

## Keudah and Peunayong: Traces of melting pot architecture, interior and landscape in Banda Aceh

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article history:</i> Received October 25, 2024 Received in revised form Dec. 11, 2024 Accepted June 14, 2025 Available online August 01, 2025</p> <p><i>Keywords:</i> Architectural history of Aceh Cross-cultural Historical research Melting pot Tolerance</p> <p>*Corresponding author: Muhammad Naufal Fadhil Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia Aceh, Indonesia Email: <a href="mailto:naufalfadhil@isbiaceh.ac.id">naufalfadhil@isbiaceh.ac.id</a> ORCID: <a href="https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0184-999X">https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0184-999X</a></p>	<p><i>According to research findings from a national private institute, Banda Aceh was labelled an intolerant city in 2023 and 2024. The information contrasts the history of Banda Aceh as a cosmopolitan city, featuring numerous architectural artefacts and lesser-known cross-cultural landscapes. This study aims to document the history and current architectural, interior, and landscape conditions of two melting pot settlements in Banda Aceh: Gampong Keudah, also known as the Indian Enclave, and Gampong Peunayong, also referred to as the Chinese Enclave. Historical research, visual archives, and socio-cultural examinations can enrich the conceptualisation and design proposals for the area, thereby facilitating the development of regional spatial plans and improving the tolerance index moving forward. This research employs a historical research methodology that encompasses four primary components: a literature review of historical writings and scholarly articles; an examination of artefacts, including sixteenth- to nineteenth-century maps and Dutch colonial photographs; photographic documentation and architectural surveys of the historic urban landscape (HUL); and the collection of oral histories through interviews. The historical research methodology documented various typologies, including temple exteriors and interiors, marketplace structures, traditional shophouses, and multiethnic cemetery landscapes. These findings demonstrate the persistence of cross-cultural architectural traditions that challenge contemporary perceptions of Banda Aceh's tolerance levels.</i></p>

### Introduction

Banda Aceh City was classified as an intolerant city in 2023, according to surveys conducted by the SETARA Institute on 94 cities in Indonesia. In 2024, Banda Aceh remains listed among the cities that consistently rank in the bottom ten, a trend that has persisted over the years, alongside other cities such as Cilegon, Pekanbaru, and Lhokseumawe (Yosarie et al. 2025). SETARA Institut conducted the Tolerance City Index survey by evaluating eight indicators, including the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan

(RPJMD) (10%), the absence of discriminatory policies (20%), the absence of intolerance events (20%), civil society dynamics (10%), city government public statements (10%), city government real actions (15%), religious heterogeneity (5%), and religious social inclusion (10%) (Yosarie et al. 2024; 2025). The SETARA Institute survey found that Banda Aceh scored well in non-discriminatory policies and the absence of intolerance events. The score implies that Banda Aceh City has maintained a robust inter-religious harmony. However, Banda Aceh City received a relatively poor mark in various

other metrics, including the RPJMD, concrete initiatives undertaken by the city administration, as well as aspects of religious diversity and social inclusion related to belief (Yosarie et al. 2024).

The low scores on these indicators contradict the historical significance and potential of various cross-cultural architectural and landscape heritages that remain largely unrecognised, particularly in Gampong Keudah, an Indian enclave, and Gampong Peunayong, a Chinese enclave, in Banda Aceh. The historical examination of cross-cultural heritage in architecture, interiors, and landscapes presents opportunities for the development of tourist destinations and trails that may enhance tolerance in the future. Creating heritage-based tolerance tourism requires the incorporation of spatial, historical, and socio-economic assessments via stringent historical research approaches.

Between the eighth and nineteenth centuries, Banda Aceh was populated by diverse ethnic groups and religions introduced by migrants along the primary trade route connecting India and China (J. Nichols and Fadhil 2016). Cross-cultural and religious influences are documented in foreign travel records and in architectural and landscape findings that reflect Hindu, Buddhist, and earlier animist traditions (J. C. Nichols, Fong, and Fadhil 2017). During the golden age of the Sultanate of Aceh (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries), architectural and landscape elements from diverse cultures and religions influenced the region's architecture and landscapes. Tiered roof mosque, for example, reflects the concept of the cosmic mountain found in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology (Putri and Muhammad Naufal Fadhil 2023). The relics from the Sultan Iskandar Thani period, including Taman Ghairah and the sultans' tombs, demonstrate significant cross-cultural and multi-religious influences (Fadhil, Putri, and Nichols 2022). This multicultural influence extends beyond architecture to include linguistic diversity, as evidenced by the integration of regional languages into Indonesia's national vocabulary, with Acehnese contributing significantly to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (Wildan et al. 2022).

The relics are primarily located in the historic city centre. Gampong Keudah, situated in Banda Aceh City, is a village within the historical urban area. In the past, Keudah was primarily inhabited by the Tamil Community. The population of Tamils and other ethnic Indians has experienced a decline since the 2004 Tsunami, which resulted in

significant fatalities and migration to other cities, including Medan. The architecture and historic landscape of Kampung Tamil include the Palani Andawer Temple and a multiethnic cemetery in Keudah, which have not been previously examined. East of the river, across from Gampong Keudah, lies the Chinatown of Peunayong, a settlement established by the Chinese community in Banda Aceh. This region features nineteenth-century shophouses, places of worship, and various historical landmarks. Prior studies on urbanism and architecture in the Peunayong region highlighted the importance of organising the area and preserving shophouses to enhance tourism (Safriana 2018; Winarso 2010).

