



RETTY ISNENDES

Ngalaksa in the Folktales of Rancakalong, Sumedang, West Java: A Local Historical Study

ABSTRACT: This article is concerned with the folktales in Rancakalong, Sumedang, West Java, Indonesia, which are the records and references for the cultural activity of “Ngalaksa”. “Ngalaksa” is an activity of making “laksa”, as an expression of gratitude for the harvest and as an activity of “ngalaksanakeun” or conducting, and respecting the mandates of the ancestors. Folktale becomes very important in the cycle of agriculture in the region. W.R. Bascom (1954 and 1983)’s theory is used in studying the folktales. The method employed is qualitative by using historical approach, with the following techniques: literary study, interview, recording and documentation, observation, and text and content analysis. Fourteen folktales become the data of this research and their relationships with the activity of “Ngalaksa” are presented, so too their historical analysis. The results show that the relationships between the content of the folktales and “Ngalaksa” in Rancakalong, Sumedang, West Java, include: the main ingredients and art in “Ngalaksa”, food processing, and traditional histories. In the last section of the article, there are recommendations to review and re-interpret the stories of the origin of “Ngalaksa”. Review and reinterpretation of the origin stories of “Ngalaksa” have to be conducted in order to be able to reconstruct the real story. By researching the history of leadership in Sumedang, it is possible to infer that “Ngalaksa” ceremony has been really old, in line with the respect paid to “Nyai Pohaci” (dry/unirrigated rice field culture) that is thought to be Sundanese authentic culture, especially pertaining the story of the origin of rice in Rancakalong, Sumedang, West Java.

KEY WORDS: *Ngalaksa* Ceremony; Folktales; Local History; Rancakalong District; History of Leadership in Sumedang.

INTRODUCTION

Rancakalong is a district in Sumedang Regency, West Java, Indonesia. The district has beautiful cultural heritage. The cultural heritage meant here is one based on strong agrarianism, because the district is indeed one of the prototypes of Sundanese traditional regions with agrarian community

as its social background (Lubis *et al.*, 2008; Kesuma, 2016; and Yulaeliah, 2017).

As a district under the Regency Government of Sumedang, the district of Rancakalong becomes significant, because of its historical development that abounds with art and culture. The regency is also famous for its historical nuances and stories,

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due to there once stood the kingdom of Sumedang Larang, which became the center of the old regency as a branch of Mataram kingdom authority in Central Java, and was influential during colonization of the Dutch administration. The condition has contributed to the wealth of the super-structural regions under the authority of the regency, including Rancakalong District (Ekadjati, 1981; Lubis *et al.*, 2008; Kesuma, 2016; and Yulaeliah, 2017).

In this regency has lived folktales, or what W.R. Bascom (1954) and J. Danandjaja (1994) calls as “prose narrative” (Bascom, 1954; and Danandjaja, 1994:50). These folktales are products of oral tradition, and also folklore inherited by the previous generation to the next generation. Folklore is a part of the culture inherited traditionally from one generation to the next generation in many versions, both orally and through examples accompanied by gestures or mnemonic device (*cf* Bascom, 1954; Dundes, 1965; Danandjaja, 1994:2; Meliono, 2011; and Rosidi, 2011).

Meanwhile, according to J.H. Brunvand (1976) as cited also in J. Danandjaja (1994), folklore includes: verbal folklore; partly verbal folklore; and non-verbal folklore. The examples are: folk language, traditional expression, traditional queries, folk poetry, folk or prose tale, and folk-song (*cf* Dorson ed., 1972; Brunvand, 1976; Egan, 1983; Danandjaja, 1994:21-22; and Meliono, 2011).

The folktales in Rancakalong District are verbal folklores, included under three major groups, as cited in Danandjaja (1994) and other scholars, namely: *Myth*, *Legend*, and *Folktale*. *Myth* is a kind of folktale that is considered to have truly occurred and is assumed to be sacred by the one who tells it. The background of *Myth* lies on the universe (micro and macro), and it tells the creation of the universe, the stars, natural events, gods and goddesses, cultural harbingers, main food, etc. *Legend* is a type of folktale assumed to have occurred, but is not believed to be sacred. On the other hand, *Tale* is a story that is regarded as never happened and its main function is for entertainment, even though many tales also convey truth, moral teaching, and even allusion (*cf* Bascom, 1954; Dundes, 1965;

Danandjaja, 1994:50-51 and 83; Gazin-Schwartz, 2011; and Noyes, 2012).

The study of myth or folktale has flourished in the Western countries, but it has been very limited in Indonesia, with the main concerns of finding the noble values believed to be sacred; and folktales have been treated merely as the “artifacts” that should be preserved (ACCU, 1998; Ahimsa-Putra, 2001:189; and Kutty, 2002). The folktales are frequently statements in the cultural context of the society of their origins, namely the rituals accompanied the tales, legitimized rituals, as well as competition and conflict in the social context of the society of their origins. Such texts are commonly attempts to the better understanding of the meanings of myths or folktales (Leach, 1976; Ortner, 1978; Meyerhoff, 1982; Ahimsa-Putra, 2001:188; Rudkin, 2007; and Garcia, 2016).

