

Symbolism and Ritual Practice: The Role of Fruits in Buddhist Ceremonies at Maha Vihara Maitreya Medan, Indonesia

M. Yuda Prayoga*, Jufri Naldo

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara Medan, Indonesia

*Correspondence: yuda402213020@uinsu.ac.id

<https://doi.org/10.51214/biis.v4i2.1581>

ABSTRACT

The fruit offering ritual in Buddhist religious practices at the Maha Vihara Maitreya Cemara Asri in Medan represents symbolism rich in theological and ethical meaning. This study aims to examine in depth the symbolic meaning of fruit in Buddhist worship and uncover its connection to the concepts of abundance and purity in Buddhist teachings. Using a qualitative approach, participatory observation methods, in-depth interviews with religious leaders, and triangulation to ensure accuracy and validity, the information obtained in this study found that fruit is positioned not only as a material offering, but also as an expression of the congregation's inner spirit, embodying the values of dāna (generosity), belief in the law of karma, and hope for virtue. Fruits such as apples and oranges are chosen because they reflect freshness, propriety, and prosperity, while fruits such as durian are avoided because they are considered to reflect less inner refinement and a sacred atmosphere. Fruit symbolism in rituals also serves as a medium for internalizing the teachings of impermanence (anicca) and the consequences of actions (vipaka), reinforcing reminders of moral action, reflections on inner qualities, and ways to visualize spiritual values in everyday life. This research enriches the body of Buddhist studies by highlighting symbolic practices often overlooked by academics.

ABSTRAK

Ritual persembahan buah-buahan dalam praktik keagamaan umat Buddha di Maha Vihara Maitreya Cemara Asri, Medan, merepresentasikan simbolisme yang kaya akan makna teologis dan etis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara mendalam makna simbolis buah-buahan dalam peribadatan masyarakat Buddha dan mengungkap keterkaitannya dengan konsep keberlimpahan dan kesucian dalam ajaran Buddha. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode observasi partisipatif serta wawancara mendalam terhadap tokoh agama, serta menerapkan triangulasi untuk memastikan akurasi dan validitas. Informasi yang diperoleh penelitian ini menemukan bahwa buah tidak hanya diposisikan sebagai persembahan materi, tetapi sebagai ekspresi batin umat dalam mewujudkan nilai dāna (kedermawanan), keyakinan pada hukum karma, dan harapan akan kebajikan. Jenis buah seperti apel dan jeruk dipilih karena mencerminkan nilai kesegaran, kelayakan, dan makna kemakmuran, sedangkan buah seperti durian dihindari karena dinilai tidak mencerminkan kehalusan batin dan suasana sakral. Simbolisme buah dalam ritual juga menjadi medium untuk menginternalisasi ajaran tentang ketidakkekalan (anicca) dan akibat dari perbuatan (vipaka), yang memperkuat pengingat tindakan moral, refleksi dari kualitas batin, dan cara untuk memvisualisasikan nilai spiritual dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Penelitian ini memperkaya khazanah studi agama Buddha dengan menyoroti praktik simbolik yang sering kali luput dari perhatian akademik.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: 12-06-2025

Revised: 18-08-2025

Accepted: 19-08-2025

Keywords:

Buddhist Ceremonies;
Fruits;
Interreligious Studies;
Religious Symbolism.

Histori Artikel

Diterima: 12-06-2025

Direvisi: 18-08-2025

Disetujui: 19-06-2025

Kata Kunci:

Buah-Buahan;
Simbol Keagamaan;
Studi Antaragama;
Upacara Buddha.

A. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism, as one of the world's major religions, has long historical roots and rich spiritual values. Emerging in the 6th century BC in India through the teachings of Siddharta Gautama, this religion spread to various Asian regions such as China, Japan, Korea, to Southeast Asia, including Indonesia.¹ The arrival of Buddhism in the archipelago occurred during the heyday of the Srivijaya and Majapahit Kingdoms, through trade routes connecting India with Southeast Asia, bringing with it the influence of Indian culture, the Pali and Sanskrit languages, and religious texts such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata.² The development of Buddhism reflects its ability to acculturate with local culture through ritual and symbolic expressions, one of which is the use of fruit offerings in worship practices.

