



## Exploring Ethical Cosmopolitanism Through *Tongkonan* Symbolism: A Hermeneutic Perspective on the Toraja Community

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### ABSTRACT

Previous studies have often regarded the *tongkonan* solely as a traditional, primordial symbol tied exclusively to Toraja culture. This article challenges that view by exploring the broader, transnational ethical dimensions of the *tongkonan* symbolism, which have not been fully addressed in existing literature. This research aims to empirically examine the relationship between individual subjects, the Toraja community, and other global communities, integrating these findings into a holistic, cosmopolitan perspective.

Adopting a qualitative approach with a hermeneutic framework, this study analyzes the *tongkonan* as a cultural text through the lenses of symbol theory and ethical cosmopolitanism. Six informants participated in the study, consisting of two customary leaders, a church official, a religious leader, an educational practitioner, and a *tongkonan* carver. Data were collected through unstructured interview and observation.

The research findings demonstrate that the symbolism of the *tongkonan*, understood as a representation of the microcosm, aligns with the principles of ethical cosmopolitanism, particularly in terms of cosmic brotherhood or fraternity. The Toraja people, through their symbolic use of the *tongkonan*, have historically positioned themselves as cosmopolitans or world citizens. The *tongkonan* embodies an ideal type of human being—one who is guided by solidarity and a sense of responsibility towards the *liyan* (fellow beings), thus reflecting a cosmopolitan personality. These results confirm the congruence between the symbolic meaning of the *tongkonan* and the tenets of ethical cosmopolitanism, indicating that the Torajan people have embraced their identity as global citizens, ethically connected across transnational scales.

## 1. Introduction

Symbols, as entities that transcend their physical form, encapsulate complex meanings and identities. In this context, cultural symbols function not only as visual representations but also as markers that embody deep social and cultural values, shaping ethnic identities. Symbolism is not merely a visual element; it serves as a means of communicating ideas and concepts, enabling communities to express and celebrate their identities (F. W. Dillistone, 2022). In many societies, ethnic symbols are an integral part of the collective experience, conveying profound messages about cultural heritage and the values that underpin their way of life (Morris-O'Connor, 2024). However, although cultural symbols are widely recognized as markers of identity, they are often trapped in romanticized and static interpretations (Djufri, 2025). For example, in Toraja society, the symbolism of *tongkonan* is traditionally understood narrowly as traditional houses, clan houses, and places for mourning rituals (*rambu solo'*) and celebrations (*rambu tuka'*) (Idrus, 2017; Lebang, 2017; Tandira'pak, 2022). This interpretation is often limited to social, religious, and political functions (Hakpantria et al., 2021), with little attention paid to its potential to reflect a broader global ethical framework, such as cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan ethics, according to this article, consists of three main pillars: unconditional respect for individuals, while evaluating cultural practices based on the extent to which they respect individuals; moral responsibility towards others; and commitment to social justice and human progress within each cultural tradition. These three pillars form the foundation of an ethics that values diversity while emphasizing global solidarity (Murray, 2025). Reinterpreting the symbolism of *tongkonan* is crucial, as it opens up new perspectives on how these symbols not only reflect local cultural meanings but also align with universal ethical values.

Existing literature tends to view *tongkonan* as an exclusive symbol of Toraja culture, understood in the context of cultural romanticism that depicts it as static and reproductive. This view ignores the dynamic and productive potential of *tongkonan* as a cultural symbol. Therefore, it is necessary to reinterpret *tongkonan* within a cosmopolitan framework, reading it not only as a cultural artifact but as a symbol that speaks to global ethical values. Today, Toraja society has undergone significant changes in terms of heterogeneity and hybridity, both socially and culturally. Unfortunately, even though this diversity is clearly visible, this community is still often perceived as homogeneous, because its cultural mix is so obvious yet easily overlooked. For example, in discussions about Toraja values and identity, terms such as "*to Sarani*" (Christian Toraja), "*to Sallang*" (Muslim Toraja), and "*to Hindu*" (Hindu Toraja) highlight the religious plurality within the community.

