

Exploring the Product Role in Indonesian Folklore "Legenda Sangkuriang" through Narrative Analysis

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Abstract

This research examines the role of the product design object in the folklore of Legenda Sangkuriang through a narrative analysis approach, drawing on theories by Freytag and Propp. Five main product objects: loom, bow-arrow, ladle, pestle-mortar, and boat are identified as having essential contributions to the narrative structure and function of the story. The findings reveal that these objects not only serve practical functions but also support the narrative development. This study confirms that product design has a strategic role in folklore. It can serve as an inspiration for the further development of folklore-based product design.

Keywords: Role; product; folklore; narrative analysis

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1.0 Introduction

Product design has evolved into a discipline that focuses not only on functional aspects but also on aesthetic, emotional, and cultural values. Shaw & Nickpour (2024) and S.-Y. Yang & Wu (2023) suggest that good product design should be able to communicate with its users through visual and narrative elements that are relevant to the cultural context. In recent years, many designers have drawn inspiration from local culture to create products that have a strong identity and added value (Dhadphale, 2024). Studies by Gumulya et al. (2023) and Paramitha & Chandra (2024) show that product designs inspired by local cultural elements can increase the emotional value and competitiveness of products in the global market. For example, product designs inspired by batik patterns or traditional carvings have successfully promoted Indonesian culture in the international market.

Indonesian folklore, as part of the country's cultural wealth, encompasses moral values, local wisdom, and national identity that can be interpreted through product design (Parung et al., 2023). Folklore has excellent potential to be a source of inspiration in design, as it contains strong and universal narrative elements (Agustin et al., 2024; S.-Y. Yang & Wu, 2023). Their studies show that folklore-inspired product design can increase people's appreciation of local culture. However, few studies have explored how narrative elements in folklore can be effectively interpreted through product design. Research by W. Yang & Lahti (2023) confirms that folklore can be an effective tool for promoting cultural values through product design. However, a comprehensive analytical approach is still needed to identify relevant narrative elements. Regarding this topic, the study employs a narrative analysis approach grounded in Freytag's

Pyramid Theory, which focuses on dramatic structure, and Vladimir Propp's work, which emphasises narrative functions. These theories were chosen as analytical tools because both provide a comprehensive framework for understanding narrative structures and elements in stories (Freytag, 2004; Propp, 1968; Trisari, 2021).

Thus, this study aims to examine the narrative functions and structural roles of product design objects within selected Indonesian folklore. To achieve this aim, the objectives of this study are to: a) identify product/objects appearing in selected Indonesian folklore narratives, b) examine the structural positions of product design objects based on Freytag's Pyramid, c) analyse the narrative functions of these objects using Vladimir Propp's theory, and d) interpret how product design contributes to plot development and cultural meaning in Indonesian folklore.

In addition to enriching academic studies on folklore and product design, the urgency of this research lies in exploring the position of product design as one of the essential elements in folklore. The results can later become an asset in the development of product design based on local culture in the contemporary world.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Freytag's Pyramid Theory

Freytag's Pyramid is a narrative theory developed by Gustav Freytag in 1863 in his book *Die Technik des Dramas* or *Technique of the Drama* (Freytag, 2004). The theory was initially designed to analyse dramatic structures in drama, but was later adapted to analyse narrative stories, including folktales. Freytag's Pyramid divides the narrative structure into five main parts:

1. Exposition: providing the basic information necessary for the reader or audience to understand the story, including the setting, main characters, and initial conflict.
2. Rising Action: the conflict begins to develop, and tensions begin to rise. The characters face various challenges and obstacles that trigger the development of the plot.
3. Climax: the peak of tension in the story where the conflict reaches its highest point and the main character's decisions or actions have a significant impact on the storyline.
4. Falling Action: the tension begins to subside, and the story moves towards resolution. At this stage, the consequences of the climax begin to show, and the conflict begins to be resolved.
5. Resolution: the final part of the story, where all conflicts are resolved, and the story concludes. The characters reach the endpoint of their development, and the story closes with satisfaction or clarity.

