

# The Symbolic Meaning of *Tiang Tuo* (old pole) in the *Rumah Godang* Traditional House in the Life of the Koto Sentajo Community, Riau, Indonesia

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## Abstract

Diverse vernacular settlements exist in the Austronesian region as well as throughout the world. They are threatened by extinction due to the growing developments of technologies and information, as well as the disasters and calamities that occur. Efforts need to be made to reduce risks through conservation efforts and studies and research.

Malay vernacular architecture in central Sumatra is part of Austronesian vernacular architecture. A traditional House called *Rumah Godang* in Koto Sentajo is one of its settlements; its existence is an interesting phenomenon because it is located on the banks of the Kuantan River, which is within the cultural border between Malay and Minangkabau. The existence of Malay kingdoms (Indragiri Kingdom) and Minangkabau (Pagaruyung Kingdom) were connected through the Ombilin, Kuantan, and Indragiri rivers which emptied into the Malacca Strait. Of the many Koto on the banks of the Kuantan River, Koto Sentajo is a settlement that still maintains its customs. This paper examines the meaning of the *Tiang Tuo* (old pole) in the *Rumah Godang* in Koto Sentajo as part of a symbol of community tradition and culture.

This study uses a qualitative approach sequentially combining ethnographic methods and grounded theory. The research collects ethnographic data from the Koto Sentajo community and continued with the grounded theory by looking at field data in the form of artifacts of the 27 existing *Rumah Godang*.

The paper concludes that *Tiang Tuo* is a mother (female) who protects her children and offspring and is a symbol of protection. *Tiang Tuo* is also a place to complain or convey grievances. It is a reciprocal relationship between the mother and offspring. Describing who governs superiority through her authority runs the wheel of life in the house.

**Keywords:** Koto Sentajo, Vernacular Settlement, *Tiang Tuo*, Malay House, Symbol and Meaning.

## Introduction

Vernacular settlements exist throughout the world. For example, the Bhungas house in Kutch in India, the vernacular Dome-Shaped house at Harran in Turkey (Thappa et al., 2022), the Siamese house in Kedah and Kelantan, Malaysia (Chuapram & Tapparut, 2022); Khanabnak vernacular house in Thailand (Sawasdee & Phiboon, 2022); Oia settlement in the island of Santorini, and the mountainous settlement of Pomaks in Xanthi, Greece (Ritzouli, 2017). They are so diverse. These settlements have been created in response to the need for shelter and protection from climate and threats. Vernacular settlements in the world are under threat of extinction due to the developments of technologies and information, in such a way that vernacular buildings are increasingly being abandoned. Moreover, the natural disasters that have occurred have also resulted in damage and loss of vernacular architecture. These threats and disasters cannot be denied. However, the diversity of vernacular architecture is a treasure that must be preserved as part of science and part of the existence of indigenous people and their culture. Vernacular architecture in the Austronesian region also varies, as does Indonesia, an archipelagic country with an extensive distribution of vernacular settlements.

This diversity of vernacular architecture is rapidly decreasing and disappearing due to natural disasters and the threat of preservation degradation. Call it the fires that occurred in Indonesia, four Batak traditional houses (*Jangga Dolok*) in Huta Lumban Binanga, Toba Samosir in 2016, then 30 houses in the Uma Kahumbu Traditional Village, Waihombo Tribe, Southwest Sumba and the Lontar Sao Mario traditional house in Soppeng, South Sulawesi which burned in 2022. In several other countries, the threat of extinction and damage is also very drastic; Shuri Castle in Okinawa-Japan also experienced a fire in 2019 (Petkoska, 2021). In Thailand, the San Chao Rong Thong market caught fire in 2005 (Pinijvarasin, 2018). Recently, the old royal temple, Wat Phae Luang, which is 176 years old, also experienced a fire (Sombat, 2023).

The threats and disasters that occur require efforts to reduce risks and conservation efforts before massive destruction or loss occurs. One of the efforts to overcome the risk of this threat is by studying and researching the diversity of architecture and ethnicity. In addition, research that relate to Vernacular Architecture in the contemporary world being carried out also emphasize the importance of Architectural research. Subroto and Malangyudo (2014), say that vernacular architecture research is an important part of knowing the common thread or continuity of the existence of local values that survive and are needed by the community in residential spaces that have developed so far.

Geographically, Malay influence is extensive, and it is also proven that the Malay language is a unifying language and has become Indonesian. It is the state language of Malaysia. The Central Sumatra region is included in the Malay family area, and there is a relationship between the two countries: both the Malay kingdoms in Malaysia, Indonesia (Sumatra), and southern Thailand, as well as other areas that were previously mentioned as areas of distribution of the Malay ethnicity. In terms of typology, Malay house is in the form of stilts, has a gable roof, has carvings, and is spread without any geographical administrative boundaries as it is now (Faisal & Firzal, 2020). According to Faisal and Wihardyanto (2020), traditional houses along the East coast of Sumatra have 3 (three) main rooms with almost the same function but different names. The influence is also quite significant because of the reciprocal relationship between one region and another. Thus, diversity also affects culture and how to build and inhabit a society.

Koto Sentajo has various tribes as a means of tribal customs that regulate and supervise and maintain community traditions in regulating life. There are four main tribes in Koto Sentjao: Melayu, Pitopang, Piliang, and Caniago (Sulistyani et al., 2020). In addition to culture, the traditional house called *Rumah Godang* (Godang House) and the construction procedures are maintained and carried out according to these customary rules. Rapoport (1969) and Oliver (1987) said that vernacular houses take advantage of local potentials such as materials, technology, and knowledge, as well as those related to the environmental context based on the resources available in the environment (Benkari et al., 2021; Jagatramka et al., 2020). Based on this concept, the *Rumah Godang* Koto Sentajo is categorized as a vernacular house because it was built by the Koto Sentajo community, using local wood from local forest sources, with local knowledge or technology guided by an old craftsman (*tukang tuo*).

