SCIENCE & CULTURE INDONESIA & TIMOR-LESTE

2026, Vol. 01, Issue. 01, No. 1, pp. 1500-1509

ISJUTL
INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL OF UNPAZ TIMOR-LESTE
International Peer Reviewed Journal: Open Access
Publication: High Visibility: Rapid Publishing

ISSN: 3007-9195 (1) : 3007-9187 (e)

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

The Symbolic Meaning of the Wet-Rice Harvest Ritual Ceremony in Cotamutu Village

[1]Gil da Conceição., [2]I Gede Pitana, M.Sc.

1. Doctor in Agriculture Science
2. Professor Agriculture, UNUD Denpasar Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 6th January 2026

Received in revised form 7th February 2026

Accepted 8th February 2026

Published online 14th February 2026

Key word:

Ethnography; cultural values; agricultural rituals; sustainable development; tourism; human–nature relations.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the rice-harvest rituals of Kotamutu Village in Timor-Leste through an ethnographic and cultural comparative approach, with Bali's long-established irrigation and farming tradition serving as a reference model. The research statement focuses on how local harvest rituals function not only as agricultural practices but also as cultural systems that preserve community identity, social cohesion, and ecological knowledge. Using ethnography, the study observes ritual practices, community participation, oral narratives, and symbolic meanings associated with rice harvesting, while cultural analysis is used to compare these findings with Bali's more structured and resilient traditional agricultural institution.

The results indicate that Kotamutu's harvest rituals carry strong cultural significance, reinforcing communal solidarity and continuity of ancestral values. However, compared with Bali's more organized and institutionally sustained system, Kotamutu's practices appear less formalized and more vulnerable to social and environmental change. The comparison highlights differences in organizational structure, resilience, and the broader cultural functions of ritual in sustaining agriculture.

The study recommends documenting Kotamutu's ritual knowledge, strengthening community-based cultural preservation, and considering selected elements of Bali's organized agricultural model as inspiration for local adaptation. Such efforts may help protect cultural heritage while also improving the sustainability of traditional farming practices..

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INTRODUCTION

The majority of the population in Kotamutu Village are subsistence farmers, primarily cultivating rice, maize, and root crops. In their farming activities, they continue to observe rituals believed to aid them in their agricultural endeavors. Although they cultivate various crops, these rituals are performed specifically for wet-field rice and maize, as these two crops constitute the village's staple foods.

The farming community of Kotamutu Village regards these rituals as an essential, inseparable part of their lives. They view them as an ancestral legacy that must be upheld and preserved an act reflecting both their sense of responsibility and their connection to their forebears. They believe that performing these rituals fosters a harmonious relationship with both their ancestors and the "ruler of the earth." Conversely, failure to observe these rituals could lead their ancestors and the ruler of the earth to punish them by withholding a bountiful harvest, potentially resulting in food shortages or even famine.

It is not merely a matter of cultural elements; the rituals embody values that must be passed down to maintain harmony among community members, particularly within their extended families. These values include gratitude, a sense of togetherness, steadfast hope, and the practice of social capital all of which have become defining characteristics of the agricultural community in Kotamutu Village. Nevertheless, few members of the millennial generation in Kotamutu Village are familiar with, let alone truly understand, these deeply ingrained ritual practices and the values they represent. To date, neither local authorities (such as the sub-district head or village chief) nor the central government have implemented programs to preserve these agricultural cultural traditions, including those associated with wet-rice farming. This situation poses a threat to the continuity of agricultural rituals that

constitute a rich ancestral cultural heritage. Scientific study serves as a strategy to explore and pass on these noble values to future generations. While there is already a wealth of research and literature regarding agrarian culture as expressed through ritual ceremonies, no such scientific studies have been conducted in Timor-Leste in general, or specifically in Kotamutu Village (Luru Sub-district, Lautem Municipality). Consequently, this research is both important and valuable; it aims to elucidate the meanings embedded in each harvest ritual and to explain the consequences of the community ceasing to practice these ceremonies in Kotamutu Village, utilizing theories of social change.

All cultures emerge and evolve within societies that aim to protect their members societies that are inherently dynamic. This implies that every society constantly undergoes change whether gradual or rapid resulting from the adaptation to new ideas and technologies.

The use of symbols is one element of wet-rice ritual ceremonies that is subject to change. Sartini (2017), in a study on the symbolic meaning of the agricultural ritual language of the Balinese people, posits that symbolic meaning refers to the significance of symbols the smallest components of a ritual which encapsulate the meaning behind the behaviors or activities characterizing Balinese agricultural rituals, such as the offering of sacrifices and the recitation of mantras.

A similar practice is observed among wet-rice farmers in Kotamutu Village; they utilize offerings placed upon a *punehe* believed to symbolize protection for the rice crop as well as betel nut and leaf (bua malus), which serve as symbols of communication and friendship, whether in the physical world or in ritual communication with their ancestors. Mulyana (2005), as cited by Manafe (2011), suggests that ritual communication is closely linked to expressive communication and is typically performed collectively. Mulyana explains that ritual communication serves a function in fulfilling human identity as an individual, as a member of a social community, and as a component of the universe. Individuals engaging in ritual communication affirm their commitment to the traditions of their family, tribe, nation, ideology, or religion.

