



Buddhist–Muslim Dynamics in Siam/Thailand

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Much has been written about the dynamics between Muslims and Thailand’s Buddhist dominant majority. However, existing literature examining the nature of Buddhist–Muslim dynamics in Thailand leaves much to unpack. Thailand’s approximately four million Muslims, who comprise the country’s largest religious minority, accounting for approximately 5.8% of its 69 million citizens, reside primarily—though not exclusively—in the country’s southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Historically, these southern provinces, along with the northern provinces of Malaysia to their south, belonged to an Islamic sultanate, the Kingdom of Patani. Thai rule over the Patani was established in 1909 (when then-Siam annexed the sultanate), since which time,

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Thailand's Muslims have faced forced "Thaification" and cultural assimilation at the hands of Thai political leadership. By the mid-twentieth century, resistance to such efforts culminated in a separatist movement in Southern Thailand that in 2004 developed into an armed insurgency.

In this chapter, we move beyond Thailand's southern provinces and analyses of the region's southern separatist movement to present portrayals of local contact, harmony, and conflict between Thailand's Buddhists and Muslims across central, north, and south Thailand. There is a desperate need for fresh air to be breathed into the analysis of the nature of the dynamics and conflict between Thailand's Buddhists and Muslims, which is commonly—though erroneously—reduced to primarily an issue of religious conflict. Although the Buddhist–Muslim conflicts cannot be reduced to religious conflict, we suggest that these communities have elicited more extreme essentialist constructions of one another that have produced tensions in the current period.

This chapter begins with an overview of the contact between Muslims and Buddhists in Thailand. We assert that in Thailand, both Muslim and Buddhist populations are more linguistically and ethnically diverse than is usually assumed and as a result, ethnic minorities have been negatively affected by the motivation of political and religious elites to maintain relatively homogeneous communities of subjects. Drawing on the late Stanley Tambiah's work, we describe how the Thai polity expanded and how the elite tried to produce a uniformity of ethnic and religious identity within this diverse linguistic and multicultural environment. We will describe how Islam has adopted and adapted Indic-Brahministic and Buddhist influences in the Thai/Malay Peninsula as well as in north and central Thailand.¹ We discuss the diverse origins and contributions of Muslims in central and north Thailand from the Ayutthayan to the Bangkok period that often have been overlooked. This chapter will also review the endeavors by Siamese and Thai Buddhist elites to manage the ethnic and religious diversity of their subjects. Finally, the chapter will examine the current tensions between Muslims and Buddhists in

¹See Christopher M. Joll, "Making Sense of Thailand's 'Merit-Making' Muslims: Adoption and Adaption of the Indic in the Creation of Islamicate Southern Thailand," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 25, no. 3 (2014): 303–320; Raymond Scupin, "Popular Islam in Thailand," in *The Muslims in Thailand, Volume 1, Historical and Cultural Studies*, ed. Andrew D.W. Forbes (Bihar: Centre for South East Asian Studies, 1988c), 31–46.

Thailand and some of the conditions and reasons that have led to these new developments.

BUDDHIST–MUSLIM INTERACTIONS PAST AND PRESENT

The large Buddhist kingdoms of Thailand (formerly Siam)² were initially formed by the migration of the Tai (language group) peoples from southern China into Southeast Asia, beginning in the seventh century. Over a period of several centuries, Tai migrants moved into the Chao Phraya river basin, met, and married members of the native Mon, Khmer, and other ethnic groups. Through their encounters with the Mons and Khmer kingdoms, the Tai people became familiar with Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Eventually, as the Tai speaking peoples outnumbered other ethnic groups. They developed the first large kingdoms in the region and adopted the religious tradition of Theravada Buddhism and its Pali texts,³ which had spread to the region by Sinhalese *bhikkhu* (monks) and was practiced by the Mon for many centuries.⁴

Muslims make up about one-third of the population in the southern region of Thailand or 85% of the three southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Approximately two million Muslims live in these southern provinces. These provinces were once a part of the ethnically Malay, Islamic sultanate of Patani, which lay between the Malayan sultanates to the south and the power centers of the Siamese in the north. As will be discussed below, this Patani region was incorporated into the

²The name Siam was adopted to refer to the region at its broadest, under the Chakri dynasty, where the kingdom of Siam included the geographic region of Thailand, along with parts of Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia. In 1939, the name Siam name was changed to Thailand by the nationalist General Phibulsongkhram (1938–1944) to incorporate the notion of a Thai nationality and “race.”

³Theravada, literally meaning “school of the elder monks” in Pali—a language native to the Indian subcontinent, in which the earliest literature on Buddhism appears—is a branch of Buddhism that focuses on the Buddha’s teachings preserved in the Pali canon, the only complete Buddhist canon that survives in a classical Indic language.

⁴Charles F. Keyes, *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation-State* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987), 15–16; Stanley Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand Against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 73–199; Raymond Scupin, “Mainland Southeast Asia,” in *Peoples and Cultures of Asia*, ed. Raymond Scupin (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Press, 2006b), 335–383.

Siamese state in the early twentieth century. The majority of the Muslims in south Thailand are bilingual, speaking both Thai and Malay. The Malay Muslims in the region identify themselves as *ore nayu* (a contacted version of Melayu in the local dialect referred to as Patani Malay), and they refer to the Thai Buddhists as *ore siye* (the Siamese people). In contemporary times, Thai Buddhists use the ethnic category *khaek* and/or *Musalayam* to describe Malay Muslims,⁵ which is perceived as a pejorative term by the native Muslims in the south.

In central Thailand, the population of Muslims is approximately 670,000 and there are about 40,000 Muslim residents in north and northeast Thailand.⁶ In central and north Thailand, both voluntary and involuntary migrants and sometimes refer to themselves as Thai Muslims or *Thai Islam*, though their religious and ethnic backgrounds are very diverse. Historically, while the Muslims of south Thailand lived in a region imbued with a Malay-Indonesian Islamic political and religious cultural ethos, the Muslims of central and north Thailand have been influenced by the political-religious culture of the Theravada Buddhist traditions. However, because of the administrative practices and policies of the Thai state during the course of the twentieth century, all Muslims

⁵There has been a considerable amount of literature regarding the term *khaek* as used by the Thai people to refer to Muslims (Scupin, "Muslim Accommodation in Thai Society," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 2 (1998), 229–258; Jerryson, *Buddhist Fury: Religion and Violence in Southern Thailand* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 151–155; Jory, "From Melayu Patani to Thai Muslim: The Spectre of Ethnic Identity in Southern Thailand," *South East Asia Research* 15, no. 2 (2007), 225–279). The term *khaek* has a quasi-racial, phenotypical or biological notion as well as an ethnic or religious reference. Traditionally, the Thai used the phrase *khon* (person) *khaek* to refer to international guests or strangers, especially the South Asian or Arab migrants or those with brown skin, as well as in respect to religion for the Malay Muslims and other Muslims in Thailand. Generally, the phrase *khon khaek* is used to classify those who are not Thai or *Chon Chat Thai*. Although originally *khaek* did not have a pejorative connotation, it has become a negative and offensive racialistic term for Muslims, especially for those southern Malay-speaking Muslims in south Thailand.

⁶We would like to thank Chaiwat Meesanthan in the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Thammasat University for providing us with estimated current population numbers for Muslims in central and northern Thailand. Chaiwat completed a Ph.D. in 2017 at the University of Malaya with an ethnographic study of Malay Muslims in Bangkok and central Thailand, *Minoriti Melayu di Bangkok dan Kawasan Sekitarnya: Antara Survival dan Kejayaan* (Malay Minority in Bangkok and its Surrounding Areas: Between Survival and Success).

in Thailand have been largely affected by the dominant Buddhist political and religious culture.

