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Keeping the Sacred, Adapting the Festive: Local Wisdom in Semboro's Manten Tebu

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ABSTRACT

Manten Tebu, a sugarcane wedding ceremony associated with the beginning of the milling season at Semboro Sugar Factory, continues to be performed despite reported changes in preparation and festivities. This qualitative case study examines how an experienced participant distinguishes ritual obligations from adjustable arrangements, describes the organizational work needed to stage the ceremony, and understands the transmission of ceremonial knowledge. The analysis draws on one Indonesian-language interview conducted in October 2026 and attributable public accounts from 2024–2026. The participant assigns particular importance to the paired canes, ijab, sesandingan, and culturally significant timing, while describing practical decisions about harvest readiness, transport, staffing, scheduling, and funding requests. Public reports document recurring ceremonies but do not provide comparable evidence of changing participation or costs. The informant also describes learning from senior workers and succession through organizing committees, neither of which independently establishes how fully cultural meanings have been transmitted. Interpreted through ritualization and social-memory scholarship, these findings suggest selective ritual continuity: a situated relationship among valued ritual acts, arrangements that enable their performance, and distinct forms of practical and cultural knowledge. The case illustrates how ritual priority, organisational accommodation, and knowledge transmission can be analytically distinguished without treating ceremonial recurrence as proof of unchanged practice or understanding.

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INTRODUCTION

Manten Tebu marks the start of the milling season at Semboro Sugar Factory, but its preparation takes place amid the ordinary demands of growing and processing sugarcane. The cane must be ready for harvest, ceremonial materials assembled, staff assigned, and time found within factory routines. These practical demands raise a question about continuity: which actions make the ceremony recognisable to someone who has helped organise it, and which arrangements can change? A recently retired employee with years of direct involvement offers a useful perspective on these decisions. The study examines that perspective instead of assuming that an annual procession necessarily reproduces the same practices.

Manten Tebu stages a ceremonial marriage between two sugarcane stalks. At Semboro, the pair represents the sugar factory and the farmers whose cane it processes (Antikasari & Andriyanto, 2023). Yet the pairing acquires its public meaning in a workplace: the stalks have to be chosen, prepared, transported, and presented by people carrying out ordinary agricultural and industrial responsibilities. The factory is therefore more than a backdrop to a cultural performance. The plantation economy described by a historical study (Knight, 2000), and subsequent research on

changing plantation landscapes (Hargo Yuwono, 2018), provide historical reasons to examine the ties between ceremonial practice and the organization of work. Neither history nor symbolism alone explains how a particular ceremony is staged today.

Dated accounts of the ceremony show how these practices have remained publicly recognisable. A 2024 report describes a ceremonial harvest with factory and grower representatives (Solichah, 2024). Reporting from 2025 describes the decorated cane pair and the symbolism of factory–grower relations (TIMES Indonesia, 2025). A further account documents the decorated pair being escorted toward the mill in 2026 (TIMES Indonesia, 2026). These dated sources establish that the public ceremony continued in those years. They do not provide comparable figures for budgets, staff hours, attendance, or the full range of performances. Neither photographs of a procession nor recollections of reduced preparations can, by themselves, establish a continuous increase or decline in participation.

The continuing ceremony has also been examined in several earlier studies of Semboro. Rizki (2014) relates variations in the ceremony to factory leadership, committee arrangements, and institutional circumstances; Widyawati (2018) examines ritual myths and their transmission; and Antikasari and Andriyanto (2023) document ceremonial procedures and symbolic meanings. Khoirunnisa' (2024) adds an ethnobotanical account of the plants used. These studies make it inappropriate to present ritual symbolism, organizational change, or the existence of inherited knowledge as new discoveries. Together, these studies provide the empirical foundation for examining how one experienced practitioner relates ceremonial priorities to the work needed to keep the tradition going.

Nabila (2022) had previously documented the local-wisdom values of Manten Tebu, simplification of festivities, and financial constraints in relation to social studies education; Triyanto (2024) likewise examined the tradition as a source for local history learning. The October 2026 interview returns to this setting through a practitioner who also informed the 2022 study, now concentrating on the reasoning behind ritual priorities and practical arrangements. Adaptation itself is not a new finding: research on ceremonial performances, Mimouna rituals, and Sekaten has already examined the coexistence of cultural priorities with variation in public enactment (Anacin, 2015; Grosglik & Levy, 2025; Nugroho et al., 2025). These comparisons help distinguish familiar evidence of adaptation from the present inquiry into how a practitioner judges the importance of particular actions within an operating sugar factory.

Studies of other sugar-industry ceremonies provide a more direct institutional comparison. Sari et al. (2016) examine ceremonial communication and coordination; Susanti et al. (2026) offer an ethnographic account of a milling-opening rite as a social and industrial practice at another factory. Organizational coordination is therefore not in itself an unstudied dimension of industrial ritual. The Semboro case adds a distinct scale and angle of inquiry: a retrospective practitioner account permits close attention to how ritual priorities are narrated alongside field readiness, timetables, staffing, and budget procedures. This viewpoint permits detailed interpretation of the practitioner's experience while keeping institutional decision-making outside the empirical claims of the article.

