

The Role and Meaning of Fire in the Ciptagelar Indigenous Community Settlement in West Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

Fire is an element of life that affects the spatial order in the Kasepuhan Ciptagelar. This is a traditional settlement in Indonesia that has maintained ancestral rules and rice culture from 1368 to present. The purpose of this research is to determine the role and meaning of fire contained in guard buildings (pangkemitan).

This is a qualitative research with data obtained through observation, documentation, and in-depth interviews with the Customary Chief, Baris Kolot, and the building guards (kemit).

The findings show that the type, location, and value of guard buildings provide information on the role and meaning of fire in the settlements. In conclusion, this research shows the existence of buildings based on the concept of fire in the settlements.

Keywords: local wisdom, indigenous peoples, function, meaning, guard post.

Introduction

According to Islam, the descent of Prophet Adam to earth was accompanied by fire dipped from hellfire, which was dipped seventy times into different rivers by Allah. In the Qur'an (Surah Al Waqi'ah 71-73), it is also explained that fire can provide the benefits required to meet all the needs of humans, such as light and fuel.

In another version of Prometheus, Zeus removed the fire 'house' from humans after it was used in religious ceremonies (Rem Koolhaas, 2014). Eastern philosophy defines the non-physical existence of fire as a sacred place for gods and goddesses or ancestral spirits, hence people should not act recklessly (Dewi, 2018).

Settlements in highlands with an agrarian background use fire and have faith in the existence of the rice culture, which is applied in ritual ceremonies (Darmenov and Tazhekeev, 2018; Smith and Segal, 2018). According to preliminary studies, a settlement is related to social, symbolic, and spiritual values (Nuraini, Djunaedi, and Subroto, 2014), which uses fire as a social symbol (Dewi, Trilita, and Safeyah, 2017).

A ritual ceremony is a form of respect for their ancestors, believed to be givers of life for agrarian societies and also symbols of guardians in residential homes. Campbell says that there is a Goddess of Fire in every hearth who is always present and guards the house (Dewi, et. al., 2016).

The concept of fire at this time can be understood as "the phenomenon of combustion as manifested in light, flame, and heat and heating, destroying and altering effects." These different

elements are phenomena of the combustion process from fire, as stated by Vitruvius in his book *Ten Books of Architecture* (Warren, 2001). This explanation shows fire's ability to produce something referred to as its functions, such as symbolic, socio-cultural, kinship, and economic center (Maxwell, 2011; Hermawan, Prijotomo & Dwisusanto, 2020). It also provides thermal comfort (Elnakat and Gomez, 2016; Ruokamo, 2016; Zografos, 2019) and is generally used for cooking, providing heat energy, watching tv, turning on the lights, smoking, and others. (Rem Koolhaas, 2014).

Fire is also a very important element of life, such as water, earth, and air. Its use can still be seen in Kasepuhan Ciptagelar, part of the Banten Kidul Customary Unit, an indigenous community in the Sukabumi Regency. The Banten Kidul Traditional Unit consists of Kasepuhan Citorek, Kasepuhan Cicarucub, and Pancer Pangawinan. Kasepuhan Ciptagelar, also known as Pancer Pangawinan (Kusdiwanggo, 2015 & 2016), is a settlement that still carries out ancestral traditions since 1368. It is located in the Sukamulya Hamlet, Sirnaresmi Village, Cisolok sub-district, Sukabumi Regency, at an altitude of 1,200 meters above the sea level, and has 568 villages (*lembur*).

Kasepuhan Ciptagelar is a settlement comprising of indigenous people famous for their rice culture, which is a source of life capable of connecting humans with their ancestors. The uniqueness of other Sundanese villages is that it comprises (1) *karuhun* rules related to rice culture but does not close itself to modernity, (2) a tradition of *ngalalakon*, such as moving the capital city of the Kasepuhan government, (3) a rice cropping pattern using *huma* and paddy fields, where the cropping pattern always shifts yearly in a different place before returning to its original position once every 8 years.

The Ciptagelar indigenous people believe a fire is *kahuripan*, an element capable of moving others, such as water, soil, and air. Fire is part of the rice culture, which is the lifeblood of the local community (Kang Yoyo, 52, the old line of Kasepuhan Ciptagelar).

