MYTH, SYMBOL AND FUNCTION OF THE TORAJA HOUSE

ERIC CRYSTAL

Sequestered in the highlands of the southwest peninsula of Sulawesi Island, Indonesia, the Sa’dan Toraja continue to maintain an ancient ceremonial system, indigenous forms of artistic expression, and a vital traditional architecture anchored in a unique dwelling design. This paper discusses traditional concepts of ritual performance and belief which are invested in Toraja living space. It notes the extent to which the Toraja house has become both a symbol and a sign of minority identity in Indonesia. As a postscript, it makes note of contemporary adaptations of traditional house forms in structures ranging from Christian churches to government offices and tourist hotels, and it comments on the vitality of traditional, transitional and contemporary Toraja architectural design.

The Sa’dan Toraja reside in the mountains of the southwest peninsula of Sulawesi Island, Indonesia. Numbering approximately one half million, they exhibit considerable cultural conservatism, maintain a highly developed sense of ethnic identity and preserve in their mountain homeland essential elements of late neolithic highland Southeast Asian culture (FIG. 1). As a traditional dwelling unit, the Toraja house is a focus of ritual activity and a symbol of ethnic identity.

TRADITIONAL DWELLING -- BANUA TO DOLO

Few dwellings anywhere on earth are as imposing as the traditional Toraja house. Such homes are characterized by dramatic saddle-backed roofs of
bamboo, incised and painted decorative panels and large hardwood support piles. Although the Toraja homeland, Tana Toraja, comprises but 3,178 square kilometers, the region contains thousands of traditional dwellings, many evidencing considerable local variation. Toraja settlement patterns are dispersed rather than concentrated. Traditional settlements include but a few homes situated amidst rice fields or adjacent to thick groves of cultivated bamboo. The local subsistence economy is based on wet rice cultivation -- either in the expansive highland valleys of the region or on terraced mountain slopes.

The traditional Toraja dwelling appears in association with one or more rice granaries. It is situated not in a conglomerate village, but at the most in association with five or six other principal dwellings. Toraja houses are scattered about the countryside in close proximity to the rice fields and garden lands of their owners (FIG. 2). Typically such homes are built either on once strategic hilltops or on inarable or agriculturally less favorable land. The courtyards of the houses of prominent people are often paved with smooth river stones. The external decoration of these dwellings includes gaily painted incised designs, three-dimensional sculptures, and occasional "necklaces" of bamboo.

Toraja settlements sometimes appear as inhabited islands strewn across a sea of green rice. The settlements are almost always marked by well developed home gardens tended in the immediate vicinity of the house that consist of several kinds of bamboo, coconut palm, fruit trees and edible and herbal leafy plants. In pre-colonial times powerful men endeavored to construct their homes on hilltops to assure defense against internecine head-taking raids. Many such hilltop habitation sites remain occupied today, although population growth and the extension of the Pax Nederland to the region...
eighty years ago has allowed a great expansion of home-building in more accessible locales.

The Toraja themselves have refined a typology of traditional house-types ranging from the simplest of bamboo lean-tos to the most elaborate hardwood and bamboo-roofed structures (FIG. 3, 4). This paper is concerned only with the banua di longa, the imposing Toraja ancestral structures which are marked by great upswept roofs. Such structures, which exist in uncounted thousands throughout the Toraja highlands, are remarkable works of art, symbolic anchors for wide-ranging ambilineal kin groups, foci for rituals ranging from birth to harvest to death, and keys to the culture of the Toraja. An oft-employed synonym for the great Toraja homes is tongkonan. Tongkon in the Toraja language means "to sit, to settle, to reside with some permanence." Another synonym is batu papan, "stone siding," a name that suggests the permanence of settlement. (For the Toraja, one of the few peoples on Earth who maintain a megalithic ritual tradition, stone implies a permanence bordering on immortality.) Traditional Torajan tongkonan are always found in association with rice granaries which replicate in quarter scale the shape and decoration of the main house. Normally from one to four of these granaries may be found in association with a single house. Such structures serve not only as rice storehouses but as reception platforms for guests and ritual centers during ceremonies occurring wholly or partially in the habitation area.

