

visions of self-interest and identity exhibited by nations and peoples. The tone of discourse was uniformly high and very well-informed, Chinese scholars being well acquainted with European thought and contemporary intellectual fashions.

Assessment

In the course of both the Fudan University and SASS's discussions, several basic realities became apparent to the foreign visiting scholars: Contemporary Chinese thinkers – being very well trained in historical materialism and still wedded to a formal ideology of Marxist social theory with its reductionist view of the human – do not accept the reality of universals for knowledge theory. Even more remarkable is their explicit *rejection* that ancient Chinese philosophic worldview (Daoism; less so Confucianism and Buddhism) embraces any sort of transcendent basis for human awareness and achievement. In a very real sense, mainland Chinese thinkers remain good children of the Enlightenment (Kant, Hegel, Marx...), and uphold a materialist anthropology and epistemology. This feature of contemporary thinking in China was painfully demonstrated when the Iranian professor Aavani presented a profound summary of the metaphysical basis of Daoism, comparing it to the Pre-Socratic thinkers Heraclitus and Parmenides, supported by references to Ibn al-‘Arabī, Suhrawardī, and Mullā Ṣadrā, and offered this metaphysical harmony as a realistic grounding for global unity. Several highly respected Chinese professors attacked him for *mis*-understanding the essence of Chinese thought, heatedly insisting that ‘transcendence’ has always been foreign to Chinese thinking and experience. This led them to an amused dismissal of Professor Aavani.

Fifth International Conference on Children and Youth in MENA Cities: "Education, Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Youth for the Labour Market" (Aleppo, Syria, 6–8 July 2009)

Azizah Anuar, LAIS Malaysia

The Fifth International Conference on Children and Youth in MENA Cities, organised by the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) and MENA Child Protection Initiative (MENA CPI), with the collaboration of Aleppo Municipality, Syria Trust for Development–SHABAB Project, UNICEF, and the World Bank, inaugurated by the Governor of Aleppo, Eng. Ali Ahmad Mansourah, gathered 26 speakers and 300 participants to share lessons learned and best practices related to vulnerable and marginalised children and youth in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. The conference aimed to share experiences from other countries regarding policies and programmes for children and youths and seek solutions and offer recommendations to curb socio-economic illnesses

among children, especially street-children, and address youth employment and employability in the MENA region.

The first session was on “Youth as the Core and Crux of Development in the Arab World” and “Youth Employment Experiences in Five Arab Cities”, which addressed the critical issues of street-children in Egypt, the impact of economic sanctions on Palestinian youths, the increasing numbers of child-labourers in Jordan, the breach of human rights, and inadequate educational programmes affecting youth employability in Arab cities. The session “Problems and Challenges of Youths and Children in the MENA Region” dealt with issues of poverty, school dropouts, unemployment, parental education and low household income in MENA countries; the session “Programs for Reintegrating Children and Youth in Formal, Informal, and Non-formal Education” described a researcher’s experience in setting up community-based projects to curb street-children and unemployment in the Arab region. Other themes were: “Youth Employment Programme: Experiences and Lessons Learned from Regional and Arab Countries” and “Youth Rehabilitation: Training and Skills Development for Youths” – mainly based on research into social illnesses among youths in Jordan, Syria, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Egypt, Morocco, the United States and some European countries.

The writer of these lines was fortunate to be invited – for the session on “The Role of Governmental and Non-governmental Organisations in Alleviating the Youth Unemployment Problem” – as the only speaker/participant from Southeast Asia to share the Malaysian experience in eliminating the issue of street-children, curbing poverty among children, and creating job opportunities. Many participants commended the Malaysian Government’s inculcation of what they referred to as “the true spirit of Islamic teachings” in upgrading their citizens’ quality of life, dealing with child labour, creating better health, education and economic programmes, and fostering new job opportunities for their graduates and youngsters. A dialogue between youths and municipal mayors on youth employment programmes and policies brought this session to a close. The closing plenary session included the ‘final declaration’ and the conference recommendations, remarks of Dr Ma’an Alshibli (mayor and chairman of the Aleppo City Council), and the closing speech by AUDI chairman HE Sheikh Abdullah Al Ali al-Naeem, delivered on his behalf by Dr Ibrahim Al-Turki (executive director of the Child Protection Initiative in the MENA region).

It is recommended that IAIS give increasing attention to issues affecting youths and children in Muslim societies and direct research toward addressing major problems impacting on urban children in particular. Moreover, it is suggested that the Malaysian Government focuses on the arising of social illnesses among children and youths due to the current economic crisis and the impact of globalisation.