



From Pikulan to Culinary Center: The Historical Transformation of Lentog Tanjung in Kudus, 1952–2014

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Abstract: Traditional cuisine is an important part of cultural heritage that reflects the social, economic, and identity dynamics of a community. This study examines the history and development of Lentog Tanjung as a traditional culinary specialty of Kudus from 1952 to 2014, as well as its transformation from a common people's food sold using shoulder poles (*pikulan*) into a culinary center. This research employs a qualitative approach using the historical method through the stages of heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography. Data were obtained from literature studies, documentation, and interviews with business actors, local communities, village officials, and the Department of Culture and Tourism (Disbudpar) of Kudus Regency. The results show that Lentog Tanjung functions not only as a culinary dish commonly consumed for breakfast by people in Kudus and outside the region, but also as a representation of cultural identity that has developed alongside social and economic changes. The shift in the selling system from mobile shoulder-pole vendors to permanent stalls in a culinary center has strengthened its position as a regional culinary icon while also encouraging local economic growth. This transformation has also influenced changes in gender roles, marked by the increasing participation of women in the production and sale of Lentog Tanjung. The sustainability of this culinary tradition is supported by the consistency of its authentic taste and presentation, as well as support from the community and local government in organizing the area and preserving traditional cuisine.

Keywords: culinary history; culinary center; Lentog Tanjung; Pikulan; traditional cuisine

Abstrak: Kuliner tradisional merupakan bagian penting dari warisan budaya yang merefleksikan dinamika sosial, ekonomi, dan identitas suatu masyarakat. Penelitian ini mengkaji sejarah dan perkembangan Lentog Tanjung sebagai kuliner tradisional khas Kudus sejak tahun 1952 hingga 2014, serta transformasinya dari makanan rakyat yang dijajakan secara *pikulan* menjadi sentra kuliner. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode sejarah melalui tahapan heuristik, verifikasi, interpretasi, dan historiografi, dengan data yang diperoleh dari studi literatur, dokumentasi, serta wawancara dengan pelaku usaha, masyarakat, aparat desa, dan Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata (Disbudpar) Kabupaten Kudus. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Lentog Tanjung tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai kuliner yang disantap sebagai sarapan masyarakat Kudus dan di luar Kudus, tetapi juga sebagai representasi identitas budaya yang berkembang seiring perubahan sosial dan ekonomi. Peralihan sistem penjualan dari *pikulan* ke warung menetap di sentra kuliner memperkuat posisinya sebagai ikon kuliner daerah sekaligus mendorong pertumbuhan ekonomi lokal. Transformasi tersebut turut memengaruhi perubahan peran gender yang ditandai dengan meningkatnya partisipasi perempuan dalam aktivitas produksi dan penjualan Lentog Tanjung. Keberlanjutan kuliner ini ditopang oleh konsistensi cita rasa dan cara penyajian yang autentik, serta dukungan masyarakat dan pemerintah daerah dalam penataan kawasan dan pelestarian kuliner tradisional.

Keywords: Lentog Tanjung; kuliner tradisional; *Pikulan*; sejarah kuliner; sentra kuliner



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Introduction

Traditional food is one form of cultural heritage that lives on and is passed down from generation to generation within communities. In addition to fulfilling physical needs, traditional food also serves as a symbol of identity, collective memory, and a representation of the social values of a community (Shinta, 2025). In Indonesia, the diversity of traditional cuisine reflects the richness of the nation's culture while also highlighting the unique characteristics of each region. Indonesian cuisine not only offers a wide variety of flavors, but also embodies local knowledge regarding ingredients, processing techniques, and traditions rooted in the social, geographical, and historical contexts of the communities that sustain them. However, many traditional foods have not yet been fully documented or received adequate academic attention, and therefore risk being marginalized amid the forces of modernization and globalization in the food sector.

This phenomenon is evident in the increasing ease with which people can access various global foods such as pizza, hamburgers, spaghetti, sushi, kimchi, and *tteokbokki*, which have gained popularity through fast food restaurants, social media, and popular culture (Ali, 2025). The presence of these global foods not only influences people's consumption patterns but also has the potential to shift younger generations' interest away from traditional cuisine if it is not balanced with adequate preservation and promotion efforts (Tirtana et al., 2025). In response to these challenges, the Indonesian government has undertaken various preservation measures, including the designation of foods as Intangible Cultural Heritage (WBTb), such as *wader liwet* by the Klayar community (Yudhanto, 2025). In addition, the government promotes preservation through regional culinary festivals, national gastronomic promotion, the publication of recipe books, and the documentation of traditional cuisine (Harsana & Triwidayati, 2020). These efforts aim to ensure the sustainability of traditional cuisine while strengthening cultural identity and increasing public appreciation of local culinary heritage.