*Rumah Godang* is a strong community identity regarding cultural transition and existence. This phenomenon must be studied because of similarities in the names and terms, both in form and spatial concepts. This paper examines the meaning of the *Tiang tuo* in the *Rumah Godang Koto Sentajo* as part of the symbol of the tradition and culture of the Koto Sentajo people, which is well embodied in the traditional rituals of Koto Sentajo. It also examines the cultural transition in the spatial context and the meaning contained therein to unearth important information in understanding the *Tiang Tuo* phenomenon. This is because there is a need for a study to understand the cultural fusions between the Malay culture in Riau and Jambi and the Minang culture in West Sumatra.

Its aim is to contribute to knowledge that symbolic meaning is physical and semantic at the same time they manifest in this settlement. Its objectives are to see the cultural concept of inhabiting the Sentajo community in the *Rumah Godang*; to see the process of building the *Rumah Godang Koto Sentajo* based on the meaning and symbol of the *Tiang Tuo*, carried out through local traditions. This effort aims to see how local rules can maintain and preserve traditional buildings carried out independently.

## Review of Literature

### Historical Connection and Previous Studies

The Malay kingdoms that used to exist in central Sumatra, such as the Indragiri Kingdom, Siak Kingdom, Rokan Kingdom, Kampar Kingdom, Pelelawan Kingdom, and Pagaruyung Kingdom, as well as the Jambi Kingdom, also created pluralism in the culture of the people in this region. Previously, there was also the Kuantan kingdom, which started from the Kandis kingdom, and the Keritang kingdom, which later became the Indragiri kingdom, and the Gasib kingdom. They continued to become the Siak kingdom, which was also preceded by a large kingdom in the Hindu era-Buddhist period (Hamidi, 2000; Samin, 2013). In addition, the influence of the Srivijaya kingdom was also huge, reaching the Kuantan Singingi area (Kuantan River) in the past. There is a site of Padang Candi (temple field) in Lubuk Jambi, Kuantan Singingi, where they found gold sheets with inscriptions explaining the existence of the former great kingdom (Sriwijaya) (Soedewo, 2013; Taim, 2014).

Koto Sentajo is exciting because it is located on the banks of the Kuantan River, the cultural border between Malay and Minangkabau. The existence of Malay kingdoms (Indragiri Kingdom) and Minangkabau (Pagaruyung Kingdom) connected through related river routes, namely the Ombilin River, Kuantan River, and Indragiri River, with their estuaries in the Malacca strait; this certainly cannot be ruled out. However, this phenomenon is more interesting because of the similarities between the buildings in the area. Previous anthropological research during the Dutch colonial era have stated that there were three Koto or countries of origin, namely Sintadjo, Kopah, and Benei, around the Kuantan River (Ijzerman, 1895). In addition, Ijzerman (1895) says that the country is grouped into *IX koto di Mudik*, *V koto di Tengah* and *IV koto di Hilir*.

Today, the country is becoming a village and sub-district administrative area in Kuantan Singingi district, Riau. The Dutch newspaper *De Nieuwe Courant* (1905) reported on the conquest of central Sumatra, which says that there were submissive cities, namely Taluk, Kari, Simandolak, Benai, and Sentajo. After the conquest, the *datuak* (customary leaders), holders of tribal customs in every koto/city along the Kuantan River, made a brief agreement or *verklaring* in 1905 with the assistant resident of Indragiri, Van de Velde. In addition, it is said that there are several countries (regions) that have Koto's called *zelfbesturende landschappen* or interpreted as autonomous state regions along the Kuantan River (Grondgebied, 1910; Swart, 1930).

Koto is the center of government and customary center in a country (*nagori/naghoghi/nagari*) in a residential area along the Kuantan River, formerly known as *Kwantan*. This Koto is called "*nagori nan koerang oso doea poeloeh*," or a country whose number is less than one in twenty (Grondgebied, 1910; Swart, 1930). In the area which later included the residency of the Netherlands, 19 countries or Koto's were mentioned in its division, namely the unitary area of *IV Koto in Ilir*, which includes Cerenti, Inuman, Baserah, Pangean; the unitary area of *V Koto in the Middle* which includes Siberakun, Simandolak, Taluk, Kari, Sibuyo; the unitary area of *V Koto in Mudik* (Lubuk Jambi) includes Lubuk Terentang, Toar, Gunung, Teluk Ringin,

Lubuk Jambi; the unitary area of IV Koto in *Mudik* (Lubuk Ambacang) includes Koto Tuo, Sungai Pinang, Lubuk Ambacang and Sampuraga; and Koto in Lubuk Ramo (Grondgebied, 1910). Of the many Koto's mentioned, Koto Sentajo is a settlement that maintains cultural customs with the existence of traditional organizations that regulate all aspects of life.

In general, many studies have been conducted with the Koto Sentajo locus. Research by looking at the existence of the Koto Sentajo location with the influence of cultural acculturation (Malay, Minangkabau, and Mandailing) has just been carried out by Khamdevi (2021; 2022; 2023) by focusing on the similarity in form and space of the Godang and Gadang houses and their characteristics. Meanwhile, other research on the acculturation of different Malay architecture and Minangkabau was carried out by Cheris et al., (2020), who compared the attributes of Rumah Lontiak (Kampar) with Rumah Gadang Sijunjung. Then, Ismail et al., (2016) carried out the design of traditional houses in Negeri Sembilan (Malaysia), Gadang houses in West Sumatra, and Lontiak in Kampar (Indonesia). Yandri (2019) and Sutomo (2020) focus on findings about the characteristics and changes in the Sentajo and other Koto settlements. Other research on Koto Sentajo has focused more on tourism development (Yasir et al., 2021), the construction of Godang Houses (Kuswoyo & Faisal, 2021), and the history of Koto Sentajo as a cultural heritage village (Muktianis et al., 2022).

*Rumah Godang* is a gathering place for tribal members and is the traditional center of the Sentajo community (Yasir et al., 2021). Based on its function, the *Rumah Godang* is a place of tribal unification ceremony (*bainduak*), a meeting place; a place to settle household affairs and tribal deliberations; and the place of inauguration or replacement of day-to-day management (Faisal et al., 2018). The intersection of Malay, Minangkabau, and Jambi cultures can be seen from the terms *Rumah Godang* in Koto Sentajo with *Rumah Gadang* in West Sumatra (Minangkabau) and *Rumah Godong* and *Rumah Gedang (Gedua)* in Jambi. In addition to the name of the house, another term found was also the existence of *Tiang Tuo* (old pillars/poles) in every *Godang*, *Gadang*, and *Gedang* house (Khamdevi, 2022; Novelia & Salam, 2021; Salamah & Kurniati, 2020). *Tiang Tuo* (old pole) is important to study; the existence of *Tiang Tuo* is not only limited to a profane pillar as a building structure. *Tiang Tuo* is considered to have a sacred and important value because the treatment of this pole is different from the other poles.

