

## Structure and Meaning of Sabu Traditional Architecture:

*A Typology-Based Descriptive Anthropological Study*

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### Abstract

#### Keywords:

*architectural  
anthropology;  
architectural typology;  
cosmology; Sabu house;  
vernacular architecture*

The traditional Sabu house (ammu hawu) represents the cultural values, cosmology, and social structure of the Sabu people who inhabit the dry island environment of East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. This study aims to examine the structure, typology, and symbolic meanings of Sabu architecture through a descriptive-anthropological approach integrated with typological analysis. This combined approach allows the Sabu house to be understood not only as a physical entity but also as a symbolic system that embodies ancestral relations, ecological adaptation, and socio-cultural order. Data were collected through field observations, architectural documentation (2D and 3D), interviews with customary leaders and homeowners, and triangulated with literature on vernacular architecture and ethnographic studies in Eastern Indonesia. Typological analysis was employed to identify formal patterns, the tripartite spatial structure (lower-middle-upper), the taga batu construction system, east-west orientation, and functional variations of the house as a dwelling, ritual house, and storage house. Meanwhile, anthropological analysis was used to interpret the cosmological principles, gendered spatial organization (duru-wui), dualistic symbolism, and the maritime metaphors that underpin the conceptual foundation of Sabu architecture. The findings reveal that the Sabu house constitutes a microcosmic representation of the universe, expressed through its architectural composition. Elements such as tarru duru and tarru wui, the three-tiered spatial hierarchy (roa mengarru-kelaga-damu), ritual orientation, and the sequence of house-building rituals reflect the Sabu worldview regarding life, fertility, and ancestral presence. At the settlement level, the traditional village (rae) exhibits a consistent typology marked by East-West alignment, a central sacred space (telora), and genealogically structured spatial organization. This research contributes new insights through the integrated use of typological and anthropological frameworks, the production of technical 2D-3D visual documentation, and a more comprehensive interpretation of the cosmological and symbolic dualisms that inform

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the spatial and structural logic of Sabu architecture. This study makes an important contribution to the broader discourse on Indonesian vernacular architecture. It provides a conceptual foundation for cultural preservation and the development of culturally responsive design practices, particularly in the Sabu-Raijua region.

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## 1. Introduction

Vernacular architecture represents a form of local knowledge that emerges through long-term processes of adaptation to the physical environment, social conditions, local technologies, and the cultural values of a community (Lake, 2014; Lake & Salura, 2021; Paramitha & Kusdiwanggo, 2024; Salura & Lake, 2014). In contrast to modern architecture, which is primarily shaped by global aesthetics and industrial technologies, vernacular architecture develops organically through the collective experiences of multiple generations (Rahmawati et al., 2023; Salura et al., 2020; Tarigan, 2023). According to Rapoport (1983), vernacular architecture is governed by cultural determinants, values, traditions, rituals, symbols, social structures, and behavior patterns that directly shape the form, structure, spatial layout, orientation, and materiality of buildings (Rapoport, 1983). Thus, vernacular architecture is not merely a material construct, but a manifestation of a living cultural system.

Globally, vernacular architecture has increasingly become an important focus of inquiry in architectural studies (Rapoport, 2000), anthropology (Neonbasu et al., 2024), and cultural studies due to its growing vulnerability to modernization and the homogenization of design (Ineru et al., 2024; Lake & Salura, 2021). Oliver (1997) argues that traditional houses function as cultural repositories of collective memory, ancestral narratives, and ecological knowledge systems. However, in many regions, shifts in lifestyle, material industrialization, and socio-economic integration have caused various forms of traditional architecture to undergo transformation, simplification, and even structural disappearance (Pratiwi & Wikantiyoso, 2022). Similar phenomena are observed across numerous Indonesian regions, including Minangkabau, Toraja, Timor, and Sumba, which exhibit signs of disintegration within their traditional settlement systems (Rong & Bahaudin, 2023; Schefold et al., 2014; Waterson, 2009).

In this context, the Sabu House (*ammu hawu*) holds a significant position as one of the vernacular architectural forms in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), emerging from the Sabu people's long-standing adaptation to their dry island environment (Jeraman, 2019). This traditional house functions not only as a dwelling but also as a cosmological symbol that connects humans with their ancestors, the natural world, and customary rituals (Mukhtar et al., 2025; Pranata & William, 2013). Every architectural element, from its inverted-boat form and East-West orientation to its gender-based spatial division and tripartite structural composition, embodies philosophical meanings linked to the social, genealogical, and spiritual structures of Sabu society (Kapilawi et al., 2015; Solikhah & Bere, 2021).

Nevertheless, research on traditional Sabu architecture remains relatively limited. Studies on vernacular architecture in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) have thus far focused more extensively on the Atoni Pah Meto community in Timor, the Manggarai people, or

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traditional houses in Flores and Sumba (McWilliam, 2005; Solikhah et al., 2025; Solikhah & Bere, 2021). Scholarly documentation specifically addressing the structure, function, and meaning of the Sabu house remains scarce, particularly research that integrates architectural typology with cultural-anthropological perspectives. In fact, within the context of changing lifestyles, in which many Sabu people now reside more permanently in their agricultural field houses rather than in their ancestral villages, the preservation of traditional knowledge has become increasingly urgent (Schefold et al., 2014; Solikhah & Bere, 2021).

