

ORAL Literature As A Tourism Communication Strategy In Singkawang City

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Abstract

This study examines oral literature as a form of cultural communication that underlies literary tourism in Singkawang City, framing the inquiry within the field of interdisciplinary communication science. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data were gathered through observation and interviews with storytellers, destination managers, and local government officials, supplemented by recording, transcription, and editing techniques. The findings reveal six folktales: Batu Belimbing, Gunung Poteng, Sibohe Waterfall, Bagak Sahwa Village, Tjhia Family House, and Batu Burung Beach, all classified as legends that function as narrative communication foundations for their respective tourist sites. Analysis of the communication context surrounding these narratives shows that intergenerational oral transmission is declining, with storytellers aged 29 to 73, and that the communicative occasions for these stories are shifting from family-based communication to more institutionalized forms such as theatrical performances or tourist-oriented communication encounters. The messages embedded in these oral narratives convey ecological, moral, and cultural values that function as communicative guidance for tourism management. Infrastructural assessment of the six destinations reveals significant disparities in how effectively each site communicates its narrative heritage to visitors: Batu Belimbing and Tjhia Family House are comparatively well-managed, while Gunung Poteng and Sibohe Waterfall remain critically underdeveloped. The study argues that positioning oral literature as a communication strategy within literary tourism offers a culturally grounded and sustainable path for heritage communication and tourism

development in multiethnic border cities, contributing to interdisciplinary dialogue between communication science and cultural tourism studies.

Keywords: Oral Literature, Tourism Communication, Cultural Communication, Narrative Communication, Singkawang City

1. Introduction

The city of Singkawang in West Kalimantan Province stands as one of the most distinctive multiethnic tourist cities in Indonesia. The presence of three main cultural communities, Chinese, Malay, and Dayak, has resulted in a rich heritage ecosystem, ranging from temple architecture, culinary traditions, and oral literature that is passed down from generation to generation through speaking traditions. But behind this diversity, there is something that is threatened: folk tales that have been the soul of many local tourist destinations are slowly losing their speakers and listeners (Effendy, 2019).

The phenomenon of marginalization of oral traditions is not a purely local problem. In a cross-cultural comparative study, Nasution, Harahap, and Wuriyani (2022) noted that oral literature is a form of intangible cultural heritage that is most vulnerable to the rapid currents of modernization and digitalization. When the primary medium of its spread, intergenerational conversation, is replaced by the screen of a gadget, the chain of verbal transmission is broken. In Singkawang, the reality is real: the younger generation knows Batu Belimbing, Sibohe Waterfall, or Batu Burung Beach as recreational spots and photo locations, without knowing what legend is behind it.

The term oral literature refers to literature that exists in oral form (Amir & Christian, 2013). Lord (in Amir & Christian, 2013), it is literature that is studied, delivered, and appreciated orally. (Nasution et al., 2022) Also, define it as a form of oral culture that is transmitted from generation to generation. (Ratna, 2015) describes it as a literary work that is disseminated and inherited through oral transmission, while Pradopo (2017) defines oral literature as all literary works that are not written but are inherited orally across generations.

This is where the relevance of literary tourism as an interdisciplinary approach becomes important to study. This concept, which was systematically developed by Watson (2006) and later expanded upon by Oppen, Brown, and Fyall (2014), essentially places literary works, both oral and written, as actors in shaping tourist attractions. Places that have an association with literary narratives become more than just physical objects; they become a space of cultural experience full of meaning. Putra (2019) emphasized that in Indonesia, this approach is still in its early stages, although its potential is very large, especially in areas rich in oral literature.

This study specifically examines how oral literature in Singkawang City is related to six tourist destinations: Batu Belimbing, Mount Poteng, Sibohe

Waterfall, Bagak Sahwa Village, Tjhia Clan Family House, and Batu Bird Beach. There are three main questions asked: first, what is the form and content of oral literature related to these destinations? Second, what is the environmental condition of the storytelling, who is the narrator, on what occasion is the story told, what is its purpose, and how does it relate to the environment? Third, what is the physical condition of the infrastructure of the six tourist destinations?

