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Art and culture of “Penjor” as media Expression of harvest and religious celebration In Bali Island, Indonesia and its commodification

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Abstract

Various regions and cultures have their own ways of celebrating the harvest. These celebrations are often linked to spiritual or religious beliefs, viewing the harvest as a gift from a supernatural power or from God. Harvest celebrations are also frequently expressed through various artistic forms. This study describes harvest celebrations in Bali, Indonesia, where many residents remain engaged in agriculture and plantation farming. While the island is renowned as a global tourist destination, its people steadfastly maintain their traditions—particularly the practice of erecting penjor during harvest times and major religious festivals, which are deeply rooted in Hinduism. A penjor is crafted from bamboo, with its base and tip curved to mimic the form of the deity of the earth's bounty, the Dragon King (Naga Antaboga). The bamboo is adorned with various palm fronds, such as coconut and sugar palm leaves, and agricultural produce is hung from the structure. These penjor are planted along the roadside in front of the entrance to a household compound. Balinese residents believe the penjor serves as a talisman to attract prosperity; consequently, they craft them with great care to ensure abundant blessings in the future. Over time, the use of penjor has evolved beyond harvest and religious observances; their forms and functions have been commodified for use in various celebrations and festivals unrelated to agriculture or religion. Even in urban areas where residents no longer farm, the tradition persists through the purchase of penjor from commercial vendors—marking a cultural shift from the practice of self-crafting using one's own agricultural produce to commercial acquisition as a means of preserving the tradition.

Keywords: Harvest, celebration, penjor, commodification, Bali, Indonesia

1. Introduction

Success in agricultural and plantation ventures depends on a multitude of factors, ranging from climate, soil quality and condition, seeds, and fertilizers to pests, labor, technology, and political conditions. Consequently, a successful harvest is often celebrated as the fruit of hard work and a divine blessing. Communities across the globe observe various harvest-related cultures and traditions; these celebrations serve multiple purposes, including expressing gratitude to God and hoping for continued success in future harvests. The exploration of indigenous knowledge systems in agriculture marks a paradigm-shifting endeavor, heralding a resurgence of timeless wisdom that forms the bedrock of human existence (Nagal, 2025).

Harvest celebrations across Indonesia vary widely, reflecting the country's archipelago geography and the diverse agricultural produce resulting from differing natural conditions. Some celebrations feature displays of physical strength and athletic contests (Rahman, 2024), while others incorporate traditional music performances (Afdilah et al., 2024). There are also celebrations that combine prayers, artistic performances, and sacred planting rituals (Umam et al., 2026). Certain unique celebrations involve the symbolic representation of cosmological concepts, such as those practiced by sugarcane farmers (Syahputra and Amri, 2025). The use of mantras during harvest festivities is another distinctive feature found in various regions of Indonesia (Hariato, 2017). Additionally, some harvest celebrations take place at natural springs, where participants splash water on one another to encourage regular rainfall (Pananrangi M, 2022).

Harvest celebrations are also found in countries neighboring Indonesia. In the Philippines, celebrations involve rituals featuring fish, legumes, snails, crabs, sweet potatoes, rice, coconut, tobacco, shellfish, and chicken (Berondo, 2025). In the Sabah region of Malaysia, harvest celebrations are held to honor spirits associated with rice and ancestors (Belly et al., 2024). Harvest celebrations also take place in countries far from Indonesia; for instance, Native Americans observe a harvest celebration known as the Green Corn Ceremony (Roy, 2005). In German-speaking countries, the harvest festival is known as *Erntedankfest* (Marpaung and Perdamean, 2025), while the Jewish people celebrate the harvest through the festival of Sukkot (Klein et al., 2016). As an expression of gratitude, communities of Chinese descent living in Taiwan, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Singapore, Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia celebrate the Mid-Autumn or Mooncake Festival (Jiang, 2025). In West Africa, there is a harvest celebration known as the New Yam Festival (August–October); this festival is an important part of West Africa's history and marks the beginning of the yam harvest season (Ongele & Anyigor, 2025; Unya, 2021). Mehregan (October) is a Persian festival dating back over 2,000 years that originated in the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism (Boyce, 1983). Lessons from Alaska's indigenous peoples show that food security can be achieved through traditional harvesting practices, the sharing of fish, and the utilization of various natural resources that are integral to food security (Heeringa et al., 2019). During the Tanabata Festival in Sendai, Japan, residents celebrate by using bamboo stems; they write their wishes on rolled-up paper and hang them from the bamboo branches, hoping for success in their endeavors (Kyoko, 2022).