The wider heritage literature helps explain why the continuation of these rituals need not imply an unchanged or universally accepted form. Abdila et al. (2024) question simplified accounts of Manten Tebu's origins and trace changes in its social meanings. Smith's (2006) discussion of authorized heritage narratives draws attention to whose understandings become recognized, while Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) show why traditions that appear continuous may be actively reformulated. These arguments do not dismiss local attachments to Manten Tebu. They make it important to examine how an experienced participant differentiates practices considered

obligatory from changes deemed acceptable, without presuming that this view represents every participant. Research on Miao ritual inheritance and Suzhou storytelling suggests that participants can interpret continuity and authenticity differently when cultural practices are safeguarded (Yu, 2015; Miao, 2025). Such work invites attention to how authority and cultural significance are expressed when particular acts are classified as obligatory or adaptable.

In this study, the term local wisdom refers to the meanings attributed to Manten Tebu in its social setting, rather than an assumption that all its practices are ancient or interpreted identically. Brumann (2014) cautions against treating heritage authenticity as self-evident, while Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) shows how the presentation of a practice as heritage can itself shape what is selected and displayed. This distinction is pertinent to the difference between a procession visible to spectators and the less visible knowledge needed to prepare it. A related perspective emerges from studies of Hadra ceremonies and water rituals, where continuing performance is examined alongside changes in participation and material circumstances (Wondimu et al., 2025; Tran et al., 2026). For Semboro, these comparisons direct attention to how a familiar ceremonial sequence is made practicable under agricultural and organisational conditions. The same practical concern is relevant to Semboro, where the symbolic importance of a ritual depends partly on the conditions that make its enactment possible.

These questions of cultural priority and practical enactment are interpreted principally through Bell's account of ritualization. Rather than assuming that rituals consist of a fixed inventory of sacred objects, Bell (1992) directs attention to the practices through which some actions are differentiated from others and given particular standing. This is relevant to the informant's treatment of the paired cane, *ijab* (a ceremonial declaration), *sesandingan* (ritual offerings), and selected times as especially important, even as transport, staffing, and festive scale can be adjusted. Bell (1997) further permits an analysis of recognizable patterns without presuming identical enactments. The theory therefore guides interpretation of the priorities described by the practitioner.

This emphasis on practice also directs attention to the people and resources involved: the paired stalks represent cooperation between the factory and growers, while the ceremony depends on staffing, schedules, and materials. Critical heritage studies distinguish public cultural representation from the authority to define and organise practices (Waterton & Smith, 2010; Bortolotto et al., 2020). Here, those perspectives help frame the work of preparing the ritual; they do not establish conflicts or managerial decisions not recorded in the interview. Research on heritage governance and cultural reconstruction likewise distinguishes visible attachment to a tradition from participation in decisions about its presentation (Tran & Nguyen, 2025; Zhang et al., 2026). In Semboro, this perspective draws attention to the different roles involved in preparing and representing a shared ritual.

Continuity also concerns what passes between successive participants. Connerton (1989) foregrounds remembering through repeated and embodied practices, pertinent to the informant's description of learning ceremonial tasks alongside senior workers. Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) draw attention to the communication and maintenance of shared cultural meanings. Read together, these perspectives help separate three questions that reports of an annual celebration tend to merge: who takes responsibility for the event, who knows how to perform its tasks, and who can explain why those tasks are significant. The interview provides an account of possible channels of transmission, not a direct assessment of successors' competence or understanding (Kurin, 2004; Paprot-Wielopolska, 2024). Research on situated learning adds a practical explanation for how participation in preparations may provide opportunities to acquire ritual know-how (Lave & Wenger, 1991), while work on music, language, and dance transmission shows that participating

in one activity need not transfer every aspect of a cultural repertoire (Gwerevende & Mthombeni, 2023). These perspectives help distinguish participation in ceremonial work from the explanations through which its meaning is communicated. Together, these perspectives offer a way to consider both the continuity of ceremonial tasks and the communication of their cultural meaning.

Taken together, the local studies and interpretive perspectives establish a more specific research problem. The task is to explain how ritual priorities, organisational adjustments, and the transfer of knowledge are related in an experienced practitioner's account. The analysis asks which actions the informant regards as necessary and why, how preparations are adjusted to agricultural and organisational conditions, and how ceremonial responsibilities and meanings are passed on. The October 2026 interview is interpreted alongside dated public accounts, with the earlier research context and overlap of key informants disclosed in the Method section. The article develops a case-specific account of selective ritual continuity by relating ceremonial priorities to organisational work and the passing on of knowledge.

METHOD

This article uses an interpretive qualitative single-case design focused on Manten Tebu at Semboro Sugar Factory, Jember, East Java. The case is the ceremony within the agricultural and organisational context of the mill, while the principal unit of empirical interpretation is one experienced participant's account of its preparation, significance, and continued performance. An intensive case approach is appropriate for examining the relationship between reported ritual obligations, practical arrangements, and the transfer of knowledge in a bounded setting (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018). The analysis centres on that practitioner's situated account, supported by dated public records.