**Symbolic Shelter**

Traditional dwellings throughout Tana Toraja are oriented geometrically toward the northeast. The part of the house which is oriented in this direction is termed the lindo banua, "the face of the house." Conversely, the rear of the house, pollo'banua, is oriented to the southwest. Between the face and the rear is the central house post, ar'iri possi', "the navel post." (FIG. 5) Here, as is the case with

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**FIGURE 3.** Schematic of earliest type of Toraja dwelling. (source: Laporan Hasil Kerja Toraja, 18.)

**FIGURE 4.** Schematic of more advanced type of Toraja dwelling, including banua melao langi -- "house descended from heaven" brought by progenitor of nobility, Puan Langi.
many other traditional societies, metaphors of the living organism are applied to the principal features of the house. Associated with the face of the house are the granaries, which in many respects are considered to be extensions of the northeastern front of the dwelling.

The cardinal directions in Tana Toraja are associated with important elements of the spirit world. In the Toraja cosmological scheme the north and the east are favorable. The north is associated with the life-giving waters of the Sa’dan River which courses through the heartland of the Toraja region. The east is the realm of the rising sun, associated with agricultural prosperity and with deata spirits of life which vouchsafe human well-being and magically extend and amplify the harvest, and which can occasionally be called upon to cure the sick and restore crops threatened by disease or pestilence. The west is the realm of the setting sun, associated with funeral rituals, which command an extraordinary amount of social activity and material expenditure. The south is the direction in which the Sa’dan River drains; it is also the putative location of puya, the land of souls.

Rice in Southeast Asia is not only the primary grain and prestige foodstuff, it is in most societies assoc-
iated with all that is good, desirable and status-
laden. The face of the Toraja house opens to the
northeast, and the rice granaries are seen as but a
further extension of it. Sheaves of harvested rice
and reserves of seed grain are stored inside the
alang granaries. Unhusked rice is removed as need-
ed during the agricultural year and pounded by
hand in wooden vessels normally situated in front
of the house. The association of house face, rice
granary and rice harvest is no accident in the
geomantically self-conscious world of traditional
Toraja cosmology. The face of the house relates to
well-being, prosperity and the life side of a dualistic
cosmological system. Rituals, taboos and beliefs
relating to death orient to the south and the west.
At the death of an important person, the wooden
rice-pounding vessels are struck with long mortars.
The emptiness and loss occasioned by the death is
proclaimed in the special mourning rhythm applied
to the milling vessels.

The decorative designs which are incised in the
wooden panels of homes and granaries in Tana
Toraja are laden with symbolic significance. Al-
most all the patterns are non-representational --
geometric abstracts which refer to the natural
world of Tana Toraja and which sometimes meta-
phorically impart the essentials of family relations
and societal norms. Most common of these incised
designs is the ubiquitous pa’tedong, the water buf-
falo abstract. If rice is the staff of life and the
essece of prosperity for the Toraja, then the water
buffalo signifies virility, strength, prestige, status
and power. Abundant harvests allow for the pur-
chase of fine water buffalos, which are ultimately
sacriified in conspicuous ritual displays. Toraja
society is highly stratified, and powerful men and
women often utilize house-builders and artisans to
affirm and display their wealth and power. Three
basic strata characterize traditional Toraja society:
nobles (puang), freemen (to makaka), and serfs (ka-
nan). In the past nobles and freemen were liable to
summon economic resources and command the la-
or to construct imposing wooden homes and
granaries.

