



Identification of Colonial Architectural Elements on Building Facades in Bengkulu City

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Abstract

The British and Dutch colonial invasion in Bengkulu left the image of the colonial area in the Khadijah and KH Ahmad Dahlan roads. Eight colonial buildings were found to be warehouses, residences, and schools, in a state of disrepair, neglect, or damage, so feared they would be erased. The research aims to identify colonial architectural elements on façades using a qualitative approach, collecting data from observations, documentation, interviews, and the literature to classify façades or conduct visual interpretation based on colonial architectural theory. The results revealed that the visual characteristics of the façade comprised 2 types of roofs, 2 types of walls, 3 types of floors, 2 types of doors, and 2 types of windows. Elements of colonial architecture, namely the gable, *bouvenlicht*, *nook actroterie*, and *geveltoppen* with a terrace, as in Berendo, in the traditional house of Bengkulu. Bengkulu's colonial buildings are interpreted as symbols of superiority, cultural acculturation, and adaptation to the tropical climate. The results can enrich architectural science and serve as a reference for the preservation of colonial architecture in the city of Bengkulu.

Keywords: Bengkulu, Colonial Architecture, Visual Characteristic

Identifikasi Elemen Arsitektur Kolonial Pada Fasad Bangunan di Kota Bengkulu

Abstrak

Invasi kolonial Inggris dan Belanda di Bengkulu meninggalkan citra wilayah kolonial di Jalan Khadijah dan KH. Ahmad Dahlan. Delapan bangunan kolonial ditemukan sebagai gudang, perumahan, dan sekolah dalam kondisi baik, diabaikan, atau rusak sehingga dikhawatirkan akan menghapus keberadaan bangunan tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi unsur-unsur arsitektur kolonial pada fasad dengan metode kualitatif, melalui pengumpulan data dari observasi, dokumentasi, wawancara, dan studi literatur, untuk klasifikasi fasad atau interpretasi visual berdasarkan teori arsitektur kolonial. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa karakteristik visual fasad terdiri dari 2 jenis atap, 2 jenis dinding, 3 jenis lantai, 2 jenis pintu, dan 2 jenis jendela. Unsur arsitektur kolonial yaitu gable, *bouwenlicht*, *noc actroterie*, dan *geveltoppen* dengan teras seperti berendo di rumah adat Bengkulu. Bangunan kolonial di Bengkulu dapat dimaknai sebagai simbol superioritas, bentuk akulturasi budaya, dan adaptasi terhadap iklim tropis pesisir Bengkulu. Hasil penelitian ini dapat dijadikan pengayaan ilmu arsitektur dan acuan pelestarian arsitektur kolonial di Kota Bengkulu.

Kata-kunci: Bengkulu, Arsitektur Kolonial, Karakteristik Visual

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Introduction

Almost all regions of Indonesia have witnessed the great influence of European colonialism, including the province of Bengkulu. In its history, the province of Bengkulu experienced some colonial periods, namely the EIC (East India Company) of the British from 1685-1824 and the VOC (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*) of the Netherlands from 1824-1942 [1] [2]. Hundreds of years as a European colony, of course, gave birth to a new culture in Bengkulu, one of which is evident in its architecture. The mixing of cultures has made colonial architecture in Indonesia, including Bengkulu, a cultural phenomenon. Colonial architecture across various places in Indonesia, when studied further, has distinct differences and characteristics from one place to another [3].

Colonial architecture is undeniably one of the images of the long journey of Indonesian architecture. Colonial architecture in Indonesia is a style that mixes European immigrant culture with the local culture of the time [4]. Furthermore, the architectural elements of colonial buildings include gables or *gevels*, towers, *dormers*, *windwijzers*, *nok acroteria*, *geveltoppen*, *bovenlicht* or ventilation, and balustrades [4][5].

