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## Cultural Da'wah and Islamic Acculturation in the Architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque in Palembang

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### Abstract

Research on da'wah has generally focused on sermons, communication strategies, and religious institutions, while the role of architecture as a medium of cultural da'wah has received relatively little conceptual and theoretical attention. This study aims to analyze how the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque in Palembang functions as a symbolic medium in representing the acculturation of Islam within a multicultural society. This study is a qualitative research employing an experimental archaeology approach enriched by multidisciplinary perspectives, particularly studies in da'wah, architecture, and the semiotics of space. Data were collected through observations of architectural elements, analysis of documentation, and interviews with administrators and congregants. The results indicate that the mosque's design represents da'wah communication through the integration of Chinese aesthetics, Malay cultural symbols, and Islamic spiritual values, manifested in the form of pagodas, color symbolism, and decorative motifs. These findings not only affirm the symbolic function of architecture as discussed in previous literature but also demonstrate that physical space operates as a non-verbal communication system that directly shapes the congregants' religious experience. Theoretically, this study proposes the concept of cultural-architectural da'wah, a framework that positions architecture as an active medium in transmitting Islamic values through visual symbols and spatial experiences. Unlike cultural da'wah approaches that focus on social practices, this concept emphasizes the material-spatial dimension as an agent of religious communication. This study is expected to advance the development of da'wah studies, particularly in the field of culture-based da'wah communication, and to enrich the body of knowledge in Islamic architecture and cultural studies through the integration of spatial semiotics perspectives. These findings expand our understanding of Islamic acculturation by positioning architectural space as an active and communicative medium of da'wah; as a single case study, these findings are contextual in nature. Future research should test this framework comparatively across cultures to strengthen its conceptual validity.

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### Keywords

Architectural da'wah; Cultural acculturation; Cheng Ho Mosque; Islamic architecture; Multicultural society

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic da'wah in modern society is no longer limited to lectures, sermons, or verbal communication alone, but has also evolved through various cultural mediums present in social life



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(Ritonga, 2019). The development of an increasingly pluralistic and open society demands an adaptive, dialogical, and contextual approach to da'wah (Maskur, 2022). In this context, da'wah is not merely the normative transmission of religious messages but also a process of cultural communication that utilizes symbols, traditions, and social spaces as vehicles for conveying Islamic values (Awad, 2021; Agirbas, 2024). One medium with great potential in this process is religious architecture, particularly the mosque, which serves as the center of Muslim religious activity (Ahmad et al., 2018).

In Islamic tradition, mosques serve not only as places of worship but also as spaces for social interaction, education, and cultural communication among Muslims (Baharudin & Ismail, 2023). Since the early days of Islam's development, mosques have played a vital role in shaping the religious and cultural identity of Muslim communities (Uzun et al., 2018; Alajmi & Al-Haroun, 2022). Throughout its historical development, the architectural form of the mosque has often adapted to the local cultures where Islam flourished. This demonstrates that mosque architecture not only represents the building's aesthetic aspects but also reflects the process of interaction between Islamic values and the traditions and cultures of the local community (Marzouk et al., 2024). Mosque architecture can be understood as a symbol of cultural communication that conveys religious messages through spatial forms, ornamentation, and visual elements used in building design (Jamaledine, 2024; Kęsik et al., 2021). From a theoretical perspective, this understanding is reinforced by Umberto Eco's architectural semiotics, which views buildings as sign systems interpretable by their users (Ben-Said & Abdeljaoued, 2026). The phenomenological approach to space pioneered by Yi-Fu Tuan also emphasizes that human experience in interpreting space is part of the construction of religious consciousness. Meanwhile, Charles Jencks, through his theory of architectural symbolism, demonstrates that design elements are not neutral but contain ideological and cultural messages (Samorè, 2024). This framework allows architecture to be understood as a medium of non-verbal communication in da'wah.

