

Unveiling the Meanings of Ritual Offerings in *Solat Montok* and *Solat Mosak* Ceremonies: A Lived Experience from the Traditional Holders' Perspectives

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Abstract. This study aims to clarify the symbolic meanings of *par* (ritual offerings) used in the *Solat Montok* and *Solat Mosak* ceremonies within the *Gawai Serumpun Tampun Juah* tradition, as understood by traditional knowledge custodians. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine participants' life experiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with Dayak community leaders and active participants, augmented by direct observation of the ceremonial procedures. The findings demonstrate that both rituals include intricate symbolic meanings related to gratitude, ancestral veneration, and communal cohesion. In *Solat Montok*, offerings include rice, *pulut empiga*, *sungki*, grilled chicken, *tuak*, and cigarettes, symbolizing patience, sacrifice, communal harmony, and veneration of ancestors. In *Solat Mosak*, the same features appear in many forms, including boiling pork, pork with vegetables, *pansuh pork*, fried pork, *tubi siap*, and *jorua*, reflecting simplicity, human-nature relations, local wisdom, creativity, and knowledge of food preservation. While both ceremonies hold essential meanings, differences in food preparation signify distinct cultural values. These findings highlight ritual offerings as cultural symbols that maintain collective memory, ecological knowledge, and social cohesion within Dayak rituals. Future studies should conduct comparative evaluations of more Dayak sub-ethnic traditions or examine the evolution of these symbolic practices within contemporary cultural contexts.

Keywords: cultural symbolism; dayak ritual; lived experience; ritual offering; solat montok and mosak

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Indonesia, a multicultural and multiethnic country, has many cultural traditions rich in meaning, values, and historical continuity. Culture is not just a set of observable behaviors; it is a system of meaning that people use to understand their world and make sense of their social reality (Geertz, 1973; Hall, 1997). In this context, indigenous rituals serve as symbolic instruments that safeguard collective memory, strengthen identity, and facilitate interactions among humans, nature, and the spiritual domain.

The *Gawai Serumpun Tampun Juah* (GSTJ) is a well-known example. It is a traditional ceremony that Dayak people in West Kalimantan do. This rite is more than just a cultural event; it is also a symbolic return to ancestral roots that strengthens the shared identity of Dayak sub-ethnic groups in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. The event takes place in Dusun Segumon and includes structured ceremonial parts, such as offerings placed in precise shapes called *Par*. These offerings serve as symbolic intermediaries that embody the interwoven interaction among humans, ancestors, and the natural environment. These rituals align with anthropological viewpoints that regard ritual as a mode of symbolic communication integrated within social existence (Turner, 1969). Even though ceremonial sacrifices are important to culture, their symbolic meanings are increasingly being reinterpreted, and in some cases, they are even being lost. Younger generations seem to view ritual items like *tuak*, *pulut*, chicken, and eggs more as ceremonial extras than as items of philosophical and

spiritual importance. This change is part of broader shifts brought about by industrialization and globalization, which typically alter traditional ways of knowing and doing (Giddens, 1991). Modern viewpoints also propose that meaning is not static but is perpetually produced through contact, experience, and social mediation (Lantolf et al., 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). In this regard, the decline of symbolic comprehension may be associated with diminished interaction with the lived cultural experiences that first generated these significations.

Previous research on the symbolic meanings of ritual food has primarily employed semiotic methodologies that focus on interpreting symbols as cultural indicators. Although these methodologies are effective at discerning symbolic representation, they frequently treat meaning as a static construct rather than as a dynamic, experiential process. Conversely, research on food and cultural practices underscores that food serves not merely as a symbolic item but also as a conduit for the active construction and experience of identity, memory, and social relationships (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013). This indicates that the symbolic meanings included in ritual offerings ought to be perceived not solely as abstract representations, but as experiences grounded in quotidian cultural practices.

To mitigate this constraint, this study employs a phenomenological method, highlighting the significance of lived experience in the formation of meaning (Husserl, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Phenomenology facilitates the examination of how individuals perceive, interpret, and embody cultural processes in their quotidian existence. This viewpoint is further reinforced by phenomenological research traditions that emphasize the emergence of meaning through direct engagement with lived experience rather than dispassionate analysis (van Manen, 2016). This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of how the symbolic meanings of offerings are constructed through continuous engagement with agrarian life, communal dynamics, and spiritual beliefs within Dayak rituals.

