



The Tomb of Mbah Kalibening: Pilgrimage, Sacred Heritage, and Community Empowerment

Aliza Putri Khairunnisa¹, Muhamad Noval Rofif²

Universitas Islam Negeri Profesor Kiai Haji Saifudin Zuhri Purwokerto, Indonesia

*putrikhai536@gmail.com

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the meaning, procedures, impacts, and purposes of a sacred tomb as a religious and cultural site. Sacred tombs function as spaces of devotion, memory, and community identity, yet their broader social significance is often overlooked or reduced to tourism. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Findings reveal that the tomb's historical narratives connect the figure of a revered scholar with sacred-water symbolism, reinforcing spiritual authority and cultural memory. Pilgrimage procedures integrate bathing, ablution, prayer, and reflection, demonstrating how physical and spiritual preparation are intertwined. The site generates economic opportunities for residents and strengthens social cohesion through collective participation in rituals and site maintenance. Culturally, it preserves ancestral memory and transmits local wisdom, while spiritually encouraging reflection on mortality, blessing, and moral conduct. The study contributes to religious tourism and heritage research by conceptualizing sacred tombs as multi-dimensional institutions. Participatory and culturally sensitive management is recommended to sustain these benefits.

Key Words: *Sacred Tomb, Pilgrimage, Religious Tourism, Local Wisdom, Community Development*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna, prosedur, dampak, dan tujuan makam suci sebagai situs keagamaan dan budaya. Makam suci berfungsi sebagai ruang pengabdian, memori, dan identitas komunitas, namun signifikansi sosialnya yang lebih luas sering diabaikan atau direduksi menjadi pariwisata. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan reduksi, tampilan, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa narasi sejarah makam menghubungkan sosok seorang sarjana yang dihormati dengan simbolisme air suci, memperkuat otoritas spiritual dan memori budaya. Prosedur ziarah mengintegrasikan mandi, wudhu, doa, dan refleksi, menunjukkan bagaimana persiapan fisik dan spiritual saling terkait. Situs ini menghasilkan peluang ekonomi bagi penduduk setempat dan memperkuat kohesi sosial melalui partisipasi kolektif dalam ritual dan pemeliharaan lokasi. Secara budaya,

ia melestarikan ingatan leluhur dan mentransmisikan kearifan lokal, sambil secara spiritual mendorong refleksi tentang kefanaan, berkat, dan perilaku moral. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pariwisata religi dan penelitian warisan dengan mengkonseptualisasikan makam suci sebagai institusi multidimensi. Manajemen partisipatif dan sensitif budaya direkomendasikan untuk mempertahankan manfaat ini.

Kata Kunci: *Makam Suci, Ziarah, Wisata Religi, Kearifan lokal, Pengembangan Masyarakat*

INTRODUCTION

Culture and religious diversity constitute fundamental resources for shaping social character, moral orientation, and collective identity in plural societies. In the Indonesian context, cultural values are not merely inherited symbols but living systems that influence both private conduct and public life. The role of culture in shaping social character has been emphasized in studies of local values and community identity (Sakti et al., 2024). Spiritual activities, including visits to sacred places, represent an important expression of cultural and religious continuity because they connect personal devotion with collective memory. Religious sites are valued not only as physical spaces but also as repositories of historical experience, inherited belief, and social cohesion. The existence of mosques, temples, churches, shrines, and the tombs of influential religious figures illustrates how sacred spaces continue to function as moral and cultural anchors in society. In the Javanese Islamic tradition, pilgrimage to the graves of respected figures has become a social practice that strengthens spirituality while reinforcing solidarity among community members (Yulina et al., 2021).

The growing public interest in spiritual experience has encouraged the development of religious tourism as a meaningful form of cultural mobility. Religious tourism refers to journeys undertaken to places associated with sacredness, devotion, contemplation, or spiritual reflection (Mirdad & Ajira, 2024). This phenomenon is socially significant because it allows communities to transform inherited religious sites into spaces of education, reflection, and cultural preservation. Indonesia has significant potential in this field because its religious heritage spans a broad historical spectrum, from prehistoric sacred landscapes to classical Islamic sites (Setiawan, 2024). Pilgrimage, as part of religious tourism, should not be reduced to ritual repetition. It is also a reflective practice through which individuals contemplate life, death, ancestry, and moral responsibility (Saikuddin, 2022). In this sense, religious tourism contributes to society by strengthening spiritual awareness, maintaining historical memory, and enabling intergenerational transmission of cultural values. It also creates opportunities for local communities to reinterpret sacred heritage as a source of identity and sustainable social development.

