



Goat milk and caddies – A Muslim community in Cha Am, Thailand

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Abstract

This paper looks at the history of a Muslim village and its interaction with the surrounding establishments. The Muslim village Baan Yai is located just adjacent to one of the huge golf courses of Hua Hin, an upscale, traditional beach resort accommodating the Summer Palace of the King Rama IX and offering world-class golf courses. Even though the village is close to one of the three university campuses and a golf course, the latter are unaware of its existence. The paper also raises the question of the role of this community in the wider *ummah* both in Thailand and overseas while presenting a brief discussion of relevant aspects of the history of Thai Muslims. The paper concludes that while the villagers might be reasonably knowledgeable about basic Islamic teachings and practices, they appear to be detached from the Islamic origins and history of the community. This relative historical discontinuity is only matched by deliberate spatial fragmentation caused by the administrative structure of the village.

Keywords: golf courses, history of Thai Muslims, Muslim village, *pondok*, spatial fragmentation, *ummah*

Introduction

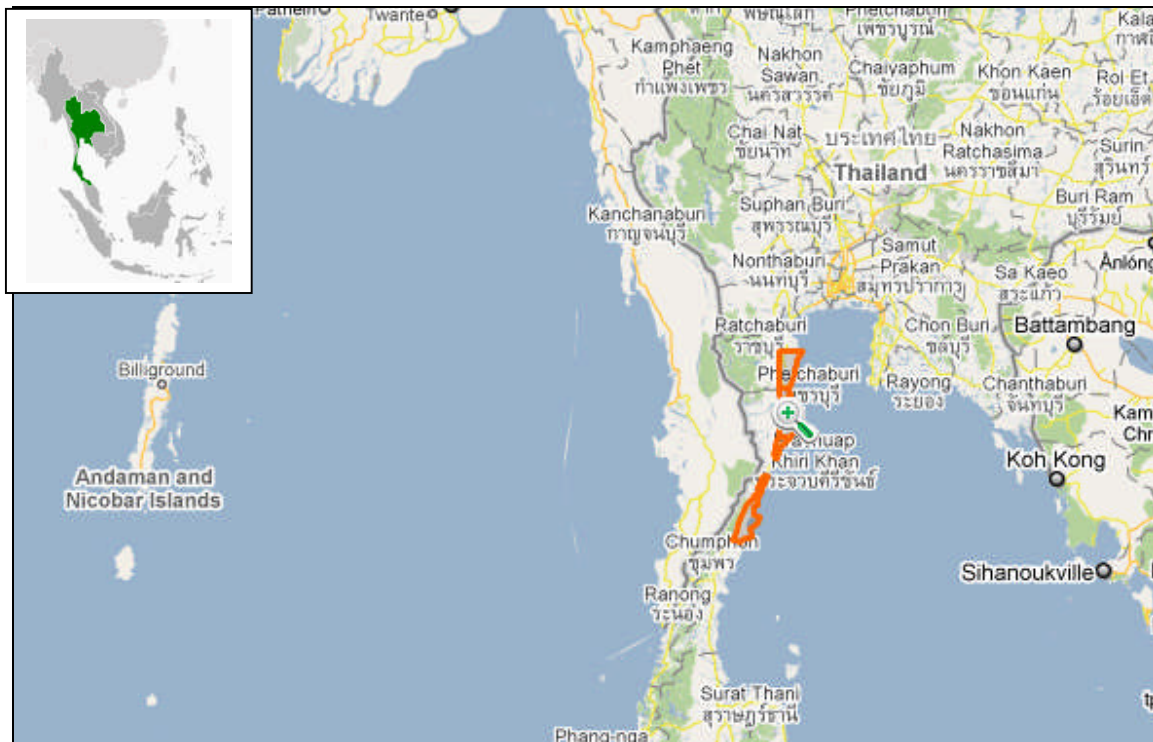
On the outskirts of the two famous beach resorts Cha Am and Hua Hin, there is a Muslim village called Baan Yai. Hua Hin is an upscale, traditional beach resort accommodating the Summer Palace (Sans Soucis) of the present King Rama IX. A few kilometres further north towards the other beach resort, Cha Am, lies the Summer Palace (Marukhathayawan) of King Rama VI. Besides a number of luxury hotels, Hua Hin also offers world-class golf courses. The Muslim village is located just adjacent to one of the huge golf courses.