In this context, Bronislaw Malinowski (1926 and 1954)’s functional approach is commonly used in the study of folktales. In addition, interpretative anthropological analysis as Clifford Geertz (1973) has conducted can be used. The same is true for Claude Levi-Strauss (1963)’ structural approach (*cf* Malinowski, 1926 and 1954; Levi-Strauss, 1963; Geertz, 1973; Bascom, 1983; and Ahimsa-Putra, 2001:188-189). In this writing, historical approach is used, namely analysis by comparing folktales to history (Kartodirdjo, 1963 and 1992; Wolf-Knuts, 1999; Sjamsuddin, 2007; Kovach, 2010; and Aisiah, Suhartono & Sumarno, 2016).

The folktales in Rancakalong District record and are made references for the cultural activities of *Ngalaksa*. *Ngalaksa* is an activity of making the *laksa* done together by male and female elders as a form of gratitude for the harvest and as an activity of *ngalaksanakeun* or “conducting” the mandates of the ancestors to always be grateful and respect their ancestors. The folktales concerning *Ngalaksa* are found in Rancakalong, both directly and indirectly, and both in the forms of myths and *sasakala* or Sundanese legends concerning the history of a place or event (Kartikasari *et al.*, 1991; Yuningsih, 2005; Isnendes, 2013; and Yulaeliah, 2017).

The aims of this research are: (1) to describe the folktales which pertain to the activity of *Ngalaksa*; and (2) to analyze the relevance of the folktales to the relationship with the local history of Rancakalong District and Sumedang Regency in West Java, Indonesia by comparing and interpreting them.

METHOD

The method employed in this research was qualitative approach using historical method, while the techniques used were: literary study, interview, recording and documentation, observation, and text analysis (Kartodirdjo, 1992; Tosh, 2002; Sjamsuddin, 2007; Kreuzer, 2010; and Suhartono, 2010). The tools used in collecting data were mainly handy-cam, camera, and pencil and paper. The location of the research is Rancakalong Administrative Village, Rancakalong District, Sumedang Regency, West Java, Indonesia, which is around 17 kilometer from the capital city of Sumedang Regency. See picture 1.

The data in this research are in the form of primary and secondary data. The primary data are obtained from interview and participatory observation; while the secondary data are gained from literary study or analysis on the written materials, recording, and documentation (Tosh, 2002; Sjamsuddin, 2007; Suhartono, 2010; Driscoll, 2011; and Johnston, 2014). The folktales presented here are obtained from the results of interviews with correspondents, namely: Mama Sukarma (80 years old); Aki Oting (75 years old), and also from the research results of L.R. Wiati (2006), and other scholars, in the form of a thesis in Sundanese language (Wiati, 2006; Isnendes, 2013; and Yulaeliah, 2017).

The analysis process consisted of simplifying the collected data, presenting them systematically, processing, interpreting, and making meaning of them (Kohlbacher, 2006;



Picture 1:

“Map of Rancakalong District, Sumedang Regency,
West Java, Indonesia”

(Source: <https://www.google.com/search?rlz, 15/1/2019>)

Table 1:
Folktales in Rancakalong Distruct, Sumedang Regency, West Java, Indonesia

No.	Type/Title	Myth	Legend	Content
1.	<i>Nyi Mas Sanghyang Sri Pohaci 1</i>	√		The main ingredients of <i>Ngalaksa</i> .
2.	<i>Nyi Mas Sanghyang Sri Pohaci 2</i>	√		The main ingredients of <i>Ngalaksa</i> .
3.	<i>Nyi Mas Sanghyang Sri Pohaci 3</i>	√		The main ingredients of <i>Ngalaksa</i> .
4.	<i>Asal-usul Rancakalong</i>		√	History of a place.
5.	<i>Asal-usul Bubur Suro 1</i>		√	Food processing.
6.	<i>Asal-usul Tarawangsa 1</i>	√		Art in <i>Ngalaksa</i> .
7.	<i>Sasaka Tujuh Belas</i>		√	History of ethnic community.
8.	<i>Asal-usul Pasir Dogdog</i>		√	History of a place.
9.	<i>Asal-usul Kuda Rénggong</i>		√	Art history.
10.	<i>Asal-usul Gunung Tampomas</i>		√	History of a mountain.
11.	<i>Asal-usul Maronggé</i>		√	History of a place.
12.	<i>Kean Santang Gagak Lumayung</i>	√		History of the spread of Islam.
13.	<i>Carios Goib 1</i> , a chain story consisting of: <i>Asal-usul Bubur Suro 2</i> ; <i>Cerita Barang Pusaka & Mantra</i> ; and <i>Asal-usul Kesenian</i>		√	Food processing; history of tools; and art.
14.	<i>Carios Goib 2</i> , a chain story consisting of: <i>Asal-usul Tarawangsa 2</i> ; and <i>Asal-usul Ngalaksa</i>		√	History of local leadership.

Sutamat, 2011:8; and Peersman, 2014). The interpretation process is defined as explaining the implied by expressing one's own opinion through meaning reproduction by means of literary convention, historical convention, and social-cultural relevance (Pradopo, 2002:39 and 47; Tosh, 2002; Kohlbacher, 2006; and Popopa, 2014).