The settlements of Keudah and Peunayong in Banda Aceh demonstrate structural and socio-cultural similarities to George Town, Penang, a UNESCO World Heritage Site recognised for its strategies in conserving multicultural heritage. Both cities emerged as trading hubs during the colonial era, characterised by ethnically distinct enclaves and hybrid architectural forms, including shophouses, temples, and public markets (Che Amat 2018; George Town World Heritage Incorporated 2016). The revitalisation of George Town, which transformed it from an area of economic decline to a heritage tourism centre, underscores the effectiveness of systematic documentation and the adaptive reuse of historic infrastructure (Halim and Tambi 2021). This model is relevant to the tsunami-damaged and neglected multicultural heritage in Banda Aceh.

Current research on George Town's HUL framework highlights urban revitalisation yet falls short in addressing post-disaster heritage recovery and the incorporation of religious pluralism into initiatives aimed at fostering tolerance. The unique context of Banda Aceh, characterised by post-tsunami reconstruction and the current label of religious intolerance, provides an opportunity to enhance theoretical models of multicultural heritage conservation through the analysis of the intersection between communal resilience and formal policy frameworks.

This research aims to map the typology of cross-cultural and cross-religious historic architecture, interior design, and landscapes in these melting-pot areas through a historical research methodology. The integration of historical studies, visual archives, and analyses of cultural, social, and natural contexts can inform future visioning and proposed designs for these areas, thereby supporting the preparation of

regional spatial plans and enhancing tolerance indices. This study serves as a pilot project for developing tolerance tourism rooted in architectural history, with potential applications in other cities across Aceh and Indonesia.

## Methods

This study utilises the historical research method, a systematic approach to investigate past events and their material traces in the built environment (Pasha, Adnan, and Ahmed 2020). This method entails a thorough analysis and interpretation of various sources written, visual, material, and oral to reconstruct the architectural, interior, and landscape history of the multicultural settlements of Gampong Keudah and Gampong Peunayong in Banda Aceh. This research identifies and determines several sources of information and data sets: (a) Literature, particularly historical writings and scholarly articles on Aceh's architecture, interiors, and landscapes; (b) Examination of artefacts, including maps of Aceh from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries and Dutch photographs from the nineteenth century; (c) Collection of photographic data and simulation of the historic built environments through field surveys; and (d) Gathering of historical narrative data regarding architecture and landscapes from the past to the present through interviews with knowledgeable individuals. The respondents included individuals of Chinese and Tamil descendants residing in both villages, as well as the village head (Keuchik Gampong), community leaders, head of the Forum of Religious Harmony (FKUB), priests, worship housekeepers, and tomb keepers.

The research process began with a comprehensive literature review, utilising scholarly works, historical texts, and archival documents pertinent to Aceh's architectural and urban history (Lee 2022). This step created a contextual framework for analysing the evolution of cross-cultural influences in the region's-built environment, as advised for thorough architectural history research (Jadresin Milic et al. 2022).

Subsequently, artefact analysis was conducted through the examination of historical images,

maps, and building parts that have persisted from the 1800s to the 1900s. The typological traits, building techniques, and spatial configurations characteristic of Tamil and Chinese architectural traditions in Banda Aceh were identified through careful documentation and analysis of these material sources. Fieldwork was a crucial component of this process, encompassing the documentation of the current state of significant heritage structures such as cemeteries, temples, and shophouses through measured drawings, photographic records, and contemporary site surveys (Baik and Alshawabkeh 2024; Nakip et al. 2022).

The research included archival and material evidence, as well as oral history interviews with community leaders, caretakers of houses of worship, and long-term residents from both settlements. The interviews yielded significant insights into migration histories, the utilisation and transformation of religious and communal spaces, and the persistence of cultural practices. The combination of oral narratives with documentary and material evidence facilitates a more detailed reconstruction of the social and cultural aspects of architectural heritage, effectively addressing potential gaps or biases in the written record (Gökcü Baz et al. 2024).

## Results and discussion

### Indian Enclave in Gampong Keudah

The Village Head (Keuchik) of Gampong Keudah, Edison, identifies four ethnic Indian heritages in Gampong Keudah: the Palani Andawer Temple, a former Tamil Temple located on Jalan Malem Dagang (currently the Banda Aceh Baitul Mal Office), a former Sikh's Gurdwara (*Mandir*) adjacent to the Palani Andawer Temple (now residential houses and a hotel), and the multiethnic cemetery at Keudah cemetery, which serves as the burial site for ethnic Tamils and Bengalis in Banda Aceh. The residences of Tamils and Bengalis are situated between the temple and the cemetery. Other Tamils reside outside the enclave yet participate in worship at the temples in Keudah Village.