THE THAI STATE AND ITS EXPANSION

In order to examine Buddhist–Muslim relations, we will begin with the political evolutionary approach used by the late Stanley Tambiah to discuss the development of the state and ethnic interactions in Thailand. Tambiah used the metaphors of the “galactic and radial polities” to describe the historical expansion of the Thai state. The galactic polity, a variant of Max Weber’s patrimonial bureaucracy, is applied to the Sukhothai (1282–1350) and Ayutthayan (1351–1767) kingdoms. According to Tambiah, in the galactic polity, the king directly controls the population and resources in a central geographical location, while the outlying provinces essentially remain autonomous replications of the center. In the galactic phase of state development of these early kingdoms, inter-ethnic relations are not dramatically transformed. Tambiah refers to the Thai state that emerged with the establishment of the Chakri dynasty and Rama I during the Rattanakosin era (1782–1932), based in Bangkok as a radial polity. The radial polity is a state that has a capital center that attempts to exert direct political control over other provinces through its governmental agents. During the Rattanakosin or Bangkok period, the Thai kingdom became a full-fledged patrimonial bureaucratic state that expanded throughout the north, northeast, west, and southern frontiers and directly controlled peripheral provinces in which inter-ethnic relations were radically transformed.

Indic and Buddhist Influences in South Thailand

Prior to the spread of Islam in the Thai/Malay peninsula there were Indic-Brahministic-Buddhist kingdoms where Sanskrit had been adopted.⁷ Islam was introduced to Southeast Asia via commercial interactions as Muslim traders traversed trade routes between Southeast Asia and regions farther east, including China, during the first several centuries of the common era, spreading to significant parts of the region by

⁷Michael F. Laffan, “Southeast Asia, History and Culture,” in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia (Vol. 1: A-K)*, ed. Josef W. Meri (New York: Routledge, 2006), 767.

the twelfth century. First propagated along immediate trade routes, Islam grew in port villages, attracting Muslims from across the Far East while also converting local elites. As these communities grew, Islam spread from port cities to the interior, encountering local spiritual beliefs and practices—including Buddhism and Hinduism—which were practiced alongside Islam. Muslim states began to grow in size and economic and political prominence, leading to the founding of the Islamic sultanate (*Kerajaan*) of Patani around the start of the fourteenth century.

Far from operating in isolation, Islamic and Indic-Brahminist-Buddhist influences and practices interacted and co-mingled within local populations. Assertions regarding the overlapping influences in Southeast Asia are based on both linguistic and archeological evidence. Advances in proto-historic archaeology reveal the presence of Indic influence in the portion of the Thai/Malay Peninsula that corresponds to southern Thailand. The Patani *Kerajaan* located as it was between the Thai Ayutthaya kingdom of central Thailand and the Malay Malacca sultanate of central Malaysia, was unique among Malay states. In the Malay sultanates, Islam normally replaced the Hindu-Buddhist influences; however, in Patani, Islam and Buddhism interacted with each other in a harmonious way. As a result, Islam demonstrated some Buddhist influences. However, Francis Bradley, who has recounted—in often harrowing detail—the five decades of war that Bangkok waged against the Malay *Kerajaan* of Patani from 1786 through “massacre, slave-raiding, environmental warfare, and the expulsion of refugees,”⁸ which brought an end to traditional cooperative state relations.⁹

⁸Joll, “Thailand’s Muslim Kaleidoscope Between Central Plains and Far-South: Fresh Perspectives from the Sufi Margins” (2016), 317–358; Francis Bradley, “Siam’s Conquest of Patani and the End of Mandala Relations, 1786–1838,” in *The Ghosts of the Past in Southern Thailand: Essays on the History and Historiography of Patani*, ed. Patrick Jory (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2012), 149–160. The dates of Siamese campaigns in south Thailand are 1785–1786, 1789–1791, 1808, 1831–1832, and 1838.

⁹Francis Bradley, *Forging Islamic Power and Place: The Legacy of Shaykh Da’ud bin ‘Abd Allah al-Fatani in Mecca and Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015), 39–62, 150.

*Muslims in Central Thailand During the Ayutthaya Period
(1351–1767)*

Port cities located between the Patani and Ayutthaya kingdoms were sites of material, cultural, and ideological exchange, and the ships that visited arrived from both the east and the west. Before the rise of Ayutthaya, the first proto-Siamese state to emerge in the Chao Phraya basin in the late thirteenth century was Sukhothai. The most important document from this period is an inscription attributed to King Ramkhamhaeng. This is dated 1292 and contains the “Persianate” term “bazaar.”¹⁰ Ayutthaya became an important center for Persian Muslims, which explains the Persians’ references to it as the “new city” *Shahr-i Nau* (Pr. *Shahr’un-nuwi*),¹¹ although Christoph Marcinkowski regards *Shahr-e Nav* (Pr. The city of boats and canals) as its correct form.¹² By the sixteenth century, the kingdom of Ayutthaya, with a population of about 300,000—larger than that of London at that time—was a cosmopolitan and ethnically diverse center.

According to historical documents, Buddhist royal rulers were generally tolerant and even supportive of Muslim religious rites during the Ayutthayan period. For example, several mosques were established at royal expense, and King Narai (Ramathibodi III) contributed lavishly towards the Muharram and other Muslim rites.¹³ There was, however, a split between official policy and practice regarding the proselytization of Islam in Thailand. According to an edict from the mid-seventeenth century, anyone allowing themselves or their kin to be converted to a foreign religion would be considered an enemy to the state. They could be imprisoned, have their property confiscated, or have other punitive

¹⁰Raymond Scupin, “The Socio-Economics Status of Muslims in Central and North Thailand,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 4, no. 2 (1981), 164.

¹¹Christopher John Baker, “Ayutthaya Rising: From Land or Sea?” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34, no. 1 (2003), 45–46.

¹²Christoph Marcinkowski, *Persians and Shi’ites in Thailand: From the Ayutthaya Period to the Present*, Volume 15, *Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre Working Paper* (Singapore: Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre, 2014), 3.

¹³Simon de la Loubere, *The Kingdom of Siam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 112; Nicholas Gervaise, *The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam A.D. 1688* (Bangkok: Siam Observer Press, 1928), 95; Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim, *The Ship of Sulaiman*, trans. John O’Kane, Persian Heritage Series No. 11 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 77.

measures taken towards them. Yet, for some time during the Ayutthayan period, Thais who did convert to Islam were exempted from corvée labor.¹⁴ And as Muhammad Ibrahim observed on his sojourn throughout the kingdom, there was some success in the spread of Shia doctrine among the Thai. The most famous Persian immigrant to Ayutthaya during this period was Shaykh Ahmad Qomi (1543–1631).¹⁵

The Siamese court granted permission to construct a mosque graveyard, and homes in the part of Ayutthaya known as *Ban Khaek Kuti Chao Sen*.¹⁶ Tomé Pires mentioned in his *Suma Oriental* “Moors” and “Turks” having settled in Ayutthaya, this Siamese entrepôt.¹⁷ In 1685, Chevalier de Chaumont observed that the Malays were “quite numerous” but that “most of them are slaves.” Makassar and “many people of the Island of Java” also had an established presence.¹⁸ Cham Muslim refugees from Cambodia regions also came to settle in Ayutthaya. Three Cham brothers had arrived at the court of King Narai in the seventeenth century. Later, following an offensive against Cambodia on the part of the Vietnamese in 1758, many Cham refugees migrated to Ayutthaya to become part of its military. In general during the Ayutthaya period

¹⁴de la Loubere, *The Kingdom of Siam*, 112.

¹⁵The Persian leaders Shayk Ahmad and his brother Muhammad Sa'id, and their descendants laid the foundations of the Bunnag family, a politically prominent family of Thai life for over three centuries (Wyatt 1974, 154–155; Rabibhadana 1969, 213; Scupin 1980a, 62–64; Bajunid 1980, 4). Shayk Ahmad and the Persian leaders in Ayutthaya were responsible for establishing the Chularajmontri (Thai) or *Shayk al Islām* that has remained as the central religious authority for the Muslim population today. Despite its Shia heritage, it has become a non-sectarian Muslim position (Yusuf 1998, 277–298). The former Commander-in-Chief or the Royal Thai Army (2005–2007) General Sonthi Boonyaratglin is a Muslim descendant of Shayk Ahmad. In 2006 Sonthi led the military coup against the Thaksin Shinawatra government. Shayk Ahmad and the Shia Muslims built the Ta'kiayokin mosque in Ayutthaya. Later Rama IV renamed the mosque Takiayokin Rajamisjinja Siam. The mosque is 392 years old. There is also an ornate tomb for Shayk Ahmad in Ayutthaya. Another mosque in Ayutthaya known as Kudi Chaufaa is over 300 years old (Pitsuwat, *Muslim Worship Sites in Thailand* (2001), 16).