However, this cultural hybridity is often overlooked in traditional interpretations of Toraja culture. Such romanticized readings can lead to attitudes that reject the inclusion of other cultural interpretations, viewing them as threats to cultural authenticity. This reaction gives rise to ideas about cultural preservation – ideas that are often championed by the government for tourism purposes and by Toraja communities for personal and group prestige (K M Adams, 1997).

However, as Sandarupa has highlighted, it is necessary to distinguish between managing culture as a commodity and managing culture as a resource. Treating culture as a commodity focuses on cultural products with economic exchange value, while managing culture as a resource prioritizes the process of cultural development, including knowledge, skills, and other forms of enrichment (Sandarupa, 2014). In this context, the idea of cultural preservation from the government's perspective tends to be business-oriented, viewing culture solely as a tourism commodity. At the same time, the Toraja people are often caught up in a culture of competition for prestige (Kathleen M. Adams, 2006).

As this situation continues, the Toraja people may fall into cultural dogmatism, such as ethnocentrism and tribalism. When people become trapped in egotistical and exclusive attitudes—viewing their community and culture as superior to others—this can trigger irrational actions, such as division, violence, and conflict (Kasomo, 2012). This is clearly an undesirable and irrelevant attitude in today's increasingly complex world. Hybridity and acculturation, in all elements of global cross-cultural societies, including the Toraja community, have occurred and continue to occur, and they represent an undeniable reality (Maragh-Bass, 2022).

The study provide a more adequate perspective, namely one that emerges from cosmopolitanism. *Tongkonan*, as a symbol that communicates, expresses, and reflects certain ideas or concepts, will be involved in hermeneutic dialogue and may even be positioned dialectically with cosmopolitan ideas or consciousness to find common ground and understanding. This will enable the Toraja people to see themselves not only as members of a particular community, but as part of a larger, cosmopolitan whole (Appiah, 2006; Soutphommasane, 2006; Wattimena, 2018). Therefore, the main question that this study seeks to answer is how the ideas communicated through the *tongkonan* symbol, through a specific hermeneutic process, can be understood as a basis that is in line with the values or ideas of ethical cosmopolitanism.

## 2. Method

This research was conducted in Toraja between July and December 2023. It employs a hermeneutic approach to connect between the "horizon of the past" and the "horizon of the present" in understanding the symbolism of the *tongkonan* in Toraja society. According to hermeneutic theory, the understanding of cultural symbols is not a static process, but a dynamic one, involving continuous iteration and reflection between traditional meanings and contemporary contexts (Prasetyono, 2022).

This research adopts operational hermeneutic steps, beginning with the fusion of horizons, meaning that the study does not merely seek to understand the traditional meanings of the *tongkonan* from the perspective of the past Toraja society, but also integrates the perspective of contemporary cosmopolitan ethics. In this approach, the meaning of the *tongkonan* symbol is interpreted productively, not only exploring static meanings, but also opening space for the development of broader and more relevant meanings in a global context.

Furthermore, the hermeneutic approach applied in this research relies on interpretative iteration, meaning that each stage of the study involves revisiting and updating understanding based on new data. In this process, the *tongkonan* symbol is not merely viewed as a cultural artifact representing the past, but also as a symbol that can be reinterpreted to provide new insights aligned with cosmopolitan ethical principles. This approach follows the hermeneutic circle, where meaning continuously evolves through the interaction between past and present perspectives (Hardiman, 2015).

The study also adopts a symbolic text analysis, where the *tongkonan* is treated as a cultural text that contains visual, architectural, and ritual elements. The symbolism of the *tongkonan* is analyzed through elements such as carvings on the structure, spatial orientation, and rituals associated with the *tongkonan*, such as *rambu solo'* and *rambu tuka'*. The analysis not only includes the visual understanding of these symbols but also interprets how this symbolism reflects the cultural values and ethics of Toraja society, as well as its connection to universal values in the cosmopolitanism framework.

