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Architecture as Communication System with Semiotic Theory (Case Study: Tjong A Fie's House)

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Abstract. Architecture is an object that can be related to a communication system. In communication systems called Semiotics is needed to examine the object being studied. Semiotics is a guide in finding the meaning of an architectural project, for this article emphasizes the search for architectural meanings of architectural projects that are appreciated by observers. The method used is descriptive qualitative by observing and finding the facts in the site. The object of the study was Tjong A Fie's house in the Kesawan area of Medan City. The results of this object study were analyzed based on the semiotic theory to draw conclusions about its role in the figure of the building. The analysis results of buildings show that there is someone role for building figures in presenting the expression of his power to a building or living environment in colonial era, that is representing of Tjong A Fie.

1. Introduction

Architecture is the result of culture produced as an anticipation form of activities carried out by humans. In its development, architecture produces evidence of human's civilization that until now can still be seen and visited with many people. As an example of Greek Civilization in the sixth century BC, which has the Acropolis of a city located on a hilltop in the city of Athens. The touch of the city indicates that architecture has an important role in strengthening human civilization in its time.

Semiotics is the science of signs. The use of semiotics is not only used in analyzing language but also can be used to study architecture. Each architectural project has different characteristics in each place [1], therefore, in appreciating and interpreting the architecture semiotics is needed. Signs in linguistics are adopted as a sign in architecture so that the meaning of an architectural project that can be appreciated to find the meaning appears. Meanings are subjective because they are related to the views of each different person.

Along with the development of developing science, the development of architectural theory is also experiencing growth. The architectural theory which is much influenced by the development of science forms a different form of architecture. The development of architectural theory in the interpretation of the architectural project is divided into 5 (five), namely: (a) architecture as a communication system, (b) architecture as an art, (c) architecture in phenomenology, (d) architecture



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as engineering, (e) architecture as politics [2]. Each of the architectural interpretations has a different development.

Architectural interpretation uses a different perspective on the appreciation of the project as a process of architectural communication. This is considered appropriate for use in the view of the architectural project by art [3]. Therefore, semiotics as a way to appreciate architecture through a communication system is a theory that deserves further study with objects of residential buildings in the Medan City.

2. Literatures Review

2.1. Semiotic Theory

Semiotic architecture is a sign system which is divided into two parts, namely: (a) denotation (b) connotation. Buildings mainly or primary functions can be referred to as denotations while buildings with secondary functions can be referred to as connotations so that primary meanings and secondary meanings are created. The primary is the meaning from the beginning desired by the planner or its architect, while the secondary meaning that occurs after the building is built/occupied and appears without going through the planning process carried out by the architect [4].

Architectural semiotics was initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure in Cobley, P & Jansz, L, who conducted a study of sign systems to bring Saussure to the realm of science. Saussure then divided his theory into 2 (two) major sections namely signifier and signified [5]. Charles Jenks explained the signifier and signified by using the Odgen-Richards triangle (1923) to become a triangle of architectural semiotics [6]. Jenks uses the term actual function to explain the actual functions and meanings presented. In the triangle also explained the relationship or relation of the three elements, namely a marker by a signifier which is a physical form of the architecture and a marker by significance which is a thought concept from that architecture as well as the actual function as the meaning presented. The relationship of these three elements can be an index, an icon, and a symbol where the triangle relationship can determine the type of sign created [7] [8] [9].

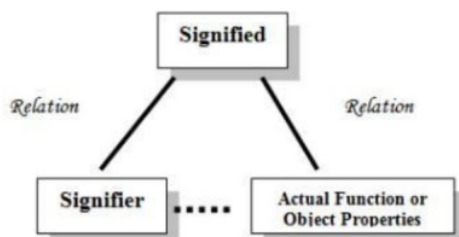


Figure 1. The Triangle of Odgen-Richards (1923) to become The Triangle of Architectural Semiotic.

2.2. The History of Tjong A Fie

Tjong A Fie's life journey in Medan began at the age of 18 years. In 1875, Tjong A Fie came to Medan, North Sumatra, to try his fortune and followed his brother, Tjong Yong Hian, who had first come to Medan and lived in Medan for 5 years. At that time, Tjong Yong Hian became a Capitan or ethnic Chinese leader in Medan, while Tjong A Fie works in a shop owned by his brother's friend, Tjong Yong Hian. Tjong A Fie is known to be good at socializing, not only with Chinese people but also with Malays, Indians, Arabs and Dutch people.