Etymologically, ritual ceremonies can be divided into two words, namely ceremony and ritual. A ceremony is an activity carried out by a group of people and has stages that have been arranged according to the purpose of the event. Meanwhile, what is meant by Ritual is something related to spiritual beliefs and beliefs with a certain purpose. Situmorang can conclude that the meaning of a ritual ceremony is an activity carried out by a group of people related to spiritual beliefs and beliefs with a certain purpose (Situmorang, 2004: 175

Meanwhile, Susane Longer, quoted by Dhavarnony in Tri P (2022), stated that ritual is an expression that is more logical than psychological, ritual pays attention to the order of objectified symbols, symbols that pay attention to the behavior and role and personal form of each worshiper. He explained that rituals are divided into four types, namely:

a. Magical action; which is associated with the use of materials that work due to mystical powers.
b. Religious acts; Ancestral cultures also worked this way.
c. Constitutive ritual; which expresses or changes social relations by referring to mystical understanding, in this way the ceremonies of life become distinctive.
d. Factitive rituals, which increase productivity or purifying and protective powers or otherwise increase the material well-being of a group

Yosep Yapi Tami, in his research on the rites and myths of the Timorese people of the Dawan tribe, explains that, to deal with nature which is not too friendly, farmers have certain strategies and tactics to ensure soil fertility, bring in rain, keep away pests and diseases and to produce abundant harvests. People carry out various kinds of traditional rites and ceremonies to ask for help and supernatural and preternatural powers. one of them is the fua pah ceremony, namely the rite of offering sacrificial animals to the ruler of the earth. This ritual continues to be done because of belief in *pah nitu*, namely the spirits of people who have died. And they believe that these spirits act as intermediaries between humans and *Uis Neno* or God.

Angy Belexy (2008) in his research on food security in Timor-Leste has found that, at every stage in agricultural activities there must be ritual ceremonies carried out with the aim of asking permission and protection from their ancestors or from the natural forces around them that they believe in. By using betel pinan (bua malus), chickens, eggs, *mantras* and other materials become symbols in these ritual ceremonies.

Research in Kotamutu Village and other previous research on Timor Island found that all ritual ceremonies practiced always used symbols that had their own meaning and function. Turner (1967) in Sartini (2017) stated that, each symbol has its own characteristics, therefore distinguishing them from being; (a) multifocal, meaning that symbols have many meanings and refer to many personal things or phenomena so that the meaning of ritual symbols varies greatly. (b) symbol polarization, because symbols have many meanings, there are often conflicting symbol meanings, (c) unification, meaning they have separate meanings. Analyzing ritual symbols will help to correctly explain the values that exist in society and will eliminate doubts about the truth of an explanation.

Turner's theory of interpretation (1967) suggests three things that can be used in symbol analysis, namely: (1) exegetical meaning, namely the meaning obtained from local informants regarding observed ritual behavior, (2) operational meaning, namely the meaning obtained is not limited to the informant but from the actions carried out in the ritual, (3) positional meaning, namely the meaning obtained through interpretation of symbols in relation to other symbols in totality. This level of meaning is directly connected to the owner of the ritual symbol. The meaning of a ritual symbol must be interpreted in the context of other symbols and their owners.

Whether as an individual, a member of a social community, or a component of the universe. Forms of ritual communication include prayer (performing *salat*, reading scripture, attending Mass), flag-raising ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, the *siraman* (ritual bathing) ceremony, and sporting events (Deddy Mulyana, 2005). Ritual communication is practiced by communities that regularly observe ceremonies throughout the course of a life and various ceremonies throughout the year.

Ritual communication is a form of communication used to fulfill human identity as an individual, as a member of a social community, and as a part of the universe.

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Method

The fundamental method employed in this study is ethnography method through descriptive analysis. This method examines the current status of a group of people, an object, or a class of events, aiming to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the facts, characteristics, and interrelationships of the phenomena under investigation (Nazir, 2003). Whitney (1960), as cited in Nazir (2003), notes that descriptive research methods study societal issues, prevailing social practices, and specific situations including the relationships between activities, attitudes, viewpoints, and ongoing processes, as well as the influences exerted by a given phenomenon.

This study was conducted in Kotamutu Village, focusing on wet-land rice farmers across three aldeia (community units). Primary data sources included one community leader, a young farmer representative, and an agricultural extension worker from each of these units. A purposive sampling technique was used, meaning only farmers meeting specific criteria were selected as the sample. Secondary data were obtained from various literature sources particularly previous studies on the same topic and from theories used to explain and reinforce the empirical findings, specifically theories regarding social and cultural change.

Kotamutu is one of six villages in the Luro Post, Lautem Municipality. The majority of the community relies on subsistence farming for their livelihood. The village is divided into three *aldeias* (hamlets): Ouroma, Etanisi, and Buanomar. According to the 2022 Timor-Leste national census, the total population of Kotamutu is 1,962, comprising 976 females and 986 males. The village covers an area of 14.7 km², resulting in a population density of 139.4 people/km². Kotamutu has the second-largest population in the area, ranking behind Luru Village, which has 2,839 residents.

The primary crops cultivated are maize and wetland rice. Root crops such as cassava and sweet potatoes as well as legumes and pumpkins, are grown using intercropping methods alongside maize. Horticultural crops, particularly vegetables, are beginning to be developed with a market orientation, although production remains limited and seasonal. Fruits like bananas are grown only in home gardens and along the edges of fields, while citrus and mango trees grow wild and have not yet been developed into commercial farming enterprises.

Socio-culturally, the people of Kotamutu maintain strong ties to traditional ceremonies and rituals. These range from funeral rites and wedding ceremonies which begin with belis (bridewealth) negotiations to agricultural rituals such as *Saubatar/su'u nua*, performed to seek ancestral permission to consume young maize. Other farming-related rituals are also practiced and will be discussed in this article. Regarding language, the local tongue used in daily life is Sa'ani, which belongs to the Austronesian language family. Meanwhile, Tetum and Portuguese serve as the national languages and are used as the media of instruction in schools and for government administration. However, many residents still use Indonesian when referring to numbers. For instance, expressing monetary values such as "$10" (ten dollars) is easier in Indonesian than in the local language.