Data analysis was conducted after the following two stages: firstly, from the documented primary source, data were transcribed into written form; secondly, from the secondary sources in the forms of tales in Sundanese language, the gained data were transliterated into Indonesian language. Afterwards, the data were analyzed and interpreted from their historical aspects (Kartodirdjo, 1992; Tosh, 2002; Sjamsuddin, 2007; Kreuzer, 2010; and Suhartono, 2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sundanese folktales in West Java have existed since the first period of Sundanese literary history, i.e. around the 16th century. This is reported by the writing of *Sanghyang Siksakanda ng Karesian* (the book of rules with guidance to be a *Resi* or wise and holy man) with colophons in 1518 AD or

Anno Domini (Atja & Danasasmita, 1981; Danasasmita *et al.*, 1987:7; Noorduyn & Teeuw, 2006; and Nurwansah, 2013).

According to W. Wibisana *et al.* (2001) and T.K. Yulianty, A.Y. Hidayat & T. Gumilar (2007), folktales – or more familiarly termed *dongeng* in Sundanese literature – can be classified as follows: *karuhun* (ancestral) stories; *kajajaden* stories (stories about unnatural beings, usually animals imitating human beings); *sasakala* (origin) stories; and *dedemit* (ghost) stories. The stories about the origin of rice are famous in the land of Sunda, because they pertain to the opening of a dry/unirrigated rice field (*huma*), where rice is planted on dry soil and its mythology (Wibisana *et al.*, 2001:212; and Yulianty, Hidayat & Gumilar, 2007).

In the District of Rancakalong, Sumedang Regency, which is a part of West Java Provincial government, folktales about the origin of rice are found to be directly related to the ceremony of *Ngalaksa*. In addition, there are also folktales containing local histories and the origins of region and activity naming. See table 1.

Folktales Related to the Ceremonial Activity of Ngalaksa. The contents of the

selected 14 folktales are related to existence: *Nyai Pohaci* (rice = main ingredient), main food processing, and art. In other words, the existences of *Nyai Pohaci*, main food processing, and the accompanying art are the main themes of folktales about the ceremonial activity of *Ngalaksa* (Kartikasari *et al.*, 1991; Heryana, 2012; Isnendes, 2013; and Yulaeliah, 2017).

Nyai Pohaci is the name of the main character in the origin story of rice. In the story, the character is the daughter of *Dewa Anta*, raised by *Batara Guru* and *Batara Uma*, her adoptive father and mother are also god and goddesses. One day, *Nyai Pohaci* or *Dewi Sri* fell ill and died. After she was buried, from her burial grew various plants that could be utilized by human beings for their welfare. The most useful plant became the main food for Sundanese, namely rice. This plant grew from the grave of *Nyai Pohaci*, on the part where her eyes lay (Heryana, 2012; Isnendes, 2013; and Sutisna *et al.*, 2017).

It should be noted that the folktales about *Nyai Pohaci* are myth in type, because they transform the myths of *Nyai Pohaci*. The character of this story has lived for centuries in Sundanese *Pantun*¹ throughout Sunda land, including Rancakalong in Sumedang, West Java, Indonesia.

In the story of *Pantun*, that is a form of a long narrative prose, the character is believed to be the mother of all plants (food), because from her grave grow various kinds of plants. The character is also believed to have sacrificed herself to be weaving tools to make material for clothes or clothing. The character named of *Nyai Pohaci Sanghiang*

¹Sundanese *Pantun* is a long tale arranged in the form of prosaic poetry (a kind of Sundanese epic). The existence of *Pantun* stories has been recorded in the *Naskah Sanghyang Siksa Kanda ng Karesian*, in 1518 AD or *Anno Domini* (Danasmarta *et al.*, 1987). The surviving *Pantun* that is thought to be really old is *Lutung Kasarung*. In this *Pantun*, the character of *Nyai Pohaci* appears. Therefore, *Nyai Pohaci* as the character of the tale is even older than the *Pantun* of *Lutung Kasarung*. The *Pantun* that directly tells *Nyai Pohaci* is titled *Sri Sadana* or *Sulanjana*, recorded and re-written by A. Rosidi (1970) from *juruh pantun* (a kind of raconteur of *pantun*) Ki Atjeng Tamadipura of Sumedang. In the middle Sundanese literature, the 17th century, the *Pantun* transformed into *Wawacan* (a kind of epic poem) in the form of *Pupuh* poetry and its content was shortened. The famous *Wawacan* is *Wawacan Sulanjana* composed by R. Satjadibrata (1931).

Sri Dangdayang Trusnawati Nyi Sri Bibiting Sri is assumed to be the manifestation of plants, especially rice as the main ingredient for the ceremony of *Ngalaksa* (Kartikasari *et al.*, 1991; Yuningsih, 2005; Yulaeliah, 2017; Isnendes, 2013; and Kesuma, 2016).