The phenomenon of acculturation between Islam and local cultures in mosque architecture can be found in various regions of the Islamic world, including Indonesia. As a country with a pluralistic and multicultural society, Indonesia boasts a diverse range of mosque architectural styles that reflect the interplay between Islam and various local cultural traditions as well as global influences (Hasanah, 2021; Erlangga, 2024). In many cases, the architectural forms of mosques are influenced not only by Middle Eastern traditions but also by local cultures such as Javanese, Malay, and Chinese, as well as by colonial influences that have developed throughout Indonesia's history (Husnan & Halimatus, 2023). This diversity demonstrates that Islam possesses an adaptive character toward local cultures without losing its essence.

An interesting example of this acculturation process can be seen in the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque in Palembang (Astrid Putri Pratiwi, 2024). This mosque features a unique architectural style that integrates Chinese architectural elements with Islamic symbols and Malay cultural motifs (Zidni et al., 2024). The pagoda-like structure, the dominant use of red and gold, and the distinctive Chinese decorative motifs indicate the influence of Chinese culture in the mosque's architectural design (Syahbani et al., 2022). These elements do not diminish the mosque's Islamic identity but rather reinforce Islam's openness to cultural diversity. The presence of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque serves not only as a historical symbol of the relationship between the Chinese and Islamic communities in Indonesia but also as a visual representation of cultural dialogue within a multicultural society (Elvariani et al., 2025). From a da'wah perspective, this phenomenon can be understood as a form of cultural da'wah that uses cultural symbols to convey Islamic values. Cultural da'wah is an approach to da'wah that emphasizes the use of local cultural elements to convey religious messages (Agustyawati, 2022; Exsan

Adde Adde, 2022). This approach aims to make da'wah more contextual, inclusive, and easily accepted by communities with diverse cultural backgrounds. Through this approach, Islamic messages are not conveyed in a confrontational manner but rather through dialogue and integration with the cultural values that have long been part of society (Ashari, 2024).

A number of previous studies have shown that a cultural da'wah approach through cultural media is considered effective in conveying Islamic values in a pluralistic society, as it allows the process of value internalization to take place in a more contextual and dialogical manner (Gomaa, 2025; Agustyawati, 2022; Exsan Adde Adde, 2022). In line with this, studies in the field of mosque architecture emphasize that the form and design of buildings cannot be separated from historical dynamics and the interaction between Islam and local culture, making architecture a reflection of social and cultural adaptation processes (Hasanah et al., 2022; Marzouk et al., 2024). Meanwhile, other research focusing on the acculturation of Islam and Chinese culture emphasizes the historical dimensions of the relationship between the Chinese community and the development of Islam in the Archipelago, including through the symbolic role of Admiral Cheng Ho (Susilo, 2021; Zidni et al., 2024). The trends across these studies indicate that architecture is still more often positioned as a cultural representation or an aesthetic object rather than as an active medium that plays a communicative role in the process of da'wah. Thus, there remains a gap in research regarding the understanding of architecture as a symbolic communication system that directly transmits Islamic values through spatial experiences.

Given these circumstances, there is a research gap in comprehensive studies that conceptually integrate architecture as a medium for religious outreach. This study formulates the following research questions: (1) How does the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque represent the acculturation of Islam through cultural symbols? and (2) How does this architecture function as a medium for cultural outreach in shaping the religious experience of the community?. This study aims to analyze how the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque functions as a medium for cultural da'wah. This study proposes the concept of "cultural-architectural da'wah" as an extension of cultural da'wah, emphasizing that spatial design and architectural symbols serve as agents of communication that shape the religious experience and understanding of Islam among the community. This concept offers a theoretical contribution to the development of da'wah studies, particularly in the field of culture-based da'wah communication, and enriches the study of Islamic architecture by integrating semiotic and phenomenological perspectives on space within an interdisciplinary analytical framework.

