

STUDY OF SPACE AND ARCHITECTURE IN THE MALIGE TRADITIONAL HOUSE, SOUTHEAST SULAWESI

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ABSTRACT

Southeast Sulawesi Province in Indonesia is one of the regions rich in culture, history, and traditional architecture. This study focuses on analyzing the architecture of Malige House, a traditional house belonging to the Buton Sultanate. The study aims to explore the relationship between space, architecture, and the culture of Malige House. The analysis method used is narrative-interpretive. The discussion indicators are Vernacular Studies, which discuss the proportions and forming factors to then understand the relationship between space and architecture that is formed. This study also discusses the proportions of space, tectonics, the use of local materials, and adaptation to the natural environment in the architecture of the Malige house. Based on the analysis results, it is known that the architecture of the Malige House reflects the cosmological philosophy, social and spiritual values of the Butonese. Each element of the building, such as pillars, roofs, floors, and ornaments, contains deep meaning that reflects social status, Islamic traditions, and the government system of the Buton Sultanate. The study's results contribute to the understanding of the role of traditional architecture in preserving cultural heritage and local identity and strengthening the study of vernacular architecture as a representation of the cultural and spiritual life of the Butonese.

Keywords: vernacular architecture, Malige traditional house, sustainability of traditional architecture, space and architecture, Southeast Sulawesi

1. PREFACE

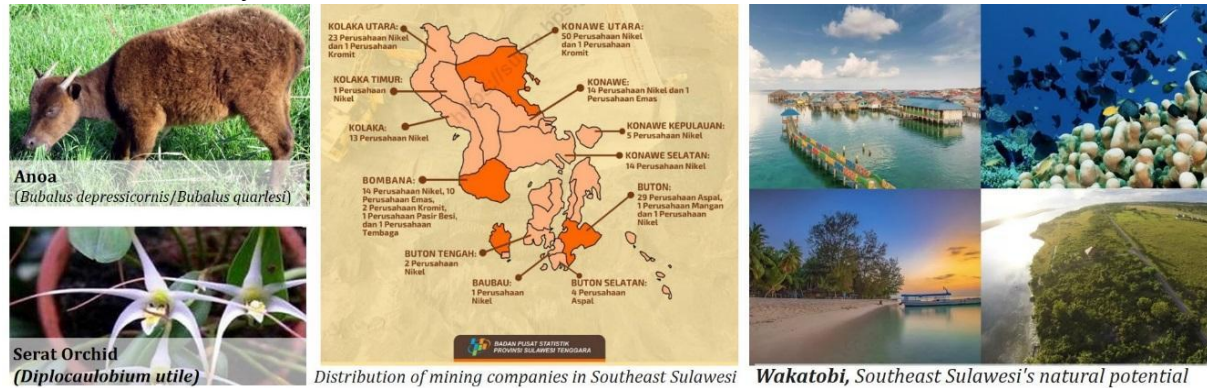
Indonesia is one of the largest archipelagic countries in the world, with very diverse tribes and cultures, one of which is Southeast Sulawesi Province. This province has an area of 153,019 km², covering a land area of 38,140 km² and a sea area of 114,879 km² with 15 districts and 2 cities. Southeast Sulawesi has diverse topographic conditions covering coastal areas, islands, and highlands. Geographically, Southeast Sulawesi is surrounded by the Banda Sea to the east and the Flores Sea to the south, and borders South Sulawesi Province to the north, and Teluk Bone to the west (Tenggara, 2023).

Natural potential

Southeast Sulawesi is one of the provinces in Indonesia rich in natural resources, including the Fiber Orchid (*Diplocaulobium utile*) and Anoa (*Bubalus depressicornis*). The availability of other natural resource potentials, namely nickel, gold, asphalt, limestone, and marble, has made the Southeast Sulawesi region experience relatively rapid development. Located in the southeastern part of Sulawesi Island, Southeast Sulawesi Province has several islands around it and borders directly on the Banda Sea. Hence, this region is rich in marine resources and has the potential to become a marine tourism area with coastal architectural diversity (HaloSultra,

2024; The Colour of Indonesia, 2015; Media Nikel Indonesia, 2022; Ikhwanudin, 2024) (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Natural Potential of Southeast Sulawesi Province



