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Food Dishes in the *Nyangahant* Ritual as Symbols of Nonverbal Communication in the Salako Community of Pueh Village, Lundu, Sarawak

Alexander Anak Chelum^{1,2}, Mohamad Maulana Magiman¹,
Chan Siaw Leng¹, Franklin Ragai Kundat³

¹Fakulti Kemanusiaan, Pengurusan dan Sains, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Kampus Bintulu Sarawak, ²Fakulti Seni Gunaan dan Kreatif, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), ³Fakulti Sains Pertanian dan Perhutanan, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Kampus Bintulu Sarawak.

Email: peterchelum@gmail.com, mdmaulana@upm.edu.my, chansiawleng@upm.edu.my, calexander@unimas.my, franklin@upm.edu.my

Corresponding Author's Email: mdmaulana@upm.edu.my

Abstract

For the Salako people in Kampung Pueh, Lundu, Sarawak, the *Nyangahant* ritual is a very meaningful ceremony. It is an offering and prayer dedicated to *Jubata*, their God, for help in times of trouble, protection from threats and calamities, blessings, fertility, and wealth. The presenting of food as an offering to *Jubata* is an important part of the ceremony. This study used theoretical semiotics, which focuses on deciphering food's meaning in nonverbal communication, to comprehend the relevance of food symbols in the *Nyangahant* ceremony. As part of an anthropological study, the researcher actively participated in the ritual ceremony and conducted interviews with *Tuha Adat* and ritual practitioners. The research uncovered the profound meaning associated with *Jubata's* meals. The food on the *Buis* tray carried numerous connotations due to its shape, colour, and processing method. It served as an icebreaker for conversations, symbolised masculinity and traditional Salako men's cuisine, represented purity and femininity, symbolised the blessings of the upcoming harvest, fostered bonding and friendship, ensured safety, served as sacrifices, and strengthened the spiritual connection. These discoveries shed light on the deep symbolism and cultural significance of food in the *Nyangahant* ritual. Understanding the deeper connotations associated with food offerings allows the Salako community to strengthen their spiritual connection with *Jubata* while also preserving cultural customs. Furthermore, this study lays the groundwork for future research by recommending that other components of the *Nyangahant* ritual be investigated in order to acquire a thorough understanding of its wider cultural context and significance.

Keywords: Symbols, Rituals, Food, Nyangahant Ritual, Salako