



Mangrara Banua Tongkonan Ceremony For The Toraja Tribal Community In Akung Village

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Abstract

This research examines the persistence of the *Mangrara Banua Tongkonan* ceremony in Akung Village through a cultural anthropology approach. As a sacred Torajan ritual, this traditional house consecration ceremony endures due to its deep cultural significance for the local community. Anthropological analysis reveals that *Mangrara Banua* is not merely a physical celebration of a new structure, but a cultural institution rich in symbolic meaning. First, the ritual serves as a collective expression of gratitude to God the Creator. Second, it functions to articulate and legitimize the family's social status (*tana'*) within the community hierarchy. Third, this momentum acts as a unifying medium for the extended family (*tongkonan*) to reinforce kinship ties. Finally, the ritual embodies sacred reverence for the ancestors. Through an anthropological lens, the continuity of this tradition proves that the *Tongkonan* remains the cosmic, social, and spiritual center for the people of Akung Village amid modernization.

Keywords: Mangrara Banua, Tongkonan, Cultural Anthropology, Akung Village, Social Status.

INTRODUCTION

Having differences is not inherently wrong; rather, it is these differences that make something unique. This expression perfectly describes Indonesia, a pluralistic and multicultural nation with numerous differences in each region. This unique cultural diversity is reflected in its diverse ethnicities, languages, religions, and cultures, all of which continue to coexist despite their differences. The motto "Binekah Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity) perfectly describes the Indonesian nation. Each region possesses its own distinctive characteristics, symbolizing the uniqueness of each region. This cultural diversity is preserved by communities, including traditional clothing, dances, songs, traditional houses, and other cultural practices related to community beliefs.

Traditional ceremonies are crucial to community culture because they are considered sacred, and each process is conducted with deep understanding, requiring attention (focus) and wisdom in every aspect of the activity. Traditional ceremonies are closely linked to the community's religious system (beliefs). They are one of the most difficult cultural elements to change (Fitriani, 2017). This illustration demonstrates the importance of traditional ceremonies in reflecting regional cultural values. Traditional ceremonies serve not only as a means of preserving traditions but also as a means of community identity and a sense of solidarity.

This solidarity remains, as is the case with the Toraja people, located in the northern part of South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The Toraja people inhabit the northern mountains of South Sulawesi. The term "Toraja," meaning "people who come from the west," originates from the Luwu people. They refer to the Toraja people as "To Riajang," meaning "west," not "north." The Dutch colonial government also referred to the tribes inhabiting this highland region as "Toraja," and the Bugis people of Sidendereng also referred to this tribe as "people who live in the land above," or in the mountains (Naqib, 2014).

Toraja has its own uniqueness, particularly related to its traditional houses, which the Toraja people call *tongkonan*. These houses are not just a physical structure consisting of a *banua* (house), a *tongkonan* (house), and a rice barn (*alang*), but also serve an important social role. *Tongkonan* serve as a gathering place for extended family members, especially during various traditional ceremonies, and are a symbol of status and dignity for the Torajan people (Nursalam, 2019). The uniqueness of Toraja's *banua tongkonan* is certainly inseparable from Torajan culture. Like other houses in general, after the construction process is completed, a thanksgiving ceremony or *selamatan* (celebration) is held. As an expression of gratitude for the completion of the construction, which takes quite a long time, the Toraja people also hold a thanksgiving ceremony called the *Mangrara Banua Tongkonan Ceremony*, performed by family groups and the community.

Uniquely, the *Mangrara Banua Tongkonan* tradition is held over three days, but the preparation takes quite a long time. In its implementation, of course, all of this cannot be separated from the basic guidelines of the Toraja tribe, namely *aluk todolo*, meaning the beliefs of the ancestors that become the direction of the lives of the Toraja people in preparing all their processes, including their customs that continue to be applied from generation to generation (Fitriani, 2017). Most of the Toraja people adhere to Christianity, but they do not immediately abandon *aluk todolo* which is the

beginning of the community's beliefs, this indicates that aluk and religion can coexist in the Toraja tribe. The importance of implementing values and understanding in every culture is quite impactful for the next generation because they are the ones who will continue what exists.

