

SYMBOLS IN JRAI PEOPLE'S LIFE-CYCLE RITUALS ACROSS VIETNAM'S CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

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Abstract: The Jrai ethnic group is the largest in the Central Highlands and has the tenth largest population of Vietnam's 54 ethnic groups so studying Jrai culture, which emphasizes life cycle rituals and their symbols is a meaningful subject full of fascinating insight in to Central Highlands culture. Using qualitative data from ethnographic interviews and participant observation in three villages: Plei Oi, Greo Pet and Ia Glai districts, Chu Se and Phu Thien districts, and applying Clifford Greetz and Victor Turner's symbolism theory, the paper describes, analyzes, and interprets the symbolic meaning in the Jrai life-cycle rituals. The study's findings imply that everyday objects are turned into symbolic objects, supporting the community's moral values in ritual context. For example, the midwife chews ginger and blows into the child's ear, a practice known as " birth ritual". In order to mature into an adult, a youngster is enduring tooth - sharpening ritual. In the wedding ceremony, a couple exchange bracelets each other as a symbol of their lifelong love. To bid farewell to the deceased without regrets, bang the gong anti-clockwise around the corpse's body. The symbolic framework of the life-cycle ritual has been preserved over time, conveying the ideals and identity of the Jrai ethnic group. The study's findings contribute to explain why the Vietnamese government's efforts to preserve ethnic cultures.

Keywords: Jrai people, symbol, life –cycle ritual, Central Highlands, minority ethnic

Introduction

Rituals are storehouses of meaningful symbols through which information is revealed and regarded as authoritative, as dealing with crucial values of the community (Tuner V. , 1968). Symbols have the power to not only disclose important social and religious ideals, but also to change people's attitudes and behaviors. The use of ritual symbols reveals their ability to influence and transform those who participate in rituals. Thus, studying the symbols in the ritual that is the Jrai ethnic identity is required in order to comprehend the Jrai people's ethical value system and social structure.

There is, however, no systematic research that examines, analyzes, and explains the symbolism in Jrai rituals in general, and life cycle rituals in particular. Some of the hundreds of works written about the Jrai mention symbols as ritual vehicles:

According to Jacques Dournes (Dournes, Jacques; Ngoc Nguyen (traslated), 2006), the ear-blowing ritual marks important changes for neonates, their transition from intrauterine life into society.

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The dew drop represents the spirit of the ancestors in the naming ritual for the infant, according to Ngo Van Oanh (2010). The midwife assisted the infant in "sticking out her tongue to taste the dew drop" in order to the ancestral spirit to enter the child. And the child is welcomed into the family.

R'Cham Oanh (2002) believes that the tooth-filing ritual is an initiation symbol indicating an individual's maturity and acceptance as a member of society.

The Special Operations Research Office (SORO) of The American University operating under contract with the Department of the Army, conducts research on military problems in support of requirements stated by the Department of the Army (1966) assumed a bracelet is a symbol of marriage proposal "the girl's mother gives a bracelet to the intermediary who then takes the bracelet and proposes to the boy's family. If the boy's parents oppose the marriage, they say, "Ask the boy what he thinks". The boy declines, because referring the question to him customarily indicates parental disapproval. When consent to the marriage is given, the go-between gives the bracelet to the boy's mother, who then places it on her son's wrist to show that the two young people are engaged" (L.Joan Schrock, William Sctocton, J.Elaine, 1996, p.274).

Phan Dang Nhat (1999) considers the act of giving kong to be the commitment of a man and a woman to become a spouse. In the customary law of the Jrai people, R'Cham Oanh (2002) refers to the kong in the kong giving ritual as an object impossible to replace.

When a person dies, the family or social order is disrupted. People feel insecure and grieving, so they cling to the concept that there is an immortal realm beyond death. Chu Thai Son (2003) states tomb statues are followers of death, whereas To Dong Hai (2018) thinks they soothe the deceased assuage their yearning for earthly life. Ngo Van Oanh (2010) assumes a grave-leaving ritual is held to see off the dead and free the living.

Some of the symbols used in the life-cycle ritual are mentioned in Jrai cultural works. They are considered as vital tools in the life - cycle ritual by the previous researchers, but there has not been any intensive research on the Jrai people's symbolism.

This study both inherits the results of the above studies and conducts three month ethnographic fieldwork to find and describe the Jrai life -cycle ritual symbols; then analyze and interpret their significance and functions. The research contributes to identifying the Jrai people's cultural traits, affirming the diversity and difference of the Central Highlands culture.

Material and Method

This study was conducted for three months (August 2014, January 2015, and January 2018) in three villages: Greo Pet, Dun commune; Ngol, Ia Glai, Chu Se district; and Plei Oi, Aun Ha, Phu Thien district where many traditional parts of the ritual are still conserved.

