



Research Article

Preserving Tay Kak Sie Temple: Negotiating Religious Function, Cultural Tourism, and Heritage Governance in Semarang

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Abstract

This study examines the resilience of Semarang's oldest Chinese temple, Tay Kak Sie (est. 1746), in the face of contemporary preservation challenges. Using a cultural history methodology, by employing the critical historical method with data gathered through field observations, interviews, and historical documentation, this study analyzes the historical and cultural importance of Tay Kak Sie Temple, looking at its role as both a place for Tri Dharma worship and a religious tourism site. However, its preservation is constrained by limited funds, especially for the restoration of the original wooden structure of the temple's main room dating back to 1771. The findings reveal a significant gap between policy and practice; although the state is designated as a primary stakeholder under Government Regulation No. 1 of 2022, local government involvement in the management of Tay Kak Sie Temple remains minimal. Consequently, the burden of preservation is shifted to private foundations and community donations, a model that is increasingly strained by economic fluctuations and limited commercial growth within the Chinatown district. Furthermore, cultural engagement is found to be ethnically concentrated, as the lack of broader public participation prevents the site from becoming a space for active intercultural dialogue. To ensure long-term sustainability, a collaborative synergy involving government, academic, and community stakeholders is necessitated. This research underscores the critical need for integrated management strategies to prevent the structural decay and cultural marginalization of urban heritage sites in Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

Tay Kak Sie Temple, established in 1746, is the oldest temple in Semarang and functions as a place of worship for followers of the Tri Dharma religion (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism). Located in the city center, the temple is widely recognized not only for its religious role but also as a cultural tourism site, characterized by its Chinese architectural elements and the presence of multiple altars dedicated to various deities. The temple is also associated with historical and cultural narratives, particularly its connection to Admiral Cheng Ho and the Sam Poo Kong Temple, which reflects long-standing processes of cultural interaction in Semarang (Tanggok, 2015).

Beyond its religious function, Tay Kak Sie Temple serves as a social and cultural hub, especially for the Chinese community. Annual events such as the Cheng Ho parade, held before the Chinese New Year, highlight the temple's role in sustaining traditions and symbolize cultural acculturation in Semarang. This dual function as both a place of worship and a tourist destination demonstrates a relatively harmonious interaction between religious practices and tourism activities, supported by a high level of social tolerance among visitors and worshippers (Dinas Budaya dan Pariwisata Kota Semarang, 2023; Erik, 2025).

Despite its significance, the increasing recognition of Tay Kak Sie Temple as a cultural heritage site and tourist attraction raises important questions regarding the balance between preservation, religious function, and tourism development. Previous studies on Tay Kak Sie Temple have approached this topic from various perspectives; however, there remains limited analysis that specifically examines how these multiple roles are negotiated and sustained in contemporary contexts. Prasetyatama et al.

(2024) explain that the Semarang City Government has a role in managing the Tay Kak Sie Temple as a place of worship and a religious tourist destination, including in the promotion and preservation of culture. However, when linked to the situation on the ground, it was found that the preservation of the temple is entirely dependent on donations from the community without any financial support from the government, thus creating a gap between written policy and actual implementation in the field. This discourse is expanded upon by Novitasari & Martanti (2022), who reveal the weak preservation of Chinese ethnic historical buildings due to a lack of attention from the state, a condition that is also reflected in the situation of Tay Kak Sie Temple, which must maintain its authenticity with limited resources. In addition, Hendro (2015) article highlights that the conservation of historic areas in Semarang is carried out more by local communities than by the government, including in the context of Kota Lama and Kampung Pecinan. The novelty of this research is that it deepens this discourse.

Previous studies on Tay Kak Sie Temple and similar heritage sites have primarily focused on policy frameworks, general conservation issues, or the role of local communities in preservation. However, these studies have not specifically examined how the interactions between state policy, community-based actors, and on-the-ground resource constraints shape the actual practices of heritage preservation in a living religious site. This study addresses this gap by providing an actor-centered analysis of the preservation of Tay Kak Sie Temple, with particular attention to the tensions between formal policy, limited governmental support, and the reliance on community resources in sustaining both its religious and tourism functions.