One of the areas in Bengkulu where colonial architecture still exists is around Siti Khadijah and Jalan KH Ahmad Dahlan in Bengkulu City. This road corridor leads to the site of an English fort, said to have been built in 1714 by an architect named Joseph Collet, who was known as Marlborough [2]. Not far from this area, there is also a Chinese village that, according to it, has been shown to apply the principles of Chinese architectural cosmology in the arrangement of regional architecture [6].

Nowadays, colonial buildings have been extensively researched and well managed, including research on the Typology of Facades of Residential Houses in the Style of Dutch Colonial Architecture in the Workshop Block Area of Sigli City [7], Style & Visual Character of Dutch Colonial Architecture in the Oranje Fort Area of Ternate [8].

Based on observations in 2025 in this part of the area, eight buildings are suspected of adopting colonial architecture and are estimated to be over 50 years old. Although this area presents a strong colonial image, there has been no study of colonial architecture here to date. Based on the observation results, the building was found to be damaged and empty. Due to a lack of research, limited community knowledge, and creative actions by the local government, it is feared that this will eliminate the colonial architectural heritage in the

region. This is inversely proportional to colonial architectural buildings in the city of Bengkulu, which have not been supported by policies or regulations that specifically regulate the direction of conservation and preservation.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to identify the elements of colonial architecture on the façades of buildings on Jalan Siti Khadijah and Jalan KH Ahmad Dahlan in Bengkulu City.

This study uses a qualitative approach, collecting data through observations, documentation, interviews, and literature on colonial architecture and the history of Bengkulu province. The results of the research are expected to be the latest knowledge about the visual characteristics of colonial architecture in the city of Bengkulu that can be used by academics, practitioners, or the government to conduct research on the preservation of colonial architecture and further research on colonial architectural buildings that are suspected to be cultural heritage.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach of descriptive research nature. This refers to the character of qualitative research, which not only examines the research variables but also considers the social situation under study, including places, actors, and activities that interact in a comprehensive way [9]. Qualitative research uses proportional empirical data analysis, including experiences, histories, interviews, artifacts, products, and texts related to culture [10]. The qualitative research procedure was carried out by taking samples, collecting open data, conducting analysis of texts, images, and tables, with personal interpretation of the findings [11].

This study uses an observation method by visiting the sample directly while taking photo documentation. Interview activities can only be conducted on a limited number of samples because some buildings are no longer occupied.

Furthermore, a literature review was conducted using the book History of Bengkulu [1] [2], the book Theory and Methods of Preservation of Architecture and the Built Environment [12], and the book Development of Dutch Colonial Architecture in Malang [5]. The study sample comprised eight buildings, selected through visualization of the building façades that characterized colonial architecture and alignment with the interview results.

This visual characteristic research uses data in the form of images of façade photographs from eight samples, narratives from interview results, and literature studies, so the appropriate method for this study is qualitative. The analysis will begin by grouping the drawings based on the theory of façade components.

The images will be compared with the theory of colonial architectural elements to determine which elements are used in the sample visual. The data interpretation stage involves writing a textual description that combines the common threads of the sample. The study's findings will be presented in a concise, clear narrative.

Result and Discussion

Identification of Building Facades

From the observation activities, eight building samples were found that characterized the visual characteristics of colonial architecture. The samples were assigned sequential codes: S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, and S8. It can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Sample Facade

From the observation activities, eight building samples were found that characterized the visual characteristics of colonial architecture, the samples were given sequential codes, namely S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7 and S8. Five samples, namely samples S1 to S5 are in the corridor of Khadijah road, while samples S6 to S8 are on KH Ahmad Dahlan road. The location of the sample distribution can be seen in Figure 2.