### Theoretical Basis Symbolic and Meaning

Traditional architecture is a manifestation of vernacular architecture that adheres to established conventions and has been passed down through successive generations. Following the findings of Oliver (1997), vernacular architecture pertains to the construction of residences and other structures that are either individually constructed or collectively produced by the community to fulfill specific requirements and accommodate cultural aspects such as values, economy, and way of life. The vernacular architecture is shaped by six modifying elements: materials, construction techniques, technology, climate, land characteristics, and socio-cultural aspects (Rapoport 1969). The socio-cultural element holds the most significant influence. Oliver (1987) examines the fundamental principles underlying vernacular architecture and rural communities, focusing on various typologies and developmental processes, utilizing locally available resources, adapting to regional climates, designing living spaces, embellishing homes, and cultural values, symbols, and meanings.

Amos Rapoport (1990) posits that *meaning* refers to the transmission of non-verbal communication from the environment to human beings. Rapoport (1980) said houses and settlements are outcomes of spatial organization, thus necessitating a comprehensive comprehension, analysis, and comparison of the constructed environment. This aspect holds greater significance than the mere consideration of form, material, and other attributes typically associated with the organization of symbolic significance (Rapoport, 1990). Furthermore, Rapoport (1990) said the expression of meaning and communication through spatial organization is contingent upon its conceptualization as a permanent entity. This suggests that it is frequently communicated through enduring characteristics, such as symbols, materials, colors, shapes, and sizes. The concept of meaning is closely linked to the interaction between individuals and their surrounding environment (Rapoport, 1980, 1990). The correlation between spatial organization and semantic

significance is a fundamental aspect that shapes and is shaped by communication, serving as a crucial mechanism for establishing connections between the constructed environment and social structures.

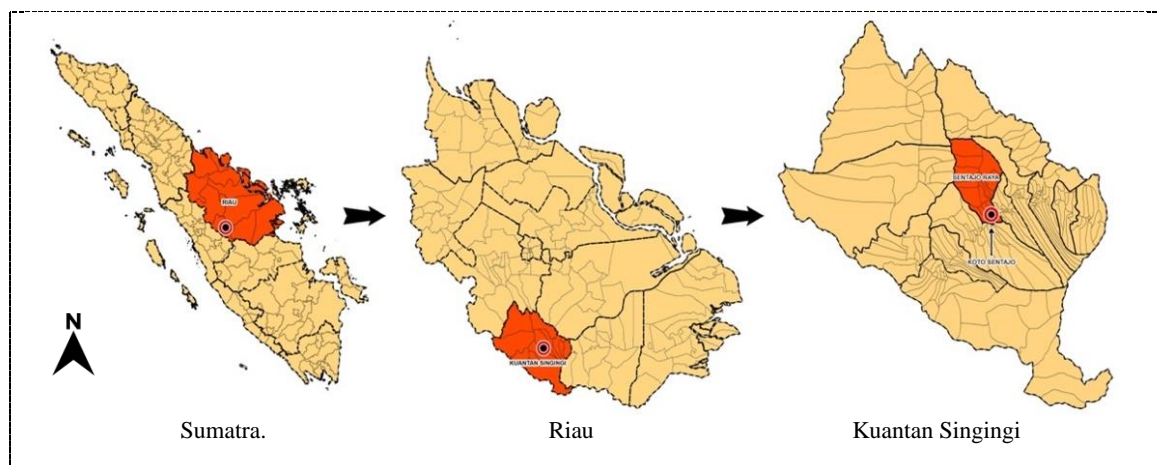
Cooper (1974) said that houses serve as symbolic embodiments of our self-perception; the home's historical and contemporary significance carries boundless symbolic implications and shapes our notions of identity and physical environment. The dwelling manifests the occupant's intrinsic and extrinsic identity; our residences convey significant information regarding our social status, aesthetic inclinations, and how we desire to project our image to society (Cooper, 1974). Again, Cooper's analysis employs a theoretical framework rooted in Jungian psychoanalytic theory, elucidating the profound insights that may be gleaned from examining our homes. Specifically, this examination reveals significant information about our socioeconomic status, aesthetic inclinations, and how we aspire to project ourselves to society.

Rapoport (1969) posits that a comprehensive understanding of the concept of vernacular may be achieved by examining the design process, which often encompasses various defining attributes. Moreover, the architectural design allows for flexibility regarding modifications, alterations, and incorporations. Hence, it is crucial to establish a connection among the many components of vernacular architecture, wherein individuals from diverse generations and makers and users engage in a collaborative process (Rapoport, 1969). As Dayaratne (2018) said, locality characteristics facilitate the ability of vernacular settlements to make significant contributions towards establishing a sustainable environment.

The concept of a house encompasses more than its physical structure; it also holds symbolic significance. Like the *Tiang Tuo*, the *Tiang Tuo* is not just a supporting structure for a house. However, *Tiang Tuo* has a close meaning and symbolizes something profound for the Koto Sentajo people. So, what is symbolized by *Tiang Tuo* impacts the preservation carried out by the Sentajo people.

## Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach, combining an ethnographic method with grounded theory. Therefore, it employs mixed methods. The research begins by ethnographically looking at the cultural phenomenon of how to build a house for the Koto Sentajo community. Then, this research was continued with the grounded theory by looking at field data in the form of artifacts of the 27 existing *Rumah Godang*, physical environmental settings, and traditional activities that took place there. The object of observation is *Rumah Godang* (Godang's house). The research location is in the Koto Sentajo settlement, Sentajo Raya District, Kuantan Singingi Regency, Riau, Indonesia (Fig. 1). In the settlement of Koto Sentajo, there are several Godang houses from various tribes. The Godang houses belong to Caniago, Malay, Patopang, and Paliang tribes. The Paliang tribe is further divided into the Paliang Soni, Paliang Lowe, and Paliang Tanjung tribes.