Having applied the theoretical approach to symbols of cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1968, 1970, 1974, 2004), the study defines a symbol as the smallest unit of ritual that retains the specific characteristics of ritual behavior; distinguishes between dominant and instrumental symbols that provides an analytical tool for the analysis of ritual symbols (Turner, 1970, p.20). The structure and features of ritual symbols are derived from three types of data: (1) external form and observable

attributes collected by participant observations include the ear blowing ceremony in Plei Oi village, the giving of names and bracelets, weddings, the custom of delivering rice every day, the supper ceremony at the burial house and funeral in Greo Pet village, and the practice of abandoning graves in Plei Oi and Ngol villages; (2) expert and lay people's interpretations such as village elders, maids, midwives, mediators, elders, village leaders, and Jrai informants who are knowledgeable about and actively involved in the rituals of the three villages; and (3) a relevant context provided by an anthropologist who immerse themselves in the Jrai's culture.

Symbols have three types of meanings: exegetical, operative, and positional. In-depth ethnographic interviews, in which questions concerning observed ritual behavior are posed, are used to determine exegetical meaning. Turner, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of distinguishing between lay and religious conceptions (Uhrin M. , 2015, 2018). It's also crucial to figure out whether the reasons given are typical of these groups or unique to the individual. The operational meaning of a symbol is determined by comparing its ascribed meaning to how it is utilized by people and a variety of behavioral patterns that can be seen in response to it. As a result, it is vital to not only inquire about the meanings of the symbols but also to observe how they are utilized in a variety of situations (Turner, 1970, p.50-51). As a result, ethnographic interviews and participant observation must both be used. Positional meaning is obtained from a symbol's relationship to other symbols, especially in a ritual complex, a relationship that ritual participants are ignorant of. The polysemic symbol may only have one or a few meanings during each ritual, or it may have different meanings at different times during the life cycle rituals held in three villages.



Figure 1: Ngol village, Ia Glai, Chu Se district, Gia Lai province. Photo: Minh Phuong, 2014



Figure 2: Greo Pet village, Dun, Chu Se district, Photo: Minh Phuong, 2014

In this paper, the symbola are presented in the order of life cycle rituals: beginning with the ear blowing ritual when the baby is a few days old, continuing with the tooth filing ritual when the child reaches adulthood (13–15 years old), weddings for adult, and funerals for the dead.

Results and Discussion

Rites of passage for the Newborn - the ear-blowing ritual

The Jrai people believe that the ear-blowing ritual symbolizes a crucial step for newborns, their passage from intrauterine life into society. A respectable midwife (po blai) would perform an ear-blowing ritual

for them to complete their social existence. This ritual was normally performed a few days after the infant was born to symbolize the child's social statue. The symbolic action was described by Jacques Dournes: "The midwife held a spool of silk thread (woven yarn), spit ginger into it, blew seven times into the hole of the silk thread spool next to the child's ear, and read the vows:

cleaning noses
taking care of ears
spatting ginger
an left ear
thinking of job
An right ear
thinking of farm
Being human, keeping the spirit
Men
Thinking of a hoe, an axe
Thinking of a spear for village defence
Crossbow and quiver
Women
Don't forget spinning wheel and loom
Don't forget weeding hook
Rice basket
Water source in village
Fire to warm parents

Then, she told the boy about the utensils she had to use, and the girl the parts of the loom" (Dournes, Jacques; Ngoc Nguyen (traslated), 2006, p.49-50)

A spool of silk thread is used as a symbol of the matriarchal society during the ear blowing ritual since it is the primary component of fabrics used to suit human requirements, which are woven by women. Ginger's spiciness will stay with you forever. Education is symbolized by the midwife's act of chewing ginger and blowing seven times into the baby's ear. A newborn (as an organism) develops into a rational and wise individual who understands how to remember and forget through education and care. "Wholeness" or the Jrai concept's number 7 (Dournes, 2003, p. 107). To put it another way, symbols (such as a spool of silk thread or ginger) and symbolic actions (such as blowing into one's ear) signify that a child is born into a matrilineal society, that they belong to the maternal line, and that they formally join the community. A child's transfer from the spirit realm to the family and the community is marked by this rite. The child must also keep in mind the gender-based tasks assigned to them as they mature into social beings. Men must consider quivers, slingshots, and spears because it is their duty to hunt and defend the nation. Women grow mulberries to raise silk worms, weave cloth, thresh rice, fetch water, and cook so they shouldn't overlook the spinning wheel and loom, basket, and stove.

Remember to become a member of society therefore the word "remember" is repeated several times in the rite, and listen to memorize and understand, so the ear is the doorway to the heart. The action in which the midwife blew seven times into the hole of the silk thread spool next to the child's ear and read the vows symbolizes reminding the child that a person is an integral component of society as a whole because living constantly entails living together.