In terms of theoretical contributions, this study offers an analysis of literary tourism based on oral traditions, not written works such as novels or poems, which have been more dominant in Indonesian literary tourism literature (Artawan, 2020; Pramudhita, Artika, & Wirahyuni, 2024). By focusing on folklore as the object of study, this study fills the gap identified by Hoppen et al. (2014) about the lack of literary tourism studies based on local wisdom in Southeast Asia. Practically, this finding is expected to be an input for the Singkawang City Tourism Office in designing a promotional strategy that integrates local cultural narratives as a competitive advantage for tourist destinations.

The urgency of this research is even more pronounced when we consider that Singkawang is widely known for its Cap Go Meh festival, but not known for its folklore. In fact, according to Richards (2006), authentic cultural experience-based tourism has a much stronger market durability than physical attractions alone. Integrating oral literature into the tourism narrative is not just about cultural preservation; it's about sustainable local economic development strategies.

2. Method

This study uses a descriptive method in the form of qualitative research and a literary tourism approach. The choice of descriptive methods is based on the need to study, describe, and interpret phenomena contextually, rather than simply measuring them numerically. Sugiyono (2017) defines qualitative research as research based on the philosophy of postpositivism or interpretivism, which places researchers as key instruments in the process of data collection and analysis. Researchers engage directly in the field, interact with informants, and interpret the meaning of the data collected.

The applied literary tourism approach is focused on two dimensions: first, identifying folklore (oral literature) that has thematic or historical relevance to certain tourist destinations; and second, analyzing how these narratives have the potential to become cultural tourism attractions. This approach is in line with the framework developed by Putra (2019), which divides the study of literary tourism into four areas: thematic study of literary texts, study of literary heritage and literary places, study of literary activities as tourist attractions, and study of literary transformation as a medium of tourism promotion.

The data sources of this research consist of two categories: informants and folklore texts. Informants were selected based on criteria adapted from Mahsun (2012), including: (1) storytellers who are natives of the research area, born and raised in the area where the story develops, aged between 25 and 65 years, physically and spiritually healthy, and willing to be resource persons; (2) tourist destination managers who have direct knowledge of the condition and management of the area; and (3) village officials who understand tourism development policies and programs in their areas.

The six research locations include: Batu Belimbing in Nyarumkop Village (East Singkawang District), Sibohe Waterfall in Pajintan Village (East Singkawang District), Tjhia Clan Family House on Jalan Sayyid Abdurrahman (West Singkawang District), Mount Poteng in the Gunung Poteng Nature Park Area (East Singkawang District), Bagak Sahwa Village in East Singkawang District, and Batu Burung Beach on Jalan Raya Sedau (South Singkawang District).

The data collection techniques used include direct observation at the research site, in-depth interviews with informants, recording folklore speech, field recording, transcription of recordings from spoken language to written form, translation from regional languages to Indonesian, and editing folklore texts for analysis purposes. Interviews are conducted in a targeted manner using pre-prepared question guides, but still provide room for informants to develop and explain things that are considered important.

The data analysis follows the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (in Sugiyono, 2017), which consists of three streams of activities that take place simultaneously: data reduction (sorting and focusing relevant data), data presentation (systematically arranging information), and drawing conclusions. The data were analyzed based on three main theoretical frameworks: oral literary theory (Astika & Yasa, 2014; Endraswara, 2018), environmental theory of storytelling (Rusyana & Raksanagara, 1978), and theory of tourist destination development (Suwanto, 2004; Spilane in Wirawan & Semara, 2021).

