
The Ghost Story of Kuyang: Establishing Social Construction of Belief System on Identity in Kalimantan

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ABSTRACT

This research described the social construction of the belief system on the identity of the ghost Kuyang in Kalimantan. This research argues that ghost stories have constructed the ghost's identity of gender and place. The gender always represents the ghost as a woman while the place represents the Kuyang ghost as a Dayak or Malay tribe in Kalimantan. This research formulates how the Kuyang ghost story can establish a social construction of the belief system on identity in Kalimantan. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method by collecting data through storytelling in the community and on YouTube social media. The results of this study show that: 1) female ghost stories represent a patriarchal system for women; 2) the development of a belief system in local communities; 3) community responses through tradition and religion; and 4) social construction shapes the identity of Ghost Kuyang in Kalimantan. The development of the social construction of the belief system in the ghost of Kuyang can bring a new discourse on identity following ethnic, religious, and culture in Kalimantan.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Kuyang story in the Malay and Dayak communities has built a belief system based on social construction in Kalimantan. This is because there are community stories that become folklore and true stories about Kuyang ghosts in Kalimantan. In addition, the belief system that grew in the Malay and Dayak communities developed through film stories to form an identity about the existence of Kuyang in Kalimantan. The concept of the social construction of the belief system described by the story of the inland community was developed in the media to introduce the origin of the Kuyang ghost in Indonesia. Media such as YouTube are used to narrate Kuyang's identity from Kalimantan. This phenomenon also emerged when the Malay community saw Kuyang in Nanga Suhaid, West Kalimantan. This story builds a social construction of the Malay belief system towards the Kuyang ghost.

So far, the study of establishing social construction on the belief system of the Malay and Dayak people about the ghost of Kuyang has developed globally. The construction of social construction on the belief system forms an identity of the existence of the Kuyang ghost in Kalimantan, which used to be civically unknown. This belief system is formed through stories and media to claim that the ghost of Kuyang is in Kalimantan. Two trends can confirm that building a social construction of a belief system will stereotype a person. First, many studies pay attention to belief systems with political and paradoxical concepts (Brandt et al., 2019; Brandt & Slegers, 2021; Dong et al., 2024; Huebner & Fickling, 2023; Mao et al., 2024; Turner-Zwinkels & Brandt, 2022). Second, studies that provide patterns of belief systems in religious rituals (Balcerowicz, 2018; Cortés Daza, 2019; Jost et al., 2014; Kwirinus & Saeng, 2023; Schumann et al., 2014; Van Buren et al., 2020). From the tendency of the study, it appears that the social construction of the belief system about the ghost Kuyang brings in the concept of the reproduction of ghost stories in Indonesia. Stories conveyed through storytelling and media will form a belief system in the community about symbols, identity, religion, and culture in Kalimantan.

This study complements the lack of existing studies by exploring how the social construction of the belief system in Malay and Dayak society about the ghost of Kuyang. This research seeks to fill the gap by focusing on the social construction of the belief system on the identity of the ghost of Kuyang in Kalimantan. The issue of social construction is directly related to people's lives in building stereotypes about belief systems in a person. This belief system refers to the extent to which a person holds on to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices and uses them in daily life (Shivani Dangi & Y K Nagle, 2016). Specifically, this paper answers how the social construction of the belief system on the identity of the Kuyang ghost. An in-depth understanding of the social construction of belief systems provides a new dimension to people's knowledge about the beliefs of spirits.

This thesis is based on the argument that the social construction of the belief system in Malay and Dayak communities about the Kuyang ghost has created a new paradigm of social identity, this identity creates a stereotype in society towards ghost stories in Kalimantan. Then the story was adopted into the historical production of the people of Kalimantan who have ancestral spirit stories in the interior of Kalimantan. The social construction of the belief system as part of the incoming new culture dominates to broadly label ghost stories. However, it cannot be denied that the Kuyang ghost story became a social phenomenon that gave birth to a new perception of the reality of religion and the belief system of indigenous peoples. Those who adopt the belief

system slowly ignore the rituals and beliefs of the indigenous people toward their true social identity. Thus, the social construction of the belief system of the Malay and Dayak communities towards the Kuyang ghost is a dialectic of society towards the identity of ghosts in Kalimantan.

