

An Assessment to the Cultural Significance of Habib Kuncung Historical Sites in Jakarta

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ABSTRACT

The historical site of Habib Kuncung was one of the sacred places in Jakarta that was believed to have *karomah* and *wasilah*. He was a religious leader and fighter, historically known for upholding Islam and fighting for Indonesia's independence. Its strategic location was often be targeted by developers who wanted to transform it into elite area. Against this background, the assessment of its cultural significance in this study was carried out as an effort to preserve its cultural heritage. It used qualitative method. The concept of cultural significance was used to estimate the value of the place, especially its historical value, so that the study can enrich the repertoire of the site to become a more valuable place for future generations. The result of the assessment showed that the cultural significance of the site—consisted of aesthetic values, outranking values, historical roles, scarcity, building characteristics—strengthening the area. It concluded that the more than 50 year old site was highly potential to be designated as a cultural heritage area by the government.

Keywords: Cultural Significance, Assessment, Historical Sites, Habib Kuncung

1. INTRODUCTION

The tomb pilgrimage site of Habib Ahmad bin Alwi Alhadaad or famously known as Habib Kuncung was located on Rawajati Timur II street No. 70, RT 003/08 Pancoran, South Jakarta. In the area, besides the tombs of Habib Kuncung and his family, there was also the tomb of Habib Munzir. In the area there was also a mosque, an endowment from the Alhadaad family, particularly Habib Kuncung's father.

Habib Kuncung's pilgrimage site was crowded with pilgrims, not only from Jakarta and surrounding areas, but also from other cities in Indonesia and even from foreign countries such as Yemen, Turkey, India, and other countries in Asia. His chaplaincy and struggle have attracted the attention and admiration of many people. His far-reaching reputation, originated from his learning period in several countries, was also the reason for many people who come to pray or expect blessing from the guardian of God [1].

People usually respected Habib Kuncung's tomb due to their belief in his *karomah* (miracle) during his life and his *wasilah* (intercession) after he passed away. His piety (*taqwa*), his perseverance (*istiqomah*), and his struggle in fighting for Indonesian independence and upholding

Islam, were the bases for people's belief in the sanctity and sacredness of the tomb. It was supported by texts and stories that were widely spread by word of mouth as a folklore.



Figure 1 Location of Habib Kuncung Historical Sites

The presence of the tomb since the death of Habib Kuncung in 1926, in the middle of a luxury settlement in Rawajati Kalibata of South Jakarta, not only provided religious nuances but also contributed to the construction of identity of the region. The regular pilgrimages

provided significant social and economic opportunity for the surrounding community. This was considered as a form of *karomah* and blessing for the existence of the tomb in their environment. This encourages the public and the pilgrims to preserve the pilgrimage site and protect it from the capitalist groups targeting it to be converted into a billion-dollar commercial area.

Against this background, this study was conducted to assess the cultural significance of the Habib Kuncung historical site as an effort to preserve its existence and sustainability as a cultural heritage area that has important historical, socio-cultural, economic, aesthetic, and educational values.

The key concept in determining the value of a cultural heritage is its cultural significance, i.e. aesthetic, historic, scientific, social and spiritual value for past, present or future generations. Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself—its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places, and related objects.

The cultural significance is one of the assessment methods that can be used to assess how important a building or area is to be preserved. For this reason, an assessment criterion is needed to facilitate the application of the conservation concept to preserve a building or area. The assessment criteria include aesthetic assessment, greediness, scarcity, privilege, historical role, and assessment of whether a building or area can strengthen the identity and quality of the area.

2. METHOD

A qualitative research method was used in this study [2]. Qualitative approach was used to examine the object's natural condition [3]. In qualitative research, truth is dynamic and can only be expressed by examining the interaction of research subjects with their social environment. The required data was collected by literature studies, especially from journals.

The data were then analyzed using the case study approach. Several criteria were used to review some of the results with the purpose of exploring information learned from a case, looking at the problem under study, construing conceptual findings in the form of a research statement, and inferring benefits that can be drawn from the case.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Historical Value

Habib Kuncung, born Ahmad bin Alwi Al Hadaad, was born in Gurfha village in the city of Tahrim, Hadramaut (now Yemen), on 26 Syaban 1254 H/14 November 1838. He studied Islamic teachings from his father, Al Habib Alwi Al Haddad, and Ali bin Husein Alhadaad in Hadramaut, Al Habib Abdurrahman bin Abdullah Al Habsyi and Al Habib Abdulan bin Mukhsin Al Attas from Empang Bogor. He was very diligent and pursued a good education to several countries such as the Netherlands, Malaysia, and Singapore. He was called

Kuncung (Javanese word for forelock) because he liked to wear *kopyah*, a type of hat from Bugis that rises upwards. Habib Kuncung was believed to be one of Allah's guardians (*wali Allah*) who had *Khoriquil a'dah*, habits that are considered unusual for human in general, also often referred to as "*Majdub*" or "*Darkah*"—whenever people get in trouble and desperately need help, he will suddenly appear.