Symbolism in worship is an important element in Buddhism. Buddhism itself emphasises compassion, peace and respect for all living beings, which is reflected in ritual practices such as prayers and offerings. Fruits are used as a symbolic form of offering that does not harm living beings, in line with the Buddhist principle of ahimsa.³ This practice reflects the transition from offerings of living beings to a more ethical form of offering, where fruit is not only a symbol of respect, but also a medium of sacred communication between humans and sacred beings.⁴ The symbolism of fruits such as bananas, oranges, apples and pears represent prayers and wishes for sustenance, virtue and divine protection that are believed to provide spiritual benefits.⁵

The phenomenon of fruit use in Buddhist rituals demonstrates the strong symbolic relationship between faith, cultural expression and spiritual attainment. In this context, fruits are not only offerings, but also represent noble values such as purity, abundance, and good karma that Buddhists strive for in their religious practices. The offerings are believed to be sincere acts of sacrifice and devotion, as well as a form of gratitude for the blessings received from the holy beings.⁶ In ceremonies such as the bathing of the baby Siddharta statue or Vesak celebrations, fruits have a symbolic role as a medium of self-purification and an expression of universal love.⁷

A number of previous studies have discussed symbolism in Buddhist religious practices, such as Utari et al.'s study, which used a qualitative case study on Maha Vihara Maitreya in

¹Nur Hayati, Zaitun Saftia, and Nurainun Br Barasa, "Awal Mula Sejarah Agama Buddha Dan Perkembangannya Hingga Masuk Ke Indonesia," *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 9, no. 2 (2023): 156–67, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30651/ah.v9i2.16562>.

²Mochammad Nginwanun Likullil Mahamid, "Sejarah Maritim Di Nusantara (Abad VII-XVI): Interkoneksi Kerajaan Sriwijaya, Majapahit, Dan Demak," *Historia Madania: Jurnal Ilmu Sejarah* 7, no. 1 (2023): 32–49, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15575/hm.v7i1.23014>; Tobias Lanslor, Willem Brownstok, and Yuri Galbinst, *Sejarah Buddhisme: Dari Permulaannya Hingga Penurunannya Di India* (Cambridge Stanford Books, n.d.).

³Safari Maulidan, "Tradisi Sembahyang Umat Budha (Studi Kasus Vihara Dharma Bhakti Gampong Peunayaong Kecamatan Kuta Alama Banda Aceh)" (UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, 2016).

⁴Agus Subandi, "Makna Simbolik Barang Persembahan Pada Altar Dewa-Dewi Di Kelenteng Liong Hok Bio Kota Magelang," *Vijjacariya: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Buddhis* 6, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.69835/vjp.v8i2.124>.

⁵Mugiyo Mugiyo and Prihadi Dwi Hatmono, "Makna Ritual Pengambilan Tirta Untuk Penguatan Karakter Religius Umat Buddha Kabupaten Banyuwangi," *Al Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 16, no. 4 (2022): 1448–58, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.35931/aq.v16i4.1135>; Yoyoh Masruroh, "Makna Dan Tata Cara Bhakti-Puja Dalam Ajaran Buddha Maitreya: Studi Kasus Di Vihara Maitreyawira Angke Jelambar Jakarta Barat" (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2008, 2022).

⁶Masruroh, "Makna Dan Tata Cara Bhakti-Puja Dalam Ajaran Buddha Maitreya: Studi Kasus Di Vihara Maitreyawira Angke Jelambar Jakarta Barat."

⁷Gillian Stokes, "Seri Siapa Dia," *Buddha, Jakarta: Erlangga*, 2001; Jimo Taram, *Pendidikan Agama Buddha Dan Budi Pekerti* (Jakarta: Pusat Perbukuan Kemendikbud, n.d.).

Medan to reveal the symbolic meaning of architectural ornaments and decorations in the context of Buddhism. The findings show that every element from statues to decorations functions as a medium for conveying religious values and strengthening the identity of the local Buddhist community,⁸ as well as research by Karina Sembiring on the altar of Dewi Kwan Im among the Chinese Buddhist community in Medan, fruits are placed as a symbol of "fruit of deeds" (phala). Devotees believe fruits symbolise the results of actions (karma), where good deeds are rewarded with happiness and sustenance, while bad deeds bring suffering,⁹ and Subandi examined offerings at the altar of the Liong Hok Bio Temple, including food and drink as offerings. Although the context is a Tridharma ritual, the symbolic meaning is steady in the karmic expectation: offerings as a form of respect and transition of spiritual value to ancestors and deities through good karma.¹⁰

However, academic studies that specifically highlight the symbolic meaning of fruits in Buddhist worship, particularly in Indonesia, are limited. Although all of them point out the importance of symbolic elements in religious rituals, none of them specifically examine the symbolic meaning of fruits in Buddhist rituals in depth, especially in the local context of Maha Vihara Maitreya Cemara Asri. Therefore, this research is here to fill this gap by focusing on fruits as symbols of abundance and purity in Buddhist religious practices, as well as exploring how fruit offerings act as a means of connecting between humans and spiritual reality in Buddhism.