In terms of infrastructure, Kotamutu Village has roads connecting it to other villages and districts, although not all of them are paved. Connectivity between the village and the city is excellent, thanks to various public transportation services operating in Kotamutu. Regarding access to information, the village is covered by all telecommunications networks operating in Timor-Leste: Timor Telecom (Timor-Leste-owned), Telkomsel (Indonesian-owned), and Telemor (Vietnamese-owned). Additionally, many residents use satellite dishes to access national and international information.

Economically, the majority of Kotamutu's residents derive income from agriculture and running small shops (kiosks), while others work as civil servants, police officers, or military personnel; some receive war veteran subsidies or elderly allowances (for those aged 60 and over). Furthermore, many young people work abroad in Europe (the UK, Ireland, Canada, Portugal, and the Netherlands), Australia, Japan, and Korea.

RESULT,DISCUSION, AND FINDING

Result

The research found 7 ritual ceremonies that occurred at several stages in the rice harvest activities, including: *Punehe faana*, *Piti lope*, *Ale sa'e ti'ala*, *ale liri*, *ale topana*, *piti pane*. All these ritual ceremonies are led by a *mosa'a* using symbols in the form of

materials and mantras. Below we will discuss one by one the meaning of the symbols used in the rice ritual ceremony.

Punehe Faana (Giving offerings to the stone protecting the rice fields)

Before the rice harvest in Kotamutu Village, the *Punehe Faana* ritual is held. By using BUA-MALUS and chicken and siwalan leaves. In Timorese culture *bua* areca nut is very important in every ceremony. Used as a means of greeting each other or as a sign.

A welcoming greeting for guests during a ceremony, in the *punehe faana* ritual as well as other rituals (bua malus) betel nut and leaf serve as symbols of ritual communication. McQuail & Windahl (1993), as cited by Yermia Djefri (2011, p. 4), state that the use of symbols in ritual communication aims to represent ideas and values associated with hospitality, celebration, or ceremonies of worship and communion. The purpose of the *punehe faana* ritual is to offer tribute to the *umura la'ida* (ancestors) who originally opened the rice field, as well as to surrounding natural forces; this serves as an expression of gratitude for protecting the field from threats such as pests and diseases, and as a prayer for a successful and safe harvest. Regarding the specific symbols used: chicken lungs symbolize a source of knowledge and act as a medium of communication between the spirit world (or supernatural realm) and the physical world. Meanwhile, siwalan (palmyra palm) leaves are used as a lupuru a marker indicating that the rice is ready for harvest.

The *Ale Kuelasi* Ceremony (Rice Field Fencing)

This ritual may be performed by *the mosa'a* (traditional leader) or another family member, provided they act under the *mosa'a's* guidance. It involves the use of four *raka tala* (jujube) branches tied into cross shapes; these are placed at the upstream and downstream ends of the rice field, as well as on its left and right sides. The ritual aims to "fence off" the ready-to-harvest rice against negative energies whether originating from nature or sent by individuals with malicious intent. The symbolism within this ritual signifies a triumph over all dark forces. The use of *raka tala* (jujube branches) represents the local community's traditional beliefs, while the cross-shaped placement of these branches signifies cultural assimilation specifically, the blending of traditional beliefs with Roman Catholic faith. Koentjaraningrat (1996) posits that assimilation is a process of social change within a society driven by continuous and significant social interaction. This dynamic ultimately encourages the community to blend existing cultural elements in an effort to accommodate all parties while maintaining established social order.

Piti Lope Ceremony / Spreading the Mat

The piti (mat) serves as the platform for the rice-threshing stage. The mosa'a uses betel nut and areca nut (siri pinang) to communicate with the spirit world specifically the *umura la'ida* (ancestors). This communication takes the form of panaana (incantations or mantras) that remain private and unknown to others, highlighting the sacred nature of every wet-rice harvest ritual in Cotamutu Village. Afterward, the chewed betel residue is placed in a corner of the mat. The ritual aims to invoke the protection of the umura la'ida (ancestors) over the threshing process. Symbolically, the betel nut serves as a communication tool for greeting others, similar to its role in the *ale kuelasi* ritual stage.

Ale Sa'e Ti'ala / First Rice-Treading

Literally, ale means rice and sa'e means head. In this study, the term refers to the mosa'a performing the initial treading on a bundle of rice stalks; this ritual signals that the ale ti'ala (rice-treading) activities may officially begin. The rice from this specific bundle is placed into a nyuri (winnowing tray) and set beside the main pile of rice bundles on the mat. The rice in the nyuri symbolizes an offering to the mu'a ouhu (local spirits). The purpose is to ensure that these spirits do not interfere with the harvest. This practice represents a traditional belief within the Kotamutu community passed down through generations that has evolved into a cultural element serving to unite and protect the people. Soerdjono Soekanto (1982) posits that culture can provide human satisfaction in both spiritual and material forms. He explains that the products of a society give rise to technology or material culture which serves the primary purpose of protecting the community from its natural environment.

Ale Liri (Haliri)

Ale liri (or haliri) is the activity of separating filled rice grains from empty ones. The ritual associated with this stage is known as ta'alini. This ritual involves the use of traditional tais clothing (in the national language, Tetum) or in the local Sa'ani language uturu and rapi (uturu for men and rapi for women). These garments are placed near a mat alongside betel nut and cigarettes as an offering to the umura la'ida the ancestors who originally cleared the rice field. Symbolically, the traditional clothing signifies gratitude, joy, and even a celebration of the harvest yield.

Abdul Hafid and Raodah (2019) state that offerings... It represents the self-actualization encompassing thoughts, desires, and feelings of the practitioner seeking to draw closer to God. The act of drawing near through offerings is essentially a form of abstract cultural accumulation. Offerings also serve as a symbolic discourse, acting as a medium for spiritual negotiation with the supernatural realm. This is done to ensure that spirits forces beyond human control do not cause harm. As Endaswara (2006:27) notes, the symbolic offering of food to spirits is intended to appease them, encouraging them to become benevolent and assist in human affairs.

