

## The Muslims in Thailand: A Review

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### Abstract

The tendency to portray Thailand as being overwhelmingly Buddhist in character and composition has tended to overshadow the role of its non-Buddhist minorities. Historically, politically and culturally the Muslims have been an integral part of Thailand for centuries. Islam is not only the second largest religion in the kingdom but also enjoys royal and official patronage. But yet, a review of existing works would reveal serious gaps in the academic treatment of the subject. The main corpus of literature on the Muslims tends to view them as a marginalized border minority rather than a well integrated national minority. Invariably it is the role of the Malay-Muslim segment of the Muslim population that is highlighted rather than the others. In contrast to this dominant trend this article offers a description of the national position of the Muslims in the modern Thai polity. It begins with a literature review and then proceeds to trace the history of the Muslims in the Thai kingdom. Their contemporary sociological profile and political role is subsequently described. The article concludes with suggestions on ways in which further research and documentation on the Muslims in Thailand could be undertaken to promote a comprehensive understanding of their actual role in Thailand.

One of the most common mistakes many people make when looking at Thailand is to imagine that it is a homogeneous Thai-Buddhist state, pure and simple. Thailand has been invariably portrayed in academic as well as popular literature as a Thai-Buddhist country. The state religion in Thailand is Buddhism but that does not necessarily mean that all Thais are Buddhists. Although it is true that compared to most of Southeast Asia, the degree of cultural and ethnic homogeneity appears more pronounced in Thailand, like the rest of the region, Thailand too is a multi-ethnic state and has its own share of ethno-cultural and religious pluralism.

In principle, the people of Thailand enjoy religious freedom. Notwithstanding the frequent constitutional modifications and revisions that have occurred since the coup of 1932, every new Thai constitution has consistently upheld the principle of freedom of conscience. Even military governments which often put aside the constitution rarely

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departed from the spirit of the constitution in respect of the question of the freedom of worship. This consistent Thai official attitude towards religious freedom sanctions and legalises the existence of Thai citizens of the Islamic and other faiths. The king, although required by law and tradition to be a Buddhist, also assumes the role of the upholder of all religions. The Department of Religious Affairs of the Interior Ministry, which is fundamentally Buddhist in organisation, outlook and aspiration, also undertakes the patronage and protection of other religions in Thailand as well. The high level of religious tolerance in Thai society has also played an important part in promoting a relatively harmonious co-existence between the followers of all the major religions of the kingdom.

Islam is accorded official patronage in Thailand and is the kingdom's second largest religion. The Thai Muslims consider Thailand as their homeland and feel no less committed to their country than their Thai Buddhist counterparts. They can easily accept the dominant role of Buddhism in the kingdom without forfeiting Islam's claim for space and recognition within their own private and public life. After all, Islam has coexisted harmoniously with Buddhism in the traditional Thai polities for centuries. It is therefore not surprising that the Thai Muslims generally do not see any contradiction between their love for their religion and their loyalty to their nation. In essence, Islam has already become an integral part of the modern Thai state.

This article broadly aims to undertake a review of the place and position of the Muslims in the modern Thai polity. It is basically organised into four parts. In the first part, the state of current research and writing on the Muslims in Thailand will be evaluated. In the second part the historical background of the Muslims in the kingdom will be traced. Their contemporary sociological profile and political role will then be examined in the third part. In the concluding part of the article, some suggestions on sources and potential topics for future research will be offered.

## **I Review of Current Research and Writing**

A casual look at the existing literature on the Muslims in Thailand might indicate that quite a lot of work appears to have been done on the theme but a closer analysis would reveal glaring gaps in the area of research and publication on the subject. This particular review selectively incorporates works in English, Malay and Thai with some minor references to works in other languages. By necessity, the review has to be selective because of the limitation of space and the problem of access to the complete corpus of literature on the subject.

It is obvious that the most appropriate place to begin our own review is probably to look at existing reviews. In this connection Chaiwat Satha-Anand's illuminating article entitled "Pattani in the 1980s: Academic Literature and Political Stories" [Chaiwat 1994] is

easily the most comprehensive evaluation that has been undertaken on the subject.<sup>1)</sup> The focus of the article is on “the ways in which the issue of Muslims in southern Thailand is re-presented to the international academic community” in doctoral dissertations, monographs and journal articles [*ibid.*: 45]. Chaiwat provides a critical evaluation of five major doctoral dissertations and one Masters thesis on the subject namely, Surin’s Ph. D. dissertation on “Islam and Malay Nationalism” which was subsequently published in a book form; Wan Kadir’s Ph. D. work comparing the Muslims of southern Thailand with the Moros of the Philippines, which has also been published as a book [Wan Kadir 1990]; Chavivun’s Ph. D. thesis on the role of women in maintaining ethnic identity and boundaries [Chavivun 1980]; Panomporn’s Ph. D. work on the political integration policy toward the Malay Muslim minority [Panomporn 1984]; Uthai’s Ph. D. dissertation on education and ethnic nationalism among the Muslim Malays [Uthai 1981]; and, Wan Kadir’s Master’s thesis on Muslim elites and politics in southern Thailand [Wan Kadir 1983]. Chaiwat notes that most of these works focus on the analysis of the reasons for the ethno-religious conflict in southern Thailand except for Wan Kadir’s contribution in both his Master’s thesis and doctoral dissertation (and book) which gives greater emphasis to the background as well as the nature of Malay-Muslim separatism that had evolved in that part of Thailand. It is pertinent to observe here that all the above theses seem to be primarily concerned with the Malay-Muslims of southern Thailand and the problems that the Thai state has had to countenance from that quarter.

In respect of research monographs, Chaiwat identifies four for analysis including Ibrahim Syukri’s *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani* and his own work on *Islam and Violence* [Chaiwat 1987]. Although Ibrahim’s work is extremely useful for anyone wanting to understand the history of Pattani and should be considered compulsory text because it gives an indigenous Malay-Muslim perspective of the history of that part of Thailand it should be read with caution considering the fact that its pro-Malay-Muslim biases are so self-evident. Chaiwat suggests that his own work is not a study of the Malay-Muslims but rather represents “an attempt to understand the relationship between Islam and violence using events which took place in the Four Southern Provinces of Thailand from 1976 to 1981” [*ibid.*: 58]. The two other monographs Chaiwat reviewed [Chaveewan *et al.* 1986; Bougas 1988] respectively discuss the problem of the social integration between the Thai Buddhists and the Thai Muslims and the subject of Muslim cemeteries. A lot more has been written in the form of articles and book reviews in academic journals and Chaiwat has done an excellent job in highlighting and analysing these. The Table that

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1) The article was originally published in *SOJOURN* 7(1), February 1992 and subsequently reprinted in Omar Farouk Bajunid, ed. *Muslim Social Science in ASEAN* (Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Penataran Ilmu) with the kind permission of the original publisher, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.

he provides in outlining all these works is extremely helpful in giving an immediate introduction to the trend that has evolved on the subject in the decade of the 1980s. Unlike the first two categories of works, the journal articles and reviews highlighted by Chaiwat do not only focus on the Malay-Muslims but attempt to evaluate the role of the Muslims in Thailand in a broader national perspective. Chaiwat's overall conclusion that the issue of subjectivity cannot be disregarded when writing about Pattani is extremely frank although provocative.

