
Case Study 2 — Indonesia

Identity in Diversity within Unity

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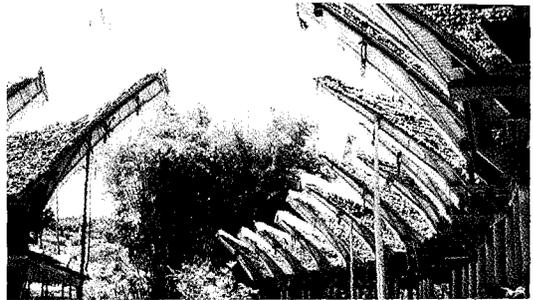
Discussions concerning the identity of Indonesian culture have often been held. But more often than not these discussions merely end in the general hope or wish to be able to discriminate as to whether a given work has an Indonesian identity, and sometimes end up agonising over whether or not a given person's work has an Indonesian identity.

Until now, the question of identity of particular cultural areas, such as Bali, Solo, Toraja, Batak and so forth, met with deceptively clear answers. But for larger cultural areas for example Java (which consists of various sub-cultures such as Madura, East Java, Solo, Yogya, Pasundan, Betawi, Banten and others) it is more confusing. Solo could represent Java, but perhaps Banten or Madura could not. This situation arises because identity is considered to be a mere product of creativity and is not seen in the light of the total process.

This paper does not attempt to explain the theory of identity, but the concept of identity as it will be dealt with in this paper must be defined within its limitations — that is identity as a set of values and knowledge which concerns the understanding of.

- a. Unity in plurality and appellation.
- b. Uniformity in the process of change and development.
- c. Self-integrity within uniformity and collectively as such requires codification in the process of social interaction. Furthermore identity serves as a guideline for the allocation of the use of resources within a certain environment.

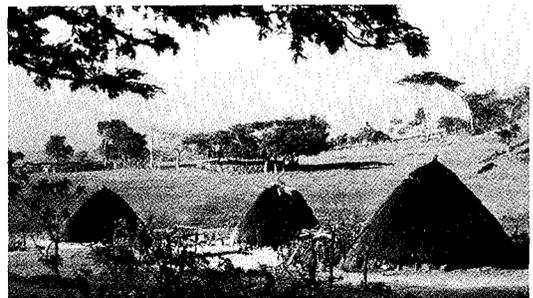
This paper is an attempt to describe the identity of a traditional culture (Bali) and is not intended to point out an Indonesian identity, particularly in architecture. Rather it is only an effort to analyse the identity of a nation that is pluralistic and complex, that contains various different sub-cultures, levels of civilisation, religious and historical backgrounds.



Toraja Graneries — Sulawesi



Museum in Padang — Minangkabau traditional architecture.



Houses in Central Timor

A set of identities within traditional societies

A group of people within a traditional society normally possess a basic philosophy of life which is affirmed by a set of village laws. These laws outline the general pattern of the people's life, especially in defining the relationship between human beings and God, between human beings and nature, and between human beings and their fellow human beings.

These specifications require a set of attributes which help to create identities within society, identities that are formed and accepted by the people themselves. A definite set of identities will help to form a well-knit community. A well-knit community serves as the basis of great vitality which is required to give birth to the creativity of its people, which in turn throws light upon all aspects of life.

I. Ketut Loji is a cheerful farmer from a small village in Southern Bali. He is the fourth child of his parent, he has no caste and possibly has a guest room for visiting friends.

All these one learns from his name whence a part of his identity is understood, as well as the categorial system within the social and family structure. Even I Ketut Loji's simple dwelling has a set of identities. The proportions of a house are founded upon the basic measurements of its owner with three elements within these measurements. The physical borderly measurements, the social standing, and the life aspiration of its owner. Thus also proportion, location, and the type of front entrance, ornamentation, display characteristics which state the inhabitant's attitude and aspiration in life to the community, to the environment and to God whom they worship.

Thus also the layout of the dwelling, the organisation of space, the construction details, the building materials, point to an identity which is basic to social interaction with nature, and "interaction" with God.