2. METHODS

This study is based on the phenomenon of the social construction of the belief system of the Kuyang ghost in Kalimantan, specifically about the identity and beliefs of the community towards ghosts. However, this study only focuses on explaining and reflecting the phenomenon of the belief system through storytelling from my mother's and friends' stories and social media in reproducing the story into a public belief. In line with that, this study is based on three fundamental analyses, namely; first, the belief system in the storytelling of the Malay people who say there is a Kuyang ghost roaming in their village. Some of them say that the ghost of Kuyang is not real and only a story of the community, but some say that the ghost of Kuyang is real and visible. Secondly, the response of the Malay community in Islam and local community traditions regarding the belief in the ghost of Kuyang. Thirdly, these considerations become the basis for reflecting on the social construction of belief systems that form social identities about the ghost of Kuyang in Kalimantan.

By using storytelling as a means to find information about Kuyang ghosts through phone calls and WhatsApp messages in community groups. Storytelling is a means to retell past and present events through one's experiences and interactions with what one sees. The respondents told the story of the Kuyang ghost through a person-to-person approach. In addition, the respondents heard the story from the people in the area. Meanwhile, to add to the data, this study utilizes social media as evidence of data about the Kuyang ghost story produced into a public story through YouTube.

This study uses the storytelling method and is descriptive and qualitative in nature. Qualitative research focuses on deep interpretation and understanding of social reality through social facts. Data collection techniques were carried out through deep interviews in storytelling with respondents in West Kalimantan. This research was conducted in 2022 through long-distance communication such as telephone and WhatsApp messages. In addition, YouTube media was analyzed in 2024. This process produces issues about the social construction of the Malay and Dayak communities' belief systems about the social identity of the Kuyang Ghost in Kalimantan.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ghost Female Stories

Ghost stories have always been identified with the supernatural knowledge of the female form of ghosts. Female ghosts are used as a social reality that women who die by suicide and are killed by people will appear as ghosts. This story is told by many people, forming a social construction in the belief system. Ghost stories have representations to create social identities and beliefs in society. For example, the Sundel Bolong ghost story depicts a beautiful female figure but has a hollow body at the back. This story also tells the story of a woman who died

because she was killed by someone who made her haunt many people. In addition, there is also the Kuntilanak ghost story from West Kalimantan. This story also describes a long-haired woman who became a ghost in the city of Pontianak. The history of this ghost is the basis for the formation of social construction in Pontianak city.

From ghost stories, people will recognize that the belief system in ghosts always depicts a female figure. Female ghosts are always identified with a face but not a visible gender. The figure of the female ghost is very dominant in people's stories. The feminine ghost or female ghost is a representation of, and commentary on, the 'otherness' of female sexuality in the mid-nineteenth century (Snailham, 2021). Their focus in representing ghost stories was to recount traumatic events, emphasizing the perceived necessity to remember, and accurately communicate emotional experiences (Hiskes, 2023). Women are always portrayed in ghost stories that are always told about social problems. These problems can be like women's feelings, the reality of life, expectations, and also women's sensitivity to life problems. So ghost stories represent women's problems that make them become ghosts.

Ghost stories have cornered a woman. This story builds a patriarchal stigma that women always experience social inequality in life problems compared to men. Many stories constructed about ghosts always relate to how ghosts appear because of women's complex problems. In these stories, the image of ghosts varies from the grotesque or frightening to the desperate or innocent, presenting ghosts as threats or victims (Tasdelen, 2022). Although there was no specific genre of ghost stories in this Century, such stories flourished and allowed for the exploration of various issues related to death, revenge, and punishment, in addition to serving as a warning to the living (Tasdelen, 2022). This issue illustrates how women are vital objects in ghost stories. Thus, female ghost stories are narratives about how women's lives easily become ghostly figures that haunt and frighten many people compared to men.

The female ghost story is also included in the Kuyang story from Kalimantan. This story describes the figure of a female ghost with imperfect body organs. It is not known why the Kuyang ghost is in Kalimantan. But what is certain is that many people say that Kuyang is a demon who haunts him because he is controlled by people who have black magic. The Kuyang ghost figure has a mission to find a sacrifice of a young pregnant woman to take her fetus. This ghost story also represents how women become the target of ghosts in someone's black magic. This story builds on the social construction that exists in Kalimantan. Social construction has the aim of comparing the development of the era from past ghost stories, then adopted in the present. Traditional stories mixed with horror in the past are reproduced into real stories in the belief system. So that local communities including the Malay and Dayak tribes believe that the Kuyang ghost is a woman from Kalimantan. This identity is attached as a citizenship recognized through ghost stories in the people of Kalimantan.