The majority of other rites, which are invariably performed by men, in contrast the prayers in the ear blowing ritual, the process of transferring memory and life to the new-born child, are always said by

women. According to Jrai, women are responsible for preserving social order through passing down memory to the following generation. The ritual expresses the matrilineal social structure of the Jrai people. Women have a responsibility to convey the community's values to the next generation.

Other ethnic groups in the Central Highlands, like the Ba Na, Ede, and Mnong, also hold ear-blowing rites in a manner similar to that of the Jrai. The specifics of the ceremony vary depending on the ethnic group in terms of the offerings, the duration, the celebrant, and some traditions, but blowing in the ears is a symbol of education. The midwife's vows in the Jrai's ear-blowing ceremony indicate the gender element, whereas in the Ba na'ceremony Yang is given a rooster for boy's ceremonies and a hen for girl's ceremonies (Hung N.M, 2016, p.278-279). While Jrai people utilize spools of silk thread, Bana people blow their ears using bamboo tubes. The Gia Rai and Ba Na hold ear-blowing ceremonies for newborns a week or two after birth, the Mnong after 7-8 years, and the Ede one day after birth.

The name -giving ritual and symbols identify a cognitive individual

The ear-blowing ritual symbolizes the child is transmitted into human society from the divine realm as well as his presence in the family, clan, and community as a distinct individual who needs a name of his own. As a child's incarnation ritual, the name-giving ritual is typically held just a few days or weeks after birth. A cup of wine, a little chicken, a tomato, a ginger root, a bamboo leaf, and a sizable drop of dew are all prepared by the family as part of the ritual. After the shaman finished his prayers, the midwife read the names of the child's ancestors while holding the tomato close to the child's mouth. He licks the dewdrop, the spirit of that ancestor has entered, and he bears that name.

In the name-giving ritual, the midwife collects dew drops and helps the child stick out his tongue to lick them. This is a symbolic way for the child to get the spirit of his ancestors.

Dew is the moisture that forms as a result of condensation so it is typically related to purity and freshness. Because of this, the Jrai people hold the belief that after passing away, their ancestors undergo seven transformations before becoming morning dew. Ancestors accumulate human quintessence, and that will be passed on to the next generation through the child licking dew drops during the name-giving ritual. The Jrai people practice this symbolic act because they think that when a child receives an official name, he carries the essence of his ancestors. As a result, the learning period to be human is shortened.

Tooth sharpening ritual and symbols of initiation

Physiological puberty and social puberty as described by Van Gennep, are distinct and share few characteristics. While Van Gennep's research about African and Oceanic initiation rituals involving male circumcision and female ear stretching, Jrai adolescents undergo tooth-sharpening ritual at the ages of 13 and 14.

The tooth-sharpening ritual is usually held on dark nights when the sun has completely disappeared. Before sharpening the teeth, the shaman bowed and prayed: "Oh, Mighty Yang, come here to witness the tooth-sharpening ritual. Sharpening to grow up, and to confirm that the natural children have turned into social adults. The ritual recipient had to lie on the floor. The prestigious villager would use a piece of stone as a fulcrum, then directly sharpen the six upper front teeth with a knife or chisel. How much suffering the ritual recipient had to endure! Family and friends sat around encouraging the ritual

recipient and helping him/her to gargle and then stop the bleeding with a black resin taken from a wild tree in the forest (Interviewed Rahlan C, Greo Pet, January 2018).

The tooth-sharpening ritual, traced from the initiation ritual, appeared during the ancient period. According to the research of G.H. Hoffet, it was said that the ethnic minorities in the mountainous Truong Son, such as X'Dang, Bana, M'ngong considered the buffalo as their totem, so they sharpened their teeth to resemble the buffalo.

X'Dang, M'ngong, and Bana teenagers typically have their six top front teeth sharpened by the time they are 13 - 15 in order to be considered adults and nice (Dao, 2007, p.319; (Chi Nguyen Kim and Chi Nguyen Dong, 2011, p.213). Teenagers from the Mnong tribe are permitted to find companions and be married after undergoing sharpening their teeth (Son, 2003, p.136). French officials forbade the Ede people's practice of honing their teeth because it was viewed as barbarous (Anne de Haute Howe, 2018, p.195). This ritual has not been practiced for half a century, but its imprint is still visible in determining the age of marriage.

The act of sharpening one's teeth signifies the removal of a bodily organ with symbolic significance and marks a transition from childhood to maturity. The recipient was made to endure pain while remaining immobile while being "trained to live in a way that is different from childhood, died and resurrected." enduring suffering at the ritual's pivotal moment. The sharpened teeth stand for a person who has been trained and put through the ringer in order to tolerate bodily suffering; a person whose spiritual existence is more significant to him than his body; that is the human element in man. A person is said to have passed the "child stage" of development when they are no longer ignorant of their place in society and have accepted its moral standards, which are first difficult to do because of physical discomfort. That taught a teenager that grownups sometimes pay a price for adhering to social conventions. The tooth-shredding rite serves as the introduction to adulthood in society.

