

Cultural Acculturation and Symbolic Meaning in the Architecture of the *Bagas Godang* of the Huristak Kingdom, Padang Lawas

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the architecture of the Bagas Godang of the Huristak Kingdom in Padang Lawas, a cultural heritage with historical, social, and symbolic significance. Previous studies on Mandailing traditional architecture have primarily emphasized physical forms and typologies, while paying limited attention to the transformation of social functions and cultural acculturation embodied in the Huristak Bagas Godang. This study aims to analyze the evolution of its social functions, architectural characteristics, and cultural meanings. Employing a historical approach within a descriptive-analytical framework, the research applied heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Data were collected through field observations, interviews with traditional leaders, and a literature review. The findings indicate that Bagas Godang Huristak has transformed from a center of traditional authority into a cultural institution that remains relevant in contemporary society. Architecturally, the building reflects an acculturation of Mandailing and Malay traditions, evident in its structural system, roof form, spatial organization, and ornamental motifs. This study contributes to traditional architecture and heritage studies by demonstrating that Bagas Godang serves not only as an architectural artifact but also as a symbol of cultural identity, social continuity, and historical adaptation, underscoring its importance for preservation.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's local cultural heritage embodies a profound richness, reflected not only in its historical and cultural significance but also in the diverse forms of traditional architecture that articulate the worldview, social organization, and indigenous wisdom of the communities that sustain them. Traditional architecture constitutes an important source for understanding social life, both historically and in relation to contemporary realities. Nevertheless, local architectural heritage has often received insufficient scholarly and public attention, resulting in the symbolic, philosophical, and functional values embedded within these structures being inadequately understood within the context of modern development. This condition reveals a substantial gap between the richness of Indonesia's traditional architectural heritage and its utilization as a source of cultural knowledge and identity formation (Manurung, [2019](#)).

In North Sumatra, the Mandailing people preserve a significant architectural heritage known as *Bagas Godang*, which continues to exist in several communities today. Within the Mandailing socio-cultural system, *Bagas Godang* occupies a central and prestigious position as the principal traditional house. Etymologically, the term *bagas* means "house," while *godang* means "large," thus referring to a "large house." Architecturally, *Bagas Godang* functions not merely as the residence of the traditional ruler but also as the focal point of customary, political, and social activities. Its spatial organization, architectural form, and constituent elements embody the values of Mandailing society while accommodating the roles of various social groups—including the traditional ruler, respected elders (*namora natoras*), clan members (*kahanggi*), and the bride's kin group (*anak boru*)—within the prevailing customary system (Effendi et al., [2018](#)).

Within architectural studies, traditional buildings are understood not simply as physical artifacts but as manifestations of social norms, power relations, and the collective identity of the communities that create and sustain them. As the traditional house of the Mandailing people, *Bagas Godang* holds strong symbolic significance for the social order of Mandailing society (Effendi et al., [2018](#)). Its architectural characteristics, expressed through spatial configuration, decorative motifs, and building layout, reflect local wisdom and patterns of social interaction embedded

within the community. Every architectural component and spatial unit carries specific functions and meanings that are intrinsically linked to customary and cultural values. Consequently, *Bagas Godang* demonstrates not only the technical expertise of the Mandailing people but also their cultural values, customary institutions, and worldview as materialized through traditional architecture (Jambak et al., [2024](#)).

The Padang Lawas region preserves not only traces of Mandailing culture but also deeper historical layers associated with the Huristak Kingdom. Local traditions and historiographical narratives trace the origins of this kingdom to Sultan Iskandar Zulkarnain of the Land of Rum, who is traditionally associated with earlier political entities linked to the Kushan civilization in Northern India. These narratives further connect the lineage of the Huristak Kingdom with the emergence of political entities such as the Minanga Kingdom of Sriwijaya and the Pannai Kingdom in Padang Lawas, which subsequently became involved in wider regional political networks, including interactions with Majapahit in Java. Nevertheless, such genealogical accounts should primarily be regarded as expressions of local historical tradition and collective memory rather than as empirically established historical facts. Archaeological and historical evidence supporting these connections remains limited and therefore necessitates further critical investigation (Hasibuan & Sam, [2020](#)).

Despite its considerable historical significance, the Huristak Kingdom remains relatively unknown to the broader public and has received only limited scholarly attention. The existence of this polity, however, demonstrates that the Padang Lawas region has historically functioned as a nexus of diverse cultural influences and political powers. These long-term interactions contributed to shaping the socio-cultural structure of local communities. They left enduring material traces that can still be identified in traditional architectural forms such as *Bagas Godang*. Consequently, the architectural heritage of Huristak offers valuable insights into the historical processes of cultural encounter and adaptation in the region (Daulay et al., [2023](#)).