In the process of the Mangrara Banua Tongkonan event held by the Toraja people, it was held lively and various rituals were carried out during the event process, in addition to the family, the community also participated in it, such as participating in the form of material or non-material (Marsuki et al., 2019). The sense of kinship and empathy that continues to be closely upheld by the Toraja people has never faded until now, mutual cooperation and helping each other are the right expressions for the Toraja people. The Toraja people still hold tightly to their customs, which are passed down from generation to generation to continue to be implemented or what they call aluk. One of the traditions that is still carried out today is the Mangrara Banua Tongkonan tradition in its implementation certainly requires very important community participation, especially the traditional leaders who will carry out each process of the event or also called (*toma'pasundun ada'*). They are the traditional leaders who have a deep understanding to carry out each process of the Mangrara Banua Tongkonan Ceremony. In every Torajan tradition, sacrificing animals such as pigs and buffalo during each ritual is commonplace. It serves as a symbol of respect, social status, and family unity, kinship, and community solidarity. Those who participate in these traditions participate.

Maintaining family honor and dignity is crucial for every family, especially during the Mangrara Banua Tongkonan Ceremony. Therefore, the preparation process requires considerable time to ensure the best possible outcome. Each traditional ceremony carries a hidden meaning, such as renewing the spiritual connection between family members and the Creator, cleansing the Tongkonan (traditional house) of negative energy and attracting blessings, affirming social status, and fostering kinship and cultural heritage. This is a fundamental principle of every community, yet many people lack a clear understanding of its meaning, and the ceremony appears to be merely a formality. Based on the above description, the researcher was interested in writing this research, entitled "The Mangrara Banua Tongkonan Ceremony for the Torajan Community in Akung Village." This research can contribute to the development of science by using a structural functionalism approach and symbolic interpretation.

METHODE

This research employs a qualitative approach with an ethnographic method to understand deeply the cultural meanings behind the *Mangrara Banua Tongkonan* ceremony in Akung Village. This anthropological approach was selected to explore the cultural values, belief systems, and social structures surrounding the ritual directly from the local community's point of view (emic perspective). The study is located in Akung Village, where the community still authentically maintains the ceremony. Primary data were gathered through participant observation, where the researcher was directly involved from the preparation stages to the execution of the ritual, alongside in-depth interviews with traditional leaders (*Ambe' Adat*), the extended family owning the *Tongkonan*, and local community figures.

The field data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative data analysis model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The researcher filtered information relevant to the study's focus, such as social status symbols, family unification mechanisms, and ancestral reverence within the ceremony. Data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation, comparing interview results across different informants with direct observation evidence and documentation studies regarding Torajan rituals. Through thick description, this method successfully unpacks how the social and spiritual functions of the *Mangrara Banua* ceremony remain dynamically preserved amidst modernization



Gambar 1. Prosesi Mangrara Banua

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Theoretical Framework of Mangrara Banua The Mangrara Banua ceremony stands as one of the most vital socio-religious institutions within Torajan culture, serving as the official consecration of the newly built or restored Tongkonan (ancestral house). In the context of Akung Village, this elaborate ritual transcends a mere physical housewarming event; it operates as a sophisticated mechanism of cultural preservation and cosmological alignment. To fully comprehend the endurance of Mangrara Banua amidst modern societal shifts, anthropological inquiry must look beyond the surface aesthetics. By employing both Structural Functionalism and Symbolic Anthropology, we can dissect how this tradition simultaneously maintains the equilibrium of the social structure and provides a web of meanings that guides individual and collective identities. From a Structural Functionalist perspective, heavily influenced by theorists like Radcliff-Brown and Bronisław Malinowski, every cultural practice exists to fulfill vital social functions and maintain societal stability. The Mangrara Banua serves as an irreplaceable mechanism for reinforcing social cohesion within the Torajan kinship system. The reconstruction of a Tongkonan requires immense economic, logistical, and physical collaboration, forcing scattered lineages to reconvene. By gathering the extended family (*raapu*), the ritual re-establishes broken ties, settles latent conflicts, and re-emphasizes mutual obligations (*misa' kada dipotuho*, *pantan kada dipomate*—united we stand, divided we fall). The ceremony acts as the social glue that prevents the fragmentation of the clan structure. Furthermore, Structural Functionalism illuminates how Mangrara Banua functions to validate and regulate the traditional social stratification, known as *tana'*. During the ritual, the scale of the feast, the number of water buffaloes slaughtered, and the distribution of meat (*tongkonan meat division*) are strictly dictated by hereditary social standing. This highly organized distribution is not arbitrary; it visually maps and legitimizes the existing hierarchy of the community. By publicly displaying and respecting these boundaries, the ceremony reinforces the structural order of Akung Village, ensuring that each member acknowledges their role, rights, and duties within the socio-political ecosystem of the village.

