



# Unveiling the Origin of Oral Traditions and Folk Tales of Cianjur: The Megalithic Site of Gunung Padang

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## ABSTRACT

### Keywords:

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This study explores the origins of oral traditions and folk tales in Cianjur, Indonesia, focusing on the megalithic site of Gunung Padang. By examining historical narratives, local myths, and the cultural significance of this archaeological site, we aim to uncover how these stories have shaped the identity of the Cianjur community. The research highlights the interplay between historical events and oral storytelling, emphasizing the importance of preserving these traditions in modernization. Ultimately, this work seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of the role of megalithic sites in enriching local folklore and cultural heritage.

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## 1. Introduction

Folktales and oral traditions are essential to a culture's identity because they are means of passing down knowledge, morals, and collective memories from one generation to the next. In Cianjur, Indonesia, rich narratives have emerged from the region's unique historical and cultural contexts, particularly surrounding the megalithic site of Gunung Padang. This archaeological marvel boasts immense historical significance and acts as a wellspring for local myths and folk tales that embellish the cultural landscape of Cianjur. Gunung Padang is the largest megalithic site in Southeast Asia. The location of Gunung Padang in Desa Karya Mukti Kecamatan Campaka Kabupaten is about 30 km from Cianjur and 90 km from Jakarta. Preservation of Gunung Padang began with historical artefact identification. Preservation involved stakeholders, including community participation. The activity carried out an inventory of a series of rectangular-shaped building stones with partitions, pundits, and gates. Identification of natural rock-forming objects is andesitic to basaltic rock; a pillar or columnar blocks of stone block size and weight vary. Some of the beams that have a rough profile, square or polygonal, are much larger, with a weight exceeding 600 kg, it has five separate terraces, each connected by stairs and standing pillars. The patio is up to a height of about 960 meters above sea level. Area inventory area of 900 square meters. Gunung Padang is a site that has the potential to be a centre for knowledge development and a tourist destination that has its characteristics, namely a collection of stepped pundits that reflect the megalithic tradition (Edi Hermawan & Hilman, 2016).



**Figure 1.** Gunung Padang Cianjur Site  
(Source: Author Document; 2021)

This study aims to delve into the origins of these oral traditions and folk tales, examining how they have been influenced by historical events and societal changes over time. The megalithic structures at Gunung Padang, believed to date back thousands of years, are not merely relics of the past; they are symbols of cultural continuity and identity for the Cianjur community. By investigating the narratives tied to this site, we seek to uncover the intricate relationship between the physical landscape and the stories that emerge from it, highlighting the importance of preserving these oral histories in an ever-modernizing world. Mount Padang megalithic site in Cianjur is open specifically for those who want to visit, pray, meditate, or do *tadabur*. The tour offered at the Gunung Padang Megalithic Site is the beauty of the terraced *punden* building composed of columns of volcanic rock. The strategy for developing the cultural heritage site of Mount Padang Cianjur, West Java, is to: use vacant land around the site area; use promotional media; socialize on the preservation of cultural heritage objects; establish good coordination with management parties regarding aspects of the development of the Gunung Padang cultural heritage site as a tourist destination; regular maintenance of facilities (Gandaresmi et al., 2022).

Through qualitative descriptive research, this study will explore the essence of Cianjur's oral storytelling practices, offering insights into how these narratives contribute to the broader understanding of local folklore and cultural heritage (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The preservation of these traditions is paramount, as they encapsulate the essence of the community's identity and resilience, enabling future generations to connect with their roots while navigating the complexities of contemporary life. Research questions include how ancestral beliefs influence the interpretation and dissemination of folk tales around Gunung Padang. How have the oral traditions and folk tales related to Gunung Padang changed over time? How do the folk tales about Gunung Padang help shape the cultural identity of the communities around the site?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research on "Unveiling the Origin of Oral Traditions and Folk Tales of Cianjur: The Megalithic Site of Gunung Padang" draws upon several interdisciplinary theories and models that elucidate the relationship between oral traditions, cultural identity, and archaeological significance. This framework offers a lens through which to examine the research findings on Cianjur's oral traditions and anchors the study within well-established scholarly discussions. Oral tradition theory is a concept that explains how knowledge, stories, and cultures are passed down orally from generation to generation. This theory emphasizes the importance of the role of oral medicine in shaping and preserving culture, especially in pre-literate societies (Ikuenobe, 2018).

Explanation related to the theoretical framework or theoretical explanation if it has been mentioned in the background section. There is no need to mention it further in this section. This theoretical framework is the same as your research literature review which becomes a research concept. Walter J. Ong: A literary and anthropologist who wrote the book "Orality and Literacy" in 1982 (Best, 2020). Ong argues that oral culture has unique characteristics that are different from written culture. Milman Parry: A classical literary expert who studied the epic poetry of ancient Greece. Parry discovered that the Greek epic poets used special formulas and techniques to remember and convey their poems orally.