Tjong A Fie grew up with a very prominent leadership character. At that time, in the Dutch-owned plantation area, there were frequent riots among workers which caused chaos. Tjong A Fie is often the mediator if there is a quarrel between Chinese and other ethnic groups. Because of this ability, Tjong A Fie was often asked by the Dutch to help overcome the problems that had occurred to him until finally he was appointed as a Chinese Lieutenant and moved to the city of Medan. In a short time, Tjong A Fie was promoted as a Capitan in 1911, to replace his deceased brother, Tjong Yong Hian.

By the recommendation of the Sultan Deli, Tjong A Fie became a member of the *gemeenteraad* (city council) and *cultuurraad* (cultural council), besides that he served as an advisor to the Dutch East Indies government in Chinese affairs [14].

Then, Tjong A Fie has become a businessman, banker, and captain who came from China to successfully develop a large business in the field of plantations in Sumatra, Indonesia. The business has more than 10,000 employees. The business includes plantations, palm oil factories, sugar mills, banks, and railway companies. As a leader of the Chinese community, Tjong A Fie was highly respected by people in Medan, because he controlled the economic and political fields in colonial era [12][14]. That makes Tjong A Fie important part of Medan's society. It makes him has the power to take part in Medan and influence the architectural design of the building.

The Dutch company which at that time held the Kesawan area concession rented the Kesawan area to Tjong A Fie, and the Sultan Deli agreed. Tjong A Fie built his palace and opened a place of entertainment [14]. The closeness of Tjong A Fie to power in colonial times can be illustrated in the following figure.

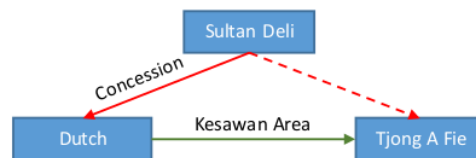


Figure 2. Tjong A Fie rented Kesawan area from Dutch Company

2.3. Relationship between Power with Architecture

Power according to Iskandar has direct or indirect relations with architecture. The expression of power is seen as the dominant factor that determines the form of architecture and the built environment. Architectural products present in space and time are expressions of various human desires for power [13].

Architecture as a symbol of strength was discussed by Grigor Boykov. In the discussion, starting from pre-history to the present, the element of power (especially the monarchy system) produces many architectural objects. This can be seen from the legacies in the form of palaces, fortresses, etc [16].

3. Method

In this research, the method used is a qualitative descriptive method. The facts contained in the site will be analyzed using semiotic theories that are used as analytical tools. The qualitative method uses an inductive approach and the facts in the site are used as objects of research which can be investigated and analyzed more comprehensively [10] [11].

The object of the research will be focused on residential buildings in the city of Medan. This building will be explored by semiotic theory to appreciate architectural work. It is expected that this method can answer the semiotic approach in architectural design. The research object is focused on historical buildings in the city of Medan. This research method consists of three steps, namely: (a) data collection (b) data compilation (c) Analysis of data and conclusion.

4. Results and Discussions

This research explains the house of TjongAFie as a sign of an area in the vicinity. The steps of explanation to examine are: (a) Signifier and signified, regarded to Tjong A Fie (b) Tjong A Fie's Palace as Semiotic of Power Expression.

4.1. Signified to be a Signifier

The signifier in semiotic architecture means that it is an architectural object itself, and the meaning contained in it is signified [5]. But Saussure discusses the signifier and signified as a discussion in human psychology and not a material concept, therefore the signifier in this case is a human who gives a sign [15]. Signs that are present in reality are the result of signifier actions. The sign will then be observed by another person and will be considered a signifier. In this case the signified becomes a signifier with the concept of meaning contained in the object, especially if the subject of the signifier no longer exists. Illustrations of theoretical analysis can be seen in the following figure.

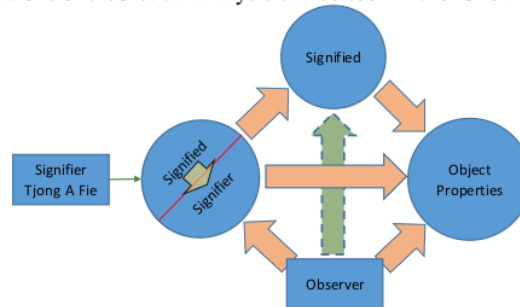


Figure 3. Signifier – Signified Illustration

4.2. Tjong A Fie’s Palace as Semiotic of Power Expression

Semiotics is a theory of signs as explained by Ferdinand de Saussure in Cobley, P & Jansz, L, in the research of sign systems that divide his theory into two major parts, namely (a) signifier (b) signified [5].

