



The Role of Purba Bolon House Architecture in Social Structure and Kinship

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ABSTRACT

Traditional houses are one of the cultural heritages left by ancestors and are now part of local wisdom, especially in the Batak Simalungun area. The Ancient Bolon House is a traditional house typical of the Simalungun people which functions as a symbol of identity and reflects the cultural values of the Batak Simalungun people. This study aims to describe the function of each part of the Ancient Bolon House using qualitative research methods. In collecting data, this study uses literature study techniques by looking at various sources such as books, journals, and websites related to the Ancient Bolon House. The results of the study show that the Ancient Bolon House has several main parts, each of which has its own function and meaning, and contains important cultural values to be preserved by the younger generation through wedding activities and customs in family events. The Ancient Bolon House can also be a tourist attraction for foreign visits with its own cultural story.

Keywords: Purba Bolon house, architecture, social structure, kinship

Peran Arsitektur Rumah Bolon Purba dalam Stuktur Sosial dan Kekerabatan

ABSTRAK

umah adat merupakan salah satu warisan budaya yang ditinggalkan oleh nenek moyang dan kini menjadi bagian dari kearifan lokal, khususnya di daerah Batak Simalungun. Rumah Bolon Purba merupakan rumah adat khas masyarakat Simalungun yang berfungsi sebagai simbol identitas dan mencerminkan nilai-nilai budaya masyarakat Batak Simalungun. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan fungsi setiap bagian yang terdapat pada Rumah Bolon Purba dengan menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif. Dalam pengumpulan data, penelitian ini menggunakan teknik studi literatur dengan melihat berbagai sumber seperti buku, jurnal, dan situs web yang berkaitan dengan Rumah Bolon Purba. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Rumah Bolon Purba memiliki beberapa bagian utama yang masing-masing memiliki fungsi dan makna tersendiri, serta mengandung nilai-nilai budaya yang penting untuk dilestarikan oleh generasi muda dengan kegiatan pernikahan serta adat istiadat dalam acara kekeluargaan. Rumah Bolon Purba juga dapat menjadi tempat wisata dalam kunjungan masyarakat asing dengan memiliki cerita budaya tersendiri.

Kata kunci: peran arsitektur, rumah Bolon Purba, struktur sosial, kekerabatan

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia boasts a rich cultural diversity. This diversity is evident in various aspects of community life, such as traditional dances, regional languages, martial arts, music, and various other art forms. Each region possesses unique and distinctive cultural traditions that serve as a source of identity and pride for its people. This diversity makes Indonesia one of the countries with the richest cultural heritage in the world, encompassing language, art, and traditional architecture.

One form of cultural heritage that persists to this day is traditional buildings. Traditional buildings serve not only as residences but also represent the cultural values, belief systems, and social order of the communities that built them (Aqidah, 2025). Every traditional building in Indonesia is designed with aesthetic considerations, social roles, and symbolic values that developed over generations. Among the various types of traditional houses, the Simalungun Bolon House is an example of authentic architecture rich in philosophical meaning and social values.

The Bolon House is an example of a traditional house from the Simalungun tribe. In the past, this traditional house served as the residence of the Simalungun kings, including the Purba kings. The Bolon House, located in Pematang Purba, was the residence of fourteen generations of the Purba King's descendants. Tuan Mogang was the fourteenth generation of the Purba King. He ruled Pematang Purba from 1933 to 1947. After 1947, the Purba Kingdom ended. However, traces of the Purba Kingdom's glory can still be seen today. The Bolon House stands as the main building in the Purba King's palace complex. The name Bolon House was given not only because of its enormous size, but also because of its function as a royal residence (Mailani et al., 2024). The word "Bolon" in the Simalungun language means "big." Therefore, the Bolon House can literally be interpreted as a large house. However, according to the caretaker of the Bolon House, the name is not only related to the building's large size but also reflects

the social status of its owner, the king (Nabila & Harnum, 2024).

Every aspect of the Bolon House's architecture, both in terms of its shape and spatial division, contains symbolic meaning closely related to the Simalungun people's outlook on life. By examining the structure and spatial layout of the Bolon House, one can understand how the social system and kinship relationships of the Simalungun people were formed, maintained, and passed down from generation to generation. Essentially, traditional Batak houses are built not only for shelter or residence, but also as a place of life with philosophical values that serve as a guide to life (Nurafni et al., 2024). Furthermore, the architectural form also has its own distinct benefits and elements (Sibarani et al., 2024).

