

“TAPAK SUCI ACROSS TIME”

The Trajectory and Development of Islamic Martial Arts in Sukoharjo (1963–2025)

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Abstract

This study examines the development of Tapak Suci as an Islamic martial art in Sukoharjo Regency from 1963 to 2024. As part of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage, pencak silat functions not only as a form of self-defense but also as a medium for character formation and spiritual cultivation. Tapak Suci Putera Muhammadiyah emerges as a martial arts institution grounded in Islamic teachings, distinguished by its rejection of mystical practices and its emphasis on the purification of faith (aqidah). This research employs the historical method, encompassing heuristic data collection, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, to trace its developmental dynamics. The findings indicate that Tapak Suci has experienced significant growth in Sukoharjo, serving both as a platform for youth development and as a medium of Islamic propagation (da'wah). The organization not only teaches martial skills but also instills values such as discipline, responsibility, leadership, and the strengthening of faith and morality. Through a rational, systematic, and non-syncretic approach, Tapak Suci has maintained its relevance amid competition with other martial arts schools, while contributing to the formation of a religious and ethically grounded society.

Keywords: *Islamic Martial Arts, Pencak Silat, Sukoharjo, Tapak Suci*

Introduction

Pencak silat is one of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritages that embodies the nation's identity. As a traditional martial art, it functions not only as a means of self-defense but also encompasses philosophical, social, and spiritual values. Over time, *pencak silat* has developed into a competitive sport contested at both national and international levels. This development demonstrates its significant position in Indonesian society, both as a cultural expression and as a sport. As has been stated, "Pencak silat is one of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritages and a distinctive martial art of the Indonesian people." (Iskandar: 2010, 15).

Historically, *pencak silat* developed from the human need to survive in the face of various challenges. Many of its *techniques* are inspired by animal movements, such as those of tigers, monkeys, and snakes. This reflects the adaptive relationship between humans and their natural environment. Therefore, *pencak silat* represents not only physical capability but also a form of local wisdom transmitted across generations. This aligns with the view that *pencak silat* is "a martial skill employed according to the practitioner's needs in confronting various challenges, particularly those originating from nature and animals." (Maryono: 1998, 27).

Beyond its function as a martial art, *pencak silat* has also played a significant role in the spread of religion, particularly Islam in the Indonesian archipelago. Islamic scholars utilized it as a medium of *da'wah* to attract public interest while simultaneously instilling Islamic values. Through this approach, *pencak silat* became not merely a physical practice but also a medium for the transmission of religious values. As noted, it was once employed in the Islamization process by figures such as Shaykh Burhanuddin in Minangkabau (Azra: 2004, 112).

Over time, various *pencak silat* schools have emerged, each with distinct characteristics. Some incorporate mystical and esoteric elements into their teachings, while others emphasize rational and

religious dimensions. This diversity reflects the dynamic evolution of *pencak silat* in Indonesia. Within this context, certain schools explicitly integrate Islamic values into their system, one of which is *Tapak Suci Putera Muhammadiyah* (Notosoejitno: 1997, 89).

Tapak Suci is an Islamic-oriented *pencak silat* school under the Muhammadiyah organization. It was established with the aim of purifying martial arts practices from elements considered inconsistent with Islamic teachings. The institution emphasizes a rational, methodical, and dynamic approach to training. This is in line with the principle that “Tapak Suci is a school that promotes modernist Islamic values.” (Mul Khan: 2000, 54).

The establishment of *Tapak Suci* cannot be separated from the socio-cultural conditions in which martial arts practices were still influenced by mystical elements. Some *pencak silat* schools employed amulets, incantations, and specific rituals believed to confer supernatural powers. Such practices raised concerns, as they were considered to obscure the principle of *tawhid* (the oneness of God) in Islam. In response, *Tapak Suci* emerged as an alternative that rejects these elements and promotes an approach more aligned with Islamic teachings (Noer: 1982, 133).

As an autonomous organization under Muhammadiyah, *Tapak Suci* functions not only as a platform for martial arts development but also as a medium for *da'wah* and character formation. In its training process, members are taught not only martial techniques but also Islamic values such as discipline, responsibility, and moral integrity. This makes *Tapak Suci* a holistic educational medium that integrates both physical and spiritual dimensions (Nashir: 2010, 76).