Wedding ritual and marriage relationship

Regardless of ethnicity or time period, marriage is a significant turning point in human life and results in the creation of a new family. Some rituals are lost over time for the Jrai people as a result of altering life circumstances, but weddings are still carefully planned with somber ceremonies because they believe that doing so guarantees a happy, healthy, and prosperous family. The engagement – kong gifting (djă kông), the wedding ritual (kdo ung mô), giving the property back to the groom's family (pu pnu), and the bride carrying firewood to her husband's home are some of the Jrai people's marital customs.

The purpose of the marriage ritual is to legalize the marriage relationship, including husband and wife relationship and the two families. The values promoted in this relationship are fidelity, mutual commitment and suffering, love and equality between the husband and wife, and the blessing for the young couple to have a prosperous life. The spouse relationship is also strengthened by the reciprocal marriage alliance relationship. Symbols and symbolic actions in ceremonies are intended to convey the above are mentioned values of marriage.

The bracelet and bracelet-giving ritual are to commit eternal love and faithfulness between husband and wife

The bracelet represents the union between a man and a woman in a marriage relationship and is a symbol of eternal love in the Jrai wedding ritual. When a woman proposes to a guy, she gives him a bracelet; if he accepts it, it implies he agrees to the relationship. The bracelet resembles an engagement. Through the official bracelet-giving ritual, which Yang and members of the two families saw, this relationship is moving toward marriage. The bracelet represents the enduring love that a husband and wife have, much like the circle itself.

A circle represents dispersal, according to the Symbol dictionary. The circle and the point share the same symbolic qualities: they are both complete, homogeneous, and devoid of differentiation or division. The circle stands for eternity because it is everlasting and has no beginning, end, or deformation. The sky resembles a circle due to its constant circular motion. The circle is a common representation of God, the almighty entity. Concentric circles are frequently shown in Buddhist carvings and artwork. Christians frequently depict saints and images of Christ with a circular halo on their heads. The circle represents qi, the sky (the horoscope sign), the sun, life (the yin and yang circle), time (the clock), movement and change (the rotational wheel), protection (the shield), and protection (ring, bracelet).

Based on the nature of the shape, most cultures consider the circle to be a symbol of eternity and indissolubility, so the ring or bracelet is a symbol of fidelity in a marriage relationship. The bracelet will be made of copper, silver, or ivory and come in various sizes depending on the owner's financial situation. Jrai women highly value the love bracelet because they consider it as a testament to their husbands' and wives' love. They work to maintain the ring clean and in good condition till the end of their lives. They value the bracelet on a par with a wine jar, a rice basket containing yang (divine) presence. Someone has mistreated Yang if they treat the bracelet improperly. They'll get the shaft.

The meaning of the bracelet has not changed despite the loss of many traditional cultural elements. The bracelet is the "treasure of her husband love" for Mrs. H'lang, a Jrai native who is over 70 years old. Since she was 16 years old, Mr. A. Don (dead) has given her a bracelet, which she still has now. She can still recall the wedding day even more than 50 years later.



Figure 3: Mrs. H'lang has kept her bracelet as a treasure of her husband love

Photo: Bich Kieu

The bracelet represents the bond between a couple who will always belong to each other, love each other, and live together forever, claims village elder K'son N. One of them will be penalized if they later give the bracelet to someone else (cow or buffalo).

After undergoing the bracelet-giving ritual, someone who is unfaithful to his/her partner will be punished according to customary law. People who don't respect the symbolic value of the bracelet-giving rite are breaking the customary law of marriage and family. The bracelet is mentioned in article 1, "about refusing to marry after a bracelet-giving ritual". When considering adultery, the village elder will consider whether the parties have exchanged bracelets. If the bracelet has been exchanged, it is officially husband and wife, and the engagement cannot be changed. Otherwise, they can select the alternative:

“They were bound. Because exchanged bracelet each other” (Nhat, 1999, pp.185).

The Jrai people interpret fidelity in a marriage connection by using the bracelet's round, without beginning or end, design. The Jrai people previously had no marriage certificate. The wearing of the bracelet, the ceremonial of giving it, and the touching of the bracelet were all seen as signs of consent in a marriage. Furthermore, it is believed that the bracelet also represents the yang who observes the husband-and-wife relationship because it is given during the sacred yang worshiping rite. The partnership is kept as solid and complete as the shape of a bracelet by their mutual efforts to fulfill the stronger commitment.

The shaman washes the hands of the bride and groom, symbolizing the erasure of the past and getting rid of bad things.

