

Minahasan Vernacular House; Values, Meanings, And Forms

Ronald M P Kolibu¹, Agus Sachari², Pindi Setiawan³

Doctoral Program in Science of Fine Arts and Design, Faculty of Art and Design,
Institute of Technology Bandung

ronaldkolibu12@gmail.com

Rumah adalah salah satu dari tiga hal yang menjadi kebutuhan dasar manusia. Posisi rumah berkembang seiring dengan perkembangan peradaban manusia. Minahasa sebagai bagian dari peradaban tersebut memiliki produk budaya arsitektural berupa rumah vernakular yang keberadaannya hadir dengan membawa nilai, makna dan bentuk yang khas dan unik. Artikel ini merupakan bagian dari penelitian guna menjawab pertanyaan (1) bagaimana pengetahuan dan teknologi yang digunakan masyarakat Minahasa dalam membangun rumah vernakular Minahasa ini, (2) bagaimana bentuk serta posisi rumah vernakular Minahasa dalam perkembangan budaya Minahasa, dan (3) apa nilai dan makna rumah vernakular Minahasa ini bagi masyarakat Minahasa. Ketiga pertanyaan inilah yang akan dijawab dalam penelitian ini. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan etnografi, dimana semua proses dan hasil akan dideskripsikan dengan membuka ruang penafsiran terhadap berbagai pola dari nilai, makna serta bentuk yang ditemui dalam proses penelitian. Etnografi dipilih karena dilihat menjadi jalan untuk melihat berbagai fenomena yang hadir dalam penelitian ini. Penelitian ini akan bermuara pada identifikasi pola perkembangan nilai, makna, dan bentuk rumah vernakular Minahasa

Kata kunci. Rumah, vernakular, nilai, makna, bentuk

House is one of human's three primary needs. It is developed alongside human civilization. Minahasa as a part of that civilization developed vernacular architecture based on their culture's unique values, meanings, and forms. This article is a part of research concerned in answering the questions of (1) how are the knowledge and technology used by Minahasan to build their vernacular house, (2) how are the shape and form of Minahasan vernacular house in Minahasa's cultural development, and (3) what are the value and meaning of Minahasan vernacular house for its people. These three questions were being addressed in this research by using qualitative method with ethnographic approach, where every steps and results will be described by interpretation of several patterns from the values, meanings, and forms found in the research process. Ethnography was utilized to see phenomena in this research. The results are identification of values, meaning, and forms development in Minahasan vernacular house.

Keywords: house, vernacular, values, meanings, forms.

Proses Review : 1 - 28 Januari 2020, Dinyatakan Lolos: 10 Februari 2020

INTRODUCTION

One cultural product that can be used as an identity to get to know an area is where humans live and do activities. We will clearly and surely point to Toraja area as soon as we see Tongkonan house, Minangkabau when we see Gadang house, Java for a *Joglo*-roofed house. This further clarifies that building art can show the identity of an area.

Cultural products, in this case, building art as it is mentioned above are known as traditional houses. The traditional house itself is comprehended as a building in which the structure, way of making, shape, function, and ornamental variety has its own distinctive features which are inherited in generations (Said, 2004: 47). The traditional word itself is rooted in the word tradition which is comprehended as a habit that is carried out in the same way by several generations without the slightest change (Said, 2004: 48). From this definition, the criteria which is used in classifying a traditional house or not is that if both from the development process and the use, it remains in the habits that have become joint rules. These habits, although are not written but they are trusted and adhered to by every member of the community in the group. For a traditional house, the rules are the way of establishment and the appearance of the house. The process of establishing a house must be in accordance with time, direction, and place with the trust of the community, which in its determination through certain rituals and ceremonies (Said, 2004: 48). Primadi Tabrani actually emphasizes that a house can be said to be traditional if it is at least used by three generations.

Minahasa area is an area that also has cultural heritage in this case residential houses as in other regions in Indonesia. This cultural product is one of the many cultural heritage that continues to be developed in Minahasa area. As a superior cultural product, the existence of this traditional house actually begins to feel vague. Because it must be admitted that many indigenous Minahasa cultures have had to give up on the times, the influence of globalization, and the lack of awareness to the importance of a cultural tradition, become the driving force behind the vague existence of Minahasa cultures. This becomes interesting to study because the identity of a human or group interface will be seen from the existence of the human or group culture. Something is missing from Minahasa culture, especially in the existence of Minahasa house which at this time should begin to enter the golden era because it has been produced in a modern way and marketed vigorously. It is interesting to be a study material because as one of Minahasa handicraft products, this Minahasa house, has also been seen as a cultural product. As it is mentioned in the problem statement, there is currently less special characteristics of a Minahasa house which confirms that this product is the result of Minahasa culture.