¹⁶*Sen* is a corruption of *Hussein*, an important personality in Shia Islam.

¹⁷Tomé Pires, *The 'Suma Oriental' of Tomé Pires: An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to China*, trans. Armando Cortesão, 2 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), 92, 104.

¹⁸Michael Smithies, *Descriptions of Old Siam, Oxford in Asia Paperbacks* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995), 42; Davisakd Puaksom, “The Pursuit of Java: Thai Panji Stories, Melayu Lingua Franca, and the Question of Translation” (PhD dissertation, Southeast Asian Studies Department, National University of Singapore, 2008), 89.

Buddhist–Muslim relationships appeared to be very cooperative and harmonious. Ayutthaya’s cosmopolitan credentials are well known and widely cited by Thais actively advocating for the establishment of a more inclusive society.

Managing the Radial Polity

National cultures are composed not only of cultural institutions, but of narratives, symbols, and representations. As such, a national culture is also a *discourse*, a means of constructing meanings that influences and organizes both actions and conceptions of identity with an affective dimension. As a means of managing the radial polity and establishing direct bureaucratic control over various locales and regions, the Siamese state developed an ethnoideology that had a decisive influence on Buddhist–Muslim relations. Despite the actual ethnic diversity within the country, Siamese nationalist leaders and state officials promoted a uniform ethnic collective identity based on notions of race, culture, and on what has been referred to as the “Three Pillars.” Various Siamese monarchs promoted the Three Pillars of national and ethnic identity for the country. The Three Pillars of this Thai collective identity are the “nation” (*chat*), “religion” (*sasana*), and “monarchy” (*phramahaksat*). This Siamese political and cultural code represented a symbol of a unified ethnic and religious identity that was formulated to mediate the actual ethnic ambiguities and contradictions within the country.

The first pillar, *chat* (derived from the Sanskrit-Hindi *jati*, which translates roughly as “caste”), was used by the Siamese majority to refer to birth, race, lineage, and origin. It also had the connotations of biology, birth, lineage, and descent, which made it somewhat equivalent to the early European concept of race. In linguistic usage, *chon chat Thai* was used to refer to the Thai race/nation/culture. This quasi-racial term of identity became the basis of ethnonationalism in Thailand and was also used to promote government policies that affected ethnic relations. The second pillar, *sasana*, religion, was synonymous with Theravada Buddhism, which is still practiced by the vast majority of the population in Thailand. The third pillar, *phramahakasat*, is an honorific term for “king” or “monarch” and embodies the vertical or hierarchical symbolic relationship between the ruler and the people in Siamese society. These three pillars were cultivated as the basis of ethnic and national identity within Siamese society.

Later developments in Thai history provoked extreme nationalistic policies that were based on notions of “race” drawn from European and Japanese sources. Under the rule of General Phibul Songkhram (1938–1944), ultra-nationalist policies and dictatorial rule emerged that had a dramatic influence on Thai interethnic and interreligious relations for generations. In particular, Luang Wichit Wathakan, who was director general of the department of fine arts during the years 1932–1941, drew on racist and fascist ideas from Europe and Japan to promote nationalism in Thailand. During World War II, he became minister of foreign affairs. Wichit Wathakan, has been compared to Hermann Goebbels of Germany and he became the major propaganda minister in Thailand. He provided a conceptual framework sanctioned by the state to create a racial and nationalistic identity for the Thai people.¹⁹

Wichit Wathakan propagated the idea that the Thai were a heroic and martial “race.” The Thai “race” was differentiated from that of Chinese, Indian, European, or American peoples. There were specific behaviors and cultural conventions assumed to be associated with the Thai “race.” Thai culture and race (*Thai rathaniyom*) and a cultural policy based on “cultural rules” (*kot wattanatham*) were publicized and propagated through the educational system and media. The polysemic symbols of nationality, royalty, religion, and the advertising industries helped produce a modern Thai identity or Thainess (*kwam pen thai*) that has had major consequences for ethnic and religious minorities in Thailand, including Muslims.²⁰ Michael Connors emphasizes that Thainess is an ethnoideology that tolerates subordinate identities but accepts no *equals*.

¹⁹Scott Barmè, *Luang Wichit Wathakan and the Creation of a Thai Identity* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), 1–186.

²⁰Michael Connors has argued that the simplistic ethnonationalist ideological complex of three pillars of Thai identity have been weakened by new developments in nationalist and international discourse, with novel local sources of cultural diversity producing a new Thainess for a global age (2005, 523–551). Yet, a more primordial Thai identity based on royalist narratives and Buddhist notions continues to be promoted. In his political analyses, Duncan McCargo describes Thailand’s nation-building elites as committed to the suppression of “all notions of ethnic difference,” a “quietly repressive process” that led to the widespread concealment, denial, or downplaying of ethnic origins (2011, 836; Joll 2016, 317–358).

Muslims in South Thailand Since the Bangkok Period

Following the incorporation of the Patani region by the Thai state in 1909, the government aggressively began an attempt at controlling and assimilating the Malay Muslim population through the appointment of Thai Buddhist bureaucrats throughout southern Malay regions. In addition, Thai authorities began to interfere directly with the religious practices of the Muslims in the South. Bangkok authorities attempted to assume all legal matters under Thai law. Thai Buddhist officials established control and monitored the Muslim legal code, structured by the *Shari'ah* and *adat* (Malay custom), and administered by the local *qadi* (Muslim judge).

During the 1930s—the period following the establishment of a democratic regime in Thailand following the bloodless coup of 1932—the Bangkok-based government promoted education as the means of integrating this region into the Thai nation. This created a dilemma for the Malay Muslims in the south because the Thai educational system was based on Buddhist values and was intimately associated with a curriculum developed by the Buddhist *sangha*—and the language of education was Thai. Therefore, to become involved in the Thai educational process necessitated a rejection of one's language and religion, the primordial basis of ethnic identity for these Malay Muslims. To resolve this dilemma, the *ulama*, the local Muslim religious leaders and the source of political legitimacy, played a prominent role in mobilizing political support around Islamic religious and cultural symbols.

As Thai compulsory education spread into the southern provinces, the Islamic schools or *pondoks* were encouraged to modify the Islamic curriculum to include an emphasis on the three sacred pillars of the Thai state. The *pondoks* were the Islamic schools that were parallel to the Buddhist temple (*wat*) in providing the basic enculturation of individuals within the wider society. *Pondoks* were sacred centers within the Malay Muslim villages of the southern Thai region and became the preeminent symbols of Malay Muslim Islamic ideals and identity. The traditional curriculum of the *pondok* was based on the classical model of the *madrasah*, the educational institutions of the Islamic world. *Tok khru* (derived from the term *guru*), or Muslim teachers, were trained in the Islamic sciences, and many possessed a knowledge of classical Arabic and Jawi (Malay with Arabic script). They taught recitation of the Qur'an, exegesis of religious texts, the traditions of the Prophet, theology, logic, history, mysticism,

and Islamic law and jurisprudence. The purpose of the *pondoks* was primarily religious and was tied to Islamic rituals, celebration of Muslim holidays and life cycle events. The *pondoks* produced the religious leaders, *ulama* and *tok kbru* that officiated in Islamic jurisprudence procedures, ritual celebrations, and religious instruction. The Thai government continued to appoint central Thai Buddhists who were unable to speak Malay as the bureaucratic officials in these southern provinces. These officials promoted Buddhist or secular policies that resulted in negative attitudes and misconceptions between the Muslims and Thai Buddhists. In response, the *ulama*, the local Muslim religious leaders and the source of political legitimacy, played a prominent role in mobilizing political support around Islamic religious and cultural symbols.²¹

By the late 1930s, with the downfall of democratic politics and the resurgence of the military faction in the Thai state led by the extreme nationalist Prime Minister, Phibun Songkram, who emulated the state policies of fascist Germany, Italy, and Japan, Malay Muslim aspirations were devastated. However, after World War II, the Thai state began once again to liberalize and pluralize its policies toward its southern provinces by establishing governmental machinery to manage the Malay leadership and draw the *ulama* into the official bureaucratic network. Through legislation known as the Patronage Act of 1945, the *ulama*, the mosque councils, and the madrasas were centralized under the authority of the *Shaikh al-Islam* or *Chularajamontri* and articulated into the Thai bureaucracy through the Ministry of Interior. The *Chularajamontri* would advise the monarchy and be considered the spiritual leader of the Muslims in Thailand. The office was to be a counterpart to the *Sangharaja* (the supreme patriarch) of the Buddhist religious hierarchy. The patronage act also directed the government to develop Islamic educational institutions for Muslim children with an appropriate Islamic curriculum.