Rice in the myth comes from the body of *Nyai Pohaci*, which consists of three types, namely: *cikal* (first/oldest) rice planted in *huma* (dry/unirrigated rice field); *panengah* (middle) rice planted in the rice field; and the last/youngest rice (sticky rice) that can be planted both in the unirrigated and irrigated rice fields. *Cikal* rice is believed to come from the first menstruation of *Nyai Pohaci*, explaining why its color is red (*ceré*). *Panengah* rice originates from the eyes of *Nyai Pohaci*. Meanwhile, the last/youngest rice or sticky rice comes from the heart of *Nyai Pohaci*. The three types of rice should be present at the ceremony of *Ngalaksa* to be made the main ingredients, which should be given some rituals before processed into *Laksa* (Heryana, 2012; Isnendes, 2013; and Sutisna *et al.*, 2017).²

The folktales containing the stories about *Nyai Pohaci*'s transformation in Rancakalong District involve three tales: *Mas Sanghyang Sri Pohaci 1*; *Mas Sanghyang Sri Pohaci 2*; and *Mas Sanghyang Sri Pohaci 3*. The contents of the three stories do not differ significantly from the above stories (Yuningsih, 2005; Supriadi, 2011; Heryana, 2012; Isnendes, 2013; and Yulaeliah, 2017).

In addition to the first to the third of *Mas Sanghyang Sri*, which is in the form of myth, there is also the folktale of *Asal-usul Tarawangsa 1*. This tale is directly related to the musical/art instrument accompanying the main ceremony of *Ngalaksa*, which is *tarawangsa*. *Tarawangsa* is a type of violin, comprising of *rebab* (fiddle) that is not curvy with two strings and played using horse's hair. In the folktale, it is told the origin of *tarawangsa*, which was created by the Prophets, especially to call *Nyai Pohaci* to earth. *Nyai Pohaci* is previously told to have

²*Laksa* is also meaning a kind of spaghetti or large-sized and long noodle made of rice flour, not wheat. See, for further information about the *Laksa* in the context of meal, Bin Xiao Fu (2008) and Leanne Kitchen (2019).

showed her anger and returned to the sky, so that she has to be called back to earth, because rice is lost and drought has occurred (Cahripin, 2008; Supriatin, 2012; Isnendes, 2013; and Yulaeliah, 2017).

Here is the story. In the past, the traditional ritual ceremony was always held in Rancakalong, so that Rancakalong society had never experienced food scarcity. After the ritual was stopped, because of various influences, there occurred famine in Rancakalong. The Prophets came to Rancakalong, because they pitied the suffering people. They called *Nyai Sri*, “*Nyai*, please come home! The people and children are screaming from their suffering, because there is no food!”. *Nyai*, then, answered, “Very well, I will come to the land of Sunda, but I want to be invited with a song!” (Yuningsih, 2005; Supriadi, 2011; Isnendes, 2013; and Iskandar, Iskandar & Partasasmita, 2018).

The Prophets, then, convened to call the Prophet Daud (David). Prophet Daud agreed with the request, and then he whistled as *Nyai Sri* gradually came down from heaven. After whistling for a long time, the Prophet felt his mouth was sore, so he sang. However, as time passed, his mouth was dry and he asked the cans and straws to sing instead, but the straws finally were broken. Later on, Prophet Daud delegated the task of singing to wires/strings. The women made *kecap* (zither), while the men made *rebab* (fiddle). Eventually, *Nyai Sri* came to the land of Sunda. After her coming, the land became prosperous without a lack of food. From then on, the art of *tarawangsa* became known, whose *waditra* uses seven-string zithers and two-string fiddles (Wiati, 2006:104; Cahripin, 2008; Supriatin, 2012; Isnendes, 2013; and Sutisna *et al.*, 2017).

In the folktales, the ideologies of the old belief (*Nyai Pohaci* and *Tarawangsa*) and the new belief or Islam (the Prophets) meet, meaning that the old belief is not left behind but still respected, while the new belief (Islam) develops well in Rancakalong, Sumedang, West Java, Indonesia. This can be called as a kind of synchronization (*cf* Jubaedah, 2001; Lubis *et al.*, 2003; Ricklefs, 2013; Yusuf, 2013; and Prawiro, 2015).

As for the folktales pertaining to food processing and art, they are mainly categorized into legend on the origins of activities and objects. The folktales are: *Asal-usul Bubur Suro 1*; *Sasaka Tujuh Belas*; *Carios Goib 1* (consisting of the tales of *Asal-usul Bubur Suro 2*, *Cerita Mengenai Barang Pusaka dan Mantra-mantra*, and *Asal-usul Kesenian dan Alat-alat Kesenian*). These folktales talk about the ceremony of *Bubur* (Porridge) *Suro* and musical instruments, zither, and *tarawangsa*, that are the main accompaniments for the ceremony of *Ngalaksa*; and *Rengkong* that is the additional accompaniment for the opening ceremony of *Ngalaksa* (*cf* Cahripin, 2008; Isnendes, 2013; Utami, 2017; Yulaeliah, 2017; and Khan, 2018).

Bubur suro is a kind of ceremony in processing various plants (rice, tubers, and fruits) and mixed them into porridge. The ceremony is held before *Ngalaksa*. The traditional ceremonies in Rancakalong District all form the cycle of *tali paranti*³ of rice in the land of Sunda in Rancakalong, Sumedang, West Java, Indonesia.

The Folktales Related to Local History.