Seni Mudmarn has also tried to evaluate the state of research and writing in English on the Muslim Minority in Thailand by Thai Muslim scholars [Seni 1994]. In the introduction to his article he points out that most of the works published in Thai seek to emphasise the threat coming from the Muslims in the south with the exception of two objective pieces, one by Khacadphai Burutphat, who reviews the problem from the bureaucrat's point of view [Khacadphai 1976] and the other by Arong Suthasasna, a Thai Muslim scholar whose work emerged as a direct consequence of the long anti-government demonstrations in Pattani [Arong 1976]. Nantawan's historical treatment of the Malay-Muslim problem, Uthai's analysis of the government's policies of modernisation and integration of the Muslims and Chavivun's anthropological study on the role of women in the maintenance of Malay ethnic identity are mentioned in passing but it is the works of Surin [1985], Chaiwat [1987] and Seni himself [1988] that have been selected for analysis. His conclusion that all the three works analysed point to the prospect of continuing problems in the Malay-Muslim provinces of the south unless the Thai State recognises the right of the Malay-Muslims to practise their separate culture and to cherish their unique Islamic identity, to say the least, is telling.

In both Chaiwat's and Seni's reviews it is obvious that in the main corpus of works on the Muslims, it is the problems in the Malay-Muslim south that have attracted overwhelming attention. Probably for that reason too, the two books by Surin [1985] and Wan Kadir [1990] respectively have received repeated reviews in many leading journals. I have myself reviewed both these works. I consider Surin's contribution to be the best ever written and the most authoritative so far on the subject [Omar 1989: 180–181]. It attempts not only to look at the relationship between Islam and the religious-cultural identity of the Malay-Muslims of southern Thailand as expressed in political protests but also seeks to analyse the nation-building imperatives of the Thai State and the Malay-Muslim responses to these. The ability of the author to couch the discussion within a theoretical framework has also considerably helped to elevate the presentation to an impressively erudite level. Although this is a major contribution by Surin, it is obvious that, as the primary focus of the book is on the problem of the Malay-Muslims in southern Thailand the full story of the role of the Muslims as a national minority has yet to be fully told. My own view of Wan Kadir's work is that it is the first major comparative study of the unresolved problem of Moro separatism in southern Philippines and Malay separatism in southern Thailand [Omar 1992b: 145–147]. It is a useful and absorbing study which

is rich in information which the author has been able to collect and collate from a wide range and variety of sources. However, it cannot be ignored that the work is essentially periphery-centric, almost deliberately disregarding the role or even the existence of the wider polity. There seems to be very little contextual information given on the kinds of problems that both Thailand and the Philippines have been encountering in their respective endeavors to create and sustain a viable nationhood, not for selected segments of their own population, but for all. Needless to say, like Surin's work, Wan Kadir's contribution still raises a lot of questions as to the kind of role Muslims play on the national scene rather than just in the provinces where they predominate.

Nik Anuar Nik Mahmud's monograph entitled *The Malay Unrest in South Thailand: An Issue in Malay-Thai Border Relations* [Nik Anuar 1994a] and article on the "Malay Separatist Movement in Southern Siam and the British, 1945-1949" [Nik Anuar 1994b] both examine the Malay-Muslim problem in Thailand and its transnational implications. Although the former deals with the immediate post Second World War period and the latter traces the situation in more recent times, both the two pieces underline the unresolved problems of Malay-Muslim disaffection with the Thai state highlighting what must be a perennial dilemma for the Thais.

Ahmad Omar Chapakia's recently completed Ph. D. thesis submitted to the Department of History, University of Malaya, tries to examine the impact of Thai politics on the Muslims of southern Thailand in the post-1932 period until around 1994 [Ahmad 1997]. Although the focus of this work is still on the south it is refreshing in at least two ways. First, it slightly departs from conventional treatment of the subject by addressing the situation in the 14 southern provinces rather than just those Muslim-dominated ones. Second, it uses the framework of democratic development in the region to assess the changing role of the Muslims. The suggestion that Muslim politicians have already recognised the fact that they can protect and promote their interests effectively through democratic channels indicates a healthy trend toward their greater political integration within Thailand.

Suria Saniwa bin Wan Mahmood's Masters thesis submitted to the Science University of Malaysia, Penang, also focuses on the Malay-Muslims of southern Thailand [Suria 1998]. Like Ahmad Omar Chapakia, Suria Saniwa bin Wan Mahmood highlights the positive aspects of the role of the Malay-Muslims in Thailand in the recent years. His basic argument is that the development of democracy in Thailand, better living standards and greater cultural interactions have all contributed to the de-radicalization of the Malay-Muslim movements. Apparently, positive political changes within Thailand itself have helped nurture conciliation rather than confrontation from its Malay-Muslim minority.

Apierat Samail's Master of Art's thesis recently submitted to the Department of History, University of Malaya, also attempts to look at the relationship between Islam and politics in the Malay-Muslim south [Apierat 1999]. The work basically examines the

political activities of the Malay-Muslims and the reaction of the Thai authorities towards these activities. However, unlike Ahmad Omar Chapakia's work this thesis is much narrower in focus singling out just one province and using the time-frame of only one decade. This is also a study of a volatile and violent period in the political history of Thailand. The unstable circumstances of the decade, particularly in Narathiwat, had created major problems for the state as well as the local population. It was a different scenario altogether from that of subsequent decades which saw a consolidation of democracy in Thailand. Although this work is useful in portraying the uncertain years of the 1970s in Narathiwat, its perspective is very much local.

A commendable effort to depart slightly from the Malay-Muslim centered approach has been earlier attempted by Andrew Forbes when he edited and published two separate volumes on the Muslims of Thailand based on the contributions of more than a dozen scholars who have been doing work on the subject for a long while [Forbes 1988a; 1988b]. The first volume particularly merits particular mention as it represents a major effort to provide an extensive overview of the various Muslim groups among the Thai-speaking Muslims all over Thailand as well as the Malay-speaking Muslims of the southern provinces. However, the second volume focuses on the problems of the Malay-speaking south and does not really provide any new national perspective on the subject. Most of the articles that appear in both these volumes are also not really new, but what makes Forbes' contribution useful is that he has managed to put them together in one volume. It should also be considered compulsory reading for anyone wanting to understand the complete Muslim perspective in Thailand and not just the Malay-Muslim south.

