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SENI RUPA & SASTRA

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DAFTAR ISI

PENGANTAR PENERBIT ~ ii
DAFTAR ISI ~ iv
PENGANTAR ~ 1

Menyemai Semangat R. A. Kartini dalam Tubuh Kajian
Seni Oleh G. R Lono Lastoro Simatupang ~ 1

BAGIAN I PEREMPUAN DALAM KAJIAN SENI PERTUNJUKAN

Kesetaraan Perempuan lewat Kajian Seni Pertunjukan
Oleh Michael H.B. Raditya ~ 8

Visualisasi Tarian Tradisi pada Karya Seni Lukis Chiang
Yutie Oleh Ariesa Pandanwangi ~ 18

Intensitas Euis Komariah pada Kearifan Lokal Tembang
Sunda Oleh Asep Sulaeman ~ 26

Tandhak dan Lengger dalam Tradisi Tari Wilayah Brang
Wetan: Refleksi Marginalitas Perempuan di Bidang Per-
tunjukan Tari Oleh R Djoko Prakosa ~ 41

Budaya Travesti dan Emansipasi dalam Tari Wayang
Oleh Lilis Sumiati ~ 55

Seni Tutunggulan sebagai 'Ruang Sosial' Perempuan
Sunda Oleh Neneng Yanti Khozanatu Lahpan ~ 63

Perempuan dalam Pergulatan Panggung Seni Pertunjukan Tradisional Oleh Turyati ~ 77

BAGIAN II PEREMPUAN DALAM KAJIAN BUDAYA REKAYASA SOSIAL

Pandangan Perempuan dalam Perspektif Adat Minangkabau Oleh Sri Rustiyanti ~ 86

Pengaruh Film terhadap Cara Pandang Masyarakat mengenai Tenaga Kerja Wanita Studi Kasus : Film Minggu Pagi Di Victoria Park Oleh Dara Bunga Rembulan ~ 95

Spirit Perempuan dalam Kuliner Indonesia Ayoeningsih Dyah Woelandhary ~ 105

Komunikasi Humanisme dalam Lukisan Tjutju Widjaya Oleh Supriatna ~ 114

Proses Kreatif dalam Kegiatan Belajar = Proses Kreasi Berfikir Integral yang Menstimuli Kreativitas Manusia Oleh Nuning Damayanti ~ 123

BAGIAN III PEREMPUAN SECARA KODRATI

Perempuan sebagai Pendidik Kodrati Oleh Nia
Emilda ~ 142

Regenerasi Budaya Lokal dalam Bahasa Ibu
Oleh Wanda Listiani ~ 149

Melalui Spirit Kartini Meningkatkan Karakter Bangsa
Dyah Limaningsih Wariyanti ~ 155

Daya Perempuan Indonesia dalam Pembangunan
Oleh Arleti M. Apin ~ 170

The Woman's Power in Sundanese Culture: The Traditional Houses of Kampung Naga West Java, Indonesia
Oleh Tessa Eka Darmayanti ~ 179

BAGIAN IV PEREMPUAN DALAM KAJIAN SASTRA

Citra Perempuan Indonesia pada Novel Bumi Manusia
Oleh Muhamad Adji ~ 187

Emansipasi dan Aktualisasi Ala Nyai Ontosoroh (Berdasar Novel Bumi Manusia karya Pramoedya Ananta Toer) Oleh Retno Dwimarwati ~ 201

Regenerasi Budaya Lokal dalam Bahasa Ibu Membaca Semangat Perjuangan Kartini dalam Empat Novel Pramoedya Ananta Toer Oleh Yulianeta ~ 212

Resistensi Perempuan berbagai Bangsa dalam Karya Sastra Oleh Lina Meilinawati Rahayu ~ 226

The Woman's Power in Sundanese Culture: The Traditional Houses of Kampung Naga West Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

In Sundanese culture, woman has the important "space" in the Sundanese cosmology. Sundanese are the largest indigenous ethnic group in the western part of Java Island. Sundanese culture closely relates to Animist, Hindu-Buddhist, and Islam philosophies. It led to the unique creation of the Sundanese traditional houses called Rumah Adat in Kampung Naga where the ancient tradition from their ancestor were upheld until today. Kampung Naga has its own characteristics which enable the conveyance of tremendous tradition from the past, since the reign of Padjajaran Kingdom to the present. Additionally, it has the ability to accelerate globalization of culture these days. The objectives of this paper are to introduce the woman's power in Sundanese culture, especially within traditional house. The paper employed qualitative investigation with the support of exploratory literature review and Sundanese cosmological concept known as tritangtu become the theoretical theory. The result of this study portrayed that the creation of traditional houses in Kampung Naga does not only serve as shelters, but it also has "breath", "soul" and may embody cosmological value. This paper is prominent in the documentation of Sundanese traditional buildings as one of cultural identity of Indonesia, which will deliver the cultural knowledge to the world wide.