The concept of fire seen in settlements is interpreted as the presence of a guard building locally called '*pangkemitan*.' This building functions as a guard post which protects the environment, and provides logistics for the kitchen at Imah Gede and the needs of the Customary Head. The fire in the transmitter room should not be extinguished even if it is only in the form of embers, therefore a guard or *kemit* is needed. This *Pangkemitan* concept of fire is located in a residential area and not inside a house, as in other Sundanese villages.



Fig. 1: Use of fire on a micro-scale in building houses
Source: Author



Fig. 2: Use of fire on a mezzoscale in settlements

Source: Author

The guard building or *pangkemitan* is located in the Kasepuhan Ciptagelar settlement, while the traditional building or *rorokan* is situated between Imah Gede's kitchen and the traditional leader's house. Furthermore, there are *pangkemitan* located in *huma*, rice fields, and community entrances. The report indicated that activities related to fire are based on the location, type of building, and the guard's value, hence the meaning of the fire concept used can be determined.

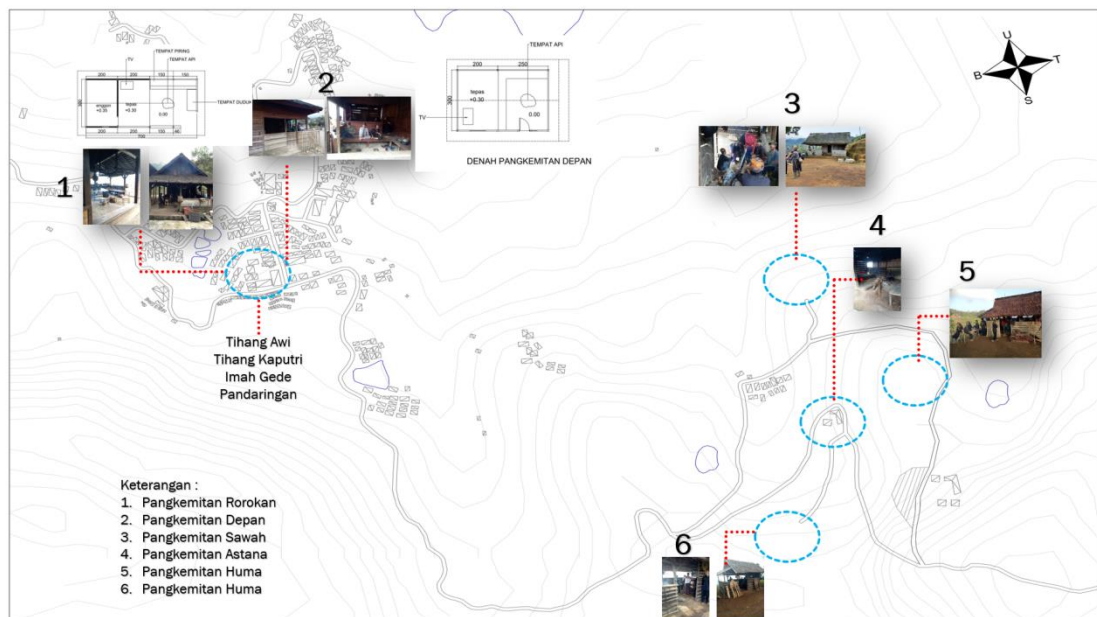


Fig. 3: The location of the guard post (*pangkemitan*) in the exterior landscape

Source: Author

This research examines the practice that buildings based on the concept of fire in settlements as they are still being maintained. Fig. 3 is related to the concept of Sustainable Cities and Communities, which is the 11th goal of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Hence later, it is expected to be a reference for similar studies in other places.

Theorizing Fire as a Place

Many scholars have conveyed the relationship between fire and architecture since time immemorial because it is believed to have great power capable of changing the human civilization. This fire function can trigger the appearance of architectural formations for the first time. Crowe

explains that fire as a social constructor originates from flame and the warm nature, which triggers people to crowd in a circle.

"The fire, he claims, drew them together around it for warmth, hence it is recognized as one of the advantages inherent in a cooperative effort invented by human society." (Crowe, 1997:140)

The above is also supported by the opinion of Semper, who put forward the theory of the function of fire for the first time as follows.