Notwithstanding the positive aspect of Forbes's contribution it is obvious from the above discussion that the major emphasis in existing works on the Muslims is still very much confined to the Malay-Muslims of southern Thailand. This approach, unfortunately, continues to give the impression that the Muslim community in Thailand is basically made up of the Malay-Muslims.

The attempt to look at the broader context of Islam in Thailand rather than just the extreme south has also been commendably attempted by Raymond Scupin in his several stimulating pieces. Apart from his two articles in Forbes' first volume, Scupin has also made other valuable contributions on this wider Islamic theme. His two articles on Islamic reformism, namely, "Islamic Reformism in Thailand" [Scupin 1980a] and "The Politics of Islamic Reformism" [Scupin 1980b] though overlapping for the most part, are indeed refreshing as they introduce a new issue in the Islamic discourse in Thailand. His various other articles on such topics as "Cham Muslims of Thailand: A Haven of Security in Mainland Southeast Asia," "Islam in Thailand before the Bangkok Period," "The Socio-Economic Status of Muslims in Central and North Thailand," "Interpreting Islamic Movements in Thailand ( 1 )," "Language, Hierarchy and Hegemony: Thai Muslim Discourse Strategies," and "The Social Significance of the Hajj for Thai Muslims," to name some, underline, in no uncertain terms the presence of Muslims outside of the Malay-

Muslim provinces of the extreme south and the existence of other issues apart from just the political problems of the south which have been over-emphasised. Scupin's latest contribution entitled "Muslim Accommodation in Thai Society" [Scupin 1998: 229-258] is one of the most comprehensive current discussions on the overall role of the Muslims in Thailand and should be considered a vital reference material for anyone interested in the history and politics of modern Thailand.

Suthep's study on the Muslim minority in Chiangmai, which is one of the earliest ethnographic studies undertaken on the Muslims outside of the Malay-Muslim provinces also represents an important contribution. Although this work was undertaken more than two decades ago and a lot of changes has taken place not just in Chiangmai but also nationally, this doctoral dissertation gives a different perspective on the Muslim discourse in Thailand.

In this connection what Imanaga has attempted with regard to his work on the Chinese Muslims in Thailand is also highly commendable [Imanaga 1990]. His survey on the Chinese Muslim society in northern Thailand which also incorporates, for comparative purposes, Thai-Muslim society in central Thailand and Malay-Muslim society in southern Thailand, which has been documented in a book form indeed constitutes an invaluable contribution to scholarship on Islam in Thailand. The data that he has made available is extremely useful for anyone who wants to pursue the investigation further. His Japanese article on the Thai Islam [Tai no Isuramu Shakai] also constitutes a balanced though brief introduction to the broader perspective of Islam in Thailand [Imanaga 1998]. Nishii, another Japanese scholar who has done a systematic field study in a "Sam Sam" village has also been able to shift the usual emphasis given to the Malay-speaking Muslims of the southernmost provinces to the Thai-speaking Muslims of Satun. In her article on the interplay between religion and politics in that rural village she argues that religious differences between the Muslims and the Buddhists do not necessarily lead to political antagonism although the potential to exploit the situation is there [Nishii 1991]. This piece is very useful in providing us with good empirical data on the dynamics of politics and religious relations at the grassroots level.

In my own doctoral thesis on the Muslims in Thailand I have tried to balance the usual emphasis on the Muslim provinces in the south with a perspective on the Muslim role at the national level in Thailand [Omar 1980]. In one particular work I have tried to locate the presence of Islam in Bangkok to demonstrate that the connection between the Muslims and the Thai polity is deep-rooted and pervasive [Omar 1992a]. Most of my articles on the subject too do not depart from this fundamental line. I think much more needs to be done in this direction.

There are other works which have not been cited or analysed here. Partly this is because of the problem of access. I know for sure that in the last ten years or so there has been an increasing amount of work done on the different aspects of Islam and the Muslims in Thailand in Thai and Malaysian universities. I have seen the list of many of

these Thai theses and graduation exercises. This is an invaluable source of scholarship on Islam in Thailand which has yet to be systematically collected and collated. I am also aware of at least one Masters thesis on Islam in Thailand written in Turkish and submitted to a Turkish university [Muhammed Roflee Weahama 1997]. It is not inconceivable that there are other works available on Islam in Thailand in other languages in many other universities around the world.

Notwithstanding this, what is obvious is that there is still a dearth of literature on the Muslims in Thailand, especially in the English language. In addition to this, most of what has been written tends to focus on the Malay-Muslims and the political problems of the extreme south. While there are certainly valid reasons to examine the volatile problems in the south it would be misleading to imagine that they represent all that there is to the Muslim perspective in Thailand. The important thing to note is that the non-Malay-Muslim factor in Thailand is also extremely important. Likewise, although there certainly was greater evidence of political disintegration in the Muslim provinces two decades ago, the situation has now improved greatly. The Malay-Muslims too have undergone a lot of changes in the last twenty years or so and more recent works on their role testify to this. It is essential that we recognize the dynamic role of the Muslims in Thailand in order to fully appreciate the processes of adaptation and change that have evolved over the years.

## **II Historical Background of the Muslims**

Historically, the Muslim presence in the traditional Thai polity is traceable to the 13th century in the Sukhotai era. It was, however, during the Ayutthayan period that the Muslims asserted their dominant position. The rise to prominence of the Thai Kingdom of Ayutthaya as a regional political power coincided with the period of the dominance of Muslim trade in Southeast Asia and the phenomenon of Islamisation in the region particularly in the Malay archipelago. This coincidence, no doubt, helped account for the presence and the influence of the Muslims in the Kingdom of Ayutthaya. Like most other Southeast Asian polities Ayutthaya was inextricably linked to the political and commercial events that were unfolding in the region as a whole, although, unlike the archipelagic kingdoms it was only peripherally affected by the Islamisation process.

The eclectic Siamese political structure with its acculturation of the important elements of Brahmanistic practices of the earlier Mon-Khmer culture into what was an essentially Tai Hinayana Buddhist kingdom showed an even more astounding degree of dynamic pragmatism during the Ayutthayan era when non-Buddhist and non-Tai came to be employed in the royal service, often in highly influential positions. It became a common feature of the Ayutthayan polity then to have foreigners such as the Japanese, Malays, Chinese, Portuguese, Persians and Indians in the service of the king and the state

in various capacities.

Invariably, just as it was trade that ushered in the Islamisation and the political and economic development of the maritime states of the Malay world in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries A. D., it was also the dominant factor of trade that brought Islam into contact with Ayutthaya, perhaps more importantly securing for it a respectable place within the Buddhist polity.