Thus, this study aims to examine in depth the symbolic meaning of fruits in Buddhist worship, explain the practice of their use in religious rituals, and reveal their relationship with the Buddhist concepts of abundance and purity. Starting from the assumption that fruit offerings are a symbolic form that not only represents liturgical observance, but also reflects the value structure and worldview of Buddhists, this research is to prove that the practice has deep theological meaning and serves as a form of spiritual mediation between humans and divine reality.

B. METHODS

This research is a qualitative research with a field study approach¹¹ that aims to deeply understand the symbolic meaning of fruits in Buddhist worship at Maha Vihara Maitreya Cemara Asri, Medan. The material object of this research is the practice of fruit offerings in the context of Buddhist religious rituals, which was chosen because it has rich symbolic and spiritual dimensions, but is still rarely studied specifically in academic literature. This research is important because it reveals the religious meaning contained in daily religious practices as well as its contribution to the understanding of local Buddhist theology. The types of data used include primary and secondary data, obtained from direct observation, interviews with key participants, and documentation of worship texts and artefacts.

⁸Diah Sri Utari, Arifinsyah Arifinsyah, and Endang Ekowati, "Analisis Makna Simbolik Ornamen Kuil Buddha Dalam Konteks Keagamaan: Studi Kasus Maha Vihara Maitreya," *Kamaya: Jurnal Ilmu Agama* 7, no. 3 (2024): 145–58, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37329/kamaya.v7i3.3586>.

⁹Karina Sembiring, "Altar Sembahyang Untuk Dewi Kwan Im Pada Rumah Masyarakat Tionghoa Buddha Di Medan: Kajian Terhadap Artefak, Kegiatan, Dan Gagasan" (Universitas Sumatera Utara, 2017), <http://repositori.usu.ac.id/handle/123456789/2059>.

¹⁰Subandi, "Makna Simbolik Barang Persembahan Pada Altar Dewa-Dewi Di Kelenteng Liong Hok Bio Kota Magelang."

¹¹Wahyudin Darmalaksana, "Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Studi Pustaka Dan Studi Lapangan," *Pre-Print Digital Library UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung*, 2020, 1–6.

The participants in this study consisted of active monastery administrators involved in the offering ritual, who were purposively selected based on their involvement and knowledge of the meaning of offerings in Buddhism. Data collection techniques were conducted through participatory observation to directly observe the ritual, in-depth interviews to explore the perceptions and meanings that people believe in the fruits offered, as well as documentation in the form of photographs, field notes, and ritual texts used. The research process was conducted in several stages, namely the pre-field stage (literature study and determining informants), the data collection stage, and the analysis stage. Data analysis was conducted inductively through data reduction, categorisation and thematic inference using a symbolic interpretative approach. Data triangulation techniques were applied to increase the validity of the results, by comparing data from various sources and methods thoroughly.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Brief of Maha Vihara Maitreya Cemara Asri

The Maha Vihara Maitreya, also known as Vihara Cemara Asri, is the largest monastery in Indonesia located in Cemara Asri Housing Complex, Deli Serdang, North Sumatra province, near Medan.¹² The monastery was built since 1991 and officially inaugurated on 21 August 2008, occupying an area of about 4.5 hectares.¹³ It was founded on the initiative of Yang Arya Maha Sesepuh Ong, the supreme leader of The World Maitreya Great Tao, who had the vision to build a large monastery in Medan. Also playing an important role is the Indonesian Maitreya Buddhist Pandita Council (MAPANBUMI) in the development of Maitreya Buddhist monasteries in various regions, including North Sumatra, and the Medan Maitreya Maha Vihara.¹⁴

The monastery complex has a magnificent architectural structure that reflects Buddhist aesthetics with Chinese style decorated with carved dragons, Bodhisattva statues, and reliefs rich in Buddhist symbolism.¹⁵ There are three main buildings: General Baktisala with a capacity of 1,500 people for Sakyamuni Buddha and Bodhisattva ritual activities, Maitreya Baktisala that can accommodate 2,500 people, and a meeting hall or multipurpose hall with a capacity of about 2,000 people.¹⁶

Support facilities include aesthetic gardens such as the Avalokitesvara Garden, a large fish pond, and a floating teapot-shaped fountain. It also provides social facilities: a guesthouse, office space, recording studio, soup kitchen, and gift shop that support the monastery's religious and educational activities.¹⁷ The lush surroundings and the lake with its population of storks make the monastery both a place for religious recreation and spiritual tourism.