## 2. METHODS

This study is a qualitative research employing an intrinsic case study design that focuses on a specific case: the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque as a medium for cultural da'wah. This design was chosen because the study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the symbolic meaning of architecture within a specific social and religious context (Moleong, 2019). In this context, the term "case" refers to the practice of symbolically representing da'wah through architectural elements of the mosque that reflect the process of acculturation among Chinese, Malay, and Islamic cultures. Through a qualitative approach, the researcher can comprehensively explore the process of cultural acculturation reflected in the mosque's architectural elements, as well as the social and religious meanings the community constructs around the building. The research was conducted at the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque, located in Palembang, South Sumatra. This mosque was chosen as the subject of the study because of its unique architectural style, which integrates Chinese, Malay, and Islamic cultural elements into its design. This integration makes the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque a symbolic representation of

cultural acculturation within a pluralistic, multicultural society.

The research data were obtained through several data collection techniques (Sugiyono, 2019). *First*, field observations were conducted to identify architectural elements of the mosque, such as the building's shape, ornamentation, color, and spatial layout. *Second*, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 informants consisting of 3 mosque administrators, 2 community leaders, and 5 active congregants, selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) possessing knowledge of the mosque's history, (2) being actively involved in mosque activities, and (3) understanding the symbolic value of the architecture. The interviews were conducted during the approximately 2-month field research period. *Third*, a documentary study was conducted using archives, photographs, and relevant literature. Although this research relates to culture, the approach is not entirely anthropological, as the focus is not on cultural practices as a whole or on the ethnography of community life, but rather on the analysis of the symbolic meanings contained within the material elements of architecture as a medium for da'wah communication. This study emphasizes an interpretive analysis of symbols and space, situated at the intersection of da'wah studies, architecture, and semiotics, rather than an in-depth study of cultural anthropology.

The data analysis technique used in this study employs an interactive analysis model comprising three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles, 2014). During the data reduction stage, the researcher selects, categorizes, and organizes data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. The next stage is to present data in a descriptive narrative that illustrates the relationship between the architectural elements of the mosque and the cultural da'wah values they embody. The final stage is the drawing of conclusions, which is carried out through the interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the mosque's architecture as a representation of Islamic acculturation within a multicultural society. To ensure the validity of the research data, the researcher employed source triangulation and methodological triangulation (Sugiyono, 2017). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from various informants, including mosque administrators, community leaders, and congregants. Meanwhile, methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation. Through this triangulation process, it is hoped that the data obtained will have greater validity and credibility, thereby yielding accurate, scientifically accountable research findings.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Integration of Chinese Cultural Symbols in the Architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque

Based on interviews and observations, the Al-Islam Muhammad Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque in Palembang was built in the early 2000s and inaugurated in the mid-2000s at the initiative of the Indonesian Chinese Islamic Association (PITI) as a representation of Chinese Muslim identity in South Sumatra. The construction of this mosque is also inseparable from the history of interaction between the Chinese and Islamic communities in Palembang, which has been ongoing since the maritime trade period, particularly within the context of Admiral Cheng Ho's maritime network. Conceptually, this mosque is linked to the Cheng Ho Mosque in Surabaya as part of a network of Chinese-Islamic style mosques in Indonesia.

The research findings indicate that the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque features a strong integration of Chinese cultural symbols. These findings go beyond mere visual description; they reveal a process of re-signification as these symbols are transposed into the context of an Islamic sacred space. This integration is evident in the building's roof shape, which resembles a pagoda structure; the

use of red and gold as dominant colors; and the presence of decorative ornaments commonly found in traditional Chinese architecture. Based on field observations, these elements serve not only as aesthetic features but also carry symbolic meanings representing the values of harmony, good fortune, and balance within Chinese cultural traditions.