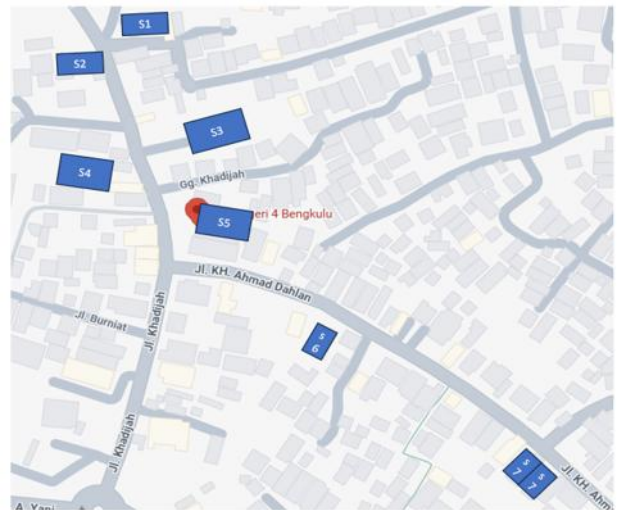


Figure 2. Location

The samples have various functions and conditions, S1 functions as a residential house and is in good condition, S2 and S4 function as residential houses but empty in good condition, S3 functions as a warehouse and is in a damaged condition, S5 functions as a State Elementary School 4 Bengkulu City in good condition, S6 and S7 function as residential houses and are in good condition, and S8 functions as a residential house and is in a damaged condition.

After determining the sample's function and condition, an analysis of visual characteristics was carried out, with the façade as one of the components of visual character [12]. The components that affect the appearance of the façade include roofs, walls, floors, doors, windows, and *sun shading* [13].

Based on the observation results, architectural elements such as columns, fences, and stairs were also found to affect the visual façade of colonial architecture in the city of Bengkulu. Therefore, these elements are also included among the façade elements analyzed.

The study found 2 types of roofs: shield and gable. Seven samples, namely S1, S2, S3, S4, S6, S7, used a shield roof, while a gable roof was only used in the S5 sample. The gable roof is often used for colonial buildings in Indonesia, including the colonial buildings

of the guard [14], while the shield roof or *limasan* is found in the colonial buildings of Blitar station, the Yonif commander, and the church of Saint Joseph Blitar [15]. In colonial buildings in the city of Semarang, there is a roof formation, namely a gable roof, but modified with a shield roof formation [16]. The shape of the roof can be seen in Figure 3.



Figure 3. The Roof

For the wall, there is a brick wall type in the S2, S3, S4, S6, S7 sample, and the *bidai* wall type in the S1, S5, S8. *Bidai* are bamboo slats woven with wire and coated with plaster. It can be seen in Figure 4. For windows, there are 2 types: double-leaf windows made of wood, or a combination of glass and wood, as found in samples S1, S2, S6, S7, and S8. In addition, there are also bay window types in the S3 and S4. The majority of the windows in use a wooden lattice design or *krepyak*, which is typical of the local culture seen in the traditional house of Bengkulu.

Double-leaf windows and wooden lattices or *krepyak* are also found on the colonial building of the Bethesda Polyclinic in Semarang [17]. A similar window shape was also found in colonial buildings inside the Willem I fortress building in Ambarawa City [18]. The shape of the window can be seen in Figure 4. For ventilation, there are 3 types. Wood ventilation in samples S2, S4, glass ventilation in samples S1, S3, S5, S6, S8 and breezeblock ventilation in samples S6, S7. It can be seen in Figure 4 and figure 11.



Figure 4. The Wall, The Window and Ventilation

Sun *shading* is not found in all building samples, this is because the size of the building's roof tends to be high and wide, so it can still protect the building from excessive light and rain intensity. For doors, there are 2 types: double-leaf doors made of wood, as shown in samples S1, S2, S5, and S8. For a combination of wood and glass doors in the S3, S6, and S7 samples, while leaf doors are found in S4. The shape of the door is a combination of wood and glass in the colonial building of *Ndalem Gebang* [15]. The wooden door is also found in the colonial building of Nuns in Manado [19]. The shape of the door can be seen in Figure 5.



Figure 5. The Doors

For flooring, wood materials are used in S1, tile materials S3, S5, S6, S7, and cement materials in samples S2, S4, and S8. Although there are different types of floors, tile floors dominate. The type of flooring can be seen in Figure 6.