It was reported that when Habib Kuncung reached adulthood, he was visited by the Prophet Muhammad *sallallaahu alaihi wassalam*. He eventually made a pilgrimage to Medina, but in Bisjarah he was told to go to Java by the Prophet *Sallallaahu Alaihi Wassalam*. Habib Kuncung was a member of the Prophet's big family. He was of the 40th generation. But his life was very mysterious.

He was a merchant since he was young. This occupation made him get to know the Southeast Asian region, especially when he traded to Singapore and made a fortune in there. "He has inherited property of thirty houses worth in the past twenty years," said Habib Salim bin Ahmad, one of his relatives in Rawajati. His mobility as a merchant also made him to Bugis and married a wife there. But there was no information about who was the wife. From the marriage a son was born, named Muhammad. He later inherited Habib Kuncung's heritage in Singapore. But unfortunately, Habib Muhammad passed away without an heir so that the lineage of Habib Kuncung was cut off.

Habib Kuncung was always in a move. No one can ensure if he was about to settle in a place. He was present and leaving as he pleased. But, he had got a house in Kampung Melayu from an employee of the Batavia governor who became his friend.

Habib Kuncung often made an appearance at the Habaib assembly in Jakarta which was centered in the residence of Habib Ali Al-Habsyi, Kwitang. He was known to the people of Bogor, because he spent a lot of time there. His nickname, "Kuncung," was also originated from Bogor. His wandering life made his history only known to a few people. He was known as a mysterious but highly knowledgeable scholar. Habib Kuncung had always provided advices based on the Qur'an and Hadist to anyone who was in a trouble and asked for his advice or fatwa.

Whenever attending scholars gathering of book discussion, Habib Kuncung was always the one who read the book, because of his euphonious voice and his mastery of Arabic. He was also infamous for his *karomahs*. It was told that one day the clerics gathered in Kwitang, planning a travel to Cirebon to fulfill an invitation. At the day of departure, Habib Kuncung was rather forgotten and did not make it to the train station. The company then left for Cirebon without him. At the time they arrived, they found that Habib Kuncung was already there. Another story goes that one day the Habib was burning a pile of garbage in a large hole. There was a banana tree by the hole, planted by someone. As the garbage was burned, the owner of the banana tree was furious at Habib Kuncung. But the Habib kept silent until the fire went out. It turned out that the banana tree not only survived, but even keep growing in a better condition. Another *karomah*: every time he was about to

ride a *delman* (a cart pulled by a horse or horses), the coachman would go home with more money than usual. So, many *delman* expected him to ride with them.

Even though being peculiar, people remembered Habib Kuncung as a respectable, pious person. The things he did were considered as brilliant. However, he didn't want people to worship him. He wanted to be known as an ordinary person. He also never expected gift or reward for his help.

Due to all of his quality, he was respected during his lifetime and honored after his death. Nowadays many people still made a visit to his tomb. Habib Ahmad bin Alwi Alhadaad, or Habib Kuncung, passed away in 29 Syaban 1345 H or around 1926 AD at the age of 93 and was buried at the Al Haddad family cemetery in Rawajati Timur II, South Jakarta. Every third Sunday of the month of Rabiul Awal a commemoration of the Prophet's birthday was held at the site.

At the time of his death, it was reported, a miracle occurred during the funeral procession. The body that was originally about to be buried in the family cemetery complex of Habib Toha bin Ja'far Alhadaad had to be moved to another site. When it was about to put into the hole, ten people strong was unable to even lift it. Finally, a prayer was conducted, it was understood the body was willing to be buried in the family cemetery of Habib Abdulah bin Ja'far, near At Taubah mosque. At the cemetery there were also the tomb of Habib Nurdin bin Fuad Alhadaad and Habib Munzir.

3.2. Aesthetic Value

The Habib Kuncung pilgrimage site consisted of several buildings, namely the sacred tomb of Habib Kuncung and his family, At Taubah mosque, and residential area for the site caretakers. The premise was initially functioned as a mosque. It then developed into a complex with cemetery area situated on the south side of the mosque after the death of Habib Kuncung.