The relationship between Malay culture and the Huristak Kingdom can be understood through processes of political interaction, commercial exchange, and the spread of Islam, linking Padang Lawas with the eastern coastal regions of Sumatra. According to local historical traditions, the Huristak Kingdom was established in the sixteenth century by descendants of King Soduguron of the Batta Pannai Kingdom, prior to the Dutch colonial period. Over time, the kingdom developed a cultural character marked by the integration of Old Batak-Malay traditions and influences from Hindu-Buddhist Śaivite culture originating in Orissa, Northern India. Local narratives also recount that King Huristak II, Sutan Gadoe Mulia Tandang, extended his influence into parts of Riau following military victories against the Sultan of Siak. These political and territorial connections fostered increasingly intensive interactions with Malay society, thereby strengthening the influence of Malay culture within the social and cultural life of the Huristak Kingdom (Wahyuda et al., [2024](#)).

Malay cultural influence intensified with the spread of Islam into the Huristak region, as Malay identity during this period was closely associated with Islam, political authority, and aristocratic status in Eastern Sumatra. Consequently, numerous Malay architectural elements were incorporated into the *Bagas Godang* of Huristak, particularly in its architectural form, chromatic composition, ornamentation, and spatial organization. Despite its pronounced Malay character, the building continues to preserve essential Mandailing features, including its stilt-house structure, its function as a venue for customary deliberation, and its symbolic representation of royal authority within the Batak Mandailing customary system. The architecture of *Bagas Godang* Huristak may therefore be interpreted as the outcome of a prolonged process of cultural acculturation between the Mandailing Batak and Malay communities that unfolded over the kingdom's historical development (Imanuel, [2023](#)). Previous studies have generally focused on the typology and physical characteristics of Mandailing traditional architecture, while paying comparatively limited attention to the historical transformations, symbolic meanings, and processes of cultural acculturation embodied in *Bagas Godang* Huristak. This study seeks to address these limitations by examining *Bagas Godang* Huristak as a historical and cultural space that reflects interactions between Mandailing and Malay traditions, transformations in social functions, and the construction of local cultural identity.

A comprehensive understanding of traditional architecture is essential for interpreting the significance of *Bagas Godang* as an integral component of Mandailing cultural heritage. Traditional architecture should not be viewed merely as a remnant of past construction practices, but rather as an expression of ideas, social institutions, and the relationships among human communities, their environments, and their cosmological beliefs (Luthan, [2015](#)). Such an understanding positions traditional architecture as a dynamic cultural system that embodies both tangible and intangible dimensions

of community life. Accordingly, architectural heritage serves as an important medium through which historical continuity and cultural identity are maintained across generations.

Based on this perspective, the study of *Bagas Godang* should encompass architectural dimensions such as building form, spatial organization, material utilization, and the symbolic meanings embedded within its structural and decorative elements. This approach enables *Bagas Godang* to be understood not merely as a historical cultural artifact but also as a physical manifestation of the Mandailing people's values, social systems, and worldview. Examining these architectural characteristics also facilitates a deeper understanding of the reciprocal relationship between built form and socio-cultural context. Therefore, architectural analysis of *Bagas Godang* is crucial for revealing how cultural values and social structures are materialized and reproduced through traditional architectural forms.

METHOD

This study employs a historical method combined with a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the architecture of the *Bagas Godang* in Padang Lawas, exploring its cultural meanings and historical development. The researchers selected the historical method because it enables a comprehensive investigation of architectural heritage within its broader socio-historical context. The study follows four principal stages of historical inquiry: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Abbas, [2014](#)). Through these stages, the researchers seek to uncover not only the physical characteristics of *Bagas Godang* but also the cultural values and historical processes embedded within its architectural form.

During the heuristic stage, the researchers collected both primary and secondary historical sources relevant to the study. The researchers obtained primary data through direct field observations at the *Bagas Godang* of the Huristak Kingdom and through in-depth interviews with traditional authorities and local community members. The researchers conducted an in-depth interview with a single key informant, namely the traditional custodian of the Huristak Kingdom, because only a limited number of individuals possess comprehensive historical knowledge of the *Bagas Godang* and the kingdom's genealogy. The researchers purposively selected this informant because he serves as the community's principal guardian of customary traditions and historical records. To strengthen data credibility, the researchers triangulated interview findings with field observations, archival documents, previous scholarly studies, local manuscripts, and other written historical sources relating to the Huristak Kingdom and the architecture of *Bagas Godang*.

