

Tongkonan is One of The Cultural Symbols For The Toraja People That Has Noble Values

Asniati Kuasa Rombelinggi¹

Bahar²

Akbar Abu Thalib³

Heppy Lismayanti⁴

¹²³Universitas Fajar

⁴Universitas PGRI Kalimantan

¹asnirombelinggi@gmail.com

²baharsetiawan@unifa.ac.id

³akbarlib@unifa.ac.id

⁴heppyismayanti2@gmail.com

Abstract

Tongkonan is a traditional house of Torajan people. Tongkonan is a place to discuss or conduct traditional affairs, not just an extended family home and a place to maintain community ties. The aim of this research is to identify the meanings contained in tongkonan. In this research, researcher using qualitative methods, with the aim of researchers to find out the meaning of tongkonan for Torajan people. The meanings of tongkonan from Torajan cultural perspective are; tongkonan is symbol of lineage and family identity, tongkonan served as the center of traditional government, tongkonan is a center of traditional ceremonies and rituals, and tongkonan as symbol of cosmic harmony (Aluk Todolo). The research result show that Tongkonan is a source of pride and splendor for the entire Torajan tribe, as this traditional house serves not only as a residence but also as a kinship symbol for the entire Torajan family, even if some family members have passed away. Tongkonan is not only a place to live with extended family, but also a place to perform various traditional rituals and ceremonies, also tongkonan is not something that is 'chosen', but something that is determined by descent.

Keywords: *Tongkonan is one of the cultural symbols for the Toraja*

Background

Tongkonan is a traditional house of Torajan people. Tongkonan are a Torajan ancestral heritage, passed down from generation to generation since their founding and still maintained by their descendants. For Torajan people, tongkonans are not only symbols of social status but also markers of the existence and glory of a traditional territory. The land of the tongkonan, as part of the traditional territory, is controlled and utilized communally by all members of the clan (Riyadi Ismanto and Margareta Maria, 2020), there are several types of Tongkonan which are distinguished based on the function of their owners in the social structure of society,: (1) Tongkonan Layuk, which is the highest traditional house which functions as the center of power and traditional government in Tana Toraja; (2) Tongkonan Kaparengesan, which is a traditional house that represents Tongkonan Layuk in organizing traditional government in certain areas; and (3) Tongkonan Batu A'riri, which is a traditional house that plays a role in strengthening kinship ties and preserving family heritage (La'bi et al., 2021). Tongkonan means a house, a place, where the extended family meets to perform traditional rituals together, both Aluk Rambu Solo' and Aluk Rambu Tuka'. Tongkonan is a place to discuss

or conduct traditional affairs, not just an extended family home and a place to maintain community ties. Rapu is a family based on blood ties, an extended family. Pa'rapuan is an abstract form of rapu, which is allied within the tongkonan or through blood ties. The foundation of the tongkonan is that each married couple must build their own house. The house serves as a center of community of everyone that related to the founder. Through tongkonan, Toraja people can express their identity. The main function of tongkonan is to build a community.

In general, Tongkonan are classified according to their respective functions: first, tongkonan layuk, tongkonan that is headed by the leader. Second, tongkonan anak patalo, meaning tongkonan is descendants of tongkonan layuk. Third, tongkonan pesio aluk, tongkonan that is responsible for implementing the provisions of aluk and adat. Fourth, tongkonan pabalian, tongkonan that assists the tasks of tongkonan layuk, anak patalo, and pesio aluk. Fifth, tongkonan patulak, tongkonan that assist with certain tasks (Ma'na et al., 2015).

The richly carved tongkonan houses carry symbolic meanings that reflect their owner's social status. The tongkonan structure has a distinctive boat-shaped roof, reminding the Torajan people that their ancestors used boats to reach Sulawesi. Tongkonan are characterized by four primary colors: red (life), yellow (God's blessing), black (death), and white (bone, symbolizing purity and cleanliness), based on information from Toraja Journey (2025), Wikipedia Torajan People, and the German Wikipedia.