²¹Surin Pitsuwan, *Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Study of Malay Muslims in Southern Thailand* (Bangkok: ThaiKhadai Research Institute, 1985, 175–207); Pitsuwan, “The Lotus and the Crescent: Clashes of Religious Symbolism in Southern Thailand,” in *Ethnic Conflict in Buddhist Societies: Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma*, eds. K.M. de Silva, P. Duke, E. Goldberg, and N. Katz (1988), 187–201; Ladd M. Thomas, “Bureaucratic Attitudes and Behavior as Obstacles to Political Integration of Thai Muslims,” *Southeast Asia: An International Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1974), 544–566; Hasan Madmarn, “Pondoks and Change in South Thailand,” in *Aspects of Development: Education and Political Integration for Muslims in Thailand and Malaysia*, ed. Raymond Scupin (Selangor, Malaysia: Institute of Malay Language, Literature, 1989), 47–92.

In conjunction with this, an Islamic college was to be established in Thailand with king's scholarships for pilgrimages to Mecca. The *ulama* were to be integrated into the state bureaucracy through Islamic provincial committees set up by the minister of interior. One surreptitious clause of the act allowed the minister to appoint and dismiss *ulama* in order to insure loyalty and to subvert irredentism. Unfortunately, because of deep suspicions of Malay Muslims toward Thai authorities, the patronage act became a divisive issue in southern Thailand, splitting Malay Muslims between "loyalists" and "separatists."

A number of Islamic-based factions emerged during the 1960s and 1970s in south Thailand reflecting a diversity of political views became engaged in activist irredentist activities. One early separatist group, the National Liberation Front of Patani, the LFRP, desired the reestablishment of Patani in its former glory, with a raja or sultan at its head. Later, one of the most influential irredentist organizations in South Thailand, the Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO) emerged in the late 1960s and was the most well known and most effective guerrilla organization and separatist movement in the Patani region. PULO was devoted to preserving "Malayness" and the Islamic way of life in south Thailand. It had several levels of organization, with its headquarters in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. PULO also maintained a regional headquarters in Kelantan, where it coordinated its guerrilla operations. In Thailand itself, the military organization of PULO was well armed and had received financial support in the past from Libya and Syria.

Although there have been sporadic skirmishes in the recent past, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Malay Muslim communities of the Patani region had largely turned away from the extremist separatist movements such as PULO and LFRP. However, in 2004, a new chapter of violent resistance to Bangkok, led by the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (National Revolutionary Front) (BRN) and an older, loosely organized coalition known as Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Coordinate (BRN-C) began in the southern provinces.²² On January 4, 2004, over a hundred Muslim insurgents raided an arms depot of the 4th Army Engineers in Narathiwat province. As diversionary moves, they also torched 20 public schools, burned rubber tires, and planted fake explosives in neighboring Yala province. Shortly thereafter, a number of Buddhist monks were

²²Duncan McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 168–174.

attacked and killed. Sporadic violence has continued for the past 16 years in southern Thailand. Since 2004, there have been over 6500 deaths of both Buddhists and Muslims in this southern insurgency in Thailand.

As a result of these developments, the prime minister at the time, Thaksin Shinawatra, called for curfews and the closing of schools in south Thailand. Since 2004, an aggressive campaign of Thai Buddhist nationalism and militarization has exacerbated Buddhist–Muslim relations in south Thailand. Between 2004 and 2007 sixteen Buddhist *wats* (temples) were attacked. As a consequence, a village defense volunteer system (*Or Ror Bor*) sponsored by Queen Sirikit, and a number of paramilitary organizations have also emerged in south Thailand. The Thai government has sponsored the militarization of various Buddhist temples in the southern provinces in order to quell the ethnic and religious violence.

Muslims in Central Thailand After the Bangkok Period

Because of historical and cultural conditions, the experience of Muslims in central Thailand has been much different than that of their Muslim affiliates to the south. Historically, the Muslims of the central corridor of Thailand have migrated, either voluntarily or involuntarily, into these regions, bringing distinctive ethnic, social, and religious conventions with them. Thus, these Muslim communities are much more ethnically heterogeneous than the Muslim communities of the South. Unlike their Islamic brethren to the south, these Muslims are ethnic minorities residing in the centers of predominantly Thai Buddhist cultural environment. This has influenced Buddhist–Muslim interactive relationships in central Thailand.

Various communities of Muslims in central Thailand, including Persians, Chams, South Asians, and Indonesians, all of which have a long history that extends back into the Ayutthaya period, settled in Bangkok. A number of the families related to the Persian Shia Muslims of Ayutthaya settled near Khlong Bangkok-Noi and Khlong Bangkok-Yai in Thonburi,²³ just across the Chao Phraya River from Bangkok. The descendants of these Persian Muslims, who settled amidst other Muslims and Buddhists, represent the oldest element of the Muslim

²³Though historically Thonburi was a separate city and a previous site of the Thai capital, as of 1971, it was incorporated into the Bangkok metropolitan area.

community in Bangkok. Muslims from India and present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh have also settled in the Bangkok area. These Muslim migrants came from variant linguistic and geographical areas of the subcontinent. Gujarati and Bengali speakers came from North India, Madrasis from South India, and others from the Malabar coast. The Pathans, who were Pashto speakers, made up the majority of Muslims from present-day Pakistan or Afghanistan. The majority of the Indian Muslims who settled in the Bangkok area were Gujarati speakers from North India. Gujaratis are well known for their mercantile orientation and have been instrumental in establishing overseas Indian communities throughout Southeast Asia.

As we described above, the Cham Muslims had settled in Ayutthaya and played a military role. As a result of their loyalty in serving the Thai military King Rama I gave the Cham a tract of land in Bangkok known as Ban Krua. Ban Krua is situated on the *Saen Saab Khlong* (Saen Saab Canal) and currently has a population of about 5000. In 1994, the Cham Muslims established an Islamic school for their children near the Central Mosque known as Jami-ul-Khariya. Indonesian Muslims, including Makassares and Javanese Muslims also migrated to the Ayutthaya kingdom and later settled in Bangkok. Other Indonesian Muslims migrated to Bangkok during the nineteenth century. There was no mass migration of Indonesians to Thailand in any particular era; they tended to come as individual traders and established small businesses related to the Thai-Indonesian trade in cloth, batik products, or molasses. Another channel for immigrant Indonesians coming to Bangkok came with the visit of Rama V (Chulalongkorn) to Java and other parts of Indonesia in the 1870s. Impressed with their agricultural and gardening techniques, he invited some Javanese gardeners to Thailand to manage the royal gardens and teach nursery and gardening methods under his patronage. A location was provided for them along Khlong Saen Saeb in Bangkok. The various ethnic groups who are descendants of these Indonesian Muslims have a population of about 5000 people.

Descendants of Malay Muslims in Central Thailand

By far the largest group of Muslims in Bangkok and central Thailand, approximately 90% or about 600,000, are descendants of Malay peoples from the southern provinces of Thailand and parts of Malaysia. Their presence in Bangkok and surrounding areas resulted from the

implementation of the vassalage network between Thailand and the Malay states. Most of central Thailand's Muslim population are descendants of these Malay war slaves (Th. *chalei*),²⁴ brought there during the five decades of war with Kedah and Patani. This practice caused frequent and sizable population movements, which explain the forms of Thai/Malay bilingualism found in some communities in Bangkok and central Thailand. Like the majority of the other Muslims of Southeast Asia, these descendants of the Malays residing in Bangkok are orthodox Sunnis of the school of Shafii. Innumerable mosques have been constructed along the canals in these and 70% were built by the Malays and their descendants.

