

The Features of Sumbanese Traditional House as An Icon of Cultural Tourism Object in East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study explores the features of Sumbanese traditional house as an icon of cultural tourism object in East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia, paying special attention to its form and meaning in view of semiotic perspective. The study is descriptive-qualitative. The results of study show that the features of Sumbanese traditional house, known as uma kalada, are unique and specific to Sumbanese culture, as reflected in its form and meaning. In terms of its form, the uma kalada is a stilt house with a towering ridge about fifteen meters with thatched roofs and bamboo walls partly made of wood. In general, it consists of three main parts, that is (1) uma kali kabunga, the first part functioning as the place for raising pigs, buffaloes, and horses; (2) uma dana, the second part functioning as the place of dwelling; and (3) toko uma, the third part functioning as the place for keeping their ancestors' heritages, in addition to storing cassava, paddy, and corn. The uma kalada is not simply defined as a house because, along with its form, it serves a set symbolic or cultural meanings, including social, religious, historical, political, and economic meaning which designate the ways Sumbanese people make sense of their world.

Key words: features, Sumbanese traditional house, cultural tourism object

Introduction

It has been widely acknowledged that pluralism is a universal phenomenon for all nations in the world. On the basis of the existing plurality indicators of nations, however, there are a number of large pluralistic nations in the world. One of those nations is Indonesia which is identified as the fourth largest pluralistic nation in the world. This is because the population of Indonesia is formed from the diversity of ethnicities widely spreading across around 17.504 islands and fourteen provinces throughout Indonesian archipelago. As the ethnic groups have their own local cultures and languages, Indonesia is known not only as a multiethnic nation but also as a multicultural and multilingual nation (Bustan, 2006; Bustan, 2007; Bustan, 2008; Wasino, 2013).

The miniature of Indonesia's pluralism as a multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual nation can be seen in the province of East Nusa Tenggara. This is because its population is

formed from 16 ethnic groups spreading over five big islands, that is Flores, Sumba, Timor, Alor, Lembata, and dozen of small islands such as Sabu, Rote, Semau, Palue, Rinca, and Komodo island. In addition, there are about 68 local languages spoken in the province of East Nusa Tenggara (Bustan & Liunokas, 2019; Kemendikbud, 2019). Therefore, it is not surprising that the province of East Nusa Tenggara is regarded as the cultural tapestry of Indonesian archipelago (Bustan, 2007).

The island of Sumba, where the ethnic group inhabiting the island is known as Sumbanese people, is divided into four regencies, including East Sumba, Central Sumba, West Sumba, and Southwest Sumba regency (Kusumawati et al, 2007). The island of Sumba is established as one of the leading tourism destinations in East Nusa Tenggara province. This is because, in addition to having beautiful natural panorama, the island of Sumba also has various kinds of cultural products inherited from their ancestors which become attractions for domestic and foreign tourists. One of the famous cultural products of Sumbanese people is their traditional house that, in terms of its form and meaning, has unique and specific features to Sumbanese culture (Kapita, 1976; Widijatmika, 1980; Kusumawati et al, 2007). The traditional house serves as the identity marker of Sumbanese people as members of Sumbanese ethnic group compared to those of other ethnic groups in the province of East Nusa Tenggara in particular and throughout Indonesian archipelago in general (Bamualim, 2013; Ande et al., 2020; Kapita, 1976). Due to its unique and specific features, Sumbanese traditional house is established as an icon of cultural tourism object in East Nusa Tenggara province (Kusumawati et al., 2007). Therefore, Sumbanese people should maintain and preserve their traditional house in the face of change as it can increase their socio-economic welfare sourced from tourism sector especially cultural tourism sector.

