

The Dynamics of Riau People in Using of “Selembayung” as a Malay Culture Preservation Strategy

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Abstract

This study purposes to evaluate the government efforts in dealing with the dynamics of “selembayung” use through social activities to preserve “selembayung” as the architectural symbol of Riau Malay. The evaluation includes exploring the efforts and social activities as well as how far the result and the continuation are. This research applies qualitative approach in analyzing “selembayung” as the strategy to preserve Riau Malay culture. Based on this approach, the writer conducted rooted interview and observation to each unit of analysis in order to find out accurate data which meet with research’s plot. The research finding shows that “selembayung” as Riau Malay architecture, can be preserved if the society support it, but with the dynamism of multi ethnical Riau society, the government gives freedom to modify it as long as it is appropriate with the philosophy values. The culture and architecture experts in Riau can give explanation concerned the concept and the meaning of “selembayung”, and refuse the application of “selembayung” inappropriately. It is since going to lose on both sides, either the meaning of “selembayung” itself and the modern building which applicates “selembayung” on it. They also emphasize that “selembayung” is only one small part of a whole Malay buildings which are also various including the shape of Limas house, Lontioik, and Lipat Kajang. The government is expected to be more open and accomodative toward other buildings.

Keywords: Dynamics; Selembayung; Strategy identity; Malay culture

Introduction

Social culture phenmona, just like other empirical matters, always run into changing. It can be told that the changing itself stays still so the existence of sosiocultural phenomena in everywhere can be dynamic. The changing and dynamics are caused by both external factors like outside strength, and internal factor as unavoidable changing [1]. The dynamics itself can emerge along with argumentations and conflicts about how to respond it [2]. The controversial dynamics now is progressing toward Riau people in responding “selembayung”. Building that is also called “Sulo Bayung” and “Tanduk Buang”, is planned to officially become the only architectural icon of Riau people’s Malay culture. The debate appears because of the planning, as a matter of fact, that the ornament which is located on both of point of tubers (perabung) at the building of “Belah Bubung” and “Rumah Lontik” that on the bottom is sometimes placed additional ornaments like unsheathed spears connecting the both of tubers’ points is not the only building which characterizes the Malay Culture in Riau [3]. “Selembayung” is considered as the most representatives for the Malayness of Riau people since it has several meanings that derive from Riau Malay philosophy and values. Those meanings are as (1) *tajuk rumah*; (2) *pekasih rumah* (harmony); (3) *pasak atap* (self awareness); (4) *tangga dewa* (God’s stepladder); (5) *rumah berada*; (6) *tuah rumah*; (7) the symbol of mighty and authority of the owner; (8) “selembayung” carving motives (flowers and leaves) symbolize embodiment, self awareness and self-custom, continuation of descendant and also the harmony in family life [3]. Meanings and functions above give “selembayung” first place in cultural activities of its admirers [4,5]. It strengthens O’Neil’s idea concerning about architecture as one of the significant reflections of culture in supporting ethos and validity of a culture. According to previous research, nevertheless, [6,7] the supports toward “selembayung” in the assumption context above are not maximum yet and even, resulting emergence of oppositional society responses though the government keeps in efforts and strategies to preserve it.

Many defense efforts and cultural revitalization have been done so far like annual events, for instance cultural festival, science academic activities like seminar and many other social activities raise pro-contra and problems. The first one raises in the process of “selembayung” recognition itself as the characteristic or shared symbol, or specifically as (the only one) the basic housing architecture of Riau people. The second one is the pro-contra toward the government efforts to legalize society mobilization through local regulation. Both of these problems become the main topic of this study that are explained by gaining general society opinions that are from various backgrounds throughout rooted interviews.

Methods of the Research

This research applies qualitative approach. Data collection techniques are observation and depth interview toward cultural or public figures, civil services, academics, the people in the management of cultural institution and social observers. Furthermore, the interview is conducted toward some local people in Pekanbaru, Kampar and Siak Sri Indrapura Regency. Secondary data collection is conducted by collecting various documents either from government official instances and related institutions including official documents, written documents, scientific papers, etc.