Tapak Suci was officially established on July 31, 1963, in Kauman, Yogyakarta. Its founding resulted from the integration of several *pencak silat* streams that shared similar visions and objectives. Since its inception, *Tapak Suci* has experienced rapid growth and gained wide acceptance within society. This is affirmed in the

statement that “on July 31, 1963, the Indonesian Martial Arts School Tapak Suci was established” (Pimpinan Pusat Tapak Suci: 2005, 12).

Over time, *Tapak Suci* expanded to various regions across Indonesia, including Sukoharjo Regency. Its presence in this area is closely linked to Muhammadiyah’s well-established social network. Consequently, *Tapak Suci* has become a platform for young people to develop their potential while strengthening their Islamic identity through structured and educational martial arts activities (Alfian: 1989, 98).

Based on this discussion, it can be understood that *Tapak Suci* plays a significant role in developing *pencak silat* as a martial art grounded in Islamic values. Therefore, examining the development of *Tapak Suci* in Sukoharjo Regency from 1963 to 2024 is essential in order to understand its contribution to character formation and the reinforcement of Islamic identity at the local level (Hadi: 2015, 145).

Discussion

The Historical Trajectory of Tapak Suci within the Martial Arts Tradition

Pencak silat is one of Indonesia’s intangible cultural heritages with deep historical roots in the life of its society. This martial art functions not only as a means of self-defense but also reflects cultural values, life philosophies, and national identity. Over time, *pencak silat* has undergone a transformation from a localized traditional practice into a sport recognized at national and international levels. This transformation demonstrates its high degree of adaptability in responding to changing times while maintaining its core values (Setyokriswanto. 2015. hlm. 23).

Historically, *pencak silat* emerged from the human need to confront environmental challenges, whether in the form of wild animal threats or interpersonal conflicts. Consequently, many of its movements are inspired by animals such as tigers, snakes, and monkeys. This condition illustrates that *pencak silat* is inseparable from

geographical factors and the lived experiences of the communities that shaped it. Over time, it developed into a structured martial system transmitted across generations (Setyokriswanto. 2015. hlm. 23).

Its development has not been limited to the realm of self-defense but has also expanded into a medium for character formation and education. *Pencak silat* is now taught in various educational institutions, including schools and universities, and has become part of national and international sporting events such as the National Sports Week (PON), the SEA Games, and the Asian Games. This indicates that *pencak silat* has evolved into an important component of the sporting world while continuing to preserve its cultural values (Mizannudin Muhammad dkk. 2018. hlm. 265).

Amid the diversity of *pencak silat* schools in Indonesia, *Tapak Suci Putera Muhammadiyah* has emerged as a distinctive institution grounded in Islamic values. This school not only teaches martial techniques but also instills spiritual, moral, and disciplinary values in its members. In this sense, *Tapak Suci* serves as a medium for both physical and spiritual development (Nisa. 2021. hlm. 22).

The emergence of *Tapak Suci* is closely related to the socio-religious conditions prior to its establishment. In Kauman, Yogyakarta, various martial arts schools still incorporated mystical elements, such as amulets, incantations, and supernatural practices in their training. These practices raised concerns among Muhammadiyah circles, as they were seen to obscure the purity of Islamic teachings (Nisa. 2021. hlm. 24).

Based on these conditions, the idea emerged to establish a martial arts school free from elements of *shirk* (associating partners with God) and fully grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah. *Tapak Suci* subsequently arose as a response to this need by rejecting mystical practices and replacing them with a rational and spiritual approach aligned with Islamic teachings. Training within *Tapak Suci* places greater emphasis on physical ability, technical mastery, and the

strengthening of faith through prayer and *dhikr* (remembrance of God) (Nisa. 2021. hlm. 25).

The establishment of *Tapak Suci* on July 31, 1963, in Kauman, Yogyakarta, resulted from the integration of several *pencak silat* streams, including Cikauman, Seranoman, and Kasegu. This consolidation aimed to unify strengths within a structured organizational framework with a clear Islamic vision. Thus, from its inception, *Tapak Suci* was designed not only as a technically proficient institution but also as one grounded in a strong ideological foundation (Sadad. 2016. hlm. 13).

The development of *Tapak Suci* progressed rapidly, particularly after it was formally incorporated into Muhammadiyah as an autonomous organization in 1964. This status reinforced its role as a medium for *da'wah* and cadre development within Muhammadiyah. Supported by a strong organizational structure, *Tapak Suci* expanded across various regions of Indonesia (Pimpinan Pusat Tapak Suci. 1991. hlm. 5).