Since the late 1970s and 1980s, many Muslims have migrated to Bangkok from the Middle East. Initially, some came as tourists but eventually decided to remain for business, trade, or religious purposes. As bilateral trade between Thailand and the Middle East increased, especially during the 1980s, a number of Muslims from Lebanon, Yemen, Egypt, and other Arab areas arrived in Bangkok. Middle Eastern restaurants and hotels developed to provide for Muslim Arab visitors and residents. One area of Bangkok has become known as the Arab quarter and is sometimes referred to as mini-Beirut of the East. The population of the Arabs and their descendants is about 1000 people. Arabic calligraphy, Arabian music, coffee-houses, belly-dancing, and other signs of Arabic culture became recognizable in this evolving cosmopolitan city of Bangkok.²⁵

Muslims of North Thailand

Muslim communities were also established in north Thailand. Many of the Muslims in north Thailand came from the Islamicized portion of China. Most authorities refer to them as Chinese "Haw," *Cin-Ho*, or *Hui*. Most of the Chinese Muslims in Thailand originate from the southwestern part of Yunnan. Historically, this ethnic group operated

²⁴*Chalei* is a Khmer term referring to "war captives used as laborers." Although low in Siamese society at the time, they were higher than ordinary slaves (Th. *that*), who could neither own land nor purchase their freedom.

²⁵Chaiwat Satha-Anand, "Bangkok Muslims and the Tourist Trade," in *The Muslim Private Sector in Southeast Asia*, ed. Mohamed Ariff (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991), 89–121.

an expansive trading network between the Shan states, China, and north Thailand. After the nineteenth century, the Chinese Muslims began to establish themselves as permanent residents in north and northeast Thailand. Then as a consequence of the Chinese revolution, in the 1950s another wave of Yunnanese refugees fled into northern Thailand, many settling in Chiang Mai province. Another group of Muslims that settled in north Thailand are the descendants of South Asian Muslims who came from Calcutta during the second half of the nineteenth century. Later, after 1947, with Indian independence and partition, there was a continuous flow of migrants from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) who first settled in Burma and gradually moved into northern Thailand and Chiang Mai city. These Chiang Mai quarters and cities in northeast Thailand also received a Pathan (Pashtun) Muslim populace who either migrated directly from their homes in Pakistan and Afghanistan or via Myanmar.

Thai Muslim Identity in Central and North Thailand

Although Thai has become the first language and native language of most Muslims in central and north Thailand, some of these Muslims are bilingual, speaking their native Malay or Mandarin languages also. Through the education system and intermarriage between these Muslims and other Thais, traditional primordial ethnic differences among these early Muslim settlers have been, to some extent, partially weakened. A number of the Muslim migrants married Thai females, who then converted to Islam. An aphorism often heard in these Muslim communities is that the children of these mixed marriages would adhere to the dress, manners, and language of their Thai mothers, but to the religion of their Muslim fathers. Like many of the descendants of the Chinese immigrants in Thailand, many of these Muslims appear to preserve their ethnic identity on an individual basis rather than that of a communal basis.²⁶

Muslims in central and north Thailand are sometimes referred to by Thai Buddhists as *khaek Islam* or *khaek Musalam*.²⁷ In most of

²⁶Thongchai Winichakul, "The Changing Landscape of the Past: New Histories in Thailand Since 1973," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26 (1995): 116.

²⁷While Scupin was doing ethnographic research in 1976–1977 on Muslims in central Thailand, he was teaching at Ramkhamhaeng University, located in a Muslim area near the Saen Saab canal. He often found that young Thai Buddhist students would jokingly refer to their Muslim friends as *khaek* in conversations with them and there would be no negative reaction, instead just a smile or laugh.

the English discussions of these Muslims, including in the Thai academic and government literature, they are referred to as Thai Muslims. Historically, despite some mutual misunderstandings between Buddhists and Muslims, there appeared to be no aggressive anti-Muslim hostility in central, north, or northeast Thailand up until recently. Consequently, there was a good deal of structural assimilation that occurred among these Muslims in their accommodation to residing in a Thai Buddhist environment. Although the Muslim communities in these Buddhist regions are identifiable by their needs for an Islamic-based *halal* diet and mosques, they tend to participate in most of the same institutions as their Thai Buddhist neighbors. For example, many Buddhists attend the *tham bun* or *kinbun* or other communal rituals of Muslims and are eagerly welcomed into these practices. And, many Muslims attended the *tham bun* rituals or *kinbun* activities of the Thai Buddhists in Bangkok and central Thailand.

Islamic Reform in Thailand

One of the developments that has influenced both the ethnoreligious identity and the political aspects of Muslim communities in both the southern as well as the central and north regions of Thailand is the emergence of various Islamic movements. These Islamic movements have had consequences for Buddhist–Muslim relations in Thailand, as well as for their group identities. One of the movements was based on the modernist or reformist ideals of the early twentieth century, which emerged in the Middle East and spread throughout the Islamic world in Southeast Asia coincided with the global impact of Western capitalism, colonialism, and what is sometimes referred to as modernization, including increases in print journalism and improvements in literacy, especially in the urban centers. This Islamic reformist movement emerged among some members of the educated urban residents within the Muslim communities in Thailand.²⁸

The Islamic reformists or *Salafists* attempted to “purify” the form of Islam that existed within the Muslim communities of Thailand. They criticized what they perceived as the syncretistic beliefs and practices of the popular forms of Islam that were influenced by Thai spirit beliefs and

²⁸Scupin, “Islamic Reformism in Thailand” (1980b), 1–10.

Buddhist conceptions. During the early twentieth century, the reformist influence came to south Thailand primarily through Haji Sulong, who received his early education in Kampung Sungei, Pattani and then in Mecca. He was exposed to the reformist ideas circulating within the Middle East. When Haji Sulong returned to Patani, he became well-known for his reformist and *Salafist* outlook and had a tremendous influence on the Muslim communities. He was instrumental in reforming much of the curriculum within the *pondoks* in south Thailand. In 1954, Haji Sulong disappeared under mysterious circumstances, and this event has helped engender Muslim political activism in south Thailand.

Another Islamic movement known as *Tablighi Jamaat*, an Indian Muslim missionary group founded in 1927 that emphasized non-political *Salafist* activities including rigid norms regarding diet and dress. The reformist activities of *Tablighi Jamaat* in south Thailand have been described by German anthropologist Alexander Horstmann.²⁹ *Tablighi Jamaat* has also had an influence on some of the Muslim communities of Bangkok including Ban Krua, and the Hui communities of north Thailand. A more recent form of Islamic reformism has developed in the southern province of Yala under the leadership of the charismatic Ismail Lutfi Japakiya, rector of the Yala Islamic University. Born in Mecca, his family brought him to Thailand when he was six years old. Lutfi learned Arabic and Islam through his father, who had taught in Mecca. His father was a *tok guru* in a private *pondok* in Pattani province. Provided with a scholarship to Madinah University in Saudi Arabia, Lutfi completed a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in Islamic Studies. Returning to Thailand, he founded the Yala Islamic University. Although sometimes described as a “Wahhabist,” Joseph Liow analyzed Lutfi’s corpus of writings carefully to demonstrate that he is not a fundamentalist, Wahhabist, or radical-militant Muslim, but rather a reformist Muslim.³⁰

²⁹Alexander Horstmann, “The Inculturation of a Transnational Islamic Missionary Movement: Tablighi Jamaat al Dawa and Muslim Society in Southern Thailand,” *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 22, no. 1 (2007), 107–130.

³⁰Liow, *Islam, Education, and Reform in Southern Thailand: Tradition and Transformation* (ISEAS, 2009), 88–95.

