Bangkok Muslims: Social Otherness and Territorial Conceptions

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Abstract

This paper discusses an alternative history of the Muslims in Bangkok. Rather than providing a mere chronological description, the paper problematises the relationship between social conceptions of the Muslims as the ‘other’ and territorial concepts of the nation and the capital city. The investigation goes through three periods. Before Bangkok was established as the new capital in 1782, in the form of a ‘walled’ city, Muslims had already been called ‘khaek’, a position of the outsiders. During the connected periods of reformation and nationalism between 1850s and 1940s, the Muslims were gradually drawn into the process of assimilation to be ‘thai-isalam’. This followed the emergence of the nation’s ‘bounded’ boundary. After the 1930s, Bangkok Muslims were increasingly associated to the ideological difference between the reformists (khana mai) and traditionalists (khana kao) which was viewed, too simply, as related to the difference between the ‘urban’ and the ‘rural’. The application here is an understanding of the relationship between shifts in the minority’s social status and transformations of Thailand and Bangkok’s spatial conditions not simply as historical facts but as sets of historical constructs.
In 2006 the first documentary focusing on the Muslims of Bangkok was released. The origins of this film, made by three Muslim directors – Panu Aree, Kong Rithdee and Kaweenipon Ketprasit – were significantly driven by the tragic events of 9/11, the recurring southern insurgency in Thailand from 2004 onwards, and the aftermaths of these on the lives of Bangkok Muslims. These events were starting points of a crucial period, when the minority must examine its identity against frequently circulating negative images. The film follows the daily lives of four Muslim men in a single day in the Thai capital. This is in parallel with the monologues of each participant contemplating and reflecting his opinions on various issues. What are intriguing, however, are not only the stories told by each participant, but also the film’s title: Khaek / In Between. This composite Thai-English name suggests the ambiguous position of being a Muslim in Thailand. The term ‘khaek’ is a very specific term used by the Thai majority to refer to Muslims in the sense that they are the ‘other’. But because the term also means guest in a welcoming sense, Thai Muslims are in the position of being ‘in between’. The title not only suggests a social status but also a spatial condition which, I suggest, is more than analogical.

The aim of this paper, ultimately, is to investigate the socio-spatial relationship of the Muslims in Bangkok through placing emphasis on the notion of otherness. To look at the relationship between the social and the spatial, it is necessary that the investigation is situated in the historical. This paper provides an alternative to the established history of the modern Thai nation by detailing the relationship between the Muslim minority and Thai society in different periods. In the present, the minority is commonly perceived as a group who can hardly be assimilated to ‘Thai culture’; yet in the past, the Muslims, though viewed as distinctive, were regarded in a very different light.

Although the concept of the ‘other’ seems central to the position of any Muslim minority group, theoretically it is one that has been frequently revisited in various disciplines. Consequently, rather than departing from a broad discussion of different perspectives, this paper looks at a localised discussion by Thongchai Winichakul, a Thai historian; his article, ‘The Others Within’, intersects the social categorisations of people in Thailand (previously Siam) through spatial categorisations. Discussing different groups of the Muslim minority and their

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1 This paper is a condensed version of the chapter Social Otherness and Territorial Conceptions which is part of the author’s doctoral research: Winyu Ardrugsa, ‘Stranger’ / ‘Home-Land’: Muslim Practice and Spatial Negotiation in Contemporary Bangkok (PhD Dissertation, Architectural Association, 2012).


different settlements and territorial conditions is not actually new; however, the
exploration of a particular relationship between the two through the notion of
otherness, I believe, is.

The ‘Others’ and the ‘Within’

The term ‘the Others Within’ is used by Winichakul to problematise the relationship
between anthropological ethnography and Thai history. With social and spatial
implications entwined, Winichakul investigates discourses which construct certain
groups as ‘others’, though they lived ‘within’ the territory of the nation. The
discussion is a specific investigation based on his famous book, Siam Mapped: A
History of the Geo-body of A Nation, which studies the emerging conception of
modern Siam as a nation defined by demarcated territory. The Others Within focuses
on the poetic travelogue (Nirat), written between the 1880s and 1920s by elite
Siameses who traveled throughout the country in order to understand the people and
the interiority of the modern nation as its territory started taking shape. Winichakul
emphasises that the significant role of ‘travel’ by noble travelers in such periods is to
gain knowledge, which is also an establishment of certain constructs.

In his discussion, Winichakul focuses on two intriguing terms: ‘chao pa’ (the
jungle people) and ‘chao bannok’ (the village people). Chao pa was used to signify
the ‘other’ based first on their place of living. Winichakul translated this as the
‘people of the wilderness’. ‘Pa’ literally means the jungle but in this context its
meaning was set against the civilised town. Winichakul suggests that these wild
people were considered only as objects “gazed at, dissected, catalogued, recorded, and
described”. He notes “rarely was there a ‘story’ or the presence of individuals”. Overall, chao pa becomes the ‘other’ for their strangeness (plaek pralat). They were
assumed to be ‘uncivilisable peoples’.

Unlike chao pa, chao bannok indicated the ‘other’ not in a cultural sense but
in a temporal one; they are thought of as the past version of the ‘Thai-self’. Bannok
are the rural villages; ban means home, house or village, while nok means outer or
outside. The popular image of bannok, synonymous with agricultural farmland and a
simple way of living, is always contrasted with the image of the capital (krung or
muang). The term is, therefore, tied to the notion of civilisation. But besides the
notion of progress which is temporally and geographically related, Winichakul
suggests that the term chao bannok was connected to the notion of loyalty.

