# Muslim "Others" in Buddhist Thailand[1]

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In this paper I will trace how Malay-speaking Muslims in southern Thailand have come to be construed by many Thai as the most radically "other" of peoples living within the Kingdom. It is my argument that this construal is a product in part of a view held by many Thai Buddhists, including influential leaders, that adherence to Islam combined with being a native speaker of Malay precludes being fully Thai. I argue that the negative view often heard among Thai regarding people of this region is also based on a racial stereotype. Thai governments have in the 21st century justified militant policies adopted toward the Malay-speaking Muslims of Thailand's most southernmost provinces on the basis of the view that these peoples are alien despite having deep roots in the area in which they live. This view is not, however, the only one held by Thai. I will conclude by discussing a significant Thai Buddhist perspective that seeks to promote tolerance toward peoples who are recognized as sharing a common humanity despite their differences from the dominant Thai Buddhist culture.[2]

The Legions of Mâra

The negative image of the Malay-speaking Muslims living in southern Thailand has its roots in premodern Siam. This is evident from a mid-nineteenth century temple painting at a wat in Songkhla, a city in a southern Thailand that borders on the provinces with Thai-Malay population.

At Wat Matchimawat in Songkhla there are mural paintings in an ordination hall that, like the mural paintings in many Thai temple-monasteries or *wats*, depict the life of the Buddha.[3] A climactic scene in this story occurs when the Buddha has
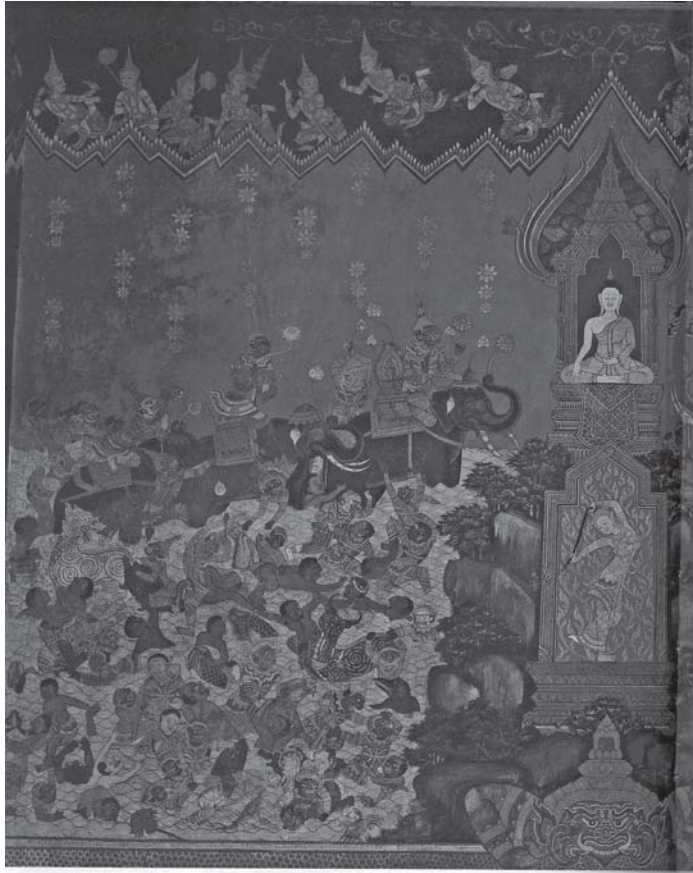
Figure 1. "The Defeat of Mâra" from the nineteenth century temple painting at Wat Matchimawat, Songkhla, southern Thailand.

reached enlightenment. The scene at Wat Matchimawat depicts him on the throne of enlightenment. Surrounding the Buddha are fearsome warriors led by Mâra, who in the scene at Wat Matchimawat, as in most Thai temple paintings, is depicted as a demon-king. Although Mâra, as Guruge (1997) has observed, in early Buddhist accounts was depicted as a deity who represented love and desire, in popular Theravâda Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia he is universally understood to be "Death, the Evil one, the Tempter (the Buddhist devil or principle of destruction)" (Rhys Davids and Stede 1972: 530, v. Mâra).