Bearing the matters stated above in minds, in this study, we investigate the features of Sumbanese traditional house as an icon of cultural tourism object in East Nusa Tenggara province. As the features of Sumbanese traditional house, as is the case with the traditional houses of other peoples such as Manggaraian people in the island of Flores (Erb, 1999; Bustan, 2005; Bustan & Pous, 2009), are so complex in nature that the study focuses on its form and meaning analyzed along with conceptualization ascribed or imprinted in the cognitive map of Sumbanese people. We are interested in conducting the study for the reason that, in addition to having unique and specific features in its form and meaning, Sumbanese traditional house designates the ways Sumbanese people make sense of their world. At the same time, another reason is that, in the cultural conceptualization of Sumbanese people, their traditional house is not simply defined as a place for them to live, but it also serves both as a sense of identity and as a symbol of identity for them as members of Sumbanese ethnic group. Added to this, the results of previous studies show that there has no any study investigating in more depth the features of Sumbanese traditional house as an icon of cultural tourism object in East Nusa Tenggara province in view of semiotic perspective as the novelty dimension of this study.

Objectives

In general, the objective of the study is to investigate the features of Sumbanese traditional house as an icon of cultural tourism object in East Nusa Tenggara province with special reference to its form and meaning on the basis of conceptualization ascribed or imprinted in the cognitive map of Sumbanese people. Referring to the two related aspects as its main concerns, the specific objectives of the study are as follows: (1) to describe the form of Sumbanese traditional house as an icon of cultural tourism object in East Nusa Tenggara province and (2) to describe the meaning of Sumbanese traditional house as an icon of cultural tourism object in East Nusa Tenggara province.

Significances

Theoretically, the study contributes the significance of semiotics as a branch of science which is concerned with the study of signs, with special reference to the signs of a traditional house as the cultural identity of its people. Practically, the study is beneficial to reveal the unique and specific features of Sumbanese traditional house as an icon of cultural tourism object in East Nusa Tenggara province that should be preserved in the face of change as it can increase the socio-economic welfare of Sumbanese people sourced from the cultural tourism sector. Along with this, the study is also beneficial to promote the unique and specific features of Sumbanese traditional house to domestic and foreign tourists so that they are interested in coming to visit the island of Sumba.

Framework

As mentioned earlier, this study is viewed from the perspective of semiotics as a branch of science which is concerned with the study of signs and their codes together with their uses in a society as members of a social group (Piliang, 2005; Piliang, 2011). This comes closest to the conception of Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008) defining semiotics as a science that explores the relationships between signs and their intended specific meanings. This implies that, in essence, semiotics is concerned with the study of signs and of anything that stands for or represents something else (Bowcher, 2018). In line with this, according to Zoest and Sudjiman, (1992), semiotics is the study of signs and all related things to signs like the functions, the relationship, the sender, and the receiver of the signs which refer everything that should be given meaning. As the study deals with meaning as its main concern or interest, semiotics can also be used to study the cultural phenomena of a people as members of a social group. As the term 'meaning' can be defined differently, in this regard, meaning is referred to as cultural meaning or symbolic meaning shared by a people as members of a social group (Geertz, 1973). However, as different people can define culture differently, in the perspective of semiotics, culture is defined as a system of signs which are interconnected by means of understanding meanings in the signs. The interconnection of signs in a culture shared by a people as members of a social group is based on social convention inherited from their ancestors. Parallel to this, according to Piliang (2011), the interconnection of signs, codes, and texts makes up a culture. Therefore, culture in this light is defined as the amalgamation of signs, codes, and texts.

With special reference to the conception of Saussure, according to Barthes (in Hoed, 2008), there are two dichotomy concepts of semiotics, including (1) syntagmatic and paradigmatic relation and (2) denotation and connotation. The concept of syntagm and system is used as the basis of analyzing such cultural phenomena as signs (Sobur, 2004). As there is a close relationship between a sign and its object as referent, according to Pierce (in Zoest & Sudjiman, 1992), there are three main categories of signs involving icon, index, and symbol. Icon is a category of sign in which the relationship between sign and its object as referent is based on similarity in some respect. Icon is a sign which has perceptible likeness in its form and meaning. Even though icon can be easily perceived easily, it is complicated to be interpreted due to its implicit meaning. Index is a sign whose meaning is interpreted on the basis of the context of its use. Symbol is a sign referring to a certain thing or object. Symbol as a category of sign can have iconic and indexical aspect depending on its use in certain context. When we discuss about symbols, therefore, we also touch directly or indirectly on the iconic and indexical aspects (Foley, 1997; Sobur, 2004; Bungin, 2007).