"The first sign of human settlement....is when the lost paradise, by setting up fireplace to light, warm and prepare food. The first alliances were of the hearth and assembled around the rude religious concepts were put into concepts of a cult. Throughout all phases of society, the hearth formed was sacred and focused on order and shape. It is the first and most important moral element of architecture" (Semper, 1989:102).

Semper defines a fireplace as a form of community in a group that functions as a light source to heat and prepare food. Another concept of fire is that a group appears and surrounds it when lit, thereby giving it a symbolic meaning.

In his book *Fireplace* (Rem Koolhaas, 2014:19), Marsilio says that "fire as a source of light, is the focus and shaper of social activities." This shows the role of fire in people's lives in settlements.

"Fire is important not only because of its heating, cooking and lighting properties but due to the ability to use as a socializing device. It is the core for activities and spatial distributor" (Rem Koolhaas, 2014:19)

Fire by nature is the heat produced by light and is capable of forming a community. People tend to gather to absorb the heat source, communicate, and keep the fire alive. Another role of fire, according to Campbell, is related to the relationship between fire and belief in the existence of guardian gods.

The presence of the old goddess guarding the fire in the center of the house is thought to have welcomed the guest invisibly from afar hence the god and the goddess communicate all night, and the next day they cook and eat (Campbell, 1960)

Furthermore, Campbell also says that there is a Goddess of Fire who guards the fireplace and the house.

These are stuck beside the hearth, where the fire-goddess, Fuji ("grandmother, ancestress"), is ever present, guarding the house; and, after having been revered there, the prayer sticks are brought to the place outside where the bear is to be killed and stuck in the ground.

The above discussion shows that there are many benefits of fire. One of them is that it can form a community, such as the Kasepuhan Ciptagelar, a settlement in the highlands. At night, when the fire is burning, a crowd of people sits around it, symbolizing ritual ceremonies in settlements. It is also a medium for worshiping ancestors, showing its relationship with belief. The Goddess is considered a guardian, housekeeper or resident guard.

Research Methods

The Ciptagelar settlement is the 19th capital of Kasepuhan, officially established on 7 Muharram 1421 H or April 12, 2000, after their ancestral immigration from Ciptarasa to Ciptagelar. According to public belief, the capital city of Kasepuhan will

move to an unknown destination until the *wangsit karuhun* comes down (Kusdiwanggo, 2015).

Ciptagelar Village is one of the three Kasepuhan located in the Mount Halimun National Park area. The other Kasepuhan are Kasepuhan Ciptamulya and Kasepuhan Sirnaresmi in the Sirnaresmi Village, Cisolok Subdistrict, Sukabumi Regency. Kampung Ciptagelar which is the center of the three Kasepuhan is the second village led by Abah Ugi, a *sesepuh girang* (customary head) who was appointed leader when he was 17 years old. However, because of his young age, this *sesepuh girang* whose real name is Ugi Sugriana Rakasiwi is called Abah Ugi.

This research uses qualitative data collected through observations and in-depth interviews. Observations were made on the guard building in the Kasepuhan Ciptagelar settlement comprising two guard buildings, *rurukan* and ordinary. *Rurukan* is located close to Imah Gede and Tihang Awi, which is the traditional leader's residence. Meanwhile, other guard buildings are scattered close to the entrance of the huma and rice fields.

From the existing guard building data, it is observed and processed into images, hence the differences between the constituent rooms can be determined. Interviews were conducted with traditional leaders, comprising three rows of *kolot* (assistant to traditional leaders) and *kemit* to obtain in-depth information.

Guard Building (*Pangkemitan*) at Kasepuhan Ciptagelar

Kasepuhan Ciptagelar is part of Kasepuhan Banten Kidul which is elder, a collection of Sundanese sub-ethnic indigenous groups living around Mount Halimun, located in the center, West and North to South of Sukabumi, Lebak, and Bogor Regencies. Kasepuhan refers to the old customs still maintained in people's daily lives, and the administrative center of Kasepuhan Banten Kidul is in Ciptagelar. It is a settlement that believes in rice culture by holding traditional ceremonial rituals for 1 year in accordance with the Kasepuhan Ciptagelar calendar.

A "*pankemitan*" building functions as an "overtime" guard, hence the fire in the delivery room should not be extinguished even if it is only in the form of charcoal because the flame generates heat. In addition, not extinguishing the fire relates to respecting ancestral spirits.