One traditional culinary dish that has distinctive characteristics and plays an important role in the social life of the community is Lentog Tanjung, a specialty of Tanjungkarang Village in Kudus Regency, Central Java. Lentog Tanjung consists of sliced *lontong montog* (traditional oversized rice cake steamed in banana leaves) served with *sayur gori* (young jackfruit) and *tahu lodeh* (tofu cooked in coconut milk broth), complemented with a sprinkling of fried shallots and side dishes such as sambal, quail egg satay, or chicken intestine satay. The simplicity of its ingredients, its distinctive savory taste, and its relatively affordable price have long made this dish a popular breakfast menu among the people of Kudus (Sophianti & Bashori, 2024). More than just a food item, Lentog Tanjung has developed into a part of the social identity of the Tanjungkarang community and is recognized as one of the culinary icons of Kudus Regency.

The origins of Lentog Tanjung are closely related to historical narratives and local legends. One version suggests that this dish emerged during the early spread of Islam in Kudus, when people were encouraged not to sell rice in the morning and to replace it with *lontong* instead (Rachmawati, 2018). Initially, Lentog Tanjung was sold by itinerant vendors who carried it using shoulder poles (*pikulan*), traveling around villages or markets in the morning (Bashori et al., 2024). This practice continued for decades and shaped the social routines of the Kudus community. Over time, particularly since around 1985, Lentog Tanjung began to be sold at fixed locations in simple food stalls, such as the legendary Pak Ndek stall. This development

later progressed with the establishment of the Lentog Tanjung Culinary Center in Tanjungkarang Village, marking the transformation of Lentog Tanjung from a street-vended staple into part of the local creative economy (Setiawan & Bastian, 2019). In the context of culinary history, the practice of selling food through the *pikulan* system has long been recognized in the economic life of Javanese society since the colonial period, as illustrated in the visual documentation of the film *Java* (1919), produced by the Eye Filmmuseum.

The *pikulan* was one of the distribution systems commonly used in trade during the early 20th century, including by Chinese merchants around the 1900s. In practice, shopkeepers did not always carry their goods themselves; instead, they often employed indigenous porters to transport various commodities using *pikulan*. In addition, some traders utilized bicycles as a means of transport to support their itinerant trading activities (Prasetyo, 2020). Over time, as economic conditions became more stable and customer networks began to form, some traders chose to settle in specific locations by establishing permanent shops or stalls. This shift marked a transition from a mobile trading system to a more structured, fixed pattern of commerce.

In the context of Lentog Tanjung, a similar transformation can be observed, as its sale, which was initially conducted through itinerant trading, gradually developed into a settled business and eventually led to the establishment of the Lentog Tanjung Culinary Center. This development is closely linked to the facilitative role of the local government through area planning, infrastructure provision, and the promotion of local cuisine as part of strengthening regional identity and tourism destinations. The establishment of a culinary center in a high-traffic area also enables local authorities to more effectively provide guidance and support for business development (Azman et al., 2024). Its strategic location near the Kudus ring road, which connects Semarang and Surabaya, further strengthens the area's position as a culinary destination, as well as a social space that fosters community interaction and local economic activity (Sophianti & Bashori, 2024). In addition, the popularity of Lentog Tanjung has increased through media exposure and digital content created by influencers and food vloggers, which has proven effective in expanding product promotion through social media (Febriyani et al., 2025; Nasution, 2021).

The promotion of Lentog Tanjung is also carried out through social media by culinary content creators. One example is the *YouTube* channel of Nex Carlos, which features Lentog Tanjung as a typical breakfast dish of Kudus that is widely found in Tanjungkarang Village and has become an attraction for culinary tourists (Carlos, 2025). The video received a significant response, with around 624 thousand views, 10 thousand likes, and 565 comments. In addition, promotion also appears on the TikTok platform through the culinary creator account @erikeninda, which shares the experience of tasting Lentog Tanjung and gained 980 likes and 38 comments (Erikeninda, 2023). This exposure helps expand audience reach and shape the image of Lentog Tanjung as a local culinary specialty that appeals to people beyond Kudus. Nevertheless, the role of digital media remains complementary, as the sustainability of the culinary center still depends on production practices, local consumption, and social relationships between vendors and the local community. These are further supported by the role of local government through area management, tourism promotion, and programs for preserving traditional cuisine.

As awareness of the value of traditional cuisine as both a cultural and economic asset increases, various efforts in destination branding for Lentog Tanjung have also emerged. Academic studies on culinary branding aim to strengthen visual identity, construct historical narratives, and formulate destination communication strategies (Ramadhan et al., 2025). This approach shows that cuisine is no longer viewed solely in terms of taste, but also as part of the creative economy that can enhance a region's image. With the right branding strategy, Lentog

Tanjung has the potential to be positioned as a culinary tourism icon of Kudus, capable of attracting both domestic and international tourists. However, the success of such branding still depends on product quality and visitor experience; therefore, aspects such as taste, hygiene, and the effective use of digital media must be consistently maintained and improved in a balanced manner.