The primary material is an in-depth interview conducted in Indonesian in October 2026 with a recently retired former employee of PG Semboro who had actively participated in Manten Tebu over many years. The participant, designated KI-01 in this manuscript, was approached as a key informant because of this first-hand involvement. KI-01 had also served as a key informant in Nabila's (2022) earlier research on the same tradition. This overlap is disclosed because the two studies draw in part on the same person's knowledge, even though the 2026 interview was a new data-collection occasion with a distinct focus. The discussion covered ceremonial obligations, harvesting and transport, preparations and scheduling, reported changes in festivities, factory–grower symbolism, and learning from senior colleagues. Recollections of earlier years were treated as retrospective testimony. The 2022 study is cited as prior research, not counted as an independent interview confirming the 2026 account. No participant observation or interviews with other participant groups were conducted for this article.

The documentary comparison used three attributable public accounts of PG Semboro ceremonies dated 2024–2026 (Solichah, 2024; TIMES Indonesia, 2025, 2026). They were included because they identify the factory and describe dated ceremonial activities or visible elements. Sources were reviewed for their stated event, publication date, and observable details, with reportage about the procession distinguished from opinions about its meaning or organisation. These reports establish selected visible elements of ceremonies performed in those years. Their coverage was compared by event and date, without treating them as a complete annual record. The 2022 thesis included field observation, but its material is cited here as prior research rather than incorporated as newly collected 2026 evidence. Earlier academic publications, including Nabila (2022), informed historical and theoretical positioning rather than being recoded as newly collected evidence (Bowen, 2009).

The Indonesian transcript was cleaned for readability and examined alongside a unit-level evidence register. It was segmented into 76 identified units (INT-001–INT-076): 73 substantive or contextual units and three closing or follow-up units excluded from substantive findings. Units received a primary code and, where relevant, supplementary codes. Codes were compared and assembled into five initial analytical clusters: ritual obligation and practical judgement; changing festivities and participation; organisational arrangements and resources; factory–grower symbolism; and learning, succession, and documentation. These were synthesised under the three research questions, guided by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and recorded in an audit trail (Nowell et al., 2017). Contrary cases were retained, including the informant's caution against generalising reduced farmer participation, accounts of continuing public performances, and confidence in committee succession. The counts describe segments of one interview, not independent observations, frequencies of events, or evidence of thematic prevalence.

Interpretations were assessed against the provenance and reach of each source: first-hand participation, retrospective memory, personal judgement, public reporting, and scholarly interpretation were kept distinguishable. The authors confirmed the selected Indonesian quotations against the interview audio after transcription cleaning, and prepared English translations that preserve their substantive meaning. The informant consented to publication of the interview findings and selected quotations, as confirmed by the research team. A study code is used in this article, although the disclosed connection to the earlier study may make the participant recognisable to readers of that work. Because the 2022 and 2026 accounts come from the same person, they were considered a continuous practitioner perspective rather than independent corroboration. The absence of internal records, direct observation, and successor interviews constrains claims about management decisions, long-term trends, and the outcomes of knowledge transmission (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; O'Brien et al., 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ritual Obligations and Sacred Priorities

The informant distinguishes actions considered necessary to Manten Tebu from activities that accompany the ceremony. The paired sugarcane stalks, ijab, and sesandingan are described as obligatory, whereas the procession's scale and the choice of performances may vary. This distinction offers insight into how a participant recognises the ceremony when some of its arrangements change. Asked which elements continue, the informant replied:

> "Pasangan tebu tetap ada. Ijab tetap ada. Sesandingan juga masih ada. Itu termasuk bagian yang dianggap wajib."
>
> (The sugarcane pair remains. The ijab remains. The sesandingan offerings also remain. These are among the elements considered obligatory).

The terms *tetap ada* (still present) and *wajib* (obligatory) do different work in the informant's account. The first describes recurrence; the second attributes a normative priority to an action. This distinction is central to the analysis because a ceremony might recur without every part having equal importance to those preparing it. Bell (1992) helps interpret this act of differentiation: what is described as obligatory is distinguished from its surrounding tasks rather than simply listed as an item that happened again. The resulting hierarchy expresses the cultural priorities described by this experienced participant.

Rappaport's account of ritual as prescribed and recurrent performance offers a complementary perspective (Rappaport, 1999). Recurrence alone, however, is insufficient to explain the Semboro

account. A procession can recur without being named wajib, while a set of offerings can be given obligatory status despite changes in other parts of the event. What the interview makes visible is a hierarchy of perceived significance: certain actions are spoken of as constitutive of Manten Tebu, while other features are evaluated in relation to their practicability. The distinction reveals how ritual necessity is articulated in everyday accounts of ceremonial preparation.

The choice of cane illustrates how ritual considerations meet agricultural requirements. The informant explains that the selected field must contain cane ready for harvest, while the day and hour remain culturally significant. In this account, practical readiness and ceremonial timing are considered together. Together, these considerations show how a meaningful time can be retained while the harvest location responds to crop readiness. The ritual action remains important, even when the conditions for carrying it out differ.

