

## **Local Beliefs and Thoughts on Origin Myth in the Kg. Gajah Sub-district, Perak: A Cultural Studies Approach**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Origin myths constitute a genre of folklore that records a society's cultural legacy and is essential for delineating the historical context of a location. This study is to examine the local beliefs and views of myths in Kampung Gajah, Perak, utilising a cultural studies framework. Furthermore, it aims to investigate the function of origin myths in safeguarding the cultural heritage of the Kampung Gajah community. This study aims to investigate the beliefs and perspectives of the local population in Kampung Gajah, Perak, about origin myths using a Cultural Studies framework. A qualitative research design was employed, utilising purposive sampling to identify six informants for semi-structured interviews, supplemented with observations and document analysis. To verify the validity of the community's oral narratives, interviews were audio-recorded and analysed thematically, ensuring both depth and dependability of the data. The analysis was guided by Barker's (2003) Cultural Studies theory, which outlines five conceptual approaches to understanding the formation of culture within communities through mythic narratives. The findings suggest that the local population's beliefs and identities are shaped by origin myths that have been preserved and transmitted orally across generations. These myths serve as historical narratives, contributing to the construction of communal identity and cultural values. This research highlights the significance of minor, often overlooked communities with strong oral traditions, offering insights into how

origin myths function to preserve cultural heritage and foster a collective identity.

### **ARTICLE INFO**

#### *Article history:*

Received: 23 February 2025

Accepted: 05 May 2026

Published: 29 May 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.34.S2.06>

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*Keywords:* Beliefs, culture, folklore, Kg. Gajah, Perak

### **INTRODUCTION**

Myths are traditional narratives passed down orally or in written form from generation to generation, primarily intended to explain the origins of natural phenomena, human

existence, animals, places, institutions, or cultural practices. Myths were often regarded as true and sacred stories within the belief systems of early societies. According to Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka (1997), a myth is an old story believed to be true, especially regarding the origin of a phenomenon or a legendary figure. Hashim (1986) defines myths as folk stories that involve extraordinary beings and events beyond the logic of human understanding, categorising them into two main types: origin myths and heroic myths. Gove (1986) further describes myth as a traditional story, often of unknown origin, associated with religious beliefs or natural explanations. O'Sullivan et al. (1996) assert that myth serves as a medium through which individuals express and connect with key concepts central to cultural identity. Additionally, Thompson (1977) views myths as traditional materials, typically transmitted orally, that bridge imagination and reality.

As one of the oldest forms of oral literature, myths in the Malay traditional context serve not only as entertainment but also as vehicles for conveying moral values and aesthetic teachings. Myths function as a reflection of the collective worldview of a community. Traditional authors frequently use them to elevate the status of characters or institutions such as kingship and governance (Zakaria et al., 2013). In modern contexts, myths remain relevant as cultural heritage that communicates the values, worldview, and identity of the society that created them.

A significant component of traditional Malay society is the belief in the life that passes through them. One definition of

belief would be something one trusts. However, belief is fundamental in the interaction between people and their creator and between people with different priorities. Lewicki and Wiethoff (2002) say that belief is an individual's conviction with the capacity to act depending on the words, deeds, and choices of others. In other words, it is a positive anticipation, assumption, or cognitive idea in daily life. From belief comes the perspective one adopts in different contexts. Habibah and Rahil (1990) holds that cognitive thinking is how individuals control objects in their surroundings. In terms of thinking, a person would notice the link between stimuli to pursue their objectives through observation. Still, thought falls into two primary forms: directed and undirected. While undirected thinking lacks goals and leans more toward daydreaming, directed thinking consists of knowledge and happens in reasoning, critical thinking, and creativity.

The researcher in this work has applied a cultural studies methodology that Barker (2003) developed. Barker (2003) presents eight concepts of cultural processes: cultural and practice marking, symbolism, materialism, expressiveness, power, popular culture, text and imagination, and subjective identity. The subjective and identity dimensions of this inquiry are crucial. Barker (2003) proposes that subjectivity and identity pertain to the trajectory of human activity in cultural study. Conversely, identity has become the foundation of cultural studies. Barker (2003) asserted that the subjective and identity approach in cultural studies constitutes a