Albert Lord: A literary expert who continued Parry's research. Lord discovered that oral traditions had distinctive structures and patterns, and that epic poets used improvised techniques to create their poems (Bizhga, 2023). Claude Lévi-Strauss: An anthropologist who studies the structure and function of myths in different cultures. Lévi-Strauss argues that myth is an important form of oral tradition in understanding belief systems and cultural values. Greek Epic: Like the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" which were originally orally revealed (Santucci et al., 2020). Myths and Legends: Folklore, myths, and legends that are passed down orally from generation to generation. Folk Poetry: Traditional poetry that is passed down orally, such as Indonesian folk poetry. Folklore: Folklore that is passed down orally, such as the folklore about Malin Kundang (McDowell, 2018).

### 3. Method

There are various kinds of research, including qualitative research, quantitative research, and research mixed-method (Azungah, 2018). The method section is written based on qualitative descriptive research, this study will explore the essence of Cianjur's oral storytelling practices, offering insights into how these narratives contribute to the broader understanding of local folklore and cultural heritage. Qualitative description (QD) is a label used in qualitative research for studies that are descriptive and widely used to describe social-related phenomena. The philosophy of QD is a pragmatic approach, with overtones of other qualitative approaches and probably the least theoretical of the qualitative approaches. This variability may indicate that there are no clear boundaries between QD and other strategies. QD has been identified as important and appropriate for research questions focused on discovering the who, what, and where of events or experiences and on gaining insight from a poorly understood phenomenon. QD should be the method of choice only when a description of a phenomenon is desired. Purposeful and maximum variation sampling may be used in QD studies. Data collection techniques usually include minimally-to-moderately structured open-ended interviews with individuals or focus groups. Qualitative content analysis using modifiable coding systems is the analysis strategy of choice in QD studies. QD studies result in a rich, straight description of experience, perception, or event using language from the collected data through long-inference interpretation during data analysis (Suardi Wahdi, 2020).

Likewise, qualitative descriptive design (QD) looks at a problem or phenomenon from a naturalistic perspective. The phenomenon in Cianjur is based on the results of open and closed interviews with a primary source named Mr. Zainal, we call it Kuncen Gunung Padang. The analysis of the Interview Transcript can be seen in the following table.

**Table 1.** Interview Transcript Analysis

Name	Questions	Answered
Librilianti Kurnia Yuki / Researcher  Mr. Zainal/ Kuncen	Good afternoon, Mr. Zainal. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us. Can you tell us a little about the roles and responsibilities of a Kuncen of Gunung Padang?	Good afternoon too. As a kuncen, it is my job to take care of this site, both physically and spiritually. Gunung Padang is a sacred place, so I keep the area clean, safe, and authentic. In addition, I also guide the traditional rituals that are carried out here.
Librilianti Kurnia Yuki / Researcher  Mr. Zainal/ Kuncen	What are the traditional rituals that are usually carried out on Gunung Padang?  Are there any specific taboos or prohibitions that visitors must follow when coming to Gunung Padang?	Yes, of course, there is. Visitors must maintain good manners and must not speak rudely or behave disrespectfully. In addition, it is forbidden to bring objects that can

<p>Librilianti Kurnia Yuki / Researcher</p> <p>Mr. Zainal/ Kuncen</p>	<p>Are there any interesting stories or experiences that you have experienced during your time as a kuncen?</p>	<p>damage nature, such as weapons or liquor. We also always remind not to take anything from here, be it stones or other objects, as it can disturb the balance of nature here.</p>
<p>Librilianti Kurnia Yuki / Researcher</p> <p>Mr. Zainal/ Kuncen</p>	<p>What are your hopes for the future of Gunung Padang?</p>	<p>There are a lot. One of the things I remember the most was when there were visitors who didn't believe in the spiritual aspect of Gunung Padang. However, after spending the night here, he experienced something that made him change his mind. He felt the presence of something that could not be explained logically. It was just one of many stories that showed that this place did have a strong aura.</p> <p>I hope that Gunung Padang will be preserved and respected, both by the local community and visitors. This place is not only a historical site but also a cultural and spiritual heritage that we must preserve. Hopefully, future generations can continue to maintain the preservation and majesty of this place.</p>

A novelty from a study is in the method section, even though the topic is the same as previous studies. New methods that are simpler but have the same ability to answer research questions are superior so that they can replicate the culture of Sundanese Culture and not only a historical site but also a cultural and spiritual heritage that we must preserve.