This shift in residential patterns aligns with Waterson's (2009) concerns that traditional houses in Southeast Asia function as centers of social and ritual identity; thus, changes in their form and orientation may directly influence transformations in the cultural structure. Consequently, research that integrates both tangible aspects (form) and intangible aspects (meaning) is essential for comprehensively understanding the transformation of vernacular architecture (Waterson, 2009).

The typological approach in architecture offers an analytical framework for identifying structural patterns, formal variations, and construction systems of the Sabu house. As articulated by Sukada (1984) and Mone (1978) an architectural type represents a fundamental pattern whose evolution can be traced over. Through typology, researchers can examine the interrelationships among form, function, and symbolism inherent in traditional architecture.

Meanwhile, the cultural anthropological approach posits that traditional houses function as symbolic spaces representing the cosmos, social structure, ritual life, and collective identity. Integrating these two approaches is essential, as Sabu architecture contains multiple layers of meaning that cannot be fully understood through formal analysis alone (Dillistone, 2002; Priarana & Rusnandar, 2025; Tjahjono, 2014).

Based on this context, the present study aims to identify the structure, function, form, and meaning of the Sabu house through a descriptive anthropological analysis grounded in architectural typology. The objectives of this research are: (1) To document and classify the typology of Sabu architecture comprehensively; (2) To reveal the symbolic and cosmological meanings underlying the formation of space and structural elements; (3) To explain the interrelationships among culture, social systems, and architecture within Sabu tradition; and (4) To provide an integrative analytical model that may be applied to other studies of vernacular architecture.

Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the preservation of traditional Sabu architecture while enriching the academic discourse on Indonesian vernacular architecture, which forms an essential component of the nation's cultural identity.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Vernacular Architecture and Its Relationship to Culture**

Vernacular architecture is a form of architecture that evolves organically through long-term adaptation to natural conditions (Widodo, 2019), social dynamics (Bhaswara, 2010), cultural frameworks (Purbadi, 2017), and the cosmological systems of local communities (Lake, 2015). Rapoport (Rapoport, 1983, 2000, 2005) emphasizes that vernacular architecture is shaped by cultural determinants, values, norms, customs,

symbols, and behavioral patterns, which fundamentally inform the formation of spatial and formal configurations. Thus, vernacular buildings function not merely as containers of human activity but as manifestations of cultural identity.

In island communities such as Sabu, the architecture of traditional houses reflects systems of belief, social structure, and ancestral cosmology. Architectural elements, including roof forms, stilted structures, materials, and spatial orientation, encapsulate ecological and symbolic knowledge passed down through generations. A vernacular perspective, therefore, allows the Sabu house to be understood as an expression of cultural values rather than merely a physical architectural artifact.

### **Architectural Typology as an Analytical Approach**

In this study, the analytical focus is oriented toward the typological examination of the Sabu house (*ammu hawu*) to uncover both its formal typology (form) and functional typology (function).

Etymologically, typology refers to the discipline that examines matters related to types (Güney, 2007; Jabłońska et al., 2022). The term type itself derives from the Greek word *typos*, which generally means a basic form or pattern. Over time, the concept of typology has acquired various meanings, depending on the perspective and analytical framework employed (Norberg-Schulz et al., 2000). Within the field of architecture, the term has undergone broad interpretation, as scholars offer differing views on the notion of type and its role in understanding architectural objects (Salura & Clarissa, 2018).

According to Budi A. Sukada, typology in architecture can be understood as a process of tracing the origins of an architectural object through three fundamental stages. First, the identification of basic forms (formal structures) inherent in any architectural object, which include fundamental geometric elements such as circles, squares, rectangles, ellipses, and their various transformations. Second, the determination of the essential properties or inherent character of an architectural object based on its geometric form; for instance, the square is often considered static, whereas the circle tends to exhibit a centripetal quality. Third, the examination of how these fundamental forms have evolved, leading to their manifestation in the contemporary context (Sukada, 1984).

Through these stages, architectural typology enables researchers to understand the relationships among form, character, transformation, and context, thereby positioning typology as an essential analytical tool in both traditional and modern architectural studies. Typological analysis identifies recurring patterns, types, and variations in architectural forms that reflect fundamental principles. Typology is not merely a classification of forms but an exploration of the collective meanings embedded within them. Typological studies in vernacular architecture serve to: (1) Identify basic formal patterns; (2) Interpret the relationships among form, function, and symbolism; and (3) Explain the transformation of forms resulting from temporal, cultural, or external influences (Bigiotti et al., 2025; Moussaoui, 2024; Vergara-perucich & Vergara-perucich, 2024). In the context of the Sabu house, typological analysis is crucial for understanding its anatomical elements, including the lower, middle, and upper enclosures.