These incised designs on one level represent the
natural world of cultigens, animal domesticates
and wild plants. For instance, a common pattern is
termed pa’tangke lumu’situru’, 'branches of moss
together intertwined.” It has been suggested by
Toraja scholar K. Kadang that this pattern indicates
that family members who cooperate closely during
day-to-day interactions are held in especially high
regard by members of Toraja society. On another
plane, representation of the red-leaved cordyline
plant (tabang) recalls the sacred function that is
associated with it as an offering to the desta
agricultural spirits. Tabang is planted around wells
and on the eastern side of the house, and it is
sometimes used in trance-dance curing rituals.
Hundreds of named designs and regional varia-
tions on such designs are found on Toraja dwel-
lings and granaries. Each design reflects an aspect
of the Toraja natural world and often suggests
metaphorical interpretations related either to ritual
and belief or to the nature and structure of human
social relationships. The traditional Toraja house,
then, not only is situated amidst the fields and is
surrounded by a host of cultigens, but in its decora-
tive design reflects and manifests its role as an
anchor point of kin ties, a focal point of ritual
activities, a center of agricultural production and a
manifestation of the rank and privilege of its builder
and his descendents.

No marker of prestige is greater in Tana Toraja than
that which recalls the number of animals sacrificed
(and meat thus distributed) at major rituals under-
taken by the owners of a great house (FIG. 6). So
it is that the jowls of pigs and the horns of water
buffalos are posted in front of houses. Many score
of water buffalo horns are often apparent. For the
Toraja, water buffalo horns of previously sacrificed
animals directly recall once notable funerals, cere-
monies at which widespread kin networks and co-
resident neighbors shared the meat of the sacrificial
animals. Normally, one carved water buffalo head
adorns the tulak sumba, the front buttress post sup-
porting the longa, the extended roof at the face of
the dwelling. The carved head is often painted in
white and black, recalling that the most valuable of
animals are piebald male water buffalo, a type
which thrive only in the highlands of Tana Toraja.
An additional three-dimensional carving found at
the front and rear of the Toraja dwelling is the uhu
katik, or carved bird’s head. Sometimes in the west-
ern districts the bird’s head is fashioned to repre-
sent an image of the sacred hornbill, so important in
the indigenous iconography of neighboring Borneo.
Analysis of these two three-dimensional sculptures (water buffalo head and bird's head) make symbolic interpretations difficult to avoid. The buffalo symbolizes virility, power and wealth; the bird's head, elegance and femininity. This interpretation also follows for the pa'barre allo, a design which invariably pairs a fighting cock (london) with the image of the rising sun. The fighting cock again symbolizes virility, aggressiveness and fearlessness. The universal association of the male organ with a bird is common here as well. The rising sun, which imparts energy and life to all growing things, is associated with the female.

Paramount rituals, elaborate houses and intricately woven and designed textiles express the ultimate unity of the dualistic Toraja cosmology. The four primary colors of Tana Toraja -- white, black, red and yellow -- symbolize the complementarity of the life and death hemispheres in the Toraja ritual system. Black is normally reserved for funerals; yellow is associated with rice and gold. Red and white are associated with life-side rituals, costumes and decorative plants. At a funeral of an important person, the great seven-night ritual combines elements of both death- and life-side rituals. The body-wrapping employed on such occasions uses four primary colors, either as gold leaf cut-out designs or in patterns stitched on the body-wrapping. A great house similarly employs all four colors, reserves the southern and northern ends for activities concerned with complementary death and life spheres, and recalls with posted buffalo horns, pig jowls and an occasional display of desiccated pig penises sacrificial offerings of past years and decades. When a seven-night death ceremony has taken place, a special garland of tuang tuang bamboo is wrapped around the principal rice granary as a sign that the ultimate death rite has transpired there. The garland is both a "necklace" embellishing the structure and a reminder of the ultimate unity of the Toraja ritual system.

Fertility rites, such as the seldom-seen ma'bua padang ritual, are also marked with the display of miniature utensils of daily life hung from granary roofs. Such implements, including small-scale water buffalo milk-gathering containers, winnows and rice-storage baskets, recall that the house has participated in a great ritual of fertility and renewal. Participation in such rituals by members of the traditional kin group associated with the house reaffirms the ultimate unity of the cosmos, re-integrates the life and death halves of the ritual system, and confirms the importance of the house as the anchor point of Toraja kin, reciprocal exchange and ceremonial relationships. To a great extent the house is the center of the Toraja familial, traditional economic and cosmological world. Eliade has written that, "... reality is conferred through participation in the symbolism of the Center: cities, temples, and houses become real by the fact of being assimilated to the Center of the World." House-raising and renewal rituals are invested with extraordinary importance in Tana Toraja. Eliade suggests that such construction activities are important as manifestations of a universal archaic mythological notion of "eternal return" to the beginning of existence, and house rituals in Tana Toraja to a great extent confirm this view. Eliade notes, "... man has the need to reproduce the cosmogeny in his construction ... that this reproduction made him contemporary with the mythical moment of the beginning of the world and that he felt the need to return to that moment as often as possible, to regenerate himself."

