

## Research Article

# Comparative Study of the Philosophical Meaning of “*Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino*” Carvings and its Implementation in Minangkabau People's Life

Faiz Alghifary\* and Riksa Belasunda

Telkom University, Bandung, Indonesia

**Abstract.**

*Rumah Gadang* refers to a traditional house belonging to the Minangkabau people, known for its distinctive *Gonjong roof* and intricate flora and fauna carvings. These carvings are rich in symbolic motifs and hold valuable life lessons for the Minangkabau people. However, a unique variation of *Rumah Gadang* exists in Koto Tangah Simalanggang, Lima Puluh Kota district. It is dubbed the *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino*, it features Chinese-style carvings with distinct techniques and colors. This research uses a qualitative descriptive-analytical research method that aims to understand the philosophical meanings behind the carving motifs on the *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino* through a comparative study with the original carving motifs on the initial type of The *Rumah Gadang* house. Peculiarly, the Chinese carving motifs in the *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino* share the same fundamental meanings as the primary Minangkabau motifs, which allows them to still serve as a valuable guide for the social life of the residents of Minangkabau.

**Keywords:** carvings, Minangkabau culture, philosophical meaning, rumah gadang

Corresponding Author: Faiz  
Alghifary; email:  
faizalghifary00@gmail.com

**Published:** 6 January 2025

Publishing services provided by  
Knowledge E

© Alghifary, Belasunda. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the BCM 2023: Creative Economy Conference Committee.

## 1. Introduction

The Minangkabau people are one of the many ethnic groups in Indonesia that resides in West Sumatra. The *Rumah Gadang* is a work of art that functions not only as a living space for the Minangkabau people but also as a symbol of the existence of the tribe and its people [1]. Besides being notable for its *Gojong* roof which has a sharp shape on the left and is thick, curved inward and low in the middle, and elongated like a buffalo horn. The shape of the *Gonjong* roof is based on a story (*Tambo*) where there was an event of victory for the Minangkabau people in a buffalo fight between the buffalo envoys of the Majapahit Kingdom [2]. The *Rumah Gadang* is also renowned for its carvings which cover nearly all parts of the outer walls of the traditional house. For the Minangkabau

**OPEN ACCESS**

people, these carvings are used as a symbol of the tribe's communal values, which are utilized as guidelines to carry out one's daily and social life within the tribe [3]. The layout of these carvings is taken from the basic forms of natural objects, such as the local flora and fauna. Afterward, these forms go through a refinement process to produce decorative carvings.

During its existence as a traditional house, the *Rumah Gadang* is not only a symbol of the Minangkabau ethnic group, but it also serves as a place to live. Therefore, the *Rumah Gadang* is primarily only found in West Sumatra today. The *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino* is one of the numerous *Rumah Gadang* that is located in Simalanggang, Lima Puluh Kota District, West Sumatra. What differentiates it from other *Rumah Gadang* is that the *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino* does not use typical Minangkabau motifs but uses Chinese motifs instead. The *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino* was completed in 1902 and was first owned by Datuk Bandaro Leman. The ownership has since change six times but always held within Bandaro Leman's family. Due to his job as a businessman and merchant, Datuk Bandaro Leman had extensive ties to overseas China. Therefore, when building this *Rumah Gadang*, he brought some Chinese people to construct the *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino* [4].

The *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino* is evidence of the acculturation between the Chinese and Minangkabau cultures in the Simalanggang, Lima Puluh Kota district of West Sumatra. Nevertheless, the Minangkabau culture is still important to its people because the carving motifs represent the life guidance of the Minangkabau people. Therefore, the philosophical meaning of the *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino* motifs must be analyzed using comparative studies to determine whether or not the motif of the *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino* still applies and maintains the values of the Minangkabau people through its' Chinese carving motif.

## 2. Methods and Equipment

### 2.1. Methods

In this study, the qualitative descriptive analysis is employed as a research method, which is aided by the data analysis process using a comparative study. Comparative study refers to a technique that involves comparing two or more objects in order to create something new [5]. The research begins with data collection through direct observation and interviews with the owner of *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino*. Subsequently, the

data analysis process is conducted with the assistance of literature pertaining to *Rumah Gadang*, carvings and motifs, philosophical significance, and Minangkabau Culture.

### 3. Results and Discussion

China is renowned for its ancient civilization and boasts a rich heritage that dates back thousands of years ago. Chinese architecture is known for its durability against natural disasters, such as earthquakes, and prominently features wooden structures. The Chinese architectural design exhibits intricate carvings on walls, doors, and windows, emphasizing hierarchies and reverence for nature. These decorative motifs draw inspiration from Chinese folk tales and myths, where flora and fauna are skillfully arranged to narrate captivating stories [6].