The pagoda-style roof, for example, not only serves as a visual identifier of Chinese heritage but has also been reinterpreted within a religious framework. As expressed by one active congregant (J3, active congregant, interview, 2025),

*“At first, it did look like a temple, but after it was explained, we understood it as a symbol of the history of Chinese Islam.”*

This quote demonstrates that architectural meaning is not fixed but is negotiated through the congregants’ religious experiences and knowledge. In this study, the analysis employs an architectural semiotics approach rooted in Umberto Eco’s thought, thereby interpreting the pagoda roof as *a signifier* that opens up multiple meanings: as a symbol of Chinese culture and, simultaneously, as a representation of maritime Islamic history. In addition to the building’s form, the use of red and gold is a key element of the mosque’s visual identity. In Chinese cultural tradition, the color red symbolizes luck, happiness, and prosperity, while gold is often associated with glory and triumph. According to a mosque administrator (P1, Mosque Administrator, interview, 2025)

*“Here, red is no longer about worldly luck, but about the spirit and blessings of Islam.”*

This finding indicates a shift from secular to spiritual meanings, where cultural symbols are not erased but absorbed and reinterpreted within the framework of tawhid. The combination of these two colors creates a strong visual character while distinguishing the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque from typical Indonesian mosque architecture. This phenomenon bears similarities to the use of red at the Red Panjunan Mosque in Cirebon, which also represents the acculturation of Chinese and Islamic cultures (Husnan & Halimatus, 2023; Hermana, 2021). Unlike the Panjunan Mosque, which developed historically and gradually during the process of Islamization in Java, the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque is a contemporary architectural structure consciously designed as a symbol of multicultural identity and a medium for cultural communication.

Research findings also indicate that the decorative ornaments found on various parts of the mosque’s structure reinforce the Chinese architectural aesthetic. These ornaments can be observed on the entrance gate, the building’s pillars, as well as decorative elements on the mosque’s roof and walls. Some motifs feature geometric and floral patterns commonly found in Chinese decorative art. However, these ornaments are adapted to Islamic aesthetic principles by avoiding the explicit depiction of living

creatures. This adaptation reflects a process of cultural selection that allows the integration of Chinese cultural elements to remain consistent with Islamic architectural values.

Beyond visual aspects, the integration of Chinese cultural symbols into mosque architecture is also tied to the historical and social dimensions of Palembang society. Since the era of maritime trade, Palembang has been known for significant cultural interaction among local communities, foreign traders, and the Chinese community. The presence of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque symbolizes this historical interaction. The mosque's name, which honors Admiral Cheng Ho, a prominent Chinese Muslim figure in the history of Asian maritime navigation, underscores its historical and symbolic significance. From a sociocultural perspective, the integration of Chinese symbols into the mosque's architecture also reflects efforts to create an inclusive religious space within a multicultural society. As expressed by one visitor (J5, visitor, interview, 2024),

*"This mosque is unique; it actually makes us feel that Islam is open and can blend with culture."*

This demonstrates that mosque architecture has the potential to serve as a medium of cultural communication, introducing Islamic values through symbolic and visual approaches.

This finding not only highlights the integration of cultural symbols but also affirms that mosque architecture functions as a space for the production of meaning, involving active processes of interpretation, negotiation, and the religious experiences of the space's users, thereby reinforcing its role as a medium for cultural da'wah rooted in symbols and spatial experiences.

### 3.2 Representations of Islamic Values in Mosque Architectural Elements

In addition to showcasing the integration of Chinese cultural symbols, the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque also embodies Islamic spiritual values through various architectural elements. These elements are evident in the use of calligraphy featuring verses from the Qur'an, the building's orientation toward the qibla, and the mosque's spatial layout, which is designed to facilitate devout and orderly worship. These elements demonstrate that while there is cultural integration in the building's design, the fundamental principles of Islamic architecture remain the primary foundation of the mosque's design. This finding was derived through the triangulation of observational data on architectural elements, visual documentation, and interviews with mosque administrators and congregants, ensuring that the resulting interpretation is grounded in empirical evidence.



