*Pig Commandments* Transcript

[music]

NARRATOR Islam is the official religion of Malaysia. Muslims make up around 62 percent of the country's population. Most of them are Malays, because the law stipulates that Malays are Muslims by birth.

[music]

NARRATOR Yusuf Ong is a Chinese of Hakka origin, born and bred here in Malaysia, he is 40 this year. He is also an Imam. As an Imam of Chinese origin, one of his main obligations includes dealing with matters concerning non-Muslim's conversion to Islam.

Yusuf Ong [non-English narration]

NARRATOR Having converted to Islam for around 20 years himself, he has set up his own Muslim family, he has also observed and deeply experienced the misunderstandings between the Chinese and Muslim communities.

Yusuf Ong, Imam, Selengar Islamic Council, Malaysia

Yusuf Ong As a matter of fact, the majority of Malaysian Chinese have a great deal of misunderstanding of the Islamic faith. These prejudices and misunderstandings did not happen overnight. They developed throughout the period of a century. The Chinese who convert to Islam undergo great changes in their daily life, particularly in terms of the food they eat. Naturally, the Chinese love to eat pork, but they are forbidden to do so once converted to Islam.

NARRATOR Islam was founded on the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century A.D. by the prophet Muhammad. From the peninsula, it propagated outwards. Now, in the 21st century, Islam has become the fasted growing religion worldwide. It is the professed faith of nearly 1.3 billion people, second only behind Christianity, which has two billion followers. Although Islam began in Arabia, only about 20 percent of the world's Muslims are there. The majority of them live in south and southeast Asia. In Malaysia alone, there are around 12 million Muslims. The Quran is Islam's only sacred book. Its 6,239 verses are grouped into 114 chapters. The Quran is the holy guide for all aspects of life, including doctrine, social organization, politics, and economics. Muslims consider the Quran to be the word of God, as dictated to the prophet Muhammad. Not a single word in the Quran has ever been altered.

Dato' Mustapha Ma, Chairman, Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association

Dato' Mustapha Ma According to the Quran, one of the commandments from God reveals that the act of consuming pork is forbidden. Allah bestows upon human beings an abundance of nutritious and delicious food and drinks which they may consume. They are forbidden to consume pork and blood, and animals that die from natural causes or from disease. It is mainly to comply with this commandment that Muslims hence do not eat pork.

NARRATOR If we look in the Quran, there are four chapters with verses related to the prohibition of pork consumption. This is one of them.

UNKNOWN This prohibition is mentioned for the first time in the 173rd verse of the 2nd chapter page 26 in the Chinese version of the Quran. This how the verse goes, "He has only forbidden you what dies of itself, and blood and flesh of swine and that over which any other name that Allah has been invoked but whoever is driven to necessity not desiring nor exceeding the limit no sin shall be upon him for Allah is forgiving, most merciful."

Ilshat Hassan, Uygur Scholar

Ilshat Hassan There are many publications in Islam which explain the reason why the Muslims do not consume pork. First of all it's stipulated as a rule in the Quran. Nevertheless, there must be an explanation for it. If we refer to the compendium of Materia Medica, the author Li Shi-Zhen writes that, "pigs are of bad nature." It suggest that pork contains harmful properties that make it susceptible to infection.

NARRATOR In Malaysia, beef is among the main foods of Muslims. It can be found in various dishes in a typical Muslim restaurant. Raw beef is also commonly found in the market. Cows are usually slaughtered by qualified butchers from Malay villages. This is a conventional butchery spot in a Malay village. Abdul Rahim is a butcher known by everyone here. He is obviously a Muslim.

Abdul Rahim Their right way to perform this is that we first tie it up with ropes, and tie the other ends of the ropes to the trunks. When it collapses, that's the time we slaughter it.

NARRATOR Abdul Rahim is 50 this year. He come to work here every day at five A.M., assisted by his two colleagues. The whole slaughtering process must comply with Islamic codes of practice.

Dato' Mustapha Ma Life and death are entirely in the hands of Allah. If you wish to sacrifice an animal for food, yes, Allah will permit you to do so, but you must first invoke the name of Allah. You must use the sharpest knife you can find so the animals suffer the least pain and it must be done at the fastest speed, then it's blood must be drained thoroughly. This what we call "Halal meat". By conforming to Islamic teachings, by invoking the name of Allah, the meat is Halal, otherwise it's non-Halal.

Haji Obaidellah Mehamad From the acclaimed Chinese ideology of Confucianism, Mencius argued for the infinite goodness of human nature. Later Xunzi developed a contrasting version of it which sees people as inherently evil by nature. These ideologies greatly influenced the development of Chinese literature.

NARRATOR Associate professor Obaidellah is the only Malay lecturer in the department of Chinese studies, University of Malaya. Despite being Malay, as well as Muslim, he received his education in Chinese throughout his school days. For decades, he has translated various Chinese classics for the benefit of the Muslim community. He commands an extensive knowledge of both cultures.

