

who dealt with this same topic but from different perspectives. The whole idea of the session was to emphasise the importance of transmitting time tested traditional human values to the future generations and understanding the nature of the challenges unique to each generation posed in the transmission process. My second contribution was in the final session where I presented a paper on the topic “The Arab Spring: Malaysian Perspectives”. Professor Azra complemented my presentation of Southeast Asian voices on the Arab Spring with his articulation of the spectrum of Indonesian responses to this interesting political phenomenon.

Viewed as a whole, the Amman seminar was meant to highlight the role of youth in contemporary Japan and the Islamic world in the light of tradition. In particular, it sought to understand the roles of youth in two different types of phenomena happening on two opposite sides of the world. One was the so-called Arab Spring, a socio-political phenomenon that swept the larger part of the Arab world. The other was the aftermath of a tragic natural catastrophe in Japan, which the Japanese themselves call “the Great Japanese Earthquake and Tsunami”. Japanese speakers one by one spoke of the kind of voluntarism among the youth in response to the tragedy that has not been seen for a long time in post-World War II Japan. They described the voluntarism as simply admirable, which ignited a fresh thinking about the meaning and role of traditional values and institutions in contemporary Japanese society. In their spirit of voluntarism these youths are seen as playing the role of revivers of the Japanese tradition, not unlike the traditional Malay/Indonesian spirit of *gotong royong* – a local conception of sociality based on reciprocity or mutual aid.

Seminar participants were told that the next dialogue seminar will be held in Tokyo sometime in early 2013.

**International Workshop on Faith and Power
(George Town, Penang, Malaysia, 5-6 March 2012)**

Tengku Ahmad Hazri, I AIS Malaysia

The workshop was organised by the Noordin Sopiee Chair in Global Studies at Penang’s Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM).

The speakers were:

- Professor Chandra Muzaffar (USM) and International Movement for a Just World (JUST) – “Faith and Power; Power as a Sacred Trust”
- Professor Wang Gungwu (National University of Singapore) – “Power and Faith in China: Past and Present”
- Professor Kim Yong-Bock (Hanil University, Wanju, South Korea) – “Faith and Power from a Christian Perspective on Liberation”

- Professor Chaiwat Satha-Anand (Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand) – “Understanding the Effects of Violence on Faith: a Spectacle Perspective on Southern Violence, Thailand”
- Swami Agnivesh (Arya Samaj scholar and Hindu activist, India) – “Faith and Power” and
- Professor Suwanna Satha-Anand (Thammasat University) – “Wisdom and the Power of Faith in Theravada Buddhism.”

Chandra Muzaffar in his presentation argued for a ‘values-approach’ to religion in public; that is, rather than singling out religion per se as the solution, one should engage with specific values of that religion as these are usually more practicable and feasible in a multi-religious world, for the same values can usually also be found in other religious and spiritual traditions. Values need to be anchored on the transcendent and it is only through particular religions that such anchorage is possible.

Wang Gungwu, in explaining the history and role of Confucianism in China, demonstrated how faith and power adapted to each other, but with many bitter episodes of faith unable to hold power to account; for example, Confucians during the Ming dynasty struggled against rulers but often succumbed to them. In contemporary China, although Confucianism has little appeal among the youth, Wang Gungwu believed that “some kind of Confucianism will emerge” which will be of relevance today. For instance, Confucians still uphold the ideal of family as a sacred spiritual institution. Indeed, the spirituality of the Chinese is seen most in the institution of the family. When man-made ideologies have failed in China, it will be seen that there is still life in Confucianism.

Kim Yong-Bock highlighted a distinctive strand in Korean liberation theology, the Minjung (people) theology which defines power as service to people, who are sovereign subjects of their own destiny.

Chaiwat Satha-Anand offered a theoretical basis of analysing violence by disentangling violence from power (Hannah Arendt) while conceiving power in the Foucauldian sense of being *exercised* rather than possessed. Violence, he argued, is anti-politics because it ignores the moral and rational agency of the victim, the affirmation of which is prerequisite for politics.

Swami Agnivesh emphasised the complementary nature of faith and power. Without some form of institutionalisation through power, religion will evaporate; and without faith, power can be manipulated. At the core of faith, he argued, is the intimate link between God and our collective humanity; the denial of God is thus “collective suicide”.

Suwanna Satha-Anand in her presentation argued that in Theravada Buddhism, faith can never be independent but needs constant guidance from wisdom. She explored the dynamics and relationship between the *sangha*, or community of Buddhist monks, and the state.