At the source criticism stage, the researchers assessed the authenticity, validity, and credibility of the collected materials. The researchers carried out external criticism to verify the authenticity and provenance of documentary sources. In contrast, internal criticism enabled them to evaluate the consistency, reliability, and accuracy of the information contained in those sources. This procedure allowed the researchers to identify and select historically credible sources for subsequent analysis. By systematically applying source criticism, the researchers minimized potential biases and strengthened the reliability of their historical reconstruction.

At the interpretation stage, the researchers analyzed and synthesized historical evidence derived from diverse sources to understand the cultural significance of the *Bagas Godang*. The researchers interpreted historical information about the Huristak Kingdom by relating it to the building's social functions and architectural characteristics. They examined architectural features such as building form, structural systems, roof typology, spatial organization, and ornamental elements. The researchers also interpreted symbolic meanings by drawing upon perspectives from architectural history and symbolic anthropology, particularly by connecting architectural elements with social status, traditional authority, cultural identity, and customary values within Mandailing society. This interpretative framework enabled the researchers to explain the relationship between architectural expression and the socio-cultural context in which it evolved.

At the historiographical stage, the researchers organized and presented the findings as a coherent historical narrative, accompanied by an analytical discussion. The researchers prepared the manuscript in accordance with APA Style, particularly regarding in-text citations and the reference list. This methodological framework allows the study to offer a comprehensive and critical understanding of the architecture of the Huristak Kingdom's *Bagas Godang* in Padang Lawas. The approach also integrates historical, architectural, and cultural perspectives to explain the significance of *Bagas Godang* as a manifestation of local cultural heritage.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of the Social Functions of *Bagas Godang* in Huristak Society

During its early phase, the *Bagas Godang* in Huristak society served as a central institution that integrated political, social, and cultural roles within a unified traditional power structure. The community used *Bagas Godang* not only as the king's residence but also as the seat of governance and a symbolic arena that legitimized authority grounded in customary law. The king exercised authority beyond formal administrative functions because community members collectively recognized and upheld traditional values and hereditary lineage as the basis of leadership (Jambak et al., [2024](#)). Community recognition of these customary principles enabled *Bagas Godang* to embody both political authority and cultural legitimacy within Huristak society's traditional social system.

Community leaders utilized *Bagas Godang* Huristak as the principal center for administering customary governance. They formulated important decisions concerning territorial management, inter-community relations, and the settlement of social disputes within this space. Traditional authorities also enforced customary law through deliberative processes involving the king and customary elders. These practices transformed *Bagas Godang* from a physical structure into a social institution that regulated and sustained collective life within the Huristak community (Oktavia et al., [2023](#)). Through these activities, community leaders maintained social order and ensured the continuity of customary traditions.

Within the cultural framework of the Mandailing Batak community, traditional leaders use *Bagas Godang* as an important means of legitimizing customary authority. The building visually represents the continuity of royal power transmitted across generations and reinforces the social hierarchy embedded within customary institutions. Community members strengthen this legitimacy by continuously recognizing and preserving deeply respected customary values. Consequently, *Bagas Godang* constitutes a tangible manifestation of a social system founded upon kinship, tradition, and collective cultural memory (Sudarwani & Priyoga, [2019](#)). Its architectural presence symbolizes not only authority but also the enduring relationship between leadership and customary values.

Max Weber's concept of traditional authority provides a useful theoretical framework for explaining this phenomenon. Weber argues that societies derive the legitimacy of traditional authority from customs and inherited traditions that communities continuously reproduce across generations (Silalahi, [2012](#)). In the context of the Huristak Kingdom, community members institutionalize traditional authority through *Bagas Godang* by utilizing its spatial arrangement, ceremonial functions, and architectural symbolism. They place the building at the center of customary deliberations, ritual ceremonies, and communal gatherings, thereby continually reaffirming the authority of traditional leaders. Through these practices, the community transforms *Bagas Godang* into more than an architectural structure; it becomes a symbolic representation of social order and political legitimacy within Mandailing society.

Residents of Pasir Lancat Lama Village, Huristak Subdistrict, Padang Lawas Regency, continue to maintain *Bagas Godang* as an active traditional institution within their local context. Community members regularly use this building as a social space for customary deliberations, ritual ceremonies, and various collective activities involving broad public participation (Ramadhan & Fitriah, [2025](#)). Contemporary communities have shifted the function of *Bagas Godang* from an exclusive center of formal political authority into a cultural institution that retains symbolic and social legitimacy. Through this transformation, local communities adapt traditional institutions to changing governance structures while preserving fundamental customary values. Luthan ([2015](#)) describes this continuity as a *living tradition*, in which communities continuously reinterpret and reproduce cultural practices to sustain their relevance across generations.