Despite its potential, communities surrounding sacred sites often face complex problems in preserving spiritual heritage while adapting to social and economic change. Many pilgrimage sites are maintained through oral tradition, local belief, and informal community management, making them vulnerable to

historical simplification, weak documentation, and uneven institutional support. At the same time, increasing visitor interest may create new expectations related to accessibility, facilities, cleanliness, ritual order, and local economic participation. The experience of religious tourism is meaningful because it may offer memorable spiritual encounters and foster the internalization of religious values among visitors who participate in pilgrimage activities (Ramadhan et al., 2022). However, when sacred sites are approached only as tourist destinations, their deeper ritual, historical, and communal meanings may be neglected. This condition requires careful study because sacred sites are not only religious destinations but also social arenas where tradition, economy, authority, and communal identity intersect. Without proper scholarly attention, the meanings embedded in rituals, sacred narratives, and community participation may be reduced to surface-level tourism attractions.

Fieldwork shows that an ancestral Islamic tomb in a rural Javanese setting functions as more than a burial place. It has become a living religious site where pilgrims, residents, custodians, and community leaders interact through rituals, prayers, commemorative events, and everyday acts of care. The site is associated with sacred narratives, ritual purification, collective prayer, and the belief that certain natural elements possess symbolic and spiritual value. Pilgrims visit not only to pray, but also to seek inner calm, remember ancestors, and participate in inherited traditions. Tradition is a social phenomenon that directly intersects with various sectors of community life (Alamineh et al., 2023). It may also be understood as an inherited legacy from the past, transmitted across generations (Rino et al., 2022). Within this setting, social values emerge through relationships among individuals in the community (Leal Filho et al., 2022). The long-standing practice of pluralism and inclusivity in local culture further strengthens the site's distinctiveness as a religious-cultural attraction (Abbas et al., 2025).

Previous studies have established that pilgrimage and religious tourism may strengthen cultural identity, support local economies, and preserve traditional values. Religious tourism in the form of pilgrimage has considerable development potential because it combines spiritual motivation, heritage preservation, and visitor mobility (Handriana et al., 2020). Such destinations can encourage small-scale economic activities through food stalls, souvenir sales, local services, and community-based hospitality. These findings indicate that pilgrimage has multi-dimensional effects, extending beyond spiritual experience to include social and economic transformation. The natural environment, peaceful rural atmosphere, and accessibility of sacred sites often enhance their appeal to visitors seeking spiritual reflection and cultural experience. Nevertheless, much of the existing discussion tends to emphasize religious tourism as an economic or destination-based phenomenon, while giving less attention to the lived meanings of ritual practices, local narratives, and everyday social relations surrounding sacred tombs. This limitation underscores the need for research that integrates spiritual meaning, cultural preservation, and community impact.

A more specific body of scholarship has examined traditions associated with the selected sacred tomb, particularly cultural practices surrounding ritual continuity and heritage preservation (Arif et al., 2024). Such studies provide important initial insights into how local communities maintain inherited religious traditions. Nevertheless, previous research remains limited in explaining how the site simultaneously functions as a historical symbol, a religious space, a social gathering point, and a source of community-based economic activity. The existing literature has not sufficiently addressed the interconnection of sacred narratives, pilgrimage procedures, social cohesion, and local economic participation as dimensions of a single religious-cultural phenomenon. This gap is important because sacred sites with strong local characteristics often shape community identity in ways that cannot be understood solely through tourism analysis. They require an approach that recognizes religious devotion, historical memory, inherited tradition, and social practice as mutually reinforcing elements. This study therefore shifts attention from a general description of pilgrimage tradition toward a more holistic analysis of the role and meaning of a local religious site in community life.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrated reading of a local sacred tomb as a religious, cultural, historical, social, and economic institution. Rather than treating pilgrimage merely as a ritual practice or a tourism activity, this research views the site as a dynamic space where spiritual devotion, ancestral memory, local wisdom, and community livelihoods intersect. This perspective is important because many studies separate these dimensions, thereby overlooking the complex role of sacred sites in local society. By examining the site through its history, ritual procedures, symbolic meanings, social relations, and community impacts, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how religious heritage continues to function in contemporary rural life. The urgency of this research is also linked to the need for culturally sensitive heritage management. Sacred sites cannot be developed only through physical facilities or tourism promotion; they must be understood through the meanings, beliefs, and social relationships that sustain them. This study contributes to that need by foregrounding the community-based significance of pilgrimage culture.

