

## The Meaning of the Oral Tradition *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* in the Accompaniment of *Kulcapi* within the Karo Community

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 15 January 2026

Revised 14 March 2026

Accepted 3 April 2026

Available online 30 April 2026

E-ISSN: [2654-3591](#)

P-ISSN: [2623-1999](#)

#### How to cite:

Sinulingga, R., Purba, M., & Ginting, P. P. (2026). The meaning of the oral tradition *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* in the accompaniment of *kulcapi* within the Karo community. *International Journal of Culture and Art Studies*, 10(1), 063–076.

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### ABSTRACT

The study examines the oral tradition of “*Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*,” prevalent in the Karo community, focusing on the semiotics of narrative and the role of the *kulcapi*, a musical instrument, as a supporting medium in storytelling. This tradition reflects the cultural, social, and religious values of the Karo community through the heroic tales of the *Sitajur* character, narrated musically. Using a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods, the research relies on primary data from interviews, observations, and field documentation. The semiotic theories of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes are employed to decode denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings conveyed in this tradition. Meanwhile, Derrida’s theory will reveal a deeper meaning, or what is known as the theory of deconstruction, regarding the story of the *Sitajur* horse. The findings reveal that “*Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*” is not merely an oral narrative but a cultural expression imbued with values of character education and local wisdom. The *kulcapi* plays a vital role in enhancing emotional depth and narrative structure, making this tradition unique among oral traditions. The study highlights that despite changes in form and medium, the essence and moral messages of the tradition remain preserved and continuously revitalized by the Karo society.

**Keywords:** *Ethnomusicology, Indonesian oral tradition, Karo culture, Kulcapi, Penganjak kuda sitajur*



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<http://doi.org/10.32734/ijcas.v10i1.24508>

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## 1. Introduction

Oral traditions are stories, tales, or legends that exist and evolve within society. Oral tradition is usually used to tell a story and describe a tribe’s identity, and is performed by speakers and listeners. Oral tradition, along with the development of the oral tradition era, certainly undergoes various changes, both ordinary changes and significant changes (Sibarani, 2014, p. 2). The oral tradition of the past can no longer be presented in the present exactly as it once was, having undergone such a transformation that it may even have died within its community; however, its values and norms can be actualized in the present. The cultural result is depicted through symbols mutually agreed upon by the community as part of its cultural identity. Oral tradition or local wisdom in Indonesia can be categorized into two aspects: tangible and intangible. This discussion focused on intangible local wisdom, such as advice conveyed verbally from generation to generation, which can take the form of songs or *kidung* that contain traditional values of teaching (Mohammad Maulana Magiman et al., 2021). A work of art is the expression or embodiment of something, formed from various elements, with each element arranged in a series of interconnected structures to create a visible framework (Aulina Umazah, 2018). This is very much in line with what has happened to the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, which now exists in many versions because the practice itself no longer exists. Each narrator has their own evolving linguistic style and dialect. As a result, the authenticity of this oral tradition can no longer be verified (Nengah Duija, 2005). This explanation is also supported by the statement of Albert B Lord, who researched the oral tradition of the Yugoslavian people, who stated that each oral tradition storyteller presents his story spontaneously and uses several languages he knows (stock-in-trade) that come to mind and then speaks (Hiasa

& Fitria, 2019, p. 106). Albert, in his book, also explains that at the formulaic and thematic levels, oral tradition not only allows freedom of change and creation but also provides a means for speakers to exercise their imagination and creativity as desired (Lord 1991). Therefore, the oral traditions of the Karo people cannot be the same or fully align with the musical and cultural experiences of each specific region. However, these variations do not imply that the oral traditions are unclear; rather, through these various versions, we can conduct a more in-depth analysis of the possible forms, characteristics, and meanings they contain. This abundance of variations constitutes the true richness of culture.

In Karo, oral traditions are referred to as “*turi-turin*”. The expression *erturi-turin* means “orderly, clear”, while *laerturi-turin* means “chaotic, confusing”, or “without reason”. According to Juara Ginting, the term *turi-turin* in Karo also means the relationship between things or people (Papenhuyzen & Brakel-papenhuyzen, 2010). Oral tradition is considered to play a very important role in shaping children’s character through the stories it tells. A child exposed to stories from childhood will certainly have deep knowledge of an oral tradition. This experience will also remain in a child’s memory into adulthood. These memories will last throughout his life and often influence his behavior in everyday life. We can find this memory in our environment, when an important person is making a speech, they often take advice from their parents, such as “my mother once told me”. The advice he received in childhood has remained a source of motivation throughout his life. This illustration shows that oral tradition serves as a means of character building for oneself and the good of one’s life.

Oral tradition has various ways of narrating. Some people tell stories only orally, but there are also oral traditions told using musical instruments as a supporting medium. There are three forms of oral tradition presentation: (1) it is done by simply telling a story without the help of other media; (2) it is done by using supporting media such as musical instruments and carvings/paintings; (3) it is done by the folklore delivery method by telling stories while chanting tunes.

Oral tradition is very rich in meanings in the story. These meanings, if studied more deeply, will reveal hidden layers with profound value. Some of the values proposed (Sibarani, 2014, p. 135) are (1) welfare, (2) hard work, (3) discipline, (4) education, (5) health, (6) cooperation, (7) gender management, (8) preservation and cultural creativity, (9) environmental care, (10) peace, (11) politeness, (12) honesty, (13) social solidarity, (14) harmony and conflict resolution, (15) commitment, (16) positive thinking, and (17) gratitude. This value makes oral tradition very important in society for maintaining culture and life. The value of oral tradition is immeasurable; each person has their own perception and interpretation of it. The meaning of an oral tradition cannot be limited to when someone interprets it differently. The meaning of oral tradition depends on one’s personal experience. This experience makes oral tradition open to everyone who wants to interpret it. However, in essence, an oral tradition rarely carries a negative meaning; rather, it offers guidance for a better life. These values make social life harmonious and civilized.