This analysis of the traditional Toraja dwelling has touched upon ecological situation, geomantic orientation and symbolic interpretation. It has also suggested that Toraja concerns for rank and status are articulated in house decoration. For example, complexity of incised decoration connotes wealth, and the number of pillars upon which a grana stands (four for a common granary, six, eight, or even twelve for the grana of unusually wealthy men) relate to the rank of the owner. The length and extension of the roof similarly functions to underscore the social rank of the owner. Water buffalo horns posted at the face of the house and pig jowls displayed before granaries confirm achieved wealth and buttress inherited status. As perceived from afar, the Toraja house serves as a focal point for the home garden and terraced rice cultivation systems, reflects in its ornamentation fundamental ecological realities and social relationships, and expresses something of the ritual history of past and present owners.
CONSECRATED DWELLING

The above discussion has presented an external view of the traditional Toraja dwelling. On the inside of the house, one can see a spirit causeway (lalan deata), "path of the spirits," that is perceived to run from the front to the rear of the house. So also the "navel post" anchors the dwelling at mid-point. The notion of a navel relates to the concepts of life, death and permanent family connection. The after-birth in Toraja, as in many traditional societies, is considered sacred. In Tana Toraja it is placed in a special type of inedible gourd, one which is used for this purpose because its bottom seems to possess a belly button. The afterbirth is buried on the east side of the house in such a gourd. Over the decades hundreds of such afterbirth internments have taken place alongside great Toraja family houses. When such houses are ritually renewed, new thatch is emplaced and extended family members from afar contribute pigs at great rituals termed mangrara banua, or "anoint with blood (of sacrificial animals)." Special offerings are made at the navel post during these. Pigs offered at such house rituals are borne on elaborately constructed palanquins fabricated in the Toraja house shape. The pigs are brought into the central courtyard and presented before the structure. On such occasions houses are ceremonially dressed. Heirloom textiles are draped from the top rafters of the house face, and ritual regalia, such as golden ceremonial swords and intricate bead work, are extracted from specially woven baskets stored high under the eaves, and displayed at the front of the structure. Decorated with garlands of yellow gourds, red peppers, and necklaces of padi rice, the pigs will be sacrificed to honor the memory of the progenitors who built the tongkonan and sustained it through past generations. The final consecration occurs when a Toraja priest races to-and-fro atop the narrow ridge of the newly re-thatched roof, holding aloft a bamboo torch. After this consecration, the arrayed pigs are sacrificed and all partake in a communal feast.

According to Eliade, construction, "in a new, unknown, uncultivated country is equivalent to an act of creation." The sacrifice performed at the building of a house, church, bridge is simply the imitation on the human plane of the sacrifice performed in illo tempore to give birth to the world. The eminent Dutch scholar Henrik Van der Veen translated the long ritual text recited by Toraja priests during the merok feast. This text is often employed to consecrate a great family house. Van der Veen writes that the mythical male ancestor, ... went hither and thither, now westward, now eastward, seeking the one who like himself was deity in order to conclude a marriage with her. He moved about in the highest part of the all-covering roof, to the north and to the south, trying to find the one who, as he did, bore the title of lord, so that he could enter into union with her. In this translation of the Toraja creation story, the male progenitor, Datu Muane, races about the upper world in search of a suitable mate in order to give birth to
mankind. The "all-covering roof" refers to the roof of the heavens. In the consecration of each Toraja traditional dwelling, and in the periodic renewal ceremonies which follow the application of new thatch, the world is again recreated. Eliade has written, "... all rituals imitate a divine archetype. Construction rites show us something beyond this imitation, hence, reactualization of the cosmogeny." A "new era" opens with the building of every house.8