Figure 2. Arabic calligraphy in the Chong Ho Mosque in Palembang

One of the most prominent elements in the representation of Islamic values is the use of Arabic calligraphy throughout the mosque's structure. Based on field observations, this calligraphy is placed

on the main wall of the prayer hall, the mihrab, and on several decorative elements throughout the mosque's interior. As expressed by one active congregant (J2, active congregant, interview, 2025),

*"The calligraphy inside this mosque makes the atmosphere feel more solemn, as if we are constantly reminded of the verses of the Qur'an during prayer."*

This calligraphy serves not only as an aesthetic ornament but also has a spiritual function, reminding Muslims of the values of the Qur'an in their lives. The placement of calligraphy in the prayer hall also creates a religious ambiance that enhances the spiritual atmosphere for worshippers praying in the mosque. In addition to calligraphy, the mosque's orientation toward the qibla is a crucial element that demonstrates its architectural alignment with Islamic worship principles. The mosque's layout is designed so that all worshippers face the same direction during prayer. As explained by a mosque administrator (P1, mosque administrator, interview, 2025),

*"From the start of construction, the direction of the qibla was the primary reference, so all spatial arrangements follow that direction."*

Semiotically, calligraphy functions as a "dominant signifier" that stabilizes the meaning of the space, ensuring the congregation's interpretations remain within the Islamic framework. This conclusion is drawn from the consistency of field findings, which show that all primary elements of the worship space are oriented toward religious function, thereby limiting the possibility of symbolic interpretations that deviate from the principle of tawhid. Cultural integration does not result in symbolic relativism but establishes a hierarchy of meaning in which Islamic symbols serve as the central point of interpretive orientation. This phenomenon indicates that mosque architecture functions as a structured system of signs, where cultural elements occupy a subordinate position relative to the value of tawhid. The representation of Islamic values is also evident in the presence of the mihrab and mimbar, which serve as primary elements of the worship space. As expressed by a mosque administrator (P2, mosque administrator, interview, 2025),

*"The mihrab and mimbar remain simple; what matters is that their function is clear for worship, not for excessive decoration."*

The mosque's spatial layout is also designed to foster a sense of devotion during worship. This is further reinforced by the experience of a congregant (J3, active congregant, interview, 2025), who stated that.

*"The spacious, open layout makes congregational prayer more comfortable and orderly."*

The main prayer hall features a spacious area without permanent partitions, allowing congregants to perform congregational prayers in an orderly manner. Additionally, natural light streaming in through the windows and the building's ventilation create an open and comfortable atmosphere for worshippers. This open-space design reflects the principle of simplicity in Islamic architecture while providing comfort to the community that uses the mosque for both worship and religious social activities. The research findings also indicate that the integration of Islamic values into the architecture of the Cheng Ho Mosque at the Sriwijaya is evident not only in the building's physical elements but also in the mosque's social function within the community. This mosque is not only used for prayer but also for religious study sessions, lectures, and other religious and social activities. This demonstrates that the mosque's architecture serves as both a spiritual and social space that strengthens religious interaction within the community.

The representation of Islamic values in the architectural elements of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque demonstrates that cultural integration in building design does not diminish the mosque's Islamic identity. On the contrary, such integration actually enriches the symbolic expression of Islam

within the architectural space. Through a combination of cultural elements and Islamic spiritual values, the architecture of this mosque reflects Islam's inclusive nature and its capacity to harmonize with cultural diversity within a multicultural society.

### 3.3 Mosque Architecture as a Medium for Cultural Da'wah

Research findings indicate that the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque serves not only as a physical space for worship but also as a symbolic medium for cultural da'wah within a multicultural society. Based on observations, the unique architectural design—which integrates Chinese cultural elements with Islamic values—positions this mosque as a cultural communication tool that conveys Islamic messages through visual and symbolic approaches. In this context, the mosque's architecture is not merely a form of religious architecture but also a medium of da'wah that conveys Islamic values in a cultural and inclusive manner. As expressed by one visitor (J5, visitor, interview, 2025),

*"I initially came out of curiosity about its design, but after entering, I became interested in learning about its history and the Islamic aspects as well."*

Based on field observations, the unique architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque serves as a distinct attraction for visiting members of the public. Many visitors come not only to worship but also to see firsthand the mosque's distinctive architectural form, which differs from that of typical mosques. This indicates that mosque architecture has the potential to serve as a medium for da'wah, capable of attracting the attention of people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Through the visual experience and spatial design of the mosque's architecture, the public can understand the Islamic messages conveyed symbolically through its architectural elements.