Moreover, the data are analyzed in three phases; firstly, reducing and grouping data according to the research problems; secondly, systematic data arrangement which are grouped into types and patterns. Further, the data are arranged into charts or narration, so they form meaningful information that meets with research problems. Thirdly, the last step in this analysis activity is conclusion and verification. After the first and the second phases, the next phase is makings conclusion.

Finding and analysis

The dynamics of selembayung as the malay cultural identity: “Selembayung as the cultural identity of Riau Malay people can be identified on how far people understand, accept and place it in their daily life. As part of social activity itself, “selembayung” changes the dynamics emerging not only in the cultural level, but also social,

spiritual and material one of the supporting society [8]. Along with that changing, through interview toward people from various levels, it is known that the understanding concerning about it is different from one person to another, from different time to another one. Mostly, people are divided into those who know and those who do not know about meaning of it. Those who know about the meaning are also divided into those who know the meaning physically and those who understand the meaning with its function.

Mostly to those who understand "selembayung" interpret it as a symbol which is believed to bring good fortune as explained in the introduction. Since this meaning is still believed by people, the government consider "selembayung" to be preserved as part of the richness of Malay culture. With a lot of efforts, the government keeps trying "selembayung" to become whole part of buildings, mainly the governmental buildings and suggesting to be used at the people's housing.

Generally, the government's intention is positively welcome by people. They support "selembayung" to be placed in the government's buildings. Also, they do not show objection if the Malay cultural architecture is combined with modern architecture. The blending of modern and traditional creates undoubtedly variation which enriches the cultural richness itself. That blending, according to people, is not going to change the meaning and the position of "selembayung" as their identity since interpretation and identification emerges on the user's thought, it does not only stick into the things or the cultural artifacts that it can be assured to frequently change with its environmental dynamics [1]. They are aware and accept cultural diversity as an effect of the changing and dynamization [9] including a confession that it is not only one kind, but also there are so many Kind of Riau Malay buildings like "Lontiok" house and "Limasan" that are also necessary to be preserved.

However, people who have open-minded point of views and their confession concerning about dynamism of "selembayung" are different from the narrow and closed ideas of elites and experts. Placing those symbols as public building ornaments like shophouses and government buildings, and making them as part of attraction for tourism are against Malay cultural nobled values. They exemplify a failure at Tourism Office building in which it shows misapplication of "selembayung". For them, there are certain parties who have rights to build the buildings which symbolize nobled Malay custom. Furthermore, these points of view consider that random combination and blending are not only going to be disadvantageous for the Malay architecture, but also the building itself. They call that as an architecture creativity stoning.

The points of view above become the main subjects of this scientific research concerning Malay culture in Riau generally. One example is the research that has been conducted by Wahyu Hidayat in 2011 concluding that most of the contemporary building designs apply Malay architecture styles, which are used in appropriate ways regarding to their philosophy. The ideas which bring contradiction appear since there are practical point of views from society and a very political point of views from the government [5].

This political point of view has become the government booster to mobilize society through movement and fundamental to frame local regulation as jurisdiction to arrange Riau public cultural activities. This idea itself unconsciously has sharpened argumentation mainly about "selembayung" that slow down the process of preservation on it.

Social activities as response and defense of Selembayung: Social activities has been held in order to raise and revitalize Malay architecture

as one of identities of Riau society Malay for any society elements (Riau Malay Customary Institution (Lembaga Adat Melayu Riau /LAMR)), Riau Arts Council (Dewan Kesenia Riau/DKR), Cultural and Social Research Center of Riau University (Pusat Penelitian Kebudayaan dan Kemasyarakatan Universitas Riau), Tennes Effendy Foundations (TEF), Riau Malay Social Communication Forum with fully support from the government. These activities have been done frequently along with echoing of Riau 2020 vision which is marking the raising of Malay culture in Riau. Several programs are considered successful and significant just like Malay Riau Customary Institution/LAMR did when this institution teams up publishing books concerning about Malay culture with Riau Tourism Office.

