

## Study of Aesthetic Elements of Karo Traditional House in terms of Dualism and Triple Patterns

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### Abstract

*This paper is a study of traditional Karo House's aesthetic elements in terms of dualism and triple patterns. Karo, which is located in North Sumatra has a lot of indigenous and cultural history. One of those histories that still survive today is the Karo traditional house. This traditional house not only functions as a protector of its inhabitants from the local climate, but also has a function and deep meaning in accordance with the customs and culture of its people. In the Karo traditional house, the form, function and patterns of the aesthetic element illustrate the close relationship between humans and the natural environment. This paper is intended as an in-depth discussion of the meaning contained in the Karo house's aesthetic element patterns. Not only as a documentation of cultural history but also as a development of science in the world of interior design education.*

**Keywords:** traditional house, meaning, aesthetic elements, Karo, Gerga Siwaluh Jabu

### Introduction

The Karo ethnic group came from the Proto Malay race mixed with the Negroid race. Mixed race marriage between Karo people and Negroid has been told in Karo's legend. Some of them are Tindang married Princess Umang, the ancestors of the ancient Merga married Umang, and King Aji Nembang who was married to Princess Umang. The Umang people mentioned in the legend were people who lived in caves in stone pits. It was said that they lived in the Durintani-Sembahe area, the Lui tribe, Deli Serdang. The Karo Traditional House can be divided into three cosmos according to its level of sacredness, namely the head (roof) is the most sacred part of the place where ancestral spirits live, the body part (living space) is a place of human life as the occupants of the house run all the activities of life, which at once can be a liaison between the upper and lower world, and the last part of the house is the foot (bottom) which represents the profane nature. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBII), the meaning of the word profane is the opposite of sacred, not related to religion, not holy because it is polluted and dirty.

**Picture 1. Cosmos Division at Rumah Adat Karo**



Source: Personal Documentation, 2016.

### Research Methods

This is a descriptive qualitative research. The method is done by describing the object in accordance with the observations and using culture study approach. Exploratory literature will also be used as a part of qualitative research analysis. As a descriptive study, this research only describes the situation or discourse, does not look for relationships, does not test hypotheses or make predictions. The data presented in this study are qualitative data (data that is without numbers), so all the data are substantive categories which are then interpreted with references and scientific references. The authors used the theory of " Paradox Aesthetics " by Jakob Sumardjo (2014).

### STUDY

#### Aesthetic Elements Analysis of Karo Traditional House: Gerga Siwaluh Jabu, Lingga Village

##### The Body Part of The House

The pattern on the body part of the traditional house (outer wall) is divided into two parts, which are called *melmelen* as the lower part of the house and the second part is called *Derpih*. *Derpih*, not only has the function of insulating cold air, but it is believed that magical power can be exhaled from the outside and into the house through cracks to attack the occupants of the house.

Picture 2. The Body Part of The House

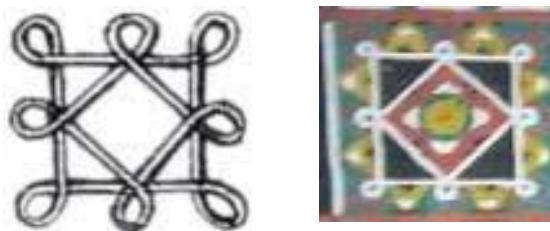


Source: Personal Documentation, 2016

##### • Footprint of Sulaiman

The form of the tread motif of Raja Sulaiman consists of a combination of two basic forms, which are a shape of the box and a shape of the rhombus on it. The name of King Sulaiman is taken from the name of the king who is considered magical, respected and feared by evil creatures. The King Sulaiman name itself is still unknown origin. Some sources said that the name Sulaiman was taken from a legendary magician. While other sources said Sulaiman is a prophet known in Christianity and Islam. When referring to the source that Sulaiman was taken from the name of the prophet, it is most likely that the decoration of King Sulaiman's treads is not a decorative variety from prehistoric times. This is based on the connotation of the object of the Prophet Sulaiman. (Sarjani Tarigan, 2008; Tersek, 2016).

