

RESEARCH ARTICLE



SYMBOLIC SPEECH AND RITUAL DISCOURSE: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SHAMANIC AUTHORITY IN THE PACU JALUR TRADITION OF KUANTAN SINGINGI

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role and identity of the Jalur Shaman within the Pacu Jalur rowing tradition in Kuantan Singingi Regency, Indonesia. While the original approach adopts a historical-biographical method, this revision reframes the study through a discourse-analytic lens to better interrogate how the shaman's role, ritual language, and spiritual objects function as symbolic practices. The central figure, Jasri, a renowned shaman, guides the spiritual preparation of rowing teams through ritual prayers, protective symbols, and oral transmission of traditional values. Drawing from interviews and cultural observation, the study investigates how speech, artifacts, and biography co-construct the Jalur Shaman's legitimacy. Adopting theoretical insights from Critical Discourse Analysis and Ritual Theory, the study analyzes prayers as performative speech acts and the shaman's tools (e.g., knives, necklaces) as cultural texts encoding meanings of defense, identity, and cosmological belief. The article reveals how the authority of a shaman is not inherited, but constructed through community narratives, ritual performance, and symbolic alignment with ancestral power. Findings suggest that the shaman's discourse sustains a sacred space where tradition is enacted, remembered, and renewed. Beyond preserving heritage, Jasri's role reflects resistance against modern secularization and provides a platform for collective spiritual identity in the postcolonial context. The study recommends incorporating discourse-sensitive approaches to analyze spiritual roles in Indigenous communities and preserving oral texts as part of intangible cultural heritage. Future research could explore the tension between institutional religious frameworks and localized spiritual discourse in similar traditions across Southeast Asia.

Introduction

Kuantan Singingi Regency is geographically located within the Kuantan River Basin (UU Hamidi, 1985). Beyond its geographical features, the regency is recognized as a cultural hub, particularly for hosting the renowned *Pacu Jalur* tradition. *Pacu Jalur* is not only a local competition but also a regional and national attraction, celebrated annually, with its most festive and large-scale event taking place in Teluk Kuantan City to commemorate the anniversary of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Suwardi, 2007). The competition has transcended local boundaries, attracting participants and audiences from neighboring countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. This highlights the transnational significance of *Pacu Jalur* as more than a sporting event, but as a cultural performance embedded with symbolic and historical values.

Riau Province itself is characterized by its richness in cultural diversity, encompassing various traditional practices and sacred values. Such diversity strengthens the role of Kuantan Singingi Regency as a unique cultural center (Zulfa, 2007). Within this socio-cultural landscape, *Pacu Jalur* emerges not only as an annual entertainment event but also as an emblematic discourse that reinforces identity, heritage, and communal solidarity. As Sabagalet (2021) notes, the beauty and uniqueness of this region lie in its diverse cultural traditions, which have become its primary attraction both for locals and outsiders.

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The competition involves boats made from specific types of strong, waterproof wood—such as Banio wood, Red Marsawah wood, Marantia wood, Tonam wood, and Kuyung wood—crafted into long vessels ranging from 20 to 40 meters (Najarispitayo, 2024). These boats, known as *Jalur*, are monumental in scale due to the number of rowers, which can range between 40 and 65 individuals (Zulfa, Juswandi, 2024; Zulfa et al., 2023). This physical characteristic of the *Jalur* symbolizes not only craftsmanship and ecological knowledge but also the collective spirit embedded in the cultural practice. The size of the vessel and the synchronized effort required in rowing construct a narrative of unity, resilience, and shared identity among the Kuantan Singingi community.

From a discourse analysis perspective, *Pacu Jalur* is more than a mere sporting competition; it is a site of cultural narration and identity negotiation. The language, symbols, and practices surrounding *Pacu Jalur* can be analyzed as discursive constructions that articulate local identity while simultaneously engaging with national and even transnational audiences. For instance, the annual commemoration of Indonesian unity during the festival situates *Pacu Jalur* within a broader political discourse of nationhood, while the participation of foreign visitors and teams introduces new layers of intercultural dialogue. Thus, the tradition functions as a living text, where meanings of heritage, identity, and modernity intersect, evolve, and are contested within public discourse.

The term *Pacu Jalur* is derived from two words: *Pacu* and *Jalur*. Within the cultural tradition, *Pacu* refers to a rowing or racing competition, while *Jalur* is understood by the Kuantan Singingi community as a type of canoe or large boat (Hasbullah, 2015; D, 2015). This etymological construction already illustrates how the tradition is discursively framed through local linguistic categories. The words themselves embody a collective identity, linking physical practices of rowing with cultural meanings attached to the vessel. Such linguistic markers are significant in discourse analysis, as they reveal how language anchors cultural practices in specific social contexts. Historically, *Jalur* was not merely a racing boat but a vital means of transportation in the early 17th century. Communities in Rantau Kuantan, an area stretching along the Kuantan River from Hulu Kuantan District upstream to Cerenti District downstream, relied heavily on *Jalur* for mobility and connectivity. At that time, when land transportation systems were underdeveloped, *Jalur* played a crucial role in sustaining daily life, serving as a communal vessel capable of carrying around 40 people (Supentri, 2012). This historical function demonstrates that the tradition has its roots in pragmatic social needs, which later transformed into a symbolic practice of competition and festivity.