The historical development of *Bagas Godang* within Huristak society reflects an adaptive, ongoing process of institutional transformation. Although the building no longer functions as the formal center of political authority, community members continue to use it as a deliberative forum, a venue for social interaction, and a symbol of collective cultural identity. Local communities have successfully adapted this traditional institution to social change without abandoning its essential meanings. This adaptation demonstrates that traditional institutions remain dynamic rather than static. The enduring relevance of *Bagas Godang* highlights the resilience of customary institutions in contemporary society.

Customary Deliberation and Indigenous Conflict Resolution Practices

Residents of Pasir Lancat Lama Village continue to use *Bagas Godang* as a venue for customary deliberation. Community members regularly gather in this building to resolve various social problems, including land disputes, family conflicts, and violations of customary norms. Traditional leaders prioritize consensus-based decision-making processes, thereby reflecting a governance model rooted in local wisdom, collective participation, and customary legitimacy (Effendi et al., 2018). These deliberative mechanisms enable the community to preserve social harmony while maintaining the authority of customary institutions. The continued use of *Bagas Godang* for deliberation demonstrates the enduring relevance of indigenous conflict-resolution mechanisms in contemporary society.

Interviews with Aguslam Hasibuan (72 years old), a traditional leader from Pasir Lancat Lama Village, reveal that *Bagas Godang* continues to occupy a central position in the social life of the Huristak community. Community members use the building not only for customary deliberations and conflict resolution but also for contemporary socio-political activities, including general election processes. By accommodating these new activities, *Bagas Godang* illustrates the integration of traditional institutions with modern governance systems. Rather than becoming obsolete under the pressures of modernization, local communities have renegotiated the institutional role of *Bagas Godang* by incorporating administrative and political functions while preserving customary authority. The coexistence of customary and state-related functions demonstrates the structural flexibility of *Bagas Godang* and reinforces its social legitimacy within modern society.

Socio-Cultural Functions and Community Cohesion

Community members also utilize *Bagas Godang* Huristak as the principal center of social and cultural activities. Residents organize various customary ceremonies, including weddings and funeral rites, within this building as part of traditions passed down through generations. Through these rituals, community members attribute sacred meaning and customary legitimacy to ceremonial practices. They also use *Bagas Godang* for meetings, cultural performances, and other collective activities that strengthen social solidarity and communal cohesion. These diverse activities enable *Bagas Godang* to function as an integrative social space that unites different segments of society within a shared cultural framework (Sulistiawati, 2023).

Architectural Symbolism and the Representation of Traditional Authority

Although the Huristak Kingdom no longer exercises formal political authority within the contemporary governance system, local communities continue to recognize *Bagas Godang* as a powerful symbol of traditional authority. The building reflects both the historical prestige of the former kingdom and the social status associated with customary leadership. Community members preserve and respect traditional values and cultural authority through the continued recognition of *Bagas Godang* as a symbol of customary legitimacy. This symbolic dimension demonstrates that power may persist through cultural representations embedded in collective memory rather than through formal administrative structures alone (Silalahi, 2012). The enduring symbolism of *Bagas Godang* illustrates the capacity of traditional institutions to sustain cultural authority across changing historical contexts.

The experience of *Bagas Godang* Huristak demonstrates how traditional institutions can adapt to social transformation while preserving their fundamental values. Community members continue to maintain the building as a center of social interaction, a venue for transmitting customary traditions, and a symbol of cultural identity that strengthens social cohesion. Their continued engagement with *Bagas Godang* demonstrates the resilience of indigenous institutions in negotiating the challenges of modernization. This case also provides important insights into the dynamic relationship among tradition, cultural identity, and social change.

Architectural Characteristics of the Huristak Kingdom's *Bagas Godang*

The Architectural Form of *Bagas Godang*

The architectural form of *Bagas Godang* fundamentally reflects the traditional architectural character of the Mandailing Batak people, characterized by stilt-house structures, soaring roof forms, and a spatial organization imbued with social and cosmological meanings. Nevertheless, the *Bagas Godang* located in Pasir Lancat Lama Village exhibits notable morphological modifications resulting from sustained interactions with Malay culture. These transformations are

particularly evident in the roof configuration, which adopts a tiered pyramidal form with a gentler slope, contrasting markedly with the elevated and curved roof typology traditionally associated with Mandailing architecture (Giawa et al., 2019). The coexistence of indigenous and external architectural features indicates that the building has undergone cultural adaptation while preserving its essential Mandailing identity. Consequently, the architectural form of *Bagas Godang* Huristak represents a dynamic expression of cultural interaction within the historical context of Padang Lawas.