The man and the woman are formally wed following the bracelet-giving ritual. To ensure a perfect marriage, the Jrai people believe that the bride and groom need to be "renewed." So, they came up with the idea of the shaman washing the bride and groom's hands to symbolize the erasure of the past. From here, the pair has a new family life. Washing their hands in water also symbolizes purification, removing their troubled history, and accepting responsibility for their new family. This shaman's act seeks to shake off any misfortunes and wish good luck in the future. A person who has had an ex-partner must forget; a husband and wife must concentrate on the future rather than bringing unwanted memories from the past to torment each other.

Symbol of equal husband and wife relationship, sharing difficulties and blessings for a happy and prosperous family

The Jrai people's social relations are "real innocent equality" (Nguyen Tan Dac, 2005, p.99), and the marriage relationship is not an exception. The division of work and the areas designated for activities accepted by the community both reflect gender equality. Men hunt and fight. Housework is done by women (Dournes, Jacques; Ngoc Nguyen (translated), 2006, p. 1).

The actions taken during the marriage ritual, such as "the matchmaker gives the bride and groom a piece of raw chicken liver to eat" or "the village elder divides a chicken leg for each person," or "the wife pours wine for her husband, the husband pours for his wife," signify that the couple will always be together and "share difficulties and happiness." Equality is essential to sustaining a healthy marriage connection for individuals in general or the Jrai people in particular.

Because a husband and wife need to live affluent lives in addition to loving each other. The shaman does not bless the young couple with a prosperous life after the bracelet-giving ritual; instead, he gives them a handful of cooked rice. This is due to the fact that the Jrai people rely heavily on agriculture as their primary food source. The shaman offers them the "most important" to support their existence on the great day leading to the beginning of a new family. The shaman hands over a bowl of rice, which is actually the god's infinitely bountiful rice ball. Having enough rice at home is a perennial concern for agricultural dwellers, but only the Jrai people visualize this dream at their wedding ritual by having the shaman give the bride and groom a small amount of rice.

Additionally, this behavior is intended to encourage the young couple, who had previously been negligent in their employment, to put in hard effort in order to have a rich life. The young couple's belief that receiving a bowl of rice from the Yang (the shaman gives) will make their lives full is supported by this action as well.

The couple's first official post-wedding reunion luncheon (meeting ritual) is held in the late hours of the wedding day. Just enough rice be prepared in a tiny pot to be shared by the matchmaker and the newlyweds. The entire pot of rice must be consumed signifying that the reunion will last a lifetime.

In addition to symbolic rites, the decision to hold the wedding ritual or not is made based on the couple's dreams following the ritual. Based on the symbolic significance of the dreams, future marriage relationships can be predicted. A dream in which they are fetching water and seeing a drop of it or a clean ditch is fortunate; a dream in which they are fishing and see a gourd predicts that their wife will become pregnant. A bad omen indicates that the husband and wife will fight frequently if they dream of clutching a string, mowing grass, or bamboo. A dream of birds singing or flying over a husband and wife is incompatible or they could get divorced or pass away.

In a marriage relationship, it is not only a relationship between two individuals, husband, and wife, but also a kinship relationship between the two parties that nurtures and strengthens a sustainable marriage. The kinship relationship on both sides of the husband and wife's family is built on the principle of "reciprocity," expressed through symbolic acts:

The symbol of a harmonious and long-lasting reciprocity marriage partnership relationship is the act "the groom's parents, the groom, and the matchmaker holding a pot of wine and a castrated rooster step

forward to the ritual pole." In the same way as the bride's father invites the groom's father to drink wine, and vice versa, so too does the bride's mother. With mutual responsibility for the young couple, this deed demonstrates that the marital alliance partnership is a "reciprocal" relationship. Because it is sustained on the tenet of "reciprocity," the connection is growing steadily more solid.

In this matriarchal society, the son-in-law resides with his mother-in-law. The daughter-in-law is still responsible to the family of her husband. The daughter-in-law must spend three days in her husband's home performing her daughter-in-law's duties, which include fetching water, gathering firewood, weaving cloth, and other duties, before the husband moves in with his wife. At the end of these three days, the daughter-in-law, and her entire family carry firewood to her husband's home to thank her husband's parents. When the rice sowing is complete, when the rice flowers, or when the rice harvesting is complete, this celebration is usually celebrated. The two families agree on a time for planning the celebration as long as it is convenient.

The absence of firewood from the bride's family at the boy's home is seen by the Jrai as an insult to the boy's family and evidence of the groom's inferiority. In the past, there was no vehicle, so the bride carried firewood on her back, but today, firewood is transported in trucks. Everyone in the bride's family will place the firewood in the yard when it is given to the groom's house, arranging it neatly in the order of firewood by the bride, by the bride's parents and siblings, and finally firewood brought by relatives. If a family has a son who is about to get married and the other bride's family has brought a lot of firewood. This firewood may not be given to this groom's family as a gift. This firewood was once saved as a valuable possession by many families.