Data were collected through unstructured interviews and observations. Six informants participated in the study, consisting of two customary leaders, a church official, a religious leader, an educational practitioner, and a *tongkonan* carver. These interviews aimed to explore the informants' understanding and perceptions of *tongkonan* symbolism in their community and how this symbolism is understood both within local and broader contexts. Meanwhile, observational data focused on how *tongkonan* symbolism is practiced and expressed in everyday life, through architectural forms, the use of symbols in souvenirs, and in rituals and ceremonies.

Data collection followed strict ethical guidelines, where all participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Moreover, the study ensured high cultural sensitivity, recognizing the deep religious significance of the *tongkonan* symbol for the Toraja people. This approach offers a new and inclusive perspective on how the *tongkonan* can reflect both local cultural significance and align with global ethical principles, such as solidarity and cosmic brotherhood.

### **3. Result and Discussion**

- **The Basis of Ethical Cosmopolitanism and *Tongkonan* as a Microcosm**

Culture, as explained by Dillistone (2022), is a pattern of meaning that is transmitted and manifested through symbols. These symbols serve as a means for individuals to convey, preserve, and develop their knowledge about human life and attitudes. In this context, *tongkonan* serves as an important symbol for the Toraja people. *Tongkonan* is not only a traditional house that performs social, religious, and political functions, but also a symbolic means of communicating, nurturing, and developing the community's understanding of its core cultural values. As stated by Ni Ketut Agusintadewi (2003), the *wantah* (foundation) of a

house symbolically reflects the ideal identity of its inhabitants. In this case, the *tongkonan* reflects the ideal identity of the Toraja people.

The core value in Toraja culture is *karapasan*, which refers to harmony or balance (Toraja, 2013). This value occupies a central position in the hierarchy of Toraja cultural values and is in line with the ideology of *sanda pitunna* or the rule of seven, which emphasizes unity, kinship, and cooperation (Tangdilintin, 1980:14). This unity, kinship, and cooperation apply in the context of maintaining harmony or balance in human life, both as individuals and as a community with the universe. In this regard, these values or basic principles correlate with the symbolism of the *tongkonan* as a microcosm (Tangdilintin, 1978).

A traditional leader, shared that the *tongkonan* is more than just a house—it symbolizes brotherhood (Yohanis, July 14, 2023). This perspective emphasizes that the *tongkonan* is more than just a physical structure; it is a symbol of the relationship between its inhabitants, their ancestors, and the outside world. This understanding is in line with the interpretation that the *tongkonan*, with its boat-like shape, symbolizes the universe, which contains the meaning of togetherness and unity (Said, 2004). The design of the house also reflects the interconnectedness of all elements of life, which is consistent with Salombe's view that the universe is a single ecosystem that can only be realized through a chain of solidarity and cooperation between all its supporting elements, including humans, animals, plants, and nature (Abu Hamid, 2009). The applicability of these values or principles to every being fosters relational awareness as "cosmic consciousness" or participating consciousness. Cosmic consciousness refers to an awareness of relationships (sense of relation) with others, from which a sense of friendship (sense of other) grows, and this feeling is then directed towards everything outside oneself. It is this relational content or form that is the essence of the epic and/or narrative symbolism of the *tongkonan* as a microcosm.

A spiritual leader also expressed a similar view, stating that *tongkonan* serve as "mirrors of life." He described the orientation of the *tongkonan* in accordance with the cardinal axes or four main directions, namely: north-south, east-west, which reflect the Toraja cosmological view of the universe, as well as a reminder that every individual must live in accordance with the moral principles that bind them to all of humanity, regardless of their location. This is in line with what the Toraja people commonly refer to, says Martha Sombolayuk a religious leader (Church Council) and also a traditional leader (*Parengnge'*), as humans being mere shadows of the universe (*bayo-bayonariki lino*): the universe is the macrocosm, the *tongkonan* is the microcosm, and humans are the smallest microcosm. The fact that *tongkonan* are now more than just Torajan property and can be enjoyed outside this region further emphasizes their global relevance (Martha Sombolayuk, August 24, 2023).

