

ISIC 2025

The Eighth International Conference on Islamic Civilisation

Call for Papers

Sects, Sectarianism, and Sectarian Identities in Islam

Dates: 1–2 November 2025

Venue: National Chengchi University (Taipei, Taiwan) and Online

Organized by

**Department of Arabic Language and Culture, National Chengchi University
(Republic of China)**

Institut Islam Hadhari, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (Malaysia)

Sectarian divisions within the Islamic world have long been misunderstood by both the media and the general public. While communal violence and conflict in modern Muslim-majority countries are often framed in sectarian terms, attributing these conflicts solely to historical sectarian divides —such as the Sunni-Shi‘a split — is misleading and reductive. Medieval Muslim sources and heresiographical literature use terms like *firaq*, *niḥal*, *ṭā’ifa*, or *madhhab* to refer to religious communities, groups, or schools of thought. These are often translated as “sects,” a term that carries connotations of schism and

heresy in the Christian tradition, implying a division from an established orthodoxy. However, applying this conceptualization of sects and sectarianism to the Islamic context can be problematic. Over the past fourteen centuries, medieval Islamic societies have largely been tolerant—and at times even appreciative—of diverse, sometimes contradictory, interpretations of revealed truth. The existence of multiple sects and schools of thought within Islam highlights the richness and diversity of Islamic expressions of faith.

While the formation of groups based on shared qualities is a universal human phenomenon, what distinguishes the Islamic world—both past and present—is the ubiquity of sectarian identities, symbols, and ideas, which permeate various genres of literature, daily rituals, and art forms. Beyond the major sectarian alignments of Sunnis and Shi'as, Muslim sects or schools are often subject to further divisions and subdivisions throughout history. Sectarian identity is frequently entangled with other social, political, and cultural affiliations, making any attempt to define an Islamic sect or sectarian identity inherently complex and multi-faceted.

Due to the nature of available sources, the formation of Muslim sects and sectarian identities during the first three centuries of Islam remains an underexplored field that warrants systematic and rigorous study. Furthermore, the historical development of Islamic sects and schools in the post-formative period should be considered in order to reassess the validity and utility of classifications based on sectarianism.

ISIC 2025 invites paper submissions on a wide range of topics related to sects, sectarian identities, and sectarianism in both pre-modern and modern Islamic contexts. Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Islamic *firaq* or heresiographical literature
- The diachronic use and meaning of sectarian labels in various genres of literature and historical contexts
- Sectarian denominations in modern Muslim politics
- Reflections on the concept of sects and sectarianism
- Origins and formation of sectarian identities and communities
- The evolution of sects in different parts of the Islamic world in pre-modern and modern periods

Proposals for pre-arranged panels dedicated to the above themes are also welcome.

Submission Guidelines

Please submit anonymized abstracts (250-300 words) in English, along with a one-page CV, to isu@nccu.edu.tw by **15 May 2025**. Both the abstract and CV should be submitted in Word docx format. The conference will take place in a hybrid format on **1-2 November 2025** at **National Chengchi University** in Taipei, Taiwan. The official language of the conference is English.

Panel Proposals

Panel proposals should include a 600-word abstract with the following details:

Introduction to the topic

The number of presenters

Short biographical information about the presenters and convenor (the person submitting the proposal)

Contact Email:

isu@nccu.edu.tw

Abstract Submission Deadline: 15 May 2025

Notification of acceptance will be sent by mid-June 2025.