

ISLAMIC REFORMISM IN THAILAND

by

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Islam in Thailand has developed in historical and cultural conditions which have produced a complex and unique religious heritage. Most scholars agree that prior to the arrival of the great traditions of either Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam into southeast Asia, the dominant religious system consisted of an indigenous spiritualism or animism. When the great traditions filtered in they were acceptable to southeast Asians only insofar as they were able to incorporate the older religious concepts and existing practices.¹ When Islam entered southeast Asia it too had to compromise its basic principles and allow for a certain degree of syncretism. This was not a wholly new pattern because Muslims, since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, have always been content with nominal 'Islamization' in any new region. This traditional Muslim policy resulted in the continuance of many indigenous religious practices and beliefs which at times were considered as being part of Islam itself.

Several anthropological studies of Muslims in rural Thailand have confirmed the basic syncretic quality of Islam in villages.² This syncretized Islam or 'folk Islam' takes two distinctive forms in Thailand depending upon specific sociocultural locale. In the southern, culturally Malay provinces of Thailand, Islam coexists with an indigenous Malay supernaturalism. In the villages of this area non-Islamic Malay spiritual practices are conjoined with traditional Islamic ritual practices. In contrast, in the rural areas where Thai Buddhists are the majority population and Muslims are the minority, Islam coexists with the well-known *phii* worship or animism of mainland southeast Asia. These different varieties of folk Islam are found to be well institutionalized and having a pervasive effect on village affairs. Presumably one reason for the popularity of folk Islam is that its values and beliefs directly impinge upon the individual villager's daily life. While the orthodox great tradition of Islam, which is based upon complex legalistic, scriptural doctrines, is incomprehensible to most illiterate rural farmers, folk Islam is both directly appealing and tangible.

The form of Islam existing in Bangkok is the result of a continuous dialectic or interplay between the rural or traditional patterns of Islam in Thailand and the novel influences introduced by an Islamic reform movement during the twentieth century AD. The development of the Islamic reform movement in Bangkok was the major impetus in initiating changes in the

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1. Kenneth P. Landon, *Southeast Asia: Crossroad of Religions* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1939), pp. 138-139; George Condominas, "Phiban cults in rural Laos", in William G. Skinner *et al.*, *Change and Persistence in Thai Society* (London, Cornell University Press, 1975).

2. Angela Burr, "Religious institutional diversity—social structural and conceptual unity: Islam and Buddhism in a southern Thai coastal fishing village", *Journal of the Siam Society*, 60:183-215, 1972; Thomas Fraser, *Rusembilan: a Malay Fishing Village* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1960).

form of Islam throughout Thailand. The reformist movement which centered in Bangkok evolved within the context of the 'Islamic renaissance' which emanated from the Middle East and spread through much of the Muslim world including insular southeast Asia. The historical genesis of the Islamic reformation extends back to the eighteenth century AD and the development of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia. By the nineteenth century this militant movement had amassed an impressive military potential and succeeded in capturing and 'purifying' Mecca. This event brought the Wahhabi movement to the forefront of the Muslim world. Wahhabism paved the way for the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reformism associated mainly with the renowned Salifiyya movement and Muhammad Abduh of Cairo (1849-1905). Abduh's writings and ideas were a direct source of inspiration for many of the urban-based Muslim intellectuals of insular southeast Asia.³

Islamic reformism reached Thailand directly from its emerging transplanted sprouts in insular southeast Asia. Reformist ideas came to Bangkok as an indirect result of Dutch colonial policy in Indonesia. They were brought to Bangkok by an Indonesian political refugee who had been exiled by the Dutch authorities in the early part of the twentieth century. His name was Ahmad Wahab and his original home was Minangkabau in Sumatra. Prior to his immigration to Bangkok, Wahab had spent a considerable amount of time in Mecca as a student. He had become familiar with the current religious thought and practices of the Middle East, including the postulates of Abduh. Upon returning to Indonesia from Mecca he became involved with Islamic reform through various Muslim associations. After being exiled by the Dutch for his anticolonial political activities, he settled in the area around Thanon Tok in Bangkok in 1926. After he had mastered the Thai language, he began teaching reformist thought in Yanawa and in the Bangkok Noi area of Thon Buri across the river from Bangkok.