The central problem addressed in this study is how a local sacred tomb functions as a religious site and how its presence shapes pilgrimage culture, social relations, cultural identity, and community welfare. The study argues that the site's significance does not rest solely on its status as the burial place of a respected figure, but on the ongoing practices, meanings, and relationships that surround it. The provisional argument is that pilgrimage culture transforms the site into a living center of spiritual reflection, cultural preservation, social cohesion, and local economic opportunity. This argument allows the research to move beyond descriptive accounts of ritual activity and toward an explanation of why the site remains meaningful for the surrounding community. The contribution of this study is therefore twofold. Theoretically, it expands discussions on religious tourism and local sacred heritage by emphasizing the interdependence between spirituality, tradition, and social life. In practice, it offers insight into community-

based preservation that respects sacred values while supporting sustainable local development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design, chosen to enable an in-depth exploration of the historical, spiritual, and socio-economic significance of the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening* for the local community. The qualitative framework was considered most appropriate, as the research aimed to capture complex social phenomena, religious practices, traditional rituals, and community interactions in their natural context, rather than to quantify relationships between variables (Perez et al., 2023; Villamin et al., 2025).

The research was conducted at the *Mbah Kalibening* Tomb Complex in Dawuhan Village, Banyumas District, Central Java, Indonesia. This location was selected due to its dual significance as both a religious pilgrimage site and a center of local cultural traditions, which collectively influence social cohesion and economic activities in the surrounding community. The tomb serves as a focal point for ritualized practices, heritage preservation, and small-scale economic enterprises, making it an ideal case for examining the interplay between spirituality, tradition, and community development.

Data were collected using a triangulated approach, incorporating direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations captured the conduct of pilgrimage rituals, use of sacred wells, and interactions among pilgrims and local residents. In-depth interviews were conducted with tomb custodians, pilgrims, local residents, and village officials to elicit perspectives on historical narratives, ritual practices, spiritual meanings, and socio-economic impacts. Documentation included photographs, archival materials, and relevant written records to complement observational and interview data (Morgan, 2024; Schlunegger et al., 2024).

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman framework, encompassing three iterative stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, raw field data were synthesized and organized around key thematic domains, including historical background, ritual procedures, spiritual significance, social dynamics, economic activities, and site management. The data were then presented descriptively to illustrate patterns and relationships within and across themes. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting these patterns in relation to existing literature, thereby elucidating the role of the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening* as a religious, cultural, and socio-economic institution within the community (Li & Zhang, 2022; Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

History of the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening*

The history of the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening* is closely connected to the figure of Sheikh Rumani Abdullah Faqih, who is remembered by the local community as an early Islamic scholar with a significant role in the spread of

Islam in Java. In local memory, he is not merely regarded as a religious figure, but also as a moral and spiritual reference whose presence shaped the religious imagination of the surrounding community. The narrative of his arrival from the land of Rum positions him as a respected outsider who brought Islamic teachings through wisdom, patience, and social closeness. This historical memory continues to influence how the community understands the tomb, not simply as a burial site, but as a sacred marker of Islamic transmission and local religious identity.



Figure 1. Gate of Mbah Kalibening's Tomb

The name "*Kalibening*" is associated with an oral narrative about the emergence of clear water from a stone after Sheikh Rumani Abdullah Faqih placed his spear into it. This story occupies an important position in the community's understanding of the site because it explains the origin of the name and gives sacred meaning to the surrounding landscape. The clear water is interpreted not only as a physical source of life, but also as a symbol of purity, blessing, and divine assistance. Through this narrative, the site becomes more than a historical location; it becomes a spiritual landscape where natural elements, religious memory, and community belief are interwoven.

