

From Ritual Protection to Public Sociability: Meaning Transformation in Mempawah's Robo-Robo Tradition

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the transformation of meaning in the Robo-robo tradition of the Mempawah community, from an initial orientation toward “village safety” through prayers and ritual processions into a broader social meaning that includes community interaction, entertainment, and the economic activation of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The research employed a qualitative approach with ethnographic orientation, using participatory observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and visual documentation as the main techniques of data collection. The findings show that Robo-robo is attended not only as a ritual obligation but also as a social arena for networking, collective leisure, and economic exchange, particularly through MSME participation during the event. Although the core ritual elements remain performed, their significance has shifted and expanded, becoming more adaptive to contemporary socio-economic needs. Theoretically, this study implies that tradition should not be understood as a fixed cultural residue, but as a living social institution capable of refunctionalizing ritual practices into multi-purpose public spaces where sacred legitimacy, social cohesion, and economic productivity coexist and reinforce one another.

Keywords: *Robo-robo, shifting meaning, village safety, social meaning, local tradition.*

Introduction

Across global scholarship, the study of ritual and tradition has long been contested between two major perspectives.¹ One strand of scholarship tends to treat ritual as a relatively stable system of symbolic meaning that maintains collective order, continuity, and sacred legitimacy.² Another strand, however, emphasizes ritual as a dynamic social field—an arena in which meanings are continuously negotiated, refunctionalized, and even redirected to

¹ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford University Press, 1991); Sally K. Gallagher, “Building Traditions: Comparing Space, Ritual, and Community in Three Congregations,” *Review of Religious Research* 47, no. 1 (2005): 70–85, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4148281>.

² Ursula Rao, “Ritual in Society,” in *Theorizing Rituals, Volume 1: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts* (Brill, 2006), 143–60, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410775_008; Angelos Chaniotis, *Ritual Dynamics in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.25162/9783515133104>.

respond to changing social structures, political interests, and economic pressures.³ This debate becomes increasingly relevant in contemporary societies where traditions are no longer confined to sacred functions but often intersect with public sociability, identity politics, and local economic activities. In this context, local rituals are not merely “survivals” of the past; rather, they may operate as flexible cultural infrastructures that enable communities to manage pluralism, sustain cohesion, and create new forms of public participation.⁴

The Robo-robo practice in Mempawah offers a crucial empirical case for engaging with this global academic debate. Historically, Robo-robo has been recognized as a tradition closely associated with requests for village safety and collective protection from various dangers through prayers and ritual processions.⁵ Yet in its current form, Robo-robo can no longer be reduced to a spiritual safety ritual. It has increasingly become a public social event involving multiple actors and interests, including local residents, traditional leaders, cross-ethnic communities, youth groups, and local government. The tradition now functions not only as a ritual mechanism of protection but also as a space for social gathering, inter-ethnic togetherness, entertainment, and the consolidation of relationships between the community and formal institutions.⁶ This transformation is important because it demonstrates how ritual continuity can coexist with shifts in function and meaning, without necessarily losing cultural legitimacy or symbolic authority.

The urgency of this research is twofold. Academically, Robo-robo provides a strategic entry point to understand how a local tradition mediates social change in a plural society, particularly in the context of increasing inter-ethnic interaction and the expansion of public space where religion, culture, and civic life intersect.⁷ Practically, the study is important to prevent Robo-robo from being framed merely as a ceremonial agenda or cultural tourism event detached from its social function. Instead, Robo-robo needs to be understood as a living mechanism through which cohesion, solidarity, and social harmony are reproduced amid shifting social realities.⁸

³ Kacy L. Hollenback, “Ritual and Religion,” in *Behavioral Archaeology* (Routledge, 2010); Carolyn Meske et al., “Perceptions of Rituals and Traditions Among Elderly Persons,” *Activities, Adaptation & Aging* 18, no. 2 (April 1994): 13–26, https://doi.org/10.1300/J016v18n02_02.

⁴ Ana S. Iltis, “Ritual as the Creation of Social Reality,” in *Ritual and the Moral Life: Reclaiming the Tradition*, ed. David Solomon, Ruiping Fan, and Ping-cheung Lo (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2012), 17–28, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2756-4_2.