In the scene from the life of the Buddha at Wat Matchimawat (Figure 1), as in comparable scenes in all other Thai temple paintings, Mâra is associated with violent beings. His legions fail, however, to force the Buddha from the throne of enlightenment because the Buddha has "called the earth to be his witness". This act, in which the Buddha has moved his right hand from his lap where, as the left

Figure 2. Detail of "The Defeat of Mâra" from the nineteenth century temple painting at Wat Matchimawat, Songkhla, southern Thailand.

hand shows, it had been in a position for meditation, leads the Earth (*Thoranî* in Thai; *Dharani* in Pâli) in the form of a woman to emerge. The Earth Goddess wrings her hair and from it floods of water flow and drown Mâra's army.

My attention was drawn to the "Defeat of Mâra" (in Thai *Mâra phacôn*) because the cohort of Mâra includes not only beings that are clearly demons, but also humans (see Figure 2).[4] Among these dark figures are several bearded figures who clearly represent Malays or South Asians whom Thai call *khâçk*.[5] These images are significant given the role that Songkhla played in the nineteenth century in the Siamese expansion into the Malay Peninsula.

Songkhla is an ancient city, formerly known in Western literature by its Malay name of Singora, located on the east coast of southern Thailand. It had long been under Siamese authority and until the end of the nineteenth century was subordinated to the more significant southern Thai province of Nakhorn Sithammarat. In the early nineteenth century it gained increasing economic significance following the settlement in Songkhla of large numbers of Chinese. The Siamese court came to depend greatly on revenues from the trade and tin-mining dominated by Chinese migrants in Songkhla. Songkhla became, in effect, a Chinese fiefdom when a Chinese

man was appointed as governor of the province. These Chinese migrants "became Thai," however, through their embrace of Thai Buddhism (see Vella 1957: 61-62).

The province of Songkhla became an important outpost of the Siamese empire. In 1791 Songkhla's governor had been given administrative authority over the Malay vassal sultanates of Patani and Trengganu. Although Trengganu would eventually be included within Malaysia, Patani would remain under Siamese authority. The sultanate of Patani was divided administratively by the Siamese court into seven small statelets and these would later be reconfigured as the three provinces of Pattani,[6] Narathiwat, and Yala. It is in these three provinces that there has recently been significant violence between Malay-speaking Muslims and military, police, and other elements that represent the Thai State.[7]

It was a combination of the greater political significance given to Songkhla by the court in Bangkok and the increase in wealth among the Chinese (now Sino-Thai) inhabitants of the province that led in the mid-nineteenth century to a signi-ficant restoration of Wat Matchimawat. The mural paintings now seen at the *wat* were first undertaken during this restoration (Silpchai Chinprasert 1957: 75).

What I want to focus on is inclusion of the *khâçk* as members of the legions of Mâra. These images point to such *khâçk* being subject to death (in this case by drowning) because they are deemed to have attacked the Buddha. Those who threaten the Buddha – and, thus, his religion – have forfeited their humanity. This interpretation underlay the condemnation that Kittivuddho Bhikkhu, a high-ranking monk, made in the mid-1970s of Communists whom he identified with Mâra. As such, they could be killed because they were less than human (see Keyes 1978). I certainly do not wish to imply that all Buddhists in Thailand – including monks as well as laity – hold that there are some categories of persons who can be attacked and even killed because they threaten the Buddhist religion, but I do want to argue that such a perspective makes sense in Thai Buddhist terms.

Buddhist Thailand

Thailand is a Buddhist country. This assertion is found in almost any general work about the country. The characterization must, however, be parsed to reveal the different meanings that are associated with it.

According to the official census for 2000, 94.6% of the population were Buddhists,[8] although this figure most certainly understates the percentage of non-Buddhists and especially Muslims in the population. Gilquin (2005: 41), whose book on Islam in Thailand is the best general work on Thai Muslims, estimates on the basis of data provided him by the Islamic Committee Office of Thailand that Muslims account for between 7.5 and 8.0% of the population. It is not the fact that the vast majority of Thai citizens are identified as Buddhist that makes Thailand a Buddhist country. Buddhism is officially recognized as the religion of the country although not

formally as the state religion[9], and the King must be a Buddhist and serve as the ultimate patron for Buddhism. For these reasons most in Thailand – including non-Buddhists – consider the country to be Buddhist.

