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Article

# A Study on the Change of Functions of Kinari Village's Rumah Gadang

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### A B S T R A C T

This paper will present the real condition of traditional house in Nagari Kinari and try to analyze the change of the traditional house function as well as its factors. The study uses a qualitative approach to identifying and collecting field data through the fieldwork in Nagari Kinari, Solok. The result shows traditional houses in Kinari have changed its functions dramatically. These changes occur due to social changes, including changes in family structure, economic income, the national education system and personal awareness, and also differences in understanding of traditional culture.

## INTRODUCTION

Minangkabau is the main ethnic group living in West Sumatra, Indonesia. Minangkabau is best known in anthropological circles for its matrilineal system. Since ancient times, they have continued the inheritance of matrilineal lineage and property, retaining a lifestyle which centered on the matrilineal lineage. From the important work of de Josselin de Jong (1951) until newly published ethnography of Gregory Mark Simon (2014), lots of scholars from local or western countries have already made many researches on Minangkabau society from different aspects, including matrilineal social organisation, custom, marriage, inheritance of property, religion, performance art, and also traditional architecture.

Many studies have shown that rumah gadang is one of the traditional architectural beauties materialized by its society and culture. It also appears as a proud identity symbol of Minangkabau people. The architecture of a Minangkabau house is more easily recognizable compared to the architecture of other cultures because the exterior design consists of a roof structure that is curved or horn-like (Bahaudin et.al, 2012). *Rumah gadang* is the place where the maternal lineage live. The house is owned by the women of the family who live there and the ownership is passed from mother to daughter. In addition to being a place of residence for

the matrilineal family, the traditional house as well as a place of family consultation, places of ceremonies, inheritance of custom values, and representations of matrilineal culture.

Although traditional house is very important as an icon and one of the identity symbols of the Minangkabau people, but in West Sumatra it generally experiences a slump and faces the problem of repairation because the construction and maintenance of the traditional house requires a lot of money and energy. Through economic and social developments, more and more traditional houses are replaced by moden houses both in cities or urban areas where the matrilineal system is still strongly practiced. Kamrita as *Bundo Kanduang* and also chairman of the Minang Village Forum, she said there were 68 *Rumah Gadang* in Sumpur Village, Tanah Datar District in 2012, but in poor condition. Some were damaged, some were broken, some were likely to collapse. Whereas in the past, this village had more than 200 *Rumah Gadang* (BNPB, 2012). From the data of *Lembaga Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Nagari* (LPMN), Sulit Air village had 111 rumah gadang before, but now there were only 61 left. Several houses were not suitable for live (Marni, 2015). I studied in West Sumatera for one year and collected some research material during my filedwork in many regencies, especially in Nagari Kinari, Solok Regency. This paper will present the real condition of traditional house in Nagari Kinari and try to analyze the change of the traditional house function as well as its factors.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach to identifying and collecting field data through the fieldwork in Nagari Kinari, Solok. With the help of village head, village cadres, and local villagers, I documented 146 traditional houses with camera in this village and gather brief information. I labeled all houses in Google Maps with different colors following each clan and drew a map of traditional houses (see Pic.1). I used purposive sumping method of informant selection and the number of samples is not predetermined. Information about the functions of traditional houses and reasons for preserving them is obtained via interviews.

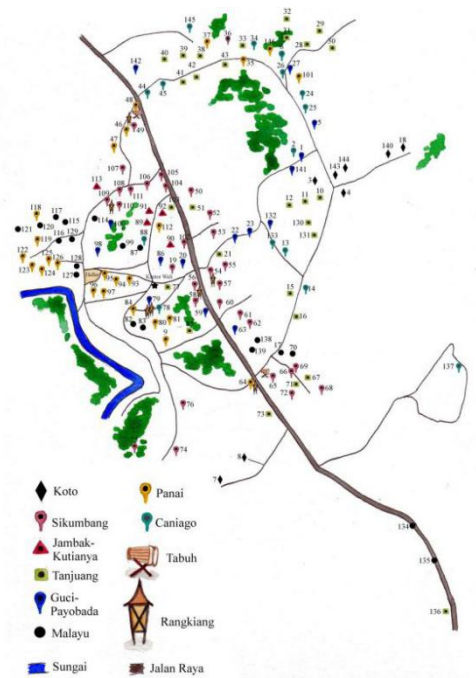


Fig.1 Map of Traditional Houses in Kinari  
(Source: fieldwork in Kinari Village, 2017)