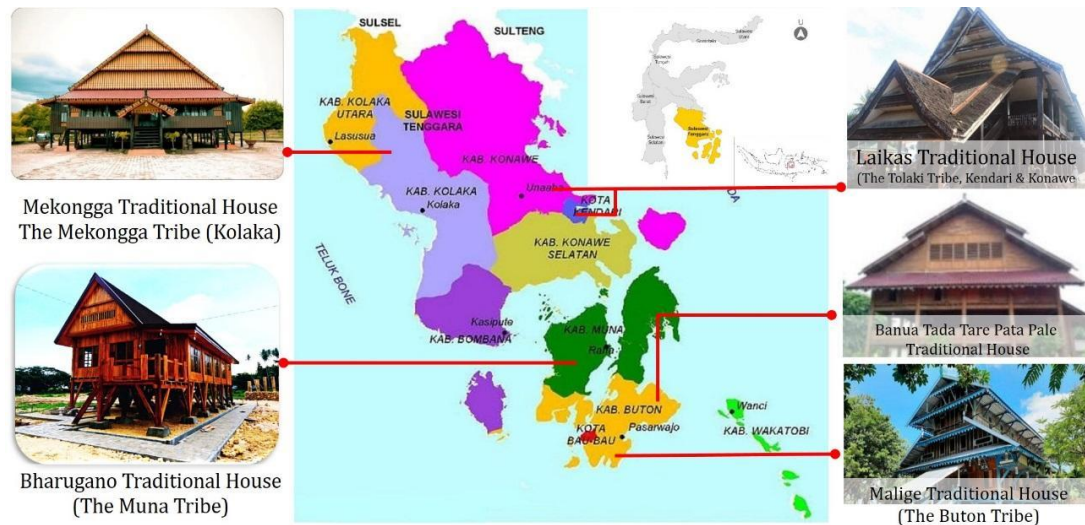
Tribes and traditional houses

The population of Southeast Sulawesi consists of natives and immigrants. Quoted from the book *Atlas Budaya dan Tradisi Nusantara* (Kartikawati, 2014), Southeast Sulawesi has seven native tribes, namely: the *Buton Tribe* (the native population of Bau-Bau), the *Culambacu Tribe* (North Konawe Regency), the *Kulisusu Tribe* (Kulisusu area, Buton Island), the *Muna Tribe* (Muna Island), the *Padoe Tribe* (Southeast Sulawesi, South Sulawesi, and Central Sulawesi), the *Tolaki Tribe* (Kendari City), and the *Wolio Tribe* (spread across the Buton, Muna, and Kabaena islands).

The Buton tribe, once the center of the Buton Kingdom—one of the largest kingdoms since the 14th century—has a famous traditional house, namely the *Malige House*. This stilt house is made of wood, built without nails, and has a complex layout, reflecting the social status and power of the sultan. The traditional house of the Buton tribe is usually called the *Banua Tada Traditional House* and is divided into three types based on the social status of its occupants, namely *Kamali or Malige*, which is a house or palace where the king and his family live; *Banua Tada Tare Pata Pale*, a four-pillared elbow house where officials and palace employees live; *Banua Tada Tare Talu Pale* which is a place for ordinary people to live (Ilahiah, 2022; Wardhani et al., 2022).

In addition to the traditional houses of the Buton tribe, Southeast Sulawesi is also home to the Tolaki tribe, who inhabit the mainland in Konawe Regency, and the Muna and Mekongga tribes who contribute to the cultural diversity of this region (Ilahiah, 2022); Ainun, 2023); Rane, 2017) (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Traditional Houses in Southeast Sulawesi



The diversity of these tribes creates unique social and cultural dynamics, making Southeast Sulawesi a region with a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Each tribe has customs, culture, and representation of traditional houses that reflect the cultural values and philosophy of its people. These traditional houses not only function as a place to live, but also as a symbol of cultural identity. The character of traditional houses in Southeast Sulawesi is included in the typical Austronesian building type. Referring to Waterson (2009), the architecture of buildings in Austronesia is usually a type of house that has three parts (head-body-foot/the tripartite house), the multi-leveled floor, outward-slanting gable, outward-slanting walls, gable finials, saddle-backed roof, and differential treatment of root and tip in the use of timber.