The condition of oral tradition in Karo society fluctuates in terms of its sustainability. For example, oral tradition was once included in local content in schools, but it is now rarely found for one reason or another. But on the other hand, it turns out that knowledge of oral traditions is still well maintained by cultural actors in Karo society. From field studies, many cultural actors in Karo society still know various oral tradition stories, including *Kuda Sitajur*. *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* is an oral tradition that has persisted and evolved in the Karo community to this day. This oral tradition developed because the Karo people, especially parents, have a habit of telling stories to their children, conveying messages they want to share, including the story of the *Sitajur* horse. *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* is the story of a hero named *Sitajur* who died heroically on the battlefield after being shot by his enemy while defending his territory, the village of Seberaya.

*Kuda Sitajur* singing is rarely found in the daily life of the Karo people. This oral tradition can usually be heard when a mother is trying to put her child to sleep. *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* is told to give important messages to her child about good and bad behavior. *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* was also often told by parents who were in a coffee shop at night. Karo people, especially male parents, have a habit of gathering in coffee shops at night to talk about various things. Coffee shops used to be the center of information about various things. Apart from being places to get information, coffee shops are also places where parents teach life lessons to their sons through oral traditions, including the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*.

Nowadays, this activity is no longer found in the daily life of the Karo people. With the rapid pace of change, this may also be why this activity is no longer practiced. However, knowledge of the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* is not completely lost. If we ask artists who are still active today about the oral tradition of *penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, they will know about it. The initial hypothesis in this case is that the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* has not been lost, but the Karo people no longer observe the practice. An initial hypothesis regarding this case is that the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* has not disappeared, but its context is no longer practiced by the Karo community. This is because few people are familiar with it anymore,

and there is a lack of interest or a decline in enthusiasm among the community, particularly among children, to learn it. This research will seek to determine in detail why this activity is so rarely observed. Although it is not the focus of the research, this data is very important for understanding the position of the oral tradition of horse *Sitajur* in Karo society.

## 2. Method

In this study, researchers used a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research methods are research methods that refer to the philosophy of post positivism, usually researching on natural object conditions (as opposed to experiments) where the researcher is the key instrument, data collection is done in triangulation (combined), data analysis is qualitative, and research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization (Sugiyono, 2017).

The research used in this study is descriptive qualitative research (Gapur & Pujiono, 2018; Nasution et al., 2023; Pujiono et al., 2022). This research will seek to describe and interpret what exists (e.g., existing conditions and relationships, emerging opinions, ongoing processes, consequences or effects, or developing trends). The descriptive method is the search for facts with proper interpretation. Then, according to Suryabrata, descriptive research aims to make sense of (describe) situations or events. From the various opinions described above, it can be concluded that descriptive research is a method for examining the status of a group of people, an object, a set of conditions, a system of thought, or a phenomenon or set of events in the present. This research examines societal problems, as well as procedures that apply in society and in specific situations, including relationships, activities, attitudes, views, and the ongoing processes and influences of a phenomenon.

To support a study, a theory is also needed to guide and clarify the research process. So, the theory the author uses to support a qualitative approach is ethnographic theory, which examines cultural patterns and perspectives to uncover the essence and complexity of culture. All research always starts with a problem to be studied. In qualitative research, findings are tentative and may evolve after the researcher enters the field. The problems studied with ethnographic model qualitative research range from anthropology, sociology, history, and cultural research. The ethnographic model, qualitative research, or ethnomethodological model is a qualitative research approach that aims to describe the cultural characteristics of an individual or a group of people who are members of a cultural community.

Researchers record facts as completely and in as much detail as possible. Notes must contain concrete information. Abstract matters and those whose authenticity is uncertain may only be included when they are truly credible or reliable. Each fact represents a significant event that will be incorporated into the propositions to be formulated later. The content of the facts includes descriptions of who, what, when, where, and how regarding the activities carried out by the research subject. This section contains: 1) a description of the research subject: physical appearance, manner of dress, behavior, and even speaking style; 2) a reconstruction of the dialogue: detailed notes of the informant's questions and answers. Their expressions are also noted; 3) a description of the physical setting: this can take the form of a narrative, an image, or a contextual map (map, sketch, diagram, photo); 4) notes on specific events: who was present, what was done, and how the event unfolded; 5) a description of the activity: a detailed account of the respondent's actions to provide insight into patterns of behavior. The methodology section details the researcher's activities during data collection and acquisition, their interactions with respondents or informants, and critiques of previously employed techniques based on their field experience. From this methodology section, an appropriate method for collecting specific data in a particular study, at a specific time and place, should be formulated. Theoretical notes can generate hypotheses that are then directly tested in the field. If no deviating results are found, then the hypothesis is worthy of being used as the basis for the study's conclusions.

This research was conducted through interviews with artists who still understand the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, namely Bangun Tarigan, Pedoman Sinulingga, and Pauzi Ginting. An in-depth study of the oral tradition of the *Sitajur* horse-riders will also be conducted by Bp. Kendal Brahmana and Djasa Tarigan, based on oral accounts and previous published research. From an organological perspective, interviews will be conducted with Pauzi Ginting and Elliana Sembiring. Finally, conclusions regarding the meaning will be drawn, which in this case will be examined through an interview with Clara Sinuhaji. The research was conducted over two months in various locations, including Lingga Village, Dokan Village, Rumah Kabanjahe Village, and the city of Medan.

## 3. Result and Discussion

*Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* is an oral tradition well known among the Karo people. It is not certain when this oral tradition began to appear in the community, but it has remained deeply embedded in the memories of the

Karo people to this day. The oldest data from research found audio, estimated to have been recorded in the 1960s. This shows that the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* has long been known to the Karo people. Several artist figures have told and played the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, which is still known today. These figures are Bp. Kendal Brahmana, Tukang Ginting, Djasa Tarigan and Bangun Tarigan. In general, the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* is not widely known among the Karo people. In telling and playing the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, only those who are currently known to have done it with the most complete documentation are known.

The oral tradition of the *Kuda Sitajur* varied depending on who told it. The way each speaker delivers and plays the game cannot be the same, or even close, but the values conveyed are the same: providing life lessons to the listener. Based on the research conducted, several versions have been told to date. Still, the most complete source is currently a reference for studying the oral tradition of the *Kuda Sitajur* persecutor. The most complete story is the version of Bp. Kendal Brahmana. He is a musical figure from the village of Rumah Kabanjahe. He was born in 1928 and died in 1998. He was also a soldier during the war in Kabanjahe. With his dedication, Bp. Kendal Brahmana was also named as one of the veterans who fought for Indonesian independence.