Picture 3. Tapak Sulaiman

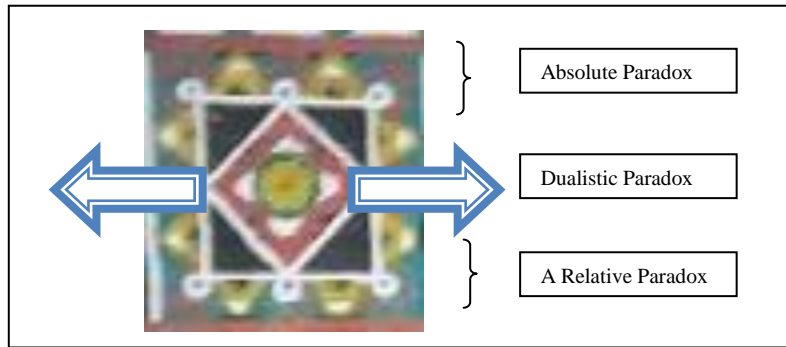


Source: Personal Documentation, 2016.

This form of motif is believed to be a place to sit which is called *ingan kundul* of King Sulaiman's powerful shaman. When seen in detail, the lines that form the box, or rhombus are unbroken, decorated with eight vertices in each corner. The eight vertices represent the eight wind directions as the main guidelines of the Karo people. The unbroken line represents the power of King Sulaiman's shamans, both visible and invisible. This is symbolized by the

Footprint of Sulaiman motif as a deterrent force that does not stop bad influence, as a protector of all residents of the house, because it is found in every corner of the wall of the house.

Picture 4. Motive Analysis *Tapak Raja Sulaiman*

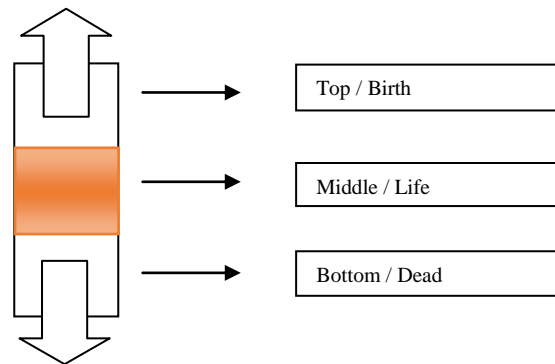


Source: Personal Documentation, 2016.

In the culture of the Three Cultivators pattern, the crossing between vertical and horizontal looks more crowded. This is due to the efforts to harmonize the heavenly (vertical) and the earthly (horizontal). The middle world of human beings harmonizes itself with the world above. (Jakob Sumardja, 2014)

Based on the analysis that has been done, the Footprint of Sulaiman motif is a combination of dualism and triple patterns in the Karo community. The pattern of dualism is only based on two opposing aspects but complement each other and give meaning to each other, for example such as life and death, black and white, male and female. While pattern three has an intermediate aspect in the middle as a balancer. The meeting between pattern two and pattern three on the Footprint of Sulaiman motif can be explained through the illustration in the picture above. In the picture, it is clear that humans are balancing aspects of life. When seen in terms of the interior or building approach, the corners of the room have an important physical role as the building's foundation.

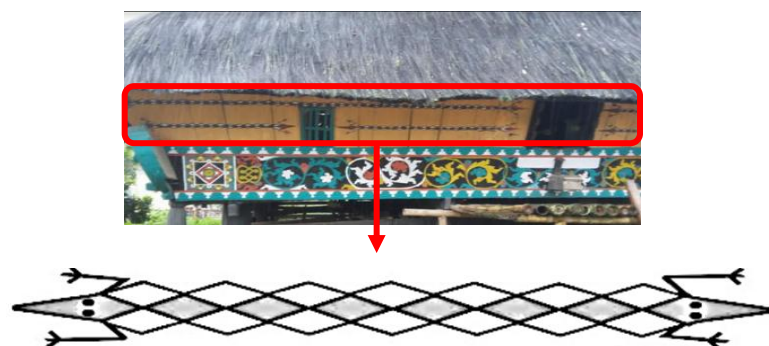
Picture 5. Motive Analysis *Tapak Raja Sulaiman*



Source: Personal Documentation, 2016.