**Fig. 1:** Location of Koto Sentajo in this Research.

Source: Authors, 2023

The authors conducted ethnographic research by being directly involved in every process of traditional activities in Koto Sentajo. The authors takes part in the activities during the second day of Eid, and the researchers attend the iftar event, the process of paying fine, inaugurating cultural leader, and building a Rumah Godang from the beginning to the end. In this process, the authors writes, documents, and redraws as well as analyzes each of these customary processes. Meanwhile, as a resource person, the authors used purposive sampling by selecting people who could describe and explain any customary activities in the Koto Sentajo. In this case, three key informants were Datuk Penghulu as cultural leaders. Monti was the cultural leader who took care of internal affairs and the customary person who had just been inaugurated during the research. The last informant was a *Tukang Tuo* (carpentry expert/craftsman) who worked on constructing the Rumah Godang in Koto Sentajo.

Data collection was carried out ethnographically by observing the process of building Godang's house in the field by recording, and documenting each finding, then analyzing it according to the ethnographic method. At the same time, the next step is to focus on the grounded process and see Godang's house as part of the research object by carrying out systematic data collection, redrawing, tabulating data, and then analyzing it using coding and concluding the findings. In addition, in the second phase of research, Grounded research, the authors redraws each existing 27 Rumah Godang to find the essence of the spatial pattern and the existence of the *Tiang Tuo*, both in the construction process and in activities attended by indigenous people.

## Findings and the Discussion

### *Traditional Settlement in Koto Sentajo*

The Koto Sentajo settlement was formed from natural conditions that allowed people to live and settle there. Koto Sentajo is in a hilly area on the banks of the Kuantan River, and there is a customary forest as a buffer zone for the settlements. This settlement integrates Godang Houses, Hall (Balai), and mosques into the community structure. The Godang house is a gathering place to discuss issues of tribal customs and a hall for inter-tribal or cross-tribal deliberations. At the same time, the mosque is a means of worship and a place for delivering religious education. In addition to these buildings, there are also *Balai Pondam* and *Sosoran* (a place to practice martial arts), *Rangkiang* for storing agricultural products such as rice (rice barn), and buffalo cages (Kennels) and huts for resting in the fields.



**Fig. 2:** Koto Sentajo Settlement

Source: Authors, 2022

In addition to the buildings, there are also natural views with their respective functions. There are grazing areas, rice fields, and fields for farming, as well as forests where natural products such as wood, honey, and other products are used. In addition to functioning as a place for fishing, the river was once the main transportation route and a place for boat racing. *Rumah Godang* is the name of the traditional house in Koto Sentajo. There are 27 units of *Rumah Godang* (Godang houses), representing the number of stomachs (*puak*/mother) of the existing tribes. This house is in the form of a stage with many pillars, using a multi-level gable roof (*atap layar*), and there is a room (imaginary room) with each function and room for a bed or storage area.



**Fig. 3:** Physical Setting of Koto Sentajo Settlement  
Source: Authors, 2023

It was observed that the function of Godang house is as a place for the implementation of traditional rituals, such as the implementation of tribal deliberations, or a place for ceremonies to give traditional titles such as Penghulu, Monti, Dubalang, Orang Siak - Khatib/Imam (priests) called *Orang Onam Boleh* (sixteen people). There is also a *Tuo Kampung* who is included in the section *Orang Duo Puluah* (twenty people). Moreover, the Godang house also functions as a community gathering place. This can be seen on the day most awaited by the native Sentajo descendants who are overseas, namely Eid al-Fitr, where at this time, the Godang house becomes a place for them to stay in touch. Therefore, on the second day of Eid (2 Shawwal), the people of the Sentajo flock to the Godang house to stay in touch with the relatives and convey the problems that existed in the tribe to the *Ninik Mamak* (customary leaders) in each ethnic group. Thus, if there is a problem, it will be resolved by family deliberation, or the *Ninik Mamak* will make decisions based on their policies. The second day of Eid was chosen as the day to visit the Godang house because on that day, it was still the Eid atmosphere, and all the relatives who were far away or abroad also returned home on this holiday; this made it possible for all the people of Sentajo to gather at the Godang house.



**Fig. 4:** The Atmosphere of the Second Day of Eid (2 Shawwal) at Koto Sentajo  
Source: Authors, 2022

### Construction of the Godang House in Koto Sentajo

The Godang house is the social status of each tribe, and each tribe is proud of the existence of its Godang house. The existence of a good and well-maintained Godang house shows this pride. The Godang house becomes a social symbol that the members of the tribe care about in terms of the existence of the tribe. A *Tangganai* manages the Godang house, where all members of the tribe gather on the second day of Eid (Rayo duo), the *Tangganai* (household care/ caretaker) will convey the physical condition of the Godang house. If there is damage, repair efforts will be agreed upon, for which the funds for the repair of the Godang house are obtained from the mandatory contribution of grandchildren and nephews every year. In addition to repairs, the old of Godang house is sometimes replaced. Apart from being damaged, the Godang house was often rebuilt because of its inadequacy of its capacity when there are many tribal members. Members of this tribe come from the maternal lineage (*puak*), indicating that the Sentajo community is a dominant matrilineal group.



**Fig. 5:** Godang House Construction Process in Koto Sentajo: (a) Traditional Meetings attended by customary Leaders, (b) Collecting Wood from the Forest, (c) Processing Wood into Poles and Preparation for Establishment, (d) Prayer before Erecting, (e) Symbols on *Tiang Tuo* (old poles), (f) Enforcing *Tiang Tuo* and others Poles, (g) Building the Godang House, (h) Completion of the Construction of the Godang House, (i) Raising the Godang House (Thanksgiving for Slaughtering the Buffalo/Cow)

Source: Authors, 2021-2023



The construction of the Godang house is carried out in a *Batobo* (cooperation) manner by the children and nephews (members) of the tribe. The construction is not only in the form of building physical activities. The development process must undergo a series of customary activities that must be met with all kinds of provisions. Before the Godang house was established, the first thing to do was an internal meeting of the customary leaders who were in the Godang house. Once agreed upon, the host (*tangganai*), who has the plan, sends invitations to traditional stakeholders from every other tribe; the invitation is in the form of *Limpan*. The *Limpan* contains betel nut, which is wrapped in a cone shape and wrapped in banana leaves. The invitation is invalid if the *Limpan* does not meet the requirements. The condition for delivering the *Limpan*, is that the *Limpan* carrier must bring *Cerano* (betel holder), which the *Cerano* contains betel, gambier, areca nut, lime, and tobacco. The invitee (*limpan*) must wear a skullcap (hat) and a sarong (sarong).