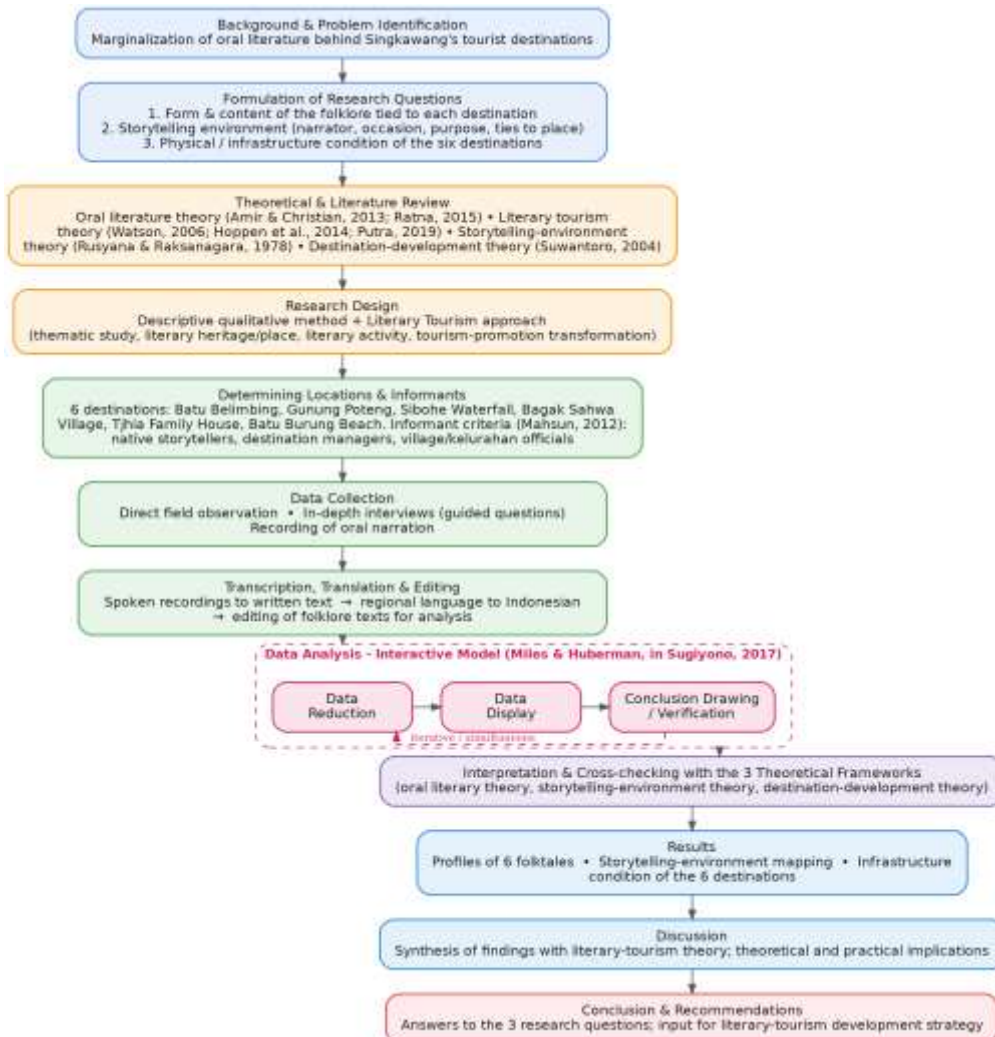


Figure 1. Research Flow Diagram, from problem formulation to the drawing of conclusions

3. Results

3.1 Oral Literature Related to Tourist Destinations in Singkawang City

Through the thematic study approach of literary tourism, this study succeeded in identifying six folktales that have a direct relationship with tourist destinations in Singkawang City. The six stories all belong to the type of legend, stories that are considered to have actually happened by the people who own them, even though they do not have a sacred status like a myth (Karim, 2015; Priyadi, 2019). These findings are in line with the opinion of Herbert (2001), who states that literature has the power to influence the way tourists perceive a place by shaping their expectations and perceptions before visiting.

The legend of Batu Belimbing tells the story of Nek Pulo, a wise old woman who lives by the lake at the foot of the hills of Singkawang. The star fruit trees that he guarded were cut down by greedy merchants who also polluted the lake. In the evening after the incident, a storm came, and when it subsided, a large stone in the shape of a star fruit appeared in the middle of the lake. Nek Pulo was never seen again; The community believes he has been the guardian of the lake forever. The story serves not only as a narrative of the origin of place names, but also as a powerful ecological message about the dangers of greed for nature. Destination managers admit that this story is what provokes the curiosity of tourists and encourages them to come directly.