⁵ Haris Firmansyah, Astrini Eka Putri, and Marisah Marisah, “Implementasi Nilai Budaya Robo-Robo Sebagai Penguat Pendidikan Karakter Peserta Didik Di Kabupaten Mempawah,” *Jurnal Basicedu* 5, no. 3 (June 2021): 1658–66, <https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v5i3.962>.

⁶ Ihsan Nurmansyah and Luqmanul Hakim Haris, “PENGUNAAN AYAT-AYAT AL-QUR’AN DALAM TRADISI SALAT ROBO’-ROBO’ DI DESA SELAT REMIS, TELUK PAKEDAI, KUBU RAYA, KALIMANTAN BARAT: ANALISIS SOSIOLOGI PENGETAHUAN,” *Tanzik: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran* 5, no. 1 (October 2022): 87–100, <https://doi.org/10.20871/tjsq.v5i1.230>.

⁷ Nurhana Azizah, AureL Maynanda, and Usman Radiana, “PENYEBARAN BUDAYA ROBO-ROBO DARI KERAJAAN AMANTUBILLAH MEMPAWAH HINGGA MENJADI POTENSI WISATA DI KABUPATEN SINTANG,” *Jurnal Budaya Nusantara* 6, no. 1 (June 2023): 240–46, <https://doi.org/10.36456/JBN.vol6.no1.6974>.

⁸ Marisah Marisah, Agus Sastrawan Noor, and Haris Firmansyah, “MAKNA DAN NILAI TRADISI ROBO-ROBO SEBAGAI PELESTARIAN BUDAYA LOKAL PADA MASYARAT KABUPATEN MEMPAWAH,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Khatulistiwa (JPPK)* 10, no. 1 (January 2021): 41–48, <https://doi.org/10.26418/jppk.v10i1.44180>.

Previous studies on communal rituals show that practices once centered on spiritual protection often expand into broader social functions. For example, moves beyond expelling negative forces and becomes a collective procession that strengthens unity.⁹ Likewise, the Wildlife Release ritual increasingly operates as a public event promoting conservation awareness.¹⁰ Makan Safar and Ziarah Akbar also extend beyond blessing and ancestor prayers into arenas of bonding and identity formation.¹¹ In the case of Robo-robo, existing research has examined it through local cultural studies, Mempawah Sultanate history, and symbolic interpretations of coastal rituals in West Kalimantan. These works generally portray Robo-robo as a spiritually rich heritage tradition linked to prayers for safety and respect for ancestors.¹² However, they remain largely normative and descriptive, paying limited attention to how Robo-robo is experienced, reinterpreted, and strategically used in contemporary everyday life. This leaves a research gap in explaining the social mechanisms behind its transformation into a space for cross-ethnic interaction, intergenerational participation, and institutional engagement.¹³

This is the core research gap addressed in this study. There remains limited scholarly attention to Robo-robo as a transforming social arena: how participation patterns change, how motivations diversify beyond ritual obligation, and how the meaning of “village safety” expands into social meanings related to togetherness, solidarity, and integration. More importantly, existing literature rarely offers an analytical explanation of why and how this shift occurs through concrete social processes, such as the enlargement of public involvement, the emergence of multi-actor interests, and the growing need for shared space in a plural community.¹⁴

Therefore, this study aims to examine Robo-robo through an approach that is more closely grounded in the social experiences of the Mempawah community. Specifically, it investigates how the meaning of village safety—previously centered on ritual and spiritual protection—has shifted into a broader social meaning in contemporary practice. By exploring the perspectives of traditional practitioners, customary elites, cross-ethnic residents, and younger generations, this study seeks to capture not only the ritual symbols and processions but also the social processes that sustain them. In doing so, the study

⁹ Jane Monnig Atkinson, “The Effectiveness of Shamans in an Indonesian Ritual,” *American Anthropologist* 89, no. 2 (1987): 342–55, <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1987.89.2.02a00040>.

¹⁰ Govindasamy Agoramoorthy and Minna J. Hsu, “Ritual Releasing of Wild Animals Threatens Island Ecology,” *Human Ecology* 35, no. 2 (April 2007): 251–54, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10745-006-9068-3>.

