

# Sunan Kudus Construction as Religious Icon for the People of Kudus Regency

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**Abstract.** Kudus Regency is an interesting area to see its dynamics. Kudus Regency is known as the largest clove cigarette producing city in Central Java and is also known as the city of santri. This city was the center of the development of Islam in the Middle Ages. In the past, Kudus City was named Tajug City because in that area there were many Tajugs. Tajug used to be a place of worship for Hindus in the area. Sunan Kudus approached the residents of the city of Tajug by making the structure of the Menara Kudus Mosque in the form of Tajug. Kudus Regency is an area that inherited the existence of Sunan Kudus. Efforts to revitalize past glories are a representation. Existence by building the collective memory of the people of Kudus Regency is very important. This research uses ethnographic method. This study shows that there are three important things related to the construction of Sunan Kudus as a religious icon for the people of Kudus Regency. First, Sunan Kudus is an influential Islamic preacher. Second, the construction of the collective memory of the people of Kudus Regency is related to the existence of Sunan Kudus. Third, the material culture of Sunan Kudus can still be witnessed today.

**Keywords:** *Sunan Kudus, construction, religion icon, collective memory*

## 1 Introduction

Locality and local wisdom in Indonesia have become problems that have received much attention after the 1998 Reformation [1]. Based on Law Number 12 of 2008 concerning Regional Government [2]. Kudus Regency is an interesting area to see its dynamics. Kudus Regency is known as the largest clove cigarette producing city in Central Java and is also known as the city of *santri* (students who study Islamic religion in traditional Islamic educational institutions known as pesantren). This city is the center of the development of Islam in the Middle Ages. In the past, Kudus City was called Tajug City, called Tajug because in the area there are many Tajugs, Tajug is a very ancient form of traditional architectural roof used for sacred purposes. Tajug was formerly used as a place of worship for Hindus in the area. Thus Tajug City used to have a certain sacred nature. Sunan Kudus approached the

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residents of Tajug City by making the structure of the Menara Kudus Mosque in the form of Tajug.

The characterization of Sunan Kudus in the Solo kethoprak (Story of Arya Penangsang) [3] which takes the source of the story from the *Babad Tanah Djawi* [4] is a representation of the Javanese Mataraman rulers, namely the Pajang Sultanate which was continued by the Mataram Sultanate and its heirs (Surakarta Palace, Yogyakarta Palace, Mangkunegaran, and Pakualaman) for the sake of hegemony. Barker argues that hegemony can be understood in terms of strategies in which the views of reality and the power of "rising" social groups are maintained. Hegemony needs to be won back and negotiated constantly so that culture is an area of conflict and struggle for meaning [5]. Meanwhile, the characterization of Sunan Kudus in the Kethoprak Pati (Story of Arya Penangsang) which takes the source of the story from spoken stories in northern coastal Java (only part of it from the *Babad Tanah Djawi*) and efforts to revitalize the glory of Coastal Java represents a form of representation of the periphery as a form of resistance for the people of Coastal Java<sup>†</sup>.

In the context of the people of Kudus Regency, the figure of Sunan Kudus is a cultural idea to imagine an event that does not actually happen in the present. The story of Sunan Kudus involves at the same time the symbols, myths, and stories of Sunan Kudus's heroism that can still be found today. Behind his central figure for the people of Kudus Regency, there are many other things that are able to build their collective memory which in Halbwach's perspective is a reconstruction of the past in a contemporary context [6]. Collective memory is a cumulative of personal narratives, then personal narratives that have similarities are transmitted into collective memory.

This study will reveal how the Kudus Regency which is closely related to the existence of Sunan Kudus is represented by the people of Coastal Java. This research was conducted between January-August 2022. The data in this study are material culture and the existence of Kudus Regency which is related to the figure of Sunan Kudus. The data also comes from interviews with several community leaders, local cultural figures, and the Menara Kudus Foundation. This study uses an ethnographic method related to efforts to see the socio-cultural context. Spradley revealed that the essence of ethnography is an attempt to pay attention to the meanings of actions from events that befall the people we want to understand. Some of these meanings are expressed directly in language and among the accepted meanings, many are conveyed only indirectly through words and deeds. This system of meaning is their culture and ethnography always implies cultural theory [7].

## 2 Sunan Kudus as a Religious Icon

The Chronicle of Tanah Djawi which represents Mataraman/inland Javanese culture builds a hegemonic-patterned representation that departs from the character Sunan Kudus who is described as a cunning figure and favoritism towards his students. Meanwhile, for the Kudus community in particular and the Java Coastal community in general, Sunan Kudus with all his heroic stories has become a respected figure.

### 2.1 Sunan Kudus is a Preacher of Islam

After the arrival of Sunan Kudus, the City was known as Al-Quds which means "Holy", in the Javanese it is called Kudus. Tajug City has long been a trading city, but its position a bit far from the Muria Strait makes it only a transit port. Tanjung Karang Port is a transit port

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connecting to the ports of Demak, Jepara and Juwana. The main export commodity of Tanjung Karang Port is wood from muria, which is also used as one of the materials for the construction of the Great Mosque of Demak. Traders from the Middle East, China, and inter-island traders from a number of regions in the archipelago traded cloth, glassware, and agricultural products in several areas around Tajug [8].

