

The 14th
International Symposium
of the Malay Archipelago

ORGANIZED BY :



Perak Branch



HOSTED BY :



e-ISSN : 3030-5543

*'Anging Mammiri Nusantara'
Sulawesi Selatan*

PROCEEDINGS INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM NUSANTARA SIMPORA XIV

'SIMPOSIUM NUSANTARA KE-14' | OCTOBER 2023

STRATEGIC PARTNER :



USK
UNIVERSITAS
SYIAH KUALA



**PROCEEDINGS INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM NUSANTARA XIV
SIMPORA XIV: 2023**

Organised by:

Centre for Knowledge and Understanding of Tropical Architectural and Interior
(KUTAI)

Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch
Seri Iskandar Campus, Perak, MALAYSIA

Diterbitkan oleh:

Unit Penerbitan UiTM Perak

Alamat:

Unit Penerbitan UiTM Perak,
Pejabat Jaringan Industri, Masyarakat dan Alumni (PJIMA)
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak Branch,
32610 Seri Iskandar Perak, Malaysia.

05-3742716

uitmperakpress@gmail.com

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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing in Publication Data

No e- ISSN: 3030-5543

Cover Design: Ismail Hafiz Salleh

Typesetting : Nur Huzeima Mohd Hussain

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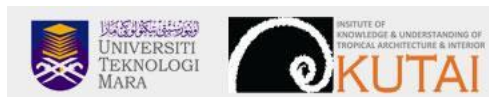
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ARCHITECTURAL REPRESENTATIONS AND THE IDENTITY OF ACEH: REVISITING LOCAL TRADITION IN MODERN TIME

Izziah¹, Cut Dewi², & Erna Meutia³

^{1,2,3}*Department of Architecture and Planning, Universitas Syiah Kuala, 23116, Darussalam,
Banda Aceh, INDONESIA*

Corresponding Author: izziah.hasan@usk.ac.id

Abstract: This paper explores architectural representation in Banda Aceh commissioned during Suharto's New Order. During this time, as Indonesian President Suharto encouraged Indonesians to raise the spirit of nationalism in search of local identity, like other places in Indonesia, the city of Banda Aceh witnessed the development of the built environment of Banda Aceh concerning the search for local identity. Concerning this, the paper focuses on how the modern architecture of Aceh deliberately incorporated traditional Acehnese elements. This paper focuses on the ideas of Ibrahim Hasan, a governor of Aceh during the New Order era between 1987 – 1993, who has tried to rethink the local identity of Aceh through several modern government buildings by revisiting its cultural tradition. As a result, in presenting the architectural identity of Aceh, the built form of Banda Aceh city sought to express traditional identity

Capitalizing on the rising sensitivity toward cultural tradition, the architectural representations appear to promote an eclectic trend of recollecting tradition; one is seen to be able to reclaim the identity of Aceh. In accomplishing this paper, the study conducts field observations and literature review. In doing this, the paper shows how the local government elites and architects working in Banda Aceh shared Suharto's view on creating a built environment that embraced traditional values. In addition, the paper also shows how they appropriate the global trend of regionalism while tracing its roots in the Western and Indonesian discourse of architecture.

Keywords: Architecture, Identity, Aceh, and Revisiting local traditions

INTRODUCTION

During the reign of President Suharto in the 1970s, which is known as the era of the New Order government, the president made significant moves concerning the debate on architectural identity in Indonesia. In this regard, the president revealed his interest in creating a national identity in architecture and urban design to be implemented throughout Indonesian regions by revisiting their local traditional past. Capitalizing on a rising sensitivity towards cultural tradition, the New Order promoted an eclectic trend of 'collecting tradition', a trend that was seen to be able to reclaim the Indonesian identity in all of its diversity and richness. A repertoire of traditional architectural forms and ideas was rediscovered under Suharto's New Order programs (Hasan, 2010; Izziah et al, 2021; Kusno, 2001; and Purwaningrum, 2022). The search for national identity became an important task to forge a sense of shared nationhood and common values among the population throughout the Indonesian Archipelago, regardless of differences in ethnic background, customs, world views and religious orientations (Hasan, 2010; and Prijotomo, 2008). Such a common sense of nationhood provides a meaningful symbol that aids the production of 'we' in Indonesia and the casting of national pride into a specific symbolic form (Anderson, 1991).