The rapid urbanization of Bangkok provided the social ingredients for the Islamic reform movement in Thailand. The expansion of the Thai economy culminated in an increasingly complex and differentiated urban milieu. New forms of educational patterns and steady improvements in communications brought about by Western technology, initially applied in Bangkok, produced an urban-based Muslim intelligentsia. Thus Bangkok was a natural depository for the insemination of Islamic reformist thought in Thailand. Wahab attracted many students and set up informal study groups. From this base, in the 1930s he eventually established the first Islamic reform association in Thailand, known as 'Anisorisunnah'. Eventually this group issued a monthly periodical, edited by Wahab, and financially supported by some members of the Muslim community in Thon Buri. Through this monthly journal Wahab directed an active reformist campaign.

Although Ahmad Wahab was responsible for the introduction of the Middle Eastern and southeast Asian versions of the Islamic Renaissance to Bangkok, it was through his students

3. Harry Benda, "Southeast Asian Islam in the twentieth century", in P.M. Holt *et al.*, *The Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970); Howard M. Federspiel, *Persatuan Islam: Islamic Reform in Twentieth Century Indonesia*, Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 11-46; Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (New York City, The Free Press, 1960), pp. 124-126; Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942* (Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, London, New York City; Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 32, 76, 78, 87; W.F. Wertheim, *Indonesian Society in Transition: a Study of Social Change* (The Hague, W. Van Hoeue Ltd., 1959), pp. 209-210.

and followers that these ideas were galvanized and translated into a *bona fide* religious movement. One of the individuals affected by Wahab's teachings was Direk Kulsiriswasd (Ibrahim Qureyshi), a central figure in contemporary Muslim theology in Thailand. Direk was born in 1923 in Ban Khrua, Bangkok, an area once populated mainly by Cham Muslims. Direk's father was a Pakistani immigrant, and his mother was Thai. Though Thai is Direk's native language, his father taught him Urdu, the Pakistani language partially derived from Persian-Arabic sources. This was an unusual practice of Pakistani Muslims in Thailand. But the acquisition of Urdu was to become important for Direk's later scholastic and theological activities. Direk was a businessman in Bangkok throughout the post-World War II years and the 1950s. In the late 1960s he developed a successful silk-screen printing business, which is presently located in Ban Khrua near the Charoenphol area of Bangkok.

Direk's father had been an acquaintance of Ahmad Wahab, but apparently had not been influenced by reformist thinking. Direk began to scrutinize his own faith at the age of 24. Having acquired Urdu at an early age, he could learn Arabic rather easily because of their related vocabularies. With his knowledge of Arabic, Urdu and English, he was able to become familiar with Islamic exegesis and thought from the Middle East and India. This exposure convinced him of the necessity for Islamic reform in Thailand. He became an avid spokesman and writer, promulgating the same ideas that Wahab had introduced into Bangkok. He then began to attend the study sessions of Wahab in order to meet others who were becoming conversant in reformist ideology. Because Thai was a native language for Direk, his writings and lectures were to have a more profound effect on the development of the reformist movement than those of Wahab.

By 1949 Direk had completed his first of many books on Islam, entitled *Swasdipab Sangkhom* (or 'Social Welfare'). Throughout his career as a businessman, he simultaneously wrote tracts on Islamic religious and cultural affairs. He wrote treatises on such topics as Islamic marriage customs, prohibitions on eating pork, fasting during Ramadan, the *haj* and Islam and science. More recently he has written essays on folk Islam, the history of Thai Muslims and the influences of Muslim literary styles on classical Thai literature. In addition to many periodical articles, he completed a massive, four-volume Thai translation of the Quran. This achievement, completed after more than ten years of effort and personal expenditure of over 100,000 baht, represents the only full translation of the Quran which is accessible to the Thai Muslim population. As of 1977, this prolific writer had finished a translation of the *hadith* of al-Bukhari. These works represent some of the contributions of the reformist attempt to bring to the Thai Muslims an awareness of the basic foundations of the Islamic faith. Direk became the foremost intellectual leader of the reformist movement of the 1950s, 1960s and well into the 1970s.