discipline that seeks to address enquiries concerning the formation of human identity, including how individuals are constructed, how they self-define as subjects, and how they identify through emotions about gender, race, and age. The researcher in this study will examine the perspectives of the community, namely six residents of the four historic villages, about this oral narrative, utilising the subjective and identification technique that influences the creation of origin narratives.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous researchers, including Mohd Fahmi (2017), have examined cultural values in folklore, specifically in his analysis of the folktales of the Temiar Orang Asli community in Gua Musang, Kelantan, which addresses the origins of this community. The research indicates that a collective of marginalised individuals from many communities initiated the Orang Asli. Being a secluded and separated culture, they are among the oldest communities living in the forest areas and avoid socializing or meeting with outsiders. Their survival in the wild depends on organic resources. However, their life also depends on metaphors, nature, and explicit and tacit historical meanings that coexist forever with ancient tales, origin stories, and genealogies passed on from their predecessors. This investigation helped the researcher to discover the special folktales full of fantastic ideas, particularly the Temiar Orang Asli tribe's origin myths. Notably, this study revealed their great intellectual capacity. This earlier research

has also incorporated numerous elements or lines of Temiar Orang Asli's origin of life based on their tribes and lineages.

Comparable research was conducted by Ahmad et al. (2015), who investigated the unique nomenclature of the communities inside the Tanjung Dawai State Legislative Assembly. The origins of these unique village names have prompted experts to conduct investigations. Moreover, a place's name might encapsulate its original environmental characteristics that may have changed due to technological advancement and the passage of time. This study can also demonstrate the richness of the legacy, culture, events, economics, and identity of the historical society. This study elucidates the origins of the unique village names in Merbok and Bujang, purportedly drawn from the oral traditions of the inhabitants, providing insight into the historical context of the area before contemporary modernity.

In a comparable year, another study conducted by Norazimah et al. (2019) asserts that genesis stories are mythological narratives that surpass human rationality. She further elucidated that origin myths, esteemed in ancient civilisations, are narratives from the past characterised by fantastical elements. This study unequivocally shown that genesis narratives are oral traditions. Additional studies investigating the origins of myths also contribute to attracting visitors to the nation's tourism sector, so enhancing its economy. The findings assert the discovery of additional origin narratives from Lenggong, encompassing atypical tales, myths, and legends. The tourism sector

of Lenggong Valley primarily relies on these origin legends, leading to the creation of various reproductions and commemorative narratives to illustrate the origins of the place's name. Nonetheless, each of these narratives contains unchanging legendary elements. They possess numerous intriguing narratives for fellow academics to expand their understanding of folk literature, drawing from the folktales and origin stories provided by the previous scholar (Hassan & Mohd Isa, 2017).

Previous research on Cultural Literary Theory by Muhammad Irfan (2013) emphasised the cultural components. This study provides insight into cultural literary theory, particularly for the Malay community, highlighting the intrinsic connection between literature and culture rooted in societal truths and lived experiences. Zainab (2006) elucidated in her research that the representation of human culture and its environment is significantly influenced by literary works. The argument also addresses the authenticity and use of oral storytelling. While some academics contend that oral traditions are less trustworthy than written records because of their fluidity and sensitivity to change over time, others like Walter J. Ong (1982) emphasise the performative and communal elements of oral stories. Ong contends that oral traditions are active processes of cultural transmission that support social cohesiveness and collective identity rather than only the preservation of the past. Oral stories concerning the beginnings of the village names in Kampung Gajah are

not only historical histories but are also contemporary customs that still influence the feeling of self in the community. These stories are an essential link between generations since they guarantee that the values, beliefs, and history of Kampung Gajah are actively remembered and actively participated in daily life.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The researcher has chosen a qualitative design for this study as the method of research procedure. This research utilises observations, semi-structured interviews via audio recording and document analysis. Observation was also obtained by documenting the environment of the recognised folktales within a group. To guarantee accurate information, the researcher visited each Kg. Gajah community possessing knowledge of the origin story and performed semi-structured interviews. Table 1 shows the list of informants interviewed during data collection.

The interview recordings were subsequently transcribed into written material, which was then subjected to thematic analysis to ensure coding and theming aligned with the research objectives. Documentation analysis involves examining images related to research documents and information gathered during data-gathering activities.

