

RPCS

QUARTERLY

Developing New Horizons of Knowledge for
Islam in the Contemporary World

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EVENT SUMMARY

A roundtable discussion was held on 28th July 2023, drawing more than 30 participants including local religious teachers (asatizah) from various agencies and organisations. The discussion opened with a call to cultivate an intellectually enriching environment and foster adaptive mindset to support the growth of religious leaders, underlining the importance of evaluating evolving narratives over time. The session mainly addressed several crucial points surrounding evolving gender dynamics and social norms in relation to spousal roles within the Muslim community. In her presentation, the RPCS Associate Research Fellow, Ustazah Nur Hafiza Roslee, highlighted the compelling need to review our understanding and interpretations of the concepts of *qiwāmah*, *nafaqah*, and *qānitāt* (as mentioned in Surah *an-Nisā'* verse 34) in response to the rapidly-changing demands of the economy and ever-evolving social realities. Dr Mohd Yusri Yusoff further enriched the discourse by sharing his analysis of our community's perceptions regarding these key marital concepts, based on the insights he gathered from the counselling sessions he had been providing for local Muslim couples and families, as well as training programmes conducted with our local asatizah.

Contact us at RPCS@Muis.gov.sg

RPCS
RESEARCH PROGRAMME IN THE STUDY
OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES THROUGH NARRATIVE CHANGE AND MINDSET SHIFT¹

Nur Hafiza Roslee, Associate Research Fellow, RPCS

*Dr Mohd Yusri Yusoff, RPCS Mentor, Director of YusriYusoff
Consulting*

28 July 2023

I. CHANGING LIVED REALITIES AND UNCHANGING SPOUSAL ROLES

The speaker outlined several changes confronting our community and society at large. These changes include the growing prevalence of dual-income households,² as well as a trend where brides often possess higher qualification(s)³ and/or salary⁴ than grooms at the time of marriage. Moreover, amidst concerns about the rising costs of living impacting family cohesiveness,⁵ recent studies have also illuminated the continued stress experienced by women due to expectations on domestic responsibilities,⁶ where certain gender norms remain entrenched in Singapore society.

(1) The full paper will be published in an upcoming edition of the RPCS Insights and Perspectives, available at <https://www.muis.gov.sg/officeofthemufti/RPCS>

(2) <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/more-dual-income-couples-in-spore-with-equal-qualifications-population-census>

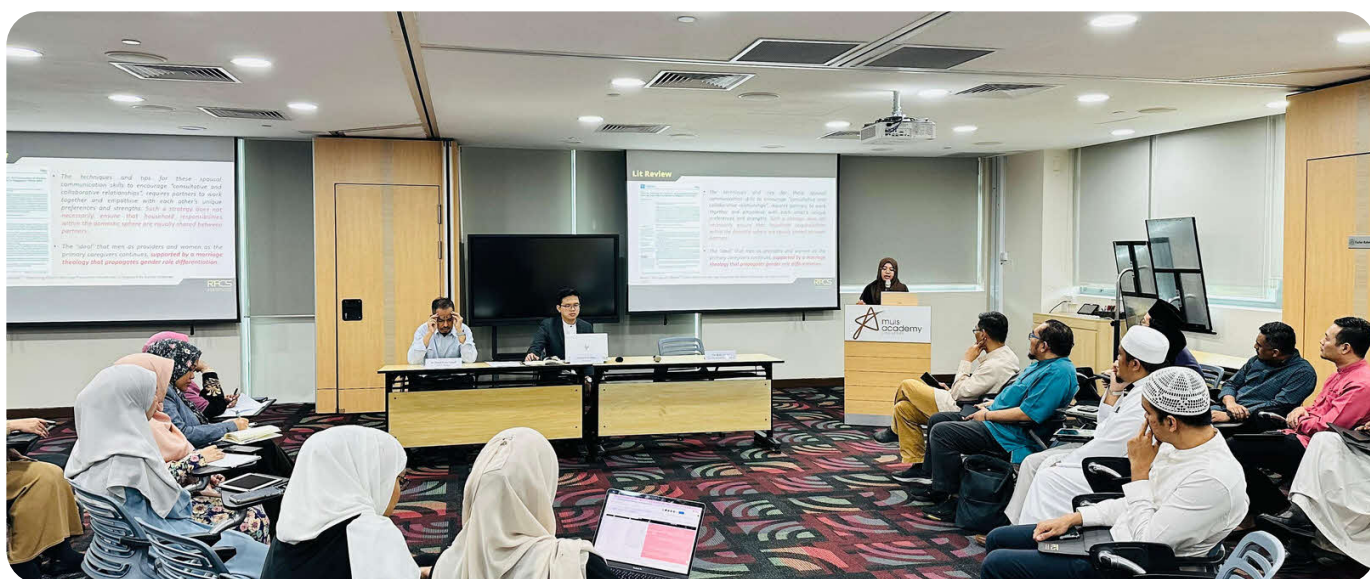
(3) Statistics on Marriages and Divorces, Reference Year 2021, Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Singapore