The bride and groom's family are happiest during the rite of delivering firewood to the husband's home. Everyone has the opportunity to come together to socialize while sipping wine. The ritual of the daughter-in-law delivering firewood to her husband's home symbolizes the two families' reciprocal relationship. To express her warmth for her husband's family, the daughter-in-law picks out good firewood to deliver to her husband's home. The better the firewood, the more it shows the daughter-in-law's affection for her husband's family.



Figure 4: Firewood which the bride's family K'sor Th brought to the groom's family, Greo Pet village, January 2014

Photo: Minh Phuong



Figure 5: Meal of two families on the day the bride's family brings firewood to the groom's house In Greo Pet village, Dun commune, January 17, 2018.

Photo: Minh Phuong

The bracelet-giving ritual, the wedding ritual, the ritual to return property to the groom's family, and the ritual for the daughter-in-law to deliver firewood to her husband's home all serve to formally establish the marriage relationship, including the husband-and-wife relationship and the relationship between the two families. By symbolically handing each other bracelets, as if the husband's body belonged to the wife and vice versa, and since this bracelet is their soul to be blessed by the Yangs, the couple, in the context of the ritual, swears to remain together forever and wishes for a fulfilling marriage. According to customary law, the bracelet will be given back if the marriage is dissolved. By giving each spouse an equal portion of chicken liver, the shaman grants the young couple a life of equality. They then have this meal together in front of their family and the gods. Additionally, the shaman offers the bride and groom a bowl of rice, signifying that their family will always have plenty to eat and lead rich lives. The harmonious, lasting alliance relationship based on the reciprocity principle further strengthens the young couple's love. The bride carries firewood to her husband's house to show her appreciation to his family, the bride's parents invite the groom's parents over for wine, and the bride and groom exchange gifts. The ceremonial symbols communicate the community norms and serve as a reminder to the

newlyweds to uphold them. The new spouse will remember the symbols from this perspective. According to this viewpoint, the symbols will transmit the morals of the community to people.

Symbols in funeral ritual

The Jrai people believe that death is not the end but rather a return to their ancestors where life is similar to that of the mundane world and the living still have the responsibility to care for their loved ones after death, so they practice many ceremonies related to the dead, including funerals, monthly eating ceremonies at grave houses (Dor Sat), annual burial ceremonies (Dec Que ador Sat), and grave abandonment ceremonies at least three years after death. Numerous symbols used in these rites signify farewell and preparation for the dead to enter the afterlife; the end of relationships between the living and the dead; the release of the living from obligations; and attachment to the dead.

Farewell and prepare for the deceased to return to the afterlife

Playing the gong around the deceased's body counterclockwise

During two or three nights, the coffin remains at home, to say goodbye to the dead, people play the gong wang around the deceased's body every few hours in a counterclockwise direction (in the direction of the sunset). The departed are also reminded by the gong sound that they are no longer in this world and should return without regret to the world of their ancestors.

- **Chicken is offered to the dead**

When someone in the family passes away, someone else catches a chicken, crosses its wings together and drills chicken with a flame until all the feathers burn, then gets the intestines and gizzards out, leaving the heart and liver intact for the dead. The Jrai people must preserve their legs unbroken and free of scrapes because they think that chickens accompany the deceased on their long journey back to the afterlife.



Figure 6: Burn a chicken to worship the dead

At Rahlan Lor's funeral, Greo Pet village, 2018

Photo: Minh Phuong

Putting a few grains of rice in the dead person's mouth, providing rice for the deceased during the funeral and afterwards at the grave site until the day the grave-leaving ritual is held, distributing household goods and other objects of personal significance with the deceased

The dead will return to life on another planet and need food, clothing, and lodging the family members of the deceased will feed them a few grains of rice (seven for men, five for women) and change their new clothes for them. To honor the deceased, everyone who attended the funeral brought rice. A bag to contain rice offerings was placed close to where the dead were lying. The left thigh, which is regarded to be the most delectable part of the flesh, is always given to the deceased from any cattle killed during the funeral.

The deceased must bring something connected to Jrai customs when returning to the ancestors. The deceased is covered with a Jrai traditional décor-brocade fabric because the Jrai people no longer dress in their traditional garb. The wealthy family also made sure the deceased had a lot of clothing. Relatives and villagers would prepare for the dead for disadvantaged families and distributes to the dead some items such as the precious jar, agricultural tools, baskets, and living utensils. All are destroyed since the hereafter is the opposite of the living world. Items for the dead cannot be utilized if they are not damaged.

The dead's soul "still wanders in the cemetery" from the time of burial to the grave-abandonment ritual (Oanh N. V., 2010, p.44). The family members may deliver rice to the deceased's tomb (dum doi) twice or once daily. They also used fire to warm the tomb in the winter. The tomb is also cleaned because it is considered the deceased's temporary residence.