From a discourse perspective, the transformation of *Jalur* from transportation to cultural performance highlights how material objects acquire new meanings within evolving socio-historical contexts. The *Jalur*, once a utilitarian medium, is now re-signified as a cultural symbol of strength, cooperation, and identity. This discursive shift is reinforced through ritualized language and public narratives surrounding *Pacu Jalur*, which continuously reproduce its relevance in contemporary society. Furthermore, the endurance of this tradition reveals a discursive construction of cultural continuity. The oral narratives, historical documents, and symbolic representations tied to *Pacu Jalur* form a body of discourse that legitimizes the practice as heritage rather than merely sport. The event itself becomes a stage where multiple discourses intersect: heritage discourse, communal solidarity discourse, and national identity discourse. In this way, *Pacu Jalur* is not only a practice but also a text to be interpreted, where language, performance, and symbolism work together to produce shared cultural meanings.

Pacu Jalur is a cultural tradition deeply embedded in the lives of the people of Kuantan Singingi Regency. It carries profound historical, social, and spiritual meanings, making the event more than just a rowing competition. The practice involves not only physical and technical aspects but also spiritual dimensions, preserved and practiced by local cultural figures. One of the most significant is the *Jalur* shaman, who ensures harmony between humans and nature during the preparation and implementation of the competition. The existence of the *Jalur* shaman highlights the cosmological worldview of the Kuantan Singingi community, where natural, social, and spiritual elements are interconnected and inseparable. Among these figures, Jasri—also known as *Anduang*—plays a central role as the shaman of a *Jalur* named *Batu Lempatan Harimau Kompe* or the “Tiger Jumping Stone.” Since childhood, Jasri has been exposed to traditional rituals performed by village elders, including those associated with the *Jalur* race, which is considered a source of regional pride. It was within this cultural environment that Jasri’s appreciation and

respect for local traditions flourished. Known by the people of Kuantan Singingi, particularly the residents of Kinali Village, Jasri is respected as a spiritual leader who provides blessings and protection to the *Jalur* he oversees (Interview with Ahmad Sukanela, April 10, 2025).

Jasri grew up immersed in Malay customs, spirituality, and cultural traditions. As a *Jalur* shaman, his responsibilities include leading purification rituals for the boats and offering protective prayers for the rowers—referred to as the “children of the race”—throughout the competition. For Jasri, this role is not merely a livelihood but a sacred calling to safeguard ancestral cultural heritage. Despite his modest lifestyle, he feels honored to preserve the traditions of his forebears. His position embodies cultural continuity, where rituals serve to reinforce the collective identity of the Kuantan Singingi people. Furthermore, Jasri actively teaches younger generations about traditional values and spiritual practices, ensuring that this cultural legacy endures in the face of modern change (Interview with Jasri, April 10, 2025). From a discourse analysis perspective, the figure of the *Jalur* shaman represents more than individual agency; it is a symbolic discourse that constructs cultural identity and continuity. The narratives surrounding Jasri’s role illustrate how language, ritual, and collective memory converge to legitimize cultural authority. His invocations and ritual practices function as performative acts that reaffirm communal beliefs about harmony, spirituality, and heritage. Moreover, the way the community speaks about and attributes spiritual power to the *Jalur* shaman reveals a discursive framework in which cultural identity is maintained through storytelling, ritualized language, and symbolic actions. In this sense, the *Pacu Jalur* tradition is not only a physical competition but also a site of cultural discourse where meanings of identity, spirituality, and heritage are continuously negotiated and reproduced.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a historical research approach, which consists of four systematic stages: heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Gottschalk, 2006). The heuristic stage involves the collection of both written and oral sources. Written sources include archives, newspapers, books, and previous research related to the *Pacu Jalur* tradition and the cultural practices of Kuantan Singingi Regency. Oral sources were gathered through interviews with key informants, such as the Head of Kinali Village, Kuantan Mudik District, *Pacu Jalur* athletes, and community members of Kinali Village, Kuantan Mudik District, Kuantan Singingi Regency. These oral testimonies are significant not only for reconstructing historical facts but also for capturing the lived experiences, perceptions, and symbolic meanings that surround the tradition. The next stage is source criticism, which ensures the validity and reliability of the data collected. In this stage, all sources—whether archival or oral—are carefully examined to evaluate their authenticity and credibility. By triangulating different types of evidence, this study aims to avoid bias and to construct a more nuanced understanding of *Pacu Jalur*. This critical process also involves identifying how narratives have been shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts. Such analysis allows the researcher to recognize which parts of the tradition have been preserved, reinterpreted, or contested over time, thus highlighting the dynamic and discursive nature of cultural memory.

Following criticism, the interpretation stage is carried out. This step involves synthesizing data from different sources to generate coherent explanations of historical phenomena. Within this research, interpretation does not stop at describing the chronological development of *Pacu Jalur*, but extends to analyzing the symbolic meanings embedded in rituals, language, and practices. By employing elements of discourse analysis, the interpretation stage seeks to uncover how traditions such as the role of the *Jalur* shaman are discursively constructed through oral narratives, ritual utterances, and community representations. This interpretive layer is crucial in showing that *Pacu Jalur* is not merely a historical practice, but also a discursive field where identity, spirituality, and power are continuously negotiated. The final stage is historiography, or the process of writing these findings into a scientific work (Gottschalk, 2006). Historiography in this research does not simply record past events, but frames them within broader discourses of cultural heritage, identity, and continuity. In doing so, the writing becomes a form of discourse production itself—organizing, legitimizing, and transmitting knowledge about *Pacu Jalur* to scholarly and public audiences. The historiographical narrative thus reflects how historical facts and cultural discourses intersect, presenting *Pacu Jalur* as both a lived tradition and a symbolic text open to critical interpretation.