However, several interviews have been done toward several people and those seemly gains information limitation about activities that have been done by the government and the institutions above. People mention that there are many communities rooted directly who are able teaming up and participating voluntarily [10]. One of them is automotive community that probably can participate to bring forward tourism in Riau, including to promote "selembayung". Other ones more urgently suggest, related to the government's teamworking with civil professions/architects, to design various attachments of Malay architectural ornaments on the buildings. This teamworking possibly establishes harmony between architectural ornament as a Malay identity and how it is attached in the middle of modern buildings without sidelining its philosophical values by keeping on consideration about the values of appropriation and the modern architecture standards.

Team working with social community of Riau in creating social activities for "selembayung" can strengthen social relationship among people, individual relationship in that community, local people involvement and create good public services [10]. Regarding these advantages, the government really needs and listens to opened public voice that accepts the dynamics of "selembayung" in any development of its modification style. By maximizing local people's roles in keeping those social activities, the governments has given solution to the dynamics and cultural richness, and not let one lose for others. With that acceptance, homogenization is avoidable and cultural artifacts which keep forming and emerging are not easily lost.

What responses say, of course, is not absolute, but at least, by opinion polling and interview, it is known that appearing various ideas are factual and accurate to become the government's basis to arrange its policies ahead. Therefore, mobilization that has been done by the government and legitimized by local regulation t can be based on people's will and understanding, that can be extracted from each of their own ideas. Just in that way, "selembayung" runs its real function as Malay identity in Riau.

The policies and the local regulations within "Selembayung" dynamization: In the last few months, it has been rapidly widespread that on August 2017, the Governor Regulation is going to arrange all things related to Malay cultural heritage in Riau, including to set "selembayung" as Riau characteristic, and its recognized form explanations as verification toward differences that are being legalized. Previously, "selembayung" is legal protected by Riau Local Regulation No. 36 2001 which is legal protection of Riau 2020 vision. Regencies of Riau then arrange similar regulation. One example is which is mentioned in Pekanbaru vision and Siak Sri Indrapura Regency vision. Thus, the Governor Regulation which is going to be legalized becomes higher legal protection to other visions of regencies of Riau. Therefore, it is highly expected that team working ties up

synergically and be relevant one another in order to achieve Malay cultural vision from various establishment aspects in 2020.

Efforts to form higher legal protection with wider scope have been done by the government since there are overlapping and different points of view toward Malay culture that can detain the accomplishment of Riau Malay culture vision in 2020. They expect that legislative pressure from the government can unite points of view and accelerate target achievement that has been mentioned in Riau 2020 vision. However, strengthening a cultural identity (Malay) needs genealogy process in the past so it can be grouped and limited. Local regulation is created to make "selembayung" usage in every company or institution to be a compulsory which meets with those rules. Even, "selembayung" is planned to become one of requirements in the Building Permission Acts so that society must obey them. As the matter of fact, this effort is opposed by many social levels since it is considered to emphasize existed differences.

One of the institutions who is against this idea is LAMR. This institution believes and agrees toward what people mostly believe. To researchers, LAMR representatives explain that they, as the supervising institution for Malay culture in Riau, never demand concerning about clarification of "selembayung" local regulation as an identity. They emphasize that all Malay architectural ornaments have become social phenomena which are dominant and can be viewed though there are different ideas and uncertainty where or when they will be. They reaffirmed that, Malay architecture never become their priority since it is considered that it has been established. Nowday, they focus on the events or cultural aspects that have not been noticed by the government, such as custom community rights and local content.