**Figure 1.** Gampong Keudah and Key Points (yellow marks) of the Indian Enclave Centre based on interview results of Keuchik and religious leader  
Source: Edited from satellite imagery of Google Earth 2024

Keudah Banda Aceh is a village characterised by its multiethnic composition. The village is inhabited by the Acehnese, Minangkabau, Javanese, Tamil, Bengali, Malay, and Chinese ethnic groups. The village head states that Tamils inhabited the area before other ethnic groups.

The connection between Tamil and Aceh is initially evident in the discoveries related to the Tamil inscription of Thanjavur, dated to 1030 AD, which features the toponym *Ilāmurideśam* or

Lamuri (Perret 2011). Lamuri was a twelfth- to fifteenth-century kingdom located on Lamreh Hill, Aceh Besar (Daly et al. 2019). Other evidence is the discovery of Tamil inscriptions in 1991 in a mosque in Neusu Village, Banda Aceh (Subbarayalu 2015). The inscription, dating to the eleventh century AD and written in Tamil, exhibits erosion on one side. The inscription is housed at the Aceh Museum (figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Neusu inscription, a Tamil inscribed stone dating back to the 11th century AD

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, Aceh served as a significant trading hub for merchant vessels from South India. The circumstances shifted significantly with the annulment of Aceh's independence guarantee in the 1824 Anglo-Dutch Treaty (also known as the London Treaty) (Reid 2020). Following the Dutch efforts to blockade trade with Aceh, the Chulias (Tamil Muslims) successfully transported approximately 3,600 metric tons of Areca Nut from Pidie, Aceh, to India. In 1873, the outbreak of war resulted in the cessation of trade between the Chulias and Aceh (Reid 2020).

Panglima Muhammad Tibang was a notable Tamil figure in Aceh, distinct from the Chulias. He was an intelligent Hindu individual who converted to Islam and assisted Aceh during the conflict with the Dutch (Deliana 2018). Sultan Ibrahim and Sultan Mahmud entrusted him with representing Aceh to pursue British and American protection in Singapore during the years 1872 and 1873 (Reid 2020).

Another narrative involves Subrahmanyam, a Hindu priest and traditional healer (*tabib*) who migrated from his native Tamil Nadu in the late nineteenth century to Banda Aceh. Subrahmanyam provided treatment to individuals in Banda Aceh, including both residents and visitors from outside the city. Subrahmanyam subsequently adopted Rasoe, the son of a patient who passed away in Banda Aceh during treatment. Rasoe, born in Binjai (North Sumatra) in 1912, was the offspring of a Tamil couple who had migrated to North Sumatra earlier. Rasoe subsequently entered into marriage with Taimah,

an immigrant from Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu, who arrived in Aceh in the early twentieth century. Several of their descendants continue to reside in Aceh today.

Pandita Rada Krishna, a religious leader in Banda Aceh, states that his grandparents were born in Banda Aceh. Their family is likely the longest-surviving Tamil family in Gampong Keudah.

#### Temple Architecture in Keudah

In 1934, a group of Tamil immigrants established a temple in Gampong Keudah. The temple is referred to as the Palani Andawer Temple. This temple was established not by a single individual or founding figure but by a collective of Tamils. Rada Krishna identifies several founding figures, including her grandfather, grandmother, and other Tamil immigrants residing in Keudah. The temple shares its name with the Vadapalani Andavar Temple in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. The initial immigrants responsible for constructing the Palani Andawer Temple might have originated from that location.

Palani Andawer Temple is dedicated to Lord Murugan. Lord Murugan, also known as Kartikeya, is recognised as the Hindu deity associated with warfare. Lord Murugan, referred to as the Lord of the Palani Hills, is associated with the mountain range located in Southern India. The name serves as the foundation for the designation of the Palani Andawer Temple, which translates to the Temple of Lord Palani (Hill) in Tamil.

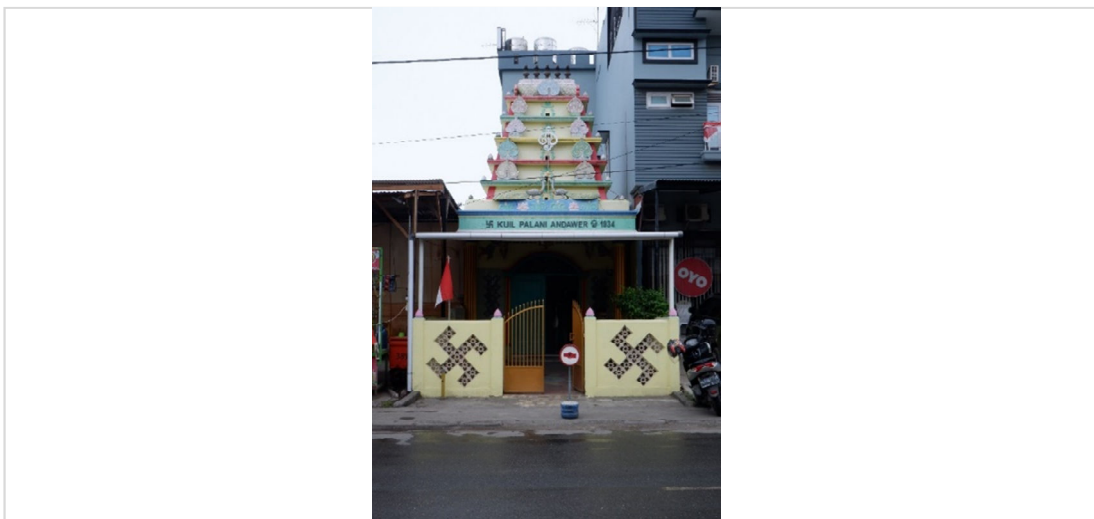


Figure 3. Exterior of Palani Andawer Temple Banda Aceh

Rada Krishna states that the temple structure was originally built of wood prior to the tsunami. Another informant, Tanda Bani, son of Rasoe, confirmed that the temple was constructed of wood; however, prior to the tsunami, renovations had commenced using masonry materials alongside some wood, indicating a semi-permanent structure. During its construction in wood, the temple featured relief carvings crafted from wooden planks.