Ale Topana / Pouring Rice Into The Granary

Ale topana is the ritual activity of pouring unhusked rice (gabah) into the granary; the granary is positioned facing a pile of cleaned rice (separated from empty husks). Before performing ale topana, the mosa'a (ritual leader) chews betel nut and recites a mantra over the granary, spitting into it as part of the ritual. The objective is to ensure that their ancestors continue to protect the harvest. The mosa'a stands behind the granary, which is placed before the pile of rice resting on a mat. As the rice is poured into the granary, the mosa'a loudly recites the mantra while striking the back of the granary. The content of the mantra, in the local Sa'ani language, is as follows:

hai la'ida madufu! Ka'u ka'u nua po ei dada ei mata hau riala which translates to: "Oh, old widow! Eat sparingly, for your descendants are too numerous."

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The essence of this mantra is an appeal conveyed via the supernatural realm for family members to practice frugality. This is significant because, from the past to the present, farmers in Kotamutu village have engaged in only a single planting season: the rainy season (January to April), with the wet-field rice harvest taking place from early June. In every society, mantras constitute a form of oral literature passed down through generations. Danandjaja (1994), as cited in Sunoto (2017, p. 3), posits that the mantra (incantation) is a form of oral literature. It is considered part of traditional literature because it encompasses emotional elements, aesthetic qualities such as rhythm, and moral values, arising from the assimilation of language and belief (Medan, as cited in Amir, 2013: 68–69).

As a form of oral literature, the mantra is classified as folk poetry or verse characterized by a specific, fixed structure determined by the incantation itself, syllable length, stress patterns, or rhythm (Danandjaja, 1994: 46). Furthermore, the mantra is a cultural phenomenon that embodies values reflecting the cultural ideals held by the community in which it originated and evolved.

Piti Pane / "Washing The Mat"

This is the final ritual in the series of activities associated with the wet-rice harvest. *Piti Pane* involves the use of *bua malus* betel nut and leaf solely as a means of communicating to the *mu'a ouhu* the surrounding spirits that the rice harvest has concluded. The ritual serves to express gratitude to these spirits for not interfering during the harvesting process. The betel nut and leaf serve as a symbolic medium for ritual communication. Deddy Mulyana (2005) suggests that ritual communication is a form of communication used to fulfill human identity whether as an individual, a member of a social community, or a component of the universe. Forms of ritual communication include prayer (such as salat, scripture reading, or Mass), flag-raising ceremonies, weddings, the siraman (ceremonial bathing) ritual, and sporting events (Deddy Mulyana, 2005). Such communication is practiced by communities that regularly observe life-cycle ceremonies and various other rituals throughout the year.

Research Findings from Comparison at the Stages of Rice Harvest in Kotamutu Village (Luro-Lospalos) Timor-Leste and Bali, Indonesia

Result-Ritual Timor

Local beliefs which are manifested through various ritual ceremonies in several places in Indonesia have been very well developed, so they are not only useful for local farming communities but have also become a tourist attraction because they have unique values that convey the process of relationships between humans and humans and also the relationship between humans and nature.

This is proof that, if every existing cultural phenomenon is studied in depth and identified all the values contained therein, it will become unique and favorable to existing development. An interesting experience that can be used as an interesting example and inspiration for this article is that SUBAK on the island of Bali has been organized so neatly and well that it has survived through the centuries, continuing to maintain and preserve the rice ritual culture so that it has become one of the attractions in the agro-tourism sector which attracts many domestic and foreign tourists.

Based on this experience, the study of ritual ceremonies in Kotamutu Village is important because it can identify various ritual ceremonial practices and also rediscover the values and meanings of ritual ceremonial symbols that can be used in development in general, so as to preserve the local culture and continue to maintain the uniqueness that exists to become an attraction for other parties, for example tourists who one day visit the place. Of the various ritual practices that exist in rice farming, especially this harvest ritual is carried out in rural and urban areas. As long as our farming area is owned by ourselves or shared by a family, it is inherited from our parents.

This research succeeded in finding 6 types of ritual ceremonies in rice harvest activities in Kotamutu Village, including:

Punehe Faana

Punehe means seven round stones, while faana means giving food or offering. Thus, it can be literally translated as the ceremony of feeding the seven round stones. This research defines the meaning that the *Punehe Faana* ritual ceremony is a ritual of giving offerings to the lamaa laida or ancestors who opened the rice fields and also to the mu'a ouhu ruler of the earth who is the caretaker of the rice fields or who may wander around the rice fields. This ritual ceremony is carried out at the place where the punehe is placed, and is carried out by a farmer who serves as mosa'a. Mosa'a is someone from a nuclear family who has accepted responsibility from his family members. Mosa'a is responsible for all ritual ceremonies during rice harvest activities in Kotamutu Village.

The purpose of this *punehe faana* ritual ceremony is to ask for permission and protection from the lamaa laida or ancestors and the mu'a ouhu ruler of the earth who is believed to be the guardian of the rice fields. This request for permission is made because farmers believe in the age of laida or ancestors and the creatures mu'a ouhu or rulers of the surrounding earth who have protected the growth process of the rice fields so that they are free from pests, diseases or other supernatural disturbances. This ritual ceremony also aims to ask for protection to continue to protect them so that the rice harvesting activities, starting from cutting the fields until they are transported home, cannot continue and do not experience any disruption.

The steps and instruments used in this *Punehe Faana* ritual ceremony are a live chicken, betel nut and rice which are carried out by a mosa'a in the following order:

a. Prepare the ingredients that are the instruments for this ritual pucara, namely: a live chicken, siri areca nut and rice.
b. Mosa'a gave a spell and then strangled the chicken until it died.
c. Mosa'a reads the liver and lungs of the chicken, from there it will be known whether the age of Laida or the ancestors and Mu'a Ouhu, the creatures who rule the earth around them, have given permission and will provide protection to them or not. If there is no good sign, you will choose another chicken and give the same spell and you can also add another wish.
d. If it is a good sign, part of the chicken, namely the liver, lungs and part of the breast and blood will be added with rice, cigarettes then served on top of the *punehe* with a *mosa'a* spell.
e. The next step is to cook the chicken and rice and then eat them together in *Punehe*.