An elite, that is former chief of Pekanbaru House of Representatives, Chaidir, gives different idea compared to other elites generally. He shared about the establishment process of Pekanbaru House of Representatives building which is one good example how well "selembayung" is built and combined with another building. He could not remember in detail the legal protection of the establishment whether it is the Major Regulation or local regulation, but he assured that the establishment went well without argumentation and objection from all involved parties. Attachment of the Malayness characteristic as part of the building is considered as it is should be. The involved parties, mainly the parliament members, only approved the main lines of the establishment and considered the using of "selembayung" already appropriate with Malay architectural standardization. Also, It still reflects Malay philosophy inside of it. When they witnessed the presentation of building combination formation, they all agreed and there was no more argumentation.

He also affirmed that there is no need for new regulation in the province level concerning about "selembayung". The first objectional reason is the points in the regulation itself. For him, the regulation that has explained technical matters about a building establishment is not too relevant to be cahrged into the governor's level. Another reason is that there is domination bias in the regulation itself. If "selembayung" is arranged by every local regulation, the characteristic and the difference still can become preserved richness. He thinks that uniformity for all regencies in Riau province doesn't make sense and lessen the richness of Riau culture itself. "Selembayung" with its basic values and elements still can be presented as Malay Riau identity and so does its varieties. The most important thing is that it is only one of characteristics among other builidings which represents Malay identity that is not singular and not necessary to be singularized.

It seems that the idea of LAMR dan several experts who requestion

the official policies to regulate "selembayung" in the local regulation can become the answer for various argumentation that comes up to the surface. The problem cannot be overcome only in uniformity matter and social acceptance which are legitimized by the formal government. It is also about how to return it to the user society and to place it into real activities in their daily life that must meet their mental and practical needs. This idea can become the first step in formulizing the effective way to face the dynamics and to preserve "selembayung" as well as to elevate the relevance in social life of modern Riau Malay.

Besides acceptance towards the dynamics, people and mainly the government cannot also and should not forget that "selembayung" is not the only Malay architectural characteristic, but there are more buildings which are closely related to the Malayness identity of the society. Those various identities appear since they have various factors influencing them which, at last, point to the individual domain and privacy of user society and those who own them. It is because the cultural identity is one's sense of belonging to culture and certain ethnic so that identity must be possessed and become part of the people's life [11].

Close relationship between cultural artifacts and its bearers is not only practical and functional, but also it involves emotional connection. Cultural identity is as emotional significance that we add into our sense of belonging or higher cultural affiliation. Moreover, identity is a product of membership of a person in a group [11]. Hence, the discussion concerning about "selembayung" cannot be co-optated only by the government and the executives themselves. The regulation arrangement from the government to the people which is top-down does not reflect the existed cultural relationship. For those matters, all decisions must balance and be netted from the society and be formulated by the government.

Closure

Summary

The dynamics emerging in the effort of preserving "selembayung" as Riau housing architectural symbols as strategy in preserving Malay culture is accepted in different ways by the government and the people. Meanwhile the government is trying to create various local regulations dan social activities as uniformity efforts, the people precisely open themselves widely to accept and develop the differences and the the dynamics. Mostly, the people regret the government efforts since all things that become Malay identity characteristics should be more dynamic in the level of user society so that uniformity and exclusion do not effectively work. The uniformity itself will lessen the richness of Riau Malay culture [12].

Suggestion

Based on the factual conditions that have benn found out in the field, several suggestions can be formulated toward parties who involve in the efforts of preserving "selembayung". Firstly, the government needs to review toward the plan to create the governor regulation about Malay architecture relating to the explained considerations. Secondly, social organizations need to create an openly real program and can accept various possibilities and "selembayung" acceptance, and involve more communities in the society. Thirdly, it is necessary to conduct continuous research by academic related to the dynamics of "selembayung" along with the development of modern architecture in Riau. Forthly, the people must elevate their knowledge about Malay architecture and involve it in their daily activities.

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