Key words : Women, Space, Sundanese, Power, Tritangtu.

Introduction

Animism, Hindu-Buddhist and Islam philosophies influenced the Sundanese culture and fused into various aspects of life, including buildings (traditional houses). Traditional houses are the buildings that may represent expressions of culture. The embodiment of traditional houses becomes a very important issue in traditional community, since it allows the community to show their existence. When Hindu Kingdom was ruled in West Java, the people believe that the kingdom as the cosmological center. After that era, when animism became the only belief, Sundanese people believe that the houses is the center of their cosmos and woman has the special "spaces" within the cosmos that represent the surrounding "universe". The Sundanese cosmos called as cosmological mythic-spiritual culture, since it always contains the theological thought [1]. This research employed qualitative investigation with the support from a list of literature on Sundanese culture and on Kampung Naga. The process of identifying the research framework was based on an observation to Kampung Naga that is located in Tasikmalaya, West Java.

The History of Sundanese Culture : Kampung Naga

After the fall of Padjajaran Kingdom in the 16th-century, Urang Sunda (Urang means people, Sunda means Sundanese) had lost their powerful cultural and spiritual center. The absence of a powerful culture center does not mean Sundanese culture disappear. This can be reflected in the presence of Kampung Naga as Sundanese traditional village. The people of Kampung Naga strongly believe the noble values that their ancestors already taught, therefore the ancient traditions are still preserved and actualized in everyday life to present day. Since the rebellion of DI/TII (local community led by Karto Suwiryo), the worst tragedy had happened in 1956. Kampung Naga had no written man-

uscript because DI/TII people burnt not only all documents, but also the whole village. After 1956, the people of Kampung Naga try to rebuild the village with their memory without losing their identity [2], since then the history of Kampung Naga is mostly maintained by oral tradition – language. Language becomes a strong tool for Sundanese people. This statement is supported by Memed Sastrahadiprawira. He stated that the language is the most evident and the most comprehensive symbols to distinguish one ethnic group from another. If the characteristics of a language disappears, the distinguishing features of an ethnicity will fade away as well. If an ethnicity no longer exists, the language of the ethnic group will also disappear in due course of time [3].”

Tritangtu

Tritangtu is known as the basic concept of Sundanese life. The concept was born based on primordial farmers’ thought. They believe everything in this world is always connected to something opposite or dualistic. To avoid the conflict, thus the third principle was born to create the harmony, then dualistic thought becomes trinity thought [1]. In Sundanese culture, the universe is divided into three parts based on the most ancient Sundanese cosmological concept called the third pattern, in Sundanese language known as tritangtu. This terminology means “tilu nya hiji, hiji nya tilu”, three in one, one in three. The term of tritangtu is derived from Sanskrit, tan means spider web. This concept can be seen as one of networking that expands outside but keep strongly inside.

Discussion

House in Sundanese is called in various names such as bumi, imah or rorompok. In traditional community, we can hear the term of “bumi alit”, bumi means world, alit means small. Then The

house known as “the world inside the world”. Traditional house in Kampung Naga not only serves as living space, but it also has philosophical value both vertically and horizontally. Vertical meaning represents the relationship between man and God, whereas horizontal meaning is about interactions among human being and nature. Vertically, traditional house is divided into three spaces. The attic known as para, the ceiling called lalangit, and the space under the house called kolong or kokolong. The space between lalangit and kokolong is the actual house called bumi or imah. Horizontally, the house is divided into five areas - tepas (man territory) also known as guest reception room, pawon or kitchen, and rice storage called goah as female territory (Fig.1), tengah imah has similar function to family room and bedroom known as pangkeng.



