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Exploring Nature and Human Phenomena in the Jama Mapun Legend of Adjung-Adjung

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Abstract

This study examined the Jama Mapun Legend of Adjung-Adjung through an ecocritical and cultural perspective, focusing on how nature and human phenomena shape the sense of place associated with the Jama Mapun community in Mapun, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines. The legend was also examined as a form of living cultural heritage reflecting values, beliefs, language, livelihood practices, spirituality, maritime identity, and collective memory. The study drew on an ecocritical reading of human–environment relationships integrated with oral tradition as cultural transmission, intangible cultural heritage safeguarding, and place-based cultural memory. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the research employed documentary, textual, thematic, and narrative analysis of one documented version of the legend. The narrative served as the purposively selected unit of analysis; no survey respondents or newly recruited research participants were involved. The analysis identified filial responsibility, gratitude, humility, ambition and social mobility, spirituality and moral accountability, maritime livelihood, family relationships, and place-based cultural memory. An ecocritical reading further shows that Juwata Bay and the sea provide the setting and resources for subsistence, navigation, and trade; the storm marks a turning point in the narrative; and the Adjung-Adjung rock formation connects the legend's moral meaning with a recognizable landscape. These representations link natural features and events to human experience without establishing a scientific explanation of the rock's origin. The documented variations among tellings also illustrate the dynamic character of oral transmission. The study concludes that the legend connects environmental setting, cultural meanings, and human experience in forming a sense of place and transmitting Jama Mapun cultural identity. Community-informed documentation, preservation of authorized narrative versions and the Pallun Mapun language, and educational use that retains the story's connection to its landscape are recommended. The study is relevant to SDG 4 through culturally grounded learning and SDG 11 through cultural heritage safeguarding; it does not measure environmental or educational outcomes.

Keywords: Adjung-Adjung; Ecocriticism; Nature; Human Phenomena; Sense of Place; Cultural Heritage; Cultural Memory; Jama Mapun; Maritime Culture; Oral Tradition; Pallun Mapun

1. Introduction

Oral traditions constitute more than inherited stories: they interpret nature and the places in which people live and interact with their environment, while preserving human phenomena such as collective memory, cultural knowledge, values, identity, language, and spirituality. Within Indigenous and ethnolinguistic communities, legends are particularly significant because they connect contemporary generations with ancestral experiences while providing culturally grounded explanations of landscapes, relationships, responsibilities, and moral conduct. Fernández-Llamazares and Cabeza (2018) emphasized that Indigenous storytelling supports the intergenerational transmission of cultural and biocultural knowledge, while recent Philippine scholarship similarly recognizes folk narratives as important sources of cultural memory, identity, education, and community continuity (Makgabo & Quintero, 2024; Trocio et al., 2023). One such narrative is the Jama Mapun Legend of Adjung-Adjung, an oral tradition associated with the community of Mapun in Tawi-Tawi, southern Philippines. The narrative was orally narrated by Datu Sheriff Alhali Daluz and subsequently retold, transcribed, and translated by Glenda O. Abdul, with confirmation by Darus Ibrahim. The source explicitly

identifies the story as part of Jama Mapun cultural heritage and acknowledges that it has been narrated in several versions across generations. At its narrative core is the transformation of a ship and its occupants into the rock formation called Adjung-Adjung, which remains associated in community memory with Juwata Bay. The legend can therefore be examined not merely as imaginative folklore but as a form of living cultural heritage in which geography, maritime livelihood, kinship, religion, morality, language, and collective memory intersect. Its preservation and scholarly examination are particularly relevant at a time when researchers have raised concerns about the gradual disappearance of oral traditions when intergenerational transmission weakens or narratives remain insufficiently documented (Tuban, 2021; Makgabo & Quintero, 2024). Consequently, examining the Adjung-Adjung narrative offers an opportunity to understand how Jama Mapun storytelling communicates culturally significant values while simultaneously contributing to the documentation and sustainable transmission of Indigenous cultural heritage. From an ecocritical perspective, a literary landscape is not merely a backdrop; representations of seas, weather, landforms, and livelihoods can reveal how a narrative imagines relationships between human experience and the natural world (Datta, 2018; Gülüm, 2024).