¹¹ Helmy Faizi Bahrul Ulumi, *Sinkretisme dalam Tradisi Ziarah Keramat di Banten* (Penerbit A-Empat, 2024).

¹² Dr Beti Yanuri Posha M.Hum, *Sejarah Mempawah (Kerajaan dan Dinamika Tradisi Robo-Robo)* (CV Jejak (Jejak Publisher), 2022).

¹³ Reimar Schefold, “Three Sources of Ritual Blessings in Traditional Indonesian Societies,” *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 157, no. 2 (2001): 359–81.

¹⁴ DINAS PENGENDALIAN PENDUDUK DAN KELUARGA BERENCANA, PEMERINTAHAN PEREMPUAN DAN PERLINDUNGAN ANAK KOTA PONTIANAK, “Acara Robo Robo Adalah Salah Satu Warisan Budaya Indonesia,” 2022, <https://dppkbpppa.pontianak.go.id>; DINAS KEPENDUDUKAN DAN PENCATATAN SIPIL, “Robo-Robo Kabupaten Mempawah Tahun 2024 serta Perpisahan Purna Tugas Bapak Punali,” <https://dukcapil.mempawahkab.go.id/>, accessed January 23, 2026, <https://dukcapil.mempawahkab.go.id/detail/robo-robo-kabupaten-mempawah-tahun-2024-serta-perpisahan-purna-tugas-bapak-punali>.

highlights how interaction, participation, and community relations are produced and negotiated through Robo-robo in present-day Mempawah.

The novelty of this study lies in its analytical framing of Robo-robo not simply as ritual continuity, but as a process of meaning transformation and social refunctionalization. It argues that the tradition functions as a cultural platform where sacred legitimacy, public sociability, and social integration are negotiated simultaneously. Through this perspective, Robo-robo can be understood as a dynamic institution that not only preserves symbolic heritage but also adapts to pluralism and contemporary needs. Ultimately, this study contributes to a broader theoretical understanding of how ritual traditions survive not because their meanings remain unchanged, but because they acquire new social functions that keep them relevant, multi-purpose, and socially productive.

Method

This study seeks to understand the practice of Robo-robo by observing it closely, as it is practiced by the Mempawah community. The method used aims to answer three main questions: what the community actually understands from Robo-robo today, why the meaning of village safety has begun to change, and how this change in meaning occurs in their social lives. The focus of the research is directed at the Robo-robo event as a real event involving many people, as well as the individuals and groups directly involved in it, such as traditional leaders, village residents, and the younger generation. This study does not place formal institutions or organizations as the center of study, but rather views them as part of the social background that influences the course of the tradition. By observing the interactions, conversations, and experiences of the community during Robo-robo, this study seeks to fully describe how the meaning of village safety is slowly transforming into a social meaning that is felt and lived together by the Mempawah community.¹⁵

This research was designed as a qualitative study, because its main objective was not to count or measure the phenomenon, but rather to understand the meaning behind the Robo-robo practice as experienced by the Mempawah community. A qualitative approach was chosen so that researchers could answer the questions of what, why, and how the shift in the meaning of village safety occurred in the community's social life. This research area is descriptive-interpretive, where researchers were directly involved in observing the implementation of Robo-robo, listening to community stories and views, and interpreting their experiences in depth.¹⁶ Data were obtained through direct observation, interviews with traditional leaders and residents, and tracing stories and practices that developed in the community. With this Regionalin, the research is expected to be able to describe the process

¹⁵ Wahyudin Darmalaksana, "Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Studi Pustaka Dan Studi Lapangan," *Pre-Print Digital Library UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung*, 2020, <http://digilib.uinsgd.ac.id/id/eprint/32855>.