Results and Discussion

Overview of Kuantan Singingi Regency

Kuantan Singingi Regency spans a total area of 7,656.03 square kilometers, equivalent to 765,603 hectares. Geographically, it lies between 0°00'–1°00' South Latitude and 101°02'–101°55' East Longitude. Administratively, the regency is bordered by Kampar and Pelalawan Regencies to the north, Jambi Province to the south, West Sumatra Province to the west, and Indragiri Hulu Regency to the east. Structurally, the regency consists of 12 sub-districts, 11 urban villages, and 198 villages. Kuantan Mudik District has the highest number of administrative units with 29 villages and 1 urban village, while Cerenti District has the smallest with 9 villages and 2 urban villages. In terms of land area, Pangean District accounts for only 1.90% of the regency, followed by Gunung Toar District at 2.16%. By contrast, Singingi District dominates with 25.52% of the regency's total area (BPS, 2024). Teluk Kuantan serves as the administrative center and capital of Kuantan Singingi Regency. Locally, it is widely known as Kota Jalur or the "City of the Lines," a title that underscores its longstanding association with the Pacu Jalur festival. For more than a century, Teluk Kuantan has been the cultural stage for this rowing competition, held every August to commemorate Indonesia's Independence Day. Covering an area of 53 km², Teluk Kuantan comprises three villages and three sub-districts. Its administrative boundaries are defined as follows: to the west, it borders Gunung Toar District; to the east, Sentajo Raya District; to the south, Benai District; and to the north, Logas Tanah Darat District (BPS, 2024).

Historical Development of Pacu Jalur

Pacu Jalur is a tradition with deep historical roots in Kuantan Singingi Regency. In its earliest form, the Jalur—a large canoe carved from a single tree trunk—was primarily a means of transportation for villagers along the Kuantan River, stretching from Hulu Kuantan District in the upstream to Cerenti District in the downstream (Hasbullah, 2015; D, 2015). During this period, when land transportation was still underdeveloped, the Jalur played an essential role in everyday life. It was used not only for carrying people—up to 40 passengers at a time—but also as a medium for transporting agricultural products such as rice, bananas, and sugarcane. Thus, the Jalur was both a functional and communal vessel, central to the economic and social life of the Kuantan people.

Over time, the Jalur also acquired ceremonial value. Villages along the Batang Kuantan organized Pacu Jalur races to commemorate Islamic holidays, including the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday, Eid al-Fitr, and the Islamic New Year (1 Muharram) (Metro Riau, 22 November 2015). These festivities embedded the Pacu Jalur within the rhythms of religious and cultural life, reinforcing its significance as a marker of collective identity and spirituality. The arrival of Dutch colonial power in Rantau Kuantan brought significant changes to this tradition. After occupying Teluk Kuantan, the Dutch appropriated the Pacu Jalur to commemorate the birthday of Queen Wilhelmina. This colonial intervention shifted the cultural calendar: the Pacu Jalur was no longer held in conjunction with Islamic festivities but instead became an annual event aligned with colonial celebrations. For local communities, the race thus became synonymous with the arrival of a new year, earning the nickname Tambaru—literally meaning "new year" (Putra, 2019). This transformation illustrates how external political power reconfigured local traditions, creating new discursive meanings that blended colonial symbolism with indigenous cultural practices.

After Indonesia's independence, Pacu Jalur once again evolved. No longer a colonial celebration, it became an arena for competition and festivity, with prizes such as buffaloes, cows, and rotating trophies awarded to the winners. This shift reflects how the tradition adapted to the dynamics of post-independence society, retaining its communal and competitive spirit while incorporating new elements of material reward (Gazali, 2018). Importantly, this process demonstrates the resilience of Pacu Jalur, which has continually reinvented itself in line with broader historical, political, and cultural transformations.

Discourse Analysis Perspective

From a discourse analysis perspective, the history of Pacu Jalur reveals how traditions are continuously reshaped through language, power, and cultural negotiation. In its early phase, the Jalur was discursively constructed as a vessel of survival and livelihood, embedded in everyday practices and religious

celebrations. During the Dutch colonial era, the discourse surrounding Pacu Jalur shifted toward colonial authority, reframing it as a symbolic spectacle aligned with Queen Wilhelmina's birthday. The very act of naming the event Tambaru illustrates how language mediated this transformation, embedding colonial power into local cultural expression.

Following independence, the discourse shifted once again: Pacu Jalur was re-signified as a celebration of freedom, community resilience, and cultural pride. The emphasis on competition, prizes, and rotating trophies reflects how the tradition adapted to new socio-political realities while retaining its symbolic significance. These shifts demonstrate that Pacu Jalur is not static; rather, it is a dynamic discursive field where meanings of identity, spirituality, power, and modernity are continuously constructed and contested. In this way, Pacu Jalur embodies what discourse analysts describe as the intersection of language, practice, and power—where traditions are not merely preserved but actively reinterpreted across historical contexts. From a discourse analysis perspective, these geographical and administrative descriptions are not neutral facts but part of a cultural narrative that situates Kuantan Singingi within broader symbolic meanings. The designation of Teluk Kuantan as Kota Jalur illustrates how language itself constructs identity: the city is discursively framed through its association with Pacu Jalur. This naming not only positions the city as the heart of the tradition but also reproduces cultural memory by embedding the event into the very identity of the place. Thus, the spatial and administrative overview simultaneously functions as cultural discourse, where geography becomes interwoven with heritage and collective pride. Moreover, the consistent staging of Pacu Jalur in Teluk Kuantan every August reflects how cultural traditions are institutionalized within local and national narratives. The linkage between the competition and Independence Day celebrations symbolizes a discourse of unity, nationalism, and cultural resilience. Here, the geography of the regency is not merely a backdrop but an active element in the reproduction of discourse, positioning Kuantan Singingi as both a political-administrative space and a cultural-symbolic space. This dual role highlights how local traditions like Pacu Jalur are discursively mobilized to strengthen both regional identity and national integration.

