



WORKSHOP TITLE

**Networks of Islamic Learning across Asia: The Role of International Centers of Islamic Learning in Building Ties and Forging New Identities**

WORKSHOP DIRECTOR

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Although globalization is often associated with “modernity” and the transfer of Western values and cultures, in fact for hundreds of years Islamic education networks throughout Asia have acted as conduits for a continuous flow of ideas throughout the region. From the earliest days of Islam, as the religion spread throughout the Middle East, and then to South Asia, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia along land and sea routes, first hundreds, then thousands, and eventually millions of Muslims would return along these same routes to participate in the hajj. As the trip often took several years many would take the opportunity to stop along the way to study with well-known scholars of Islam. These informal networks were later solidified as Islamic colleges were established, first at al Azhar in Cairo, and later throughout Asia.

Today, students from every region of Asia, including China, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, the Gulf, and the Middle East, travel to centers of learning in other parts of Asia, primarily in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Iran, Pakistan and Indonesia. This phenomenon is both a continuation of practices that have existed for centuries, but also the result of the recent resurgence of Islamic education throughout much of the world.

These students are arriving at centers of Islamic learning during a period of intense reflection on what it means to be Muslim today. At these universities they meet local Muslim students, as well as students like themselves, for example, those coming from ethnic minority communities, those belonging to religious minority groups, those coming from societies in the midst of the economic reform and social unrest created by rapid development, moderate Islamic societies, and more conservative Islamic societies. With Arabic as their lingua franca, students from throughout Asia, and the rest of the world, form communities, studying together in programs lasting two to six years.

This workshop seeks to include:

- scholars and practitioners working in the field of Islamic education in Asia, specifically those involved with international centers of Islamic learning;
- scholars carrying out research on Muslim communities that have sent students overseas to complete their Islamic studies;
- scholars in the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, religion, education and Islamic studies interested in ways in which local and transnational identities have been influenced by international centers of Islamic learning;
- those teaching at centers of Islamic learning.

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Some of the questions and issues that will be addressed include:

- what role have international centers of Islamic learning played in the development of local and international Muslim identities among students, both historically and in the present;
- to what extent have the networks created among students been maintained after graduation, and how have they continued to influence students;
- to what extent are universal identities forged, or local identities reinforced;
- what influence do students have upon their home communities upon their return after graduation; and,
- are there significant differences between the impact of different centers of Islamic learning.