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MEMORIES OF ANGELS AND THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE SACRED: Folklore, Ecology, and Tourism at Lake Rowobayu in the “Desa Penari”

Nasution

¹History Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

Abstract

This study research transformation folklore, ecology sacred, and tourism culture at Lake Rowobayu, Banyuwangi, with attention specifically on the figure Badarawuhi, water symbolism, and impact tourism triggered by films after KKN in Penari Village. Use approach qualitative based on observation field, interview in-depth and analysis narrative thematic, study This explore How folklore in a way historical functioning as governance system informal environment rooted in cosmology local. Findings show that although folklore Once arrange behavior ecological through taboo and fear, its effectiveness has decrease Because commodification, media exposure, and governance weak structural, a conceptualized conditions as failure folklore. Although thus, folklore still relevant among segment society that maintains trust traditional Hindu- influenced culture, where ecology sacred Keep going support attitude-oriented conservation. This study also found that film-fuelled tourism has speed up desacralization Rowobayu, change it become destination recreation and improve pressure ecological research This contribute to the study folklore and tourism with integrate ecology sacred, ecology politics, and media representation, with argue that tourist culture sustainable need planting return folklore in system living trust and a strong governance framework For switch from respect symbolic going to protection ecological material.

Keywords: folklore, ethics ecology, tourism culture, Lake Rowobayu, *Desa Penari*.

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*Corresponding author:

E-mail: nasution@unesa.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

Folklore has long functioned as a primary medium for conveying cultural values, moral norms, and ecological knowledge across generations. In many traditional societies, myths and legends do not merely serve as entertainment but also operate as symbolic systems that regulate human interaction with the natural environment through taboos, rituals, and moral sanctions (Douglas, 1966; Berkes, 2012). Natural elements such as lakes, forests, springs, and mountains are often sanctified in folklore, instilling environmental ethics in collective memory and everyday practice. Through this process, ecology becomes inseparable from culture and belief systems.

In the Indonesian context, folk tales frequently reflect a close relationship between humans, nature, and the spiritual world. Many local narratives conceptualize the natural environment as a space inhabited by spiritual entities whose presence demands respect and self-restraint. One recurring motif throughout the archipelago is the legend of heavenly maidens who descend to earth and form close associations with water sources such as lakes, springs, and waterfalls. These narratives are widely interpreted as symbolic representations of purity, balance, and moral discipline, positioning water as a sacred source of life and a moral medium (Geertz, 1960; Irmawati, 2013).

Lake Rowobayu, located in Banyuwangi, East Java, represents an important site where folklore, historical memory, and ecology intersect. The lake is closely associated with the legend of Badarawuhi, a female guardian spirit believed to inhabit and protect the lake, as well as with narratives of heavenly maidens bathing in sacred springs. Historically, these stories functioned as moral boundaries that regulated behavior around water resources and surrounding forests, reinforcing ecological control through respect and fear. In this sense, folklore in Rowobayu can be understood as a form of informal environmental governance embedded within local cosmology (Nuraini, 2015).

However, in recent years, the cultural meaning of the Rowobayu folk tale has undergone significant transformation. The popularization of the Dancing Village narrative with horror themes particularly following its cinematic adaptation has increased public curiosity and tourist interest in the lake. Although this exposure has enhanced the site's visibility, it has also contributed to the commodification and desacralization of sacred narratives, reframing folklore as spectacle rather than as an ethical guide (Bruner, 2005). At the same time, broader processes such as religious change, tourism development, media circulation, and economic pressure have weakened the authority of folklore as a regulator of ecological behavior, a condition conceptualized in this study as a failure of folk narratives.

Despite these transformations, the folk tale of Rowobayu has not entirely lost its relevance. Field evidence shows that among segments of the local community particularly those maintaining Hindu-influenced traditional beliefs folklore continues to function as a living moral framework that supports conservation-oriented attitudes toward lakes, springs, and forests. This indicates that the effectiveness of folklore is unevenly distributed and highly dependent on the sustainability of belief systems and institutional contexts, rather than declining uniformly.