Tongkonan is a symbol of family and dignity for the Torajan people. Pawning or selling tongkonan is the same as pawning or selling the dignity of the family and ancestors, bringing shame to the tongkonan family members. The wealth of a tongkonan can be increased, but not decreased, to ensure the survival of the tongkonan's generations (Adams / Torajan studies; *Making a Living Between Crises and Ceremonies*, Tana Toraja; *Tongkonan Houses – family heritage articles*)

For Charles Sanders Peirce, symbol is a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the symbol to be interpreted as referring to that object. According to Peirce (1931–58), a sign is something that 'stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity,' while a symbol is a sign whose meaning is determined by 'a rule' or prevailing interpretive custom—without any visual resemblance or real connection to its object. All words, phrases, and books are symbols because they are bound by conventional rules through shared use and interpretation."

Tongkonan is very meaningful for Torajan people because tongkonan is not only about a place to live, also tongkonan is not something that is 'chosen', but something that is determined by descent (Mashuri & Helmi 2019; Idrus et al. 2016; Pa'rapuan values). Tongkonan is said to be a symbol of unity for Torajan people because it is the center for Torajan people fostering kinship and a place to carry out various activities or traditions of the Torajan people without regard to any existing differences. For Torajan people, tongkonan is rich in elements, civilization, beliefs, ancient traditions, and a source of pride for the Torajan people themselves. Therefore, building this traditional house is not something to be taken lightly. According to the kinship theory of the Toraja people (Bararuallo 2010; Tangdilintin 1975; Waterson 1986), Tongkonan is a gathering place for the extended family which is passed down through descendants (bilateral descent) and forms a family identity. Torajan people have considered Tongkonan as something sacred and considered to be an important part of their lives, because tongkonan is used as a meeting point in Torajan society to resolve things on the basis of family.

Tongkonan as identity for Torajan people because represent traditional architecture and lifestyles of the local communities. Tongkonan has the boat shaped roof as a reminder that their ancestors used boats to reach Sulawesi. Tongkonan also a place for family in carrying out ceremonies that related to beliefs and a place to discuss and deciding on rules in society that regulate social interaction relationship (St. Hadidjah Sultan, Karina Masya Sari 2014).

Based on the background, researcher identify the meaning of tongkonan in the lives of Torajan people according to Torajan cultural perspective.

Methodology Of The Research

In this research, the researcher used qualitative research to analyze the represent of tongkonan as symbol for Torajan people. In this research, the data which are collected aim to resolve the problem namely . There is research instrument that are used in conducting the research, is note taking.

Finding

From Torajan cultural perspective, Tongkonan is not just a traditional house, but a symbol that rich in meaning and the center of Torajan society's social, cultural, spiritual, and political life. The following are the meanings of tongkonan indicators from Torajan cultural perspective

Symbol of lineage and family identity



Pict: Tongkonan

Tongkonan are inherited houses built by ancestors and serve as a symbol of the identity of an extended family (tribe). Not everyone can build a tongkonan, only those who have a lineage from a particular ancestor can build one



Pict 1 : the roof of tongkonan

The roof of tongkonan which is triangular in shape, also resembling the shape of a boat which holds a legend about the origins of Torajan people who sailed using a boat to arrive in South Sulawesi

From data above showed that the boat-shaped roof of tongkonan is a sign with visual iconicity, as it resembles a boat. This shape is a signifier of the meaning of ancestral origins and Torajan spirituality (signified). The roof of tongkonan functions as an icon, index, and symbol all at once. This symbol affirms the cultural identity of the Torajan as a society that respects its origins, upholds ancestral values, and understands that tongkonan is not just a place to live, but a center of spirituality, pride, and family solidarity.



pict 2: Pa'tedong Motif

The name of the motif is Pa' Tedong on the tongkonan wall, which is a carving of a buffalo head carved on the top large board (Indo' Para) and on the body of tongkonan (Manangga Banua) as a symbol of prosperity, wealth, nobility, dowry, a means of buying and selling transactions, an object of offering and its role in managing agricultural land.

From data above, showed that Pa'tedong motif in Tongkonan serves as a signifier of social status, while the carved form is the signifier. This motif is iconic and symbolic because it visually depicts a buffalo and symbolizes the wealth and spiritual strength of ancestors. Pa'tedong motif is not merely an ornament, but a cultural symbol imbued with ideological and religious meaning in Torajan society.



Pict 3 : Pa'Barre Allo and Pa'Manuk Londong

Pa' Barre Allo is a round sun carving and Pa'manuk Londong is a carving of a rooste, that carved on the front and back of the triangular board (Para Longa) on top of the Tongkonan and is often carved in pairs.