Discussion

The Significance of the Shaman's Presence in Pacu Jalur

Shamans in the Pacu Jalur tradition function as the guardians of spirituality and cultural continuity, embodying the community's belief in the interconnectedness between the physical and supernatural worlds. Before each race, shamans conduct special rituals to "cleanse" the Jalur of evil spirits and to invoke protection for the rowers. These rituals are not merely symbolic acts but represent a discourse of respect for ancestors and the guardian spirits of the river, reaffirming the belief that human success is inseparable from spiritual harmony. As figures of authority, shamans hold a central position in preserving oral traditions and local wisdom that have been passed down through generations. They possess knowledge referred to as the "science of Jalur," which includes determining auspicious times for training, identifying favorable directions, and advising on taboos that rowers must avoid. This specialized knowledge highlights the shaman's role as a cultural interpreter, translating abstract spiritual values into practical guidance for the community. In this sense, shamans are not only religious figures but also cultural mediators who ensure that traditions remain relevant within the rhythm of everyday life.

The figure of the shaman can be understood as a site of cultural power where language, ritual, and symbolism converge. The words spoken during rituals, the chants, and the narratives about ancestral spirits all construct a discourse of legitimacy around the role of the shaman. By articulating ideas of purity, protection, and ancestral respect, shamans reinforce communal beliefs and sustain cultural identity. The discourse of "cleansing" the Jalur is particularly telling: it frames the boat not only as a physical object but also as a spiritual entity that must be ritually prepared before entering competition. Moreover, the shaman's role embodies a counter-discourse to modern rationality. While contemporary perspectives might frame Pacu Jalur in terms of athletic performance or tourism, the discourse surrounding the shaman insists on the inseparability of the sacred and the profane. This coexistence of traditional and modern narratives demonstrates the dynamic nature of cultural discourse. The shaman's practices reveal how language and ritual create a symbolic system that legitimizes the tradition, sustains communal solidarity,

and negotiates its relevance in the present. So, the shaman is more than a spiritual guide; he is a discursive figure whose role continuously constructs and reproduces meanings of heritage, spirituality, and cultural pride. In this way, discourse analysis shows that the shaman is not only preserving tradition but also shaping the cultural text of *Pacu Jalur* itself, ensuring that it remains a living, evolving practice rather than a relic of the past.

Sacred Significance and Collective Belief

Belief in shamans fosters a sense of togetherness and confidence within the *Jalur* team. Their presence is believed to bring positive energy, good fortune, and spiritual motivation. In the *Pacu Jalur* tradition, the presence of shamans is not only as ritual leaders but also as the center of the community's collective belief system. Their role represents sacred values believed to influence the *Jalur* team's success in the race. This sacred meaning is as follows:

1. Social and Cultural Mediators

Shamans play an important role as mediators in community deliberations, especially in decisions related to the conduct of *Pacu Jalur*. Their involvement is not only based on spiritual authority but also on cultural legitimacy, as they are perceived to possess deep insights into both sacred and customary matters. In this way, shamans occupy a respected social position that extends beyond ritual into governance and cultural leadership. From a discourse perspective, their authority is reinforced through narrative and communal acknowledgment. The way villagers speak about shamans—using terms of respect, attributing wisdom, or recounting their success in rituals—creates a discourse of legitimacy. This discourse ensures that the shaman's role as a cultural mediator is not questioned but accepted as part of the social order, sustaining their influence in community affairs.

2. Community Unifiers

The rituals led by shamans before and after *Pacu Jalur* serve as collective practices that bring together diverse members of the community. Involving rowers, leaders, elders, and villagers, these ceremonies provide a shared cultural space where unity is emphasized over individual differences. This process transforms the competition into not just a contest of strength but also a reaffirmation of community solidarity. In discourse analysis, such rituals produce what is called a communal narrative. Through collective chants, prayers, and actions, the community tells itself a story of unity and shared destiny. The ritual language and practices do not merely reflect solidarity; they actively construct it. In this sense, shamans function discursively as community unifiers, creating a symbolic framework where collective identity is strengthened through shared participation.

3. Promoters of Cultural Identity

By maintaining their traditional roles, shamans serve as living symbols of cultural identity. They embody ancestral wisdom, preserve ritual practices, and transmit knowledge that connects present generations with the past. Their continued presence ensures that *Pacu Jalur* is not reduced to a sport but remains a cultural event with deep spiritual and historical resonance. In discourse terms, shamans represent a narrative anchor for cultural identity. The stories told about them, the language of respect used in rituals, and their visible presence in ceremonies all contribute to the reproduction of identity discourse. They help the community articulate who they are, not only as competitors in a race but as inheritors of a sacred and enduring tradition.

4. Educators of Traditional Values

Shamans also act as informal educators, imparting spiritual teachings and cultural advice to younger generations. Their role is especially crucial in the transmission of taboos, sacred practices, and moral values that may not be taught formally in schools. By guiding youth in both ritual and daily conduct, shamans help ensure the sustainability of cultural knowledge across generations. From a discourse analysis perspective, this educational role is enacted through storytelling, advice, and ritual language. These are forms of didactic discourse that construct authority, transmit values, and socialize individuals into the cultural worldview of the community. Shamans thus function as cultural teachers whose words and actions sustain the symbolic system of *Pacu Jalur*.