Figure 6. The Floor

In addition to the façade elements mentioned in the theory above, there are also architectural elements such as columns, fences, and stairs on the terrace. Wooden columns were found in samples S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8. Rows of wooden columns were also found in colonial buildings in the Oranje Ternate fort complex [8]. The shape of the column can be seen in Figure 7.



Figure 7. The Column

On the façade, there are some types of stairs, namely the stairs in front of the terrace in the S1, S2, S3, S6, S8 samples, the stairs around the building in the S5 sample and the side stairs in the S7 sample. The existence of stairs as access to the building was also found in the colonial building of the Office of the Madiun Regional Coordinating Board [20] The shape of the stairs can be seen in Figure 8.



Figure 8. The Stair

Identification of Colonial Architectural Elements

Colonial architecture is a style introduced by Herman Willen Deandels, who served as the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies in the period 1808-1811 [5]. During the colonial period, the region in Indonesia was influenced by Western (occidental) norms in various aspects of life, including urban planning and architecture. The Dutch presence, along with the way of life and traditions they introduced, synergized with the local culture, ultimately creating a new form of culture known as Indish culture [21]. Colonial-style buildings are architectural styles that developed in countries across the Americas and Europe [22]. Colonial architecture is one of the architectural styles that has existed in Indonesia since the Dutch colonial period. The style, character, and characteristics of colonial architecture are influenced by the interplay between Dutch and Indonesian cultures [20]. Dutch colonial architecture can be examined through the periodization of its development and through the ornamental elements used in colonial buildings [23].

Architectural elements of colonial buildings consist of gables or *gevels*, towers, dormers, *windwijzers*, *nok acroteria*, *geveltoppen*, *bovenlicht* and *balustrade* [4] [5]. A gable, or *gevel*, is a triangular wall that supports the roof. A tower is a tower, while a dormer is an outward-facing, roofed structure with windows. *Windwijzer* is a wind indicator, while *nok acroteria* is a rooftop decoration. *Geveltoppen* is an ornament on the gable at the front of the building. *Bovenlicht* is a small window or vent placed above a room, while a balustrade is a small pillar that forms a barrier on a terrace, staircase, or balcony [19].

One of the colonial buildings that still retains complete colonial architectural elements is the Batavia City Hall, or *Stadhuis*, which has now been repurposed as the Fatahillah Museum [20]. Based on

table 1, there are only five elements of colonial architecture associated with colonial buildings in Bengkulu, and no sample has all elements. Even so, it was found that there are S3, S4, and S5, each having 3 elements of colonial architecture.

Table 1. Colonial Architecture Element on the Façade

Elements	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Gabel	-	-	√	√	√	-	-	√
Tower	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dormer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Windwijzer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Noc	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
Acroterie	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bouvenlicht	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	-
Balustrade	√	√	-	√	-	√	√	√
Geveltoppen	-	-	-	-	√	-	-	-

The incompleteness of these architectural elements is common, as the Maritime Museum's colonial building lacks some of them [21]. Similar conditions were also found in the colonial building of the Djoeang Building in Surakarta which did not have these architectural elements in complete [26].

In colonial buildings in Bengkulu, 2 types of gables were found, namely gables with gable roofs in S5 and gables in *perisal* roofs in S3, S4, and S6. It can be seen on Figure 9.

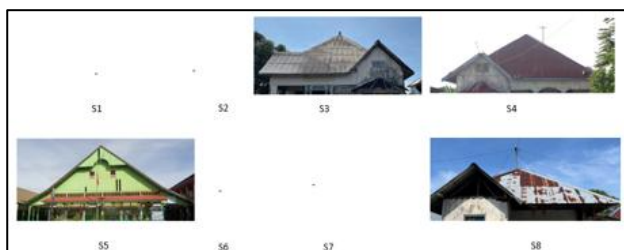


Figure 9. The Gabel

For *nok acroteria* is only found in S3. It can be seen in Figure 10. The *bovenlich* is found in S3, S4, S5, S6, S7 in the form of wood, glass and breezeblock grilles. It can be seen in Figure 11.

