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### The Cultural Messages of Pyramid House in Palembang

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#### Abstract

Pyramid House in Palembang is one of the works of art that is still very interesting to be researched today. The problem raised in this study aims to analyze the cultural message of the Pyramid House in Palembang. The method used is a qualitative method with a case study research design. The data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and document study. The results showed that in the manufacture of the Pyramid house, the main construction of traditional buildings used wood construction and a stilt system. The foundation used the construction of piles, the walls used boards, the roof used a leaf or shingle roof. The core parts consisted of the roof of the house, the door, the window, the stairs, and the floor of the house. In general, the typical architectural form of the Pyramid House, namely, the roof was shaped like a severed pyramid. Besides, the uniqueness of the house located in its multi-storey shape (*kijing*) and the walls were made of wood shaped like planks. Then related to the house name Pyramid, it contained two special meanings, namely, Five and Gold. The word five means the number five, while gold means the precious metal of great value. This is also a symbol of the function of the Pyramid house.

**Keywords:** Pyramid House, Cultural Messages

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## INTRODUCTION

Pyramid house is a typical building of Palembang community leaders (Patih, Regent, Adipati, and Prince) in the area where they were in power (Siswanto, 1997: 3). Thus, Pyramid house generally has historical links with the Palembang city or at least with local rulers who are respected by the surrounding residents.

The uniqueness of the decorative motifs of Pyramid house in Palembang is not owned by another traditional Indonesian house, Rahman. A (2015) adds a characteristic form of the Pyramid House in Palembang decoration motif can be seen from its pyramid-shaped roof that descends steeply, decorated with symbols, and added with jasmine flowers that symbolize majesty and protection. The motif used is a plant motif which has its own meaning, Nugroho. S & Anwar (2016) explains that from the data obtained, most of the motifs used in carvings were flora motifs. All of these motives described the life or manners of the Palembang community, as conveyed by Tondi. M. L & Iryani. S. Y (2018) wrote in his writing that besides being famous for its architectural form, this traditional house also had a distinctive form of ornament which had philosophical meaning and value. These ornaments were also symbols of the habits and customs of the Palembang community. As Kurniawan (2017: 102) explains that cultural identity is one of the fundamental elements that every individual or group in community, this is related to identity or identification for a person, group, region, even country.

The interaction between humans and various cultural activities and abilities that lasts continuously for a long time, finally forms a social system, which results in a dynamic cultural product. This concept of culture can be seen in Koentjaraningrat (1990: 203-204) which states that culture has a definition of a whole system of ideas, actions, and human work in the context of community life which belongs to

humans. The phenomenon of the use of flora and fauna motifs is also commonly found in traditional Javanese houses. Cahyadari (2012) explains that there is a tendency to use elements, decorations, and space. The most frequently used in traditional Javanese houses are flora and nature decorations. As the hierarchy of buildings increases, so it will be added namely fauna, and then religion.

Settlements and habitation are part of a cultural form that is formed by human ideas, actions and works. Mardanas (in Imriyanti et al., 2017) explains that the existence of traditional architecture is closely related to the daily life of its people who still adhere to the collective life system, namely having harmony and suitability between the macro cosmos (universe) and the micro cosmos (building). Traditional architecture contains integrated cultural forms including ideal forms, social forms, and physical forms of culture. The form of culture is a system of ideas, concepts and results from human activities. One of the cultural products of a traditional Palembang house that still exists today is the Pyramid house or *umah bahri* for the community of South Sumatra, especially Palembang.

Based on the description above, this study would clearly write down the cultural message to be conveyed through one of the cultural products of the Palembang community, namely the Pyramid house in Palembang. For more details, the authors would describe in the discussion below

## METHODS

The method used in this study is qualitative method. It means that the data produced is descriptive data in the form of words (can be oral for religious, social, cultural, philosophical research), notes relating to meanings, values and meanings (Kaelan 2012: 5).

The approach used is a cultural approach, with a case study research design. The research location was in Alang-Alang Lebar Subdistrict, Palembang City. The data

collection techniques used include observation, interviews, and document study. The observation method used in this study is ordinary observation. This means that researchers did not need to be involved in emotional relationships with the perpetrators who were the target of their research (Rohidi 2011: 184). In addition, the interview technique used in this study was in-depth interviews.