Challenges and Relevance in the Modern Era

1. Challenges of Modern Rationality

In the contemporary era, shamans face skepticism from younger generations influenced by rational and scientific perspectives. Their practices are sometimes dismissed as superstition, reducing their influence within certain segments of society. This tension illustrates how modernity introduces competing frameworks of meaning that can undermine traditional authority. From the perspective of discourse analysis, this represents a clash between two discourses: the discourse of tradition and the discourse of rational modernity. Each discourse frames reality differently, and the contest between them shapes how the role of shamans is understood. This tension does not eliminate traditional discourse but forces it to adapt and negotiate its place within the modern world.

2. Regeneration and Continuity Issues

Another challenge lies in the lack of regeneration. Few young people are willing or able to inherit the role of shaman, as it requires not only spiritual dedication but also deep cultural knowledge. Without regeneration, there is a risk that the practices and wisdom associated with shamans will diminish over time. In discourse terms, this represents a gap in narrative continuity. The absence of successors disrupts the chain of oral traditions and ritual discourse that sustains the role of shamans. Preserving these discourses requires active cultural strategies, such as documentation, revitalization programs, and intergenerational dialogue. Without such efforts, the discursive framework of shamanic authority risks being eroded.

3. Commercialization of Pacu Jalur

The increasing commercialization of *Pacu Jalur*—as a tourism event and competitive sport—risks shifting focus away from its spiritual essence. When the event is framed primarily in terms of sponsorships, prizes, and entertainment, the sacred discourse of the shaman can become marginalized. This commercial shift redefines *Pacu Jalur* within a market-oriented narrative, sidelining its traditional significance. From discourse analysis, this indicates the emergence of a commercial discourse that competes with traditional narratives. While the two discourses can coexist, the dominance of one over the other alters how the tradition is perceived. The challenge lies in maintaining balance, ensuring that cultural and spiritual values remain central even as modernization brings new economic opportunities.

4. The Continuing Relevance of Shamans

Despite these challenges, shamans remain relevant as symbols of local wisdom, guardians of social harmony, and unifiers of the community. Their role can be reinterpreted contextually, not only as ritual leaders but as cultural custodians who embody the community's identity. Figures such as Jasri, the *Jalur* shaman of Kuantan Singingi, demonstrate how this role continues to adapt while preserving its essence. From a discourse analysis lens, the enduring presence of shamans illustrates the resilience of heritage discourse. Even as modernity introduces new interpretations, the symbolic and linguistic frameworks that surround shamans sustain their authority and meaning. This shows that traditions are not static relics but dynamic discourses, continuously rearticulated to remain relevant in changing contexts.

Jasri's Life and Background

Jasri was born on May 19, 1964, in Seberang Pantai Village, Kuantan Mudik District, Kuantan Singingi Regency. His childhood unfolded in a modest environment, where he lived with his parents and five siblings. As the second child in a large family, Jasri experienced a formative upbringing shaped by the values of patience, cooperation, and responsibility. He often served as a role model to his younger siblings and assisted his parents in managing the household. These familial roles taught him discipline, compassion, and perseverance, qualities that later defined his role as a cultural and spiritual leader (Interview Jasri, 10 April 2025). Narratives of simplicity, love, and mutual care construct Jasri's identity as someone grounded in collective values rather than individual ambition. The way his childhood story is told reflects the cultural discourse of togetherness (*kebersamaan*) that is central in Malay communities. Through such stories, Jasri's life is framed not as a personal struggle against poverty but as an embodiment of communal resilience and familial solidarity.

Due to economic constraints, Jasri's formal education ended after the third grade of elementary school in Seberang Pantai. Rather than continuing his studies, he chose to support his family by entering the workforce

at a young age. Beginning in 1980, Jasri worked as a truck driver, transporting rubber from Lubuk Jambi to Padang. His career lasted until 2021, when he retired due to age. This long period of labor demonstrates his persistence, discipline, and willingness to sacrifice personal ambitions for family welfare (Interview Jasri, 10 April 2025). Analyzed discursively, Jasri's work narrative constructs him as an agent of responsibility and sacrifice, someone who accepts hardship as part of his social duty. The way this story is recounted not only emphasizes economic struggle but also conveys a cultural discourse of *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *tanggung jawab* (responsibility). These terms frame his life story in moral and spiritual dimensions, where sacrifice is interpreted as a virtue rather than a burden.

Beyond his career, Jasri became widely known in Kuantan Singingi, particularly in Kinali Village, as a respected shaman (*dukun jalur*). His responsibilities include leading boat purification rituals and offering protective prayers for rowers in *Pacu Jalur* competitions. This transition from truck driver to cultural custodian illustrates a shift from material labor to spiritual service, yet both roles emphasize endurance, responsibility, and dedication (Interview MT, 12 May 2025; Interview Jasri, 10 April 2025). Jasri's role as shaman positions him within a sacred narrative where his authority derives not from wealth or education, but from cultural legitimacy and spiritual knowledge. The repeated references to his humility and devotion reinforce a discourse of authenticity: Jasri is not an outsider exploiting tradition, but an insider faithfully preserving ancestral heritage. His personal narrative is therefore woven into the broader cultural discourse that defines *Pacu Jalur* as both a competition and a sacred tradition.