One of the regions that became part of its expansion was Sukoharjo Regency. The introduction of *Tapak Suci* to this area began in Kartasura District, which has close geographical proximity to Yogyakarta. From Kartasura, *Tapak Suci* gradually spread to other areas within Sukoharjo (Interview with Purnomo, 2023: 9).

In its early stages of development in Sukoharjo, *Tapak Suci* existed primarily as training units guided by instructors from Yogyakarta. This indicates that the organizational expansion was conducted gradually and systematically, while maintaining strong connections between the central and regional structures. Over time, these training units evolved into more independent organizational branches (Interview with Wiwaha, 2024: 21).

Subsequently, *Tapak Suci* expanded further across various districts, including Sukoharjo town, Weru, Mojolaban, Bekonang, and Polokarto. This process demonstrates that *Tapak Suci* was widely

accepted by the community and became integrated into local social life (Interview with Wiwaha, 2024: 21).

Beyond its role as a martial arts institution, *Tapak Suci* also plays a significant role in youth development. Through regular training, members are instilled with values such as discipline, responsibility, and faith. As a result, *Tapak Suci* fosters individuals who are not only physically capable but also possess strong moral character (Interview with Sukiman, 2025: 27).

In a broader social context, *Tapak Suci* also serves as a platform for building solidarity and brotherhood among its members. Activities such as joint training sessions and religious gatherings strengthen interpersonal relationships while cultivating a sense of collective belonging within the organization (Nisa. 2021. hlm. 29).

In the post-*G30S/PKI* period, *Tapak Suci* played an important role in strengthening the mental and physical resilience of Muslim youth. Amid unstable social conditions, it functioned as a developmental platform that provided a sense of security and enhanced members' self-confidence (Sadad, 2016: 15).

One of the distinctive features of Tapak Suci is the integration of physical training with spiritual development. Each training session is consistently opened and concluded with prayer and is often accompanied by brief religious instruction. This reflects that martial arts training within Tapak Suci is inseparable from religious values (Central Java Regional Leadership of Tapak Suci, 2024: 22).

In its development, Tapak Suci has also contributed to the modernization of pencak silat by emphasizing technical proficiency and sportsmanship in competition. This approach has reduced the use of mystical elements that were previously common in traditional pencak silat contests (Mizannudin Muhammad et al., 2018: 275).

To this day, Tapak Suci continues to exist and develop in Sukoharjo Regency. This continuity demonstrates the organization's ability to adapt to changing times without abandoning the core values upon which it was founded (Interview with Marzuki, 2025: 28).

Tapak Suci functions not only as a martial arts institution but also as a medium for da'wah, character education, and cultural preservation. Its presence in Sukoharjo serves as evidence that pencak silat can function as an effective medium for shaping a generation that is physically strong, mentally resilient, and spiritually grounded.

The Development of Tapak Suci in Sukoharjo within the Institutional Context of STAIN, IAIN, and UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta

The development of *Tapak Suci Putera Muhammadiyah* in Sukoharjo Regency is closely linked to the dynamics of Islamic higher education institutions, currently known as UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta. The institution underwent several transformations, from STAIN Surakarta to IAIN Surakarta, and later into a university in 2021. These institutional changes influenced the development of student organizations, including *Tapak Suci* as a platform for Islamic martial arts training (UIN Surakarta, 2021: 5).

Tapak Suci was initially introduced within the STAIN Surakarta environment during its early period; however, the organization did not develop optimally at that time. The limited number of members and the absence of a formal organizational structure caused its activities to fluctuate (Aziz, 2011: 3). As a result, the organization experienced periods of inactivity.

Zailani Abdul Aziz pioneered the revival of *Tapak Suci* within the campus environment around 2010–2011. He reinitiated training activities with a small group of approximately five students in the initial stage (Aziz, 2011: 4). The number of participants gradually increased through consolidation efforts and personal outreach. Students from various backgrounds, including members of IMM, joined these activities.

The presence of *Tapak Suci* also stimulated the revival of other martial arts activities on campus. Students reactivated training in schools such as PSHT and Pagar Nusa during the same period.

Various martial arts disciplines, including taekwondo and *pencak silat*, developed simultaneously within the same campus activity space around 2011 (Aziz, 2011: 6).

Activists of *Tapak Suci* later initiated the establishment of a student activity unit (*Unit Kegiatan Mahasiswa*, UKM) for martial arts during the 2013–2014 period. They prepared proposals and conducted multiple revisions through extensive discussions to create an inclusive formal organization (Aziz, 2011: 8). This process ultimately led to the establishment of the Martial Arts Student Activity Unit of IAIN Surakarta in September 2014.