The *Legend of Adjung-Adjung* emerges from the cultural and geographical environment of Mapun. The account describes the story as a traditional Jama Mapun narrative repeatedly told and retold within the community. It further explains that "adjung" refers to a small launch or boat in Pallun Mapun and associates the legend with the rock formation situated at the entrance of Juwata Bay. Such localization is important because oral traditions often acquire their cultural significance through their connection to particular landscapes, livelihoods, memories, and community experiences. The narrative begins with a poor young man named Suyyong, who lives with his mother near Juwata Hill. Their livelihood consists primarily of fishing in Juwata Bay and cultivating tapioca and cassava on the hillside. Despite these humble circumstances, Suyyong aspires to become a wealthy and respected trader. His aspiration becomes more concrete after seeing a large vessel near their community. He eventually joins its crew, leaves his mother, succeeds through hard work, inherits wealth, becomes a merchant, and establishes a prosperous life. The narrative subsequently moves from material advancement to moral conflict. When Suyyong later returns near his homeland, his aging mother recognizes him and approaches him. Ashamed of her appearance before his companions, however, he denies that she is his mother. Her grief culminates in a prayer to Allah, after which a violent storm occurs and Suyyong realizes his wrongdoing. According to the legend, the vessel, Suyyong, his wives, and his crew eventually become stone, forming the landmark remembered as Adjung-Adjung. These narrative events allow the legend to operate simultaneously on several levels. It is an etiological legend, because it provides a traditional cultural explanation for a recognizable geographic formation. It is also a moral narrative, because ambition and economic success are contrasted with filial responsibility, humility, gratitude, and recognition of one's origins. At the same time, its references to fishing, farming, maritime travel, boats, trade, datus, the Sultan, kinship, and Islamic expressions create a culturally situated representation of community life rather than an abstract moral tale. This interpretation is strongly supported by recent research specifically concerning Jama Mapun storytelling. Monteron (2024) examined Jama Mapun *kana-kanahan ni uruhan* and included the *Legend of Adjung-Adjung* in her analysis. She identified ungratefulness (*buta atoy*) as a major theme and livelihood-seeking or economic endeavor (*man ngusaha*) and godliness (*mapagtuhan*) as additional themes. This independently documented interpretation strengthens the position that *Adjung-Adjung* embodies interconnected moral, spiritual, and socioeconomic meanings rather than merely recounting a supernatural transformation. Importantly, the narrative should not be treated as a scientific explanation of the geological origin of the rock formation. Rather, its scholarly significance lies in understanding how the Jama Mapun culturally interpret, remember, narrate, and attach meaning to a place. Distinguishing cultural explanation from geological causation protects the academic integrity of the research while respecting the legend on its own cultural terms.

Oral traditions transmit cultural knowledge, values, and experiences that may be absent from written archives. Fernández-Llamazares and Cabeza (2018) emphasized Indigenous storytelling as a means of intergenerational knowledge transmission and cultural continuity, while Trocio et al. (2023) showed that Philippine oral narratives preserve beliefs, identities, and moral values. In this context, Adjung-Adjung reflects Jama Mapun livelihood, maritime mobility, family relationships, spirituality, and community geography. Makgabo and Quintero (2024) likewise noted that Indigenous oral traditions embody histories, values, and worldviews, supporting their preservation and use in education, cultural studies, governance, and nation-building. A central theme of the legend is the tension between material success and moral responsibility. Suyyong's ambition and hard work lead to prosperity, but his moral failure occurs when wealth distances him from his mother and his origins. Monteron (2024) identified buta atoy, or ungratefulness, as a major theme, showing that the narrative does not condemn success itself but warns against prosperity without gratitude, humility, and familial responsibility. Spirituality also shapes the story's moral framework, particularly through gratitude to Allah and the mother's supplication, consistent with Monteron's (2024) identification of mapagtuhan, or godliness, as another key theme. The legend is also strongly rooted in maritime culture. Fishing, navigation, ships, trade, and knowledge of local waters represent livelihood, mobility, aspiration, and social advancement. The word adjung further connects the narrative to maritime material culture. By linking its moral message to the Adjung-Adjung rock formation at Juwata Bay, the legend becomes an example of place-based cultural memory in which story, landscape, identity, and history reinforce one another. Its preservation therefore sustains not only the narrative itself but also the cultural relationships connecting the Jama Mapun people to their values, heritage, and place. Read ecocritically, the sea, hillside, sun, storm, and rock are also narrative elements through which dependence on natural surroundings, mobility, vulnerability, and the meaning of place become visible. This interpretation concerns how the legend represents nature, not a claim about actual environmental conditions or the geological formation of Adjung-Adjung.

Monteron (2024) provides the strongest contextual basis for the study by documenting Jama Mapun storytelling and including Uruhan Adjung Adjung as part of this broader oral tradition. The existence of multiple versions is evident: the English narrative uses Suyyong, Monteron (2024) uses Totoh, while the Jama Mapun-language version refers to Ahmad. These differences should not be treated as errors because oral narratives naturally vary across storytellers, occasions, transcriptions, and generations (Mokgoatšana, 2020). Rather than imposing a single standardized version, documenting their provenance, recurring themes, and variations provides a more culturally sensitive approach. The need for preservation is also supported by Philippine scholarship. Makgabo and Quintero (2024) emphasized the continued recording, preservation, publication, and educational use of Indigenous narratives, while Tuban (2021) and Trocio et al. (2023) highlighted the role of oral traditions in sustaining cultural values, identity, and Indigenous knowledge. Community-based and digital approaches can further support safeguarding. Irfaniah (2023) emphasized community archives in preserving intangible cultural heritage, while Shiri et al. (2022) showed the potential of digital storytelling for heritage preservation and access. For Adjung-Adjung, recordings, Pallun Mapun transcriptions, translations, photographs, and documented variants can complement oral transmission while maintaining community ownership. The study adopts an integrated eco-cultural perspective: ecocriticism provides a literary lens for examining the representation of nature and human–environment relationships, complemented by oral tradition as cultural transmission, intangible cultural heritage safeguarding, and place-based cultural memory. This integration examines both what natural features do within the story and how their representations contribute to cultural meaning and identity (Datta, 2018; Gülüm, 2024; Machiridza & Kapumha, 2023). Indigenous storytelling enables cultural knowledge and values to pass across generations (Fernández-Llamazares & Cabeza, 2018), while community-based documentation helps sustain living heritage (Irfaniah, 2023; Shiri et al., 2022). In Adjung-Adjung, Juwata Bay, the sea, surrounding hills, and rock formation also function as cultural markers that spatially anchor the narrative. The legend consequently links storytelling, cultural values, intergenerational transmission, identity, and place within a broader framework of heritage sustainability.