Sociologically, Islamic reformism in Bangkok progressed from an informal teacher-student relationship to a more corporately organized movement. The initial proponent of reformist ideology in Bangkok, Ahmad Wahab, who ethnically was outside of a Thai cultural framework attracted a small local following from Bangkok Noi Muslims in the early 1930s. Informal, learning sessions were held in Wahab's household for a tightly knit group of young Muslims. The Ansorisunnah was founded and served as the printing house for the propagation

of reformist thought through its monthly magazine. As the reform movement gathered strength throughout the 1940s and 1950s, its organizational base shifted from the Ansorisunnah to the 'Jam'i-yatul Islam', another voluntary Muslim group in Bangkok. The Jam'i-yatul Islam was founded by some Indo-Pakistani migrants and their descendants residing in Bangkok. Jam'i-yatul Islam was modelled along the lines of the well-known 'Jama'at-i Islami' of the south Asian subcontinent which played such an important role in Indo-Pakistani politics. Although originally Jam'i-yatul Islam was an ethnic association, after the 1950s the organization opened its ranks to all Muslims in Thailand. Reformist leaders from varied ethnic backgrounds joined to administer Jam'i-yatul Islam. The present secretary of Jam'i-yatul Islam is Direk Kulsiriswasd.

The other reformist organization in Bangkok is the Young Muslim Association of Thailand (YMAT). YMAT might be considered as the younger generation's vehicle for initiating social and religious reform, and is a direct spin-off of Jam'i-yatul Islam. There are close and informal networks between the leaders of Jam'i-yatul Islam and YMAT. Most of the younger leaders have been inspired by the older members who struggled during the formative period of the reform movement. Presently the meetings and activities of YMAT are centered at the Islamic Centre and Foundation of Thailand which was originally to have been constructed as a central mosque in Bangkok. Because of a lack of funding, construction has fallen behind schedule and the mosque has not been completed. The Center has become a reformist enclave in Huamak. Muslims from the Phrakhanong and Huamak areas attend lectures given by the young leaders of YMAT every Saturday and Sunday. During holy days YMAT organizes activities for the Muslims throughout the city.

Reformist ideology in Thailand

The Islamic reform movement in Thailand, centered in Bangkok, is a derivative of the reformist complex of the Middle East and the Malayan-Indonesian region. The essential ideology which permeated these various cultural areas retained certain unifying elements which are important to the Muslims of Thailand in the 1970s. Reformist conceptions were elaborated in order to deal with certain interrelated problems which were affecting Muslims in the Middle East, as well as Muslims throughout southeast Asia. The initial problem besetting Muslims, as conceived by the reformists, was that Islam had become decadent. Muslims in Thailand and throughout the world were in a state of backwardness in comparison with those from Western European countries. This condition was a result of genuine ignorance of the true spirit of Islam and a consequent weakening of social, moral and intellectual will. It was held that the spiritual principles of Islam had been corrupted by degrading customs which had become institutionalized because of the complacency of the traditional *ulama* (Islamic scholars

and official theologians). The solution for this problem, as proposed by the reformists, was to return to the simple teachings of the Quran and *hadith*, a basis for which all Muslims could unite.

In Thailand the most visible aspect of this Islamic decadence or backwardness was folk Islam as it existed in the rural communities, and other non-Islamic practices and teachings within the Muslim communities of Bangkok. The Thai reformers held that this state of affairs was due to a lack of comprehension of the genuine tenets of Islam. Folk Islam was of dramatic concern to these Thai Muslim reformists, not only because of the indigenous spiritualism which surfaced during ritual practices, but also because of the intermingling of elements from the other great traditions, namely Buddhism and Hinduism. As more Thai Muslim intellectuals were exposed to reformism, their tolerance for folk Islam diminished greatly. They suggested that Islam had become decadent or corrupted in Thailand simply because of its distance from the spiritual center of Islam, the Middle East. It was assumed by these Thai Muslim reformists that as more Muslims learned more about orthodox Islam, they would be more likely to reject the accretions from other great traditions and folk elements. This assumption implied that the transformative effect of Islamization was a continuing, unilinear process which proceeded in stages. There was a gradual religious evolution from folk to great orthodox traditions which was directed by the education of Thai Muslims as to what was considered the true principles of Islam.