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### **Symbolic Meanings of Space and Form**

Meaning in vernacular architecture does not arise solely from its physical form but also from the symbolic structures that underlie cultural foundations (Salura, 2018). Recent research emphasizes that the spatial meaning embedded in vernacular architecture reflects cultural and social values beyond mere form, revealing how communities imbue space with historical, social, and cultural significance (Lake & Jeraman, 2023; Manurung et al., 2022). According to Eliade, (1987), sacred and profane spaces are distinguished by symbols, rituals, and cosmological markers. Vernacular houses are often regarded as a microcosm of the universe.

In the context of the Sabu house: (1) The roof symbolizes the connection with the ancestors; (2) The middle space represents the human world; (3) The underfloor area signifies the lower world (a symbolic realm); (4) The house orientation follows specific directions that hold spiritual significance; (5) Each space possesses gendered (masculine-feminine) and socially stratified functions (Jeraman, 2019).

### **Conceptual Framework of the Research**

Research on traditional architecture in Indonesia has developed through various theoretical and methodological approaches, particularly those that position traditional buildings as manifestations of culture, cosmology, and the social structures of their communities. This study is grounded in that intellectual foundation while simultaneously offering a methodological intersection that is relatively uncommon: the integrated use of architectural typology and cultural anthropology, specifically within the context of the traditional Sabu house.

In theoretical studies on traditional architecture as a representation of cultural identity, Kemas (2017) argues that traditional architecture serves as a cultural symbol inseparable from the value systems, norms, and social structures of its community. From this perspective, every architectural element, whether form, structure, or material, constitutes an expression rooted in collective consciousness (Norberg-Schulz & Norberg-Schulz, 1979; Rapoport, 2005). This view is essential as a point of departure for interpreting the traditional Sabu house not merely as a physical composition, but as a representation of cultural identity shaped through historical processes.

Likewise, architecture as a symbolic system and a medium of social communication has been articulated by Dillistone, (2002), who emphasizes that symbols in culture play a central role as instruments of social communication. In architecture, these symbols manifest in spatial orientation, structural hierarchy, distinctions within domestic areas, as well as in ornaments and rituals that accompany the use of a building (Habraken, 2000). This perspective enriches the understanding of how the Sabu house functions as a space of meaning and a site for articulating social identity.

Cosmology, social structure, and ritual as determinants of Nusantara architecture provide a theoretical foundation for this study; therefore, the work of Tjahjono (2014) is employed to strengthen the theoretical framework. It emphasizes that traditional Nusantara houses reflect the community's cosmology, social hierarchy, and ritual systems, which are institutionally embedded in local culture. A house is not merely a dwelling, but

a cosmological space that connects humans with nature, ancestors, and one another (Salura & Lake, 2014). This framework allows the Sabu house to be interpreted through a triadic relationship: cosmology – society – ritual. In addition, Rapaport (1969) offers one of the most comprehensive theories of vernacular architecture, highlighting cultural determinants that shape architectural form, structure, and spatial patterns. He positions vernacular architecture as the product of a long evolutionary process shaped by needs, climate, local technologies, social organization, and cultural symbolism. This theory provides a direct reference for the present study in understanding the Sabu house as an outcome of continuous dialogue among landscape, genealogy, and belief systems.

In the context of East Nusa Tenggara, traditional houses are positioned as symbols of social order and representations of the cosmos (Hasudungan et al., 2020; Schefold et al., 2003, 2014; Solikhah & Bere, 2021). Their studies demonstrate how the placement of pillars, spatial divisions, and building orientation are closely linked to kinship structures and life-cycle rituals. These findings are highly relevant for understanding the architectural structure of the Sabu house as a manifestation of the cosmology of the Sabu-Raijua ethnic community. Several local studies have documented the transformation of Sabu traditional houses due to external interactions and shifting lifestyle patterns. In areas such as Haba and Dimu, traditional settlements have undergone disintegration, leaving only a few old houses that are no longer inhabited. In contrast, regions such as Mahara, Liae, and Raijua still maintain ancient houses that remain occupied and well-preserved. Moreover, there is an observable tendency for the community to prefer living in field houses located outside the main village, except during customary ceremonies.

These phenomena indicate a shift in the function, value, and continuity of traditional Sabu houses in the modern context, underscoring the importance of an in-depth study of their transformation, typology, and meaning. Although numerous studies have explored Nusantara traditional architecture and ethnographic accounts of the Sabu people, only a few have combined architectural typology with anthropological approaches to reveal the structure and meaning of the Sabu house comprehensively.

The elaboration of anthropological and typological approaches is essential because: (1) Typology enables the systematic mapping of patterns, forms, structures, and physical variations of traditional houses; (2) Anthropology provides explanations of the social, cosmological, and symbolic meanings underlying these forms; (3) The integration of both approaches allows for a deeper understanding of how the architectural elements of the Sabu house embody cultural messages and local identity.

Thus, this study offers a significant contribution to enriching the body of knowledge on vernacular architecture in Indonesia, particularly within the context of Sabu-Raijua, while also providing an analytical model that can be applied to other studies of ethnic architecture.