Accordingly, this research investigates how preservation is practically managed and negotiated among different actors, and to what extent the absence of consistent governmental financial support affects the sustainability of Tay Kak Sie Temple as a cultural heritage site. Although Tay Kak Sie Temple has been recognized as a cultural heritage site, the implementation of preservation policies reveals a discrepancy between formal recognition and practical support. In principle, local governments play a role in supporting heritage conservation; however, empirical conditions indicate that financial resources for the maintenance of Tay Kak Sie Temple largely depend on community donations and the managing foundation, with limited direct financial involvement from the Semarang City Government (Andre, 2025). This situation highlights a gap between policy expectations and on-the-ground practices, particularly in sustaining an aging heritage structure that requires continuous and substantial maintenance.

In light of the identified gap between policy frameworks and the practical realities of heritage preservation, this study aims to examine the development, management, and preservation dynamics of Tay Kak Sie Temple as a living religious and cultural heritage site. Accordingly, the research questions are formulated as follows: First, how has Tay Kak Sie Temple developed as a religious tourist attraction? Second, how is Tay Kak Sie Temple managed as both a place of worship and a tourist attraction? Third, what are the challenges and efforts involved in preserving Tay Kak Sie Temple as a cultural heritage site?

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a historical method to analyze the preservation of Tay Kak Sie Tri Dharma Temple (TITD) in Semarang. The historical method is used as the main analytical framework to examine the development and preservation of the site over time, while observation is applied as a data collection technique to capture empirical phenomena and understand the meanings embedded within them (Basri, 2014). This approach aims to obtain in-depth data on the preservation efforts of the Tay Kak Sie Temple as a Tri Dharma Place of Worship in Semarang City.

Data collection in this study was conducted through three techniques, namely observation, interviews, and documentation. First, observation was carried out by directly visiting Tay Kak Sie Temple to examine its physical condition and to observe the roles of relevant stakeholders, including management authorities and the surrounding community, in preservation practices. This observation aimed to capture empirical phenomena in the field and to understand the context of heritage preservation (Gulo, 2002).

Second, interviews were conducted as a separate data collection technique to obtain in-depth information from selected informants. The interviews were conducted on March 4, 2025, using a semi-structured format to allow flexibility in exploring relevant issues. A total of three informants were involved, selected based on their direct relevance to the research topic. These included: (1) Andre (39 years old), Head of Tay Kak Sie Temple Management, who provided insights into management policies and preservation strategies; (2) Kristi (33 years old), an MSME trader in the temple area, who shared perspectives on the socio-economic aspects surrounding the temple; and (3) Erik (39 years old), a Chinese tourist from Makassar, who offered views as a visitor and worshipper. Through these interviews, data were obtained regarding management practices, community involvement, and challenges in preserving the temple.

Third, documentation was conducted by collecting supporting materials such as photographs, videos, and archival records related to Tay Kak Sie Temple. This included visual documentation of the temple's condition before and after restoration, which was used to analyze the extent and form of preservation efforts.

The historical method in this study is applied through four operational stages tailored to the case of Tay Kak Sie Temple. First, the heuristic stage involved collecting primary and secondary sources directly related to the temple, including archival records from the Semarang City Tourism Office, previous academic studies on Tay Kak Sie Temple and Chinese heritage in Semarang, as well as field data obtained through interviews with temple management and community members. Visual materials, such as photographs of the temple before and after restoration, were also included as supporting historical evidence. Second, source criticism was conducted by evaluating the credibility and consistency of the collected data. Oral information obtained from interviews, particularly from the temple management, was cross-checked with written sources such as policy documents and prior research to ensure reliability and to avoid bias or factual distortion. Third, the interpretation stage focused on analyzing the verified data within the specific context of Tay Kak Sie Temple. This included examining how the temple's preservation has evolved over time, how the reliance on community funding has shaped its sustainability, and how cultural practices such as the Cheng Ho parade contribute to the continuity of its historical and symbolic significance. Finally, the historiography stage involved constructing an analytical narrative that integrates historical developments, empirical findings, and contemporary preservation issues. This narrative emphasizes the dynamic relationship between policy, community involvement, and cultural heritage preservation in the case of Tay Kak Sie Temple, rather than merely presenting a general historical account (Wasino & Hartatik, [2018](#)).

