



AcE-Bs 2012 Bangkok
ASEAN Conference on Environment-Behaviour Studies,
Bangkok, Thailand, 16-18 July 2012

Modernization and Cultural Transformation: The Expansion of Traditional Batak Toba House in Huta Siallagan

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Abstract

Batak Toba people today are facing the dilemma of maintaining their tradition and keeping up to the modern way of living. This has resulted in cultural transformation of traditional houses, where modern utensils, new spaces and domestic life are added with no reference to the original one. The traditional settlements of Huta Siallagan in Samosir Island North Sumatra begin to aspire for urban standards of living, and traditional building practices are dying out because the basic domestic life systems are changing. Traditional houses are undergoing transformation as they are more and more influenced by the modernizing effect of capital economy.

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Keywords: Batak Toba; cultural transformation; modernization; traditional house

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1. Introduction

The island of Samosir is located in the middle of Toba Lake in North Sumatra. The entry point to the island is the port of Tomok, which can be approached by ferry from the city of Parapat in mainland Sumatra. The course Parapat-Tomok takes around 30 minutes and further to *Huta Siallagan* takes another 10 minutes drive along the outer ring road to the direction of Tuktuk Siadong. The traditional village of *Siallagan* is established by the clan *Siallagan* and at present is preserved as an exclusively enclosed settlement for the descendants of family clan *Siallagan*.

The traditional settlement of *Huta Siallagan* is one of the famous touristic destinations of the island Samosir in Toba lake, North Sumatra. *Huta* is the local name for a traditional village, which is set up when a group of people from the family clan establish a new settlement amidst cultivated or an open land. The one who establishes the settlement becomes the chief of the *Huta* (*raja ni huta*) and he or his successor is in command of management and development of the *Huta*. All families living within the *Huta* must be from the same family clan, hence in *Huta Siallagan* all the inhabitants are from *Siallagan* family clan. Under certain circumstances, the chief of a *Huta* has the authority to invite people who are not from the family clan to settle down in his territory, yet they do not have any right to be engaged in the process of developing the settlement. However the social and physical sustainability of a *Huta* is the responsibility of every inhabitant.

In an earlier time, a *Huta* is a political and territorial unit of Batak people. To get a territorial claim one has to set up a homeland out of nature land, and the settlement stands for a legitimate territoriality of the family clan. Batak people have the basic structure of patriarchal extended group, and the kinship system is called *marga*. They belong to an exogamous society in which a Batak man must choose his wife from other unrelated *marga*. Hence, the marriage of a man and a woman is not a private matter but a matter of joining two *marga* and building a relationship between kinship groups. For Batak people, it is sensible and necessary to recognize one's kinship to others in order that one can clearly position his/ her place in the society. One of the rational reasons for strictly ordered territoriality is physical constraint of its natural environment and socioeconomic threats in the region that demands exclusive solidarity.

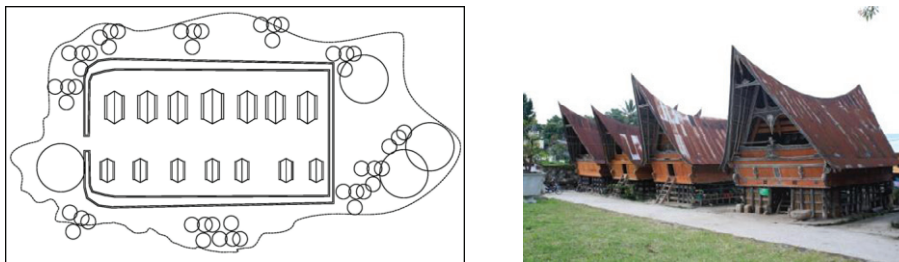


Fig.1. (a) Typical village of Batak Toba in Samosir layout; (b) perspective view of the open space between houses

A Batak Toba traditional village is rectangular in form and consists of two rows of buildings (houses and granaries) with an ample open space in between. Houses and granaries are laid out facing the open space (*alaman*) which is used as a multifunction public space such as passageway, crop processing, working area, social gathering, children playing, and ritual ceremony. Houses stand side by side with the front gable facing the same direction. A granary is built similarly to a house yet smaller in size and no enclosure, its position corresponds to the opposite house which is evidently to be the owner. The village is enclosed, by either massive walls or bamboo fences, to mark its territoriality, and has one entrance gate to

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