¹²Atika Rahmah et al., "Eksplorasi Studi Wisata Religi: Etnomatematika Pada Maha Vihara Maitreya Di Cemara Asri Medan: Exploration of Religious Tourism Studies: Ethnomathematics at the Maitreya Maha Vihara in Cemara Asri Medan," *Al-Aqlu: Jurnal Matematika, Teknik Dan Sains* 3, no. 1 (2025): 89–97, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.59896/aqlu.v3i1.143>; Utari, Arifinsyah, and Ekowati, "Analisis Makna Simbolik Ornamen Kuil Buddha Dalam Konteks Keagamaan: Studi Kasus Maha Vihara Maitreya."

¹³Nur Fadhilah Nasution and Luthfiatunnisa, "Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Berbasis Moderasi Agama Di Desa Sampali Kec. Percut Sei Tuan," *JURMA Jurnal Program Mahasiswa Kreatif* 6, no. 1 (2022): 62–73, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32832/pkm-p.v6i1.1010>.

¹⁴"Sejarah Pendirian," n.d., <https://mahaviharamaitreya.org/sejarah-pendirian/>.

¹⁵"Sejarah Pendirian."

¹⁶"Maha Vihara Maitreya," n.d.

¹⁷Rita Nariswari, "Eloknya Vihara Cemara Asri, Salah Satu Yang Terbesar Di Indonesia," *tempo.co*, n.d., <https://www.tempo.co/hiburan/eloknya-vihara-cemara-asri-salah-satu-yang-terbesar-di-indonesia-975752>.



Figure 1. Maha Vihara Maitreya

Activities at the monastery are open and inclusive; Buddhists and the general public are allowed to enter the complex while maintaining peace. The monastery is often the centre for major rituals, including Vesak celebrations, Cap Go Meh, and social activities such as social services and non-formal religious education classes such as the Maitreya Buddhist Sunday School, which was established in 2009.¹⁸ This approach emphasises the monastery's vision as a cross-cultural, spiritual and social space.

2. Types and Symbolic Meanings of Fruits in Buddhist Worship

The use of fruits (apples and oranges) in Buddhist worship practices is not just a tradition, but an integral part of a religious symbolic system that is full of meaning. This section presents the main findings of the research related to the types of fruits used in religious offerings, their symbolic meanings in Buddhist doctrine, as well as variations in practice between monasteries that show the richness of religious expressions. The findings are analysed inductively and supported by the symbolic interpretive approach proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce, showing how everyday objects such as fruits can represent profound teachings such as karma, impermanence (*anicca*), and offerings (*dāna*).

In this case, fruits in Buddhist rituals function as a medium of honour to the Buddha. The choice of fruit as an offering is not without reason; *fruit* is seen as the *finished product* or *fruit of karma*. In an interview with Mr Dicky, one of the administrators of Mahavihara Maitreyawira Vihara, explained that, "*In worship, especially in Buddhism, we often use fruits as one of the offerings in rituals or in performing a ceremony. It is one of the ways we Buddhists honour the Buddha*". Furthermore, he explained that, "*Fruit is often associated as a result, often associated with karma or in other languages 'kama'. So, when we offer fruits, it is expected that there will be good results or karma*". This explanation is in line with the understanding of the teaching of *anicca*, that everything is impermanent,¹⁹ and the practice of offering fruit is a form of

¹⁸Nariswari.

¹⁹Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), h. 53.

contemplation of karma and the temporary nature of life.