The existence of the *Kalibening* spring strengthens the sacred status of the tomb complex. Local people and pilgrims believe that the water carries spiritual value and may be used for purification, prayer preparation, and personal reflection. The presence of three wells within the tomb complex the *Pasucen* well, the women's bathing well, and the men's bathing well shows that water is central to the ritual and symbolic structure of the site. These wells are not treated as ordinary physical facilities, but as parts of a sacred system that connects the pilgrim's body, intention, and spiritual orientation before approaching the tomb.



Figure 2. Pasucen Well

The Kali Bening Well is not only a historically important place, but also a religious destination. Many pilgrims come to pray, take the water, or simply commemorate the great service of the Romanian Sheikh Abdullah Faqih in spreading Islam in the land of Java. This tradition shows how his spiritual legacy continues to live on in society, reminding the current generation of the importance of maintaining the values of purity, blessings, and peace that he taught through the teachings of Islam.

Historically, the tomb functions as a site where collective memory is preserved through oral stories, ritual practice, and repeated pilgrimage. The community's respect for *Mbah Kalibening* is maintained not only through narratives about his role in spreading Islam, but also through everyday practices that keep the site alive as a religious destination. Pilgrims come to pray, take water, reflect on his legacy, and participate in a tradition that has been inherited across generations. This finding shows that the history of the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening* is not static; it continues to be reconstructed through belief, ritual, memory, and the ongoing relationship between the community and the sacred site.

Table 1. Ideal Influence of Historical Narratives on the Sacred Meaning of the Tomb

Informant Identity/Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Custodian of the Tomb of <i>Mbah Kalibening</i>	"During the dry season, <i>Mbah Kalibening</i> asked for divine guidance so that the community would not suffer from water scarcity and could perform ablution. He was instructed to place his spear into the rock, and clear water emerged from it. This became the origin of the name ' <i>Kalibening</i> '."	Oral history of <i>Kalibening's</i> origin; sacred-water narrative; spiritual authority of <i>Mbah Kalibening</i>
Tomb Custodian / Key Informant	Additional interview data should clarify how the origin story of <i>Kalibening</i> has been transmitted to pilgrims and local residents across generations.	Transmission of local memory; continuity of oral tradition; custodian as cultural mediator
Pilgrims	Additional interview data should explore why pilgrims believe in the spiritual value of <i>Kalibening</i> water and how this belief shapes their pilgrimage practices.	Pilgrim belief; sacred meaning of water; spiritual motivation

Local Community Figure	Additional interview data should examine how the community interprets <i>Mbah Kalibening</i> as part of its local religious and historical identity.	Local identity; historical legitimacy; collective belonging
Village Official / Site Manager	Additional interview data should investigate how the historical narrative of the tomb is used to support heritage preservation and pilgrimage-site management.	Heritage preservation; site governance; institutional support

The table indicates that the primary influence of the tomb's history lies in the power of its origin narrative. The story of clear water emerging from a rock is not merely a local legend; it functions as a symbolic foundation for the sacred status of the site. Through this narrative, *Mbah Kalibening* is represented as a spiritually authoritative figure whose presence is associated with divine assistance, communal welfare, and ritual purification. The water narrative also gives material form to sacred memory: water is not only understood as a physical resource for ablution, but also as a sign of blessing, purity, and spiritual continuity. In this sense, the history of the tomb operates as a living cultural memory that shapes how pilgrims and local residents interpret the site.

However, the table also exposes a major methodological weakness in the current findings section. The manuscript relies heavily on a single explicit interview excerpt from the tomb custodian, while the theme of historical meaning requires a broader range of voices. For a stronger qualitative finding, the study should include direct statements from pilgrims, local community figures, village officials, and site managers. These voices are necessary to show how the historical narrative is remembered, transmitted, believed, and institutionalized in contemporary community life. Without such triangulation, the finding risks becoming a descriptive historical account rather than a well-supported qualitative interpretation. To strengthen this section, the authors should add field-based quotations that explain how the *Kalibening* narrative shapes pilgrimage motivation, local identity, sacred-water practices, and community-based heritage preservation.