The workshop also addressed three specific issues related to theme of “Faith and Power”, which were separately discussed by three working groups.

The first group discussed the advantages and disadvantages of having religion as a state ideology as is the practice of some countries today. It was argued that religion as ‘state ideology’ has almost the character of oxymoron, for ideology is man-made philosophy to which divinely revealed religion should not be reduced. In fact sometimes the description is hardly accurate; e.g., in Malaysia, Islam is the ‘religion of the Federation’, not ‘state ideology’. Yet the dissociation of religion from state ideology does not equal secularism. Justification for secularism as a political principle usually rests on the claim that the state should not express preference to any particular religion; it should be neutral in this respect. Yet this argument is untenable because (a) religions are not mutually exclusive, so that the advancement of one does not by default preclude others: there is ample scope for shared values; (b) neutrality is impossible to start with, because any decision made by the state is bound to have endorsers (who are in this case ‘privileged’) and those who object to the decision (who are ‘discriminated against’); (c) social and political disputes between adherents of different religions should not be seen as conflicts between religions per se but rather as disputes between those groups alone; (d) values that are publicly cherished, such as justice, peace and dignity, which the state should be committed to, have religious basis and implications; and (e) citizens, politicians and state officials are individuals with their own beliefs and principles which are derived simultaneously from a variety of sources (including religion), and which influence their decisions whether consciously or unconsciously. The way forward is not state neutrality but to allow religious values to flourish so that it is the religions themselves that will weed out sectarian tendencies within themselves and forge a universal and inclusive approach in their encounter with each other.

The second group deliberated on why countries which do not emphasise faith in public can somehow develop effective mechanisms for constraining power relative to those which espouse faith-based politics. Such is particularly true, for instance, with some Scandinavian countries which always top the list in transparency and quality of life indices. By contrast, countries which profess to commit to particular religions frequently register abysmal performance in the same indices. As a matter of fact, it was observed, what is being seen is not the absence of religion as such but the redefinition of its role and place. Religion need not tread the political path only to effectuate social transformation, for there are plentiful opportunities in civil society and people’s movements. At the same time, we should remember that many of the so-called religious regimes are in fact supported by so-called democratic nations, which is why some dissenting religiously-inspired people’s movements are suppressed. Moreover, some countries which are able to develop strong institutions as checking mechanisms on power can only do so because of their economic stability. Yet some

of these countries cannot deny their colonialist past through which they economically exploit nations that now suffer from economic under-development, with devastating consequences on their ability to establish the rule of law and curtail corruption and abuse of power. The group was nevertheless conscious that such reasoning might easily degenerate into polemics of the ‘religious East’ versus the ‘secular West’, so it was also highlighted that the West in fact is currently witnessing religious revival, while some parts of the East are declining into materialism and consumerism. The encounter between East and West has also reached such a degree that, as one group member noted, “The East has already internalised the West.”

The third group addresses how faith can influence power in a globalised world mired in crises. The said crises are numerous – food, financial, environmental, energy, nuclear and others. A group member said that in fact faith is *already* influencing power, whether with positive consequences, as when government leaders promote global religious solidarity, or with negative ones, like when military campaigns are waged under the pretext of religion. So the more appropriate question to be asked is, “How can faith prevent power from being abused resulting in various global crises?” The reformulation of the problem thus offers preventive rather than remedial measures by which relatively minor problems can be resolved before they spiral into a global crisis. Such preventive measures can be done by instilling consciousness through education that also emphasises deeds and actions, so as to inculcate the habit of self-restraint. Faith also needs to be translated into knowledge by rationally examining the suppositions of one’s belief. In a sense faith also *requires* knowledge because to even have faith in something implies that one is properly acquainted with what exactly this something is.

The workshop offered crucial perspectives in understanding how faith and power interact and presented significant insights on the role through which spirituality and religion can co-opt and confront power.

**Interview with Professor Chaiwat Satha-Anand
at the International Workshop on Faith and Power
(George Town, Penang, Malaysia, 5-6 March 2012)**

Tengku Ahmad Hazri, IAIS Malaysia

Professor Chaiwat Satha-Anand is a renowned political scientist and peace activist from Thailand, concerned especially with Islam and non-violence, as well as Islam in Thailand. He is currently Professor of Political Science at Bangkok’s Thammasat University, Thailand. The following interview was conducted after the International Workshop on “Faith and Power”, 5-6 March 2012, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Penang, during which he presented a paper (see Event Report), arguing that violence