This meaning is spread across three symbolic dimensions: (1) fruit as the result of action, (2) fruit as a symbol of impermanence, and (3) fruit as a representation of the value of *dāna* or generosity. All three are intertwined to form the collective meaning of the community. Mr Dicky revealed, *"When we become a human being, we have to do good, give funds... one of them is offering fruits."* In this case, fruit becomes a symbol that not only reminds people to give, but also as a means of reflection on inner qualities and karma. Lewis states that symbolism in Buddhism not only conveys explicit meaning, but also forms an implicit understanding that deepens the spiritual experience of devotees.²⁰

The intensity of the use of fruit symbols is seen strongly at Mahavihara Maitreyawira Monastery, where every religious ceremony almost always presents fruits as the main dish. *"Usually, fruits are used because of the meaning or symbol in it, and it is almost always present in every ceremony"*. Not only in big celebrations like Vesak, but also in routine rituals and daily offering practices. Arisna emphasises that fruit offerings in the Buddhist context are part of the sacred communication between devotees and transcendental entities.²¹ The continuity of its use, then, reflects the importance of this symbolic value in the collective consciousness of Buddhists.

Furthermore, it must be understood that not all fruits are used in offerings; there is a special selection that considers the symbolism and nature of the fruit. Mr Dicky explains, *"We often choose fruits that do not rot quickly, such as apples, oranges... besides based on their quality, it also depends on the region."* This selection is not only because of their durability, but also because their shape and aroma do not disturb the atmosphere of worship. In contrast, *"Fruit like durian, because it has thorns, it symbolises thorns and sharpness, and because of its pungent smell it can disturb the worship process, so we avoid it"*. This shows that aesthetic and spiritual values become a reference in the selection of fruit types. Kitiarsa's research reveals that the objects of offerings in Asian religious cultures are strongly influenced by aesthetic symbols and morals.²²

The mapping of the types of fruits used shows diversity based on region, access to availability, and local guidance from each monastery. In the interview, Mr Dicky said, *"Sometimes in certain monasteries because access to one kind of fruit is limited, so the types of fruits can vary... depending on the monastery."* This shows that although there are general guidelines in fruit selection, the practice is highly influenced by the local context. Swearer mentions that Buddhist religious expression is flexible and adapts to the social and geographical realities of its people.²³

The intensity of this flexibility can be seen in the monasteries' adaptation to local conditions. In urban areas, fruit tends to be more diverse and of higher quality. In remote areas, local or seasonal fruits are still used if they fulfil the criteria of ritual propriety. *"If for example in remote areas there is no good quality fruit, we use local fruit. The important thing is*

²⁰Todd Lewis, "Conveying Buddhist Tradition through Its Rituals," *Teaching Buddhism: New Insights on Understanding and Presenting the Traditions*, 2017, 122–48.

²¹Arisna Putra, "Makna Sesajen Dalam Tradisi Sedekah Bumi Di Dusun Krajan, Desa Tunahan: Kajian Eksploratif Berdasarkan Konsep Pattidāna Dalam Ajaran Buddhis Theravāda," *Jurnal Budi Pekerti Agama Buddha* 2, no. 4 (2024): 11–25.

²²Pattana Kitiarsa, "Beyond Syncretism: Hybridization of Popular Religion in Contemporary Thailand," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2005): 461.

²³Donald K Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 2nd ed. (New York: Suny Press, 2010), h. 143.

that it is appropriate and does not interfere with worship," explained Mr Dicky. This demonstrates an appreciation of the diversity of practices while maintaining the core value of the offering symbolisation.

Then, we see that fruit is not the only form of offering. In daily practice, devotees also offer clothing, food, and even money. *"So, when the monk passes by, we as devotees make offerings... sometimes in the form of clothes, mineral water, snacks, or money. Not only fruits,"* explained Mr Dicky. This shows that fruit offerings are just one part of a broader *dāna* system, where any form of giving has spiritual value if done with sincere intentions. Saddhatissa stated that in Theravāda Buddhism, giving is the main spiritual practice path that cultivates virtue.²⁴

This mapping of offerings expands the notion that fruit is just one medium to express the value of *dāna*. In some celebrations, fruit is also shared by devotees and monks. *"Usually, if people want to take back the fruit they brought, it is allowed. Sometimes we also share it with the monks, or eat it together after the ceremony,"* said Mr Dicky. In Keyes' view, food and offerings are not only religious symbols, but also tools for building social and spiritual relationships between community members.²⁵

All of the above findings, namely fruit as a symbol of karma and impermanence, selection of fruit types based on aesthetic and spiritual values, and fruit offerings as part of a broader *dāna* system, show that fruit in Buddhist worship is not just a physical dish, but a symbolic communication medium rich in meaning. This practice combines doctrinal, cultural (locality), and social (inter-community relations) aspects. Thus, the symbolisation of fruit shows how spiritual practices can be concretised in simple yet meaningful material forms, reflecting the harmony between transcendental values and everyday life.