Koentjaraningrat's concept of cultural acculturation provides a useful analytical framework for interpreting these architectural transformations. According to this perspective, acculturation occurs when two or more cultural groups engage in sustained interaction and selectively adopt cultural elements without eliminating their respective core identities. Architectural forms frequently emerge through such long-term cultural encounters, resulting in new expressions that retain essential characteristics of the original tradition while incorporating external influences. In the case of *Bagas Godang* Huristak, Malay cultural influences did not replace the Mandailing architectural system; rather, local builders selectively integrated Malay elements into specific architectural components, including roof morphology, façade composition, color schemes, and ornamental motifs (Hamdi & Harahap, 2022). This selective integration demonstrates how local communities negotiated cultural change while maintaining the continuity of their indigenous architectural identity.

As shown in Figure 1, the front façade of *Bagas Godang* clearly illustrates this acculturative process through the combination of the traditional Mandailing stilt-house structure with a tiered pyramidal roof, an open veranda, and decorative features commonly associated with Malay architecture. Despite these external influences, the building retains several defining characteristics of Mandailing traditional architecture, particularly its elevated floor construction and customary spatial arrangement. The preservation of these features indicates that the community consciously maintained key elements of Mandailing identity while accommodating new architectural influences. Such architectural hybridity reflects a broader process of cultural negotiation that shaped the historical development of Huristak society. The resulting architectural form, therefore, embodies both cultural continuity and adaptive transformation.



Figure 1. Front View of the *Bagas Godang* House in Pasir Lancat Lama Village

Source: Personal Documentation, 2026.

The *Bagas Godang* in Pasir Lancat Lama Village, Huristak Subdistrict, exhibits architectural characteristics that differ considerably from those commonly found in other Mandailing regions. Traditionally, *Bagas Godang* refers to a large customary house occupied by a king or traditional leader and typically emphasizes Mandailing identity through its elevated platform, monumental roof, distinctive carved ornamentation, and socially meaningful spatial organization. The Huristak structure, however, demonstrates substantial Malay influence in both its architectural form and decorative components. These characteristics make the building a significant example of cultural acculturation in the evolution of traditional architecture in North Sumatra (Naufa et al., 2020). The building, therefore, offers valuable insights into the historical processes by which local communities integrated diverse cultural traditions into a coherent architectural expression.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the roof of *Bagas Godang* in Pasir Lancat Lama adopts a tiered pyramidal configuration that differs substantially from the classical Mandailing roof typology. The most prominent distinction appears in the overall roof profile. Conventional *Bagas Godang* structures generally feature elevated, curved roofs that create a monumental appearance while symbolizing the authority and prestige of their owners. By contrast, the Huristak *Bagas Godang* employs a gently sloping, tiered pyramidal roof reminiscent of traditional Malay houses found in coastal regions. The simplified ridge line and orderly arrangement of roof tiles further reinforce the argument that this structure does not fully conform to classical Mandailing architectural conventions but instead reflects adaptation to local environmental conditions and external cultural influences (Immanuel, [2023](#)).



Figure 2. Roof Form of the *Bagas Godang*

Source: Personal Documentation, 2026.

As shown in Figure 3, the typical *Bagas Godang* continues to preserve the fundamental characteristics of Mandailing traditional architecture, particularly its stilt-house construction, spatial organization, and symbolic elements associated with customary authority. A comparison between the Huristak *Bagas Godang* and the classical Mandailing model reveals that local communities selectively modified specific architectural features while retaining essential structural and symbolic components. This pattern suggests that architectural transformation in Huristak did not constitute a complete departure from Mandailing traditions. Instead, the community actively reinterpreted traditional architectural principles in response to changing socio-cultural circumstances. Such processes demonstrate the adaptive capacity of traditional architecture to accommodate external influences while preserving its cultural foundations.



Figure 3. Typical Form of the Mandailing *Bagas Godang*

Source: Personal Documentation, 2026.

The façade of *Bagas Godang* Huristak also reveals a strong Malay architectural influence. Classical *Bagas Godang* structures generally display geometric carvings and traditional Mandailing symbols on the front elevation, emphasizing customary identity and social status. In contrast, the *Bagas Godang* in Pasir Lancat Lama features wide, symmetrically arranged windows, brightly colored window frames, and pointed eave decorations, all commonly found in traditional Malay houses. The use of pastel colors, particularly light blue, yellow, and white, further reflects Malay aesthetic preferences that emphasize openness, brightness, and visual harmony (Luthan, [2015](#)). These façade elements demonstrate how local communities selectively integrated external cultural influences while preserving the essential identity of Mandailing architecture.

