The Orientation of *Amben Tengah* at Javanese House in Gedangan Village, Tulungagung

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**Abstract** The present study aims to examine the orientation and significance of *Amben Tengah* within traditional Javanese households, with a specific focus on the Tulungagung region in East Java. The exploration of *Amben Tengah*, a sacred space situated within these dwellings, is undertaken in the context of the house's overarching orientation and its association with cultural beliefs and practices. The findings of the study indicate that *Amben Tengah* generally corresponds to the alignment of the primary entrance of Javanese houses, which conventionally faces south, facilitating convenient entry from the main entrance. Nevertheless, there are differences in the orientation of *Amben Tengah* observed in buildings that no longer prioritise facing the mountain, so underscoring the significant role of *Amben Tengah* in the architectural design of Javanese houses. Notwithstanding alterations in its orientation, *Amben Tengah* persists in its role as a hallowed venue for religious practices, as well as for the provision of sleeping quarters and storage facilities. This study illuminates the lasting cultural importance of *Amben Tengah* in the architectural and spiritual context of traditional Javanese dwellings.

**Keywords:** Traditional Javanese Houses, *Amben Tengah*, Orientation, Cultural Significance

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Introduction

*Amben Tengah* is a space commonly used as a place of ancestor worship by the Javanese people in ancient times before the advent of Abrahamic religions in Java. Apart from being used for worship, *Amben Tengah* also serves as a storage place for weapons, bedrooms, and storage for harvests. The advancement of time has led to changes in human activities and needs, resulting in adjustments in spatial requirements. This space has undergone changes both in its existence and function, with many now being left vacant after the advent of Abrahamic religions. These changes have obscured the characteristics of this space, including its nature, position, and the community's perspective on *Amben Tengah*. Among these characteristics, one determining indicator is spatial orientation. The orientation of *Amben Tengah* becomes crucial when examining a region as a whole, considering the presence of its houses. House orientation may be influenced by *Amben Tengah*, and vice versa. This research aims to analyze the orientation of *Amben Tengah* to understand its nature and significance for the Javanese community.

*Amben Tengah*, also known as *senthong tengah* or *krobongan*, is a sacred space for storing weapons, also serving as a boundary for the rear porch and possessing sacred characteristics (Kartodirdjo et al., 1993). *Amben Tengah* is renowned as a sacred space for worship and rituals. *Krobongan* or *Amben Tengah* is the most sacred and private area compared to other spaces. *Amben Tengah* is commonly used for prayer, worship, rituals, meditation, and nighttime sleeping (Prijotomo, 1992). Common activities in *Amben Tengah* include rituals for events such as *slametan* (a communal feast), departures, promotions, and others (Kartodirdjo et al., 1993).

Regarding Javanese houses, in Javanese society, houses symbolize their social status (Rashid & Ara, 2015). Therefore, the houses in this village also differ in terms of occupation and social status of their owners. The social status of the occupants affects the knowledge acquired and the spatial needs, as well as the repurposing of space in Javanese houses when necessary. In the spatial functions of Javanese houses, there is an important space called *Amben Tengah*, primarily used for worship. The changes in time have impacted the occupants' activity patterns, leading to changes in the arrangement, characteristics, and functions of spaces within Javanese houses, including *Amben Tengah*. *Amben Tengah* has undergone changes adapted to the occupants' needs. These changes have caused several aspects of *Amben Tengah* to shift, necessitating research into these aspects, one of which is *Amben Tengah*'s orientation.

Methods

The method used in this research is qualitative descriptive. This method provides a description of the real conditions of the variables under study. The research method involves pattern analysis of houses that have been selected as the study objects. In the process of data collection, there are sample houses that have been adjusted to the existing qualifications, one of which is still having *Amben Tengah* in their house layout. The samples are examined for similarities and differences in characteristics and the role of *Amben Tengah* in Javanese houses. Observation and data collection are the initial steps in this method, followed by processing the collected data into information.

Information was obtained from integrated analysis of patterns found after...
collecting data on the observation objects. The obtained information can provide new indicators of subcategories for the object grouping process, enabling further analysis and leading to conclusions as research answers. Based on the descriptive approach of Miles & Huberman, (1994): data collection, data reduction, data presentation, data analysis, and discussion, conclusions. As for data presentation, an approach can be taken from the presentation of data that has been obtained before analysis according to the variables found in the reduction stage. The presentation of this data starts using the approach from Rengkung et al., (2018) and Makarau et al., (2018).

**Results and Discussion**

**Amben Tengah**

*Amben Tengah* is a sacred space commonly used as a place of offering. This space is used for offerings to ancestors/forefathers before the advent of Abrahamic religions according to the beliefs at that time. Rituals in *Amben Tengah* emerged due to the majority of occupations being farming and animal husbandry, leading to various offering activities before harvests, after livestock give birth, and other activities.