Another related problem perceived by the Thai Muslim reformists was the question of *taqlid*. *Taqlid* was an established pattern of education among Muslims for centuries which involved the acceptance of belief on the authority of others without question or objection. *Taqlid* was a traditional approach to interpreting the Quran and *hadith* which rested on the claim that only the early generations of Muslims had had the capacity to interpret Islam. The reformists viewed this attitude of religious conservatism as an obstacle to their endeavor to purify Islam of non-Islamic practices and attitudes. They maintained that *taqlid* was responsible for the endurance of folk practices and other elements or innovations accepted by many Thai Muslims.

The Thai reformers argued that beliefs based on an uncritical acceptance of textual sources or traditional religious authorities, were wrong because the only sources for religious beliefs and practices were the Quran and authentic *hadith*. They contended that Muslims should strive to attain truth by utilizing *akal* (reasoning), a process known as *ijtihad*. *Ijtihad* involved discovering the legal and religious prescriptions laid down in the Quran and *hadith* and, through reason, applying them to the contemporary Thai social and political environment. The purification of religion, the rejection of *taqlid* and the acceptance of *ijtihad* were conceived to be among the first stages toward releasing Muslims from ignorance and rediscovering the true principles of Islam which in the past had uplifted Muslims throughout the world. Wahab, Direk and other Thai reformists could not countenance the accumulation of illegitimate non-Islamic beliefs and practices as upheld by practitioners in the Muslim communities of Thailand. Beliefs in the Thai *phii* or Malay spirits by Muslims were objectionable because they amounted to *shirk* (syntheism, or the ascribing of powers of God to things or others than God). As the reform movement spread in Thailand the reformists began to view themselves as a select

minority who were faced with the task of upholding the true doctrine against superstition and 'pagan' traditional rites.

Another concern of the Thai reformists was the relationship between religion, the Quran and modern scientific practices. They maintained, as did the Middle Eastern and Malayan-Indonesian reformers, that there is essentially no conflict between science and religion, that both are based upon reason, and both to a certain extent study the same phenomena, but each with its own object in view. Thai Muslim reformists applied this ideological perspective in their attempt to deal with the traditional, supernatural or anti-scientific concepts which were deemed non-Islamic. Their position is that the fundamentals within the Quran are in no way opposed to modern scientific or medical practices, and that in many cases the Quran and *hadith* must be comprehended as in fact revealing modern scientific principles.

Other more specific issues which concerned the Thai reformists involved religious practices and rituals which were observed in the Thai Muslim communities. 'Hagiology', spirit worship, the use of traditional spirit doctors, and rurally oriented death practices were matters of concern. The practices of returned pilgrims or *hajji*, traditional feasting activities, methods for determining the time of Ramadan, certain types of prayers, the use of religious imagery and the use of the Arabic language were other areas in which the reformists hoped to have some educational influence. In a more mundane context the Thai Muslim reformists hoped to challenge the traditional *ulama* and compete for certain bureaucratic posts dealing with Islamic affairs within the Thai government. In this way they proposed to develop an innovative religious-bureaucratic structure which would be responsive to the demands of the Muslim population in Thailand.

Traditionalist reaction

In 1935 the first polemical attack directed at Muslim reformist ideology was published in Bangkok. This tract was entitled *Rua sunni siam* ('The Sunni School of Thought of Siam'), written by *Hajji* Tuan Suwannasat (or Tuan Yah Yawi). This publication signified the actualities of the split which was taking place within the Islamic community in Bangkok. From this point onward there were to be two major camps representing Muslim ideology and practices in Bangkok. And from Bangkok the schism would ultimately reach out into the adjacent provinces in central, southern and northern Thailand. The major theme articulated in *Rua sunni siam* involved the notion of *taqlid* and their interpretation of the Islamic religious texts. The conservative *ulama* of Bangkok opposed the use of *ijtihad* in the interpretation of the Quran or other Islamic literature. It was argued that the truths established by the *ulama* could not be questioned or reexamined, for this could lead to misinterpretation and error. An adjunct to this thinking as expressed in *Rua sunni siam* is that only the established religious scholars, the so-called '*mujtahids*' were able to confirm the correct interpretation of the sacred texts. The *Rua sunni siam* did not specify Ahmad Wahab or any reformists directly, but it was obvious that the arguments marshalled by Tuan Suwannasat were definitely directed at the reform movement.