This study employs purposive sampling aimed at elder individuals in the Kampung Gajah Sub-district who possess knowledge of the oral tale of the myth's origin. Several communities in the Kampung Gajah sub-district were chosen, including

Table 1  
*List of informants*

Informants	Age	Sex	Locality	Role
A	70	Male	Kampung Gajah	Villager
B	87	Male	Kampung Selat Pulau	Villager
C	78	Female	Kampung Kota	Villager
D	60	Male	Kampung Geronggong	Head of Village
E	48	Male	Pasir Salak	Curator Officer Kompleks Sejarah Pasir Salak
F	52	Female	Kampung Pasir Garam	Villager

Kampung Geronggong, Kampung Pasir Garam, Kampung Selat Pulau, and Kampung Gajah. For data validation purposes, a curator from Kompleks Sejarah Kuala Kangsar was questioned. For data validation purposes, a curator from Kompleks Sejarah Kuala Kangsar was questioned. The study location is depicted below:

The outcomes of the thematic analysis will be directed towards cultural studies, emphasising the influence of oral tradition on cultural memory and identity. This notion is endorsed by Barker (2003), who contends that artistic endeavours, narratives, and social interactions perpetually construct identity. In the context of Kampung Gajah, the origin narratives serve as a form of cultural memory, allowing the community to forge a shared identity. Narratives and cultural artefacts embody the values, beliefs, and historical awareness of society.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Views and Beliefs of the People about Oral Narratives as a Heritage Story

Oral narratives are accounts transmitted throughout generations. Oral narratives constituted the paramount literary forms

before the advent of writing systems, as they were perpetuated through oral transmission without any written records. Amoamo (2011) asserts that renowned notions about natural disasters or historical events are prevalent in mythology. According to the Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka (2010), myths in Malay are defined as narratives from ancient times that are considered authentic, particularly those involving components about the early history or origins of a tribe, events, natural phenomena, and similar subjects. Moreover, according to the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (2010), myths are characterised as fabricated narratives, specifically tales concerning humans or inaccuracies. Although the tale is considered true regarding events from antiquity, such as the origins of the cosmos, humanity, or a nation, (Hassan & Mohd Isa, 2017) define myths as narratives linked to local cultural stories.

Since antiquity, oral narratives transmitted from ancestors to subsequent generations have served as a form of expression. Something that must be transmitted across generations. The transmission of cultural heritage across generations is often intangible,

encompassing folk stories or oral histories conveyed verbally without written documentation, rather than being limited to physical activities or objects that may be perceived by sight or touch. The researcher will investigate the perspectives and convictions of the residents of the small district of Kampung Gajah regarding the origin narratives of the seven ancient villages located along the Perak River's banks. The researcher selected an individual to determine the historical significance of the name's origins. Interviews with six informants—village residents—revealed that nearly all the narratives shared by locals regarding the origins of the village names were believed to be transmitted through generations.

The origin of the name of the village Kota is from this city (while pointing to the fortress next to his house). This is the fortress. The fortress used to be a man's land. My father and grandfather told me that in the middle of this fortress, there was a city. The city used to be built like a palace, but it wasn't a palace; it was like a place for the big people to take shelter. Then it was surrounded by a fortress. This fortress stretches from here to the Selat Pulau school behind your house. In the past, when there was a war, the big people would stay in the city. The soldiers would guard the outside. To build this fortress, there wasn't even a hoe. They used to use a stick to take soil from the river and then bring it here to make it a fortress (informant C, Interview).

According to informant C, their origin stories were inherited from their ancestors.

Before writing systems were developed, locals entertained themselves with the fascinating folktales of their forebears. Additionally, it might inspire society to recognise and value oral storytelling. Thus, it brings up important issues for the Malay community. These oral histories offer valuable insights into the preservation of intangible cultural property because they are grounded in the lived experiences and historical consciousness of the local community. By recording and examining these origin stories, this study contributes to the preservation of non-material traditions that are in danger of disappearing due to modernity. These stories also contribute to the subject of Cultural Studies by providing factual proof of how legendary storytelling influences collective memory, cultural identity, and socio-symbolic structures within Malay society. Thus, the study reinforces the significance of indigenous oral traditions as both a cultural resource and a scholarly lens through which to understand the dynamics of meaning-making in localised settings.

### **Culture as a Practice of Meaning-making: The Role of Origin Myths in Shaping Community Identity**

The origin narratives of Kampung Gajah, including the legend of the colony named after migrating elephants, function as cultural practices that generate and disseminate meanings, allowing the community to comprehend its history, environment, and identity. These legends are deeply embedded in the societal fabric and represent

more than mere captivating narratives. They function as conduits of significance that connect the community to its natural environment and the present to the past. Source of information A asserts, "The elders informed us that Kampung Gajah was named after elephants that migrated to this location" (Informant A, Interview 2022). This narrative elucidates the reasons for our village's uniqueness" (Precillia, 2024). This narrative underscores the significance of folklore in shaping cultural identity. Research on Kumun Debai, Desa Domas, and the Dayak community (Dismas, 2023; Precillia, 2024; Wulandari & Rosalina, 2021) unequivocally demonstrates that this subject reverberates across multiple cultural contexts.