Interviews with mosque administrators reveal that the architectural design was indeed intended as a symbol of cultural dialogue. As stated by a mosque administrator (P2, mosque administrator, interview, 2025),

*"This mosque was indeed built to serve as a symbol of friendship, particularly between Muslims and the Chinese community."*

The use of Chinese architectural symbols in the mosque's design is viewed as a form of respect for the history of relations between the Chinese community and the development of Islam in Indonesia. Thus, the existence of this mosque serves not only as a place of worship but also as a symbol of Islam's openness to cultural diversity within society. In practice, the mosque's architecture also plays a role in strengthening da'wah communication through religious social activities held in its vicinity.

As expressed by a congregant (J4, active congregant, interview, 2025),

*"Many people initially come to see the building, but end up attending religious study sessions or activities here."*

The Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque regularly hosts various activities, including religious study sessions, religious lectures, and social events that bring together people from diverse backgrounds. The mosque's unique architecture often serves as a gateway for the community to learn more about the Islamic values taught in these activities. In other words, the mosque's architecture functions as an initial medium that opens up space for social interaction while introducing da'wah messages in a more contextual manner. Research findings also indicate that the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque helps foster an inclusive, open image of Islam that is open to cultural diversity. As expressed by a visitor (J6, visitor, interview, 2025),

*"This mosque shows that Islam is open and can blend with culture."*

By integrating Chinese cultural elements into the mosque's design, the community can see that Islam does not reject cultural diversity but can harmoniously interact with local traditions. This conveys a symbolic message: Islamic da'wah can be carried out through a cultural approach that respects the community's social identity without compromising the fundamental values of Islamic teachings. The existence of this mosque also contributes to strengthening social harmony within Palembang's multicultural society. Many visitors view the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque as a symbol of tolerance and intercultural friendship. The mosque's architecture, which blends diverse cultural elements, serves as a visual representation of Islam's values of tolerance, dialogue, and brotherhood. Thus, the da'wah function carried out by the Mosque is not merely religious; it also has a social dimension that strengthens intergroup relations within society.

The architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque serves as a medium for cultural da'wah, conveying Islamic values through cultural symbols and spatial design. Through this approach, da'wah messages are conveyed not only through verbal communication but also through visual and symbolic experiences that can be understood by a broader segment of society. Thus, mosque architecture can be viewed as an effective cultural da'wah strategy for fostering inclusive religious communication within a multicultural society.

### **3.4 Mosque Architecture as a Symbol of Islamic Acculturation in a Multicultural Society**

Research findings indicate that the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque represents a form of cultural acculturation between Chinese elements and Islamic identity within a multicultural society. Based on field observations, this cultural integration is evident in the building's form, the use of red and gold colors, and distinctive Chinese decorative ornaments found on the gate, roof, and interior of the mosque. Nevertheless, key elements of Islamic architecture—such as the qibla direction, Arabic calligraphy, the mihrab, and the primary function of the main space as a place of worship—remain preserved as central components of the mosque's structure. This indicates that the cultural elements incorporated into the mosque's architecture are still aligned with Islamic values. As stated by a mosque administrator (P1, mosque administrator, interview, 2025),

*"Culture is allowed to be incorporated, but it must still be in accordance with Islam."*

This statement indicates that the use of cultural symbols in the mosque's architectural design is selective and remains within the framework of Islamic values. In practice, Chinese cultural elements are incorporated into the mosque's visual identity without altering its primary function as a space for Muslim worship. In Palembang's diverse society, the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque is seen as a symbol of harmonious relations between the Chinese community and the local Muslim population. Based on interviews with congregants and visitors, many people view this mosque as a representation of unity and intercultural tolerance. As expressed by one congregant (J4, active congregant, interview, 2025),