Research on traditional cuisine as part of cultural identity as well as a potential driver of the creative economy has been widely conducted in Indonesia, particularly in relation to strengthening regional image and developing culture-based tourism. Pakpahan and Kristiana (2019) explain that local cuisine holds strategic value in reinforcing regional identity and enhancing tourism appeal, as traditional food embodies local wisdom that can be recognized and enjoyed by visitors. Their findings indicate that the introduction and promotion of traditional cuisine can increase tourists' awareness of local cultural values while also encouraging community economic growth through empowerment and appropriate promotional strategies. The relevance of these findings can be seen in Lentog Tanjung, which is not only known as a culinary specialty of Kudus but also has the potential to become a regional economic commodity if managed through consistent promotion and a strong cultural narrative.

In line with this, Christiawan et al. (2014) highlighted efforts to strengthen the identity of Lentog Tanjung through destination communication strategies and visual design. Their study showed that the community and business actors in the Tanjungkarang area are aware of the economic value of Lentog Tanjung, but this awareness has not yet been supported by an integrated promotional strategy. Therefore, the development of a visual identity, logo, and promotional narrative that emphasizes local values, distinctive flavors, and the history of Lentog Tanjung as a traditional culinary product is needed. Additionally, Wijaya (2019) emphasizes that Indonesian cuisine has great potential as both a means of cultural promotion and a driver of tourism-related economic activity. Through culinary cultural mapping, he shows that traditional foods embody social values, history, and regional identity, making the strengthening of narratives and documentation of local cuisine essential for broader recognition, including at the global level. This framework is relevant to Lentog Tanjung, which not only serves as a daily food item but also holds historical and symbolic value that can be developed as a tourism and creative economy attraction through sustained narrative development, promotion, and documentation.

Another study by Utami and Prambudi (2025) views cuisine as part of culinary tourism, which is not only related to food consumption but also to cultural experiences, identity, and social interactions within the local community. Meanwhile, Hatidah et al. (2025) highlight the role of traditional cuisine in strengthening the local economy through innovation, business networks, and its connection with the tourism and creative economy sectors. These various studies indicate that traditional cuisine can be understood from multiple perspectives—historical, socio-cultural, tourism-related, and economic—thereby reinforcing its position as both cultural heritage and a valuable resource for regional development.

This perspective is further supported by research published in the journal of *Ethnic Foods*, including a study by Wargadalem et al. (2023) that examined pempek Palembang as a distinctive culinary specialty born from a long historical process and developed into part of the ethnic identity of the Palembang community. The study demonstrates that pempek is not merely food, but a representation of cultural heritage preserved through traditional preparation methods, social practices, and intergenerational transmission, making the cuisine both a marker of identity and a collective memory for the community.

This study adopts a culinary historiography perspective, viewing food as part of cultural products that carry historical, social, and economic dimensions. In addition, approaches from

the creative economy and destination branding are used to understand how traditional cuisine can be developed both as a regional identity and as an economic resource. This perspective is also combined with social studies to examine changes in distribution systems and the dynamics of gender roles in community economic activities.

Based on the aforementioned background, this study aims to analyze the historical development of Lentog Tanjung in Kudus during the period 1952–2014, examine the transformation of its selling system from the shoulder-pole (*pikulan*) model to a culinary center in Tanjungkarang Village, and explain the changes in gender roles in the production and sale of Lentog Tanjung. The urgency of this research lies in the importance of preserving local culinary heritage as part of the community's cultural identity as well as its potential as a regional economic asset. Furthermore, this study is expected to fill the gap in academic research related to the historiography of Lentog Tanjung and contribute to the development of preservation strategies and the strengthening of the creative economy, ensuring that this culinary tradition remains relevant amid the currents of modernization.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using the historical method to examine the origins and development of Lentog Tanjung as a traditional culinary specialty of Kudus from 1952 to its transformation into a culinary center around 2014. The temporal boundary of 1952 was selected as it is considered the early period when the practice of selling Lentog Tanjung began to develop more widely within the community, while 2014 marks the establishment and development of the Lentog Tanjung Culinary Center. Spatially, the study focuses on Tanjungkarang Village, Kudus Regency, as the center of the development of this culinary tradition. This research also highlights the transformation of the selling system from a mobile shoulder-pole (*pikulan*) model to a culinary center, as well as shifts in gender roles in sales activities, from male-dominated vendors during the *pikulan* era to a more prominent involvement of women in the culinary center phase.

The historical method employed in this study consists of five stages: topic selection, source collection, verification, interpretation, and historiography (Herlina, 2020). Through this approach, the research seeks to understand Lentog Tanjung not only as a culinary product but also as a historical and cultural phenomenon that has developed within the dynamics of Kudus society. In the initial stage, the researcher determines the focus of the study by positioning Lentog Tanjung as a research object that is relevant in the context of preserving local cultural heritage while also addressing social change and modernization.