This study uses a cultural history approach to examine the preservation of Tay Kak Sie Tri Dharma Temple (TITD) in Semarang by focusing on its dual and interconnected functions as a place of worship, a religious tourism destination, and a cultural heritage site. This approach is applied to analyze how religious practices of Tri Dharma followers are maintained within the temple, how tourism activities develop and interact with these spiritual functions, and how both dimensions influence ongoing preservation efforts. By situating the temple within these overlapping contexts, cultural history enables an examination of how cultural values, beliefs, and social practices are continuously negotiated, particularly in balancing the demands of worship, tourism, and the sustainability of heritage preservation over time (Kartodirdjo, [1987](#)).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Development of the Tay Kak Sie TITD Temple

The Tay Kak Sie temple was originally a house that served as a gathering place for Chinese migrants who came from China to the archipelago. After returning from work, they would usually gather in an old house that they had purchased together as a place to stay. These Chinese people had animistic and dynamic beliefs, particularly in worshipping gods and goddesses. Each of them had different beliefs in gods and goddesses. Based on these beliefs, they then took the initiative to place statues of gods and goddesses in the old house where they lived, so that they could come and pray at the same time. In 1746, the house eventually developed into the Tay Kak Sie Tri Dharma (TITD) Temple as a place of

worship for followers of the Tri Dharma religion, namely Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. The Tay Kak Sie Temple is not a clan temple that favors a particular family, but a public temple that is open to the general public (Andre, [2025](#)).



Figure 1. View of the Buddha statue in the courtyard of the Tay Kak Sie Temple
Source: Personal Documentation, 2025

During the construction of the Tay Kak Sie Temple in Semarang, the same architect was used as for the Tay Kak Sie Temple in Cirebon, namely an architect who came directly from China. Meanwhile, the construction workers were a mix of people from the Indonesian archipelago and China. The construction of the temple also used *feng shui*, which is an art and science inherited from ancient Chinese society. This knowledge is usually used to design a building, object, or space in an area that takes into account harmony and balance environmental and human balance to bring peace and prosperity (Putri & Nugroho, [2022](#)). Before becoming a temple, the Chinese community house was built in a *tusuk sate* position. A *tusuk sate* house is generally a house located at the end of two roads that form a straight intersection. Visually, this position is often likened to the letter "T", with the perpendicular road leading directly to the house standing in the middle of the intersection. The location of the house facing directly towards the road is considered to receive too strong and direct energy flow, which, according to *feng shui* beliefs, can have a negative impact on the harmony and well-being of its occupants (Qothrunnada, [2024](#)). Therefore, the Tay Kak Sie Temple was built, and a Buddha statue was placed in the temple courtyard, as seen in Figure 1, to neutralize this energy, thereby channeling positive energy that protects the surrounding community (Andre, [2025](#)).



Figure 2. View of the main altar of the TITD Tay Kak Sie Grand Temple
Source: Personal Documentation, 2025

Tay Kak Sie Temple still maintains the originality of its building. Based on Figure 2, it can be seen that the main altar room in the center of the temple is still original from 1771, and the supporting pillars in the room are also still made of the same wood. This is because the temple management routinely carries out maintenance, so that the building is still strong today. However, over time, several renovations have been carried out on the temple. The most significant change is that the temple roof tiles, which were originally made of ancient tiles, have been replaced with modern ceramics. Then, the walls, which were originally made of lime, had deteriorated and were replaced with cement to sharpen and strengthen the temple building. In addition, developments were made to the office of the temple manager, the right wing of the temple, and the left wing of the temple (Andre, [2025](#)).

The replica of Cheng Ho's ship in front of Tay Kak Sie Temple was built in 2005 at the suggestion of residents to commemorate the 600th anniversary of Cheng Ho's arrival in Semarang. The construction of the replica ship used participatory funds from the community amounting to Rp 1.5 billion. Gradually, the existence of the replica of Cheng Ho's ship became an additional tourist attraction in the Chinatown area of Semarang, especially for local and foreign tourists from Asia who visited Tay Kak Sie Temple. The replica of Cheng Ho's ship was designed to be durable for up to a decade (Herusansono, [2013](#)). However, in 2014, the replica of Cheng Ho's ship had to be dismantled because it was considered to be disrupting the flow of the Semarang River. According to the Head of the Semarang Municipal Public Order Agency, Endro PM, the replica of Cheng Ho's ship built on the river in front of the Tay Kak Sie Temple violated two local regulations (Perda), namely Perda No. 5 of 2009 concerning Building Construction Permits and Perda No. 13 of 2006 concerning Environmental Management (DetikNews, [2014](#)).

Tay Kak Sie Temple was recently inaugurated as one of Semarang's tourist destinations after gaining attention from the Semarang City Tourism Office. The Cheng Ho parade, which is held every August to commemorate the arrival of Admiral Cheng Ho in Semarang, became a turning point for the temple. The parade was then made an annual event by the Semarang City Tourism Office. In 2015, the TITD Tay Kak Sie Grand Temple was officially designated as a cultural heritage site by the Semarang Cultural Heritage Preservation Center. After the temple was designated as a cultural heritage site, the government showed its support by promoting the activities and events that are regularly held at the temple (Andre, [2025](#)).