Conceptually, the relationship may therefore be expressed as:

Oral Narrative → Representations of Nature and Human–Environment Relationships → Human Phenomena, Cultural Values, and Indigenous Knowledge → Sense of Place, Cultural Identity, and Memory → Intergenerational Transmission and Heritage Safeguarding

Within this integrated framework, Adjung-Adjung is the narrative source. An ecocritical reading considers the sea, hillside, sun, storm, and rock formation in relation to fishing, farming, navigation, moral conflict, and human vulnerability. The cultural reading examines filial gratitude, humility, spirituality, livelihood, maritime identity, and attachment to place; oral and written transmission connects these meanings to memory and identity, while community-centered documentation may contribute to heritage safeguarding. These are interpretive relationships within a narrative, not measured environmental or community outcomes.

Despite the continuing importance of oral narratives, several research gaps justify a focused investigation of the *Legend of Adjung-Adjung*. First, Philippine folk literature remains unevenly documented across ethnolinguistic communities. Makgabo and Quintero (2024) noted that although Philippine folklore research has made important contributions, substantial oral material still requires recording, preservation, and publication. This issue is particularly significant for traditions transmitted predominantly through community storytelling. Second, scholarship directly concerning Jama Mapun narratives remains comparatively limited. Monteron's (2024) study represents an important contribution because it specifically examines Jama Mapun storytelling and analyzes *Adjung-Adjung*. However, the existence of additional narrated, translated, and transcribed versions—including the version forming the primary source of the present paper—creates opportunities for further research on cultural themes, narrative variation, language, memory, spirituality, moral education, and place. Third, the coexistence of Suyyong, Ahmad, and Totoh across available versions demonstrates a methodological issue requiring scholarly attention. Oral traditions should not be evaluated solely according to expectations of textual uniformity. As Mokgoatšana (2020) argues, variation is inherent in oral transmission. Future analysis should therefore investigate what remains culturally stable across versions—not merely which wording or protagonist name should be considered the definitive one. Fourth, further study is warranted regarding how the legend may contribute to intergenerational cultural education. Philippine studies show that oral traditions are useful for maintaining cultural knowledge and identity (Tuban, 2021; Trocio et al., 2023), but the educational potential of Jama Mapun legends can be explored more systematically, particularly in community-based, language, heritage, and local history education. Finally, preservation should extend beyond transforming an oral tradition into static written text. Digital storytelling research suggests possibilities for community-controlled audiovisual documentation, multilingual transcription, archiving, and educational access (Shiri et al., 2022). The *Adjung-Adjung* tradition could therefore be studied not merely as a surviving story but as part of a living cultural knowledge system requiring ethically grounded and community-sensitive safeguarding. Accordingly, the study aims to examine (1) representations of nature and their relationship to human experiences in the documented legend; (2) the cultural, moral, and Indigenous knowledge expressed through these representations; and (3) how the narrative associates the Adjung-Adjung landscape with sense of place, collective memory, and cultural heritage.

The study aligns most directly with SDG 4 – Quality Education and SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities. Under SDG 4, Target 4.7 calls for learners to acquire knowledge and competencies supportive of sustainable development, including appreciation of cultural diversity and recognition of culture's contribution to sustainable development. The systematic study and preservation of *Adjung-Adjung* can support this target by creating culturally grounded materials through which Jama Mapun history, values, language, worldview, and heritage can be incorporated

into formal or informal learning. Oral literature should therefore not be viewed only as material from the past; it can become a contemporary educational resource for strengthening cultural literacy and intergenerational understanding. This argument is consistent with Tuban (2021), who highlighted the importance of educating succeeding generations about Indigenous oral traditions, and Makgabo and Quintero (2024), who identified educational applications as an important contribution of folk literature research. The study also directly contributes to SDG 11, particularly Target 11.4, which calls for stronger efforts to protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage. Although *Adjung-Adjung* is principally an intangible narrative tradition, it is inseparably associated with a recognizable landscape feature at Juwata Bay. Its preservation therefore illustrates the relationship between intangible heritage—the story, language, memory, and cultural meanings—and tangible or natural place—the rock formation and surrounding landscape. The study does not claim that documenting one legend independently achieves these international targets. Rather, it contributes at a localized level by providing scholarly documentation that may support education, heritage awareness, cultural transmission, and community-based safeguarding.