History of the Buton Kingdom

Abstracted from Zuhdi et al. (1996), the Buton Sultanate in Southeast Sulawesi was founded in the 13th century and led by King Wa Kaa Kaa as a small kingdom focused on agriculture before playing a role in the archipelago's trade. In 1542, under the reign of King Timbang Timbangan, this kingdom officially became an Islamic sultanate after its king converted to Islam and changed his name to Sultan Murhum. In the 16th to 18th centuries, supported by its strategic location and strong naval fleet, the Buton Sultanate reached its peak as a center of spice trade and an important maritime power in eastern Indonesia.

In the 17th century, Buton established diplomatic and trade relations with the VOC (a Dutch East India Company). However, the influence of the VOC increasingly limited Buton's power until finally, in the 18th century, the Buton Sultanate came under Dutch colonial influence. Entering the 19th century, the political and economic power of the Buton Sultanate began to decline due to colonial pressure, changes in trade routes, and the loss of control over spices. Finally, in 1906, the Dutch officially ended the rule of the Buton Sultanate, and its territory was integrated into the Dutch East Indies government.

Malige House architecture is rich in philosophical values and local wisdom, including closeness to nature, belief, social, and aesthetic values (Umar et al., 2023). Malige House is also a representation of vernacular architecture. Based on the *Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage* from ICOMOS (1999), vernacular buildings are the result of traditional and natural approaches used by communities to build their own homes. Therefore, vernacular buildings

represent local characters that are responsive to the environment. Based on its important role which also influences the diversity of architecture in Southeast Sulawesi, this study focuses on the analysis of *Malige House* architecture, the traditional house of the Buton Sultanate, which describes the relationship between space, architecture, and culture.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Research approach

The research method used in this study is narrative-interpretive, which aims to understand and analyze the space and architecture of the Malige House in Southeast Sulawesi. Interpretive research is an investigation of socio-physical phenomena in a complex context, aiming to explain the phenomenon in a holistic narrative form (Groat & Wang, 2002). This method emphasizes a qualitative approach focusing on collecting descriptive data and in-depth analysis of the cultural and social contexts underlying the architecture of the Malige House. The main focus of this study is how the proportions of the building and its forming factors reflect the relationship between space and architecture in the context of local culture.

Indicator

The discussion indicators of Vernacular Studies are the proportions and factors that form space to understand then the relationship between space and architecture that is formed. The indicators used are: the proportion of space and building, construction and materials, and the social and cultural functions of each space in the Malige house.

Data collection and analysis

At this stage, the authors conducted a descriptive-narrative study of vernacular architectural elements, such as spatial planning and construction techniques to analyze the proportions of each space in the Malige house. The author also identified and analyzed the formative factors that influenced the architectural design of the Malige house, such as natural factors, availability of materials, and the culture of the Buton tribe, including the social hierarchy status that influenced the arrangement of space and the shape of the building.

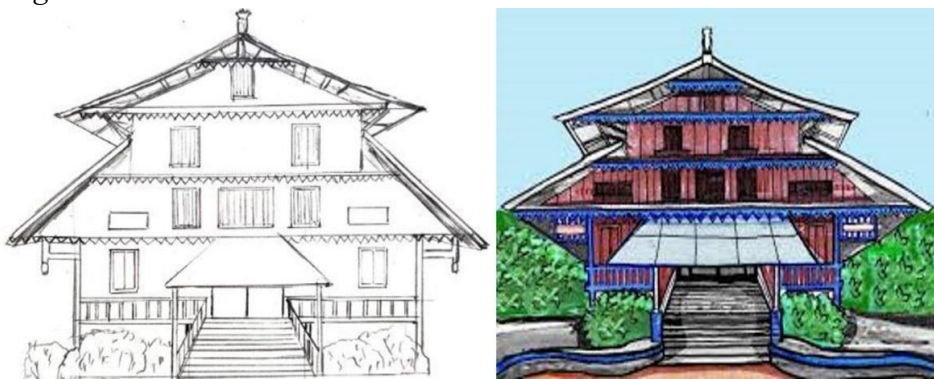
3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

History of Malige House

Malige House comes from the word *mahligai*, which means the king's residence in the palace environment. This palace was built by the 37th Sultan of Buton, La Ode Muhammad Hamidi, and was strongly influenced by Islamic principles, the dominant religion on Buton Island, after the arrival of Sheikh Abdul Wahid from Johor, Malaysia. The design of the Malige house is full of meaningful details that have been taken into account by the Sultan, including the orientation of the building facing east to make it easier for visitors to the sultanate to know the direction of the qibla (Rane, 2017; Jasrub & Sifatu, 2018) (Figure 3). Figure 3 was redrawn by the authors based on Franciska and Wardani (2014) and Rane (2017).