However, the transition of Tay Kak Sie from a communal residence to a public 'living' heritage site introduces a significant management paradox. Although it is designated cultural attraction, its preservation is highly vulnerable because the survival of its original 1771 wooden structures depends almost entirely community-based donations with minimal state intervention. This situation underscores a critical gap in Indonesia's heritage governance, where formal recognition is not consistently followed by fiscal support. Such governance frameworks often face structural hurdles that shift the burden of preservation from the government to local actors (Saputra, [2024](#)). This reliance on private resources creates a sustainability gap that threatens the temple's authenticity, as seen in the current physical condition of the main hall's structures.

Management of TITD Tay Kak Sie Grand Temple Tourism

As time goes by, Tay Kak Sie Temple no longer serves only as a place of worship for the three teachings of Tri Dharma. However, since the Semarang Chinatown area has become a tourist destination, the temple now has a dual role. Both functions must be carried out simultaneously to maintain a balance between religious and tourist functions. This balance is maintained through management that relies not only on the foundation but also on the role of the local government (Andre, [2025](#)).

The balance between the two functions of religion and tourism is regulated in several regulations issued by the government. Government Regulation No. 1 of 2022 stipulates regulations related to the National Register and Preservation of Cultural Heritage, which covers ownership, compensation, incentives, and the function of cultural heritage itself (Peraturan Pemerintah (PP) No. 1 Tahun 2022 Tentang Register Nasional dan Pelestarian Cagar Budaya, [2022](#)). These regulations indicate that the government, as a stakeholder, should play a dominant role. Based on observations, however, the government's role has been very passive. The dominant role is still in the hands of the Tay

Kak Sie Temple Foundation. The government's role is limited to recognizing the Tay Kak Sie Temple as a cultural heritage site and providing incentives in the form of non-financial support. Meanwhile, as the oldest temple, the maintenance required is certainly different from other temples, thus requiring a very large amount of money (Andre, [2025](#)).

This collaboration should open up opportunities to introduce Tay Kak Sie Temple to a wider audience. However, the passive role of the local government, caused by the central government's lack of funds for cultural heritage development, could lead to conflict if left unresolved for too long. This conflict could take the form of a decline in the trust of the temple management and the Tri Dharma community in the government. This is because the financial burden is borne entirely by the temple management. In accordance with official policy, responsibility for physical development should be shared by both parties. If each role can be carried out in accordance with the stated rules, then the function that can be felt is not only the dominance of religious activities but also more active aspects (Peraturan Pemerintah (PP) No. 1 Tahun 2022 Tentang Register Nasional dan Pelestarian Cagar Budaya, [2022](#)).

Based on Law Number 11 of 2010 Article 5 concerning Cultural Heritage Buildings, the temple has cultural value that aims to strengthen the nation's identity (Peraturan Pemerintah (PP) No. 11 Tahun 2010 Tentang Penertiban dan Pendayagunaan Tanah Terlantar, [2010](#)). The purpose of introducing the TITD Tay Kak Sie Grand Temple as the oldest temple in Semarang is to provide understanding to the community and highlight one of the social functions carried out by the temple. This introduction is carried out through educational and cultural activities. One of the strategies used in an effort to realize the values in the article is the study tour activity. These activities are provided to children at the kindergarten and elementary school levels to fulfill curriculum requirements. The existence of these activities provides an opportunity for all groups to recognize and learn about Chinese culture through the existence of the TITD Tay Kak Sie Grand Temple. The fulfillment of the values in the law reflects and represents the cultural diversity of society amid modernization (Andre, [2025](#)).

In terms of heritage management, the reliance on internal foundation resources reveals a significant discrepancy between formal regulation and practical government. Although Peraturan Pemerintah (PP) No. 1 of 2022 theoretically positions the state as a primary stakeholder in protecting cultural heritage, day by day management of Tay Kak Sie remains an autonomous effort by the local community. The cultural heritage status serves a formal recognition that enhances the site's tourism profile, yet it fails to provide a consistent fiscal framework for its physical survival. City branding initiatives in Indonesia often capitalize on the aesthetic and historical value of vernacular architecture without providing the necessary adaptive preservation funding (Nursanty et al, [2023](#)). Consequently, the burden of maintaining the temple's architectural integrity is shifted entirely to private actors, highlighting a tension between the state's symbolic recognition and its lack of practical financial intervention.