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After finishing eating, *Mosa'a* will plant siwalan leaves in one place in the rice fields as a sign that the rice is ready to be harvested.

The Ale Kuelasi Ceremony (Wet-Rice Field Fencing)

Literally, the name of this ritual consists of two words: *ale,* meaning rice, and *kuelasi*, meaning to cut around the perimeter. Thus, this study interprets the *Ale Kuelasi* ritual as an activity performed to "fence off" the rice using *raka tala* (jujube) branches against harmful influences or negative energies that could damage the crop prior to harvest. Local people believe that raka plants can ward off dark forces, whether originating from sorcery or from surrounding supernatural entities.

Raka tala (jujube branches), having been imbued with incantations by *a mosa'a* (ritual leader), are placed in a cross-like arrangement at specific points: at the upstream inlet of the irrigation channel feeding the field, at the downstream outlet, and at the left and right sides of the field. The placement of the *raka tala* (jujube branches) need not be performed by the *mosa'a*; it can also be carried out by other family members or relatives.

Once this ritual concludes, the rice harvesting begins. The *mosa'a* performs the initial cut and gathers a bundle roughly the size of an adult's thigh, known as *Ale Sa'e*. Here, *Ale* means rice and *Sa'e* means head. This *Ale Sa'e* bundle is used in the *Ale Ti'ala* ceremony, which is described in the subsequent stage.

Piti Lope Ceremony (Spreading the Mat)

The third ritual ceremony performed is *piti lope*, which translates to "spreading the mat." The purpose of spreading the mat in the middle of the rice field is to create a designated space for stacking the previously bundled rice stalks. These bundles are arranged in a square formation that corresponds to the shape and volume of the harvest. During this stage, the *mosa'a* (ritual leader) chews *bua malus* (betel nut) and places it beneath the edge of the spread mat. This act is accompanied by a mantra known only to the *mosa'a*. The objective of this ritual is for the mosa'a to instill a spiritual safeguard against negative energies forces believed capable of disrupting the process or diminishing the harvest yield if such protective measures are not taken.

Farmers continue to practice the *piti lope* ceremony because, in the past, harvests would sometimes unexpectedly fall short of expectations or yield less than anticipated. Issues such as an excessive number of empty or unfilled grains would occur, thereby affecting overall production. When this happens, the *mosa'a* believes that a disruption has occurred due to an error. Such errors might stem from the *mosa'a's* own negligence during the preceding ritual stages for instance, a mistake in reciting a mantra or an error in the offering process that angers ancestral spirits or local supernatural entities, resulting in negative consequences. Another possibility considered by the *mosa'a* is that someone may have directed negative energy toward the field, intending to damage the harvest.

Ale Sa'e Ti'ala / First Rice-Treading Ceremony

As previously explained, ale sa'e ti'ala is essentially a ceremony devoid of complex ritualistic steps; rather, it serves as a specific stage within the broader ale tia'la ritual cycle. This activity takes place before the general rice-treading process or mechanical threshing begins. *A Mosa'a* (ritual leader) performs this act on a single sheaf of rice that was set aside during the earlier harvesting stage. The *Mosa'a* treads upon or threshes the sheaf, then places the grain into a basket positioned beside the main pile of rice sheaves. This act serves as an expression of gratitude to their ancestors, acknowledging that the first portion of the harvest must be offered to them. Through this offering, they believe their ancestors will continue to provide protection, particularly throughout the harvest period.

Only after this ceremony concludes do the people seated on large woven mats (biti bot) begin taking up their own rice sheaves to tread upon them, or if using threshing machines begin the mechanical threshing process. The treading process often involves holding hands and jumping upon the sheaves, accompanied by songs featuring a call-and-response poetic exchange (*pantun/masu leu*). These lyrics convey themes of togetherness and tales of hardship, and sometimes even include playful banter or teasing. This hand-in-hand singing and movement gave rise to a dance form known as tebe-tebe (traditional dancing). This dance celebrates the bountiful harvest, much like the folk dances found in European countries. However, this practice is no longer common, as farmers have largely shifted from manual treading to the use of threshing machines.

Ale Liri (Separating/Pouring Rice)

Ale liri refers to the activity of separating filled rice grains from empty ones a process known as haliri (pouring). The term combines ale (rice) and *liri* or *haliri* (pouring). Before the *ale liri* begins, an offering is made to the ancestors associated with the rice harvest; participants wear traditional attire, specifically a *tais* cloth known as ta'alini. This is followed by the process of transferring the rice grains into a large granary. A small basket is placed over the granary's opening, and a designated person continuously rotates it until the *ale liri* process is complete. The purpose of placing and rotating this small basket atop the granary is to protect the stored grain; according to local belief, malevolent spirits roam the area and could steal the grain from the granary if it were left unprotected.

Ale Topana

Ale topana is the activity of placing harvested rice grains into a rice barn; the barn is positioned facing a pile of cleaned rice grains (separated from empty husks). Before performing ale topana, the *mosa'a* (ritual leader) chews *bua malus* (betel nut) and recites a mantra over the rice barn, spitting into it. The purpose is to ensure the ancestors continue to protect the harvest and to encourage frugality during consumption, so that the produce lasts for the entire year. To ensure this conservation of resources, the *mosa'a* conveys the mantra to the ancestors. The mosa'a stands behind the rice barn, which is placed in front of the pile of rice grains laid out on a mat. As someone begins tossing the rice grains into the barn, the mosa'a loudly recites the mantra while striking the back of the barn. The content of the mantra, in the local Sa'ani language, is as follows:

Hai la'ida madufu! Ka'u ka'u nua po ei dada ei mata hau riala, which translates to: "Oh, old widow! Eat sparingly, for you have too many children and grandchildren."