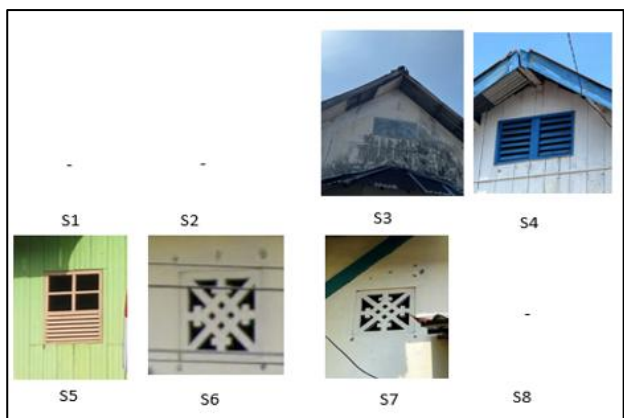


Figure 11. The *Bovenlich*

The *balustrade* is available in S1, S2, S4, S6, S7, S8 with plastered wood or brick materials. It can be seen in Figure 12. For the *geveltoppen* only found on S5, the roof decoration is made of wood that is right on the roof *gewel*. It can be seen on Figure 13.



Figure 12. The Balustrade

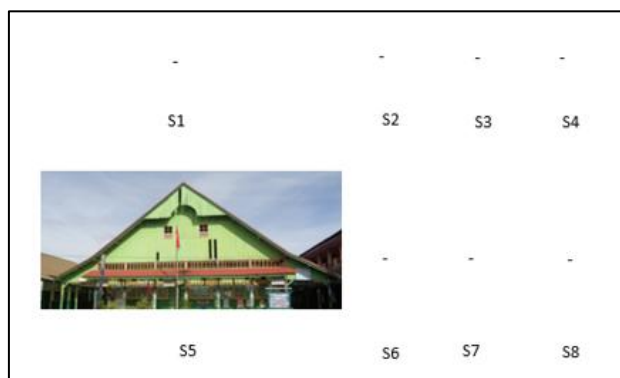


Figure 13. The *Geveltoppen*

In the S3 sample, there were *gables*, *nok acroteria*, and *bovenlich*. According to the interview results, this building used to serve as an office and residence for PT. PELNI, because at that time the port of Bengkulu was still located in Tapak Paderi. After the port was moved to the Baii Island harbor, this building was abandoned until it was finally rented as a warehouse due to the large size of the building.

In sample S4 there are *gables*, *bovenlich*, balustrades. According to the interview results, this house belonged to a merchant who served as the main distributor of fuel oil in Bengkulu. This house has also been established since the Dutch colonial era.

In the S5 sample, there are *gables*, *geveltoppens* and *bovenlich* on the façade. According to the results of interviews and literature studies, the S5 sample is the building of the *Dutch Inlandsche School* (HIS) established in 1934 for a school for children of Dutch descent in Bengkulu [2]. Although there are some minor changes to the façade, the typical colonial characteristics are still felt from the side and interior of the space. The S5 sample is still used as a school and is one of the cultural heritage objects in the city of Bengkulu.

The Meaning of Colonial Architectural Buildings in Bengkulu

From the identification results of colonial architectural facades and elements, it is known that the facades of colonial buildings in Bengkulu have large roofs and wide door and window openings. It is known that the air temperature in Bengkulu ranges from 23-33.9 OC, with rainfall ranging from 218-652 mm, wind speed 1-16 m/s, and air humidity 72-100% [22]. This causes daytime conditions to be hot and nighttime conditions to be humid. Large, tall windows and doors allow maximum illumination to enter the building, which is essential for improving the physical and emotional health of the occupants [23].

The design of *krepyak* windows, *krepyak* doors, and ventilation allows air to continue flowing throughout the day, reducing humidity at night. This is in line with research findings indicating that, in humid tropical climates, the design of the *krepyak* window opening is used to ward off radiation and improve air circulation in a room [29].