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4 Winichakul, "The Quest For "Siwilai": A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the
Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam," The Journal of Asian Studies 59, no. 3 (2000).
5 Winichakul, "The Others Within: Travel and Ethno-Spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects
1885-1910," 43.
6 Winichakul, "The Quest For "Siwilai": A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the
Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam," 535.
7 Ibid.
8 Winichakul, "The Others Within: Travel and Ethno-Spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects
1885-1910," 54.
Winichakul argues that *chao pa* and *chao bannok* were products of “the discursive construction of a conceptual scheme of two kinds of the others, differentiated by two spatial domains”.\(^9\) For Winichakul, this is the construction of ‘ethno-space within the geo-body’ of Siam.\(^10\) In his final remark, he accepts that the theme can apply to investigating various groups also considered as ‘others’. The central question is to “ask how the Others of Bangkok are classified and represented by various kinds of knowledge”.\(^11\)

The term ‘the Others of Bangkok’ captures my interest. The Muslim majority of the deep southern provinces of Thailand certainly falls into this category. But the term questions the ambiguous position of the Muslims of Bangkok. They, too, could be considered as ‘others’ living at the centre of the Thai kingdom; here, the term ‘within’ could be reframed not simply as the territory of the modern nation-state but also through its various conceptions. Based on certain periods of transformation of the kingdom and the capital, in the following discussions I put forward sets of relationships between social otherness and territorial conception as related to Thai Muslims.

*Khaek* and the Walled City

Since before the Bangkok period, the Muslims have been generally known by the term ‘*khaek*’, literally meaning guest and visitor. Considering that ancient towns and cities, called ‘*muang*’, were enclosed by walls, the term indirectly suggests a social-territorial conception. The presence of the wall significantly underpinned the relationship between Muslim foreigners and the Siamese court. It encircled Bangkok’s initial core, and in so doing created geographical distinction between the central and the peripheral, between the near and the far. Many different settlements of ‘*khaek*’ originated in relation to this spatial relationship.

Established as the capital in 1782 by King Rama I (Phraphutthayotfa, reign until 1809), the rise of Bangkok marked the beginning of the Chakri dynasty. The town was founded following Ayutthaya, a kingdom which lasted for over 400 years but fell to the Burmese in 1767, and Thonburi, a kingdom which existed in transition for only 15 years. At the time, Bangkok was already a village. According to the popular understanding, the name Bangkok means an area of olive trees (‘*bang*’ means canal and also the hamlet located by the canal, while ‘*kok*’, short for *makok*, means the olive).\(^12\) Because wars with neighbouring kingdoms were highly possible; indifferent from other ‘*muang*’, Bangkok was built as a walled city. There were layers of fortification. At the outermost, Bangkok is surrounded by Chao Phraya River on

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\(^9\) Winichakul, "The Quest For "Siwilai": A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam," 535.


\(^11\) Ibid., 57.

\(^12\) Sujit Wongthes, *Krungthep Ma Jark Nai? (Bangkok: The Historical Background)* (Bangkok: Matichon, 2005), 26.
the west and a new manmade canal on the east.\textsuperscript{13} Along these waterways, the town was protected by walls and forts (Figure 1.1).

Despite being enclosed by walls, the inhabitants of early Bangkok were heterogeneous. Sujit Wongthes argues that these inhabitants were not only Thai but, more importantly, there was no shared and obligatory concept of being ‘Thai’.\textsuperscript{14} Based on the literature \textit{Nang Noppamas}, he suggests that there were people speaking

\textsuperscript{13} This section of the River Chao Phraya was originally a man-made canal. Wongthes, \textit{Krungtheb Ma Jark Nai? (Bangkok: The Historical Background)}, 34, 108.

\textsuperscript{14} Wongthes, \textit{Krungtheb Ma Jark Nai? (Bangkok: The Historical Background)}, 188. Srisaka Vallibhotama, “Sai-Sakul Sulatan Sulaiman Shar [The Lineage of Sultan Sulaiman Shar],” in \textit{Mutsalim Nai Prathet-Thai [Muslims in Thailand]}, ed. Prayoolsak Chalainadecha (Bangkok: The Islamic Library of the Lineage of Sultan Sulaiman, 1996), 75. Nevertheless, during the Thonburi period, there was a prohibition, punishable by death, that did not allow local Thais to accept Islam (called the religion of Priest Mahamad). Direk Kulsiriswasd, \textit{Khwam Sumpan Kaung Mutsalim Taang Prawut-Saht Lae Wunna-Kadee Thai [The Historical and Literary Relations of Muslims in Thailand]}, 25.
over sixty languages. In relation to *khaek*, there were twelve groups of them; it seems certain that six were Muslim. In addition, the figure of *khaek*, mostly Arabs or Persians, was found depicted alongside other figures of different races and origins on walls and doors in late Ayutthaya and early Bangkok periods (Figure 1.2). In general, it seems evident that from Bangkok beginnings there were various groups of Muslims – Persians, Arabs, Indians, Malays, Chams, etc. By focusing on specific communities, the locations of these early Muslim settlements allow significant understandings of the social position of each group.