The next stage involves data collection, which includes books, scholarly journal articles, and oral data obtained through interviews with Lentog Tanjung business actors, village officials, and the Department of Culture and Tourism (Disbudpar) of Kudus Regency. This data collection aims to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Lentog Tanjung. This is followed by the verification stage, which involves checking the validity and credibility of the data by comparing, confirming, and testing the consistency of information from various sources, both through document analysis and clarification with informants (Herlina, 2020). This stage is crucial in historical research as it determines the reliability of the data and the quality of the resulting historical reconstruction. In this study, interviews were conducted with 17 informants, consisting of 14 Lentog Tanjung business actors across generations, one village official, one custodian (*juru kunci*) of Mbah Kulah, and one representative from Disbudpar. Among all informants, there were 13 women and 4 men, aged between 20 and 70 years. The majority of business actors were women over 50 years old who have been selling for decades, while those

aged 20–35 generally represent the next generation continuing family businesses. To maintain confidentiality, all informants' names were anonymized using initials.

Interviews with business actors were conducted with informants anonymized as P-AM, P-AS, P-I, P-K, P-R, P-SK, P-S, P-SU, P-U, P-SW, P-AF, P-A, P-F, L-R, L-A, and L-ST. In addition, this study also involved a community figure, L-SY, as the custodian (*juru kunci*), and L-SM as the village head, to obtain historical, social, and policy perspectives related to Lentog Tanjung, as well as one representative from the Department of Culture and Tourism (Disbudpar) to complement the institutional perspective in efforts to preserve this traditional culinary heritage. The next stage is interpretation, which involves an in-depth analysis of the verified data by examining the interconnections between the historical, social, and cultural aspects of Lentog Tanjung. The final stage is historiography, which entails presenting the results of the interpretation in a coherent and systematic scholarly narrative. Through this series of methods, the study seeks to portray Lentog Tanjung as both a cultural identity of the Kudus community and a culinary tradition capable of adapting to the changing times.

Research Result

In this study, the researcher involved 19 informants who were purposively selected to be interviewed regarding Lentog Tanjung in Kudus. The interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth information on the historical development of Lentog Tanjung, its production and selling processes, as well as the social and cultural meanings attached to this culinary tradition. The informants came from various backgrounds, including Lentog Tanjung business actors and individuals with knowledge of the development of this cuisine over time. Through the involvement of these informants, the data obtained are expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of Lentog Tanjung as both a cultural identity and a local economic activity of the Kudus community.

Lentog Tanjung (Figure 1) is a traditional culinary dish that has long developed within the cultural life of the Kudus community, particularly in Tanjungkarang Village as the center of this culinary tradition. Its preparation process involves a series of traditional kitchen activities beginning in the early morning. Rice that has been washed is placed into *lontong* molds and then boiled until it expands and solidifies, producing pale white *lontong montog* with a soft yet dense texture. Meanwhile, young jackfruit is cut and boiled until tender, then cooked with coconut milk, ground spices, and aromatic leaves until the broth thickens and turns yellowish. Tofu and tempeh are subsequently added to the *lodeh* dish, blending with the *gori* (young jackfruit) and producing a distinctive savory aroma.



Figure 1. Lentog Tanjung, A Typical Kudus Food
Source: Research Data, 2025

Once all components are fully cooked, the *lontong* is cut into thick slices and arranged on banana leaves as a serving base. The *gori* vegetable dish, prepared in a rich coconut milk broth, is then poured over it and complemented with a topping of fried shallots, sambal, and side dishes such as quail egg satay or chicken intestine satay. The use of banana leaves not only enhances the natural and traditional impression but also reflects the serving practices of Lentog Tanjung during the shoulder-pole (*pikulan*) selling era. Visually, Lentog Tanjung presents a simple yet distinctive appearance, reflecting values of authenticity, closeness to nature, and the continuity of the culinary tradition of the Kudus community, even as it has developed within a more modern culinary center context.



Figure 2. Process of Making *Sayur Kotokan* (thick and savory coconut milk broth)
Source: Source: Research Data, 2025



Figure 3. Process of Making *Sayur Gori* (young jackfruit dish)
Source: Research Data, 2025



Figure 4. Process of Making *Lentog* (Indonesian rice cake boiled in a banana leaf)

Source: Research Data, 2025

To understand the uniqueness of Lentog Tanjung, it is important to first explain the meaning of the term “lentog” as the identity of its main component. Based on an interview with one of the vendors, identified as P-A, the term *lentog* differs from *lontong* in general. P-A explained that the term refers to a form of *lontong* that is larger in size, has a softer texture, and appears plumper or “montog,” distinguishing it from regular *lontong*, which tends to be smaller and denser. Meanwhile, in another interview, L-SZ, the custodian (*juru kunci*) of “Mbah Kulah,” explained that:

“The legend goes like this, back in the historical period between the Majapahit and Mataram eras, Islamic teachings began to spread here. It was a time when the Hindu kingdoms were declining and the Islamic Bintoro kingdom was rising. Around that era, in 1514 CE, during the time of the Wali (saints), the legend of Lentog Tanjung originated, that’s the beginning, the root of the story.” (Interview with L-SY, January 12, 2024).

