

## Intangible heritage in Astana Gunungjati Tomb Complex, Cirebon

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**Abstrak.** Astana Gunungjati is a tomb complex for the descendants of the palaces in Cirebon. One of them is the tomb of Sunan Gunungjati, one of The Walisanga and also the King of the Cirebon Sultanate. The purpose of this research was to describe the phenomenon of intangible heritage cultural values from Jeneng-Bekel-Kemit in Astana Gunungjati. Jeneng-Bekel-Kemit is the term used for the caretaker of the tomb. The existence of a caretaker known as kuncen in the Astana Gunungjati room played an important role in the service of tomb pilgrimage tourists. Kuncen at Astana Gunungjati has a unique value system in his work, and values are part of a culture that is an intangible heritage. The research method used a qualitative descriptive method. The method of data collection was carried out by interviewing several kuncen who were met by using Snowball. Field observations were carried out to visually record the space and the activities of the kuncen. The analysis method was carried out using qualitative description. Data was collected and classified. Observations made to the linkage among groups of categories to form a concept. The results of the research show ethical, spiritual, cultural, and esoteric values. The findings can be documented as intangible text attached to the Astana Gunungjati space.

*Kata Kunci:* Astana-Gunungjati-Space; Conservations; Intangible-Heritage; Kuncen

### 1. Introduction

In 2003 the Indonesian Heritage Conservation Network (JPPI) in collaboration with the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Indonesia and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism declared the 2003 Indonesian Heritage Preservation Charter, which included one agreement, namely Indonesian Cultural Heritage in the form of tangible heritage and intangible heritage [1,2] Previous studies have focused more on the palaces in Cirebon

such as the buildings' quality [2], the local spatial system [3], the settlement's vulnerability [4], and the ancient philosophy [5].

Astana Gunungjati is one of the cultural heritages specified in the Cirebon Regency Spatial Planning (RTRW) document. The RTRW already has a formal legal basis as a reference for regional development through Regional Regulation Number 7 of 2018. The Astana Gunungjati Room, which is a cultural heritage, has many aspects of intangible heritage that have not been explored. One of them is the kuncen-kuncen in this area. The number of kuncen is 121 people, this number has been maintained until now. The recruitment system has been kept for generations. Attitudes and values are developed among the kuncen, the community, tourists, the local government, and the palace, all of these are not actualized in cultural heritage documents because they are intangible. Nevertheless, this is attached to the Astana Sunan Gunungjati cultural heritage site.

The reference that formed the basis for this study, Vecco [6] stipulates that intangible heritage must be protected and maintained. Further revealing that immateriality and orality are inherited steps that lead to the enrichment of all mankind. References Mubaideen & Al Kurdi [7] argue that conservation is extended to link the historical and cultural context of a site. Furthermore, it refers to the perspective of space and human perspective [8]. These references formed the basis of this study.

The objective of this paper is to describe the intangible heritage phenomenon of kuncen values and culture in the Astana Gunungjati region. This research was exploratory in nature of the formed phenomena. The exploitation of phenomena to document the intangible heritage of the existence of kuncen-kuncen in the Astana Gunungjati area. The findings of this study have the potential to transform knowledge about intangible cultures in the Astana Gunungjati region. The novelty of this study lie in its exploration of Astana Gunungjati's intangible heritage values, particularly the hierarchical kuncen management system. In addition, the Kuncens upheld moral principles as well as spiritual and esoteric beliefs. The symbols and spatial shapes of Astana Gunungjati have been the subject of earlier research [9]. The research's novelty is genuine as it is only manifest specifically in the Astana Gunungjati.

## **2. Methods**

The research was carried out in the Astana Gunungjati area, located in Astana Village, Gunungjati District, Cirebon Regency, West Java Province. The location is 7 km to the north of the palaces in the city of Cirebon. The position of the research location can be seen in Figure 1 below.

