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A Bridge Through Time: UiTM - IFEA Embrace Cultural Legacy and USR at Dongda Mosque, Kaifen



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In the ancient city of Kaifeng, where the dust of centuries settles upon stone and memory, stands the Dongda Mosque—a living testament to the enduring presence of Islam in China. On 13 September 2025, this historic sanctuary became more than just a monument; it transformed into a vibrant classroom and a bridge of cross-cultural understanding for a ten-member delegation from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and the International Future of Education Association (IFEA). Under the framework of University Social Responsibility (USR), this visit represented a profound engagement with a unique Islamic heritage, blending service with scholarship in an unforgettable demonstration of global Muslim solidarity. The visiting delegation consisted of:

UiTM Representatives:

1. Ts. Dr. Aslizah Mohd Aris
2. Dr. Nordayana Zulkifli
3. Dr. Muhammad Aidil Ibrahim
4. Dr. Siti Norazura Jamal
5. Madam Masilah Mohamad
6. Dr. Mohd Asyran Safwan Kamaruzaman
7. Dr. Mohamad Hasif Jaafar
8. Dr. Ong Woon Chuan

IFEA Representatives:

1. Mr. Nicholas Hsiu Wei Kong
2. Ms. Chloe Chong
3. Ms. Nur Amara Shahirah Mohamad Zarini
4. Ms. Nurin Najihah Basri

Echoes of the Silk Road: The Historical Significance of Dongda Mosque

The Dongda Mosque, or the East Great Mosque, stands as one of China's four great ancient mosques, its foundations rooted deep in the rich soil of Chinese Islamic history. Established during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), it reached its zenith in the Song and Yuan dynasties, when Kaifeng served as a flourishing capital and a pivotal hub along the legendary Silk Road.



The mosque's origins are intertwined with the journeys of Arab and Persian merchants who traversed the vast deserts and mountains to reach the Middle Kingdom. These intrepid travelers brought not only spices, textiles, and gems but also their faith, establishing small communities in China's heartland. Over time, these settlers integrated into Chinese society, becoming the Hui people, and the Dongda Mosque became their spiritual anchor.



The mosque's architecture is a breathtaking synthesis of Islamic and Chinese traditions. Unlike the domes and minarets typical of Middle Eastern mosques, Dongda Mosque embraces classic Chinese palace design. Its multi-tiered pagoda roofs, adorned with glazed tiles and mythical figures, soar skyward, while the complex is organized around a series of serene courtyards in the traditional Chinese siheyuan style. Yet within this distinctly Chinese framework, Arabic calligraphy of Quranic verses adorns the walls, and the main prayer hall faces precisely toward Mecca. This architectural harmony perfectly embodies the Hui Muslims' successful integration into Chinese society while maintaining their distinctive religious identity—a balance maintained for over a millennium through dynastic changes, cultural revolutions, and the relentless passage of time.



USR in Action: Service and Scholarship at the Ancient Crossroads

The UiTM-IFEA delegation's program was meticulously crafted to honor this legacy through practical engagement and mutual learning, embodying the true spirit of University Social Responsibility.

The morning commenced with the humble yet profound act of **cleaning the mosque compound**. As delegates swept the inside the mosque, they were not merely performing a physical task but participating in the Islamic tradition of *ihsan* (excellence) in maintaining places of worship. This hands-on service created an immediate bond between the Malaysian visitors and the local custodians of this sacred space, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers through shared reverence.



In a gesture of deep cultural and religious significance, the delegation presented **copies of the Al-Quran translated into Mandarin**. For a community that has navigated the delicate balance of faith and Chinese cultural identity for centuries, this gift represented both practical utility and symbolic recognition of their unique journey. The translated Qurans will serve as valuable resources for Chinese-speaking Muslims and non-Muslims alike seeking to understand Islam through the lens of their native language.



One of the most intellectually engaging segments was the **Madhhab exchange on slaughtering practices**. This scholarly dialogue brought together perspectives from different schools of Islamic jurisprudence, creating a platform for meaningful discussion about halal certification and slaughtering methods in different cultural contexts. The exchange highlighted the diversity within Islamic unity and demonstrated how Muslim communities worldwide adapt religious practices to their specific circumstances while maintaining core principles.

The spiritual pinnacle of the visit was the congregation's **performance of Solat Zuhr together**. As the UiTM-IFEA delegation stood shoulder-to-shoulder with their Kaifeng brothers in faith within the historic prayer hall, the moment powerfully embodied the concept of *Ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood). The unison of movements and recitations in Arabic, despite the vast geographical and cultural distances between Malaysia and China, reinforced the universal bonds of the Muslim *Ummah*.



Deepening Cultural Understanding: Architecture and Wushu

Beyond the core USR activities, the delegation immersed themselves in two distinctive learning experiences that further illuminated the unique synthesis of Chinese and Islamic cultures.

A comprehensive session on the **architectural and historical significance of Dongda Mosque** allowed delegates to appreciate the structure as more than just a building. Experts explained how each architectural element—from the moon tablet indicating the Islamic calendar to the Chinese-style "minaret" that also serves as a watchtower—tells a story of cultural negotiation and religious preservation.



The delegation also received an introduction to Chinese Muslim Martial Art (Wushu), a centuries-old tradition that exemplifies the Hui community's unique cultural synthesis. This practice combines the physical discipline and philosophical foundations of Chinese martial arts with Islamic spiritual principles, creating a distinctive form of physical worship and self-cultivation that has been preserved and transmitted within Muslim communities in China for generations.

Conclusion: Weaving New Threads into an Ancient Tapestry

The UiTM-USR program at Dongda Mosque represented more than an academic excursion; it was a meaningful contribution to the ongoing story of this ancient community. By engaging in service, dialogue, and shared worship, the delegation wove new threads of international friendship into the rich tapestry of Kaifeng's Islamic heritage.

As the delegates departed, they carried with them not just memories and photographs, but a profound appreciation for the resilience and adaptability of the Muslim community in China. The program successfully demonstrated that University Social Responsibility, when approached with cultural sensitivity and genuine

partnership, can build bridges across time and space—connecting modern Malaysian scholars with an ancient Chinese Muslim community in a shared celebration of faith, history, and mutual understanding.



This encounter at Dongda Mosque stands as a shining example of how educational institutions can serve as catalysts for cross-cultural dialogue, preserving the past while building foundations for a more connected and compassionate future.