¹⁶ Brigitte Smit and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, "Observations in Qualitative Inquiry: When What You See Is Not What You See," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 17, no. 1 (December 2018): 1609406918816766, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918816766>.

of changing the meaning of Robo-robo in its entirety, not as numbers or statistical variables, but as a living and meaningful social experience for the Mempawah community.¹⁷

The data in this study were obtained from various sources to provide a more comprehensive picture of the Robo-robo practice. The primary data sources came from people directly involved in the Robo-robo practice, such as traditional leaders, village residents, and young people who participate in the tradition. From them, researchers heard stories, experiences, and perspectives about Robo-robo, from the reasons why this tradition is still practiced to how it is perceived today.¹⁸ Furthermore, this study also utilized written materials as supporting data, such as local history books, scientific papers, newspaper articles, and online news outlets discussing Robo-robo and Mempawah culture. Photos, video recordings, and other visual documentation were also utilized to help understand the atmosphere and process of Robo-robo practice. By combining oral, written, and visual documentation, this study seeks to capture the practice of Robo-robo as a living and meaningful tradition in the lives of the Mempawah community.¹⁹

Data collection in this study was conducted in stages and closely connected to the community. Researchers first visited and participated directly in Robo-robo activities to observe the proceedings, see who was involved, and observe how people interacted with each other. Afterward, they engaged with the community through interviews, which were more conversational in nature than a formal Q&A session. The interview guide served only as a guide to keep the discussion focused, while informants were given space to share their experiences. In addition to interviews, researchers also engaged in casual dialogue in everyday situations, such as during preparation for an event or after Robo-robo concluded, to capture more candid and natural perspectives. On several occasions, small group discussions were also held to explore how the meaning of Robo-robo was discussed and understood collectively by the community. Through these methods, researchers sought to understand firsthand what was happening, why it was important to the community, and how the meaning of Robo-robo had changed in their social lives.²⁰

In this research, the data analysis process was carried out slowly and iteratively, while the researchers continued to reflect on what they saw and heard in the field. After returning from Robo-robo activities or after speaking with the community, the researchers reviewed their notes and re-listened to the interview recordings to capture the essence of the stories conveyed. From there, the researchers began to notice certain patterns, such as how people talked about village safety, togetherness, or their reasons for participating in Robo-robo. Stories with similar meanings were then grouped, compared to each other, and their contexts understood. This process was carried out continuously, not in one go, until the researchers

¹⁷ SJ Agius, “Qualitative Research: Its Value and Applicability,” *The Psychiatrist*, no. Query date: 2025-06-18 05:14:19 (2013), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-psychiatrist/article/qualitative-research-its-value-and-applicability/51B8A4C008278BA4BA8F518060ED643C>.

¹⁸ Carl Auerbach and Louise B. Silverstein, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (NYU Press, 2003).

¹⁹ G Allan, “Qualitative Research,” *Handbook for Research Students in the Social Sciences*, no. Query date: 2025-06-18 05:14:19 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003070993-18>.

²⁰ AM Ambert et al., “Understanding and Evaluating Qualitative Research,” *Journal of Marriage and the ...*, no. Query date: 2025-06-18 05:14:19 (1995), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/353409>.

felt they truly understood how the changing meaning of Robo-robo occurred. Ultimately, all these findings were woven into a coherent research narrative, allowing readers to clearly see how Robo-robo is not only interpreted as a safety ritual, but also as a vibrant social space for the Mempawah community.

Result

Field observations reveal that many people attend Robo-robo not out of fear of disaster if they don't participate, but rather because Robo-robo is now understood as a space for entertainment and community economic activity. Residents come to enjoy the performances, the crowds, and the festive atmosphere rarely encountered in their daily lives. Throughout the Robo-robo event, the presence of MSME stalls becomes a special attraction, both for vendors and visitors. People stroll, buy food, chat while enjoying the entertainment, and spend time with family. In this context, Robo-robo functions not only as a traditional ritual, but also as a social recreation event and a driver of the local economy. This change in community attendance patterns demonstrates that the meaning of village safety has shifted and is understood more socially, namely as the creation of a safe, lively, and beneficial atmosphere for the communal life of the Mempawah community.

Based on field observations and interviews, the current practice of Robo-robo in Mempawah demonstrates a shift in how the community interprets the tradition. Robo-robo is no longer understood solely as a village safety ritual, but also as a social space that provides entertainment and economic activity for the community. The large number of visitors, the large number of small traders and MSMEs, and the presence of entertainment have made Robo-robo a popular family recreation event. This was expressed by one resident who stated, *"Now Robo-robo is more of a lively event, lots of people selling things, so it's a fun way to hang out with the family."* Another statement stated, *"When there's Robo-robo, the kids are happy, they can watch the entertainment and buy snacks."* This quote suggests that community participation is driven more by social appeal and entertainment than by ritual motivation alone.