> "Jadi tempatnya tidak semata-mata karena pertimbangan khusus tertentu, tetapi juga melihat tebu mana yang sudah layak dipetik. Sedangkan hari dan jamnya tetap diperhitungkan."
>
> (The location is not chosen only for particular special considerations; it also depends on which sugarcane is ready to be harvested. The day and time are still taken into account).

Transport provides a second example. The informant considers escorting the ceremonial cane important, although a pickup truck may be used when the field lies far from the factory. The distance affects how the escort is arranged, not necessarily whether the cane receives a ceremonial transfer. For this participant, the action's significance can remain recognisable despite a change of vehicle. The example shows how one practical decision can be reconciled with an obligation the informant values.

Bell's account places ritualized action among ordinary social practices rather than separating ritual symbols from the circumstances of their use (Bell, 1992, 1997). It also invites a limited comparison with work on water rituals in Hanoi, where material circumstances are discussed in relation to the practicability of established ceremonial sequences (Tran et al., 2026). The useful comparison concerns the practical decisions about materials, location, or movement that allow a meaningful sequence to continue. At Semboro, the informant's examples of harvest readiness and vehicle choice make this relationship visible within the everyday conditions of a sugar factory.

The related *selamatan giling* (milling thanksgiving) offers a more difficult case. The informant recalls that a cattle head was once buried as part of that sequence and believes that it is now prepared without burial. The recollection concerns a ceremony associated with Manten Tebu, rather than a verified change to the cane-wedding ritual itself. It nevertheless complicates an overly simple division between sacred objects that remain untouched and festive activities that can change. An object may retain ceremonial significance even when the associated action is remembered differently.

> "Dulu, dalam rangkaian selamatan giling, ada kepala sapi yang ditanam. Sekarang, setahu saya, kepala sapi masih disiapkan, tetapi tidak lagi ditanam seperti dahulu."
>
> (In the earlier milling thanksgiving sequence, a cattle head was buried. Now, as far as I know, the cattle head is still prepared, but it is no longer buried as it was before).

In this example, retention of a ceremonial object and retention of the action associated with it are analytically distinct. The example challenges the assumption that every practice described as significant is reproduced without variation. As a recollection about the connected milling thanksgiving, this example serves as a boundary case for the distinction between ritual objects and the actions performed with them. Bell (1997) helps place such variation within recognisable ritual patterns.

The paired stalks introduce a social dimension to the informant's account of obligation. The stalks are represented ceremonially as male and female, symbolically associating the factory with growers and staging their relationship as a marriage. The use of male and female here is a ritual designation, not a botanical classification. Previous studies of Semboro have documented this symbolic association (Nabila, 2022; Antikasari & Andriyanto, 2023). The present interview does not discover the symbolism anew; it helps explain why an established symbol remains central when arrangements around the ceremony are described as flexible.

> "Tebu laki-laki diibaratkan milik PG, sedangkan tebu perempuan milik petani. Tebu PG dan tebu petani kemudian 'dikawinkan' menjadi satu."
>
> (The male sugarcane is understood as belonging to the factory, while the female sugarcane belongs to the farmers. The factory's cane and the farmers' cane are then 'married' into one).

The paired stalks turn the relation between cultivating and processing cane into a public image of union. Earlier Semboro studies have documented this symbolism (Antikasari & Andriyanto, 2023; Nabila, 2022). Its analytical role here is different. The same factory that appears as one symbolic partner also reportedly provides the personnel, timetables, approvals, and logistical arrangements through which the ceremony is made possible. Read together, the symbolism of union and the practical division of ceremonial work introduce the organizational conditions through which the ritual is sustained. The interview does not show whether the ritual ideal matches everyday relations between managers and growers, or who ultimately has authority to interpret its meaning (Waterton & Smith, 2010).

Festive Adaptation and Organizational Practices

The continuity of these ritual priorities also depends on how Manten Tebu is prepared, staffed, scheduled, and presented. The informant's comparison of earlier and later celebrations is grounded partly in a changing personal role: previous involvement included escorting cane and preparing ceremonial equipment, sometimes late into the evening, whereas more recent participation was often attendance in a representative capacity. This change of vantage point matters when interpreting memories of reduced festivities. The informant was also consulted in Nabila's (2022) earlier research, so similarities between the accounts cannot serve as independent corroboration of a long-term decline. His changing involvement provides a perspective on the preparatory work that visitors to the public event may not see.

Four dimensions of adaptation can be distinguished within the testimony: ceremonial time, the labour of preparation, the form and location of participation, and the organizational resources used to stage the event. These dimensions need not change at the same pace. Changes in timing, work allocation, and routes of participation therefore need to be distinguished from changes in ritual priority. Work on public ritual and heritage staging cautions against equating visibility with cultural fidelity (Quang et al., 2022). In Semboro, the relevant issue is not whether a smaller

spectacle is automatically weaker, but what alterations to the organization of the event are compatible, in the informant's account, with the performance of valued ritual acts.

The informant's most concrete comparison concerns timing. In earlier years, the ceremonial harvest could occur about a week before selamatan giling; more recently, several activities have been arranged closer together. The recalled contrast identifies a specific adjustment that general descriptions of a less festive celebration may overlook. A compressed schedule changes when preparations take place and how they must fit around factory work.

