

## CHINESE-ISLAMIC CULTURAL CONTACT IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF BABAH ALUN MOSQUE: VISUALISING MULTICULTURAL DA'WAH AS INITIAL INTERACTION

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### Kata kunci:

Komunikasi Lintas Budaya, Kontak Budaya, Masjid Babah Alun, Visualisasi Dakwah

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara mendalam bagaimana visualisasi dakwah di Masjid Babah Alun berperan sebagai bentuk interaksi budaya dalam masyarakat multikultural. Dengan menggunakan teori Race Relation Cycle, penelitian ini berfokus pada tahap "kontak" sebagai fase awal terjadinya pertemuan antara kelompok berbeda budaya yang menciptakan ruang interaksi sosial dan spiritual. Masjid Babah Alun menjadi representasi menarik karena berada pada persilangan budaya Tionghoa dan Islam yang melebur dalam ekspresi visual dakwah. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi partisipatif terhadap pengelola masjid, guru, siswa, serta masyarakat sekitar. Analisis data dilakukan secara tematik dengan menyoroti tiga unsur utama tahap kontak, yaitu kontak primer dan sekunder, konflik persaingan impersonal, serta ambisi kolektif. Hasil temuan memperlihatkan bahwa simbol-simbol visual pada arsitektur masjid, seperti ornamen Tionghoa, penggunaan warna merah, dan kaligrafi bergaya aksara Cina, tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai elemen estetis, tetapi juga menjadi medium komunikasi lintas budaya. Meskipun sempat menimbulkan rasa asing di kalangan jamaah, unsur tersebut justru menghasilkan dialog sosial yang memperkuat toleransi dan penghargaan terhadap perbedaan. Ambisi kolektif dari komunitas sekolah dan masyarakat sekitar mencerminkan kesadaran bersama untuk menjadikan masjid sebagai ruang dakwah inklusif, tempat pertemuan budaya yang damai dan sinergis. Secara teoritis dan praktis, penelitian ini memperkaya khazanah studi komunikasi dakwah dan sosiologi budaya melalui pemahaman bahwa visualisasi dapat menjadi media dakwah nonverbal yang efektif, adaptif, serta menggambarkan nilai Islam sebagai rahmat bagi seluruh alam.

### Keywords:

Babah Alun Mosque, Cross-cultural Communication, Cultural Contact, Visualisation of Da'wah

### Abstract

This research aims to examine in depth how the visualisation of da'wah at Babah Alun Mosque acts as a form of cultural interaction in a multicultural society. Using the Race Relation Cycle theory, this research focuses on the "contact" stage as the initial phase of the encounter between different cultural groups that creates a space for social and spiritual interaction. Babah Alun Mosque is an interesting representation because it is at the crossroads of Chinese and Islamic cultures that merge in the visual expression of da'wah. This research uses a qualitative method with a case study approach through in-depth interviews and participatory observation of mosque managers, teachers, students, and the surrounding community. Data analysis was done thematically by highlighting three main elements of the contact stage, namely primary and secondary contact, impersonal competitive conflict, and collective ambition. The findings show that visual symbols in the mosque's architecture, such as Chinese ornaments, the use of red colour, and Chinese script-style calligraphy, not only function as aesthetic elements, but also as a medium for cross-cultural communication. While these elements may cause a sense of unfamiliarity among the congregation, they generate social dialogue that strengthens tolerance and respect for differences. The collective ambition of the school community and the surrounding community reflects a shared awareness to make the mosque an inclusive da'wah space, a place of peaceful and synergistic cultural encounters. Theoretically and



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*practically, this research enriches the treasures of da'wah communication studies and cultural sociology through an understanding that visualisation can be an effective, adaptive, nonverbal da'wah medium that illustrates the value of Islam as a mercy for all nature.*

## INTRODUCTION

The era of society 5.0 has brought about profound changes in the way humans interact, communicate and express cultural identity. The development of digital technology and visual media has made public space a complex multicultural communication arena, where symbols, colours and shapes become a universal language that transcends verbal boundaries. In the context of Islamic da'wah, visual approaches are becoming increasingly relevant, especially in heterogeneous and dynamic urban environments. Da'wah is no longer only delivered through lectures and writings, but also through spatial aesthetics and cultural symbols that can be interpreted across identities (I. Ansusa Putra et al., 2021).