The conservative *ulama* defended many of the traditional practices which were viewed as heterodox by the reformists. They argued that many of these practices were valid in a southeast Asian context and felt that they were harmless to the cause of Islam. For example they maintained that the traditional feasting activity (known in Thailand by the Buddhist term *tham bun*) was a well institutionalized custom throughout the Malaysian-Indonesian Islamic world. And they believed that these *tham bun* ceremonies served an important religious and social function in integrating the Muslim community in Thailand.

In general the traditional authorities or *hajji* of the Thai Muslim communities objected to the 'modernizing' trends of the reformists. They opposed Direk's translation of the Quran and proscribed the use of it by Thai Muslims. They categorized Direk as an extreme liberal and rationalist who was not really under the 'Word'. In other words they implied that his translation was too free in dealing with the meanings in the Quran and that his real exegetical methods were based on modernist reasoning rather than the literal 'Word' of God. The conservative *ulama* viewed scientific trends as suspect. One aspect of their reasoning was that the acceptance of modern scientific thought from the West, once accomplished, would inevitably lead to materialism and secularism. By adopting scientific notions Muslims would become apostates. Western civilization and culture would have an eroding effect on Islamic thought and institutions in Thailand. These traditionalists regarded science as isomorphic with Western ethics and values.

To some extent, because of the reform movement and its consequences, Islam in Thailand appears on the surface as two distinctly opposed forms of thought and action. In Indonesia, Geertz had popularized the typologies of *santri* and *abangan* to refer to the differences between the urban reformers and the traditionalists.⁴ The *santri* were those Muslims who were influenced by the reformist doctrinal winds from the Middle East, while the *abangan* were those Javanese who adhered to a syncretic blend of pre-Islamic traditions and Islam. In the literature on Thai Muslims, Burr in her study of Muuthiinyng, a village near Songkhla, urban-educated Muslim reformists were referred to as 'Wahhabis'.⁵ This socioreligious category is also used in the same way in Bangkok. The traditionalists in Muuthiinyng called themselves *phuak kau* ('old group'). In Soonthornpasuch's work on Chiang Mai Muslims, he noted that the reformists were designated as *phuak mai* ('new group') as opposed to *phuak kau*.⁶

But in Bangkok the labels utilized most by both traditionalist Muslim and reformist Muslim alike, are *khana kau* and *khana mai*. *Khana* translates roughly as 'group', 'body', 'organization' or 'team'; while *kau* means 'old' and *mai* is 'new' or 'recent'. Thus *khana kau-khama mai* represents the heterodox-traditionalist versus the orthodox reformist ideological patterns in the Thai Muslim communities. It must be emphasized, however, that this dichotomous formula cannot be used as anything more than an analytical mode in assessing the religious and cultural heritage of Islam in Thailand. And even though such conceptual modes have some basis in the empirical Thai world, most Thai Muslims do not consistently identify with the

4. Geertz, *ibid.*, pp. 11-215.

5. Burr, *op. cit.*, pp. 195.

6. Suthep Soonthornpasuch, "Islamic identity in Chiangmai City: a historical and structural comparison of two communities", unpubl. diss. in anthrop., University of California at Berkeley, 1977, p. 164.

conceptual framework of any one of the ideal modes. Rather, the majority of Muslims in Bangkok fall in between somewhere being influenced by both *khana kau* and *khana mai* elements. The extremist positions are only tendencies, and are a reflection of the kind of information gained from those informants who are able to articulate their religious beliefs and actions in a comprehensible fashion.

