



Representation of Moral Values in the Legend of the Tadulako Statue

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-04-07 Revised: 2026-05-19 Accepted: 2026-08-08 Keywords: Moral values, Representation, The Legend of the Tadulako Statue, Character building, Oral Tradition DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.11385 Corresponding Author: Dita Indah Sari Monai dita.indah.monai@gmail.com Indonesian Language and Literature Education, Tadulako University	<i>The Legend of the Tadulako Statue was chosen as the object of this research because it is one of the oral traditions of the Behoa tribe that still survives to this day, especially in the form of stone monuments, so the moral narrative behind it is at risk of being forgotten even though the site is still widely known. This study aims to describe the representation of moral values in the Legend of the Tadulako Statue from Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi Province, using descriptive qualitative methods with thematic analysis. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with four key informants in Doda Village and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The analysis of moral values uses the framework of Kees Bertens (2018), which classifies moral values into four categories—relationships with God, oneself, fellow human beings, and nature—combined with Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of representation; Bertens explains what moral values are present, while Hall explains how these values are constructed and circulated through meaning-making practices. The novelty of this research lies in the study of the Behoa legend, which has never been documented academically, analyzed through Bertens' four categories of moral values and Hall's representational lens. The results of the study show that this legend is rich in moral values represented through characters and events: individual and social values appear most dominant, while religious and natural values appear more briefly but play an important role at the beginning and climax of the story. This research contributes to the study of regional folklore that is still minimally documented and the development of character education based on local wisdom, while also emphasizing the urgency of documenting regional oral traditions that are</i>

threatened with extinction before they eventually only leave physical monuments without accompanying moral meaning.

1. Introduction

Every literary work, both traditional and modern, contains values that can be used as guidelines for life. Traditional oral literature is the focus of this research because it contains noble values that are passed down across generations, and among these values, moral values occupy a central position because they are related to the teachings of good and bad and human behavior. As stated by Eliastuti (2017:41), morality is the conformity of human attitudes to generally accepted ideas in society regarding right and proper actions, so that morality is always related to the assessment of human behavior as good or bad. Legends, as a form of oral literature that is passed down from generation to generation, generally tell stories of past events that are associated with certain figures, places, or events, and in addition to their entertainment function, legends also serve to educate because they contain moral messages that can be used as examples.

One legend originating from Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi Province, is the Legend of the Tadulako Statue. This legend was originally passed down orally by the local community before being compiled into a book to reach a wider audience. This story tells the heroism, courage, loyalty, and betrayal of a figure named Tadulako, who is revered by his community. Through this story, people not only learn about the history and culture of their region but also learn various moral values from it (Danandjaja, 2019).

With the changing times, interest in folklore and regional legends has begun to decline, especially among the younger generation. Initial observations in Doda Village indicate that most young people only recognize the Tadulako Statue as a physical object or cultural heritage site, without understanding the essence of the story or the moral values it contains. This gap in cultural understanding has the potential to break the chain of passing on noble values to the next generation.

Critical Review of Previous Research

A number of studies have examined moral values in folktales and literary works from various regions, but when examined more critically, these studies generally have two limitations that actually emphasize the gap that this study fills. First, in terms of the object of study: Susanti Minajuddin (2015) identified three types of moral values (relationships with oneself, others, and God) in the novel Tuhan Ijinkan Aku Menjadi Pelacur!, while Purnamasari (2010) found a similar pattern in the novel Ranah 3 Warna. Because novels are individual creations, the moral values revealed in them more or less reflect the author's personal vision, not merely a communal outlook on life. Rosna (2015) is closer to this study because it uses Bertens's four categories of moral values in regional literary works, but the

objects studied have long been documented and are not legends that still live orally in a particular community. Second, in terms of geographical and linguistic scope: more recent research on moral values in folktales—for example, the study by Nurhasanah et al. (2026) on the folktale “Si Kabayan” and Zurviana, Permadi, and Yulianeta’s (2025) study of the Kabayan Tale—focus on Javanese and Sundanese oral traditions that have long been documented, taught, and readily accessible nationally.

A similar pattern is seen in international studies: Ngo and Luong (2023) show that folklore in Southeast Asia functions simultaneously as an informal historical archive and a means of instilling moral values, while Tran and Nguyen (2023) assert that Vietnamese fairy tales remain effective in teaching life values and socio-emotional competencies in the classroom. These studies confirm that the moral function of oral traditions remains a vibrant concern, but all analyze established and widely documented folklore, rather than legends whose narrative content remains largely undocumented outside their own communities. The Legend of the Tadulako Statue falls precisely into this gap: a Behoa oral tradition whose physical site is widely known, but whose narrative and moral content have barely received academic study.