Belief System on Malay Storytelling

The Kuyang ghost story among the Inland Malay community developed in the Nanga Suhaid and Jongkong areas, Kapuas Hulu, West Kalimantan. This story illustrates that the ghost of Kuyang is always related to the figure of a female ghost. Those who believe in the Kuyang ghost admit that they have never seen the ghost, but believe the stories of local people. This belief started when I heard the news from my friends and mother. In 2022, I called my mother to ask

about the news of the people in West Kalimantan. I heard news that the Nanga Suhaid people in West Kalimantan were being hunted by a spirit called Kuyang. This fine creature can fly over people's houses. My mother said that people who saw Kuyang felt scared and shocked and chose to hide in their homes.

Likewise, the story in Jongkong. My friend namely Fawzia Ummyati (informant, 2024) said that the people of Jongkong were excited about the Kuyang incident. She said that people told stories about Kuyang roaming around Jongkong Hilir. She said that this information was obtained from stories from the community. However, she said that no one had seen Kuyang for sure, what it looked like. People told stories about Kuyang roaming around Jongkong, initially because they saw blood dripping for two nights. Meanwhile, local people said that no women were menstruating in the house. Fawzia also said that people told stories about Kuyang always roaming around starting at 00.30 WIB (Western Indonesian Time).

Apart from that, my friend namely Arif provided information (informant, 2022) that it was true that Kuyang was hunting people in Nanga Suhaid village. Arif goes around with the residents looking for the whereabouts of the Kuyang ghost that haunts the night. He and his friends looked for Kuyang's ghost from the forest to school, but couldn't find what Kuyang's ghost looked like. According to Arief, Kuyang is controlled by people with supernatural knowledge (black magic). Kuyang is looking for a young woman to have her blood drawn.

Meanwhile, Kuyang has never been found until now. The issue of community beliefs about Kuyang has formed a new dogma about ancestral spirits that are considered evil. It is said that in the beliefs of the Malay community, if Kuyang flies above a resident's house, it means that there is a ghost looking for humans to sacrifice, such as young pregnant women and menstruating women. Community stories describe that the Kuyang Ghost is the figure of a woman who has no organs, only wandering with her head and hair. The ancestral spirit is considered evil and roams around the house to hunt residents at night. The community has been surprised by the local community's beliefs about ancestral spirits that are considered evil like the Kuyang ghost. In community stories, the description of Kuyang is like a figure that can fly and disturb and scare humans in the form of a human without a body.

The ghost of Kuyang storytelling was explained by my friends and mother as the story from Geertz, (1976) about spirit belief that was illustrated by A young carpenter. A young carpenter told him that there were three main kinds of spirits: memedis (literally, frighteners), lelembut (literally, ethereal ones), and tujul. Memedis merely upset people or scare them, but they do not usually do serious damage (Geertz, 1976). Male memedis are called gendruwo and female ones wéwé (married to the gendruwo, they are always seen carrying small children on their hips in shawls, just like human mothers) (Geertz, 1976). Memedis are usually encountered at night in especially dark or lonely places (Geertz, 1976). Often they will take the form of parents or other relatives, dead or alive—sometimes, even, of one's own children (Geertz, 1976). The storytelling of a young carpenter from Geertz, (1976). almost the same as the story of Kuyang in West Kalimantan. Spirit belief formed system belief on human from past to adopt in storytelling in the future. Not only story from Geertz, (1976), Duile, (2020) also explained about Kuntilanak. Duile said that in those countries, Kuntilanak (in Malaysia and Singapore referred to as Pontianak) is known as a female ghost with vampire-like characteristics: attracted by blood, which she also uses as her nourishment, she is dangerous to women giving birth (Duile, 2020). As an undead person, she threatens the living since she cannot find peace (Duile, 2020). She wears white clothes

and it is said that she usually lives under trees or in the jungle (Duile, 2020). Geertz, (1976) and Duile, (2020) tend to reveal that it turns out that spirit belief has formed a culture in society to believe in ghost stories.