Figure 3

Malige House



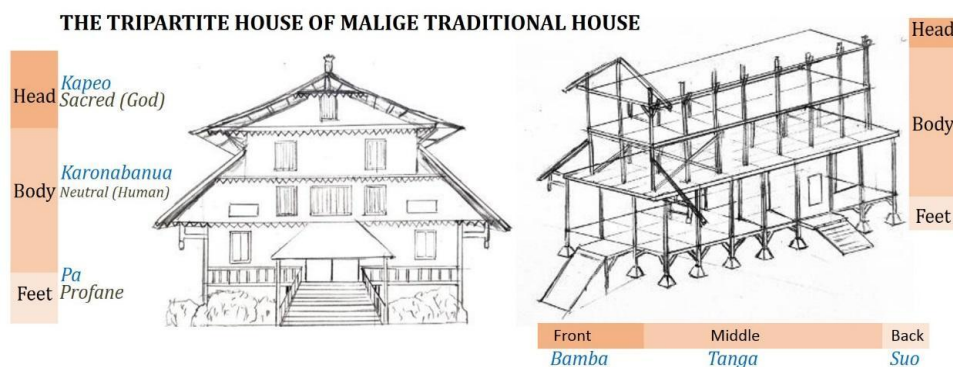
Malige House has four floors with a structure that tapers upwards. The first floor is smaller than the second floor, which looks like it has wings, and contains 18 rooms (9 rooms on the right side and 9 rooms on the left side). Meanwhile, the third and fourth floors become narrower, reflecting the vertical pattern of humans that connects architecture with spiritual values and the religious life of the Buton people (Jasrub & Sifatu, 2018).

Building proportions

The traditional Buton house is a symbol of the microcosm, which is based on a spatial arrangement pattern consisting of three spatial parts, namely: *bamba*, *tanga*, *suo*, and vertically *kapeo*, *karonabanua* and *pa* (Figure 4). It symbolizes the essence of humans, feet, body and head which have the same meaning as the macrocosm (the greatness of God) (Hamasi et al., 2022).

Figure 4

The Tripartite House of Malige Traditional House



Head

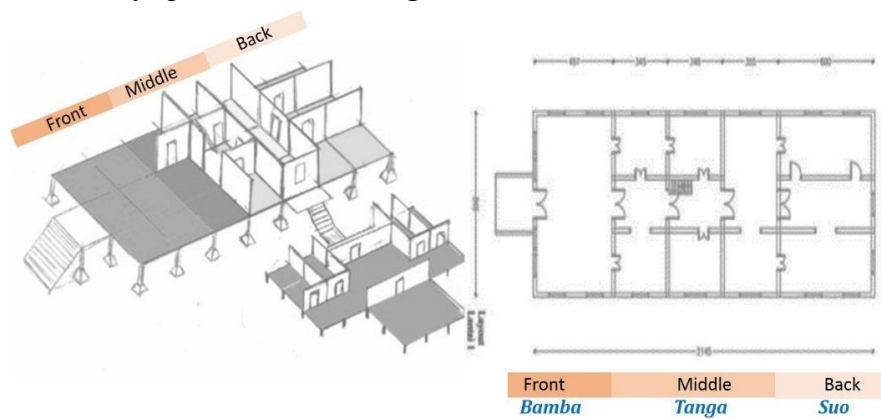
The roof of the house is made of *rumbia* and *hipa-hipa*, arranged with Islamic principles that symbolize the attitude of prayer, namely the right hand that is closed. The triangular roof shape is considered as two hands that are praying. The inhabitants of the palace are symbolized as the soul or spirit of humans. The relationship between the body and the human spirit contains an understanding of mutual care and maintenance. Perfection is obtained from human thought, which is located in the head. Therefore, the triangular shape is interpreted as the human head on a building facade (Franciska & Wardani, 2014).