Toraja reckon kin relations in terms of ancestral tongkonan family houses. The most prominent of these are thought to have been constructed by pioneer settlers of specific noble fiefdoms. Indeed, the nobility of the southern Toraja districts traces its origin to the descent from heaven of the mythological noble Puang Tamborolangi. He is said to have come to earth in a magical Toraja house that descended atop sacred Mount Kandora. Suspended from the sky, this house enabled the hoary male ancestor of the southern Toraja nobles to wed a water nymph inhabiting a sacred sweet water pool at the base of the mountain. Even when the physical tongkonan has disappeared, fallen into disrepair, been abandoned, or perhaps been burned to the ground by accident or political design, family members continue to refer to membership in a specific house. Thus great Toraja houses are rallying points for ambilineal rampages, they symbolize continuity with past generations of ancestors, and they serve as stages for cyclical house rituals that allow dispersed kin to reaffirm membership.

Major house ceremonies fall within the ritual realm of Toraja life-side celebrations. Whether the house-oriented event be the preparation and blessing of seed grain at the beginning of the agricultural year, the sanctification of a new bamboo thatch roof, or the celebration of the good fortune of the ambilineal kin group, the house and its associated granaries are linked to the ceremonial celebration of life. But Toraja die as well as are born under the great upswept eaves of their traditional dwellings, and the ceremonies of death also relate closely to the form and function of the Toraja house.

Ritual celebration of both life and death take place within and around the Toraja house. Because the Toraja ritual system is so skewed toward ceremon-
cal principles of the Toraja belief system. The architectural tradition of which the Toraja dwellings are a constituent part recalls a late neolithic East Asian tradition. Van Heerkeren has written, "the artistic style of the Sa'dan Toraja of mid-Celebes ... is a typical hold-over if the Dongson Culture. The houses of the Toraja . . . and of the Toba Batak of Sumatra are the same as those portrayed on some kettle drums. The shape is pure Dongson." Structures similar to Toraja houses and granaries appear on ancient DongSon bronze drums dating back to 1500 B.C. from what is now the northern coastal region of Vietnam. Form and function of traditional Batak dwellings in north Sumatra, the sacred complex at Ise in Japan, and archaic architectural traditions of southwest China once again suggest that Toraja houses are not so much unique exemplars as vestigal remnants of a once pervasive architectural tradition in late neolithic times (2500-500 B.C.). Indeed, highland Sulawesi mythology often refers to a mainland-Asian genesis for the Toraja people; local folklorists often speculate on a putative origin in far-off China. The tongue-and-groove fitting of Toraja house construction, the emplacement of houses on high pillars, the shape of the roof and the rarely observed ma bua padang feasts of merit also suggest a relationship between Toraja houses and sea-going ships. The great bua'padang ritual, which celebrates the merit of a prominent family and the well-being of the surrounding village community, dramatically suggests sea-borne migrations in former times. At the conclusion of this ceremony great white banners are erected atop the roof of the tongkonan. Viewed from afar, these white cloth banners appear as sails, symbolically propelling the house across the hills and valleys of Tana Toraja. At such rare ritual occasions, offerings are made directly to Puang Matua, the Toraja high god thought to reside at the zenith of the heavens. Here the upward sweep of the Toraja roof takes on additional meaning, as offerings of betel are affixed to sail-like textiles and raised above the roof to be blessed by the principal deity.