The folktales related to local history classified into legend, namely: *Sasaka Tujuh Belas*; *Asal-usul Pasir Dogdog*; *Asal-usul Kuda Renggong*; *Asal-usul Gunung Tampomas*; *Asal-usul Marongge*; *Kean Santang Gagak Lumayung*; and *Carios Goib 2*, consisting of: *Asal-usul Tarawangsa 2* and *Asal-usul Ngalaksa* (Kartikasari *et al.*, 1991; Yenilawati, 1993/1994; Isnendes, 2013; Sopyan, 2013; and Ismail, 2017).

These folktales talk about the local history, specifically *Sasaka Tujuh Belas*, concerning ethnic community; *Asal-usul Pasir Dogdog*, the origin of Dogdog Valley, an art instruments; *Asal-usul Kuda Renggong*, the origin of Sumedang horse performing art; *Asal-usul Gunung Tampomas*, the origin of Tampomas

³According to J.P. Millie (2006:6), the term of *tali paranti* is ultimately used by H.H. Moestapa (1913); R.A.P. Soeganda (1962); W.M. Rikin (1973); and R. Wessing (1978). Even, according to W.M. Rikin (1973) as cited also in J.P. Millie (2006), the Sundanese term of *tali paranti* is a more accurate term to refer to the complex practice and belief, which are the traditions of Sundanese people, especially the metaphorical way representing consecutive movements through life cycle. For further information related to the *tali paranti*, read also R. Isnendes (2012 and 2013); and Agus Mahardika (2017).

Mountain, a mountain in Sumedang abounded with histories; *Kean Santang Gagak Lumayung*, a holy legend of Prince Santang in spreading of Islam in the land of Sunda; and *Asal-usul Marongge*, a region famous with love charms (Kartikasari *et al.*, 1991; Yenilawati, 1993/1994; Saleh, 2011; Komandoko, 2013; and Sulasman & Suparman, 2013).

On the other hand, *Asal-usul Tarawangsa 2* and *Asal-usul Ngalaksa* talk about the local history of local leadership. These two folktales are very interesting if they are connected to the “local history” of Rancakalong in Sumedang, West Java, Indonesia, even though the title mentions *Tarawangsa* and *Ngalaksa*, which pertain to art instruments and food processing (Kartikasari *et al.*, 1991; Supriatin, 2012; Isnendes, 2013; and Yulaeliah, 2017). The story of *Asal-Usul Tarawangsa 2* is following here:

First Time Setting: Mataram.

The origin of *Tarawangsa* art, that has always been the main musical instrument in the ceremony of *Ngalaksa*, was begun when a long drought and food scarcity in Rancakalong occurred. Rice was failed to be harvested and rice seeds were difficult to get. To fulfill the needs for food, the people planted *hanjeli*, an intermediate plant. Until one day, when someone was going to take *hanjeli* from the *lumbung* (storage) to be cooked, an unknown child played inside the storage, got buried under the heaps of *hanjeli* and died.

After some time, the dead body of the child was smelled by a goat, and people found the body. The people were shocked and became traumatized with *hanjeli* plant. However, they had no other recourse, because rice seeds had not yet been obtained in Rancakalong. The fact prompted *Eyang Wisanagara* to make an effort to search for rice seeds to the kingdom of Mataram in Central Java by pretending to be a busker (artist). *Eyang Wisanagara* was paid with rice seeds and hid them in *Tarawangsa*. He came back to Rancakalong safely. The seeds were then spread and Rancakalong people lived prosperously.

As a form of gratitude for the abundant harvest, the ceremony of *Ngalaksa* was then held every 3.5 years. As a commemoration for the regained rice seeds from kingdom of Mataram, *Ngalaksa* ceremony has always been accompanied by *Tarawangsa* art, an instrument played by *Eyang Wisanagara* in order to get rice seeds. Thus, the activity is also called

“*punika tiban ti Mataram*” or there was coming from Mataram (interview with Respondent A, 8/2/2017).

Meanwhile, the story of *Asal-Usul Ngalaksa*, which has been revived by the local people, is following here:

Second Time Setting: The Dutch (VOC).

The ancestors were colonized by the Dutch. The colonization also reached Sumedang. *Ngalaksa* was forbidden by the Dutch colonial rule, because they did not like for the native people to gather, as if they were going to rebel. Finally, the activity of *Ngalaksa* got to be held secretly in *Leuweung Tiis* (Desolate Forest) in Nagarawangi Administrative Village. Until then, the *panglaksanaan* (the place to make *laksa*) came to be located in *Leuweung Tiis*.

However, it is not the Dutch if they did not have spies; they finally found out that the people of Rancakalong still held the *Ngalaksa* ceremony. Then, the Dutch tore *Leuweung Tiis* apart and its *panglaksanaan*. The elders of Rancakalong, as a result, moved the ceremonial activity of *Ngalaksa* to *Supa Burung*, close to a spring. But again, the Dutch spied the activity and destroyed it (interview with Respondent A, 8/2/2017).

Third Time Setting: The Beginning of the 20th Century.

It was told that the ancestors who used to hold *Ngalaksa* passed away, and there was left a twelve-year-old child, named *Emod* (*Eyang Emod*). *Eyang Emod* was, then, nurtured by *Eyang Embin* until *Eyang Emod* grew into an adult and very skilled in agriculture.