## DISCUSSION

### Traditional House in Nagari Kinari

Nagari Kinari is one of the villages in the Bukit Sundi District, Solok Regency. Geographically, this village is located at 0°31'-1°45' South Latitude and 100° 25'-101°41' East Longitude, about 2 km from Muaro Paneh (Muara Panas), the capital of Bukit Sundi District and about 10 km from Solok City. According to the data of year 2016, the total number of villagers is 4,482, of which 2,109 are men and 2,373 are women. There are 146 traditional houses in Kinari. Most houses are still inhabited by people and treated well. In 2016, Solok Selatan Regency achieved a Indonesia World Records Museum(MURI) record with 134 rumah gadang in one village. Compared to previous studies and data, Kinari village has more traditional houses than other villages and the condition of traditional houses there also looks better. The village still has a strong tradition to preserve the Minangkabau indigenous culture and the traditional house. The village head told me that the villagers were suggested to open the windows of traditional houses everyday.

Referring to the location of traditional houses, most of them are located in the center of this village. These traditional houses belong to 8 clan (suku), to be more specific, 15 for Caniago clan, 14 for Guci-Payobada, 6 for Jambak-Kutianya clan, 8 for Koto clan, 24 for Melayu clan, 24 for Panai clan, 27 for Sikumbang clan, 28 for Tanjuang clan.

According to Ismael (2007), the ideal spatial layout of traditional houses, which has four vertical spaces (*lanjar*) and has a number of rooms (*ruang*) in odd numbers, such as five rooms, seven rooms, or nine rooms (see picture1). According to my research, now most of traditional houses in Kinari have 4 rooms (79.45%). In addition, there also have traditional houses that consists of 5 rooms, 6 rooms, 7 rooms, 8 rooms or even 10 rooms. This situation is different from other areas that have a house with a number of odd rooms. The numbers and percentages are shown in the chart below.

**Table 1. Percentages of Houses Based on Different Rooms**

Number of Room	Sum of Houses	Percentage	Windows (left+right)
2	2	1.37%	3+2/2+1
4	116	79.45%	4+3/5+2/3+3/4+2
5	6	4.11%	5+4/6+3/4+4
6	18	12.33%	7+4/6+5/8+3/5+5
7	1	0.68%	7+6
8	2	1.37%	8.5+6.5
10	1	0.68%	5+4+2+5

Source: fieldwork in Kinari Village (2017)

### Social Function of Traditional Houses

The social functions of the traditional houses reflect the culture and values of the Minangkabau. Traditional house is the first place in one's personality's development to appreciate the character and outlook of the community which reflects harmony that is included with the elements of *raso* (taste), *pareso* (feeling), malu(shame), and respect towards each other (Widya, 2001). It serves as a residence, a hall for family meetings, and for ceremonial activities. Syafwan pointed out that the traditional house was a reflection of the matrilineal system they embraced as well as a symbol of a sense of togetherness, mutual cooperation, democracy, and at the same time as the identity of a people, as well as the inherent desire of the people (Syafwan, 2016). Mr.

Syahrial Chan, a Kinari villager as the notable person in the field of Minangkabau culture told me that traditional house has several important functions as follows,

- 1) is a place for family or community gatherings, especially to hold all forms of ceremonies, such as inauguration of the clan head (*batagak panghulu*), marriage, religious recitation, and the funeral ceremony;
- 2) as a monument, has historical value, philosophy, traditional teachings, and a symbol of the greatness of Minangkabau customs.
- 3) as an institution, is a source of unity among the *saparuik*, the administrative center of the people, the place for nephew coaching in traditional education, etc.

However, with the observation in the village for a long time and depth interviews with the villagers, I have increasingly discovered the social functional changes of the traditional house.