Based on the type, the guard building is divided into two, namely the front and the rear. The front guard building is located at the entrance to the residential area, while the rear is used as a logistics center that helps Imah Gede's kitchen needs.

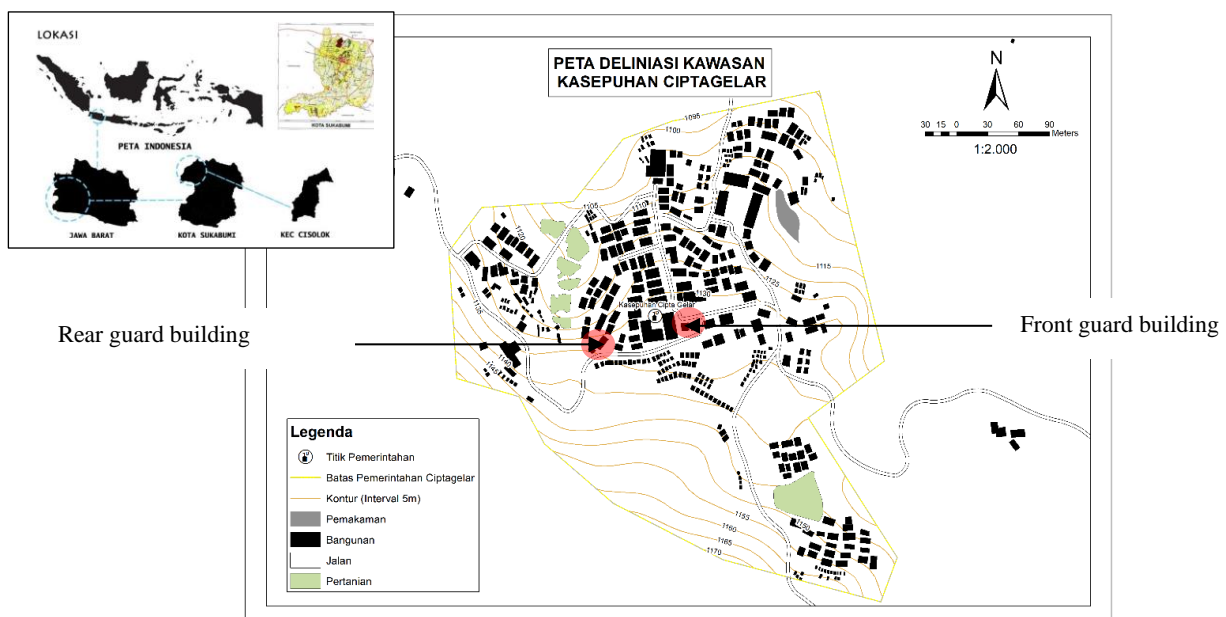


Fig. 4: The location of the guard post (*pankemitan*) in the settlement

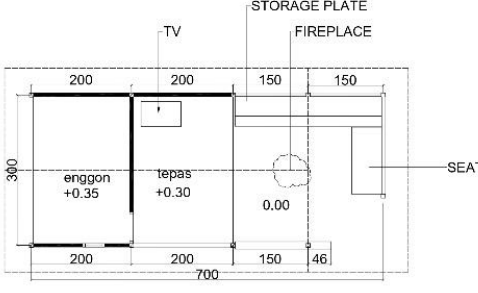

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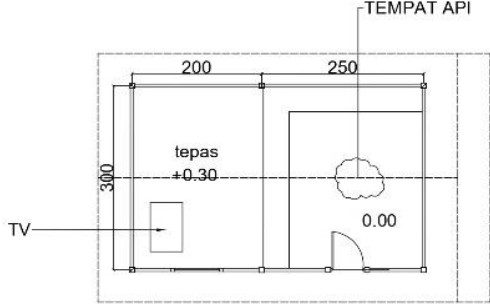