As described above, it can be interpreted that the symbolism of the *tongkonan* reflects what is known as cosmic consciousness—an understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings. This relational consciousness encourages a sense of solidarity that transcends the individual to encompass the community

and the universe as a whole. According to Hanh's concept of interbeing (co-existence), this interconnectedness means that all beings, both human and non-human, exist within the same cosmic system. Hanh's perspective is reinforced by a biologist Lewis Thomas, who explains that the human body consists of many small organisms that are essential to our survival. Without these organisms, humans cannot move, think, or survive; in other words, the planet is one large living, breathing cell, and all its parts are symbiotically connected (Hanh, 2017:37-40). In the context of *tongkonan*, this symbolism transcends the biological dimension to encompass the emotional and ethical dimensions. *Tongkonan* fosters a sense of kinship and solidarity, which reflects Hanh's concept of interbeing by bringing this unity to life through compassion (empathy and compassion). This combination of cultural theory and practice highlights the importance of ethical cosmopolitanism, where solidarity and responsibility are the main principles of human existence.

Socially and even historically, *tongkonan* is understood as a symbol of kinship limited to blood relations within the Toraja community, and, along with that, a political claim is also made that it is only identical to certain communities or groups within the Toraja tribe (Wong et al., 2022). However, the data collected in this study shows that the symbolism of the *tongkonan* should be understood more broadly, namely as cosmic kinship (read: cosmopolitan). Several informants revealed that the symbolism of the *tongkonan* transcends blood ties and encompasses the entire cosmos. A *tongkonan* carver said that the symbols outside the building are not only symbols of social status, but also signs that it is part of the universe (Marlilis Pasondong a craftsmen or carvers of Tongkonan-Alang, September 28, 2023). This statement is in line with the views of two Torajan scholars: C. Salombe and John Liku Ada'.

C. Salombe and Liku Ada', traced the *pasomba tedong* manuscript (buffalo purification prayer) and found that the Toraja people understand themselves as brothers, relatives, or family of other creatures and created objects (Abu Hamid, 2009). This relationship is referred to as *sangserekan* or *sangpa'duanan*. In principle, these two terms mean that Toraja brotherhood or kinship is infra-human (Ada', 2010:177).

In addition, Sandarupa, through his serious study of the philosophy of *tallu lolona, a'pa' tauninna* (three peaks of life, four tembuni), concluded that Toraja brotherhood is holistic. This relationship of brotherhood or kinship, as described by Sandarupa, is based on the spirit of reciprocity or mutual benefit (Sandarupa, 2014:5). It is also emphasized that the relationship between these branches of life (humans, animals, and plants) is equal (subjects, not subjects-objects). No one is the center of the other. This is in line with the explanation given by one of our informants that the buffalo and plants carved on the *tongkonan* symbolize the equality of all beings in the cosmic order (Marlilis Pasondong, September 28, 2023). This view affirms the belief of the Toraja people that in cosmic kinship, all entities, both human and non-human, are seen as equal partners in the ecosystem.

From this point of view, it can be said that the *tongkonan* is a symbol of kinship or cosmic brotherhood. As a symbol, the *tongkonan* does not merely represent blood ties, but more than that, it produces universal kinship ties between all cosmic elements that are equal in position, in solidarity, and in cooperation.

- **The Circle of Ethical Cosmopolitanism and *Tongkonan* Symbolism**

Mary Douglas in her study of symbols, as explained by Dillistone, argues that humans not only have the function of organizing society, but also expressing the cosmology of that society, and what is often used analogically to mark this is the body (Dillistone, 2022:108). Dillistone further explains that this analogy of the body can have universal meaning if interpreted as a system (Dillistone, 2022). That is, what is naturally symbolized is the relationship between the parts of the organism (individual) and the whole (society). Individuals and society are understood as two bodies. Two bodies that are sometimes very close and sometimes one or united, but can also be far apart. It is the tension between these two poles that, according to Douglas (1970: 72-87), allows for the development of meaning.