### A Place Called Home

The important concept in Minangkabau society is the *suku*. The same *suku* means all members of that are considered to be from the same female ancestor. The most basic political and economic unit of Minangkabau society is the matrilineal lineage which is called *kaum/pariuk*. According to custom, a lineage member is composed of five generations. They generally live in the same house and work and produce together for the prosperity of this family. In the past, traditional houses often accommodated the member from one *kaum*. According to Willinck's research, in the Highlands a single rumah-kamanakan sometimes houses seventy to eighty persons descended from the same ancestral mother (Edwin, 1933). Muhamad Radjab (1950) mentioned in his autobiography, "when I was a child (about 1910), my family's ancestral house was about 16 meters long and 8 meters wide. The floor was 2.5 meters away from the ground. There were 7 rooms in it dan each room was the home to a married woman and her children. At that time, about 40 people lived in that house". Because it takes a lot of energy and financial resources to build and maintain a traditional house, the number of families who are willing to build new house is becoming less and less. Kato's research shows that proportion of adat houses in IV Angkat was nearly 69% in the early 20th centur, but only left 13% of 395 houses were adat houses in the 1970s. New adat houses are seldom built, only 5% cases was a new adat house built during the past thirty years (Kato, 1982). The average estimated percentage of Minangkabau houses per village goes up from 9% to 13%. It's very close to the result of syafei's research, that is, 8%-12% of the houses are traditional houses (Kato, 1982). Data from Kinari (2011) shows that percentage of traditional houses is nearly 15%, much higher than the average data of West Sumatera in 1970s. However, the amount of modern houses nearly 5 times than the number of traditional houses.

According to villager S, the construction of a modern house which was named as *gedung* in Kinari village was starting from the 1960s until the 1980s. Building a modern house has become a main stream of living style because its low cost and durability. S stated that the villagers started building houses after they began planting cocoa and cloves because their income increased with that result and life was also more developed than before.

With the increase in modern houses and the emergence of nuclear famlies, the number of people who are living in the traditional houses has also been greatly reduced. In Kinari, there are very few cases where married sisters live together in one traditional house. In 2015, the nuclear family in Kinari was 79.14%, the expanded family accounted for 13.43%, and the single-parent households and single-family households occupied 5.71% and 1.14% respectively. Generally, people who have the ability to move out will choose to build the new houses nearby, and those

who do not able to build new houses or the youngest daughters will stay with their mothers in the traditional houses if they have.

Although, there still many traditional housese inhabited, traditional houses were not the home for the matrilineal lineages any more. It will become a temporary place of residence for the big matrilineal family only during the Idul Fitri holiday and Idul Adha holiday. Meanwhile, some traditional houses were empty in the daily life because the families were living in their own modern houses.

### **A Place for Traditional Education**

Traditional houses became the center of education for women members in the community, but it was also one of the ties to the kinship relations of the people. Traditionally, only women who have rooms in the gadang house, while a boy would leave the house and stay in the prayer rooms (*surau*) of his lineage when he was seven years old. Girls were be taught how to be elegant and how to treat her family well, however boys need to learn religious knowledge and martial art in *surau*. Due to the outbreak of war and the two political turmoil in the 20th century, more and more parents are afraid to let young boys live in *surau*.

With the promotion of education in the country, improvement of local education, and the changing attitudes for parents of sending children to school, girls have more opportunities to get secular education. Village K even had studied in Jakarta in 1938 and became a teacher in Padang later. Now, Indonesians are required to attend 12 years of school. The 12-year compulsory education program which was launched by the Education and Culture Ministry in 2013 replaced the previous nine-year compulsory education program launched in 1994. Currently, there are 4 kindergartens, 4 primary schools and 1 middle school in Kinari. Children spend much more time in the school with their classmates and teachers compared with their parents.

In addition, most of parents have to work in the daytime, no matter in the factory or in the farm. Nowadays, more and more children are being cared for by grandparents. So, the function of traditional house as the place for teaching and learning traditional knowledge has become weaker and weaker.