Haji Obaidellah Mehamad, Associate Professor of Chinese Studies, University of Malaya

Haji Obaidellah Mehamad The teachings of Islam clearly state the prohibition of consuming pork or any by-products related to pigs. The Quran has put this definition across firmly and clearly. Therefore, it is expected that all Muslims have a strong grip on this concept. The impression of come Chinese towards this religion falls directly on the issue of not eating pork. That's one of their main understandings toward Islam. They also know that Islamic law permits a man to have as many as four wives. That is their only understanding about Islam and not the complete understanding of its teachings. They don't realize the nature of this belief nor the meaning of this faith. If we study both cultures, one of them strongly forbids the consumption of pork, the other is accustomed to it as an important source of food. There is a distinct line between the two. We should not let prejudice govern our minds. We should not discriminate against other just because they do not eat pork.

The Pig Commandments, End of Part 1

[music]

NARRATOR This is a Chinese village in Penang, northern Malaysia. The villagers are mostly descendents of immigrants from the Guangdong and Fujian provinces of China. This village is known for its pig farming business. In the old days, virtually everyone was a pig farmer. Lee Hock Jua is one of the second generation pig farmers here. In the past few decades, he and his wife have been faithful getting up at dawn to feed their livestock. His father began pig farming in the 1950s.

Lee Hock Jua

Lee Hock Jua When we first arrived here he brought with him two sows. My father kept them here on this farm. The farm expanded and then I took over the business. Now, my son has taken up the baton. It has been passed through the hands of three generations, so far.

NARRATOR Lee follows a rather traditional way of pig husbandry. The pig pens are located just next to their house.

Lee Hock Jua In the old days, we fed our pigs with mashed and cooked sweet potatoes or tapioca. It's different nowadays. Now we give them a mixture of raw maize soya bean and wheat bran, or rice bran and sometimes powdered taro. Now we don't cook the fodder anymore. We just mix it up.

NARRATOR Their farm now keeps 200 sows and 13 boars for breeding. Altogether, they have around 2,200 pigs. The pigs are sold directly to the pork merchants, and they mainly supply the markets of Penang and Kelantan states. This is Lee's son, Lee Kar Khun. He is the third successor to this family based business.

Lee Kar Khun Here, it's quite natural for a son to inherit his father's trade. However, the younger generation are more intellectual. They choose to attend college. Not may of them are willing to devote themselves to this hard work. We had no choice but to take up the only path given to us.

NARRATOR At dusk, the pig merchant comes. They collect the pigs four times a week. They ship off around 20 to 30 pigs per trip. Despite being a job that demands commitment and devolution, Lee's 11 year old son, Nan Yi, shows great interest in taking over the family business in the future.

Nan Yi When I grow up, I would like to help my father and carry on his business in the future. I hope the price of pigs will increase. That's my wish.

[music]

NARRATOR The daily life of the Chinese is closely linked to the pig. In fact, this relationship began a long time ago. If we study the structure of the Chinese character hom, you'll see that the relationship between the Chinese and the pig has existed since ancient times. In 1898, an artifact was unearthed in a small village in Hunan province, China. It dates back to 3000 years ago and shows the ancient for Zha Guen, the oldest Chinese character system.

Dr. Lin Shu Hao, Associate Professor of Chinese Studies, University of Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia

Lin Shu Hao The Chinese character "Jia (home)' consists of a radical resembling a 'roof' on top, and underneath it is a character representing the 'pig.' In other words, the most important element of a home is not the people, but the pig!

Dr. Sun Zhen Yu, University of Ning Xia, China

Sun Zhen Yu The ideogram of 'Jia (home)' suggests a very interesting phenomenon. From the structure of the ideogram itself, it reflects the importance of the pig within the family life of the Chinese.

NARRATOR In 1956, another artifact was unearthed at the School of Film Studies in Changsha, Hunan province. It further supports this suggestion.

Tang Ah Chai, Scholar

Tang Ah Chai The pig was known as 'black gold" in ancient China. There are also titles such as 'the black faced master' or 'the black lord.' In fact, it represents prosperity. Pigs have brought fortune to the Chinese as livestock. We also hear of them in folk tales or see them as symbols in paper art, such as this one. In this paper cutting you can see the shape of a pig, carrying a treasure bowl on its back. It's a symbol of wealth and prosperity. From there we can say that the representation of the big plays an important role in Chinese culture, and this relationship began at least 5,000 years ago. No matter how much time passes and the world changes, the relationship is not weakened. It persists.

NARRATOR This is Ju, whose expertise at roasting pork has made him a big name in Penang. When there are memorial ceremonies in the Chinese community, he will be the prime supplier of roast pork, the most important item of offering to gods and ancestors. Tonight is the eve of such an important ritual. Ju's roast pork is in great demand. He had to start preparing the orders in the small hours. His main source of fuel is coconut shells. It's believe to be the key to producing delicious roast pork. There are around six million Chinese in Malaysia. Masters of pork roasting can be found in every state here. Roast pork is one of the must have offering items in traditional Chinese rituals.