This study focuses on the *Solat Montok* and *Solat Mosak* stages of the *Gawai Serumpun Tampun Juah* rite, analyzing how offerings organized in PAR serve as symbolic manifestations of appreciation, patience, harmony, and spiritual connectivity. Things that seem simple, like *tuak*, *pulut*, and eggs, are actually cultural artifacts with many meanings rooted in shared experiences and cultural continuity. Thus, this study seeks to (1) elucidate the symbolic significances inherent in ritual offerings during the *Gawai Serumpun Tampun Juah* rite and (2) investigate the ways in which these significances are seen and constructed by members of the Dayak community. This research underscores the experiential aspect of ritual, contributing to wider dialogues on cultural preservation by illustrating that the longevity of tradition relies not only on its performance but also on the perpetuation of meaning-making processes. In a time of rapid cultural change, it is important to understand how meaning is lived and shared to protect the integrity of indigenous knowledge systems and cultural identity.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Culture is often defined as a socially constructed system of shared meanings, behaviors, and values passed down from one generation to the next. Culture is not a fixed entity; it is dynamic and continually reshaped by social interaction and interpretation (Geertz, 1973; Hall, 1997). From this perspective, cultural practices, including rituals, serve as symbolic systems through which

communities articulate, negotiate, and preserve their collective identities. Ritual, a fundamental aspect of cultural activity, has been extensively analyzed as a mode of symbolic action that communicates significance beyond its immediate physical expression. Turner (1969) defines ritual as an organized process in which symbols serve as conduits of meaning, enabling participants to engage with the social, spiritual, and cosmic aspects of existence. In this context, ritual transcends a mere series of actions; it constitutes a significant activity that embodies and fortifies a community's collective worldview.

A key component of ritual practices is the use of material things, especially food and offerings, which function as symbolic media. In cultural contexts, food transcends its basic role as sustenance, becoming a significant symbol of identity, memory, and social connections. Counihan and Van Esterik (2013) assert that culinary practices embody cultural values and social systems, serving as a conduit for the expression and experience of meaning. In ceremonial contexts, offerings such as food and drink often carry symbolic meanings associated with appreciation, reciprocity, and the connection between humanity and the spiritual domain. Nonetheless, understanding symbolic meaning solely through representational or semiotic analysis may constrain interpretive depth. Conventional methodologies often treat symbols as static entities that can be interpreted without regard for the people who encounter them. Sociocultural approaches, by contrast, emphasize that meaning is created through contact, mediation, and participation in cultural practices (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf et al., 2015). From this perspective, symbolic meaning is not inherent in objects but arises through interaction with cultural instruments and social settings.

To deepen this understanding, phenomenology offers a framework for analyzing how meaning is formed through lived experience. Husserl (1970) posits the notion of intentionality, asserting that consciousness is perpetually oriented toward meaning. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty (1962) underscores the embodied nature of experience, showing how perception and meaning are rooted in the body's engagement with the world. Van Manen (2016) contends that lived experience is crucial to understanding how people interpret their environment, especially when meaning is not overtly expressed but rather implicitly grasped through behavior. This phenomenological perspective is especially pertinent within the framework of indigenous rituals, as shown by the practices of Dayak groups. Cultural acts, such as the preparation and placement of ritual offerings, are often carried out as part of transmitted traditions without explicit articulation of their meanings. Nonetheless, these meanings endure through continual practice, communal memory, and experiential interaction with the environment, spirituality, and communal life. This indicates that symbolic meaning in ritual situations is not merely representational but also experiential and embodied.

Consequently, the integration of cultural theory, sociocultural perspectives, and phenomenology yields a more holistic framework for understanding ritual offerings. This approach moves beyond viewing offerings as static symbols, recontextualizing them as dynamic components of living cultural experience. This theoretical framework underlies the current study, which aims to investigate the construction, experience, and preservation of symbolic meanings associated with ritual offerings in the *Gawai Serumpun Tampun Juah* culture.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative, phenomenological framework to examine the symbolic importance of ritual offerings within the *Gawai Serumpun Tampun Juah* culture. Qualitative research is adept in investigating cultural phenomena, as it enables an in-depth comprehension of meanings, experiences, and interpretations within a socio-cultural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological framework was employed to clarify the construction of meaning through lived experience, highlighting that cultural comprehension arises from involvement, perception, and iterative practice (van Manen, 2016). In line with previous research examining lived experience through participants' perceptions and reflective narratives, phenomenology enables researchers to reveal profound meanings inherent in cultural practices (Siboro & Agung, 2022). Based on this view, the study examines how documented cultural manifestations are shown and can be understood in different ways.