In general, symbol as a category of sign can be classified into material and nonmaterial symbols. The material symbols are referred to as those which are tangible such as houses, foods, and clothes. The nonmaterial symbols are referred to as those which are intangible like language, knowledge, and the system of belief. Regardless their physical appearances, the meanings of the symbols are known as symbolic meanings which are closely related to culture. As they are closely related to culture, symbolic meanings refer to cultural meanings as public meanings encoded in shared symbols, not self-contained private understandings (Geertz, 1973). As culture can be defined differently, culture in this light is referred to as a system of meaningful symbols belonging to a society as members of a social group. As it puts emphasis on culture as its main concept, one of the kinds of semiotics is known as cultural semiotics, a branch of semiotics examining symbols through the prism or lens of culture (Sobur, 2004).

In terms of its products, in general, the symbols of culture can be identified into material and nonmaterial symbols. The material symbols refer to the tangible products of culture that can be seen and touched and, in contrast, the nonmaterial symbols refer to the intangible products of culture that cannot be seen and touched. Regardless such differences, the material symbols of culture are of many different kinds and one those kinds is traditional house (Koentjaraningrat, 1992; Koentjaraningrat, 2004). In view of semiotic perspective, the traditional house of a people as members of a social group has unique and specific features, as reflected in its form which refers to its design or shape and meaning which refers to symbolic meaning or cultural meaning that designates the ways they view and make sense of their world (Erb, 1999; Bustan, 2005; Bustan, 2009). With special reference to its unique and specific features, according to Bustan (2009), the traditional house belonging to a people as members of a social group is not simply defined as house for them to live, but it also serves both as a sense of identity identifying them as members of an ethnic group and as a symbol of identity differentiating them from those of other ethnic groups.

Method

This study is descriptive in nature because it describes the features of Sumbanese traditional house in terms of its form and meaning on the basis of data found from the field research carried out in the island of Sumba and the description is considered along with the cultural conceptualization of Sumbanese people on their traditional house as a cultural product inherited from their ancestors culture that reveals their existence as members of Sumbanese ethnic group (Muhadjir, 1995).

The sources of data were primary and secondary data. Along with the ways of acquiring the two kinds of data, the procedures of research were field and library research. The field research was aimed at collecting the primary data dealing with the form, function, and meaning of Sumbanese traditional house. In an attempt to achieve the intended aim, the field research was carried out in West Sumba regency, especially in Tarung village as the main location of research that lies in Waikabubak as the capital city of West Sumba regency. The village was chosen as the main location of the field research for the reason that it is one of the traditional villages in West Sumba regency that has been wellknown as an icon of cultural tourism object in the island of Sumba. The methods of data collection were observation and interview (Bungin, 2007; Sudikan, 2001; Spradley, 1997). The observation was carried out in order to have data regarding a general view on the features of Sumbanese traditional house. Based on the data of observation, then we interviewed the members of Sumbanese people as the sources of data, especially those living in Tarung village as the main location of the field research. For the purpose of the study, they were represented by two key informants selected on the basis of

ideal criteria proposed by Sudikan (2001), Spradley (1997), and Bungin (2007). The techniques of data collection were recording, elicitation, and note-taking. The library research was aimed at collecting the secondary data. The method of data collection was documentary study. The documents used as the sources of data were of two kinds involving general references (books) and special references (result of research, articles and papers).

The collected data were then analyzed qualitatively by using inductive method in the sense that the analysis was started from the data to theory/concept. The theory/concept is defined as a local-ideographic theory/concept because it describes the features of Sumbanese traditional house as the identity marker of Sumbanese people as members of Sumbanese ethnic group along with its significance as an icon of cultural tourism object in East Nusa Tenggara province. As such, despite the possibility of similarities in some respect to the features of traditional houses in other cultures, such as Manggaraian culture, the theory/concept applies specifically to Sumbanese culture, or in other words, it does not apply universally to all cultures around the world.

