

when interaction with other civilisations was at its peak. His answer to the perennial question of what caused the 'decline' of Muslim civilisation was that there was a general decrease of curiosity and interest in developing new resources for administration and ways of functioning. This was followed by insular behaviour. When new syntheses and cultural development were discouraged, creativity was not cherished and rewarded. Consequently, seeds of decay were planted.

Among the participants, there was consensus that there is an acute need for intra-Muslim dialogue and understanding, the lack of it doing serious damage to Islam as a whole. Moreover, there was consensus that Muslims should not abandon the prophetic tradition and heritage, and that Islam should not be considered an 'imported religion', but rather be an inclusive part of modern society. Moreover, there must be taken conscious steps in order to strengthen the 'middle path' (*ummat^{am} wasat^{am}*; Qur'ān 2:143). Professor Ayumardi, for instance, made references to the work done by MUIS in this regard which provides a useful model for other Muslim communities to emulate. Moreover, it was argued that it would be critical for Muslims to strengthen Islamic-based civil societies. Muslims are in need of self-funding, self-regulating NGOs that can bridge the gap between state and society.

Conference 'Towards Building an Inclusive Malaysian Chinese Society' (Kuala Lumpur, 17 July 2010)

Eric Winkel, IAIS Malaysia

This conference was well-organised and provided an overview of the different communities of Chinese in Malaysia. The keynote speaker was internationally renowned historian Professor Wang Gungwu – University Professor at the National University of Singapore, Chairman of the Managing Board of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Chairman of the East Asian Institute, Emeritus Professor of the Australian National University at Canberra, and previously also Distinguished Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) where he is now Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

Wang described four groups and traced their influence on Malaysian society and internationally. The first group were male immigrants from China over the last 2,000 years who assimilated completely, becoming essentially Malay. Group B were pointedly *not* assimilated, because – under European domination – the colonial powers wanted to create and maintain a distinctively Chinese bloc of traders who would be their connection to China. The colonial powers, therefore, for their own interests, promulgated a separate 'racial category': the Chinese. Group C is probably the largest group now. Chinese immigrants were needed in the Industrial Revolution, and this group generally maintained a Chinese ethnic and cultural identity along

with a national identity. While the British sent workers from India to Sabah and Sarawak who generally stayed in the Malay Peninsula, the Chinese often did go all the way to Borneo to settle. Group D, in turn, is not that large. They are people who see themselves primarily in national Malaysian terms, not as ethnic Chinese. The efforts of the last few years to build a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic Malaysia play into historical demographic trends. The Malaysian government encourages the two groups, C and D. Group C are Chinese who identify themselves as Chinese and vote in an ethnic bloc, but also have a national Malaysian identity and help the nation develop harmoniously. Group D is interesting because they fall out of the cracks of government politics, not belonging to any ethnic bloc, and yet they contribute to national harmony by putting their ‘Malaysian-ness’ foremost.

Speakers then addressed issues of the Chinese communities in Sabah and Sarawak, respectively. This writer was interested to learn how outside historical events impinged on the Chinese demographics of the region. Somewhat similar to the above-mentioned Group A are the Sino-natives, or Chinese-Iban.

The names of buildings and streets in Malaysia became very much alive during the lecture on English-educated Chinese – Loke Yew, Chow Kit, H.S. Lee. In 1948, Sir Henry Lovell Goldsworthy Gurney (1898–1951) – he too has a street in Kuala Lumpur named after him – the British High Commissioner in Malaya who was assassinated by communist terrorists during the Malayan Emergency, advised the Colonial Office on the Chinese based on the following pattern: assimilated Chinese, no problem; Chinese locally-born and loyal to Malaya, no problem; the English-educated, no problem. However, concerning the non-English speaking Chinese he argued that they “can only be regarded as a menace”. The status of the English-educated was high up until the 1969 general elections, the speaker argued. In recent years, however, the division between English-educated and Chinese-educated is fading.

Dr Rosey Wang Ma gave an especially fascinating presentation. She referred to the Chinese–Muslim dichotomy as artificial. In fact, Islam has an uninterrupted history in China of 1,300 years – being thus fully half a millennium older than the history of Islam in Indonesia. With colonialism, the status of Islam in the eyes of the Chinese in Southeast Asia declined, with official colonial segregation of ethnic groups. Islam was identified with the Malays – and unfortunately this meant it was identified as disadvantaged. Without Chinese Muslim immigrants (the Hui), Islam became seen as Malay *Jiao*, the ‘Malay religion’. Today this has not really changed, because from the Constitution and onward ‘Islam’ is identified with ‘Malay-ness’, especially by the Malays themselves. Dr Rosey Wang Ma had a number of anecdotes to demonstrate this further: in one encounter, the teacher cannot figure out ‘who’ Dr Rosey’s own child is – “You are a Muslim, right? So, your father must be Malay.” “No, he’s Chinese.” “Is at least your mother Malay?” “No, she too is Chinese.”

And then, when her kids did not eat at a non-*halāl* restaurant on a field trip, the organisers complained that they should have ticked ‘Malay’ in the *bangsa* (race) box. (One could well add to this, that Western converts to Islam living for many years in Malaysia often face similar, often offensive, ‘treatment’ from the part of Malay ‘born Muslims’.)

The hopeful solution is deeper appreciation of the closeness of Islamic values and Confucian philosophical ethics. These similarities made Islam an integrated part of China from the seventh century onward. Slides showing Chinese-Arabic calligraphy, pagoda-roofed mosques, and vases combining Islamic and Chinese motifs demonstrate conclusively the possibility of a Chinese Muslim identity. Dr Rosey Wang Ma ended with a plea to the Chinese community to accept this “community that combines Chinese and Islamic characteristics with a Malaysian flavour. What is important is for the Chinese community to accept their choice, and not dismiss them into another ethnic boundary.”

Meeting Between IAIS Malaysia and the Cordoba Foundation (TCF) (London, 16 August 2010)

Amjad Saleem, The Cordoba Foundation (TCF)

On 16 August 2010, a meeting took place at the London Muslim Centre (LMC), in Whitechapel, London, between the Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) and The Cordoba Foundation (TCF). In attendance were Mohammad Hashim Kamali (representing IAIS Malaysia), accompanied by his wife, Anas Altikriti (TCF), Amjad Saleem (TCF), and Abdullah Faliq (TCF).

The meeting’s discussions included brief introductions to each organisation, their mandates and work outline along with descriptions and identifications of areas of synergy and collaboration. The topics discussed and agreed upon included the following:

- There are areas of commonality for research;
- there is a need to develop a framework of cooperation and a paper exploring the potential areas for cooperation, especially with reference to being representatives of each other in the respective countries, Malaysia and the United Kingdom;
- both organisations will link each other on their respective websites;
- IAIS Malaysia is to create a space for TCF in its journal and other publications (and vice versa);
- there would be potential collaboration with regard to IAIS Malaysia’s Occasional Paper Series (OPS) and Monograph Series;