Procedure for Pilgrimage to the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening*

The pilgrimage procedure at the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening* reflects a religious tradition that has developed within the local community. This practice is closely related to the community's belief in the sacredness of the tomb and the spiritual value attached to the surrounding ritual spaces. The pilgrimage is not only understood as a visit to a burial site, but also as a meaningful religious act that involves respect, purification, prayer, and remembrance. Through this practice, pilgrims express reverence toward ancestral figures while strengthening their spiritual relationship with God.

The tomb complex contains three main wells, namely the *Pasucen* well, the women's bathing well, and the men's bathing well. These wells are believed to have symbolic and spiritual significance in the pilgrimage process. Before entering the main prayer ritual, pilgrims usually begin by cleansing themselves

in the bathing wells. The women's bathing well is designated for female pilgrims, while the men's bathing well is designated for male pilgrims. This separation reflects the ritual order maintained within the tomb complex and shows how local religious practice is organized through specific spatial arrangements.



Figure 3. Princess Bath Well

The bathing process is not merely intended to cleanse the body physically. It is also understood as a symbolic act of inner purification before pilgrims enter a solemn state of prayer. Through this process, pilgrims prepare themselves spiritually and emotionally to approach the sacred area of the tomb. After bathing, pilgrims continue the ritual by performing ablution at the *Pasucen* well, also known as the Barokah water well. The water from this well is regarded as spiritually meaningful and is believed to bring blessing. Some pilgrims also take the water home because they believe it may serve as a source of blessing and protection for their families.



Figure 4. Well of the Bath of Putra

After completing the purification process, pilgrims proceed to the tomb of *Mbah Kalibening* and other ancestral graves located within the complex. At this stage, they offer prayers for safety, well-being, peace, and spiritual guidance. The atmosphere of the tomb complex is described as calm, solemn, and respectful, allowing pilgrims to reflect and strengthen their relationship with the Creator. The pilgrimage tradition therefore functions not only as a form of respect for ancestral figures, but also as a medium for spiritual reflection and religious devotion.

The tomb complex also has its own attraction in terms of architecture and surrounding environment. The tomb is surrounded by shady trees that create a cool and peaceful atmosphere. Traditional elements can be seen in the ornaments decorating the gates, walls, and cemetery area. This environment contributes to the contemplative experience of pilgrims. Many visitors feel that the peaceful atmosphere of the site helps them reflect, calm their minds, and draw closer to God. For some pilgrims, spending time in the tomb complex brings inner peace and helps relieve anxiety.

Pilgrimage to the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening* also functions as a moment of social gathering. Pilgrims often come with family members or community groups to perform rituals and pray together. This collective practice strengthens relationships among relatives, friends, and fellow visitors. For the surrounding community, the tomb complex forms an important part of their cultural and religious identity. Annual activities, such as collective prayers and commemorative events, are held to honor ancestral figures, thereby strengthening the local community's spiritual and cultural bonds.

The Impact of the Surrounding Community with the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening*

The presence of the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening* has had a significant impact on the surrounding community, particularly in social, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects. As a sacred site visited by pilgrims from various areas, the tomb is not only a place of prayer and remembrance but also a space that shapes the everyday lives of local residents. Pilgrimage activities bring people into continuous interaction with the community around the site, creating opportunities for economic exchange, social cooperation, and cultural preservation.

Economically, the arrival of pilgrims opens opportunities for local residents to develop small-scale businesses. Visitors who come to the tomb often need food, drinks, parking, local guidance, and other support services. This condition encourages residents to sell food, beverages, souvenirs, religious items, and local products. The existence of the tomb therefore provides an additional source of income for the surrounding community. Through these activities, the pilgrimage site contributes to the growth of micro and small enterprises and helps improve local economic circulation.

The social impact of the tomb can be seen in the strengthening of relationships among residents and between residents and pilgrims. The community works together to maintain the cleanliness, order, and comfort of the tomb complex. Local residents also participate in welcoming visitors, supporting religious events, and maintaining public facilities around the site. These activities create a sense of togetherness and strengthen social cohesion. The pilgrimage tradition encourages cooperation, mutual assistance, and shared responsibility among community members.