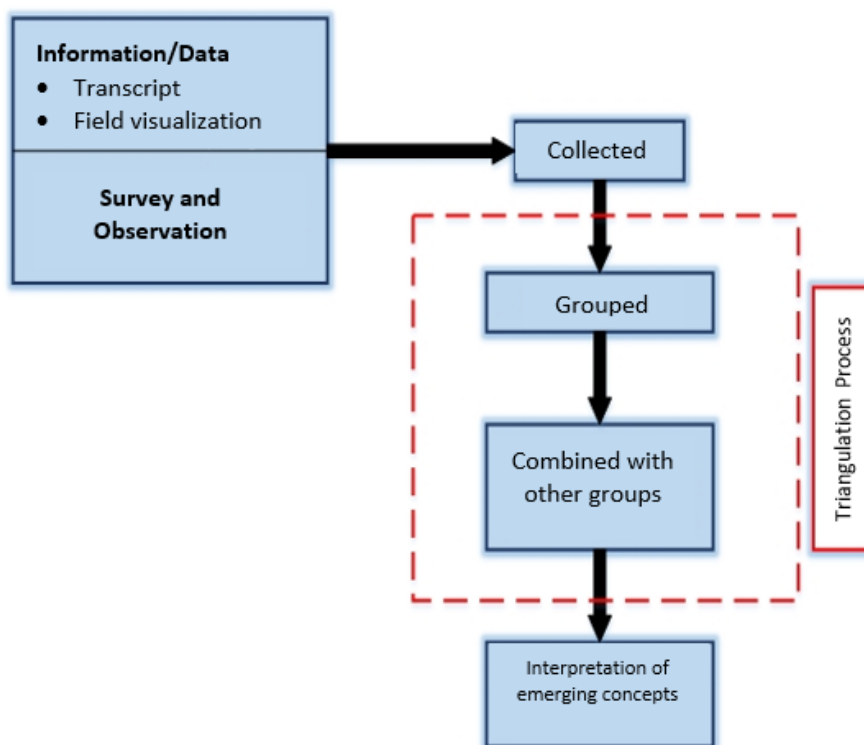


**Figure 1.** Position of research location.

The survey preparation was carried out for two days, and the initial survey took 3 days to get an initial impression and the situation in the field. Then, it took 7 days to conduct a more detailed and in-depth survey. The first survey was conducted from January 14 2022 to January 16, 2022. Then the second survey was conducted from February 14 2022 to February 20, 2022.

Data was gathered by conducting snowball interviews with the selected kuncen. The results of the interviews was recorded through a voice recorder. Furthermore, observations or field

observations was made on the occurrences. The camera recorded the findings of the observations, to obtain visual representations of the phenomena that occur. All data was collected into a single unit and the date of data acquisition was assigned.



**Figure 2.** Research design.

This research was carried out with a qualitative method. Figure 2 depicts the research design that was used. The analysis method began with the collection of all data/information. The information/data obtained was then classified, and the relationship between one data/information and another was determined. Validating was done by means of triangulation, namely checking back to the field and verifying the data/information from the observations obtained. The result showed the findings of concepts that emerge from the field.

### 3. Result and discussion

The findings of the study were demonstrated through ethical, spiritual and esoteric values that go beyond the exoteric.

#### 3.1. Ethical value

The findings indicate that ethical values are created as a result of the activities that occur. The ethical values of key terms and conditions. The term *getok tular* from a father who has become a *kuncen* is used to recruit a son to become a *kuncen* from generation to generation. The condition is that it is the first son in a family who will continue the *kuncen* profession from the father. This requirement still applies today. Even now, the *kuncen* are preparing the first son

to take over their responsibilities. If the old kuncen dies, the young one would replace the position. The total number of kuncen must be 121. Kuncen recruitment is determined if the population is reduced due to death. The provision for as many as 121 key figures is a relic from the past. This number has remained unchanged to this day.

