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Panel:
Religion

1. Chinese Muslim Dakwah Work in Malaysia

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This paper aims to discuss the social implications brought about by the Chinese Muslim *dakwah* (missionary) work in Malaysia. As a part of the global Islamic revivalism, the *dakwah* movement in Malaysia since the 1970s contributes not only to the rising number of Chinese conversion to Islam, but also the changing mode of conversion. The new generation of Chinese Muslim converts, who are mostly middle-class educated urban youth, are enthusiastic about their newly adopted religious belief and often take on duties of revitalising Islam. As Islamic missionary work usually involves preaching to the established Muslim community in order to strengthen the faith of believers, the Chinese Muslim *dakwah* work depicts a peculiar scene in which converts preach to born Muslims.

The success of the Chinese *dakwah* work calls for the reconsideration of the born Muslim convert hierarchy within the Muslim community and the social role and responsibility of Muslims in Malaysia. Apart from fulfilling Muslim duties, the Chinese Muslim *dakwah* work has another rather personal motivation. While Islam is heavily connected with Malay ethnicity in Malaysia, conversion to Islam is considered as an act of ‘becoming Malay’. Chinese converts are therefore often rejected by their Chinese families and social circle for ‘betraying their cultural heritage’. On the other hand, they are not entirely accepted in the Malay Muslim community either due to the long standing ethnic tensions between the Chinese and the Malays and the idea of Malay superiority in the Muslim community. Previous studies suggest that Chinese Muslim converts are marginalised by both communities and their identity faces serious crisis. This work intends to show that, by putting themselves on the frontline of religious devotion, the Chinese converts are able to gain recognition and respect in the Muslim community. Furthermore, with their unique conversion experiences and Chinese cultural background, the Chinese *dakwah* work proves to be especially effective in spreading Islam to non-Muslim communities. By presenting themselves as both Chinese and devout Muslims, they challenge the idea of incompatibility between Islam and Chinese-ness. Consequently, the ‘Chinese Muslim’ identity no longer appears problematic and Chinese converts obtain recognisable social position in the Malaysian society.

Last but not least, the Chinese Muslim *dakwah* work provides substantial inputs on

the development of the general *dakwah* work and influences the Islamic discourses in Malaysia. The two Chinese Muslim preachers discussed in this work demonstrate how Islamic authority is established in modern Muslim public discourses, especially by converts. The ability to interpret and cite extensive Islamic texts, to engage modern issues with Islam, and equally importantly a sense of humour, are reasons contribute to the popularity of these Chinese Muslim preachers. Combining these qualities, it is the art of 'preaching beautifully' that is behind most successful *dakwah* works. The contemporary Islamic revivalists in Malaysia are thus not heading towards fundamentalism as some studies suggest, but instead reflect the pluralistic character of modernity by avoiding direct confrontation and maintain an open religious 'marketplace' (Hefner 1998).

2. Translocal and Cosmopolitan Islam: Chinese-style Mosques in Indonesia and Malaysia

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This paper is a comparative study of Chinese-style mosques in Malaysia and Indonesia, set within their political and social contexts. Two main questions that drive this research are: 1) To what extent do Chinese-style mosques promote inclusive and cosmopolitan Islam? 2) What are the translocal connections and local dynamics that make the establishment of Chinese-style mosques possible?

Since the collapse of the Suharto regime, at least five Chinese-style mosques have been built across Indonesia. The first one is the Cheng Hoo Mosque in Surabaya, which its 'temple-like' architectural design is inspired by an old mosque in Beijing, even as its activities are reconfigured within the local context. With the support of both Chinese and Muslim organizations in Surabaya, the mosque was established to declare that there can be a Chinese way of being Muslim and to reassure people that Indonesian Islam is tolerant of various cultural traditions. The mosque is both a sacred and social space shared by all ethnic and religious groups.

Meanwhile, in Malaysia, the combination of a state-controlled Islamic bureaucracy and an ethnicized Islam that equates Malays with Muslims has discouraged the establishment of Chinese-style mosques, and even rejected it in some cases. Yet, recently, there are some positive developments, witnessed by the establishment of the Beijing Mosque in Kelantan and the proposal of the MACMA (Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association) Mosque in Kuala Lumpur.

This paper will also explore two broader issues. First, it examines the discourse and practice of Islamic pluralism in both Malaysia and Indonesia, by examining the recent development of mosque architectures in their major cities. Second, it investigates the possibility of 'Chinese Muslim diaspora', represented by the cultivation of ties of Chinese Muslims in Southeast Asia to Hui Muslims in China, the promotion of the role of Admiral Zheng He in Islamic propagation, and the building of Chinese-style mosques in both countries.

3. Reshaping Shi'i identities in Southeast Asia: between local tradition and

foreign orthodoxy

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Throughout Southeast Asia, next to the millions of Sunni Muslims, stand several communities devoted to Imam 'Ali and his descendants. Bearing in mind that 'Alid piety does not necessarily equal normative Shi'ism,¹ in Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia devotees of the *Ahlul Bayt* ('people of the house', referring to the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter, Fatima, her husband, 'Ali, and their two sons, Hasan and Husayn) are split between those striving to link contemporary devotion to ancient rituals by invoking genealogical and spiritual lineages, and those committed to foreign-inspired orthodoxy.²

This situation is the result of centuries of exchanges between the greater Middle East and Indo-Malay regions, as elements of 'Alid devotion have since been part of the local cultural landscape. The interaction between 'cultural Shi'ism' and different ethnic and religious dynamics has brought forward diverging outcomes: whilst in Indonesia and Malaysia features of 'Alid piety were largely absorbed and incorporated in mainstream Sunni traditions, in Singapore Shi'ism was initially an exclusively South Asian phenomenon, and its cultural manifestations are still limited.