In addition, Robo-robo also serves as a means of strengthening social relations between residents. During the activity, people were seen greeting each other, gathering, and spending time together. One informant said, *"When Robo-robo, the village comes alive, we can meet lots of people."* Although elements of the village safety ritual are still carried out, not all residents participate in the entire series of rituals, but still feel part of Robo-robo through their presence and social interactions. This shows that the meaning of village safety has shifted, from what was previously interpreted in a spiritual-ritual sense to a broader social meaning, namely the condition of the village.

The findings of this study indicate that the Mempawah community now understands Robo-robo differently than in the past. While Robo-robo is still recognized as a village safety tradition, in practice, people no longer attend solely for ritual reasons. Many residents attend to experience the lively atmosphere, enjoy the entertainment, and spend time with family and loved ones.

It's clear from the field that Robo-robo is a moment when the village comes alive. People gather, greet each other, chat casually, and children enjoy the atmosphere. The presence of vendors and MSMEs also makes the event even more engaging, as in addition

to gathering, people can shop and enjoy various snacks. Although traditional processions still take place, not all residents participate fully. However, they still feel like they're participating in Robo-robo because they are present and part of the festivities.

With this perspective, the meaning of village safety shifts. Safety is no longer understood solely as protection from danger or disaster, but also as a sense of security due to a bustling village, strong relationships between residents, and a warm social atmosphere. Robo-robo has become a shared space that not only preserves tradition but also addresses the current social and economic needs of the Mempawah community.

From observations and interviews, it appears that the current Robo-robo practice in Mempawah exhibits several prominent trends. First, Robo-robo is increasingly understood as a social and entertainment space. Many residents attend to enjoy the festive atmosphere, sit with family, or simply meet friends and neighbors they rarely see. Children play, parents chat, and the bustle brings the village to life. These activities demonstrate that Robo-robo now serves as a much-anticipated moment of togetherness and recreation for the community, rather than simply a traditional ritual.

Second, the presence of small traders and MSMEs is a crucial part of the event. Residents take advantage of this opportunity to purchase food, drinks, and local products, while vendors can market their wares. This economic activity makes Robo-robo not only a cultural tradition but also a means of boosting the local economy and empowering the community. Third, the meaning of village safety has shifted. Previously, communities emphasized rituals and prayers to protect the village from danger. Now, safety is also understood in a social context: a bustling, safe, harmonious, and interconnected village. The presence of residents, interactions, and crowds are tangible indicators of this social sense of safety. Fourth, although elements of traditional rituals remain, community participation is now more flexible. Not everyone participates in the entire procession, but they still feel a part of Robo-robo through their presence and interaction. This demonstrates that traditions can adapt to the social needs of today's society, preserving cultural values while adapting to the more dynamic nature of everyday life.

Taken together, these patterns demonstrate the shift in meaning of Robo-robo from a village safety ritual to a social practice that unites entertainment, economics, and community togetherness. This tradition now not only preserves cultural heritage but also creates a vibrant and beneficial social space for the people of Mempawah. The research results show that the Robo-robo practice in Mempawah has shifted in meaning from a village safety ritual to a broader social one. Observations and interviews revealed that many people attend not only for ritual purposes but also to enjoy entertainment, shop, and gather with family and neighbors. Children play, parents chat, and residents who rarely see each other can reunite. This lively and festive atmosphere demonstrates that Robo-robo has now become a much-anticipated moment of togetherness and recreation for the community.

Overall, these observations confirm a shift in the meaning of Robo-robo. Village safety is no longer understood solely as spiritual protection, but also as a social condition in which the village feels vibrant, safe, harmonious, and provides opportunities for social interaction and economic activity. This tradition now serves a dual purpose: it honors

traditional rituals while also serving as a vibrant and beneficial social space for the Mempawah community.