Fig 1. Pawon as a Female Territory (right)

In Sundanese culture, female has special “spaces” that she can represent particular life, becoming “the content/isi” for human’s life circle in a house. House is considered as place or “container/wadah” of life. In Sundanese culture, the terms “isi” and “tempat” relate closely to “Dunia Atas” and “Dunia Bawah” as parts of the Sundanese cosmology. It can be better understood using the approaches of poetry meaning or Sundanese ancient verse containing the meaning of Sundanese cosmology. Earlier in this writing, it has been explained that ancient Sundanese people are included in the farmer category, therefore rice field and farmers are important for Sundanese society. This kind of rice (padi) relies heavily on rainfall, therefore the existence of the “Dunia Atas” are significantly important. In Sundanese culture, the Upper World is known as wet areas that are identical with sky, which has the nature of female, whereas the Under World is known as dry areas that are identical with land, which has the nature of male. The division of world based on that concept of gender can be seen in Sundanese verse. The Sundanese verse is a an epic story that rhymes. It tells the story of Kings or Princes from Galuh or Padjadjaran Kingdom. Commonly, the verse is recited with the accompaniment of Sundanese traditional music instrument, Kecapi. The followings are 12 line verse that is divided into two. They tell the story of Raden Layung at Panggung Karaton [5]:

A

*Teras kangkung galeuh bitung
 Tapak meri dina leuwi
 Tapak soang dina bantar
 Tapak sireum dina batu
 Kalakay pare jumarum
 Sisir serit tanduk ucing*

B

*Sisir badag tanduk kuda
 Kekemben layung kasunten
 Kurambuan kuwung-kuwung
 Tulis langit gurat mega
 Panjangnya sabudeur jagat
 Inten sagede baligo*

According to Jakob Sumardjo (2015), there are contradictions in meaning between part A and B, however if one of the part is reversed, then the meaning looks complementary. The verse could be seen as follows:

A	B
<i>Sisir serit tanduk ucing Tapak</i>	<i>Sisir badag tanduk kuda</i>
<i>Kalakay pare jumarum</i>	<i>Kekemben layung kasunten</i>
<i>Tapak sireum dina batu</i>	<i>Kurambuan kuwung-kuwung</i>
<i>Tapak soang dina bantar</i>	<i>Tulis langit gurat mega</i>
<i>Tapak meri dina leuwi</i>	<i>Panjangnya sabudeur jagat</i>
<i>Teras kangkung galeuh bitung</i>	<i>Inten sagede baligo</i>

The critical interpretations of the poetry are as follows:

A	B
<i>Sisir serit tanduk ucing Tapak</i> (as plural symbol, represent wordliness)	<i>Sisir badag tanduk kuda</i> (as singular symbol, represents heavenly nature)
<i>Kalakay pare jumarum</i> (pare means dried rice, down to earth in nature, represent male)	<i>Kekemben layung kasunten</i> (layung means twilight, high in nature, like sky, represents women)
<i>Tapak sireum dina batu</i>	<i>Kurambuan kuwung-kuwung</i> (kurambun means rainbow, high in nature, like sky)

Tapak soang dina bantar	Tulis langit gurat mega (tulis langit means writing in the sky, high in nature, like sky)
Tapak meri dina lewi (tapak means foot print, down to earth in nature)	Panjangnya sabudeur jagat (sabundeur jagat means around the sky)
Teras kangkung galeuh bitung (it means "empty/kosong", represent "wadah" or container)	Inten sagede baligo (Inten means diamond, baligo or beligo means watermelon - diamond as big as watermelon), it means "content/isi")

In the earlier section of Introduction, it is said that Sundanese Traditional house is considered as the central cosmos for Sundanese daily activities. This house can be said as the microcosmos or macrocosmos within the Sundanese culture. This is the center of "universe" for the surrounding environments, it gives "contents" for "emptiness". These terms can be identified from the concept of birth of the three patterns or tritangtu, which is known as the Sundanese philosophy.

In the process of tritangu emergence, every entity starts with "emptiness", then "content" is created. In Sundanese culture, dominated by the belief of Animism and Hinduism, it is believed that "emptiness" creates willingness known as tekad. Kuasa (power) relates closely to power known as ucap and to deed known as lampah. Those three philosophies are the modern terminology for Batara Keresa, Batara Kawasa, and Batara Karana. They are the nature or characteristics of Batara Tunggal or Sang Rama, where in Islamic approach is called as Adam Tunggal. Those natures are the "contents" for the "emptiness" [6].

Summary

The meaning of space is not only the tangible space, but also the intangible space. The “unseen” space but possible to feel. Woman as the universe “content” is become the intangible space in Sundanese culture, specifically within the house. They represent the life of surrounding. They fill the “power” into “container”. In Kampung Naga, the house also represents the harmonious relationship between human, nature, and their communication with God as the divine power. Many research discuss Sundanese traditional house in Kampung Naga. But, this paper is expected to give contribution by proposing in-depth analysis on the traditional house with cosmological approach called tritangtu, as the basic of ancient Sundanese principle cosmology and especially explore the woman’s power inside the Kampung Naga’s houses. This paper may also be a reference for future research with more in-depth analysis.

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