This said, it is important to quickly dispel any notion that all Thai Buddhists share the same religious outlook or the same perspective on non-Buddhists. In a recent paper, McCargo (2009b; also see 2004 and 2009a) has strongly attacked my assessment (especially Keyes 1999) that a "civil religion" had emerged in Thailand that is "inclusivist and tolerant". In the paper on which McCargo bases his attack I actually argued that establishment Buddhism, whose roots lie in policies instituted by the Thai state beginning in the early twentieth century and which had prevailed through the 1960s, was radically undermined by the crisis in the Thai political order that began in the 1970s. At the outset of that paper, I wrote that "the series of conflicts between proponents of an older establishment Buddhism and the alternative Buddhisms that have emerged resulted not in the triumph of a politicized Buddhism but in the shaping of a new understanding of *satsana*, "religion," that accommodates a diversity of Buddhisms (and even non-Buddhist religions). This new understanding, I argued, constitutes a "'civil Buddhism,' comparable to civil religions found elsewhere" (Keyes 1999: 1).[10] This inclusivist understanding of "religion" did not, however, lead to the disappearance of interpretations of religion by Thai. What I do maintain is that at least since the late 1990s there has been a tension between "civil Buddhism" and other more nationalistic versions of Buddhism, the most prominent representative of which is what I term "establishment Buddhism".[11]

"Establishment Buddhism" is manifest in the hierarchy of Buddhist monks, or the sangha, that is under an ecclesiastical council headed by the patriarch (*sangharât*) appointed by the King on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. It is these monks associated with the established sangha hierarchy who are present at royal and state-sponsored rituals. Some members of the established sangha have also been co-opted by military officials for their counter-insurgency efforts in southern Thailand. The established sangha does not, however, exercise unchallenged control of Buddhist discourse in Thailand.

There is one significant Buddhist sect, namely Santi Asoke, that is closely associated with Chamlong Srimuang, a prominent politician – whose clergy are not under the establishment hierarchy because its leader was expelled from the state-sponsored sangha. The monk who leads another sect, Dhammakaya, a sect backed by Thaksin Shinawatra, a former Prime Minister and the leader, albeit from outside Thailand, of a large political movement, only barely escaped being expelled from the established sangha. Even though this leader retained his membership in the sangha, his sect, which has a large middle-class following, has taken a distinctly different approach to Buddhism than that of the established church. Many Thai non-governmental organization activists as well as many other educated Thai look to monks and lay-leaders associated with what is called "socially-engaged Buddhism"

Figure 3. Thailand's "Deep South" – the provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala whose populations are predominantly Malay-speaking Muslims

for moral authority rather than to the establishment sangha. Further, there is a significant, but indeterminate number, of mainly middle-class Thai who are what I have called "post-Buddhists". That is, they still identify as Buddhists, but rarely participate in Buddhist rites and are intensely secular in their actions.[12]

Because of the fragmentation of Buddhism since the 1970s, the stances taken by some establishment monks and some military and administrative officials who link themselves with establishment Buddhism toward non-Buddhist minorities cannot be assumed to represent the perspectives of all Buddhists in Thailand. While it became difficult, I recognize, since the early twenty-first century for proponents of "inclusivist and tolerant" Buddhism to be heard, their voices have far from disappeared. I will return to this point later in my paper.

Muslims in Buddhist Thailand

Muslims were found in the Siamese empire from which modern Thailand has evolved. In his late seventeenth century account of his visit to the Siamese capital of Ayuthaya, the French envoy Simon de la Loubère noted that the Siamese King had sent as an envoy to Persia one Agi Selim who was identified as a Moor. This envoy returned with a Persian ambassador who "was a *Moula*, or Doctor of the Law of *Mahomet*" whom the Persian king had asked to instruct the king of Siam in the Islamic religion. The King of Siam received the envoy, but did not convert. "Generally speaking, these trading Kings do exceedingly make use of the pretence of Religion, for the increase of their Commerce" (la Loubère 1969 [1688]: 110). The tolerance of religions other than Buddhism in order to advance trade was characteristic not only of Kings of Siam, but also of Buddhist rulers of small principalities in Northern Thailand. Whereas the Muslims who were involved in trade with Siam came mainly from Persia and India, those in northern Thailand were primarily Hui or Chinese Muslims from southern China, whom the Thai call *cîn hô*. In addition, there is also a community of Cham from Vietnam who had originally been recruited in late Ayuthayan times as "auxiliary soldiers" (Gilquin 2005: 21).[13]

The Muslim communities associated with the court in Ayuthaya and subsequently Bangkok as well as those involved in trade in what became northern Thailand remained very small. Their descendants would, for the most part, become "Thai" other than in religion. That is, they replaced their original languages with Thai and came to regard themselves as subjects of the Siamese/Thai king.