The data validity technique used data triangulation technique. The flow of data analysis techniques used is an interactive model analysis flow starting from the data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and data verification.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Building Construction of Pyramid House in Palembang

Currently, the understanding of traditional houses is associated with the existence of a developed vernacular architecture. From the diversity of Indonesian vernacular architecture, if it is observed, there are similarities in the diversity which comes from the same root, namely Austronesian culture. Even the similarities of diversity can also be seen from non-Austronesian architectures namely Papua (Aryanti. D, 2012)

This phenomenon is also found in the construction of traditional Pyramid house buildings, the main thing is the use of wood construction and a stilt system. The foundation uses the construction of piles, the walls uses boards, the roof uses a leaf or shingle roof. Likewise for tall buildings it is difficult to implement unless using a really strong foundation system. The arrangement of wooden planks in the wall construction is upright and some are horizontal. In terms of appearance, the outer side of the wall has a flat appearance, but the other side is the appearance of the wooden frame which is often unsightly. To overcome this, on this side it is often covered with layered wood (triples/ multiplex). So, in the section below, the researcher briefly

describes the parts of the Pyramid house in Palembang.

### The roof of the Pyramid House in Palembang

The roof of the Pyramid house in Palembang consists of four roof planes, two planes unite on one ridge line and two planes unite at the upper ridge line or at the nook. If you look at this side, there are two trapezoid-shaped planes and two triangular-shaped areas. This roof shape completes the saddle shape, which consists of two sloping top planes in the shape of a trapezoid. In general, the construction type for the pyramid house is the pen and hole construction. In terms of the community of Palembang, it is more familiar to know the terms *lanang* and *betino* or men and women



**Figure 1.** The roof of the Pyramid house in Palembang (Documentation: Ario)

The figure above shows the visual form of the roof of the Pyramid house in Palembang. The parts that stretch upwards are called the *simbar*. The object that is used as a symbol for the roof of the Pyramid house in Palembang makes use of the plants that are around it. The plant is a pioneer plant. The pioneer plants of their life are always attached to tall trees. The choice of pioneer trees is because the community of Palembang make an analogy for the community of Palembang to live independently. Furthermore, if you look visually the roof of the Pyramid house in Palembang in the form of a severed pyramid, the angle of the roof is estimated at 600 and 200.

### The door of Pyramid House inn Palembang

The door to the Pyramid house in Palembang is made of wood. Commonly, the woods used is unglen, petanang, or merbau. One door has a width of 60-70 cm and a door height of more than 2.5m - 3.0 m. The door in this section consists of two doors that open outwards.



**Figure 2.** The door of Pyramid House in Palembang (Documentation: Ario)

When the door figure above observed, there are ornaments in the form of lines at the top of the door. The ornament functions as the exit and entry of air, so that it is not hot indoors and the air can pass freely. In this context, the ornaments on the door of the pyramid house function the same as the ventilation that is commonly used in modern home designs that are widely used today.

### The Windows at Pyramid House in Palembang

The windows in the Pyramid house in Palembang are made in pairs, it is located on the side of the house wall. Each room usually has two pairs of windows. The width of each window is about 60cm-70cm, at the top of the window and door, there are clearly beautiful carvings in the form of Arabic alphabet or what is commonly referred to calligraphy with gold ink. These two shutters are used for the entry

and exit of the room, so that the room in the house feels fresher.



**Figure 3.** The windows of Pyramid House in Palembang (Documentation: Ario)

It can be seen in the figure above that there are two shutters on the body of the Pyramid house, in the middle of the window, there is a piece of wood that is arranged regularly and vertically. The wood added in the middle serves as a barrier so that animals or humans cannot freely enter the space. Because indeed the basic function of the window is to replace the air in the room.

### The stairs used in the Pyramid House

The stairs used in the Pyramid house is made of unglen wood planks. Usually, there are seven stairs. Philosophically, according to the views of the Palembang community in ancient times these seven stairs meant seven layers of mountains, this view was one of the influences of Buddhism. Visually, the stairs used in the Pyramid house in Palembang are straight (single flight stairway).