The Babah Alun Mosque, located in South Jakarta and Central Jakarta, is a concrete example of this phenomenon. Its architecture combines elements of Islam and Chinese culture, such as oriental-style Arabic calligraphy and red lanterns, creating a strong visual appeal and a starting point for cultural interaction (Aziz et al., 2022). The mosque's design serves not only as a place of worship, but also as a nonverbal preaching medium that conveys messages of tolerance and unity through aesthetic symbols (Fireza et al., 2025).

This research is important because scientific studies on da'wah visualisation in the perspective of cross-cultural communication are still minimal. Most previous studies emphasise the architectural aspects or historical value of the mosque, without examining in depth how visual elements can be an effective means of da'wah in building initial cultural contact. Wahyu's research (2022) on Cheng Hoo Mosque in Purbalingga, for example, highlights cultural acculturation in mosque architecture, but has not explicitly linked it to intercultural communication theories such as the Race Relation Cycle (Aziz et al., 2022).

In this study, Robert Ezra Park's Race Relation Cycle theory approach is used specifically in the first stage, namely contact. This stage explains how initial encounters between cultural groups create curiosity, sympathy and social interactions that form the basis of cross-cultural relationships. The cultural contact that occurred at Babah Alun Mosque, both through direct and symbolic interactions, became the starting point of identity negotiations between the Muslim and Chinese communities, as well as urban communities in general (Ng et al., 2024).

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the visualisation of da'wah as a form of initial cultural contact in cross-cultural communication. This research not only examines mosque architecture as an aesthetic object, but also as a medium of da'wah that is able to bridge cultural differences and create inclusive spaces for multicultural societies. By combining the visual communication approach and intercultural relations theory, this research offers a new perspective in contemporary da'wah studies (Marfu'ah, 2017).

This research aims to examine how the visualisation of da'wah at Babah Alun Mosque becomes the starting point of cultural interaction through primary and secondary contact, how conflicts of perception of Chinese cultural symbols are managed by the school community and DKM, and how the collective ambition of the community encourages the formation of inclusive and communicative multicultural worship spaces (Ain, 2023).

## METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, which aims to deeply understand the phenomenon of da'wah visualisation as a form of early cultural contact in the architecture of Babah Alun Mosque. Case studies were chosen because they allow contextual exploration of the social and symbolic interactions that occur in multicultural worship spaces. According to Yusanto, this approach is suitable for investigating activities or events that are limited by a certain time and place, and allows in-depth data collection through various techniques (Yoki Yusanto, 2020).

The research subjects consisted of mosque managers (DKM), PAI teachers, Muslim and non-Muslim students, the surrounding community, and visitors to Babah Alun Desari Mosque and Babah Alun At-Taqwa Mosque. The selection of subjects was carried out purposively, namely based on the consideration that they have experience and knowledge relevant to the phenomenon under study. The object of the research is the architecture and visual symbols of the mosque as a nonverbal da'wah media that reflects the cultural contact between Islam and Chinese (Gunawan et al., 2023).

The main research instruments were in-depth interviews and participatory observation. Interviews were conducted directly with the specified informants, as listed in the interviewee transcripts (Rijali, 2018). Observations were made by observing people's interactions with the visual elements of the mosque, including responses to design, ornaments, and religious activities. Visual documentation such as photographs and field notes were also used to strengthen primary data. These data collection techniques refer to the methods described by Yona (2006), who emphasise the importance of data triangulation in qualitative research.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach based on (Robert Ezra Park, 1964) theory Race Relation Cycle, particularly at the contact stage. Data were analysed through a process of reduction, categorisation and interpretation of narratives that emerged from interviews and observations. The researcher identified key themes relating to cultural contact, such as first impressions, symbolic acceptance, and initial social interaction. This analysis draws on Park's model and is reinforced by contemporary studies on visual communication in multicultural public spaces, as described in the Scopus article *Visual Communication and Religious Identity in Multicultural Mosques*, which can be accessed via the following link: Scopus Record.