To carry out the ritual meeting by inviting the customary leader (sixteen people), the inviting tribe is obliged to sacrifice at least one goat, with the goat cooked and served for the *Datuk Penghulu Berompek* (four Cultural Leader). If the head of the goat/cow/buffalo is not available, then the *Datuk Penghulu* can cancel the event. After the meal, *Monti* from the Godang House tribe told *Datuk Penghulu* about the purpose for being invited to the Godang House. In the meeting, the head of the *Datuk* will convey the requirements for constructing the Godang house. Wooden poles are mandatory; the number of poles must be at least 16 pieces, and other tribes must approve the development. In addition to these requirements, traditional stakeholders also convey other rules. Both procedures are for taking wood material from the forbidden forest. The construction process ends with the thanksgiving ritual (prayer) when the house has been completed. After these conditions have been met, a house construction permit is officially granted.

The tribal members start the construction by looking for wood in the forest. Timber harvesting in protected forests must obtain prior approval from *Datuk Penghulu* with a precise number of cubic volumes, and the felling process of cutting wood which must be supervised by sixteen people. These are customary leaders. This is because the allotment of wood in protected forests can only be used to construct Godang houses, public facilities such as mosques and footbridges (bridges) and building houses for residents affected by a disaster. This rule ensures that forest wood is maintained and not used carelessly. After the wood is taken, it is taken to the location of the tribal land where the Godang house is built. Construction begins by erecting the pillars of the house together, where one of the pillars, *Tiang Tuo*, takes precedence and is distinguished and marked.



**Fig. 6:** Buffalo's Horns and Tails placed on the Door and then transferred to *Tiang Tuo* (Old Pole)

Source: Authors, 2022

Furthermore, the work on finishing the walls and roof is continued by *Tukang Tuo* who the chief craftsman is, who is assigned to work on the construction of the house. After the Godang's house is completed, the final process is going up to the house for the prayer for the completion, starting with eating with the craftsman, then inviting all the customary leaders of sixteen people and *Tuo Kampung*. This Thanksgiving event is served by slaughtering a buffalo or cow (four-legged

animal with long nail) as a condition for the meal of the thanksgiving prayer. The head and tail of the buffalo are hung in front of the house entrance; meanwhile, after that, the Godang house can be used, but the buffalo's head is placed on *Tiang Tuo*, where the first pole was built in the process of building the house.

#### *Tiang Tuo (old pole) at Godang House in Koto Sentajo*

Every traditional activity in Koto Sentajo is inseparable from the provisions and customary rules led by the *Ninik Mamak (customary leader)* called *Orang Onam Bole* (sixteen people). *Datuk Penghulu* is the person who becomes the leader of the tribe. Usually, the *Datuk Penghulu* will be given a mat (mattress) for sitting in the Godang house. *Datuk Penghulu* will also get a special dish made from buffalo/cow/goat head which the members of the tribe have cooked. This is a way for tribal members to respect the *Datuk Penghulu* or customary leader. In addition to the *Datuk Penghulu*, there are other traditional instruments, namely, *Monti* (minister), *Dubalang* (commander), and Imam / *Kotik* (priest). The customary holders of *Ninik Mamak* are sixteen people, and each tribe has four customary holders; with the four main tribes in Koto Sentajo, the number of *Ninik Mamak* is sixteen ( $4 \times 4 = 16$ ). Each person among the sixteen people, is identified from the color of their clothes, the *Penghulu* and *Dubalang* wearing black clothes, *Monti* wearing yellow clothes, and *Imam/Kotik* wearing white clothes.

Meanwhile, the members of the tribe wear ordinary clothes that are polite. Male members also wear caps of the tribe for the formal event. Every *Datuk* is required to attend a formal event held at the Godang house; if someone is unable to attend, then the *Datuk* must find someone who can replace him, and if there is still no one who can replace him, a shirt or sarong will be brought and at least a skullcap (hat). This is because the *Datuk* had entered the Godang house as evidence that the *Datuk* could not be present, and no one could replace him. The absolute requirement of any formal event involving the *Datuk* is *Cerano*. *Cerano* is an essential requirement in a procession at the Godang house; if there is no *Cerano*, then the *Datuk* will not enter the Godang house.

*Tiang Tuo* is the first pole cut down in the forest or known as *Cocak Paek*. The type of wood used for *Tiang Tuo* is wood that is large enough, and this wood must be straight and strong. The ritual when taking *Tiang Tuo* is asking the forest dwellers for wood, which shamans do by saying a congratulatory prayer, then providing a set of plain flour (sitawar leaf/*crêpe ginger*, *sidingin/kalanchoe pinnata*, *kumpai/lycopodiophyta*, *cikorau/asteraceae*, *bore betia/fried rice without oil*, *ayam/chicken*, and embers). In the construction of the Godang house, *Seminai* wood, *Kolek* wood, *Meranti Batu* wood, and the type *Tonam (Marsawa)* wood are used. *Rumah Godang* generally uses sixteen pillars or more, this symbolizes that the *Sentajo* country is led by sixteen people, who are the customary leaders.