A kuncen has 3M prohibitions: Mabok, Maen Judi, and Maen Perempuan. Mabok is synonymous with getting drunk. Maen judi refers to any form of gambling. Maen perempuan means doing inappropriate behavior with women other than his wife. This prohibition is not written but has become a morality ethic of kuncen.

The execution of kuncen tasks is completed through group division. There are 12 people in the group. Each group takes turns to do a picket task and "tugas dalam" which can also be called an internal task. Internal tasks are those that take place inside Astana. The internal task must stay in Astana Gunungjati. While picketing is a task performed outside of Astana. Every four months, internal assignments will be replaced. Once a week, outside assignments will be replaced.

The implementation of tasks in Astana is determined by Jeneng. Jeneng is the highest leader of the kuncen. Jeneng was appointed by the Kings of the Kanoman and Kasepuhan Palaces. Jeneng is in charge of organizing all of the kuncen. Jeneng is the coordinator of all the kuncen. He arranges the schedule for the kuncen or kemit tasks. Jeneng is not always present in Astana, depending on the need for coordination or if the King of the Palace requests his presence.

Kuncen or Kemit at Astana Gunungjati has a hierarchy of positions with the following term:

- Level 1 is called nyai anom
- Level 2 is called nyai sepuh
- Level 3 is called kadipaten anom
- Level 4 is called kadipaten sepuh
- Level 5 is called gedong malang
- Level 6 is called penanggapan
- Level 7 is called Kanoman
- Level 8 is called panembahan anom
- Level 9 is called Sultan Jamaludin
- Level 10 is called penjangkaran
- Level 11 is called Juru batu
- Level 12 is called Juru mudi
- Level 13 is called bekel anom
- Level 14 is called bekel sepuh

The higher the rank, the higher the position. The promotion is determined by Jeneng. This hierarchy of positions can be described as shown in Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3.** Hierarchy of Astana Gunungjati kuncen position from the lowest (level 1 to the highest, namely Jeneng).

Each level has tasks that correspond to its level and role. Level 5 is in charge of the kitchen, where meals are prepared for everyone on duty. Levels 1-4 provide assistance to Level 5. Level 5 is also in charge of level 1-4 tasks. Levels 6-14 are responsible for welcoming guests/tourists who visit the tomb, cleaning the tomb, and guiding tourists to pray tahlil if they request it. Shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** *Kuncen* in charge of one group, Pak Dudung is one of the research informants, as indicated by the blue arrow.

When on duty, *Kuncen* must wear official attire, which includes a white koko shirt, headband, and batik cloth. *Kuncen* is responsible for providing clothing on his own. When performing tugas dalam or internal duties, official attire is worn. Meanwhile, they are not required to wear full official attire for "external duties".

The income of *kuncen* is uncertain. Their income is determined from donations made by tourists. The more tourists who donate, the more money the *kuncen* will make. Tourist donations, on the other hand, are another source of funding for Astana's operations. They continue to think positively about their uncertain income. They always say that: "God has arranged our sustenance." The *kuncen* profession is one that, according to them, has already been predetermined by the Almighty. They never refused; in fact, one of them had become a Civil Servant (PNS) and then had to replace his father who died, so he left the civil servant position to become a replacement for his father.

The phenomenon of attitude and action reveals ethical values. The statements of those who do not object to the terms and conditions of becoming a *kuncen*, accepting the task as an obligation that must be fulfilled, attitudes that are not centered on money, and the attitudes of choosing the profession of *kuncen* as their life call. They are consistent in carrying out *kuncen*'s duties despite the lack of material clarity. Today's world civilization leads to the power of matter. They claimed that Gusti Allah had arranged for it so that they could perform their duties as well as possible. Their attitude and outlook on life are values that are not written in Astana Gunungjati's physical artifacts. The physical form of Astana Gunungjati is captured by the five senses, but the ethical values that emerge from its *kuncen*'s attitudes, behaviors, and actions are not. This is something intangible that is inherent in Astana Gunungjati's physical structure.