The dominant position of the Muslims in Ayutthaya can be seen in the fact that many of them at various times, even served the King as his ministers and factors [Collis 1936: 29, 42]. A Muslim of West Asian origin was said to have been appointed by the Thai king as a minister whose duties included the administration of foreign trade and the affairs of foreigners in Ayutthaya; the collection of import-export duties and the supervision of international shipping [Kukrit 1972: 9]. Subsequently he rose to occupy an even higher position in the royal court and at the age of 87, during the reign of King Prasat Thong, became a royal adviser [*ibid.*: 10].

The commercial influence of the Muslims was generally pervasive. It was, however, in the export sector that the Muslim merchants were most active [Smith 1977: 75]. The role of the Muslims as the king's ministers and merchants for successive rulers made them a very powerful group in the Ayutthayan court. This, to some extent, explains why many accounts of the time attribute the power and influence of the Muslims elsewhere in the Thai kingdom, particularly on the trans-peninsular trading route, as being the direct result of the instrumental role of the Muslim Ministers in promoting their cause from Ayutthaya [Collis 1936: 42]. The Muslims, therefore, not only totally engrossed the trans-peninsular trade, but also secured key administrative appointments all over the kingdom of Ayutthaya.

Along with the Indians and the Persians, the Arabs, Chams, Malays, Macassarese and Acheenese formed the broader section of Muslim society of the time, although numerically it was the Malays who were the most distinct. The Muslims appeared to be the largest foreign nationality in Ayutthaya. The Moors especially seemed to be a favoured group, who, unlike the other foreign nationalities came under the direct protection of the king [Ravenswaay 1969 [1900]: 66].

The cause of Islam, interestingly was also supported by the State in many ways. Islam was patronised by the king [La Loubere 1969 [1691]: 112]. State funds were used for the construction of mosques in Ayutthaya and the cost of Muslim religious festivals was even borne by the king. The Siamese who embraced Islam had even been exempted from the personal service tax required of others. This was a clear evidence of early Siamese conversions to Islam. Foreign Muslim states too, perhaps encouraged by the special status Islam enjoyed in Ayutthaya and the presence of a large Muslim community had even tried to persuade the Ayutthayan rulers to embrace Islam by sending special missions for the purpose. In 1668 A. D. Ambassadors from Acheen [Indonesia] and Golconda [India] tried in vain to persuade King Narai to accept Islam [Wood 1926: 196–

197]. In 1685 a Persian Ambassador tried to convert the Thai king without success [Anderson 1890: 248].

The Muslims in Ayutthaya also took up military duties. There were Moors and Malays in the Ayutthayan army [Schouten 1969 [1636]: 134]. The Moors made up two companies of the horse-guards who were in the service of the king [La Loubere 1969 [1691]: 97]. The Admiral in charge of a war fleet sent by Ayutthaya in 1692 A. D. in an expedition to quell the rebellion in Nakhon Si Thammarat, in the south, was a Malay, as was the rebel governor of the province [Wood 1926: 221]. The Muslims also served in the king's merchant navy; together with Chinese and Thai-born Chinese they helped man the king's junks [Smith 1977: 40].

The Thai traditional polity under the Chakri dynasty was in many ways unlike the traditional polity of Ayutthaya. If, during the Ayutthayan era centrifugal tendencies were reasonably tolerated among the distant provinces and vassals, during the Bangkok era, the process of territorial consolidation and centralization of power, which was started by Phya Tak during the Thonburi interregnum, from 1767 to 1782 A. D., was vigorously pursued by successive Chakri kings.<sup>2)</sup> Trade was no longer the dominant regulator of foreign policy as it used to be during the Ayutthayan times. Similarly, the international relations of Siam no longer principally involved the relations with the other independent and sovereign Asian and Southeast Asian states as was the case during the Ayutthayan days, because of the advances of colonialism which seemed to be subduing one state after another. In the second half of the 19th century, the flood of Chinese immigration into Siam had also altered considerably the demographic and economic landscape of Siam. However, up to the early years of the 20th century, the Muslims continued to constitute an important element of Siamese history and politics.

The Muslim population of Siam under the Chakris was as heterogeneous as ever consisting of Malays, Arabs, Persians, Chams, Bengalis, Chulias, Javanese and Baweans [Carter 1904: 111]. Before the influx of the Chinese into the kingdom the Muslims constituted the largest single minority in the kingdom, next in importance only to the Siamese. According to one estimate in the early 19th century the Malays alone made up 1 million out of the kingdom's total population of 6 million people [Bowring 1969 [1857]: 81]. The Muslims were not only a numerically large group but were also to be found in many areas in the kingdom apart from the southern provinces.

One factor which brought a fairly wide dispersal of the Malays in the kingdom of Siam was a direct result of State policy on man-power. The organisation of man-power

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2) The Thonburi period was an attempt by Phya Tak to restore some measure of central rule in Siam after Ayutthaya was destroyed by the Burmese in 1767 A. D. This period was soon followed by the establishment of the Chakri dynasty in Bangkok in 1782 A. D. The present dynasty owes its origin to this period.

was always a central concept in the Siamese art of government, as indeed was true of other traditional Southeast Asian States as well. Populations would be moved from one area of the kingdom to another for all sorts of reasons such as to open up new agricultural areas; to diminish the prospects of future rebellion by dependencies; to weaken the power of the provincial governors and etc. In the case of the majority of the Malays living in the central plains of Siam, many were brought there in captivity as prisoners-of-war and a good many more were forcibly rehabilitated in those areas as a consequence of defeat in war. The prisoners-of-war were mostly retained as slaves of the king although a few might be shared by the principal courtiers and settled in villages near Bangkok.

The Malays did not only dominate the traditional bureaucracy in the tributary states but had also made their presence felt elsewhere in Siam. Ranong, a province in the Isthmus region bordering Burma, for example, had at one time a Malay chief. Phattalung too, another southern province, used to have a Muslim ruler. Malay interpreters served both in the Court of Bangkok and among the ruling circle of Nakhon Si Thammarat. Diplomatic missions, especially those that were sent to the Malay states, were undertaken by Malays in the service of Siam. The Malays were also engaged in trade in Siam. Malay ships sailed regularly between the Malay states and Siam. The Malays too participated in the overland trade of the Isthmian region together with the Chinese and the Coromandel Indians. There were also Arab merchants in Bangkok. It was, however, like earlier times, the Indian Muslims who appeared to be entrenched in the trade and commerce of Siam in the 19th century. Trade between Siam and Surat in India was still flourishing. Many Indian Muslims too had opened up small businesses in the kingdom although a good many continued to serve the commercial interests of the royalty and the mandarin. It was still through the avenues of trade that many Indian Muslims found their way into positions of influence and authority with the Siamese ruling elite of the time.