Even though the village is close to one of the three university campuses and a golf course, the latter are unaware of its existence. The villagers, however, are quite familiar with their affluent neighbours as many men work in the campus area as security guards, while women work as caddies on the golf course.

This chapter looks at the history of the village and the interaction between the Muslim village and the surrounding establishments. It also raises the question of the role of this community in the wider *ummah* both in Thailand and overseas. Finally, a brief discussion is presented on the aspects of the history of Thai Muslims.

The setting

Hua Hin is an international tourist golf attraction. Thailand's first ever golf course was built here in 1924, (the Royal Hua Hin) right next to the railway station. In the early 1990's golfing in



Figures 1. Location of Hua Hin and Cha-an

Thailand really took off with many courses being built in the area to international standards by the likes of Jack Nicklaus. To date some Japanese and Hong Kong golfers come to Thailand and finance their holiday by playing a couple of rounds here instead of at home. The savings are

tremendous since the green-fees are currently only about 1200-2500 Baht on weekdays. There are 5 world-class courses in the vicinity of Hua Hin and new ones are continually added.

The village of Baan Yai is geographically located on the outskirts of Cha Am and Hua Hin (Figures 1), but it is officially administered by the Cha Am district and belongs to the Petchburi province. The first settlers to this village arrived some 30 years ago from Petchburi, and they speak the same Central Thai dialect.

The village has a government-controlled elementary school, whereas for secondary education the children have to go elsewhere. The teachers in the elementary school are hired by the government authorities and hence not part of the Muslim community. In case the villagers want to pursue secondary education for their children, they usually send them into a pondok in Pattani at the age of 10. Girls can also be sent to a pondok for further studies.

The key persons in the village are the Amid, who is the leader of the village dakwah group, the Imam and the village headman (phu yai baan). The economy of the village is currently based on raising goats, catfish and garden products. There are three mosques in the village. The largest one, called Masjid Darul Solehin, also houses a religious school, Farrid Atuddeen. The two smaller ones are called Masjid Darul Muhajirin and Masjid Nurul Eya-Zaw.

Most of the villagers trace their roots back to Petchburi, to a community of seamen and fishermen. In 1976 (B.E. 2519) they moved to Baan Yai to the land, which allegedly was to be abandoned by the Buddhists due to continuous severe droughts. The Buddhists consequently sold the land to the Muslims. Miraculously, it started to rain, and the land could feed the new settlers. In 1979 ten households moved to Baan Yai from Petchburi supposedly to escape poverty.

The villagers cultivated pineapples, pumpkins, corn and yam beans. In the long run, however, the soil deteriorated by the heavy use of chemicals on the pineapple farms. Pineapple orchards used to be a lucrative business on the east coast ever since Dole set up a pineapple business in the region in the 1970s. The villagers in Baan Yai used to sell their pineapples to a fruit cannery in Chonburi. Some pineapples are still grown in the village, but nowadays the retailers come to purchase the pineapples in the village, currently for 4 baht per kilo.

During the economic boom years of PM Chatichai Choonhavan (1988-1991), many villagers sold their land and went for the Hajj. Even after the chemicals had deteriorated the soil, some villagers managed to sell their land to a developer, who later built a golf course and a university campus in the former pineapple orchards; hence the village's close links to the golf course and the university.

With the present government's policy of one region (tambon), one product, the village received a favourable loan from the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) in order to start a goat milk business. The villagers run a co-operative called Cha Am Goat Milk and they even have a website at www.chaam.goat.com. The village headman (phu yai baan) runs a bottling factory. The milk has to be sold quickly as it does not last long. According to the villagers, most of the milk goes to the Indians and Nepalese working in Cha Am and Hua Hin in restaurants and tailor shops. Crown Princess Mahachakri Sirindhorn is the patron of the goat milk production.

The village appears to have very good relations with the royal household. The newest mosque, Masjid Nurul Eya-Zaw is built on royal land. First, an Imam donated one *rai* to the mosque. Later, the King donated five *rais* in 1982. The Imam subsequently raised money by charity in order to buy one more *rai*, and eventually the mosque was constructed on a seven-*rai* piece of land in the year 2000. The King donated 500,000 baht for the construction work, and an Indian family headed by Pak Nana donated two million baht. The construction of the newest mosque cost seven million baht.