A unique celebration takes place on a small Indonesian island known as Bali—a destination renowned for both its natural beauty

and its rich culture. Residents celebrate the harvest by erecting bamboo poles adorned with coconut and sugar palm leaves, from which various agricultural products are hung. These decorated poles, known *penjor* (as shown in Fig. 1), are the subject of this article; a detailed discussion of them offers valuable insight into the significance of harvest celebrations around the world.

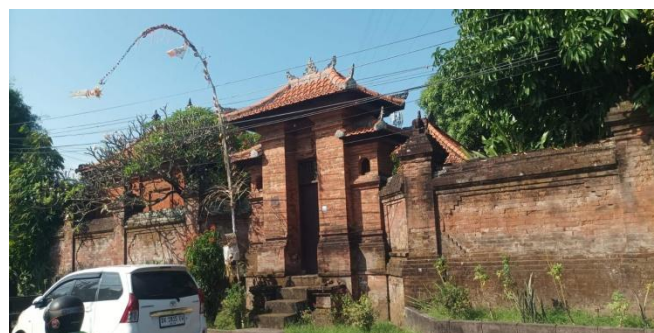


Figure 1 curved bamboo pole decorated with sugar palm leaf and coconut leaf is so called *penjor* as expression of harvest festival in Bali Island Indonesia

2. Research Method

The researchers are a native Balinese who actively participates in this tradition and possesses an understanding of its purpose and underlying significance. This study also documents the changes and developments that have occurred, presenting them through descriptive accounts accompanied by photographs illustrating these transformations.

A qualitative research approach is employed to gain insight into the current perspectives, thoughts, and experiences of the Balinese people regarding this tradition. By engaging in discussions with local practitioners and observing their behaviors, the researcher aims to construct a comprehensive picture of the origins and nature of this tradition.

An ethnographic approach is also utilized, involving immersion in the community to study daily life during harvest celebrations in Bali.

A literature review complements the descriptive findings. Comparative analysis is conducted to contrast harvest celebrations in Bali with those in other regions of Indonesia and neighboring countries. Furthermore, comparisons are drawn with harvest festivals in societies far removed from Indonesia, allowing for a broader understanding of the connections between harvest celebrations in Bali and the rest of the world.

3. Result and Discussion

Harvest celebrations in Bali take place every six months, coinciding with the fruit-bearing seasons that occur twice a year. These celebrations are marked by the placement of a bamboo pole with a curved tip in front of the house entrance. The pole is adorned with coconut leaves and sugar palm leaves (Figure 2). It is decorated to resemble a dragon (Naga Antaboga), the deity of the earth's bounty/crops for the Balinese people (Figure 2b) and is known in Bali as a *penjor*.



(a)



(b)

Figure. 2 (a) appearance of penjor that is made as a symbol of God of Crops (*Naga Antaboga/Anantaboga*) God of Crops in the society of Bali is symbolized by Dragon (b)

Various types of produce—particularly coconuts and rice stalks, along with traditional foods are hung from the penjor to symbolize the abundance of food that has been harvested. The bamboo used must be freshly cut; reusing bamboo from the previous year's celebration is prohibited. Furthermore, the penjor must not be painted with artificial colors but must instead feature the natural hues of the plant materials. However, as the prosperity of the Balinese people has grown and colorful fabrics have become readily available, many penjor are now decorated with various colored cloths.