Based on the data above, Pa'Barre Alloand Pa'Manuk Londong symbolizes leadership, honesty, wisdom, rules and customs, and a symbol of being able to adapt to any situation, just like a chicken that knows the time of light and dark.

Traditional center of government



In the past, tongkonan served as the center of traditional government, where important decisions were made by traditional elders. Tongkonan is the center of power, customary law, and a symbol of social authority within the Torajan social structure.



Pict 1: Tongkonan Layuk

Tongkonan Layuk is the main tongkonan in Torajan social structure, serving as the center of traditional government or the main house of a lineage.

The data above shows that Tongkonan Layuk is a place where major decisions for the entire extended family or customary area are made, such as meetings on customary regulations and social norms

Center of traditional ceremonies and rituals



Tongkonan is the primary venue for various traditional ceremonies, both those related to death (Rambu Solo') and life (Rambu Tuka'), as well as other thanksgiving ceremonies. Tongkonan serves as a link between humans, ancestors, and gods. It is a sacred and spiritual space.



Pict 1: Mangrara Banua

Rambu tuka' is a thanksgiving tradition that emphasizes the Torajan people's gratitude, held at the Tongkonan, such as the Mangrara Banua (Tongkonan Inauguration).

From the data above says that Mangrara banua or commonly known as the ceremony to purify tongkonan traditional house with animal blood, is performed before the owner moves in. This ceremony aims to honor the ancestors who built the tongkonan and to ensure prosperity in the future. Mangrara Banua Tongkonan, which is carried out in accordance with the results of the deliberations of the family groups of Tongkonan.



pict 2: funeral ceremony

Rambu solo' ceremony is a tradition for the death of a family member in a tongkonan. Rambu solo' is known as a famous funeral and one of the most expensive in Indonesia. The deceased's coffin called "Erong" is placed in front of tongkonan.

The data shows that tongkonan functions as a gathering place extended family to discuss all preparations such as the right day to hold Rambu Solo' funeral ceremony, the amount of financing that will be used and the amount of buffalo must be sacrificed according to their family's noble status and abilities respective economies to provide these buffaloes.

Symbol of cosmic harmony (Aluk Todolo)



Pict: Rambu Solo'

Aluk Todolo is the indigenous religion of the Toraja people. Since 1969, this local Torajan religion has been officially recognized as a branch of Hindu Dharma, and since then, it has been called Alukta, meaning "our religion". Aluk Todolo is the ancestral religion of the Toraja people. Among the practices of Aluk Todolo that still carried out until today is a death ceremony, called Rambu Solo'. Death ceremonies are indeed part of a belief system, therefore, in certain societies, death holds a special place in the Toraja people's belief system. This belief in an afterlife, where spirits separated from the human body are believed to live among them and even influence their lives. Alukta or Aluk Todolo, is believed to provide a strong theological basis for this death ceremony in Toraja, known as Rambu Solo'. In traditional Aluk Todolo, tongkonan are built based on cosmological principles: the east symbolizes life (sunrise), and the west symbolizes death (sunset).



Pict: Ma'badong

Before Rambu solo' ceremony, Torajan people first perform Ma'badong tradition. Ma'badong is a form of dance and singing without accompanied by musical iinstruments, which recite prise poems about people who have died or wailed sadness from those left behind.

The data exerpt show that the leader of badong is considered to have mastered the badong poetry, known as Indo Badong. The poems recited serve several purposes, including badong advice, badong lamentation, badong marching, and badong blessing. This tradition serves as a medium for transporting the spirits of the deceased to the afterlife. Ma'badong in Toraja society shows spiritual values, where at that time the community still embraced Aluk Todolo belief which was inherited from their ancestors until now.

Conclusion

Tongkonan is a source of pride and splendor for the entire Torajan tribe, as this traditional house serves not only as a residence but also as a kinship symbol for the entire Torajan family, even if some family members have passed away. Tongkonan is not only a place to live with extended family, but also a place to perform various traditional rituals and ceremonies, also tongkonan is not something that is 'chosen', but something that is determined by descent. Tongkonan has the boat shaped roof as a reminder that their ancestors used boats to reach Sulawesi. Tongkonan is very sacred tradiitiional house. Through tongkonan, Toraja people can express their identity.

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