Freytag's Pyramid is beneficial for analysing dramatic structure in folklore because it provides a clear framework for identifying key elements that build tension and resolution in narratives (Tjahyadi & Firdaus, 2021). This theory helps researchers understand how folklore is constructed and how product design influences its narrative elements.

2.2 Vladimir Propp's Theory

Vladimir Propp was a Russian folklorist who developed narrative theory in his book, "Morphology of the Folktale" (1968). Propp analysed hundreds of Russian folktales and identified recurring narrative patterns (Propp, 1968). He found that although the folktales had variations in plot and character, they had a similar narrative structure.

Propp identified 31 narrative functions that can appear in folktales (see Table 1). These functions are the actions or events that drive the storyline.

Table 1. The 31 Propp's narrative functions

Narrative Functions	
1. Absentation	17. Marking
2. Interdiction	18. Victory
3. Violation	19. The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated
4. Reconnaissance	20. Return
5. Delivery	21. Pursuit
6. Trickery	22. Rescue
7. Complicity	23. Arrival
8. Villainy	24. Unfounded claims
9. Mediation	25. Difficult task
10. Beginning counteraction	26. Solution
11. Departure	27. Recognition
12. Testing	28. Exposure
13. Reaction	29. Transfiguration
14. Acquisition	30. Punishment
15. Guidance	31. Wedding (Marriage or ascension to the throne)
16. Struggle	

(Source: Propp, 1968)

2.3 Integration of Freytag's and Propp's Theory

The combination of Freytag's and Vladimir Propp's provides a comprehensive approach to analysing folklore. Freytag's Pyramid focuses on the dramatic structure of the story, while Propp's theory contributes to the analysis of narrative functions. Combining these two

theories will provide a deeper understanding of how product design, as an object, plays a role in the structural construction of the story (plot) and its narrative functions.

2.4 Previous Research

Based on the literature review, research on product design inspired by local culture, including folklore, has experienced rapid growth in recent years. Some previous studies have explored how cultural elements such as batik patterns, traditional carvings, and cultural symbols can be integrated into product design to enhance the emotional value and identity of the product (Dhadphale, 2024; Gumulya et al., 2023; W. Yang & Lahti, 2023). However, these studies focus more on the visual and symbolic aspects of culture. At the same time, the potential of narrative in folklore as a source of design inspiration is still less explored.

Research by Agustin et al. (2024), Ratri et al. (2021), and S.-Y. Yang & Wu (2023) have paved the way by exploring the role of folklore in product design. They found that folklore can be a powerful source of inspiration for product design as it contains narrative elements that are universal and rich in cultural values. On the other hand, Li et al. (2024) and Wu (2024) tried to apply narrative theory in a design context. However, in this case, they did not use folklore as a source of inspiration, so there is no analysis of the structure and elements that can be adapted from folklore into product design.

This research occupies a unique position because it combines Freytag's Pyramid narrative analysis approach with Propp's Theory, as well as product design studies. Previous studies, such as those by Mariah et al. (2025) and Tjahyadi & Firdaus (2021), focused on the visual aspects of culture or narrative analysis in a literary context. This research also seeks to bridge the two fields by exploring how product design, as an object, plays a role and functions as a narrative element in folklore. Thus, this research not only fills a gap in the existing literature but also offers an innovative approach that can contribute to the development of culture-based product design in local contexts.

3.0 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative narrative analysis approach, which is appropriate for examining meaning, structure, and symbolic functions within cultural narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Narrative analysis enables researchers to systematically interpret how objects function within the context of story structures and cultural frameworks.

The research design follows a theory-driven qualitative coding process, integrating Freytag's Pyramid for structural analysis and Vladimir Propp's narrative functions. This dual-framework approach has been widely applied in folklore and narrative studies to ensure analytical rigour and conceptual clarity (Freytag, 2004; Propp, 1968; Saldaña, 2013).

3.1 Data Source

Legenda Sangkuriang (the Legend of Sangkuriang) was selected as the primary data source based on three criteria: a) narrative richness, including a clear dramatic structure and conflict progression; b) presence of identifiable product objects actively involved in the storyline; and c) cultural significance, as one of the most widely recognised Indonesian folklores.