> "Dulu petik tebu manten bisa dilakukan sekitar satu minggu sebelum selamatan giling. Sekarang beberapa rangkaian dilakukan dalam waktu yang lebih berdekatan."
>
> (Previously, the ceremonial sugarcane harvest could take place about a week before the milling thanksgiving. Now several parts of the sequence take place closer together).

Changes in timing have consequences for the type of work required, even where the same ceremonial acts remain. The informant recalls preparing costumes and ritual objects, arrangements sometimes continuing late at night, and women employees participating in food and equipment preparation. Such activities rarely appear in photographs of the ceremonial procession, yet they make the visible event possible. These recollections foreground preparation as a substantial, often less visible form of participation. Bell's perspective on ritualized action is helpful precisely because the actions treated as ceremonially significant depend on a larger network of ordinary tasks (Bell, 1992).

The preparatory work matters analytically because it connects ritual priority to practical feasibility. Retaining an ijab or a ceremonial escort requires a field and crop ready for harvesting, people able to prepare the objects, a suitable means of transport, and available time in the factory schedule. Earlier research has documented changes in factory organisation and the scale of festivities (Rizki, 2014; Nabila, 2022). What the present account clarifies is how a practitioner places such adjustable arrangements alongside acts treated as more demanding of continuity. The distinction is between different kinds of importance within a single performance, rather than between a culturally meaningful ceremony and an administratively neutral background. A comparative perspective appears in Meladze (2026), which examines agricultural work and seasonal ritual together as living heritage in Upper Svaneti. The comparison concerns their practical entanglement, not an equivalence between the two cultural settings.

The earlier study supplies a concrete observation of collaborative ceremonial work. At the April 2022 ceremony in Nogosari, Nabila (2022) documented employees, growers, and local residents participating in the event, including work before and after the procession. This record gives historical context to the practical responsibilities described retrospectively in the 2026 interview, without treating the two accounts as independent informant testimony.

The informant is more cautious when discussing farmers' participation. Asked whether fewer growers now take part, the participant did not endorse a general decline. Earlier escorts included farmers and representatives of the local sugarcane growers' organisation (KPTR), some wearing *beskap* (formal Javanese attire); participation could also occur at the factory rather than along the procession route. These are different ways of taking part, and reduced visibility in one setting does not necessarily mean withdrawal from the event. With no attendance records, the comparison remains a description of changing participation rather than a measurement of its extent.

> "Untuk petani, tidak bisa langsung dikatakan berkurang semuanya. Dulu ada petani dan perwakilan KPTR yang ikut serta, bahkan memakai beskap."
>
> (For farmers, one cannot simply say that participation has decreased across the board. In the past, farmers and KPTR representatives participated, some even wearing beskap traditional dress).

Dated public accounts provide a vantage point different from the retrospective interview. Reports from 2024, 2025, and 2026 document the continued holding of public ceremonies and certain visible acts (Solichah, 2024; TIMES Indonesia, 2025, 2026). They can contextualise the claim that Manten Tebu continued to be staged, but cannot verify changes in preparation hours, expenditure, or each participating group's attendance. They should not be treated as independent assessments of the informant's organisational explanations; published reports can also share publicity sources. The defensible contrast is between continuing public visibility and one practitioner's memory of the labour and organisation behind that visibility.

The account also describes the work of arranging the ceremony inside the factory. According to the informant, different sections discuss dates and duties, cultivation staff attend to selecting and cutting cane, and the final programme is subject to managerial approval and competing commitments. No meeting minutes or interviews with managers were available to verify particular decisions. Even so, the description makes an important point about performance: activities regarded as ritually necessary still require staff, equipment, transport, and time. The organisational account therefore helps explain how ceremonial priorities are put into practice without treating management procedures as a verified source of ritual rules.

> "Anggaran diajukan terlebih dahulu ke pusat melalui mekanisme permintaan modal kerja (PMK). Karena itu, besarnya anggaran juga memengaruhi bentuk dan skala pelaksanaan."
>
> (The budget is first proposed to the central office through a working-capital request (PMK). Consequently, the available budget also affects the form and scale of the event).

The informant's reference to a working-capital request, or *permintaan modal kerja* (PMK), gives this organizational dimension particular specificity. Earlier Semboro research had already discussed funding constraints and changing arrangements (Rizki, 2014; Nabila, 2022). The present account adds a description of a request channel through which the informant believes the scale of festivities is affected. It would be inappropriate to infer the value of any approved allocation or establish a causal impact without financial records. Nonetheless, this testimony illuminates how a practitioner relates decisions about the scale of public festivities to an administrative process while simultaneously insisting that certain ritual actions remain necessary.

The factory has two roles in the account. In the ceremony, its cane is symbolically united with the growers' cane. In everyday preparation, the factory is also the workplace through which people, schedules, vehicles, and funding requests are coordinated. The symbolic relationship explains what the marriage is intended to express, while the organisational details explain how the event can be staged. Reading both together keeps the analysis close to the industrial setting, where cultural commitments must be enacted through ordinary working arrangements.