Astana Gunungjati's ethical values is intangible heritage as an intrinsic part of the Astana Gunungjati environment. It is a part of the cultural landscape [7], and it is infused with culture [10]. The revelations are also knowledge that must be disseminated to the public [6] and turned into conservation material [11].

### 3.2. *Spiritual values*

The next finding is the spiritual value system emerged from the phenomena of dhikr-tahlil that reverberate in every part of the tomb room. Dhikr is glorifying God Almighty. Tahlil is the recitation of the holy verses of the Qur'an to ask forgiveness for the spirits of those who have died.

All kuncen are very fluent in dhikr tahlil. They can guide and lead tahlil to pilgrim tourists. There is no time limit for performing the tahlil prayer. Everything can be done at any time based on the needs of pilgrim tourists visiting Astana Gunungjati. The time of pilgrimage is not limited by the time of visit. Should pilgrimage activities lasted for 24 hours, the kuncen would be on duty according to the schedule. When the number of tourists increased, Kuncen would be overwhelmed by guiding tahlil.

Tourists will increase by the Hijri calendar, also known as the Javanese calendar. The times of blessing to perform prayers are determined by Islamic teachings. Including pilgrims' visits to do tahlil very much at the time of prayer blessing. The tahlil schedule will be busy on Friday night. Friday is a day that is considered full of blessings. The schedule for changing days in Islam occurs after the Maghrib prayer. Thus, Thursday evening in Gregorian calendar mean early Friday in Javanese calendar, and crowds of pilgrims for tahlil would start. It will be even more crowded if it coincides with the Friday-Kliwon schedule. This event is known as Seba-Kliwonan. The phenomenon of tahlil density can be seen in Figure 5 below.



**Figure 5.** Crowdedness of pilgrims performing tahlil in Astana Gunungjati.





The palace's traditions will use the Astana Gunungjati room for the event procession, so the kuncen will take part. The event will reach its peak during the month of Rabiulawal or Mulud Moon. Because this is the month of the Prophet Muhammad SAW's birth, the kuncen will be guiding a lot of tahlil for pilgrim tourists. In addition to this time in the month of Shawwal, the pisowan event is held, and the kuncen will take part in all the processions.

The phenomenon of tahlil and ancient traditions builds the soul/mind/spiritual for the existence of forces outside of humans. Activities that strengthen human spirituality. This incident is not documented in the cultural heritage of Astana Gunungjati. The phenomenon of tahlil and tradition is a form of spiritual value system that persists in Astana Gunungjati. Even the pilgrim tourists know independently the schedule of tahlil traditions and activities. This phenomenon is proof that the spiritual value system persists in Astana Gunungjati through the understanding of the kuncen-kuncen to tourists. These values are intangible and unique in Astana Gunungjati.

A spiritual crisis occurs in modern society as a result of modern youth's lack of life guidance and meaning [12]. Morality and justice are founded on spirituality [13]. Spirituality is associated with the quality of the will, and the level of individual self-regulation, and is defined as the ability to direct and regulate one's behavior, actions, and activities following universal values [12]. The spiritual values that emerged from the phenomenon at Astana Gunungjati became a way for humans to reintroduce spirituality that had been lost in the modern era. Typical values that become part of Astana Gunungjati's intangible heritage.

### *3.3. Etiquette values towards space*

The Astana Gunungjati building is located in a hill-shaped area. This area is named Mount Sembung. As a result, the highest point on the land serves as the peak. Sunan Gunungjati's tomb is located at the highest point of the land. He is the king of the Cirebon Sultanate and a guardian of the spread of Islam in West Java. The placement of his tomb at the top demonstrates respect for him. The peak area is not open to the public. This zone extends from the fourth to the ninth door (top area). Only kuncen who have been assigned a specific task are permitted to enter that area (see Figure 8 Areas that can only be entered by a limited circle of people).