### **A Place for Ceremonies**

Traditional houses is a place for traditional ceremonies, such as marriage, funeral, religious recitation and inauguration of the clan head. Until now, this function is still preserved. When I asked the villagers why they need to build or repair the traditional house, most of them said that they needed to use it for marriage and funeral. Although the fast pace of modern society has prompted more and more young people to choose to hold weddings in towns, if they want to have a wedding in the village, it must be held in the traditional houses. Nearly 5 years ago, clan heads and community leaders of Kinari made an agreement that the bride's family had to run the traditional wedding before the modern one in Kinari. The traditional wedding have to be hold in traditional house. As we known, males can get a title from his lineage only after the traditional wedding. So traditional house plays important role in the traditional wedding. For the villagers, they will feel ashamed if they don't have traditional house to hold a wedding. If someone don't have his own traditional house, he should borrow from his closest lineage.

When a Kinari villager dies, whether in the village or outside, such as Padang or Jakarta, there will be an announcement to the villagers through loudspeaker from *masjid*. Then, the bereaved family will hold a death ceremony at the traditional house. The relatives will clean the body of

the dead and recite the Qur'an there. The villagers will visit the family and mourn for the dead. The villagers told me that although the living room is big in the modern house, it can only afford nearly 10 persons, while the traditional house can afford more people at once. Therefore, it's more convenient to receive the visitors from the whole village in a traditional house.

I realised that villagers mention the word "*peduli*" (care about) much often when I asked them about the reason why they still need traditional house even they already have new houses. Caring about the way of marriage and funeral which as the two important parts of life cycle means they care about the traditional Minangkabau culture, the close relationship of matrilineal families, the *gotong-royong* (cooperation) spirit and Minangkabau identity.

### **A Place as Social Status Symbol**

As many researches have mentioned, not all the villagers can own traditional houses, only the primitive people have the right to build it. So, traditional house is a status symbol of the family. In olden days, the villagers who have traditional houses usually have more property because their ancestors had been living here for long time and gained more lands than others. Usually, the size of traditional house also reflects the wealth of the family. Even today, when someone is in love, the elders in the family usually ask where the traditional house of his or her lovers is to judge whether it is a suitable choice.

Although the construction of traditional house is rarely done in Kinari after the 1970s, there are still 5 traditional houses built or enlarged around the 1980s and 1 modern styled traditional house was built in the 1990s. These houses are all funded by successful *perantau*. It's hard to build a traditional house for a villager because the cost is rather high. It was said that build a traditional house now at least need three billion rupiah ( $\approx$ 210583 US dollar). If someone wants to have ornamental carvings for decoration, the cost will be higher because the craftsman who is good at carving has reduced and the engraving process is also long.

*Merantau* is a socially and culturally institutionalised pattern of migration in Minangkabau society. Minangkabau society encourages younger people to *merantau* to gain more wealth. According to the investigation, most of *perantau* Kinari made an economic contribution to the maintenance of the traditional houses. Marcel Vellinga found that Abai villagers are still keen to build or renovate the traditional houses because it can be regarded as strategic instruments that are used to constitute social differentiation (Vellinga, 2004). Reenen thought that the members of 'house with eleven rooms' in Rao-Rao seem to underline and reinforce their status as a wealthy and honourable group (Van Reenen, 1996). In Kinari, the newly built or renovated traditional houses also become a symbol of successful family under modern standard.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Since the 1970s, the number of traditional houses has become less and less. Although there are still 146 traditional houses in Kinari, its functions have changed dramatically. First of all, traditional house no longer accommodates all members of the same *kaum*, although it still belongs to the female members of them. Some traditional houses accommodate one nuclear family or one extended family only. Second, traditional house as the place for teaching and learning traditional knowledge has become weaker and weaker because of the flourishing development of educational institutions in Indonesia, whether for secular education or religious education. Then, the traditional house still retains two important functions, namely the place of important ceremonies and the symbol of social status. Especially in the village, people still choose to hold weddings and funerals in the traditional house. Although the symbol of social

status also changed from the primitive settlers to the successful *perantau*, the traditional house reflects the social status of the owner of it.

These changes occur from social changes, including changes in family structure, economic income, the national education system and personal awareness, and also differences in understanding of traditional culture. The development of society will inevitably bring about the functional changes of traditional house. But if we look for more details, we will find that the functional practicability has changed a lot, and the ritual and social functions have basically been preserved because these two functions reflect the core of the Minangkabau culture. All in all, although some functions of the traditional house have changed, their core functions have not changed.

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