As a cultural activity, folklore is fundamental in developing and preserving cultural identity, as the Kumun Debai people clearly show. Folklore is a means for passing local knowledge and values from one generation to the next and a source of cultural expression via many forms, including proverbs, folktales, songs, and traditional rites (Precillia, 2024). In Kampung Gajah, the tale of the migratory elephants also serves as a uniting agent, tying the society together under a standard narrative that clarifies their relationship to the environment and their past. This is consistent with Hoffman and Moya (2024), which implies that even if they do not function as superstimuli, group myths can establish shared knowledge and group limits. Thus, the history of Kampung Gajah not only offers a historical narrative but also

helps the community members develop their sense of identity and belonging.

Another important element of these origin stories is the link between the community and their surroundings. For example, the toponyms of the five villages in Desa Domas show a strong focus on natural aspects like water and trees, which are fundamental to the society's way of life (Wulandari & Rosalina, 2021). Analogously, the name Kampung Gajah, derived from migrating elephants, emphasises the historical and continuous interaction of the community with their natural environment.

There are several stories about the origin of the Elephant Village. All are jungle huts. There are no buildings like the ones we see today. In the past, this Elephant Village was not called Elephant Village, in the past, people called it Elephant Village because in the past, this Elephant Village was full of elephants who camped here. The elephants came from the single hill in front of them. People called the single hill because it was the only hill there. That's why people called it the single hill in the past. I heard stories from people in the past, the elephants came from a single hill because there was no food there, so they wandered around looking for food until they found this village. People in the past liked to plant bananas and other fruits, so when they came, the villagers who had the plants ate them all. But the villagers were not angry because they felt sorry for the elephants. So the elephant was tamed and fed, and the villagers also protected the elephant. They used to use elephants to carry things. After that, the elephants also

went on strike (sulking) until they took themselves wherever. But they also heard that the elephant went to Batu Gajah there (Informant A, Interview 2022).

As demonstrated in the tale of Ratu Roro Kidul, which emphasises the interdependence of people, nature, and the supernatural, this emphasis on nature is not unique to Kampung Gajah; it is a frequent topic in various cultural settings (Damayanti & Taum, 2024). These stories remind the community of its reliance on the environment and its need for preservation for the next generations. Moreover, as evidenced in the ancient beliefs of the Dayak people, these myths sometimes have intellectual and spiritual implications. The foundation of the Dayak community's social and cultural life is their mythology and religious systems, which offer a way of life that directs their contact with the surroundings (Dismas, 2023). Likewise, the beginnings of Kampung Gajah have a spiritual meaning that strengthens the link of the community to the ground and their ancestors beyond mere historical description. This fits the idea of mythology as a narrative framework that ties people to the holy (Damayanti & Taum, 2024). Therefore, the narrative of the migrating elephants acts as a link between the physical and spiritual spheres, offering a better knowledge of the society's position on the earth.

Ultimately, the origin stories of Kampung Gajah—such as the tale of the migrating elephants—are more than just tales; they are cultural activities that

generate and spread meanings, therefore enabling the community to make sense of its past, present, and future. Deeply entwined in the community's cultural fabric, these stories provide means for spiritual direction, knowledge transfer, and cultural expression. From the Kumun Debai community to the Dayak people, folklore and mythology are important in forming cultural identity and strengthening the group's relationship to its natural and spiritual environment, as witnessed in many other cultural settings. Through mythological research and folklore studies, we may better appreciate these myths' relevance in modern society and underline their importance in safeguarding cultural legacy and fostering community membership.

### **Symbolism and Representation in Origin Myths: The Case of "Kampung Pasir Salak"**

Rich in symbolism, the origin stories of "Kampung Pasir Salak" reflect the values, ideas, and close relationship with their natural surroundings of the society. Drawing from the natural aspects of the Salak fruit and the riverine environment, the term "Kampung Pasir Salak" is a tribute to this symbolic representation, therefore reflecting society's pragmatic and humorous perspective. When informant E (Interview 2022) notes; "The name Pasir Salak comes from the Salak fruit found by the river" " it shows how our ancestors used what they saw to name places" (Sujud et al., 2022), In addition, studies examining Malay storytelling and cultural identification have

found that naming locations based on natural features is widespread in Malay cultural landscapes (Hussain et al., 2020; Putri et al., 2024).