Compared to other legends in Central Sulawesi, such as those from the Kaili or Pamona communities, the Legend of the Tadulako Statue is unique: its moral narrative is anchored in a physical monument that can still be seen today. This uniqueness provides the community with a concrete and continually updated moral reminder, rather than relying entirely on evanescent oral memories.

Moral Values and Moral Value Representation: Two Different Focuses

Because the title and focus of this research are the representation of moral values, not moral values per se, it is necessary to emphasize the difference between the two. Identifying moral values means answering the question “what values are present in this legend?”, while examining the representation of moral values means answering the additional question “through what means and why do these values become meaningful and are passed down?”. Following Hall (1997), representation is the process of producing and exchanging meaning through language, symbols, and narrative, so that a story does not simply reflect an existing moral reality but also helps construct and circulate a community’s shared understanding of right and wrong.

In this sense, the Legend of the Tadulako Statue does not simply depict moral values that stand alone outside the story; through the fates of its characters, the narrative itself produces and reinforces the moral meaning of the Behoa community, and continues to circulate it each time the legend is retold. This lens of representation complements Bertens’ (2018) four-category classification: while Bertens’ framework identifies what moral values are present, Hall’s theory explains how these values become meaningful and are maintained across generations through storytelling practices. The relationship between these two

concepts can be summarized as a conceptual chain: legends (as cultural texts) represent moral values (categorized according to Bertens) through their characters and events, and these representations in turn serve a character-educating function for the people who continue to tell and listen to the stories. This conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 1.

Gambar 1. Kerangka Konseptual Penelitian

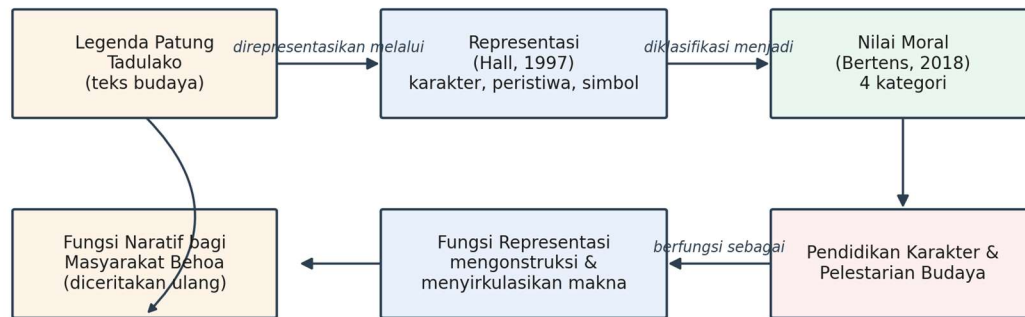


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Research

Therefore, this study aims to (1) describe the representation of moral values contained in the Legend of the Tadulako Statue, and (2) describe the representation of the function of these moral values through the characters in the legend. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the regional legend of the Behoa tribe which has never been documented as a means of moral representation, studied through a framework that includes the four dimensions of human moral life according to Bertens (2018) and is also interpreted through Hall's (1997) representation theory.

Theoretical Framework

Moral Values in Literature

Moral values are teachings about good and bad behavior related to character formation and serve as guidelines in social life. According to Bertens (2018:143), moral values are the conformity of human attitudes and actions with norms that are seen as obligations in social life. Nurgiyantoro (2019:321) adds that a person's views on morality, values, and tendencies are usually influenced by the perspectives of their society or nation. Bertens (2018:145) further explains that although moral values usually depend on other values, they remain unique and are even considered the highest values, based on four characteristics: (1) related to personal responsibility; (2) related to conscience; (3) obligatory; and (4) formal. Lickona (2019:62) distinguishes between universal moral values (for example,

respecting individual freedom and equality, which can unite all people across cultures) and non-universal moral values (for example, certain religious practices). The legend of the Tadulako Statue contains both types of values: universal values (courage, responsibility, concern for others) as well as values that are specifically rooted in the Behoa tradition (customary sanctions, relationship with nature).

Classification of Moral Values

Based on Kees Bertens' (2018) framework, the moral values in this study are classified into four categories. First, moral values related to God (religious), including faith, dependence on divine power, and gratitude. Second, moral values related to oneself (individual), including honesty, courage, discipline, responsibility, and self-control. Third, moral values related to fellow human beings (social), including social interactions such as helping each other, respecting others, and fulfilling social obligations. Fourth, moral values related to nature, including awareness of environmental protection and living in harmony with nature.