In traditional architecture, a house is not merely a shelter, but a womb in which human beings grow and are educated. Thus in Balinese traditional architecture, a house should fulfil certain conditions, amongst others. It should represent a microcosm harmonious with the macrocosm, its orientation should be distinct — the hierarchy of its measurement exact, the use of its material appropriate, its correct ritual cycle observed and ultimately the dwelling should be declared to be a living being which must be respected and regularly maintained.

In order to understand the background of traditional Balinese architecture which possess the above mentioned set of created identities, we can, provisionally, analyse it along the following lines

Divine model of space

The ultimate aim in life in Hindu Bali religion is to reach Moksha, man as the micro cosmos blends into the macro cosmos in its ultimate perfection. For that aim the harmony of micro and macro cosmos has to be maintained at any time, place or condition. A house, a village, is an extension and a model of a human being, a divine model of macro.

Through tradition and religion, a set of teachings become precise manuals, guiding mankind into the right orientation.

Orientation

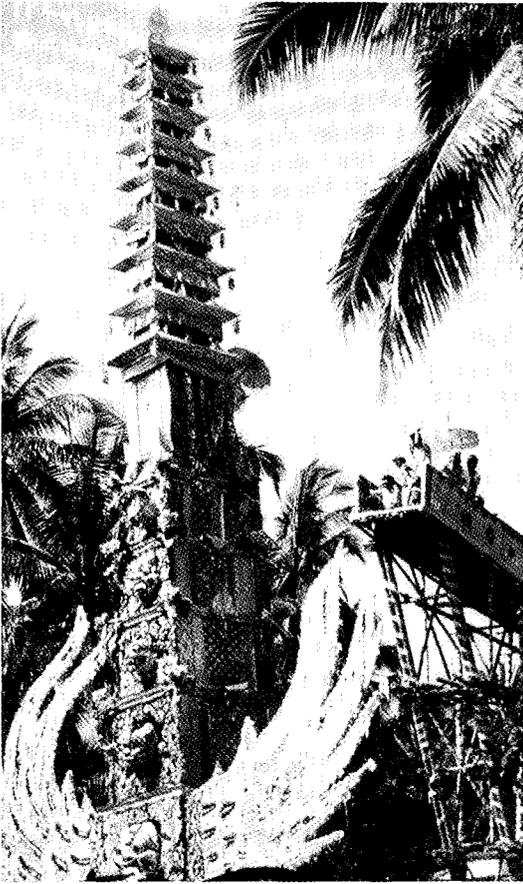
Orientation holds an important place in life. All things in life should have a distinct orientation, in direction as well as time. Letters, numbers, colours, objects, etc., all have distinct orientations.



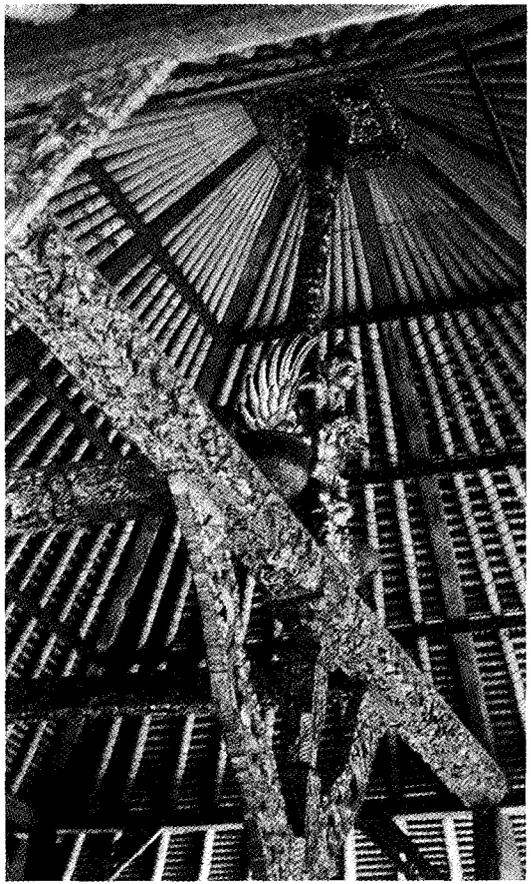
Balinese traditional architecture — Tampar Siring, Bali.