The symbolic use of nature is deeply ingrained in Malay culture's traditional way of life, as argued by Sujud et al. (2022), storytelling's moral, social, and philosophical messages are much enhanced by nature. Drawing from the Salak fruit, it represents the community's inventiveness and relationship to their surroundings, in addition to being a natural resource. This is consistent with Hussain et al., (2020). which underlines how the Malay community's values and beliefs are reflected in the construction of the cultural landscape using natural elements.

The name "Kampung Pasir Salak" has symbolic importance beyond its exact meaning. It reflects the cultural ecology of the community, in which environmental sustainability and folklore are closely entwined. As noted by Jabar et al. (2024) folklore sometimes has vital messages about environmental preservation, teaching people how to engage with nature sustainably. Furthermore, the word "Pasir Salak" reminds us of the community's historical and continuous connection with their surroundings, underlining the need to protect natural resources for the next generations. Moreover, the name "Kampung Pasir Salak" is a cultural emblem that enhances the people's connection to their cultural background. As described by Putri et al. (2024), cultural motifs in Malay folklore, such as the Salak fruit, play a significant role in establishing and preserving cultural identity.

These themes inform and entertain society about their background, values, and interactions with their surroundings.

The designation "Kampung Pasir Salak" epitomises the broader symbolic tableau in Malay origin narratives, as articulated by Low (2006), which posits that myths and origin tales serve as manifestations of symbolic imagery rooted in the experiences of a specific populace at a particular time and place, reflecting the historical and cultural occurrences of the community. "Pasir Salak" exemplifies this symbolic landscape. Ultimately, "Kampung Pasir Salak" signifies the values, beliefs, and connection with the environment rather than merely a geographical label. The name's incorporation of natural elements reflects the community's pragmatic and humorous perspective, as well as its strong connection to cultural heritage. From the standpoint of Malay cultural landscapes, folklore, and cultural ecology, "Pasir Salak" serves as a significant reminder of the necessity to save natural resources and cultural identity for future generations.

### **Power and Ideology in Origin Myths: The Role of Elders and Storytelling**

Origin narratives reflect societal power dynamics and are intricately linked to the duties of elders and community leaders who safeguard cultural knowledge. These legends, often transmitted through generations, foster a sense of identity and underpin moral frameworks and social structures. The dissemination of such narratives underscores the necessity of oral history for maintaining cultural continuity

and the influence of individuals who safeguard and share these stories. This scenario denotes power dynamics, the role of elders in transmitting these narratives, and the broader implications for cultural and ideological continuity. Informant D affirms acquiring the village myth from predecessors and thereafter disseminating the information to subsequent generations: "I learnt the story of Kampung Geronggong from my grandparents. I inform my children so they are aware of our heritage".

A crucial component of cultural preservation is how elders pass down stories. Elders are respected in many indigenous cultures as bearers of traditional knowledge, including tales explaining the world's beginnings, the creation of people, and the formation of societal standards. For example the story from informant B:

My grandfather used to tell me when I was little that Kampung Kepala Pulau was an extension of Selat Pulau. There is a connection between the two villages. Kepala Pulau is an abandoned island with an island in the strait of Pulau. When people from outside come and ask what village this is, the villagers don't have a name to call it. So the villagers call it Kampung Kepala Pulau. That's where they built the Dato Sagor bridge. But the area by the cliff is really an area where people want to cross. People who want to go to Teluk Intan also cross over there. There aren't many stories about Kampung Kepala Pulau. Those who know are the people who are old enough to tell stories (Informant B, Interview 2022).

Elders like Temsula Ao and Esther Syiem use storytelling to pass on cultural and spiritual knowledge among the Ao-Naga and Khasi communities of India's Northeast, therefore ensuring the survival of their traditions in the face of modernisation and outside influences (Chakraborty, 2020). Likewise, among the Kanien'skehá:ka (Mohawk) people, elders are essential in passing myths and legends crucial to the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) people's cultural and spiritual life. These legends provide the basis of the community's cultural identity since they are not only amusement but also closely related to historical, ritualistic, and spiritual rituals (Deer, 2016).