Tang Ah Chai In Chinese customs, offerings are prepared during religious ceremonies. There are a wide range of offerings. They are presented depending on the subject they are worshipping or the nature of the occasion, be it a joyful celebration, such as a wedding or a mournful memorial like a funeral. Among the offerings there is always pork.

NARRATOR Penang is the state in Malaysia where the majority of Chinese live. Some of the customs and practices have been well preserved here, even though they've been lost in China. There are over 200 Chinese temples on the island of Penang alone. In most of the religious ceremonies, roast pork is the most important item of sacrifice. This is the scene of a traditional Chinese funeral in Penang. Roasted pigs are placed at the most significant spot. The quantity of this item symbolizes the degree of filial piety the deceased has gained from the descendents. It's also an indication of his or her social status and wealth, as well as indicating the reputation of the family.

UNKNOWN [non-English narration]

NARRATOR When the funeral rites are completed, all the mourners are invited to a feast of roast pork. To the Chinese, the pig is not just a foodstuff.

The Pig Commandments, End of Part 2

[music]

NARRATOR Sim Go Wat has been in shipping for 28 years. He is now an experienced pig transporter. He delivers pigs to other states from Penang. This route crosses over the main mountain range of peninsular Malaysia. It links up several main cities between the east and west coasts. Sim travels across four states. His journey takes a total of nine hours. There are more and more mosques in sight. Apparently, he's entered the state of Kelantan. Kelantan is one the northernmost states of peninsular Malaysia. It has the strongest Islamic tradition among all the states. Since the Islamic party successfully gained power in 1990, pig farming activities have faded rapidly. The Chinese here are forced to get their pig supply from Penang. This is a small town in Kelantan called Kuala Krai. The majority of the townsfolk are Muslims. Only 5,000 Chinese live here. Sim arrives at the pig slaughterhouse one kilometer away from the town center. It's the only legitimate pig slaughterhouse available in Kelantan.

NARRATOR Xu Bai Xiong is the owner of the slaughterhouse. He has been a pork butcher for over 30 years.

Xu Bai Xiong

Xu Bai Xiong The government has instructed us to move to this location. In fact, it's for the sake of the Malays or the Muslims. Once the slaughterhouse was surrounded mostly by the Chinese community. Later, the population of the Malays increased tremendously. The government wanted us to be considerate. To me, the importance of mutual respect and understanding between the Chinese and the Muslims is paramount. So, I relocated my slaughterhouse voluntarily. When this new location was proposed the authorities came to inspect the surroundings. It was approved. That's it. I was permitted to resume my business. I think the prime concern should be the standards of hygiene. The slaughterhouse must be at least 1 km away from residential areas. The whole area must be maintained as odor-free as possible. Not only for the sake of others but also our own health.

Xu Bai Xiong As for the unwanted leftovers or waste of the slaughter. I usually burn it off immediately. That's the way I do it. And that's why there is no stench around. Isn't there? Anything that is unwanted will be reduced to ashes by the end of the day. It kills all the bacteria and harmful microorganisms. This is a trick the Health Authorities taught me.

Xu Bai Xiong I learned the skill of pig slaughtering from my father when I was as young as 20 years old. I am now 55. I don't think it is particularly difficult to run the pig butchery business in Kelantan. There must be mutual respect in society. The Chinese must understand the situation of the Muslims. That is the key to survival. The pig is a sensitive issue to the Muslims. I think we in the Chinese community must try to be considerate. This enables us to co-exist and survive, despite having many differences between our cultures.

[music]

NARRATOR Ilshat Hassan come from Shinzhen, China. He is a scholar of Uygur origin. In China, the Uygurs are one of 10 ethnic groups that follow Islam. Two years ago, he came to Malaysia for advanced studies. Studying Islam in an Islamic country gives him much food for thought, particularly about the issue of pigs, which often creates much conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Ilshat Hassan, Uygur Scholar

Ilshat HassanWhere I come from, the issue of pigs being a sensitive subject exists, too. We too have experienced much racial and religious conflict in my homeland. It often happens between us, the Uygurs, [sic] and the Han Chinese. Conflict and ill feeling caused by the pig are common. Take myself as an example. All through my schooldays, up until when I started working, some of my colleagues and mates from the Han ethnic group were extremely polite and kind to me. They have a certain degree of understanding toward Islam. They tried their best not mention the word 'pig,' or any subject related to pigs in my presence. However, this world is full of ignorant individuals, who often attempt to provoke conflict. They intentionally speak about pigs or challenge our reason for not eating pork. Some of them made up ridiculous stories and suggested that Muslims are forbidden to consume pork because our ancestors were once rescued by a pig; that pigs are sacred to us and so on. These remarks are very hurtful to Muslims.

Dr. Sun Zhen Yu, University of Ning Xia, China

Sun Zhen Yu When the two cultures, namely Islamic and Chinese, collide due to the issue of pork it becomes a rather serious problem. From my personal experiences, the core of the problem lies in the hands of the Chinese. That's because pigs are a big part of their daily life. Pork has become something the Chinese can't go without. In other words, eating pork is something as natural as drinking water. In the absence of Muslims, they speak about pigs or pork without a second thought. In cases when Muslims are present, there is great possibility that they might fail to notice the sensitivity of the issue or have no knowledge or awareness about the seriousness of this particular prohibition. I believe the Chinese do not usually provoke the issue deliberately. Instead, they just fail to realize sometimes. It is understandable, as they are so accustomed to eating pork.