Division of the village

The village is divided into eight hamlets or zones (mu), of which only two are Muslim while the others are Buddhist. The hamlets are known by a number: Number One and Number Eight are Muslim hamlets. Number Eight is the smaller hamlet with only 75 families, yet it houses the newest mosque Masjid Nurul Eya-Zaw built by royal support. On Fridays, the mosque is crowded as the international students from a university participate in Friday prayer. There are also some other royal projects in hamlet Number Eight, such as a school called Centre of Moral Teaching (Soon Charivatham) for students aged between five and fifteen. A dam has been constructed to provide villagers with safe tap water. The mosque was officially inaugurated by Crown Princess Mahachakri Sirindhorn. The King has visited the mosque 7 or 8 times according to the villagers. Former Prime Minister, Barnham Silpa-archa also paid a visit to the mosque. One can draw the conclusion that hamlet Number Eight is well connected with the highest echelons of Thai society.

Hamlet Number One is bigger and houses some 300 families. The villagers trace their roots back to Petchburi, Ban Laem district (amphoe), from where they migrated some 30 years ago for economic reasons. The religious school, Farid Atuddeen is located in the largest mosque, Darul Solehin Mosque in hamlet Number One. The school was established seven years ago and is headed by a 60-year-old teacher called Abdul Abdi. Besides him, there is a young male teacher fresh from his schooling in Cairo, and two young female teachers. One of the female teachers is the daughter of the Amid, while the other is the Imam's daughter. Both of them cover their faces, except when photographs are taken. The female teachers have studied in pondoks; the Amid's daughter in Pattani and the Imam's daughter in Phattalung.

The religious school is open every Saturday and Sunday. The Thai government supports the school twice a year with 12,000 baht, i.e. 24,000 baht per year. The teachers receive a nominal salary. They work for six hours on both days. The children are aged from 6 to 12, both boys and girls wear traditional Muslim attires and study Koranic Arabic. There are about 100 students in the school.

The government supports all the three mosques in the village with 2,800 baht a year, but the mosques are responsible for the rest and hence financially independent. There appears to be a certain stability and continuity in the village administration. The Imam acts as the *kamnan* of the entire village. There is a village committee consisting of 12 persons. The present kamnan has held his position for 19 years. He is administratively responsible for the Cha Am district (amphoe). The village headman (phu yai baan) of hamlet Number One has been in his position for 23 years.

Links to the ummah

All the three key persons of the village have performed the Hajj to Mecca although it costs by the estimate of Abdul Abdi some 100,000 baht. Abdul Abdi himself stayed in Saudi Arabia for two years and worked as a carpenter to finance his Hajj. According to the Amid, more than 100 villagers have performed the Hajj.

The villagers trace their roots to the Petchburi province, which in the 19th century was ruled by Mon warlords. The rural areas were populated by Mon and Lao peasants. Ordinary villagers in Baan Yai do not seem interested in knowing how this particular Pattani Muslim community ended up in Petchburi. According to the Amid, their forefathers were war captives from the war between the Bangkok kings and the Pattani sultans in 1902. Some of the kinship words used in the village are the same as in Pattani and differ from Central Thai dialects.

Those few villagers who continue their education to a tertiary level usually study at Ramkhamhaeng University in Bangkok. The university accommodates a large number of

Muslim students, thus giving an opportunity to the students from Baan Yai to join various Muslim youth groups.

The Amid travels frequently on his dakwah missions all over Thailand, and has also visited Vietnam, Malaysia (Penang) and Indonesia (Medan). He speaks Malay and was educated in the Ridwan Masjid in Bangkapi in Bangkok for four years, after which he studied in Pattani at Yaring pondok and at Minburi pondok in Bangkok. His son now attends the Minburi pondok.

The Imam was also educated in the Ridwan Masjid for nine years. The Thai imams meet once a year. The Imam of the Baan Yai village attends a national meeting for imams from the North, North East and Central Thailand, whereas Southern imams have their own separate meeting." The highest authority of the Thai Muslims, called Chularajamontri, sometimes attends the meetings.

The Baan Yai Muslims tend to inter-marry, but occasionally they may also marry outsiders. There are a few new Muslims (muallaf), whom the Amid regularly teaches: Usually, they are non-Muslim females. There is a good opportunity to meet Muslims from other communities, for instance, when the villagers organise charity fairs. One such fair was organized in Baan Yai's hamlet Number One in March 2003 to raise money for the school.