*"This mosque shows that culture and Islam can coexist peacefully."*

Additionally, some visitors noted that the mosque's architectural style, which differs from that of typical Palembang mosques, is a unique attraction for the public. The building's distinctive design piques many visitors' curiosity about the mosque's history and the interplay between Chinese culture and the development of Islam in Indonesia. As expressed by one visitor (J6, visitor, interview, 2025),

*"When you look at this mosque, the Chinese elements are very evident, yet the Islamic atmosphere remains strong."*

Based on observations, the name "Cheng Ho" used for the mosque is also frequently associated by the community with the history of Chinese Muslims and maritime trade relations in Palembang. The

mosque's management explained that the use of this name is intended as a form of respect for the historical relationship between the Chinese community and the development of Islam in the Archipelago. In addition to serving as a place of worship, the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque is also used for various social and religious activities, including religious study sessions, celebrations of major Islamic holidays, and community events. These activities involve people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds who gather in the vicinity of the mosque. This situation demonstrates that the mosque's existence functions not only as a religious space but also as a social space that brings the community together in shared activities.

The research findings also indicate that integrating cultural elements into the mosque's architecture creates a positive impression among some visitors of the relationship between Islam and local culture. Many people view the existence of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque as evidence that Islam can thrive within a diverse society without erasing pre-existing cultural identities. The research findings indicate that the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque represents a fusion of Chinese cultural elements and Islamic identity within a single religious space utilized by the multicultural community in Palembang.

### ***Discussion***

The research findings indicate that the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque in Palembang serves not only as a space for worship but also functions as a medium for cultural da'wah, representing the process of Islamic acculturation within a multicultural society. This finding is directly related to the research objective, which aims to analyze how mosque architecture can serve as a medium for communicating Islamic values through cultural symbols (Othman & Zainal-Abidin, 2021). The integration of Chinese cultural elements into the mosque's architectural design—such as the pagoda-like roof, red and gold colors, and distinctive Chinese decorative ornaments—demonstrates that architectural space can serve as a symbolic medium for conveying religious messages. From the perspective of symbolic communication theory, cultural symbols in architecture can construct social meaning through the interpretive processes of society (Taib & Rasdi, 2021). Therefore, mosque architecture not only serves as a physical place of worship but also as a cultural text that conveys messages about identity, values, and the relationship between religion and culture.

From the perspective of cultural da'wah theory, these findings indicate that the transmission of Islamic values is not always carried out through verbal or institutional approaches, but can also be achieved through cultural media that are alive within society (Amin, 2020; Husein, 2020). Cultural da'wah emphasizes the importance of an adaptive approach to the social and cultural context of society so that Islamic messages can be received in a more inclusive manner. In this context, the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque can be understood as a form of cultural da'wah that uses cultural symbols to convey religious messages. The integration of Chinese cultural symbols into the mosque's architecture conveys the message that Islam can harmoniously engage with diverse cultural traditions without compromising its fundamental principles. This demonstrates that the process of da'wah can unfold through cultural strategies that prioritize cultural dialogue and respect for diversity.

The findings of this study can also be analyzed through the lens of cultural acculturation theory. According to acculturation theory, the interaction between two distinct cultures can give rise to new forms of cultural expression without erasing the identity of either culture (Laili et al., 2021; Daud Yahya et al., 2022). The acculturation process evident in the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque is seen in the fusion of Chinese cultural symbols with Islamic architectural elements. Elements such as the

mihrab, the building's orientation toward the qibla, Arabic calligraphy, and the main hall's primary function as a space for congregational prayer are preserved as the core of Islamic architecture's identity. Meanwhile, Chinese cultural elements are evident in the visual aesthetics, enriching the mosque's architectural character. This demonstrates that cultural acculturation does not erase the building's religious identity but rather creates an architectural expression more aligned with the community's social environment. From the perspective of Islamic architectural theory, a mosque is not merely a physical space but also a symbol of spiritual and social values in the lives of Muslims (Bahrun & Ramadhani, 2024; Hidayatulloh, 2020). Mosque architecture often reflects the interaction between Islamic theological values and the local cultural context in which it is built. The diversity of mosque architectural forms across the Islamic world reflects a process of dialogue between Islamic teachings and the cultural traditions of local communities. The architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque demonstrates that Islamic architectural expression can evolve dynamically through cultural adaptation while maintaining fundamental principles of worship.