In all three cases, however, political change (both international and domestic) affected transformations to the local *Ahlul Bayt* communities: the 1979 Iranian revolution and the subsequent promotion of Shi'ism resulted in the spread of normative Shi'ism throughout Southeast Asia, stepping over ethnic boundaries (in Singapore) and initiating a 'purification' process (in Indonesia and Malaysia), despite these governments' anti-Shi'a propaganda – mostly pursued under the rubric of Shi'ism's potential for unrest (in Malaysia Shi'ism is still considered 'heresy'). Nationally, it appears evident that in Singapore's stable environment Shi'ism emerged as just another religious group, limited in scope and numbers; in Malaysia, as 'State Islam' strengthened its grip over Malay Muslims, Shi'i rituality has been pushed underground, and could possibly become an outlet for discontent parallel to the first wave of *dakwah*; in Indonesia the fall of the Suharto regime, and the subsequent lifting of censorship, unleashed the aspirations of some *Ahlul Bayt* communities to shape their beliefs and rituality in forms closer to the model of Qum, Iran.

This paper addresses the question of how political turmoil affects change in the sphere of religious piety. More specifically: how did the opening up of the public sphere in post-Suharto Indonesia affect the re-shaping of *Ahlul Bayt* identities along the lines of an exogenous orthodoxy?

Drawing on two years of research on *Ahlul Bayt* communities in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, I suggest that the scholarly authority and ritual model of Qum is

¹ As observed by Hodgson (1974) and further researched in Pakistan and Egypt by Qasim Zaman and Valerie Hoffman-Ladd.

² Formichi, 'One Big Family? Dynamics of Interaction among the 'Lovers of the Ahlul Bayt', in Formichi and R. M. Feener (eds), *Shi'ism and Beyond: Alid Piety in Muslim Southeast Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris).

becoming increasingly important as Southeast Asian Shi'is strive to shape a well-defined group (provided with schools, mosques and civil society organisations) within the broader aim of strengthening their religious identity *vis-à-vis* other members of the *umma*, deepening the divide between Sunnism and Shi'ism. The paper will address these dynamics presenting two Indonesian cases of 're-Shi'a-ization' of traditional Muharram rituals, one in Bengkulu (Southwest Sumatra) and the other in Java.

4. Religious identity and urban piety in Indonesian society: A social movement analysis of the Salafiyya and the quest to 'purify' Islam

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Key Questions: How has a salafist religious movement in Indonesia built on wider shifts in society concerning religious identity? How does it use the current democratic climate to propagate its message? And how has this affected wider debates concerning the role and interpretation of Islam within Indonesian society?

This paper aims to analyse the dynamic interplay between Islamic religious identity and the influx of new global communication tools within urban Indonesia. By conceptualising religious renewal within Indonesia as a diverse social movement, it enquires how new global forms of communication and technology have been utilised to disseminate information and create networks that support issues of religious identity and lifestyle that have thus impacted and altered previously established religious power relations. More specifically, it shall analyse the salafist movement, which takes a literalist interpretation to religious text and is strongly influenced by religious networks in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, as a case study for the aforementioned analysis.

The paper shall be divided into three parts, each answering an interlinked question. Firstly, I ask how the salafi movement was able to enter the Indonesian religious landscape? Using a predominantly sociological lens, I enquire how rapid urbanisation and increased global communication in Suharto's Indonesia catalysed the diversification of religious authority and networks that, together with wider societal transformations linked to economic development, facilitated a growing Islamic religious renewal. I argue that salafism was able to take hold in Indonesian society as it was part of a wider shift in religious activism from one concerned with 'emancipation politics' (creating a religious or Islamic state) to concerns of 'life politics' (providing the ability to live a religiously pious life), expressed through an 'objectified' religiosity (Eickelman and Piscatori, 2006).

Secondly, I enquire how the dismantling of Suharto's New Order has altered the dynamics of this salafi movement, allowing them to spread openly through official institutions, public forums and an intricate school/ university network. Through a social movement analysis, I wish to highlight its reach in Yogyakarta, Indonesia through an 'epidemiological' approach. Examining the increased sophistication involved in the proliferation of salafi books, magazines, radio stations, schools and

social programs, all tailored to the Indonesian religious landscape (although theological references remain global), the answer provided will be based on interviews and ethnographic studies conducted in Indonesia.

Thirdly, I wish to ask how the propagation of the salafi movement in post-Suharto Indonesia has impacted overarching and wider debates concerning religion in the Indonesian public sphere? I will look directly at how the contemporary movement's aim to purify Islam from Indonesian 'innovations' and realign it was a literalist and imagined 'global Islam' challenges the religious authority and doctrinal references of established Islamic organisations. Not only does this challenge religious identity within society, but also has led to a vast array of counter-challenges by those who question the validity of the salafi message. Interestingly, the ensuing public debate plays into wider concerns of Islamic identity within society and the ethical boundaries of an 'Indonesian Islam'.