

The *Geni* tradition as the center of the shelter for Plateau settlements

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ABSTRACT

Theories of fire and architecture have been widely stated according to studies conducted in regions with four seasons. Fire is believed to be the beginning of architecture and the center of protection for humans. Humans living in regions with four seasons and those living in regions with two seasons have different characters. The difference in climate will lead to the different treatments of humans towards the fire. The present study seeks to reveal the meaning of fire in *Geni* (fire) tradition held in tropical areas of the plateau. A qualitative method using in-depth description strategies was applied. The object of the study is the Dieng plateau of Indonesia. The results of the study indicate that the *Geni* tradition plays a role as the center of the shelter instead of the center of protection. The results strengthen the theory that fire is closely related to architecture but it has a different role in regions with four seasons.

Key words : *Geni, Qualitative, Shelter, Dieng, Architecture*

Introduction

The phenomena of the uses of fire in all aspects of life have been interesting since fire belongs to one of the elements which form life. The uses of fire from since its invention until the information technology era have developed so rapidly that fire is considered to exert a great influence on civilization. This also applies to the field of architecture. Civilization has many meanings related to human societies. The term is often used to refer to a complex society: characterized by practices in agriculture, masterpiece, and settlement; comparable to other cultures; as well as a complex division of labor based on the social hierarchy. Civilization includes all forms of good development, such as that of materials, science, art, and social in a society (Inrevolzon, 2013).

The phenomenon of how fire controlled human life, particularly that related to human settlement, is

interesting to examine. At present, occupants of traditional houses in mountainous areas depend very much on fire to cope with climate, to cook, as well as, to live their life. The fire has a deep meaning in civilization (architecture) in influencing human life. It is highly needed for the continuity of human life in spite of its consequences it may lead to. It can be either a human friend or a foe. The fire that can be controlled can help humans meet their needs, while fire that cannot be controlled can cause damage.

The connection between fire and architecture initiated the emergence of several theories: Gottfried's theory of the four elements of architecture (Semper, 1851), Simon Unwin's theory which states that fire serves as the center of socio-cultural activities and the social identity (Unwin, 1997), and Crowe's theory which finds out that fire influences the complexity of human civilization (Crowe, 1997). Such theories were based on the results of the research

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conducted in regions with four seasons. The cold climate in the regions can kill humans, and therefore fire is used as protection. Meanwhile, the cold climate in regions with two seasons (tropical regions) will not cause humans to die but disrupt human activities. When feeling cold, humans will shiver and therefore this condition will hamper their activities. In regions with two seasons, fire provides a focal point for shelters. It supports the function of architecture as a shelter.

The shelter serves as the main function of architecture and the element of fire is added to realize perfection as a shelter. Some studies mention that fire becomes an element that creates comfort for the occupants of the architecture (Vitruvius, 1960). The phenomenon of fire which realizes the perfection in the shelter is seen both in the past and at present. The fire had a dominant role in the past, but the domination tends to decrease at present due to the change of era.

From the view of language, the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language mentions that *naung* or *bernaung* (shelter) means 'under something'. Josef Prijotomo states that to shelter is to take shelter beneath the shade trees. *Tiyang sumusup ing griya saged kaupamekakan ngaub in sangandhaping kajeng ageng* (those who creep into a building are analogized as those who take shelter beneath the shade trees). Taking shelter does not mean protecting from nature, but attempting to create balance in nature. Humans require shelters to ensure that their activities can run smoothly. The required shelters mean houses (Prijotomo, 2018).

The main elements that help human activities run smoothly are ventilation and lighting (Ashadi and Nelfiyanthi, 2015). The light source can be used for the lighting. Sunlight presents as the light source from morning to evening, while another light source except sunlight is needed at night. In the primordial era in which electricity did not exist, the fire was used for lighting. At that time, fire functioned as a light source (Yakub, 2015).