The 2004 tsunami disaster destroyed the semi-permanent Palani Andawer Temple, along with the loss of all its contents in the tsunami waters. The temple reconstruction commenced in 2006 and was completed six years later. The reinforced concrete temple was inaugurated in 2012 and has been in official use by Hindus in Banda Aceh since then. The artisans responsible for constructing the temple originated from Medan City. The artisans were selected due to their expertise in carving reliefs in diverse places of worship.

The new temple features a Gopuram, the tallest component of the entrance, characterised by its distinctive exterior colours. The Gopuram section serves as a ceremonial gateway and is a prominent feature of South Indian temples (Sharma et al. 2019). The Gopuram in Aceh differs from those typically seen in South India, the Malay Peninsula, or the Sri Mariamman Temple in Medan, as it is adorned with carvings and ornaments rather than statues of deities. Two peacock statues, positioned on lotus flowers, are situated at the forefront of the gopuram's gunung (mountain-like structure) (see figure 3). The temple's name and year of construction are located at the base of the gopuram.

The Palani Andawer Temple has dimensions of 5 by 12 meters. The temple contains a primary altar with an offering altar positioned in front of it. The primary altar features a central statue of Lord Murugan, flanked by statues of Lord Ganesha on the left and Lord Yama on the right.



Figure 4. Interior of Palani Andawer Temple Banda Aceh

Prior to 1934, Tamils were actively engaged in constructing temples in Banda Aceh. In 1521, Joao de Borba, a Portuguese captain, documented his visit to Aceh, noting the presence of a significant pagan temple renowned for its gold

(Fadhil, Putri, and Nichols 2022). No additional information is available regarding the temple; however, it is evident that multiple temples of different sizes were constructed in Aceh prior to Palani Andawer.

In the Keudah area, in addition to the Palani Andawer Temple, there existed the Siwen or Shiva Temple. The Shiva Temple, constructed in 1925, was the oldest in Keudah Banda Aceh. The temple, covering an area of 600 square meters, was built using wood. The temple was dismantled prior to the 2004 Tsunami due to the deteriorating condition of its wooden structure, rendering it unfit for use. The temple was not reconstructed following the tsunami. The temple site was subsequently transferred to the Aceh Government, which constructed the Banda Aceh Baitul Mal Building. Pandita and Keuchik Keudah assert that the land ownership transfer occurred through a mutual agreement between the Aceh Government and the Hindu community in Aceh.

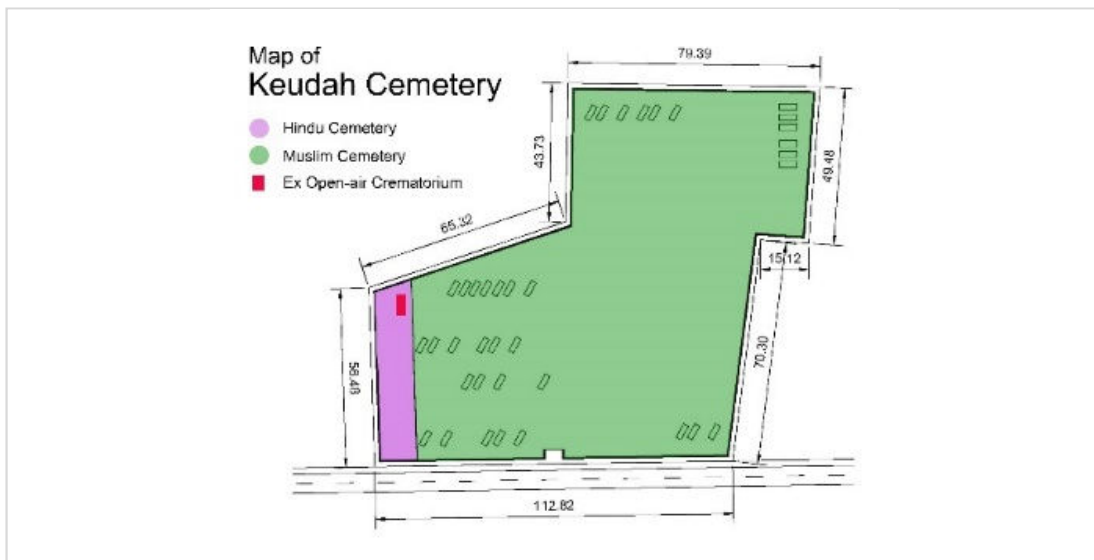
Alongside the Siwen Temple, adjacent to the Palani Andawer Temple, a Gurdwara or Mandir once existed. The Gurdwara serves as a place of worship for Sikhs in Banda Aceh. The Gurdwara was initially a residence for Bengalis and was subsequently repurposed as a place of worship. During the 2004 tsunami, the Gurdwara was destroyed. The building remained unreconstructed because the owner, who also acted as its caretaker, relocated to Medan City.