The study contributes to cultural, educational, social, linguistic, technological, community, and institutional sustainability. Culturally, documenting Adjung-Adjung helps preserve Jama Mapun oral heritage while recognizing the legitimacy of its different versions. Educationally, the legend provides culturally grounded material on literature, local history, ethics, spirituality, maritime life, language, geography, and heritage. Socially, it communicates values such as gratitude, family responsibility, humility, and accountability within the Jama Mapun cultural context. Linguistically, preserving the Pallun Mapun version alongside translations supports the intergenerational transmission of local language and culturally embedded meanings. Digital documentation can further support preservation through community-approved recordings, transcripts, multimedia, and repositories. Shiri et al. (2022) highlight the role of digital interfaces in Indigenous heritage preservation, while Irfaniah (2023) emphasizes community participation in cultural archiving. More broadly, Adjung-Adjung intersects literature, linguistics, anthropology, education, heritage studies, geography, and Indigenous knowledge. Its preservation therefore extends beyond conserving a story; it sustains the connections among Jama Mapun identity, values, language, collective memory, landscape, and intergenerational cultural transmission.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative descriptive research design employing documentary, textual, thematic, and narrative analysis with an integrated ecocritical interpretive lens. This design was appropriate because the research sought to interpret the meanings and cultural elements contained in an existing oral narrative rather than measure variables or establish causal relationships. The Legend of Adjung-Adjung was treated as a cultural and environmental narrative through which recurring ideas concerning filial responsibility, gratitude, ambition, livelihood, spirituality, family relations, maritime culture, and attachment to place could be systematically examined. The analysis also recognized the narrative as part of a continuing oral tradition rather than as a fixed literary text. The legend narrative explicitly states that the legend has been told and retold by the Jama Mapun in several versions through the years and that the version used in the study was based on the narration of Datu Sheriff Alhali Daluz. Thus, the study concentrated on the meanings represented in the documented version while acknowledging the possibility of variation across other community telling. The ecocritical dimension focuses on representations of the marine setting, hillside, sun, storm, and rock formation in relation to the characters and events; it is an interpretation of the documented story rather than environmental fieldwork.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The cultural setting of the study was Mapun, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines, particularly the community and landscape surrounding Juwata Bay. The legend is associated with the Jama Mapun people and explains the traditional origin of the rock formation known as Adjung-Adjung, located at the entrance of Juwata Bay. The locality is integral to the analysis because several narrative elements are directly connected to the physical and socioeconomic environment of Mapun. The story describes fishing in Juwata Bay, cultivation of tapioca and cassava on nearby hillsides, small-boat navigation, maritime travel, and trading. The landscape therefore functioned not merely as a setting but as an important component of the legend's cultural meaning and collective memory.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The study utilized an existing documented oral narrative as its primary source of data, with the individuals identified in the source serving as cultural knowledge contributors to the study. Datu Sheriff Alhali Daluz provided the oral narration, while Glenda O. Abdul retold, transcribed, and translated the narrative, with Darus Ibrahim providing confirmation. Their documented contributions establish the provenance and cultural authenticity of the source and provide a strong basis for interpreting the Legend of Adjung-Adjung within the context of Jama Mapun oral tradition.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study used purposive documentary sampling in selecting the *Jama Mapun Legend of Adjung-Adjung* as the principal text for analysis. The narrative was selected because it directly represents a Jama Mapun oral tradition, contains identifiable cultural and moral themes, is associated with a specific geographic landmark in Mapun, and includes both an English retelling and a Jama Mapun-language version. The entire documented legend constituted the unit of analysis rather than isolated passages alone. The English narrative covers the life of Suyyong from his impoverished childhood

and departure from Mapun to his eventual prosperity, rejection of his mother, and transformation into stone. The concluding portion connects these events to the Adjung-Adjung rock formation at Juwata Bay.

2.5 Research Instrument

The principal research instrument was a researcher-developed textual analysis guide used to organize and interpret significant narrative elements in the legend. The guide focused on recurring cultural meanings and narrative evidence related to family and kinship, gratitude and filial responsibility, ambition and material advancement, religious beliefs, traditional livelihood, maritime practices, community values, and relationships between narrative and place. The source text itself served as the primary documentary material. Particular attention was given to passages describing the family's subsistence through fishing and farming, Suyyong's aspiration to become a trader, his mother's expressions of gratitude to Allah, his maritime employment and economic success, his later denial of his mother, and the supernatural consequence associated with the formation of Adjung-Adjung. The Jama Mapun-language text included in the source was also considered part of the documentary corpus because it demonstrates the narrative's connection to the community's linguistic heritage. For alignment with the ecocritical objective, the textual interpretation also considers descriptions of the sea and hillside as livelihood settings, the sun as a navigational reference, the storm as a narrative turning point, and the rock formation as a place invested with cultural meaning. These categories require confirmation against the underlying source text and the author's analysis guide.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering involved repeated reading of the documented Legend of Adjung-Adjung to establish its narrative sequence, characters, setting, conflict, resolution, and cultural context. Relevant passages were identified and organized according to themes related to livelihood, economic aspiration, family relationships, spirituality, maritime knowledge, social status, and attachment to Juwata Bay. The analysis considered each passage within the context of the complete narrative and recognized the document as one retold and translated version of a tradition with multiple oral variants. Photographs and descriptions of Juwata Bay and the Adjung-Adjung rock formation were also examined to understand the relationship between the narrative and its cultural landscape. Attention was also directed to the passages depicting interactions between people and their surroundings, particularly fishing, hillside cultivation, navigation by the sun, the storm, and the identification of the rock formation with Juwata Bay. No environmental measurements or new community interviews were conducted.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The textual data were analyzed using qualitative thematic and narrative analysis. Meaningful narrative units were identified, grouped into related categories, and synthesized into major themes, including filial responsibility and gratitude, ambition and social mobility, spirituality and moral accountability, livelihood and maritime culture, family and community relationships, and place-based cultural memory. Themes were supported by specific events, dialogue, descriptions, and narrative consequences in the source. Narrative analysis also examined Suyyong's progression from poverty and economic advancement to conflict with his mother and eventual punishment. The transformation into stone was interpreted according to its function within the legend as a connection between moral memory and physical landscape, without presenting the supernatural account as historical or geological fact. An ecocritical interpretive reading considered how these same textual details position nature in relation to human livelihood, movement, vulnerability, and remembrance. In particular, the sea enables work and travel, the storm changes the story's direction, and the rock formation becomes the enduring spatial reference for its moral narrative. The reading treats these elements as literary representations, without assuming that the narrator intended a specific modern environmental doctrine or that the events are scientific facts.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations focused on the respectful treatment of Jama Mapun cultural heritage. Proper attribution was given to the oral narrator, reteller, transcriber, translator, confirmer, and photographers identified in the source. The study recognized Adjung-Adjung as a living oral tradition with multiple versions and limited interpretation to meanings supported by the documented narrative. Indigenous language, religious expressions, community values, and culturally specific concepts were treated with cultural sensitivity and preserved within their original context. The analysis also distinguished the legend's cultural explanation of the Adjung-Adjung rock formation from scientifically established geological accounts.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Nature, Human–Environment Relationships, Maritime Culture, and Place-Based Cultural Memory