It is crucial to comprehend that within this discussion, the term ghost of Kuyang still was asked the clarity between reality or only illusion on people. Story from my friends and mom about Ghost of Kuyang still not evidence in material because my mom only heard from story of people and my friends only saw something to fly above people's home when some people shock saw material flying such ghost in the night. In material concept, several scientists explained that term of ghost is cultural material system which is built from story to story like film, storytelling, and fairy tale of the past on society in present (Hardi, 2023; Thompson, 2019). Cultural Materialism – which aimed to provide logical and evidence-based explanation about the emergence and massification of certain beliefs within the society (Hardi, 2023). Operationally, cultural materialism provides an explanation about the emergence of cultural variations in society by dividing the component of our socio-cultural system into three different layers, which consist of: (1) the infrastructure; (2) the structure, and; (3) the superstructure (Hardi, 2023). Cultural materialism promotes the idea that infrastructure, consisting of “material realities” such as technological, economic and reproductive (demographic) factors mold and influence the other two aspects of culture (Buzney & Marcoux, 2017). The “structure” sector of culture consists of organizational aspects of culture such as domestic and kinship systems and political economy, while the “superstructure” sector consists of ideological and symbolic aspects of society such as religion (Buzney & Marcoux, 2017). Therefore, cultural materialists believe that technological and economic aspects play the primary role in shaping a society (Buzney & Marcoux, 2017). Cultural materialism aims to understand the effects of technological, economic and demographic factors on molding societal structure and superstructure through strictly scientific methods (Buzney & Marcoux, 2017). In the case of kuyang, the “superstructure” sector consists of the ideological and symbolic aspects of society such as religion and local beliefs. The community believes in the existence of the Kuyang ghost through stories from community to community. This story does not yet describe the true form of the Kuyang Ghost, only telling the events and presence of Kuyang in Nanga Suhaid and Jongkong. However, the community believes that there is a Kuyang ghost spirit present in their lives. This concept is called the socio-cultural system or community belief system in the superstructure. Thus, the community is brought into the flow of the belief system that is built through social construction in the local community.

Malay community response through Islam and Tradition

Islam has taught humans to ask God for help from the devil. This is because ghosts can scare people in real life. The people of Nanga Suhaid maintain the strategy of Islamic teachings by performing prayers and traditions so that no disaster occurs when the Kuyang ghost approaches. Surah al-baqarah verse 255 is essential reading for Muslims to ward off the presence of Kuyang in the community. The Islamic strategy in fighting ghosts uses the Qur'anic verse as a form of sacralization with the practice of Islamic teachings. Sacralization is a sacred value in religious practice (Podoliaka, 2022; Wastawa & Sudarsana, 2019). The values of sacredness in Islam have become a social strategy used by Islamic religious leaders such as Kiyai, Ustadz, and the Malay community to shape the spiritual and social beliefs of the belief system.

The Malay community's response as a strategy against evil spirits is used in the belief system through culture and Islam. In the cultural strategy, the community practices the belief system through local traditions. Local traditions such as reading prayers to *tola' bala'* and *slametan* to ask for safety and stay away from calamities from death. This tradition is considered sacred because it influences the formation of the community's belief system about the Kuyang Ghost. In belief systems, sacred teachings take many forms in various religious traditions, focusing on creation and sacramentality in Islam, the nature of God and human creation in religion, and spiritual and social practices in both (Moore, 2020). People usually from different faith traditions meet to socialize and ask the spirits for help (Drew, 2019). This response is a tradition to ask God for help through the medium of honoring ancestral spirits.

The religious strategy is used for the Malay community asking for help from God as the authority that gives Islamic values to a Muslim. Islamic values form a survival strategy in realizing sacred values for Muslim adherents (Nurhayati, 2017).. These values become part of the concept of purity, as well as the threshold of what is allowed (Kovbasiuk, 2016). Cultural and religious patterns in Malay society form a belief system in the wandering spirit or ghost of Kuyang. This belief system makes religion and culture play an important role in representing belief practices in Indigenous communities. Thus, building a conceptual representation of the belief system regarding the presence of Kuyang with the process of understanding is the identification of the relationship between the object and the purpose of the believer (WEGMAN, 1981). The Malay community believes that Kuyang's presence can be resisted through prayers and rituals of indigenous peoples to build social construction in a belief.