Against this background, the present study seeks to explore how folk tales and the Badarawuhi narrative at Lake Rowobayu reflect cultural memory and ecological ethics, how their functions have shifted in the context of film-driven tourism, and how folklore can be repositioned within a framework of sustainable cultural tourism. By integrating perspectives from folklore studies, sacred ecology, political ecology, and tourism studies, this research aims to contribute to a broader and more informed debate on the role of cultural belief systems in environmental governance and sustainable tourism in postcolonial contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Folklore, Cultural Memory, and Meaning

In contemporary scholarship, folklore is no longer understood as a static repository of ancient oral traditions transmitted unchanged from one generation to the next. Instead, folklore is increasingly conceptualized as a dynamic cultural process that continually adapts to social, religious, political, and technological transformations. As noted by Elliott Oring (2021), folklore is shaped by the contexts in which it is performed, narrated, and repeatedly interpreted. Stories, myths, legends, and rituals not only endure over time but also evolve in response to shifting power relations, belief systems, and collective anxieties. This adaptive quality enables folklore to remain meaningful in communities experiencing rapid modernization, migration, and cultural hybridity.

Within this framework, folklore functions as a form of cultural memory. Cultural memory refers to shared representations of the past that are preserved and transmitted through narratives, symbols, and performative practices. Folk tales sustain collective interpretations of historical experience, cosmological beliefs, and moral values, while simultaneously shaping identity and social norms in the present. Through repeated storytelling and ritual practices, communities reaffirm what is considered sacred, dangerous, desirable, or taboo. Thus, folklore operates not merely as a record of the past but as an active mechanism through which communities negotiate continuity and change.

In many societies, folklore encodes moral teachings and social ideals through symbolic narratives rather than explicit instruction. Mythical characters, supernatural beings, and extraordinary events function as metaphors that communicate ethical norms and cultural expectations. From a psychological perspective, such symbolic figures can be interpreted through the lens of Jungian psychoanalysis. Carl Gustav Jung proposed that recurring motifs and characters in myths and folk tales emerge from the collective unconscious a shared psychic reservoir in the form of archetypes inherited by humanity. These archetypes manifest across cultures in remarkably similar forms, revealing deep patterns of meaning formation.

One of the most recurrent archetypes found in global folklore is the figure of the heavenly maiden or celestial woman. As discussed by Anas Ahmadi (2011), heavenly maidens often symbolize ideals of purity, femininity, beauty, and transcendence. Their narratives typically unfold in liminal spaces such as mountains, forests, and especially bodies of water where the human and the divine intersect. Water, in this context, carries rich symbolic meanings, representing life, fertility, purification, and renewal. The recurring association between celestial figures and water reflects a universal symbolic structure in which transformation and rebirth occur through contact with the sacred.

By understanding folklore as culturally embedded memory shaped by archetypal symbolism, scholars can better appreciate its enduring relevance. Folk tales do not merely entertain; they encode collective wisdom, emotional structures, and moral orientations that continue to shape how communities understand the world and their place within it. Folktales and Ecological Ethics

Folktales play role important in form ethics ecology, in particular in public traditional where Environmental management in many traditional societies is guided more by cultural values than by formal legal frameworks. Environmental wisdom embedded in folk tales often operates through taboos, myths, and rituals, functioning as an informal yet effective system of ecological governance. Rather than relying on written regulations or state law enforcement, communities internalize norms that define appropriate relationships between humans and nature. These

norms are transmitted through stories, prohibitions, and ceremonial practices that regulate access to forests, water sources, agricultural land, and other vital ecological resources.