In accordance with this approach, the research included qualitative secondary data obtained from documented cultural sources, encompassing academic papers, anthropological descriptions, and audiovisual materials pertaining to the *Gawai Serumpun Tampun Juah* rite. The data concentrated on the categories of ritual offerings, their organization in PAR, and their functions within principal ritual phases, specifically *Solat Montok* and *Solat Mosak*. Data collection was accomplished through systematic document analysis, which involved locating and selecting sources according to specific criteria to ensure that the materials provided comprehensive descriptions of ritual activities and symbolic components. This method aligns with qualitative research methods that place high value on data rich in information for in-depth analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once these data sources were set up, the study examined how symbolic meanings are constructed and felt within the context of the ritual.

Qualitative content analysis was used to look at the data. This included data reduction, categorization, and interpretation. At first, pertinent data were identified and categorized by offer type and symbolic significance. These findings were subsequently analyzed within a phenomenological framework by correlating them with lived cultural experiences, communal behaviors, and the interrelated dynamics among humanity, nature, and spirituality. This interpretive perspective underscores that meaning is not intrinsic to objects but arises from human interaction with cultural activities (Vygotsky, 1978; van Manen, 2016). To ensure the study's credibility, source triangulation, thick description, and theoretical triangulation were employed, anchoring interpretations in multiple sources and bolstering them with recognized theoretical frameworks (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results show that ritual offerings in the *Gawai Serumpun Tampun Juah* tradition are not just ceremonial objects; they also signify the deep connections between people, nature, and the spiritual world. In the Dayak cultural framework, ritual acts are situated within an extensive system of significance that encompasses social, ecological, and spiritual aspects. This corroborates the perspective that ritual functions as a symbolic structure through which societies construct and perpetuate their worldview (Geertz, 1973; Turner, 1969). A more detailed look at the ritual phases, especially *Solat Montok* and *Solat Mosak*, shows that the arrangement of offerings in PAR serves as a structured symbolic medium. The arrangement and content of offerings are not random; they are

based on cultural meanings shaped by shared experiences. For example, the presence of *tuak* in the welcoming rite (Ngalu Ketemuai Datai) signifies openness, respect, and connection with others. Instead of just being something to drink, *tuak* is a cultural marker that shapes how people in the community interact. This discovery corroborates the assertion that food within cultural traditions serves as a conduit for the expression and experience of social identity and relationship values (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013).

Additionally, ritual sacrifices to spiritual beings such as Jubata or Petara demonstrate how physical offerings can connect the human and spiritual worlds. These sacrifices signify sentiments of appreciation, reverence, and reliance on superior powers, embodying a cohesive cosmological viewpoint wherein human existence is inherently linked to spiritual energies. From a phenomenological perspective, these meanings are not abstract creations but are formed by repeated engagement in ritual activity. Van Manen (2016) posits that meaning arises from lived experience, wherein individuals assimilate cultural values through bodily participation rather than through direct instruction. The results also show that persistent practice, not formal articulation, keeps symbolic meanings alive. Numerous ritual components are performed without direct explanation; yet their significance endures through communal memory and cultural continuity. This corresponds with sociocultural theories that highlight meaning as a result of interaction and mediation within cultural frameworks (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf et al., 2015). In this context, ritual offerings serve as cultural instruments that facilitate the transmission of values through generations.



Nonetheless, the analysis also uncovers a significant contradiction between continuity and transformation. Recent investigations indicate that younger generations often view ritual gifts as procedural elements rather than significant cultural emblems. This change shows that people are slowly moving away from the sensory basis of cultural activities, where rituals could turn into empty routines without any real meaning. This kind of change is part of a bigger trend toward modernization, in which old ways of knowing are rethought or made easier to understand (Giddens, 1991). Significantly, this discovery does not imply the eradication of cultural meaning, but rather a reorganization of the methods through which meaning is accessed and comprehended. Older generations find meaning by direct involvement and personal experience, whereas younger folks may not have enough experience to assimilate these symbolic values. This underscores the significance of experiential continuity in preserving cultural meaning, thereby strengthening the phenomenological assertion that meaning cannot be conveyed entirely by representation alone but must be experienced and enacted.