The response of the Malay community through the teachings of Islam and tradition forms a pattern of social life in the belief system. The belief system of such traditions through ancestor reverence is a traditional strategy that has the effect of influencing the behaviour of several generations of descendants of the same ancestor (Carpenter, 1996; Clark & Coe, 2021). This model describes the function of ancestor veneration as promoting altruism and cooperation among descendants, even those with only distant ancestry (Clark & Coe, 2021). This strategy has interdependent values, namely the relationship between humans and nature as supernatural (Maarif, 2021). Whereas in Islamic teachings, the supernatural considered by the Malay community is how Islam constructs religious prayers to be protectors from evil spirits through belief in other realms or according to the supernatural. The concepts of *al-ghaib* can be interpreted as invisibility, sacredness, and imagination, as reflected in the views and main practices of Muslims that aim to reveal things that are unknown and invisible (el-Aswad, 2019). It is this response that is used by the Malay community to take refuge from the evil of the Kuyang ghost in Kalimantan.




Social construction becomes Identity: region, ethnicity, and religion of Kalimantan

The social construction of Malay people's belief in the Kuyang Ghost has formed social construction in an area. Social construction is formed because of the way of thinking, actions taken, norms, and behaviors and these actions will be reflected in the social, daily, and cultural order (Ramirez & Lepez, 2023). People who know about Kuyang stories always reveal that Kuyang comes from Kalimantan. In terms of identity, we do not know whether Kuyang has citizenship in Indonesia, especially the identity of residents in Kalimantan. This social construction is formed due to the existence of community stories that have always presented

people's beliefs in storytelling. This story was then raised in a movie that represented Kuyang from Kalimantan. This story forms an identity through social construction in society. The Kuyang story is also present through the stories of the people in Kalimantan. This story provides an image of a ghost that is feared by some Malay people.

The social construction formed in the identity of the Malay community in Kalimantan can be seen from the community's belief system in ghosts. This system is formed from the mindset of the community adapted through sight and hearing about the Kuyang ghost in Kalimantan. Malay people who adapt the Kuyang story through vision are those who directly see the existence of Kuyang in Kalimantan. Meanwhile, those who did not see the Kuyang ghost only heard through the stories of local communities. As described on social media by YouTubers about the Kuyang ghost in Kalimantan:

Table 1. *The history of Kuyang in Kalimantan*

No	Picture	sources
1		<p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jM90YPDmaIs</p> <p>account= Obrolan santai</p>
Seeing Kuyang in a Dayak village in Kalimantan		
2		<p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJQKCYCBV3g</p> <p>Account= Malam mencekam</p>
One village attacked by 2 Kuyang “a true story from Balikpapan”		
3		<p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkvix2bGyUg</p> <p>Account= Lentera Malam</p>
Kuyang House in the Kalimantan Forest		

From the 3 YouTube media, the YouTubers claimed to have seen Kuyang in Kalimantan. They told stories about Kuyang in Kalimantan on YouTube. Through the story on YouTube, the Youtubers want to convey information widely that Kuyang is in Kalimantan. This social construction has the potential to form a social identity claim about Kuyang's origin from Kalimantan. In addition, the social construction of Kuyang's ghost identity in Kalimantan will be formed when Kuyang's story is elevated into a “horror” movie. Of course, the folklore of the

movie will be done in the interior of Kalimantan. The horror movie about the Kuyang ghost will give more belief systems to society through the production and knowledge of the movie in theaters, online movie sites, and national and private TV channels in Indonesia.