### **3. Research Method**

This study employs a descriptive-anthropological approach grounded in architectural typology to reveal the structure and meaning of traditional Sabu houses. This approach is selected because traditional houses are not merely physical constructions but symbolic systems representing the cosmology, social structure, and cultural values of the

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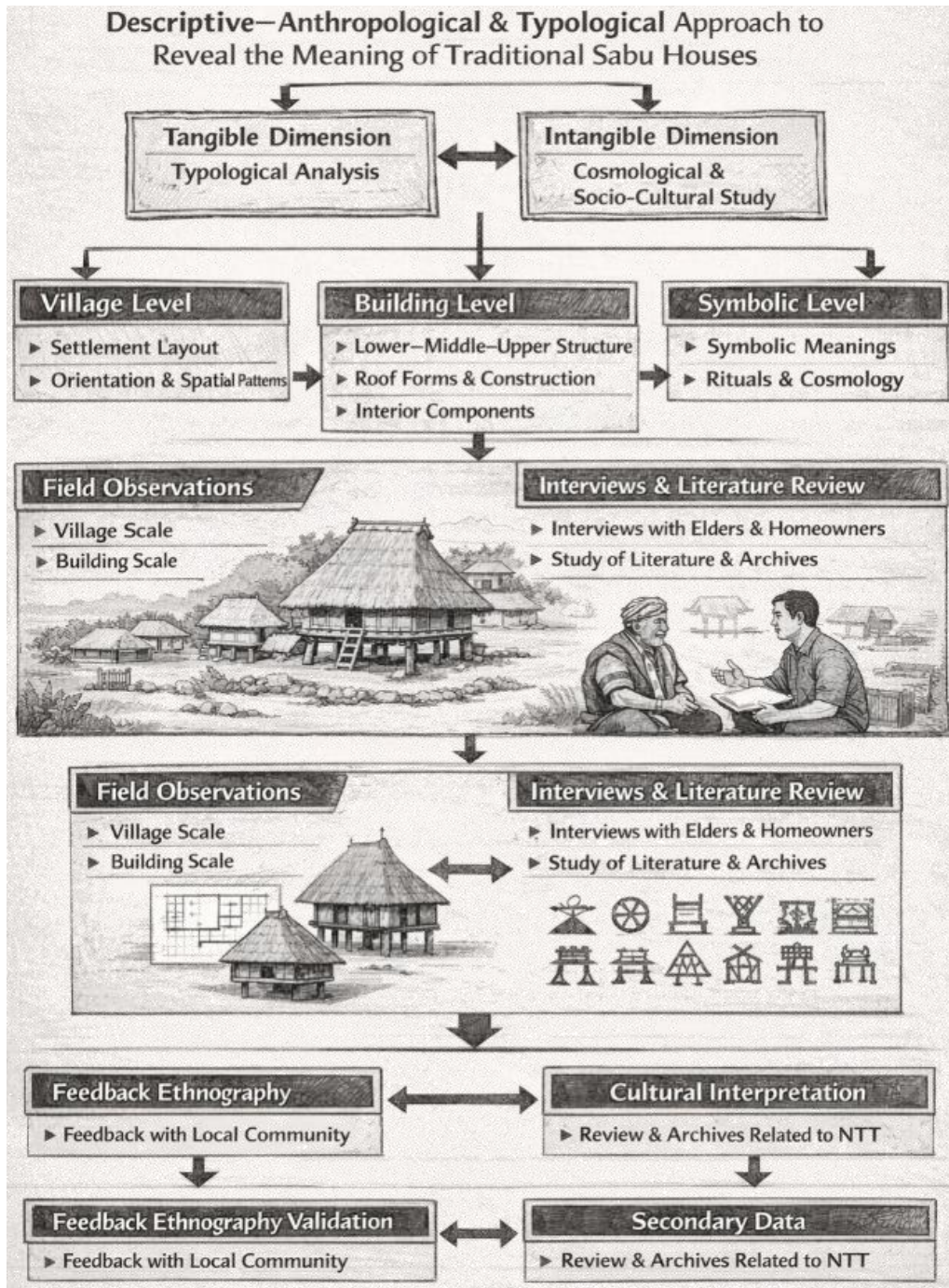
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Sabu community. The anthropological perspective provides a framework for interpreting the relationships among architecture, culture, cosmology, and social systems, enabling the researcher to capture both tangible (physical) and intangible (non-physical) meanings. In line with Kemas (2017), traditional architecture inherently incorporates philosophical dimensions that are integrated with cultural identity; thus, the research method must be capable of comprehensively addressing both domains.

The descriptive-anthropological approach allows the architectural phenomena of Sabu to be described through an understanding of cultural values, belief systems, and patterns of life. The Sabu house is viewed as a cultural text that can be “read” through symbols, cosmological narratives, and ritual aspects. Meanwhile, typological analysis (tangible analysis) provides an analytical structure to map the architectural elements of the Sabu house at three levels: (1) Village level: settlement layout, orientation, and spatial patterns; (2) Building level: lower-middle-upper structural components, roof forms, construction systems, and interior space; (3) Symbolic level: meanings embedded in structural elements, spatial positions, ornaments, and cosmological principles. The intangible (non-physical) dimension is analyzed through the cosmological narratives of the Sabu community, kinship systems and gender relations, ritual space functions, symbolism of structural elements, meanings of house orientation, and the philosophical interpretation of lower-middle-upper enclosures.