This paper aims to explore on how the modern architecture of Aceh deliberately incorporated traditional Acehnese elements to create a local identity. In completing this study, field observations and literature reviews were conducted. The study observed architectural representations of public buildings in Banda Aceh that attempted to express local identity as following Suharto's directives. In terms of literature review, the study examined several written sources relating to several discourses. Those sources include the architectural discourse concerning the rebirth of tradition (Prijotomo, 2008; and Tzonis, 2001), architectural identity in Indonesia that relates to the vision of Suharto's political identity (Hasan, 2010; and Kusno, 2001), Regionalism and architectural identity (Curtis, 1987; and Frampton, 1996) and several documentations on the governor Ibrahim Hasan's program on Physical development of Aceh (Pemerintah Daerah Istimewa Aceh, 1998; Hasan et al, 2020; Pemerintah Daerah Istimewa Aceh, 1991). In this study, the paper shows how the local government elites and architects in Aceh shared Suharto's idea of presenting identity through historical memory and sensitivity toward cultural tradition.

ARCHITECTURE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

The question of national or local identity in architecture emerged in the twentieth century due to the saturation of the universal image of modern architecture and this, according to several architectural theorists, is seen as an endanger to the world's rich cultural identity (Budiharjo, 1997; na, 1996; Curtis, 1987; Frampton, 1996). Sharing such a thought, the second Indonesian president, Suharto, initiated to create national identity in Indonesia by raising sensitivity toward native traditional culture (Hasan, 2010; Kusno, 2001; and Sudradjat, 1991). In the mid-1970s the Indonesian government through the president's directive produced a significant action toward the debate on modern architecture in Indonesia. Supporting the government's idea, an

eminent Indonesian architect, Budihardjo (1997), strongly proposed contemporary Indonesian architecture that has the root of its cultural heritage. It is therefore, as Budiharjo adds, that the outlook of Indonesian cities should not be the same as those cities in other parts of the world. Several national seminars were then held, focusing on how to recreate national identity in architecture by reworking the rich and colourful heritage of all provinces in Indonesia. This marked the rebirth of tradition (Tzonis, 2001).

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT OF ACEH AND THE REBIRTH OF LOCAL TRADITION

As followed by the central government's vision to the search for architectural identity, the 1970s city of Banda Aceh started to colour its built environment with a traditional accent. The governors of Aceh whose roles as representatives of the central government at the provincial level followed President Suharto's instruction on how to present architectural representation which has local character as well as connected with vernacular forms (Anderson, 1991; Hasan et al, 2020; and Pemberton, 1994). Furthermore, architects working in Aceh, shared the governors' directives in creating contemporary architecture in Aceh and seeking inspiration from local tradition. As a result, several buildings adopted an eclectic approach, whereby traditional architectural elements were chosen and incorporated into modern buildings (Arif, 2006; and Nas, 1999). The reference to the local tradition first appeared in government projects – the parliament office building and the provincial governor's office –constructed in the 1970s during the reign of Aceh Governor, Muzakkir Walad (Figure 1).



Figure 1 The parliament office, built in the mid of 1970s
Source: Author's collection

Several government buildings of the 80s, constructed during the reign of Governor Ibrahim Hasan, show a widespread concern with demonstrating a sense of belonging of being Acehnese by following the same trend of previous efforts. Traditional elements of Acehnese houses such as gable roofs, rows of columns, and traditional Aceh motifs are inserted in contemporary buildings. Moreover, to present local identity, most public buildings constructed before 1980

added new entrances. Each entrance is marked by two rows of columns to support an additional pitch roof attached to the main building (Figure 2).