![Figure 1.2: Depiction of Muslim Foreigners on a door of a shrine at Wat Phrachetupon](image)

The Muslim group that seemed to have the most influential role was the Shiite Persians, who were called ‘*khaek persia*’. There is evidence that generations of these

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15 Wongthes, *Krungthep Ma Jark Nai?* (Bangkok: The Historical Background), 188-203.
16 Kulsiriswasd, *Khwan Sumpun Kaung Mutsalmim Taang Prawut-Saht Lae Wunna-Kadee Thai* [The Historical and Literary Relations of Muslims in Thailand], 22.
Muslims had already served the royal court of Ayutthaya as ministers, generals and religious leaders. The most prominent figure was Sheikh Ahmad, a Persian Muslim who rose in the reign of King Song Tham (1610-28) to the positions of Krom Thakwah and Krom Thaklang, which are comparable to modern commercial ministers. He was also appointed the first Chularajmontri, the leader of all Muslims. After the fall of Ayutthaya, many families of these Muslims moved to Thonburi, the new capital. They settled adjacent to the city wall and on the bank of Bangkok Yai Canal connecting to Chao Phraya River. After the immigration, some Persian noblemen continued to serve in the royal court of Thonburi and, subsequently, Bangkok. They were granted a plot of land from King Rama I to build a Shiite mosque, Kudi Luang. The word Luang signifies the royal patronage. Because of the continued relationship between the Persians and the Siamese court during the Ayutthaya, Thonburi and early Bangkok periods, their settlements always seemed to be located within the vicinity of these kingdoms’ centres.

The second distinct group of Muslims in early Bangkok was the Chams, or ‘khaek cham’. Originating in the Kingdom of Champa located in modern Cambodia, many immigrated to Siam. The group took a significant role under King Ekathotsarat (1605-10) as a group of voluntary soldiers serving the kingdom. They were known as Krom Asa-Cham, literally the unit of Cham volunteers. They served the royal court in this function until the beginning of the Bangkok era. In the last great battle with Burma in 1785, the Battle of Nine Armies, the group fought on the side of the King. Chaiwat Satha-Anand wrote “when the Burmese were defeated, in an act of appreciation, King Rama I graciously granted a piece of land to these Cambodian Muslims where they built their homes”. For Kasem Tuamprathom this piece of land could already have had a settlement of Cham captives brought back from a series of wars with the Khmer kingdom, dating to the Thonburi period. Wongthes also notes that the Cham captives helped, during the establishment of Bangkok, to construct the city canals in the area and were consequently allowed to settle there. These stories seem to represent the origin and expansion of the community in different periods. What is important here is that the community, now situated at the heart of central


18 The mosque is also known as Kudi Chao Sen. Both the Sunni community at Kudi Yai and the Shitte community at Kudi Luang had a very good relationship and formed a large Muslim community in the former centre of Thonburi. Chalainadecha, Mutsalim Nai Prathet-Thai [Muslims in Thailand], 38, 43. (Prayool, 38, 43) Omar Farouk Bajunid, "The Other Side of Bangkok: A Survey of Muslim Presence in Buddhist Thailand's Capital City," 44.


22 Wongthes, Krungthep Ma Jark Nai? (Bangkok: The Historical Background), 116.
Bangkok, was not located within or immediately outside city walls, but the town’s periphery. This specific geographical condition reflected another distinct relationship between the Siamese court and the Muslim minority.

Besides the Persians and the Chams, the Malays, or ‘khaek malayu’, was another significant Muslim group. Despite their various roles, the relationship between the majority of Malay Muslims and the Siam Kingdom had been established largely through conflicts. The southern Islamic kingdoms of Patani and Kedah were tributary states under Siam. There were times when these states decided to stop the overlordship, which frequently became the reason that Siam sent troops to subjugate the rebellion. To decrease the possibility of further insurgency, and to obtain labour forces, the large amount of Malay war prisoners and populations were relocated to Ayutthaya and Bangkok as captives. There were two groups of captives. Muslims from noble families were allowed to live in the area close to the palace complex across the river to the south, known later as Siyak Ban Khaek or the junction of the khaek community. The majority however was broken into a number of groups to settle in the outer areas around the capital’s agricultural farmlands. There is a record of King Rama III using the terms ‘outside’ or ‘out there’, as opposing to ‘in here’, for specifying the area where the group should be settled. A reason for the distribution was to protect a chance of uprising. The largest group of these Malay commoners was placed on the peripheral periphery east of Bangkok. They served as labourers in rice growing and canal construction. Although these areas are now under the administration of Bangkok, in the past they were remote areas. Unlike the Persians

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23 Please note the difference between Patani (also Fatani), which was the ancient kingdom, and Pattani, which is now a province in southern Thailand.


25 This was a record noted by the official Luang Udomsombat on a conversation between the King Rama III and Praya Rachawangsan that [if] the mosque has an adequate area, do resting them for a comfort. Praya Rachawangsan replied that the area of the mosque at Nang Hong canal [the mosque Tonson located slightly across the grand palace] is adequate. [The king] said putting them in here first, looking after those who are ill, bringing the doctor to nurse,... taking care, arranging food, don't let them be starved. If in the future more families were sent in at a large amount, then arranging to move to settle communities out there. Then the king asked how many people came from muang sai [a southern town, Saiburi, split from Patani after the 1816 uprising]. Praya Rachawangsan replied that there are 3,545 muang sai men. [The king] ordered to take care with effort...If there are more sent in, arranging to move to settle communities out there. This is my translation; all italics are my emphasis. The phrase in here is used for the term 'nai nö'. The term 'outside' used here replaces the term ‘kang nök’ while ‘out there’ is translated from the phrase ‘yu nök’. The word ‘nai’ means ‘in’ and the word ‘nök’ equals ‘out’. Jitmoud, *Klum Chat-Pun Chao Thai-Mutsalim (Ethnic Group: Thai Muslim)*, 112-113. Referred to Luang Udomsombat, *Jod-Mai Luang Udomsombat [The Documents of Luang Udomsombat]* (Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department, 1987), 169-170. in Ampan Na Pattalung, *Sai-Sakul Sulatan Sulaiman B.E. 2145-2531 [The Lineage of Sultan Sulaiman A.D. 1602-1988]* (Bangkok: Amarin Printing Group, 1988), 267.
and the Chams, the Malay captives, who formed the majority, did not have much of a relationship with the centre of Bangkok.