Results And Discussion

Results

The results of study show that the traditional house of Sumbanese people is known as *uma kalada* in Sumbanese language. As can be seen in its lexical items, the term *uma kalada* appears in the form of a nominal phrase made up of two words as its component parts. The two words as its component parts are the word (noun) *uma* 'house' functioning as head (H) or core word and the word (adjective) *kalada* 'big' as its modifier (M). In accordance with the lexical meanings of its words, the *uma kalada* means "big house" which is referred to as the main or origin house of a patrilineal-genealogic clan living or residing in a village that designate the existence of the clan as members of a house based-community (Bamualim, 2013; Ande et al., 2020; Kapita, 1976). In terms of its form, function, and meaning, the *uma kalada* has unique and specific features designating the the identity marker of Sumbanese people. Along with this, the *uma kalada* serves not only a sense of identity for Sumbanese people as members of Sumbanese ethnic group but also as a symbol of identity differentiating them from those of ethnic groups in the province of East Nusa Tenggara. It is conceptualized in the cognitive map of Sumbanese people that the *uma kalada* is not simply defined as a house that anchors them to a place, divides them into visible groups, and expresses their continuity of relationships over generations. As it is closely tied up with the birth, marriage, and death events, the *uma kalada* is a link with their past in many ways that include, among other things, their system of belief on the existence of ancestors as supernatural powers known as *Marapu* in Sumbanese language (Kapita, 1976; Widijatmika, 1980; Kuara Jangga Uma, et al., 2018).

Discussion

As can be seen in its physical form, the *uma kalada* is designed as a stilt house with a towering ridge about fifteen meters with thatched roofs and bamboo walls partly made of wood. In general, the *uma kalada* consists of three main parts or levels and each of which has different name and function as well. The first part known as *lei bungan* is the under part of the house functioning as the place for raising such animals as pigs, buffaloes, and horses. The second part known as *ronggo uma* is the central part of the house functioning as the living place for human beings, in this case the members of a patrilineal-genealogic clan who own the traditional house in question. The third part known as *uma daluku* consists of two parts, that is the upper part

known as *hindi marapu* functioning as the place for keeping their ancestors' heritages and the lower part functioning as the place for storing cassava, paddy, and corn (Kusumawati et al., 2007). Along with its form and function, it is conceptualized in the cognitive map of Sumbanese people that the *uma kalada* is not simply a house as it has several symbolic meanings which are interconnected to one another designating the ways Sumbanese people view and make sense to the world. In accordance with the phenomenological realities they experience in the contexts of living together for years and across generations, the *uma kalada* serves social, religious, historical, political, and economic meaning.

In general, the social meaning of the *uma kalada* is indicated by its function as the main or origin of house belonging to a patrilineal-genealogic clan living in a village as members of a house based-community. More specifically, the social meaning of the *uma kalada* is reflected in the physical shape of its ridge. As conceptualized in the cognitive map of Sumbanese people, if the ridge is high, it indicates that the members of clan who own the traditional house are of high social status, or vice versa, if the ridge is low, it indicates that the members of clan who own the traditional house are of low social status. The social meaning of the *uma kalada* can also be seen in the function of the *ronggo uma* as its central part used not only as the living place of the clan members who own the house but also as the meeting place as well as the place for them to conduct such cultural events as birth, marriage, and death.

The religious meaning of the *uma kalada* is related to the system of belief embraced by Sumbanese people regarding the existence of God known as *Mori* as well as the existence of their ancestors known as *Marapu* as supernatural powers. The manifestation of the religious meaning of the *uma kalada* is reflected in the function of the *hindi marapu*, the upper part of the *uma daluku* as the place for storing the ancestors' heritages. Along with function of the *uma daluku* as the place for storing the ancestors' heritages, it is conceptualized in the cognitive map of Sumbanese people that the *uma kalada* is also regarded as a sacred place. In this regard, the *uma kalada* is defined as a center of the world or an *axis mundi* for Sumbanese people because it is a place of connection between both heavenly realm and earthly realm. It is worth noting that, although most of Sumbanese people have embraced Christianity nowadays, the belief in the existence of the *Marapu* as supernatural powers still tends to be maintained by them, especially those living or residing in the rural areas (Kapita, 1976; Widiyatmika, 1980; Kusumawati et al., 2007).