In harmony with nature — Besakih Temple, Bali



Cremation — Ubud, Bali



Interior of traditional building — Bali

Hierarchy of spaces

Humans, just like nature, consists of three divine parts, each following its own nature and characteristics such as the head, the body and the feet. Accordingly all things in nature can be distinguished abstractly as consisting of a head, body and feet. Environment, village, house, structure, pillar, all details consist of the three divine division and each bearing their own characteristics. Thus too, space structure in Bali is symbolically divided into three. The mountain as the head, the primary part which is holiest and where places of worship are built. The plains area is the body and indicates the middle world where old life activities occur. This is the place of dwelling area. And the sea is symbolised as the feet, the impure area. Graves are usually pointed towards the sea.

Aside from the mountain sea orientation, spatial hierarchy is also determined by the direction of the sunrise and sunset. Sunrise is supposed to be sacred, while sunset is supposed to be impure. When we look at the island of Bali with its mountain in the centre

of the island dividing the island into north and south region, and consider also the direction of the sun cycle, it will be noted that the Balinese spatial hierarchy of space is indicated as a fold diagram. The hierarchy of space is valid for all scales, rooms, houses, villages, environments, regions.

Proportion

The various methods of measurement in traditional architecture not only serve to produce pleasing dimensions and harmony, strength and beauty, a proportionate environment and structure, but it also serves as an educational tool and social process. The proportions of dwellings are determined by at least three aspects of the owner, his physical measurement, his caste and his personal aspirations.

Space structure of a village

The village is also divided into three. The temple as

head, the dwelling area as body and the graveyard as feet. The community space is stretched in the centre of the village. Even though there are a variety of village plans, yet in principle, a village is symbolised by a human figure with a head, body, and feet, albeit in different postures.

Maintenance of cycles by rituals

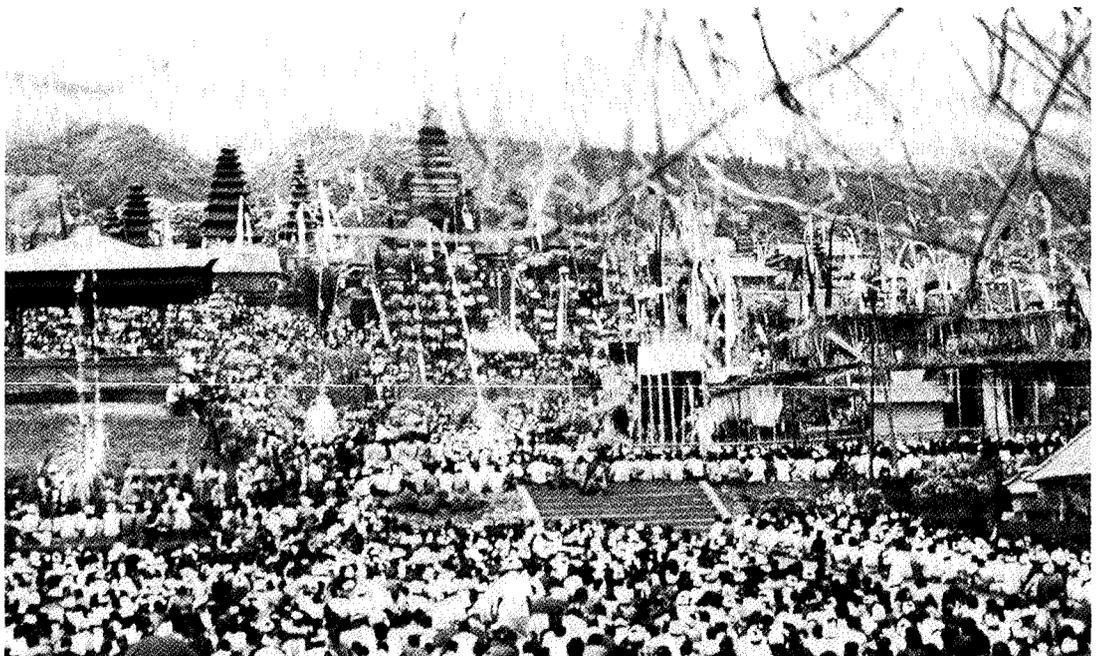
There are several degrees of the hierarchy of values and spaces. Each degree has its certain structure and cycles to be maintained through a set of rituals.