3. Relevance to Buddhist Concepts of Abundance and Holiness

The meaning of fruit in Buddhism cannot be separated from two main concepts, namely abundance and holiness. The findings of this study reveal that Buddhists interpret fruits as symbols of the results of deeds or karma (*phala*) and as a form of sacred honour to the Buddha. In an interview, Mr Dicky explained, *"Fruit is often associated as a result, often associated with karma... so when we offer fruit, we hope there will be good results or karma."* This shows that the fruit offerings are not merely symbolic, but rather a tangible manifestation of the devotees' spiritual hope for the abundance of goodness that will return to them. This offering reflects an awareness of the law of cause and effect which is the moral foundation of Buddhism.

The symbol of fruit is also closely related to the principle of purity, especially as fruits are chosen based on their outward qualities and meaning. The types of fruit used, such as apples and oranges, are chosen because they are fresh and do not rot easily, while fruits such as durian are avoided because they smell strong and have sharp thorns. Mr Dicky asserts, *"Fruits like durian symbolise sharpness and can disturb the worship process... that's why we avoid it."* This confirms that the choice of fruit is not only a practical consideration, but also a symbolic one; the fruit should reflect the purity of intention and the serenity of the ritual. In this context, fruit becomes a reflection of the inner qualities that are expected to be present when making offerings: clean, calm, and not disturbing others.

²⁴Hammalawa Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Wisdom Publication, 1997), h. 176.

²⁵Charles F Keyes, *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation State*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 1987), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429308710>.

These findings expand the understanding of fruit symbols in Buddhist rituals, which were previously discussed more from the visual side of the altar or ornaments. Utari et al.'s research at Maha Vihara Maitreya, for example, focused on architectural and decorative ornaments in conveying Buddhist religious values. The symbols reinforce community identity, but do not highlight the role of fruit as an active spiritual symbol in the practice of *dāna* (giving).²⁶ Meanwhile, Karina Sembiring in her study of Dewi Kwan Im altars among Chinese Buddhist communities refers to fruit as the "fruit of deeds", which is believed to bring sustenance and happiness if it comes from good deeds.²⁷ Subandi also notes the symbolism of food and drink offerings in the Tridharma tradition at the Liong Hok Bio temple as a form of respect and hope for karmic rewards.²⁸ However, they have not specifically discussed the relationship of fruit to *ritual sanctity* and the selection of fruit types that reflect *ethical values*, as found in this study. These findings broaden the scope of reading the symbolic meaning of offerings, pushing symbolic readings into contemplative territory, where fruit is not only present as a symbol, but also as a reminder of the abundance that comes from sincerity.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings corroborate Clifford Geertz's view of functional symbolism that symbols in religion not only explain meaning, but also direct action.²⁹ Fruit, as a symbol, is not only an offering object but also a reminder of moral action, a reflection of inner qualities, and a way to visualise spiritual values in daily life. Fruit symbolism in Buddhism, thus, becomes a medium of value education: devotees learn about karma, self-control, and purity from the fruits they choose and offer. This offering also serves a social function, where the fruit that has been offered can be consumed again by the devotees, monks, or shared during communal meals, as Mr Dicky said, *"If the fruit brought by the devotees wants to be taken back, we are welcome... sometimes we also share it with monks and other devotees."*

The implications of this study are important for monastery managers and Buddhist communities. Strengthening symbolic education about fruit in offering practices is needed, so that devotees not only perform rituals formally, but also understand the deepest meaning of their actions. An educational module or pocket book could be developed to explain the philosophy of fruit in Buddhist offerings, the types of fruit recommended, and the inner values they represent. In addition, this approach could be adapted for younger generations to keep them connected to the tradition through contextualised understanding. This research also opens room for further studies, for example by comparing the meaning of fruit in urban and rural monasteries, or the exploration of fruit symbols in the context of Theravāda Buddhism, Mahāyāna, or other local Buddhist traditions.

²⁶Utari, Arifinsyah, and Ekowati, "Analisis Makna Simbolik Ornamen Kuil Buddha Dalam Konteks Keagamaan: Studi Kasus Maha Vihara Maitreya."

²⁷Sembiring, "Altar Sembahyang Untuk Dewi Kwan Im Pada Rumah Masyarakat Tionghoa Buddha Di Medan: Kajian Terhadap Artefak, Kegiatan, Dan Gagasan."