(a)



(b)

Figure 3. (a) Penjor with the original design. (b) Penjor that have evolved and undergone commodification, becoming more elaborate with new designs that differ from the original pattern.

There is a classic *penjor* design featuring simple bamboo ornamentation, with its main components consisting of a head, a tail, and decorative rings resembling a dragon. However, this style evolved because Balinese people believe that the more lavishly a *penjor* is decorated, the greater the abundance of food—specifically the harvest—they will receive in the coming season. Subsequently, the *penjor* became a feature of various celebrations, extending beyond its original role in harvest festivals; however, these versions differ in that they are not hung with food items but instead incorporate decorative elements to enhance their beauty, as illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Penjor serve to add a festive touch to various celebrations unrelated to the harvest.

A unique development has emerged in 2026, with one family adorning their *penjor* with LED lights. Other Balinese residents have not yet ventured to add such accessories, as they regard the *penjor* as a sacred symbol (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The addition of LED lights to the penjor, a new feature observed in 2026.

It is undeniable that the livelihoods of Bali's population have shifted, with many no longer engaged in agriculture. Although many work in non-agricultural sectors, such as business, banking,

tourism, the civil service, and the military. Balinese people continue to uphold their culture by displaying *penjor* at their homes in urban areas, and businesses selling *penjor* have emerged, as shown in Fig. 6.



Figure 6. In urban areas, Balinese people no longer make *penjor* themselves but purchase them from various businesses that provide *penjor* services.



Figure 7. In urban areas with extensive networks of power and telecommunication cables, *penjor* can sometimes cause problems if the bamboo breaks.



Figure 8. Various sacred decorations made from coconut leaves hanging at a house entrance for a harvest celebration in Bali.

At the end of the harvest festival in Bali, the Balinese people also hang various decorations made from yellowish young coconut leaves, as shown in Fig. 8. The *penjor* remain in place for about a full month.

3.1 Comparison of harvest celebrations in Bali with those of other nations.

Celebrations involving bamboo poles are found not only in other regions but also in Japan. During the Tanabata festival in Sendai, Japan, residents celebrate using bamboo stalks; they write their wishes on rolled-up paper and hang them from the bamboo branches, hoping their wishes will reach the stars (Kyoko, 2021). However, actual harvested crops are not hung during the Tanabata festival.

Since rice is the staple food for the people of Bali, bamboo poles used in Balinese harvest celebrations are adorned with harvested rice. In addition to rice, corn is a very common agricultural product added to represent grain crops (*pala wija*). Beyond grains, root crops (*pala bungkah*) and hanging fruits (*pala gantung*) must also be hung on the *penjor* bamboo poles. By comparison, Native Americans celebrate the harvest through the Green Corn Ceremony (*Busk*), which takes place at the beginning of the corn harvest (Roy, 2005).

Offerings of various agricultural products to celebrate the harvest also take place in German-speaking countries, where the event is known as *Erntedankfest*. During this celebration, church altars are adorned with decorations made of fruit, vegetables, bread, and wheat crowns. In some regions, parades are held featuring a harvest queen adorned with wheat (Marpaung and Perdamean, 2025). Vegetables are not used in Balinese harvest celebrations; instead, they are replaced by various ornamental plant leaves (*plawa*) tied to the *penjor* bamboo poles. The use of wheat in these celebrations holds the same significance as the use of rice namely, as a staple food.

The Jewish people celebrate the harvest in a unique way known as *Sukkot*. During this festival, they erect booths with roofs made of palm fronds and offer fruits and plant materials such as the citron, date palm fronds, myrtle boughs, and willow branches (Klein et al., 2016; Zuchra and Riyanto, 2023). The use of palm fronds in this festival bears a resemblance to celebrations in Bali, where fronds from a similar palm-like tree (the coconut tree) are also utilized. While the Jewish people use willow stems, myrtle, and citrons, Balinese celebrations employ bamboo poles alongside various fruits, tubers, grains, and ornamental plant leaves.