This distinction also clarifies the limits of a purely symbolic interpretation. Factory–grower solidarity is staged through the paired cane, but the organizational work described by the

participant is differentiated across sections, roles, and approval procedures. That difference does not demonstrate social conflict. Critical studies of heritage invite attention to representation and authority (Smith, 2006; Jones, 2017), yet the Semboro interview cannot reconstruct deliberations or compare the influence of farmers and managers. A more firmly evidenced insight is that the public representation of unity depends on coordinated, unequally distributed practical responsibilities. Ceremony and workplace organization therefore intersect without being analytically identical.

Taken together, the examples suggest a form of organizational accommodation: the informant describes ceremonial time, staffing, transport, and financial provision as arrangements through which valued ritual acts can continue to be staged. This account distinguishes the culturally attributed standing of an act from the organisational decisions described as enabling its performance. The distinction extends the analysis beyond the familiar observation that festivities may become simpler (Rizki, 2014; Nabila, 2022).

The reported adjustments therefore extend beyond the size of the celebration. They involve the spacing of events, the work assigned to employees, the locations in which people participate, and the resources requested for preparation. Public reports confirm that Manten Tebu continued to be performed. The account thus foregrounds organisational arrangements around ritual actions that the participant continues to value. Those arrangements in turn depend on the practical knowledge and responsibilities passed between workers.

Cultural Transmission through Workplace Participation

The work required to stage the ceremony also depends on knowledge passed between experienced workers and those who later take on their responsibilities. The informant recalls learning by helping senior colleagues during preparations, rather than through formal instruction. The interview therefore identifies participation alongside experienced colleagues as a route through which ceremonial responsibilities and practical knowledge are reportedly shared.

> "Biasanya diajari ketika menjalankan kegiatan. Jadi belajar langsung dari orang yang lebih senior dan dari keterlibatan dalam pelaksanaan."
>
> (They are usually taught while carrying out the activities. In that way, they learn directly from more senior people and through participating in the event).

Connerton's argument that social memory can be sustained through repeated, embodied practice helps interpret this channel of learning (Connerton, 1989). In ceremonial preparation, tasks such as selecting cane, arranging adornments, preparing offerings, and joining the procession may preserve ways of acting that are difficult to acquire from written descriptions alone. The informant's account is particularly useful for distinguishing the opportunity to learn through participation from the cultural explanations that accompany practical tasks.

Situated learning provides a complementary explanation for why such participation may matter. Lave and Wenger (1991) describe learning in relation to involvement in a community's activities, a perspective compatible with the informant's description of younger workers receiving guidance while helping senior colleagues. In Semboro, the informant's examples point to learning opportunities built into the practical preparation of the rite. Research on embodied heritage likewise stresses that practical understanding may involve action and sensory familiarity as well as verbal explanation (Yu & Mei, 2024). This distinction becomes especially important when the data turn from how the rite is performed to what its participants understand.

The informant also distinguishes involvement from understanding. Some employees, including some in the cultivation division, are said to know relatively little about the ceremony's meaning, while those who have helped prepare it tend to be more familiar with its details. Its significance lies in the distinction being made: watching a procession, performing an assigned task, and explaining the cultural reasons for that task are different forms of familiarity with Manten Tebu.

> "Tidak semua memahami. Bahkan di bagian tanaman pun tidak semua orang mengerti secara mendalam. Biasanya yang benar-benar tahu adalah orang yang pernah terlibat langsung."
>
> (Not everyone understands it. Even in the cultivation division, not everyone understands the tradition in depth. Those who really know it are usually people who have been directly involved).

The account makes it useful to distinguish three, rather than one, objects of transmission. Organizational responsibility concerns who is assigned to ensure that the event takes place. Procedural knowledge concerns the ability to select and handle cane, prepare ceremonial objects, and coordinate the sequence of activities. Cultural understanding concerns the capacity to explain the meanings and obligations attributed to those acts. Read through Connerton (1989) and Assmann and Czaplicka (1995), they distinguish remembrance through performance from the communication of cultural meaning: continuity of performance may depend on a different combination of knowledge and responsibility from continuity of explanation.

This concern about uneven understanding sits alongside the informant's confidence in committee succession. Senior employees reportedly pass responsibilities to younger colleagues so that the event can continue. There is no necessary contradiction. A committee may acquire the ability to stage the next ceremony without every member learning the same explanations, while hands-on participation may also preserve skills that are difficult to describe. The interview leaves both possibilities open, rather than establishing either the loss or the complete transfer of ceremonial knowledge.

> "Menurut saya tidak sampai menjadi masalah besar karena selalu ada panitia dan ada proses regenerasi. Sebelum orang yang senior pensiun, biasanya pengetahuan dan tugas diturunkan kepada orang berikutnya supaya tidak hilang."
>
> (In my view, it is not a major problem because there is always a committee and a process of succession. Before senior people retire, knowledge and responsibilities are usually passed on to others so they are not lost).