Legend as a Literary Form

According to Sibarani (2018:45), a legend is a folktale that is believed by its supporters to have actually happened and is related to the history or origins of a particular place or figure. Endraswara (2019:86) adds that legends are secular, related to past events that are connected to real life. Danandjaja (2019:67) classifies legends into religious legends, supernatural legends, personal legends, and local legends. The Legend of the Tadulako Statue falls into the category of personal legends combined with local legends, because it centers on a particular historical figure (Tadulako) while also explaining the origins of a geographical form (the stone statue on Buleli Hill).

2. Method

The approach used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach with thematic analysis, which aims to analyze the representation of moral values and meanings contained in the Legend of the Tadulako Statue. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore noble values, educational messages, and teachings about good and bad that develop in the Behoa tribe community through direct interaction with informants and observations in their natural cultural environment. According to Sugiyono (2017:9), qualitative research is a method used to examine the condition of natural objects, with the researcher as the key instrument and the resulting data being descriptive, in-depth, and comprehensive. Thematic analysis is applied by identifying text units (narrative quotes or informant speech) that show moral attitudes or judgments, then grouping them into themes that follow Bertens' four categories.

The research was conducted in Poso Regency, specifically Doda Village, on March 25–May 20, 2026. Doda Village was chosen because it is located close to the Tadulako Statue and the majority of its population is the indigenous Behoa

tribe, thus facilitating access to authentic information regarding the legend.

Instruments and Participants

The primary instrument of this research was the researcher herself, equipped with an interview guide (see Appendix 1), a recording device, and field notes. The interview guide consisted of five open-ended questions regarding the origins, formation process, main characters, time of events, and the complete storyline of the Tadulako Statue. The questions were structured based on the research theoretical framework, reviewed with the supervising lecturer before use, and further refined in the field according to the direction of each informant's story.

Primary data sources were obtained from four key informants who were interviewed individually between May 6–9, 2026, each lasting approximately 90–145 minutes: (1) Nelvin Lage, S.Pd., M.Pd. (46 years old), a legendary scriptwriter and school principal; (2) Aminadap Soro (69 years old), a farmer and manager of the Megalithic Cultural Heritage Site; (3) Rondo Woiya (91 years old), former traditional leader of Doda Village; and (4) Lorbes Mengkiri (55 years old), a farmer and current traditional leader of Doda Village.

These four informants were deemed sufficient to meet the data saturation requirement for this study for three reasons. First, they were cultural authority figures (culture-bearers) whose perspectives complemented each other: the author and written heir of the story, the physical site manager, and two intergenerational traditional figures (a former and a current traditional leader). This combination encompassed nearly all parties socially authorized to narrate the authoritative version of the legend in Doda Village.

Second, all four informants conveyed a single oral version that was substantially consistent with one another without significant narrative differences; the only differences were in emphasis or word choice, and were resolved by cross-checking with the written text of the legend compiled by Nelvin Lage, the community's recognized author. Third, since the four accounts corroborated each other without generating significant new themes, adding informants outside the identified circle of cultural authority figures risked simply repeating the same information rather than adding substantive variation—an indication of data saturation in qualitative research with a limited population of official speakers (Sugiyono, 2017).

Prior to the interviews, the researcher explained the research objectives and procedures and obtained the informants' verbal consent to participate and be recorded. Research activities in Doda Village were also conducted with the knowledge and permission of the village government and traditional leaders. Secondary data were obtained from books, journals, and documents related to the legend.

Integration of Oral and Written Sources

The legend of the Tadulako Statue was analyzed from two complementary sources: oral narratives told directly by the four informants, and a written version of the legend, compiled into a book by Nelvin Lage. The written version served as the primary reference text for the coding process because of its stable and precisely quotable form, while the oral narrative was used to enrich the context, verify interpretations, and capture nuances of meaning (e.g., emotional emphasis or the reasons behind a character's actions) that are not always captured in the written text. When these two sources converge in the same scene, such as the story of Tadulako's broken promise, quotations from the written version were used as primary data, while the informants' comments were used to reinforce the interpretation of the scene's moral meaning.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews conducted in a relaxed and natural manner, audio recording with the informant's consent, and systematic note-taking, in the following order: (1) approaching the informant and explaining the research objectives; (2) obtaining verbal consent and initiating the recorded interview; (3) transcribing the recording and cross-checking it with field notes; (4) coding the transcript and legend text based on Bertens' four categories of moral values; and (5) conducting member checking on the interpretation results with the informant before finalizing them.