The former vacant Gurdwara site has been sold and converted into residential and commercial properties, including houses and a hotel.

#### Keudah Cemetery

Keudah Cemetery contains a landscape characterised by multiethnic graves alongside its architectural heritage. The cemetery is presently in a state of neglect, primarily due to the deaths of most families with relatives interred there during the 2004 Tsunami disaster, while others have migrated to Medan City. The Palani Andawer Temple currently manages the cemetery. The responsibility for grave maintenance lies with each family. The Keudah cemetery is presently located within the administrative boundaries of Gampong Peulanggahan, a village that borders Keudah. This cemetery serves as the final resting place for Aceh Tamils, including Subrahmanyam, Rasoe, Taimah, and Rada Krishna's grandparents, as well as their relatives.

The Keudah Multiethnic Cemetery consists of two parts separated by a fence (figure 5). The Muslim graveyard is located in the east of the cemetery. The smaller Hindu section is in the southwest. Both Tamils and Bengalis are buried in this small part.



**Figure 5.** Division of Keudah Multiethnic Cemetery

The cemetery is now overgrown with shrubs and floods during heavy rains (figure 6). The tsunami has destroyed most of the graves. One of the surviving old Tamil graves belongs to P. Ratinam, who passed away on May 28, 1934. The

tomb is constructed from black stone, and the name plaque is crafted from white marble. The name features a Tamil inscription at the top. (figure 7).



**Figure 6.** Current Condition of Keudah Multiethnic Cemetery



**Figure 7.** Old Tomb of P. Ratinam

Before the tsunami, the graves were still neatly arranged in the Tamil cemetery. Some graves were made of black stone, while others were covered with ceramics of various colours. A significant white tomb was situated at the easternmost part of the cemetery, adjacent to an antiquated gravestone that had been obscured by pavement from street expansion. On the south

side of the large tomb is an open-air cremation ground commonly used by Bengalis. It is rarely used by Tamils as most Tamils in Banda Aceh bury their family members in this cemetery. After the Tsunami disaster, the cremation ground was not rebuilt. The condition of the cemetery, as recalled by the author and interviewees in 2002, is depicted in [figure 8](#).



**Figure 8.** Simulation of the Keudah Multiethnic Cemetery in 2002 prior to the tsunami disaster

#### Chinese enclave in Peunayong

According to Sharifuddin Adi, Keuchik of Peunayong, the origin of the term Peunayong remains unclear. There are three perspectives on the origin of the name Peunayong. The predominant oral history of the town originates from the term Pelayung (*Bahasa Indonesia*: umbrella holder), signifying its role in providing shelter to all foreign communities. The rarely discussed narrative originates from the anchoring of Jung's boat in the area. Acehnese frequently asked whether the Jung Boat had docked there, posing the question, 'Peu Na Jong?' (Acehnese: "Is there a Jung boat?"). Chinese folks who did not recognise the language interpreted the word as the name of the place where they arrived. The term "Peu Na Jong" was subsequently used to identify the location, which was later altered to "Peunayong." The third hypothesis is based on the name Pedayung (*Bahasa Indonesia*: boat peddlers) since there are numerous boat peddlers in this area (Arif 2008).

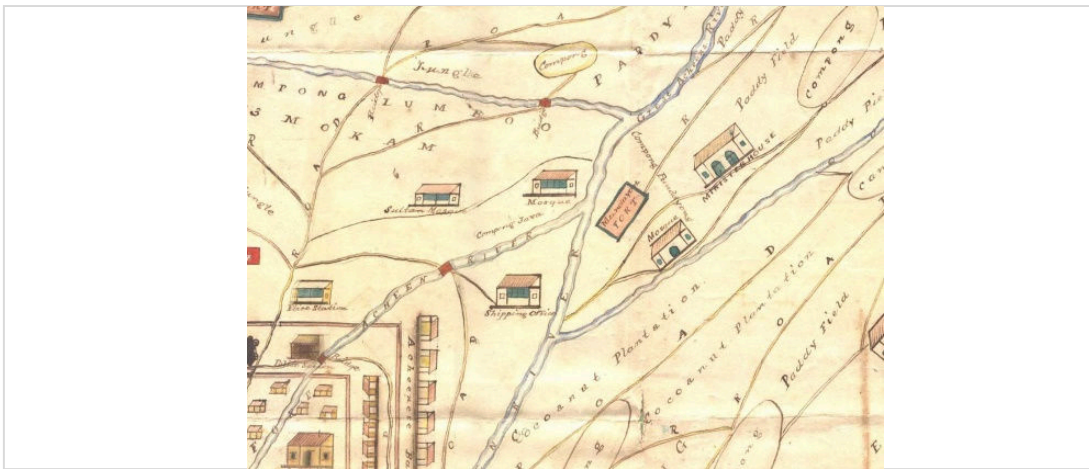
The Chinese village was initially established in the coastal area of Ulee Lheue, Banda Aceh. The establishment of the first two temples in Pantai Cermin Ulee Lheue, Vihara (temple) or Tua Pek Kong Dharma Bhakti in 1878 and Vihara Dewi Samudera in 1947, serves as evidence of this development. In 1947, Vihara Dewi Samudera was established behind the Ulee Lheue Mosque, as reported by the temple's management. This phenomenon indicates that religious

harmony and tolerance have existed for a long time, even in the coastal villages of Banda Aceh, as evidenced by the adjacent places of worship. Prior to the 2004 Tsunami disaster, several Bong or ethnic Chinese graves in the area were beginning to submerge in water.