The village headman has relatives in the Baan Khrua Muslim community in central Bangkok and sometimes organises charity campaigns to help the community. The Baan Khrua community includes the famous ethnic Chams, whose silk patterns and weaving skills was successfully utilised by an American businessman Jim Thompson for commercial purposes. The village headman, however, is not a Cham; but traces his ethnic roots to the Pattani Muslims in Petchburi. As an adult, he moved to Pattani to work there as a fisherman for a while. He has an entirely secular education up to the third grade of secondary school (M3) and has never studied at a pondok.

The Muslim villagers of Baan Yai can receive *halal* food in a hospital in Petchburi, but in the other hospitals their family members will have to provide them with food.

An Islamic Bank was opened in Petchburi on 19 June 2003, in fact only a week after the first Islamic Bank opened in Bangkok. All the three key persons of the village strongly encourage the villagers to transfer their savings and loans there, as the bank follows the Islamic teachings and does not charge interest. The Islamic Bank operates as a branch of the state-owned Krung Thai Bank.

Zakat is paid in the village to those in need. There are two types of zakat in the village - agricultural zakat, where once a year an owner of 70 heads of cattle donates one to the poor. The other type of zakat - *zakat* - is paid after Ramadan.

The key persons of the village are known by name are some of the leading members of the Thai Muslim community, such as Interior Minister Wan Mohammad Noor Matha and former Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan, but they do not seem to have any closer links to them. They do not seem to follow the general election behaviour of the Southern Thais, who traditionally vote for the Democrats. Instead, the present Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra from the Thai Rak Thai Party (Thai Loves Thai) is a popular figure in the village, thanks to his development projects, such as the 30-baht health care scheme, the one *tambon*, one product project, and the one-million baht loan for each village.

The wider perspective

According to the Key Statistics of Thailand 2002, the country had a little over three million Muslims in 1999. The common estimate, used in the media, usually ranges from six to ten million, which would indicate that some 10% of the Thai population comprises Muslims. There are thousands of mosques in Thailand and some 200 mosques in Bangkok alone.

The history of the Thai Muslims has been studied by a few noted Thai scholars, such as Surin Pitsuwan and Chaiwat Satha-anand and a Malaysian scholar Omar Farouk. The notion by Thongchai Winichakul concerning the emphasis in Thai history on the national story seems to apply to the story of the Thai Muslims as well. The history of the Petchburi Muslims can be regarded as to represent the unwritten history of the margins.

Knowledge of the history and background of their own community in Baan Yai village appears to be rather fragmentary. Not even the teachers at the religious school did recognise such basic concepts or names of Pattani history as *bunga mas*, Dusun Nyor or Abdul Kadir. The only person who was familiar with the history of the community was the Imam in hamlet Number One.

According to Surin, Pattani was the major Malay-Muslim principality in the South and a bone of contention between the colonising British and the Thai leaders in Bangkok. With the administrative reforms by King Rama V, which began in 1902, the local Pattani princes and royalty were removed from their positions and simply replaced by Thai bureaucrats.

The Pattani rulers did not accept the reforms without protests. They wrote to Sir Frank Swettenham, Governor of the Straits Settlements in Singapore, demanding his intervention. London, however, preferred to keep Siam as a buffer state so as not to anger the Bangkok rulers by any interventions in local affairs. The Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 ceded Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu and Perlis to the British in exchange for the recognition of Thai sovereignty over Pattani. The pension paid to the Pattani rajas and princes was raised in order to prevent anti-government activities.

The last ruling king of independent Pattani was Raja Abdul Kadir, who ascended the throne in 1899. He was related to the ruling family of Kelantan and was encouraged by the British to move to Kelantan after Pattani had been incorporated into Siam. Abdul Kadir moved to Kelantan in 1915, a move which inspired a rebellion against Siam.

After the Constitutional Revolution of 1932 in Siam, the son of Abdul Kadir travelled to Bangkok to meet Dr. Pridi to announce that the Pattani Muslims now would be willing to join Siam as the country had a newlydrafted constitution. In the first general elections in 1933, one Malay Muslim representative was elected. During the military dictatorship of Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram (1938-44), the minorities were expected to submit to the Thai race concept, a fact which further deteriorated the Thai-Muslim Relation.