The oral tradition of the *Kuda Sitajur* trekking, obtained through research, is the third recording ever made with Bp. Kendal Brahmana. The first and second recordings are still very complete and structured, but they are all lost and cannot be found anymore. Bp. Church circles stigmatized Kendal Brahmana for still playing the *kulcapi*, a traditional Karo musical instrument, at the *perumah begu* and *erpangir ku lau* ritual ceremonies. With the continuous negative stigma, Bp. Kendal Brahmana finally followed the teachings of Christianity and burned all his musical instruments, including the *kulcapi*. This event made Bp. Kendal Brahmana had a vacuum in playing *kulcapi* until finally Bp. Kendal Brahmana returned to playing *kulcapi* after being persuaded by the community in Rumah Kabanjahe. This is what led to the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* being documented and preserved by his son, Perdana Brahmana. After becoming a Christian, Bp. Kendal Perdana started playing the *kulcapi* again, but no longer participated in the *gendang perumah begu* and *erpangir ku lau* ceremonies to avoid unfavorable stigma from the community. Bp. Kendal Brahmana only plays *kulcapi* in coffee shops to entertain people relaxing there in Rumah Kabanjahe Village. The following is the script in the recording of the oral tradition of the *Kuda Sitajur* persecutor.

### 3.1. Context of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*

#### 3.1.1. Situation Context

The oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* is usually performed at night as a pastime before resting. Usually, the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* is told in coffee shops or village halls. Usually, the coffee shop is very close to the village hall, so when there are artistic activities, such as the delivery of oral traditions, people in the coffee shop will automatically go to the village hall, and vice versa. When there is a gathering of people who agree to listen to oral traditions or music games, they will invite people considered to have knowledge and expertise in providing entertainment and education to the community, such as *perkulcapi*. *Perkulcapi* will recount the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* himself in the speaker's style. As an oral tradition that aims to educate listeners, of course, this affects the situation. Both speakers and listeners achieve the effect through the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*. In addition to giving effect, of course, this activity provides learning for speakers and listeners to hone their abilities, mindsets, understanding, and ethics in life and society.

First, as speakers will get a place to express their Karo cultural identity. Based on life experiences and learning, along with the values embedded in the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, this will help speakers better understand matters related to Karo culture in particular. The speakers' expression of cultural identity can certainly help maintain and strengthen the cultural values passed down through the oral tradition of the horse *Sitajur*.

Second, as a development of communication skills. As a speaker, of course, when conveying the oral-tradition story of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, one must always hone one's ability to influence the audience. Speakers need to understand how to attract the audience's attention when conveying the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*. One of the topics discussed in this context is pragmatics. On this occasion, the speakers will use intonation and tone pressure to influence the audience. In the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, there is a lot of intonation and tone pressure to consider when someone is crying or humming in the story. If the speaker cannot adjust his intonation and tone pressure during practice, the audience is unlikely to be affected by the story he tells.

Third, as a speaker, you will get recognition and an increase in honor and status. In the past, in the Karo community, artists, especially traditional musicians, were highly regarded and respected. Traditional music players are considered intermediaries to express gratitude to God through the music they play. In this context,

*Perkulcapi* is also considered to play an important role in the lives of the Karo people. Apart from providing entertainment for the community, *perkulcapi* also reflects the ethics of life in accordance with the oral tradition of the *Kuda Sitajur*. Every word issued by the speakers of the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* will be a reflection for a better life. Speakers of the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* are also recognized as custodians of history and collective knowledge, which contributes to their personal respect and honor.

The audience, or listeners, also experience the effect of the oral-tradition story, *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, presented by the speaker. This creates a symbiotic relationship of social mutualism in everyday life. This relationship is what has enabled the oral tradition to survive to this day, even as technological developments have slowly eroded it, including oral tradition practices such as the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* in the Karo community. The speaker's presentation is very useful in providing the community with an overview of how to maintain the culture and understand the values contained therein.

First, the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* will serve as a source of learning and knowledge in social life. Through the oral tradition, *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* will teach listeners about the community's history, myths, legends, moral and social values, and beliefs. The speaker's knowledge will also help the audience understand their origins as Karo people.

Second, the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* provides the development of imagination and empathy. Speakers will describe the story, plot, setting, and atmosphere in the presentation. With this picture, of course, it will provide an opportunity for the audience to imagine and imagine the setting, characters, and events in the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*. This experience will help the audience develop visualization and creative thinking skills. In addition, the oral tradition *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, delivered by the speaker, contains a strong emotional element, allowing listeners to feel and understand the emotions and experiences within it, ultimately evoking sympathy and empathy.

Thirdly, it fosters strong social ties within society. The process of gathering to listen to and share stories, *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, fosters a sense of togetherness and cohesion within the community. It strengthens social bonds and creates shared experiences that become part of the collective identity. This experience will then continue to be told from generation to generation.

In the long run, the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* can help maintain social stability and unity. By nurturing and spreading cultural values through the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, communities can cope with social change and maintain a sense of identity and unity. In addition, oral traditions often serve as an educational tool, teaching moral and ethical values to the younger generation and helping shape their character and behavior in the future.

### 3.1.2. Cultural Context

Oral tradition *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* is a story about the struggle of a man with the rank of commander who became the protector of the village of Seberaya in various situations. In his story, there are many descriptions of how the Karo culture actually lives and how the ethics that occur in the Karo community. In addition to stories of struggle, some narratives depict Karo culture as the Karo people's identity. In this case, there are two forms of ways to study the cultural context of the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, namely the source text and the target text. Here are some examples of cultural context in the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*.

Source Text:

*Bas Merga Silima, bagi Sitajur me katakenna me katakenna Sembiring mergana bre Karona Rumah Kabanjahe Nari. Terlebih-lebih labo lit bage jineken, man suruhen labo me kisasat.*

Target Text:

In *Merga Silima*, as *Sitajilah* mentioned, people surnamed Sembiring Bere Karo from Kabanjahe House. There is no such thing as being lazy.