**Figure 1:** Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino,(Source: Author documentation, 2021).

The Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino is an example of cultural acculturation between the Chinese and Minangkabau through Chinese decorative layer in the Simalanggang, Lima Puluh Kota district of West Sumatra. With the difference in the Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino, a comparative study was conducted between the original carvings on the standart Rumah Gadang and the Chinese carvings on the *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino*. It aims to find the meaning of the Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino and whether or not it is in harmony with the values of the Minangkabau people.

The following are the results of the comparative study between typical Minangkabau carvings and carvings in Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino:

TABLE 1: Study Comparative Table (Source : Author Analysis, 2023).



NO	Comparison Objects	Comparative Analysis
1	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rumah Gadang</b></p>	<p>Upon comparing the meanings of the <i>Itiak Pulang Patang</i> motif and the Magpie Bird motif, it can be observed that there are differences in their respective meanings. However, both carvings incorporate the fundamental characteristics of their original forms, which are the symbolic representations of ducks and Magpie birds. These carvings hold significant values and prayers that entail positive things, serving as a prayer for the homeowner. The meanings embedded in these carvings revolve around good traits and well wishes.</p>
	<p><b>Itiak Pulang Patang</b></p>  <p><b>Figure 2:</b> Itiak Pulang Patang Carving (Source : padangexpo.com)</p>	<p>This motif has the form of ducks that are neatly lined up. This motif represents the harmony, order, and discipline of the Minangkabau people [7].</p>
2	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino</b></p> <p><b>Burung Magpie (Magpie Bird)</b></p>  <p><b>Figure 3:</b> Magpie Bird Carving on RGUC (Source : Author documentation, 2021)</p>	<p>Magpies symbolize compassion and true love in Chinese culture [8]. Evidence of this is shown within a poem written by an unnamed poet from the Song dynasty entitled '<i>Titian Magpie</i>.' Additionally, the placement of magpie carvings in the upper area of the building was done due to the belief that hearing birds singing above the house would bring good luck to the household.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rumah Gadang</b></p>	<p>Although the carvings on the <i>Rumah Gadang</i> use the basic form of <i>Jala</i>, and the carvings on the <i>Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino</i> takes the form of carved fruit and peach trees, the philosophy of these two have the same meaning, namely the hope of being kept away from bad things. In addition, the <i>Jalo Takambang</i> carving also goes through a decorative transformation process so that it looks like the shape of the carving of plants or flora.</p>

TABLE 1: Continued.







NO	Comparison Objects	Comparative Analysis
	<p><b>Jalo Taserak (Mesh/net)</b></p>  <p><b>Figure 4:</b> jalo Taserak Motif Sumber : zetstudio.com</p>	<p>The <i>Jalo Taserak</i> means throwing cast net for fishing. The initial shape of the net undergoes a transformation resulting in a novel decorative shape that retains its original significance. This motif symbolizes the separation of good things and bad things. Therefore, this motif is usually placed at the entrance to the <i>Rumah Gadang</i> as a prayer to ward off bad things from happening [9].</p>
	<p><b>Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino</b></p> <p><b>Peaches</b></p>  <p><b>Figure 5:</b> Peach Motif and carving on Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino (Source : Author documentation, 2021)</p>	<p>Peaches represent immortality, and the peach tree happens to be a symbol of fighting against evil spirits or demons. Therefore, the use of peaches in the carvings is used to wish for a long life, as well as to ward off bad things from occurring.</p>
3	<p><b>Rumah Gadang</b></p>	<p>Both motifs are derived from the basic form of plants or flora. These two motifs share the same meaning. The <i>Aka Cino</i> motif symbolizes hope for a long and sustainable life, and it provides benefits in life. Chrysanthemums also represent hope in the form of longevity and patience.</p>
	<p><b>Motif Aka Cino (Chinese Root Motif)</b></p>  <p><b>Figure 6:</b> Chinese Roof Motif (Source : zetstudio.com)</p>	<p>In Minangkabau language, "Aka" means root and can also mean sense or power of thinking. While "Cino" means Chinese. So The <i>Aka Cino</i> Carving motif personifies characteristics of the Chinese people such as resilience, perseverance, and perpetual motion, this is evident in its continuous scrolling form. The carving embodies enduring vitality that fosters a constant exploration of fresh perspectives and novel concepts throughout life's journey [10].</p>

TABLE 1: Continued.