Figure 7: Deliver rice to the deceased's tomb twice or once a day

Greo Pet village, 2014

Photo: Minh Phuong

The grave abandonment ritual and symbols for the liberation of the living from ties to the deceased, the resurrection of the dead

The Jrai people have the view that after passing away, the spirit goes back to the world of the ancestors but soon after, it reincarnates as a child. The grave abandonment ritual to bid farewell to the soul of deceased person. The souls of the dead are entirely separated from the souls of the living, and the living

are genuinely set free from the dead (Oanh N. V., 2010, p.41). Only after the grave abandonment ritual widow/ widower is allowed to remarry.

The new house abandonment ritual for the dead (the feet stomping ritual – Jɔa): The offerings and rituals at the handover ritual of this new house are as basic as the rituals for the new house. Offerings consisting of goat liver (tai be) and small wine jars used for worshipping ceremonies (bo'um) are displayed at the entrance to the tomb. The piece of goat liver is placed next to an offering wine pot, an iron ax (jông) and a small stone (ptâu). Everyone in the dead's family must enter the tomb one by one, stomping on the blade of the ax and the stone. Meanwhile, the house owner (pun sang) holds a leaf (lá ngăn)—a kind of sacred leaf that grows in the forest—and swings it back and forth over the mouth of the wine pot and prays. The prayer content: "Nai kǎo soi tai bui, be, kiǎng hiem droi jam. Huǎi noh sát, huǎi djɔ, huǎi djɔ, huǎi noh dong tah" ("I offer pig and goat livers, hoping you (the deceased) have a decent body, are not fascinated with the cemetery home, and are no longer a part of the family.")

The ritual in which personal belongings for the deceased are distributed

Items prepared for the dead are delivered to the grave after the ritual foot stomping. These are daily living items and production tools made of wood: knives, axes, baskets, wine racks, drinking rods, machetes, and hoes for men. For the female dead, production tools include small baskets, spinning wheels, ding jong flutes, axes, hoes, machetes, and knives. The Jrai people call such things ðò cho (offered things).

Ritual of delivering animals to the dead

At 5–6 pm on the first day of the grave abandonment ritual, families who hold the ritual deliver buffaloes or oxen to tie them to poles (gâng kopao/ gâng l'mo) at the back of the grave house. That means animals are distributed among the dead.

The Jrai people perform a rite known as the animal abandonment ritual (it is also named pokloh) before taking the buffaloes or oxen to the grave house. This ritual, which is "laden with magical symbolism" (Oanh N. V., 2010, p.88) and is described as follows: "Before a buffalo or cow is escorted out of the village gate, it is tied by jute rope." Then, all family members come to grab the rope (pǎn) one by one and then take a packet of rice (nung braih) that has been wrapped in banana leaves and scatter the rice (dzai braih) on the buffalo or cow. While spreading rice, they prayed, "Anai kǎo pǎn, kǎo jai braih. Hoǎi kom rayom dong tah. Kloh laih huǎi kom dong tah "(I grabbed the rope, scattered the rice. That is, there should be no more taboos or entanglement).

The grave abandonment ritual (abandoning ghosts) includes: (1) farewell cry; (2) the ritual to see off the dead's the soul is promptly returned to the abode of the deceased and reincarnating in living world.

The farewell cry ritual is not held elaborately but expressively in mourning. During the grave abandonment ritual, before the liberation rite, relatives often take turns going to the grave house to cry for the dead. Meanwhile, outside, people are eating, chatting, playing gongs, and dancing. The second day, the Jrai people call it the broken day [rɔ pochǎ]. When the villagers, relatives, and guests from all over the place come in full, the farewell cry ritual is held.

"When completed praying, the gongs start to sound and the grand nostalgic farewell also begins," Ngo Van Oanh writes. Everyone participated in the farewell ritual in silence. The Jrai's Death Farewell is a unique mass art performance (Oanh N. V., 2010, p.64). Masks are worn, gongs are played, and people dance. Atau dance (soang atâu) and Atau gong music are gloomy, melancholy, and slow as they convey the local family's grief at having to say goodbye to their loved ones. While the ancestors, represented by the people wearing masks, are thrilled and excited to welcome more of their offspring, the procession moves slowly around the grave house as a gesture of grief and regret.

The grave abandonment ritual's symbolic objects and actions represent rebirth, the process of creating a new being, as well as assisting the deceased in becoming less linked to the living and releasing the widow or widower from the condition of "mourning" so they might find a new companion.

Death is a short interruption of the unending life stream, in Jrai's viewpoint (Chi, 2003, p.358). The concept of "revival" is conveyed fully and in detail through the grave statues, puppets, and sexual connections on the day of the ritual grave abandonment because the concept of death is the end of existence in the physical world and resurrection in the spirit realm.