Muslims in what became southern Thailand have a very different history than the Muslims of central and northern Thailand. In the sixteenth century, King Naresuan (r. 1590-1605) conquered an area of the Malay Peninsula south of the Siamese outpost of Nakhon Sithammarat. This area included several Malay sultanates whose rulers had embraced Islam since the fifteenth century.

The relationship between the Siamese court and the outlying parts of the empire began to undergo radical changes following the establishment in 1782 of the Chakri dynasty with its capital in Bangkok. Rama I (r 1782-1809) deployed significant military forces to establish control over the Lanna principalities in the north that had previously been under Burmese rule, to extend Siamese authority over Lao and other Tai-speaking statelets in the northeast and east including beyond the left bank of the Mekong River, to challenge the Vietnamese empire for control of Cambodia, and to assert control over a number of Malay sultanates in the northern part of the Malay peninsula. In the latter case, Siamese troops in 1785 attacked Patani and destroyed the palace of the sultan. The ruling family of Patani who had resisted the Siamese force was taken to Bangkok. The Siamese royal chronicles referred to this family as *khâçk*, thereby setting a precedent for how people of this area would be construed in Siamese thinking.[14] Although the Siamese court would eventually succeed

in transforming Lao, Khonmüang (Yuan, Northern Thai), Khmer and the related Kui, as well as immigrant Chinese into "Thai" (Keyes 1967, 1971; Tej Bunnag 1997; Thongchai Winichakul 1994; Skinner 1957), this was not the case for the Malay-speaking peoples of the former sultanate of Patani.

The people living in the former sultanate were eventually re-organized as the three provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala and not only retained a strong social memory of belonging to an independent polity, but they resented the efforts of the Thai state to replace Muslim schools (*pondok*) with Thai government schools (*rôngrian*) in which the medium of instruction was standard Thai instead of Yawi – Patani Malay written with Arabic script (Uthai Dulyakasem 1981, 1991). There were also tensions created with the introduction of Thai law instead of Muslim-based law (Loos 2006). Although the Thai state succeeded in asserting authority over this area, resistance continued to erupt throughout the twentieth century. As this history has been well described elsewhere (see Chaiwat Satha-anand 1986; Che Man, Wan Kadir 1995; Davisakd Puaksom 2008; Farouk 1984, 1986; Nantawan Haemindra 1976, 1976-77; Suhrke 1970-71, 1975, 1977; Surin Pitsuwan 1985, 1988; Uthai Dulyakasem 1984, 1986), I do not wish to repeat it here. Rather, I wish only to emphasize that the roots of current conflict in southern Thailand lie in the persistent efforts of Malay-speaking Muslims living within the territories formerly belonging to the sultanate of Patani to maintain a distinctive identity.

In the 1990s the tensions between the peoples of the border region had diminished somewhat because of the success of a number of Muslims, including some Thai-Malays, to attain political power through new democratic processes instituted in the wake of the retreat of the Thai military from politics after 1992. The tensions intensified again, however, after the beginning of the twenty-first century owing to the fact that the Democrat Party, which had gained significant followings in the Muslim areas of southern Thailand, lost power to the new Thai Rak Thai party led by Thaksin Shinawatra.

Not only did Thaksin not favor the politicians from southern Thailand, but his decision to join the American-led "coalition of the willing" in the war in Iraq also offended most Thai Muslims (as well as many other Thai). By the early twenty-first century, the influence of fundamental Islam (Wahabism) had grown significantly among Malay Muslims and especially among young men in the region. These circumstances served as catalysts for the emergence of a new, more violent, conflict in southern Thailand.