The locations of these early settlements of the Persian, Cham and Malay Muslims reflect not only different degrees of social otherness or different groups of ‘khaek’, but also register differences in spatial relationships between ethnic communities and the centre of ‘muang siam’, or Bangkok. Here, the relationship between the centre of early Bangkok and Muslim enclaves – the walled city, ‘muang’, and ethnic communities, ‘ban’ or ‘moo-ban’ – implies a socio-spatial logic based on the distances between an established centre and surrounding nodes of concentration.

‘Thai-Isalam’ and the Mapped Territory of the Nation

From the second half of the nineteenth century, the statehood of Siam was altered by its increasingly tense relationship with western imperial powers. Ever since Siam’s territory had started taking identifiable shape, Muslims were gradually included in processes of integration and assimilation in order to become citizens of the unified nation. Significant stages in the processes could be roughly discussed in relation to the period when Siam entered a great reformation and the period when Siam began to be influenced by racial nationalism. In relation to the Muslims, this is in fact the discussion on how the minority, previously known by the term ‘khaek’, gradually became identified as ‘Thai’. Additionally, this change in the social concepts of the minority in these two periods was also a transformation in concepts of the nation’s territorial existence, which was based largely on the representation of the map.

During Siamese Reformations

The Siam kingdom and the British Empire signed the free trade agreement, the ‘Bowring Treaty’, in 1855; this marked the moment when the traditional enclosures of the capital increasingly lost their significance. In 1851, King Mongkut (Rama IV, ruling between 1851-68) ordered the construction of the third ring of canals and forts on the east side of the city (Khlong Phadung Krung Kasem). There was, however, no wall; the canal was meant for transportation. This reflected a significant transition in the form of the city; due to growth in trade and population, Bangkok could no longer be delimited by walls and canals.27

The expanding territory of the capital was in contrast with the boundary of the kingdom which was soon to be delimited. Before the pressures of Western powers on the Indochinese peninsula, the territories of Siam and other states were never clearly demarcated. In Siam Mapped, Winichakul investigated how Siam was constructed through the new knowledge and technology of mapping.28

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began with the hiring of a British surveyor, James McCarthy. The kingdom’s modern map was published in 1888 and later in 1900 (see Figure 1.3). Ironically, the final shape of Siam was created not by Siam’s efforts alone, but through a series of conflicts and negotiations with Britain and France.

Figure 1.3: Map of the Kingdom of Siam and Its Dependencies (1900). This is the second version of the map; the 1888 edition presented the Malay Peninsula in a separated frame (Courtesy of Thavatchai Tangsirivanich).
The eastern border conflicts between Siam and France were concluded in the 1907 treaty, in Bangkok, by military enforcement; the Chao Phraya River was blocked by two gunboats and the palace was held at gunpoint for days. For Winichakul, this incident was a ‘scar’ which deeply affected the Siamese court and generations of elites. In addition to the 1894 agreement on the western border between Siam and British Burma, the dispute over the Malay Peninsula was finalised in 1909. This marked a turning point for the Islamic south as four Malay states, Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis and Kedah, officially became part of the British Empire, while the sultanate of Patani came to an end as it was annexed to Siam.

Winichakul coined the famous term ‘geo-body’ to describe Siam as a spatial entity; it is only through the presence of this ‘body’ that the nationhood of modern Siam existed. In parallel to, and because of, the change in concept of territoriality, the kingdom also went through a significant administrative shift. Under the newly-engineered centralised system of ‘thesaphiban’, ‘protection or control over territory’, the powers of kings and lords of tributary states were gradually decreased.

At the intersection of the births of ‘geo-body’ and administrative centralisation, a unified concept of citizenship was also being constructed, in which people were full members of the state. The signs emerged around the end of the nineteenth century, when King Chulalongkorn abolished slavery and set up the system of conscription. The notions of the ‘Thai race’, chon-chat-thai, and the ‘Thai nation’, prathet-thai, started being emphasised to match the European idea of the nation as a political unity of people of the same race; however, the country was still known as Siam.