Furthermore, sharing origin stories via narrative is an excellent weapon for subverting accepted wisdom and claiming Indigenous sovereignty. Indigenous elders have employed decolonial storytelling in the framework of settler colonialism to challenge imposed colonial conceptions of time, gender, and relationality. Eco-erotic (hi)stories told by Indigenous elders, for instance, stress the intimate and sexual understanding of more-than-human entities like lands, waterways, and spiritual beings, therefore subverting homonormativity and settler colonialism. Shared by seniors like Richard Van Camp and Melissa Nelson, these tales show how storytelling may be a queer and decolonial activity challenging colonial constraints and reasserting Indigenous relationality (Burns, 2024).

Beyond cultural preservation, the significance of elders' storytelling reaches into people's psychological and spiritual well-being. Studies on the life tales of

Anishinaabe people show that keeping traditional Indigenous knowledge helps people to build their narratives, therefore improving their efficacy and personal determination. Rich in existential and spiritual themes, Elders' stories offer a framework for deeply ingrained cultural traditions and meaning-making. Especially in the context of historical trauma and integration efforts, this emphasises the transforming power of narrative in promoting resilience and cultural continuity (Bird, 2014).

Ultimately, the origin mirrors power relations in societies, with elders and community leaders playing a crucial role in passing down tales. Elders also guarantee the survival of customs, preserve social cohesiveness, and question accepted narratives through their stewardship of cultural information. Storytelling also serves as a means of cultural preservation and a strong instrument for claiming indigenous sovereignty and promoting individual and group well-being. Therefore, the responsibility of elders in disseminating these stories is indispensable since it guarantees that their communities' cultural, moral, and spiritual bases remain vivid and relevant for the next generations.

### **Globalisation and Hybridity: The Persistence of Origin Myths as Cultural Resistance**

A robust cultural resistance, the persistence of origin myths amidst globalisation and modernity, enables cultures to maintain their identity and traditions against the

homogenising influences of global change. Frequently transmitted through oral traditions and storytelling, these myths function as a repository of collective memory and cultural values, enabling communities to resist the obliteration of their heritage among external influences (Matthei & Smith, 2008). Informant G states, "Despite contemporary alterations, we continue to narrate these tales. They remind us of our roots and preserve our traditions" (Informant G, 2022). This perspective highlights the dual role of origin narratives in cultural preservation and resistance to globalisation influences.

Strong cultural resistance, persistent origin myths during Globalisation and modernity, allow cultures to maintain their identity and traditions against the influence of homogenous global change. Often transmitted through oral tradition and storytelling, these myths function as a repository of collective memory and cultural values, enabling communities to resist the destruction of their heritage among external influences (Matthei & Smith, 2008). Informant F stated, "Despite contemporary changes, we continue to tell these stories. They remind us of our roots and maintain our traditions" (Informant F, 2022). This perspective highlights the dual role of original narratives in cultural preservation and resistance to the influence of Globalisation.

After Kampung Biak, this is Kampung Bandor Tua, right? I can tell a little bit about Kampung Bandor Tua. Kampung Bandor Tua was once recorded in the history of the Perak War of 1875.

The battle between the British and the Malays at that time resulted in the formation of Bandar Tua. Let's not assume that the old town was like the current town, which is like Bandar Ipoh. The old town and the current town are very different. The town used to be a place where people gathered to trade. Here, people called it the Old Town, and on the other side, people called it the New Town. So in this small district of Kampung Gajah, there are two town villages that don't have a town inside; they just use the term town because they developed with the population. So with stories like this, we feel like we want to take good care of our village because people used to work hard (Informant F, Interview 2022).

For example, the Garifuna people show how origin stories may be used as a weapon for cultural opposition and adaptation. Originating at the junction of European colonisation and indigenous Caribbean traditions, the Garifuna have kept their unique identity through their origin stories, chronicling their history of resistance and resiliency (Matthei & Smith, 2008). These stories give the Garifuna a basis for collective identification and a sense of connection with the past, allowing them to negotiate the difficulties of Globalisation while maintaining their cultural uniqueness. In South Asia, tribal people have kept their oral traditions and folktales despite print culture's predominance and modern invasion (Goel, 2024). These oral archives help communities to preserve their cultural memory and epistemic systems in the face of outside influences, therefore acting as intangible means of knowledge transfer.

