

READINGS IN ISLAMIC DA'WAH

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DA'WAH TO NON-MUSLIM CHINESE IN MALAYSIA: SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

Osman Abdullah@Chuah Hock Leng

Background of Malaysia and Ethnic Relationship

Malaysia consists of Peninsular Malaysia and the states of Sabah and Sarawak. It has an area of 329,758 sq km of which Peninsular Malaysia has 1,598 sq km, Sabah 73,711 sq km and Sarawak 124,449 sq km. Malaysia has a population of 23,127,469. The Malays are the majority consisting of 11,680,421 or 51%. This is followed by the Chinese of 5,691,908 or 26% and Indians of 1,618,922 or 7%.¹ There are also other very small ethnic groups such as Eurasians, the natives of Peninsular Malaya known as Orang Asli² (aborigines) and also natives in East Malaysia known as Kadazan, Iban and Dayak.

The religions of the people are Islām, Chinese Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism and others. This diversity was due to Malaysia being located strategically between the sea routes of China and India and between the East and West.³

The development of Malaysia as a multi-racial country is due to the historical past. People from various countries came and eventually settled down in Malaysia giving rise to the ethnic mosaic of today. The presence of a great number of Chinese and Indians was due to the colonial policy during the nineteenth century when the British needed labour for the economic exploitation of the states. There were massive immigration of Chinese and Indians during this period. This gave rise to the ethnic

¹ Malaysian census is done every 10 years, in 1980, 1990 and 2000. This figure is derived from the most recent census.

² Orang Asli the primitive tribe in Malaysia usually live near the jungle or rural area.

³ Malaysian Year Book, 2000.