(4) <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/growing-share-of-couples-in-s-pore-have-wives-earning-more-than-their-husbands>

(5) The Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP)'s Perception Survey on The Malay/Muslim Community in Singapore (2017)

(6) [Unpaid Work: A Study on the behaviours and attitudes towards household and domestic caring responsibilities in Singapore \(2021\)](#)

One primary example would be the belief that women are, by default, the caregivers of the family and men, the breadwinners.⁷ Discussions in recent studies reveal that Malay/Muslim women still assume a larger portion of housework and that gender-defined roles and norms in our Muslim households still persist despite the discourse on both parents' equal contribution as caregivers becoming more mainstream.⁸



II. RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES ON SPOUSAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The changing economy and increasing trend of women in the workforce begs the question why ‘traditional marriage theology’ or the religious narrative on marital roles where men being providers and women being caregivers still remain deeply entrenched. Dr Suriani Suratman highlights this in her work, noting that, “while there are small shifts in practices of sharing household and child caring tasks in Malay dual-income households, conformity to “Ideal Muslim” marital couples strongly underpin the nature of gender roles within the household, and religion remained the premise for instructional advice”⁹. Emphasizing the crucial role that *asatizah* play in strengthening the family institution, further discussions include shedding light on the anecdotes highlighted by the discussant which informed the analysis on issues surrounding *qiwamah*, *nafaqah* and *qanitāt*. These include common misconceptions regarding these key marital concepts, and how they consequently affect marital functions as well as divorce decisions.

(7) The Role of Malay-Muslim Fathers in the Family, The Karyawan, AMP (2022)

(8) Marriage and Parenthood Survey 2021

(9) <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781351109871-3/dual-income-households-among-singapore-malay-families-suriani-suratman-maznah-mohamad>

III. REVIEWING RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF SPOUSAL ROLES

Amidst the dynamic landscape of competing ideologies and rapidly-changing social norms within our Muslim community, the pivotal role played by our religious leaders and *asatizah* cannot be overstated. The ability of our religious leaders and *asatizah* to cultivate intellectual resilience and maturity is crucial in navigating this terrain effectively, contributing to the strengthening of families and communities through proactive narrative change and a transformative mindset shift. The discussion raised the imperative of reconciling traditional interpretations with evolving norms citing evidence from the works of several traditional scholars alongside their contemporary successors. While some shifts in the way marital issues are being discussed by some of our local *asatizah* are observed, the question is then how extensive or prevalent these shifts are in the first place. Both presentations advocated for a renewal of narratives and the development of contemporary perspectives on *qiwamah*, *nafaqah*, and *qānitāt* which align with the current social norms and lived realities.

During the panel discussion segment, diverse opinions from the *Asatizah* surfaced on the topic of gender roles and interpretations of Quranic verses related to family dynamics. Despite varying viewpoints, there was a unanimous agreement on the necessity to re-evaluate the way these key marital concepts are being understood and discussed throughout our public education efforts and initiatives.



BETWEEN REVISIONISM AND CONTEXTUALISATION: RE-EXAMINING CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TOWARDS HADITH IN PLURAL SOCIETIES

Dr Alladein Adawi
Head of the Department of Usuluddin and Associate Professor,
The University of Jordan
18 August 2023

On 18 August 2023, RPCS welcomed Dr. Alladein Adawi, Associate Professor from the University of Jordan, as a distinguished guest speaker for a riveting roundtable discussion.