For Jasri, being a track shaman is not simply a profession but a calling. He perceives his role as part of his responsibility to uphold the honor and identity of the Kuantan Singingi community. His life embodies the values of humility, service, and cultural preservation, making him a living symbol of local wisdom. In this sense, his biography is more than an individual story; it becomes a collective memory that connects past traditions with present practices (Interview Jasri, 10 April 2025). Jasri's narrative functions as a cultural text, where his life story is mobilized to reaffirm community identity. The language used—emphasizing respect, spirituality, and honor—constructs Jasri as both a custodian of heritage and a moral exemplar. His story thus sustains the discourse of tradition in an era where modernity and commercialization challenge the continuity of local customs.

Jasri's Early Involvement in Path Shamanism

Jasri grew up surrounded by an environment deeply rooted in tradition, where the *pacu jalur* was not only a competition but also a cultural celebration infused with ritual and spirituality. From an early age, he observed the elders performing ceremonies that highlighted the sacred bond between humans, nature, and ancestral spirits. These observations ignited his curiosity and respect for the cultural practices of his community. The repeated exposure to rituals and collective festivities cultivated in Jasri a sense of belonging and an awareness of the symbolic meanings embedded in the *pacu jalur*. Over time, these experiences shaped his perception that the event was not merely a sport but a sacred tradition that needed to be preserved and respected.

Jasri's formal involvement as a *pacu jalur* shaman began when he was 40 years old, marking a new phase in his life where cultural heritage became his calling. Under the guidance of Habunipa, a senior shaman respected for his knowledge and experience, Jasri learned the intricacies of rituals, chants, and spiritual practices that accompany the *pacu jalur*. The mentorship was not only technical but also spiritual, as Jasri was introduced to the deeper philosophy of balance, harmony, and respect that underlies every ritual. Through this apprenticeship, Jasri gradually internalized the knowledge that empowered him to perform the role of a shaman with authenticity and devotion, continuing the legacy of his mentor while adapting it to his own context.

The tools Jasri uses as a *pacu jalur* shaman, such as a knife and a protective necklace, carry symbolic as well as practical functions. These objects are not perceived merely as material possessions but as extensions of spiritual protection and personal strength. The knife serves as a safeguard against unseen disturbances, while the necklace symbolizes his spiritual bond and readiness to perform rituals. Their presence in his practice reflects the discourse that blends physical artifacts with metaphysical meaning, reinforcing the idea that spiritual work requires both tangible and intangible forms of preparation. As illustrated in Figure 1, these

items are central to his role, serving as markers of identity that connect him to the sacred traditions of his ancestors and to the collective memory of the community.



Figure 1. The knife used by Jasri (Source: Albetro Documentation)

The shaman's knife used by Jasri in guiding the Batu Lempatan Harimau Kompe route is more than just a physical object; it embodies layers of meaning that connect ritual, belief, and cultural practice. For Jasri, the knife symbolizes spiritual strength and protection, serving as a safeguard for the young racers during the pacu jalur. When the racers enter the river, the knife becomes an extension of the shaman's prayer, channeling energy to ward off unseen dangers and ensuring the safety of those who participate. In this sense, the knife is not only a ritual object but also a narrative device that reinforces the community's trust in the shaman's spiritual authority. Through its presence, the community's collective belief in the importance of spiritual protection during competition is continually reproduced and sustained.

From a theoretical perspective, the role of the knife and the shaman's practices can be explained through Functionalism as introduced by Bronislaw Malinowski. This approach highlights how traditions serve the social function of maintaining stability and reinforcing collective values within society. Jasri's use of the knife aligns with this view, as it not only protects individuals but also symbolizes the reinforcement of customary norms and the preservation of harmony between humans and nature. By embedding the knife in ritual practice, Jasri reaffirms the cultural understanding that human activity—such as rowing in the pacu jalur—is inseparable from spiritual protection and ancestral blessings. The knife, therefore, becomes a cultural signifier, representing both continuity with the past and the resilience of collective belief systems that remain vital in the present (Interview J, June 8, 2025).



Figure 2. Necklace worn by Jasri (Source: Albetro Documentation)

The Jalur shaman's necklace is an item with spiritual meaning and value in tradition. This necklace is always worn by Jasri when he is competing in the Batu Lempatan Harimau Kompe race and serves to protect him from harm from rival shamans who have malicious intentions. A protective necklace, in the context of a Jalur shaman, often refers to an accessory believed to possess spiritual powers to protect the wearer from negative energy or supernatural interference and is used in shamanic practices to enhance individual protection and safety (Interview Jasri 10 April 2025). Jalur shamans, like Jasri, have significant responsibilities in every Pacu Jalur competition. They are considered guardians of the tradition and spirituality of the sport. Their duties include:

1. Rituals and Prayers: Before the race, the Jalur shaman performs rituals and prayers to ask for safety and success for the Jalur team. This creates a sense of confidence and enthusiasm for the boat crew. Based on an interview with Mr. Jasri in Kinali Village, Kuantan Mudik District, Kuantan Singingi Regency.

"Before the Jalur departs from the mooring, all the children are already in the Jalur. There, the shaman or shaman of the Jalur will recite a mantra to offer a prayer of safety for the young pacu or athlete.

Bismillahirramanirrahim

*Waj'alna Mimbaini Aidihim Wama Khalfahum Layub Sirun Lahaw Lawa Kuata
Illahi Billahilhazim.*

If the shaman of another Jalur has malicious intentions towards the children or athletes of our Jalur, this prayer will act as a shield for our children and athletes, protecting them from the evil of their opponents."