Dakwah (Dawah)

More recently, since the emergence of Islamic resurgence movements in the Middle East and elsewhere, some Muslims in Thailand have participated in contemporary Islamic movements similar to those that have influenced Malaysia and Indonesia. The major sources of the new Islamic movements stem from what has been referred to as the *dakwah* religious trends that have been growing in Thailand. The *dakwah* movement represents multiple strands of recent Islamic discourse within Thai society and is an extended continuation of the earlier reformist, or *islah* revivalist tendencies. Connections between Muslims in Thailand and the Middle East led many of the Muslim women involved in the *dakwah* or *salafi* activities to adopt Middle Eastern dress, including the *hijab*, and for some, the *niqab* or veil.³¹ Despite these ethnoreligious markers of identity, however, some of the *dakwah* leadership has called for a Muslim–Buddhist dialogue and cooperation to help bring about mutual understanding and social and economic improvement throughout Thailand.

Tariqa (Sufism)

One additional Islamic development that has influenced the Muslims of Thailand is what is broadly known as the *tariqa* movement, based on the traditional Sufi mystical practices. Joll has conducted recent multi-sited ethnographic research on the Sufi orders (*tariqa*, pl., *turuq*, sg.) and their beliefs and practices among Muslims in south and central Thailand.³² He did fieldwork on the *tariqa* practices in Ayutthaya, Bangkok, Narathiwat, Songkhla, Satun, Krabi, Phuket, Pattani, Yala, Kota Baru, and Mae Sot in Thailand, as well as in Kelantan in Malaysia. In south Thailand, the Ahmadiyyah-Idrisiyyah *tariqa* founded in Meccain the eighteenth century has spread at the expense of the more traditional Shattariyyah order, while in central Thailand, the Qadriyyah

³¹In a recent illuminating Ph.D. thesis “Gender Piety of Muslim Women in Thailand” (Faculty of Philosophy and History, University in Frankfurt am Main, 2016), ethnographer Amporn Marddent, who describes herself as an assimilated Thai of Malay descent, studied the women involved in the Islamic reformist movements, *dakwah*, and *salafi* activities in Bangkok and in south Thailand.

³²Joll, “Revisiting Ethnic and Religious Factors in Thailand’s Southern Discomfort” (2015), 91–113.

turuq associated with South India has been most prevalent in Ayutthayan and Bangkok Muslim communities. Another *turuq*, the Shazuliyya, was brought in 1929 by an Arab from Hijaz who was actively proselytizing along the Saen Saab Khlong in eastern Bangkok. Although the population numbers are small, the Sufi *tariqa* have had an influence on many of the traditional rituals and prayers in Muslim mosques throughout Thailand.

Buddhist Movements in Thailand

Similar modern economic, social, and political conditions that gave rise to Islamic movements were also prevalent for stimulating various Theravada Buddhist movements in Thailand. These movements within Buddhist communities have definitive similarities with the Islamic movements. European contacts with Thailand led to the earliest Buddhist reform movements. Theravada Buddhist reforms were initiated by King Mongkut (Rama IV; 1851–1868) in an attempt to bring Thai Buddhism in line with the newly introduced Western scientific ideas and to encourage a critical stance towards popular or folk elements within Theravada Buddhism. Mongkut founded the Thammayut Buddhist monastic order as an institution to promote these reforms.³³ Thai Buddhist reforms of Mongkut were continued with the emergence of new class alignments in Thailand following the extension of capitalist and industrial developments. An emerging middle class opposed to the Thai economic, political, royalist, and religious elite began to offer new interpretations of Theravada Buddhism, providing for further rationalization of religious sources. With exposure to democratic and secular trends emanating from globalization, the Buddhist reformists began to reject metaphysical and supernatural doctrines that were based on post-canonical textual sources. During the 1960s and 1970s, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, through his sermons and writings of the 1960s and 1970s drawn from the *dhamma*, recommended a new political and ethical focus for Theravada Buddhism. He strived to blend the moral aspects of the Theravada tradition with civic virtue and the public good. Buddhadasa's sermons and teachings were particularly influential with young urban Thai intellectuals, who were disillusioned with the ethical import of global capitalism and

³³Keyes, "Buddhist Politics and Their Revolutionary Origins in Thailand" (1989): 121–142.

excessive consumerism, individualism, and political expediency.³⁴ Since the 1980s, some of the educated middle class have been drawn to the *Santi Asoke* and *Dhammakai* sect. The *Santi Asoke* movement encouraged an inner-worldly ethic or “*Dhammic* action,” which provides a blueprint for a new social and political order in Thailand. They advocated an austere ascetic lifestyle including strict vegetarianism and back-to-basics morality.³⁵ The *Dhammakai* movement emerged during the late 1960s at several universities in Thailand. This movement began to use the media, especially television, and has been compared to American TV evangelism.

Muslim Ethnicity and Essentialism in Thailand

In a widely cited essay, ethnographer Mattison Mines introduced the concept of Muslim ethnicity.³⁶ He indicated that as Islamization increased among the Muslim Tamils in rural Tamilnadu, their religious traditions became more intertwined with their ethnicity. In assessing the political conditions of south Thailand, Imtiaz Yusuf refers to the “ethnification” of religion and uses the term “ethnoreligious” to focus on how religion blends with ethnicity for the Malay Muslims of south Thailand.³⁷ He discusses how the global Islamic movements including *salafi* and Wahhabi influences in south Thailand have created a clash between the ethnoreligious identities of Malay Muslims versus Thai Buddhists. Linguistic scholar Seni Mudmarn from south Thailand argues that the ethnonym “Malay Muslim” represents the inseparability of Islam with Malay ethnicity.³⁸ It appears that both Muslims and Buddhists in Thailand essentialize one another’s ethnoreligious identities very easily. In south Thailand, Malay ethnicity and the Islamic (whether *salafist*

³⁴Swearer, ed. and trans., *Toward the Truth* by Buddhadasa (Westminster Press, 1971), 1–189.

³⁵Swearer, “Fundamentalistic Movements in Theravada Buddhism” (1991), 628–690.

³⁶Mattison Mines, “Islamisation and Muslim Ethnicity in South India,” *Man* 10, no. 3 (1975), 404–419.

³⁷Yusuf, *Faces of Islam in Southern Thailand* (2007), 1–25.

³⁸Seni Mudmarn, “Social Science Research in Thailand: The Muslim Minority,” in *Muslim Social Science in ASEAN*, ed. Omar Farouk Bajunid (Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Perataran Ilmu, 1994), 32; Joll, *Muslim Merit-Making in Thailand’s Far-South* (2011), 69.

or *dakwah*) have become entwined in the morass of political struggles with the Thai Buddhists.

Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, writing about the epistemological status of ethnicity, says,

It is widely held, by social scientists as well as by lay people that the members of human groups have an ‘innate’ propensity to distinguish insiders and outsiders, to delineate social boundaries and to develop stereotypes about the ‘other’ in order to sustain and justify these boundaries. If this is indeed the case, ethnicity can be conceived of as being nearly as universal a characteristic of humanity as gender and age.³⁹

For a number of decades, anthropological debates about ethnicity were divided between primordialists and instrumentalists or constructivists. Although both approaches to ethnicity have their own partisans, most contemporary anthropologists tend to agree with Stanley Tambiah’s suggestion that ethnic identity is a combination of the “semantics of primordial claims” and “the pragmatics of calculated choices” in the contexts of political-economic competition among differing interest groups.⁴⁰ Many anthropologists and other scholars believed that ethnic and nationalist identities would become less essentialist, more flexible, situational, more hybrid, and less clunky as modernity developed. Yet, despite the widespread deconstruction of ethnic and nationalist identities by anthropologists and other scholars, essentialist identities have become more prevalent and powerful throughout the world. Essentialism is the tendency to treat members of certain categories like “ethnicities,” “nationalities,” or “religious groups” as though they have an underlying nature that governs the observable characteristics of their membership in that category. An ethnic, national, or religious group is essentialized when either members of the group or outsiders assume that the group’s members share some internal property or essence that is supposedly inherited and that creates the behaviors typical of that group. As groups are essentialized, individuals make inferences about how the people in those groups think and behave. It appears that these essentialization processes

³⁹Eriksen, Thomas Hylland, “The Epistemological Status of the Concept of Ethnicity,” *Anthropological Notebooks* (Czech Republic), (2019), 1.