**Figure 4.** Stairs from the side of Pyramid House in Palembang. (Documentation: Ario)

The position of the stairs at the front generally faces a public road. Then the pillars are rectangular or round, while the variations of the feet of the stairs are connected to the ground or given a base with a harder object. A base at the bottom of the stairs is intended so that the stairs does not dissolve on the ground right at the part of the stairs. The objects that are usually used as bases for stairs are usually use from wood or other objects.



**Figure 5.** Stairs at Pyramid House in Palembang (Documentation: Rio)

It is clear that the figure above are stairs in the Pyramid house, the function of the household in the Pyramid house in Palembang is not much different from the traditional houses in other areas, namely as a medium for entering the house, because as the author said at the beginning that the Pyramid house in Palembang is a traditional house that hangs above the ground. This means that to enter the house or room, the owner of the house or the community who wants to visit the house must have the media to climb the house, in the context of this house, the media used is the stairs.

#### **The Floor of Pyramid House in Palembang**

The base floor of the Pyramid house in Palembang uses wood as the base material. When it is observed from its aesthetics, the use of *lantau* made of wood in the design of a house can give a natural impression. This is because wood has properties that can store heat during the day and then the temperature can be used for heating during the day.



**Figure 6.** The floor of the Pyramid house in Palembang (Documentation: Ario)

The figure above is the bottom floor of the Pyramid house in Palembang. It is clear that the position of the wood used as the floor is arranged regularly, then the wood used is made of boards with a thickness about 3 inches. In order to be strong, the floor and sturdy, at the bottom of the board, a piece of wood is added which serves to support the wooden planks of the Pyramid house, so that the floor that is being digged into the house will be strong and not easily broken.

#### **Culture Message of Pyramid House in Palembang**

Message is a set of verbal or non-verbal symbols used to convey the meaning and form of message organization. Hafied (2004: 14) adds that a message is a series of signs or symbols created by someone for a specific purpose in the hope that the delivery of the sign or symbol will succeed in causing something. Effendy. O. U also said in his book *Theory and Practice Communication Science* (2007: 18) that messages can be interpreted as statements

that are presented in the form of symbols that have certain meanings.

In order for the content of the message to be conveyed well, the message is usually made in a tangible form, as the author has described in the paragraph section above. For example, the message that we want to convey in the creation of a traditional Palembang house or what we know as the Pyramid house. Dina. R.R (2015) adds that in tracing the historical traces of the existence of the Pyramid house until now it is still difficult to find certainty about when and who first built.

Pyramid house in Palembang is currently a house that is used as a family residence in fostering daily life or for carrying out ceremonies in the family. Sari (2015) explains that the name of Pyramid comes from the words five and gold, namely majesty and greatness, harmonious peace, manners that are polite, safe, fertile and peaceful and prosperous.

It means that the choice of the name of a traditional Palembang house is not sorted carelessly, because the word Pyramid is nothing but the symbol of the number five and all of them have a special meaning for the community of Palembang. The same thing was conveyed by Dina. R.R (2015) explains in more detail that the origin of the name "Pyramid" is a combination of two special meanings, namely "Five" and "Gold". The word five means the number five, while gold means the precious metal of great value. This is the meaning of the symbol which is aimed at the function of the Pyramid house, namely the First Gold: meaning the Pyramid and greatness of God. This means that the occupants of the pyramid house are religious people who are always grateful for Allah's blessings. The second gold: means harmony and peace. The principle of deliberation is a family principle that is upheld. The third gold: Symbolizes courtesy. This is inseparable from the community of Palembang, who always prioritize social procedures with a sense of courtesy, mutual appreciation, and mutual compassion. They always welcome guests with respect and care. The fourth gold: Signifying a safe, fertile and safe life, this is

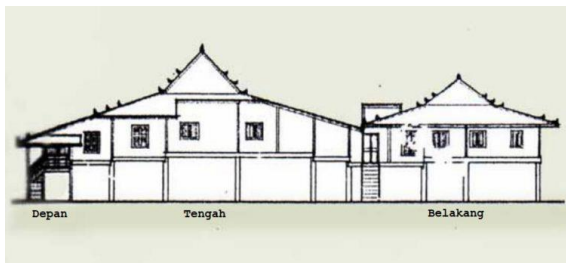
implemented in the life of helping each other in the family and community of Palembang in general. The same thing was conveyed by Hidayad. F & Kuniawan. D (2020) that Pyramid contains the meaning of "five" and the gold of the five gold respectively means: (1) majesty and greatness, (2) harmony and peace, (3) having good manners, (4) safe, fertile, (5) prosperous.