Ethnographer Nguyen Tu Chi stated that "it is not surprising that nights of "grave abandonment" are complete freedom for unmarried men and women. This is a time of meeting Death and Life, of transitioning from Death to Life, of preparing for life in the midst of death (Chi, 2003, p.358)

A mythology concerning the origin of the first humans is also depicted in the farewell ritual at the grave abandonment ritual. Besides the artistic performances of fertility, some grave statues represented the behaviors that reproduce new beings, for example, a couple statue displaying their genitals or making love, a healing woman statue, and a fetal position statue. These statues "not only make the grave house more fun during the grave abandonment ritual but also represent a belief in the cessation of death to rebirth." (Son, 2003, p.99)

After the farewell ritual, the deceased have officially gone, and the living are no longer involved with the dead. However, the family has to hold a cleansing ritual in order to truly liberate the dead's loved ones. As soon as the farewell ritual ends, villagers play the fun music gong and take the deceased's relatives to a river or a stream to bathe, wash their hair, and then put on new clothes. In places far from water sources, villagers splash water on them.

Water represents removing all ties. The completion of the period of mourning and the start of a regular life are symbolized by brushing hair, donning fresh clothes, and dancing with the villagers. The widows can then remarry, have all the pleasure with the rest of the hamlet, and are totally free.

The grave abandonment ritual, according to Ngo Van Oanh, is "a day of joy and communion, farewell to the dead, freeing the living, and reincarnating the deceased" (Oanh N. V., 2010, p.68). Through activities and rituals of fertility, the grave abandonment rite effectively conveys the dualism of "farewell to the dead and rebirth to the dead."

The gong player walks counterclockwise during the funeral but clockwise during the grave abandonment ritual, signifying that the deceased are resurrected in the world of the ancestors.

The village elder performs the ritual by pouring wine on the string of meat to let it flow down to the head of the grave and recites the vows (sơmah) "Hey Atau (Ghost)! I inform you that we will bring you huts, houses, pots, and jars, which you can take away with you. Don't ask for anything more. You have become a ghost or a yang. That's all. All that remains of the family, please don't take them away. The family has done enough duty with you already. After the village elder finished praying, the deceased's family members went to the grave house to mourn for the last time with the deceased "(Oanh N. V., 2010, p.70). The prayers have a magical meaning to make the souls of the dead go easily to the afterlife and to prevent the dead from causing harm to the living.



Figure 8: The grave house is the house of the dead

Ngol village, 2014

Photo: Minh Phuong

The Jrai people's life cycle rituals sustain emotions of family and community and satisfy people's spiritual requirements; therefore, they are not only retained by families but also carried out by the local government in a traditional manner. For instance, the 2020 Culture-Tourism Week in Pleiku City featured a traditional Jrai wedding ceremony performed by the Gia Lai provincial administration. The Management Board of Vietnam Ethnic Culture-Tourism Village worked with stakeholder groups in Gia Lai province to stage the grave abandonment rite as part of the celebrations for Culture Day of Ethnic Minority Culture on April 19, 2021. Director of the Center for Culture, Information, and Sports in the town of Ayun Pa in the province of Gia Lai, Mr. Lai Van Minh, stated: "We intend to hold classes on teaching gongs and brocade weaving in the near future in order to conserve and enhance cultural values in the region. Rituals must also be studied in order to understand their enormous spiritual and human significance. The local government will then start programs that support and uphold customary practices." (Accessed September 12, 2022, from <http://bienphongvietnam.gov.vn>, 2021)

Conclusion

Language does not convey all the people's wishes, expectations, and thoughts in the context of ritual, so they use symbolic objects and actions instead of "things to say." The main symbols in each life cycle ritual have the function of transforming the ritual receivers' statues.

As part of their socialization into the community, newborn children are subjected to an ear-blowing ceremony. They are assigned to their gender roles: men work hard outside the village, while women care for the family and do light housework. Nobody wants to play these roles differently because their

children have grown up with them. That is how the Jrai raise their children, according to neighborhood customs.

By the name given in the ritual, children become members of the community. People apply dew drops to children's feet or allow them to lick them. This represents children who have received their ancestors' essence so they can enter life confidently, but have not yet been recognized as adults because they have not undergone the tooth-sharpening ritual.

Bracelet and bracelet commuting represent the husband and wife's unwavering commitment to live together for the rest of their lives, as "an eternal circle is neither beginning nor ending."

When someone dies, the bond between that person and others is severed. The family performs several symbolic acts to keep the spirits of the dead from bothering the living, to bid the dead farewell, and to assist the dead in reincarnating in another world.

These symbols serve as intermediaries in the interactions of humans and deities. They also demonstrate the Jrai's belief in animism, the presence of gods in all life cycle rituals, an equal view of people, and the "reciprocity" principle in relationships

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