According to Nuraini (2015), myths and prohibitions in local traditions function as mechanisms of environmental control that influence collective behavior. Taboos related to cutting certain trees, polluting water sources, or intruding upon sacred landscapes often carry moral and spiritual consequences, thereby discouraging exploitative practices. Such belief systems create a sense of fear, respect, and responsibility toward nature, effectively limiting overuse and ecological degradation. In this sense, folklore functions as a form of ecological knowledge that is experiential, symbolic, and deeply embedded in everyday life.

In Javanese culture, ecological ethics are particularly evident in the symbolic treatment of water. Water is not only a physical resource but also a sacred element closely associated with spiritual balance and cosmic harmony. Springs, rivers, and lakes are often believed to be inhabited or guarded by supernatural beings, which reinforces communal responsibility for their protection. Rituals associated with water serve as reminders of its sacred status and its role in sustaining both physical and spiritual life. This symbolic framework fosters an ethical orientation that emphasizes balance, self-restraint, and respect for natural elements.

One prominent example is the siraman ritual, a ceremonial bathing practice performed during various life-cycle events such as weddings, pregnancy rites, and spiritual purification. As explained by Irmawati (2013), siraman links water to sanctification, moral renewal, and divine presence. The ritual often involves water drawn from sacred springs and is symbolically associated with feminine and angelic imagery, reinforcing ideas of care, protection, and life-giving power. This symbolic association elevates water beyond its utilitarian function, positioning it as a sacred trust rather than a mere commodity.

Historically, such belief systems have contributed to the conservation of springs, rivers, and lakes in Javanese society. Areas surrounding water sources are treated as sacred spaces where destructive activities are restricted or prohibited. Through ritual practices and mythic narratives, folklore thus cultivates ecologically driven conservation ethics long before the emergence of modern environmental discourse. Understanding folklore as a carrier of ecological values underscores its relevance to contemporary discussions on sustainability, particularly in integrating cultural perspectives into environmental protection strategies.

Folklore and Tourism Culture

Contemporary tourism studies indicate a significant shift from destination-based tourism to experience-based tourism, in which visitors seek meaningful engagement rather than passive sightseeing. Within this model, narratives, symbols, and cultural stories become central components of the tourism experience. B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore (1999) argue that the modern economy increasingly values staged experiences, where meaning, memory, and emotional resonance are as important as physical settings. In this context, folklore functions as a powerful narrative source that transforms natural and cultural sites into spaces of imagination, memory, and interpretation.

From an anthropological perspective, tourism not only consumes culture but also actively reshapes it. Edward M. Bruner (2005) emphasizes that tourism transforms culture into performance, in which traditions, rituals, and stories are selectively presented to audiences. This process inevitably raises questions of authenticity, representation, and commodification. When folk tales are displayed for tourists, they may be simplified, aestheticized, or recontextualized to meet visitors' expectations. Critics argue that such commodification risks reducing complex cultural meanings to marketable symbols detached from their original social functions.

However, more recent studies challenge the assumption that commodification necessarily leads to cultural degradation. Empirical research in Indonesia shows that tourism-based folklore can preserve and even revitalize local cultural meanings when communities retain interpretive authority over their narratives. Nurhadi et al. (2022) demonstrate that when local actors control storytelling, ritual performances, and site management, folklore remains embedded in local value systems rather than becoming mere commercial spectacle. In such cases, tourism provides an alternative platform for cultural transmission, intergenerational learning, and economic empowerment without erasing symbolic depth.

Within this framework, folklore performs a dual function in tourism culture. First, it enriches visitors' experiences by offering cosmological explanations, moral lessons, and emotional engagement with place. Second, it serves as a medium through which local communities negotiate identity, authority, and sustainability in the face of external demands. Rather than becoming passive objects of tourism, local communities actively manage meaning by deciding which stories are told, how they are staged, and for whom they are intended.