The use of a single, well-established folklore text aligns with qualitative narrative research practices that emphasise depth of analysis over breadth (Riessman, 2008).

3.2 Data Collection & Criteria

Data were collected through systematic textual analysis of authoritative written versions of Legenda Sangkuriang. Product objects were identified based on their explicit mention and active involvement in narrative events.

An object was classified as a product design object if it met the following criteria:

- It possesses a clear utilitarian function in everyday life.
- It is used or manipulated by characters within the narrative.
- It contributes to plot development or character transformation.

This selection procedure follows object-centred narrative analysis approaches commonly used in design and cultural studies (Grimaldi et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2024; Riessman, 2008).

Additionally, images of product objects used in this study were collected from publicly accessible online sources and were used solely for illustrative and analytical purposes. Each image was cross-referenced with textual descriptions from the folklore to ensure contextual accuracy. The visual materials support object identification and do not serve as primary analytical data.

3.2 Data Analysis

As presented in Fig. 1, the initial process is reading thoroughly and identifying the product object in the story. The objects were identified using Freytag's Pyramid to determine the role of product design as an object related to narrative structure elements in folklore (Freytag, 2004) and Vladimir Propp's Theory to identify objects associated with narrative functions (Propp, 1968). The results serve as a basis for findings and a descriptive discussion.

To enhance analytical reliability, the coding process was conducted through iterative comparison among the researchers. Initial coding results were discussed collaboratively to resolve interpretive differences and reach consensus, a method commonly adopted in qualitative narrative research to improve analytical trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

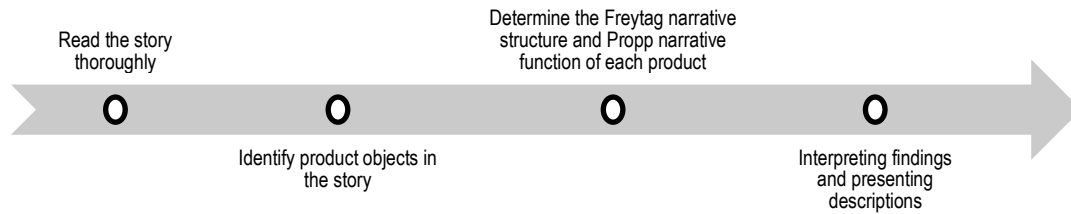







Fig. 1: Flowchart of data analysis
(Source: Septian et al., 2025)

4.0 Findings

In the Legenda Sangkuriang, various traditional product objects appear, specifically the loom, bow and arrow, ladle, pestle and mortar, and boat. Each of these objects serves a practical function in people's lives, while also holding a symbolic meaning and a specific narrative role in the Sangkuriang storyline. The following Table 2 identifies these objects:

Table 2. Identification of products/objects in Legenda Sangkuriang		
Product/Object	Freytag's Narrative Structure	Propp's Narrative Function
	Description of Product/Object	Involvement in the Story
1. Loom	Exposition	Absentation
		Initially, Dayang Sumbi is told that she likes weaving. The loom shows Dayang Sumbi's skill as a weaver. The incident of the falling thread triggered her vow to marry Tumang (a dog descended from the god) and caused her to leave the castle.
	Rising Action	Villainy
2. Bow and arrow		
		A traditional arrow weapon used by Sangkuriang for hunting. Unable to find a prey, Sangkuriang shot Tumang to death and took his liver.
	Rising Action	Counteraction-Marking
3. Ladle or rice spoon		
		The rice spoon that Dayang Sumbi used to hit Sangkuriang's head when she found out he had killed Tumang and made her eat Tumang's liver. This blow left a scar on Sangkuriang's head. Dayang Sumbi told him that Tumang was his birth father. Sangkuriang was shocked and left the house.
	Rising Action-Climax	Rescue
4. Pestle and mortar		

Product/Object	Freytag's Narrative Structure	Propp's Narrative Function
	Description of Product/Object Involvement in the Story	
		Dayang Sumbi used to make a sound like pounding in the morning, so that Sangkuriang was surprised to think that morning had come and thwarted his efforts.
5. Boat	Climax-Falling Action-Resolution	The difficult task-Solution
		The wooden boat that Sangkuriang built with the help of the genies was a condition for marrying Dayang Sumbi.