The mantra in this *ale topana* ritual appeals to an elderly woman figure to watch over her descendants and encourage them to be thrifty. This plea for frugality is crucial because, historically and currently, farmers in Kotamutu Village engage in only one planting season the rainy season from January to April with the

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wet-rice harvest taking place from the start of the season through June. Through this mantra, the author can draw parallels between the beliefs of farmers in Kotamutu Village and those elsewhere in Indonesia. For instance, the Balinese farming community's belief in Dewi Sri as the Rice Goddess a belief and cultural practice that remains inseparable from wet-rice farming in regions such as Bali, Java, and other parts of the country. In Bali specifically, these rituals have been thoroughly and meticulously studied and developed into agro tourism attractions, generating income not only for farmers but also for the village and the region of Bali as a whole.

Piti Pane / Mat Washing

This ritual marks the final stage in the series of ceremonies comprising the entire rice harvest ritual in Kotamutu Village. The *Piti Pane* ritual signifies the purification or washing of the mat (piti means mat, and pane means wash). The ritual is performed by the *mosa'a* (ritual leader), who chews betel nut and sprinkles young coconut water from one corner of the mat to the other. The purpose of this ceremony is to express gratitude and thanksgiving to the ancestors and surrounding spirits, while also petitioning for continued protection in the coming season.

According to the *mosa'a*, if the harvest yield is satisfactory, a chicken or goat may be slaughtered as an act of thanksgiving. If an animal is used in the ritual, the *mosa'a* must chant incantations over it before the sacrifice. The mosa'a also examines the chicken's liver and lungs to determine whether any problems might arise in the management of the wet-rice farming operations in the future. If the liver and lungs reveal an unfavorable sign, the mosa'a must pledge to the ancestors to offer further sacrifices either in the near future or during the next season prior to land preparation.

Rituals from a Communication Perspective Bali Ritual Rice Harverst (Panen)

Ritual communication is related to expressive communication and is typically performed collectively (Deddy Mulyana, 2005). During ritual ceremonies, participants utter specific words or exhibit particular behaviors that carry symbolic significance. Those participating in these ritual communication events reaffirm their commitment to the traditions of their family, tribe, nation, state, ideology, and religion. Rituals are often equated with routines or habits. They can also be understood as habitual actions practices passed down through generations that are formal in nature and embody transcendental values (Nick Couldry, 2005). Ritual communication is linked to expressive communication and is typically performed collectively (Deddy Mulyana, 2005). During ritual ceremonies, participants utter specific words or engage in symbolic behaviors. By participating in these ritual events, individuals reaffirm their commitment to the traditions of their families, tribes, ethnic groups, nations, ideologies, and religions. Regarding the harvest ritual ceremony viewed through the lens of social change as a cultural dimension, Himes & Moore (cited in Sartini, 2017) posit that when a new element is integrated into a culture, the existing form is replaced by the new one. In the context of social change within the cultural dimension as described by Himes & Moore, this phenomenon represents innovation in the form of an "invention." Such an invention may involve the new development, combination, or simplification of cultural elements that influence the way a ritual is performed.

When examining the evolution of ritual practices in various regions of Indonesia, it is evident that the original purpose of these rituals was to seek permission and protection from nature. However, in certain areas particularly on the island of Bali ritual ceremonies have become a key element in the development of agro tourism. For instance, the various ritual practices associated with the Subak system have become a unique attraction for both domestic and international tourists which serves as the basis for ongoing study and development regarding various agricultural rituals, particularly those concerning wet-rice farming. The following are examples of wet-rice rituals from various locations in Indonesia.

Wiwitan

One wet-rice ritual still practiced on the island of Java today is *Wiwitan*. This ritual was observed by the Javanese people even before the arrival of Hinduism. It is performed prior to the harvest season as an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving to the Earth regarded as a "sibling" (*sedulur sikepi*) and to Dewi Sri (the Goddess of Rice), who is believed to have bestowed abundance upon the farmers. Wiwitan represents a form of balanced relationship between humanity and the natural environment.

In this context, Sukarna (2021) citing Keraf (2002) explains three fundamental theories regarding human interaction with the natural environment: (1) Anthropocentrism: This theory views humans as the center of the natural system, where human beings and their interests are considered the primary determinants within the ecosystem's order and in policies concerning nature, whether directly or indirectly. Humans hold the highest value; only humans possess intrinsic worth and merit consideration. (2) Biocentrism: This theory is grounded in the morality of the sanctity of life, whether in humans or other living beings. Consequently, the universe is viewed as a moral community in which every form of life human and non-human alike possesses moral value. (3) Ecocentrism: This theory extends the biocentric environmental ethic. However, ecocentrism encompasses the entire ecological community, including both biotic and abiotic elements.

The *Wiwitan* ritual is typically led by an elder known as *Mbah Kaum*. He begins the ceremony with a prayer, followed by the cutting of a small number of rice stalks to signal that the crop is ready for harvest. The *wiwitan* ritual also involves the serving of food, including nasi gurih (savory rice), free-range chicken, jackfruit vegetable stew, crackers (krupuk), tofu and tempeh, anchovies, peyek (savory fritters), other small snacks, and eggs wrapped in banana or teak leaves.

This ritual ceremony is open to the entire village community, allowing everyone to taste the food served during the *wiwitan* ritual. This demonstrates a collective spirit of mutual support, fostering effective functionalism among the various social structures within the community and achieving social balance. This reality reflects the structural-functional sociological theory proposed by Émile Durkheim; structural theory is a sociological approach that views society as a system composed of various parts that interact and support one another to maintain the system's balance and functional continuity. This theory aligns with the functionalist approach in sociology, which focuses on social functions in maintaining societal stability.