Eyang Embin had a daughter named *Eyang Rupi*, who was wanted by *Mantri Garam* (Salt Official). In order to keep his wealth, *Eyang Rupi* was wedded to *Eyang Emod*, who was already 30 years old at that time. After the couple was blessed with a child, *Eyang Emod* changed his name into *Eyang Muhari* (name change among Sundanese and Javanese after marriage is common, and is usually made similar to the name of one’s child—the researcher’s).

The wealth of *Eyang Muhari* was depleted, because his farm was attacked by pests. *Eyang Muhari* became shocked, fell ill, and brought here and there for medication with no avail. Until finally, *Eyang Muhari* was brought to Solokan Jeruk, Majalaya, Bandung Regency. The *Kiyai* (Islamic leader) whom he visited said that he did not have to be treated, because he would heal by himself and become the leader of his region.

Eyang Muhari was brought back to Rancakalong and his sickness got more severe until he finally died. There were crowds of people who visited and took care of the body

of *Eyang Muhari*, but when he was about to be bathed, an elderly named *Eyang Salwiyan* said, “Don’t bath him yet, because his body still has a pulse and warmth. Wait for a night”. It turned out that the command was right; at dawn *Eyang Muhari* woke up and wondered at the crowds around him. He said that he did not die; instead, an ancestor came to him and told him that he died because of the loss of his wealth and the failed harvest. If he wanted his life and the lives of Rancakalong people to be prosperous again, they had to redo the previous activities commonly held in *Supa Burung* (Bird Mushroom).

After saying so, *Eyang Muhari* returned to his temporary death. Two hours later he woke up and said that the ceremony should use *sasajén* (offering of folwers or foods to spirits). He, then, returned once again to his temporary death, woke up again, and said that in holding *Ngalaksa*, they had to prioritize *syahadat* (the confession of a Muslim).

Eyang Salwiyan told the other child of *Eyang Muhari*, namely *Eyang Wiranta*, that his father mandated to practice *syahadat* and *talari karuhun ngalaksa* complete with the *sasajén*. But *Eyang Wiranta* was afraid of the punishment from the government.

Then came *Eyang Jayapraja*, a brave elder who guaranteed himself if the government ever took any action. *Eyang Jayapraja* also contributed the majority of the materials needed for the *Ngalaksa* ceremony. Eventually, *Ngalaksa* is held again in a period of 3.5 years or approaching the fourth year (interview with Respondent A, 8/2/2017; and interview with Respondent B, 10/3/2017).

The two stories above are interrelated if put together and are interesting to be interpreted through historical analysis. The first time setting is the era of Mataram kingdom in Central Java, Indonesia, namely *Asal-usul Tarawangsa 2*. The second is during Dutch colonization—actually the era of VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* or Association of East-India Dutch Company), namely *Asal-usul Ngalaksa*; and, then, the story entered the setting of the beginning of the 20th century, namely *Asal-usul Ngalaksa* (Kartikasari *et al.*, 1991; Lubis, 2008:122-144; and Isnendes, 2012 and 2013).

Historical Context and Comparison. When Banten⁴ reigned in power and

⁴Banten is the name of a region in the western part of West Java Province under the authority of the Hindu kingdom of Pajajaran, but later on Banten separated itself in line with the teachings of Islam that continuously developed in the

Pajajaran⁵ collapsed in 1579 AD (*Anno Domini*), afterwards, the land of Sunda in West Java was broken down into parts and Sumedang established its own kingdom under the authority of Prabu Geusan Ulun (1579-1610), who already embraced Islam—it is of wonder that this King of Sumedang is never mentioned in the tales or oral stories of the local people; while in fact, he succeeded in gathering as many as four leaders, consisting of 26 *kandaga lantés* or kind for writing and 18 *umbuls* or banners with *cacah* or people as many as ± 9,000 *umpis* or houses (Ekadjadi, 1981; Kartadibrata, 1989; Soedradjat, 1996; Zamhir, 1996; and Lubis *et al.*, 2008).

Furthermore, Prabu Geusan Ulun gained trust to continue Sunda kingdom with the symbolic transfer of Sunda King gold crown by four *kandaga lantés* sent by the last Sunda King, namely Raga Mulya Surya Kencana. The crown was named *Makuta Binokasih Sang Hyang Pake Siger* (Zamhir, 1996; Kusmayadi, 2018b; and Lubis *et al.*, 2008).

After the demise of Prabu Geusan Ulun, in the eastern region, the Sultanate of Mataram in Central Java was getting stronger; the Sultanate even claimed to the VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* or Association of East-India Dutch Company) that the whole region of West Java, except Cirebon and Banten, were under their authority. The substitute of Prabu Geusan Ulun, Raden Suriadawangsa, visited Sultan Agung of Mataram kingdom, and declared Sumedang to be under the authority of Mataram (Kartadibrata, 1989; Zamhir, 1996; Lubis *et al.*, 2008; and Ricklefs, 2013).