Unlike Batu Belimbing, which has a speaker and a story that is still quite complete, Mount Poteng is in a more fragile position. The story that was successfully collected revolves around Poteng, a girl who lost her grandmother after the two were forcibly kicked out of the mountain. Poteng then swore that he would haunt the mountain before finally jumping from the top. The story has a high narrative complexity, touching on issues of eviction, trauma, and man's relationship with nature, but its transmission is very limited. The speaker who managed to meet admitted that he had forgotten many details. This kind of fragmentation of stories is a serious sign that oral literature is heading for extinction (Nasution et al., 2022).

Sibohe Falls has a simpler legend, but its moral message is sharp. A child named Sibohé is dragged into a river vortex when he is too obsessed with chasing a glittering snail that turns out to be the river's guardian. His parents searched for him but never found him. Since then, the sound of small children's cries is claimed to be often heard from the direction of the waterfall. The story teaches that greed and carelessness can be fatal, and symbolically warns people to respect nature and not take more than necessary.

The story of Bagak Sahwa Village centers on the character of Nek Bagak, a magical figure from the Sambas Kingdom who was able to hide himself from royal envoys who wanted to collect taxes using a magical twig from his dream. Nek Bagak also played a role in calming the residents when the NICA troops came, and inherited a strong leadership philosophy: a leader should be like a tree that shades. The story goes beyond just the origin legend of the name; he retains the memory of resistance to colonialism, which is still understood with pride by the local Salako Dayak community, even to the cognate community in Sarawak, Malaysia (Rusyana & Raksanagara, 1978).

The Tjhia Family House presents a narrative with different characters: not a natural legend, but an oral history of the family. The story of Tjhia Hiap Shin, who emigrated from China, worked hard for the Khokho merchants, survived the sabotage attempts of his colleagues, and finally built a fleet of ships and a family home in 1901, all of which are still told by the manager to every visitor who comes. This is a vivid example of what Robinson & Andersen (2002) call a "literary place": a physical space that is also a cultural and emotional landscape shaped by narrative and memory.

Meanwhile, Batu Burung Beach has a simpler yet organic origin story. The name came naturally from the habit of seabirds perched every morning and evening on a large rock on the beach. The fishermen began to call it Bird Stone, and the name spread by word of mouth. Although the story does not have the complexity of a heroic legend like other stories, its function in building the identity of the place and the emotional connection of tourists with the location is quite significant. The manager noted that this story has become an "icon story" promoted by the city government.

From Bascom's perspective (in Endraswara, 2018), these six stories carry out the four functions of the classical oral literature: as a projection of collective wishful thinking (the desire for justice against greed, nature, and power), as a validator of cultural institutions and institutions (the legitimacy of place names and community identities), as a tool of education (ecological and moral values), and as a tool of social control (norms about how society should behave towards nature and others).

3.2 Oral Literature Storytelling Environment in Singkawang City

The theory of the storytelling environment from Rusyana & Raksanagara (1978) includes four interrelated aspects: the storyteller, the opportunity to tell the story, the purpose of the storytelling, and the relationship between the story and the environment. The analysis of these four aspects in the six folklores studied reveals a complex picture of the condition of oral literature in Singkawang.

In terms of storytellers, the six speakers who were successfully met were all natives who were born and settled in the area where the story developed. Their age range ranges from 29 to 73 years old, with diverse profiles: a housewife who owns a canteen in the Batu Belimbing area (Siti Windarsih, 65 years old), an Indonesian language teacher who has published folklore books (Loriya Elofhia, 29 years old), the traditional head of the Tjhia clan (Thjia Thian Chong, 73 years old), the founder of an art studio who once staged the story of Nek Bagak (Paulus Indung, 73 years old), the traditional chief and administrator of Mount Poteng (Ignasius Iyang, 67 years old), and a fisherman who owns land in the tourist destination of Batu Burung (Pawadi, 65 years old). All the speakers got stories from their parents or grandmothers, who confirmed that intergenerational oral transmission did indeed work, although now it is starting to stall.