## RESULT

The results show that the first impression of Babah Alun Mosque is strongly influenced by its unconventional visual appearance. Many interviewees mentioned that the mosque's design resembles a temple with red colours and Chinese ornaments. Some respondents such as Gunawan and Nayla stated that they immediately associated the design with Chinese culture Nayla (2025) and feel attracted to stop by because of its unique appearance and different from other mosques in general (Gunawan, 2025).

Most of the interviewees mentioned that the visualisation of the mosque was the initial trigger for social interaction. Daffa, an employee of Podjok Halal, said that non-Muslim visitors often ask about the activities inside the mosque, showing curiosity and interest in the symbols displayed by Daffa (2025). Mr Suwarta, (2025) also mentioned that outsiders have started to come for Friday prayers at the school mosque, which was not the case before. This shows that the visualisation of the mosque plays a role in opening social access and expanding the reach of da'wah

Some interviewees mentioned that the design of the mosque did not cause any discomfort, even though it initially felt unfamiliar (Suroto, 2025). Audrey (2025) and Nabila (2025) stated that they are not bothered by the Chinese cultural symbols, and even feel proud that the mosque was built by Chinese Muslim figures. Muhammad Jidan (2025) mentioned that the Chinese and Arabic ornaments in the mosque made him feel that Islam can be conveyed through various cultural forms.

In the context of education, the mosque is used as a centre for Rohis activities and student character building. Activities such as mentoring, dhikr together, and commemoration of Islamic holidays are carried out regularly in the mosque (Anwar Sadat2025). Jovian Kolonica Tjahyadi (2025), non-Muslim students, mentioned that the mosque is also used for student council activities and school events, showing that this worship space is inclusive and multifunctional.

Most interviewees mentioned that the location of the mosque is quite strategic and easy to reach, especially since it is near the toll road. This makes the mosque frequently visited by road users who want to worship or just take a break anonym (2025). Several interviewees mentioned that the mosque's design has become an attraction for passers-by, and is even used as a location for podcasts, adhan shoots, and charity events (Suroto, 2025).

In terms of cultural acceptance, the majority of interviewees mentioned that Chinese cultural elements in mosque design are not a problem. They said that the important thing is that the mosque functions as a place of worship, and cultural symbols do not interfere with the faith. Several interviewees mentioned that lectures at the mosque often touch on issues of tolerance and diversity, indicating that the visualisation of the mosque is also used as preaching material.

The results show that the visualisation of da'wah at Babah Alun Mosque acts as a starting point for cultural interaction. The visual elements of the mosque not only attract attention, but also open space for dialogue, expand social access, and form a new understanding of Islam that is inclusive and adaptive to cultural diversity (Basri et al., 2021).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **A. Primary and Secondary Contacts in the Da'wah Visualisation of Babah Alun Mosque**

Primary and secondary contact are two forms of initial interaction in the Race Relation Cycle theory which explains how intercultural relationships are formed through direct and symbolic encounters. (Logan, 2020). At Babah Alun Mosque, primary contact occurs through the physical presence of cross-cultural people who come to worship, visit, or interact with the school community. Interviewees such as Gunawan (2025) and Nayla (2025) mentioned that

the mosque's temple-like design and red colour triggered their interest in stopping by. This interaction is direct and emotional, forming a strong first impression of Chinese cultural symbols in an Islamic worship space.

Secondary contact occurs through visual symbols that convey messages without direct interaction. Chinese ornaments, oriental-style Arabic calligraphy, and mosque architectural forms become nonverbal communication media that convey values of tolerance and diversity (Basri et al., 2021). Daffa, an employee of Podjok Halal, mentioned that non-Muslim visitors often ask about activities inside the mosque, suggesting that the visualisation of the mosque serves as a proselytisation tool that reaches cross-religious and cultural audiences. Hall emphasises that in intercultural communication, nonverbal elements such as colours and shapes have deep symbolic meanings and can effectively convey messages across identities (Edwards et al., 2020).

Research by Vonneilich (2022) in *Social Networks and Health Inequalities* mentions that social contact is the basis of community life and plays an important role in shaping inclusive social relationships. In the context of Babah Alun Mosque, primary and secondary contacts complement each other in forming an open and harmonious social network. Direct interaction between students, teachers, the surrounding community, and visitors from various backgrounds shows that this mosque has become an effective space for cultural encounters.