One hundred year cycle Eka Dasa Rudra Ceremony — Besakih Temple, Bali



Offering symbols — Eka Dasa Rudra Ceremony — Besakih, Bali



Eka Dasa Rudra Ceremony — Besakih Temple, Bali.



A dancer — Besakih, Bali

From the above examples of traditional architecture one can conclude that identity is a means to avoid disrupting the existing harmony. And it is also a means to create a harmonious dialogue with God, nature, and fellow humans.

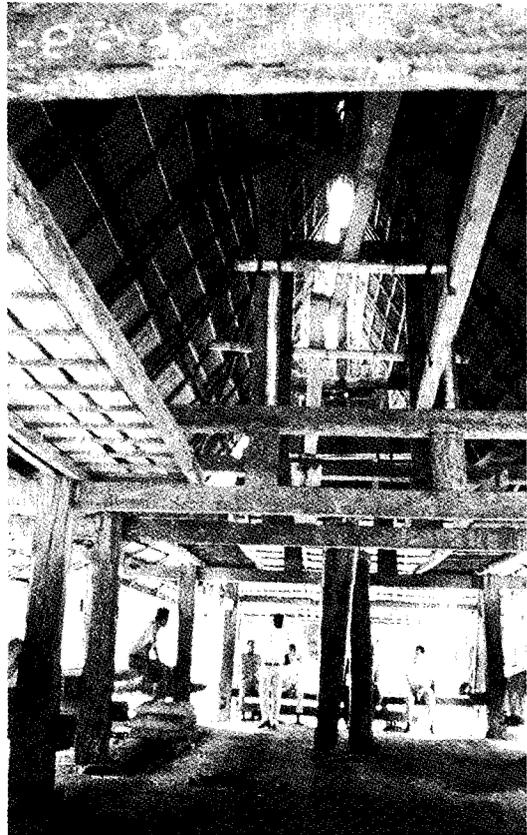
This set of means is an appropriate value system as well as knowledge which is formed and accepted communally. Identity as a means creates a well-knit community which exudes vitality, and as such possesses a creativity which can transform all aspects of life with its particular characteristics. Besides being a means to dialogue and interaction, identity comes into being as a creative statement of cultural life.

What happens if such a society comes under the pressure of fundamental, constant, and large scale of change?

Identity within a pluralistic sub-culture

Identity in traditional culture is actually more important in the light of the creative ability of a people to manifest their culture, rather than as the mere characteristics of cultural products which remain identical throughout the ages. In Bali cultural manifestations differ and vary from region to region, from period to period. There is a variety that is highly visible built on a common foundation. That variety is born as an expression of life which can be digested and absorbed creatively in order to remain part of itself.

It is interesting to see that there is a common thread that binds the region of Nusa Tenggara together, a region which consists of a chain of islands to the East of Java. Despite the fact that various different influences have come to divide the region, a certain cultural unity can still be felt. In its manifestations the region's architecture displays many different