What Douglas means applies to the *tongkonan*, which is a symbol that represents Toraja cosmology and analogizes the human body. Azis Said's explanation of this, for example, says that the *tongkonan* is placed at the center of Toraja cosmology. It is the center of the East-West latitude and North-South longitude (Said, 2004:37). The *tongkonan* is interpreted as a place where the four cardinal directions meet and a vessel for the principles of human life. Ferry Rita states that the four sides are cube-shaped, referring to the basic shape of the *tongkonan* house (Rita, 2005). This is explained further. The cube shape referred to is a nuanced cultural index or four-dimensional shape originating from four sides (north, south, east, and west) in four positions (top, bottom, right side, and left side), with four corners (here, there, over there, and inside). It has four colors (white, black, yellow, and red), targeting four, to the center point, which refers to the connotation of the four sides in the totality of human life as perfect beings. The four-sided pattern as described is presented through the symbolism of *tongkonan* and attempts to illustrate that humans, as perfect creations, must have unity of sympathy or "*sympatheia*" or a high sense of solidarity, which is not only applied to humans but also to other creatures on earth. In other words, Toraja cosmology is closely related to the idea that emphasizes the relationship and *kaboro'* (love) towards the universe. Humans and the universe as a society of real entities in the concept of *tallu lolo* (*lolo tau*/humans, *lolo tananan*/plants, and *lolo patuoan*/animals) is a situation that points to the vital unity between beings in the universe who are always moving in the process of "becoming" as fellow creations.

In addition to having symbolic value that refers to the human body, *tongkonan* is seen as an entity similar to the structure of the human body, complete with parts that represent the dimensions of human life. As explained by Said (2004: 32), the *tongkonan* is considered to have a head (*ulu banua*), face (*lindo banua*), navel (*posi' banua*), and buttocks (*pollo' banua*) (Said, 2004). Sandarupa's explanation adds another dimension, especially when this meaning is associated with *alang* (rice

barn). Sandarupa explains that the *tongkonan-alang* has a symbolism that depicts humans in both female and male aspects. In this perspective, the *tongkonan* symbolizes women, while the *alang* symbolizes men (Sandarupa, 2014:4).

Furthermore, the relationship between the *tongkonan* and the *alang* is not only limited to gender symbolism, but also involves brotherhood and marriage. This reaffirms the meaning of *tongkonan* as a microcosm, emphasizing that humans, along with all cosmic elements, are considered siblings and are the result of the marriage between heaven and earth (Tallulembang, 2012). This view gives a spiritual and cosmic dimension to the symbolism of *tongkonan*, connecting it to the depth of the relationship between humans and the universe as a whole. Thus, this view expands the meaning of *tongkonan* symbolism, not only as a traditional house structure, but also as a metaphorical representation that encompasses the human journey from its origins, brotherhood, to the bonds of marriage, all of which are reflected in the structural elements of the *tongkonan*. This description creates a deeper understanding of the role of the *tongkonan* in encapsulating the complexity of human life and its harmonious interaction with the universe.

When we explore Douglas's theory of symbolism as described above, the concept of *tongkonan* symbolism is not merely a depiction of cosmology and an analogy of the human body. However, it can also be interpreted as a system that encompasses meanings that involve everything and/or are universal in nature. In other words, through the symbolism of the *tongkonan*, both individuals and Toraja society are closely connected to the whole or to a wider community beyond their own boundaries. This connection is evident because the *tongkonan*, as a symbol, carries the meaning of unity and cosmic brotherhood. Understanding Toraja society through this symbolism is not limited to egoistic and exclusive relationships with oneself (to/self-individual), family (to *sangrapu*/family), friends or relatives (to *sisangmane-sangbaine*/friends), tribal and religious communities (*toraja/to Aluk Todolo, To Sarani, to Sallang*, etc.), citizens (to *Indonesia*), but also involves relationships with all of humanity (to *lino*), and even as brothers and sisters in solidarity with the natural environment as fellow creations (*pada ditampa*). This concept illustrates that humans and the universe are not separate entities, but rather a unity of various actual units that point to total unity. It should be noted that the unity between all these elements or actual units is placed on an equal footing, with solidarity (sympathy) and cooperation forming a strong foundation. Thus, the meaning of the symbolism of the *tongkonan* not only reflects the social and cultural life of the Toraja people but also summarizes the principles of interconnectedness that unite humans and maintain harmony with the universe.

