Abstract
Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. According to the Malaysian Constitution, being Muslim is associated with being Malay. In the country, Malay Muslims are the majority with more than half of the population, followed by Chinese and Indians and other minorities from various ethnic backgrounds such as the Orang Asli, Iban, Kadazan, and Bajau. In Malaysia, religion is normally linked with ethnicity, hence the common perception is Malays are Muslims, Chinese are either Buddhists, Taoists or Christians, and Indians are Hindus. Contrary to the common perception there are also Malaysian Chinese who are Muslims although the number is not large. However, the origins of Chinese Muslims in Malaysia can be traced back to the Hui Chinese who migrated to the Malay Archipelago more than 500 years ago. Throughout the years they have endured many trials and tribulations. This article analyses the origins of Malaysian Chinese Muslims and the challenges they experience, especially in maintaining their Chinese and Muslims identities.

Introduction
This article examines the evolution of Malaysian Chinese Muslims. This study sets out to demonstrate that the struggle of Chinese Muslims to preserve their cultural and religious identity has not waned in spite of living in a multi-cultural and multi-religious country like Malaysia. Malaysian Chinese are descendants of Chinese who migrated to Malaya. They are also considered as Overseas Chinese.

In 2000, there were 57,000 Chinese Muslims in Malaysia. According to the Department of Statistic in July 2010, the population of Malaysia was estimated to be 28 million and the Malaysian Chinese population was approximately 6,960,000 of which 0.66 percent were Muslims compared to Buddhists who were 83.5 percent, 11 percent were Christians and 3.4 percent were Taoists. This data indicates that the Malaysian Chinese Muslims are minorities in two separate categories. First, they are a minority compared to the Malay Muslims who are the majority among the Muslims in Malaysia. Second, the Malaysian Chinese Muslims can also be considered as a minority even among the Chinese who are either Buddhists or Christians. It is noteworthy to reiterate that religion is closely associated with ethnicity in Malaysia.

Hence, the idea that ‘Muslim is Malay’ has caused confusion among non-Malaysians since there are also Muslims who are not Malay, such as the Iban, Melanaus, Dayaks, Bajaus and Kadazans from East Malaysia, Malaysian Indians, Pakistanis, Punjabis, and Chinese Muslims. Moreover, the idea that ‘Muslim is Malay’ has also caused