Chinese immigrants lived in temporary huts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in an estuarine village. According to the interviewees, the village is most likely Ulee Lheue. During Iskandar Thani's rule in 1638, the sultanate forbade Chinese people from entering and living in Aceh because they raised pigs in their yards (Reid and Ito 1999). The Chinese Quarter in Banda Aceh was first depicted on a seventeenth-century Dutch map created by De Vlamingh, also known as the Florence Map of Aceh (Fadhil and Nichols 2025). In September 1642, Sultana Safiat Al-Din appeared to have extended an invitation for the Chinese to return to Aceh, as noted in the Dutch map (Reid and Ito 1999). They were moved from the estuarine village and positioned near the sultanate's centre upon their return to Aceh (Fadhil 2020; Fadhil and Nichols 2025). This area was later developed into today's Peunayong, which is located next to the former sultanate centre. Chinatowns in Peunayong and Pantai Cermin seem to have developed alongside one another until sea erosion forced the Chinese residents of Pantai Cermin to relocate to Peunayong at the beginning of the twentieth century.

A later Dutch map, prepared in 1873 based on information from a traitor, depicted Kampung

Peudayong in the southern section of the palace (figure 9) (Fadhil and Fakhria 2021).



**Figure 9.** Part of the Dutch map of Banda Aceh from 1873, featuring the sultanate palace located in the bottom left and Peunayong village positioned centrally  
Source: (Fadhil and Fakhria 2021)

The oldest section of Peunayong is located on Jalan Kartini and Ahmad Yani. These sections were formerly a collection of shopping areas that have retained their original character. The historical shophouse structure persists in Jalan Kartini (figure 11) and Jalan Ahmad Yani (figure 12). A photograph from 1873 depicts the Peunayong area, likely identified as Jalan Kartini, featuring a wooden structure shophouses. During the initial period of the Dutch presence in Banda Aceh at the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of shophouses were single-story structures made predominantly of wood, with the

wood used in both their framework and exterior cladding (Dewi et al. 2022). In the early 20th century, shophouses were predominantly renovated or reconstructed to feature two stories. Following the renovation, the structure was modified to feature a reinforced concrete frame complemented by brick masonry walls. This shophouse variant is prevalent in the historical urban areas of Peninsular Malaysia, including Penang, Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore. The shophouses feature a five-foot pedestrianised frontage known as the 'five-foot way' or *kaki lima* (Harding 2018).



**Figure 10.** Peunayong in 1873  
Source: KITLV 1873



**Figure 11.** Old shophouses at Jalan Kartini, Peunayong



**Figure 12.** Merchandise displayed in the five-foot way of the Old Shophouses on Jalan Ahmad Yani

A market is located within Peunayong, situated between Jalan Kartini and Jalan TWK Daudsyah. The market initially served as a gathering location for residents of the row houses in Chinese Enclave. The increase in trading activities led to the development of the area into a market. The government constructed a roof to shelter the market located on this narrow street as

part of the Aceh Hakka Community initiative. The roof features red lanterns and a gate inscribed with the words "*Kampung Keberagaman*" (Indonesia: Multicultural Village). Peunayong's Acehnese-Chinese residents prefer the term 'Kampung Keberagaman' over 'Chinatown' to reflect the area's multiculturalism.



**Figure 13.** Sunday morning at Pasar Keberagaman Peunayong

The head of the Yayasan Hakka Aceh, Kho Kie Siong (Pak Akhie), stated that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, overcrowding in Peunayong prompted Chinese immigrants, who arrived annually to seek alternative locations in Banda Aceh due to the unavailability of land in Peunayong. They then established small communities in Kampung Baru (Pasar Aceh) and Teuku Umar Street, Gampong Setui Banda Aceh.

#### Temple architecture in Peunayong

The temples (viharas) are located in neighbouring villages that border Peunayong. Vihara Sakyamuni, Vihara Dewi Samudera, and Vihara Maitri are situated in Mulia Village. Vihara Dharma Bhakti is located in Laksana Village. Vihara Dharma Bhakti, founded in 1878, is the oldest Vihara in Banda Aceh. The second oldest viharas are Vihara Dewi Samudera, founded in 1947, and Vihara Maitri, built in the 1940s. The latest Vihara built in Banda Aceh is Vihara Buddha Sakyamuni, which was completed in 1960. Vihara Dharma Bhakti was constructed in Ulee Lheue in 1878. The building remained in use until 1936. Sea water abrasion led to the abandonment of the Vihara and the old Chinese

enclave. In 1936, the Vihara relocated to a Hokkien Association Inn in Peunayong. Yuswar, Chairman of the Dharma Bhakti Foundation and head of the Forum of Religious Harmony (FKUB) Buddhist Chapter, stated that his grandparents were born in Banda Aceh and served as caretakers of the Hokkien Inn in 1936. His grandmother was employed as a seamstress for mosquito nets, and his grandfather was the innkeeper. The inn served as temporary accommodation for newly arrived Chinese individuals in Aceh who had not yet secured permanent housing. The building was subsequently developed into Tua Pek Kong Temple.