The period of transformations in Siam’s territory and citizenship, during the reigns of King Rama IV and King Rama V, was the beginning of an ambiguous positioning of the Muslim minority. This was exemplary in the case of Muslim immigrants from South Asia. As a result of the Bowring Treaty, there was a significant influx of Muslims from present-day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. No specific term was used to refer to the group, but they were generally called ‘khaek tes’. These Muslims were not only attracted by the possibility of international commerce opened by the treaty, but also by the extraterritorial legal protection they had as subjects of the British Raj. Shops, offices and communities of these Muslim groups were founded in several commercial districts. When Siam reached territorial agreements with colonial powers, the extraterritorial right was ended. All Indo-

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30 Gilquin, The Muslims of Thailand, 68.
33 Ibid., 63-64.
34 Raymond Scupin, "Thai Muslims in Bangkok: Islam and Modernisation in a Buddhist Society" (University of California, Santa Barbara, 1978), 36-43. Ratchanee Sardprem, "The Role of Muslims in the Central and Southern Parts of Thailand During the Rattanakosin Period A.D. 1782-1910 " (Silpakorn University, 1978), 56-57.
36 Baker and Phongpaichit, A History of Thailand, 64.
Pakistani Muslims who continued to live in Siam became citizens of the kingdom. These Muslims, however, were still recognised by the general term ‘khaek’, like other Muslim groups. To sum up, at the time when Siam became materially represented through the map of its ‘geo-body’, Muslims were ambiguously positioned between being part of Siam’s population and being the ‘others’.

**Under Thai Nationalisms**

As Siamese rulers were influenced by the then worldwide ideology of nationalism, the position of Muslim populations was significantly changed. The concept of ‘Thainess’, initiated during the reign of King Rama V, gained immense momentum in the following reign of King Rama VI, Vajiravudh and later, when the absolute monarchy was overthrown in 1932 under the administration of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram.

During the reign of Vajiravudh (1910-25), the king particularly emphasised the notion of ‘chat thai’ as the country where the ‘Thai race’ and ‘Thai culture’ were supreme. The non-Thais were viewed as the others. Based on the British model of ‘God, King and Country’, Vajiravudh also conceived the triangular relationship of ‘Chat, Sassana, Pramahakasat’ or Nation, Religion and Monarchy, as a foundation of Siam’s identity. It was also the initiative of King Vajiravudh in 1917 that these institutions be immortalised in the national tricolor flag; red is for nation, white is for Buddhism and blue is for the king. In 1913, the Nationality Act was released, including all who were born in Siam to have ‘Thai nationality’. According to the law, Muslims in Siam seemed to officially become ‘Thai’.

On 24 June 1932, ‘Khana Ratsadon’ or People’s Party, a group of Siamese military officers and civilians, conducted a coup seizing the power of King Rama VII (Prajadhipok, reign 1925-35) and replaced the absolute monarchy with a constitutional one. But during the two periods when Marshal Phibunsongkhram (Phibun) became the prime minister, between 1938-44 and 1948-57, the nationalist ideology was furthered with the rise of militaristic power. During 1939 and 1942, Phibun’s government issued a series of ‘cultural mandates’, known as ‘ratthaniyom’, aiming to create a ‘civilised’ Thai nation. The first edict marked a new beginning by changing the country’s name from Siam to Thai (Thailand in English) and announcing that all Siamese be called ‘Thai’. In the declaration, the reason provided was that the word ‘Thai’ had been more popular among citizens than the word ‘Siam’.

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37 Noteworthy were the Cham, and some Malays, who are still found being called by the terms ‘khaek cham’ and ‘khaek malayu’ in a letter of tax exemption as a reward for their great contribution in the navy of King Mongkut. Jitmoud, *Khum Chat-Pun Chao Thai-Mutsalim (Ethnic Group: Thai Muslim)*, 194-195.


40 The leader of the military branch was Phibunsongkhram while the leader of the civilians was Pridi Banomyong. It should be noted that in the civilian group there were five Muslims participating in the event. Chalainadecha, *Mutsalim Nai Prathet-Thai [Muslims in Thailand]*, 63.
Elsewhere, other racial reasons were given based on the notion that the name Siam “is not in accordance with the race of citizens who are Thai…the Thai race is the majority in the present time. It is appropriate to call the nation by honouring the Thai race”⁴¹ Ultimately, this was an attempt to re-conceive the nation as a land of the Thai.

In other edicts, principles of national unity and progress were emphasised, but these also included specific norms and practices which had everyday implications. It was during the peak of Thai nationalism that various Muslim groups in Siam were re-conceived as Thais, not simply in the broad sense of the 1913 Nationality Act, in which the heterogeneity of populations survived, but in a mandatory sense that Thais must be homogeneous. Thanes Arpornsuwan suggests that the term *thai-isalam*, along with the term *thai-mutsalim*, have their origins under Phibun’s policy to impose a certain unity on the Thai nation.⁴² Ironically, the term was officially rejected in Phibun’s third edict itself to protect a wider usage.

![Figure 1.4: ‘The Culture of Thailand’: Don’t and Do (1941)](image)

The attempt to promulgate the homogeneous Thai identity, of which the invention of the term *thai-isalam* was part, did not continue without affecting the life of the minority. The immediate effect of ‘ratthaniyom’ was harsh among the Malay Muslims in the southernmost provinces. For example, ‘the Culture of Thailand’ was enforced, which comprised rules of ‘do’ and ‘don’t’ for dressing when ‘going into public places and streets’ (Figure 1.4). The policy assimilating Muslim populations

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⁴¹ Charnvit Kasetsiri, *Jark Sa-Yahm Pen Thai Naam Nun Sumkun Cha-Nai? [from Siam to Thailand: How Significant Is the Name?]* (Bangkok: Matichon, 2005), 29, 36, My translation. These reasons were given by Luang Wichitwathakan, the most influential advisor to Phibun regarding nationalism. See further: Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*, 156-159.

was, nevertheless, not limited only to the south but also operated in the central region where considerable amounts of Muslims resided, especially the Malays. Jitmoud notes that the pressures of Phibun’s administration on assimilating and integrating Muslims had such a far reaching impact that some minorities decided to renounce Islam.  

