

EMBRACING CHINESE MUSLIMS: THE REKINDLING OF RELIGIOUS, ECONOMIC & CULTURAL TIES on 21 March 2013

1. Firstly, I would like to welcome this historical visit of the Chinese Muslim delegation to Malaysia.
2. Malaysia's ties with China went back more than 1000 years. The contacts had always been through trade. Malaysia had exchanged jungle produce for silk and lacquer-ware etc from China.
3. Chinese trade took advantage of the monsoon to sail to Southeast Asia. They had to wait for the Southwest Monsoon winds to sail back with the goods they acquired. Sometime they would have to stay in Malaysia for months. During that time the Malays were able to observe the Chinese at close quarters.
4. Although the great Admiral Cheng Ho was a Muslim, almost all the Chinese traders were of the Buddhist or Taoist faith. Malays therefore regarded all Chinese as non-Muslims. This prevented intermarriage between them. On the other hand, many of the Arabs and Indian traders who came to Malaysia to meet their counterparts from China were Muslims. Marriage between Malays and Indians and Arabs were frequent. These traders often settled down in Malaysia and became Malays, using the Malay language as their main language and practicing Malay customs and cultures. Eventually they became Malays.
5. The Chinese on the other hand seldom marry Malays. They remain isolated and separate. Still they begin to sue Malays as their home language and wear dresses which were influenced by the Malay styles.
6. Although the Chinese were not assimilated they lived in peace with the Malays and with the other races. These Chinese were known as Babas and Nyonyas. They remained Buddhists or Taoist.

7. Unfortunately when Malaysia became independent they discarded their Malaysia influenced culture and language and identified themselves as Chinese. Their interaction with the Malays were stopped.
8. Your coming here as Chinese Muslims will help change the perception of the Malays about the Chinese. Being Muslims like themselves, the Malays will feel more comfortable socially, and even when interacting in business and trade. This will contribute towards better trade and investments between our two countries.
9. Malaysia is very open. We welcome foreign investments. There are hardly any conditions or restrictions. Of course when partnerships are formed with locals the business is easier simply because the local partner knows the ways and regulations of Malaysia.
10. I believe it is the same in China. It would be very good if Malaysia found good partners in China.
11. Your visit here is important because you will get to know Malaysia's businessmen. In business knowing people is important. You cannot choose strangers to be your partners. You need people you know and this conference will enable you to form friendships with Malaysians who can be your partners.
12. You come from a special place in China where there are a lot of Muslims. You will know what trading goods are available in your region. We know that Chinese industries are very advanced and you produce a lot of manufactured goods. You also have a very good craftsmen who can produce a lot of craft products. As for food products, you are capable of producing what can be consumed by Muslims. You are therefore in a good position to supply the need of Malaysian Muslims.
13. Your visit here would enable you to identify the products marketable in China. Some may be because they are halal and specifically for the Muslims of China. But there are other products of industry which can become components in the products you manufacture.

14. In addition, while you are here you can develop friendship with Malaysian business people who can partner you in your business or who can become agents for your products. This conference itself will contribute to developing friendships and good relations between China and Malaysia which can bloom into partnerships.
15. I think one of the best moves would be to set up a kind of representation organization for the Chinese Muslims in Malaysia while Malaysians set up a Malaysian counterpart in that region in China.
16. Those offices can gather and disseminate information on trade and travel in our two countries. They will be the first contact point for traders in both countries. Each will familiarise itself with the rules and regulations in each country. Of course the locals can make use of these organizations if they wish to get any information regarding our two countries.
17. An important element in the relationship of countries is tourism. This industry brings people in close contact with each other.
18. For Malaysians, especially Malays meeting Chinese Muslims is an unusual experience. We need to know more about our Chinese Muslim brothers and sisters. It is an eye-opener for us to know that. China became Muslim earlier than us.
19. Malays embrace Islam only about 600 years ago.