Generally, under the Bangkok rulers, the Muslims continued, at least until the opening decades of the 19th century, to enjoy a significant role in directing Siamese political and economic affairs although they were soon overtaken by internal and external events. By the late 19th and early 20th century more Muslim immigrants, particularly from the Dutch East Indies and the Indian sub-continent made their way into Siam. There was also a good deal of internal migration, voluntary and compulsory, within the country. Increasingly, the Muslims in Thailand were becoming a much more diverse community. But while in most of Thailand the Muslims had been making all sorts of adjustments in response to the changes generated by Thailand's modernisation efforts, the Muslims in the Pattani region resisted integration into the kingdom.<sup>3)</sup>

The emergence of the Bangkok dynasty had introduced a new pattern in the nature of Siamese-Malay relations. Instead of the Ayutthayan model of indirect control, the

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3) The Pattani region essentially constitutes the present provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat and some areas in the adjacent province of Songkhla.

Bangkok rulers, in their attempts to achieve the territorial consolidation of the kingdom, often resorted to the use of physical force and direct intervention in the affairs of the Malay states, a strategy which alienated the Malay rulers. It was during this period of territorial consolidation of Siam that resistance from the Malay states was at its height. The whole Malay region which used to maintain a tributary relationship with the Siamese traditional polity became restive and rebellions were endemic. The Sultanate of Pattani was eventually dismembered and its ruling elite displaced in the process of its complete territorial and political absorption into the modern nation-state of Thailand, while the Sultanates of Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu managed to free themselves of Thai political control and subsequently emerged to become part of Independent Malaya and then Malaysia, which is usually perceived as being a Malay state.<sup>4)</sup> The direct Thai political intrusion in the Pattani region had led to an unprecedented cultural confrontation in the area between the Malays who constituted the overwhelming majority of the population and the new Thai bureaucrats sent to rule them from Bangkok. This was essentially the background of the chronic conflict that would characterise the Pattani region for much of the 20th century.<sup>5)</sup>

In contrast to the experience of the Malays in Pattani, the cosmopolitan Muslim community living away from the Pattani region, had established a much more congenial relationship with the Thai state over the Chakri era. Perhaps assisted by their direct exposure to the mainstream of Thai culture and society they have become in many ways behaviourally Thai, at least outwardly. Generally they are indistinguishable from the other Thais and have in the context of the overall Muslim situation in Thailand been positive towards the modern Thai state, often, assuming the role of the political mediators of their co-religionists in the south.

### III Contemporary Sociological Profile and Political Role

It is obvious from the foregoing that the Muslims have ancient roots in Thailand. They are neither a recent community nor a marginal one. Thus, the Muslims now constitute an integral part of the modern Thai nation. The Muslims today, just as in the past, continue to be numerically and politically significant as a national minority in modern-day Thailand. The immediate question that comes to mind then is how many Muslims are there in Thailand. This is definitely not an easy question to answer because there are several versions as to how many Muslims there are in Thailand. The official version has

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4) Control of the Malay States of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu was relinquished by Bangkok to the British in 1909 through a Treaty.

5) For a balanced discussion of the confrontation between the Malay-Muslims and the Thai State beginning early this century see Surin [1985: especially chapters II and III].

always been that Muslims constitute slightly less than 4 % of the total population. Other versions differ dramatically. One foreign source estimates the Muslims to number around 14% of the Thai population. An internal Muslim official account with grassroots contacts claims that they make up 10% of the population [Omar 1988: 1-2]. Various academic estimates consider the Thai official version to be on the low side and the Muslim figures to be unduly inflated. A recent paper published by a Muslim academic suggests that there are as many as 4 or 5 million Muslims in Thailand [Imtiyaz 1998: 279]. This view approximately coincides with my own personal estimate that there are between 5 to 8 % Muslims in Thailand [Omar 1987: 8]. In any case, the question is not whether it is 4 % or 5 % or even 10%, because even if we go by the lowest estimate given, in absolute terms we are really talking about a Muslim population in the region of at least 2.4 million. By any standard, numerically, the Muslim community in Thailand must be a very large community.

The Muslims are by no means a monolithic group although officially, they are all known as "Thai-Islam" or "Thai-Muslim" [Omar 1988: 24]. In the popular parlance the Muslims are often referred to as "Khaeg," a pejorative label meaning "guests" or "dark-skinned visitors," which they strongly object to for obvious reasons [*ibid.*: 25]. They do not consider themselves as "aliens" and are often frustrated with the inability of the ethnic Thais to understand the ethnic mosaic that characterises Muslim society. The Muslims in Thailand are a heterogeneous group of people. For analytical purposes, it may be useful to classify them into two broad categories, namely, the Thai-Muslim and the Malay-Muslim. It must be recognised, however, that the boundaries between the two categories are not rigid but overlap considerably. Consciously and unconsciously too, there have been attempts by the Muslims to manipulate this aspect of their identity. The Thai-Muslims, who are generally more assimilated into Thai society, are represented by various ethnic groups such as Thai-Malay, Thai, Chinese, Javanese, Cham, Pathan, Tamil, Persian, Arab, Sam Sam, Bengali and Baweanese [*ibid.*: 5-12]. The Malay-Muslims, however, constitute the biggest ethnic group in the broader Muslim community in Thailand and appear to be the most resistant to assimilation into Thai society despite the fact that in recent years their Malay identity too has undergone a great deal of transformation. But even then, there are already signs that although the Malay-Muslims still, by and large, cherish their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness they have, at the same time, become definitely more integrated within Thailand now than ever before especially in the fields of language, education, commerce and economy. Politically too, apparently with the advent of democracy in the kingdom, their role in Thailand has become more visible. The Thai-Muslims have always tended to be more positive about their Thai identity. In fact, although in many ways there would still be tangible traces of their respective distinctive original culture even to this day and although they do continue to communalize along their respective sub-ethnic lines in certain areas, the cultural and linguistic boundaries that used to insulate them from the ethnic Thais have

now become much more permeable and pliable. In a sense, they have emerged almost as a new community, decidedly Muslim in faith but recognizably Thai in culture.

It is also important to note here that on account of the fact that conversion is a primary institution in Islam and people do convert, the community therefore logically appears as an ever-expanding one. Converts do not suddenly leave behind their language, culture, jobs, friends, relatives, residence and whatever that used to be part of their lives. On the contrary they bring with them all their pre-existing network into contact with Islam and the Muslim community. It is this phenomenon that has helped expand the reach of Islam in the kingdom making it no longer a "foreign" faith but rather a familiar one in the eyes of many Thais who may not themselves be Muslims. But the important thing to take note of in trying to understand the contemporary Muslim society in Thailand is that, the *muallafs* or the new converts to Islam also constitute an important element of that society. For another, there have also been a significant number of intermarriages between new Muslim immigrants, be they capitalists, businessmen, tourists or missionaries and local Thai women, both Muslim and Muslim converts adding to the ranks of the Thai Muslim community a growing new breed of children of mixed parentage.