A Bangkok Muslim called Cham Phromyong was nominated as the first Chularajamontri, a new position created by the Patronage of Islam Act 1945. According to Surin, Chularajamontri's office was an equivalent of the Shaikh ul-Islam of the early Islamic empires. The Act further states that Chularajamontri acts as His Majesty's personal aide fulfilling His royal duties in the patronage of Islam. He was chosen by the Bangkok authorities, not by the Thai Muslim communities.

Some Muslims felt that he was not the right man for the job and did not really represent the Muslim community. A prince of Narathiwat officially protested against the nomination and later had to escape to Kelantan where he joined the anti-Bangkok underground movement. A pan-Malayan political party was established in 1945 in British Malaya, but the British made it quite clear that the party should not desire to annex Greater Pattani, because the Thais had threatened to stop their deliveries of rice to post-war Britain even if the deliveries were, in fact, a part of the war reparations paid to Britain.

Another Southern Muslim leader, Haji Sulong started a mass movement against the Thai rule in 1947. According to Surin, Haji Sulong was the real Muslim spiritual leader of Thailand and should have been nominated as Shaikh ul-Islam (Chularajamontri) instead of Chain Phromyong. Haji Sulong was arrested in 1948 and decided to seek political asylum in British Malaya.

There was an anti-government rebellion of 1,000 men in April 1948, led by Haji Abdul Rahman. This is known as the Dusun Nyor rebellion. The Cold War fears of communist rebellions reflected on all dissidents and led to a harsher treatment of all opposition in Thailand.

In this atmosphere, Haji Sulong and his son Ahmad Tomina disappeared in 1954. A number of militant separatist movements and guerrilla armies was established in the South, some of them being still active today.

The villagers of Baan Yai, however, do not seem to be very familiar with their own history or with the struggle of Pattani.

Conclusion

The Baan Yai Muslim community appears to be a close-knit community, yet rather isolated from the other Muslim communities in Thailand. The fragmentation at the village level originates from the administrative division into hamlets (or zones), where the two Muslim hamlets are located several kilometres from each other. The Muslims of hamlet Number One do not actively socialise with the Muslims in hamlet Number Eight, or vice versa. Only for a bigger event, like the charity fair in March 2003, did the villagers from the two hamlet join.

This fragmentation is thus mainly caused by the administrative structure of the village, but obviously also by the allegedly different timing of migration into the village. The villagers of hamlet Number One and hamlet Number Eight provided somewhat contradictory information concerning the history of the village.

The economic basis of the village appears to be rather ad hoc. To a certain extent, the hamlets are self-sufficient as they do have cattle, poultry, fishponds, small fields, gardens and fruit orchards. The land is quite barren and does not yield much surplus for sale. The earlier income-generating resource, pineapple cultivation, has recently been replaced by a totally new state-supported goat milk production. The economy is henceforth based on the policies of the present government and vulnerable to changes in these policies. It is also unclear when the villagers are due to pay back the loan to the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives. These borrowers consist of a community of illegal immigrants who might be forced to leave Thailand at short notice.

The three key persons of the hamlet Number One seem to be quite well connected with the surrounding society. The Imam meets with the other imams, and as a kamnan attends meetings with the other kamnans and officials in the Cha Am district. The Amid travels around on his dakwah and the village headman meets with state officials and runs his goat-milk bottling business. However, in the case of the Imam, it is interesting to note that he is only entitled to meet the Central, Northern and Northeastern imams, but not the Southern imams, who, in fact, should be his reference group, as the community does seem to perceive itself as a Pattani Malay community. The fragmentation of the Thai Muslim community seems to be of an administrative nature clearly created by the state authorities.

While the villagers might be reasonably knowledgeable about basic Islamic teachings and practices, they appear to suffer from a severe case of amnesia when it comes to the origins and history of the community. This might reflect the old Cold War policies of the Thai state, when all ethnic and religious minorities were perceived as a potential threat to the centralised and militarised state power. The new Constitution of 1997, however, does promise more freedom to ethnic and religious communities to promote their own traditions in terms of teaching minority languages and cultures. For the Baan Yai Muslims- both caddies and goat milk producers - this may provide an opportunity to reconstruct their own past.

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