The Demonization of *khâçk Mâlayû*

Most Thai-speaking people in Thailand refer to the Malay-speaking peoples of southern Thailand as *khâçk*. This term has long been used in Thai to refer to, in the words of a late nineteenth century dictionary, "Asiatic stranger, not being Chinese

or Japanese" (Michell 1973 [1892]: 40). A recent Thai encyclopedia glosses *khâçk* as "meaning visitor, guest, foreigner, stranger, is also an old word found in the pre-modern law code referring to people from India, Persia, Turkey, and the Arabian Peninsula".[15] In discussing this concept with a number of Thai, one must recognize as Anusorn Unno noted in an email (dated June 7, 2009), "the notion of "*khâçk*" in Thai perception is quite complex.[16] Although it is often, as in the dictionary definition cited above, used to designate 'strangers' from other lands, it can also mean 'guest'."

The first meaning can, Anusorn observes, carry the significance of a person who is "dangerous and untrustworthy". Most Thai whom I have asked about the term repeated the saying that *thâ cü ngû kap khâçk, tî khâçk kôn*, "if you meet a snake and a *khâçk*, hit the *khâçk* first." Jan Weisman, an American scholar who wrote her dissertation under my direction on race in Thailand, argued that *khâçk* is a "racialized term", "based at least partially in phenotype and not solely on culture or citizenship." She add: "Phenotypic factors connoting *khaek*-ness include a dark complexion, an aquiline nose, and, in men, facial and/or body hair" (Weisman 2000: 128).[17] This racial connotation is negative since many Thai express a strong preference for light skin rather than dark skin as is manifest in the prominent role that Eurasians have in the entertainment industry.

On the other hand, Gilquin (2005: 24) in his *The Muslims of Thailand* writes "the term *khâçk* does not imply a pejorative connotation." In support of a more benevolent connotation of *khâçk*, Anusorn noted that the "Buddha himself is historically known as a '*khâçk*'". Chaiwat Satha-anand (personal communication, June 3, 2009) observed that there are some who are known as *khâçk khâo* (white *khâçk*) who have prominent and positive roles in the Thai entertainment business. Although Chaiwat himself might be identified as a *khâçk* because of his Indian ancestry and adherence to Islam, he is more widely known as a professor at Thammasat University and as a public intellectual.

There is a difference, however, between *khâçk*, whether positively viewed as "guests" or negatively viewed as "strangers," who have roots outside of Thailand and *khâçk Mâlâyû*, that is, Malay-speaking *khâçk*. From the time of subjugation of Pattani in the late eigthteenth century on, *khâçk Mâlâyû* have been construed in Thai written and oral discourse as alien even though they and their ancestors have always lived in the area where they are found today in southern Thailand. As the painting at Wat Matchimawat in Songkhla shows, this alienness can be so radical as to situate *khâçk Mâlâyû* in the ranks of demons. While the demonization of *khâçk Mâlâyû* was for a long time rather muted, it has become much more common as some of those identified as *khâçk Mâlâyû* have engaged in violent acts directed at individuals and institutions who are "truly Thai" (*Thai tâç*).

Since the early twenty-first century what appears to be a rather small number of young revolutionaries committed to an uncompromising ideology of Islamic revolution have engaged in hundreds of attacks on schools, police stations, railways,

and Buddhist temples which they take as concrete manifestations of a hated Thai state. Some of these attacks have been particularly violent, and have included beheadings of both Buddhists and Muslims who are assumed to work with the Thai state and – although not recently – murders of Buddhist monks and novices. The graphic images of these attacks – some of which have been published in Thai newspapers and other posted on web sites[18] – have led many Thai to view those responsible as demonic. The association of *khâçk* with the legions of Mâra as depicted in the temple painting I described at the beginning of my paper has become a reality for probably a majority of Thai who have been following events in southern Thailand. The nature of the violent conflict in southern Thailand has made the demonization of *khâçk Mâlâyû* credible also for the security forces deployed in the area and, as well, for some very highly ranked persons.

On January 5, 2004, "Martial law was declared in three southern provinces … – Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani – after 17 schools and three police posts were burnt down and four soldiers killed in a raid on a military camp" (*Bangkok Post*, January 5, 2005). These events were first said to be the work of "bandits," but it soon became clear that they represented a marked escalation of ethnoreligious conflict.