Building on this perspective, the present study examines tourism-based folklore at Lake Rowobayu. By focusing on how local narratives are mobilized in tourism practices, this study seeks to understand the balance between cultural display and cultural integrity. In doing so, it contributes to a broader discussion on how folk tales can function as sources of sustainable cultural power supporting experience-based tourism while maintaining their role as living cultural memory rather than static commodities.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study use qualitative approach case studies for study folklore and ethics ecology in Lake Rowobayu. Qualitative methods suitable for understand meaning symbols, beliefs, and practices culture in context nature (Creswell, 2014).

Data Collection

Data obtained through: analysis of folklore, literature academic, and reports related cultures of community surround lake Rowobayu in Bayu Village. Observation field regarding Lake Rowobayu and the surrounding springs. Interview with inhabitant local and community leader.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to systematically identify patterns of meaning across interview transcripts, field observations, and narrative notes collected during the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis focused on narratives surrounding the legend of Badarawuhi, the development of Lake Rowobayu as a sacred space, the symbolic meanings of water and holy springs, and locally embedded ecological restrictions.

Coding was conducted inductively to capture local perspectives emerging from the data and deductively to interpret the findings through the lenses of sacred ecology and folklore studies (Berkes, 2012; Nuraini, 2015). The analysis examined how elements of folklore historically functioned as moral and ecological regulators, as well as how their meanings have shifted under the influence of tourism development and media exposure, particularly following film adaptations. This approach enabled the identification of changes in narrative emphasis and social function as folklore transitions from a ritual-ecological framework toward tourism-oriented experiences, while continuing to operate within segments of society that maintain traditional belief systems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rowobayu Lake as Landscape Historic and Sacred

Findings from field observations and interviews indicate that Lake Rowobayu occupies a distinctive position as both a historical and sacred landscape. Located on the slopes of Mount Wongso, the lake is embedded in local historical memory associated with the Blambangan Kingdom and the mystical disappearance (mokhsa) of King Tawangalun. These narratives construct the lake as a liminal space where history, spirituality, and nature intersect, thereby reinforcing its sacred status within local cosmology (Pigeaud & de Graaf, 1976).

Central to this sacred landscape is the figure of Badarawuhi, who is widely acknowledged by local informants as the resident guardian spirit of the lake. In contrast to popular horror representations, Badarawuhi is locally understood not as a malevolent or predatory entity, but as a moral and spiritual guardian who regulates human behavior and maintains balance between humans and nature. These findings reveal a fundamental divergence between local cosmological interpretations and external representations circulated through popular media. While national discourse emphasizes fear and danger, local narratives stress protection, self-restraint, and ethical order. These differences confirm that folklore in Rowobayu functions as a site of contested meanings, shaped by unequal narrative authority between local communities and external cultural producers.

Ecology Sacred, Water Symbolism, and Landscape Feminine

One of the main empirical findings concerns the deep ecological and symbolic significance of water in local folklore. Field observations confirm that Lake Rowobayu is sustained by five main springs Dewi Gangga, Kaputren, Rahayu, Panguripan, and Kamulyan which together form a sacred hydrological system supporting both the lake and the surrounding communities. These springs continuously contribute to the lake's water volume and discharge, playing a crucial role in maintaining water availability throughout the year.

Among these five springs, Kaputren holds particular cultural significance. Derived from the Javanese word putri (princess or woman), Kaputren is believed to have been a bathing place for royal princesses or heavenly maidens. Such narratives position Lake Rowobayu as a feminine and sacred landscape, in which water symbolizes purity, protection, and moral perfection. The association between femininity, holy water, and spiritual power aligns with broader Javanese cosmology, in which water is linked to fertility, renewal, and divine presence (Geertz, 1960; Irmawati, 2013).

Further empirical observations indicate that these springs are actively used by local residents as sources of water for household needs and limited agricultural activities. This demonstrates that sacred ecology in Rowobayu operates simultaneously at both symbolic and material levels. Water is revered as sacred while also functioning as a vital livelihood resource. However, this dual function also creates ecological vulnerability when symbolic respect is not supported by effective conservation measures and governance structures (Berkes, 2012).