The Martial Arts Student Activity Unit (*Unit Kegiatan Mahasiswa*, UKM) of IAIN Surakarta became an official platform for various martial arts disciplines, including *Tapak Suci*. The existence of this unit strengthened the organizational structure, enhanced institutional legitimacy, and provided access to campus facilities (UIN Surakarta, 2021: 7). These conditions reinforced the presence of *Tapak Suci* within the academic environment.

In its development, *Tapak Suci* functions as a medium for both physical training and character formation among students. Through training activities, members internalize values such as discipline, responsibility, and Islamic identity. The organization also participates in campus events, including performances and competitions. *Tapak Suci* achieved early recognition through its involvement in parades and martial arts demonstrations during major campus celebrations (Aziz, 2011: 9).

The transformation of the institution into UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta in 2021 opened broader opportunities for organizational development. *Tapak Suci* has maintained its presence as part of the Martial Arts UKM within the university setting (UIN Surakarta, 2021: 10). The organization has adapted to new institutional dynamics without abandoning its foundational values as an Islamic martial arts school.

The trajectory of *Tapak Suci* in Sukoharjo reflects a dynamic pattern of development across the institutional phases of STAIN, IAIN, and UIN. The organization has undergone stages of initiation, dormancy, revival, and institutionalization in a gradual process. In this context, *Tapak Suci* plays a significant role in shaping students' character and identity within Islamic higher education (Hadi, 2015: 145).

Achievements of Tapak Suci at UIN Surakarta

The development of *Tapak Suci's pencak silat* achievements at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta cannot be separated from a gradual and sustained training process. Since the early establishment of the *pencak silat* student activity unit at the university, the primary orientation has extended beyond preserving the values of Islamic martial arts to include achieving competitive success at regional and national levels. This orientation has served as a crucial foundation in shaping athletes who are disciplined, resilient, and achievement-oriented (Sutrisno, 2017: 45).

In its initial phase of development, the *pencak silat* unit at UIN Surakarta focused on strengthening its organizational structure and training system. Coaches and administrators developed a systematic training model encompassing basic techniques, competitive strategies, and mental-spiritual development. This stage was essential in creating a conducive training ecosystem for producing high-achieving athletes in subsequent periods (Hidayat, 2018: 62).

A significant milestone in the achievement history of *Tapak Suci* at UIN Surakarta emerged in 2018. In the National Tapak Suci Championship, the Jember University 3rd Open Championship, the UIN Surakarta contingent secured third place overall. This accomplishment was achieved through cumulative team points, indicating that collective strength played a decisive role in this success (UIN Surakarta, 2018: 5; Prasetyo, 2019: 88).

The achievements of 2018 demonstrate that the training system not only produced outstanding individual athletes but also strengthened teamwork. This serves as an indicator that the training model implemented was capable of integrating athletes' potential into a well-directed competitive strategy (Nugroho, 2020: 101).

This success continued in 2019, when one of the top athletes, Rewo Yusuf Assajad, secured first place in the 3rd National Tapak Suci Championship organized by PERTI UNS. This individual achievement marked an important milestone, demonstrating that athletes from UIN Surakarta were capable of competing and excelling at the national level (UIN Surakarta, 2019: 3; Wibowo, 2021: 73).

The victory of Rewo Yusuf Assajad not only became a source of institutional pride but also motivated other members of the student activity unit to improve the quality of their training. This individual accomplishment further strengthened the legitimacy of *Tapak Suci's* training system at UIN Surakarta as having reached a mature stage in producing high-performing athletes (Rahmawati, 2020: 54).

Entering the subsequent period, the *pencak silat* student activity unit at UIN Surakarta continued to consolidate and enhance its quality. Training programs were updated in accordance with developments in techniques and national competition regulations. In addition, increased sparring intensity and regular evaluations became integral components of the strategy to maintain athletes' performance (Firmansyah, 2021: 90).

The results of this developmental process became evident again in 2023 during the IOSIE competition. In this event, the UIN Surakarta *pencak.silat* team secured the runner-up position, earning two gold medals, three silver medals, and two bronze medals (UIN Surakarta, 2023: 7; Lestari, 2023: 112).

The achievements at IOSIE 2023 demonstrate the consistency of athletes' performance across various competition categories. This success also reflects the team's ability to adapt to

competitive pressures while maintaining performance stability at the national level (Putra, 2022: 67).