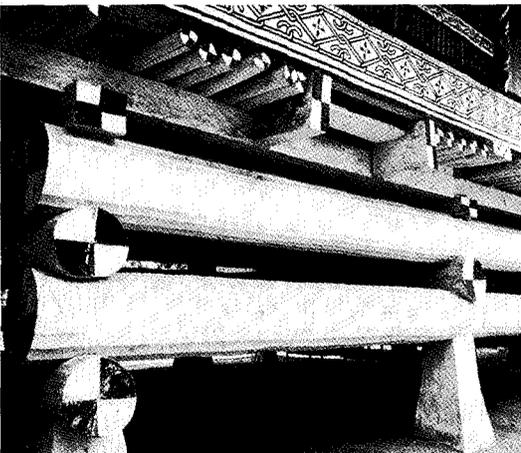
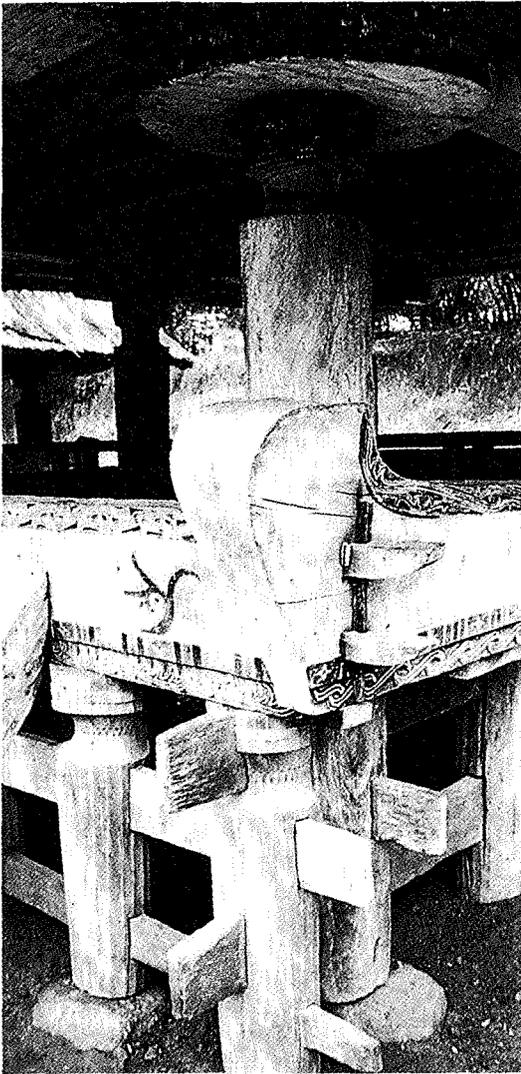


Interior of Public Hall — Ternate

themes, but its unity is underlined by concepts held in common such as similar 'divine models', orientation, hierarchy of space, etc.

In Sumbanese architecture we can see a simplicity in the expression of hierarchy of spaces. The ancestral home consists of three levels, the highest being for worship, the middle for dwelling, the lowest for safeguarding livestock. Thus buildings whose sole purpose is as a place of worship consist only of the higher level, and for those houses which do not contain a place of worship, (e.g. temporary dwellings) no higher level is built. In other houses the forms of the divine model undergo various modifications. The village central court can be oval, square, or rectangular. The similarities of such patterns are still clearly to be seen from island to island, or from area to area. This is true despite the fact that the manifestation of building forms vary from island to island.

Before the onslaught of 'modern progress', the influences of foreign religions and colonial government still allowed for a measured process of absorption. But with the acceleration of progress there no longer exists the means, the time, nor the ability to



Details — Batak house, Sumatra

digest it. The population explosion brought with it a more dynamic pattern of migration. At the same time resources and employment are becoming limited. Another aspect of the situation is the fact that the rapid and vast development of knowledge has in fact left the majority of the population far behind in its wake, and with a completely uneven distribution of knowledge. These conditions make possible various forms of manipulation which becomes less and less clear despite the fact that more and more is at stake.

The world is becoming confused and ill to such an extent that the identities of people in their own social groups are transformed into empty forms which they attempt to maintain. Identity changes from being a means to being a goal of dreams. It drifts but does not make its position clear, it speaks but does not act. It is more personal, individual, there is no longer any dialogue.

Territorial boundaries become unclear, the microcosm is broken up and becomes smaller and more densely packed. This is caused by the overlapping of traditional territorial boundaries with administrative borders, road patterns which divide traditional sacred space (instead of encircling it), economic traffic patterns which become more dominant, pluralistic structures within societies consisting of numerous differing sets of identities.