From the above text, a picture of the Karo community in the context of its culture can be seen, including customs referred to as *merga silima* (the Karo kinship system). In the source language and target language, it can be concluded that: 1) Karo people have a concept of a kinship system, which is because *silima* is a reference to determine their identity and a reference to determine the relationship between Karo people based on their birth. 2) *Sitajur* figure into a picture of the Sembiring cause. When someone gives advice, the Karo people will tell a parable about *Sitajur*. This parable aims to educate everyone. This illustrates that when a Karo community has a *Sembiring merga*, then he will be equated with *Sitajur*, who also has *Sembiring merga*. 3) illustrates that the Karo community is not difficult to govern and has the nature of obedience and respect for every situation

that occurs in life.

Source Text:

*Rehna gundari, nggo dat berita bage nande Sitajur i kuta Seberaya maka anakna kepe nggo matei ermusuh ibas taneh buah turam uram ndai. Emaka ngandung nandena "Anakkuu turang nandena Sitajur nandena anakku turang nandena Sitajur nandena buang-buang timah singgebu, ola merawasa nakku bage kel ningku nduba ajarku la seh turang nandena anakku kel ateku turang nandena anakku Sitajur nandena buang-buang timah singgebu" bage nina nandena ngandung tanah Seberaya ntah kin pe bage ngeluh tangis-tangis seberaya.*

*Nggo ka bage dung nande Sitajur enda ndai ngandung, eimaka sangana gundari nggo bage seh bage i kuta seberaya bibi Sitajur enda i teran senina nandena, sambar pegancih ndube didong-doahken Sitajur. Janah gundari ngandung me bibina ndai "Anakku anakku ja kel nge tadingndu ei, anakku" bage ka me nina bibi si taneh teran nari ndai.*

Target Text:

Now, the news came to *Sitajur's* mother in Seberaya that her son had died in the battle at Taneh Buah Buram-Uram. His mother cried, "*Anakkuu turang nandena Sitajur nandena my son turang nandena Sitajur nandena waste lead singgebu, ola merawasa nakku bage kel ningku Nduba teach me la seh turang nandena my son ex-sister turang nandena my son Sitajur nandena waste lead singgebu*". That's how his mother cried in Seberaya, who lived like crying-crying Seberaya. After Mrs. *Sitajur* had cried, she had also arrived in the village of Seberaya. Aunt *Sitajur* of Teran is the sister/brother of Mrs. *Sitajur*. And they cry, and they cry, and they cry. Aunt of *Sitajur* cried "my son my son *ja kel nge tadingndu ei, my son*". That's how *Sitajur's* aunt from Teran cried.

From the text above, it can be concluded that the Karo people have a unique habit in grieving against an event: 1) in the Karo community, there is a place that becomes a place when there are disputes and wars that are going on. Karo society is not a place to settle matters or fight. There is a place called *Uruk Buah Situram-Uram*, where the ongoing war is taking place. This has become the ethics of the Karo people, who avoid waging war near settlements. 2) Karo people have a culture of crying and humming to someone who has died. This incident can be seen from the way people mourn the death of *Sitajur*. In addition to crying, they will hum with simple words over and over again. Two perspectives can be seen from this culture, namely that hum is a form of cultural ethics that should have been done or hum is spontaneously done by the Karo community, which has become a cultural ethics in the death ceremony in the Karo community.

Source Text:

*Gendekna turi-turin nggo ka bage kuburkenna bage Sitajur ndai, rikutken ka arihna ersada endai kurumah kang kari beguna bage nina. Eimaka isuruh me bagei erlegi guru ku kuta jaranguda. Jadi gendek turi-turinna ndai, guru jaranguda nggo ka seh Seberaya. Jadi sangana gundari peselukken menda guru ndai. Nggo kenca dung bagei guru ndai landek, eimaka tangis me guru ndai kurumah me lebuhnam nandeina.*

Target Text:

Long story short, they were buried. In accordance with the consensus agreement that the spirit of *Sitajur* must be coming home, the teacher of smart people was invited to Jaranguda village. After the guru arrived in Seberaya village, the *peselukken* (dissociative trance disorder) *guru orang pintar*. After the teacher / smart people finished dancing. Cry, teacher / smart people, and call *Sitajur's* mother home.

From the text above, this section is the final part of the oral tradition *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*. From the explanation can be concluded that: 1) in the Karo community, there is a belief that when a person dies, his spirit will be called back or his spirit will come back home. It is believed to be a way for a deceased person to ask about unresolved matters while still alive. This Ritual is called *perumah begu*. 2) At the Karo community death ceremony, when someone dies, they will be taken to the *losd* (village hall) for a death ceremony before being buried. At the ceremony, *the sangkep nggeluh* (Karo community kinship system) will alternately deliver messages of condolence. In the Karo death ceremony, each person will have their own *tegun* (role/position) and will get the opportunity to dance to accompany/approach the body of someone who has died. 3) Karo people have a belief that there are people who have talents, also called smart people, as intermediaries between the living and the dead, called *Guru Sibaso*. *Guru Sibaso* in the Karo society is always present in the *begu* household rituals and other rituals. *In practice, Guru Sibaso will recite mantras and dance, which is believed*

to be a ritual to summon the spirits of the dead.

### 3.1.3. *Kulcapi* in Karo Society

*Kulcapi* is organologically a description of death in the Karo community. Death and *kulcapi* are two inseparable entities in Karo society. *Kulcapi* is always used in the death ceremony of the Karo community, both in the context of the death ceremony and in the post-death ceremony, during which the Karo community is called the Begu House. So, what does *kulcapi* have to do with a death in Karo society? This is apart from the function of *kulcapi* in the Karo community, which is considered a medium for conveying prayers to God Almighty; thus, in this position, *kulcapi* becomes a priority that cannot be absent from a death ceremony in the Karo community, both during and after implementation.

*Kulcapi* is a myth that until now continues to be discussed in various circles, but in fact, *kulcapi* cannot be said to be a belief because at this time, *kulcapi* in essence and substance is no longer required to be used in death ceremonies along with *begu* housing rituals, which are currently very rarely found in Karo people's lives. According to Roland Barthes, myth is a process leading to belief. Myth still exists in society, and its persistence is maintained by instrumentation and an understanding of its value. Before the 2000s, *kulcapi* was considered a myth that would become a belief, but this did not happen because current religious rules prohibit performing rituals related to *pemena* beliefs (First Trust in the Karo community). If the ritual ceremony must still be performed as in the past, then *kulcapi* will certainly be a belief whose value cannot be diminished, in both position and portion, in the Karo community.