The tomb also has cultural significance because it helps preserve local wisdom and inherited traditions. Religious activities, collective prayers, and commemorative events held around the tomb become important spaces for transmitting cultural and spiritual values across generations. Through these practices, the community maintains its connection with ancestral memory and local identity. The tomb functions as a cultural symbol that strengthens the community's awareness of its historical roots and religious heritage.

However, the positive impact of the tomb requires proper management to prevent potential problems. The increasing number of pilgrims may create pressure on the local environment, especially if cleanliness, waste management, and visitor flow are not properly regulated. Environmental damage, waste accumulation, and overuse of local resources may occur when pilgrimage activities are not supported by adequate management. Therefore, cooperation among the community, site managers, and local authorities is necessary to preserve the sacredness, cleanliness, and sustainability of the tomb complex.

Table 2. Community Impacts of the Tomb of Mbah Kalibening

Impact Dimension	Observable Form in the Community	Indicator
Economic Impact	Local residents sell food, drinks, souvenirs, and religious items to pilgrims.	Growth of small businesses; additional household income; local economic circulation
Social Impact	Residents cooperate in maintaining cleanliness, welcoming pilgrims, and supporting religious activities.	Social cohesion; mutual assistance; collective responsibility
Cultural Impact	Collective prayers, commemorative events, and pilgrimage traditions are maintained by the community.	Preservation of local wisdom; transmission of inherited values; strengthening of cultural identity
Religious Impact	Pilgrims visit the tomb for prayer, reflection, and spiritual purposes.	Spiritual devotion; sacred-site awareness; religious continuity
Environmental Impact	Increasing visitor activity requires waste control, facility maintenance, and site management.	Environmental pressure; need for regulation; sustainability of the pilgrimage area
Institutional Impact	The community, site managers, and local authorities need to cooperate in managing the site.	Collaborative governance; heritage preservation; visitor management

The table shows that the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening* produces multi-dimensional effects on the surrounding community. Its influence is not limited to religious activity, but extends to economic livelihood, social relations, cultural continuity, and environmental responsibility. The strongest visible impact appears in the interaction between pilgrimage activity and local economic participation, where residents benefit from visitor needs through small-scale trade and services. At the same time, the tomb strengthens social cohesion because its maintenance depends on cooperation among residents, custodians, and local actors. However, the table also shows that these benefits are not

automatic; they require effective management to prevent environmental pressures and preserve the sacred character of the site. Therefore, the tomb should be understood as both a spiritual center and a community-based heritage space whose sustainability depends on balanced economic, social, cultural, and environmental governance.

Purpose of Pilgrimage to the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening*

The primary purpose of pilgrimage to the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening* is to reinforce the awareness of life's temporality and to remind pilgrims of human mortality. Visitors engage in pilgrimage as a reflective practice that allows them to contemplate their spiritual journey, personal conduct, and moral responsibilities. The act of visiting the tomb also serves to maintain a living connection with the historical and spiritual legacy of *Mbah Kalibening*, highlighting the integration of religious devotion and community tradition.

Pilgrimage activities are carried out collaboratively between key custodians of the tomb and local community authorities. This cooperative approach ensures that the site is properly maintained, ritual practices are observed, and facilities are upgraded to support the comfort and spiritual needs of pilgrims. Collaborative management also enables community involvement in caring for the tomb, fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for preserving sacred heritage. This participatory system strengthens the relationship between the tomb's custodians, local governance, and the community.

Pilgrims arrive at the tomb with diverse spiritual motivations, including the pursuit of blessing, personal strength, stability, longevity, or well-being for themselves and their families. The pilgrimage functions as a space for collective religious practice, where families or community groups gather to pray, perform ritual ablutions, and commemorate ancestors. In doing so, the pilgrimage reinforces social cohesion, creates shared experiences, and facilitates the intergenerational transmission of cultural and religious values.

The pilgrimage also serves an educational and cultural purpose. The tomb is a site where younger generations learn about local history, ancestral contributions, and spiritual traditions that have been preserved over time. By participating in rituals, observing the pilgrimage's organization, and engaging with custodians and community members, pilgrims gain insight into both religious teachings and local heritage practices. This dual role of spiritual and cultural education positions the tomb not merely as a sacred site, but as a central institution for sustaining community identity, religious continuity, and the cultural memory of the local population.