In the context of architecture, which essentially carries symbolic dimensions, the intended relationships or connections can be clearly seen in the way the Toraja people combine and even adopt all the symbols of the *tongkonan* in the structure of buildings, such as Government office buildings (such as the regent's office and the Tana Toraja Regional Representative Council), places of worship (both churches and mosques), or even church institutions such as the Toraja Church Synod Office (see Figure 1 below). This building is called *Tongkonan Sangulele*

(house for all). This proves that the Toraja people have accepted Toraja Christianity (*to Sarani*) positively and creatively.

Figure 1. Office of the Toraja Church Synod Working Committee, Toraja Utara



Source: Personal documentation, 2023.

As observed by one informant, the incorporation of *tongkonan* symbols into modern buildings shows that the Toraja people are opened to new identities, while maintaining their traditional values (Yohanis a traditional leader (*Parengnge'*), July 14, 2023). This example shows how the Toraja people integrate their cultural symbolism into a global framework, strengthening their cosmopolitan identity. This is also in line with what David T. Hansen said, that this motif invites us to reconsider cultural meanings and the relationship between home and the world (Hansen, 2010).

The inclusion and application of these symbols can be interpreted as a form of acceptance and connection between the Toraja community and other entities, identities, and values through a process of ethical and cultural negotiation. Another example that reflects the Toraja community's affiliation with broader entities is when the Indonesian Government, together with the Toraja community, promoted the *tongkonan* as a world heritage site to UNESCO in 1995. Furthermore, in 2020, the recognition and appreciation of Toraja identity as an integral part of Indonesia was reaffirmed when traditional *tongkonan* souvenirs were given as gifts to the G20 summit delegates. All of these events can be considered evidence representing the strong affiliation between Toraja and Indonesia (*to Indonesia*) and, directly or indirectly, with all of humanity (*to lino*). In the images below, you can see how this phenomenon is manifested in practice, which helps to provide a more transparent and constructive picture of how the symbolism of the *tongkonan* is not only an integral part of traditional Toraja architecture, but also demonstrates a more complex relationship with Indonesia's pluralistic national identity and, in part, globally, as seen in the following images. Mosque buildings that incorporate Toraja architecture, proving that Toraja Muslims (*to sallang*) are accepted by Toraja society and vice versa. Islamic and Toraja identities complement each other, as seen in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Masjid Ridha Allah in Toraja Utara



Source: Toraja Tribunews, 2025.<sup>1</sup>

Observing and considering the horizon of meaning as described above, it is found that the meaning is considered equivalent to the Stoic philosophers' horizon of cosmopolitanism regarding what they call concentric circles (Wattimena, 2017). It is explained that in developing cosmopolitan ethics, the Stoic philosophers did not accept the traditional narrow classification between Greeks and barbarians. They asserted that their polis, or city-state, was the entire cosmos, or the whole world (Hill & Blazejak, 2021). From this, the Stoics took into account the Greek assumption of their own racial and cultural superiority and developed what is known as concentric circles as a model of ethical-philosophical cosmopolitanism. This circle states that humans reflect themselves like concentric circles, which include themselves, their immediate family, their extended family, then their ethnic-tribal group, their fellow citizens, and finally universal humanity. In this circle, everyone feels closeness and love for others.