Judging from the form of organology, *kulcapi*, as a musical instrument, certainly has meaning in terms of its shape and the images it contains. The correlation between *kulcapi* and death among the Karo people is something many may not currently be able to connect with, because there may be very little data to reveal it. However, after conducting various observations, researchers found a correlation between *kulcapi* and death in the Karo community. In the Karo community, there is a ritual that is no longer performed, namely the *Pelangkah* ritual (death boat). *Pelangkah* is a ritual in the Karo community in which, after the body is prepared, the *sirang-sirang* (cremation) is placed in the *Pelangkah*, which is usually hung next to the traditional Karo house. The ashes of the cremated body will be in it, and the bones will also be put into the boat. After the ashes of the dead body are inserted, it will be washed into the river, which is believed to be the flow of the river that will carry the ashes of the dead through the boat to freedom as a spirit. *Pelangker*, organologically, has similarities to The Shape of *kulcapi* among the Karo people. Researchers believe this is not a coincidence but rather a correlation that can be explained logically and empirically.

After conducting this research, Pauzi Ginting, a resource person in this study, justified it. Pauzi Ginting said that a relationship between *Pelangkah* and *kulcapi* is possible, as evidenced by the organology and the history of Karo distribution. More clearly, Pauzi Ginting said that if we cannot ensure the originality of the arts that exist today because our tradition is only told orally, but if viewed anthropologically and materials used in Karo music, including *kulcapi*, then it makes sense if the Karo musical instruments, including *kulcapi* come from coastal areas or Langkat, which then reaches the mountain areas in the Karo region. *Pelangkah* is also mostly found in the Langkat region because there are many rivers there, which is logical. The fact that boats are used there, in contrast to the Karo region, which does not have enough rivers, is considered a valid criterion. Sinulingga guidelines also state that, in this case, the steppers exist only in the Karo Langkat area because there are many rivers used in cultural rites, and, formerly, they were very numerous in the *pemena* belief (the first belief of the Karo people), which derives from Hinduism. However, Pauzi Ginting also said that finding the truth about Karo's current wealth, including the history of *kulcapi*, cannot be said to be absolutely true; we can only assume and logically and empirically assess the possibilities. The relationship between *kulcapi* and stepper is very likely; there is a strong correlation when studied structurally and organologically, but once again, Pauzi Ginting asserts that there is nothing original or absolute about the truth, but rather the most powerful assumption in the study of *kulcapi* and stepper.

*Pelangkah* in the Karo community has a shape very similar to *kulcapi*. In addition to their organological similarities, step and *kulcapi* are also used in the same context. There are several conclusions about the correlation of *kulcapi* with the stepper in the Karo community, namely: 1) both are usually / only used at the death ceremony of the Karo community; 2) in organology *kulcapi* and steppers have similarities in terms of body shape that is behind the Hornbill head or chicken head, similar things also exist in the organology of *kulcapi* where the tip is also made to resemble a chicken head or hornbill head; 3) *kulcapi* and steppers have a hole in the middle with the same function. In the middle of the *kulcapi* has a function as a place to store the resonance of the sound produced, while the middle of the stepper as a place to store the ashes of corpses that have been cremated; 4) the Karo people believe that only other natural waters can only be reached through water in this case through the intermediary of a stepper, on the other hand, the Karo people also believe that

prayer can only be conveyed through music in this case through the intermediary of the sound of *kulcapi*; and 5) the ashes in the stepper as an image to deliver the corpse into another world dimension and are believed to be spirits, the sound in the *kulcapi* to describe a message or prayer delivered to God which in this case is also believed to be in another dimension.

### 3.2. Semiotics of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*

#### 3.2.1. *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur as an Illustration of The Area*

The Karo people originally adhered to the Pemena belief system, which Hinduism later adopted. Following the arrival of Christianity, certain dogmas emerged within the community that eventually solidified into powerful myths. In this context, “myth” does not imply fantasy; rather, it refers to a stage where such understandings have evolved into deeply held beliefs within the community. This myth holds that anything related to Karo culture is considered a concept that denies God and contradicts religious principles. Consequently, the community gradually abandoned Karo cultural practices, particularly ritual performance. Those who continued to perform these rituals faced discrimination and ostracism from the community itself. This is what Barthes refers to when he says that a myth speaks to how assumptions within a society develop into a belief, in this case, the third level of meaning known as the myth.

Research conducted has ultimately concluded that the Karo society has evolved through various fluctuations. Given this evolution, it is certainly necessary to establish safeguards to preserve the authenticity and depth of this culture. The latest field data, in the form of recordings by Bp. Kendal Brahmana, serves as a crucial and sufficient reference for explaining all the processes of cultural fluctuation within Karo society. Therefore, the researcher conducted a semiotic analysis up to Barthes’s myth level, yielding the understanding that the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* has not been lost; rather, it remains known and is believed to serve as a benchmark within *Kulcapi*.

In this section, Derrida’s theory, which addresses the deconstruction of meaning, plays a crucial role. This theory is employed to reveal meanings that have long gone unconsidered or remained inaccessible to the Karo people in their daily lives and cultural practices. This concept also describes a cultural phenomenon within the study of difference, which addresses the temporal delay in the revelation of cultural meaning. This aligns closely with what occurs in the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*. Although this oral tradition has existed for a very long time, its meaning can only be fully understood today.

Culture in Karo varies across regions, including kinship systems, customary procedures, and arts. Communication among people can take different forms, one of which is the use of music. Music is one medium used by singers or songwriters to convey messages or express feelings (Nuryanti & Pragita, 2023). In the tradition of *erdidong* (crying), the Karo people have their own characteristics, which vary by region. Although logically, the *erdidong* is a spontaneous chant, each region in Karo usually describes its own characteristics: for example, the tone is not too long, it usually uses a low or high tone, and the *tengget* (bend) used is also different. Perdana Brahmana’s son also confirms this statement. Kendal Brahmana, who told the story of the oral tradition *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, said that in the *kulcapi* game of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* oral tradition, there are several cries after *Sitajur* died, with the cries coming from several *Sitajur* families from various areas of Karo.