TORAJA DWELLING: VITALITY AND TRANSFORMATION

At one and the same time, the traditional Toraja house serves as both dwelling-place and sacred space. The traditional Toraja religion is rooted in the natural and cultivated environment of highland Sulawesi. It is anchored in the network of kin and status relationships which focus on ancestral family houses, and it is structured by the complex rank, status and reciprocal obligations which configure Toraja society. Anthropologist Toby Volkman has written of the "pregnant house," suggesting that Toraja traditional dwellings are impregnated with symbolic kin and cosmological relationships which are ultimately expressed in major religious events such as the ma'bua ritual she observed in the Sesean district a decade ago. Toraja houses are linked to the land and are also tied to the sky; they provide both shelter and consecrated sacred space for crucial ceremonial events. For a people with many natural sacred spaces, the house is the one man-made place at which rituals can be conducted indoors. Miniature images of houses are used as vehicles for the dead and also as palanquins for pigs to be sacrificed at house renewal rituals. Granaries serve as storage structures, guest-reception centers and appendages to the ritual center, the house. An aura of deep tradition pervades Toraja traditional housing sites. Huddled under the great eaves against the rain, Toraja villagers are sheltered by structures consecrated by long-departed but not forgotten ancestors. The essential elements of fire, water and wind are combined in the three-stone hearth on which rice is cooked in blackened earthware pots. Successive rice planting seasons are begun with the extraction and blessing of seed grain and concluded with consecration of padi sheaves as they are placed inside the granaries. The birth of generations of ancestors is commemorated with the burial of the afterbirth alongside the east, or life-side, of the house. The grandeur of past funerals at which the status and largesse of the extended kin group was reinforced with the distribution of meat is recalled by the posted water buffalo horns, arrayed for all to see. The upswept roof reaching toward the zenith of the heavens, and the "path of the spirits" that allows supernatural guarantors of the harvest and of human health to easily enter the abode recall the ultimate life-supporting orientation of the Toraja house. Built and rebuilt, thatched ad re-thatched, incised designs repainted every generation, the Toraja house recalls the first settling of the land, the importance of the extended ambilineal kin group and the geo-
mantic centering crucial to the cosmology of the Toraja.

In recent decades Tana Toraja has experienced fundamental and sometimes cataclysmic social change. From 1951-1965 a regional insurrection of Muslim separatists pressed hard upon this homeland of loyal Christian and animist Torajas. Armed by the central government in Java to guard their territory, Toraja villagers tried as best they could to defend their ancestral villages against marauding rebels who viewed Toraja houses as symbols of animist resistance to Darul Islam, “the Realm of Islam.” Hundreds of Toraja houses were burned to the ground in this conflict, and in some borderland districts the rebuilding process has only commenced within the past decade. Christian missionaries arrived in Tana Toraja at the turn of the century in the wake of Dutch troops. Conversions proceeded slowly until the decade of the 1960s; but by 1969 half the population had embraced the Christian monotheistic alternative to Islam. Today approximately 75 percent of the Toraja are Christian, 17 percent adhere to the traditional religion, Aluk to Dolo, and the rest are Muslim. Tourism within the past fifteen years has suddenly loomed as a new and increasingly important factor in Toraja life. No tourists visited the area in 1968 when the author and his wife commenced field-work. By 1987, however, 40,000 European, American and Japanese visitors were finding their way to Tana Toraja each year. The role and function of the Toraja house has changed along with the local social dynamic, taking on new and unprecedented significance both within local society and outside it, where it has had an impact on Indonesian national culture and even on international cultures.

More than any other physical artifact, the banua to dolo, the ancestral house, symbolizes the history, culture and identity of the Toraja. Model Toraja houses have for many decades been fabricated for sale in villages in the vicinity of Rantepao, the market center. Since the introduction of missionary-managed Christian educational facilities in the region 75 years ago, the Toraja have taken full advantage of training and educational opportunities that are unparalleled in eastern Indonesia. Technically proficient Toraja have migrated in search of work throughout the archipelago. Whether in the provincial capital of Ujung Pandang or in the national capital, Jakarta, emigrant Toraja invariably take with them a model Toraja house both as a nostalgic reminder of their homeland and a marker of ethnic identity. With increased tourism, the external market for such models has burgeoned.