In addition, the largest building in the Ancient Royal Palace complex served as the king's residence. This house is built on stilts and is divided into two parts: the Lopou (house) and the Bolon House (house). The front of the house, called the Lopou, served as the residence for the king, his main consort (puang bolon) and his first wife (puang bona). The rear of the house, known as the ceremonial building, called the Bolon House, housed the king's other wives. Traditionally, the roof of this building is made of palm fiber, the walls are made of woven bamboo (tepas), and the floor is made of split sugar palm tree trunks. The Bolon House measures approximately 29.44 meters in length, 7 meters in width, and 5 meters in height at the top. The building is supported by 20 large wooden pillars decorated with typical Simalungun carvings, while the Lopou section is reinforced with 10 large wooden beams. At the rear of the house, there is a cooking stove, also known as a tatarang, and mats provided as bedding for the king's wives, each occupying five places on the left and five on the right. (Hasugian & Ginting, 2022).

In the context of social semiotics, the architecture of the Bolon House can be understood as a sign system that represents the social and cultural



significance of the Simalungun people. For example, the spatial division of the Bolon House indicates the division of roles and social status among family members. The main room, designated for the king and his family, symbolizes honor, power, and the center of authority, while other parts of the house demonstrate social functions related to traditional activities, family gatherings, and interactions with the community outside the palace.

In social semiotics, the architecture of the Bolon House can be understood as a sign system that represents the social and cultural relationships of the Simalungun people. Each part of a building has a specific function and use that is not only practical but also reflects the social values embraced by the community. (Titian: Jurnal Ilmu Humaniora, 2025) Social semiotics is a branch of semiotics that emphasizes the relationship between signs, meaning, and the social context in which those signs are used. According to Halliday (1978), every sign or communication system, such as language, symbols, and forms of material culture, is always situated within a social context that provides meaning. In other words, meaning is not only found in the symbol itself but is also influenced by social interactions, functions, and norms that exist within society.

Thus, in the Simalungun Bolon House, social semiotics is applied to understand the function and role of each part of the house as a social symbol. Each space, from the main room, the rooms for other family members, to the spaces used for traditional activities, has a social meaning related to status, roles, and hierarchies within society. Using a social semiotic approach, this study seeks to understand how the function of each part of the Bolon House architecture represents the social and cultural systems of its community. This approach positions architecture not only as a physical form, but also as a “social text” whose meaning can be read and interpreted based on the local cultural context.

Furthermore, increasingly intense globalization has influenced the way the Toba Batak peo-

ple view their cultural identity. Foreign cultures, perceived as more “modern,” often have a strong appeal to the younger generation. As a result, local culture, including the Ruma Bolon, is beginning to lose its appeal. This is a serious concern for cultural observers and the government, as if left unchecked, this cultural heritage could be lost in the coming generations. The social transformation experienced by the Toba Batak people has also impacted the patterns of relationships between individuals within the community. In the past, the Ruma Bolon served as the center of social interaction, a place where all members of the extended family gathered to discuss various matters, from family decisions to traditional rituals. The advent of modern technology, such as the internet and communication devices, has transformed these interaction patterns into a more individualistic one. Communication that previously took place face-to-face within the Ruma Bolon is now more frequently conducted through electronic devices (Jekmen et al., 2025).

Problem Formulation

1. What are the architectural forms and characteristics of the Ancient Bolon House, the traditional house of the Batak people?
2. What role does the architecture of the Ancient Bolon House play in shaping and reflecting the social structure of the Batak people?
3. How does the spatial layout of the Ancient Bolon House reflect the kinship system (clan, social position, and family relations)?

Research Objectives

1. To describe the form, structure, and architectural characteristics of the Ancient Bolon House.
2. To analyze the relationship between the architecture of the Ancient Bolon House and the social structure of Batak society.

3. To reveal how the spatial layout of the Ancient Bolon House functions within the traditional kinship system.
4. To explain the supporting factors and challenges in preserving the social values ??of the Ancient Bolon House in the modern era.

Research Benefits

a. Theoretical Benefits

1. To contribute to the study of Batak architectural and cultural anthropology.
2. To serve as a scientific reference regarding the relationship between space, symbolism, and social structure.
3. To enrich the literature on traditional houses as a representation of the kinship system.

b. Practical Benefits

1. To serve as information for local governments and cultural institutions in efforts to preserve the Ancient Bolon House.
2. To provide insight for architects, spatial planners, and academics regarding the concept of culture-based traditional housing.
3. To serve as a source of education for the wider community regarding the social values ??and kinship of the Batak people.