A Scopus study titled *Visual Communication and Religious Identity in Multicultural Mosques* also confirms that visual symbols in mosque architecture can be a starting point for the formation of an inclusive collective identity. This article can be accessed through the following link: [Scopus Record](#). This research supports the findings at Babah Alun Mosque, where cultural contact not only occurs physically, but also symbolically and emotionally, shaping a new understanding of Islam that is open and adaptive.

Primary and secondary contacts at Babah Alun Mosque play an important role in building cross-cultural interactions. Through a communicative and symbolic visual approach, the mosque is not only a place of worship, but also a da'wah space that strengthens the values of tolerance and social harmony (Junaeny et al., 2024).

## **B. Impersonal Competition Conflict in Visual Perception of Babah Alun Mosque**

Impersonal competitive conflict in Robert Ezra Park (1964) theory refers to a form of competition that is not personal, but arises from differences in values, symbols, or perceptions between cultural groups. At the Babah Alun Mosque, this conflict comes in the form of doubts and questions from the community about the mosque's unconventional design. Some interviewees mentioned that the mosque's temple-like appearance had raised questions, especially regarding the authenticity of the Islamic identity it represents (Echa, 2025).

This conflict did not develop into resistance because of the explanation and understanding given by the school and DKM. Suwarta (2025) said that calligraphic writing that resembles Chinese characters still uses Arabic characters and does not violate sharia. This explanation is key in reducing potential conflict and building mutual understanding. In fact Jovian Kolonica Tjahyadi (2025), a non-Muslim student of Chinese descent, stated that he felt proud of the mosque that reflected his ancestral culture and called it an inclusive form of Islam.

Impersonal competitive conflict in the context of cross-cultural communication can be an opportunity to build dialogue and understanding. Research by Lyman (1991) in the *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* mentions that changes in perceptions of cultural symbols can occur through a process of negotiating meaning supported by open and inclusive communication. Babah Alun Mosque, through its visual design, has opened a space for this negotiation, where Chinese cultural symbols are no longer seen as a threat, but as part of an adaptive expression of Islam.

The strategies used by the DKM and the school in managing this conflict also reflect a contextualised da'wah approach. Anwar Sadat (2025) mentioned that Islamic religious education in schools instils the value of pluralism and tolerance, without indoctrinating students. This approach allows students to understand that Islam can be conveyed through various forms, including visual symbols that reflect cultural diversity.

The impersonal competitive conflict in Babah Alun Mosque does not become an obstacle, but instead a catalyst for the formation of cross-cultural understanding. Through inclusive visual communication and contextualised da'wah strategies, the mosque has managed to turn potential conflicts into opportunities to build social harmony.

### **C. Collective Ambition as a Driver of the Formation of Multicultural Worship Space at Babah Alun Mosque**

In Robert Ezra Park (1964) theory, ambition is a social drive that emerges after contact and competition, where individuals or groups begin to form common goals that transcend cultural differences. In Babah Alun Mosque, collective ambition is evident in the process of building and managing the mosque, which involves various elements of the community, including school alumni, Chinese Muslim leaders, and the education community. The mosque is not only built as a place of worship, but also as a visual da'wah symbol that reflects Islamic values that are open and adaptive to cultural diversity.

Based on an interview with Mr Suwarta (2025), Principal of SMAN 24 Jakarta, the construction of the mosque began with the initiative of alumni who wanted to repair the damaged worship facilities. When funds were insufficient, a Chinese Muslim figure, Mr Jusuf Hamka, stepped in as the main donor and completed the construction within eight months. This process demonstrated a collective ambition to create a worship space that was not only physically viable, but also socially and culturally meaningful. Babah Alun Mosque has since become a centre for Rohis activities, character building, and even a venue for interfaith school events.

This ambition is also reflected in the mosque's design, which harmoniously combines elements of Chinese and Islamic culture. Interviewees such as Audrey and Nabila (2025) mentioned that the large and artistic mosque increased their enthusiasm for worship. They feel that the mosque becomes a visual icon that distinguishes it from other mosques in the urban area. Muhammad Jidan (2025) added that the Chinese and Arabic ornaments in the mosque attract many people to stop by and learn more about Islamic values. This statement shows that the ambition to create an attractive and inclusive worship space has been successfully realised.