The Pyramid House in Palembang was built with a foundation in the form of poles or forks that were stuck into the ground. Dina. R. R (2015) explains that the shape of the Pyramid house consists of square and rectangular rooms facing east and west. In the philosophy of the community of Palembang, they often refer to the terms facing toward the *mato ari eedoop* and the *mato ari mati*. The term philosophy can be translated roughly like this, *mato ari eedoop* which means "the sun rises" or is philosophically defined as "the beginning of human life". Meanwhile, when translated *matoari* in Indonesian, it means "sunset" and in a special sense it can be interpreted according to the view of the community of Palembang as a sign of "the end of life or death". This philosophy for the community of Palembang is considered a reminder of the human life cycle from birth to death. The same thing was conveyed by Mr. Febri as a Palembang cultural observer, who said that when viewed from the layout of the room the direction of the pyramid house indicated that there was a division of the front building and the back of the building.

The views of the community of Palembang in the past were usually decided by deliberation together, either between families or with traditional and religious leaders in the neighborhood. Hanafi. M (2013) explains that the importance of *shura* or (deliberation) in people's lives, explained Abdullah Hamid Ismail al-Anshori in his book "*Al-Shura wa Asuraha fi al-Demokratiah*" citing and suggesting the importance of deliberation which can be described as follows. Deliberation can create national unity, train brain activity in thinking, and as a path to the truth that contains goodness and blessings. Furthermore,

deliberation is a "human virtue", it is a straight path to know and express opinions with the aim of reaching the real truth and clarity in every problem.

Pyramid House, which is a cultural product of the community of Palembang, has received special attention in the Palembang area, it's just that with the development of times and the decline in wood production so that many Palembang people build houses using concrete, but it is still related to the philosophical meaning of the house. Next, the researcher includes a sketch of the position towards the Pyramid house and some parts of the Pyramid house in Palembang.



**Figure 7.** The Sketch of Pyramid House in Palembang .

Figure 7 shows the three types of space are used sequentially, the first is the front room, it is often called the veranda, there are two stairs to enter the house and there is a dipper and a barrel filled with water, the second part of the middle room has several *kekijing*, at each *kekijing* has two windows located on the right and left, and the third room behind there is a wall cabinet that is used for a divider or barrier. The same thing was reinforced by the opinion of Kemas (interview, 2020) who stated that:

Many of the original pyramid houses are located on the banks of the Musi river, which has long size in the Palembang city. Along with the development of the times, many developments around Musi river, my awareness to preserve the cultural heritage of Palembang City, was moved to the mainland of Palembang City in 1990. Interview (kemas 2020)

It can be understood from the above quotation that many pyramid houses were

scattered on the banks of the Musi River. Geographically, the Musi River, which is one of the widest and longest rivers in the province of South Sumatra is almost flat with a puddle of water. Palembang City is a lowland area that is affected by tidal water. The area which is included in the continuous and seasonally inundated group covers an area of about 50% of the Palembang city area. The difference between tidal water fluctuates around 3 to 5 m. based on the condition of Palembang, whose territory is greatly influenced by tides and the Musi river, it is understandable that most people's houses are colonnaded houses (stilts) which are located on the riverbank, above swamps or floating on the river. This means that a traditional house with a character like the Pyramid house in Palembang is very suitable and adaptive to the geographical environment of Palembang.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research and discussion, it can be concluded that, first, the Pyramid house is a traditional house shaped like a house on stilts with carvings carved from every angle as a work of art that has a use value in the riverside community in Palembang City. Pyramid house has a supporting poles with a height of 1.5 meters to 2 meters from the ground. Then the shape and layout of the Pyramid house in Palembang is divided into three rooms, namely the front room, the living room, and the back room. The three types of space are used sequentially; first the front room is often called the veranda here there are two stairs to enter the house and there is a dipper and a barrel filled with water, the second the middle room has several *kekijing*, in each *kekijing* there are two windows located on the right and the left, and the third room behind there is a wall cupboard that is used for a divider or barrier.

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