⁴⁰Tambiah, “Ethnic Conflict in the World Today” (1989), 336.

are universal and transnational and have provided the foundations for in-group and out-group conflict.⁴¹

By the mid-1970s, although a great degree of structural and cultural assimilation had affected the Muslims in Bangkok and central and north Thailand, there were some tendencies toward more primordial and essentialized ethnoreligious expression and assertiveness. For example, ethnoreligious expression was explicit and observable within the context of Islamic activities during the celebration of holidays such as *Mawlid al-Nabi* (the birthday of the prophet).⁴² Ethnic groups such as the Pathans or Indonesians set up booths to serve their own foods and participate to assert their unique ethnoreligious identities. Also, with the spread of a global Islamic awakening in the 1970s and with the emergence of the Iranian revolution, many young Shia Muslims from Thailand were taking scholarships to get educated in Qum, the center of Shia religious scholarship in Iran.⁴³ There were even a small number of young Sunni Muslims in Thailand who were converting to the Shia tradition as a means of affirming their Islamic identity.

In the 1990s, Cham Muslim ethnoreligious identity was mobilized in a form of political protest against the Thai government. The Bangkok authorities wanted to develop a new highway system which would destroy the traditional Cham neighborhood of Ban Krua. Demonstrations mobilized many Muslims, and the Cham began to assert their ethnoreligious ties. In some senses, the Cham Muslim community represented a model of a moral community, standing together against the forces of globalization, corporate capitalism, vested interests, and corrupt government-inspired development.⁴⁴ Many other Muslims throughout Thailand were mobilized and joined the demonstrations to help support the Chams in their political and ethnoreligious struggle.

⁴¹Jerryson, *Buddhist Fury*, 143; Scupin, "Anthropology, Conflict, and International Relations" (2017), 163; Hirschfeld, *Race in the Making* (1996), 25; Gelman, *The Essential Child* (2003), 5.

⁴²Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Celebrating Muhammad's Birthday in Buddha's Land: Managing Religious Relations Through Religious Festival," in *Religion, Public Policy and Social Transformation in Southeast Asia, Religion, Gender, and Identity*, Volume 2, ed. Dicky Sofjan (Jakarta: Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies, 2016), 130–161.

⁴³Scupin, "Muslim Accommodation in Thai Society," 256; Liow, *Islam, Education, and Reform in Southern Thailand*, 146.

⁴⁴Scupin, "Cham Muslims in Thailand: A Model of a Moral Community" (2000), 453–464.

In a general survey of Muslims in Thailand in 2001, the French sociologist Michel Gilquin, observed that “in the universities and some districts, one can find men sporting a skullcap and trying hard to grow a beard. This is a recent phenomenon. If the visitor had come ten years or so earlier, he would not have seen skullcaps. Thai Islam is now more visible in the capital.” He continued, pondering whether this phenomenon signaled “a return to a stricter observance of the faith by the younger generation in the face of increasingly aggressive modernisation” or whether it simply represented “a way of emphasizing its difference by external symbols.”⁴⁵

Recent Enhanced Essentialism Among Buddhists and Muslims

In our discussion above, we have identified some of the recent circumstances that have resulted in more essentialist ethnic and religious identities among both Buddhists and Muslims in Thailand. The resurgence of both Islamic and Buddhist movements since the 1970s has heightened the significance of ethnic and religious identity for these populations. In addition, the insurgency in south Thailand since, 2004 pitting Buddhists and Muslims against each other, in violent confrontations has certainly given rise to increases in essentialist characterizations and more Islamophobic reactions among the Buddhists. Although we cannot posit any ideal utopian harmony between Buddhists and Muslims at any stage of Thai history, as we have seen there were, at times, more cosmopolitan and pluralistic tendencies in the past. In contrast, recent historical and political developments have engendered more essentialist ethnoreligious identities that have been heightened and sensationalized in the Thai media.

Within the context of these trends in essentialization of ethnoreligious identities, Duncan McCargo has argued that the Thai state has encouraged a more restrictive and orthodox form of Theravada Buddhism as a means of reinforcing ethnic and religious homogeneity and repressing difference. In two essays published in 2009, McCargo criticizes Charles Keyes and Donald Swearer’s emphases on how Buddhism has created

⁴⁵Michel Gilquin, *The Muslims of Thailand*, trans. M. Smithies (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2005), 5.

a more civil and democratic process in Thailand.⁴⁶ He suggests that Keyes and Swearer romanticize Thai Buddhism as having created a more pluralistic and civil order for religious freedom in Thailand. McCargo discusses a Buddhist sermon of an unidentified monk on a widely circulated DVD entitled *Muslim Klueu Phut* (Muslims Swallow Buddhists), heightening fears and Islamophobia. He also describes a book, *Dangers for Buddhism in Thailand*, by the prominent conservative Buddhist intellectual monk Prayudh Payutto, which discusses how Christians and Muslims encourage religious intolerance and describes the aggression of Christianity and Islam compared to the peaceful and civil traditions of Buddhism. Prayudh Payutto argues that only Buddhism can maintain religious freedom in Thailand and serve as the legitimate source of Thai national identity. McCargo indicates that these nationalist forms of Buddhism have been engaging Thai Buddhists since the insurgency in south Thailand. However, he also cites a chapter by Buddhist scholar Suwanna Satha-Anand, who had noted a “shrinking space” for tolerance in Thai Buddhism prior to the 2004 insurgency.⁴⁷

Keyes responded to McCargo’s criticism by noting that in his own analyses of Thai Buddhism, he distinguishes establishment Buddhism, militant Buddhism, and nationalist Buddhism from the more civil forms of Buddhism that are in competition with one another in Thailand.⁴⁸ When considering whether the inextricable connection between the Thai state and Buddhism has engendered more repressive or more tolerant and civil trends regarding non-Buddhist traditions, it would appear

⁴⁶McCargo, “Thai Buddhists and the Southern Conflict” (2009a), 1–10; McCargo, “The Politics of Buddhist Identity in Thailand’s Deep South” (2009b), 11–32; Charles Keyes, “Buddhist Politics and Their Revolutionary Origins in Thailand” (1989), 121–142; Donald Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*. Second edition (2010), 1–320.

⁴⁷Suwanna Satha-Anand, “Buddhist Pluralism and Religious Tolerance in Democratizing Thailand,” in *Philosophy, Democracy and Education*, ed. Philip Cam (Seoul: The Korean National Commission for UNESCO, 2003), 193–213.

⁴⁸Charles Keyes, “Theravada Buddhism and Buddhist Nationalism: Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Thailand,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 14, no. 4 (2016), 41–52. In an illuminating essay entitled “Muslim ‘Others’ in Buddhist Thailand,” Keyes traces a racial stereotype used to demonize *khaek* and the Malay Muslims of south Thailand to premodern sources and an image in a nineteenth-century mural painting in Wat Matchimawat in Songkhla depicting evil and violent beings associated with *Māra* who are attacking the Buddha. Charles Keyes, “Muslim ‘Others’ in Buddhist Thailand,” *Thammasat Review* (Bangkok) 13 ([2008] 2009): 19–43.

that both McCargo and Keyes' views represent both types of tendencies within the very diverse Thai political milieu.⁴⁹ There are both conservative voices that contend and compete with more liberal and civil expressions regarding how religion and politics are interwoven. For example, in the 1990s, there were conservative Buddhist organizations that advocated that Theravada Buddhism become the national and official religion of Thailand. They tended to claim that followers of Theravada Buddhism are the sole, authentic representatives of a "single, homogeneous, authentic Thai people." Yet, the Thai constitution, developed in 1997 and approved by the late King Bhumiphol, expanded the interpretation of the pillar of *sasana* to refer to non-Buddhist religious traditions. The 1997 constitution did require that the King had to be a Theravada Buddhist, and in actuality and in practice, the Theravada Buddhist tradition is the default official state religion in Thailand, as noted in our discussion about how the Three Pillars had been implemented for centuries. Further evidence for the promotion of religious pluralism is reflected by how the royal family has served as a patron for various Islamic activities such as the Quranic *tajwid* chanting contests and Christian events based in Bangkok.