Not to mention that apart from social media, people will retell the ghost of Kuyang to fellow friends through folklore or community stories. This issue will strengthen one's belief and knowledge that the ghost of Kuyang has an identity as a citizen of Kalimantan. Social identity as an individual's decision about the identity of the population reveals how they understand their future after colonialism, within the region, commonwealth, and nation (Solomon, 2023). In the study of the Kuyang ghost, it is still questionable whether it is true, that the Kuyang ghost is identified as residing in Kalimantan. The subjectivity of the origins of individuals and communities is often at odds with what appears as official discourses of loyalty and exclusive belonging (Solomon, 2023). Early experiences of residence are instead shaped by complex intersections of race, class, and transnational identities, as well as pragmatic judgment and emotional decision-making (Solomon, 2023). This not only reflects a state-driven process but instead represents an important aspect of a region's complex social history of decolonization and its population's initial transition from colonial society to national citizenship (Solomon, 2023). The claim that Kuyang is a supernatural being originating from Kalimantan builds a new stigma that Kuyang has a local population identity in Kalimantan. This social construction has been formed into a belief system for generations. Thus, this belief system provides a claim to the identity status of the ghost Kuyang from Kalimantan.

In addition, social construction forms a tribal identity about the ghost of Kuyang. The existence of the Kuyang ghost in Kalimantan provides a thesis that the Kuyang is a Malay or Dayak tribe. This reason is because Borneo island has indigenous tribes, namely Dayak and Malay. King, (1982) during his 1972 field research on the island of Borneo on the Dayak Maloh tribe, Kapuas Hulu, West Kalimantan, said that the original natives of the island of Borneo were Dayak people before Islam entered various regions (King, 1982). He saw the process of spreading Islam and Malay culture starting from the 17th century when many people embraced the Muslim faith and gradually became Malay communities (King, 1982).. The process of spreading Islam was carried out in the hinterland through the phases of trade, kingdoms, and institutions. Some Dayaks who became Muslims recognized themselves as Malay. This identity forms a new culture called assimilation, which is a combination of the old culture and the immigrant culture. A social identity emerges in the Malay people who say that they are not Dayaks and that they are indigenous. However, if in the case of the Kuyang ghosts as indigenous, then the Kuyang can be identified as having a tribal identity on the island of Borneo. There is a need for deeper tracking of Kuyang's current identity.

The tribal identification of the Kuyang ghost needs to be questioned if the claim of the Kuyang ghost comes from Kalimantan. Especially if Kuyang's claim is also one of the supernatural creatures controlled by black magic power from people who come from the Island of Borneo. Of course, this will stigmatize the exact identity of the Kuyang ghost as a tribal human on the Island of Borneo. But religiously, Kuyang is also still questionable, from which local culture or belief system recognizes the subjectivity of their relationship with supernatural beings. This concept will lead to a big discourse on the identity of the Kuyang ghost, does it have an ethnicity, religion, and culture from Borneo?

CONCLUSION

It turns out that the social construction of the Kuyang ghost has built a belief system in the social identity of Kalimantan. This identity is attached to a recognition and claim to the existence of Kuyang in Indonesia. Kalimantan is one area that is the object of social claims to the existence of Kuyang at large. The social construction of the belief system provides an expansion of meaning that the identity of life is not only about human life but also about the existence of ghosts as a form of social recognition in the world. This research has explained the social construction of the belief system in the identity of the ghost Kuyang in Kalimantan as a form of community representation through storytelling and media. This is because the Kuyang story has been globalized around the world through folklore that is elevated into real stories about the Kuyang ghost in Kalimantan. The belief system attached to the community creates a stigma that Kuyang's identity is not only a woman but also regional in Kalimantan.

This research provides a perspective to see the social construction of belief systems through storytelling and social media. There are four concepts found in storytelling and social media regarding the ghost Kuyang, namely ghost stories about women, belief systems, religious responses, and traditions, as well as social construction in society. Knowledge of the social construction of the belief system about the ghost Kuyang provides an argument that it turns out that ghost stories have built ghost identities about gender and place. Gender always represents the ghost as a female while the place represents the ghost of Kuyang as a Dayak or Malay tribe in Kalimantan. The social construction of the belief system can build a new discourse about the identity of ethnicity, culture, religion, and the place where the Kuyang ghost lives.

This paper has limitations in data sources that only rely on storytelling and media research. Therefore, it cannot be used as a strong basis for broad claims about the social identity of the Kuyang ghost at large. Policy formulation as a broad knowledge requires extensive studies and data on social issues about the Kuyang ghost not only in Kalimantan. Research on several concepts on the social construction of belief systems is ongoing to look back at various aspects of research. Further research that accommodates a wider sample of various sources of information can be a source of knowledge for future authors.

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