Orientation also becomes less distinct in terms of direction, time and procedure. Thus too the hierarchy of spaces which formerly was based upon spiritual values shifts to a hierarchy based upon materialistic values (wealth and power). The sense of community which exists under these conditions comes under the added pressure of a population increase further complicated by greater unemployment and backwardness — along with the tendency to social inequity leading to the establishment of a small elite whose knowledge and material means far exceeds that of the masses, and whose presence amongst the ever-poorer majority becomes more and more mysterious.

Such a situation makes it impossible for the people to remain sensitive to the fundamental elements of identity. The individual aspect becomes more dominant along with the idea of identity as a label or a slogan. That is why what is considered to be the symbols of identity in architecture are merely roof forms and details of ornamentation which create a sensation of nostalgia.

Identity in diversity within unity

The Indonesian archipelago consists of thirteen thousand islands and around three hundred distinct

ethnic groups. Needless to say cultural boundaries do not coincide with administrative borders.

As is the case with the Nusa Tenggara chain of islands, Indonesia, which is an archipelago between two continents and between two oceans, has a “uniformity” and unity of culture despite the varying characteristics of its many parts. Within its diversity its many parts are tied together. Understandably enough, these ties point to the uniformity of these diverse sub-cultures. But on the other hand if this current of uniformity becomes too strong, it is only natural that a counter-current appears moving in the direction of diversity. It is because of this that the foundation of the unity of Indonesia is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, the unified diversity and the diversified unity.

Interaction among these ethnic groups of sub-cultures, with their separate identities formed a national identity. It is clear that the cultural identity of the Indonesian people consists of the values and creative knowledge born of the interaction of its sub-cultures, and not merely the separate identities of each of its sub-cultures. This also is the case with the identity of Indonesian architecture.

During the colonial period this interaction of sub-cultures was cut short. On a regional scale the sub-cultural interaction was broken and replaced by the centralisation of *kraton* (palace) culture which was closely guarded by the colonial government.

Architecture during this period was influenced by various things:

- Colonial fortresses (Jakarta old town, Ujung Pandang).
- The central setting of a city and its social-psychological influence. A manipulation of traditional pattern adapted without demur by all cities.
- Colonial house which was gradually changed to “*landhuis*”.
- Large scale buildings designed by Dutch architects who were actually trying to show a European architecture, but some were trying to adapt traditional forms of local architecture.
- Churches, a completely alien structure.

During these times the colonial influence on local architecture was easily distinguished by the people as distinct from purely local architecture. It was not yet so complex and its intention were clear (power, intrigue, and adaption).

In the era of independence the patterns which were localised in the *kratons* under extraordinary control were suddenly unravelled, the ties were undone and at the same time outside influence in the form of foreign cultures and modernisation poured in with full force. During that period ‘National Culture’ as

the polar opposite of foreign culture became an issue, whilst the local sub-cultures were hemmed in by the currents of an incomprehensible rush of modernisation.

The attempt to create a unity of culture in Indonesia can be gauged from the Youth Vow of Allegiance (*Sumpah Pemuda*) 1928 which claims as its ideal “One Land, One People, One Language”. This vow gives a frame of unity to diversity. The birth of *PANCASILA*¹, the five philosophical basis of the state, as the basis of the nation have created a solid and complete foundation for national identity. It goes without saying that time is needed in order to make *PANCASILA* grow into the vitalised spirit which can give birth to creations commonly accepted as the new identity of Indonesia. A creation that might be new, yet possessed of the full and determined force of a unified culture. It is more than the fruit of interaction, among the identities of sub-cultures. It is both a dialogue of the heterogenous development of the living world, and the tangible expression of love that Man bears for his Creator, nature and all fellow beings. And the identity of Indonesian architecture should be based on these same values.

Footnotes

- ¹ *PANCASILA* is the philosophical basis of the Indonesian State meaning five principles. It consists of five inseparable and mutually qualifying principles which are:
- 1st Sila : belief in the one supreme God
 - 2nd Sila : just and civilised humanity
 - 3rd Sila : the unity of Indonesia
 - 4th Sila : democracy led by the wisdom of deliberations among representatives
 - 5th Sila : social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia

All photographs courtesy of Robi Sularto Sastrowardoyo