Table 1. Table of Findings: Meaning Shift in Robo-robo

Dimension	Earlier Meaning (Protective Ritual)	Contemporary Meaning (Social Function)	Field Indicators	Direct Interview Quote
Participation motive	Avoiding misfortune, seeking spiritual protection	Leisure, enjoyment, family recreation	Attendance motivated by entertainment and crowd atmosphere	“Now Robo-robo is more of a lively event...”
Main attraction	Ritual prayer and procession	Festive atmosphere, performances, social gathering	People come to watch performances and spend time together	“When there's Robo-robo, the kids are happy...”
Economic role	Secondary or marginal	Central driver of participation and attraction	MSME stalls and vendors become a major event component	“lots of people selling things...”
Social interaction	Unity expressed mainly through ritual participation	Networking, reunion, everyday social bonding	Greeting, chatting, meeting people rarely seen	“the village comes alive, we can meet lots of people”
Meaning of “village safety”	Protection from danger/disaster	Social comfort, harmony, and liveliness	Safety linked to togetherness and a positive public space	Supported indirectly by all quotes
Mode of participation	Full ritual compliance	Flexible engagement	Some residents attend without joining all ritual sequences	(Need transcript quote)

Based on observations, interviews, and data visualization analysis, the Robo-robo practice in Mempawah now displays a shift in meaning from a village safety ritual to a broader social meaning. Visually, researchers observed crowds of residents arriving with their families, children playing around the location, and adults sitting and chatting while enjoying the atmosphere. Rows of small traders and MSMEs added color to the event by selling various foods, drinks, and local products. The entertainment stage also took center stage, adding to the festive and enjoyable impression. This data is reinforced by an observation matrix that shows the patterns of resident attendance, economic activities, and social interactions that occur simultaneously.

Interview results confirmed these visual findings. Many residents stated that they attended not because of ritual obligations, but because they wanted to enjoy entertainment and social interaction. One informant said, "When it's Robo-robo, it's crowded, the kids are happy, they can buy snacks, and meet neighbors and old friends." Another informant added, "If the event is orderly, it's fun to participate, so you can relax and chat." This quote shows

that the community interprets Robo-robo as a moment of togetherness, entertainment, and a space to strengthen social relations, while still respecting the ritual procession.

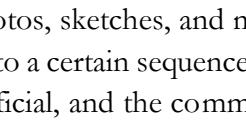
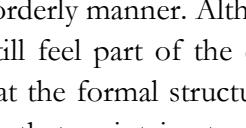
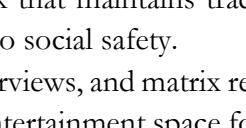
Observation Matrix of Robo-robo in Mempawah				
Observed Aspect	Field Findings / Visual Data	Residents' Quotes	Interpretation / Social Meaning	
Resident Attendance	Crowded, families come, children play	<i>"During Robo-robo, it's lively, the kids are happy, we can buy snacks, and we can also meet neighbors and old friends."</i>	Social space and entertainment	  
Economic Activities	Many MSME vendors, snacks, food	<i>"Many people sell things, so we can also take a walk around with the family."</i>		 
Formal Ritual / Procession	Opening by traditional leaders / officials, procession follows the order	<i>"If the event is orderly, it feels good to join, we can relax while chatting."</i>		
Social Interaction	Residents greet each other, sit together, have casual conversations		Togetherness & comfort	
Meaning Transformation	Safety is understood as a lively and harmonious village	—	Social and economic meaning	

Figure 1. Observation Matrix of Robo-robo

In terms of formality, data visualization in the form of photos, sketches, and matrix tables shows that the ritual procession is still carried out according to a certain sequence. The event opens with a speech from a traditional figure or regional official, and the community is aware of the sequence of activities, so the event proceeds in an orderly manner. Although not all residents participate in the entire series of rituals, they still feel part of the event through their presence and social participation. This confirms that the formal structure in Robo-robo is not merely a symbol, but functions as a framework that maintains tradition while providing space for the shift in meaning from village safety to social safety.