The most common storytelling opportunities in the past were at family gatherings and as bedtime for children, two contexts that are increasingly scarce in the digital age. An interesting exception is the story of Rumah Keluarga Tjhia, which has a responsive and interactive storytelling pattern: the story is only told when someone asks. This model turns out to be more adaptive to social change, as it places tourists and visitors as the triggers of storytelling. Speaker Nek Bagak (Paulus Indung) has even created innovative new storytelling opportunities through the staging of dramas, a form of

institutionalization of oral literature that has the potential to reach a much wider audience. Meanwhile, the speakers of Batu Burung honestly admit that the tradition of gathering, the main forum for folklore telling, is now becoming less and less common.

The identified storytelling goals of all five stories (with the exception of Gunung Poteng, whose narrator cannot adequately explain them) all have strong ecological and social relevance. The story of Batu Belimbing aims to make humans not greedy for nature; Sibohe Waterfall teaches harmony with others and the environment; Rumah Keluarga Tjhia emphasizes intergenerational responsibility in preserving heritage; Nek Bagak encourages the advancement of people's thinking; and Batu Burung emphasizes the importance of preserving habitats. The ignorance of the speakers of Gunung Poteng about the purpose of the story is an important signal that the inheritance process there has been seriously disrupted.

The relationship between the story and its environment is proven to be very close in all cases. People do not view these stories as mere fiction, but as events that actually happened and influenced their behavior until now. The people of Batu Belimbing avoid negative deeds around the location because they believe there are "waiters". Tjhia's family has been diligently guarding their home for seven generations because of the ancestral stories that bind them to the place. The Batu Burung community maintains the habitat around the stone because they believe in the truth of the story behind its name. This kind of relationship, between narratives and the real behavior of society, is what makes oral literature a true instrument of environmental management (Simanjuntak, 2021).

From a more critical perspective, the condition of the storytelling environment in Singkawang City shows a gap that is quite alarming. Of the six folklores studied, none were in a healthy state of transmission. All face the same challenges: older speakers, younger generations less interested, and fewer storytelling opportunities. Without planned intervention, these stories have the potential to become "forgotten history" in the next two to three generations (Dwipayana, 2023). This is where literary tourism can play a role as a strategic preservation mechanism: when folklore is made an integral part of the tourist experience, there are economic and social incentives to sustain it.

Table 1. Summary of the Storytelling Environment of Six Folklore in Singkawang City

No.	Story Title	Speakers & Ages	Storytelling Purpose	Physical Evidence in the Environment
1	Star Stone	Siti Windarsih, 65 years old	Educate not to be greedy for nature	Star-shaped layered stones in the lake area

No.	Story Title	Speakers & Ages	Storytelling Purpose	Physical Evidence in the Environment
2	Mount Poteng	Ignatius Iyang, 67 years old	Unknown speaker	Mount Poteng, with its Dutch-era ponds and rare flora
3	Sibohe Waterfall	Loriya Elofhia, 29 th	Teaching harmony with nature and others	The waterfall itself is a natural destination
4	Bagak Sahwa Village (Nek Bagak)	Paul Mother, 73 years old	Advancing people's thinking	The name of the village changed from Kampung Lalang to Bagak Sahwa
5	Tjhia Clan House	Thia Thian Chong, 73 th	Maintaining ancestral homes across generations	The 1901 building that is still standing, inhabited by seven generations
6	Bird Stone	Pawadi, 65 th	Preserving the habitat around rocks	A large rock on the coast of Sedau that resembles a bird

Source: Primary Data, 2026

3.3 Conditions of Tourist Destinations Related to Oral Literature

The assessment of the condition of six tourist destinations was carried out using the minimum criteria and standards of tourist destination areas developed by Kreck (in Suwantoro, 2004), including aspects of objects, access, accommodation, facilities, transportation, catering services, recreational activities, shopping, communication, banking systems, health, security, cleanliness, and worship facilities. The results of the assessment show a very striking disparity between the six destinations.