As time passed, the function of *Amben Tengah* changed, primarily due to the introduction of Abrahamic religions and the abandonment of rituals conflicting with religious rules. Many *Amben Tengah* spaces have become empty or merely used as storage areas. *Amben Tengah* is situated in the arrangement of *senthong*, where it occupies the first position, signifying "Siji utawa Gusti Sing Sawiji", meaning the One and Only God (see figure 1).

The presence of *Amben Tengah* indicates that the Javanese society has understood the balance of the macrocosm since ancient times. In *Amben Tengah*, everything is always connected with nature and something metaphysical (Badriyah, 2019). In reality, *Amben Tengah* has partitions between the *senthong*, with partitions being distinguished as permanent and temporary. Temporary partitions currently undergo changes, with their removal (see figure 2).

**House Orientation**
The orientation of Javanese houses, particularly those in Tulungagung, East Java, is to face the mountain located to the north of the Tulungagung Regency. In Javanese houses that still stand today, they all face south. This has a philosophy of facing the mountain to lean on it, so that the owners' blessings may ascend. The arrangement of Javanese houses follows rules similar to other traditional houses in Indonesia. According to Wibowo et al., (1998), a Javanese dwelling must at least have a central area (senthong tengah), left side area (senthong kiwa), right side area (senthong tengen), inner house (omah dalem), and front porch (emperan). However, ideally, Javanese houses have two to three structures that include a pavilion (pendopo), front porch (pringgitan), storage area (gandok), kitchen, bathing area (pekiwan), granary, and animal pen.

The Tajug house is commonly used as a place of worship, such as a mosque. One prominent feature of Javanese mosque interiors is the soko guru, consisting of four pillars. These four pillars support the roof of the Tajug mosque (Tjahjono, 1998). Javanese houses and mosques both have the four soko guru pillars as a symbol of the same philosophical concept when viewed in terms of their purpose.

The orientation towards the mountain is not found in all houses; only Javanese houses from at least 50 years ago have this orientation. The existing houses now are oriented towards the main road or their accessibility route. Typically, Javanese houses face north-south for ordinary people, as it is believed to be the residence of the ruler of the South Sea and the Protector Goddess of the Mataram Kingdom. In ancient times, it was very rare for Javanese houses to face west because it was considered facing death (Musman, 2019).

**Amben Tengah Orientation**

The orientation of Amben Tengah in Javanese houses follows the
orientation of the main door of the house. In this case, Javanese houses face south, so the majority of Amben Tengah also faces south or backs onto the mountain. The mountain in Tulungagung that serves as the backdrop is Mount Wilis.

The door of Amben Tengah is aligned with the main door, providing direct accessibility from the main entrance. However, for Javanese houses with a bale, there is a partition separating the transition space between the bale and the central house (omah tengah). This results in Amben Tengah and the main door of the Javanese house not being directly connected.

**The Relationship between House Orientation and Amben Tengah**

Amben Tengah shares the same orientation as the orientation of Javanese houses. This is evident from the position and direction of the Amben Tengah door, which follows the main door of the Javanese house. The situation changes when Javanese houses no longer adhere to the orientation of facing the mountain; in this case, the orientation of Amben Tengah will vary. However, it’s important to note that the position of Amben Tengah still remains central within the Javanese house regardless of its orientation.

**Conclusion**

The orientation of Amben Tengah adjusts according to the main door of the Javanese house, which faces south, and it has direct access from the main door for Javanese houses without a bale. However, the orientation of Amben Tengah in Javanese houses that have undergone a change in orientation, no longer emphasizing facing the mountain, varies based on the central position within the house. Nevertheless, the orientation of Amben Tengah remains central in the arrangement of Javanese houses and is always utilized as a respected space, such as a place of worship, bedroom, and storage for harvests.

**Author(s) Statement**

Authors with this declare that this research is free from conflicts of interest with any party, has never been published anywhere and has complied with the rules of publication ethics.

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**Author(s) contributions**

**Rahima Dheta Yaistrina** conceptualized and designed the study, conducted the research, and contributed to the analysis and interpretation of the data. Additionally, Rahima Dheta Yaistrina drafted the manuscript and provided critical revisions for important intellectual content.

**Antariksa** contributed to the conceptualization of the study, provided guidance throughout the research process, and assisted in the interpretation of the data. Antariksa critically reviewed and revised the manuscript for important intellectual content. Additionally, Antariksa approved the final version of the manuscript for submission and agreed to be accountable for the accuracy and integrity of the work.