I. HADITH AND ITS COMPATIBILITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

In an era where the role of religion in contemporary society comes under intense scrutiny, religious communities are compelled to revisit how their religious texts are being interpreted and understood to ensure that its teachings remain compatible with rapidly changing circumstances. Unfortunately, some radical groups espousing extremist and violent religious understandings have tainted the image of religion, particularly Islam. What further complicates matters is the inaccurate depictions of Islam and Muslims through mass media. For Muslims, while the Quran and the Hadith remain paramount as primary sources of religious guidance, there is a growing recognition of the need for nuanced and diverse interpretations, reflecting the varied

contexts in which Muslims reside globally. Many Muslims, especially those living in contemporary societies, have come to appreciate that some religious texts may not always be understood literally. On the other hand, others problematise the apparent incompatibility of certain Islamic texts with modern society and current developments, undermining the credibility of these sources altogether. Considering these complexities, it is therefore important for us to evaluate the different approaches to understanding the Hadith tradition comprehensively. Through this exercise, we aim to ensure the Hadith tradition is accorded the high regard that it is rightly due.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF THE HADITH TRADITION

In his presentation, Dr Adawi spoke about the development of the Hadith tradition beginning from the early days of Islam. He explained how the study of hadith progressed in stages alongside the gradual expansion of the Muslim nation globally. With this expansion came the increase in transmission of religious information, in addition to novel issues which required guidance and reasoning derived from established sources of the religion. Scholars developed a framework to ascertain the credibility of each transmitted Prophetic narration, placing significant emphasis on the studying of the chains of narrators, known as *isnad*. This meticulous process proved effective in allowing scholars to sift through the vast number of prophetic narrations, categorizing hadith into different tiers, ranging from authentic, fair, weak, and other classifications. It is only when narrations are deemed to have met the acceptable criteria that it becomes viewed to have weight on the Hadith tradition. With that said, this criteria which Hadith scholars upheld to determine the authenticity of narrations varied, leading to different grading of narrations. Even when narrations were deemed to be of an acceptable grade, scholars do encounter a dilemma whereby two or more narrations on a particular topic appeared inconsistent in their meanings.



III. CONFLICT AND CRITICISMS WITHIN THE HADITH TRADITION

To address perceived incongruence within the Hadith tradition, scholars of Hadith formulated several steps through which this conflict in meaning can be resolved. Having verified the authenticity of these narrations, scholars sought to harmonize them by providing a detailed context for each *hadith*, and explaining their relation to others. Scholars may give preference (*tarjih*) to one narration over another based on reasonable. The concept of abrogation (*naskh*) or the suspension of judgement (*tawaqquf*) may also be applied in examining conflicting narrations, maintaining the integrity and rigour of the Hadith tradition.

More recently, Western scholarship has approached the study of Hadith tradition differently. Dr Jonathan Brown categorized these approaches into four: The Orientalist, Philo-Islamic, Revisionist, and Western Evaluation. While the Orientalist and Revisionist approaches on early Islamic history were characterized as being based largely on inaccurate and uncritical assumptions, the Philo-Islamic and Western Evaluation offered balanced responses which restored the sophisticated rigour of the Hadith tradition. Dr Adawi remarked that Muslims should strive to engage this discourse on Hadith criticism, which may strengthen our knowledge and appreciation of the historicity of our own religious texts.

IV. IMPORTANCE OF A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING TOWARDS HADITH IN CONTEMPORARY AND PLURAL SOCIETIES

Dr Adawi presented several examples of the application of Hadith in contemporary society that may not be straightforward. For instance, many Muslims situated within non-Muslim majority societies would¹⁰ find themselves in apparent conflict with the Hadith in which the Prophet p.b.u.h said, “I am free from every Muslim that lives among the idolaters.” However, a deeper analysis into the circumstances surrounding the revelation of the Hadith, otherwise termed *asbab al-wurud*, would enable us to understand that this narration was intended to protect the welfare of Muslims specifically during times of societal strife. Therefore, to apply its literal meaning without historicising it would lead to misleading application of the Hadith. While the contextualisation of Hadith is especially relevant for Muslims living in the contemporary world, its efforts should be led by those who possess the requisite training and criteria in interpreting religious texts. In summary, a deep understanding of the nuances of the Hadith sciences provides a framework for us to thrive in and become contributive members of a plural society.