Many in Thailand were horrified when on January 22 and 24 four monks, including two in their 60s, and a young novice were murdered and several others were attacked. These attacks were clearly meant to provoke anger and to ensure that the government would use violence itself in response. Many more government troops were dispatched to the South and their use of force was as much based on such anger as on rational assessments of what could be done to calm the situation.

On April 28, 2004, Thai forces attacked a group of young Thai Malay men inside the historic Krue Se mosque in Pattani province who were being sought as among the "assailants" who had attacked police stations that morning. Thirty-two young men were killed (out of a total of 106 killed that day) in the mosque and the mosque itself was riddled with bullets (although the bullet holes were later covered up).

The outrage at the killing of young men who were, it was discovered, very poorly armed, especially as they had taken refuge in a mosque, was expressed not only by relatives of those who had died but by civil rights groups, academics, and many newspapers in Thailand. A commission appointed to investigate "accused security forces of using excessive force."[19] These deaths inflamed many Malay-speaking Muslims, but the government's strong reaction was strongly supported by the Buddhist majority in the country. Chaiwat Satha-Anand, Director of Peace Information Center, Foundation for Democracy and Development Studies and professor of Political Science at Thammasat University, unquestionably the most articulate and compelling Thai Muslim scholar, wrote of the incident of Krue Se:

When the government attacked the Kru-ze[20] mosque and went in to kill those inside, it seems to indicate to the people that state power stands triumphantly against God, Your God. … I am also saddened when I read that the government's approval rate was high: 92% approval of the ways it responded. I felt like something was lost, a kind of decency, gentleness, a sense of respect for sacred places which constitute a measure of how 'civilized' a society is. All those were lost – together with the dangerous rise in political cost. I don't know how long it will take for Thai society to deal with this problem, to heal the wound that cuts deep into the alienated part of its imagined community (Chaiwat Satha-Anand 2004a).

It is noteworthy that Chaiwat's English article is entitled "The Demon Within" (also see Chaiwat 2004b and 2007).[21]

In the months following the attack at Krue Se there were an increasing number of deaths and "disappearances," some traceable to insurgents, but many more to government forces who now felt they had a mandate to use violence to solve the situation. The government moved also to close Islamic schools that were deemed breeding ground for insurgents. Both the disproportionate use of force in response to the violence perpetrated by the insurgents and the moves to close religious schools added fuel to the fire as an editorial in the *Bangkok Post*, dated September 21, 2004, observed:

The daily violence in the South is enough to horrify all decent Thais and it appears to be escalating. … But authorities seem equally determined to press ahead with a single-minded policy that is costing vital support.

… Authorities have the right to take necessary action against people deemed to be security threats. But they also have the duty to act against fellow Thais according to law, order and custom.

Such advice was, unfortunately, not heeded because a new incident on October 25, 2004 made tragically clear that many carrying out dictates of the Thai government to suppress the insurgency in southern Thailand considered Malay-speaking Muslims to be undeserving of the civil rights accorded to all Thai citizens in the 1997 Constitution. That is, the *khâçk Mâlâyû* were considered to be lesser humans than other Thai.

On October 25, a crowd of protestors – estimates vary on the size of the crowd, but it was at least 2,000 – gathered at the police station in Tak Bai district, Narathiwat province to seek the release of six people arrested on suspicion of having stolen guns from defense volunteers. Police and military forces used fire trucks and at least some live ammunition to control the protest. In the melee at least six protestors were killed. About 1,300 of the remaining protestors were forced to strip off their

shirts and lie on the ground or near the shore of the nearby river and have their hands tied behind their backs. At least three of the protestors drowned, presumably from not being able to help themselves when lying by the river because their hands were tied. What proved to be far more shocking was that 78 were found to have "suffocated" to death while being transported from Tak Bai to a military base in Pattani.[22] It also appears from subsequent reports that as many as 40 people who were among the protestors have never been accounted for.

An editorial in the *Bangkok Post* on October 27 summarized well the significance of Tak Bai: "Something Went Terribly Wrong." Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, however, showed himself initially to be extremely insensitive to the implications by claiming that "Protesters died because they were in a weak physical condition resulting from fasting. They just collapsed in the crowded situation and anti-riot forces did not touch them" (*The Nation*, October 27, 2004). Images of the dead and the subsequent outpouring of condemnation from both within Thailand and from outside the country, and especially from Islamic countries, made it painfully clear even to Thaksin and his cabinet that the events in southern Thailand could not be explained by the actions of "bandits" who can be deterred by ever increasing use of lethal force.