Figure 2 The government office in Taman Sari built in the 1970s
Source: Author's collection



Figure 3 A row of an eclectic building style along the road from the city centre to Darussalam
Source: Author's collection

By the 90s, architectural representations, both public and private buildings in Banda Aceh city increasingly appeared to insist on the reproduction of local identity with an eclectic style. The oldest University in Aceh, the University of Syiah Kuala, located in Banda Aceh also participated in attempting to express local identity. Its architectural style shows the then prevailing interest in combining traditional references with modern design (Figure 4 and 5). Several older

buildings, mostly built in the early period of establishment were demolished and rebuilt following the new trend.



Figure 4 Directorate building, University of Syiah Kuala,
built-in 1990s with the reference of traditional
Source: Author's collection



Figure 5 The building of the Department of Architecture
Source: Masdar's collection

Traditional references – the gable, rows of columns, ornamentations – inserted in contemporary architectural forms in Aceh show, as Chris Abel (2000) argues, a mere “pre-selection of the supposedly pure element of regional or national culture. The use of the traditional-architectural elements in premodern times, such as a gable screen, relates to its function to pass the airflow to get inside the room under the roof (Dall, 1982; Hasan et al, 2020; Izziah et al, 2021; and Leigh, 1989), in modern buildings, the use of gable screen, however, serves “a token” to express local belonging.

IBRAHIM HASAN'S INFLUENCE

During the reign of Governor Ibrahim Hasan, the search for local identity for the built environment of Aceh was intensified (Hasan, 2010). Hasan believed that the representative architecture and built environment must be balanced with adequate human resources. It is therefore, during his reign, which was between 1987 - 1993, Governor Hasan was able to translate Suharto's policy for national development into several investments in human resources and physical development projects in Aceh (Pemerintah Daerah Istimewa Aceh, 1998; Pemerintah Daerah Istimewa Aceh, 1991). In terms of human resources investment, Governor Hasan – at the beginning of his reign in 1987 – initiated to establishment of a foundation the so-called Yayasan Malem Putra. The foundation's main aim was to provide financial support for outstanding Acehese students who were willing to obtain further education. Governor Hasan's vision was to encourage young Acehese to acquire the necessary knowledge and technical skills to be able to participate in the development of Aceh's built environment (Hasan et al, 2020)

Concerning physical development projects, a large number of infrastructures and facilities were built in Aceh. Having used the provincial budget, a network of roads including bridges was constructed to open access between several towns and remote areas in Aceh (Hasan et al, 2020; and Pemerintah Daerah Istimewa Aceh, 1991). These facilities were equipped with electricity supply in remote areas (Pemerintah Daerah Istimewa Aceh, 1991). Moreover, Educational and health facilities also became his priority. In addition, several government offices were constructed. In order to introduce local identity into the built environment, Governor Hasan shared Suharto's view and followed the previous government policy of creating identity in architecture and the built environment. Concerning this, Hasan placed a strong emphasis on the return to tradition in the development of art and architecture. He highly recommended the use of traditional references in new designs. In other words, He emphasized architects who are involved in architectural work search for a type of modernity that incorporates local cultural heritage and traditional values (Pemerintah Daerah Istimewa Aceh, 1991). Having used the provincial budget, he then implemented his idea into reality by constructing and upgrading three important buildings as pilot projects that would be able to express local characters by placing a strong emphasis on local forms (Hasan et al, 2020). The works included the renovations of the great mosque of Baitur-Rahman, the complex of Pendopo (the governor's house), and the construction of the governor's office (Pemerintah Daerah Istimewa Aceh, 1998; Hasan et al, 2020; (Pemerintah Daerah Istimewa Aceh, 1991).

The Baitur-Rahman Mosque and the pendopo were built by Dutch. After renovating these two buildings, the appearance of the interior of the mosque (Figures 6 and 7) and pendopo (Figures 8 and 9) changed dramatically, especially with the deliberate replacement of the European decorations with Acehese motifs. The surfaces of the interior, walls, doors, and windows, were decorated with traditional Acehese art (Figures 8 and 9). In order to enhance local identity, after the renovation the Pendopo was renamed as Meuligo, an Acehese term that means "palace".