In colonial-era buildings in Bengkulu, there is also a wide terrace on the façade, which is certainly different from the colonial country of origin. The addition of this terrace design can be seen as an adaptation to the local culture of the Bengkulu Malay or Rejang tribal house, which has a terrace in front of the building called *berendo* [30].

In local culture, the *berendo* serves as a transitional room at the entrance to the house and as a social space for welcoming guests and interacting. Furthermore, the design of the terraces of Bengkulu colonial houses tends to be spacious and roofed, which is in line with the results of colonial architecture research at the Bethesda Semarang polyclinic, which also has a large terrace or portico on the façade of the building [16]. On the other hand, there are also colonial buildings with small terraces, such as the J. Sondakh colonial building in Manado [26] and the Pastoran colonial building [27].

Of the eight observation samples, there was 1 stilt house and 7 other houses in the form of landed houses, but the similarity was that they all had stairs, so they were not level with the ground. The elevation of this house is to avoid waterlogging caused by heavy rain, which often occurs in Bengkulu.

The colonial house with a staircase and a *berendo* terrace has a concept that is in harmony with the traditional house of Bengkulu, as seen in the Bubungan Lima house belonging to the extended

family of Mrs. Fatmawati Soekarno, the first lady of Indonesia, who came from Bengkulu [33]. Rumah Bubungan Lima is a stilt house with a pentagonal roof with spaces, carvings, and aesthetics that are full of philosophical meaning, which the people of Bengkulu believe. Furthermore, in the Tanjung Agung sub-district area, Bengkulu City, there are still settlements with traditional Bengkulu houses [29].

This study found that there were efforts to adapt the design and elements of colonial architecture to the local climate, local culture, and adjust to the type of materials available, so that they tended to maintain the colonial architectural elements that were functional. This was caused by different climates, limited materials, techniques used in colonial countries, and other shortcomings that eventually led to modifications of colonial architectural forms that differed from the designs in their countries [35].

The strengthening of the desire to better accommodate functions, reduce symbolism, and solve architectural problems quickly so as to affect the morphology of colonial residential and housing architectural design to be simpler [31]. In addition to being seen in colonial buildings in Bengkulu, the morphology of colonial buildings that tend to be simple and functional is also seen in colonial buildings in Kota Baru, Yogyakarta [37], and several colonial buildings on Diponegoro Street, Semarang [33].

Based on the description above, it can be said that colonial buildings in Bengkulu can be interpreted not only as a form of acculturation of colonial culture and Bengkulu, adaptation of the tropical climate of the coast of Bengkulu, but also as a symbol of superiority, which is only owned by the Dutch government or the Dutch people in Bengkulu, the wealthy indigenous people, and the Indonesian government. The size of the colonial building tends to be larger than that of the surrounding houses, so it looks more dominant.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the study, it was stated that the purpose of the research was to identify the facades and architectural elements of colonial buildings in Bengkulu, particularly along Khadijah and KH Ahmad Dahlan roads. The research yielded the most complete identification of colonial architectural elements in the S3, S4, and S5 samples, namely *gable*, *nok acroteria*, *balustrade*, *geveltoppen*, and *bovenlicht*. The research also revealed that colonial buildings in Bengkulu are large and have a wide front terrace, like a *berendo* in a traditional Bengkulu house. The terrace

is bounded by rows of wooden columns that blend with a fence-like *balustrade* in a colonial building.

Bengkulu colonial buildings are interpreted as symbols of superiority and as forms of cultural acculturation and adaptation to the tropical climate of the Bengkulu coast. The results of the research can serve as an initial reference for the submission of buildings suspected of having cultural heritage, given that the colonial buildings currently managed are limited to the Marlborough Fort and the Bung Karno Exile House [39].

The limitations of this study still focus on the façade, so it has not shown a comprehensive study of other architectural aspects. Therefore, future research can be advanced by complementing it with a measurable reimagining and by focusing on the preservation strategy of colonial architecture, the spatial characteristics of colonial buildings using space syntax, the structural characteristics of colonial buildings, and thermal simulation of buildings.

AI Use Declaration

No artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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