Folklore, Tourism Culture and Contestation Narrative

The emergence of Desa Penari (Dancer Village) as a viral narrative and cinematic phenomenon marks a significant transformation in the social function of the Rowobayu folktale. Popular media repeatedly frame Badarawuhi and the lake within the horror genre, emphasizing danger, transgression, and spectacle. This process reflects what Bruner (2005) describes as the

performativization of culture, in which complex belief systems are simplified into easily consumable narratives for mass audiences.

The findings indicate that local communities strongly reject this redefinition. Interviews reveal that residents oppose the Dancer Village label, viewing it as an external construction that stigmatizes and misrepresents their identity particularly by portraying local women as dangerous or morally suspect. These rejections underscore the importance of interpretive authority in tourism-based folklore. Consistent with previous studies, folklore does not necessarily lose its meaning through tourism when local communities retain control over narrative interpretation (Nurhadi et al., 2022).

Accordingly, Rowobayu emerges as a site of narrative tension, where sacred ecology and tourism culture intersect under unequal power relations. Competing interpretations local cosmological narratives versus externally produced popular representations coexist and contest one another, shaping how the landscape is understood, valued, and governed.

Field observations show that Lake Rowobayu is surrounded by a pine forest that functions as both an ecological buffer and a symbolic boundary. However, informants disclose that parts of this forest are controlled by private business interests whose ownership status remains unclear, reflecting unresolved land tenure issues following the postcolonial transition from colonial administration to Indonesian independence. This situation mirrors broader patterns of contested land governance and resource control in postcolonial Indonesia (Peluso, 1992; Li, 2014).

In the context of this, folklore obtains dimensions political-ecological. The informants articulate two interpretations dominant about circulation narrative horror. First, the stories scary functioning as a cultural strategy to prevent damage environment with instil fear and respect to area forest. Second, the narrative horror can also function for limit access society, in general no direct protect interest economy private sector. This findings disclose that folk tales can in a way simultaneously functioning as ethics ecological and mechanisms control Spatial .

Degraded Forest Ecology: Imagination Sacred versus Detached Material

Despite the persistence of sacred narratives, field observations indicate that the forest ecosystem surrounding Rowobayu is no longer as dense or intact as commonly imagined. Evidence of tree logging, declining canopy cover, and cleared areas was observed at several locations. Interviews suggest that logging is carried out by local residents primarily to meet household and economic needs, reflecting livelihood survival strategies rather than a direct rejection of sacred beliefs.

These findings challenge romanticized assumptions that sacred status alone is sufficient to ensure ecological preservation. As noted by Dove (2011), traditional environmental ethics are vulnerable when they are not supported by formal governance structures and viable livelihood alternatives. In Rowobayu, sacred ecology continues to exist at a symbolic level but has failed to translate into effective ecological protection on the ground.

The Failure of Folklore and the Decline of Horror as a Control Environment

A key finding of this study is the declining effectiveness of horror-based folklore as a deterrent to environmental degradation. Historically, fear and taboo functioned as powerful mechanisms of informal regulation (Douglas, 1966; Rappaport, 1979). However, empirical data indicate that such narratives no longer effectively prevent ecological damage. Younger generations increasingly interpret horror stories as entertainment rather than as moral imperatives, particularly following their commodification through film and digital media.

This condition is conceptualized in this study as the failure of folk narratives, referring to the erosion of folklore's regulatory power due to media saturation, economic pressure, and

cultural change (Bruner, 2005; Bauman, 2017). Horror narratives continue to exist, but their function has shifted from ecological restraint to cultural spectacle.