L-SY situates this narrative in the period known as the “zaman perwalian” (the era of the Islamic saints), referring to the time of Islamic dissemination by the *wali*, which in his account is associated with around 1514 CE. During this period, in the Tanjungkarang area, there were two figures known as Mbah Kulah and Mbah Sukesi. Mbah Kulah is described as a figure entrusted with safeguarding the *kulah* (a water reservoir or bathing source), while Mbah Sukesi was responsible for preparing food supplies for the group constructing the first mosque in the area. According to L-SY, this site is a *petilasan* (historical site) that preserves traces of the early mosque’s construction, marked by relics such as the *kulah*, *belik* (spring or well), and stone bases (*umpak*) as evidence of the existence of these figures.

During the construction process, which took place at night, the community was heard pounding and processing rice and *tewel* (*gori* or young jackfruit), producing a “dok-dok” sound. This activity is believed to have been the preparation of porridge or *liwet*, which is later understood as the precursor of Lentog Tanjung. The sound of the pounding tools has since become embedded in the collective memory of the community as a marker of the early origins of Lentog Tanjung in Tanjungkarang Village. In local oral tradition, there is also a saying that the descendants of the Tanjungkarang community will not prosper if they sell rice, but will succeed if they sell porridge or *liwet* (*lentog*). Therefore, Lentog Tanjung is understood not merely as food, but as a hereditary mandate that connects the religious, social, and economic

values of the community, and is thus continuously preserved as a distinctive culinary identity of Kudus.

The roots of this legend are aligned with the traditions of the Kudus community during the spread of Islam, which encouraged the substitution of rice with *lontong* in the morning. As a result, various *lontong*-based dishes, including Lentog Tanjung, became part of the community's daily consumption. Although it has long been known, the more systematic development of Lentog Tanjung as a distinctive culinary specialty only became evident around 1985, when it began to be sold in a more permanent manner through simple food stalls. This period marked an important milestone, as Lentog Tanjung was no longer merely a homemade dish or a meal served at family gatherings, but began to be traded in a more structured way. Early stalls, such as the one owned by Pak Ndek, played a significant role in strengthening the presence of Lentog Tanjung as a culinary identity of Kudus. Since then, Lentog Tanjung has increasingly been recognized as a regional culinary icon, supported by the regeneration of its vendors and the consistency of its taste, which has been maintained to this day.

Based on an interview with P-AS, the daughter of Pak Ndek, her family's Lentog Tanjung business has existed since the early phase of the dish's development after 1952. She explained that her father began selling Lentog Tanjung itinerantly using a shoulder pole (*pikulan*) from 1952 to 1984, after which he sold it in a fixed location for approximately five years before eventually passing away. An interview with another vendor, P-U, also indicates that the tradition of selling Lentog Tanjung dates back even earlier, to before 1945 during her grandfather's time. The business was then continued by her father until 2008 and is now carried on by her as the third generation. Before the emergence of permanent stalls, Lentog Tanjung was sold by male vendors who carried it around using shoulder poles as part of the morning economic routine of the Kudus community. This system not only served as a food distribution strategy but also expanded the reach of Lentog Tanjung across various parts of the city. This practice illustrates the mobility dynamics of traditional culinary trade, as also depicted in the documentary film *Java (1919)* by the Eyefilm Museum, particularly in the scene *Een Javaansch Draagbaar Restaurant*, which shows food vendors traveling while carrying their goods using shoulder poles or by hand.



Figure 5. Lentog Tanjung Pak Ndek

Source: Research Data, 2025

The transformation of the selling system began when Lentog Tanjung was no longer marketed through itinerant trade, but instead sold in fixed locations through simple food stalls. This change became more pronounced after 2000, when vendors started to gather in a single area that later developed into the Lentog Tanjung Culinary Center. Based on an interview with the Head of Tanjungkarang Village, the culinary center that continues to operate today was officially established around 2014, coinciding with the construction of the Tanjungkarang Village Market as part of efforts to organize and centralize vendors. This transformation marks a shift in Lentog Tanjung from a mobility-based culinary practice to a more organized and sustainable business system. The relocation of vendors to the culinary center was also encouraged by the local government as an effort to organize the area, making it more suitable and attractive as a tourist destination. The Head of Tanjungkarang Village explained that Lentog Tanjung has long been recognized, both by the people of Kudus and those from outside the region. Nevertheless, the village government continues to play an active role in strengthening its position as a distinctive culinary specialty with an officially recognized identity.

One of the measures taken was to facilitate vendors through the establishment of the Lentog Cooperative (Koprataselen) as a collective economic platform. In addition, the village government has managed the legal aspects of Lentog Tanjung, including patent rights, trademarks, and hygiene standards recognized by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. These efforts aim to protect Lentog Tanjung from being claimed by other regions as its popularity increases. As part of cultural preservation, Tanjungkarang Village also regularly organizes the Kirab Lentog each year to maintain the tradition while introducing this culinary heritage to future generations: “Many buyers come, not just from Kudus, but also from Jepara and other cities, even from Malaysia. There are also tourists, people from Papua, and even movie stars who come to buy.” (Interview with P-SW, November 12, 2025).