In addition to lighting, comfortable ventilation in spaces where activities are done also makes human activities run smoothly (Pramadya, 2015). Indonesia as a tropical country with a humid climate has two regions with different climates. Lowland areas tend to have a hot climate, while highland areas tend to have a cold climate. Indonesia is a country with two seasons, unlike other countries which have four seasons. In four-season regions, humans have to sur-

vive from extreme cold conditions (Havita, 2018). Meanwhile, in two-season regions, humans do not need protection towards extreme conditions. In regions with too hot/cold climate, ventilation should be adjusted so that humans can do their activities well. In lowland areas, an air conditioner is required to make the occupants of the house feel comfortable. Meanwhile, in highland areas, a heater is needed to make the occupants of the house feel comfortable, as well as to make the ventilation fit to human body condition. Fire presents as the element which provides warmth to the population of the highland areas. It contributes to their comfort by giving warmth (Hematang *et al.*, 2014).

Humans live and do their activities at their house. The house will be occupied by humans as long as they have succeeding generations. However, the house will not exist all the time. The fragility of materials in residential construction affects the durability of residential buildings. The conservation techniques of the building materials have been a concern for many experts in the field of construction. The fact that local houses are able to create comfort for the occupants attracts the attention of many experts. Local houses in Indonesia are constructed from wood. Fire is believed as a means of conserving building materials of wooden houses (Prijotomo, 2018).

Human activities lie not only on functional aspects but also on social and symbolic aspects which complete human life. Humans as social creatures cannot live without others. Humans will always interact with each other when doing their activities. The relationship between humans is known as a horizontal relationship. In performing the horizontal relationship, humans living in tropical areas with humid climate often interact with each other (have a chat). Such activity is called *endhong-endhongan* (Yunus, 2017). Some regions in which the tradition is preserved include Temanggung and Wonosobo. *Endhong* is a tradition of visiting relatives and neighbors in one village, between villages, or between sub-districts to have a chat (*remponan*) while smoking or sharing cigarettes or hand-rolled cigarettes (Sunaryo, 2013).

The symbolic aspect also involves the use of fire as a medium to connect humans with their Creator. In settlements located in highland areas, the God of Fire is respected. Offerings are placed near a firebox. In addition, fire is also used as a medium to burn incense in a traditional ceremony. Ceremonies both

of birth and of death are held near the firebox. The respect on fire, thus, indicates that fire presents as the embodiment of symbolism for the societies of highland areas (Pancawati *et al.*, 2017).

Materials and Methods

The present study applied a qualitative approach using such strategies as observation and interview. It was conducted in Karangtengah village located around Dieng, Central Java, Indonesia. The Dieng plateau areas include several mountainous areas such as Mount Prau (2,565 m a.s.l.), Mount Pakuwaja (2,395 m a.s.l.), Mount Bismo (2,200 m a.s.l.), and Mount Pangonan (2,500 m a.s.l.). In Karangtengah village, the fire has a vital role both indoor (firebox/ kitchen/ *bagenen/pagenen*) and outdoor. At outdoor, fire is often started at 5 pm and 9 pm. However, at the fireplace, fire is lit in the morning, in the evening, and even in the afternoon, especially in cold climate (when *bun upas*, 'poisonous dew or bloom', occurs with an air temperature of reaching minus 10 °C). Karangtengah village of Batur sub district of Banjarnegara regency has an elevation of 2,081 m a.s.l and a distance of 30 km from Wonosobo regency.

Results and Discussion

The Outdoor *Geni* Tradition

The societies living in the plateau hold both indoor and outdoor *Geni* tradition. The outdoor *Geni* tradition is held at empty spaces in the edges of roads or t-junctions, as well as in spacious courtyards when the weather is bright for either intended or unintended purposes. The time when the tradition is held is not certain; it can be in the morning, in the evening, or at night according to needs and intention of the societies, even it is unplanned. The time duration is also not certain; it can last for 15 minutes or even some hours. The tradition aims at keeping warm, having a chat, discussing religious activities, and creating a warm atmosphere when taking part in the village activities. The *Geni* tradition can be unplanned when societies go out, meet others, and have a chat. Only males, both youth and elderly, hold outdoor *Geni* tradition. The fire is lit using fuels found in surrounding environments like flammable wastes such as plastics, papers, old tires, and others in addition to wooden branches and dry

leaves. The spatial patterns constructed due to the presence of fire are in accordance with the history of the fire usages and the belief that fire is the embryo of architecture. It is seen from the fact that the *Geni* tradition is held in courtyards. The courtyards are believed to be the center in which many buildings were established in its surrounding areas (Hermanto, 2012). The grouping of the establishment of the buildings is also believed to be based on the number of fireplaces. Fire serves as the center of the establishment of areas (Jones, 1971).