Figure 6 and 7 The traditional Acehese motifs on the mosque's interior
Source: Author's collection



Figures 8 and 9 The present Governor House (Pendopo/Meuligoe) and the guest room of the Pendopo, decorated with the Acehese traditional art
Source: Author's collection

The construction of the new office building of the provincial governor was conducted after the renovation of Meuligo was finished. The office, located along the main road that connects the city and the Darussalam campus built at the beginning 1990s, also reflects vernacular reference, particularly in exposing the columns, traditional ornamentation, decorated gable, and roof (Figure 10). As designed from the outside, the interior of this office was also decorated with traditional Acehese motifs.



Figure 10 The Governor's office building in Banda Aceh, built at the beginning of the 1990s
Source: Author's collection

CONCLUSIONS

The postcolonial space of Aceh has shown how the New Order's most important figures at the provincial level, whose view reflected the government's directions, shared Suharto's view on creating a built environment that embrace traditional values. In creating identity in the built environment, such traditional values become reflective of the richness of local characteristics. Such value, however, was limited to the reuse of precolonial images then were transformed into new forms. In fact, the local leader's drive for sensitivity toward local value has caused the eclectic tendency in the modern architecture of Aceh as certain pre-colonial images were reused and transformed into new forms that served modern rationality. This approach produced architectural representations that considered tectonic and visual imageries. In this regard, this study showed how historical memory and sensitivity toward cultural tradition became the underlying trend that shaped the modern architecture of Aceh. While sharing the visions of the local leaders, Acehnese architects and educators became interested in Western architectural theory, and this was reflected in the many attempts to reconcile tradition with modernity.

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MAIN AUTHOR'S PROFILE



Mithen Lullulangi is a Professor of Planning Education in the Building Engineering Education Study Program (1988 - 2014), Population and Environmental Education Master's Study Program (2015 - present) at Universitas Negeri Makassar. Undergraduate Faculty. Completed a Bachelor's degree (S1) in the Architectural Engineering Education Study Program at IKIP Ujung Pandang, in 1986. In 2002 he completed a Masters (S2) Program in the Architecture Study Program, at Hasanuddin University Postgraduate Program. In 2014, he completed the Doctoral Program at the Population and Environmental Education Study Program, at Makassar State University.



Kartina Alauddin is an Associate Professor in the Quantity Surveying Program at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak Branch, Malaysia. She earned her PhD in Built Environment from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Melbourne, Australia. Her research focuses on intellectual capital for the adaptive reuse of historical buildings, and she has made significant contributions to the field through her publications in peer-reviewed journals, conference papers, and book chapters. Additionally, she is a researcher for the Knowledge and Understanding of Tropical Architectural and Interior (KUTAI) research interest group. With over 25 years of teaching experience at both undergraduate and graduate levels, Dr. Kartina has instructed a variety of courses in quantity surveying and project management. Her dedication to research excellence, teaching, and student mentorship underscores her invaluable role in the academic community.



Finished her undergraduate of architecture from Hasanuddin University, graduated in architecture from the Institute of Technology Bandung, and focused research design on old cities as tourism. And her Doctoral Student from Technische Universität Wien, Austria. focuses research on Architecture culture and Heritage. She worked at Universitas Negeri Makassar.



Izziah received a Bachelor's degree from Surabaya Institute Technology (ITS), Surabaya, Indonesia in 1987. She finished her master's degree at Drexel University, Philadelphia in 1994 and her doctoral degree in Architecture and Urban Design at the University of Adelaide Adelaide, Australia in 2010. Izziah's PhD thesis at the University of Adelaide, which focused on Aceh's architectural identity, proved a major advantage in her role in the rebuilding program.



Othman Bin Mohd Nor is a senior lecturer in the Interior Architecture Department at the UiTM Perak Branch. He graduated with a Ph.D. in Architecture in 2018 from the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), after obtaining his MSc in Design in 2013 from the Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB). He received a bachelor's degree in Interior Architecture from the Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) in 2000 and a Diploma in Interior Design (ITM) in 2006. His field(s) of interest focus on Interior Design, Interior Architecture, Identity Architecture, Traditional, heritage, and conservation.