Sun Zhen Yu It's not easy for them to understand the sensitivity of it. In cases when sensitive words have been spoken unintentionally, even thought it could cause an unpleasant atmosphere. I think they should be forgiven for their unintended mistake.

NARRATOR This is a dinner organized by the Muslim Welfare Organization of Malaysia. The members were here for a conference earlier. Masyitah is one of the active members of the youth club. She comes from a typical Chinese village in Pahang state. She converted to Islam in 2001. Her conversion caused her a quandary soon after, for she dared not inform her family about it, especially her dear mother.

Masyitah Chong, Malaysian Chinese Muslim

Masyitah Chong When I first converted to Islam I did not dare tell my mother. Mainly, it was the fear of her disapproval. Her rebuke was what I feared the worst. So I kept it a secret. Until one day she saw me performing prayers at home. I had no choice but to tell her the truth. Her immediate reaction was anger. She said some very unpleasant words. I can't tell you how sad I was at the time. I was taken over by fear and guilt. However, things were back to normal afterwards. I still went home every day as usual. The only inconvenience was actually food. I couldn't have meals with my family because the food is not Halal. So I usually ate out, or merely had snacks or fruits, where are allowed. I think this is the main thing that saddened my mother. I used to love her cooking above all food in this world. The only chance I have to sit down with them and enjoy a family meal now is on the first day of the Chinese New Year when we have vegetarian food. Mother prepares my share of the food in a separate set of pots. Just once a year when I have chance to join them for a family reunion meal.

[music]

Chen Soo Se, Scholar

Chen Soo Se If we look around carefully, the Muslims are among several groups who are forbidden from consuming pork. They are in fact not the only ones. The Jews are not allowed to eat pork, either. So are many other ethnic or religious groups. If you find the practice of not eating pork unbelievable, try to think of some other religious beliefs which forbid the consumption of beef.

NARRATOR The best example would be Hinduism, which is one of the four major religions of the world. Around two million Hindus live in Malaysia. They're mostly Indians. The Hindus worship some gods that are in the form of animals. Cows are sacred to them, and therefore, beef consumption is forbidden.

Chen Soo Se There is an intriguing question to ask ourselves. Why has the prohibition of beef never become an issue, whereas that of pork causes so much controversy?

The Pig Commandments, End of Part 3

[music]

NARRATOR In 1999, at the turn of the millennium, an unprecedented outbreak of disease occurred among pig farmers in Malaysia. A previously unrecognized virus maliciously attacked pig farms in the states of Perak, Nigiri Simbelan, and Selangor. The virus transmitted from infected pigs to humans. One after another, pig farmers who had close contact with their livestock died. By mid 1999, the number of people infected reached 257, and the death toll hit 105. The epidemic had reached an emergency stage. Desperate to contain the outbreak, the government ordered the slaughter of more than one million pigs, carried out by thousands of soldiers. People stopped consuming pork and its by-products. The incident resulted in economic devastation for the Penang farmers. The once glorious pig farming trade crumbled overnight, all brought on by the deadly culprit, the nipah virus.

NARRATOR It's been seven years since the disaster, this is Sungai Nipha village, after which the deadly virus was named. It has had the same fate as Bukhet Pelanduk, which was once the biggest pig supplying region in the country. Now nothing is left here. It's just a ruin, a graveyard to those doomed pigs. The evidence of death is still clearly visible.

UNKNOWNThe pigs were herded to this area here. Then they shot them one by one. Two shots each.

UNKNOWN The carcasses were pushed into the trench by an earth scraper. After the slaughter of the pigs the dead corpses were buried here.

UNKNOWN That was it. That was here where they were buried.

[music]

Yu Ming Xiang

Yu Ming Xiang He was infected after handling a dead pig. The pig was obviously infected by the virus. He dragged the dead pig by himself and her buried it. However, he did not wear any protective clothing. Not even a mask. Soon after that he suffered from fever. It must have been the infection of the virus. When the fever worsened I admitted him to the main hospital. One the next day his condition deteriorated and he went into a coma. He was unconscious for as long as 18 days. At that time I saw a report in the newspaper. It said that a new drug for this disease had been introduced. I begged the doctors to let him try the drug. The doctors advised me that the new drug might cause side effects or some kinds of after-effects. I didn't have much concept about the after-effects at that stage. My only concern was for him to stay alive. So they gave him the drug. His condition was quite promising at first. After being discharged from the hospital he was able to walk around. Though his memory was not as brilliant as before. He kept forgetting things. After three months, he started having problems walking. He fell over frequently. And then I noticed his legs were starting to bend. They also became very stiff. since then he has lost the ability to walk. He can't even get up.

[music]

Zheng Guang Han

Zheng Guang Han My son is a very good person. He worked so hard. He is the most obedient of my five children. He doesn't drink or smoke or gamble. All he did besides work was hang out with his girlfriend or go traveling. I can't stop my tears whenever I think of it.