Religion and spirituality, within a functionalist framework, serve to alleviate existential anxieties and enforce moral consensus. The expressions of gratitude to God the Creator (*Puang Matua*) embedded within Mangrara Banua function to reaffirm the moral and spiritual foundation of the community. By attributing the successful completion of the Tongkonan to divine blessing, the ritual fosters a collective conscience and shared values. This spiritual consensus deters deviance and encourages pro-social behaviors, as the community aligns its earthly achievements with cosmic approval, thereby ensuring psychological security and societal equilibrium across generations.

Finally, the functionalist lens views the veneration of ancestors (*To Mebali Puang*) during the ceremony as an institutional method for maintaining historical continuity. By honoring the ancestral spirits who founded the lineage, the living generation links themselves to an unbroken historical chain. This connection reinforces respect for traditional customary law (*aluk*) and elder authority. The ancestral house becomes a living monument of heritage; as long as the Mangrara Banua is performed, the social memory of the village is preserved, protecting the community from the anomie and cultural disorientation often triggered by rapid external modernization.

In contrast to the structural focus on societal survival, Symbolic Anthropology—pioneered by Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner—shifts the focus to how humans construct meaning through symbols. Under this paradigm, culture is an enacted document, and Mangrara Banua is a complex text to be read and interpreted. The ritual does not merely keep society running; it tells a story that Torajans tell themselves about themselves. Every object, chant, and spatial movement within the ceremony represents a dense node of meanings, allowing the people of Akung Village to interpret their existence, experience deep emotions, and understand their place in the universe.

The Tongkonan as a Cosmic Microcosm Central to this symbolic interpretation is the Tongkonan house itself, which acts as a physical metaphor for the cosmos. Facing strictly toward the north—the realm of life and the divine—the architecture symbolizes the origin of life and continuous growth. The soaring, boat-shaped roof represents both the vessels of the ancestors and the celestial vault. During Mangrara Banua, the house is anointed with sacred symbols, transforming it from a material shelter into a sacred axis mundi (the center of the world). The physical structure symbolizes the intersection between the human realm, the divine sky, and the ancestral earth, anchoring the inhabitants within a meaningful, orderly universe.

The ritual slaughter of animals, particularly the water buffalo (*tongkonan buffalo*), carries profound symbolic weight beyond its functional economic value. In Torajan symbology, the shedding of buffalo blood on the earth during Mangrara Banua signifies purification, fertility, and the cosmic renewal of the land. The blood acts as a symbolic bridge that cools the earth and washes away past transgressions of the lineage. Furthermore, the display of buffalo horns on the front pillar (*ba'ba*) of the house is a visual text read by outsiders, symbolizing not just wealth, but the virtues of endurance, honor, and parental sacrifice invested into the lineage.

Applying Victor Turner's concept of ritual process, Mangrara Banua can be understood as a threshold experience or liminal phase. The period of transition from an unblessed, secular structure to a consecrated, sacred home involves a temporary suspension of ordinary life. Through specific liturgical chants (*Passura'*) and prayers led by traditional priests, the family passes through a symbolic gateway. This transformation changes their ontological status; they enter the ritual as separate individuals and emerge as a unified, sanctified lineage explicitly bound to their ancestral roots, effectively transforming a profane space into a sacred sanctuary.

In conclusion, the persistence of the Mangrara Banua tradition in Akung Village relies on the harmonious interplay between social function and symbolic depth. Structural Functionalism reveals how the ceremony physically sustains the community by binding families, reinforcing necessary social order, and maintaining ancestral continuity. Concurrently, Symbolic Anthropology exposes how the ritual feeds the human need for meaning, turning architecture into a cosmos

and sacrifice into spiritual renewal. Together, these theories demonstrate that Mangrara Banua survives because it satisfies both the structural requirements of Torajan society and the deep spiritual longings of the individual soul.

Mangrara Banua Tongkonan Ceremony Procession.

The people of Akung Village, located in North Toraja, South Sulawesi, hold the Mangrara Banua Tongkonan Ceremony as a traditional expression of gratitude after completing the construction of a traditional tongkonan house. This ceremony is an important part of *aluk todolo*, the Torajan ancestral belief system. The Torajan ancestral belief regulates the balance between humans, nature, and spirits. Spiritually, the slaughter of animals in the tongkonan serves as a sacred place ready for occupancy, symbolizing the continuity of the extended family line (Tandirerung, 2023).