Through this ritual, the athletes are expected to compete with high spirits and confidence, and avoid any interference that could affect their performance. Thus, this tradition not only strengthens team bonds but also preserves the cultural values and beliefs of the local community in the sport of Jalur Balapan.

2. Advice: Jasri provides advice and guidance to the team on strategy and mental preparation before the competition.

Jasri's Journey to Becoming a Path Shaman 2004-2024

Jasri's journey to become a path shaman is a long process filled with learning, spiritual experiences, and a deep inner journey. Jasri, a figure who underwent this transformation in 2004, experienced a unique journey that defined who he was in the supernatural world and ancestral traditions. In 2004, Jasri began his spiritual journey to become a path shaman and the path that Jasri was shamanizing was the Tiger Jumping Stone Path of Kompe from Kinali Village, Kuantan Mudik District, Kuantan Singingi Regency. In 2004, the Tiger Jumping Stone Path of Kompe that Jasri was shamanizing won the championship or 5th place in the National Event at the Narosa Bay of Kuantan Bay, Kuantan Singingi Regency (Interview Jasri 10 April 2025). Jasri's journey was not always smooth. Jasri faced doubts from some modern society towards shaman practices. For more details, see the image below:



Figure 3. Jasri Shaman Jalur (Source: Albetro Documentation)

In 2005-2006, Jasri faced challenges in his role as a path shaman, where the path he was responsible for failed to win a championship for two consecutive years. Not winning a championship for two consecutive years was probably quite a difficult experience for Jasri. As a path shaman, he had the responsibility to provide guidance and support to the team. In 2007, Jasri's path from Kinali Village, Batu Lempatan Harimau Kompe, won fifth place. This success made the Kinali Village community proud in the Pacu Jalur competition in Kuantan Bay. Pacu Jalur, a longboat racing tradition steeped in culture and history, became the main stage for the enthusiasm and togetherness of the children of the race athletes. In 2008, Jasri worked as a driver, earning additional income outside of farming. This work helped meet his family's economic needs, especially when the harvest was insufficient or when facing challenges in farming. This additional income was invaluable in improving the family's quality of life (Interview Jasri 10 April 2025).

In 2009, Batu Lempatan Harimau Kompe once again demonstrated impressive achievements in the Pacu Jalur competition. This victory confirmed the team's strength and skill, and strengthened their sense of togetherness and community spirit in preserving the traditions of this sport (Supentri. 2018). Batu Lempatan Harimau Kompe's victory in 2009 was a significant moment, cementing their place in Pacu Jalur history. In the competition, the Batu Lempatan Harimau Kompe team faced various challenges from other, equally strong routes (Interview, AS, 12 Mei 2025). In 2010, Batu Lempatan Harimau Kompe's route, led by Jasri, won fourth place at the National Event at Tepian Narosa, Teluk Kuantan. This achievement was considered extraordinary considering the intense competition involving hundreds of routes from various villages. This success was measured not only by technical aspects, but also by the community's belief that spiritual factors play a vital role in maintaining the health and performance of pacu jalan athletes. Jasri was considered a figure who brought positive energy and protection to his team. Along with these achievements, Jasri's name began to become widely known among the community, both in Kinali Village and beyond. Jasri became an influential path shaman, recognized for his ability to guide competing paths and provide spiritual guidance (Interview, ABA, 8 Juni 2025).

The years 2011-2014 were challenging for Jasri, as his path failed to win a championship for four consecutive years. Despite facing failure in competitions, he continued to serve as a motivator for the team and community, emphasizing the importance of passion and hard work. Furthermore, Jasri lived a life as a rice farmer and driver, which served as the primary source of income for Jasri and his family. Jasri's presence as a path shaman from 2015-2019 demonstrates the strengthening of his role in an increasingly complex society. Jasri may be increasingly recognized as a figure who functions not only as a healer or protector of path members, but also as a spiritual leader and advisor in various aspects of community life. One of the path members who went viral worldwide as an aura farmer in Taluk Kuantan (see figure 4).



Figure 4. Aura Farming Pacu Jalur Taluk Kuantan Kuantan Singingi Riau Province (Source: Google Documentation)

In 2020-2021, Pacu Jalur was not held. The main reason for the cancellation of this event was the Covid 19 pandemic that hit the whole world, including Indonesia. The local government and event organizers decided to postpone the Pacu Jalur festival to protect public health and safety. Pacu Jalur, after being canceled for 2 years, was held again in 2022 with the implementation of strict health protocols to ensure the safety of all participants and spectators (Interview, ABA, 8 Juni 2025). The Pacu Jalur festival was held again in 2022 after a two-year hiatus due to the Covid 19 pandemic. This event took place from 21 to 25 August 2022 in Kuantan

Singingi Regency, Riau and was enthusiastically welcomed by the community and visitors, marking the revival of local culture. Jasri's role as a shaman for the Batu Lempatan Harimau Kompe route in Kuantan Singingi Regency in 2023 earned him a third-place ranking in Tepian Datuk Lelo Budi, Kari, Kuantan Tengah District, and a sixth-place ranking in Tepian Datuk Simambang Rajo Nan Putih Sentajo Raya. Jasri's role as a shaman for the route is expected to continue until 2024 and beyond (Interview, ABA, 8 Juni 2025).