3.1.1 Maritime Livelihood and Jama Mapun Life

The findings revealed that the sea is fundamental to the narrative rather than a passive background. Suyyong and his mother survive partly through fishing in Juwata Bay, while farming tapioca and cassava on the hillside. His familiarity with the marine environment becomes explicit when he tells the captain, "I know these waters well. I even travel to nearby islets with my small banca. I use the sun to guide me when sailing." His economic transformation subsequently occurs through maritime employment and trading, and his return to Mapun also takes place aboard a ship. The narrative therefore links subsistence, navigation, mobility, economic aspiration, personal transformation, and eventual tragedy to the sea. The repeated presence of fishing, navigation, boats, trade, coastline, and Juwata Bay situates the narrative within a distinctly maritime cultural landscape. Oral traditions can preserve such relationships between livelihood, environment, and identity even when transmitted primarily as stories. Machiridza and Kapumha (2023) argue that

landscapes can become repositories of collective memory, oral traditions, identity, and Indigenous epistemologies because communities attach meanings to places through storytelling and continuing social practices. Similarly, Csurgó and Smith (2022) found that cultural heritage and sense of place are closely related because communities imprint values, traditions, memories, and identities onto landscapes. The maritime elements of Adjung-Adjung therefore contribute to its value as a cultural text documenting how Jama Mapun memory is connected to coastal and seafaring life. From an ecocritical standpoint, the sea is therefore not only scenery: it enables subsistence and travel, shapes the protagonist's aspirations, and situates his achievements and return within a marine environment. His use of the sun for navigation portrays environmental knowledge as part of lived human experience. These observations describe how nature functions in the documented narrative; they do not independently establish present-day Jama Mapun livelihood practices.

3.1.2 Adjung-Adjung Rock as a Cultural Landmark

The narrative culminates in the transformation of the ship, Suyyong, his wives, and the crew into stone following the storm. The concluding passage states, "To this day, that rock formation stands at the entrance of Juwata Bay in Mapun. The people call it Adjung-Adjung, a reminder of the son who forgot his mother and the curse that followed." The document further describes Adjung-Adjung as "a natural landmark connected to the local legend passed down by the Jama Mapun people." Thus, the narrative directly connects an intangible oral tradition with a physically recognizable place. This connection demonstrates the importance of place-based cultural memory. Pikirayi and Magoma (2021) found that myths and legends can play central roles in how Indigenous communities interpret landscapes, maintain cultural identity, and develop a sense of place. Their research further argues that such narratives should not be dismissed as merely stories because they encode relationships between communities and culturally significant environments. Feng et al. (2021) similarly demonstrated that landscape narratives and oral histories can explain how communities transform physical landscapes into culturally meaningful heritage. In the case of Adjung-Adjung, the rock formation can therefore be understood as a mnemonic landmark: the physical formation provides a continuing spatial reference for the story, while the story assigns social and moral meaning to the landscape. Machiridza and Kapumha (2023) further explain that landscapes may become "houses" of myths, legends, memories, and narratives through which communities maintain collective identity. The continuing visibility of Adjung-Adjung therefore provides a material point through which the legend can be remembered and retold. Read ecocritically, the storm interrupts the protagonist's journey and places human ambition and wrongdoing within a narrative of exposure to natural force. The rock formation then turns this moment into an enduring relationship between moral remembrance and physical place. These are literary functions attributed to natural phenomena within the legend, not evidence that the storm or transformation occurred as described.

3.1.3 Ecocritical Synthesis of Nature and Human Phenomena

Across the documented legend, nature and human phenomena are interdependent narrative categories rather than separate subjects. The bay supports fishing and serves as a route for travel and trade; the hillside sustains cultivation; the sun guides navigation; the storm coincides with the moral crisis; and the rock formation anchors the story's continuing association with place. The sea and land thus organize livelihood and mobility, while weather and the landmark mediate the transition from individual actions to collective remembrance. This ecocritical reading extends, rather than replaces, the findings on cultural values and heritage: the meaning of the landscape emerges through the ways the narrative connects its natural features to work, kinship, spirituality, and identity. Because the study relies on one documented retelling, these findings concern its textual representations and should not be generalized to all versions or treated as ecological observations.