Discussion

The findings from the study align with and extend the existing literature on pilgrimage and religious tourism by demonstrating that sacred sites play multidimensional roles beyond simplistic religious devotion. For example,

current scholarship recognizes that pilgrimage traditions can empower local communities socially and economically, reinforcing cultural resilience through endogenous practices (Rohanda et al., 2024; Shinde & Olsen, 2022). This study similarly finds that the tomb's history operates not merely as heritage but as a living narrative shaping community identity and spiritual meaning, paralleling research that situates local sacred heritage as central to collective memory and social cohesion. However, unlike global pilgrimage studies that emphasize large, formalized pilgrimages with structured tourism systems, our research reveals how micro-level oral histories and site-specific rituals are equally pivotal in sustaining local spiritual economies and social bonds.

With respect to pilgrimage procedures, the ritual sequence documented in this study reflects structured practices that integrate body, space, and spirituality, resonating with broader findings that pilgrim motivations and ritual actions are complex and influenced by multiple psychosocial factors (Hassan et al., 2023; Liutikas, 2025). While much of the literature focuses on motivational profiles and satisfaction outcomes, our findings emphasize how ritual purification and embodied practices shape pilgrimage meaning at the community level, supporting arguments that pilgrimage is an experiential process rather than merely a travel event. In this sense, the procedure underscores the synergy between traditional ritual logic and lived religious practice reinforcing recent work that pilgrimage experiences cannot be fully understood without considering local symbolic orders and material environments.

The impact of the tomb on the surrounding community confirms the socio-economic spillovers documented in recent pilgrimage research, where religious tourism drives income generation, business opportunities, and hospitality services (DPA (cand.), Emerissa Jane L. Tendero, RN, 2024; Sadiq & Ahmed, 2025). However, our study also offers nuance by showing that impacts are not evenly distributed and depend significantly on community agency, management capacity, and institutional cooperation, as systematic reviews indicate variability in the benefits of religious tourism based on governance and local participation. This study contributes to theory by articulating how informal economic activities such as pilgrim-oriented micro-commerce are embedded within religious practices and reinforce local livelihoods, thereby bridging religious studies and development literature.

The purposes of pilgrimage observed spiritual reflection, ancestral remembrance, and cultural education correspond with broader theoretical frameworks that position religious journeys as agents of identity formation and moral meaning-making (Liutikas, 2025; Tresnawaty & Enok Risdayah, 2025). However, the specific constellation of goals found here suggests that the meaning of pilgrimage is contextually situated: it is shaped by lived histories, communal narratives, and shared values. This underscores a key novelty of the research: rather than depicting pilgrimage as uniform or primarily economic, this study highlights how place-specific meanings co-produce spiritual purpose, cultural continuity, and social interaction within one cohesive interpretive field.

Theoretically, this study advances the literature by integrating sacred history, ritual procedure, community impact, and pilgrimage purpose into a single framework that captures how local sacred sites function as dynamic institutions shaping both collective identity and socio-economic networks. Practically, the study's findings imply that heritage managers and policymakers should adopt participatory, culturally sensitive strategies that valorize intangible heritage, stimulate local entrepreneurship, and balance environmental sustainability with visitor demand. The research's impact lies in its contribution to theories of pilgrimage as lived practice and its potential to inform inclusive community-based tourism models that respect spiritual values while promoting socio-economic resilience.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is that the Tomb of *Mbah Kalibening* functions as a multi-dimensional religious, cultural, social, and economic institution, where historical narratives, ritual practices, pilgrimage procedures, and community engagement collectively sustain spiritual meaning and local identity. The key lesson drawn from this research is the critical role of place-based traditions in reinforcing cultural continuity and fostering social cohesion while simultaneously providing tangible socio-economic benefits through pilgrimage-related activities. The strength of this study lies in its integrated approach, which contributes to academic discourse by linking heritage preservation, spiritual practice, and community-based development within a single analytical framework and offers theoretical and practical insights for religious tourism and intangible cultural heritage management. However, the study is limited by the narrow range of informants and reliance on a single case, which may constrain the generalizability of findings. Future research should expand the sample across multiple sacred sites, incorporate longitudinal observation, and include diverse stakeholder perspectives to strengthen understanding of how local sacred spaces mediate spiritual, social, and economic dynamics.

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