Figure 1.5: Map of History of Thailand’s Boundary  

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The impulse behind all attempts to unite different groups of population under the name ‘Thai’ seems to have a territorial concern at its foundation. Between 1935 and 1936, a series of maps was published illustrating Khun Wichitmatra’s conceptions of the origin of the Thais and (retroactively imagined) territories of Siam in different periods. Within the series, one of the most important maps seemed to be the one projecting all territories considered lost to Burma and significantly to Britain and France.\(^45\) In 1940 this map was distributed again under the campaign of Phibun’s government to have these territories returned from colonial powers (Figure 1.5).

During the Second World War, Phibun took sides with Japan, allowing Thailand to be used as a passage and base, with the hope of gaining back territories occupied by Britain and France. This is to fulfill the constructed aspiration of ‘the Great Thai Empire’ (Maha-anajak-thai) which obtained expansive territory. But when Japan lost the war in 1945, the dream collapsed.

Perhaps, according to Winichakul, the aspiration to have the Great Thai Empire was an effect of the 1893 crisis which created the concept of ‘the loss of territories’ (kan soonsia dindaen). Until now, it addresses the sentiment that we, the Thais, lost our lands, should have them back, and there shall be no further loss. The implication here is that the social identity of homogeneous Thainess is also imaginarily limited to the actual ‘land’ of the nation. This was evident in the third state edict which announced that “names which divide the Thai people into different groups were not appropriated to the condition of the Thai nation as one which cannot be divided”.\(^46\)

Throughout the periods of Siamese reformation and Thai nationalism, concepts of citizenship evolved alongside concepts of territoriality of the nation, from the ‘geo-body’ to the ‘lost territories’. The position of minority groups as the ‘others’, too, were altered to suit these concepts. The attempt to change Muslim position, from ‘khaek’ to ‘Thai’, was never fully completed, because the singular concept of Thainess and established practices persist until the present. Within the relationship between the terms ‘Thai’ and ‘Islam’, there remains a sense of foreignness. For Decha Tangseefa, this is the ‘inclusive exclusion of the others’.\(^47\)

‘Khana Kao’, ‘Khana Mai’ and the Urban-Rural Distinction

During the nationalist period, when Muslims became increasingly ‘Thai-ised’, a new sense of otherness based on the difference between ‘reformism’ and ‘traditionalism’


\(^{46}\) Phibunsongkhram, “Ratta-Niyom Cha-Bub Tee Sahm: Garn Riek Chue Chao-Thai [The Third State Edict: The Name of the Thais].” My emphasis.

was emerging within the community of the minority. An interesting issue here is the possibility that such a difference appeared and persists in correlation with the changing conditions of Bangkok. Although it is true that not all Muslims in the capital identify themselves with specific encampments, the tension between the two religious traditions has always existed in the everyday life. Likewise, the growing difference between the city and the countryside has been an undeniable reality of transformation. Consequently, the development of the conflict from the 1930s onwards marked not only the moment when Muslim settlements started to be understood in relation to the categorisation of modern ‘khana mai’ and conservative ‘khana kao’, but also in relation to the distinction between the ‘urban’ and the ‘rural’. I study Raymond Scupin’s work, *Thai Muslims in Bangkok: Islam and Modernisation in a Buddhist Society*, which offers insights into the tension between the two ideologies from around the 1930s to 1970s.48 In particular, I bring forward and add the territorial understanding of the conflict to the discussion.

‘Khana mai’ and ‘khana kao’ are not two different denominations as in the case of the Shiite and the Sunni, but are two terms coined to describe the different factions of the reformists and traditionalists of Sunni Islam in Thailand.49 Literally, *khana mai* is the ‘new group’ while *khana kao* is the ‘old group’. In principle, the idea of a reformed Islam is the faithful return to the Texts, holding on to only the Qur’an and the teachings of the Prophet known as *hadith*.50 The revivalistic aspirations of the reformists mean not only to reject idolatry and innovation but also to give no significant role to classical and medieval interpretations and directions, which survive as the four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence: Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki and Shafi’i. The majority of Muslims in Thailand, however, follows the Shafi’i school. Besides the conflict at the level of principles and related religious practices, the reformed-traditional difference also appears in the way each group is related to existing sets of beliefs in the region. *Khana kao* is also a broad term used to refer to ‘folk’ and ‘syncretised’ Islam, while *khana mai* refers to the group which completely rejects these forms of tradition.

It is important to know how the notion of reformism arrived in Siam. Bangkok Muslims were not exposed to the idea of revival through a spectrum of movements but through the activity of one man. In 1926, Ahmad Wahab, an Indonesian man who escaped the Dutch authorities for his participation in anti-colonial activities, came to live in exile in Bangkok. Around the 1930s, he established the association An-Islahs, which has since actively promoted reformist thought through various publications.51

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48 Scupin, "Thai Muslims in Bangkok: Islam and Modernisation in a Buddhist Society".

49 The Shiite-Sunni difference is fundamentally based on the question of whether Islam has chief religious leaders after the prophet Muhammad.

50 This ideology emerged in eighteenth-century Saudi Arabia as an essential part of a religious movement led by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, later known, or rather labeled, as Wahhabism. The movement has a very close association to the Salafiyyah movement, which emphasises following examples set by Muslims of the patristic period.