3.2 Cultural and Moral Meanings Embedded in the Legend

3.2.1 Filial Responsibility, Gratitude, and Humility

The analysis identified filial responsibility and gratitude as the most prominent moral concerns of the narrative. At the beginning of the story, Suyyong and his mother live modestly through fishing and farming. Although Suyyong expresses dissatisfaction with poverty, his mother emphasizes gratitude by telling him, "My son, this is what Allah has given us. We must be grateful because we are still able to eat and remain healthy to worship Him." The central conflict emerges when the now-wealthy Suyyong returns near Mapun and refuses to recognize his elderly mother because he is ashamed of her appearance. When she embraces him and brings his favorite childhood food, he rejects her, saying, "No! You are not my mother! My mother is beautiful and young. Look at you—dirty old woman! Go away!" His eventual remorse becomes explicit when he cries, "Mother! Forgive me! You are my true mother on earth and in heaven. I was an ungrateful son!" These contrasting episodes establish gratitude, filial responsibility, and humility as central values within the legend. This finding closely corresponds with Monteron (2024), whose analysis of a Jama Mapun version of Adjung-Adjung identified ungratefulness or buta atoy as its major theme. The result indicates that the moral problem in the narrative is not Suyyong's desire to improve his life but his eventual rejection of the person who supported him before his prosperity. This distinction is significant because the legend does not portray ambition as inherently immoral; instead, it presents material success without gratitude, humility, and relational responsibility as ethically problematic. Storytelling frequently performs this moral function by embedding expectations of acceptable behavior within memorable narratives. Asamoah-Poku (2024) similarly found that traditional storytelling functions as a mechanism for moral instruction, cultural preservation, education, and identity formation. Datta (2018) further emphasizes that Indigenous storytelling transmits knowledge through relationships, experiences, values, and culturally grounded ways of understanding the world.

3.2.2 Ambition, Livelihood, and Social Mobility

The legend also presents economic aspiration as an important narrative element. Suyyong begins the story under conditions of material poverty and depends on fishing and the cultivation of tapioca and cassava with his mother. His

encounter with a large ship intensifies his ambition, as he tells his mother, “I am tired of fishing and farming just to eat. I want a big house and a ship like that!” He later explains, “I want to work on it and travel so I can become rich. I want to learn trading like the datus.” After joining the ship, he is described as industrious, intelligent, and obedient. These qualities lead the captain to adopt him, appoint him as master of the ship, and eventually leave his wealth to him. Suyyong subsequently becomes a wealthy merchant and gains social recognition. Thus, the narrative depicts upward social mobility as the product of aspiration, maritime knowledge, work, and opportunity before introducing the moral conflict associated with his later behavior. The result supports Monteron's (2024) identification of livelihood-seeking or man ngusaha as one of the secondary themes of the Jama Mapun Adjung-Adjung narrative. The story therefore contains a socioeconomic dimension alongside its moral dimension. It records culturally meaningful images of fishing, farming, seafaring, trading, and mobility rather than presenting its protagonist in an unspecified social environment. Philippine research on Indigenous oral lore similarly shows that traditional narratives preserve information concerning cultural practices, values, identities, and ways of life. Trocio et al. (2023) found that Blaan oral lore reflects beliefs, lifeways, moral values, and collective identity, demonstrating that oral literature can serve as a source for understanding how communities represent their socioeconomic and cultural environments. The economic trajectory of Suyyong can consequently be interpreted as part of the legend's representation of aspiration within a maritime community rather than simply as background to the moral lesson.

3.2.3 Spirituality and Moral Accountability

Religious expressions appeared throughout the narrative and were integrated into the moral development of the story. Suyyong's mother initially interprets their modest circumstances through gratitude to Allah, while Islamic greetings such as “Assalamu Alaikum” and “Wa Alaikum Salam” are used when the captain meets the villagers and when Suyyong requests employment aboard the ship. The strongest spiritual expression occurs after Suyyong rejects his mother. She prays, “Ya Allah! If that man is truly my son—if he drank milk from my breast and if I carried him in my womb for nine months—then let him learn a lesson for forgetting his mother.” The storm follows within the narrative sequence, prompting Suyyong to recognize his wrongdoing and ask his mother for forgiveness. The spiritual elements demonstrate that the moral logic of the legend is intertwined with a religious worldview. Monteron (2024) likewise identified mapagtuhan, or godliness, as one of the themes of the Jama Mapun story. The legend therefore presents accountability not merely as a social matter between mother and son but within a larger spiritual and moral order. This function is consistent with the broader role of oral tradition in transmitting culturally grounded values. Asamoah-Poku (2024) explains that oral storytelling communicates cultural knowledge, values, identity, and moral instruction across generations. In this case, spirituality reinforces the themes of gratitude, respect, repentance, and responsibility without being detached from the everyday life portrayed in the story.

3.3 Oral Transmission and Narrative Variation

3.3.1 Multiple Versions of the Adjung-Adjung Narrative

The narrative explicitly establishes that Adjung-Adjung is not a fixed single text. It states that the narrative “has been told and retold” by the Jama Mapun community and that the legend has existed “in several versions through the years.” The documented English version identifies the protagonist as Suyyong, while the Jama Mapun-language version later in the same document refers to the protagonist as Ahmad. A further variation occurs in the version studied by Monteron (2024), where the protagonist is identified as Totoh. Despite differences in personal naming and some narrative details, the versions retain the central pattern of a poor son who leaves his mother, becomes successful, returns, fails in his filial responsibility, and becomes associated with the stone formation known as Adjung-Adjung. These variations are consistent with the nature of oral tradition rather than necessarily indicating textual errors. Mokgoatšana (2020) explains that orally transmitted narratives cannot ordinarily be passed down word for word and that differences inevitably emerge among narrators, periods, contexts, transcriptions, and retellings. The search for a single unchanging “original” text can therefore misrepresent the dynamic nature of oral tradition. Gülüm (2024) similarly describes folk narratives as traditions continuously shaped through intergenerational transmission, repetition, rewriting, and other forms of remediation. For the present study, the presence of Suyyong, Ahmad, and Totoh is therefore important evidence of the legend's living and variable transmission history. The more appropriate scholarly approach is to document the provenance of each version and examine both their common narrative core and meaningful variations rather than arbitrarily selecting one form as the only authentic account.