Batu Belimbing is the most structured growth destination since its official management began in 2021 by the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), which was formed at the encouragement of the Nyarumkop village. This destination already has gates, counters, canteens, garbage cans, gazebos, artificial lakes with crankshaft duck rides, prayer rooms, ablution places, toilets, stages, paved roads to the location, information boards, and P3K facilities. Monthly income ranges from IDR 25-30 million with a transparent management system (70% for member salaries, 30% for operations). Support from PLN through CSR and PT Kapal Api has provided digital infrastructure in the form of laptops and cameras. However, the parking area is still dirty, it

becomes muddy in the rainy season, and the lack of lodging accommodation is a shortcoming that needs to be addressed immediately.

Rumah Keluarga Marga Tjhia is a unique case in that it operates entirely without government or private assistance, but still manages to attract domestic and foreign tourists. The building, which dates back to 1901, has an authenticity that can't be made up: authentic ancient Chinese architects, an active worship altar, a collection of historical photographs, a meeting hall, original wooden staircases, and a well-kept garden. Its governance is completely hereditary in the Tjhia clan family. The cultural heritage status it holds provides legal protection, even though it is not accompanied by adequate financial support from the government. The main limitations are the information board, which is still minimal and not available in foreign languages, and the absence of a souvenir shop.

Batu Burung Beach shows a professional management profile at the individual level, even without the support of Pokdarwis. Managed by one family since 2007, this destination already has homestays, prayer rooms, canteens in two locations (one on the mainland, one on the beach), toilets, bridges to the beach area, and water tour boat rides. The official ticket of IDR 5,000 per person has been set since 2023 with government permission. The target of 1,000–2,000 visits per month is generally achieved. The manager consciously rejected the entry of private investors to keep ticket prices affordable for all, an attractive value as an inclusive model of people's tourism.

On the other hand, Mount Poteng presents a sobering picture: it is a once-glorious destination (very popular in the 1970s–1980s with its paved roads and villas) but then abandoned for decades. Currently, the road leading to the site is in a severely damaged condition, with potholes, narrow (only enough for one four-wheeled vehicle), and without safety fences on the dangerous sides. The Dutch heritage bathing pool is no longer maintained, the villa no longer exists, there are no public toilets, no prayer rooms, no structured managers, and no financial support from the government or the private sector. Ironically, Mount Poteng has ecotourism assets that are actually very valuable: rare *Rafflesia* flowers, endemic butterflies, and beautiful natural beauty. This gap between potential and actual conditions is a reflection of inconsistent tourism policy failures (Prayudi, 2017).

Sibohe Falls faces a more fundamental structural problem: there is no formal management at all. The destination is managed voluntarily by local youngsters who maintain parking without a fixed rate. There are no entrance tickets, no toilets, no prayer rooms, no canteens operating all year round, and the road to the location in the form of solid soil has never been repaired since the first cement staircase was built independently around 2004–2005. An additional complication is the fact that parking lots are privately owned, so infrastructure development is hampered. The absolute dependence on rainfall, as the falls can dry up for months in the dry season, makes this destination commercially highly unstable.

Bagak Sahwa Tourism Village is in an ambivalent position: it has the richest cultural potential among the six destinations (with Ngabayut rituals, durian tourism, and the surviving wisdom of the Dayak Salako customs), but it is hampered by the status of all-encompassing land ownership of the community. This creates a complicated management dilemma: any development decision must go through negotiations with landowners who do not always agree. The existing facilities include a gate, a longhouse (Bantang Binuo Salako), a bamboo bridge, and a fruit sales area. Adequate toilets, prayer rooms, and parking are not yet available. However, the connections of the Salako Dayak cultural network that transcend national borders, encompassing communities in Sarawak, Malaysia, are a tremendous asset of cultural diplomacy if used appropriately.

Referring to the tourism development framework of Suwantoro (2004) which includes five main elements, objects and attractions, tourism infrastructure, tourism facilities, infrastructure management, and community/environment, overall the six tourist destinations in Singkawang still need substantial development, especially in the aspects of infrastructure (roads, electricity, clean water), facilities (accommodation, transportation, restaurants), and a structured management system.