Chaiwat Satha-Anand again provided a compelling analysis of the dangers that faced Thailand because of the escalating conflict in the southern provinces: "A possible consequence of this normalisation of violence is that Thai society risks losing its ability to find political solutions to violence and being suffocated in the pool of violence itself" (Chaiwat Satha-Anand 2004b).

Despite the dangers, the Thaksin government in the six weeks following the Tak Bai tragedy sought to promote a constricted nationalism as the solution. The government strongly rejected suggestions made by Mahathir Mohamad, former prime minister of Malaysia, that Thailand should consider granting autonomy to the Pattani area (*The Nation*, November 1, 2004). Thaksin also threatened if the subject of Tak Bai was raised to walk out of the ASEAN summit held in Vientiane, Laos on November 28-30, 2004 (*The Nation*, November 27, 2004), although in the end he did have a private meeting with the leaders of Indonesia and Malaysia (*The Nation*, November 29, 2004). The Village Scouts, a right-wing nationalist organization with royal backing that had played a role in conflicts in the 1970s when constricted nationalism was also promoted vis-à-vis "Communists," have reappeared. In *The Nation* on November 29, 2004 it was reported that "The 20,000 Village Scouts who rallied yesterday at Sanam Luang [royal grounds in Bangkok] from throughout the Kingdom, brandishing national flags and belting out a Cold War-era patriotic song, were treated to a promise by one of their leaders that their 'separatist' enemies in the South would soon be driven out of the country."[23]

By late 2005, a new political crisis led to the violence in southern Thailand being relegated to the equivalent of the back pages of newspapers. But the violence

had not gone away. In September 2006 Thaksin Shinawatra was overthrown in a coup led by General Sonthi Bunyaratklin. General Sonthi, as a Thai Muslim, presented himself as being able to resolve the situation in the south. Instead, the insurrection intensified.

Successive Thai governments, including the one installed by the military junta in 2006 and the weak ones which have come to power since the re-institution of elections in late 2007 have each allowed military authorities to be in charge of suppressing the insurrection in the south. The militarization of the conflict was raised to a new level with the creation of armed militias under the patronage of the Queen.[24] In a move that would have surprised even Kittivuddho Bhikkhu, the outspoken advocate of militant Buddhism in the 1970s, soldiers have been recruited to become monks, some even carrying arms under their yellow robes (Jerryson 2009; McCargo 2009a, 2009b).

Conclusions

There is no question that conflict in Southern Thailand has significantly undermined relations between local Buddhists and Muslims in the region. Many Buddhists outside of southern Thailand have also embraced a "Buddhist chauvinism" (McCargo 2009b: 32) – what I term "militant Buddhism" (see Keyes 1978) – in response to a conflict impelled in part by young men committed to a jihadist understanding of Islam and fueled by the heavy use of military power by Thai authorities. At the same time, it is premature, at best, to conclude that a "civic Buddhism" that promotes toleration of religious diversity and dialogue between those of different faiths has proven to be a romanticized chimera created by some analysts such as myself.

My perspective on modern Thai history is that change has occurred not in a teleological manner, that is, evolving toward a determinate; rather I see change as a dialectical process. The first policies of national integration were predicated on promoting a common ground so that the diverse peoples of the country – Lao, Yuan or Northern Thai, Khmer, Chinese, etc. – could come to see themselves as "Thai". This ground was initially based on the premise that everyone within the kingdom would identify as subjects of a common monarch. There was challenge to this premise by some traditional local princes and rulers, but through a combination of "carrots" in the form of sizeable pensions and "sticks" in the form of military repression of significant resistance, the Thai court had by the early twentieth century succeeded in extending the authority of the Thai monarch throughout most of the kingdom.

The next step in national integration was to bring all Buddhists under a single national organization. This effort again met with resistance on the part of some monks who deeply resented the discrediting of their distinctive traditions. Nonetheless, by the 1930s, all monks throughout the country had accepted the authority of a unified sangha.

A third step in bringing about the integration of the diverse peoples of the country was accomplished through compulsory primary education. By the 1930s most people in the country had acquired some competence in standard Thai and some knowledge of national history as a consequence of attending primary education.