NO	Comparison Objects	Comparative Analysis
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino</b></p> <p><b>Chrysanthemums</b></p>  <p><b>Figure 7:</b> Chrysanthemums Carving (Source : Author Documentation, 2021)</p>	
4	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rumah Gadang</b></p>	<p>These two carvings share the same purpose as containers, with the common goals of promoting peace and showing respect for individuals. It is clear from the objects they hold that they are significant in both Minang and Chinese cultures.</p>
	<p><b>Carano Kanso Carving Motif</b></p>  <p><b>Figure 8:</b> Carano Kanso Motif (Source : zetstudio.com)</p>	<p><i>Carano</i> refers to a type of container where betel nut and gambier are stored, in the customs of Minangkabau people. This <i>Carano Kanso</i> motif shows the custom of the Minangkabau, where guests are appreciated by being welcomed with <i>Carano</i> [11]</p>
	<p><b>Flower Vase</b></p>  <p><b>Figure 9:</b> Flower Vase Carving on RGUC (Source : Author Documentation, 2021)</p>	<p>Flower vases are an auspicious object that symbolizes the repository of divine blessings, which is embodied in the purity of divine drinks and water.</p>

The results shown in the comparison table indicate that each motif carved on the Rumah Gadang and the Motif on the *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino* has a profound philosophical meaning and conveys good wishes for the community, especially the owner of the house. The analysis also compares the cultural diversity and cultural acculturation results of the Chinese and Minangkabau Cultures. The carving used in the *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino* is the only Rumah Gadang in West Sumatra that has a Chinese carving style, making it a differentiator and a source of pride for the owner.

Nevertheless, the Chinese carving motif in *the Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino* does not eliminate the philosophical meanings of the original Minangkabau carving, which serves as a guide for the Minangkabau community's life.

## 4. Conclusion

*Rumah Gadang* represents a profound symbol, a cornerstone of identity, and a guiding principle for the Minangkabau community, encapsulating the essence of their way of life. The exquisite carvings adorning the walls of *Rumah Gadang* stand as tangible evidence of the cultural opulence that characterizes the Minangkabau heritage. Among the myriad *Rumah Gadang* found in the region, *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino* emerges as a distinctive outlier, with Chinese motifs interwoven within its intricate wall carvings. Through an extensive comparative study comparing the general motifs found in a standard *Rumah Gadang* with those in *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino*, it becomes evident that the divergence in motif styles fails to alter the essence of *Rumah Gadang* itself. Each carving, regardless of its distinct aesthetic, embodies a profound and benevolent meaning that aligns harmoniously with the principles guiding the lives of the Minangkabau people. Furthermore, the unique shapes and decorative carvings, as well as the deliberate choice of colors adorning *Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino*, serve as unmistakable differentiating factors. These variations stand as a testament to the Minangkabau people's openness to external cultures, provided that such influences do not erode their well-preserved customs.

## References

- [1] Marthala AE. *Rumah Gadang Kajian Filosofi Arsitektur Minangkabau*, Bandung: Humaniora. 2013.
- [2] Supriatna C and Handayani S. Ungkapan Bentuk Dan Makna Filosofi Atap Masjid Raya Sumatera Barat, Padang, Indonesia. *Jurnal Arsitektur Zonasi*. 2021; 4(2): 307-316
- [3] Damayanti RA. Makna Seni Ukir Itiak Pulang Patang dan Implementasinya Dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat Minangkabau. *Seminar Nasional Pakar ke 1 Tahun 2018*. 2018; 1: 57-63.
- [4] Wiwita JS. Makna Simbolis Ragam Hias Pada Rumah Gadang Ukiran Cino Di Simalanggang, Kabupaten Lima Puluh Kota. Bachelor Thesis, Universitas Gadjah

- Mada; 2007.
- [5] Heidenheimer AJ, Heclo H, Adams CT. Comparative public policy. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- [6] Moedjiono. Ragam Hias Warna Sebagai Simbol Dalam Arsitektur Cina. Modul. 2011; 11(1): 17-22.
- [7] Damayanti RA. Pengaruh Islam Pada Bentuk Ornamen Ukiran Itiak Pulang Patang Sumatera Barat. Dimensi. 2017; 13(2): 141-152.
- [8] Juan W. Magpies, Bridge and Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols and Rediscovering the Lost Goddess in Chinese Qiqiao Festival. Comparative Woman. 2023;2(1):1-15
- [9] Khairuzzaky. Kajian Struktur Ragam Hias Ukiran Tradisional Minangkabau Pada Istan Basa Pagaruyuang. Jurnal Titik Imaji. 2018; 1(1): 54-67.
- [10] Aisyah S. Pola Dasar Dan Makna Ukiran Motif Rumah Gadang Koto Sani Kec. X Koto Singkarak Sumatera Barat. NARADA, Jurnal Desain & Seni FDSK. 2018;5(3):401-416.
- [11] Shalika MP, Sibarani R, Setia E. Makna Ornamen Rumah Gadang Minangkaba : Kajian Semantik. Humanika. 2020;27(2):70-81.