Structural Governance and Different Tourism Outcomes

Findings indicate that the effectiveness of folklore depends heavily on structural governance factors, including land tenure clarity, forest monitoring, conservation policy, and community-based management. Without such structures, sacred narratives alone are insufficient to prevent ecological degradation (Peluso, 1992; Li, 2014; Berkes, 2012). Two divergent pathways emerge. Under weak governance, folktales are commodified into tourism-based fear narratives that reproduce stigma and contribute to ecological decline. Under stronger governance and community-led interpretive control, folklore can be recontextualized as a form of sustainable cultural ecotourism that reinforces ecological awareness and cultural dignity (Nurhadi et al., 2022).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that folklore at Lake Rowobayu functions as a dynamic system of meaning formation characterized by contestation. The folktale serves as an intermediary connecting humans and nature, memory and power, as well as culture and economy. However, the capacity of folklore to protect ecological systems depends on its integration with structural governance. Without such integration, sacred ecology risks remaining symbolic rather than operational.

Additional field observations reveal important nuances in understanding the sustainability of folklore in Bayu Village. Despite evidence of ecological degradation and the declining effectiveness of horror-based narratives in regulating environmental behavior, folklore in Rowobayu has not entirely lost its social relevance. This persistence is closely linked to the continued influence of traditional belief systems rooted in Hindu-influenced Javanese cosmology that remain embedded in everyday life.

Interviews and participant observations show that segments of the local community continue to adhere to belief systems emphasizing harmony among humans, nature, and unseen spiritual forces. These beliefs, rooted in pre-Islamic Javanese cosmology and shaped by Hindu influences, inform attitudes toward sacred spaces such as lakes, springs, forests, and ancestral sites. Within this worldview, natural elements are not perceived as inert resources but as living entities imbued with spiritual presence and moral significance (Geertz, 1960; Lansing, 2006).

Within this cultural context, folklore particularly narratives surrounding Badarawuhi and the sacred springs continues to function as a moral and ecological reference point for traditional community members. For these groups, folklore is not viewed as entertainment or spectacle, but as an extension of religious–cosmological belief. Field observations indicate that individuals who maintain ritual practices, respect taboo areas, and acknowledge spiritual guardians are more likely to support conservation-oriented behaviors, such as avoiding water pollution and limiting forest exploitation.

These findings complicate the notion of the failure of folk narratives by demonstrating that the effectiveness of folklore is uneven across social groups. Rather than declining uniformly, the regulatory power of folklore varies according to levels of cultural adherence and belief continuity. While fear-based folklore may have lost influence among younger or media-oriented populations, it remains relevant among traditional segments who interpret folklore as part of lived religious practice rather than as cultural narrative alone. Similar patterns have been observed in other Asian contexts, where enduring indigenous and Hindu-influenced belief systems continue to support conservation ethics at the local level (Berkes, 2012; Dove, 2011).

Overall, these findings suggest that folklore-based ecological conservation remains viable when embedded within robust traditional belief systems and ritual practices. In Bayu Village, folklore survives not only as cultural memory but also as a living ethical framework supported by local cosmology. This reinforces the argument that sustainable ecological governance should not disregard folklore, but rather selectively strengthen its role by involving traditional belief holders as key stakeholders in conservation and cultural tourism initiatives.

Desacralization of Space: Film -Driven Tourism and the Disappearance of Spirit Sacred

Field observations indicate a significant social transformation in the meaning of Lake Rowobayu following its popular association with the film *KKN di Desa Penari*. Informants consistently note that since the film's national release and circulation, Rowobayu has increasingly been perceived not only as a sacred landscape but also as a recreation-oriented tourism destination. This shift is particularly evident among younger visitors, who tend to visit the site for leisure, photography, and curiosity-driven purposes rather than for ritual or spiritual engagement.

Empirical data show that the surge in tourism triggered by the film has contributed to the gradual erosion of the lake's sacred aura. Practices that were previously restricted by taboos such as noisy behavior, unregulated interaction with sacred areas, and neglect of ritual norms have become increasingly common. For local elders, this transformation signifies the loss of spiritual discipline and respect that historically governed interactions with the lake and its surrounding environment.