The pattern that emerges from this data is quite clear: destinations that have folklore that lives on in the memory of communities and structured management tend to develop better, while those that experience a decline in oral literature as infrastructure deteriorates tend to fall into a downward spiral that reinforces each other. This supports the theoretical argument that the revitalization of oral literature and the development of tourism infrastructure should be carried out simultaneously and integrated, not separately (Putra, 2019).

Table 2. Summary of the Condition of Facilities and Infrastructure of Six Tourist Destinations in Singkawang City

No.	Destinations	Management Status	Condition of Facilities	Priority Needs
1	Star Stone	Pokdarwis + active village support	Quite adequate; gates, canteens, artificial lakes, prayer rooms, and info boards available	Parking, paving, accommodation, ATM
2	Mount Poteng	Self-help society; Old Vacuum	Very concerning; Roads are badly damaged, and	Comprehensive road repairs, toilets,

No.	Destinations	Management Status	Condition of Facilities	Priority Needs
3	Sibohe Waterfall	No official manager	facilities are abandoned Very minimal; stairs are cracked, parking is not arranged, there are no toilets or prayer rooms	swimming pools, canteens Repairs to roads, toilets, prayer rooms, P3K posts, and official Pokdarwis
4	Bagak Sahwa Village	Pokdarwis + customary managers; stagnant	Not enough; WC and parking are not yet available, partial roads	Toilets, parking, accommodation, access to transportation, and digital promotion
5	Tjhia Clan House	Independent family; Cultural Heritage	Quite adequate; Authentic buildings maintained, parking available	Bilingual information boards, souvenir shops, and organized photo spots
6	Bird Stone	Landowners; Self-contained, stable	Quite adequate; Homestay, canteen, toilet, prayer room available	Parking paving, addition of toilets and prayer rooms, digital promotion

Source: Primary Data, 2026

4. Discussion

From Bascom's perspective (in Endraswara, 2018), these six stories carry out the four functions of the classical oral literature: as a projection of collective wishful thinking (the desire for justice against greed, nature, and power), as a validator of cultural institutions and institutions (the legitimacy of place names and community identities), as a tool of education (ecological and moral values), and as a tool of social control (norms about how society should behave towards nature and others).

From a more critical perspective, the condition of the storytelling environment in Singkawang City shows a gap that is quite alarming. Of the six folklores studied, none were in a healthy state of transmission. All face the

same challenges: older speakers, younger generations less interested, and fewer storytelling opportunities. Without planned intervention, these stories have the potential to become "forgotten history" in the next two to three generations (Dwipayana, 2023). This is where literary tourism can play a role as a strategic preservation mechanism: when folklore is made an integral part of the tourist experience, there are economic and social incentives to sustain it.



Figure 2. Causal Flow of Oral Tradition Transformation: from modernization to tourism integration

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5. Conclusion

This study confirms that oral literature and tourist destinations in Singkawang City have a real, organic, and mutually supportive relationship. The six legends studied are not just the story behind place names; It is a system of ecological knowledge and values programmed in the collective memory of society. When those values are still alive, such as in the sustainability-conscious Batu Belimbing management community or the Tjhia family, who preserve the heritage from generation to generation, the tourist destinations tend to be more sustainable.

The general condition of the storytelling environment shows signs of setbacks that need to be watched out for. The average age of the speakers, the scarcity of opportunities to tell stories in a family context, and the lack of knowledge of the younger generation about the narrative behind the destinations they visit are indicators that oral transmission is weakening. Without planned revitalization efforts, Singkawang's oral literary wealth has

the potential to become mere records in research archives, not a living and developing tradition.

In terms of infrastructure, there is a striking disparity between well-managed and abandoned destinations. Mount Poteng and Sibohe Waterfall require immediate attention, not only because of their poor physical condition, but because the ecological and cultural potential they possess is too valuable to be left behind.

Overall, this study argues that literary tourism based on local folklore is the most appropriate approach for Singkawang City to build an authentic, sustainable, and not easily replicated tourism identity. In a city known for its cultural diversity, it is precisely the oral stories that have been hidden behind the names of rocks and mountains that have the potential to become the true competitive advantage.

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