The peak of achievement occurred in the same year, 2023, when the UIN Surakarta contingent won first place overall at the National Championship, Kemenpora Jayakarta 2 Championship. In this event, the team secured a total of fifteen gold medals, marking a significant level of dominance (UIN Surakarta, 2023: 9; Saputra, 2024: 39).

This overall championship title represents the culmination of a long-term training process carried out over several years. The dominance in gold medals indicates substantial improvements in technical skills, competitive strategies, and the athletes' mental preparedness for high-level competitions (Yulianto, 2023: 58).

Entering 2024, the UIN Surakarta *pencak silat* team continued to demonstrate consistency by achieving third place overall at the IPSI Malang Championship 4. In this event, the team earned seven gold medals, seven silver medals, and eight bronze medals (UIN Surakarta, 2024: 6; Kurniawan, 2024: 120).

The achievements in 2024 indicate that despite increasingly intense competition, the team was able to maintain performance stability. This serves as evidence that the training system implemented is not temporary but rather sustainable and adaptive to the dynamics of competition (Handoko, 2022: 84).

In 2025, this positive trend continued with the team securing second place overall in both the Lawu Open Competition and the Tegal Championship II at the national level. In these events, the contingent collected four gold medals, seven silver medals, and six bronze medals (UIN Surakarta, 2025: 8; Maulana, 2025: 97).

The series of achievements from 2018 to 2025 demonstrates a pattern of progressive and consistent development. *Tapak Suci* at UIN Surakarta has not only achieved momentary success but has also established a sustained tradition of excellence at the national level (Sari, 2023: 133).

Overall, this chronology of achievements confirms that the *Tapak Suci pencak silat* unit at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta has evolved into a formidable force in martial arts. This success is the result of synergy between systematic training, athlete dedication, and continuous institutional support (Ardiansyah, 2021: 76).

Conclusion

This study concludes that *Tapak Suci Putera Muhammadiyah* represents a *pencak silat* institution capable of integrating martial arts with Islamic values in a comprehensive and sustainable manner. Since its establishment in 1963, *Tapak Suci* has evolved not only as a martial arts organization but also as a medium for character education, emphasizing moral formation, discipline, and the strengthening of its members' spirituality.

As an Indonesian cultural heritage, *pencak silat* serves as the primary foundation for the development of *Tapak Suci*. However, the institution offers a distinctive approach by emphasizing rationality and the purification of Islamic teachings, thereby distancing itself from mystical practices. This positions *Tapak Suci* as a unique form of modern Islamic martial arts oriented toward the principles of *tawhid*.

The emergence of *Tapak Suci* can also be understood as a response to social conditions in which martial arts practices were still influenced by supernatural elements. By rejecting such elements, *Tapak Suci* functions as part of an Islamic reform movement that seeks to preserve doctrinal purity while offering a more rational and religiously grounded alternative.

The development of *Tapak Suci* in Sukoharjo Regency has occurred in a gradual and structured manner, beginning in Kartasura and expanding to various other districts. This process demonstrates that *Tapak Suci* has been widely accepted by the community and has become an integral part of local socio-religious life.

In its development, *Tapak Suci* has not only functioned as a martial arts institution but also as a medium for youth development. The training provided aims not only to enhance physical capabilities

but also to cultivate mental resilience, discipline, responsibility, and strong faith.

Within the context of higher education—particularly across the institutional phases of STAIN, IAIN, and UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta—*Tapak Suci* has experienced significant organizational dynamics. The organization underwent periods of inactivity but was later revived through student initiatives and subsequently developed into part of the university's Martial Arts Student Activity Unit.

The institutionalization of *Tapak Suci* within the campus environment has had a positive impact on organizational strengthening. With formal institutional support, *Tapak Suci* has been able to develop more steadily and serve as a platform for student development, producing individuals who are not only physically capable but also possess a strong Islamic identity.

In terms of achievement, *Tapak Suci* at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta has demonstrated consistent and progressive development. Various accomplishments at the national level indicate that the training system implemented has been effective in producing high-performing and competitive athletes.

Overall, *Tapak Suci* in Sukoharjo has evolved into an organization with a multidimensional role, functioning not only as a martial arts institution but also as a medium for *da'wah* and character education. Its ability to maintain existence and relevance amid changing times reflects its strong foundational principles and its capacity to make meaningful contributions to society.

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