• *Pengret-ret*

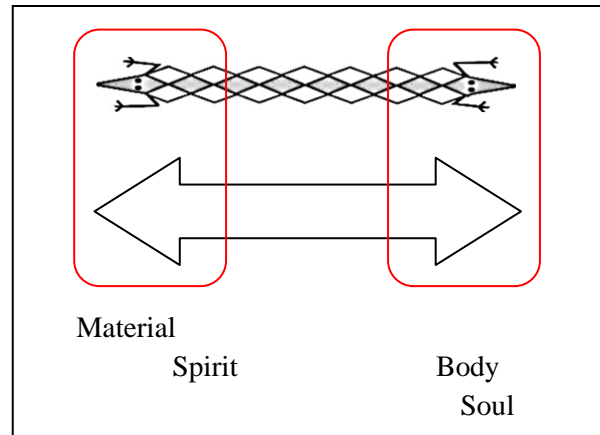
Picture 6. Motive *Pengret-ret*



Source: Personal Documentation, 2016.

Pengret-ret is a lizard-like motif with two heads on the front and the back. *Pengret-ret* is a mythical animal for the Karo people. In the Karo people's myth, these animals are found in the forest which are believed to help show the way home for people who are lost. It symbolizes strength, antidotes, family unity, and vigilance. In addition to the magical function, this ornament is used to strengthen the walls (derpih) of a traditional house, functioning as nails. This decoration can be found on the walls (derpih) of traditional houses. Usually the *pengeret-ret* decoration is made of black palm fiber rope. The fibers are connected to one another by punching holes in the house to form a triangle that is joined together. On each head, there are feet with three toes. The two retainer heads are a symbol of the honesty of the Karo people. The two sides of the head are often interpreted as a relationship of kinship, unity and symbol of solving problems in social life.

**Picture 7. Equations of reverse Patters & Motive Pengretret**



Source: Modification for Jakob Suardjo, 2014.

Two-sided analysis of the head when viewed with the dualism approach stated by Jakob Sumardjo (2014), that the dualism or aesthetic patterns of Pattern Two emphasize more on "opposites" even though they have complementary meanings. The Motifs of the Pengretret are included in the Pattern Two with reversing patterns representing the two sides of men and life whose "existence" can only be seen from the material and spirit sides. Contradictory things that complement each other (*dwitunggal*), which are material-spirit, body-soul, friends, right-left, male-female until life and death. The various characteristics of dualism are indeed within the body, both in the true and metaphysical sense, they provide "life", "feeling", "alertness" to "strength" in order to gain strength in facing all walks of life.

### **Conclusion**

The aesthetic element in the Karo Traditional House is a part of the structure and existence of the Karo community. That existence was also born based on historical background, social and cultural circumstances. These conditions encourage the emergence of motifs in the Karo Traditional House which are not only *tangible* aesthetic elements, but also contain *intangible* meanings. The aesthetic approach brings another interesting perspective on the aesthetic elements of the Karo Traditional House which turned out to be dominated by a diversity of patterns of three, or trinity, and patterns two, or dualism. Pattern three is formed as a counterweight based on the existence of pattern two. Balancing the pattern of three on the aesthetic elements of the Karo Traditional House is more about humans and their lives including the belief in the natural world, the beliefs held and various traditional rituals prevailing in the Karo community. The aesthetic element of the Karo Traditional House is always based on aspects of birth, life and death. The meaning of the aesthetic element of Karo is *sustainable*, meaning that it not only stops at birth, but continues until today and does not rule out the possibility of future contributions, both to the Karo community itself and other communities.

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