(Source: all images were compiled from various websites on Google and elaborated by Septian et al., 2025)

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Object Role Analysis from a Product Design Perspective

The loom has a practical function of combining threads into fabric. Symbolically, Dayang Sumbi's strength as a reliable weaver woman shows the heritage of local wisdom (weaving skill) integrated in the story. Weaving is a preserved cultural product, so the presence of the loom emphasises the traditional context of the legend. Narratively, the tool triggers the conflict as the fall of the thread caused Dayang Sumbi to be bound to marry the taker, highlighting that design elements of everyday tools can serve as story triggers (Nedaei et al., 2022).

The wooden bow and reed arrows are traditional hunting weapons. From a design perspective, the bow and arrow require precision, tension, and aerodynamics. Practically, Sangkuriang used a bow and arrow to hunt animals in the forest. The narrative becomes tragic when he deliberately shot Tumang to death because he unsuccessfully got a prey. The story highlights the arrow's function as a hunting tool that brings great tragedy (Grimaldi et al., 2013). Symbolically, the arrow symbolises unexpected fate and fight. This object illustrates how even a simple tool can serve as a crucial narrative element that triggers the central conflict in the story.

A ladle or rice spoon is a simple kitchen tool, crafted from lightweight natural materials. Its practical function is to scoop rice, but its narrative turns into a weapon when Dayang Sumbi hit Sangkuriang on the head with it. Symbolically, an everyday household object turns into an instrument of punishment (Huang et al., 2024). The ladle's rounded design reflects traditional hospitality that dramatically turns into a symbol of regret (Sangkuriang's wounded head). Although this small object has no magic effect, it complements the initial events of the conflict, demonstrating the multifunctional role of everyday products in the narrative.

Pestle and mortar (also known as *alu* and *lesung*) are traditional tools used for pounding rice. Their practical function is clearly in food production. In the story, Dayang Sumbi hit the pestle against the mortar repeatedly in the early hours of the morning to create the sound of pounding rice (as if it were morning). Symbolically, the use of the pestle emphasises the theme of ingenuity and the shifting of time. From a product design point of view, the pestle and mortar are designed to be strong enough to withstand impact (hardwood) and comfortable to hold. In the story, these objects are engineered to function as "magic tools" that deceive time. This concept is similar to the idea of product design that combines both functionality and storytelling (Grimaldi et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2024). Here, the pestle and mortar not only reflect traditional tools, but also become an essential part of the story's climax, the sound stopped the genies's help before the task was completed.

In practical terms, a boat is a type of transportation designed to bear large loads and remain stable on the water. In the story, the boat (which was made from a single large tree trunk) becomes an important focus of the plot. Symbolically, the boat symbolises Sangkuriang's journey and ambition, as well as the consequences of his arrogance. From a product design perspective, the traditional boat retains the architectural principles of local boats. According to Paramitha & Chandra (2024), products that integrate cultural

elements become "cultural ambassadors", conveying local values through their design. In the context of Sangkuriang, the boat becomes a cultural icon because its continuation transformed into Mount Tangkuban Perahu, an inverted boat, making this boat design a symbol of the power of nature.

5.2 Analysis with Narrative Theory: Freytag and Propp

According to Freytag, the dramatic structure of a story has five elements (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution) that are causally interconnected (Freytag, 2004). In *Legenda Sangkuriang*, exposition occurs when Dayang Sumbi is introduced, weaving fabric, and meeting Tumang. The rising action begins when Sangkuriang left the house after shooting Tumang to death. Then, a ladle ignited Dayang Sumbi's anger and hit Sangkuriang on the head.

Then Sangkuriang reappeared to ask Dayang Sumbi to marry him and was given an impossible task (create a lake and a boat overnight). The climax is reached when he failed to fulfil the requirement (Dayang Sumbi simulated dawn by utilising sounds from pestle and mortar), so that the boat turned to the Mount Tangkuban Perahu. The reversal occurs when Sangkuriang went berserk, Dayang Sumbi escaped, and the tragic ending (Denouement) when Dayang Sumbi turned into a Jaksi Flower. Thus, the boat object appears right at the top of Freytag's Pyramid: the boat as the culmination of Sangkuriang's efforts, and the pestle-mortar as the trigger for his downfall (Grimaldi et al., 2013).