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model: (1) data reduction, selecting and simplifying relevant data from the transcripts; (2) data presentation, organizing the data into a systematic narrative based on moral value categories; and (3) drawing conclusions, based on patterns emerging from the data. This analysis procedure is depicted in Figure 2.

Gambar 2. Prosedur/Alur Analisis Data Penelitian



Figure 2. Research Data Analysis Procedure/Flow

The coding process involved repeated readings of the transcripts and legend texts, identifying and marking segments of dialogue or narrative that expressed moral attitudes or judgments, labeling each segment with the character and moral

category it represented, and then grouping the labeled segments into Bertens' four categories to find recurring patterns. As a concrete illustration, the quote "You must return to our village to be accountable for what you have done" was marked as a morally charged segment, labeled with the character "Tadulako's parents" and the category "individual—responsibility," and then grouped with other similar segments (such as Tadulako's obedience to his parents' messages) to form the theme "personal responsibility and accountability" in the individual values category.

After coding based on Bertens' categories was completed, the researcher conducted an additional analysis step to operationalize Hall's (1997) theory of representation: each categorized segment was re-examined with the question "through what signs, symbols, figures, or events is this value constructed and conveyed to the listener, and what collective meaning does the narrative reproduce?" For example, Tadulako's transformation into stone was not only coded as a "natural value," but also analyzed as a representational device: nature acts as a sign that constructs and perpetuates the moral meaning of failure to keep a promise, so that the message continues to circulate every time the site is seen or retold. This additional step is what distinguishes representational analysis from simply identifying moral values.

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through member checking with informants and triangulation between informant accounts. The researcher was also aware of the potential for subjective bias, particularly due to the researcher's familiarity with the community and reliance on the accounts of cultural authorities who tend to convey socially "agreed-upon" versions. To minimize this bias, the researcher (1) involved the supervisor in reviewing the interview guide and coding results, (2) conducted member checking so that the researcher's interpretations were confirmed directly by the informants, rather than simply assumed, and (3) deliberately noted and reported small variations in emphasis across informants, rather than standardizing them, so that readers could judge for themselves the limits of the researcher's interpretations.

3. Result

Analysis of the Legend of the Tadulako Statue identified four categories of moral values, all represented through characters, events, and narrative structure. Individual and social moral values emerged as the most dominant categories, appearing most frequently and described in the most detail in the narrative, while religious and natural values, while clearly present, were represented more concisely and concentrated at the beginning and climax of the story, respectively. Table 1 summarizes the findings before being broken down by category.

Table 1. Summary of Moral Values in the Legend of the Tadulako Statue

Moral Values Category	Form in Legend	The Characters Who Represent
Religious Moral Values	Offerings to the gods; prayer for offspring; gratitude for blessings	Husband and wife (Tadulako's parents)
Individual Moral Values	Courage in hunting and fighting; responsibility; fighting spirit; admitting mistakes	Tadulako
Social Moral Values	Deliberation; loyalty; keeping promises; respect for customs; social concern	Village residents; village head of Bada; Tadulako's parents
Natural Moral Values	Harmony with the forest; nature as witness; transformation into stone	Tadulako; Tadulako's wife; natural landscape of Behoa Valley

Table 2. Data Coding Frequency per Moral Value Category

Moral Values Category	Amount of Coded Data	Percentage
Religious	4	26.7%
Individual	4	26.7%
Social	4	26.7%
Naturalness	3	20.0%
Total	15	100%

Note: frequency is calculated based on the data units (quotes/segments) recorded and categorized in the research coding table (see Appendix 2), not the literal number of word occurrences.

The distribution in Table 2 shows that the first three categories appear with relatively equal frequency, while the naturalness value is recorded slightly less frequently as a separate data unit—although narratively, this value stands out as a marker of the story's climax (the transformation into stone). This confirms that frequency of occurrence does not always align with a category's narrative weight, a nuance that will be discussed further.

The relationship between the four categories of moral values, instead of standing alone, is interwoven into a narrative thread centered on the character Tadulako, as depicted in Figure 3.