Figure 1. Minahasa Vernacular House
(Photo by Bode Talumewo, Repro Scan by Ronald 2019)

METHODOLOGY

This research is closely related to cultural phenomena, so this research departs from the level of a cultural research. The position of this research that is included in the product of cultural research makes it using a qualitative research paradigm. Because in its capacity as a cultural phenomenon, this research has specificity in the form of unique cases which in this condition it is less possible to apply the quantitative research paradigm. This qualitative research paradigm itself then has guided the author to unexpected new data discovery and this situation by the authors can be accommodated in this qualitative research paradigm (Suardi Endraswara, 2003: 15).

And in its capacity as a qualitative research, this research must place itself as an instrument. It follows cultural assumptions, while it still follows the obtained data. In positioning themselves, researchers are expected to be flexible and reflective but still have distance from the research object. As a consequence of this research method, researchers must be placed in a participatory observation or observers / researchers are involved (Julia Brannen, 2005: 11).

The initial step in this research is to inventory as much information as possible about the Minahasa vernacular house. This information is then described based on ethnographic studies. Ethnographic studies are used because in nature, ethnography is a written description of society, social activities, rituals, symbols and characteristics of a group of people (Duranti, 1997). The ethnographic study model itself is a research model that is mostly related to the science of anthropology which studies and describes cultural events, life outlooks and activities of an object of research. Ethnography itself is derived from the word *ethnos* which means people and *graphein* which means writing. The term is then interpreted as a type of writing that uses materials from field research to describe human culture. According to Spradley, culture is all knowledge learned by humans and is used to interpret experiences and

shape behavior, and ethnography is research that discusses culture, both explicitly and implicitly (Spradley, 1980).

RESULT AND OR DISCUSSION

Minahasa Vernacular House, A Historical Review

Regarding to its position as a cultural product, we begin this discussion by looking at how the development of Minahasa vernacular house is. Its own existence is basically colored by the occurrence of many changes both in terms of function and form. The changes are forced, because of intervention of the authorities. In addition to it, the process of adaptation to the environment, lifestyle, and the development of the times are also seen to provide considerable pressure in the change process.

Before we discuss further about Minahasa vernacular house, it is better for us to see the condition of Minahasan vernacular houses at the past. From the existed historical records, at least from the documents that can be identified, it was in around 1619 when Peter Blas Palomino found that the forms of houses in Minahasa area resembled the form of houses in southern Philippines. It was estimated that this similarity occurred due to the land conditions in Minahasa used to be one land with Philippines. This fact is supported by a statement from Graafland regarding the geographical conditions of Minahasa area:

The islands in north of Minahasa used to seem to have converged with Sangihe archipelago and further to north with a larger land, which according to the interpretation of Sangihe folklore is Philippines. In Sangihe and Bolang, there are stories about traces of settlement, and the story does not conflict with the location of the island and the position of the mountains (Graafland, 1991: 8).

The Minahasan vernacular houses used to be in the form of a large and long building because it was a place of residence not only for one family but it was inhabited by six to seven families who were still a family group like the Longhouse in Kalimantan region. This is as it is said by Robertus Padtbrugge, a Dutch VOC Governor in Maluku who came to Minahasa on December 25th, 1678 to January 23rd, 1679 to have a cooperation agreement. Padtbrugge revealed:

Minahasan house is in the form of a high-poled long house, of when the house is inhabited by five to nine families where each family has its own kitchen. The oldest family has the largest room, a staircase from one intact log that is notified for footrest (Wenas, 2007: 118)

The same thing was written by Graafland in his notes:

The houses at that time were much bigger. Five or ten to twenty kitchens are in it. But there are no rooms. Rattan or rope is stretched inside the house, and in that way they make rooms. They hang rugs or clothes on rattan or ropes. That is how they make rooms. (Graafland, 1991: 58)

The above data describes, initially, Minahasa vernacular house has the following characteristics and forms:

- a. It is rectangular in shape. This shape form is of almost



Figure 2. Sketch of the 1824 Sonder House by A.A.J. Payen. (Collection Photo of Jessy Wenas, Repro Scan by Ronald 2019)

all traditional houses in Indonesia, most of it is used because it is simple and easy to make.