From a structural perspective, traditional *Bagas Godang* architecture typically employs large wooden pillars and a high underfloor space as both environmental adaptations and expressions of social prestige. The *Bagas Godang* in Pasir Lancat Lama retains its stilt-house configuration, yet it stands at a lower elevation than its classical counterparts. Builders have also widened the front staircase and incorporated modern ceramic tiles, thereby enhancing accessibility and residential comfort. These modifications indicate that local communities have adapted the building to contemporary functional needs while maintaining its traditional architectural framework (Jambak et al., [2024](#)). Such adaptations illustrate the dynamic relationship between tradition and modernity in the evolution of indigenous architecture.

The *Bagas Godang* of Pasir Lancat Lama, therefore, represents a transformed expression of Mandailing traditional architecture shaped by significant Malay cultural influences. This process of architectural fusion manifests in the roof configuration, façade composition, chromatic scheme, and structural system. Rather than preserving a static architectural tradition, local communities have continuously modified the building in response to changing social, cultural, and environmental circumstances. The existence of this house consequently demonstrates that traditional architecture evolves through ongoing processes of adaptation and cultural negotiation. These transformations underscore the capacity of indigenous architecture to accommodate external influences without abandoning its fundamental cultural identity.

Analysis of the Symbolic Meanings Embedded in the Stilt-House Form of *Bagas Godang*

Field observations, interviews with Aguslam Hasibuan as the traditional custodian of the Huristak Kingdom, and previous studies on Mandailing architecture and symbolism indicate that the architectural components and ornamentation of *Bagas Godang* constitute an integral part of the Huristak community's cultural system. Informants explained that several architectural features, including spatial organization, ornamental motifs, and the elevated stilt-house structure, symbolize social status, customary authority, and the continuity of traditional values within the community. Previous studies on Mandailing architecture similarly emphasize the symbolic dimensions embedded within traditional architectural forms. Consequently, these architectural elements perform not only technical and functional roles but also communicate cultural values, collective identities, and broader social transformations occurring within the community. Through these symbolic expressions, *Bagas Godang* functions as a cultural text that records and represents the historical trajectory and social experiences of the Huristak people.

Stilt-House Structure and Supporting Pillars

The stilt-house structure, supported by wooden pillars, is one of the most important architectural elements of *Bagas Godang*. These pillars perform structural functions while simultaneously conveying symbolic meanings associated with social organization and customary authority. Field observations and interviews with Aguslam Hasibuan revealed that community members interpret the pillars as representations of social order and traditional leadership. The informant explained that the arrangement and positioning of the pillars symbolize both the hierarchical organization of the community and the status of traditional rulers within the customary system. Previous studies on Mandailing traditional architecture have similarly demonstrated that the number, arrangement, and spatial positioning of pillars frequently correspond to social rank and prevailing cultural values (Pasaribu & Sinulingga, [2022](#)). The stilt-house structure, therefore, represents not merely a technical construction system but also a material expression of social hierarchy and customary institutions.

The *Bagas Godang* of Huristak continues to preserve its elevated stilt-house structure as a defining feature of traditional architectural identity. However, the platform height remains considerably lower than that of classic Mandailing examples. This modification reflects local efforts to accommodate practical needs and enhance residential

comfort. At the same time, the reduced height suggests a transformation in symbolic meaning, as the building increasingly prioritizes utilitarian considerations alongside traditional values. Such changes illustrate the influence of modernization and broader social transformations on indigenous architectural practices. The adaptation of the stilt-house structure thus reveals how local communities reinterpret traditional forms to address contemporary social realities.

Roof and Ridge Configuration

The roof constitutes the most visually dominant element in the architecture of *Bagas Godang*. Classical Mandailing *Bagas Godang* typically features a tall and curved roof with pronounced upward projections at both ends, creating a monumental appearance that symbolizes authority and social prestige. This expressive roof form also reinforces *Bagas Godang's position* as the center of political power and customary authority within Mandailing society (Sibarani et al., 2024). In contrast, *Bagas Godang* Huristak employs a tiered pyramidal roof with a gentler slope and lacks the prominent curved profile characteristic of classical Mandailing architecture. This difference demonstrates that *Bagas Godang* Huristak does not fully preserve conventional Mandailing architectural patterns but instead incorporates features commonly associated with traditional Malay houses.

The transformation of the roof form illustrates the influence of Malay architecture, which generally emphasizes simplicity, order, and functionality. Local communities adopted a gentler roof slope not only for aesthetic reasons but also to accommodate environmental conditions and practical residential requirements. Consequently, the roof of *Bagas Godang* Huristak reflects more than a stylistic modification; it also embodies a process of cultural interaction and adaptation. This architectural transformation highlights traditional communities' ability to negotiate external influences while preserving essential cultural meanings. The roof, therefore, represents both an architectural adaptation and a material expression of evolving socio-cultural dynamics.