Gambar 3. Interkoneksi Empat Kategori Nilai Moral dalam Legenda Patung Tadulako

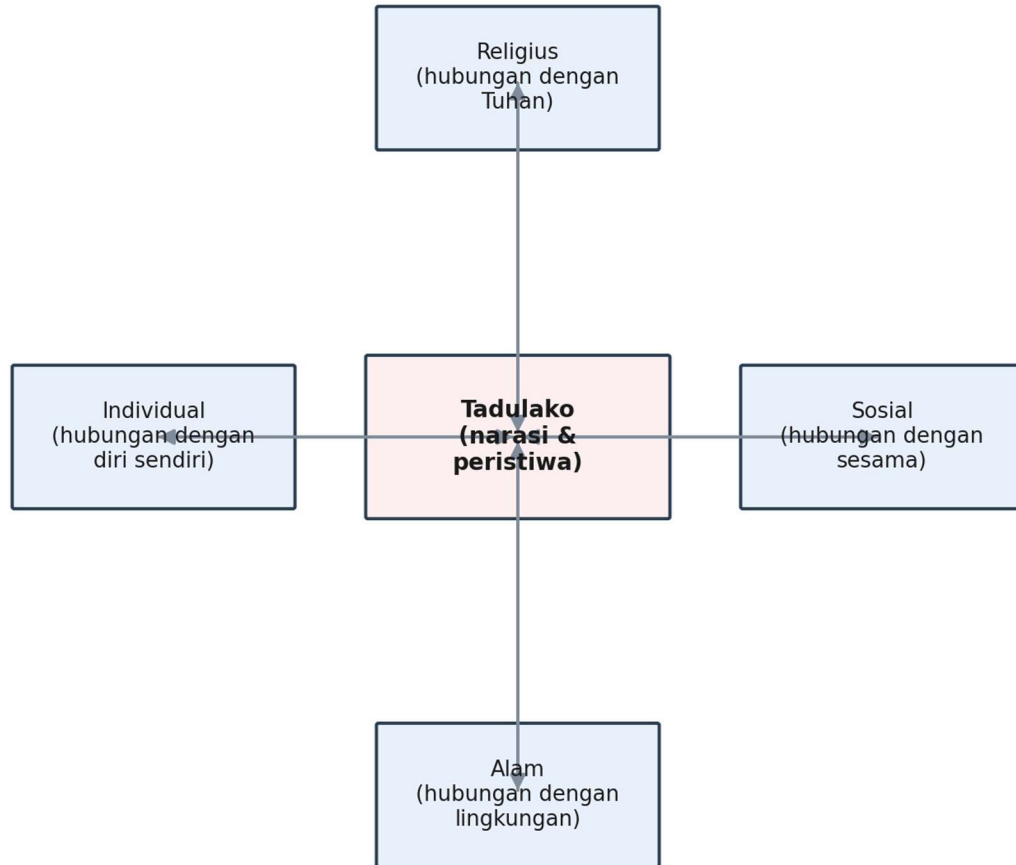


Figure 3. Interconnection of Four Categories of Moral Values in the Legend of the Tadulako Statue

Moral Values Related to God (Religious)

Data. Religious moral values are represented at the beginning of the story, when a husband and wife who have been married for a long time but have not been blessed with children decide to make offerings to the gods:

"Mom, how about we bring our offerings to the gods, asking that we be given offspring?... Tomorrow morning we have to wake up early and we go to the forest next to this hill. There is a big tree and that's where we will offer sacrifices while praying for the gods to grant our request."

When the wife later became pregnant, the husband spontaneously expressed his gratitude: "Thank you, God, you have answered our prayers and hopes."

Interpretation. Although the people at that time still adhered to animist beliefs rather than monotheism, the two quotes above demonstrate a clear

awareness of and reliance on a power greater than humankind. From Hall's representational perspective, these rituals of offering and thanksgiving serve as signs that construct a shared understanding of the human-divine relationship, and this pattern continues to circulate each time the legend is retold by subsequent generations. Mr. Rondo Woiya, one of the informants, confirms this reading:

"I see the legend of the Tadulako Statue as an ancestral legacy filled with moral messages about the relationship between humans and God, each other, and nature. The story of a married couple patiently waiting for a child until it is finally granted teaches us to never give up and always be grateful."

Moral Values Related to Oneself (Individual)

Data. The most prominent individual moral values are represented by the character of Tadulako. His courage is formed through the habit of hunting in the dense forest, sometimes for days, accompanied only by a dog: "Because of this habit, Tadulako finally became a brave young man. Every time he returned from hunting, he always brought his catch." This courage was later tested on the battlefield, when he led his troops to victory despite the enemy's greater numbers. The value of responsibility is represented when Tadulako's parents reprimanded him for breaking his engagement promise: "You must return to our village to be accountable for what you have done."