The growing significance of the role of the Muslims in Thailand becomes even more self-evident if we were to look at their geographical profile in the kingdom. For a long time the general myth that was perpetuated was that the Muslims in Thailand were essentially a border community living in the southernmost provinces which are either contiguous to Malaysia or in close proximity to it. The truth of the matter is that the Muslims are to be found in virtually every province in Thailand although their number varies from province to province. As at present the total number of registered mosques which are found in 53 out of 73 of the kingdom's provinces stands at a staggering figure of 2,800 and is still growing (see Appendix 1).<sup>6)</sup> There are definitely more mosques in Thailand than in many Muslim countries including, for example, Brunei, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait or even Jordan! There are also more mosques in Bangkok than in Bandar Seri Begawan or Singapore. Surely, if the mosque index in Thailand is any indication, the Muslims are not only well spread geographically but also maintain a visible presence all over the kingdom.

Although Muslims are found all over the Thai kingdom it is in the southernmost provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Satun, which lie close to Malaysia, that they

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6) In my earlier published works I was only able to identify about 2,111 mosques spread over 38 provinces. In my recent fieldwork I discovered the gap between my earlier data and the most current. This is of course partly because many new mosques have been built in a number of new areas since I conducted my field research in the late 1970s but partly it is also because many people were not aware of their existence then.

make up the majority group reversing the national trend elsewhere. But it is, the Malay-Muslims who predominate in these southernmost provinces rather than the Thai-Muslims. It is this demographic reality that has made the Malay-Muslims the most dynamic element among the Muslims within the broader Thai national society, acquiring critical cultural and political leverage which is quite disproportionate to their numerical strength vis-a-vis the total population in the kingdom.

The Muslims in Thailand are represented both in the rural as well as the urban areas of the kingdom. Occupationally, they are also very diverse although the greater majority seems to be engaged in fishing, farming and agriculture. Muslims in Thailand have always been a part of the business community in the kingdom. They are represented by established trading families as well as the ubiquitous vendors in the local markets and the emerging business centres. The Muslims also have a virtual monopoly on the beef and cattle business in the kingdom. With a great deal of emphasis being given to industrialization, many Muslims too have become factory workers and managers. There has also always been a small but growing number of Muslim bureaucrats and professionals in Thailand. They are in most respects almost indistinguishable from the other Thais.

The majority of the Muslims in Thailand are Sunnis following the Shafiee school with a small number of Hanafi followers especially among the Haw Chinese and the Indians. The Shiites, however, also have a strong base in Thailand, especially in the Thonburi district of Bangkok. They have established themselves in Thailand for a few centuries already since they occupied a prominent role during the golden years of the Ayutthayan era. However, there are no serious tensions between them and the larger Muslim constituency. Other religious schisms within the Muslims such as the tussle for leadership of the Muslim community between the traditionalists and the fundamentalists, the competition for influence between the reformists and the others, and the general criticism of the community towards individuals who are considered too secular are definitely more relevant issues in the context of the present-day intra-community politics. *Qaddiyani* teachings, which are considered deviationist by mainstream Islam are normally not tolerated. Movements like *al-Arqam*, which has been banned in Malaysia, and the more informal *tabligh* and *dakwah* activities, generally flourish without serious difficulty in Thailand. In fact, in this context, there seems to be greater religious freedom for Muslims in Thailand than elsewhere including many Muslim countries where strict monitoring and control of Islamic activities is usually done to protect only the established school of Islam.

The existence of a fairly well insulated stretch of territory where Muslims predominate and where they appear to have closer affinity with their ethnic brethren across the border in Malaysia has become the principal source of the birth and growth of the problem of both Muslim secessionism and Malay irredentism in the extreme south of Thailand. This problem has often been manifested not only by the existence of various

armed separatist groups but also a high incidence of political violence and an on-going guerrilla war in the region. The situation has not been helped by the fact that for the greater part of its recent history Thailand had been under military rule which generally encouraged local repression by intolerant, irresponsible and corrupt officials.

The cycle of repression and violence that had characterized the relationship between the Muslim separatist groups in these provinces and the State for more than four successive decades in the post Second World War period and the political instability that it often caused had seriously threatened to undermine Thailand's claim to political legitimacy over the area. It was the recognition of the need to overcome a serious credibility dilemma and the necessity to resolve the problem of the political mal-integration of the Muslims in that part of Thailand which appeared most vulnerable to secessionist pursuits that had impelled the Thai state to make concessions to the Muslims to try to win over their undisputed political allegiance to the kingdom. Thus, all kinds of concessions began to be given to the Muslims in the area of Muslim Family Laws, educational quota, job opportunities, dress codes, economic and infrastructural development of the region and so on. But perhaps the most significant gesture on the part of the state was the creation of a Muslim bureaucracy under the leadership of the Chularatmontri or Sheikhul-Islam, who was to be a royal appointee functioning as the official adviser to the state on Islamic affairs.<sup>7)</sup>

This bureaucracy brought Muslims throughout the kingdom under a kind of semi-official and loosely structured Islamic administrative network which conferred on the Muslims some semblance of socio-religious autonomy. During the period when avenues for political participation for the Muslims were constricted, this bureaucracy had emerged as the most important political institution to bring about the political co-option of the Muslims into the State. The Muslim socio-religious bureaucracy created a framework which allowed the Muslims to become involved in their own religious activities within the broader national setting and with official patronage.

Paradoxically, the desire of the Thai state to placate the Malay-Muslims of the southernmost provinces in order to avoid the prospect of a prolonged crisis in that part of Thailand which seems most vulnerable to Muslim secessionism had the effect of, firstly motivating Muslims elsewhere in the kingdom to enthusiastically undertake the political socialization of their southern brethren and secondly, of giving Islam a higher national role and visibility. The very existence of that administrative network, especially for the Muslims outside of the Muslim-majority provinces, was generally positively viewed as a kind of benevolent patronage of their status and their religion. For many different reasons though the Muslims in the southern provinces were not as enthusiastic

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7) For a brief but useful discussion of the institution of the Chularatmontri see Imtiyaz [1998].

as their counterparts elsewhere in the kingdom. Nevertheless, they too became drawn into the new Muslim socio-religious framework and thus, in the process rendered themselves to greater exposure to Thailand.