The Karo community is divided into several parts of the region based on history. The Karo area in question is distinct from Karo Regency, which exists only on the Karo Plateau. According to history and tradition passed down through generations, Karo is said to comprise several areas where the Karo people live. As for some of the area names, Karo is commonly called Karo Gugung, Karo Ginger, Karo Langkat, and Karo Berneh or Singalor Lau. The Karo region also describes some of them in the oral tradition, *Penganjak kuda sirajur*, through a song sung to *Sitajur*. One important disclosure in the oral tradition, *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, is that it conveys the message that Karo culture is not one but diverse. From that form, what is meant by the disclosure of meaning and signs becomes clear in the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*. *Meaning of Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*:

#### a. Singing of Mother *Sitajur*

At the time of *Sitajur*’s death on the battlefield, *Sitajur*’s mother was the first person to mourn his passing with *erdidong* beside *Sitajur*. Mrs. *Sitajur*’s cry describes the characteristics of *erdidong* found in the Karo Gugung area, from which her own mother also came, from the village of Seberaya. From the tone of Mrs. *Sitajur*’s crying, it can also be seen that her mother uses a dominant tone, a medium tone (also referred to as middle), in accordance with the *erdidong* habit practiced by the Karo people who live in Seberaya Village.

### Tangis Nande Sitajur

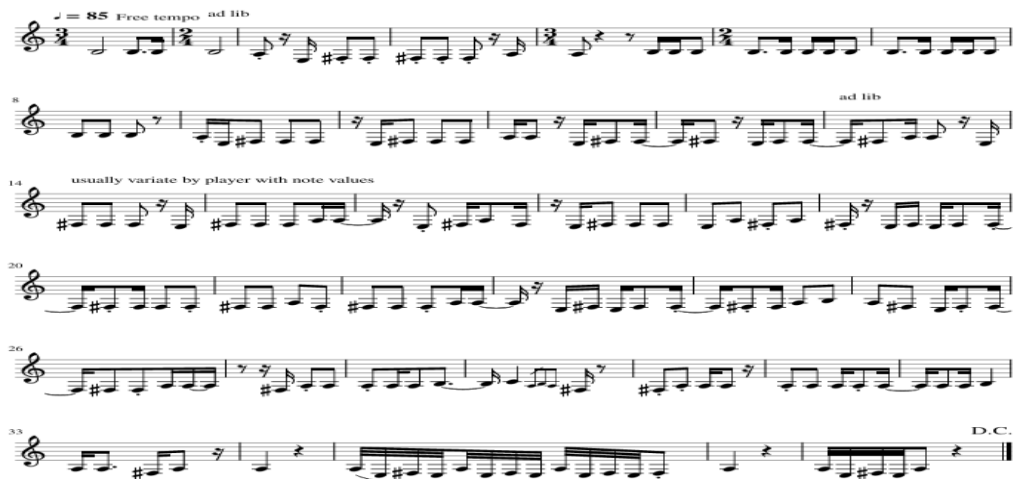


Figure 1. Singing of mother Sitajur

#### b. Singing of Aunt Sitajur

Bibi *Sitajur*'s cry describes the erdidong habit performed by the Karo people in the Karo Gunung area, specifically from the village of Naman Teran. The crying tone of *Bibi Sitajur* tends to the use of high tones, also referred to as high terms. This custom is often found in the cries of the mountain area in the Karo community. Another thing that describes the typical cri is the shape of the *tenget*, which is typically not long.

### Tangis Bibi Sitajur

The musical score for 'Tangis Bibi Sitajur' is written in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. It features several tempo markings:  $\text{♩} = 70$ ,  $\text{♩} = 100$ ,  $\text{♩} = 110$ ,  $\text{♩} = 130$ ,  $\text{♩} = 100$ ,  $\text{♩} = 130$ ,  $\text{♩} = 100$ , and  $\text{♩} = 75$ . The score consists of six staves of music. The first staff contains measures 1 through 9. The second staff contains measures 10 through 18. The third staff contains measures 19 through 26. The fourth staff contains measures 27 through 33. The fifth staff contains measures 34 through 39, with the instruction 'Ad Lib' above it. The sixth staff contains measures 40 through 45, with the instruction 'With Variation' above it, and ends with a double bar line.

Figure 2. singing of Aunt Sitajur

#### c. Singing of Sister Sitajur

Although they come from the same area, namely *Seberaya* village, the way Sitajur's mother and sister cry is very different. This is because *Sitajur*'s sister does not live in *Seberaya* village because she is married and lives in *Rumamis* Village. The tone uses a middle intonation, with several instances of a low-tone region or a low with a slightly long *tenget* shape. *Rumamis* and *Seberaya* are not too far apart in rarity, so from the cries

played in the oral tradition, *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* is not too different either.

### Tangis Turang Sitajur



Figure 3. singing of sister *Sitajur*

#### d. Singing of Uncle *Sitajur*

Uncle *Sitajur* used a higher cry compared to the cry of Aunt *Sitajur*. The use of *tenget* is also not too much at the end of the sound but rather a literal repetition at the time he *erdidong*. This describes how the *erdidong* customs are carried out in the Karo Singalor Lau/Berneh area of Perbesi.