Interpretation. Tadulako's courage reflects the individual values of fighting spirit and bravery as identified by Suparno et al. (2019:33). Representationally, the character of Tadulako functions as a single sign that simultaneously condenses exemplary behavior (courage) and a warning (the consequences of denying responsibility) into one figure, thus inviting the listener to understand that both virtue and moral failure can be present in the same character. Informant Aminadap Soro adds emphasis to the social dimension of this courage:

"In my opinion, the most prominent moral value in this legend is Tadulako's courage and devotion to his people. He was willing to lead a war to protect his village and even other villages in need."

Moral Values Related to Fellow Humans (Social)

Data. Social values are represented through the deliberation to appoint Tadulako as a war leader: "One day a meeting was held in the village, and they deliberated to appoint a brave war leader to repel the enemy." The values of loyalty and keeping promises are emphasized through the customary warning to Tadulako: "Don't break that promise, because if you do, you will be subject to customary sanctions." Respect for Tadulako is also evident when the village head of Bada asks for his help: "Tadulako, you are a brave man and news about you has spread to our village."

Interpretation. These three scenes demonstrate that in Behoa society, important decisions are made collectively, promises are a socio-legal bond and not merely a private matter, and one's services must be publicly acknowledged.

Informant Nelvin Lage considers Tadulako's broken promise to be the deepest moral lesson of this legend:

"The legend of the Tadulako statue contains profound moral values, particularly regarding the importance of keeping promises. In this legend, Tadulako, who broke his promise to his fiancée, ultimately suffered severe consequences. This serves as a lesson for the younger generation that honesty and responsibility are not merely social norms, but the foundation of a dignified human character."

From Hall's perspective, the anger of a betrayed family and the fatal consequences that accompany it serve as narrative devices that construct social norms about the seriousness of a promise, while also circulating them as a collective warning.

Moral Values Related to Nature

Data. The value of nature is most strongly represented at the climax of the story, when Tadulako and his wife turn into stone: "Kamatena mpu'u mi Tadulako duu'na mewali' watu hai watu iti jawa' watu Tadulako to ara bulu' Buleli" (in Behoa language, confirming the death and transformation of Tadulako into stone on Buleli Hill).

Interpretation. In the Behoa worldview, nature has the power to permanently immortalize moral events. Stone statues become permanent moral texts written in the language of nature, carrying the moral lessons of these legends to future generations who witness them. Mr. Lorbes Mengkiri, the current traditional leader of Doda Village, explicitly emphasizes this function:

"The legend of the Tadulako Statue is not just an old story; it contains a moral lesson that is very relevant today. Tadulako's eventual reneging on his promise demonstrates that no matter how strong a person is, if they fail to uphold their trust and honor, they will face the consequences. This legend teaches us that even nature can bear witness to human actions."

He also points to the physical mark in the form of a hole in the statue's head, the result of a blow during transformation, which the community views as solid physical evidence of the story's moral truth, not merely a symbolic detail. From a representational perspective, this physical mark is what makes nature not just a setting, but an active moral agent: a signifier that continually renews and circulates moral messages without relying entirely on verbal memory.

Summary of Results

Overall, the four categories of moral values in the Legend of the Tadulako Statue do not stand alone, but are interwoven through the figure of Tadulako as the axis of representation: his courage (individual) is devoted to his community (social) in the natural landscape (natural) under the supervision of divine power (religious). The data also shows that the representation of moral values in this

legend is consistently emphasized by all four informants although with different emphases, providing a balanced picture of how the Behoa community interprets this legend to this day. These findings form the basis for further discussion regarding the position of this legend in regional literary studies, narrative theory and collective memory, as well as its implications for character education and cultural preservation.

4. Discussion

Comprehensive and Interwoven Moral Representations

The Legend of the Tadulako Statue demonstrates that a single folk narrative can encompass a comprehensive moral worldview, encompassing all four dimensions of human moral life according to Bertens (2018). This finding aligns with and extends the research of Susanti Minajuddin (2015) and Rosna (2015), who identified similar categories of moral values in other literary works but did not examine legends from the Behoa tradition.

The intertwining of these four categories is evident at the narrative turning point: Tadulako's violation of a social promise is simultaneously a failure of self-discipline (individual), punished through a transformation effected by the natural order (natural), and framed throughout the story by the same divine oversight that granted his birth (religious). In other words, none of the four categories operates as an independent moral trajectory; each is activated by, and has consequences for, the others, so that the moral power of this legend arises from the interplay of these categories, rather than from any single category standing alone. This pattern also aligns with Lickona's (2019) observation that moral knowledge, moral feeling, and moral action are interconnected aspects of character, not separate dimensions.