The Mangrara Banua Tongkonan Ceremony is a traditional Torajan thanksgiving celebration held after completing the construction of a traditional tongkonan house. This celebration is celebrated lavishly by family members and the village community. Mangrara Banua Tongkonan itself means "flowing the blood of the house," also known as offering sacrifices for the house, as an expression of gratitude to the Creator for the successful construction of the traditional tongkonan house. This tradition falls under the category of *rambu tuka'* (joyful ceremonies) and reflects the family's social standing. The Mangrara Banua Tongkonan tradition, also known as *Merok*, is still preserved in Akung Village from generation to generation. Despite the numerous processes and preparations required by the family of the Tongkonan owner, they continue to carry out this tradition. The involvement of the local community is evident in various forms and actions throughout the process. Research shows that the Akung Village community continues to practice this tradition, as evidenced by several aspects:

Thanksgiving Ceremony to God.

The Mangrara Banua Tongkonan ceremony, rooted in gratitude to God as its core, reflects the *aluk todolo* belief in honoring the Creator for the successful construction of a traditional house that stands strong. This gratitude extends beyond physical requirements to serve as a reminder of ancestral origins, conveyed to future generations, ensuring the family's identity remains intact. The Tongkonan serves as the center of various family and community activities. This is a hope for prosperity, protection from disasters, and a lasting happiness, according to the beliefs of the Akung Village community in Toraja. The Tongkonan is considered a symbol of cultural identity that connects humans with the universe. It is believed that the upper world is like the sky, the middle world is for human life, and the underworld is for spirits. As stated by Mr. Markus Pantun Lolo, Head of the Traditional Institution, he stated:

The Mangrara Banua Tongkonan tradition, also known as *Merok* by the people of this village, is an expression of gratitude to God for the blessing of the plans of the *toma'rapu* (extended family). The construction of the tongkonan house is a process, and the various stages that are undertaken until the tongkonan can be built. After completion, the *toma'rapu* (extended family) realizes that the tongkonan was built thanks to God's help. It is natural for us to praise God through this tradition. This act, called Mangrara Banua, involves all the families of the tongkonan owners gathering to decide and agree to perform a pig slaughtering ritual according to the capabilities of the *toma'rapu* in the tongkonan. In this sense, it is an expression of gratitude to God, as doing something without doing it is wrong. Therefore, this tradition must be carried out by the tongkonan owners." (Interview, January 15, 2026).

Mr. Yohanes Pagayang, a traditional figure (religious leader), echoed this sentiment:

Through the Mangrara Banua Tongkonan ceremony, we can clearly see that God's presence in us and our extended family continues to protect and protect us. From the felling of the first tree for the tongkonan to its completion, we hold the Mangrara Banua Tongkonan as an expression of gratitude from the beginning to the end of the tongkonan's construction. Furthermore, the Mangrara Banua Tongkonan ceremony must be performed by every family group that owns the tongkonan. The tongkonan serves as a place for the extended family to gather to discuss the ancestral precepts related to the tongkonan, so that the extended family can get to know each other and understand each other." (Interview, January 21, 2026).

Based on the results of the informant interviews above, it can be concluded that the Mangrara Banua Tongkonan Ceremony in Akung Village illustrates the essence of *aluk todolo* as a form of respect to God for His guidance. In the construction of a tongkonan house which requires a long process in its construction, this traditional residence represents cultural identity, ancestral origins, and the center of extended family life (*toma'rapu*), so it is mandatory to carry out the Mangrara banua tradition as a form of gratitude. This tradition is not only a ritual of slaughtering a pig as an expression of gratitude for the successful construction of a traditional tongkonan house, but also as a way to strengthen the bonds between members of the extended family that owns the tongkonan. The discussion concerns the ancestral lineage of the tongkonan that was built and hopes for prosperity, protection from disaster, happiness, for the family and future generations. This ritual is not only an expression of gratitude through the slaughter of sacrifices, but also a gathering place for the extended family of Tongkonan owners to discuss ancestral values, strengthen bonds between extended families, so that they can get to know each other and understand the cultural heritage passed down by their ancestors.