In line with the reorganization of the area, the relocation of vendors to a culinary center has also had a positive impact on the development of Lentog Tanjung. Seller P-SW explained that once the vendors were concentrated in a single location, Lentog Tanjung became easier to find and access for tourists from outside the city. This condition indicates that the transformation of the sales system from carrying goods on shoulder poles to a centralized culinary hub not only changed trading practices but also represents a shift in the local economic structure. Lentog Tanjung is no longer understood merely as a daily food of the Kudus community; rather, it has developed into a tourist attraction as well as part of the village’s creative economy, providing added value for the people of Tanjungkarang.

The change in the sales system has also led to a shift in gender roles in the production and sale of Lentog Tanjung. During the period when goods were sold using shoulder poles, trading activities were dominated by men due to the need for high mobility and physical strength. However, as sales transitioned to permanent food stalls, the role of women became increasingly dominant. Today, the majority of Lentog Tanjung sellers are women, which, according to P-U, is influenced by the patriarchal social structure of the past as well as changes in the nature of the work, which no longer requires high physical mobility: “In the past, it was typical to use shoulder poles... it was somewhat patriarchal... so the ones who worked were mostly men... but over time, without having to carry loads and without requiring much physical strength, women have been able to sell as well.” (Interview with P-U, November 12, 2025).

Although the statement cannot be fully understood as a patriarchal practice, it indicates that the shift in the sales system has contributed to increasing women’s access to economic activities. When the shoulder-pole system was no longer a primary requirement for trading, women gained greater opportunities to participate as managers of family-run culinary

businesses. This was also conveyed by seller P-SW in an interview conducted by the researcher. She stated that,

“Most of them are women because the men don’t want to stay and guard the place. The men go around, while the women stay here, miss. Let me tell you, most of the people here are already the second generation; the first generation is gone, and those who used to carry the load are no longer around. It’s hard to find the next generation. I belong to the later generation myself, if you ask me about the old times, I can’t really explain because I don’t fully understand. I’m also worried about what will happen if one day there’s no next generation.” (Interview with P-SW, November 12, 2025)

Seller P-SW explained that most of the currently active Lentog Tanjung vendors belong to the second generation, while many of the first-generation actors have passed away. As a result, the tradition of selling using shoulder poles is now increasingly rare, and information about the early practices of Lentog Tanjung trade has become more difficult to trace. P-SW also expressed concern that not all succeeding generations fully understand the history and early development process of Lentog Tanjung, raising questions about the continuity of this knowledge once the older practitioners are no longer around.

On the other hand, women’s participation in the sale of Lentog Tanjung reflects the dynamics of Javanese household economies, in which women often play a role in managing domestic finances while also running small businesses. Although the sales system has changed, the consistency in the presentation of Lentog Tanjung has been maintained. Seller P-U emphasized that the serving method, from the era of shoulder-pole selling until today, has not changed, including the use of banana leaves as a serving base, which carries traditional value as well as practical benefits by making it easier to clean eating utensils. Consistency in seasoning, cooking techniques, and the use of natural ingredients without preservatives demonstrates the sellers’ efforts to preserve the authenticity of Lentog Tanjung, even as the prices of raw materials fluctuate, in order to maintain the taste that has become embedded in customers’ memories.

The shift in gender roles among Lentog Tanjung sellers reflects the socio-economic dynamics of the Kudus community alongside the transition in the sales system from mobile shoulder-pole trading to permanent stalls in culinary centers. In the early period, trading activities were dominated by men because the shoulder-pole system required physical strength, high mobility, and long working hours. This is illustrated in an interview with seller P-U, who stated that his father used to travel from Loram Pasar Kliwon to the Djarum factory area from morning until afternoon while carrying goods on a shoulder pole. This activity shows that trading at that time demanded significant physical capability.

This condition was also influenced by a still patriarchal social structure, in which public work requiring mobility and physical strength was predominantly carried out by men, while women tended to remain in the domestic sphere. In line with this, the Head of Tanjungkarang Village also stated that: “Yes, because carrying loads requires physical strength. It would not be feasible for women to carry them. So in the past, it was indeed carried on shoulder poles.” (Interview with the Head of Tanjungkarang Village, January 20, 2026).

Work that once required significant physical strength and long-distance travel later shifted into activities such as cooking, preparing dishes, and serving customers in a single location. This change in the work context created greater opportunities for women to become involved as sellers. This phenomenon was also conveyed by seller P-U, who emphasized that women’s dominance began to emerge when the sales system no longer relied on shoulder poles.