The diversity reflected in the management of the temple is not only seen in the tourists who visit. The large number of temple managers who adhere to other religions also demonstrates a high level of tolerance. This has become an attraction for both religious and non-religious visitors to the temple. In managing the diversity of visitors at Tay Kak Sie Temple, a rule is enforced that prohibits taking photos of worshippers in order to respect their privacy. The main function of the temple as a house of worship means that tourists cannot visit at any time. Tourists usually visit at certain times of the year, which are accompanied by religious rituals regularly held by the temple. Several religious rituals, such as potehi puppet shows, Cap Go Meh celebrations, Cheng Ho parades, and other Tri Dharma rituals, keep the temple alive and relevant to this day. These interactions foster a high level of tolerance not only between believers and tourists, but also between different religious communities (Andre, [2025](#)).

Standing as a temple that maintains both functions, Tay Kak Sie Temple has not lost its sacred value. As shown in Figure 3 below, the temple's possession of statues of gods and goddesses that are not found in other temples is a unique attraction for both domestic and foreign tourists. For worshippers at the temple, the presence of a complete set of statues of gods and goddesses representing the Tri Dharma teachings, such as the statue of the God Taishang Laojun, one of the gods of Taoism, is significant. The condition of the building, which still retains its originality, provides a unique spiritual

experience. This uniqueness not only shapes and strengthens the spiritual identity of Tay Kak Sie Temple, but also opens up a space for lively cultural interaction. This space has become a meeting point between tradition, history, and the dynamics of a modern society that continues to evolve. Upon closer inspection, the temple is also an important representation of the Chinese community in Semarang. Collaboration between temple managers, local government, and the community is key to designing inclusive and sustainable preservation strategies. Preservation is not merely about maintaining physical conditions, but can be achieved through holistic strategies that encompass social and spiritual aspects (Andre, [2025](#)).



Figure 3. Statue of the God Taishang Laojun at Tay Kak Sie Temple
Source: Personal Documentation, 2025

Challenges and Preservation Efforts of the TITD Tay Kak Sie Grand Temple

The TITD Tay Kak Sie Grand Temple, as one of the oldest religious and cultural tourism destinations in the city of Semarang, not only holds high historical and spiritual value, but also faces complex challenges in its preservation efforts. These challenges encompass the physical aspects of the building, economic factors, regulations, and the social dynamics surrounding the temple's existence in a modern context (Andre, [2025](#)).

The most obvious challenge is the physical maintenance of the building, which is more than two centuries old. Based on Figure 4, it can be seen that the main structure of the temple, especially the central hall, built in 1771, still retains wood as its main element. The old wood is now showing signs of damage due to termite infestation. Maintenance of the building by the management of Tay Kak Sie Temple involves voluntary efforts by the management and worshippers, who inject anti-termite liquid into the rotten parts of the wood. However, this method is only temporary and does not address the need for comprehensive restoration. Plans for major structural restoration are hampered by the extremely high costs involved. A preliminary study required by the Cultural Heritage Preservation Agency (Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya) requires the use of four-dimensional scanning technology to map the condition of the building in detail, which is estimated to cost up to Rp. 450 million. This figure only covers the initial documentation process and does not include the restoration costs, which are estimated to reach Rp. 5 to 8 billion. The lack of funds and minimal assistance from the local government has caused many restorations plans to be delayed or even abandoned altogether (Andre, [2025](#)).

Previous research has revealed that the government is responsible for involving a team of conservation experts in the restoration of temple buildings (Prasetyatama et al., [2024](#)). However, based on observations, the restoration or renovation of temples is carried out solely by the Tay Kak Sie Temple Foundation. The restoration is carried out with the aim of preserving the condition of the temple, given its fragile state. The unavailability of funds that should have been provided by the government means that the temple management relies solely on funds donated by worshippers to the temple as a form of devotion. The development and maintenance are carried out in a special and careful manner because the temple management still maintains the authenticity of the building, for example, the main altar still

uses original teak wood from China as the main pillars of the building, as can be seen in Figure 4. The submissive role played by the local government is due to the non-distribution of private cultural heritage funds (Andre, [2025](#)).