Overall, the interpretation of the combined visual data, interviews, and matrix reveals four important things: first, Robo-robo has become a social and entertainment space for the community; second, economic activities through MSMEs have become an important part of the event; third, the meaning of village safety has shifted from spiritual protection to a safe and harmonious social condition; fourth, rituals are still carried out but community participation is more flexible, adapting to their needs and convenience. This shift shows how traditions can survive, adapt to the modern socio-economic context, and still maintain cultural values.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that Robo-robo in Mempawah can no longer be understood merely as a protective ritual oriented toward village safety in a strictly spiritual sense. Contemporary participation is increasingly shaped by social enjoyment, entertainment, and local economic activities. Families attend together, children play freely, adults socialize, and residents who rarely meet in everyday routines reconnect during the event. This indicates

that Robo-robo has become a highly anticipated moment of togetherness that provides both social experience and economic opportunity for the community.

This transformation can be interpreted through Émile Durkheim's perspective on ritual as a mechanism of social solidarity. Durkheim argues that collective rituals generate emotional energy and reinforce a shared moral community through what is often described as collective effervescence.²¹ In Robo-robo, this collective emotional intensity does not emerge exclusively from prayers and formal processions, but also from the crowd, shared excitement, and communal interaction that fills the public space. As such, "village safety" is increasingly experienced not only as metaphysical protection but as a socially embodied condition in which the village feels alive, connected, and orderly through collective presence.

Victor Turner's framework further clarifies why Robo-robo becomes socially meaningful beyond its formal ritual structure. Turner emphasizes the liminal nature of ritual events, in which ordinary routines are temporarily suspended and participants enter a transitional space that can generate *communitas*, a form of intensified togetherness and egalitarian bonding.²² Robo-robo functions as a yearly liminal moment that enables residents to cross everyday boundaries of distance, busyness, and even social segmentation, producing an atmosphere where collective identity is renewed through presence, interaction, and shared enjoyment. The gathering itself becomes a social achievement that strengthens cohesion, not only through symbolic ritual acts, but also through everyday practices such as chatting, walking together, and spending leisure time as a community.

At the same time, the growing prominence of MSMEs and informal trade demonstrates that Robo-robo is not simply a ritual event that "accidentally" includes economic activities, but rather a public arena where social and economic life become integrated. This aligns with the perspective of ritual economy, which views ritual events as spaces where symbolic life and material circulation are intertwined. Food stalls and local products attract visitors and encourage participation, allowing economic transactions to function as part of the event's social texture. Importantly, this does not automatically mean that the ritual loses legitimacy; instead, the tradition becomes socially sustainable because it accommodates contemporary needs and interests.²³

The shift also resonates with Catherine Bell's concept of ritualization, which highlights how rituals are socially produced through strategies of ordering, repetition, authority, and embodied participation. Robo-robo remains formally opened by traditional leaders and officials, and ritual elements are still maintained, yet participation has become more flexible. Not all residents follow the entire ritual sequence, but they still feel involved through attendance and social interaction. This flexibility suggests that ritual authority and symbolic

²¹ Emile Durkheim, "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life," in *Social Theory Re-Wired*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2016).

²² Victor Turner, "Process, System, and Symbol: A New Anthropological Synthesis," *Daedalus* 106, no. 3 (1977): 61–80.

²³ Aditya Ferdy Pratama, Yohannes Bahari, and Hadi Wiyono, "Social Solidarity the Robo-Robo Tradition," *ICoCSE Proceedings* 1, no. 0 (December 2024): 177–86.

continuity are preserved while the meaning of participation is increasingly negotiated within contemporary social life.²⁴

From Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, Robo-robo can be understood as a social field where different forms of capital are produced, displayed, and converted. Traditional leaders maintain and reaffirm symbolic capital through ceremonial authority, while local government actors may gain political legitimacy through visible engagement with community traditions.²⁵ Meanwhile, MSMEs convert social capital and crowd-based visibility into economic capital through sales and market access. For many residents, attending Robo-robo is also a way of reproducing belonging and social recognition, reaffirming one's position as part of the local community. This explains why participation remains high even when the ritual motivation becomes less dominant: Robo-robo now offers multiple benefits that circulate across social, symbolic, and economic domains.