The informant's confidence in committee succession, alongside the belief that some workers know little about the ritual, makes this distinction especially salient. A new committee may be able to organize a recognizable ceremony, and newer employees may learn tasks from experienced colleagues, without these observations establishing the depth of their understanding of ceremonial meanings. The important distinction is between the organisational ability to stage another ceremony and the cultural explanations that individual participants may carry forward. Connerton (1989) illuminates the practical route of remembrance; Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) clarify the distinct question of shared explanation.

Studies of living-heritage transmission also suggest that continued participation and the acquisition of cultural knowledge are distinct questions. Research on youth involvement in safeguarding in Laos describes an explicitly learner-centred community of practice (Thanapornsangsuth et al.,

2025), while work on linked music, dance, and language practices considers different repertoires that must be transmitted together or separately (Gwerevende & Mthombeni, 2023). These comparisons sharpen the distinction between the transfer of tasks described by KI-01 and the separate question of how participants learn to explain ceremonial symbols.

The informant's account of documentation raises a related concern. Photographs once kept on a compact disc reportedly became unreadable, and the participant is unsure whether the factory holds a complete written archive. The first recollection concerns the fragility of a personal collection; the second cannot establish that institutional records are absent. Both draw attention to the difference between preserving evidence that a celebration occurred and retaining explanations of its preparation. Images can show the participants, objects, and procession, but they seldom record why a field was chosen or what particular ritual materials meant to those responsible.

> "Setahu saya tidak ada arsip tertulis yang lengkap."
>
> (As far as I know, there is no complete written archive).

The distinction between documenting appearance and documenting know-how also applies to the dated public reports used in this study. They document visible performance, while accounts of instruction and cultural rationale depend on practitioners' explanations. Assmann's treatment of cultural memory is pertinent to the circulation and preservation of representations (Assmann, 2011), while Connerton (1989) draws attention to knowledge reproduced through performance. Neither form of preservation replaces the other. The central question is how visual traces, explanations, and practical competence may be connected so that records remain meaningful beyond the occasion on which they were produced.

This interpretation has practical implications for documenting an intangible tradition. Work on participatory films, descriptive contextualisation, and community-based archiving emphasises the usefulness of recording practitioners' explanations alongside cultural performances (Valentinčič Furlan, 2025; Zlodi, 2023; Putra & Adam, 2026). For Semboro, this suggests recording the name and use of ceremonial materials, reasons given for decisions, task sequences, and accounts from people responsible for preparations, alongside images of the public procession. Such documentation could make existing records more interpretable and useful for those preparing later ceremonies.

Opportunities to acquire such knowledge are also connected to proximity and work roles. The informant considers people who have worked in the factory or lived near it more familiar with Manten Tebu than those with little exposure to the event. Familiarity, however, can mean having seen the procession, having assisted in a task, or being able to explain a ceremonial requirement. These are different experiences. The testimony consequently draws attention to how access to activities and knowledgeable practitioners may shape opportunities to learn. The distinction is consistent with approaches to living heritage that locate transmission in ongoing community practice rather than in the storage of cultural objects alone (Kurin, 2004; UNESCO, 2003).

For safeguarding purposes, the most relevant implication is to connect performance records with practical and interpretive knowledge while those who hold it can still explain their activities. Photographs of a cane escort could, for example, be accompanied by descriptions of how the field was chosen, who prepared the offerings, and what the timing signifies to the people responsible. Recording multiple practitioners' perspectives would be preferable to treating the present

informant as the sole authority on meanings and procedures. This recommendation responds to the kinds of practical knowledge that the available records capture only partially. Community-engaged approaches to safeguarding support that distinction between making records available and sustaining the social practices that give those records significance (Radzuan et al., 2024; Tan et al., 2026).

The third theme thus complements, rather than merely follows, the analysis of ritual obligations and the organizational work needed to fulfil them. The reported learning of tasks, succession of committees, and circulation of visual records concern different aspects of a continuing ceremony. An event may be repeated because responsibilities have passed on, while the detailed reasons for particular choices remain more unevenly known. This analytical separation builds on earlier attention to ritual myths and inheritance at Semboro (Widyawati, 2018), but focuses on the distinction between the recurrence of performance and the transmission of its practical and interpretive knowledge.

Across the three themes, selective ritual continuity names a case-bound interpretation of the informant's distinctions among obligatory ceremonial acts, adjustable practical arrangements, and different forms of knowledge transmission. The paired canes, ijab, sesandingan, and significant timing acquire priority in this account, while their enactment depends on harvesting conditions, transport, organisation, and scheduling. Committee succession may sustain performance without demonstrating equal transfer of explanations and meanings. The analysis thus describes the relationship among these dimensions as understood by one experienced participant (Bell, 1992; Connerton, 1989; Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995).

Table 1 distinguishes the work done by each source. The interview provides the participant's explanations, dated reports show selected public activities, and the authors' interpretation identifies connections and unresolved questions. The distinction is particularly useful for interpreting accounts of budgeting, participation, and workplace learning alongside photographs of public events. Table 1 is organised by analytical domain rather than year. Public accounts support the continued visibility of the ceremony, while information about staffing, budget requests, and workplace instruction comes mainly from KI-01. The recollection concerning the cattle head belongs to the related milling thanksgiving and is not evidence of a verified change to Manten Tebu itself.