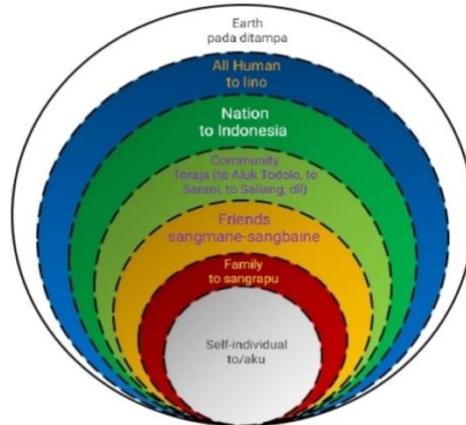
In his description of ethical cosmopolitanism, Etinson (2010: 28-29) explains that the Stoic cosmopolitans essentially had an ethical doctrine: namely, the equal and fundamental moral status of individuals and the obligation to consider the good of all humanity in our actions. In developing cosmopolitan thought, Stoic philosophers did not accept the traditional narrow classification between Greeks and barbarians. They asserted that their polis, or city-state, was the entire cosmos, or the whole world. At this level, the Stoics took into account the Greek assumption of their own racial and cultural superiority and considered a new cosmopolitanism from a philosophical perspective. Marcus Aurelius, as noted by Etinson, described the principle of cosmopolitanism in terms of depicting all of humanity as one body; to ignore one part of humanity is like cutting off a limb. His task as a cosmopolitan was to describe the circle in such a way that it reached the center, thereby making all humans and other creatures fellow inhabitants of the cosmos (Etinson, 2010). When the horizon of meaning of the *tongkonan* symbolism above and the horizon of meaning of what the Stoics meant by

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<sup>1</sup> [https://toraja.tribunnews.com/2023/03/21/pesona-dan-keunikan-masjid-ridha-allah-bukti-kerukunan-umat-beragama-di-toraja#google\\_vignette](https://toraja.tribunnews.com/2023/03/21/pesona-dan-keunikan-masjid-ridha-allah-bukti-kerukunan-umat-beragama-di-toraja#google_vignette), accessed 10 Oktober 2025.

concentric circles of identity are combined or dissolved, it can be illustrated as follows (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3. Concentric Toraja Cosmopolitan



Source: Personal documentation, 2023.

Turning to the modern Stoic conception of cosmopolitanism, there is an increasingly strong emphasis on moral or ethical aspects, which highlight the achievement of greater justice. This concept is based on unlimited responsibility towards the presence of other people's "faces." In this context, Eduard Jordaan highlights the fundamental aspect of cosmopolitanism according to Levinas, in which the achievement of cosmopolitan goals requires open responsibility towards others (Jordaan, 2009:83). Responsibility towards others or *liyan* becomes a central argument in this view of cosmopolitanism. It is important to note that this orientation towards others or *liyan* is not merely a theoretical concept, but also flows in the rhythm of *tongkonan* symbolism. As the center for managing harmonious relationships between the three peaks of life (*lolo tau*/humans, *lolo tananan*/plants, and *lolo patuoan*/animals), *tongkonan* illustrates that every individual, especially the Toraja people, is always oriented towards others or fellow humans, including humans and other creations. This relational orientation tangibly represents the principle of shared responsibility or, in the Toraja language, known as *sikananaran* (*si*: mutual; *kanana'* or *kana'na*: caring with affection) (Liku-Ada', 2014:161). Thus, the symbolism of *tongkonan* not only reflects a philosophical conceptual framework but also embodies the values of orientation and responsibility towards others, which gives a practical dimension to the foundations of deep cosmopolitanism.

Not unlike ethical principles that emphasize responsibility as the basis of ethics, the symbolism of *tongkonan* described above emphasizes hospitality. Based on this principle, ethics is defined as hospitality. This hospitality is open and unconditional, accepting others as different but equal human beings (Basir & Prajawati, 2021). If this hospitality is interpreted in a framework similar to that reflected in the symbolism of the *tongkonan*, and vice versa, as an expression of brotherhood and solidarity (*sympatheia*) towards all cosmic elements (with unconditional openness), then it can be concluded that the two are in line with each other. The consistency of these values reflects integrated ethical principles,

which link responsibility and hospitality as the main foundations in the context of cosmopolitan ethics.