Figure 2 Siteplan of At Taubah Mosque.

The picture above shows the difference in architectural style between the mosque and the tomb. The At Taubah mosque was of modern architecture with a touch of detailed elements of Islamic architecture, while the tomb was of local architecture.

At Taubah Mosque was one of historical sites in Jakarta. It was built around the 18th century by Habib Abdullah Ja'far Alhadaad, Habib Kuncung's great-grandfather. It was located at the center of the crowded area of Kalibata, Pancoran, South Jakarta. Even so, the complex was so beautiful with many trees surrounding the mosque. The mosque, and particularly the tomb of Habib Kuncung, was regularly welcoming pilgrims from many regions.



Figure 3 Interior of At Taubah Mosque

Initially there were only two tombs at the complex. But, the number has been increasing. All of those who were buried there were the descendants of the founder, including Habib Kuncung.



Figure 4 The Building of Habib Kuncung Tomb

Besides Habib Kuncung's tomb, there were several other tombs, situated on the terrace and behind the building. There were also three barrels containing water which were prepared as part of the ritual process for the pilgrimage to the tomb. Each pilgrim was recommended to take a cup/bottle of water to take on the pilgrimage, after which the water was drunk. It was said that the water was equivalent to the *Zamzam* which is beneficial to people's health.



Figure 5 The tomb of Habib Kuncung

3.3. Social and Spiritual Value

For Muslim community in Jakarta, Habib Kuncung was a figure with a high degree of piety. It was believed that he had been endowed with a heavenly gift (*karomah*) that distinguished him from lay people. Habib Kuncung often carried out prayer (*salat*) at the At Taubah mosque, especially late at night. The At Taubah mosque eventually became the center of worship for the Muslim community in Kalibata.

The Habib Kuncung pilgrimage site was developed into a destination of religious tourism which has been welcoming pilgrims both from Jakarta and other regions, even from other countries including the Middle East countries. This area was a magnet for the growth of Kalibata and its surrounding area. At the present day, the area around the tomb has been developed into an elite residential area, bordered by Kalibata Indah and the Indonesian Parliament's residential complex.

In addition to the religious meaning, the site was infested with social meaning, since it braided a strong social tie between the pilgrims and the local community. By knitting social ties among pilgrims, it even sometimes gave birth to a new community of fellow pilgrims.

Furthermore, by welcoming a large number of pilgrims regularly, the site also developed an economic meaning. The pilgrimage to Habib Kuncung's tomb provided the local community with an opportunity to make a good fortune by selling various needs and merchandises such as flowers, rose water, perfume, prayer beads, cap and Muslim clothing, the Qur'an, and

others. The surrounding area even began to grow food and beverage stalls.

3.4. Assessment of Cultural Significance

Cultural significance is a widely adopted concept utilized by, and forming an integral part of, conservation protocol world-wide. The Burra Charter (1999) defines "cultural significance" as "aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations" [4]. Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects. Places may have a range of values for different individuals or groups. Cultural significance is, therefore, a mechanism for determining the value of places, buildings and associated artefacts that helps our understanding of the past, enriching the present and ultimately future generations [5].

We made an assessment of cultural significance of the Habib Kuncung pilgrimage sites with the following criteria:

Table 1 Culture significance assessment

No	Criteria	Value	Information
1	aesthetic	2	Variables and the concept of buildings and regions are changing in the At Taubah mosque area
2	outstanding	3	The entire building looks dominant so that it can become a landmark of the area, around the pilgrimage site is a settlement area
3	Historical role	3	The site area has a connection with the role in the history of the struggle of religious leaders in Jakarta
4	Scarcity	3	No similarities were found with other buildings around it.
5	Character of the building	2	Has a character that is different from the environment around it. But for the tomb building, the character of the building is almost the same as the surrounding area
6	strengthen the region)	3	The building elements as a whole create architectural continuity and barrel in the Region.
Total value		16	

The value of the Habib Kuncung pilgrimage site's cultural significance was 16. Based on the assessment criteria it can be concluded that the site has a high potential to be preserved. This assessment can help us in identifying and making place of value to us and our society.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of study, it can be concluded that the Habib Kuncung pilgrimage site was worth of conservation. In terms of age, the site was built more than 50 years, although it has undergone many changes

and development. It had many functions. Other than a place of worship (At Taubah Masque), it also served as a pilgrimage site, especially for Muslims who admire Habib Kuncung with all of his quality and *karomah*. In addition, the side gave strong meaning and hue to the surrounding area both in social, cultural, and economic fields.

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