The occurrence of Myth stories throughout many civilisations and historical eras emphasises its universality as a literary and cultural phenomenon even more. From postcolonial tales to ancient literature, myths' origins have repeatedly created and strengthened cultural identity (Rocco & Lombardi, 2024). These stories typically acquire fresh relevance in postcolonial settings as they are reinterpreted to question accepted narratives and assert local identities, challenging prevailing narratives. Redefining their cultural memory will help communities assert their alternatives to modernism and fight the influence of outside values. Collective memory and localised narratives are closely related to the building and spreading of origin myths. These narratives, transmitted across generations, become normalised and institutionalised within society (McAuley, 2024). Myth origin is also essential in building social and cultural identities and offering a familiar feeling of belonging and purpose. Emphasising their resilience and adaptation in the face of globalising influences, the Garifuna origin stories, for example, provide a template for their modern identity and record their past experiences (Matthei & Smith, 2008). In South Asia, tribal people employ their oral histories to maintain their epistemic agency, conserving their knowledge systems and subverting the dominance of Western epistemologies (Goel, 2024).

The role of myths and cultural memory in Latin America is evidently oppositional. Writers and storytellers have intentionally altered their cultural

narratives to counteract the oppressive impacts of colonialism and capitalism (Astvaldsson, 2011). By reinterpreting their origins and cultural heritage, these communities have forged their identity and presented alternative concepts of modernity grounded in their traditions. This cultural process of reinvention is not a rejection of change but a selective acceptance of modernity, where communities opt to keep what is most relevant to their identity in their culture. Origin narratives resonate valiantly amidst the fleeting forces of globalisation and the mechanisations of modernity, and thus establish an important strategy of cultural resistance by which groups doggedly and skilfully preserve and reinterpret their cultural heritage in the negotiation of their identity and agency. These narratives — whether manifested in the oral traditions of South Asian rain-forest tribes people, the origin tales of the Garifuna, or literary adaptations by Latin American authors — exist as a potent asset in the fight against homogenising forces of globalisation. Exploring these specific settings provides insight into the dynamic interactions of cultural memory, identity and resistance, no less than the lasting importance of origin stories as a shaping feature of a nation's similarly challenged social and cultural fabric around the world.

### **Cultural Studies as Critical Practice: The Role of Myth Origin in Reinforcing Cultural Autonomy and Resistance**

Cultural studies, as a form of critique, emphasises the significance of considering how the subtexts of cultural narratives,

including those addressed in origin stories, serve to fortify cultural isolationism through resources for resisting outside totalising influence. What Barker has to say about cultural studies, especially in the context of external pressures, is that they have performed the active labour of constructing and maintaining social identities rather than reflecting culture. Interestingly, this study demonstrates how myth origin is a strategy for cultural preservation and resistance, and thus references research from other contexts on the functions of storytelling, oral traditions and cultural narratives in indigenous/marginalised communities. For example, oral traditions and folktales have long been intangible means of information transfer in South Asia, retaining cultural legacies despite the invasion of imperialism and modernism (Goel, 2024). Likewise, the active function of storytelling in cultural resilience is shown in the Embera Chamí Navera Drua community of Colombia, where children's stories are purposefully employed to promote cultural identification and maintain the original tongue (Lozano et al., 2024). These instances show how dynamically engaged in the fight for cultural autonomy and resistance, cultural narratives—especially origin stories—are rather than fixed.

After that, there was another story about Kampung Gajah. From Bukit Tunggul, there was the kelembai. The kelembai was not an animal but a supernatural creature of the Kabo people. Anyone who passed by him was cursed by him. He used to live on Bukit Tunggul, but there was also an uncle who

heard him sitting on that hill of Changkat Lada. Wanting to make a story on Bukit Tunggal, there was an elephant sitting there and then he was rebuked by the kelembai. The kelembai also swore that the elephant would turn into stone. So the people of this village called this place Kampung Gajah. So, we used to have to believe what the storyteller told us because they would open a stage every Sunday night, so parents would tell their children and grandchildren to listen to it (Informant A, Interview 2022).

The situation of African indigenous people makes explicit how important the origin is in supporting cultural autonomy. Among the Frafra and Akan peoples, environmental adaptation and climatic resilience are just two of their resilience strategies that revolve primarily around storytelling. These stories are entertaining and profoundly ingrained in their ontologies and epistemologies, offering a cultural framework for comprehending and negotiating the difficulties of a fragile present and unpredictable future (Amo-Agyemang, 2023). In the Sámi community of Sápmi, storytelling about skábma traditions also acts as a decolonising process whereby teachers and children interact with less-known indigenous religious traditions to produce new stories based on them. Protecting cultural information and focussing on the active role storytelling has towards cultural conservation and resistance takes this step further by enabling a sense of responsibility for a sustainable future (Nutti et al., 2024). These examples illustrate how cultural identity and agency are formed through

living and forming activities rather than just historical narratives and myths of origin.