It is important to highlight an aspect that deserves attention, namely, the position of humans who are elevated to a level of equality and equity. In Toraja society, this dynamic is often reproduced and becomes a subject of debate, especially in relation to social stratification that tends to reinforce inequality. However, when we examine the meaning of the symbolism of the *tongkonan* and other "textual" elements in Toraja culture, as explained earlier, it is clear that the concept of equality does not only apply between humans, but also encompasses all cosmic elements, including other creations. However, in some cases, these arguments or explanations are often rejected, especially when social stratification becomes an undeniable reality. As a result, the logical consequence of this rejection undermines the entire argument in these findings and casts doubt on them. The question arises, how is it possible that the Toraja people, who through their culture recognize equality between humans and other creatures (animals and plants), can reject this value in their relationships with fellow humans? This becomes a contradiction, an inconsistency, and even an absurdity. When the principle of equality continues to be denied, we must also consider the values recognized by the Indonesian constitution, which are existentially and normatively recognized by the Toraja people as Indonesian citizens. This includes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (International Law Making, 2006), which guarantees and protects the human rights of individuals and the Toraja community as free and equal citizens (Senoaji et al., 2021). The same applies to religious values and identity, for example, as Christians (*to Sarani*/Toraja Kristen), where the awareness that humans are essentially the same and equal to images of God is accepted and lived out. This entire context provides a further dimension to the debate on equality in the cultural and constitutional context recognized by the Toraja community.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The symbolism of the *tongkonan*, as a manifestation of the microcosm, has a deeper meaning as a symbol of kinship or cosmic brotherhood that transcends mere representation of blood ties or relationships with the ruling community in the Toraja tribe. Through this symbolism, the *tongkonan* creates universal family or brotherhood bonds with all cosmic elements, where each entity has an equal position, supports one another, and participates in cooperation. Empirical findings in this study, supported by interviews with traditional and spiritual leaders, confirm that the symbolism of the *tongkonan* is not only about blood relations, but also about a broader connection with the universe and all living things. This shows that the Toraja people, through the symbolism of the *tongkonan*, are seen as entities that understand themselves as part of a unity that is closely connected to the wider community. In this regard, the field data also reflects the concept of ethical cosmopolitanism found in Hanh's theories of interbeing, which focus on interconnectedness and solidarity among living beings and the universe. Data from informants who describe *tongkonan* as a "mirror of life" supports the argument that *tongkonan* symbolism contains

principles of cosmopolitan ethics rooted in the values of unity, kinship, and cooperation.

Furthermore, observations of the carvings on the *tongkonan*, which involve not only humans but also animals and plants, show that the Toraja people, through the symbolism of the *tongkonan*, understand themselves as part of a broader cosmic ecosystem. Overall, the Toraja people, from the beginning through the symbolism of the *tongkonan*, have demonstrated the qualities of being citizens of the world or cosmopolitans. The ideal type of human being depicted by this symbolism, in an ethical context, is an individual who is not selfish and exclusive but always oriented towards and in solidarity with fellow inhabitants of the cosmos, thus possessing a cosmopolitan character. This is in line with the theory of ethical cosmopolitanism, which emphasizes the importance of shared responsibility in maintaining balance and harmony between humans and the universe.

However, the limitation of this study lies in its greater focus on the symbolism of *tongkonan* in the context of Toraja culture, which, although providing deep insight, may not fully cover the broader nuances of the various variations of cosmopolitanism practices that exist in the world. Further research could explore how this symbolism develops and is interpreted in a more global context or how it interacts with ever-evolving modernity and globalization. In addition, it should be noted that although empirical data show an understanding of cosmopolitanism in Toraja society, there are also tensions related to social stratification that may be contrary to the principle of universal equality promoted by the symbolism of the *tongkonan*. Therefore, future research should consider the social and economic limitations that exist within Toraja society, as well as their implications for the application of cosmopolitan values in everyday life.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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