Relevant Research

1. Simanjuntak (2015) "The Symbolic Meaning of the Bolon House Architecture of the Toba Batak." This research explains the meaning of the symbols found in the Bolon House and their relationship to the cosmological concepts and social structure of the Toba Batak.
2. Sihombing (2017) "The Spatial Function of Batak Traditional Houses in the Kinship System." Focuses on the division of space within traditional houses and how space is used for traditional activities, guest positions, and clan relations.

3. Hutagalung (2019) "Changing Functions of Batak Traditional Houses in the Modern Era." Examining the sustainability of the social function of traditional houses when faced with developments in modern life.
4. Purba (2020) "The Purba Bolon House as a Cultural Identity and Medium of Social Interaction." Highlighting how the Ancient Bolon House remains a symbol of cultural identity and a forum for interaction between members of society despite social change.

METHOD

Traditional houses are traditional structures that symbolize the identity of a community. Their construction is based on belief systems, cultural values, and is part of local wisdom passed down through generations. This study of the Ancient Bolon House employed a qualitative research method aimed at describing the function of each part of the building.

This research was conducted within a qualitative paradigm with an interactive model and an anthropolinguistic approach (Silaban et al., 2020).

Data collection techniques utilized literature studies such as journals, books, and other related materials. The physical condition of the Ancient Bolon House was examined to obtain a more concrete picture of the function and meaning of each part. Thus, the data obtained is expected to provide an in-depth description of the cultural values embodied in the Ancient Bolon House.

The research method used in this study is a qualitative paradigm with an interactive model. This interactive model of the qualitative paradigm employs four interactive steps: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and drawing/verifying conclusions (Silaban & Sibarani, 2021).

RESULT

The research results indicate that the architecture of the Ancient Bolon House plays a crucial role in shaping, maintaining, and representing the social structure and kinship system of the Batak



Simalungun people. First, from a spatial perspective, the division of areas within the house demonstrates a clear social hierarchy. The space of the head of the family or clan leader is located at a higher, more strategic level, signifying a position of authority within the kinship group. Meanwhile, spaces for other family members are positioned in a hierarchical manner, following their genealogical position within the clan structure.

Second, the research found that the house's architecture also functions as a symbolic medium representing traditional values. Elements such as the main pillars, gorga ornaments, and the position of the stairs reflect the concepts of honor, courage, and balance that underlie social relations in the community. These symbols are not only aesthetic but also serve as behavioral guidelines for each family member.

Third, the Ancient Bolon House functions as a communal space that strengthens kinship solidarity. This house serves as the center for traditional ceremonies, deliberations, and collective activities, thereby strengthening bonds between clans and maintaining the continuity of traditions. The interactions between extended family members within the house create communication patterns that strengthen social cohesion.

Overall, the architecture of the Ancient Bolon House serves not only as a residence but also as a socio-cultural instrument that maintains the social structure and kinship system of the Simalungun people from generation to generation.

DISCUSSION

Each building Each part of the Bolon House is designed with its own function and role that adapts to the purpose of its construction. Its creation. The collection of building elements that have form, function, and aesthetic value is what is called architecture. Based on this principle, the traditional house was born as a form of traditional architecture that not only functions as a residence, but also reflects the cultural values, who built it. According to (Gilang Ramadhan et al., 2025), the traditional house is one of the real representations of

cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation and becomes a symbol of the collective identity of a community. More than just a physical building, a traditional house reflects the social order, outlook on life, and cultural values adopted by the supporting community. In general, traditional houses are inhabited by extended families who are bound by kinship ties and established customary norms. Therefore, traditional houses serve not only as shelter from the elements, but also as spaces for social education, forums for deliberation, and a medium for transmitting noble values from ancestors to the next generation (Setiawan Tampubolon et al., 2023).

Furthermore, traditional houses reflect humanity's connection to nature and the surrounding environment. Each part of the building is typically constructed taking into account the geographical conditions, available natural materials, and the local community's belief systems. For example, the shape of the roof, supporting pillars, and wall carvings often have symbolic meanings related to the community's beliefs, social status, or philosophy of life. Thus, traditional houses possess not only functional value but also profound symbolic and spiritual significance.

In the Batak Simalungun community, traditional houses are known as Rumah Bolon. This house is not just a residence, but also a center of social and cultural activities. The structure and layout of the Rumah Bolon reflect the Simalungun people's outlook on life, which upholds togetherness, mutual cooperation, and respect for ancestors. Each part of the house has its own function and meaning, both architecturally and in the social lives of its inhabitants. Therefore, understanding the architecture of the Rumah Bolon also means understanding the value system and perspective of the Batak Simalungun people on life. Consequently, the Rumah Bolon has ornaments and parts for carrying out activities (Pratikno, 2020).