3.3.2 Transcription and Translation as Forms of Preservation

The narrative represents a transition from oral performance to documented cultural text. The source identifies the work as “An oral version told by Datu Sheriff Alhali Daluz, retold, transcribed, and translated by Glenda O. Abdul, with confirmation by Darus Ibrahim.” The document contains an English retelling, a Jama Mapun-language version, photographs of culturally associated locations, and explanatory descriptions. These elements preserve several dimensions of the tradition, including its narrative content, language, source attribution, and connection to Juwata Bay. Such documentation contributes to heritage safeguarding, particularly when oral traditions face disruption in intergenerational transmission. Irfaniah (2023) found that community archives can support the identification, preservation, documentation, and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage. Shiri et al. (2022) likewise showed that digital storytelling and digital interfaces can facilitate preservation and access to Indigenous cultural heritage. More recently, Ng et al. (2026) demonstrated that technological documentation of Indigenous cultural heritage can enhance preservation and intergenerational engagement when communities remain actively involved in representing their own knowledge. For Adjung-Adjung, preservation would therefore be strengthened through culturally appropriate documentation that retains the original language, identifies storytellers and cultural knowledge holders, records variant

versions, and, where authorized, incorporates audio and audiovisual forms rather than relying exclusively on an English written retelling.

3.4 Educational and Intergenerational Significance

3.4.1 The Legend as a Cultural Learning Resource

The analysis showed that the narrative contains several forms of culturally relevant knowledge that can be transmitted to younger generations. These include vocabulary in Pallun Mapun, traditional foods such as boiled cassava, kahawa, and sambal, fishing and farming practices, navigation and maritime travel, relationships between parents and children, Islamic expressions, moral expectations, local geography, and the cultural meaning attached to the Adjung-Adjung formation. For example, the narrative describes the family's simple meal as "boiled cassava, kahawa (coffee), and sambal," while Suyyong's description of using the sun to guide his banca records an element of maritime knowledge within the story. These elements are embedded within the narrative rather than presented as formal lessons, allowing the legend to preserve cultural information through storytelling. The educational potential of oral storytelling is supported by recent research. Ntwalana and Matiso (2024) found that oral storytelling can preserve cultural knowledge within educational settings while supporting cultural understanding and heritage continuity. Jacob et al. (2024) reported that Indigenous-language storytelling can contribute to moral learning and social development, demonstrating that culturally grounded stories may have educational value beyond entertainment. In the Philippine context, Makgabo and Quintero (2024) emphasize that folk literature research can contribute to education, cultural studies, governance, and nation-building and stress the need to preserve oral traditions that remain insufficiently documented. The Adjung-Adjung narrative therefore has potential as a culturally responsive educational resource, although the present documentary analysis did not directly test its effect on learner outcomes.

3.4.2 Intergenerational Transmission of Cultural Identity

The source directly demonstrates intergenerational transmission by explaining that the narrative "has been told and retold" within the Jama Mapun community and that it "has also been part of the author's childhood as her mother repeatedly narrated to her during bedtimes." This indicates that the legend survived not simply through formal written documentation but through repeated family and community storytelling. Its subsequent transcription and translation therefore represent another stage in the movement of cultural knowledge from oral memory into documented heritage. This finding reinforces the broader significance of storytelling to cultural continuity. Asamoah-Poku (2024) identifies storytelling as a mechanism through which communities transmit identity, traditions, collective memory, and values. Datta (2018) similarly argues that Indigenous storytelling connects knowledge to community relationships and lived experiences rather than treating knowledge as detached information. Philippine evidence from Trocio et al. (2023) further demonstrates that oral lore can sustain Indigenous identities and values through continuing communal interaction. The intergenerational history of Adjung-Adjung thus strengthens its classification as living heritage because its significance depends not only upon preservation of the words of the story but also upon continued relationships among narrators, listeners, families, language, and place.

3.5 Cultural Sustainability and Community-Based Preservation

The results indicate that the cultural significance of Adjung-Adjung depends on several interconnected elements: the narrative itself, its multiple oral versions, the Pallun Mapun language, recognized narrators and knowledge holders, community memory, religious and moral meanings, maritime lifeways, and the physical landscape of Juwata Bay. The source itself confirms this continuing relationship by describing Adjung-Adjung as a landmark "connected to the local legend passed down by the Jama Mapun people." The existence of several versions further indicates that cultural continuity does not depend on preserving only one standardized text but on recognizing the broader process of narration, retelling, transcription, translation, and community remembrance. Current heritage research supports a community-centered approach to safeguarding. Irfaniah (2023) emphasizes that intangible cultural heritage preservation requires participation by cultural communities rather than documentation imposed entirely by outside institutions. Ng et al. (2026) similarly argues that involving Indigenous communities in digital documentation allows them to retain greater control over how their cultural heritage is represented. Such an approach is particularly appropriate for Adjung-Adjung: future preservation efforts could document several authorized versions, maintain Pallun Mapun alongside translations, record oral performances with consent, preserve attribution, and involve Jama Mapun cultural knowledge holders in decisions concerning interpretation, archiving, educational use, and public dissemination. From a sustainability perspective, the findings suggest that Adjung-Adjung contributes principally to cultural, educational, linguistic, community, and institutional sustainability. Feng et al. (2021) associate sustainable cultural heritage with the continuing relationship between communities, narratives, landscapes, and local wellbeing, while Csurgó and Smith (2022) demonstrate that cultural heritage can strengthen place identity and social cohesion. The significance of Adjung-Adjung therefore lies not only in preserving an old story but in sustaining a continuing relationship among cultural memory, community identity, language, and the physical environment in which that memory remains meaningful.