This phenomenon reflects a broader process of desacralization, in which sacred spaces lose their transcendent meanings through commodification and mass consumption. As Bruner (2005) argues, when culture is transformed into a performance for tourism, its normative and ethical dimensions are often weakened. In the case of Rowobayu, cinematic representation has accelerated this process by repeatedly framing sacred folklore as entertainment, thereby detaching it from its original cosmological and ecological functions.

These findings further indicate that film-driven tourism reinforces the failure of folk narratives. Horror narratives that once functioned as ecological deterrents are now reinterpreted as attractions that draw visitors rather than restrain behavior. Instead of reinforcing taboos, the film normalizes their violation by presenting sacred danger as a consumable experience. Similar patterns have been documented at other heritage sites, where increased media exposure enhances visitor numbers while diminishing spiritual significance (Bauman, 2017; MacCannell, 1999).

Importantly, local communities exhibit ambivalent attitudes toward this transformation. While increased visitation provides economic opportunities, it simultaneously undermines the site's cultural and spiritual foundations. This tension reinforces the central argument of this study: without structural governance and community-led narrative control, tourism—particularly film-driven tourism risks accelerating the erosion of sacred ecology rather than supporting its preservation.

Overall, these findings underscore the need for a critical reassessment of the relationship between popular media, folklore, and tourism culture. At Lake Rowobayu, cinematic exposure has not revitalized sacred meaning but has instead hastened its decline. Therefore, sustainable tourism must move beyond passive consumption and actively re-engage visitors with local cosmology, ethical norms, and governance frameworks if the sacred spirit of the place is to be preserved.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that folklore at Lake Rowobayu does not function as a static cultural remnant nor as a uniformly effective mechanism of ecological regulation. Rather, folklore operates as a dynamic and contested system of meaning formation situated at the intersection of sacred ecology, political economy, media representation, and tourism culture. The findings reveal that folklore manifested in narratives surrounding Badarawuhi, sacred springs, and the feminized lake landscape has historically played a central role in shaping moral order, regulating ecological practices, and mediating relationships between local communities and nature. Through taboos, fear, and belief embodied in ritual practices, folklore once functioned as an informal environmental governance mechanism embedded within local cosmology.

However, this study identifies a critical transformation conceptualized as the failure of folk narratives. Despite the continued circulation of sacred and horror narratives, ecological degradation persists in the form of forest thinning, logging activities, and increasing pressure on water resources. The commodification of folklore through popular media particularly the film *KKN di Desa Penari* has accelerated this process by repeatedly framing sacred narratives as entertainment. As a result, fear has shifted from a moral deterrent into a consumable spectacle, weakening the capacity of folklore to regulate behavior and protect ecological systems.

The findings further indicate that film-driven tourism has contributed to the desacralization of space in Rowobayu. As the site becomes increasingly associated with cinematic representation, the lake is more frequently treated as a recreational destination, especially by younger visitors. Practices that were once governed by taboos and spiritual discipline have become normalized, reflecting a diminishing sensitivity to sacred values. Rather than reinforcing ecological restraint, cinematic representation has encouraged curiosity-driven visitation and casual interaction with sacred spaces, intensifying cultural and ecological pressure on the site.

At the same time, the study reveals important nuances: folklore has not entirely lost its relevance. In Bayu Village, segments of the community continue to adhere to Hindu-influenced traditional belief systems that sustain folklore as a living moral and ecological framework. For these groups, folklore remains embedded within religious practice rather than existing as a detached cultural narrative, and it continues to support conservation-oriented attitudes toward lakes, springs, and forests. This demonstrates that the effectiveness of folklore is unevenly distributed and highly dependent on the continuity of belief systems. Folklore fails when detached from cosmological practice, yet remains effective when supported by ritual observance, worldview coherence, and communal adherence.