Social Status Symbols



Social status symbols refer to behaviors, actions, or characteristics displayed to indicate position within society, allowing others to quickly recognize and understand a group's social status. This is not only about the practical function of objects, but also about their symbolic value, which strengthens the social structure within society (Hindarto, 2018). Social status symbols in Toraja society are referred to as *tana'* (caste). Toraja society recognizes four social levels: *tana'bulan* (noble class), *tana'bassi* (middle-noble class), *tana'karurung* (commoners/free people), and *tana'kua-kua* (servant class). These *tana'* serve as symbols of social status (Tobar & Kasnawi, 2020). The implementation of the Mangrara Banua Tongkonan Ceremony tradition shows the social strata of families or groups in Akung Village, where the ability to build a tongkonan is a sign of pride and respected status in the Tongkonan community, not just a residence but also a symbol of community identity that can be seen directly through the carvings and buffalo horns displayed in front of the tongkonan house, the higher the arrangement can explain the identity of the owner of the tongkonan. Like determining the position of traditional leaders, who will carry out every traditional procedure in the community and strengthen the position openly for future generations, the Mangrara Banua Tongkonan Ceremony clarifies the strengthening of the position of a family in society and the attitude of mutual respect for one another.

As stated by Mr. Marten Bula', the owner of a tongkonan:

Social status symbols in the Mangrara Banua Tongkonan Ceremony among the community are a way to demonstrate a family's rank or position within society. This isn't just about money, but also an expression of "we have an extraordinary inheritance from our ancestors." The tongkonan functions like a grand house with special symbols. Each buffalo horn displayed in front of the tongkonan tells a story about the victory or sacrifice of previous ancestors. This house is like a history book that villagers can read to determine who the owner is. This status influences children and grandchildren, who will later find a life partner and live with their families within the community." (Interview, January 8, 2026).

Ms. Damaris Londo also stated:

The tongkonan house symbolizes the owner's extended family. There's no need to ask further questions. Just by looking at the shape, carvings, buffalo horns, and boar tusks, you can already tell who the owner is. That's one reason why the community carries out the Mangrara Banua tradition to maintain their status and to ensure their children and grandchildren maintain it (Interview 02, February).

Based on the interview above, it can be concluded that the social symbols in the Mangrara Banua Tongkonan ceremony in Akung Village reflect a family's standing in society, transcending the functional value of objects to affirm social status. The tongkonan building symbolizes honor and high dignity for its owner, as evidenced by the carved ornaments, stacks of buffalo horns, and boar tusks, as if it were a record of the ancestors' lives, recording past achievements and sacrifices. This ritual, as a whole, establishes the family's position, including the appointment of traditional leaders and their influence on future generations, while demonstrating respect among members and the preservation of ancestral heritage. The social status symbol in the Mangrara Banua Ceremony serves as a marker of family rank in Torajan society, transcending financial aspects to become something valuable: a special ancestral legacy. Tongkonans hold stories of ancestral victories and sacrifices, directly revealing the identity of the tongkonan owner and their influence on their children and grandchildren in family life.

CONCLUSION

The persistence of the *Mangrara Banua Tongkonan* ceremony in Akung Village underscores its irreplaceable role as a foundational cornerstone of Torajan life, blending structural necessity with profound symbolic depth. Through the lens of Structural Functionalism, this sacred ritual serves as a vital engine for social preservation. It actively prevents the fragmentation of kinship networks by demanding cross-generational collaboration, while simultaneously validating the traditional community hierarchy and customary laws. By structuring meat distribution and ceremonial roles based on hereditary standing, the ritual maintains societal equilibrium and fosters a deep sense of collective solidarity among the extended family network, ensuring the community remains unified against external societal pressures.

Concurrently, Symbolic Anthropology reveals that *Mangrara Banua* fulfills a critical existential and spiritual need for the people of Akung Village. The ceremony transforms the physical architecture of the *Tongkonan* into a living cosmos, where every physical element—from the northward orientation to the sacrificial buffalo blood—acts as a text loaded with cultural meaning. The ritual is not merely a social obligation, but a sacred threshold that allows participants to reaffirm their place in the universe, bridging the gap between the earthly realm, the divine, and the ancestors. It provides the community with a shared vocabulary of honor, identity, and cosmic order that cannot be replicated by modern substitutes.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the endurance of the *Mangrara Banua* tradition in the face of modern globalization lies in its dual capacity to provide both functional stability and cognitive meaning. As a dynamic cultural institution, it harmoniously synthesizes the structural needs of the clan with the evolving spiritual realities of contemporary Torajan society. The *Tongkonan* remains far more than a material relic of the past; it endures as the active

cosmic, social, and emotional anchor for the people of Akung Village, proving that traditional indigenous rituals can successfully adapt and retain their vital significance in the modern world.

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