[music]

Zheng Guang Han I am worried about the future of my son. When I grow too old to look after him what will become of him? It's been seven years since he was infected. I have looked after him single-handedly all this time. I exercise his muscles every single day. It takes an hour per session. Three sessions a day. What will happen when I die? There is no one left to look after him.

[music]

UNKNOWN This incident really makes me sad. My heart sinks whenever I think of it.

NARRATOR During the breakout of the epidemic, most of the villagers chose to flee. Yand Da Ren insisted on staying. He fed the uninfected pigs as usual, until the day the military came. Here, he witnessed the slaughter of his pigs. The destruction his blood and sweat. Later, his own brother fell victim to the disease and died.

[music]

NARRATOR Sungai Nipah village, once a glorious pig farming village, all you can find here now are widows, the elderly, and victims with brain damage.

[music]

Yang De Ren

Yang De Ren The village has waned. Conditions are going downhill. People here have lost their enthusiasm. The younger generation have gradually moved out of here, leaving behind the elderly and the weak. The youngsters have left for better lives. There are no more job opportunities here. We once relied on pig farming. We were one of the biggest suppliers in the country. I along kept a hundred pigs. I slaughtered just one a day, and it earned me three thousand Ringgit a month. It was a very prosperous business. Now it's a different situation. I can't even afford a packet of cigarettes.

NARRATOR Nigiri Simbelan used to be the largest pig farming state. After the Nipah incident, all 895 pig farms were closed. The state lost its leading position in this sector overnight, and Perak, a state in central peninsular Malaysia, has risen in its place. Dinding pig farm is the largest in Perak. It has adopted the latest technology and techniques of pig husbandry. It supplies the market with more than 4,000 pigs a month.

Shen Han Shan, Managing Director, Dinding Farm

Shen Han Shan Since the Nipah incident, if I am not mistaken, the number of pig farms in the country has been reduced from 2,000 to just 800. Since the occurrence of the unfortunate disaster, people have lost confidence in the sector. Some people consider it a life threatening activity.

NARRATOR Fear for safety has sparked awareness in the sector. A new generation of pig farms are taking extra steps to prevent any possible threat from disease.

Zhuang Zhi Qiang Look at the way it walks. It's dragging its feet. What does that indicate? That means it is ill. This one suffers from Arthritis. And this one. It's so thin and weak. It's ill. They need injections. It's quite common for a male pig to have weak legs. When that happens, we need to check on it to make sure it's not something serious.

Zhuang Zhi Qiang, Manager/Veterinarian, Dinding Farm

Zhuang Zhi Qiang There is a certain degree of risk in the pig farming sector. So we must be well prepared, especially at preventing the outbreak of diseases. The types of disease we are most concerned about are swine fever, rabies and the like, or other viral infections. These are the most common types. By vaccinating the pigs against these diseases the risk can be greatly reduced. Prevention is also important to prevent the transmission of diseases from other animals. It's often neglected in the traditional way of pig farming. Thier pigpens are often without proper fencing. It makes it easy for external factors to transmit diseases into the pigpens. Factors like rats, dogs or cats. They are capable of transmitting fatal diseases. Therefore, bio-security is crucial. Besides, when you purchase the breeding stock, the procedure of quarantine needs to be supervised closely. No strangers should be allowed contact with your livestock. I believe these precautionary steps will help greatly in disease control.

NARRATOR These are sows impregnated by artificial insemination. They're placed in the confinement area and will soon be ready to give birth.

Shen Han Shan I can't foretell the future of this sector. The future is unforeseen. There is a big possibility that we will be ordered to relocate at some point. If the authorities wish to develop this area we will have no choice but to move. When that day comes we will face big problems. There is nowhere else to cater for a farm of this scale.

Zhuang Zhi Qiang My only hope is that more help can be offered by the government. The last thing we wish for our country to resort to importing pork from abroad.

The Pig Commandments, End of Part 4

NARRATOR It's the 18th of September, 2005. At the busy port of Klang in Selangor state. Among the crowd is a group of Chinese Muslims. Today they have booked a boat to sail them across the straits of Malacca to Ketam island for their annual mid-autumn festival celebrations.

UNKNOWN Not here yet? Let's wait a moment. Why don't you give him a ring? I don't have his number. Do you?

UNKNOWN No, I don't either.

UNKNOWN So what now?

UNKNOWN He'll have to make his own way there.

NARRATOR There are about 60,000 Chinese Muslims in Malaysia. That's only one percent of the whole Chinese population here. For the Chinese who convert to Islam, the path to conversion is full of obstacles. They face a great deal of rejection and discrimination. The greatest rejection often comes from their own families. They're branded as betrayers or traitors by the community.

NARRATOR Ketam island is well known for its delicious crabs. It's also called the island of crabs. It's an island dominated by the Chinese population. Approximately 8,000 islanders live here. The number of Chinese Muslims here barely reaches 10.