- b. It is a long and large building. This is because this house is inhabited by more than one family that still has one lineage.
- c. It has a triangular roof made of *katu*. The shape of a triangular roof is an adaptation of Indonesia climate conditions which have tropical climate where there are only two seasons, dry and wet.
- d. Its height is about 5 meters from the ground. It is based on the consideration that the house is getting higher from the ground then it will be safer from enemy attacks.

The characteristics and the forms of Minahasa vernacular house are based on several things, namely: (1) Security considerations, at which that time attacks from other groups often occurred for reasons of old grudges or because of wars between groups of people, (2) To avoid attacks from wild animals, (3) Also to avoid attacks from *pengayau*, it is a group of people who because of animistic beliefs beheading for reasons of gaining strength or recognition of their might. From these reasons, usually Minahasa houses at that time were also equipped with a watch tower building that served to monitor if there were enemies coming. The type of houses is known as *wale wangko* or big houses. Another characteristic of Minahasa house at that time was that it did not have a room wall from wooden board and also it did not have an attic. The inside part of the house consists only of roof poles, and on these poles, there are given a range of ropes or bamboo or rattan to hang bamboo woven or mats that function as room dividers (Walukow, 2010: 30).

The shape of a long and large house changed around the 1850s. The form of Minahasa vernacular houses became smaller houses which were only occupied by 1 family. This change itself is based on several things, namely:

- a. In the 1840s to 1850s, there were natural disasters in Minahasa area, the earthquake in 1845 and the mountain eruption on January 5th, 1845.
- b. Outbreaks of cholera and dysentery in 1851-1854
- c. Prohibition from the Dutch government to build large traditional houses along with the entry of Christianity in Minahasa, and the construction of roads and struc-

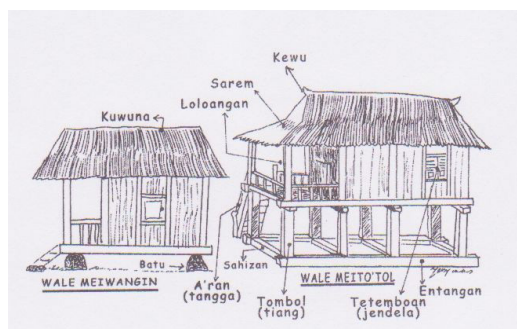


Figure 3. *Wale Mei wangin* and *Wale Meito'tol*
(Sketch of Jessy Wenas, Repro by Ronald 2019)

turing of villages in Minahasa around 1878. At this time, there started to be a division of the house model which began with the names of *Wale Mei wangin* and *Wale Meito'tol*. This name is based on the placement of house buildings at the base of the house. *Wale Mei wangin* is a designation for a house which base is placed on a rock while *Wale Meito'tol* which the house pillars are placed on a flat beam that extends and transversely. *Wale Meito'tol* house model is an earthquake resistant house design because all parts of the house are joined together and tied to the pillars of the house.

Both types of Minahasa vernacular house models by Agus Walukow are divided based on the economic ability of homeowners, of which *wale mei wangin* model is usually owned by the families from underprivileged economies (*tou'le'ngay*) while *wale meito'tol* model is usually owned by the families whose economic lives are wealthy/rich (*tou singa'*) (Walukow, 2010: 31-32).

The models of these houses were later known by the community as a form of Minahasa vernacular houses. In its development, the shape of this house began to use two stairs which were placed in the front of the house which Minahasa community believed to be a way to inflict evil spirits who wanted to enter the house where when the spirits climbed on one side of the stairs, they would immediately descend on the other side of the stairs. In the model of this house also began to be known as the term of attic (*soldor*). It is the space under the roof which functioned as a place to store food, but also had another function as a place to perform rituals in this case was believed to be a place for ancestors. In the attic/*soldor* ritual function to be a place to store the results of *mengayau* which was believed if it was led inside the house, the wisdom and power of the owner will remain in the house and it can be owned by the homeowner. Another concept of Minahasa vernacular house in the structure of the roof, the house, and the under space itself developed from the concept of three worlds, namely the upper, middle and under world. The model of Minahasa vernacular house in the form of a stilt house also provides a space under the floor of the house which was used by some families as a warehouse but by many



Figure 4. Houses with poles and under space made from concrete

(Photo of Bode Talumewo Repro by Ronald Kolibu 2019)

families in Minahasa it was functioned as their cattle shed such as cows or horses. One thing that is fundamental to changing of Minahasa vernacular house in this era is that the stove/kitchen has been separated from the main house and it stands alone at the back. Although the placement is connected to the main house so that it seems that it is a part of the main house.