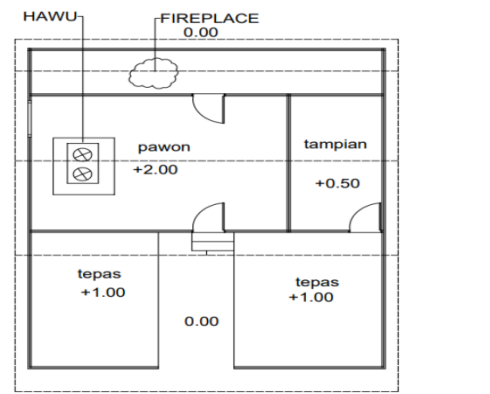

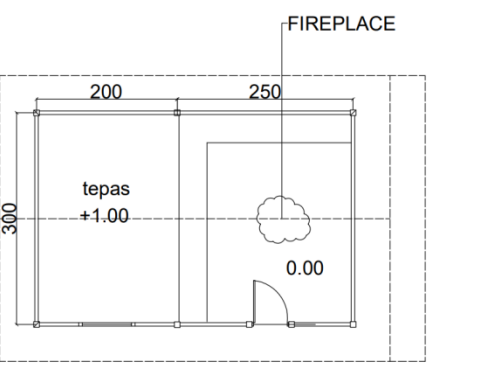

The guard building (*pangkemitan*) in the Kasepuhan Ciptagelar settlement is divided into settlements and outer spaces of the Kasepuhan settlement. The guard building in the settlement consists of the following:

1. *Guard building (Pangkemitan) rear*
Pangkemitan rurukan is a building with a 'kemit' or guard, whose job is to keep the fire from going out all day long. *Kemit* traits are passed down from one generation to another and are usually represented by a male (interview with Jamang, The kemit, 28th)
2. *Guard building (Pangkemitan) front*
Pangkemitan front is a building in which there is also a *kemit*, but the nature of the guard is not hereditary.

While the guard buildings in the outer space of the settlement consist of the following:

1. *The guard building (Pangkemitan) of rice fields*
Pangkemitan is a building located in a rice field area and is used when there are related events, such as *tandur*. It is not guarded for 24 hours because it is only used during the events.
2. *Guard building (Pangkemitan) Astana*
This Pangkemitan is located in the burial complex of the family of the previous *Kasepuhan* leader and guarded by the *kemit* for 24 hours.
3. *Guard Building (Pangkemitan) Huma*
Huma Pangkemitan is a building located in *huma* or field. The nature is the same as *pangkemitan* in the rice fields and is only used when traditional ceremonies take place, such as *ngaseuk*, *pamageran* or *mipit*, and *mabay*.

No	Guard Building Type	Floor plan	Activities in the guard building
<i>settlement</i>			
1	Guard building (<i>pangkemitan</i>) <i>rurukan</i>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PANGKEMITAN RURUKAN PLAN</p>	
Description:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This building consists of three rooms, namely <i>tepas</i> (terrace), <i>enggon</i> (bed), and a fireplace placed directly on the ground. ▪ The roof, which is known as <i>jolopong</i> is lined with <i>tepus</i> or palm fiber leaves. ▪ It guards the needs of traditional kitchens and private houses of leaders. ▪ Intangible meaning: the smoke produced by the fire is a magical weapon factory (Aki Karma, Aki Jumri, baris kolot kasepuhan Ciptagelar) 	

No	Guard Building Type	Floor plan	Activities in the guard building
2	Guard Building (<i>pangkemitan</i>) front (enter residents' houses)		
<p>Description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This building consists of two rooms, namely the <i>tepas</i> (terrace) and the fireplace, which is placed directly above the ground. ▪ The roof is known as <i>jolopong</i>, which is lined with <i>tepus</i> or palm fiber leaves ▪ The guard post protects the private house of traditional leaders from the front ▪ Meaning of intangible: - 			
Residential outdoor space			
1	Guard building (<i>Pangkemitan</i>) Rice field		
<p>Description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This building consists of several rooms, namely <i>tepas</i> (terrace), <i>pawon</i> (<i>hawu</i>), <i>tampian</i> (bathroom), and a fireplace placed directly on the ground. ▪ The roof is known as <i>jolopong</i>, which is covered with <i>tepus</i> or palm fiber leaves ▪ It functions as a guard post during traditional ritual ceremonies in the rice fields. ▪ Meaning of intangible: - 			
2	Guard building (<i>Pangkemitan</i>) Astana		
<p>Description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This building consists of two rooms, namely the <i>tepas</i> (terrace) and the fireplace, which is placed directly above the ground. 			