In comparison to earlier studies, these findings both confirm and expand existing scholarship. Like previous research, Robo-robo remains a heritage tradition with formal processions and preserved ritual values, often interpreted as a collective prayer for safety and an expression of respect for ancestors. However, this study demonstrates a key difference that has not been adequately developed in prior literature: the meaning of village safety is shifting into a broader social meaning, where participation is increasingly driven by social gathering, entertainment, and economic engagement through MSMEs. The novelty of this research lies in showing that Robo-robo's continuity is sustained not through static meanings, but through a process of refunctionalization, where ritual legitimacy remains intact while the tradition adapts to contemporary socio-economic needs and plural social realities.

Despite its positive functions, this transformation also raises potential challenges. A stronger emphasis on entertainment and economic attraction may lead some participants to experience a thinner engagement with ritual values, where attendance becomes primarily recreational. Increased crowds also create practical pressures related to event management, security, waste control, and environmental sustainability. These challenges do not necessarily indicate cultural decline, but they highlight the need for governance strategies that protect ritual integrity while managing socio-economic growth responsibly.

In response, an integrated support program for Robo-robo becomes a realistic and constructive recommendation. Local government and traditional leaders can maintain the ceremonial structure and ethical orientation of the ritual while organizing the event flow to ensure safety, order, and comfort. At the same time, MSMEs can be supported through regulated spaces and facilities, allowing economic empowerment to develop without disrupting core ritual practices. Community education initiatives may also help sustain awareness that Robo-robo is not merely a festive agenda, but a cultural mechanism for cohesion, identity, and collective wellbeing.

Theoretical Contribution. This study advances a broader theoretical understanding by conceptualizing Robo-robo as a “ritual public space”, a hybrid arena where ritual legitimacy,

²⁴ Ressy Rustanuarsi, “Systematic Literature Review: Exploration of Ethnomathematics on Malay Culture in West Kalimantan,” *Proceeding International Conference on Education*, October 28, 2025, 627–39.

²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, “Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction,” in *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change* (Routledge, 1973).

social bonding, and everyday interests converge within a single communal event. Drawing on Durkheim, Robo-robo generates collective solidarity through shared emotional intensity, in which safety is produced not only by prayer but also by the lived experience of being together in a socially vibrant environment. Through Turner's lens, Robo-robo functions as a liminal social space that cultivates *communitas*, enabling intensified interaction across generations and social groups beyond ordinary routines. At the same time, following Bourdieu, Robo-robo operates as a social field where symbolic, social, and economic capital are negotiated and converted: customary elites reaffirm authority, residents reproduce networks of belonging, and MSMEs transform public sociability into economic opportunities. By integrating these perspectives, Robo-robo is best understood not as a static heritage ritual, but as a dynamic public institution through which communities reproduce cohesion, renegotiate collective meanings, and sustain local livelihoods under contemporary conditions.

Conclusion

The most important lesson from this research is that the Robo-robo tradition in Mempawah is not merely a rigid traditional ritual, but can adapt to the social and economic life of the community. People now assess the safety of their village not only through prayers or ritual processions, but also through togetherness, social interactions, and the economic activities that take place during the event. From this experience, we learn that traditions will remain alive and relevant if there is flexibility and an understanding of the context, thus preserving cultural values while providing real benefits to residents. In essence, Robo-robo proves that local cultures can be modern without losing their identity, as long as they are managed wisely.

The strength of this research lies in its contribution to the scientific understanding of the shift in local traditions. This research not only documents the practice of Robo-robo descriptively, but also highlights the shift in the meaning of village safety into a social meaning involving social interaction, entertainment, and the economic activities of MSMEs. Conceptually, this research introduces a holistic approach that connects ritual, social, and economic activities within a single analytical framework. Furthermore, the research questions proposed open up space for further study on how local traditions can adapt to modern needs, thus providing new contributions in terms of variables, approaches, and scientific perspectives.

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, the focus of the study was limited to the Robo-robo practice in Mempawah, so the findings may not fully represent variations in similar traditions in other regions. Second, data collection was primarily through interviews and field observations, so deeper aspects of individual perceptions or experiences may not have been fully explored. Third, this study emphasizes the socio-economic meaning of Shifting, so detailed ritual or spiritual analysis is still limited. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the scope of the region, add more data collection methods, and explore the spiritual or psychological aspects of the community to achieve a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Shifting traditions.

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