The construction of the Menara Kudus Mosque which is designated as the Anniversary of the Kudus Regency is related to Sunan Kudus as its founder. Like the other walisongo (main preachers of Islam in Java), Sunan Kudus has a wise way of preaching. He is able to adapt the teachings of Islam in a society that already has an old culture with the majority being Hindus and Buddhists. Sunan Kudus carried out accommodation for Hindu and Buddhist cultures, this can be seen in the architecture of the Menara Kudus Mosque. This mosque he founded in 956 H or 1549 AD This can be seen in the inscription on the stone which is 30 cm wide and 46 cm long which is in the mihrab of the mosque, written in Arabic

## **2.2 Community Collective Memory Related to the Existence of Sunan Kudus**

In the past, Kudus City was named Tajug City because in that area there were many Tajug buildings. Tajug is an ancient traditional architectural roof that is used for sacred purposes. Tajug is a place of worship for Hindus. Thus, Tajug City used to have a sacred nature, this city is considered sacred for local residents who are Hindus.

Ja'far Sadiq (later known as Sunan Kudus) did not eliminate the meaning of the sacredness and holiness of Tajug City. Sunan Kudus then named the city with the name Kudus City, which comes from Arabic which means holy. In the oral story that developed, at first Sunan Kudus who was seeking knowledge in Arabia, to be precise in the Jerusalem City (Palestine) faced a plague. He was assigned by the regional leader to stop it and succeeded in destroying the plague.

The district leader gave him a land gift, but he refused. Sunan Kudus preferred to spread the teachings of Islam in Java. Then the regional leader gave a stone plaque, as a token of the gift of land ownership. After returning to Java, Sunan Kudus preached in Tajug City and built a mosque. Now the mosque is known as the Menara Kudus Mosque. The land ownership charter was placed above the mihrab and marked the founding of the Kudus City. Actually it is called Al-Quds, but because of the Javanese tongue, it is called Kudus.

The people of Tajug were inspired by the philosophy recommended by Sunan Kudus, Gusjigang. Gus means good, ji means learning the Quran and Islam, and gang means trading or doing business. Through this philosophy, Sunan Kudus guides people to become people with good personalities. Diligently study the teachings of Islam and trade. From assimilation through trading facilities and the spirit of Gusjigang, the Kudus people later became known as people who were good at trading, especially in the business of batik and jenang (traditional food typical of Kudus Regency). The Muria Strait has been swallowed up by sedimentation and the Port of Tanjung Karang has been lost and destroyed by sedimentation. However, the Gusjigang philosophy is still maintained by the people in Kudus Regency to this day.

## **2.3 The Material Culture of Sunan Kudus**

Kudus Regency has developed several nicknames and iconizations. Kudus chose the slogan "Semarak", short for "Sehat, Elok, Maju, Aman, Rapi, Asri, dan Konstitusional" which means "Healthy, Beautiful, Forward, Safe, Neat, Beautiful, and Constitutional", as a slogan for maintaining the beauty of the city. City of Santri because many students are studying Islam in Kudus Regency. Kudus is also the center of the development of Islam in the Middle Ages with the landmark Menara Kudus Mosque. This can be seen from the tombs of five important

figures in the spread of Islam in Java, namely Kyai Telingsing, Sunan Kudus, Sunan Muria, Sunan Kedu, and Syeh Syadzili. Kretek City because in Kudus there are many cigarette factories including: Djarum, Sukun, Jambu Bol, and others. The city of Jambu Bol because Kudus is very famous for guava agricultural products, especially guava bol. Guava bol was also appointed as the official identity flora of Kudus Regency. And Jerusalem van Java because in the Menara Kudus Mosque there are stones from the Al Quds (Jerusalem) area. It is said that the stone was brought by Sunan Kudus himself and became an inspiration when building on the island of Java, where he chose to spread Islamic teachings.

The location of the Menara Kudus Mosque is in Kauman Village, City District, Kudus Regency. This mosque is very unique because it has a tower similar to a temple building and an architectural pattern that combines the concept of Islamic culture with Hindu-Buddhist culture. This shows the process of acculturation in Javanese Islamization. Everyday, the mosque is crowded with pilgrims. They visit this mosque for worship and pilgrimage to the tomb of Sunan Kudus which is located on the west side of the mosque complex. This mosque is also the center of the crowd at the *Dhandhangan Festival* which is held by the local government and the people of Kudus Regency to welcome the holy month of Ramadan.

### 3 Conclusion

The figures of Sunan Kudus and the Menara Kudus Mosque are embedded in the history and culture of the Kudus Regency community. There are three important things related to the construction of Sunan Kudus as a religious icon for the people of Kudus Regency. First, Sunan Kudus is an influential Islamic preacher. Second, the construction of the collective memory of the people of Kudus Regency is closely related to the existence of Sunan Kudus. Third, the material culture of Sunan Kudus can still be witnessed today.

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