The development of Minahasa vernacular house, in addition to being influenced by the recommendation of Dutch government that required one house for one family, was also influenced by the presence of Dutch buildings which were made of concrete. The influence on Minahasa vernacular house was that at that time many houses were traditional houses but they were semi-permanent because the stairs and the bottom of the house had been made of concrete. In terms of space functions, there has been a clear division of function space between the living room/terrace, bedroom and kitchen.

Minahasa Vernacular House, An Architectural Review

Talking about a house in the concept of a traditional house besides it is seen as a cultural product, it must also be seen as an architectural product. As a product of architectural culture, traditional houses can also be identified from the architectural side. This architectural concept by Harimu is said that the architectural side of traditional houses, especially in Indonesia, can be recognized by the display of thatched/palm fiber roofs, and walled with wood/bamboo slats. There are people who also state that Indonesian architecture is the architecture of stilt houses from wood, namely buildings with construction techniques by using joints without nails or tools and connecting materials other than wood. A common feature of the stilt house is that the house is built with pillars. The floor of it is above the ground. It is made of planks or bamboo, except that the kitchen does not have under space.

Likewise in Minahasa, Minahasa vernacular house is in the form of a stilt house or under spaced-house. The material which is used is generally wood, namely ironwood, *linggua*, *cempaka utan*/champak wood or *wasian*/michelia wood, *nantu* wood, and *maumbi* wood. Iron wood is used



Figure 5. Minahasa vernacular house in Sawangan village
(Photo by Ronald 2019)

for poles. *Cempaka* wood is for the walls and floors. *Nantu* wood is for roof frames (Walukow, 2010: 52-53). For low economic level people, they use *petung* bamboo/*bulu Jawa* for poles, roof frames and *nibong* for the floor and also for the walls.

The architecture of Minahasa vernacular house can initially be identified by its construction characteristics: the roof frame is a combination of saddle and pyramid, wood/bamboo bar construction, tied with palm fiber on bamboo, the building body uses wood construction and the connection system, under space the building consists of 16-18 poles with the size of 80-200 cm (one pole size can be hugged by two adults) with the height of 3-5 cm, a staircase from the roots of a large tree or bamboo. The characteristics of space in the house, there is only one room which is called *fores* like the ward that is used for all occupants' activities. The territorial barrier is by stretching the rattan or palm fiber and hanging the mat. The orientation of the house that faces the direction is determined by Tonaas who received the instructions from *Empung Walian Wangko*/God (Graafland, 1991: 226-227).

The physical form of Minahasa vernacular house has changed. The level of physical change in Minahasa traditional houses for its construction, materials, and patterns of space was relatively large. There are significant differences in changes in the physical form of Minahasa vernacular houses. Physical changes in construction are mostly found in traditional houses that were built after 1900, generally the changes due to the influence of the building age. The weathered wood which is then replaced with other materials influences the construction system.

The existence of this house is one of the houses in the traditional category that still survives. According to the owner, this house is a family home that has been passed down in generations. There have been at least three generations living in this house, and he is the third generation. This house was built by his grandparents around the 1930s. The interesting thing about the existence of this house is that we can find the characteristics of traditional Minahasa vernacular house. The shape of the roof which is a combination of saddle and shield with window openings on



Figure 6. The roof shape of this house is one of the main characteristics of Minahasa traditional houses
(Photo by Ronald 2019)

the roof, very characterizes the appearance of Minahasa vernacular house.

This house also displays the features of Minahasa house which until now has become the identity strength of Minahasa vernacular house. This characteristic is the presence of two stairs on the front of the house.

The installation of a wall filler board in this house is still a typical installation of the wall board in Minahasa house which is all mounted vertically. The function of the under space in this house is also used as an additional space. Pole construction still uses wood construction with the installation without using nails. The following house is a description of the physical changes in Minahasa vernacular house that was quite far and had the impression of losing their distinctive characteristics because they were made more to the wishes of the community that were adjusted to the development of the trend.