Women who are not clean (menstruating) are not permitted to enter the rooms on the fourth through ninth floors. Women are only permitted to enter until the third, or pasujudan, door. The treatment of places with such unwritten rules exemplifies the phenomenon of etiquette values toward space. Phenomenon demonstrating intangible heritage.

The Astana area provides space specifically for kuncen/kemit who are on night duty. A kitchen is provided for the provision of their consumption, a place for prayer and a place for their clothes lockers are available (see Figure 9 and Figure 10 of the Astana Gunungjati Room). This phenomenon also shows etiquette towards space according to the activities of the kuncen in the Gunungjati area.



**Figure 8.** Door 4 – door 9 area.



**Figure 9.** Kuncen's room and their wardrobe.

The phenomenon of human behavior towards space refers to: "Space is not empty. The nature of deep space—of which our ordinary space is but a projection—is conceived of as a plenary, highly variable structural process that includes potentially infinite qualities. Thus, space itself is understood as a multidimensional ordering medium [14]. The reference confirms that space does have multiple dimensions, including the etiquette related to the human mind that fills it.

Etiquette towards a space is a part of socio-ecology. Socio-ecology has raised several issues that lead to the sustainability of space in a broader sense, such as a city, as a place for human life [15]. The etiquette towards space depicted in Astana Gunungjati is a real-life example of how humans "need to be civilized" when it comes to space.

Today's world has evolved toward being "entropically," erasing the sense of place, resulting in space becoming a commodity to be traded [8]. Such issues have an impact on the long-term viability of space. According to the law of thermodynamics, everything in the universe will experience disorder or a change in form, which is referred to as "entropy." Then humans utilize

the concept of humanism to minimize or slow down environmental damage, which is assumed to minimize "entropy" [16]. Consistency of thoughts and attitudes shown by the kuncen community, such as etiquette towards space, will slow down changes in entropy, including the entropy of space. Phenomena that are intangible heritage.



**Figure 10.** Astana Gunungjati building.

### 3.4. Esoteric

According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), esoteric is something that is secret. The esoteric form derived from the kuncen statement always states, "They are guarded by the guardian." Sunan Gunungjati is the meaning of the guardian. They secretly believe that the wali's magic will continue to manifest even after his physical body has been buried. According to Simondon, artifacts are magical objects that have a relationship with organisms and the environment [17]. Kuncen becomes a part of the organism of Astana Gunungjati's space and,

without realizing it, forms an alliance with the Astana Gunungjati environment. Esoteric arose from a friendship with Waliyullah Sunan Gunungjati.

The findings of this study must be documented in the guidelines for development plans, including the Cirebon Regency Spatial Plan, to conserve the area. As a result of local cultural exploration, cultural-based spatial planning [18]. Spatial planning needs to be developed for regional development as well. This is expected to attract visitors to visit where visitors with certain characteristics will be educated [19]. Until now, the planning documents have only regulated cultural heritage areas in the form of decrees, without describing in depth the culture that is formed. Apart from that, it does not govern the proposed cultural heritage area program in detail. It also can develop a planning for tourism and contribute to the regional economy [20]. Planning becomes world heritage knowledge, particularly for future generations. It also can develop a planning for tourism and contribute to the regional economy.

#### **4. Conclusions**

According to the initial explanation the purpose of the study is to describe the intangible heritage phenomenon from the findings of the values studied from the kuncen/kemit in Astana Gunungjati. The values that emerge are: (1) Ethical values from the cultural phenomenon of recruiting kuncen from the "getok tular" method, the number of kuncen remains is 121. The hierarchy of positions is 14 levels with the leadership of a jeneng. (2) The spiritual values demonstrated following the spirituality of the ancient Islamic tradition, namely tahlil. (3) The etiquette values toward space, as indicated by the spaces that are limited by the actors and their activities, as well as the presence of a special room for kuncen activities. (4) The esoteric value system of the eternal existence of waliyullah Sunan Gunungjati as a holy man.

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