The Didactic Function of Moral Failure

One of the key findings of this study is how the legend uses moral failure, not just moral success, as a means of education. Tadulako's broken promise and its tragic consequences serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of both individual and social moral values. This use of negative examples as a didactic tool aligns with Nurgiyantoro's (2019:321) view that moral values in literature are not only positive role models, but also warnings of the consequences of moral failure. The tragic ending of Tadulako's story also reflects Durkheim's (2017:52) view that moral values function as a means of social control that maintains order in society: when Tadulako violates the social bonds of his engagement, the resulting conflict tears apart the social fabric of more than one village, confirming that individual moral failure is never merely a personal matter.

Enriching Reading through Narrative Theory, Collective Memory, and Social Learning

In addition to Bertens and Hall's framework, a reading of the Legend of the Tadulako Statue can be enriched by three additional theoretical perspectives. First,

narrative theory (Barthes, 1966) asserts that the story's structure—the causal sequence between the broken promise, the family's anger, and the transformation into stone—is not simply a sequence of events, but rather a meaningful construction designed to make the moral consequences appear narratively inevitable, not accidental.

Second, collective/cultural memory theory (Assmann, 2008) helps explain why the Tadulako stone monument is so important: in this theory, physical artifacts function as "memory sites" that bind a community's collective memory to a moral narrative, so that the statue itself becomes a mechanism for preserving memory that transcends individual recall or mere oral recitation. Third, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) explains the psychological mechanism behind the legend's effectiveness as a means of character education: by witnessing the consequences of Tadulako as a model of behavior, listeners of the legend—especially the younger generation—are invited to vicariously learn (through observation) about the consequences of violating social norms, without having to experience them themselves. These three theories do not replace the Bertens-Hall framework that is the foundation of the research, but enrich the explanation of why and how this legend works narratively, mnemonically, and psychosocially at the same time.

The Position of the Tadulako Statue Legend in Indonesian Regional Literature

The Legend of the Tadulako Statue is one of Central Sulawesi's contributions to Indonesia's regional literary heritage. Compared with more widely studied oral traditions such as those of Java and Bali, the oral tradition of the Behoa people in Poso remains relatively under-researched in national and international academic discourse. Its narrative structure, which centers on the life, heroism, moral failure, and tragic end of a single character, places it within the category of individual legends according to Brunvand (in Danandjaja, 2019:72). However, unlike most individual legends that merely celebrate the virtues of their characters, the Legend of the Tadulako Statue presents a complex moral portrait, encompassing both admirable and flawed dimensions of Tadulako's character—a strength in itself as a source of moral education because it avoids the simplistic depiction of a perfect hero. Its geographic anchorage in the specific landscape of Buleli Hill and Doda Village also places it within the category of local legends (Danandjaja, 2019:72); the presence of the stone statue at the site serves as physical evidence supporting the community's belief in the historical truth of the events narrated, while also distinguishing it from purely fictional narratives.

The Function of Moral Values through Characters

The moral values represented by the characters in the Legend of the Tadulako Statue operate on several levels. At the individual level, Tadulako serves as a model of personal virtue (courage, perseverance, physical strength) worthy of emulation,

as well as a warning example of the consequences of betraying commitments. At the social level, the deliberation process leading to his appointment as warlord models the ideals of collective decision-making in the Behoa community, while his parents' insistence that he keep his promise models the community's expectation of loyalty to the social contract, and the reaction of the betrayed family models the system of accountability and social sanctions for violations. As Sibarani (2018:49) notes, oral tradition is not merely a repository of past knowledge, but an active instrument of cultural transmission and social reproduction; through its continued retelling, the story of Tadulako continually reinforces moral values in the consciousness of each new generation of the Behoa community. The fate of Tadulako's wife, who also turned to stone while fleeing from the threat of her husband's broken promise, also has important moral significance because it highlights the vulnerability of innocent parties who also suffer the consequences of the moral failures of others—confirming Bertens' (2018:143) view that moral values are related to social responsibility, not just personal virtue.

Comparison with Related Research

The findings of this study are relevant compared to previous research on moral values in Indonesian literature. Susanti Minajuddin (2015) identified three categories of moral values in the novel *Tuhan Ijinkan Aku Menjadi Pelacur!*, while this study identifies four categories, adding the relationship with nature as a separate moral domain—reflecting the importance of nature in the worldview of the Behoa people, who view landscape not merely as a backdrop but as an active moral agent.