Similar to other structures in Banda Aceh, the Vihara was constructed using wood and featured a tin roof. The building is entirely painted red, consistent with the architectural style prevalent in Peunayong. In Chinese culture, the colour red holds a significant status, symbolising prosperity (Xu 2024). The wooden building was demolished in 1977 due to its damaged and weathered condition, and it was replaced with a reinforced concrete structure, which remains today. The temple was finalised and officially opened in 1978.

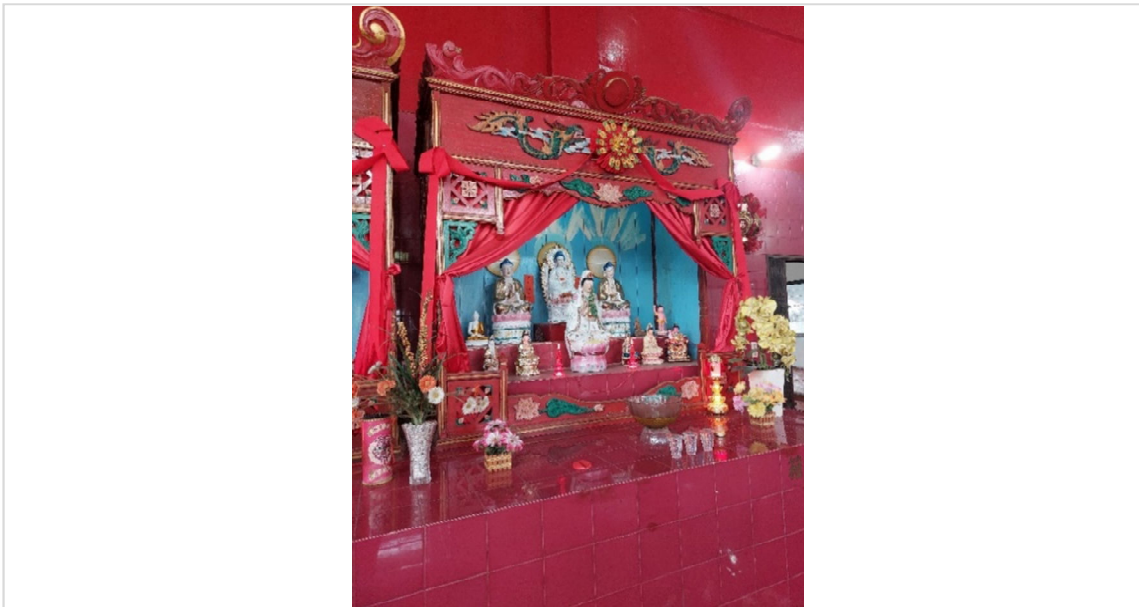


**Figure 14.** The interior of Vihara Dharma Bhakti

In addition to Dharma Bhakti, the Vihara Dewi Samudera was founded in Ulee Lheue in 1947. Vihara Dewi Samudera was established by immigrants from Hainan, who are closely associated with maritime activities. During their journey to Aceh, the Hainanese transported a statue of Dewi Machu, the Goddess of the Ocean, aboard their vessel. Upon their arrival in Aceh, they constructed a temple and placed the statue of Dewi Machu within it.

The vihara structure was initially constructed from wood; however, due to issues related to abrasion, it was relocated to Peunayong. The relocation occurred in 1957. In Peunayong, the

Vihara, which was originally constructed from wood, was situated on Jalan Pocut Baren, Gampong Mulia, Banda Aceh. The Vihara was subsequently relocated to its present site at the end of Jalan T. Panglima Polem. The structure at that site was constructed in 1993, coinciding with the new Sakka year. The information is inscribed on the stone table located in front of the altar. The altar house, where the statue of Dewi Samudera is located, was constructed in 1957 and has since suffered damage due to termites. The Dewi Samudera Foundation intends to undertake renovations of the altar house in the near future.



**Figure 15.** The altar house at Vihara Dewi Samudera

### Comparative summary of Gampong Keudah and Gampong Peunayong

The historical research findings indicate that the two areas exhibit distinct yet complementary

characteristics in shaping the multicultural identity of Banda Aceh. This table summarises the location, historic urban landscape, historical narratives, and socio-cultural and natural contexts of the two areas for a comprehensive comparison.