(10) p.b.u.h: Peace be Upon Him



FOURTH WORLD CONGRESS ON LOGIC AND RELIGION MEETING REPORT

Organised by University of Oxford and University of Warsaw

Participation by Ustaz Sheikh Mohamad Farouq

Associate Research Fellow

RPCS, Higher Education and Research

3rd - 8th September 2023

From 3rd September to 8th September 2023, Associate Research Fellow Ustaz Farouq represented RPCS for a workshop on AI and religion in Warsaw, Poland, sponsored by the Ian Ramsey Centre at Oxford University. Ustaz Farouq also had the privilege of presenting his paper, 'Chat-GPT, Muslim Cyberspace and the Construction of a Critical Islamic Epistemology'. Below, we delve into his comprehensive report and coverage of the workshop.

I. BACKGROUND

The World Congress on Logic and Religion (WoCoLoR) was convened to bring together theologians into conversation with scholars and practitioners from the different fields to discuss about the latest developments in the relationship between religion, logic, and science. Among the keynote speakers were Professor Richard Swinburne and Professor Eleonore Stump who have contributed immensely to the philosophy of religion and science. In total, five workshops were conducted throughout the congress including one on Religion, Logic and AI that was co-financed by the Ian Ramsey Centre, University of Oxford, as a part of the project New Horizons for Science and

and Religion in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) funded by the John Templeton Foundation. I presented a paper titled 'Chat GPT, Muslim Cyberspace the Construction of a Critical Islamic Epistemology' that was also published under the RPCS Insights and Perspectives Series.

II. DAY 1 OF EVENT

The first workshop explored the link between religious symbolism and logic. Religious symbolism involves imbuing objects with spiritual meanings that is a common practice in many religious traditions. Through this practice, it allows believers to understand abstract manifestations of truths and for researchers to explore the role of symbolism in fostering religious cohesion and communication. Ultimately, presenters in the workshop concluded that religious symbolism has the potential to enable a deeper understanding of the connection between human spirituality and intellectual reasoning.

III. DAY 2 AND 3 OF EVENT

Day 2 started with the keynote session that was delivered by Professor Richard Swinburne on determining the metaphysical modality of theological propositions. Professor Swinburne developed his arguments from the work of David Chalmers, a version of "conceivability" theory, and applied it to considering how we can prove or disprove a claim that "God is a (logically or metaphysically) necessary being". Through his arguments, Professor Swinburne invited us to think about the complexities of the relationship between God as an omnipotent being and the human volition.

The subsequent sessions were focused on religion and reconciliation. Deliberations were based on Martin Buber's postulation that relationships in life are built on three interconnected spheres namely with people, nature and intelligible forms. Against this backdrop, presenters contended that suffering is a result of broken relations with all these three spheres and thus proposed a framework of reconciliation that entails a shift away from a "I-It" mode of relating, where individuals view each other as objects to be used, towards an "I-Thou" mode of relating, where individuals see each other as subjects with inherent value and worth. This framework promotes empathy, active listening, and a willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue in order to achieve true reconciliation. By recognizing the interconnectedness of all living things and approaching nature with respect it can help to promote a more holistic approach to life and countervail the dominionism that exists in some Abrahamic traditions.

IV. DAY 4 AND 5 OF EVENT

We began with the discussion on the intricate relationship between language and religion, particularly in the context of the digital age. Presenters examined the impact of social media on language and communication. They contended that social media platforms have influenced communication practices and enabled the emergence of new linguistic strategies, such as memes and hashtags. The sessions also explored the impact of these new linguistic norms on identity making and belonging particularly for marginalized individuals whose voices are amplified through these platforms. These deliberations served as a segue to the workshop on AI and religion that was sponsored by the Ian Ramsey Centre, Oxford University. I presented my paper on ‘Chat-GPT, Muslim Cyberspace and the Construction of a Critical Islamic Epistemology.’ In my presentation, I discussed how the emergence of new digital technologies has revolutionized the way information is disseminated, making it easier for people across the globe to communicate and connect instantly.