Purnamasari (2010) found the values of hard work, responsibility, perseverance (individual), mutual assistance and social care (social), and steadfastness of faith (religious) in the novel *Ranah 3 Warna*—significant overlap with the values found in this legend, indicating that certain core moral values appear consistently across Indonesian literary forms. Compared with more recent folklore studies such as those on the story of Si Kabayan (Nurhasanah et al., 2026; Zurviana et al., 2025), which examine long-established and widely taught oral traditions, the uniqueness of this study lies in its object: a legend that still lives orally in a small community and is being documented academically for the first time through this research.

Another fundamental difference lies in the nature of the object of study: a novel is an individual work that can reflect the author's personal vision, while a legend is a collective work formed by many speakers across generations and thus more directly reflects a communal moral outlook. Further comparative studies comparing the representation of moral values in legends from different ethnic groups in Indonesia—for example, between the Behoa, Kaili, and Pamona traditions in Central Sulawesi, or across islands—will enrich understanding of the extent to which such patterns of moral representation are locally specific or cross-cultural.

Implications for Cultural Preservation and Character Education

The rich moral content of the Tadulako Statue Legend supports its use as a resource for cultural preservation and character education. Specifically, the legend's four-category moral value structure can be integrated into the Indonesian language and literature curriculum at the junior and senior high school levels, taught alongside more popular national folktales, or incorporated into local content specific to Central Sulawesi. The same structure can also form the basis of simple learning modules, for example, asking students to identify the moral value categories contained in a particular episode of the legend—a folklore-based approach that has proven effective in various regions of Indonesia (Wiradinata et al., 2023; Nurhasanah et al., 2026).

The urgency of this documentation is even more pressing in the digital age. Initial observations from this study indicate that younger generations are increasingly becoming familiar with the Tadulako Statue through photos and short videos on social media, rather than through oral accounts of its story. This means that the site's online visibility actually outpaces the transmission of its moral narrative. Kokhan and Kokhan (2024) suggest that transposing oral narratives into new textual and performance formats, such as drama scripts, is a viable strategy to help such traditions compete for attention in the digital media age; similar strategies, such as short video retellings or interactive digital storybooks for young audiences, could also be explored to keep the moral content of the Legend of the Tadulako Statue circulating, rather than leaving the physical monument visible without its accompanying moral meaning.

As a brief note before concluding, the findings of this study still have a number of important limitations, which are outlined in more detail below, particularly regarding the coverage of informants in one village, the reliance on a single written reference text, and the lack of direct study of the acceptance of the younger generation.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

This study has several important limitations. First, it relies on data from four informants in a single village, which may not capture the full range of ways this legend is told and understood across the Behoa-speaking region. Future research should expand data collection to other villages and communities sharing this cultural heritage. Second, this analysis focuses on a written version of the legend based on oral accounts during the study period, yet the legend has numerous oral versions that may differ in emphasis, narrative detail, and moral framing; a comprehensive analysis requires comparing versions collected across time and across speakers. Third, this study examines the moral values represented in the legend but does not examine how contemporary society, particularly the younger generation, actually accepts, interprets, and applies these values. Future research could use ethnographic methods to observe the legend's use in community life, as

well as surveys or interviews to assess the younger generation's understanding of its moral teachings. Fourth, this study does not compare the Legend of the Tadulako Statue with other legends from the same or neighboring communities. Such comparative studies will help identify which moral values are unique to this legend and which are shared with the wider Behoa oral tradition or the traditions of other Central Sulawesi communities, including studies across ethnic groups in Indonesia in general.

5. Conclusion

This research shows that the Legend of the Tadulako Statue contains a rich and comprehensive system of moral values, represented through its characters, events, and narrative structure. The four identified categories of moral values—religious, individual, social, and natural—are interwoven throughout the legend and collectively shape the moral worldview of the Behoa people. Religious values are represented through the characters' recognition of and reliance on divine power, expressed through ritual offerings and prayers.

Individual values are embodied in Tadulako's courage, perseverance, and responsibility, as well as in the warning lessons of the consequences of failing to maintain personal integrity. Social values are demonstrated through collective deliberation, the social imperative of keeping promises, and the community's response to social violations. Natural values are present through the harmonious relationship between society and its natural environment, and nature's role as a moral witness and reminder.

This research contributes to the documentation and analysis of the moral heritage of Sulawesi regional literature, serving as a resource for cultural preservation and character education. As a carrier of the moral worldview of the Behoa people, the Legend of the Tadulako Statue deserves an important place in the cultural and educational life of the Poso region and in the broader Indonesian regional literary landscape. Future research should expand this analysis to compare the moral values of the Tadulako Statue with other Behoa legends, explore how this legend is transmitted today in Doda Village and surrounding communities, and develop and test character education curriculum materials based on the moral content of this legend.

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