Field observations (tangible data) were carried out at two scales: (1) Village scale: observing spatial patterns, house orientation, relationships among buildings, open spaces, and the social structure influencing settlement organization; (2) Building scale: documenting the lower, middle, and upper structural components. All elements were recorded through photographs, measurements, field sketches, and dimensional documentation. Field data were redrawn into two-dimensional representations (plans, elevations, and sections) and three-dimensional models to obtain accurate proportions, structural relationships, and visual interpretations. This technique follows the vernacular architectural documentation practices recommended by (Oliver, 2006).

Primary data were obtained predominantly through direct interactions with homeowners, traditional elders, cultural leaders, and traditional builders. Interview data were validated using a feedback ethnography approach (Birt et al., 2016) to ensure that the researcher’s interpretations of symbolic meanings did not conflict with local community perspectives. Secondary data were collected from previous research, local archives, regional government documentation, ethnographic studies of the Sabu people, and architectural typology literature on East Nusa Tenggara.



#### 4. Results and Discussion

The traditional settlement areas in Sabu Raijua Regency exhibit a remarkable richness of cultural heritage. In almost every customary territory, traditional villages remain well preserved, both in their architectural forms and in their spatial arrangements, which reflect the cosmological values and social structures of the Sabu community. The endurance of these traditional settlements not only serves as evidence of the continuity of tradition but also reflects the local community's commitment to safeguarding ancestral heritage across generations.

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In official planning documents, particularly the Regional Spatial Plan (RTRW) of Sabu Raijua Regency, these traditional villages are designated as strategic regional assets. The local government positions these areas as cultural tourism destinations, recognizing their historical, architectural, and anthropological value. This designation also represents an integrated preservation effort in which tourism potential is developed sustainably without compromising the authenticity and cultural integrity of the Sabu community. Therefore, the architecture of the Sabu house holds significant importance as a research object, particularly for revealing its typological forms and architectural meanings.

### **Typology of Traditional Sabu Settlements: Structure, Orientation, and Meaning**

Kana (1983) The study of the Sabu community notes that traditional settlements, or *rae*, are constructed according to cosmological and genealogical principles that are materialized in spatial form. Villages are generally situated along hill ridges and enclosed by stone fences, forming an elliptical or rectangular pattern with rounded corners. This indicates a stable spatial configuration that may be categorized as a morphological typology of settlements characterized by an elliptical cluster pattern.

The presence of two main gates – *toka dimu* (East) and *toka wa* (West) – reinforces the village's orientation toward the rising and setting of the sun. This east–west axial alignment corresponds to the concept of *panau nga ngi'u rai* ("following the body of the boat"). This metaphor not only illustrates the form of Sabu Island but also reflects the community's connection to the symbolism of the ancestral journey.

Similar studies among Austronesian societies reveal comparable patterns: East–West orientation as a marker of life cycles, rituals, and the ancestral realm (Fox, 1997, 2006; Waterson, 2009). Thus, spatial orientation in Sabu settlements is not merely utilitarian but represents a manifestation of cultural values and belief systems.

#### **a. The Middle Space (Telora) as the Cosmological Center**

The most significant typological element in a Sabu village is the central space, *telora*, which contains the *nada rae*, the village altar composed of stone arrangements, sacred trees, and ceremonial stones. Typologically, the *nada rae* can be categorized as a communal sacred space, functioning as the gravitational center of the village's social life, rituals, and cosmology.

This concept of a central ritual space aligns with Waterson, (2009) findings on the ritual center in Austronesian settlements, as well as Oliver (1997) discussion of the sacred core in vernacular architecture worldwide. The presence of the three ceremonial stones (*wowadu rai bala*, *wowadu riru bala*, and *wowadu dabi bala*) reflects the triadic cosmology of the Sabu people: earth–sky–sea. This configuration further reinforces the relationship between physical structure and the community's belief system.

#### **b. Building Mass Patterns and Orientation (*Duru Dimu/Duru Wa*)**

Houses within the *rae* are constructed in parallel alignment following the longitudinal axis of the village. Even when geographical conditions compel the settlement to extend in a North–South direction, the orientation of individual houses must still adhere to the customary rules of *duru dimu* or *duru wa*, in which the *anjungan* (*duru*) must face

either east or west. This reflects a typology of ritual orientation rather than a purely functional one.

This principle aligns with Rapoport (2000), the theory that traditional architecture consistently establishes symbolic orientation as a marker of cultural identity. Similar patterns are also found in traditional houses in Timor, Toraja houses, and traditional Sumbanese houses, indicating that ritual-based house orientation is a typical architectural pattern throughout eastern Indonesia (Forth, 1998; McWilliam, 2005; Waterson, 2009).