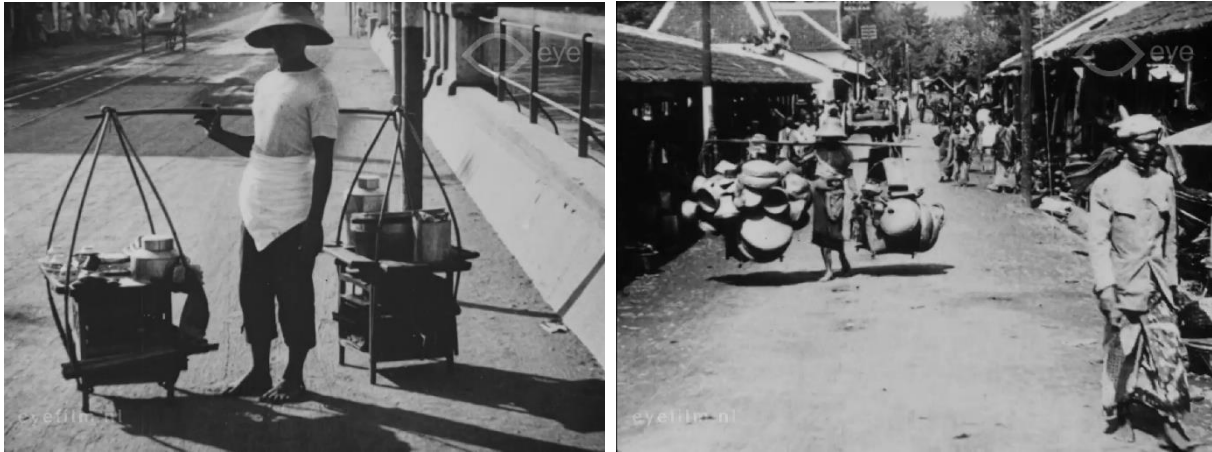
History of the Emergence and Development of Lentog Tanjung in Kudus (1952–2014)

Local wisdom as a component of character education is rooted in a long history. Therefore, studying history is an essential part of discovering such wisdom (Murdi, 2017). Within this concept, traditional cuisine functions not only to fulfill physical needs but also serves as a cultural practice that preserves local knowledge, social customs, and history passed down through generations. The processing methods, selection of ingredients, and presentation styles make traditional cuisine a representation of the community's relationship with its environment and traditions, as well as a marker of regional identity. Baiquni et al. (2018) state that traditional cuisine plays a vital role not only as a source of consumption but also as a part of cultural identity and local economic potential that can be developed as a tourist attraction. Meanwhile, Rahman (2023) explains that the history of food in Indonesia is inseparable from the social, economic, and cultural dynamics of its people, as food also serves as a marker of identity and collective memory. This aligns with the view of Gardjito et al. (2018), who emphasize that cuisine is a creation of taste imbued with cultural values and the collective experience of the community. In its development, the sustainability of traditional cuisine is also influenced by innovations in processing, presentation, and packaging, which allow traditional food to remain relevant to the needs of modern consumers without losing its cultural significance (Setiawan et al., 2025).

In this context, Lentog Tanjung is one of the traditional culinary items with deep historical roots in the socio-cultural life of the Kudus community, particularly in Tanjungkarang Village. Its existence is closely related to the *lontong*-based food tradition that has developed since the early spread of Islam in the Kudus region, where *lontong* was often used as an alternative to rice at certain times. Local oral narratives also associate Lentog Tanjung with prominent figures from the era of the Islamic saints, making this cuisine not only understood as food, but also as part of a symbolic heritage containing religious, social, and cultural values. Although it had been known earlier, 1952 became an important milestone in the development of Lentog Tanjung, as this period marked the beginning of consistency in its production and sales system, leading to broader social recognition. Furthermore, the development of permanent Lentog Tanjung stalls and the establishment of a culinary center around 2014 signify the transformation of Lentog Tanjung from an informal folk food into a culinary commodity with economic value as well as a distinctive regional identity.

Transformation of Lentog Tanjung from Shoulder-Pole Selling to a Culinary Center

The transformation of Lentog Tanjung from a mobile trading practice to a culinary center cannot be separated from the history of traditional cuisine that shapes the cultural identity of the Kudus community. Traditional food, as explained by Shinta (2025), is a symbol of collective identity passed down across generations. Lentog Tanjung itself originates from the *lontong*-based culinary tradition that developed during the early spread of Islam, when *lontong* was used as a staple substitute for rice, leading to the emergence of various *lontong*-based dishes as local culinary preferences (Nadilla & Raida, 2025). Since around 1952, Lentog Tanjung has been known to the public through vendors who sold it by traveling around using shoulder poles. In its development, around 1985 Lentog Tanjung began to be sold in permanent settings through simple food stalls and became increasingly recognized as one of Kudus' culinary icons. This is in line with Sophianti & Bashori (2024), who emphasize that Lentog Tanjung functions not only as a breakfast dish but also as part of the cultural identity of the Tanjungkarang Village community. The tradition of selling Lentog Tanjung is even believed to be a hereditary mandate since the time of Mbah Sukesni, indicating that this cuisine has long been an integral part of the community's economic and spiritual identity (Sophianti & Bashori, 2024).



Figures 5 and 6 (From Left to Right). Portrait of a trader using a shoulder pole in his trading activities.

Source: Documentary film Java (1919) by Eyefilm Museum.