Table 1. Interview accounts, documentary context, and interpretive boundaries in Manten Tebu

Analytical domain	Evidence from interview (KI-01)	Dated public context	Interpretation and evidential limit
Ritual priorities	The cane pair, ijab, sesandingan and meaningful timing are treated as important; cane readiness and transport are also considered.	Public accounts from 2024–2026 show recurring ceremonial elements and visible performances.	Obligation reflects a practitioner's judgement, not an official rule. The cattle-head recollection concerns the associated selamatan giling.
Staging adaptations	Recalls shorter intervals, changing preparation and escort roles, and budget requests through PMK.	Reports document continuing ceremonies but lack comparable figures for staffing, budgets and attendance.	No measured trend in participation or verified causal effect of funding can be inferred.

Transmission and succession	Describes learning alongside senior staff, committee succession and uneven understanding among participants.	Public images and reports show visible enactment, not the content of workplace learning.	Responsibility, procedural knowledge and cultural understanding remain distinct; successors' outcomes were not assessed.

Figure 1. Analytical domains of selective ritual continuity in the Semboro case. Connections represent a case-bound interpretation, not tested causal pathways; public documentation supports visible recurrence only.

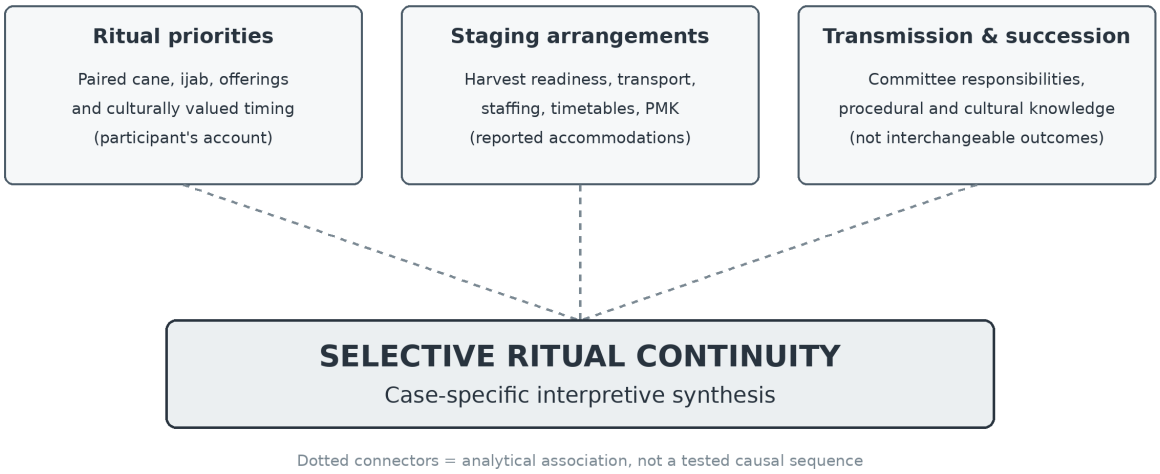


Figure 1 shows how the three analytical domains connect without treating them as equivalent. The informant identifies important ceremonial acts, describes the arrangements required to perform them, and recalls ways of passing on duties and knowledge. Public documents provide a complementary record of the ceremony's visible recurrence.

Together, the domains in Figure 1 explain why public recurrence is only part of the continuity examined here. The same participant who describes the obligation to retain selected acts also discusses the choices involved in obtaining cane, arranging transport, allocating staff, and deciding on timing. Learning from senior colleagues and committee succession describe ways the ceremonial work may be carried forward. The figure portrays these analytical relationships without assigning them causal direction.

CONCLUSION

The interview shows that maintaining Manten Tebu does not require every element of its organisation to remain unchanged. The paired sugarcane stalks, ijab, sesandingan, and culturally meaningful timing are treated as important, while harvest readiness, transport, staffing, and scheduling call for practical decisions. The informant recalls changes in preparations and the scale of the festivities, and dated reports confirm that public ceremonies continued. The findings point to continuity shaped by differentiated ritual priorities and practical adjustments. A further distinction concerns what is passed on when responsibility for the ceremony changes hands. The informant describes learning from experienced colleagues and the continuing work of organising committees. Yet taking charge of an event, knowing how to perform its tasks, and understanding the cultural reasons behind them are not identical. This is the basis for using selective ritual continuity as a situated interpretation linking valued acts, their practical enactment, and the transmission of knowledge. The contribution lies in explaining these relationships together within

the social and industrial setting of Semboro. Further research could examine how current factory employees, sugarcane growers, ritual organisers, and younger successors understand Manten Tebu across successive milling seasons. Such perspectives would clarify how ceremonial responsibilities, practical skills, and cultural explanations are shared beyond the experience considered in this article. For those involved in safeguarding the tradition, the findings highlight the value of documenting how practitioners select cane, prepare ceremonial materials, coordinate the event, and explain the meanings attached to these actions. Such records would complement documentation of the public procession while acknowledging that much ceremonial knowledge is learned through participation.

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