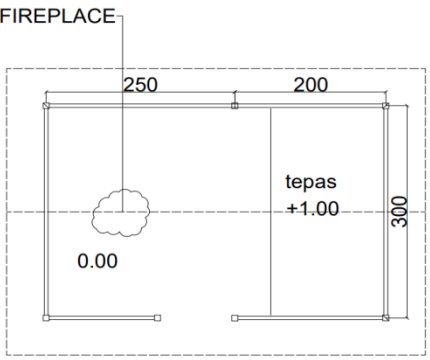


No	Guard Building Type	Floor plan	Activities in the guard building
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The roof is known as <i>jolopong</i>, which is lined with <i>tepus</i> or palm fiber leaves. It functions as a guard post to protect the graves of families of traditional leaders and their descendants during visits by strangers. Intangible meaning: The smoke from the fire is considered capable of accompanying the ancestral spirits in the tomb at night.
3	Guard Building (Pangkemitan) Huma		 
	<p>Description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This building consists of two rooms, namely <i>tepas</i> (terrace) and a fireplace placed directly on the ground. The roof is formed using <i>jolopong</i> lined with <i>tepus</i> or palm fiber leaves It functions as a guard post for gathering places when there are traditional ritual ceremonies in <i>huma</i> (field) Meaning of intangible: 		

Fig. 5: The Typology of guard post (pangkemitan)

Source: Author

Guard buildings are scattered throughout the settlement, mostly using wood as the main material. The spaces inside usually consist of *tepas* and a fireplace, except for the guard building in the field, which is located in the rice field area with a *pawon* as a place to cook and a bathroom (*tampian*).

Discussion

The concept of fire explained in the previous studies discusses the function outside residential homes in Kasepuhan Ciptagelar. As the center of government for the existing community, Kasepuhan Ciptagelar is considered an "old" settlement due to the presence of the *Pangkemitan* building.

As previously explained, it is the capital of the Banten Kidul Indigenous Unity, which makes it the oldest area compared to other places. The building is always guarded by the *kemit*, who always follows the position of the older person (Abah Ugi). This also implies that "*kemit* always looks after the elders," as illustrated in the various types of existing *pangkemitan* buildings in Fig. 6.

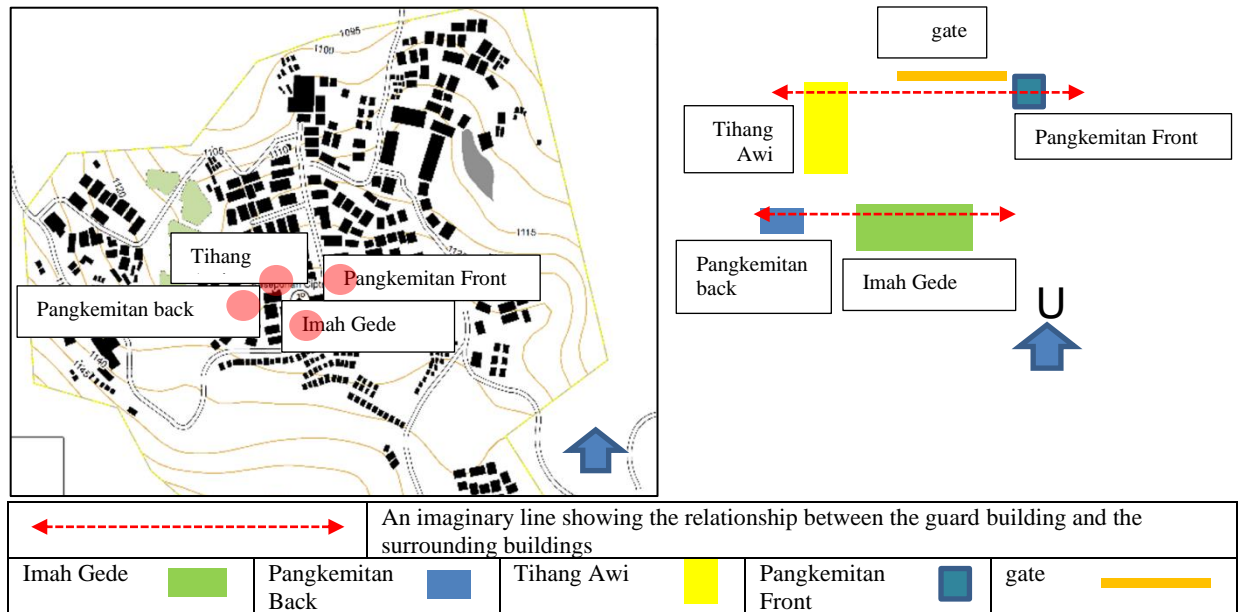


Fig. 6: The position of guard post (pangkemitan) in settlement

Source: Author

Tihang Awi is a traditional leader's private residence, meaning that not all parties are granted entrance. While *Imah Gede* is a traditional building in which there is a kitchen and *pandaringan*, a place to store rice for guests and residents who visit the settlement. The location of the vanguard building is not far from *Tihang Awi* because the guards have to protect the traditional leaders.