51 Scupin actually noted this as Ansorisunnah Association but it should be An-Islahs. Scupin, "Thai Muslims in Bangkok: Islam and Modernisation in a Buddhist Society", 96.
Wahab passed away in 1966 but with the help of his students and followers the reformed direction of Sunni Islam began to be established in Thailand.

The growth of this new ideology in the capital did not spread without affecting the traditional form of Islam already practiced at the time. Mureed Timasen, a famous preacher in the revivalist path, agrees that this was indeed the crucial moment in which the Muslim community in Bangkok became divided into khana kao and khana mai encampments. And from this point, the relationship of the two became largely hostile.

Once the modern-traditional conflict had gradually taken shape, Bangkok entered another phase of considerable growth following the end of the Second World War lasting until the 1960s. Baker and Phongpaichit called this ‘the American Era’, as Thailand became an ally to the US to fight the spread of communism and gained large ‘development’ support. Central Bangkok was soon drastically different to the countryside. The population reached three million. The city was approximately ten kilometres in diameter (see Figure 1.6). But the area where the majority of Muslims now resides was largely undeveloped. It was only with the developments and constructions of Ramkhamhaeng road, facilities supporting the Asian Games of 1966 and Ramkhamhaeng University in 1971 that the transitional area east of Bangkok was transformed.

52 Scupin explains the earliest formal reaction: In this early period there were very few leaders within the traditional khana kau communities who were intellectually prepared to refute the arguments or approach of the khana mai Muslims. But in 1935, the first polemical attack directed at Ahmad Wahab and his followers 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 pamphlet represented the first response of the leadership of the khana kao Krungthep [Krungthep is Bangkok], or conservative ulama [Islamic scholars] to the khana mai ideology. Ibid., 121.

53 Mureed Timasen, "Sao-Poon Rum-Hai [The Stone Column Cries]." In addition, a Thai religious scholar, Fareed Fendy, writes: "Looking back for the past 30-40 years, it would be found that there had been violent disputes in the reformist-traditionalist conflict [khana mai-khana kao]. Both groups tried to bring forward evidences which they believed and practiced. And for the mentioned violence, it was imbued with gunshots' noises, projectiles, assaulting each other and many more. The severity went as far as mosques, friendships and families became separated, which are not right. The manifestation of the Sunnah in the past is not easy. Sometimes, it took blood and tears. Before today, it took the risk of life while some become disabled". Fareed Fendy, Garn Purm 'Wabihamdihe' Nai Ruku Lae Sajud [The Addition of the Phrase 'Wabihamdihe' in Bowing and Prostrating] (Bangkok: Nafarsi Book Centre, 2010), 6.

54 Baker and Phongpaichit, A History of Thailand, 140.

The emerging conflicts of *khana mai* and *khana kao* ideologies can be discussed geographically. In its formative years, the reform movement was highly associated with Bangkok’s urbanity; the movement established several centres in the capital and attracted a sizeable urban Muslim group. Two mosques could be considered the origins of the movement, Ansorisunnah and Al-Atik. The first is located in Thonburi’s Bangkok Noi, an old part of Bangkok opposite the historical centre. The second mosque, Al-Atik, is located in Charoen Krung, the commercial area that expanded along the river from the historical centre. Wahab’s life was closely associated with these two urban communities; his funeral was organised at Al-Atik while he was buried at Bangkok Noi.\(^56\) These two mosques became well-known centres for teaching reformed Islam in Bangkok. The inception and growth of the reform movement is best expressed by Scupin’s observation that “[t]he urbanisation of Bangkok provided the social ingredients for Islamic reform movement in Thailand. The movement attracted an urban based social clientele or intelligentsia rather than a rural constituency”.\(^57\)

While the *khana mai* movement emerged and was active mainly within the urban area of Bangkok, the *khana kao* group had its base in virtually all parts of the

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\(^{56}\) Timasen, “Sao-Poon Rum-Hai [The Stone Column Cries],” 54.

capital, both urban and rural. During the time when Suwannasat was active as a leader of the *khana kao* group, he taught Islam at Anyuman Institute located in Bangrak, a commercial district in central Bangkok. The institute was a significant centre producing religious teachers according to the Shafi’i school of thought. The mosque Kudi Yai, or Tonson, one of the oldest mosques in the capital in Thonburi district, also maintains the traditional path. Indeed, the base and connection of the traditionalists lay beyond Bangkok. This can be concluded from the first election of *Chularajmontri*, the Islamic leader, in which Suwannasat was chosen. Since 1949, the nominations and elections have been performed by Provincial Islamic Committees, of which the majority comes from the countryside. Scupin notes that “the great percentages of these committee members are viewed as and consider themselves to be *khana kao* Muslims”.

The relationships between the reformed and the urban and between the traditional and the rural could be straightforwardly conceived of as a division based on the city-countryside distinction. This is especially so when considering that the majority of Muslims in Thailand lived outside urban areas, both Bangkok and other provinces, and that Islam existing in rural areas significantly diverged from the form of Islam propagated in the city. However, the distinction between the urban and the rural as a background for the divergence between reformist and traditionalist groups is an oversimplification. As Scupin suggests, it is true there is a correlation between reformism and urbanism, this does not imply however that there is no similar correlation for the traditionalist. The traditionalist group in Bangkok was rather different from the traditionalist group in the rural area; to emphasise this Scupin added the name *krungthep*, a more common name for Bangkok in Thai, to make ‘*khana kao krungthep*’. It can be concluded that the conflict between *khana mai* and *khana kao* between the 1930s and 1970s was predominantly urban-based. Indeed, the schism significantly spread from Bangkok to all regions of Thailand.