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Ngampung or Manyi

Sartini (2017) conducted research at the Subak Kedua Pasedahan Yeh Lauh in Peguyangan Kangin Village, West Denpasar District, regarding the symbolic meaning of the agricultural ritual language used by the Balinese people. She noted that the purpose of the ritual is to seek safety and request that no disturbances occur while the rice harvest is underway. *Ngampung or Manyi* is a ritual held by Balinese farmers during the rice harvest. The offerings consist of yellow rice, accompanied by egg yolks and yellow flowers. The ritual is rich in symbols, each holding profound meaning for the Balinese people in general and for the rice farmers performing the ritual in particular. One of the symbols used is yellow rice; the color yellow signifies the hue of rice that has ripened and is ready for harvest.

Regarding this symbol, Spradley (1997), as cited in Santri (2019), states that a symbol comprises three elements. Symbols relate to the symbol itself, to the object being symbolized, and to other symbols and the objects they symbolize. The object being symbolized can be anything conceived within human life experience. In understanding symbols, Spradley identifies three key factors: (1) the stimulus, (2) the reference, and (3) the interpreter. The creation, use, and interpretation of symbols occur within local contexts; meaning varies from one culture to another.

Mendak / Mapag Toya Ritual

The meaning of this ritual is "fetching water." It is an agricultural ritual symbolizing the retrieval of water from a source the wellspring of life to ensure that rice crops flourish without suffering from drought. It is typically performed at the Pura Panghulun Subak (the upstream subak temple). The purpose is to express gratitude and offer reverence (astiti bhakti) to Bhatari Danu the deity presiding over Lake Batur as a manifestation of

Almighty God (*Ida Sang Hyang Widi Wasa*), who is believed to bestow fertility.

Regarding this goddess of fertility, Ardhani et al. (2022) in their study titled The Meaning of Fertility in the Myths of Dewi Sri and Dewi Laksmi found that the myth of Dewi Sri as the goddess of rice and agricultural fertility aligns with Nastiti's (2020) research. Nastiti noted that in the cultural traditions of the Sundanese, Javanese, and Balinese people, Dewi Sri is revered as the Goddess of Rice. Specific rituals and practices are performed during rice field cultivation to honor her; indeed, Dewi Sri is widely recognized as the Goddess of Fertility.

The Ngendag Memacul Ritual

The word *ngendag* derives from the root endag, meaning "to rise" or "to emerge" (Kersten, 1980). In some locations, this ritual is referred to as *ngendagin.* The ngendag memacul ritual marks the commencement of hoeing the rice field; it involves symbolically turning the soil at the hulu sawah (the head or upstream end of the field) three times, accompanied by the recitation of a mantra Om Bhatari Sri Wastu ya nama Svaha by the farmer as a supplication to Dewi Sri. This ritual and mantra demonstrate the community's and specifically the farmers' respect for God's creation. Suaka (2013) notes that, according to enduring cultural myths, Dewi Sri is believed to be the origin of the rice plant.

Sartini (2017) explains that the mantra recited when beginning to hoe (*ngawit numberg*) serves as a symbolic element of agricultural ritual communication in Bali. It embodies both veneration and a request for permission addressed to Mother Earth (*Ibu Pertiwi*), seeking safety and well-being in the work being undertaken. Thus, the beliefs embedded in the *ngendag* memacul ritual and mantra represent an application of the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy specifically the aspect concerning the relationship between humans and Almighty God (*parahyangan)*. Donder (2004) states that the *Tri Hita Karana* concept rooted in Hindu teachings has long been applied, particularly in Bali; consequently, the framework used to organize the island is a Hindu one. It is no exaggeration to describe Bali as a Hindu island, the "Island of a Thousand Temples," and the "Island of the Gods." The Tri Hita Karana concept fosters harmonious relationships between humans and God (Parahyangan), among humans themselves (Pawongan), and between humans and the environment (Palemahan). These three relationships symbolize a balance established by humans across both vertical and horizontal dimensions.

Furthermore, Atmadja (2010) explains that the close bond between humans and nature is far from ordinary. He posits that the human being is a microcosm, while the universe is the macrocosm. If the sustainability of the macrocosm is compromised, it significantly impacts the survival of the human microcosm. Given this intimate connection between the human body and the natural environment, it is natural that both Hinduism and traditional Balinese wisdom mandate that the Balinese people in particular live in harmony with nature. This idea is explicitly articulated in the Sarasamuccaya, which asserts that humans have a duty to ensure the well-being of the universe (bhuta hita). This is because universal well-being upholds the ultimate goals of human life: dharma (righteousness), artha (prosperity), kama (desire/fulfillment), and moksa (liberation). If nature is left unprotected, human well-being becomes difficult to achieve, leading instead to abhuta hita (a state of disharmony or suffering for the universe).

Ngurit Ceremony

This ceremony is performed for the sowing of seeds. It utilizes offerings (banten) such as *nasi kojongan* (conical rice packets), *pucuk bang* (red hibiscus) flowers, and segehan putih kuning (white and yellow rice offerings) placed in the rice fields (pengalapan). These offerings, dedicated to Mother Earth (Ibu Pertiwi), are part of a ritual where specific actions and activities hold deep symbolic meaning for the farmers. The symbolic meaning inherent in the *Ngurit ritual* is a supplication for blessings and protection from the Sun God (Dewa Surya) and Mother Earth (Ibu Pertiwi) as farmers prepare to sow their seeds (Sartini, 2017).

Abdul Hafid and Raodah (2019) state that, generally, every symbol used in a ritual holds a specific meaning or significance linked to the mindset of the community that practices it. Furthermore, Geertz (1992) notes that the symbols present in a society's life reveal how its members perceive, feel about, and conceptualize their world, and how they act in accordance with relevant values.