Noraini Chia, Malaysian Chinese Muslim

Noraini Chia Before being an official Muslim, I discussed my intention to convert with my family. I talked to my siblings about it, too. I told them I wanted to marry a Muslim and subsequently convert to Islam myself. They were very negative about my plan. They were very angry. My parents worship Chinese gods. And we eat pork as a major source of food. Conversion to Islam means I would be forbidden from eating pork. At the same time, my elder brother strongly opposed my plan to marry a Muslim. I did not see them again for four long years.

UNKNOWN [non-English narration]

Malaysian Chinese Muslim

Ibrahim Chia The Chinese here poked fun at me. They said to me, "You have converted to Islam, so now you're a Malay." I protested that I wasn't a Malay, and never would be. I told them I was still Chinese. Like everyone else on this island. 100% pure Chinese. Their concept is that when you convert to Islam your ethnicity will be converted to Malay at the same time. They don't understand. After my conversion I lot many friends. They chose not to be my friend anymore. Why is that? It's mainly because we now eat different types of food. I can't consume some of the food that they are accustomed to. Not being able to sit down for a meal, we have become more and more estranged.

UNKNOWN Ladies and gentlemen, folks of Ketam Island, a very good evening to you all. Welcome to the annual Mid-Autumn festival celebration co-organized by the Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association and Klang Education Department. This beautiful evening we wish to share the joy of Mid-Autumn and celebrate with the islanders of Ketam. At the same time, let us find out more about Islam, so as to promote harmony in our society.

[music]

NARRATOR This mid-autumn party organized by the Muslims, has attracted many local children. They enjoy the celebration together under the full moon. The mid-autumn festival is one of the most important traditional Chinese celebrations. Lanterns and moon cakes make the night look even more festive. Traditional values are firmly preserved. Even if they're in different religious worlds now, they've not forgotten the meaning of mid-autumn. The only difference is the people that have been brought together.

NARRATOR Rafi Ong is 51 this year. He owns a Chinese Muslim restaurant in the state of Kelantan. He was born in the adjacent state of Teranganu. His father sent him to Kelantan when he was just 18. The reason was to stop Rafi from mixing with a group of Malay friends. He was worried they'd introduce the idea of converting to Islam.

Rafi Ong, Malaysian Chinese Muslim

Rafi Ong I'd wanted to convert to Islam since I was 18. My father was strongly against this idea. He was an extremely strict parent. When he really got angry with me he would punish me severely.

[music]

Rafi Ong My parents passed away when I was 40. That's when I officially converted to Islam. I think as humans we make the same mistakes over and over. When our parents are alive, we do not try out best to cherish the precious relationship between us. Now that they are gone I feel so much regret, so remorseful for I failed to visit them more often. I was devastated when they passed away. Every year on 'Qing Ming' I always go to visit their graves. My wife usually goes with me. Even now, I still feel the grief and sadness of losing them.

NARRATOR After his parents passed away, Rafi converted to Islam. He then married a Malay girl 20 years younger. They had a traditional Malay wedding ceremony. The newlyweds started a restaurant business selling Chinese Muslim food on the Chinese street of Kelantan. They share the workload between them.

[music]

Rafi Ong The non-Muslims, especially the Chinese carry a lot of prejudice against us. They look down on us. They even despise us. They like to think that we have turned into Malays.

NARRATOR It's the first day of Ramadan. After fulfilling a day's fasting, Rafi and his wife are heading to the home of a close friend. They will join them for Iftar, the breaking of the fast.

NARRATOR Rafi's close friend, Johari Yap has come to welcome him. His house is under renovation. Johari hopes to complete the building work by the end of Ramadan, ready for the celebration of Eid ul-Fitr. Johari was educated in Malay throughout his school days, despite being Chinese, he doesn't speak a word of it. He converted to Islam 10 years ago. His parents were also strongly against his decision.

Johari Yap, Malaysian Chinese Muslim

Johari Yap The first question my mother ask me is "Why you turn into a Malay? Why you become a Malay?" No, no. It's just a religion. I'm still me. I'm still who I am. And then, she start crying, crying, crying. I tried to comfort here. My father, he's, big man so, he's cool, I don't know how he's feeling about it. He doesn't talk much to me, but last time, he was joke with me, and then, but, after that occasion, he, he's like nothing much. He's not that close to me anymore. What is making me very sad.

NARRATOR Failing to get the support of his parents, Johari was forced to leave his hometown. He didn't go back there for five years. After the birth of his first child, Johari was forgiven by his parents at last. Today, he's an experienced IT professional. He contributes his free time to supporting the disable of all races and backgrounds by coaching them in IT skills.

Johari Yap At first, um, I hide my surname. So when I when I introduce, I just introduce myself "Johari," and everybody assumed I'm Malay, so, okay, I'm safe. They won't ask me further. But, um, when I'm a bit stable economically, and my family also accept me, then started to introduce myself as "Johari Yap." The reason why? Uh, I want to tell the Malay that Chinese also, there are Chinese Muslims. You don't have to be a Malay to become a Muslim. And, I mix a lot with the Chinese as I did, after that. Before that, I only meet with the Malay, because I always thought that the Chinese are, you know, um, they are, they hate me because I overturned, you know? I have that kind of feelings.