### Muslims in Contemporary Bangkok?

This paper outlines the relationships between social and territorial conditions which come to shape general understandings of the Muslim minority in Bangkok. By following Thongchai Winichakul’s argument that the notion of ‘the others within’ is a set of socio-spatial constructs, the status of social otherness of the minority and the territorial transformations of Thailand and Bangkok are not considered as simply natural but parts of conceptual sets.

So far I have discussed three sets of relationships between social otherness and territory concerning the Muslim minority of Bangkok. All seem to be related to

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60 Ibid., 102.
each other in a historical sequence from the foundation of the capital in 1782 to the 1970s. Yet, these sets of social-territorial conceptions are still relevant to investigations of Bangkok Muslims in the present. Socially, the Muslim is no longer addressed as ‘khaek’ by the Thai government; they are called ‘Thai Muslim’, which is a correction of the term ‘thai-isalam’. Nevertheless, the term ‘khaek’ is still regularly used, emphasising the group as the ‘other’, especially when they resist following particular ‘Thai’ cultural practices. For the Muslims themselves, the relationship between khana kao and khana mai is greatly developed, as the reformists’ efforts in eliminating folk traditions are recognised by the traditionalists. Despite this, the category still plays an important role in day-to-day conflicts. Territorially, the inseparable nature of the nation’s ‘geo-body’ becomes a crucial frame of reference and representation for homogeneous Thai identity for both Thais and Thai Muslims (see Figure 1.6). In addition, there remains the concept of well-confined community, which sustains the oversimplified image of Muslim enclaves despite the fact that no ethnic community remains walled or isolated (see Figure 1.7). For the issue of khana mai and khana kao, although the reform movement spreads from the city to the traditionalist’s base in the countryside and the conflicts could be found nearly everywhere, the city is still a crucial site where interactions between the two groups emerge.

Figure 1.7: Image of mosques collaged within the ‘geo-body’ of Thailand
Figure 1.8: Imaginary map of Muslim enclaves which is largely conceived in relation to ethnic identities and histories of communities.

Although these concepts are still vital for understanding the socio-spatial condition of the Thai Muslim minority today, the limitation exists in their segregation. Most importantly, the concepts risk being outdated when considering current processes of Islamisation and urbanisation. This is a change on an international level, and in Thailand, during the last 30 to 40 years the Muslim world has entered a significant period of ‘Islamic resurgence’; this entails broad reconsiderations of Islam as both integral and alternative to modernity. The terrorists’ attack on the United States at the turn of the millennium, which engendered a worldwide negative image for the Muslim world, indirectly continues such movements of reviving and reasserting Islamic identity. Secondly, and in parallel to the first concern, Thailand has become part of the globalised world and one of Asia’s most important economic nations, while Bangkok’s growth increasingly merges urban and rural areas at a rapid pace. Within this context, an important question here is whether a more encompassing, yet particularly specific, framework could be constructed.
Figures

Figure 1.1: Department-of-Town-and-Country-Planning, “Bangkok in King Rama III’s Reign (A.D. 1824-1851),” Garn Pung Muang Nai Ratcha-Samai Prabaht Somdej Prachao-Yuhaob Bhumibol Adulyadej [Urban Planning in the Reign of the King Bhumibol Adulyadej].

Figure 1.2: “Pab Tee Pra-Too Dan-Nha Kang-Sai Kaung Phra-Wiharn Tit-Nua [the Illustration at the Front Left Door of the Northern Shrine],” in Sa-Mut-Pab Wat Phra-Chetupon Wimolmun-Galaram [the Photo Book of Phra-Chetupon Wimolmun-Galaram Temple] (Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department, 1992).

Figure 1.3: “Map of the Kingdom of Siam and Its Dependencies by James McCarthy,” Courtesy of Thavatchai Tangsirivanich and Museum of Siam, Bangkok.

Figure 1.4: “The Culture of Thailand,” in Anake Nawigamune, Garn Tang-Guy Samai Rattanakosin [Dressings in Rattanakosin Era], 2 ed. (Bangkok: Muang Boran 2004).

Figure 1.5: “Map of History of Thailand’s Boundary,” in Thongchai Winichakul, Geo-Body and History, trans. Puangthong Pawakapan, vol. 3, Far-Diow-Gun (July-September 2008), 84. Original Source: Sung-kep Ekasan Prawatsart Ror Sor 112 [The Compilation of Historical Documents Rattanakosin Era 112].

Figure 1.6: Compiled by the author from a series of maps: Thailand Survey Department, "Phaenthi Krunthep Thonburi [Map of Bangkok and Thonburi]," (Bangkok: Royal Thai Survey Department, 1965).

Figure 1.7: “Untitled image of mosques collaged on a map of Thailand,” in Nung-Seu Anu-Sorn Ngan Muadil Klang Hang Prathet-Thai Hor Sor 1429 [Memorial Book of the Central Maulidin (Prophet Muhammad's Birthday) Celebration of Thailand A.H. 1429], (Bangkok: 2008).

Figure 1.8: “Map of Nine Muslim Communities,” in Sai-Nam Sai-Yai Hang Kwarm Song-Jum [Stream and Bond of Remembrance] (Bangkok: Committee of Woman Affair of the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday Celebration A.H. 1428, 2007).

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