Dr Marcin Introducing the synopsis of the workshop to the sponsors, Ian Ramsey Centre, Oxford University

I argued that an unbridled usage of such technologies would expedite an intellectual death and a certain degree of ‘epistemic disobedience’ is necessary to prevent a technological dystopia and create space for critical reflection on the digital world we are building. Against this backdrop, I proposed the construction of a critical epistemological framework in Islam that builds on the intellectual heritage of Islam to critically engage modern technologies to ensure that it is used responsibly.

The subsequent sessions in the following day deliberated on the possibility of using large language models (LLM) in religious discourse analysis as well as envisioning them as possible techno-theologians. Although the presenters argued that that an LLM model like Chat-GPT cannot function as an independent philosopher as it lacks 'deep qualities' such as rationalisation of consciousness, the findings that were presented indicate that Chat-GPT excels in dialectics and creating connections with different concepts to construct arguments. In sum, Chat-GPT can be a great help to make connections between data sets or knowledge systems but to generate a rich response it requires the higher-order thinking skills that are unique to humans.



Presentation on 'Chat-GPT, Muslim Cyberspace and the Construction of a Critical Islamic Epistemology'

Author Information:

Sheikh Mohamad Farouq Abdul Fareez is an Associate Research Fellow in the Research Programme in the Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS). He obtained his first degree in Comparative Religion and Usuluddin from the International Islamic University of Malaysia and holds two master's degree in Islamic Thought and Applied Ethics as well as Asian Studies with a special focus on inter-religious relations in plural societies. His area of research interest involves issues concerning religion, human development, and ethics. He is currently working on a research project that seeks to understand the interplay between AI and Islam to ensure that emerging technologies are advanced for human flourishing and the common good.

GPT= Generative Pre-trained transformer. Chat GPT is one type of model (LLM). ChatGPT is a chatbot that uses GPT.

RPCS FELLOWSHIP TRAINING

The RPCS Fellowship Training plan encompasses a selection of identified courses and workshops that establishes, at a minimum, graduate-level foundation in research methods and skills. This training plan aims to equip RPCS research fellows and research officers with the necessary tools and skills for the development of their respective research projects. RPCS participated in five training programmes conducted by the National Library Board, the National University of Singapore (NUS), Republic Polytechnic (RP) and Aventis Learning Group as follows:

INTRODUCTION TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

NUS CFPR - Centre for Family and Population Research 24 & 25 July 2023



In partnership with the Centre for Family and Population Research-NUS (CFPR), eleven RPCS researchers attended the Introduction to Qualitative Research Workshop. This platform provided an opportunity for researchers to delve into the intricacies of human behavior and the lived experiences of individuals within diverse social, cultural, religious, and

political contexts. It equipped researchers with the necessary tools for in-depth exploration of the meanings, motivations, beliefs, and relationships of interlocutors, fostering a rich and nuanced understanding of their experiences. Central to the workshop's focus was guiding attending researchers to present gathered data in a manner that can be potentially catalyze transformative impacts on both individual and collective levels. Additionally, the workshop also underscored the paramount importance of ethics in conducting research, emphasizing the importance of maintaining the integrity of findings while ensuring the well-being of the individuals involved in their respective projects. This can be achieved by treating interlocutors as co-producers of knowledge, rather just subjects providing data. This approach cultivates mutual trust and helps mitigate any potential power asymmetries, thus nurturing a research environment characterized by safety and equity. Overall, the workshop provided researchers with valuable insights and equipped them with the requisite skills to conduct qualitative research effectively and responsibly.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH NUS SSR - Social Service Research Centre, 11 & 12 September 2023

In partnership with the Social Service Research Centre-NUS (SSR), nine RPCS researchers attended the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) workshop. It provided a valuable framework for uncovering and examining power relations and social inequalities embedded within symbols and texts. Serving as an introductory course on



utilizing CDA, the workshop explored the use of CDA not only for text, but also as a tool to conceptualize and develop research projects aimed at uncovering or challenging the reproduction of existing power asymmetries. A highlight of the workshop would be the case study segment which allowed researchers to delve into and interrogate power dynamics within the dominant discourse on social issues. Through the analysis of newspaper clippings and visual media, researchers gained insights into how these discourses shape perceptions and influence social realities.