The main function of the rear guard building is to supply food and firewood for *Imah Gede*'s kitchen. This is reinforced by a statement from the customary leader, as follows:

The front Pangkemitan is the Abah's guard hence the location need to be close to Abah because his job is to protect him from attacks, and the rare pangkemitan is to keep all kitchen (in Imah Gede) needs to be fulfilled, and immediately provide wood. The location of this front pangkemitan can still change every year depending on the safety point (Abah Ugi, Traditional Leader)

The front guard building function optimally when there is a ritual ceremony in the settlement because it is guarded by the security from the local hamlet. While on the back, the fire function is visible for 24 hours without ever breaking the guard. The firekeeper in the back *pangkemitan* is a descendant of the predecessor and is directly responsible for the kolot line of dukunan.

The fire in the building is always burning to provide a feeling of warmth. According to Abah Ugi, people need to feel warm, hence they approach this heat source. The fire is lit by the *kemit* situated behind whose duties are divided with the approval of *Aki Karma* as head of the shaman (*kadukunan*) at Kasepuhan Ciptagelar.

For the guard buildings spread over the *huma* and rice fields, the activities are almost similar to those in the front only when there are traditional ritual ceremonies related to rice. Different functions are shown in the guard building located in *Astana*, which is the tomb of the ancestors, with the continuous provision of fire by the *kemit*. The fire smoke produced is interpreted to 'accompany' the spirits of the ancestors at night and hence it should be kept on at all times. (Aki Karma. Kepala kadukunan).

The use of fire in Kasepuhan Ciptagelar is not only as a tool for cooking but also a medium for rituals related to rice culture, community shapers, food preservatives, and also building materials. What distinguishes it from other places is the existence of a guard function in several

places around the fire to keep the flame at all times. The existence of this guardian gave rise to another meaning of fire related to the spirits of the ancestors.

Based on the references, the function and meaning contained in fire only talk about respect for ancestors, which is carried out in residential houses, (Campbell, 1960; Dewi, 2018). Meanwhile, other studies say that fire is limited only to respect for ancestors, but there is no mention of the flame that should be guarded continuously (Dewi et.al., 2016).

Conclusions

This settlement is located in the highlands with an agrarian background, which causes the use of fire in daily life and for ritual processions based on the adaptation of rice culture. The role of fire as a form of the community can be seen in the Kasepuhan Ciptagelar settlement in accordance with the theory mentioned by Crowe. Its function is still visible and used in this settlement to generate heat and light. The guard still maintains the heat because it needs to be able to keep one warm and form a community where the activity shows the existence of life.

This guard building exists only in Kasepuhan Ciptagelar because the *kemit* only protects elders or customary leaders. This shows that the concept of this guard is not only in residential houses but also in the settlements. Meanwhile, the meaning of fire based on the type, location, and value contained in the guards is associated with the magic weapon factory and as a 'friend' for the ancestral spirits at night. The development illustrates that there are buildings designed in settlements based on the concept of fire, and hence they can be used for further research in different places.

Fire has a function in addition to warming a place, indirectly as a community shaper as in Kasepuhan Ciptagelar. The heat emerging from the burning fire makes residents will get closer to the heat source. In addition, the smoke that emerges from the burning fire is also interpreted as the guardian of the settlement. The smoke that rises above the sky will protect the residents of Kasepuhan Ciptagelar in it.

Glossary

Abah	: Indigenous peoples' call to indigenous heads
Baris Kolot	: Indigenous people
Hawu	: Fireplace
Imah Gede	: A large guest house
Karuhun	: Ancestors
Kemit	: guard
Ngalalakon	: the process of moving the capital of the caste
Pangkemitan	: Guard post building

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