

Introduction

This volume is basically a documentation of the proceedings of a workshop which was held in Kyoto, Japan on 20 May, 2007 organized by the Center for Integrated Area Studies, Kyoto University. The workshop itself was extremely important for a couple of reasons not least of which because of the theme that it sought to address, namely, Islam at the margins, focusing on the Muslims of Indochina. Hitherto, the prevailing tendency in scholarship on Islam and the Muslim world has been to continue to regard the Middle East, the birthplace of Islam, as the central point of reference for Muslims worldwide throughout time and space. For historical, geographical, cultural and even political reasons, Arab countries, in particular, continue to be viewed as constituting the core or center of Islam. The role of other Muslims outside the traditional Arab historical-cultural belt, in geographical regions such as Southeast Asia, has somehow not been fully understood or appreciated or even recognized, for that matter. The ethno-cultural mosaic, linguistic diversity and complex contextual realities that characterize the Muslim world of Southeast Asia have really yet to be seriously and systematically examined. This is even more true in situations where the Muslims live as minorities and where Islam exists on the margins of a variety of cultures, communities and countries. Very little, for example, is known of the Muslims of Indochina even in respect of their basic demographic data. The varieties and strands of Islam adopted by the Muslims of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, their local and transnational networks, cultural and spiritual orientations and peculiarities and ethnic and political ambitions and dilemmas have not really been duly investigated and documented. The nature of their presumed marginality within the Islamic space has also yet to be identified, explored and analyzed and their place in their respective national polities located and explained. There is obviously a glaring gap in our knowledge and understanding of the Muslims who are, often, generally and even mistakenly assumed to be on the fringes of Islam and the Muslim world. This is the obvious relevance of the workshop.

The fact that the workshop was held back to back with another symposium which sought to explore the concepts of *'bangsa'* and *'umma'* in the Islamic areas of Southeast Asia was also of great symbolic importance because although the focus of that meeting was more on the Malay archipelago, its discussions could not possibly be complete without also looking at the situation in Mainland Southeast Asia including Indochina. By any reasonable yardstick surely the Muslims of Mainland Southeast Asia including Indochina constitute an integral part of the Muslim *'umma'*, whether that defined by the geographical region of Southeast Asia or by the global fraternity of the faithfuls. They often see themselves as such and have also always been recognized accordingly by their co-religionists in the region and beyond. Likewise, although, the Muslims are themselves a diverse group in Indochina, as they are elsewhere, it is the Chams who constitute the backbone of the Muslim population especially in Cambodia and Vietnam. The Chams certainly are, as they have always been since ancient times a *"bangsa"* in their own right. It would not therefore, be an overstatement, to suggest that the complete history of Southeast Asia could not possibly be written without acknowledging the proper place of *'bangsa Cham'* within it.

A third factor why this workshop was special was simply the people that it brought together. The paper presenters came from different backgrounds in respect of their, ethnicity, nationality, vocation and education. Dr. NAKAMURA was one of the first few Japanese to have done extensive work on the Chams in Vietnam. She graduated from an American

university and was at the time of the workshop working for an American organization in Thailand. She has now taken up an academic post in Malaysia. Dr. Ba Trung PHU, a Vietnamese national is a Bani Islam Cham. He is a curator at the Museum of History in Ho Chi Minh City and has done a great amount of archeological excavations on ancient Cham sites. STOKHOF, a polyglot who also speaks Vietnamese, is a doctoral candidate in the Netherlands who has lived many long years in various parts of Southeast Asia including Vietnam. He is now an executive with a multinational corporation with business interests in Vietnam. MOHAMAD ZAIN Bin Musa, is a Malaysian academic who is of Cambodian Cham descent who was born in Phnom Penh and educated in France and Malaysia. Professor NISHIO is one of the few Malay-speaking Japanese who has done extensive fieldwork all over the Malay world of Southeast Asia since the 1980s. OMAR FAROUK is a Malaysian living in Japan and conducting an on-going research on the Muslims in Indochina for over a decade already. Dr. YAMAMOTO also has extensive ties with the Malay world especially Malaysia. Dr. ISHII, who was the coordinator of the workshop has also done extensive research in the Philippines. Professor Anthony Milner, not only graced the workshop with his presence but also contributed significantly in the discussions with his well-framed ideas and thoughts. The other participants who were present at the workshop, too many to mention individually, were also scholars who have been active in the field in Southeast Asia for a long time. Their presence and active participation in the workshop no doubt greatly enhanced its value.

Last but not least, the workshop and hence this volume, are special because of the issues that have been addressed in the various papers to try to explain the amazing complexity of the real Muslim world of Southeast Asia on the ground and the remarkable ingenuity of local Southeast Asian Muslim communities to adapt and to adjust themselves to the demands of their immediate environments to ensure their survival, presence and continued relevance. Essentially the papers that are compiled in this volume were those that were presented at the workshop. They have, however, subsequently been revised and updated before being edited. But even then, they should perhaps better be regarded as papers written for a work-in-progress publication rather than that of a definitive book.

Dr. NAKAMURA's absorbing paper is an attempt to understand the ethnicity of the Cham communities in Ninh Thuan Province by examining the dual structural principle in Cham cosmology called *Awar* and *Ahier*. Dr. Ba Trung PHU's paper, with helpful illustrations, seeks to describe the role of the Bani Islam Chams and their heterodox version of indigenized Islam in Vietnam from a sociological perspective. STOKHOF's very interesting paper, on the other hand, examines the Baweans of Ho Chi Minh City and their place within the wider polity, MOHAMAD ZAIN's paper tries to evaluate the religious reforms that were going on in the Cham community in Cambodia through the dynamic leadership of Imam Musa, a modernist Muslim leader. My own paper looks at how the re-organization of Islam has been attempted in Cambodia and to a lesser extent Laos, in the recent decade or so. Finally, Professor NISHIO's paper represents a preliminary attempt to examine the links between the Malay world and Indochina from the viewpoint of commercial activities. Essentially, the main motivation of all the papers was simply to try to provide hitherto little known data on the Muslims of Indochina and to introduce new perspectives with which their role can be analyzed with a view to stimulating interest on a subject which has apparently been neglected far too long.

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