The findings of this study also align with previous research, confirming that the development of mosque architecture in Southeast Asia is often influenced by local cultural “.” The process of Islamization in this region generally occurs through a cultural approach that adapts to local traditions. The integration of local cultural elements into mosque architecture is a key strategy for fostering social acceptance of Islamic values. This study offers a new contribution by positioning architecture as a medium of cultural da'wah that serves a symbolic function in fostering religious communication within a multicultural society. This perspective broadens the scope of da'wah studies, which have traditionally focused more on verbal communication and institutional religious activities.

The architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque can also be understood as a symbol of Islamic acculturation within Palembang's multicultural society. Historically, Palembang is known for strong cultural interactions among various ethnic groups, including Malays, Chinese, and other immigrant communities. In this social context, the existence of a mosque with architectural features integrating Chinese cultural symbols conveys a message of harmonious coexistence between religion and culture. The architectural symbols used in the mosque's structure serve as a visual representation of the values of tolerance, openness, and social cohesion within a diverse society.

The implications of these research findings suggest that religious architecture has strategic potential to foster intercultural dialogue within multicultural societies. By integrating cultural symbols into mosque architecture, places of worship can serve not only as centers of religious activity but also as social spaces that strengthen relationships among diverse cultural communities. Therefore, future mosque architecture development could consider a cultural approach as part of a more contextual and inclusive da'wah strategy. This study also opens opportunities for further research to examine in greater depth the relationship between religious architecture, cultural symbols, and da'wah communication in various social and cultural contexts, thereby enriching interdisciplinary studies between da'wah studies, Islamic architecture, and cultural studies in pluralistic societies.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the architecture of the Cheng Ho Sriwijaya Mosque in Palembang represents cultural da'wah through the integration of Chinese cultural symbols with Islamic architectural elements. Elements such as the pagoda-like roof shape, the use of red and gold, and distinctive Chinese decorative ornaments not only serve as aesthetic elements but also carry symbolic meanings that represent the values of harmony, openness, and intercultural dialogue. From an

architectural semiotics perspective, these elements function as a sign system that produces religious meaning through visual representation, while within the phenomenological framework of spatial,“ congregants’ experiences of the mosque’s space shape religious interpretations that are subjective and contextual. This integration indicates a process of selective acculturation, in which cultural symbols are adapted without completely erasing the mosque’s religious identity as a sacred space; this process is not entirely neutral, as it also opens the possibility of negotiations and even tensions of meaning between religious values and cultural symbols within the religious space. This study formulates the concept of “architecture-based cultural da’wah” as a process of communicating Islamic values through architectural space's symbols, forms, and experiences. This concept demonstrates that architecture functions not only as a vessel for worship but also as a semiotic medium and spatial experience that enables the production, negotiation, and contestation of religious meanings. Nevertheless, this conceptual contribution remains preliminary and requires further refinement through more systematic integration with semiotic frameworks, spatial theory, and the study of lived religion. The implications of this research suggest that religious architecture has the potential to serve as an inclusive and contextual medium for religious outreach; however, its effectiveness is not universal, as it is influenced by social dynamics, power relations, and the diversity of interpretations within society.

This study has limitations related to the use of a single-case study design and to the inability to capture a broader range of users’ experiences of the space. The analysis, which focuses on symbolic dimensions, has not fully accounted for performative aspects and *lived practices* in the use of religious spaces. Further research is recommended to develop comparative studies of mosques with acculturative architectural characteristics in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, and to integrate approaches from architectural semiotics, the phenomenology of space, and spatial communication to analyze how religious meanings are produced, negotiated, and practiced in sacred spaces more comprehensively.

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