As an expression of gratitude, communities of Chinese descent living in Taiwan, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Singapore, Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival (or Mooncake Festival). This harvest celebration involves families gathering to enjoy mooncakes filled with sweet bean paste, egg yolk, meat, or lotus seed paste. The festival is observed to thank the moon for a successful harvest (Jiang, 2025). In Bali, harvest celebrations are directed toward the deity of the earth's produce, *Naga Antaboga*, whereas for communities of Chinese descent, the celebration is dedicated to the Moon.

By way of comparison, in West Africa specifically among the Igbo, Yoruba, and Idoma peoples of Nigeria, the harvest celebration is known as the New Yam Festival. The yam is a type of tuberous root vegetable. The celebration features dancing, music, masquerades, and communal feasting. It serves to express gratitude to deities and ancestors while invoking blessings for the coming year (Ongele and Anyigor, 2025; Unya, 2021). Balinese celebrations also involve ancestor worship, with offerings placed at family temples in addition to the erection of *penjor* (*decorated bamboo poles*) in front of homes. Uniquely, Balinese celebrations also require the hanging of tubers similar to the yam known locally as *pala bungkah*.

The Persian people have celebrated the harvest for two thousand years, a tradition rooted in the ancient faith of Zoroastrianism. Known as Mehregan, the festival honors the deity Mehr, the god of friendship, love, and affection. Celebratory traditions involve arranging a table known as a *sofreh*, adorned with dried marjoram, Zoroastrian scriptures, a mirror, flowers, nuts, and autumn fruits such as pomegranates, grapes, and apples. A sweet beverage

known as *sharbat* is also served during the festivities (Boyce, 1983). This practice parallels harvest celebrations in Bali, where "fall fruits"—referred to as *pala gantung*—are hung from penjor bamboo poles. The distinction lies in the recipient of the offering: in the Persian tradition, it is dedicated to the deity *Mehr* (the god of friendship, love, and affection), whereas in Bali, it is dedicated to the deity of the earth's bounty (*Naga Antaboga*).

In contrast, for peoples living near the Arctic Circle such as the indigenous populations of Alaska, food security is achieved through traditional harvesting practices, the sharing of fish, and the utilization of various natural resources that serve as integral components of their food security (Heeringan et al., 2019). Naturally, given that the cultures of Alaska's indigenous peoples are centered on fishing, there is no offering of agricultural produce like that found in Bali.

3.2 Comparison of harvest celebrations in Bali and Indonesia's neighboring countries

In the neighboring country of the Philippines, residents of Santa Ana, Tapaz, Capiz, celebrate the harvest with a ritual known as *Tagurabong*. During this celebration, residents offer various elements, including beans, freshwater snails, freshwater mud crabs, cassava delicacies, roasted sticky rice, lizardfish, coconut wine, frankincense, dried mullet, tobacco, *baye-baye* (rolled sticky rice), *urang* (freshwater prawns), and *manok* (chicken). These items represent the richness and diversity of their environment and illustrate the interdependence of humans and nature in agriculture. The community honors these connections and seeks blessings, protection, and good fortune for their harvest and health (Berondo, 2025). This harvest celebration in the Philippines is more comprehensive than the one in Bali regarding the inclusion of animal elements from the farming environment; while the Philippine offerings incorporate animals such as fish, prawns, crabs, and chicken, these creatures are not hung from the *penjor* bamboo poles used in Balinese celebrations.