Façades and Openings (Doors and Windows)

The façade of *Bagas Godang* expresses both the building's visual identity and its social functions. Traditional *Bagas Godang* structures generally display distinctive Mandailing Batak carvings rich in symbolic meaning, including geometric motifs and representations associated with protection, social harmony, and ancestral relationships. In this context, the façade functions not merely as an exterior surface but also as a medium of cultural expression that communicates collective identity and social status (Sitindjak et al., 2016). The façade of *Bagas Godang* Huristak, however, incorporates wide windows, bright colors such as yellow, blue, and white, and a more open spatial configuration. These features reveal the influence of Malay architectural traditions and create a more accessible and communicative front space.

The incorporation of larger openings facilitates interaction among community members and accommodates customary gatherings and social activities involving guests. Rather than functioning solely as a symbolic representation of authority, the façade now mediates interactions among the domestic, customary, and public spheres. This transformation indicates a shift from the predominantly symbolic orientation of classical Mandailing architecture toward a more socially oriented spatial arrangement. Broader changes in patterns of social interaction and the evolving role of traditional institutions in contemporary society have shaped this architectural development (Indriani et al., 2019). The façade of *Bagas Godang* Huristak, therefore, reflects both continuity in cultural identity and adaptation to changing social conditions.

Veranda (*Serambi*) as a Transitional and Social Space

The presence of a veranda constitutes one of the clearest indicators of Malay cultural influence in *Bagas Godang* Huristak. Architecturally, the veranda functions as a transitional space that mediates between the exterior and interior domains of the building. Beyond its architectural role, the veranda also serves as an important social space where community members engage in both informal and semi-formal interactions. This spatial element consequently embodies not only practical functions but also the social values that have evolved within the community (Aisyah & Siregar, 2024). The inclusion of a veranda, therefore, reflects significant changes in the social organization of domestic space.

In Malay cultural traditions, the veranda serves as a reception area for guests and as the focal point of everyday social activities, embodying values of openness, hospitality, and communication. By incorporating this architectural

element into *Bagas Godang*, local communities transformed the building's spatial orientation from a predominantly hierarchical, restricted arrangement into a more communicative and inclusive environment. This adaptation demonstrates that *Bagas Godang* has experienced not only formal architectural transformation but also a reinterpretation of its social functions. Community members increasingly use the building as an open space for social interaction and collective activities. Such developments illustrate how traditional architecture continues to evolve in response to changing patterns of community life.

Stairs and Entrance

In traditional *Bagas Godang* architecture, staircases generally exhibit a simple form and incorporate a specific number of steps that often convey symbolic meanings. Beyond providing physical access to the main interior space, the position and orientation of the staircase also closely align with customary spatial arrangements and social norms governing movement and interaction within the domestic environment. Within this cultural framework, the staircase functions not merely as a circulation element but also as an integral component of a symbolic system that reflects the community's values and worldview (Immanuel, [2023](#)). Traditional societies, therefore, perceive the staircase as a transitional element linking the physical and social domains. The architectural configuration of the entrance consequently reinforces customary principles embedded within the spatial organization of *Bagas Godang*.

The staircase of *Bagas Godang* Huristak has undergone several modifications that reflect adaptation to contemporary needs and changing patterns of habitation. Builders have constructed a wider, more symmetrical staircase using modern materials, such as ceramic, while prioritizing comfort and accessibility. Despite these alterations in form and material, the staircase continues to preserve the traditional number of seven steps. Oral traditions and interviews with Aguslam Hasibuan, the traditional custodian of the Huristak Kingdom, indicate that these seven steps symbolize the homeowner's social status as a king or customary leader. This interpretation corresponds with previous studies on Mandailing traditional architecture, which emphasize that architectural elements frequently communicate social hierarchy and customary authority (Hamdi & Harahap, [2022](#)). Although the staircase has experienced material and formal modifications, it continues to maintain both its symbolic significance and its essential function as a connector between exterior and interior spaces, demonstrating the adaptive continuity of traditional architecture within an evolving social context.

Ornaments and Carvings

Traditional Batak Mandailing *Bagas Godang* architecture generally incorporates geometric carvings and customary symbols that embody profound philosophical meanings. These motifs frequently symbolize protection, balance, and the relationship between human beings and their ancestors. Community members utilize these ornamental elements not only for decorative purposes but also as media for transmitting cultural values and belief systems across generations. Each motif consequently carries symbolic meanings closely associated with social order, collective identity, and customary institutions (Sitindjak et al., [2016](#)). The ornamental system, therefore, functions as an important visual language through which Mandailing communities express their cultural worldview.