A signifier is a marker of a place, while the signified is a place marked by the signifier. In this case, revealing something that is meaningful to a region, to the territory can be something that can be remembered especially for people who live in that place.

This discussion is located in the house of Tjong A Fie where he has been told about his arrival in subchapter 2.2. Tjong A Fie was an influential figure in the city of Medan, at that time, to have an impact on the region.



Figure 4. Tjong A Fie’s house was in the past, Ahmad Yani Street, Medan City.

Source: <https://publicinsta.de/hashtag/TapakSejarah>

The picture above indicates how Tjong A Fie's house was in the past. In the picture, it can be seen that there are no arcades on the road in front of the house, in contrast to the surrounding houses both right and left, ever from the front of the house. This represents the difference in social status of Tjong A Fie's in this region. At that time, as explained in subchapter 2.2, Tjong A Fie had power over this area so that it was realized from the house he owned which was located in this area as well.

And this becomes a separate interest for further discussion in this subchapter that can prove how the representation is. It is also as the establishment for architectural design in this area, as one of them is shop houses appears.



Figure 5. The surrounding environment of Tjong A Fie's house was in the past, Ahmad Yani Street, Medan City. (Source: tropenmuseum)

This becomes a significant difference seen in the Tjong A Fie's house with its surrounding dwellings which is a commercial residence or often called RumahToko (Ruko).



Figure 6. The gate of Tjong A Fie's house was in the past, Ahmad Yani Street, Medan City. (Source: www.tjongafiemasion.org)



Figure 7. The gate of Tjong A Fie's house in this time, Ahmad Yani Street, Medan City. (Source:www.situsbudaya.id)

The gate of Tjong A Fie's house is located right on the side of the roadside, does not have an arcade, and is different from the others. It is not a commercial residence (Shop Houses). This condition is still the same today.

The environment around the Tjong A Fie's house is currently in the form of commercial residence or often called as shop houses (ruko), some of which are still original shop houses of the past while others have been adapted to functions in the present, for example, the number of renovated shop floors is no longer two floors but three floors, shop facade changed to be more contemporary, but the use of arcades is still maintained.



Figure 8. The surrounding environment Tjong A fie's house in this time, Ahmad Yani Street, Medan City.

At the front of the shop, there is also a car park. However, this does not apply to the road that is located on the road in front of the Tjong A Fie's house. Even there is a prohibited parking sign placed on the side near the Tjong A Fie's house.



Figure 9. The road in front of Tjong A fie's house in this time, Ahmad Yani Street, Medan City.



Figure 10. London Sumatera, Ahmad Yani Street, Medan City. (Source: www.dolandolen.com)

On both sides of Kesawan Road, there is a colonial-style building that gives a significant difference to this area, Kesawan area. The colonial-style buildings are London Sumatera (Figure. 10) and PP BKS (Figure. 11). Both of these buildings seemed to be the starting point for different architectural styles of other buildings. These two buildings flank the area around Tjong A Fie's house to this area as forming a square.



Figure 11. BKS PP, Kesawan Square, Medan City.

The Kesawan square is on Ahmad Yani Street, West Medan District, Medan City in the form of commercial residence often called as a shop house or Ruko forming a corridor functioning commercially, living and office. The history of the existence of Tjong A Fie in this region is an area surrounded by the city's economic center on the commercials road, Jalan Masjid, Merdeka Square and Jalan Katamso offices.

5. Conclusions

The presence of Tjong A Fie in this area has a great impact on the city of the terrain. Tjong A Fie becomes a marker of an area or is called signifier for Area, while Kesawan square becomes Signified produced by Tjong A Fie's house. The power factor in accordance with the history of Tjong A Fie in Medan City is manifested by several things, namely: (a) only Tjong A Fie house that does not use or provide arcade (b) parking is not permitted on the street in front of Tjong A Fie's house (c) around the

neighborhood there is a colonial-style building but different in the corridor created by this Kesawan square, this area comprises a commercially functional building where the dwelling with this style comes from China.

Related to the Medan City and Kesawan Historic Area, there was the issue that the front yard and gate of the palace of Tjong A Fie would be evicted by the Medan City government. Therefore, with the results of this study, proposed that the plan should be canceled because it would erase the fact of history power that was present in the city of Medan, once.

Acknowledgments

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