Yusuf Ong, Imam, Selengar Islamic Council, Malaysia

Yusuf Ong During the 80s, if one converted to Islam, it would be a major matter in one's life. If the person was Chinese, then it would be an even more serious matter, especially if the convert lived in a Chinese area. In fact, one might be discriminated against by the whole community. One would be judged and be labeled as a traitor. Personally, I too experienced a lot of nasty, rude remarks after conversion.

NARRATOR Even with the pressure of everyone else's disapproval, Yusuf decided that it was his ultimate destiny. His determination drove him to follow his heart. He became a devoted Muslim who performs his religious obligations strictly.

[music]

NARRATOR Nevertheless, the process of his conversion was a difficult one. He couldn't get over the devastation of his family's rejection.

Yusuf Ong Three months after my conversion they took drastic action by totally boycotting me. My whole family. That included my parents and all my siblings. They all deliberately moved to Kuala Lumpur I was left alone in the state of Perak. My father even tole me before he went. He said: "now that you have become a Muslim who has a strong line-up of Muslim allies, they will be able to help you. That's it. From today onwards, you need to stand on your own feet, without us."

The Pig Commandments, End of Part 5

[music]

NARRATOR 21st century Malaysia is a democratic country that carries the banner of multiculturalism and racial harmony. The Chinese and Malays have coexisted here for as long as two centuries. Nevertheless, misunderstandings creep in among them in every facet of society, especially things caused by confusion over the definitions of religions and ethnicities.

Dato' Mustapha Ma, Chairman, Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association

Dato' Mustapha Ma In Malaysia, when someone wishes to convert to Islam, in the Malay language the action if often described as 'masuk Melayu,' which literally means 'naturalized as Malay,' which also means to become a Malay. This concept put the Chinese in quandary. The Chinese are naturally proud of their ethnicity. They are reluctant to be transformed into aborigines. They are adamant to keep their roots. At the same item, all Malays here are Muslims. Indirectly, it causes some form of confusion. Even the Malays have the same misconception. They have the impression that a Chinese cannot be a Muslim at the same time.

Yusuf Ong, Imam, Selengar Islamic Council, Malaysia

Yusuf Ong I am also one of the victims of the misconception. Soon after I converted to Islam people treated me as a Malay. Not only did the Chinese think I was a Malay, even the Malays themselves thought the same. To describe my conversion, in the Malay language they said "Jadi Melayu, masuk Melayu," which means "becoming a Malay, or joining the Malay race." That's the way they looked at it. They have neglected the key word, which is in fact Islam. They categorize you by ethnic, group, not religion.

Haji Obaidellah Mohamad, Associate Professor of Chinese Studies, University of Malaysia

Haji Obaidellah Mohamad I think religion should be the ultimate category, followed by ethnicity. This will clear up all misconceptions. If we place both religion and ethnicity at the same level, there is a large likeliness that a religion will be 'dominated' by a certain ethnic group. For example, the Arabs might think that Islam belongs to them or the Malays might have the same misconception. The truth is it is not supposed to be this way.

Dr. Yulduz Emiloglu, Uygur Writer

Yulduz Emiloglu In this country there is a mix-up between Islam and the Malay ethnicity. People often address the muslim festival Eid-ul-Fitr as Malay New Year. In fact, that's incorrect. Eid-ul-Fitr falls in the ninth month of each year, not the first month of the new year. However, people still call it Malay New Year, as if the festival is only to be celebrated by Malays. In fact, it's an important occasion shared by Muslims all over the world. Even the Malays have this kind of misconception.

Yulduz Emiloglu This is an experience of my own. I hired a Malay teacher in my home to teach my son to recite the Quran. He asked me why son did not wear a 'baju Melayu,' which is the traditional Malay costume. In his opinion, it's the proper attire to Wera for reciting the Quran. I insisted that the long sleeved shirt my son was wearing was appropriate enough. I asked him if the Arabs need to wear 'baju Melayu' when they're praying. Arabia is undeniable the birthplace of Islam. How could be justify this? The teacher was convinced and he agreed with me.

[music]

Dr. Yulduz Emiloglu, Uygur Writer

Yulduz Emiloglu According to Islamic practice, whoever wishes to convert to this religion will be given an Islamic name. For example, for a man it could be names like Ibrahim or Ismail etc. This is a very straightforward concept, just like Christians giving Christian names. You could be named Peter or John. Nevertheless, the key difference here is that following the given Islamic name, you need to add an Islamic surname, for the male it will be bin Abdullah, and for a female binti Abdullah. You will thus lose you original surname. To the Chinese, who take great pride in their families, changing their names is taboo let alone their surnames. Chinese surnames also represent their roots. Therefore, they are reluctant to be 'rooted out,' especially the men.