#### 4. Result and Discussion

Results and discussions can be made that contain research findings and explanations. The result of research questions: how ancestral beliefs influence the interpretation and dissemination of folk tales around Gunung Padang. How have the oral traditions and folk tales related to Gunung Padang changed over time? How do the folk tales about Gunung Padang help shape the cultural identity of the communities around the site? The following are answers to research questions related to the influence of ancestral beliefs, changes in oral traditions, and the contribution of folklore to the cultural identity of the people around Mount Padang: Ancestral beliefs have an important role in shaping and maintaining the folklore that develops around Gunung Padang. The local community considers Gunung Padang to be a sacred place, where their ancestors are believed to have inhabited the site. This belief is rooted in animist views and belief in spiritual forces believed to maintain the balance of nature. Evolving folklore often reflects views on the relationship between humans and nature, where ancestors are considered guardians who must be honoured through traditional rituals and ceremonies. This influence is seen in the way stories are told – in a language full of symbolism – as well as in the process of passing on stories from generation to generation, which is done through kuncen (guardians of tradition) and traditional elders. In addition, ancestral beliefs also reinforce respect for nature and the megalithic site itself. The stories that are spread serve to teach values about harmony with nature, as well as warnings not to violate taboos that can "disturb" the spiritual balance around Gunung Padang.

The oral traditions and folklore related to Gunung Padang have changed with the times, but the core of the story and the values conveyed have survived. In the past, folklore was more strongly influenced by myths and magical beliefs, which focused on ancestral stories, spiritual powers, and creation myths. However, along with the entry of modernization, formal education, and mass media, folklore began to adapt. Some elements of the story have been reduced or reinterpreted to be more relevant to the context of a more modern society. For example, narratives that were once loaded with mystical elements are now told more as part of the history and identity of local culture, with an emphasis on the archaeological and historical aspects of Gunung Padang. Despite this, kuncen and Indigenous peoples continue to strive to preserve this oral tradition through traditional ceremonies, cultural festivals, and non-formal education in their communities. The younger generation, who had once been less interested in these stories, is now beginning to show a renewed interest, especially after the international recognition of Gunung Padang as a site of historical and cultural importance.

Folklore about Gunung Padang plays an important role in shaping the cultural identity of the people around this megalithic site. Through stories about ancestors, creation myths, and the history of Gunung Padang, the local community builds a sense of pride in their ancestral heritage and awareness of the importance of preserving the site. These stories provide a unique identity to the local community, connecting them to their past and ancestors, as well as to the long history of civilizations in the region. Through this oral tradition, the people of Cianjur and its surroundings feel a deep spiritual and historical connection to Gunung Padang, which distinguishes them from other communities in the West Java region. In addition, the narratives contained in this folklore are often used to strengthen community solidarity. These stories provide moral lessons about cooperation, obedience to customary rules, and the importance of maintaining a balance between humans and nature. In this case, folklore serves not only as entertainment but also to strengthen collective values that are the basis for social life around Gunung Padang.

Overall, these folklore and oral traditions serve as a tools for preserving cultural identity and strengthening social bonds among the communities living around Gunung Padang, ensuring that ancestral values remain alive and relevant in the modern context. The following is a Figure with the Kuncen Gunung Padang.



**Figure 2.** Researchers and Kuncen Gunung Padang  
(Source: Author Document, 2022)

#### 4.1. Presenting the Results

The study results are presented in a figure or table that directly compares with the findings of other researchers. The following table explains three researchers on Gunung Padang in different focuses.

**Table 2.** Research Analysis

Name Researchers	Research Title	Research findings
Sutarman, Haryono Edi Hermawan, Cecep Hilman	Gunung Padang Cianjur: Preservation of The Largest Megalithic and World Heritage (2016)	To preserve and protect the Gunung Padang site from damage, it is necessary to reconstruct the shape of the building and educate the surrounding community, visitors, educational institutions, government agencies, and all related agencies who are responsible for maintaining and owning the wealth of national cultural heritage. Activities that need to be carried out continuously with a strong



		commitment from all parties until they are successful, as is the case with the current Borobudur Site.
Indarti Komala Dewi, Ruslan Fauzi, M Yogie Syahbandar	Threat of landslides hazard at the core zone of Cultural Conservation Strategic Area of Gunung Padang megalithic site, in Cianjur District (2022)	Based on the study's results on the level of landslide hazard, structural and non-structural mitigation efforts are needed to maintain the site's sustainability. To maintain the Gunung Padang site's safety, structural and non-structural measures are required. The structural measures include reinforcing the steep terrace wall, and the non-structural measures include restricting tourist access to high-risk landslides. In addition, it is necessary to increase the capacity of local government officials and the community through socialization about site security and its rules, as well as increase public awareness of the need to participate in the preservation of the site
Tri Agustini Gandaresmi, Yayat Sudaryat, Nunuy Nurjanah	Mount Padang Cianjur West Java as a Tourism (2022)	Gunung Padang is one of the mountains in the Cianjur area of West Java. In the past, Gunung Padang was used as a place of worship and for large meetings/deliberations attended by various kingdoms. However, now, it is preserved as a nature reserve and tourist spot. Gunung Padang's Operational Hours are open from 08:00 to 17:00 for general tourism, while in the evening, it is open specifically for those who want to visit, pray, meditate, or do tadabur. The tour offered at the Gunung Padang Megalithic Site is the beauty of the terraced punden building composed of columns of volcanic rock. The strategy for developing the cultural heritage site of Gunung Padang Cianjur, West Java, is to: use vacant land around the site area; use promotional media; socialize on the preservation of cultural heritage objects; establish good coordination with management parties regarding aspects of the development of the Gunung Padang cultural heritage site as a tourist destination; regular maintenance of facilities.