In the context of da'wah, this collective ambition becomes an effective communication strategy. Babah Alun Mosque not only conveys religious messages through lectures, but also through communicative visual design. Anwar Sadat (2025) mentioned that the interior of the

mosque is used as part of the delivery of the da'wah message, and the principle of amar ma'ruf nahi munkar is applied in the design to encourage attendance and awareness of worship. Visual techniques such as the fusion of Javanese, Sumatran, Makassarese and Chinese cultures are used to emphasise unity and harmony, without creating conflict.

Research by Rizki Briandana et al., (2020) in the *International Journal of Economics and Business Administration* mentions that effective da'wah communication should be able to reach audiences through media that are relevant to their social and cultural context. Babah Alun Mosque, with its visual approach, has fulfilled this criterion and become a successful example of da'wah based on collective ambition to build a communicative and adaptive worship space.

Ambition is also evident in the involvement of the non-Muslim community. Jovian Kolonica Tjahyadi (2025) a student of Chinese descent and Christian Spiritual leader, mentioned that he felt comfortable and curious about the cultural symbols attached to the mosque. He even stated that the presence of the mosque made him better understand the practice of Islamic worship and formed an attitude of mutual respect between religions. This shows that the collective ambition to create an inclusive worship space has succeeded in shaping positive interfaith understanding.

In the perspective of cultural sociology, collective ambition is a social force that can transform physical space into a symbol of shared identity. Babah Alun Mosque, through its design and function, has become a representation of the ideals of a harmonious multicultural society (Wibowo & Sufyanto, 2024). Research by Robert Ezra Park (1964) mentions that ambition in intercultural relations can produce new forms of social integration that are accepted by all parties. In this case, Babah Alun Mosque is a clear example of how collective ambition can be realised in the form of communicative and inclusive da'wah architecture.

The collective ambition that drives the construction and management of Babah Alun Mosque has been a major force in creating positive cultural contact. Through inclusive visual design and contextualised da'wah strategies, the mosque is not only a place of worship, but also a symbol of the ideals of a harmonious and open multicultural society (Amymie, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

This research shows that the visualisation of da'wah at Babah Alun Mosque plays an important role as a starting point for cultural interaction in a multicultural society. Through the Race Relation Cycle theory approach particularly at the contact stage, it is found that primary contact occurs through direct interaction between cross-cultural communities present at the mosque, while secondary contact takes place through visual symbols such as Chinese ornaments, the colour red, and oriental-style calligraphy. Both forms of contact succeed in building a positive first impression and fuelling curiosity and social engagement from both Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

Impersonal competitive conflicts arising from different perceptions of the mosque's design do not develop into resistance, but rather become a space for negotiation of meaning that is wisely managed by the school community and the DKM. Explanations about the meaning of symbols and contextualised da'wah approaches succeeded in reducing potential conflicts and

strengthening cross-cultural understanding. In addition, the collective ambition of the community and educational community in building mosques as inclusive and communicative worship spaces shows that visualisation of da'wah can be an effective strategy in conveying Islamic values that are adaptive to diversity.

The findings contribute to the scholarly fields of da'wah communication and cultural sociology, particularly in understanding the role of visual symbols as nonverbal da'wah media that can bridge differences in identity. This research also expands the understanding of how worship spaces can function as arenas for social interaction and the formation of inclusive collective identities.

## SUGGESTIONS

For future research, it is suggested that the da'wah visualisation approach be studied further in the context of other mosques in urban areas that have multicultural characters. The research can be expanded by using quantitative methods to measure the level of community acceptance of cultural symbols in worship spaces, as well as their impact on religious understanding and attitudes of tolerance. In addition, comparative studies between mosques with conventional designs and mosques with acculturative designs such as the Babah Alun Mosque can provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of visual da'wah communication in shaping cross-cultural interactions.

Researchers can also explore the role of social media in expanding the reach of da'wah visualisation, as well as how the younger generation interpret cultural symbols in digital da'wah. With an interdisciplinary approach that combines communication, architecture, anthropology, and religious studies, future research can make a more comprehensive contribution to the development of relevant and contextualised Islamic da'wah in a multicultural era.

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