Expressing Marginal Identity through Living House

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Abstract. As landed-sea gipsy, Akit people recognized as an ethnic group who are trying to adopt some different cultures and traditions in their daily life. In the adopting process, the people are settled down on a coastal area of an island, or at river’s estuary compound. This process has seen as a way to ensure preserving their sea life tradition and also to adopt land traditions at the same time. Through field survey and in-depth interviews method, this paper shows how most Akit people at the Rupat Island foster Chinese culture in their daily life, including on their house. The house is not only to show their marginal cultural identity but also to express the influence of the Chinese-side that can be seen both on their traditional and contemporary home. This paper confirms that the living house of Akit people has found as a form of compromising cultural life in expressing their today’s identity.

Keywords: Akit, Marginal Cultural Identity, Living House

1. Introduction
The Akit people have identified as an ethnic group people who currently inhabit islands on the east coast of Sumatra. In the beginning, the Akit people known in the era of the Kingdom of Gasib around the 15th century [1]. They live on a raft and move around the Straits of Melaka and water the east coast of Sumatra [2, 3]. Their daily life is close to sea-life activities such as fishing. In the 15th century, this community population had estimated by 300 people with a composition dominated by men [4].

According to Batin (an ethnic sub-leader), Akit comes from the word of berakit (rafting) that was a community carrying wood along the Jantan river for the needs of wooden for buildings construction during the Gasib time. This routine activities, in the end, became the identity of the community groups which came to be known as Akit people (Wang Amoi, interview, 2016). Due to security problems in sea and wild animals around the coast, during the reign of the Sultanate of Siak in the 18th century, the Akit people got permission to inhabit the island of Rupat. They shared this territory with the Rempang ethnic people through an agreement [5]. Since then, the Akit began life and traditions on land-life and built modest houses along the coast or river estuary.

In its development, aside from continuing to catch sea fish, the Akit people began to recognize catching river fish by using bamboo trap and utilizing mangroves for burning charcoal. This land-life developed further during the Japanese occupation that Akit had forced to open rubber, coconut, sago plantations and open shifting rice fields and pig raising [6]. In this period, the Akit people began to be attached to the Chinese’s loan sharks and bonded system in terms of survival. From the contact with Chinese’s loan sharks, this ultimately brought essential changes to the Akit people, including in terms of housing needs. At present, the settlement of the Akit people is still living in the northern part of the Rupat island in the village of Titi Akar. From the 12,000 thousand inhabitants who inhabit the island, approximately 5,000 people are Akit people consisting of 903 households [7].
This paper investigates how marginal communities have expressed their identity in the living house nowadays. The changing of the house through time becomes a research focus in gathering filed data to figure how the community is adapting to the surrounding environment.

2. Research Methods
This paper has prepared using a qualitative research approach in looking for values, perceptions, and also the process of a community change that is taking place at the location where the research has conducted [8, 9, 10]. By listening directly [11], researchers can position themselves more deeply in assessing the problems that are happening [12, 13, 14]. Therefore, the first-hand data from the research location becomes important as primary data [15] so that the research conclusions are not biased.

3. Results and Discussion
At the beginning of the landing process, the Akit people made houses in the form of stage construction. This house on stilts has a leaf roof, wall of tree bark and bamboo flooring, whereas the construction connection uses rattan ties and wooden pegs. But this original house building is no longer found today. This situation is following the view of [16] that houses grow under community traditions by optimizing existing local potential. In line with the opinion of Upton [17] who saw the general simple buildings carried out by traditional groups would be able to survive for a long time.

Furthermore, from the field survey, various types and forms of Akit houses are found. One of the oldest traditional forms houses shows some elements of early home construction such as exterior houses still with the wall of tree bark and leaf roof. However, there are adjustments on the floor that already use boards and construction links using nails. There are very few houses like this (Figure 1). Small adjustors to the elements of the house saw a common thing as a form of response and adaptation but remain in the corridor to maintain tradition [18].

![Traditional Akit’s House at Rupat Island](image)

Even though it looks similar, the house is the initial clue to the homeowner whether he still embraces the ancestor beliefs as animism. In the community, if the Akit people embrace the religion of Islam either because of a converted or of marriage, then that person is no longer called an Akit, but is considered a Malay. This is due to the adherents of Islam are identified as Malay, and the descendants afterwards [19, 20, 21].

It is different if the Akit people embrace Confucian beliefs or believe in Chinese gods; then they are still regarded as part of the Akit people. Besides due to the influence of trade, the leeway in the identification of social community that brought the majority of the Akit people moved to embrace Confucian beliefs, so that only a small portion of the Akit people still survive with their animism.

The house of the Akit who embraced Confucian beliefs had a unique sign, both on the exterior and interior of the house. In general, the interior of this house will adjust to provide the place of worship and is marked in red (Figure 2).
Figure 2. Worship Area With a Red-Marked in the House

Giving a red mark is also applied to the exterior of the house. This mark is by placing a small red flag in the yard or by providing a red mark on the front door of the house (Figure 3). The phenomenon of the use of red marks on homes is not only applied in traditional dwellings but also applies to contemporary Akit houses (Figure 4).

Figure 3. A Red-Marked on House’s Exterior

Figure 4. Frond Door with Red-Marker

Using markers at Akit’s house, this is following Hutcheon’s [22] opinion that the power of cultural beliefs and values are significant to shape physical and social movements. In this context, even though the physical condition of the house can change, traditions formed by previous cultural beliefs continue to be brought and maintained by today’s Akit people.

Changes in physical elements are also believed by Mumford [23], who argues that architectural forms play an essential role as a symbol of social transformation in responding to changing conditions that are happening. A similar view was also expressed by Dovey [24], who saw architectural forms as a mediator in social relations within society while addressing other social problems. Therefore, the phenomenon that occurs in Akit people’s homes is a unique condition as a way to overcome the issues of society as well as a form of expressing the cultural values of the Akit people today.
4. Conclusion
Acculturation can be observed both from on tangible and intangible culture. In this study, the use of colour in the home becomes a unique guide from marginal communities. From this research, the house is not only just as a shelter, but as a medium in expressing Akit culture. This is following to Waterson [25] house is the creation of a social and symbolic space which both mirrors and moulds the world view of its creators and inhabitants.

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