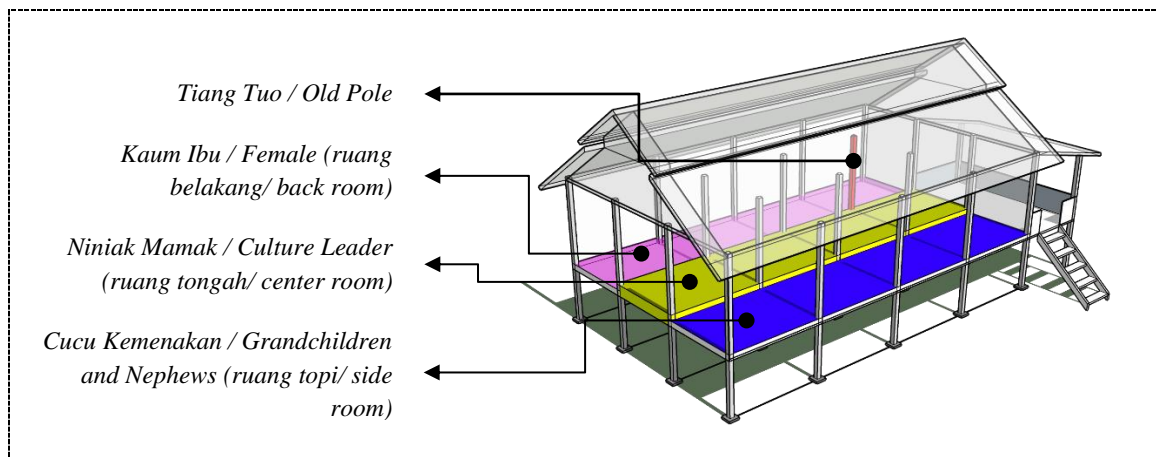


**Fig. 7:** (a) Timber Felling, (b) *Cocak Paek/Tepung Tawar* (Spells/Prayers), (c) The Erection of Poles, and (d) Giving Ornaments to Old Poles (*Tiang Tuo*)

Source: Authors, 2021-2023

At the beginning of the construction of the house, after the wood is taken from the forest, the wood specifically for the *Tiang Tuo* is erected together. Then, the new Godang house is added with decorations, and some objects are hung and tied to the *Tiang Tuo*. These items are an umbrella, one set of clothes (*Kain Sapatogakkan*), one banana bunch (*Pisang Satandan*), one stick of sugar cane (*Tebu Sarumpun*), and two coconuts tied together (*Kelapa Setali*). The meanings of the objects placed on the *Tiang Tuo* of the newly built house are as follows.

- Umbrellas mean protection;
- The set of clothes means that this house belongs to women (female) and is intended for daughters, clans, or mothers (matrilineal);
- Sweet sugar cane means that there are no bad-looking people in the Godang house (must be sweet with a smile);
- The bananas and coconuts mean togetherness and unity.



**Fig. 8:** *Tiang Tuo* (Old Pole) Position and Space Separations of Godang House at Koto Sentajo  
Source: Authors, 2023

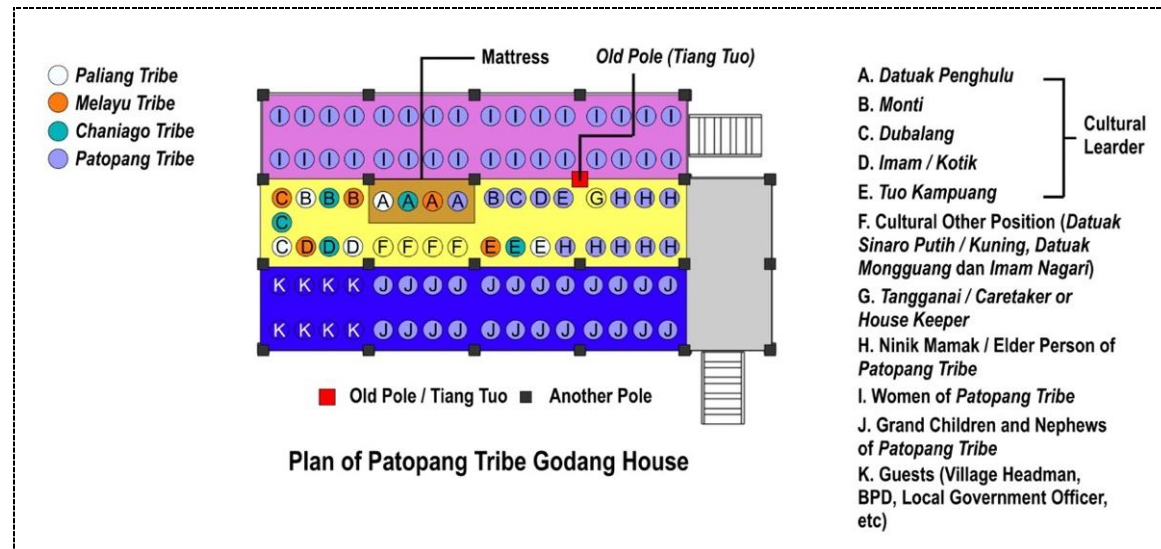
The Godang house consists of 3 (three) rooms, where there is a space limited by *Bondual* (beams) on the floor of the house. This *Bondual* serves as a divider part of the Godang house room. There are side, middle, and back rooms with different functions. The front room/side is where the grandchildren and nephews (*cucu kemenakan*) sit, the middle room is elevated on the floor (5-10cm) where the *Ninik-Mamak* (*Datuk*/customary leaders) seats, while the back is for the mothers (female). The position of the *Tiang Tuo* is in the middle room where the *Ninik Mamak* is; the *Tiang Tuo* can be on the left or right side of the center of the building. When there is a formal event, the sitting position in the Godang house has a stipulation; the person sitting on the *Tiang Tuo* is a customary holder from the tribe of the house where the event is held. Meanwhile, *Datuk Penghuhulu* sat in the middle of the sixteen raised people covered with a mattress.



**Fig. 9:** The Sitting Position of the *Datuk Penghulu* on the *Tilam* (Mattress) and *Tuo Kampung* or *Tangganai* on the *Tiang Tuo* (Pillar/Old Pole)

Source: Authors, 2022-2023

The pillars of the house are placed on top of the *sondi* or *umpak*; *sondi/umpak* or a pedestal. In the past stone was used, but now the *sondi* of the house uses cement. The mast of the Godang house is shaped into an 8-sided shape; this is done to facilitate the process of lifting the pole so that not a lot of wood is wasted in its processing. This is to connect or tie the poles and other beams using pegs as the main structure of the Godang house. The wood used must be in rhythm with the wood groove; it must not collide between the end of the wood and the end of the base of the wood with the base; this is interpreted so that the house does not produce disputes that can cause divisions. Erecting the pillars of the Godang house is a collective obligation; this signifies the cohesiveness and togetherness between grandchildren and nephews and is witnessed by sixteen people: the customary leaders.