As land, air and electronic communication have eroded the former geographic and cultural isolation of Tana Toraja, the people of Toraja have also become more confident and appreciative of their cultural traditions. Twenty years ago government planners and officials disdained the traditional Toraja dwellings, constructing a model village for emulation that bore no traces of traditional construction or decoration. No feature articles could be found in the local provincial press about Tana Toraja in 1968. Indeed, Toraja culture was viewed with some embarrassment in the provincial capital, where urbanites often spoke of the Toraja and their adherence to ancestral tradition with lightly veiled disdain. Churches, offices and contemporary brick and plaster homes have recently borrowed increasingly from traditional Toraja dwelling design, however. Once little known beyond the borders of South Sulawesi Province, the Toraja house now adorns the Indonesian equivalent of the five dollar note. The major three-star international hotel in the provincial capital of Ujung Pandang now features a coffee shop based on the form of Toraja granaries and maintains wooden incised house-patterns as decorative motifs throughout its rooms. Toraja incised wooden patterns on serving trays and decorative plaques can be observed throughout Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Once hidden in the remote valleys and along the bamboo-studded slopes of the Quarles Range of southwestern Sulawesi Island, Toraja houses have now become a public artifact of Indonesian culture. Traditional Toraja dwellings have become an object of curiosity if not concern for thousands of foreign tourists now travelling to Indonesia from afar. One epiphenomenon of the opening of Tana Toraja to tourism has been the looting of sacred sites for valuable artifacts of archaic Indonesian art. Most attention of thieves and "legitimate" art dealers who pay for their wares has been directed at the hard-
wood statues of the deceased situated at Toraja burial sites. But finely sculpted house doors, three-dimensional pig and water buffalo sculptures associated with the great ma'bu'a rituals, and all manner of incised panels have been bartered, bought, or brazenly stolen from habitation sites in recent years. As Tana Toraja has opened to the outside, changes in construction techniques, materials and design have been introduced. Beginning in the 1950s, bamboo thatch began to be covered with "zinc" galvanized iron sheeting, which was less expensive and withstood the elements for a longer period of time. In recent years some shingling imported from adjacent Borneo has been used for roofing as well. Glass windows are beginning to be emplaced in the oldest dwellings. During the past five years increasingly worldly members of the Toraja elite have begun to absorb some of the perceptions of overseas visitors. Whereas in the 1950s and 60s denigration of all that was traditional in Toraja society was the fashion among the local elite, a new reassessment of the value of traditional culture is on the rise today. The most affluent families have begun to thatch traditional dwellings again without the final sheet metal layer, seeking to regain a certain measure of authenticity to please tourists, government officials, and a growing constituency of Torajas who are coming to revalue their traditional architectural heritage. Traditional granaries and dwellings not only persist as archaic examples of ancient Indonesian architecture, but they are being constructed anew at a tremendous rate.

Highly trained and hard working, Toraja entrepreneurs and bureaucrats residing beyond the borders of their homeland frequently invest cash earnings in the purchase of land, and especially in the construction of granaries and houses in Tana Toraja. Often, modern brick and plaster standard Indonesian dwellings are constructed first and are subsequently joined by wooden Toraja houses raised alongside. These are replete with bamboo thatch, upraised roof and elaborately incised and painted designs. In 1987 a fully decorated traditional Toraja house cost approximately $10,000.

Such construction activity reflects rising cultural confidence and also intense status competition in a rapidly changing social order. Whereas in former times only high-status village leaders could construct a fine house and an eight-pillared rice granary, now even descendants of former serfs can and do build such valued structures, proclaiming with the help of builders and artisans their newly acquired status.

Whether embellishing an Indonesian 5000 Rupiah note, lending shape to the coffee shop of an international hotel, or appearing on European, American or Japanese tourist brochures, the image of the Toraja house has in recent years been disseminated far beyond the relatively small, isolated Tana Toraja homeland. The Toraja house has become for many a symbol of ethnic identity and a means of expressing social mobility and a rejection of society.

REFERENCE NOTES

1. For an evolutionary typology illustrated with both line drawings and photographs, see U.I. Mahasiswa, Laporan Kuliah Toraja (Fakultas Teknik, Universitas Indonesia, 1975), pp. 17-23.
5. Ibid, p. 10.
7. H. Van der Veen, "The Merok

8. M. Eliade, Cosmos and History, p. 76.