The royal patronage of Islam has also been an important factor in promoting greater Muslim political allegiance to the state or at least in warding off opposition to it as the Thai king was highly revered and respected by the rural Muslim folk for his magnanimity towards them. This was also considered as a vital source of protection particularly when Thailand was under oppressive military rule. The Thai political system therefore, to a large extent has always had an important impact on the role of the Muslims within the state. Invariably, the incidence of greatest resistance to the state tended to coincide with the period of non-democratic rule. Democracy, had from time to time, given the Muslims a platform to air their grievances and participate directly in the affairs of government, but its repeated breakdown in Thailand, had only left them disillusioned and neglected. Bureaucratic rule in Thailand, usually under a military dictatorship of some sort tended to breed corruption and to encourage repression. The Muslims, especially those in the southernmost provinces, like their fellow-citizens elsewhere in Thailand had to bear the brunt of the excesses of a political system which they had no control over. It was only when democratization was pursued in a more vigorous manner that Muslims began to assert a growing role in the public affairs of the State. There is no doubt that democracy has directly helped give the Muslims in Thailand not only opportunities for greater political participation but also their proper role in government.

The significance of the Muslims is acknowledged by almost all political parties and they are normally represented almost at all levels in most political parties. The electoral strength of the Muslims in areas where they predominate has always been recognized. Traditionally the Muslims have tended to identify with the Democrat Party but in 1988 the Wahdah<sup>8)</sup> group was formed by a number of leading Muslim politicians who decided to align themselves with the New Aspiration Party (NAP) to strengthen their political bargaining power. The strategy of the Wahdah group was to try to win as many seats as possible in the Muslim dominated provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Satun in order to be in a bargaining position for ministerial positions [Imtiyaz 1998: 290]. In the 1992 parliamentary elections six members of the Wahdah group representing the NAP

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8) The term "*wahdah*" is derived from the Arabic word signifying "oneness" or "unity." In the Thai Muslim context the Wahdah group is supposed to function as a political faction presenting a unified position among Muslim parliamentarians to promote and pursue Muslim collective interests. It has to be borne in mind that as the Thai Constitution forbids the formation of a religious-based party, the formation of such a faction like the "Wahdah" is the closest the Muslim politicians could get to using religion as a common bond. The attempt to form a Muslim political faction was also aimed at challenging the traditional alliance between the Democrat Party and the the Muslims.

were elected to parliament in the Muslim-dominated provinces while the Democrat Party had only four Muslim representatives who won the elections [Suria 1998: 157–158]. In the 1995 general elections seven Muslim politicians from the Democrat Party were elected and five Muslim representatives from the NAP were returned [*ibid.*: 158–159]. In the 1992 Cabinet line-up two Muslim Members of Parliament were made Deputy Ministers but for the first time in the history of modern Thailand a Muslim was made a full Minister in the Government of Banharn Sila-arpacha in 1995 [*ibid.*: 160]. The trend of having Muslim ministerial representation at the highest level of the Thai government was sustained in the coalition governments of General Chavalit Yongchaiyut and Chuan Lekpai. Apart from this appointment there were also other Muslims who have been elected to successive Parliaments. At present the Speaker is a Muslim and the latest Thai Constitution bears his signature [*Constitution* 1998: 99]. The present Foreign Minister of Thailand in Chuan Lekpai's Coalition Cabinet, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan who is from the Democrat Party, is also a Muslim.<sup>9)</sup> With a high-profile presence of the Muslims in Government, many more significant concessions have been gradually accorded to the Muslims. Prayer rooms, for example, have been allocated to Muslims in public places such as the International Airport, the major train station in Bangkok at Hualumpong and, even at the House of Parliament itself. Contemporary Muslim representation in Government has definitely given Islam a much more favourable place in the polity than ever before.

Of course, although the role of democracy has been fundamental in giving Islam space and recognition, there were also other factors which helped. There were at least three other important developments that favoured Islam and the Muslims in Thailand. The first, was the large movement of Thais going abroad to Muslim countries especially in the Middle East to work. The overwhelming majority of these people were Buddhists rather than Muslims. In their sojourn abroad most of them became greatly exposed to Muslim culture and way of life, often working for Muslims or with Muslims. When they returned to Thailand they brought back with them the aggregate sum of their experience and knowledge. Quite a number among them who came back with language skills in Arabic, for example, even attempted to either set up their own businesses with dealings with the Arabs or continued to work in outlets in Bangkok and elsewhere where some degree of Arabic proficiency was required.

A significant number of people had even embraced Islam. For example, according to one source, more than 10,000 Thais from *issaan* or the northeast region, had converted to Islam in Saudi Arabia alone. The significance of this development is that, for a long while it was generally thought that there were no Muslims at all in the northeastern provinces of Thailand but apparently in the recent years Islam seems to be growing steadily in

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9) Dr. Surin Pitsuwan is a Member of Parliament for Nakhon Sri Thammarat province in a constituency where Muslims make up only about 15% of the electorate.

these provinces although it may not be due to this factor alone. But perhaps more importantly, Islam is increasingly asserting a presence in areas where it was said to have hardly existed before. The fact that this phenomenon is taking place at a time when more people from this particular area have converted to Islam albeit for whatever reason and in a foreign land too, must surely have some ramifications somewhere. The image of the Muslim as a “Khaeg” or a dark-skinned southerner or foreigner has already begun to change in Thailand. Of course, it is not only the conversion to Islam that has brought this about as this kind of attitudinal change has equally been an important function of education, enlightenment and greater exposure to Islam itself.

The other thing that brought about a shifting attitude towards Islam and the Muslims in Thailand was the influx of Muslim tourists, especially from the Middle East [Omar 1992a: 7–9]. They were definitely not the best models of Muslims as most were plain pleasure seekers but the money they brought in to the kingdom and the jobs that they helped create and sustain especially in the tourism-related industry made them a very welcome group of people. If anything, it was the Thai Muslims who felt disappointed by the earthly pursuits of their co-religionists who were behaving in ways seen by them as being contrary to Islamic values and teachings. But this is besides the point. The important thing is that the ordinary non-Muslim Thai, through this kind of new exposure to Islam and the Muslims began to become more aware of the diversity that characterizes the Muslim world.

The third factor was very much linked to pure economics. As Thailand began to move aggressively into a market economy, Muslim capital was much sought after, just like other foreign investments. Of course, compared to Thailand’s traditional investors like Japan, Hongkong, Taiwan or South Korea, investment from Muslim countries was still very nominal. But it was increasingly beginning to be seen as a relatively untapped source with a tremendous amount of promise. Muslim capital has indeed already begun moving into Thailand. But interestingly, the new contacts that were established, though primarily initiated by economic considerations, also brought about other probably unanticipated side-effects. For one thing of course, the movement of Muslim capital also brought with it the movement of a new Muslim culture, not that there was none before but this new phase certainly helped enhance the role of Islam within the modern Thai polity.

The initiative, energy, creativity and vision of the Muslims themselves have actually also generated a lot of interest and confidence in them. Although the Muslim community, like Muslim communities elsewhere, is not free from the internal tensions that often beset heterogeneous groups, its leaders have at least demonstrated their maturity, social skills and understanding in relating to the demands of citizenship without sacrificing their commitment to Islam. In fact, they have in turn shown that they can act in tandem with the State to help harness the positive aspects of Islam for the good of the country and its people across the board.