Aspect	Gampong Keudah (Indian enclave)	Gampong Peunayong (Chinese enclave)
Historic Location	Kuta Raja District, Banda Aceh: On the western bank of the Krueng Aceh River, adjacent to Gampong Peulanggahan.	Kuta Alam District, Banda Aceh; located across the river from Keudah, on the eastern bank of the Krueng Aceh River, and includes Jalan Kartini and Jalan Ahmad Yani.
Architectural Heritage of Religious Significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Palani Andawer Temple (1934, reconstruction 2012).</li> <li>Former Siwen/Shiva Temple (1925-before 2004).</li> <li>Former Sikh Gurdwara (destroyed by 2004 Tsunami).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vihara Dharma Bhakti (1878).</li> <li>Vihara Dewi Samudera (1947).</li> <li>Vihara Maitri (1940s).</li> <li>Vihara Buddha Sakyamuni (1960).</li> </ul>
Other Architectural Heritage	Tamil and Bengali residences are situated alongside temples and Keudah Cemetery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Historic shophouses on Jalan Kartini and Jalan Ahmad Yani.</li> <li>Pasar Keberagaman (Multicultural Market) between the historic shophouses.</li> <li>'Five-foot way' on the shophouses</li> </ul>
Multicultural Urban Landscape Heritage	Keudah Multiethnic Cemetery features graves of Tamil, Bengali, and Muslim communities.	A traditional trading area characterised by narrow streets and alleyways, typical of Chinatown.
Historical Narratives and Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Tamil-Aceh connection dates back to the 11th century, as evidenced by the Thanjavur inscription from 1030 AD.</li> <li>11th-century Tamil inscription in Neusu.</li> <li>The role of Panglima Muhammad Tibang.</li> <li>Subrahmanyam migration in the late 19th century.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existence dates back to the 16th and 17th centuries.</li> <li>Settlement and trade were prohibited during the reign of Iskandar Thani (1638-1641) and were later re-invited during the reign of Sultana Safiyat al-Din (1641-1675).</li> <li>Documented in Dutch maps from 1645 and 1873.</li> <li>Centre for a trade involving Jung boats.</li> </ul>
Socio-Cultural Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diverse community comprising Tamil, Bengali, Acehnese, Minangnese, Javanese, Malay, and Chinese populations.</li> <li>Collaborative involvement in religious festivals.</li> <li>The Tamil language is utilised in tomb inscriptions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chinese culture is characterised by its multi-tribal composition, including groups such as Hakka (Khe), Hokkien, and Hainan.</li> <li>Residents prefer the term 'Kampung Keberagaman' to 'Chinatown' to emphasize the region's multiculturalism.</li> <li>The symbol of prosperity is represented by the colour red.</li> </ul>
Natural Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The cemetery flooded during heavy rain and is now overgrown with bushes.</li> <li>Impact of the 2004 tsunami on the structure and landscape.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dense trading area.</li> <li>Coastal abrasion that led to the relocation of the estuarine village of Ulee Lheue.</li> <li>Impact of the 2004 tsunami on the structure and landscape.</li> </ul>
Dominant Building Typology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A temple with a Gopuram without deity statues.</li> <li>Black stone and white marble graves.</li> <li>The wooden temple was constructed prior to the 2004 tsunami and rebuilt as a concrete structure afterward.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two-story shop house with a five-foot way.</li> <li>Viharas with distinctive red colour.</li> <li>Traditional market in the alleyways.</li> <li>Shophouse with Peranakan architectural style.</li> </ul>

### Conclusions

This historical research methodology has provided concrete evidence of Banda Aceh's multicultural heritage, which contests contemporary views of the city as intolerant. The research identified specific architectural typologies within the two settlements in Keudah

Village: (1) the Palani Andawer Temple, characterised by South Indian design elements and gopuram with peacock and floral elements without deity statues; (2) a multiethnic cemetery landscape exemplifying religious coexistence; in Peunayong: (1) historic shophouses featuring five-foot ways; and (2) Multicultural marketplace in the alleyways, alongside (3) various viharas

reflecting Chinese architectural traditions. The physical remnants serve as lasting monuments to Banda Aceh's history as a cosmopolitan trading center where various ethnic and religious communities coexisted.

In light of these findings, the following policy interventions are recommended: first, the formal integration of cross-cultural sites into Banda Aceh's Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) with designated protection status; second, the creation of a Heritage Conservation Board comprising representatives from all religious communities to supervise restoration and maintenance; and third, the adoption of a Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) framework akin to that of George Town, Penang, which includes adaptive reuse strategies for historic structures. The proposed policy mechanisms aim to rectify the deficiencies highlighted in the SETARA Institute report, utilising the city's multicultural architectural heritage to enhance tolerance metrics.

The recorded heritage sites should be transformed into an integrated "Tolerance Tourism Trail" linking both enclaves through informative signs, cultural events, and guided walking tours. This initiative requires the installation of multilingual heritage interpretation panels at significant sites, the development of a digital application that maps the cultural landscape of both enclaves, the implementation of regular interfaith cultural festivals in these historic locations, and the training of local guides from various communities. This tourism development plan would protect architectural heritage while promoting religious and cultural understanding, transforming these physical places into catalysts for enhanced social inclusion and tolerance in modern Banda Aceh.

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#### Author(s) contribution

**Muhammad Naufal Fadhil** contributed to the research concepts preparation, methodologies, investigations, data analysis, visualization, articles drafting and revisions.

**Aji Sofiana Putri** contribute to the research concepts preparation and literature reviews, data analysis, of article drafts preparation and validation.

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