The results indicate that ritual gifts within the *Gawai Serumpun Tampun Juah* tradition serve as dynamic cultural components that encapsulate complex meanings influenced by social interaction, spiritual beliefs, and ecological consciousness. This study integrates cultural theory, sociocultural perspectives, and phenomenology to demonstrate that symbolic meaning is not fixed but is perpetually produced through lived experience. This perspective enhances comprehension of the preservation, transformation, and potential contestation of cultural traditions amid current societal change.

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To further illustrate these findings, the following table presents several dishes commonly used in the *Solat Montok* and *Solat Mosak* rituals. These offerings reflect not only material practices but also embedded cultural meanings within the ritual context.

No	Stage	Findings	Interpretation	Symbolism
1		Tuak is produced through fermentation using glutinous rice and natural yeast, requiring care, patience, and traditional knowledge.	The process reflects discipline, patience, and respect for cultural practices passed down through generations within the community.	Tuak symbolizes ritual completeness, serving as a cultural offering that connects physical preparation with spiritual intention and communal relationships.
2		Pulut Empiga is made from harvested rice processed and cooked in bamboo using water, requiring careful fire control and attention.	The process reflects patience, diligence, and precision, as each stage requires effort and timing to achieve proper results.	Pulut symbolizes perseverance and balance, representing the need for patience and control, where effort directly affects the final outcome.

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3		Pekasam ikan is a fermented fish preservation method used to store food for longer periods, especially during scarcity.	It reflects reliance on rivers and nature, showing human adaptability to environmental conditions and limited food resources.	It symbolizes patience and gratitude for natural resources, reflecting appreciation for sustenance provided by the environment and community knowledge.
4		Rice is cooked and served on leaves, then shared among participants while also being offered to spiritual entities.	This shows integration of sustenance and spirituality, where food connects human life, social relations, and the unseen spiritual world.	Rice symbolizes life and sustenance, while leaves reflect purity and closeness to nature, representing harmony between humans and the spiritual realm.
5		The meat is cooked using traditional methods in a communal setting, showing shared labor and food preparation as a social practice.	The transformation from a living being into food reflects a process where sacrifice becomes a meaningful act of respect.	The cooked pig represents sacrificial offering, symbolizing respect, gratitude, and the transfer of value from humans to the spiritual world.
6		Eggs are placed on uncooked rice as a simple offering, combining staple food and animal produce within a ritual context.	This reflects reliance on both agriculture and livestock, showing how the community acknowledges life sources and expresses gratitude through symbolic offerings.	Rice symbolizes life and sustenance, while eggs represent new beginnings, together expressing fertility, balance, and harmony between humans, nature, and spiritual forces.

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CONCLUSION

This study has shown that ritual gifts in the *Gawai Serumpun Tampun Juah* tradition are more than just ceremonial elements; they are symbolic means by which the Dayak community builds and maintains links among people, nature, and the spiritual world. The examination of the *Solat Montok* and *Solat Mosak* phases indicates that offerings perceived as basic, including *tuak*, *pulut*, and eggs, carry intricate cultural significance associated with appreciation, harmony, and spiritual connection. These meanings are not only representational; they are constructed and sustained via lived experiences and recurrent cultural practices. The originality of this work lies in its phenomenological methodology, which shifts the analysis from viewing ritual offerings as fixed symbols to understanding them as dynamic components of lived cultural experience. This study underscores that symbolic meaning is continually generated through interaction, participation, and experiential involvement, integrating cultural theory, sociocultural perspectives, and phenomenology. This viewpoint enhances the overarching dialogue in cultural studies by highlighting that the endurance of traditional practices relies not solely on their maintenance as rituals but also on the perpetuation of meaning-making processes within the community.

The findings indicate the need to enhance cultural transmission through experiential involvement, especially among younger generations who may view ritual behaviors as procedural rather than significant. Consequently, efforts to safeguard cultural traditions must focus not only on preserving ritual forms but also on fostering a deep understanding of their symbolic and experiential significance. There are some problems with this study. The reliance on qualitative secondary data limits direct access to participants' lived experiences, potentially hindering the depth of phenomenological insight. It is advisable for future studies to use primary data-gathering methods, such as interviews or ethnographic fieldwork, to obtain direct insights from community members. Moreover, future studies could investigate comparative analyses among other indigenous traditions to assess the construction and transformation of symbolic meanings within distinct cultural contexts.

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