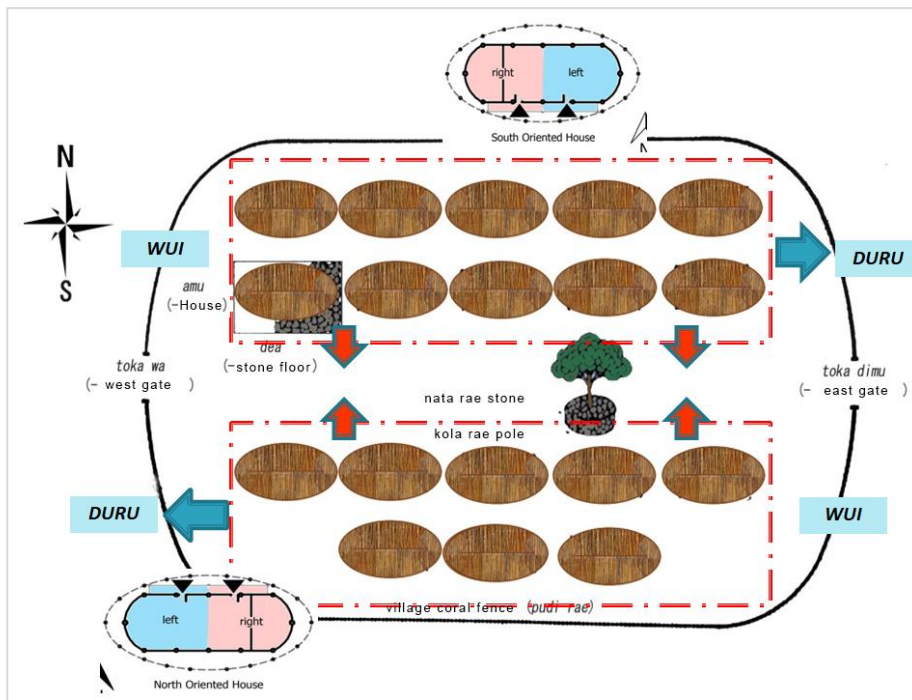


Figure 2. Settlement Pattern of the Sabu People, according to Niko L. Kana

c. Settlement Patterns: Rae Kowa and Field Houses (*Ammu pa Liha Pada*)

There are two primary settlement patterns in Sabu: *rae kowa* (boat-shaped villages) and dispersed field dwellings. (1) *Rae Kowa* (Boat Village) – This is the ancestral or primary settlement, consisting of clustered houses forming an orderly residential unit, typically enclosed by coral-stone fences (*pudi* or *la pudi*). It is within this spatial configuration that the whole structure of traditional settlement is manifested: houses aligned along the East-West axis, the ritual space located at the village center, and layered stone-and-cactus fences functioning as protective boundaries. These stone fences are tightly arranged with soil filling the gaps as a binder, while the cactus plants atop them serve as traditional defense systems, a practice also found among the *Lamaholot* community and several ethnic groups in Timor (McWilliam, 2005). (2) *Ammu pa Liha Pada* (Field Houses). These are dwellings scattered across agricultural land. Field houses serve as places for daily activities such as farming, livestock raising, and storing produce. Today, residents often spend more time living in these field houses and return to the main village only for customary ceremonies or family rituals. This layered spatial use reflects a dual settlement pattern, a configuration that, according to Forth (1998) It is also found among the Sumbanese and other traditional settlement systems.

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### Architecture of the Sabu House (*Ammu Hawu*)

Findings from the literature review and field observations indicate that descriptions of the types or typologies of Sabu houses (*ammu hawu*) appear in several versions, yet they share similar conceptual foundations. In early literature, Niko L. Kana (1983) categorizes Sabu architecture into two major groups: the traditional Sabu house (*ammu hawu*) and the non-native or “foreign” house (*ammu jawa*). The traditional Sabu house is a stilted structure that falls into two primary types: *ammu ae nga roukoko* and *ammu taga batu*.

The first type is characterized by roof ridges extending prominently toward the East and West, following the longitudinal East–West orientation of the Sabu house, and by the use of *roukoko*, a roof element known as the “neck leaf.” Meanwhile, the *taga batu* refers to two curved beams attached to the broader sides of the house, forming semi-circular shapes on the eastern and western ends. The *taga batu* construction is the structural foundation that gave rise to the *ammu ae nga roukoko* type, as both employ the same structural system.

Houses that do not utilize *taga batu* and have earthen floors are classified as *ammu jawa* (foreign houses). A stilted house whose side walls do not curve due to the absence of *taga batu* is referred to as *ammu atta* (the “cut” house).



Figure 3. *Ammu roukoko*



Figure 4. Ammu atta

a. Typology of Sabu Houses Based on Tradition and Construction

Yudson from the Department of Tourism and Culture of Sabu Raijua Regency describes the architecture of the Sabu house (*ammu do hawu*) as classifiable according to: (1) Type, namely *ammu hawu* vs. *ammu jawa*; (2) Model, namely *ammu taga batu* vs. *ammu atta*; (3) Size, namely *ammu ae* (large) and *ammu iki* (small); (4) Construction system, namely *ammu tukki* vs. *ammu halla*; and (5) Religious function, namely *ammu kapue* vs. *ammu pe*.