Chen Soo Se, Scholar

Chen Soo Se When you choose Islam as your belief no rules in Islamic teaching say that changing your name is compulsory. You do not actually have to change you name. There are also a large number of Muslims in China. They keep their Chinese surnames all the same. These are the common surnames we come across daily. The people are Muslims, but they use the same naming system we all use. One character for their surname and two for their given name. It's just like you and I. so why do we have the perception that all converts are required to change their names? There is no such compulsion. It only happens in Malaysia due to man-made reasons. To me, this is unacceptable.

Yusuf Ong, Imam, Selengar Islamic Council, Malaysia

Yusuf Ong In the 80s, changing your name for the sake of religious conversion was extremely sensitive and controversial to the Chinese. In other words, you chose to erase the symbol of your inheritance, the evidence of your ancestral existence. It was utterly unacceptable to the Chinese. On the other hand, the law required you to do so if you wished to convert to Islam legitimately. This situation put the Chinese in an insoluble dilemma. Things have changed nowadays. The new law provides some room for leniency. It is no longer compulsory for a convert to change their name. I can be called Ong and at the same time be a Muslim. So, times have changed. A new era has started.

Dr. Sun Zhen Yu, University of Ning Xia, China

Sun Zhen Yu In my opinion, ethnic issues in Malaysia has been greatly influenced by the political issues. An obvious pattern in Malaysian politics is that it is based on politics between ethnicities. It's an impossible mission to thoroughly solve all problems and tensions between the Malays and the Chinese. As two major ethnicities in this country, it is natural that competition exists. This competition for survival is common. However the competition is also the catalyst for conflict between the races. The issue of pigs was initially a minor one. It has snowballed into an extremely controversial issue. Why? What does it mean? I think it implies that racial issues and conflicts between ethnic groups are no small matter. There is no straightforward answer to this. If a permanent solution to solve these conflicts exists, it resides crucially in the processes of their daily life and is the key to their coexistence for many generations to come. However, under the harsh realities of life and survival they may face a great deal of obstacles. I think the only way out of this dilemma lies in a return to the value of tolerance.

Ilshat Hassan, Uygur Scholar

Ilshat Hassan When a non-Muslim openly speaks about pigs, we must first consider if it's intentional. If it's an unthinking remark, we should forget about it. The pig as an animal and shouldn't be such a big issue. After all, God is the great creator of all in the universe. That includes all creatures, even the filthiest ones, such as pigs and rats. God is the lord of all. As a life form created by God, pigs are sinless. We shouldn't be sensitive toward their existence.

UNKNOWN I contacted him just now. Okay, let's go. Look at us, we grew up on pig farms. We have been farming pigs for decades. What are we going to do without this job? They even confiscated our farm.

UNKNOWN No land and no livestock now. We have lost our only source of livelihood.

UNKNOWN There are mouths to feed at home. We have literally lost everything. What have we done to deserve this?

UNKNOWN Why can't we do what we are good at? We need an answer from the authorities.

NARRATOR The outbreak of the nipah virus has but the majority of pig farmers in serious financial trouble. In 2001 184 of them decided to file a lawsuit against the government. They sough 130 million ringgit compensation. The case was dismissed by the supreme court of Malaysia. On April 6, 2005 they attempted to appeal against the dismissal, hoping to be heard in a court of law.

Lay Yong Tee, Chairman of Nipah Disease Relief Team

Lay Yong Tee Most of us now have zero income. But don't get me wrong, we wholeheartedly support the action of destroying the pigs as it was necessary. However, the demolition of the buildings and the pigpens was totally irrational. It's very unfair to us. Just here, let him stay just here.

UNKNOWN That's it.

[music]

NARRATOR The appeal is proceeding in court. And out here, the farmers are waiting. The outcome of this appeal will be a crucial turning point for the future of the pig farming sector in Malaysia.

UNKNOWN Great! That's great!

UNKNOWN Congratulations!

UNKNOWN First of all, I think this is a fairer decision. I would like to thank the appeals court for giving us the green light. It gives the farmers a chance to be heard.

Lay Yong Tee I cannot tell you how happy my heart is now. At least we have a chance to be heard.

UNKNOWN I am truly delighted and relieved. There is at least a chance now to be heard. It gives us hope. Before this we were all deeply depressed. Now we are looking forward to the future. Hope is with us.

[music]

Dedicated to the Chinese and Muslims who embrace peace

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Narrator, TEH Yong

Animation Art Design, ZENG Xiao Lian

Animation Director, WONG Kew Chee

LIU Jing Sun, TOO Wen Bin

Sound, CHEN Yao Kun, LIU Soon Zhang

Lighting, CHEN Yao Khun

Still Photography, WONG Kew Kin

Animation Narrator, ZHAO Felix

Post Produciton Coordinator, MAK Chee Chong

Sound Effects/Mixing, CHAN Chee Wah, Willaim TAN, HOW Kuan Tiong

Director of Photography, WONG Tak Fung

Script/Director, WONG Kew Lit

Production Manager/Editor, CHAN Shiau Wei

Exective Production Supervisor, HUANG Hai Bo

Administrative Production Supervisor, WAN Kong Shing

Production Supervior, CHENG He Lin

Chief Production Supervisor, WANG Ji Yan

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