In its early development, the sales system of Lentog Tanjung was carried out using shoulder poles, with male vendors traveling from village to village. This pattern was closely related to the patriarchal social structure of the community, in which men were considered more capable of performing work that required high mobility and physical strength. Wijaya (2019) explains that in the past, the distribution of traditional cuisine was often carried out through the mobility of male vendors who traveled around villages as part of informal economic activities. The pattern of food distribution during this period relied heavily on informal social networks, inter-village reach, and the physical ability of traders to carry their goods in daily activities. This condition shows that male vendors played an important role in introducing and maintaining the presence of traditional cuisine in public spaces, especially at a time when transportation access and permanent sales systems were not yet widely developed. These findings are also in line with the study by Gutomo (2023), which shows that culinary culture in the early 20th century was closely related to the mobility practices of business actors in distributing food within urban spaces and settlements.

As public interest in Lentog Tanjung increased, the sales pattern, which had previously been mobile, gradually shifted to permanent selling in a specific area that later became known as the Lentog Tanjung Culinary Center. This change not only marked a transformation in the business patterns of the vendors but also strengthened Lentog Tanjung's position as a local culinary icon. The presence of this culinary center has also contributed to community economic growth through micro-business activities and the development of culinary tourism. Efforts to preserve Lentog Tanjung have also received support from the local government through the promotion of culinary tourism and the organization of the culinary center area. The Tourism Office of Kudus Regency promotes Lentog Tanjung as one of the region's leading culinary destinations, as stated on the Jateng Travel Guide website, which identifies the Lentog Tanjung Culinary Center in Tanjungkarang Village as an iconic traditional breakfast of Kudus rich in cultural and historical value. Through this promotion, the government not only encourages an increase in tourist visits but also seeks to preserve the distinctive presentation and traditional taste of Lentog Tanjung as part of safeguarding cultural heritage while simultaneously developing local economic potential.

Changes in Gender Roles in Lentog Tanjung Sales Activities

The development of the Lentog Tanjung sales system from the shoulder-pole model to a culinary center has brought significant changes to the division of gender roles in the economic activities of the Tanjungkarang Village community, Kudus. During the period of mobile selling, these activities were dominated by men due to the demands of high mobility, physical strength, and long working hours in public spaces. However, when Lentog Tanjung began to be sold in permanent culinary centers, the nature of the work became more structured and stable, creating greater opportunities for women to participate in managing culinary businesses without fully abandoning their domestic roles. A fixed business space allows women to actualize their cooking skills, meticulousness, financial management abilities, and competence in interacting with customers. This is in line with the findings of Aini et al. (2025), which show that women not only act as workers but are also capable of leading and managing culinary businesses through adaptive leadership styles suited to socio-cultural contexts. Furthermore, Prayoga (2021) emphasizes that women play an important role in maintaining the sustainability of culinary practices as part of everyday social and cultural life.

The shift in gender roles is also closely related to the process of local economic modernization and the more organized structuring of culinary spaces. The arrangement of culinary center areas creates a more stable business environment, increases the effectiveness of production and marketing, and encourages the growth of the community's creative economy (Setiawan & Bastian, 2019). This condition provides opportunities for business actors, especially women, to develop creativity, service innovation, and product quality within a more centralized business setting. Lokantara (2019) also emphasizes that the development of creative spaces can empower community potential, making economic activities more productive and sustainable. In this context, the existence of the Lentog Tanjung Culinary Center not only strengthens local economic activities but also requires adequate environmental infrastructure support, such as a proper drainage system to maintain comfort and the sustainability of the business area (Umam et al., 2025). Thus, the dominance of women in the culinary center era reflects a social transformation influenced by changes in work patterns, the organization of business spaces, and the growth of a creative economy that increasingly recognizes the role of women in the traditional culinary sector.

Conclusion

Lentog Tanjung is a traditional culinary specialty of Kudus that has developed alongside the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of the local community. In addition to serving as a breakfast dish, Lentog Tanjung also functions as a marker of local identity shaped through a long historical process. Since gaining wider recognition around 1985, this cuisine has undergone a transformation from a mobile sales system using shoulder poles to a more permanent form of business that later became concentrated in the Lentog Tanjung Culinary Center. This change reflects a shift in distribution patterns and the community's economic structure, from mobility-based informal economic practices to a more organized and centralized business system. The transformation has also impacted gender roles in culinary economic activities, where during the shoulder-pole selling period, trading was dominated by men due to the demands of mobility and physical strength, while in the era of culinary centers, women have increasingly taken on roles as primary managers and sellers.

The sustainability of Lentog Tanjung to this day is supported by consistency in preserving its authentic taste, ingredients, and methods of presentation, despite undergoing modernization in aspects such as business space, promotion, and management. Community support, along with the role of the local government in organizing the culinary center area, strengthening trader

institutions, and promoting tourism, has further reinforced Lentog Tanjung's position as a living cultural heritage as well as a source of local economic potential. Therefore, the preservation of Lentog Tanjung needs to be carried out sustainably through efforts to maintain the authenticity of its culinary traditions while also encouraging innovation in packaging, service, and promotion to remain relevant to the development of culinary tourism. In addition, further research is needed to document the history and social dynamics of this cuisine so that Lentog Tanjung can continue to be passed down as part of the cultural identity of the Kudus community across generations.

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