Body

The first floor of the *Malige House* consists of five rooms with various functions. The first room functions as a large living room and a place for traditional discussions, accommodating up to 50 people. This room is separated from the second room by a partition that can be opened or closed as needed. In the second room, there is a guest bedroom on the left side and a guest dining room on the right side. The third room consists of two rooms for the Sultan's married children, with a circulation space in front of the room to go to the fourth room. The fourth room functions as the Sultan's dining room, which also has a hole in the floor for bathing the body. This hole is intended so that the Sultan always remembers death, so that he leads with trust and fear of God. The fifth room, located at the very back, is a special room for the Sultan's daughters, called *suo* (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Division of Space Plots in Malige House



The further back, the higher the position of the room. This is the same as the body of a boat between the bow and stern or the position of prostration in a Muslim's prayer. In the Malige house, the kitchen and toilet are located in separate buildings and are only connected by a staircase. The kitchen and toilet are symbols of the outside world whose existence is analogous to the waste disposal system in the human body.

Feet

Malige House is a stilt house consisting of 40 supporting pillars. At the front there are 5 pillars that are lined up to the back as many as 8 rows. So that the total has 40 pillars (Wulandari, 2018) (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Rows of Supporting Pillars that Form the Stage Structure



Tectonics

The structure of the *Malige house* is based on a cosmological concept, so that the tectonics that form it also represent the balance between nature and humans (Figure 7). Figure 7 is interpreted from Umar (2015) and Suleman (2010).

Figure 7

Tectonics of the Malige House



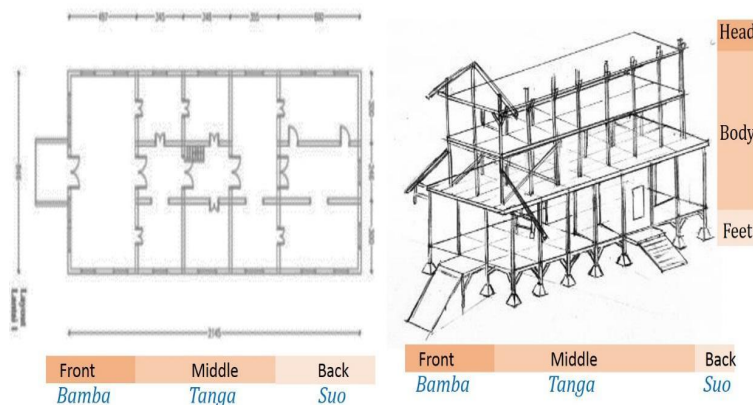
The tectonics of Malige house is: (a) Beams (*Kasolaki*): Smoothly planned connecting beams symbolize the palace residents who must have noble character; (b) Pillars (*Tutumbu*): There are three main pillars, namely the middle pillar (*Kabelai*), which symbolizes the oneness of God. The supporting pillars that depict the status of the homeowner, and the supporting pillars that reflect mutual cooperation and openness; (c) Stairs and Doors (*Oda*, *Bamba*): The stairs symbolize the journey of human life, while the sliding doors create a boundary of space. The front stairs are for guests, and the back stairs are for the family; (d) Floors (*Lante*): It is made of teak wood, symbolizing the tranquility and noble status of the Sultan. The difference in floor height reflects the rhythm of human breathing; (e) Walls (*Rindi*): The walls function as protection and a symbol of secrecy and reflect the strong Islamic principles in the Sultan's life; and (f) Windows (*Balo-Balo Bamba*): The windows symbolize the entry and exit of air and light, with dome-shaped decorations that show the influence of Islam.

Space and architecture

Malige house has three parts (head-body-feet/the tripartite house). The architectural space formed is an analogy to the human body so the architectural space formed is divided into three from front to back (horizontal) and top to bottom (vertical). The room in the Malige house is horizontally divided into three parts. The front room (*Sasambiri*) is used to accommodate male guests. The middle room (*Bamba*, *Tanga*) is for women, except the head of the family. The back room (*Suo*) is used for seclusion and becomes a kitchen (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Space and Architecture in Malige House



4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study of the space and architecture of the Malige House, a traditional house of the Buton tribe in Southeast Sulawesi, provides in-depth insight into the representation of vernacular architecture, which is also a strong representation of Austronesian architecture. Each architectural element reflects the harmony between worldly and spiritual life. Overall, the Malige House reflects the Sultan's responsibility as a trustworthy leader and protector of the people, as well as a social space that values relationships between individuals and the relationship between humans and God.

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