A related problem associated with the strict application of these ideal types of folk heterodox/reformist orthodox is the general assumption held by most anthropologists that these 'pure' types exist in well-demarcated geographical zones, viz. rural/urban. This assumption is linked to the folk-urban schematics stemming from Redfield, Singer *et al.* According to these folk-urban theorists, there is a continuum between the rural-folk 'little tradition' and the urban-orthodox great tradition. Urban religiosity is conceived to be closer to the pure literary tradition, while the rural little tradition tends to be syncretistic and adulterated. There is a tendency to view these structurally opposed models as if they were isolable and existed in a vacuum. The problem with this formulation is that there is a demonstrable interrelationship between these models which cannot be overlooked. For in Bangkok, a very urbanized area, the essential character of Islam is a consequence of the dialectical relationship between the traditionalist and reformist modes of thought and action. These heuristic devices used to analyze religious systems ought not to be confused with religion at the 'grass-roots' level.

The religious conflict between the *khana mai* and *khana kau* resulted in both direct and indirect, abrupt and subtle, transformations in the form and content of Islam in Thailand. Through the endeavors of the *khana mai* and their reformist critique, many Thai Muslims have a deeper understanding of Sunni doctrine and practice.⁷ This is due to factors like the *khana mai* sponsorship of the Friday sermon being given in the vernacular, rather than in Arabic, a language which is foreign to most Thais. It is also a result of the translation efforts and scholarship of Direk Kulsiriswasd who translated the Quran and other religious texts into Thai. Though the *khana kau* oppose the translation on theological grounds, it is the most widely used source of the Quran in Thailand (with the exception of the Malay-speaking provinces in the kingdom). Other notable successes of the *khana mai* involved the elimination of some of the folk practices and beliefs that had become acceptable aspects of Islam. The urban reformists were the cultural brokers who were attempting to reconcile the basic tenets of Islam with certain modern socio-economic transformations in Thailand.

Yet there are some areas that have been a fecund source of contention among the *khana kau* and *khana mai* which have not undergone any dramatic transformations. Though the *khana kau* have accommodated themselves to some elements of the modernization processes in Thailand since the beginning of the Bangkok era, they still cling tenaciously to some of the beliefs and practices that are considered heterodox by the reformists. Certain death customs, feasting practices (*tham bun*), the use of religious imagery and types of prayers are some of the areas where traditionalism still has precedence over the form of Islam in Bangkok and Thailand. Even these practices, however, are under the pressure of criticism because of the steady

7. There is a small Shia minority located in Bangkok referred to by Thai Muslims as '*chao sayn*'. This minority community is located in Thon Buri, and their principal mosque is Charoenphol Masjid. See R. Scupin, "Thai Muslims in Bangkok: Islam and modernization in a Buddhist society", unpubl. diss. in anthrop., University of California at Santa Barbara, 1978.

growth of the reform movement throughout Thailand. Consequently there are subtle, ongoing changes in these traditional rituals and beliefs that tend to keep Islam in Thailand in a state of transition. In reality static traditionalism is not a viable stance in a post-traditional society such as Thailand. Unremunerative ritual practices will not be condoned for long by those Muslims exposed to the contemporary educational, social and religious trends of twentieth-century Bangkok.

The major sociological contrast between the *khana kau* conservative *ulama* and the *khana mai* reformist is that the former have been educated within the traditional Islamic schools in Thailand, while the latter have been exposed to outside influences. The traditional Islamic schools in Bangkok and the countryside have produced the leadership in the rural and urban areas. These leaders monopolize most of the important bureaucratic posts in the Thai government dealing with Islamic affairs.⁸ From this organizational base the conservative *ulama* exercise a profound influence on the form of Islam in Thailand. This institutionalized authority structure has a captive audience. The reformists, for the most part, function outside of this institutionalized context and appeal largely to an educated, emergent middle class of Thai Muslims. This creative minority has had a minimal impact on the vast majority of the Muslim populace, especially in the rural areas.