### Tangis Kila Sitajur

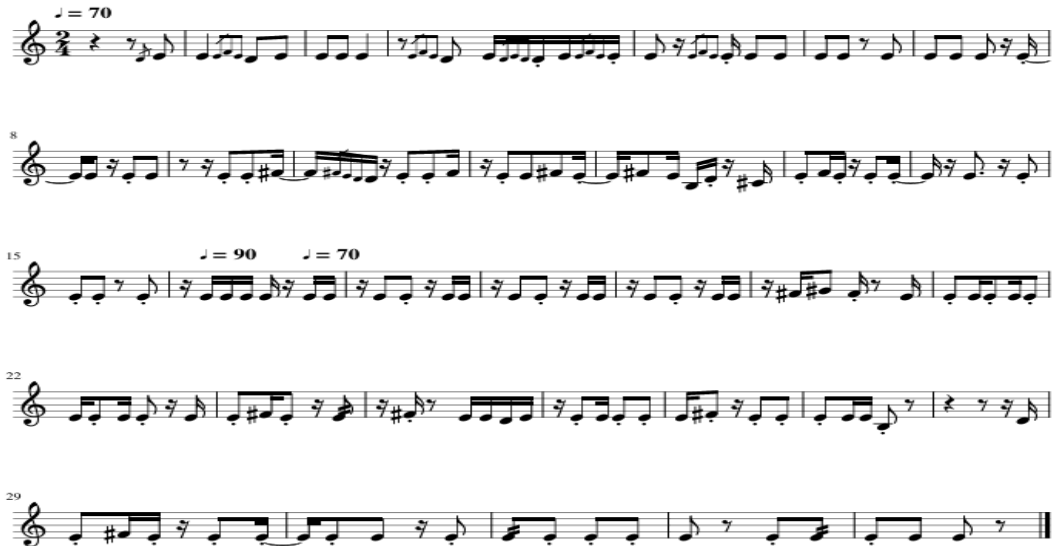


Figure 4. singing of uncle *Sitajur*

Of the four cries in the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, each differs greatly across Karo regions. This event was fully justified by Perdana Brahmana, the son of Bp Kendal Brahmana, who preserved the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* in the 1960s. Perdana Brahmana explained that each cry has its own characteristics and its own territory. This is evident in every traditional ceremony in the Karo community. When someone is *erdidong* at a traditional death or marriage ceremony, we can find out where they came from by looking at their intonation, articulation, and Teng-Teng. More clearly, Pauzi Ginting explained that indeed every region in the Karo community has its own characteristics,

and the musical range used also varies from high, mid, and low.

### 3.2.2. Meaning of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* in Karo Society

*Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* is an oral tradition that conveys many messages about good and bad. The message can be seen not only from the perspective of the story, but also through the traditional habits and the cries within it. To examine the message conveyed in the oral tradition, *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* can be analyzed using Roland Barthes's concepts of denotation and connotation. Barthes uses the theory of the signified-signifier, which was later developed into the concepts of metalinguistics and connotation. Barthes prioritizes three things that become the core of his analysis: denotative meaning, connotative meaning, and myth. The first-level meaning system is called denotative, and the second is connotative (Perangin-angin et al., 2023). This is because the Karo community generally conveys its intentions and goals through parables and figures of speech. The following are some of the meanings in the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*.

Table 1. Semiotic of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*

Words	Translation	Denotation	Connotation
<i>Penganjak Kuda Sitajur</i>	<i>Sitajur</i> the horseman	<i>Sitajur</i> was a man who had a horse	In ancient Karo society, if someone has a horse, then he is an important person, like a king or commander
<i>Uruk buah turam uram</i>	Hill <i>buah turam-buram</i>	A hill that became a gathering place for the Karo community	Hill place of war and bloodshed to resolve a matter and conflict
<i>anakku turang nandena Sitajur nandena buang-buang timah singgebu</i>	My beloved son <i>Sitajur</i>	A mother holding her child	Parenting to adulthood with a variety of life messages that have been taught
<i>ola merawasa nakku bage kel ningku nduba ajarku la seh turang nandena anakku kel ateku turang nandena</i>	I told you not to think it's great, you didn't listen to my son	Portrays a mother crying over the passing of her dead son	Has the meaning of a message to <i>Sitajur</i> , who has a rash nature and feels the greatest, so that it makes him have to die in battle
<i>ngeluh tangis-tangis seberaya</i>	Crying like singing Seberaya	Crying by humming with Rengget Karo while saying the words	Karo people, especially from Seberaya village, have the characteristic of <i>erdidong</i> , which is a characteristic at the end of a humming sentence that tends to do a short stretch
<i>Anakku anakku ja kel nge tadingndu ei</i>	My son, Where Are you left	The cry that <i>karen Sitajur</i> has died and as a spontaneous response from a grieving mother	Indicates that <i>Sitajur</i> affairs have not been completed as long as they are alive and there are still many dreams of <i>Sitajur</i> and family that have not been achieved
<i>gendang perangken me perang-perang orang guru salihna ku simalungun ketaren</i>	Play the music <i>perang-perang</i> the teachers passed on to simalungun ketaren	In this incident, music was made to accompany the death ceremony of <i>Sitajur</i> with the name of <i>prenang-perang</i> of the teachers and the Simalungun Ketaren	The music played is sacred music in the Karo community because it is related to the human world and other worlds
<i>Jadi sangana gundari peselukken menda guru ndai</i>	Currently to dance teacher / the smart guy	Describing the activities of a smart person who danced in the post-death event <i>Sitajur</i>	Master tried to call the spirit from <i>Sitajur</i> back to inquire about the unfinished matter in the world.

In the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, the language used is different but refers to the same

meaning. An example of the language in the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* is the phrase in the shout of *Sitajur*'s younger brother: “*Turang.... turang.... singuda Turang kel ateku turang Turang singuda Turang kel ateku turang Turang singuda Turang kel ateku turang*” and the cry uttered by *Sitajur*'s uncle: “*uga ka kel kari nggo permen bengkilana.*” Although the language of these two sentences is very different and the people speaking them are different, their meanings are the same: to express grief over the sad news of *Sitajur*'s death.

### 3.2.3. Value of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*

Meaning, by meaning, has been dismantled in the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* through semiotic study. The meaning finally unravels the facts and logic in both the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* and its relationship to the Karo community. After the meaning-eating *terbongar*, of course, the meaning also conveys the importance of the meal in the lives of the people of Karo. The value in question encompasses all aspects of Karo community life, including relationships between man and the creator, among humans, and with nature. In this section will discuss about what is the important value of the meanings that exist in the oral tradition *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* to the entire Karo community:

#### a. The Value of God

Karo people strongly hold the concept of trust both religiously and in their cultural customs. The Karo people have the concept of *dibata kaci-kaci*, in which they believe three religious concepts protect their lives: *dibata datas*, *dibata tengah*, and *dibata teruh*. *Dibata datas* refers to the belief that God Almighty is the owner of life as a whole. *Dibata tengah* refers to the intermediary God who regulates all human activities on Earth, and spirits are believed to protect water, plants, and others. At the same time, *dibata teruh* is a representative of God in human form, called *kalimbubu* in Karo society.