Figure 4. View of the main altar with teak wood pillars
Source: Personal Documentation, 2025

The physical consequences of these combined management challenges and external pressures are clearly documented in the site's current state. The degradation of the 18th century wooden pillars and the adaptation of modern materials for the roofs structure necessitated by limited the resources illustrate the practical compromises made by the foundation. These visual records provide empirical evidence of the sustainability gap discussed previously, highlighting the urgent need for a more integrated conservation approach that balances modern urban development with the preservation of authentic architectural heritage.

The next challenge relates to the legal and administrative status of temples as cultural heritage sites. Although Tay Kak Sie Temple has been categorized as a cultural heritage building, its management is entirely left to the foundation without adequate financial support from the city or provincial government. The head of the Tay Kak Sie Temple Management, when interviewed, mentioned that there is no specific budget allocation for the maintenance of cultural heritage sites in the city of Semarang, unlike other provinces such as DI Yogyakarta or West Java, which have more progressive policies and funding for the protection of cultural heritage sites. This creates a paradox: temples are prohibited from making changes or renovations without permission, yet they do not receive material or technical assistance from the authorities who should also be responsible (Andre, [2025](#)).

Beyond internal management issues, Tay Kak Sie Temple faces external pressures from rapid urbanization and the pervasive influence of globalization. The surrounding Chinatown district has undergone significant commercial transformation, which threatens the temple's role as a spiritual sanctuary. The forces of modernization often lead to the commodification of heritage sites, where original cultural meanings are challenged by shifting economic interests (Hiswara et al, [2023](#)). At Tay Kak Sie, this is manifested in the difficulty of maintaining traditional architectural integrity amidst a changing urban landscape. The community's resilience in sustaining these traditions without substantial state support underscores a strategy of cultural survival against standardizing of a globalized world.

Tay Kak Sie Temple also faces challenging social and economic dynamics. The Chinatown area, which is home to the temple as well as the living space of the community and small economic actors, is now increasingly dependent on major celebrations such as Chinese New Year, Cap Go Meh, or the cruise ship tourist season. Outside of these periods, the area tends to be quiet. Local traders around Tay Kak Sie Temple say that their sales are highly volatile, with business fluctuating depending on the number of visitors to the temple and culinary destinations such as Lumpia Semarang in the Chinatown area. When it is quiet, economic activity virtually grinds to a halt. In addition, internal regulations from temple managers that limit the number of traders in order to maintain order often led to covert

competition and limited economic access for newcomers. This dependence makes economic activity around the temple unstable throughout the year (Kristi, [2025](#)).

When viewed from the perspective of diversity and community involvement, another challenge arises in the form of a lack of participation by non-Chinese local communities in cultural and spiritual activities at the temple. Although major events are open to the public, in reality, regular visitors to the temple are predominantly Chinese. Social interaction between worshippers and tourists is harmonious, but it has not yet fully developed into an active space for cultural dialogue. Visitors who are also followers of the Tri Dharma religion from Makassar, such as Erik, believe that Tay Kak Sie Temple still preserves its original spiritual values and ornaments. This shows that the public still pays attention to the authenticity and cultural values of Tay Kak Sie Temple. However, this attention has not been fully institutionalized in the form of a broader collective preservation movement (Erik, [2025](#)).

The preservation of the TITD Tay Kak Sie Grand Temple faces very complex challenges, requiring not only internal awareness from the management community, but also cross-sector support from the government, academics, and civil society. Without strong synergy, this cultural heritage, which has survived for more than two and a half centuries will continue to face pressure from modernization, structural degradation, and marginalization in cultural heritage management policies (Novitasari & Martanti, [2022](#)).

CONCLUSION

The study of Tay Kak Sie Temple demonstrates that the preservation of urban living heritage sites is often hampered by a profound disconnect between legislative mandates and actual fiscal allocation. While the temple is legally recognized as cultural heritage, its maintenance is primarily sustained by communal religious devotion rather than state intervention. This case contributes to the broader discourse on heritage management by highlighting how non-state religious sites frequently navigate a precarious balance between their sacred functions and their secular status as public tourism assets. It is argued that without a shift from symbolic recognition to integrated financial support, such sites remain vulnerable to structural decay and social marginalization. However, this research is limited by its singular focus on the Semarang context and its emphasis on foundation-level perspectives. Future studies are encouraged to adopt a comparative framework across different regions in Indonesia to assess whether similar patterns of fiscal neglect occur in other minority religious landmarks. Additionally, further inquiry into the long-term impact of post 2022 heritage regulations on community-led preservation would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving state-society relationship in cultural conservation.

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Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

The authors have given approval for the publication of this manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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