Rahmansah, born in Puttada, Majene, West Sulawesi in 1982. Completed his undergraduate education in the Department of Civil Engineering Education and Planning, Faculty of Engineering, Makassar State University in 2007, completed his Masters in Architectural Engineering, Postgraduate Program, Hasanuddin University Makassar in 2011, completed his undergraduate education in the Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, Pepabri University Makassar in 2013, and completed his Insiyur professional education at the Insiyur Professional Study Program, Faculty of Engineering, Hasanuddin University Makassar in 2021. The author is a permanent lecturer at the Faculty of Engineering, Makassar State University in 2012 until now. The courses taught are Archi. Design Studio, Building Structure & Construction, and Architectural Drawing.



Muhamad Ferdhaus is a senior lecturer in the Urban and Regional Planning Department at the UiTM Perak Branch. He graduated with a Ph.D. in Urban Geography in 2018 from the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), after obtaining his MSc in Sustainable City and Community in 2013 from the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). He received a bachelor's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in 2011. His field(s) of interest focus on sustainable cities and communities, Islamic planning and development, urban geography and metropolitan areas, tourism planning and development, and heritage and conservation.



Moh Sutrisno received a doctorate in 2020 in architectural engineering and planning from Gadjah Mada University. Previously he also earned a master's degree at the same campus in 2014 with cum laude predicate. He has taught architectural theory and criticism at UIN Alauddin Makassar since 2019 and has been the main subject in his functional position since being an expert assistant. The courses included the scientific fields of history and architectural theory. His research includes the theory of iconic architecture since 2012. He studied iconic buildings in various parts of the world, heritage architecture as an icon of its time in the old city space of Palopo (2015-2020), and Icons of Islamic architecture in South Sulawesi (2020-2022). Currently, he is interested in Heritage building preservation methods using HBIM (2022-2023)



Graduated and holds a Doctor of Architecture in Architecture from the Department of Architecture ITB in 2011. She is an Associate Professor in the School of Architecture, Planning, and Policy Development (SAPPD) ITB. She teaches disaster-resilient architecture, sustainable architecture, and building materials. She is also a member of the Building Technology Research Group which is one of the research groups under the Faculty of SAPPD. Her research includes fire risk in buildings and dense urban areas (1996-2022), fire-resistant plaster bamboo wall construction (2015-2023), waste-based building materials (2020-2024), and local wisdom of traditional communities in disaster management (2017). She is currently interested in developing research on traditional building designs in Indonesia that anticipate fire hazards.



The author is a permanent lecturer in the Department of Civil Engineering and Planning Education at the Building Engineering Education Study Program (2015-2021), Architecture Study Program (2021-present) Faculty of Engineering, Makassar State University. Completed her Bachelor's Degree (S1) in the Architectural Engineering Study Program, Hasanuddin University in 1999. In 2012 she completed the Master's Program (S2) in the Planning Study Program and Regional Development of Hasanuddin University Postgraduate Program. Currently continuing her doctoral studies in the Doctoral Program at the Architectural Science Study Program, Department of Architectural Engineering, Hasanuddin University with the research topic Adaptive Thermal Comfort of Coastal Stilt Houses in Humid Tropical Climates. Writing a book with ISBN: Space Conditioning Viewed from Building Physics Aspects (First edition, November 2021). Interested in writing and conducting research in the field of architecture: building science, traditional architecture and environmental architecture.



Armiwaty is a Lecturer in Architecture Program Study at Universitas Negeri Makassar. A motivated professional with a blend of academic excellence, creative flair, and a track record of achievement. Dedicated and versatile professional with a passion for writing and research. Graduated with a bachelor's degree in architecture in 2000. A master's degree in regional planning and development in 2012 and currently continuing my studies in the doctoral program in architecture at Hasanuddin University with a research topic on thermal comfort in floating houses on Lake Tempe. I was awarded the Best Paper Award Presented in The Technical and Vocational Education and Training International Conference (TVETIC) Faculty of Education Universiti Teknologi Malaysia in 2016. The last article published in the Central European Management Journal Vol. 31 Iss. 2 (2023) is The Symbolic Meaning of The Essential Engraving and Its Placement in Mamasa Traditional Architecture.



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