Most importantly, this study underscores that the fate of sacred ecology cannot be separated from structural governance. Ambiguous land tenure, hidden economic interests, weak forest regulation, and the absence of effective tourism management frameworks significantly undermine the capacity of folklore to protect ecological systems. Without institutional reinforcement, folklore alone cannot withstand economic pressure and media-driven commodification. Conversely, when integrated with clear land governance, community participation, and culturally sensitive tourism regulation, folklore can be recontextualized as a source of ethical power supporting sustainable cultural ecotourism rather than spectacle-based fear.

The primary contribution of this study lies in its integrative framework bridging folklore studies, sacred ecology, political ecology, and media-influenced tourism research. By introducing the concepts of failure of folk narratives, desacralization, and structural governance into the analysis of tourism culture, this study moves beyond the binary debate between preservation and commodification. Instead, it argues that folklore functions as an ethical infrastructure for

sustainability, contingent upon its articulation with belief systems and living institutional structures.

In conclusion, the case of Lake Rowobayu demonstrates that sustainable tourism culture and ecological conservation cannot rely solely on symbolic narratives or cinematic popularity. They require the reintegration of folklore into local cosmology supported by robust governance frameworks. Without such integration, media exposure risks accelerating the erosion of sacred meaning and ecological degradation. With it, folklore can continue to serve not merely as stories of the past, but as ethically grounded sources of guidance for a sustainable future.

Implications Policy

Sustainable management of Lake Rowobayu need integration ethics ecology-based folklore with formal governance and regulations tourism. Local narratives around Badarawuhi and the holy spring must be institutionalized through regulation village and zoning conservation For translating symbolic taboos become an environmental norm that can enforced. At the same time, ownership undeveloped land completed and supervised weak forest must overcome through transparent governance and oversight based community. Remembering increasing tourism after triggered by films *KKN di Desa Penari*, management visitors must prioritize zoning restrictive culture access to the sacred area while allows tourist controlled educational. Seize return authority narrative through led interpretation community can shift tourist from spectacle based afraid going to reflection ecological and cultural. Lastly, the income generated from tourist must invested return to in restoration forest, protection springs, and management rubbish to ensure that benefit economy in a way direct support sustainability ecological term long .

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Appendix

Figure 1. Lake Rowobayu (Author's Personal Collection).



Figure 2. Water Flow from the Springs Surrounding Lake Rowobayu (Author's Personal Collection).

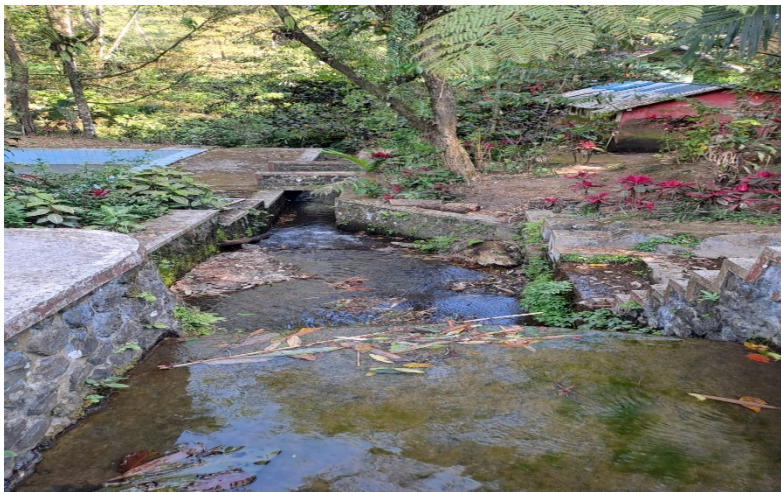


Figure 3. Rahayu Spring and Panguripan Spring (Author's Personal Collection).



Figure 4. Keputren Spring (Author's Personal Collection).



Figure 5. Dewi Gangga Spring (Author's Personal Collection).



Figure 6. Kamulyan Spring (Author's Personal Collection).



Figure 7. Meditation Site of King Tawang Alun (Author's Personal Collection).