²⁸Subandi, "Makna Simbolik Barang Persembahan Pada Altar Dewa-Dewi Di Kelenteng Liong Hok Bio Kota Magelang."

²⁹Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture [1973]," *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, 2010, 3–30; Abena Dadze-Arthur, *An Analysis of Clifford Geertz's The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Macat Library, 2017).

D. CONCLUSION

The symbolic meaning of fruits in Buddhist worship at Maha Vihara Maitreya Cemara Asri is not merely a decorative element or a hereditary tradition, but has a spiritual depth that reflects the core of Buddhist teachings, such as karma (phala), anicca (impermanence), and dāna (giving). Fruit in offerings is understood as a representation of the results of good deeds, a form of honour to the Buddha, and a medium of contemplation of inner qualities. The fruits offered are not only chosen for their physical durability, but also for their deep symbolic significance, such as apples and oranges being considered spiritually clean and worthy, qualities of purity, and durability, while sharp or pungent-smelling fruits, such as durian, are avoided as they are considered out of tune with the inner atmosphere of the ritual. Fruit offerings are even part of the process of educating devotees to give with sincere intentions and understand the law of cause and effect in their spiritual lives. Moreover, this practice emphasises the flexibility and adaptability of Buddhism to social and geographical contexts. The fruits offered may vary according to local availability, but still refer to certain aesthetic and spiritual values. The symbolism of fruit is not only a means of spiritual communication, but also shapes collective consciousness and social relations between people.

Conceptually, this research contributes to an expanded understanding of symbols in Buddhism by focussing on the functional and flexible material object, the fruit as a living symbol, which is chosen, consumed and interpreted in a dynamic socio-spiritual context. The symbolic interpretive approach used allows for a reflective reading of devotees' practices, making this research relevant in the study of the anthropology of religion and ritual ethnography. However, this research is limited in scope as it only focuses on one urban monastery in the Mahāyāna Maitreya tradition, thus not capturing the diversity of symbolic meanings in rural monasteries or in the Theravāda and Vajrayāna traditions. Therefore, further research should be directed towards comparative studies across different Buddhist traditions and geographical areas, including longitudinal exploration of the transformation of offering symbols in the context of social and generational changes. In addition, the development of educational modules based on the results of this research can be a practical contribution to strengthen symbolic understanding in Buddhist religious education in Indonesia. In the end, of course this research has not yet reached the word perfect and still needs to be improved. In future research, it is recommended to deepen the symbolic meaning of fruits in the worship of Buddhist communities in Maha Vihara Maitreya. And can also make comparisons with 2 or more Maha Vihara Maitreya to get more accurate data.

References

- Dadze-Arthur, Abena. *An Analysis Of Clifford Geertz's The Interpretation Of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Macat Library, 2017. [Google](#)
- Darmalaksana, Wahyudin. "Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Studi Pustaka Dan Studi Lapangan." *Pre-Print Digital Library UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung*, 2020, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.21043/riwayah.v6i2.7752>
- Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward An Interpretive Theory Of Culture [1973]." *The Interpretation Of Cultures: Selected Essays*, 2010, 3–30. [Google](#)
- Harvey, Peter. *An Introduction To Buddhism: Teachings, History And Practices*. 2nd Ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CB09781139050531>
- Hayati, Nur, Zaitun Saftia, And Nurainun Br Barasa. "Awal Mula Sejarah Agama Buddha Dan