Assuming that Thailand as a nation continues to develop economically and socially along similar lines as in the immediate past, an increasing percentage of the population will become literate and educated. This population will include Thai Muslims who will be acquainted with the innovative ideas associated with the processes of modernization. They will also undoubtedly become more familiar with reformist thought in Thailand. Some of the younger generation will go abroad to study at Al-Azhar or in other Middle Eastern universities. Consequently, as more Muslims become familiar with the idiom of reformist ideology, the movement is bound to grow. In doing so, the Islamic renaissance will inevitably have profound implications for the form and content of Muslim thought and ritual in Thailand.

A NOTE ON THAI MUSLIM POPULATION

In 1976 Thailand had a population of approximately 42 million. According to official government statistics 95.3 per cent of this population was Buddhists, 3.8 per cent Muslims, 0.6 per cent Christians, and 0.3 per cent of other faiths.⁹ Usually scholars and government officials in Thailand classify the Thai Muslim population in two separate categories: the Malays and non-Malays.¹⁰ This linguistic anomaly is a result of the peculiar cultural and histor-

8. Tuan Suwannasat, the *khana kau* leader who was the author of *Rua sunni siam*, is presently the Chularajmontri in Thailand. The Chularajmontri is the highest-ranking Muslim position within the Thai bureaucracy. This bureaucratic post has historical precedents extending back to the Ayudhyan period. See R. Scupin, *ibid.*, ch. 5.

9. Royal Thai Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Islam in Thailand* (Bangkok, 1976).

10. Nantawan Haemindra, "The problems of the Thai Muslims in the four southern provinces of Thailand (Part One)", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 7(2), 1976; Somkid Maniwong, "Thai Muslims", *Social Science Review*, 1(3), Bangkok (in Thai), 1964; Suthep Soonthornpasuch, *op. cit.*

ical situation of the Muslims in Thailand. Islam first came to the merchant princedoms of Indonesia and Malaysia during the thirteenth century AD. Ethnohistorical data indicated that 'Islamization' of this area was a gradual process encompassing several centuries. In conjunction with this general process the political entity known presently as Thailand was expanding southward into the Malay cultural area. Historical tributary Malay states were progressively transformed into provinces dependent upon and incorporated into the Thai polity. The Muslim population residing in these provinces has retained its Malay cultural heritage, and has resisted Thai governmental attempts at assimilation. Consequently the residents of these provinces are referred to as the 'Malay' Thai Muslims.

The non-Malay Thai Muslims are those Indians, Pakistanis, Iranians, Chams, Indonesians, Chinese and Malay Muslims and their descendants who live in areas in which Thai Buddhists are the majority. The majority of these Muslims are descendants of Malay prisoners-of-war, or other migrants, who now reside outside of the four southernmost provinces of Thailand. But these Muslims are legitimately referred to as Thai Muslims, for their native language is Thai, and for all practical purposes most of these Muslims have been assimilated into the mainstream of Thai culture. The economic, educational, social, political and cultural conditions were conducive to the 'Thaification' of these Muslims. Apparently in northern Thailand traditional patterns of ethnicity are still evident, but in central Thailand and in Bangkok uniform, institutionalized socialization processes and intermarriage have had a leveling effect on all vestiges of traditional ethnicity.¹¹ Hence the social structural and cultural (outside of religion) features exhibited by these Muslims are essentially the same as those of the dominant Thai Buddhist population.

In Bangkok the non-Malay Thai Muslims make up from about 6 to 8 per cent of the entire population of about 4 million. Historically these Muslims resided in compact homogeneous 'ethnic' neighborhoods. But during the twentieth century the diverse geographic and social mobility patterns connected with complex urbanization processes have resulted in the dissolution of these ethnic enclaves. The only exception to this generalized pattern is the northeast edge of Bangkok which extends from Phrakhanong in the south to Bangkokpi and out into the countryside to Minburi. Within this area there are distinctive Muslim neighborhoods which lie interposed between the dominant Thai Buddhist settlements. According to the official census of 1970, the Muslim population of Bangkok consisted of 74,532 males and 75,836 females. These figures are questioned by several Muslim associations and leaders in Bangkok. Considering fertility rates, urban in and out-migration, and estimates of Muslim associations, the present population of Muslims in Bangkok appears to be between 200,000 and 230,000.

11. For the Muslims of northern Thailand, see Suthep Soonthornpasuch, *op. cit.*