In Clifford Geertz's Symbolic Theory, tradition is understood as a system of symbolic meaning. Rituals led by shamans are not only religious acts but also symbols of the identity and shared narrative of the Kuantan Singingi community. Jasri, as the pacu Jalur shaman, consistently performs rituals and recitations that convey symbolic meaning within the pacu Jalur tradition. Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu's Cultural Capital theory views shamans as social actors possessing significant symbolic capital. They inherit and pass on traditional knowledge, which serves as a source of cultural power within society. Preserving their role means maintaining the sustainability of local cultural capital. With this approach, preservation involves not only maintaining the physical form of the tradition (such as boats or festivals), but also the structure of meaning, social function, and authority of the knowledge within it.

Implications for Cultural Policy

The preservation of the Pacu Jalur tradition and the sacred role of shamans cannot be separated from broader cultural policy, where recognition, protection, and revitalization must go hand in hand. The formal recognition of shamans as part of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is essential to ensure that their practices are not marginalized by modernization and commercialism. From a discourse analysis perspective, this recognition reflects how state narratives and local cultural discourses interact in shaping legitimacy. The state's acknowledgment provides legal and administrative authority, while community narratives position shamans as spiritual guardians. Together, these discourses construct a layered legitimacy that strengthens both policy implementation and cultural practice.

Efforts at cultural regeneration, particularly through traditional education and knowledge transfer, also highlight the importance of discourse in shaping collective memory. When schools or cultural training centers integrate lessons about shamans and Pacu Jalur, they do more than transmit information—they reproduce the cultural discourse that positions tradition as integral to identity. Such institutionalized storytelling ensures that the symbolic meanings of rituals, prayers, and tools like the shaman's knife are continuously interpreted within new generations. In discourse terms, this practice prevents "silencing" or erasure, allowing traditional voices to remain part of the cultural conversation even in modern contexts.

The authenticity of regional festivals also relies on the way rituals are framed discursively within celebrations. If Pacu Jalur is reduced to spectacle or tourism, the discourse shifts toward entertainment, risking the loss of its sacred essence. However, by involving shamans and traditional leaders as central actors, the discourse is redirected to emphasize spirituality, local wisdom, and collective values. This shows that cultural authenticity is not just preserved materially but discursively, through how the event is narrated, staged, and experienced by the community and outsiders alike.

Finally, the issue of funding and protection of traditional knowledge highlights the tension between commodification and preservation. In discourse analysis, financial support can be seen as both a tool of empowerment and a site of contestation. On one hand, grants or cultural incentives enable shamans to continue their practices; on the other, they risk reframing sacred rituals as transactional or performative. Thus, safeguarding traditional knowledge requires not only financial mechanisms but also discursive strategies that respect shamans' authority and protect cultural meanings from distortion or exploitation.

In academic terms, the study of shamans in Pacu Jalur expands the discourse of ritual anthropology and local wisdom by showing how collective beliefs are reproduced in practice. It also demonstrates how community-based cultural preservation can serve as a model for other regions, especially in negotiating modernity without losing tradition. Through interdisciplinary perspectives—from anthropology to cultural psychology—this discourse creates new ways of interpreting tradition as both lived practice and symbolic resource. In this way, cultural policy, academic research, and local narratives converge to ensure that the Pacu Jalur tradition and the role of shamans are not only maintained but continually recontextualized in meaningful ways amidst social change.

Conclusions

Kuantan Singingi Regency, through the Pacu Jalur tradition, demonstrates how cultural practices can serve as both heritage and living discourse that continuously constructs identity. The competition is not only a rowing race but also a narrative where history, spirituality, and social solidarity are articulated. In discourse analysis, Pacu Jalur becomes a text through which the community defines itself—rooted in ancestral practices yet adaptive to changing times. The act of rowing together, the crafting of boats from selected logs, and the rituals led by shamans all produce meanings that go beyond their material expressions. They reproduce collective memory and reinforce shared values, ensuring that cultural pride is not simply remembered but actively performed.

The role of the shaman, exemplified by Jasri, is central in this discursive construction. Shamans act as custodians of oral tradition and spiritual authority, mediating between human endeavors and unseen forces. Their presence demonstrates that Pacu Jalur is not purely physical competition but also a ritual performance embedded with sacred meaning. In discourse terms, the figure of the shaman legitimizes the event by situating it within a broader framework of cultural identity, respect for ancestors, and harmony with nature. By transmitting prayers, taboos, and rituals, shamans like Jasri embody a discourse of continuity that resists the erosion of traditional values in the face of modernization.

Moreover, the endurance of Pacu Jalur reflects how local traditions function as sites of negotiation between global influences and local identities. The growing recognition of Pacu Jalur as a tourism attraction risks reframing the event within a discourse of commodification. However, the persistence of rituals and the active role of shamans counterbalance this, ensuring that the tradition retains its sacred and communal dimensions. From a discourse analysis perspective, this tension illustrates how cultural practices are contested spaces where different narratives—spiritual, communal, commercial—intersect and compete. The challenge, therefore, is to sustain the discourse of authenticity so that Pacu Jalur continues to represent local identity rather than being reduced to spectacle.

Ultimately, the preservation of Pacu Jalur requires acknowledging its multiple dimensions: as sport, ritual, social gathering, and cultural symbol. Each of these dimensions is constructed and reinforced through discourse—whether in oral storytelling, ritual language, or public policy. By framing the event as more than entertainment, the community ensures its relevance for future generations. In this sense, the tradition of Pacu Jalur illustrates how cultural heritage is not static but dynamically reproduced through language, practice, and belief. It shows that Kuantan Singingi's identity is continually written and rewritten in the rhythm of the oars, the chants of the shamans, and the shared pride of its people.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

There are no conflicts of interest concerning the publication of this paper.

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