**Fig. 10:** Sitting Position of Customary Leaders at the Godang House

Source: Authors, 2022-2023

*Tiang Tuo* is the center of activities at the Godang house. If it is focused on the locus of its position, it does not fit right in the middle, but *Tiang Tuo* is the starting point or the pivot for cultural activities in the Godang house. Those who occupy the *Tiang Tuo* in each Godang house are the traditional stakeholders who own the Godang house where the cultural event (ceremony) takes place. For example (Fig 10), when the customary leaders (sixteen people) gather at the Godang house of the Patopang tribe, the one who sits at the *Tiang Tuo* of the Godang house is *Tuo Kampung* from the Patopang tribe. Where *Tuo Kampung* adjoins the *Tangganai* house of the godang. Then shifting to the right from the sitting position of *Tuo Kampung* are *Imams Kotik*, *Monti*, and *Dubalang*, while in the case of the inauguration ceremony, those who were sworn in sat next to (before) the four *Datuk (PENGHULU)*. The *Datuk Penghulu* has a special seat based on a mat (mattress), where at the beginning (base) the *Datuk Penghulu* who sits is the *PENGHULU* from the Godang house tribe; if in the Patopang tribe's house, then the first *PENGHULU* is the *PENGHULU* of the Patopang tribe continued next to him the Melayu tribe chief, if in the house of the Melayu tribe next to it must be the Patopang tribe.

According to the customary rules, the Patopang tribe must live next to the Melayu tribe, whereas the Caniago tribe must be adjacent to the Paliang tribe. This tribal couple is called *Selatak Tumang* (close friend/consulting friend). The Caniago tribe is called the 3 (three) *Ninik* tribe, which has close friends from the Paliang tribe (6 *Ninik* tribes), while the Melayu tribe (4 *Ninik*) partners with the Patopang tribe (5 *Ninik*). If you look at the patterns 3 and 6, 4 and 5, the total is always 9. After the *PENGHULU*'s sitting position is continued with *Monti*, where the pattern remains the same according to which house the event takes place, then *Dubalang*, *Imam Kotik*, and continued other (honorary) positions in the customary structure. This sitting position applies in the middle of the house meaning the living room, where the customary leader sits. While at the front (side room/*ruang topi*) at the end (inside of the stairs) the guests sat, and at the base close to the stairs

sat the grandchildren of the nephews from Godang's house where the event was taking place. The back (*ruang belakang*) is filled by female/mother (Induak/Ibu) from the Godang house tribe.

#### *The Meaning of Tiang Tuo (Old Pole)*

*Tiang Tuo* are not only found in Koto Sentajo, Kuantan Singingi, Riau. Several other areas also have *Tiang Tuo*, such as the Gedang/Gedua house in Kerinci, Jambi, and almost all Gadang houses in West Sumatra. Another term for *Tiang Tuo* is sometimes called *Tiang Tuha*, *Tonggak Tuo*, and *Tiang Tua*. In addition to the Godang, Gadang, and Gedang houses, *Tiang Tuo* is also found in vernacular houses of indigenous tribes or customary communities in Riau and Jambi. For example, the use of *tuo* poles can be found in the house of the *Sakai* tribe (Khamdevi & Dewi, 2021), the house of the *Talang Mamak* tribe (Faisal & Wihardyanto, 2020), and the house of the *Anak Dalam* tribe, which is also called the *Godong* house (Khamdevi, 2021).

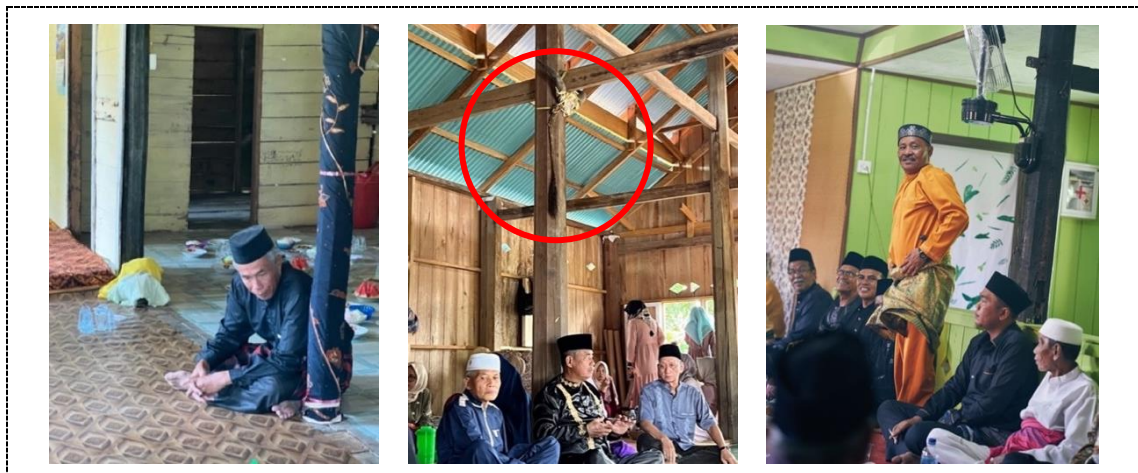
The Koto Sentajo people have high spatial awareness, which can be seen from how they are aware of their sitting position within the *Tiang Tuo* of the Godang house. That is the one who is allowed to sit near *Tiang Tuo* which is *Tuo Kampung* or *Tangganai* in that house. This is because of the sensual feeling that they feel and have about the existence of the *Tiang Tuo*. The rules governing who has the right to sit on the *Tiang Tuo* are not just a symbol but have become public awareness. Meanwhile, grandchildren or nephews will not dare or want to sit on the *Tiang Tuo* because they know their position and hierarchy within the tribe.