The architectural typology of the Sabu house aligns with Amos Rapoport's (1982) theoretical framework, which views vernacular architecture as the outcome of interactions among culture, environment, symbolic values, and social needs. Characteristics such as the use of the *taga batu* structural system, the East-West orientation, the symbolism of *roukoko*, and the spatial divisions based on gender and social hierarchy demonstrate that Sabu architecture is a cultural artifact. This material expression represents the social system and cosmology of its community.

Studies by Fox (1997), Schefold et al. (2003), and other ethnographers in the East Nusa Tenggara region also reveal a similar pattern, namely that traditional houses in this area function not only as dwellings but also as representations of social status, media for ritual

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practice, ancestral symbols, and cosmological structures. In the context of Sabu, these functions are clearly reflected in the spatial separation between the male space (*duru*) and the female space (*wui*), the loft structure used for storing heirlooms and food supplies, and various construction elements that adopt the forms and terminology of boats, an aspect that connects the Sabu people with their maritime identity.

### **b. Typology of Sabu Houses Based on Function**

Christoffel Kana (1986) further develops this classification by focusing on functional typology, dividing Sabu houses into three categories: dwelling houses, ritual houses, and storage houses. This classification underscores that the typology of Sabu houses is determined not only by form and construction, but also by the socio-cultural and religious functions embedded within their spatial structure.

#### **Dwelling House (*Ammu Pe*)**

In the Sabu language, a dwelling house is called *ammu pe*. Based on social status, dwelling houses are categorized into *ammu pe douae banni ae* (royal house), *ammu pe mone aha* (commoner's house), *ammu mone kaja* (house of the wealthy), and *ammu mone kehia* (house of the poor). Although in daily practice these social-status labels are not always explicitly mentioned, variations in form and construction quality clearly indicate the owner's social standing.

The naming of houses typically refers to roof forms, the shape of the *kebie* (penendes beam), structural posts, and the level of authenticity of the house. For example: (1) *Ammu ae roukoko* has a *bangngu* beam that spans the full length of the house, producing a distinctive roof profile; (2) *Ammu iki* uses a shorter beam, resulting in a different roof form; (3) *Ammu taga batu* uses additional elliptical beams, giving the roof the appearance of an inverted boat this type is classified as an authentic Sabu house; (4) *Ammu atta* ("cut house") does not use these additional beams and therefore has a rectangular form; it is also called *ammu jawa* (foreign house); (5) Based on structural posts, there are *ammu halla* (posts embedded in the ground) and *ammu tuki* (posts tied to *tuki* beams).

Other classifications include *ammu kelaga* (stilt house) and *ammu laburai* (house with earthen walls), often associated with the degree of authenticity and cultural acceptance within the local tradition.

#### **Ritual House**

Ritual houses within the Jingitiu tradition comprise several types of structures:

1. *Ammu kapue/ammu ngaa kewahhu/ammu ada*: the principal ancestral house where ancestors gather, and ceremonies are conducted.
2. *Ammu Deo*: a worship house in which the Deo Rai lead rituals.
3. *Ammu rue*: a place designated for purification rituals.
4. *Ammu Maja*: a house used for rituals honoring the figure Maja Pai Jawa.

Ritual houses are typically large in size (*ammu ae*) to accommodate various communal ceremonies held throughout the year. This reflects the strong religious function of these buildings and the close interrelationship among architecture, ritual practice, and the community's social structure.

### **Storage House (*Ammu Tegida/Ammu Taka Kepepe Pana*)**

Storage houses are used to keep weaving tools, death shrouds (*bara wutu made*), and other sacred objects. The term *tegida* refers to the device used to tighten weaving threads, whereas *taka kepepe pana* denotes a container considered “hot,” sacred, and *taboo* to touch carelessly. This typology demonstrates the close relationship between architecture and the human life cycle, consistent with anthropological findings that traditional houses in many eastern Indonesian societies function as centers for the production of symbols, rites of passage, and the transmission of identity.

### **The Meaning of Sabu House Architecture from an Anthropological Perspective**

The meaning of Sabu house architecture (*ammu hawu*) is not oriented solely toward physical function, but also reflects the cosmology, symbolism, and social order of the Sabu community. Anthropologically, the structure of the house is understood as a representation of a boat, an important icon in maritime culture, visible through its terminology, form, and construction details. Several parts of the house, such as the *anjungan*, *buritan*, *gela*, and *roa*, use terms identical to those found in boat components (Kana, 1983). This shared terminology affirms the symbolic relationship between the house, the boat, and Sabu identity.

Beyond its association with the boat, the Sabu house is also treated as a living entity. Through a series of house-building rituals, the structure is believed to receive *hemanga* (life force), thus acquiring a spiritual dimension and becoming a place where family members live, grow, and develop. The concept of *hemanga* emphasizes the cosmological view that the house is an integral part of the Sabu life cycle.