3.6 Integrated Ecocritical and Cultural Interpretation of the Legend

Taken together, the findings indicate that the Legend of Adjung-Adjung operates at multiple cultural levels. At the individual level, it presents Suyyong's transformation from poverty to prosperity and subsequently from achievement to moral failure. At the family level, the statement "I was an ungrateful son!" explicitly crystallizes the narrative's concern with filial responsibility. At the spiritual level, the mother's prayer to Allah connects human behavior with moral accountability. At the socioeconomic level, the narrative preserves representations of fishing, farming, navigation, migration, and trading. At the geographic level, the concluding explanation that the rock formation remains "a reminder of the son who forgot his mother" attaches cultural memory to Juwata Bay and Adjung-Adjung. At the intergenerational

level, the source itself records repeated family and community retelling across time. These interconnected dimensions confirm that oral legends should not be reduced to fictional entertainment alone. Monteron (2024) demonstrates that Jama Mapun legends contain identifiable cultural themes and remain part of the community's storytelling tradition, while Pikirayi and Magoma (2021) show that legends can strengthen relationships between Indigenous identity and culturally meaningful landscapes. Asamoah-Poku (2024) further emphasizes their roles in moral instruction and cultural continuity, and Gülüm (2024) highlights the importance of repeated retelling in maintaining folkloric memory. The Legend of Adjung-Adjung can consequently be understood as a form of living cultural heritage through which moral values, spirituality, maritime identity, collective memory, and attachment to place are simultaneously transmitted. The study does not establish that the supernatural transformation described in the story is a historical or geological event. Rather, its research significance lies in demonstrating how a culturally transmitted legend gives meaning to a physical landmark, preserves elements of Jama Mapun life, and communicates values to succeeding generations. This distinction maintains academic rigor while allowing the narrative to be examined respectfully according to its cultural function and significance. Viewed through an integrated ecocritical lens, the same narrative links natural settings and phenomena to the human story: the bay and hillside sustain early life, the sea makes trade and return possible, the storm marks the crisis, and the rock becomes the site through which the community's reported memory is expressed. The sense of place in the documented legend arises from this interaction of environmental representation, moral experience, and cultural transmission; it does not demonstrate that the described supernatural events occurred or that an environmental effect was measured.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that the Jama Mapun Legend of Adjung-Adjung constructs a sense of place by linking Juwata Bay, the marine environment, the storm, and the Adjung-Adjung rock formation with human experiences, moral meanings, and collective memory. From an ecocritical perspective, the sea and surrounding landscape are more than settings: they enable subsistence and maritime mobility, while the storm and rock formation connect the protagonist's moral crisis with a memorable natural landmark. The legend is also represented in the documented account as living cultural heritage expressing Jama Mapun values, beliefs, livelihood practices, maritime identity, language, and memory. Filial responsibility, gratitude, humility, spiritual accountability, ambition, and the consequences of rejecting familial origins remain central to its human dimensions. Together, these environmental and cultural representations explain why nature and human phenomena cannot be separated in interpreting the text. Variations among documented tellings underscore the need to understand the legend as an evolving oral tradition rather than a single fixed historical or geological account.

Based on these findings, documentation and educational use of the Legend of Adjung-Adjung should preserve both its cultural meanings and its represented relationship with the natural landscape. Where authorized by Jama Mapun cultural knowledge holders, community-informed recordings, Pallun Mapun transcription, translation, and preservation of multiple versions may retain details about fishing, navigation, Juwata Bay, the storm, and the rock formation alongside the legend's moral and spiritual themes. Educational materials could use this integrated eco-cultural interpretation to examine how stories create a sense of place, while distinguishing literary representation from scientific explanations of natural phenomena. These are recommendations for future preservation and educational work, not interventions evaluated by the present study.

The study is limited to the textual interpretation of one documented version of a legend known to have several variants. No additional community interviews, independent oral accounts, environmental field observations, or learning-outcome assessments were undertaken. Therefore, the ecocritical analysis concerns representations of human–environment relationships within this version, not the actual geological origin of the rock formation, ecological conditions at Juwata Bay, or contemporary community-wide beliefs. Differences in personal names, wording, transcription, and translation may influence interpretation, and the conclusions should not be treated as definitive for every Jama Mapun version of Adjung-Adjung.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

The authors affirm that no conflicts of interest exist in relation to this study. As the research analyzed an existing documented oral narrative, no human participants were directly involved. Ethical considerations therefore focused on the respectful treatment of Jama Mapun cultural heritage, proper acknowledgment of the narrator, reteller, transcriber, translator, and confirmer, and culturally sensitive interpretation of Indigenous language, religious expressions, community values, and traditional knowledge. The study also recognized the existence of multiple versions of the Legend of Adjung-Adjung and limited its interpretations to the documented narrative, treating supernatural elements as expressions of cultural belief and heritage rather than as historically or scientifically verified events.

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