The ornamentation of *Bagas Godang* Huristak has undergone a significant transformation under the influence of Malay aesthetics. This influence appears in the incorporation of floral motifs, simplified decorative patterns, and pointed trim elements commonly found in traditional Malay houses. These modifications suggest a shift from an ornamental tradition dominated by symbolic meanings to one that emphasizes aesthetic and visual considerations. Nevertheless, these changes have not eliminated the cultural values embedded within Mandailing traditions. Field observations and interviews with Aguslam Hasibuan reveal that community members continue to interpret *Bagas Godang* as a symbol of customary authority, social cohesion, and collective identity, despite changes in its decorative expression.

The continued practice of customary deliberations, ritual ceremonies, and communal gatherings within *Bagas Godang* also reinforces the symbolic meanings historically associated with the building. Community members, therefore, preserve traditional values not primarily through decorative motifs but through the sustained performance of customary practices and social functions. Although the visual appearance of ornamentation has changed, the core symbolic traditions of Mandailing culture remain embedded within the building's social and cultural roles. These transformations consequently reflect processes of adaptation and cultural acculturation rather than cultural replacement. Such developments have enriched the architectural expression of *Bagas Godang* while enabling it to remain relevant within a continuously evolving society (Nofiyanti & Heldt, [2022](#)).

Building Colors

The use of color in *Bagas Godang* architecture also conveys cultural meanings that are inseparable from the value system of the supporting community. Mandailing communities traditionally employ colors selectively and symbolically, often associating particular colors with customary values, social status, and philosophical concepts. Color selection in this context extends beyond aesthetic considerations because it also communicates cultural identity and reinforces the prevailing social order (Indriani et al., 2019). Traditional builders, therefore, use color as a medium for expressing social distinctions and cultural principles. The chromatic composition of *Bagas Godang* consequently forms an integral part of its symbolic architectural system.

The color scheme of *Bagas Godang* Huristak reveals a significant transformation shaped by Malay cultural aesthetics. Field observations indicate that the building predominantly features bright colors such as yellow, blue, and white. Interviews with Aguslam Hasibuan further demonstrate that community members associate these colors with dignity, harmony, and social openness, values that emerged through long-standing interactions between Mandailing and Malay communities. Previous studies of Malay traditional architecture similarly identify yellow as a symbol of authority and nobility, whereas lighter color palettes commonly express openness, hospitality, and harmonious social relations (Indriani et al., 2019). The predominance of these colors, therefore, creates an architectural impression characterized by openness, friendliness, and social harmony. Changes in color usage thus represent not merely aesthetic modifications but also broader transformations in cultural values that have shaped *Bagas Godang*'s architectural evolution in response to changing social dynamics.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the *Bagas Godang* of the Huristak Kingdom in Pasir Lancat Lama Village, Huristak Subdistrict, Padang Lawas Regency, constitutes an important cultural heritage site that embodies historical, social, and architectural significance. The study demonstrates that *Bagas Godang* functions not merely as a traditional building but also as a symbol of cultural identity, customary authority, and social continuity within the Huristak community. The findings further indicate that the architecture of *Bagas Godang* reflects a process of cultural acculturation in which Mandailing architectural traditions coexist with Malay influences, particularly in the roof configuration, façade composition, ornamentation, and color scheme. Despite these external influences, the building continues to preserve the fundamental symbolic traditions and customary functions associated with Mandailing culture. The architectural characteristics of *Bagas Godang*, therefore, illustrate the capacity of traditional architecture to accommodate cultural interactions while maintaining its indigenous identity.

This study contributes to the fields of architectural history, heritage studies, and local historiography by demonstrating that traditional architecture should be understood as a dynamic cultural institution rather than as a static architectural artifact. The findings reveal that communities continuously adapt traditional architecture to changing social conditions while preserving its cultural legitimacy and symbolic meanings. The study also shows that *Bagas Godang* functions as a cultural text through which the Huristak community records historical experiences, expresses social values, and articulates its worldview. Community members sustain these cultural meanings through customary practices, social interactions, and the continued use of the building in everyday life.

This study also encountered several limitations. The researchers relied on a limited number of informants because only a few individuals possess comprehensive historical knowledge of the Huristak Kingdom. The scarcity of historical documents and written sources related to the kingdom further constrained the depth of historical reconstruction. Future researchers should therefore involve a broader range of informants and integrate archaeological, architectural, and ethnographic approaches to produce a more comprehensive understanding of *Bagas Godang* and its historical development.

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