Raden Suriadiwangsa was given a title of *Raden Rangga Gempol Kusumadinata*, and became the coordinator of the Regents in Priangan region. The word of *Priangan* comes

Indonesian archipelago. This self-separation was helped by the Sultanates (Islamic Kingdom) of Demak in Central Java and Cirebon in West Java. See, for further information, Y. Iskandar (1992:282-294); Jajat Burhanudin & Kees van Dijk eds. (2013); and M.C. Ricklefs (2013).

⁵Pajajaran is a kingdom once glorious in the land of Sunda in West Java. The kingdom was a unity of Sunda kingdom, namely Prabu Tarusbawa and his successors; and Galuh kingdom, namely Prabu Wretikandayun and his successors. The two *Prabus* (Kings) were the eighth successors of Raja Purnawarman VIII of the famous Tarumanagara kingdom in the 4th century. See, for further information, Y. Iskandar (1992:309); and N.H. Lubis *et al.* (2003 and 2008).

from *Prayangan*, a sincere as suited to region, under the authority of Raden Suriadiwangsa or *Raden Rangga Gempol Kusumadinata*. Raden Rangga Gempol Kusumadinata I reigned from 1601-1625 AD (Surianingrat, 1983; Lubis, 2003; Lubis *et al.*, 2008; and Zakaria, 2008).

The government was succeeded by Raden Rangga Gede, the son of Prabu Geusan Ulun from Nyi Mas Gedeng Waru. Raden Rangga Gede reigned from 1625-1633 AD with many conflicts undergoing. Raden Rangga Gede was even once punished and detained by the Mataram kingdom, because he was thought to be unable to control the government. But, he was sentenced free in 1632 AD, because he succeeded in helping the arrest of Dipati Ukur, who was suspected to rebel against Mataram kingdom (*cf* Ekadjati, 1977 and 1981; Surianingrat, 1983; Setiawan & Syahbudin, 2006; and Lubis *et al.*, 2008).

The next government was led by Raden Rangga Gempol II, the son of Raden Rangga Gede. It was not until the government under Rangga Gempol II that Sultan Agung of Mataram kingdom formed three new Regencies in Sumedang. This made the region of Sumedang even smaller, and Raden Rangga Gempol II handed the government to his son. Rangga Gempol II reigned from 1633-1656 AD (Lubis, 2003; Lubis *et al.*, 2008; Hermawan, Sofian & Kuswara, 2017; and Lukmantara, 2018).

The son of Raden Rangga Gempol II was titled *Pangeran Panembahan Kusumadinata* or *Raden Rangga Gempol III*. He led for 50 years, namely from 1656 to 1705 AD. During his leadership, there were complicated internal as well as external conflicts. But, it was also under his leadership that Mataram kingdom was weakened in terms of its position and power, and VOC took over the power (Lubis *et al.*, 2008; Thresnawaty, 2011; Manse & Kemper, 2015; and Hermawan, Sofian & Kuswara, 2017).

It was also in *Pangeran Panembahan Kusumadinata's* era that the forest was made into rice field. Hence, the rice field became increasingly expanded under his leadership. In addition, his era gave birth to the term of *Pamuk*, referring to security guards

chosen, consisting of 40 selected people. Furthermore, from rice field opening, the terms of *Carik* (Village Head) and *Bengkok* (land for use of village head in place of salary) were born. The prince rearranged Sumedang in the beginning of May 1681 by moving the capital city of Sumedang from Tegalkalong to the current Sumedang City (Lubis *et al.*, 2008:122-144; Fauzan, 2011; and Thresnawaty, 2011).

An Analysis of Historical Context.

Folktales play a very important role in the politics and authority, in addition to being power legitimation. There is a reason for this: is it possible that the leaders of Rancakalong or Sumedang in West Java under the names of *Embah Wisanegara*, *Embah Wiranagara*, *Embah Reguna*, as told in the folktales, actually refer to *Pangeran Rangga Gede* in the history? The similarities of the names and stories trigger the question. Because it was only *Pangeran Rangga Gede* who "went" to Mataram kingdom in Central Java, got detained; and returned to Sumedang, set free because of helping Mataram (Lubis *et al.*, 2008; Zakaria, 2008; Thresnawaty, 2011; and Lukmantara, 2018).

The second thing that should be noticed is the possibility that the name of *Eyang Mas Ja(ti) Kusumah*, who brought back rice seeds from Mataram kingdom, as mentioned in the folktales, actually refers to *Pangeran Panembahan Kusumadinata* or *Rangga Gempol III*, where similarity in names has also to be noticed (*Kusumah*). However, what actually happened is that the Prince did not literally bring rice seeds from Mataram kingdom, probably only adapting a part of Mataram's rice field pattern, because *Pangeran Panembahan Kusumadinata* in fact opened rice fields as expansive as possible and developed agriculture in Sumedang, while Mataram kingdom was in bankruptcy. It is no wonder if during his government, the people were prosperous and held activities expressing gratitude after harvest (Lubis *et al.*, 2008; Thresnawaty, 2011; and Iskandar, Iskandar & Partasasmita, 2018).