Furthermore, the workshop encouraged researchers to critically examine the production and reproduction of public knowledge and dominant narrative. This prompted them to consider the significant potential of their respective research projects in re-shaping public knowledge to more accurately reflect the lived experience of those on the margins of society. The workshop also introduced researchers to the various frameworks of CDA for social services that facilitates the redistribution of power to enable marginalized voices to be heard in the decision-making processes affecting their lives. Such efforts are integral to combatting social injustices and fostering the development of more inclusive policies and practices. Overall, the workshop provided researchers with a deeper understanding of CDA and its potential application as a conceptual framework for their research projects.



RPCS JUNIOR FELLOWSHIP TRAINING SCHEME 2024/25

(Contract - 2 Years)


APPLICATION IS NOW OPEN

The Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS) was launched in June 2021, and it was developed as part of Muis' efforts in advancing religious thought leadership For the future.

The RPCS would like to invite Asatizah and religious graduates with an interest in research work and academic writing, to apply for the RPCS junior research fellowship. Candidates should ideally hold a Masters degree or extensive experience serving the local Muslim community. Research topics need to be aligned to any of the three RPCS Research Focus areas- Governance, Society, and Science & Technology. Interested applicants are invited to write in to the RPCS Secretariat at RPCS@muis.gov.sg to express your interests.

The RPCS Programme seeks to develop contextualised bodies of knowledge on socio-religious issues that are typical for Muslim communities living in secular states and advanced economies. The RPCS focus will be on developing new understanding, interpretations and application of Islamic principles, values and traditions to contemporary issues and challenges. The RPCS aims to bring together local scholars and senior practitioners to look into current and future issues in the socio-religious life of the Singapore Muslim community. It serves as a platform to nurture the right intellectual environment to facilitate the growth and development of its own group of religious leaders, scholars and thinkers who are authentic and credible to guide the local Muslim community.

For more information on RPCS, please visit: www.muis.gov.sg/officeofmufti/rpcs



THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME IN THE STUDY OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS (RPCS)

The Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS) is developed as part of Muis' efforts in advancing religious thought leadership for the future. The programme seeks to develop contextualised bodies of knowledge on socio-religious issues that are typical for Muslim communities living in secular states and advanced economies. The RPCS focuses on developing new understanding, interpretations and application of Islamic principles, values and traditions to contemporary issues and challenges through its research and publications.

The RPCS aims to bring together local scholars and senior practitioners to study current and future issues in the socio-religious life of the Singapore Muslim community. Through RPCS seminars, workshops and roundtable discussions, it serves as a platform to nurture the right intellectual ecology and environment to facilitate the growth and development of its own group of religious leaders, scholars and thinkers who are seen as authentic and credible to guide the local Muslim community.

Aside from conducting research, the RPCS also aims to develop future thought leaders through its fellowship programmes and research training workshops to familiarise with the evolving religious discourse and analysis of issues relevant to the theme of Muslim Communities of Success. Its research agenda encompasses three broad areas:



GOVERNANCE

Islam, Secularism & Diversity

Study and develop new understanding on the relationship between religion and secularism, identify models of successful citizenship and contribution, and formulate a robust and credible framework of successful living drawn from Islamic traditions, history and experiences.



SOCIETY

Family & Social Cohesion

Identify ways of supporting and strengthening the family institution and review laws as society evolves so that they remain resilient amidst these challenges, and how religions can be an effective resource in enriching further the common space and common good in any pluralistic society.



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Biomedical ethics, new food technologies, digital technologies and ethics, crypto-currencies

Develop Islamic thought and ethics to provide new guidance on issues such as new food technologies, digital and financial technologies, environmental challenges and others.

If you are interested in the topics and discussions covered in our RPCS Roundtable Discussions, do keep a look out on our website and related platforms for upcoming sessions. We look forward to providing a safe space for collaborative learning and the building of new bodies of knowledge on the range of topics covered. Please visit

www.muis.gov.sg/officeofthemufti/RPCS.

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