

The legend of Sangkuriang (The Upturned Boat)

(Ref: All Around Bandung; Gottfried Roelcke & Gary Crabb)

A long time ago the ancient land on Sunda was ruled by a king and queen who had one daughter. Her name was Dayang Sumbi. She was beautiful and clever but also pampered and spoiled. One day when she was weaving in her pavilion she became moody and distracted which caused her to keep dropping her shuttle on the floor. Once, when it fell she exclaimed that she would marry the one who gave it back to her. At that very moment her dog, Tumang, a demigod possessing magic powers came up to her with the shuttle in his mouth. Dayang Sumbi had to marry him.

They lived happily together and Dayang Sumbi gave birth to a baby boy, human in appearance but endowed with his father's magic powers. She named him Sangkuriang. As the boy grew up he was always guarded by the faithful dog Tumang whom he knew only as a companion and not as his father. Sangkuriang became handsome and brave.

One day his mother asked him to go hunting with the dog and bring her some venison for a feast. After hunting all day without success Sangkuriang worried about facing his mother empty handed. Desperate he took an arrow and shot the dog. He returned home and handed over the meat to his pleased mother. However Dayang Sumbi questioned her son about the absence of Tumang. At first he evaded answering but finally he told her what had happened. She was horrified and struck her son so hard on the temple that he collapsed. Her father punished her for her act of violence by banishing her from the court and she was made to roam around the kingdom. Sangkuriang recovered but was left with a large scar on his temple and he too left the court to wander around the world.

Years later Sangkuriang met a beautiful woman and instantly fell in love with her. It was his mother but they did not recognise each other. He proposed to her and she accepted. On the day before the wedding as she was caressing her fiancé's hair Dayang Sumbi detected the scar on his temple and she realised who he was. She was horror struck that she was about to marry her own son. Without revealing the truth to him she tried to get out of the marriage by setting conditions that would be impossible for him to meet. Sangkuriang had to make a lake that filled the whole valley and build a boat for the couple to sail in—all before dawn.

Sangkuriang started to work. His love gave him extraordinary strength and he used his magic powers to summon spirits to help him. With boulders and mud they dammed the river in the valley and the water rose and began to form a lake. In the early morning hours he chopped down a huge tree in the forest and began hollowing it out to make a boat. When Dayang Sumbi saw that he was about to accomplish what she had thought impossible she called on the gods to bring the sun up early and therefore thwart Sangkuriang.

The rooster crowed and the sun rose much earlier than usual and Sangkuriang realised he had been deceived by the woman he loved. In a fit of fury he cursed Dayang Sumbi and kicked the half finished boat back into the forest. There it lies upside down today forming the mountain Tangkuban Perahu (Upturned Boat). Not far away is the stump of the tree Sangkuriang had felled now called Bukit Tunggul.

The dam Sangkuriang had built caused the valley to become a lake where both Sangkuriang and Dayang Sumbi drowned themselves.