The spatial structure of the Sabu house is built upon symbolic oppositions rooted in gender, social hierarchy, and cosmology. The division between *duru* (male space) and *wui* (female space) represents a fundamental dualism in Sabu culture, such as light–dark and open–closed. The *duru* area is public and exposed, while the *wui* area is domestic, hidden, and associated with fertility. This dualism is also reflected in seasonal rituals: ceremonies in the rainy season are dedicated to the female figure *Bani Ae*, whereas ceremonies in the dry season are directed toward the male figure *Pulodo*.

The typology of Sabu houses also reveals distinctions of “elder–younger” through the orientation of front–back or right–left (*kagena–keriu*). Wooden structural elements such as *taga batu* and *badu* are arranged according to this hierarchical principle. The front rafters are installed first and considered symbolic of the male, while the rear elements are associated with the female. This constructive arrangement is not merely technical; it reflects the social order, the patrilineal kinship system (*udu*), and genealogical relationships among household members.

### **The Meaning of Sabu House Architecture as a Symbol of World Order**

From a cultural anthropological perspective, the traditional Sabu house (*ammu hawu*) is understood not merely as a dwelling, but as a representation of world order, social structure, and the religious expression of its people. As explained by Timo (2005), the arrangement of the Sabu house, its form, orientation, spatial structure, and architectural terminology, is grounded in symbolic meanings embedded within the local cosmology.

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Every architectural element carries associative and imaginative values that articulate the Sabu worldview.

These cosmological principles are reflected in various taboos and rules governing house construction, such as the prohibition against building a house at the mouth of a river believed to be the dwelling place of spirits or using timber containing bird nests or holes, which is thought to bring misfortune (van de Wetering). The Sabu stilt house itself embodies a principle of sacred offering, expressed in the saying *kattu kelaga kemubu*, which holds that Sabu family life is regarded as a sacred offering, thereby requiring the dwelling to be elevated above the ground. Thus, the *ammu hawu* is understood as an act of devotion and reverence toward transcendent powers.

Structurally, the Sabu house consists of three levels with symbolic functions: the lower space (*roä mengarru*), used for women's activities such as weaving; the middle space (*kelaga*), serving as the locus of family life; and the upper space (*damu*), used to store seeds, sacred objects, and agricultural tools. Access to the upper level is restricted to the women's chamber, underscoring women's role as guardians of fertility and the continuity of life. The building's orientation always facing North or South is linked to the Sabu cosmographic understanding of the island's position and the directional flow of life.

The structure of the house is further defined by the number and function of its posts and beams, each of which bears a specific name. Their number must not be even, as even numbers are believed to bring death. The two main posts *tarru duru* (male) and *tarru wui* (female) serve as the symbolic center of the house. The partition wall between them is known as *rulabu* or *ruhedidi*. The *tarru* elements hold profound religious significance, serving as sites for seeking blessings, protection, and the resolution of family issues through rituals such as *hapo kebake* and *kerei kepoke*. In these rituals, the ancestors are symbolically invoked to reveal the causes of misfortune, provide moral guidance, and restore balance within the household and the community.

Thus, the *tarru* represents the spiritual presence of the ancestors in daily life, making the traditional house not only a physical structure but also a sacred space and a center of ethical and social orientation. The ambivalence of rituals directed either toward *deo* (the divine) or *wanggu* (other spiritual forces) reveals the complexity of Sabu belief systems. Overall, the architecture of the *ammu hawu* serves as the primary medium through which the Sabu people interpret their relationship with the world, the ancestors, and transcendent powers, thereby establishing the house as a holistic symbol of the cosmic and social order of Sabu society.

### **5. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates the architecture of the Sabu house (*ammu hawu*). This study concludes that the traditional Sabu house (*ammu hawu*) embodies an integrated system of architectural structure and cultural meaning formed through the interaction of cosmology, social organization, and ritual practice. Through a descriptive-anthropological analysis grounded in architectural typology, the research demonstrates that each typological category of the Sabu house corresponds to specific structural configurations and symbolic meanings.

At the settlement level, the *rae* typology is characterized by East-West orientation, a central *telora*, and an elliptical cluster pattern that reflects cosmological order and

genealogical structure. At the building level, the typology of ammu hawu is defined by the taga batu construction system, tripartite spatial hierarchy (lower-middle-upper), and gendered spatial division between duru and wui. Functionally, the differentiation between dwelling houses (ammu pe), ritual houses (ammu kapue), and storage houses (ammu tegida) demonstrates how architectural form is directly linked to social roles and ritual significance.

The findings confirm that the Sabu house functions as a microcosmic representation of the universe, where architectural elements operate simultaneously as structural components and symbolic media connecting humans, ancestors, and the cosmos. By integrating typological analysis with anthropological interpretation, this research provides a more precise explanation of how structure and meaning are inseparable in Sabu traditional architecture. This integrative approach offers a valuable analytical framework for future studies of vernacular architecture and supports efforts to preserve culture and to develop culturally responsive architectural design in eastern Indonesia.

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