Nandur Ceremony

Sartini (2017) explains that *Nandur* a rice-planting ritual is performed prior to the commencement of planting, accompanied by specific offerings. The *Nandur* ritual marks the beginning of the rice-planting process. According to the Aci-aci Subak guidelines, the offerings presented during this ritual include white porridge (*bubuh putih*), *canang, cau petik, cau mumbul,*

penyeneng, pebersihan, banten danan, and *kayu penyugjug* (dapdap wood), andong, puring wood, sisih wood, temen wood). These offerings contain symbols linked to the traditions and beliefs of Balinese farming communities. Regarding symbolism, Herusatoto (2000) posits that the use of symbols in ceremonial practices is carried out with a high level of awareness, understanding, and deep appreciation values upheld traditionally from one generation to the next.

Ngadegang Dewa Nini Ritual

As noted by Sartini (2017), the *Ngadegang Dewa Nini* ceremony involves creating a symbol of Dewi Sri (Nini) from rice stalks, consisting of a Lanang (male) figure made of 108 *badih* (sheaves) and an *Istri* (female) figure made of 54 badih. This ritual utilizes a substantial array of offerings, including: *sesayut pengambian, dapetan, peras penyeneng* with three jinah bolong (ancient Chinese coins) as sesari (ritual payment), tumpeng guru, sesayut ardhanareswari, sodan putih kuning (white and yellow rice offerings), *payasan asoroh* (ceremonial attire/ornaments), rantasan (fabric for ritual clothing), naceb sanggah (erecting a shrine), and a penjor adorned with hanging palawija (secondary crops).

These offerings are dedicated to the deities residing at Besakih Temple. Each element holds meaning and symbolism connected to the beliefs and traditions of the Balinese people a society that is deeply religious and devoted to customary traditions and culture. In this context, McKean (cited in Geriya 2000; Suwardani 2015) describes how Bali is renowned as a highly traditional island, yet in reality, it is also very modern when compared to other regions in Indonesia. Evidence of this can be found in the *Dewi Nini ceremony*; Dewi Nini a manifestation of Dewi Sri in Balinese belief is the goddess who bestows life, a figure honored as farming communities express gratitude and thanksgiving for abundant harvests.

Ngampung (Manyi) Ritual

This is a ritual performed at the time of harvest, utilizing yellow rice, egg yolks, and yellow flowers. The yellow color in this offering represents the hue of ripening rice, signifying that the crop is ready for harvest.

Supanto et al. (1992) state that traditional rituals or ceremonies are an integral part of the culture of the communities that practice them, serving to reinforce the norms and values prevailing within that society. This is because one of the functions of traditional ceremonies is to strengthen existing cultural norms and values. These norms and values are symbolically expressed through the performance of ceremonies conducted with great solemnity by the community which foster a sense of security among the local people and serve as a guide for their daily attitudes and behaviors.

According to Sartini (2017), an interesting aspect of this process is that prior to the harvest (manyi), a mecaru ritual must be performed beneath the sanggah penanduran (a shrine dedicated to the planting phase). This involves a series of offerings such as jaja kukus maunti (steamed cakes), pisang sasih nasak (ripe bananas), and red, white, and yellow rice placed in five takir (leaf containers) dedicated to spirits such as Sedahan Be Julit, Sedahan Yuyu (crab), Juru Tumbuk, and Sedahan Padi. The purpose is to seek safety and ensure the harvest proceeds without interference. The ritual is rich in symbolism that holds profound meaning for the Balinese people.

Ngerasakin Ritual

This ceremony, known as the "tax-paying" ceremony, marks the final stage in the sequence of rituals associated with wet-rice farming; it serves as an expression of the farmers' gratitude to God for a successful harvest. The ceremony involves various offerings, such as chickens, ducks, or a whole roasted pig (babi guling). Symbolically, the ritual represents an act of devotion to God specifically to Dewi Sri, Dewi Uma, and their attendants in appreciation of the blessings bestowed and the successful harvest achieved. Abdul Hafid and Raodah (2019) state that offerings consisting of various types of food symbolize gratitude for the blessings of God Almighty, while also serving as a feast presented to supernatural beings and their ancestors.

NOVELTIES

1. Rituals as more than religious practice: The local rituals are presented not only as spiritual traditions, but also as practical systems that support farming communities.
2. Cultural value as development potential: The text highlights that when cultural practices are studied deeply, their embedded values can be identified and used to support broader social and economic development.
3. Human-nature relationship in agricultural ritual: The rituals express a strong connection between humans, society, and nature, showing that agriculture is shaped by cultural and ecological relationships.
4. Tourism potential of local traditions: Ritual-based agricultural traditions are described as having unique appeal that can attract tourists, especially because of their distinct cultural meaning.
5. Bali's cultural as a comparative model: The text introduces Bali's cultural system as an example of a well-organized traditional irrigation and farming institution that has survived for centuries, suggesting it may serve as a reference point for understanding or improving local practices elsewhere.
6. Comparative insight for Timor-Leste: The comparison with Timor-Leste implies that local rice-harvest rituals in Kotamutu Village have cultural significance that can be analyzed alongside Bali's cultural to reveal differences in organization, resilience, and cultural function.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the wet-rice harvest rituals in Kotamutu Village, several conclusions can be drawn: all the harvest rituals namely *Punehe Faana*, *Ale Kuelasi, Ale sa'e Ti'ala*, *Ale liri*, *Ale topana*, and *Piti pane* possess symbolic meanings deeply rooted in the local beliefs and culture of Kotamutu Village. Key meanings derived from these rituals include seeking permission from ancestors and the guardians of the earth, praying for safety, and expressing gratitude and appreciation to those same ancestors and guardians. These rituals demonstrate that the community of Kotamutu Village upholds cultural values that foster harmony both among community members and in their relationship with their ancestors.

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