#### IV Conclusion

The Muslims have been an integral part of the Thai polity for centuries. Historically, politically, culturally and even economically their role has indeed been significant. Nevertheless they still appear to be little understood as a community. Even basic knowledge on Islam and the Muslims seems to be scanty and fragmented. The tendency to view Thailand as a Buddhist monolith has also had the unfortunate effect of marginalising their place in the kingdom. Likewise, for many decades in the post-Second World War era the frequent outbreak of violent resistance against the state in the Muslim-dominated provinces and the repression by the military regime in Thailand on political dissent exacerbated mutual suspicions and gave rise to all kinds of prejudices against the Muslims. They were also often associated with the acts of violence, the lawlessness and the political troubles that were chronic to that part of the kingdom. Geographically they were seen as being essentially the people of the border provinces of the extreme south. The existence of Muslims elsewhere in the kingdom was either downplayed or little appreciated. The heterogeneous nature of the Muslim community too was not understood. Despite the high tolerance level of the Thai Buddhists there were prejudices toward Islam as a religion because it was invariably associated with the troubled south. It was against this background that a lot of the earlier works on the Muslims in Thailand focused on the theme of the political disintegration of the Malay-Muslims of the southern region.

As Thailand matures as a modern state and as democracy begins to assert its presence in Thailand the Muslims have begun to be viewed in a more positive perspective. The phenomenon of greater contacts between the Thai government and foreign Muslim governments and peoples, the intensification of interactions between Thai Buddhist migrant workers and their Muslim hosts in many Muslim countries, the adoption of more democratic measures and a commitment to the goals of a free market economy have all impelled the Thai state to adopt a more positive attitude towards its Muslim citizens and Islam itself as they begin to be treated as equals. A new era of positive Muslim-State relations seems to have emerged enabling the Muslims, among other things, to claim their rightful role in the new political scenario in the kingdom. They now appear more politically integrated and seem to assume a more visible public profile.

The new image of the Muslims in Thailand is much more positive than what it used to be for a long time. They now appear to have a tangible stake in the affairs of the nation. They are now seen and see themselves as an integral part of modern Thailand. Hence they have begun to move into what used to be thought of as unconventional areas for them, geographically, politically, occupationally and socially. Perhaps more important than this is that the emerging democratic political conditions in Thailand have

created an academic climate which is conducive to research on Islam and the Muslims when not too long ago there used to be plenty of restrictions. This is most helpful for new research to take place.

What seems still lacking in our understanding of Islam and the Muslims in Thailand is reliable and comprehensive data on them. The sources for information on the Muslims in Thailand have not only become more varied but also much more easily accessible. It is, for example, now possible to gather data on the Muslims in Thailand through the internet. There are already a number of Thai Muslim web sites in place. Likewise, the number of Thai Muslim publications in Thailand, including Muslim newspapers and journals, has grown. Field-work in Muslim enclaves all over the kingdom is also easier to undertake now than any time in the past. The question of access therefore should no longer pose any major problem now.

In terms of research themes perhaps we should start from the basics. Indeed one of the most viable areas of research that could and should be undertaken soon is the collection and collation of basic demographic and ethnographic data on the Muslims. The survey type of work which Imanaga has initiated is extremely useful except that it needs to be more detailed, thorough and comprehensive. In the initial stages such a survey should not attempt to make regional comparisons but rather concentrate on getting raw and reliable data all over the country. In addition to this kind of survey more focused anthropological studies on specific Muslim villages should also be undertaken. It is surprising that, to the best of my knowledge, there has been very few anthropological studies of Muslim villages that have been conducted away from the Malay-Muslim provinces.

The role of Islamic ideas in Thailand has also not been systematically investigated. Scupin has made an invaluable contribution in examining the issue of Islamic reformism in Thailand but there are many more issues that can be researched. The evolution of Islamic literature in Thailand, in terms of sources, media, circulation and impact could be investigated without major difficulties. The Shiite sect which is still very much alive in Thailand as it has been for centuries certainly makes a viable research topic. The role of the *al-Arqam* in Thailand has not been examined at all. The *tabligh* movement too, which has a very strong international network and is very established in Thailand has not been thoroughly researched.

The role of Islamic institutions such as students' associations, teachers' unions, alumni, foundations, societies, mosques and madrasahs can also be systematically examined to try to understand the various complex processes that are taking place in the Muslim community. Islamic education is also an under-researched area. The role of *muallafs* or new converts to Islam in the Muslim society in Thailand could also provide interesting insights into the dynamic nature of the community as opposed to its static or rigid image.

In the political realm, Muslim parliamentarians also make a good theme for research.

Muslim political participation in Thai political parties is also worth examining. Muslim electoral behavior is another researchable topic. Another area which has yet to be touched upon is that of political biographies of leading Muslim personalities, past and present.

The list of researchable topics on the Muslims is almost endless but yet, hitherto, scholarship on Islam and the Muslims in Thailand is still sketchy and limited. The overemphasis on the role of the Malay-Muslims in the southern provinces at the expense of that of the national Thai-Muslim community too has not been very helpful. The complete picture of the role of the Muslims in Thailand is still far from clear. Much more certainly needs to be done to fill the existing gaps.

**Appendix 1** List of Registered Mosques in Thailand

1. Bangkok	159	28. Phattalung	71
2. Krabi	144	29. Phichit	1
3. Kanchanaburi	3	30. Phitsanulok	1
4. Kalasin	1	31. Phetchaburi	13
5. Khon Kaen	1	32. Petchabun	2
6. Chanthaburi	1	33. Phrae	1
7. Chachoengsao	50	34. Phuket	36
8. Chonburi	24	35. Maehongson	2
9. Chainat	1	36. Yala	308
10. Chumpon	5	37. Ranong	19
11. Chiengrai	4	38. Rayong	6
12. Chiangmai	11	39. Ratchaburi	2
13. Trang	95	40. Lopburi	1
14. Trad	8	41. Lampang	1
15. Tak	2	42. Sakolnakhon	1
16. Nakhon Nayok	25	43. Songkhla	294
17. Nakhon Ratchasima	1	44. Satun	147
18. Nakhon Sri Thammarat	97	45. Samutprakhan	10
19. Nakhon Sawan	1	46. Samutsongkhram	2
20. Nonthaburi	19	47. Saraburi	3
21. Narathiwat	477	48. Singburi	1
22. Pathum Thani	25	49. Suphanburi	1
23. Prachuabkhirikhan	9	50. Surat Thani	32
24. Prachinburi	2	51. Surin	1
25. Pattani	544	52. Angthong	1
26. Ayutthaya	55	53. Udonthani	1
27. Phangga	78		

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