Furthermore, traditional houses also reflect people's connection to nature and the surrounding environment. Each part of the building is usually constructed taking into account the geographical

conditions, available natural materials, and the local belief systems. For example, the shape of the roof, supporting pillars, and wall carvings often have symbolic meanings related to the community's beliefs, social status, or philosophy of life. Thus, traditional houses possess not only functional value but also profound symbolic and spiritual significance.

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The Pattangan Raja House

The Pattangan Raja House is located at the front, directly to the right of the entrance to the *lopou*. This building served as a resting place for the king during the day. Architecturally, the Pattangan House resembles a rest house, measuring approximately 2 meters long, 1.5 meters wide, and reaching a height of over 3 meters.

The Pattangan Puang Bolon House

The Pattangan Puang Bolon house is now located to the east of the bolon house, measuring approximately 2.5 meters long, 1.67 meters wide, and 3.5 meters high. This building served as a resting place for the king's *puang bolon* (consort) during the day. It was also often used as a place for weaving *hiou* (traditional Chinese *hiou*).

Balei Bolon

The Balai Bolon building serves as a venue for traditional meetings, deliberations, as well as a courtroom and detention center. This building

measures 13.32 meters in length, 6 meters in width, and 5 meters in height. In the center of the building stands a central pillar known as a *nanggar* (*basiha bolon*), which serves as the foundation for the court or place of execution for disobedient citizens who violate the rules of *Jabu Untei*.

The *Jabu Untei Jungga* building is a stilt house that served as the residence of the royal commander or *pangulubalang* (*goraha*). Today, the building is separate and stands to the left of the royal palace entrance gate (*harbangan*), extending in a tunnel-like manner. The building is 4.4 meters long, 4.2 meters wide, and 4.5 meters high.

Balei Buttu

The Balei Buttu building is a stilt house, measuring approximately 4.85 meters in length, 4.13 meters in width, and 4.5 meters in height. The layout of this building is such that the front entrance to the palace complex is the *harbangan* (gate) and serves as the residence for the royal guards. Furthermore, the Balei Buttu also serves as the main guard post at the palace's long tunnel entrance. All arriving guests are required to pass through this tunnel, which serves as the sole entry and exit route. The guards then notify the king of the arrival of the guests, and only those with permission are allowed to enter the palace.

Jabu Untei Jungga

Jabu Untei Jungga, known as *Jabu Untei Jungga*, features elements of a stilt house used as a residence for the royal commander's family, or *pangulubalang* (*goraha*). This structure stands in a split shape to the left of the main gate of the royal palace (*harbangan*), resembling a tunnel. This stilt house measures approximately 4.4 meters long, 4.2 meters wide, and 4.5 meters high.

Jambur

The term *Jambur* refers to a magnificent building that served as a lodging for guests and family members familiar with the king at night. This structure consists of two sections, measuring 8.5 meters



long, 6.6 meters wide, and 4 meters high at the top. The upper section was used to accommodate royal guests, including people who came to pay tribute to the king. The lower section, known as the "kolongnya," was used to stable horses for guests and horses within the palace. The Jambur was located not far from the king's resting place (pattangan).

Losung House

The Losung House is a special building used to process rice, the staple food source for the royal family and its followers. This structure is approximately 8.5 meters long, 4.85 meters wide, and 5 meters high. Inside, there are two long losungs, each with 12 holes for pounding rice, and 24 wooden pestles.

Bolon House

This main building within the complex is now the bolon house, known as the king's residence. Measuring approximately 29.44 meters long, 7 meters wide, and 5 meters high, the house is predominantly brown with white accents. Although it lacks windows, air circulation within the house is regulated by wooden bars on the walls.

Structurally, the Bolon House is divided into two rooms. The first room, located at the front, is called the Lopo, and serves as the king's chamber. This room is supported by large pillars that serve as the main supports for the building. The second room is at the rear and is used by the queen and her family. This room is larger and supported by 20 large wooden pillars.

At the front of the house is a two-story veranda used as a guard post. To enter the Rumah Bolon, visitors must climb nine steps, with a long piece of rattan hanging from the middle of the stairs serving as a handrail while ascending the stilt house.

CONCLUSION

Regarding the ancient Rumah Bolon of the Simalungun Batak community, it can be concluded that each building had a specific function and role according to its purpose, ranging from a residence for the king and queen, a rest room, a guard post, to supporting facilities such as a rice mill. The placement of each building not only served a practical function but also carried symbolic meaning that reflected social status, life philosophy, and the community's value system. The location and use of building materials demonstrate the community's connection to the surrounding environment and nature.

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