Following the bloodless coup d'état in September of 2006, the military overthrew the Thaksin government and repealed the 1997 constitution. In the constitution of 2007, minority religions were still offered protection, rights, and support. Section 37 of the 2007 constitution states, "A person shall enjoy full liberty to profess religion, religious sect or creed, and observe religious precept or exercise a form of worship in accordance with his or her belief; provided that it is not contrary to his or her civic duties, public order or good morals." "Civic duties" in Thai is *na thi khong phonlamuang*, which roughly translates to English as "duties of the citizens."

In the wake of the most recent coup in 2014, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, the commander in chief of the Royal Thai Army, dissolved the government including the senate, declared martial law, and

⁴⁹Both McCargo and Keyes refer to the Thai Buddhist monk Phra Paisal Visalo, who is a peace activist who wants to encourage Buddhist-Muslim dialogue and who served on the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) to investigate the south Thailand conflict and make recommendations to resolve the insurgency. McCargo regards him as a minor influence in Thai politics, while Keyes views him as the ideal in Buddhist civil and peaceful relations in Thailand.

announced plans for a new codified constitution. The new codified constitution was developed in 2017 and was approved by the new King, Maha Vajiralongkorn (Rama X). In the 2017 constitution, Article 31 states,

A person shall enjoy full liberty to profess a religion, and enjoy the liberty to exercise or practice a form of worship in accordance with his or her religious principles, provided that it shall not be adverse to the duties of the Thai people; neither shall it endanger the safety of the State, nor shall it be contrary to public order or good morals.

The wording in Article 31 uses the phrase “duties of the Thai people,” which translates into Thai as *Puang chon chao thai*. This phrase translates into English as “the whole Thai people,” which includes all Thais, regardless of ethnic or religious identities or sub-identities.⁵⁰ Thus, this is not the same meaning as *chon chat Thai*, which was used as an ethnic and religious, quasi-racial identity promoted by Phibun and other Thai royalty and officials in the nationalist project of earlier times. Yet, many Muslims objected to the notion in Article 31 that freedom of religion was conditional on adherents not undermining “the safety of the State,” which was construed as a slur on their loyalty.

In addition, Article 67 in the 2017 constitution says that the State should support and protect Buddhism and other religions. However, Article 67 also emphasizes that the State should promote and support education and dissemination of *dhammic* principles of Theravada Buddhism and have measures to prevent Buddhism from being undermined in any form. This special clause to protect Buddhism has also created controversy for some Muslims who view this as state-sponsored religious chauvinism.⁵¹ Thus, although the constitutions of 1997, 2007, and 2017 have promoted both freedom of religion and increased tolerance for non-Buddhist religious traditions, there appears to be an inclination for state-sponsored Theravada Buddhism.

A recent development during the March 24, 2019 elections appears as an ominous trend in Buddhist–Muslim dynamics. A new political

⁵⁰Thongchai Winichakul helped confirm these translations of the Thai constitutions into English for us (personal communication, January 14, 2018).

⁵¹McCargo, Alexander, and Desatova, “Ordering Peace: Thailand’s 2016 Constitutional Referendum” (2017), 86–87.

party known as the Pandin Dharma Party emerged to contest a seat in parliament in the March elections. A member of the party, clothing and cosmetics model, Sirima “Grace” Sarakul, contested the seat. The Pandin Dharma (translates as “Land of Buddhist Teaching”) Party members claim that there is a considerable threat from the Muslim minority to Theravada Buddhism. They maintain that Thai secular authorities are promoting the interests of the Muslim minority who harass Buddhist monks and endanger the religion of the majority. The leader of the Pandin Dharma Party is a former Buddhist monk, Korn Medee, who asserts that the government favors other religions over Buddhism. Although some Buddhists have questioned the authenticity of Pandin Dharma adherents as “real Buddhists,” this development is a concern for those who want to support civic and religious pluralism in Thailand.⁵²

Ethnicity and religion have always been highly significant in marking and determining identity, solidarity, and political organization within and between states. However, the global expansion of capitalism and globalization have tended to accelerate the trends in the essentialization and assertiveness of ethnic and religious identities in Thailand. The religious tradition of Islam is perceived by the leaders of reform and *Salafist* movements as being undermined by these new capitalist-based, non-communal, individualistic, and anarchic conceptions of obligations and responsibilities. New cultural conceptions of individual autonomy conjoined with market consumerism compete with traditional notions of communal moral obligations along with the perceived attendant destruction of the Muslim (and Buddhist) communities. As the ethnic and religious movement in the Ban Krua Muslim community in the 1990s highlighted, ruthless economic liberalization and neoliberal capitalism left many people materially insecure and unmoored. Communal ties were discouraged in order to produce a mobile work force and economic development in these neighborhoods. These Muslims wanted to restore and cultivate cultures of community, care, and small-scale democracy.

Anthropologist and global theorist Jonathan Friedman notes that as hybridization emerges among cosmopolitan elites, an equivalent tendency towards rootedness and primordialism, to boundary-making, and

⁵²Wongcha-um, Panu, “‘Buddhism Under Threat’ Thai Election Gives Platform to Radicals,” *Reuters World News*, March 6, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-election-buddhism/buddhism-under-threat-thai-election-gives-platform-to-radicals-idUSKCN1QO0E1?utm>.

increasing Balkanization develops among locals.⁵³ A recent work by anthropologist Akbar Ahmed describes similar processes.⁵⁴ He compares numerous tribal and peripheral Muslim societies throughout the world, including the Muslims in south Thailand, and demonstrates how both state repression and globalization are contributing to current ethnic and religious assertiveness. Ahmed indicates that as these Muslims recognize that globalization is not incidental to their lives but is rather a recognizable transformation in their everyday circumstances, they draw on reconstructions of ethnic identity and religious fundamentalism as a means of restoring power over their lives. The reconstruction and reinvigoration of their ethnic and religious identities give these people a sense of greater control in what appears to be a “runaway” and destructive world. Fundamentalist or more *Salafist* religious movements articulate the uncertainties and distress brought about by expanding globalization and loss of control over local realities. These disruptive local and global conditions result in alienation for many of the young people from their ethnic, tribal, and communal ties. This destabilization of communal identity provides a context for the recruitment of some of these young people in these peripheral communities into political dissent and violent activities such as the Muslim insurgency in south Thailand.⁵⁵

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Buddhist–Muslim dynamics in Thailand confront clouded (and wishful) thinking by state-makers and scholars, who have long perpetuated the fallacy of an ethnically, linguistically, and religiously homogenous Siam (before the 1930s) and Thailand (after it). This chapter has placed the

⁵³Jonathan Friedman, “Global Crises, the Struggle for Cultural Identity and Intellectual Porkbarreling: Cosmopolitans Versus Locals, Ethnic and Nationals in an Era of De-Hegemonisation,” in *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, eds. Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (London: Zed Books, 1997), 70–89.

⁵⁴Akbar Ahmed, *The Thistle and the Drone: How America’s War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 91–92.

⁵⁵Another trend accompanying global capitalism in Thailand is secularization. Generally, global industrializing trends are conjoined with rationalistic-scientific modes of inquiry, and the separation of religiosity from other institutions within society. These scientific, secular ideals and rationalistic values and institutions tend to dislocate primordial ties whether based upon ethnic or religious communities.

range of interactions between Buddhists and Muslim in central, north, and south Thailand in their wider cultural and historical context. In what is now south Thailand, there has been a long history of interaction between Indic-Buddhist and Islamic influences. Muslim communities have contributed to the prosperity and security in central and north Thailand in the past and present. In all of these areas, one can discern some degree of cosmopolitanism and harmony between Buddhism and Muslims. Following the development of various Islamic and Buddhist movements, many Muslims and Buddhists have incorporated more essentialist views of their own ethnic and religious identities as well as the identities of each other. The recent insurgency in south Thailand has tended to accelerate more primordial and essentialist ethno-religious identities within these populations. Most historical, sociological, and anthropological data tends to confirm that as different ethnic and religious groups interact with one another in efforts that involve collective strategies and goals, essentialist perceptions and primordial identities soften. It remains to be seen whether this will be the future for ethno-religious identities and pluralism for Buddhists and Muslims in Thailand.

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