Moreover, one cannot deny the extent to which youth contribute to making cultural autonomy and resistance. Because they want to reach both material "well-being" (having enough goods) and cultural "well-being" (keeping their own identity), young indigenous people in Bolivia are redefining two totally different forms of governance and values. In this mingling of ideals, their pursuit of *bienestar* (material well-being) and *vivir bien* (living well) illustrates their embrace of new knowledge while preserving cultural traditions (Mynen, 2012). The duality is also reflected in children's stories in the Embera community, which combine pedagogical methods aligned with this worldview in parallel with storytelling practices, and help engage children in cultural identity sustenance since childhood (Lozano, et al., 2024). These illustrations emphasise the agency of young people in maintaining cultural autonomy and resistance and, thereby, highlight how, within narrative cultural information is transferred between generations.

Another important factor of cultural narratives' ability to support cultural autonomy and resistance is their decolonising power. Making new stories based on skábma traditions in the Sámi people means decolonising procedures that subvert mainstream narratives and recover Indigenous knowledge systems. Stories, *duodji* (Sámi craft), and children's playtime help link the present to the past while imagining a sustainable future by accomplishing this (Nutti et al., 2024).

In South Asia, the preservation of oral traditions questions Western ideas. It emphasises the importance of decolonising archive activities in the digital age by stating the epistemic agency of indigenous people (Goel, 2024). These initiatives provide alternative ways of being and knowing grounded in Indigenous worldviews, preserving cultural knowledge and challenging dominant narratives.

Finally, cultural studies are a vital activity showing how important origin stories and narratives are in preserving cultural autonomy and resistance. These stories provide means for retaining cultural identity, subverting accepted narratives, and claiming rights for underprivileged groups. Through education and community activities, the stories of intergenerational transmission guarantee their ongoing significance in the face of modernisation and globalisation. The specific themes identified in this study, supported by direct testimony from the local community, are summarised in Table 2.

Emphasising the ongoing relevance of cultural narratives in the struggle for cultural autonomy and resistance, Informant A beautifully states, "These stories are our way of preserving our culture. They remind us of who we are and where we come from" (Informant A, Interview 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the origin myths of Kampung Gajah, Perak, serve as vital cultural instruments for the preservation of intangible heritage, the construction of communal identity, and the intergenerational transmission of values and beliefs. Narratives such as the migrating elephants' legend, the Kampung Kota fortress, and the Pasir Salak's symbolic naming demonstrate how oral traditions embed historical consciousness and socio-cultural meaning into everyday life. These findings directly address the study's objectives and are situated within the theoretical lens of Cultural Studies,

Table 2  
*Summary of themes, subthemes, and informant quotes*

Main Theme	Subtheme	Informant Quote
Local Cultural Identity	Origins of village names	"Kampung Gajah was named after elephants that came from Bukit Tunggal." (Informant A)
Collective Memory	Inheritance from ancestors	"I got this story from my grandfather and now I pass it on to my children." (Informant D)
Human-Nature Relationship	Natural elements as symbols or markers	"The name Pasir Salak came from the salak fruit that grew near the river." (Informant E)
Preservation of Oral Tradition	Folktales as tools of education	"We still tell these stories even though times have changed." (Informant F)
Community History	Fortresses and traditional social roles	"This fortress was built using river soil, as a shelter for the village chiefs during times of war." (Informant C)

particularly Barker's (2003) emphasis on subjectivity, identity, and meaning making in cultural discourse.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the broader academic field by illustrating how localised myth-making functions as a mode of cultural resilience and symbolic resistance. It offers insight into how marginalised communities preserve their identity through storytelling, even amidst modernising forces. Practically, the study has implications for heritage conservation efforts, community-based tourism initiatives, and the development of culturally responsive educational content. Nonetheless, the study's scope is limited to six informants from selected villages within the Kampung Gajah sub-district and relies primarily on semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Future research could expand by incorporating comparative analyses across regions, applying visual ethnographic methodologies, or exploring digital archiving of oral traditions. These avenues would enrich understanding of myth as a dynamic cultural practice and strengthen efforts to safeguard intangible heritage in Malaysia and beyond.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support, collaboration, and scholarly contributions of all co-authors involved in this research. The authors also wish to thank the Applied Heritage Group for their continuous assistance, constructive discussions, and support throughout the research and publication process.

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