This house is one of the products from Woloan village as the house craft center of Minahasa. The shape of the roof is very clearly changing. The change of this roof is an adaptation to the trend of buildings that come with various shapes. Basically the shape of the roof still accommodates the roof shape of Minahasa traditional house, which is a combination of saddle and shield. That additional saddle roof on the front is a new variation on this Minahasa vernacular house.

This house also only has one ladder on the front. This is also a form of change which is made, because one of the characteristics of Minahasa traditional house is to have two stairs. Variations in the front display of Minahasa house become a usual matter because basically the making of Minahasa house in terms of form is not too tight longer. The main consideration is how this house can look attractive as it is presented by Yorry Pandey the owner of the house.

The shape variations by including various forms such as the above picture are also new trends in Minahasa house. Previously in Minahasa house, it only knew the square shape without any curved shape. There is a desire of the



Figure 7. The stairs that become the main characteristic of Minahasa vernacular house today
(Photo by Ronald 2019)

people to make Minahasa house as a more attractive residential home which makes them then begin to include form variations. This is then seen as an accommodative attitude towards the development and desires of the community, but it also makes Minahasa house even more blurred in terms of identity.

Variations in the wall board installation have also changed because they have been installed varied by combining horizontal and vertical mounting. These changes are the changes from the architectural side which are basically important elements of a building, which are not only provides structural functions, but are also a carrier of distinctiveness for a building especially in buildings which are called traditional buildings that can be seen as identities.

CONCLUSION

The presence of cultural products both the existing and the new ones is part of Minahasa cultural identity that currently exists. Its existence is a part of the process of imagining Minahasa culture.

The existing Minahasa vernacular house is a cultural art product of the past which existence is still very much felt today. Its function as a cultural artifact then develops towards industrialization. In its position as part of a handicraft industry, the packaging and the display are then the main consideration. This on the one hand then made Minahasa house has an obscure identity in terms of meaning and function. The desire of modern community then defeats the meaning and function of Minahasa vernacular house that has been part of the identity since long time ago. The more days, the more shifted Minahasa function and meaning which is attached to Minahasa vernacular house. An irony that cannot be avoided.

Facade as a representation of the philosophy and worldview of Minahasa community can be a medium of imagining Minahasa culture. This imaging process requires media that can revitalize the cultural facade of Minahasa vernacular house into a part of Minahasa cultural products. The position of Minahasa facade as a product of the past



Figure 8. Minahasa vernacular house in Woloan village, Tomohon. The roof variations with the addition of a shield form to cover the part of the terrace, and the number of stairs on the front which only has one ladder
(Photo by Ronald 2019)

and now makes it the right media to re-socialize Minahasa house as a Minahasa cultural heritage. The application of various facade models on craft media is an imaging solution of past cultural products into contemporary cultural products and can make it a solution to the irony of obscure in Minahasa cultural identity. The image of a new culture is part of the process of forming an image in a community. The image that will eventually lead to the presence of a new cultural image as part of the process of forming cultural identity.

The process of forming a cultural image in this study is carried out by giving meaning to the facade of Minahasa vernacular house which represents the old meaning in accordance with the function of the house in its time, but also interprets it in the context of changing the views of Minahasa community after acculturation with various cultures and beliefs. This shifting process was possible made because of the strong change in Minahasa culture after the inclusion of new cultures (China, and moreover, Western). In another view, this change is seen as an answer to the dynamic of Minahasa culture. Minahasa culture is an accommodative and open culture.

The next process is to revitalize the new cultural products by contextualizing them in the current views and philosophy of Minahasa community. A process that does not mean eliminating old meanings and forms, but digging, uplifting, and preserving these meanings and forms within the framework of contemporary cultural products. This revitalization is carried out by applying the image of this ornamental script to other cultural products which are also the products of Minahasa culture.

This application is one way out in the process of preserving Minahasa culture. The strong influence of industrialization in culture provides an opportunity for the obscure meaning and form of a cultural product as a cultural identity. As an offer to accommodate past cultural products that enter the realm of industrialization so as not to lose identity, this facade application becomes an alternative.



Figure 9. The installation of a wall board that overall had been installed vertically, began to be combined with horizontal installation.

(Photo by Ronald 2019)

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