A harvest celebration is also found in another neighboring country, Malaysia, specifically in the Sabah region where the indigenous people celebrate the harvest through an event called *Kaamatan*. The celebration involves offering rituals dedicated to spirits associated with rice and to ancestors. This celebration includes the crowning of the *Kaamatan* Queen (Belly et al., 2024). This shares similarities with the Balinese celebration, where offerings are also made to ancestors. However, the crowning of a *Kaamatan* Queen is not a feature of harvest celebrations in Bali.

3.3 Comparison of harvest celebrations in Bali with those in other neighboring regions within Indonesia.

It is also worth comparing this Balinese harvest celebration with those in other regions of Indonesia. In the Belawae area (Sibulue District, Bone Regency), the harvest celebration involves a test of leg strength: two individuals join one of their legs together, and a third person kicks the joined calves as hard as possible using their own shin. This practice serves to maintain leg strength, a vital asset in agricultural work; the celebration thus incorporates physical activity to promote health (Rahman, 2024).

The harvest celebration of the Kaemba community in Pabentengang Village (Marusu District, Maros Regency) is unique; it involves the collective striking of a long wooden mortar with bamboo pestles to create harmonious rhythmic sounds—a celebration known as *Dengka Se Lolo* (Afdilah et al., 2024).

In Cigugur Village (Kuningan Regency), the Sunda Wiwitan community observes a harvest celebration known as *Seren Taun*. The festivities begin with the lighting of thousands of lanterns (*damar sewu*), followed by the *Rajah Siliwangi* prayer, the *Budak Angon* dance, tree planting accompanied by gong strikes, and finally, the singing of hymns (*kidung*) (Umam et al., 2026).

East Java is home to a unique harvest celebration among sugarcane farmers known as *Manten Tebu* (Sugarcane Wedding). The celebration involves creating male and female effigies out of sugarcane stalks and adorning them to resemble a bride and groom. This ceremony links social activity with a cosmological understanding—specifically, the farmers' perspective on nature and the harvest (Syahputra & Amri, 2025).

In Timbang Jaya Village (Langkat Regency), the harvest is celebrated through a tradition called *dedeng*, which involves chanting various mantras in the Malay language while harvesting rice (Harianto et al., 2017).

In the Barru District of Indonesia, there is a unique rice harvest celebration known as *majjene-jene*, during which local residents bring various foods to a natural spring. They offer prayers together, followed by the ritual sprinkling of water toward the four cardinal directions. Afterward, participants engage in a water-splashing activity that leaves everyone thoroughly soaked. This ritual serves as a plea for abundant rain during the upcoming planting season. The event concludes with a communal meal enjoyed while everyone is still drenched (Pananrangi et al., 2022). Among the Laporo ethnic community in Kombeli Subdistrict, Buton Regency, Indonesia, there is a unique harvest celebration called *Mataano Mambio*, which is closely linked to the maize harvest. The celebration begins with prayers and the ritual slaughter of a goat, the meat of which is subsequently cooked and shared among the community. The festivities continue with the exchange of agricultural produce and are further enlivened by martial arts dance performances (Rizki and Asrani, 2025).

Conclusion

Harvest celebrations in Bali are unique, distinguished by the erection of curved bamboo poles adorned with young, yellow coconut leaves. These poles are decorated to resemble a dragon—specifically *Naga Antaboga*, the Balinese deity associated with the earth's bounty. Various agricultural products are hung from the poles, including root crops (*pala bungkah*), fruits and crops that grow above ground (*pala gantung*), and grains or seeds (*pala wija*). Coconuts are an essential item to be hung on these poles, which are known as *penjor*. Even Balinese residents who are not actively engaged in farming continue to display *penjor* in front of their homes during the harvest season, as they believe in the sacred nature of the celebration and its role in invoking prosperity.

This specific style of harvest celebration—featuring such bamboo poles—is unique to Bali; it is not found in the traditions of other nations, nor in Indonesia's neighboring countries, nor even in other regions within Indonesia itself. While each area has its own specific way of celebrating the harvest, the underlying purpose remains the same: to express gratitude and pray for a successful harvest in the coming season.

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