The third thing that needs to be highlighted from the stories is the news on the revival of *Ngalaksa* ceremony after

the Dutch colonial took the authority and that they always dispersed the ceremony. Hence, for a long time, *Ngalaksa* ceremony had been stopped until there left a twelve-year-old child named *Emod*. Through the events occurred to *Eyang Emod*, who changed his name to *Eyang Muhari*, the *Ngalaksa* was revived. Seen from the setting of time paralleled to the year the Dutch colonial or VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* or Association of East-India Dutch Company) colonized Priangan area, including Sumedang, which was 5 October 1705, it was after the people felt safe under the government of *Pangeran Kusumadinata* or *Pangeran Rangga Gempol IV* or *Pangeran Karuhun* that the people of Rancakalong were predicted to freely do what has been mandated by the ancestors, because *Pangeran Rangga Gempol IV* also opened new rice field that was quite large (Lubis *et al.*, 2008; Thresnawaty, 2011; and Isnendes, 2013).

If *Ngalaksa* was not revived during that era, it was probably during the government of *Pangeran Surianagara Kusumadinata* or *Pangeran Kornel* then in 1791-1828 AD (*Anno Domini*). This is so because under his leadership, Sumedang was glorious. Nicolaus Engelhard, a Dutch employee, reported that in the Resolution dated on 14 July 1795, *Raden Tumenggung Adipati Surianagara* was directly involved with the activity of people's agriculture to improve rice productivity (cited in Lubis *et al.*, 2008:162).

Even so, the statement of Aki Oting (70 years old) as the witness has to be heeded, because he is the son of *Eyang Jayapraja*, a figure in the folktale of *Asal-usul Ngalaksa*. If Aki Oting was born around 1943, then, *Eyang Jayapraja* was born around 1900s or the 19th century heading to the 20th century. If in the 1900s, *Ngalaksa* was revived after getting banned by *golongan kaum* (a group of Islamic religious people) in the era of a *dalem* (a leader of a palace), who was faithful to Islamic teachings for fear that there would be *syirik* (belief in more than one God) — it can be inferred that the ceremony was not banned by the Dutch colonial government (cf Kartikasari *et al.*, 1991; Isnendes, 2013; Kesuma, 2016; interview with Respondent A,

8/2/2017; and interview with Respondent B, 10/3/2017).

Who is the faithful *Dalem*? One name that has to be mentioned, because of his faithfulness to religion, is *Pangeran Aria Suria Atmaja* (1882-1919) who was the Regent of Sumedang in the era of Dutch colonial government until the end of it. The Prince died in Mecca, when completing Hajj, so that he was given a title of *Pangeran Mekah* (Sutherland, 1973; Lubis, 1998; Lubis *et al.*, 2008:168-177; and Kusmayadi, 2018a). Looking at the years of *Pangeran Mekah* and the banning of *Ngalaksa* ceremony and the age of the characters in the folktale of *Asal-usul Ngalaksa*, their existences are deemed relevant (Kartikasari *et al.*, 1991; Lubis *et al.*, 2008; Isnendes, 2013; Kesuma, 2016; and Kusmayadi, 2018a).

CONCLUSION ⁶

The folktales about *Ngalaksa* are important components in understanding the cultural activities and artifacts of *Ngalaksa*. This is because in the folktales live ideal thoughts, which are concepts or rules made as guidance in realizing the cultural activities.

The contents of the 14 folktales pertain to the activity of *Ngalaksa* and its history. In relation to the activity of *Ngalaksa*, the existences of the followings are recorded: *Nyai Pohaci*, main food processing and art. *Nyai Pohaci* is an important figure, who in the traditional thinking of the people transformed into main food (rice, flour) that has to be used for *Ngalaksa*. Meanwhile, from the relationship of the folktales to history, it can be interpreted that there are relevancies between folktales, which are oral literature, and the oral tradition products to the real history.

In the folktales of Rancakalong in

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Sumedang, King of Pajajaran in West Java and King of Mataram in Central Java are always mentioned. This represents the two cultural powers, namely the culture of dry/unirrigated rice field and Sundanese religiosity in the government, which in the era of Mataram kingdom transformed into the culture of rice field and Islam. But, in reality, political and power conflicts were more highlighted.

Review and reinterpretation of the origin stories of *Ngalaksa* have to be conducted in order to be able to reconstruct the real story. By researching the history of leadership in Sumedang, it is possible to infer that *Ngalaksa* ceremony has been really old, in line with the respect paid to *Nyai Pohaci* (dry/unirrigated rice field culture) that is thought to be Sundanese authentic culture, also its *Tarawangsa* art.

However, after the transfer of authority to Mataram kingdom, because its Regent surrendered, a “deviation” of the story of rice originating from Mataram kingdom was made as power legitimation and a form of “surrender” to those in power at that time.⁷

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⁷**Statement:** I, hereby, declare that this article is my original work; so, it is not product of plagiarism. After receipt and revised this article, it will not be withdrawn by the author from the TAWARIKH journal.

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Ngalaksa Ceremony in Rancakalong, Sumedang, West Java

(Source: <https://media.neliti.com>, 17/1/2019)

Review and reinterpretation of the origin stories of *Ngalaksa* have to be conducted in order to be able to reconstruct the real story. By researching the history of leadership in Sumedang, it is possible to infer that *Ngalaksa* ceremony has been really old, in line with the respect paid to *Nyai Pohaci* (dry/unirrigated rice field culture) that is thought to be Sundanese authentic culture, also its *Tarawangsa* art.