**Table 1:** *Tiang Tuo* Meaning of the Vernacular House Godang, Gadang, and Gedang  
Source: Authors, 2023

	Godang House (Koto Sentajo/Riau)	Gadang House (Minangkabau/Sumatra Barat)	Gedang House (Kerinci/Jambi)
<b>Function and position</b>	main pillar; center, the Middle of the right side of the house; <i>tangganai</i> and or <i>tuo kampung</i> seats	<i>limpapeh</i> (center pillar, main pole); <i>tonggak tuo</i> ; in the Middle	sacred, the first pillar; the Middle of the house; <i>Tangganai</i> seat
<b>Owner/ Perpetrator</b>	female, the cloth on the pole is female's clothes	<i>bundo kanduang</i> (biological mother); <i>limpapeh</i> (female's headdress)	wounded with the blood of a girl ( <i>batino</i> /female)
<b>How to take / Establish</b>	<i>cocak paek</i> (marked with a pickaxe); prayed with <i>tepung tawar</i> ; wood from the Forest is welcomed (accepted) by the mothers (female); when erecting the Tuo pole, the femael (parents/mother) also pull the Tuo pole	<i>mancacak paek</i> ; two girls pulling a rope to build a pole ( <i>Jarek</i> )	marked by sticking an ax; released by girls while looking for <i>Tiang tuo</i> in the Forest; turmeric rice as wood cooler
<b>Accessories on the pole</b>	an umbrella, a set of clothes, a bunch of bananas, a stick of sugar cane, and a pair of coconuts	chicken, banana bunches, Mayang areca nut, and coconut bud	betel, areca nut bunches, plantain bananas, lemongrass, one stick of sugar cane, one piece of coconut, and white and red cloth
<b>Reference</b>	(Field Data, 2022)	(Salamah and Kurniati, 2020; Fitriza, 2018; Yunarti et al, 2021; Rini et al, 2021; Fox, 2006)	(Hasibuan, 2010; Novelia and Salam, 2021; Khamdevi, 2022)

Furthermore, it can be concluded that the Koto Sentajo people think that philosophically, the *Tiang Tuo* symbolizes protection, emphasizing the belief in the protection of the mother (old pole) who protects her children. *Tiang Tuo* is the mother of the offspring, and the mother is the protector of the shelter and the place to complain. *Tiang Tuo* as a mother, the gift of life (giving birth, raising, and eventually getting married and having children to continue life in the world) is from a mother to her children. The mother (female) is something sacred in the lineage, and the Godang house is a symbol of the lineage of the mother (tribe) line of tribal names inherited from the female line. The mother figure is a strong figure, which is also manifested by the selection of *Tiang Tuo* from strong, straight, and large wood. Poles are not only a support in a building structure as a sensual empirical form, but this *Tiang Tuo* (old pole) is a support in life that is more associated with meaning. The Godang house is a house where people gather, as a place of refuge, a house that is open to anyone of their descendants. If they do not have another house (they have not been able to own one), they can return to their Godang house, occupy it, and take shelter there. Where the *Tiang Tuo* in the house symbolizes comfort and peace as a place to return to, the mother is an artifact that provides protection.

The reciprocal relationship described above is closely related to giving, receiving, rights, and obligations. What is the treatment of the *Tiang Tuo*? From the start of collecting wood in the forest (choosing wood), when it arrives at the village (construction site), it is the mothers who welcome and stroke (hold) the *Tiang Tuo*. The giving of female's clothes to the pole (that the Godang house is a symbol of female's ownership), the material gift of life is symbolized in the form of plants (bananas, sugarcane, coconuts) which are symbols of life with *Tiang Tuo* as its epicenter. The rights and obligations towards this *Tiang Tuo* are a form of give and take. The people consciously provide treatment (clothes, food, umbrellas) and ask for the right to protection from the *Tiang Tuo* in the form of profane and non-profane. They believe there can be a reciprocal relationship from this, from which general visible measurements cannot be made. *Tiang tuo* is likened to a "mother" (female/mother's parent) who has propositions regarding the existence, position, duties, and symbolic role of a female/mother in a constellation of cultural slices as protectors of her offspring or the ethnic line.



**Fig. 11:** *Tiang Tuo* with Cloth Wrapping and Horns and Buffalo Tails as Leaning Places for *Tuo Kampung* and *Tangganai* or whose Seat will be Appointed.

Source: Authors, 2022-2023

## Conclusions

*Tiang Tuo* is a symbol of protection. The protector is not only a house (shelter) that shelters and protects from heat and rain (climatic conditions). However, *Tiang Tuo* also has the meaning of protecting in another sense. This *Tiang Tuo* is essentially not just an ornament or an accessory. *Tiang Tuo* is the center (center point) of a house, as the epicenter of indigenous people's lives. This can be seen in the position of the *Tiang Tuo*, which is always in the middle of the house. *Tiang tuo* is described as a mother (female) who protects her children and offspring as a place to convey complaints (complaint).

*Tiang Tuo* is a mother (female) who, in superiority, through her authority, runs the wheels of life in the house. The reciprocal relationship of the mother who governs every life is reflected in the relationship between the *Tiang Tuo* and the Godang House, which constitutes of a relationship that refers to latent aspects. This can also be seen from the treatment given by the Sentajo people to the *Tiang Tuo*, as well as what the *Tiang Tuo* symbolizes about what the Sentajo people expect and want for its existence.

*Tiang Tuo*, as a manifest, represents female as life preservers. To navigate life, it takes the characteristics of a strong, healthy female (guarding, protecting, and caring for), which are denotatively depicted in the symbolism of the *Tiang Tuo*. Female's authority in life and female's supremacy in maintaining the continuity of life are important lessons symbolized in *Tiang Tuo*. This important lesson is an important reference for the uniqueness and superiority of the meaning of an object in a building in the form of a *Tiang Tuo*.

The physical spatial setting of each traditional ritual at Rumah Godang presents the connotation of female having a secondary/inferior role which is strengthened by their position in the back area, which is oriented towards domestic activities (giving birth, cooking, raising children, and so on) and affirms that men have a primary role/superior known in the perspective of Malay culture and civilization. While the consideration of the empirical physical existence of the *tiang tuo*, which has a central position as well as being the epicenter of ritual activities at the Godang house, semantically implies the existence of a powerful position of female denotatively culturally in protecting/maintaining the lineage.

However, it is necessary to study further the existence of the origin or genealogy of this *Tiang Tuo*. The similarity in the mention of terms, both from the elements of the building, the name of the building, as well as other parts of the building that exist in the scope of Malay society and across cultures, needs to be further studied. The genealogy of Austronesian vernacular buildings or houses needs to be continuously looked at so that this diversity becomes knowledge that can be passed on to the next generation. In addition, the genealogical study is one of the efforts in building preservation.

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