In the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, this concept is also evident in how the Karo people maintain *dibata kaci-kaci*. However, overall, it does not reflect these values in detail. But in the meaning already explained, how the concept of Air-God is in the Karo community. Divine value is evident in the household ritual practices of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*.

*Perumah begu* Ritual is a ritual performed to ask God for help to call back the spirit of someone who has died. The ritual *perumah begu* is performed by a person called *Guru Sibaso* or a smart person. In the oral tradition of *penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, *Guru Sibaso* would pray for the strength to call back the spirits of the dead *Sitajur*, in accordance with the beliefs of the time. As someone considered to have extraordinary talents, *Guru Sibaso* will still ask God for guidance in the Karo community, called *dibata kaci-kaci*. *Guru Sibaso* also became the most respected person, and every word was always a reference in thinking and acting, so that the Karo community also always followed the concept of Air-God, who *Guru Sibaso* highly exalted. *Guru Sibaso* in the Karo community is also believed to be a messenger from God who answers prayers and resolves various matters arising in individuals' lives.

#### b. The Value of Humanity

Oral tradition *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* provides the values of the story *Sitajur* experience. The value of humanity describes what is good and what is not good in the life of the Karo community. The story of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* offers a valuable lesson for every generation: always think carefully before taking risks and avoid rashness in all you do. According to Pauzi Ginting, the story of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* conveys the message of being a warrior and remaining unyielding in the face of life's obstacles. The spirit of *Sitajur*, as a commander guarding his territory and people, is very worthy of emulation.

#### c. The Value of Unity

In the Karo Community, any traditional ceremony is always discussed in a deliberative process. The result of a decision on an activity cannot be decided by someone. The value of unity in the Karo community is a very clear concept called *runggu*. *Runggu* is an activity that involves a kinship-based decision-making system in the Karo community. *Runggu*, in general, must be attended by a kinship system called *sangkep nggeluh*. In the implementation of *runggu*, the following must be present: *kalimbubu*, *sukut/sembuyak*, and *anak beru*. These three parts describe *rakut sitelu* in Karo society, which is crucial to a traditional ceremony discussed in *runggu*.

The value of unity in the Karo community is evident in the story *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, set after *Sitajur*'s death on the battlefield. More details of the sentence are “*ibenaken ate i ban rungun also kerna Penguburen Sitajur enda ndai, erkite-seeken children Beru sibayak perbesi as rungu lenggu I je, emaka I told to ngenda jelma ku taneh perbesi erlegi sibayak perbesi*”. This means that deliberation related to the burial ceremony of *Sitajur* will begin, since the new child of *Sibayak Perbesi*, as the person who arranged the deliberation, was

sent to *Perbesi* to pick him up. From the sentence, it is clear that the kinship system in the Karo community is strong and always united in decision-making. This concept strongly illustrates the value of unity in the Karo community. It indicates that the Karo community never acts alone; all decisions must be made through *runngu*.

#### d. The Value of Citizenship

The Karo People always prioritize togetherness in everything that happens within the Karo community. One very strong expression of populist values in Karo society is the concept of *runngu* (deliberation), in accordance with the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* story. In the story, there is an activity called *runngu*, which the Karo people use as their main approach to solving various problems. When one of the kinship systems in the Karo community, *rakut sitelu*, does not exist in a *runngu*, the activity cannot be carried out because it is considered incomplete and not feasible to make decisions on the matter. This illustrates that the concept of citizenship is very strong in Karo society. Mutual respect for every element of the Karo community, and in making decisions, must be based on joint decisions and be mutual in carrying out the activities agreed upon in *runngu*.

Based on the discussion of denotation and connotation, several meanings emerge in the context of education as a form of learning within this tradition. The educational messages are crucial to highlight in this study to ensure the preservation of this oral tradition, and their content can serve as a guide for shaping the character of its listeners. *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* conveys several educational messages through both the narrative and the behavioral aspects of this oral tradition. Some of the educational messages within the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* oral tradition include: 1) A lesson to avoid acting rashly or making hasty decisions; 2) To be responsible once one has earned the trust and recognition of the community; 3) To foster self-confidence and courage in children from an early age; 4) *Sitajur*'s fighting spirit serves as an example that one should never give up under any circumstances and should always be prepared; 5) The *Sitajur* horse dance as a means of conveying messages about what is good and what is not; 6) Through its presentation with the *Kulcapi*, it serves as a message to the next generation to introduce and preserve the traditional music of the Karo people; 7) This oral tradition activity occurs where parents act as narrators and children as listeners, embodying a form of respect from the listeners especially the children—toward the narrators, who in this case are the parents. An attitude of respect and appreciation for elders is instilled in the oral tradition of the *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*; and 8) The routine practice of passing down oral traditions within Karo society provides experiences and memories that ultimately influence character development within the community, particularly among children as they mature.

## 4. Conclusions

Until now, the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* remains a story, though it is not as strong as it once was. In some cases, the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* is still a picture of doing good and not good for someone to have a good personality. In accordance with the customs of the Karo people, who convey the message of life through existing stories, one of them is the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*. The oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur* has developed extensively to date, in various ways and with different narratives from each speaker. However, the oral tradition of the *Kuda Sitajur* still conveys the same meaning. Until now, only two complete versions have been found in the delivery of oral traditions: *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*. The longest version that researchers of this study's results have is the recording of Bp. Kendal Brahmins were recorded around the 1960s. The second most complete version is the *Tarigan* build version. In originality, it cannot be determined which one existed before, but when viewed from the manner of delivery, The Voice of the speaker and The Voice of *Kulcapi*, the use of language, and the storyline. The Kendal Brahmana recorded in the 1960s was more complex than ever before. In Addition to Bp. Kendal Brahmana and Bangun Tarigan; several actors have also been involved in reintroducing the oral tradition of *Penganjak Kuda Sitajur*, including Djasa Tarigan, Pulumun Ginting, and Ramanta Alkaro Sinulingga. Through regeneration, coaching, and revitalization, the tradition of Lisa Penganjang Kuda Sitajur will be maintained and continue to be known by the entire community, especially the Karo community. This article is also intended for researchers engaged in the revitalization or re-examination of oral traditions, as well as for educators as a suggested approach to introducing culture through oral traditions.

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