Some figures for research activities taken from 2021-2022 can be seen below.



**Figure 3.** Main Researcher at the Research site Gunung Padang  
 (Source: Author Document, 2021)



**Figure 4.** Gunung Padang main door at Up Mountain  
 (Source: Author Document, 2022)



**Figure 5.** Gunung Padang from Upstairs  
(Source: Author Document, 2022)

#### 4.2. Discussion

In this section, from some of the research above, we can obtain different findings to discuss as an overview of our research this time. The author's response is from a study titled "Gunung Padang Cianjur: Preservation of The Largest Megalithic and World Heritage" (2016). Advantages of a comprehensive conservation approach: This study focuses on the preservation of Mount Padang as the largest megalithic site, raising important aspects in cultural heritage conservation. The importance of international recognition: Highlighting the importance of Gunung Padang as part of the world heritage, this study provides a strong argument for the need for the protection of this site at a global level. Technical details of conservation: Provide guidance and strategies related to the physical conservation of the site, including the protection of megalithic structures from environmental damage or human activities. Threat of Landslides Hazard at the Core Zone of Cultural Conservation Strategic Area of Gunung Padang Megalithic Site, in Cianjur District" (2022). Focus on natural disaster risk: This study is particularly relevant because it identifies the threat of landslides around Mount Padang, which could damage the site and surrounding infrastructure. Powerful technical analysis: Provides detailed geological and hydrological analysis, aiding in disaster mitigation planning. Present mitigation recommendations: This research not only diagnoses the problem but also provides mitigation measures that can be implemented to protect the site.

Gunung Padang Cianjur West Java as a Tourism" (2022). Pros: Focus on the economic potential of tourism: Highlighting Mount Padang as a tourist attraction, this study is relevant in the context of utilizing the site as an economic source for the local community. Tourism development strategies: This study presents various strategies to improve tourism infrastructure and services in Gunung Padang, which can improve the visitor experience. Tourism impact analysis: Provides an analysis of the impact of tourism on megalithic sites and local communities and suggests measures to protect the site from damage caused by tourism activities. Unveiling the Origin of Oral Traditions and Folk Tales of Cianjur: The Megalithic Site of Gunung Padang" (2024). Pros: In-depth cultural approach: This research is very strong in elevating aspects of oral traditions and folklore related to Gunung Padang, providing a rich anthropological perspective. The connection between history and culture: Explains the close relationship between megalithic sites and the cultural identity of local communities, providing insight into how folklore and ancestral beliefs play a role in shaping the culture around Gunung Padang. Contribution to cultural preservation: Focusing on the importance of preserving folklore and oral traditions, this research contributes to the often-overlooked preservation of non-materials.

#### 5. Conclusion

The conclusion contains a summary of the research findings, which correlate with the research objectives written in the introduction of these four studies, each study highlights different aspects of Gunung Padang—from preservation, disaster risk, and tourism to oral traditions. The advantage is that each study focuses on a specific perspective, providing valuable insights regarding the management and preservation of these sites. However, the drawback is that each study tends not to consider holistically all aspects that affect Gunung Padang, both in terms of physical, cultural, economic, and

social. Ideally, a cross-disciplinary approach that combines physical preservation, disaster mitigation, sustainable tourism management, and cultural preservation should be considered to preserve Gunung Padang long-term. The conclusion of Oral tradition and folk tales of Gunung Padang in Cianjur, like many traditional tales, carry moral, social capital and cultural significance. These stories very often serve to give an understanding of local natural features, impart lessons, or conserve the history and beliefs of the people around it. A common theme in such traditional stories involves respect for nature, spiritual beliefs, and the importance of humility as traditional wisdom. The mountain could be seen as a sacred space, and the traditional story could include aspects warning against human greed, arrogance or abuse of the land. Teaching the value of living in harmonious relations with nature. The oral tradition and folk tales of Gunung Padang likely could benefit as a cultural tool to reinforce respect for the natural environment and the spiritual beliefs of the local people in Cianjur. At the same time, they also offer moral guidance about human conduct concerning the earth and the forces of nature. They help maintain the cultural identity and continuity of the community with balanced local wisdom.

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