From Propp's theoretical point of view, every character and object in a fairy tale fills a constant narrative function. Propp concluded that the number of functions in fairy tales is limited, and the order is fixed. Initially, Dayang Sumbi was described as skilled at weaving. The loom served as an object that revealed Dayang Sumbi's character as well as the trigger for the first conflict, specifically when one part of the loom fell, prompting her to swear that if a man found it, she would marry him. A male dog named Tumang found the loom, and Dayang Sumbi married him, leaving the castle (Function 1: Absentation). They were blessed with a child named Sangkuriang. When he grew up, Sangkuriang committed violence by killing Tumang with an arrow (Function 8: Villainy). Dayang Sumbi was so angry that she hit Sangkuriang's head with a ladle and left a wound (Function 10 & 17: Counteraction-Marking).

When Sangkuriang grew up, he met Dayang Sumbi again but did not recognise her because he had lost his memory after being hit by the ladle. Sangkuriang wanted to propose to Dayang Sumbi. Nevertheless, Dayang Sumbi realised that the scar on his head marked him as her biological son; she did not like the proposal. Finally, Dayang Sumbi gave an impossible condition: to build a lake and a large boat in one night, and it must be completed before dawn arrived. Sangkuriang unexpectedly agreed to this. To save herself, Dayang Sumbi devised a plan by making the sounds of pestle and mortar to trick Sangkuriang that dawn had arrived (Function 22: Rescue). Because of this, Sangkuriang became angry and kicked the boat, which was "the difficult task" (Function 25) and had failed to be completed (Function 26: Solution), until it capsized and turned into a mountain.

Overall, the design objects in *Legenda Sangkuriang* serve not only as a setting but also as proxies for the narrative. From a product design perspective, they possess both specific practical functions and aesthetic and symbolic dimensions. This analysis demonstrates that folklore narratives rich in cultural artefacts can be understood through the lens of dramatic structures (Freytag's Pyramid) and narrative functions (Propp), where each object fills a distinctive role both narratively and culturally.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Legenda Sangkuriang not only contains a mythological narrative about the origin of Mount Tangkuban Perahu but also features significant roles for various traditional products as elements that support the story structure and represent local cultural values. Through narrative analysis based on Freytag's Pyramid and Vladimir Propp's Theory, it is identified that objects such as the loom, bow and arrow, ladle, rice spoon, pestle-mortar, and boat make strategic contributions to moving the storyline and strengthening the dramatic and symbolic dimensions of the legend.

In Freytag's dramatic structure, these objects appear at crucial points such as rising action (the loom fell and was found by Tumang, the bow-arrow killed Tumang, and the ladle as a medium for Dayang Sumbi's anger at her son's mistake), climax (the deceptive sound of the pestle-mortar and kicking the boat), and resolution (the boat overturned and transformed to a mountain). In Propp's framework, these objects fulfil fixed narrative functions such as absentation, villainy, counteraction, marking, rescue, the difficult task, and solution, all of which support character development and story dynamics.

From a product design perspective, each object in the story is not only utilitarian (a hunting, transportation, or cooking tool) but also has layers of symbolic and representative meanings that reflect the culture. For instance, the boat represents ambition and downfall, the loom reflects the women role, and the pestle-mortar serves as a symbol of time.

However, this study is limited by its focus on a single folklore narrative and the interpretive subjectivity inherent in qualitative narrative analysis. Future research may strengthen the findings by translating narrative insights into design-oriented practices, such as developing folklore-based product prototypes through design sprints and user testing. Comparative studies across multiple Indonesian or cross-cultural folklores, as well as participatory and co-design approaches involving designers and cultural practitioners, are also recommended. Additionally, the development of an evaluation framework addressing narrative fidelity, cultural resonance, usability, and market viability would support a more comprehensive integration of narrative theory and product design practice.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper contributes to the study of folklore and the development of product design.

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