The historical meaning of the *uma kalada* is concerned with the function of the *uma daluku* as the place for storing the ancestors' heritages. In the conceptualization of Sumbanese people, the ancestors' heritages stored in the *uma daluku* serve as the sources of historical references for them to trace their genealogic descents that they originated from the same ancestors. This also implies meaning that the *uma kalada* is one of the historical evidences that confirms the existence of a patrilineal-genealogic clan residing in a village as members of a house-based community.

The political meaning of the *uma kalada* is indirectly concerned with its function as the living place for *rato* as the leader of patrilineal-genealogic clan living in a village. Along with the social role and status of the *rato*, the natures of differences in power relationship that prevail in the social structure of Sumbanese people are characterized by the obedience of the clan members to the *rato* as their leader. It is worth noting that, in the social structure of Sumbanese people, the relationship of power between the *rato* as the leader of clan and the ordinary members of clan is asymmetric as the *rato* holds higher power than the ordinary members do. The power of the *rato* can be clearly seen, for instance, when he leads religious rituals related

to the marapu as supernatural powers in the belief system of Sumbanese people. The belief still survives today even though most of Sumbanese people have embraced Christianity.

The economic meaning of the uma kalada is reflected in the function of the lei bungan as the place for raising such animals as pigs, buffaloes, and horses, in addition to the function of the uma daluku as the place for storing cassava, rice, and corn as the staple foods for Sumbanese people. The functions of the two parts of the uma kalada designate that, in terms of economic system, Sumbanese people live from both livestock and agriculture. It is worth noting that one of their famous types of livestock is the sandalwood horse or pony which is named after the sandalwood trees and, as such, it is not surprising that the island of Sumba is also known as the island of Sandalwood (Kapita, 1976; Widijatmika, 1980). Along with the livestock of horses, one of the interesting rituals in Sumbanese culture is pasola, that is a traditional war in which two groups of horsemen face and chase each other while throwing wooden javelins at the sparring opponents. Besides aiming to respect to and ask for forgiveness from the Marapu, the pasola ritual also aims to ask for prosperity marked by abundant harvests (Kuara Jangga Uma, et al., 2018). The availability of abundant cassava, rice, and corn as their staple foods stored in the uma kallada is defined as one of the indicators of household economic welfare for Sumbanese people.

Conclusions

Sumbanese traditional house, uma kalada, has unique and specific features to Sumbanese culture. The unique and specific features of the uma kalada as the identity marker of Sumbanese people are reflected in its form, function, and meaning that serve both as the sense of identity and the symbol of identity for Sumbanese people as the members of Sumbanese ethnic group. In terms of its form, in general, the uma kalada consists of three main parts or levels, that is the kali kabunga as the first part functioning as the place for animals, the uma bei as the second part functioning as the living place for human beings, and the uma daluku as the third part functioning as the place for keeping their ancestors' heritages (the upper part), in addition to storing cassava, paddy, and corn as their staple foods (the lower part). In the cultural conceptualization of Sumbanese people, the uma kalada is not simply defined as a place to live for them, but it also shares a set of symbolic meanings, including social, religious, historical, political, and economic meaning. The symbolic meanings of the uma kalada are interconnected reflecting the ways Sumbanese people view and make sense of their world in accordance with the phenomenological realities they experience in the contexts of living together for years and even across generations. Due to its unique and specific features, the uma kalada is established as an icon of cultural tourism object in East Nusa Tenggara province. As such, it is suggested for Sumbanese people to preserve the uma kalada in the face of change as it can increase their socio-economic welfare sourced from tourism sector, especially cultural tourism sector.

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