Fig. 1. The trace of outdoor *Geni* tradition held in Karangtengah village

(Source: Author)

The Indoor *Geni* tradition

The shapes of Dieng buildings vary if seen from the wall materials. Most houses have plaster walls, some others have wooden walls, and few houses have woven bamboo walls. All of the houses have various fireboxes. Most houses have zinc roofing. Zinc is used as the roofing considering that zinc can conduct heat so that the houses can be warmer.



Fig. 2. Local houses in Karangtengah village

(Source: Author)

In addition to outdoor, *Geni* tradition is held indoor by all occupants of the houses from children to adults both females and males. It is regularly carried out in the morning, in the evening, and at night and often involves the participation of neighbors or relatives, even guests who are visiting. They are invited to come to the kitchen and take part in the tradition. At certain times, indoor *Geni* tradition is done for holding family or Neighborhood manager meetings in addition to chatting, boiling water, drinking tea or coffee, sitting down, smoking, and babysitting. Societies can talk about their child schools, attitudes, family celebration, the implementation of activities in the village, as well as politics, legislative and presidential elections. The supporting elements of the *Geni* tradition are a firebox, a kettle, and short-sized stools. Some houses have short-sized tables.



Fig. 3. The indoor *Geni* tradition
(Source: Author)

The *Geni* tradition is often performed in the kitchen using an irremovable firebox. However, *anglo*, a removable firebox, is used in some houses. The firebox can be made of stones, concrete cement, ceramics, or irons. The number of holes varies, ranging from one hole, two holes, to four holes, according to the number of the occupants. The holes are believed to influence the social conditions of the building owner. The more the number of the fireboxes or the holes is, the higher the level of social conditions of the building owners will be (Friesen, 2007).

The *Geni* Tradition in Architecture

The position of the kitchen in the house is different.



Fig 4. The fireplaces in Karangtengah Village (Source: Author)

Most kitchens are located at the back of the house considering that they are dirty parts of the house which are not allowed to be seen by those who are not known well. The size of the kitchens also varies. Most houses of high-level societies have a kitchen of which size is larger than other parts of the house. The main equipment in the kitchen includes a firebox and *dingklik* (short-sized stools). Some houses are equipped with *jengkok* (short-sized tables) and *anjab* (a cupboard). The elements existing in the kitchen as a means of *Geni* activities serve as interior elements in a building which exert an influence on the building circulation. The circulation will provide comfort for the occupants to do their activities. The



Fig. 5. The relationship of the fireplaces among houses
(Source: Author)

relationship between a kitchen of a house to another kitchen in another house is in accordance with the kin relationship. The kitchens are connected by the back side doors. The doors make the relationship closer. Most of the doors face each other. The closer circulation gives comfort to the occupants to interact with their neighbors, most of which still have the kin relationship. The ease in the circulation supports the comfort of the occupants. The comfort results from the presence of a firebox in the kitchen which functions as a place to gather with relatives easily.

The *Geni* tradition is held by the societies both indoor and outdoor. The outdoor activities are performed when the climate conditions are acceptable for humans. At certain conditions, the climate is considered unacceptable if it is too extreme to cause death. In regards to such conditions, the firebox for the plateau societies in Indonesia functions to provide warmth and comfort. Such functions do not involve protection from nature since in tropical areas nature has been a friend of humans (Maria et al, 2014). The function of providing comfort is the function of shelters. In architecture, a shelter can be called a guard in terms of not only warmth but also building circulation.

Conclusion

The *Geni* tradition attempts to provide comfort in sides of both social and architecture. In the side of social, societies can tighten the kinship and the neighborhood. Meanwhile, in the side of architecture, the comfort of the circulation is created both intra- and inter-houses. In addition, the rooms in the house can be comfortable due to the warmth. The *Geni* tradition has become an element which affects the warmth. Social and architectural comforts resulted from the *Geni* tradition will make the house comfortable and appropriate for human needs. The tradition can be called the center of the shelter for the plateau societies.

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