- Perkembangannya Hingga Masuk Ke Indonesia.” *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*9, No. 2 (2023): 156–67.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30651/ah.v9i2.16562>.
- Keyes, Charles F. *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom As Modern Nation State*. 1st Ed. New York: Routledge, 1987. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429308710>.
- Kitiarsa, Pattana. “Beyond Syncretism: Hybridization Of Popular Religion In Contemporary Thailand.” *Journal Of Southeast Asian Studies*36, No. 3 (2005): 461.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463405000251>
- Lanslor, Tobias, Willem Brownstok, And Yuri Galbinst. *Sejarah Buddhisme: Dari Permulaannya Hingga Penurunannya Di India*. Cambridge Stanford Books, N.D. [Google](#)
- Lewis, Todd. “Conveying Buddhist Tradition Through Its Rituals.” *Teaching Buddhism: New Insights On Understanding And Presenting The Traditions*, 2017, 122–48.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199373093.003.0007>
- Mahamid, Mochammad Nginwanun Likullil. “Sejarah Maritim Di Nusantara (Abad VII-XVI): Interkoneksi Kerajaan Sriwijaya, Majapahit, Dan Demak.” *Historia Madania: Jurnal Ilmu Sejarah*7, No. 1 (2023): 32–49. <https://doi.org/10.15575/hm.v7i1.23014>
- Masruroh, Yoyoh. “Makna Dan Tata Cara Bhakti-Puja Dalam Ajaran Buddha Maitreya: Studi Kasus Di Vihara Maitreyawira Angke Jelambar Jakarta Barat.” UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2008, 2022. [Google](#)
- Maulidan, Safari. “Tradisi Sembahyang Umat Budha (Studi Kasus Vihara Dharma Bhakti Gampong Peunayaong Kecamatan Kuta Alama Banda Aceh).” UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, 2016. [Google](#)
- Mugiyo, Mugiyo, And Prihadi Dwi Hatmono. “Makna Ritual Pengambilan Tirta Untuk Penguatan Karakter Religius Umat Buddha Kabupaten Banyuwangi.” *Al Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan*16, No. 4 (2022): 1448–58.
<https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v16i4.1135>
- Nariswari, Rita. “Eloknya Vihara Cemara Asri, Salah Satu Yang Terbesar Di Indonesia.” Tempo.Co, N.D. [Google](#)
- Nasution, Nur Fadhilah, And Luthfiatunnisa. “Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Berbasis Moderasi Agama Di Desa Sampali Kec. Percut Sei Tuan.” *Jurma Jurnal Program Mahasiswa Kreatif*6, No. 1 (2022): 62–73. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32832/pkm-p.v6i1.1010..>
- Putra, Arisna. “Makna Sesajen Dalam Tradisi Sedekah Bumi Di Dusun Krajan, Desa Tunahan: Kajian Eksploratif Berdasarkan Konsep Pattidāna Dalam Ajaran Buddhis Theravāda.” *Jurnal Budi Pekerti Agama Buddha*2, No. 4 (2024): 11–25.
<https://doi.org/10.61132/jbpab.v2i4.591>
- Rahmah, Atika, Avita Salsabila, Afifah Nabila Nasution, Sri Rahayu Ningsih, Zulayli Syahrani, And Ella Andhany. “Eksplorasi Studi Wisata Religi: Etnomatematika Pada Maha Vihara Maitreya Di Cemara Asri Medan: Exploration Of Religious Tourism Studies: Ethnomathematics At The Maitreya Maha Vihara In Cemara Asri Medan.” *Al-Aqlu: Jurnal Matematika, Teknik Dan Sains*3, No. 1 (2025): 89–97.
<https://doi.org/10.59896/aqlu.v3i1.143>.
- Saddhatissa, Hammalawa. *Buddhist Ethics*. 2nd Ed. Wisdom Publication, 1997. [Google](#)
- “Sejarah Pendirian,” N.D. [Google](#).
- Sembiring, Karina. “Altar Sembahyang Untuk Dewi Kwan Im Pada Rumah Masyarakat Tionghoa Buddha Di Medan: Kajian Terhadap Artefak, Kegiatan, Dan Gagasan.”

Universitas Sumatera Utara, 2017. [Google](#)

Stokes, Gillian. "Seri Siapa Dia." *Buddha*, Jakarta: Erlangga, 2001. [Google](#)

Subandi, Agus. "Makna Simbolik Barang Persembahan Pada Altar Dewa-Dewi Di Kelenteng Liong Hok Bio Kota Magelang." *Vijjacariya: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Buddhis*6, No. 2 (2019). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.69835/vjp.v8i2.124>.

Swearer, Donald K. *The Buddhist World Of Southeast Asia*. 2nd Ed. New York: Suny Press, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1353/book161>

Taram, Jimo. *Pendidikan Agama Buddha Dan Budi Pekerti*. Jakarta: Pusat Perbukuan Kemendikbud, N.D. [Google](#)

Utari, Diah Sri, Arifinsyah Arifinsyah, And Endang Ekowati. "Analisis Makna Simbolik Ornamen Kuil Buddha Dalam Konteks Keagamaan: Studi Kasus Maha Vihara Maitreya." *Kamaya: Jurnal Ilmu Agama*7, No. 3 (2024): 145–58. <https://doi.org/10.37329/kamaya.v7i3.3586>