While these policies did succeed in bringing about national integration in Thailand, they also stimulated the emergence of ethnoregionalism not only in southern Thailand but also in northeastern and northern Thailand. Since the 1970s dissent from establishment Buddhism has also intensified. Moreover, the policies of national integration that had never been embraced wholeheartedly by the Malay-speaking population of southern Thailand – in marked contrast to other significant linguistic minorities such as Chinese and Khmer – began to be even more strongly resisted as the influences of Islamic fundamentalism began to be felt.

Awareness that the "Thai-ness" rooted in late nineteenth and early twentieth century policies was increasingly being questioned led to some soul-searching debates among those charged with drafting a new constitution in the late 1990s. The 1997 Constitution refigured the premises on which Thai nationalism is based.[25]

One clause (V, 78) provided for the decentralization of power, a move in quite the opposite direction to the centralization of power in 1892:

> The State shall decentralise powers to localities for the purpose of independence and self-determination of local affairs, develop local economics, public utilities and facilities systems and information infrastructure in the locality thoroughly and equally throughout the country as well as develop into a large-sized local government organisation a province ready for such purpose, having regard to the will of the people in that province.

Regarding religion, whereas the Constitution (II, 9) specified that the king must be a Buddhist, he also was charged with being an "upholder of religions". Citizens were recognized as having the right (III, 38) to profess any religion and they were "protected from any act of the State, which is derogatory to his or her rights or detrimental to his or her due benefits on the grounds of professing a religion, a religious sect or creed or observing religious precepts or exercising a form of worship in accordance with his or her different belief from that of others." The state, in turn, (V, 73) "shall patronise and protect Buddhism and other religions, promote good understanding and harmony among followers of all religions as well as encourage the application of religious principles to create virtue and develop the quality of life." It is important to note that the term *sâtsânâ* (Pâli, *sâsânâ*) that had historically meant only Buddhism and which is still understood as such today in Sri Lanka is used in the Constitution to refer to any religion.[26]

The refiguration of "Thai-ness" that was embodied in the 1997 Constitution has been strongly undermined by the political crisis that has beset Thailand in recent

years. One aspect of the crisis began with the intensification of violence in southern Thailand in 2004. Then a second aspect began in late 2005 with challenge to the premiership of Thaksin Shinawatra who had come to power through elections authorized by the 1997 Constitution. While this challenge was based on legitimate grievances about Thaksin's misuse of power, it led to the coup of 2006 and the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution.

A new constitution was drafted under the guidance of the government put in power by the military junta.[27] The referendum on the constitution that was held in August 2007 revealed that there was strong dissent from the social contract that it represented. Only 58% of the electorate actually voted, far less than in recent parliamentary elections, and 63% of the voters in northeastern Thailand, which was the stronghold of Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai Party and the region with over a third of the total electorate, voted against it. It is noteworthy that while the 2007 constitution significantly curtailed the power of elected representatives and replaced the mandate to "develop" decentralized administrative bodies with one to "encourage" such development, it retained the same clauses about religion. More significantly, however, was the fact that the lack of consensus about the new constitution revealed that the crisis of power at the center of the Thai polity that had begun with the protests against Thaksin beginning in late 2005 very much continued.

Despite the deep uncertainty about how and when the crisis will be resolved, there still remain significant voices in Thailand who continue to advocate for the tolerance and inclusiveness that were validated by the 1997 Constitution. The most compelling voices have been those expressed in the report of a National Reconciliation Commission set up, under pressure, by the government of Thaksin Shinawatra in March 2005. The Commission was headed by the well-respected former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun; its 50 members included "17 persons from the southern border provinces area, 12 persons from civil society outside the area, 7 persons from the political sphere, including the government, the opposition and members of the Senate, and 12 civil servants involved in resolving the problem related to security and development."[28] While a number of Islamic and Buddhist leaders (including two monks) were among the members, the military was notable in its lack of representation.

McCargo (2009b: 28-29) has noted that while "a number of prominent southern Muslims were invited to join the Commission, including the heads of the Islamic Councils in the three [southernmost] provinces," none of their Buddhist counterparts, "the chief monks of the southern provinces" were invited. "Only two Buddhist monks joined the NRC: Phra Paisal Visalo, a nationally prominent peace activist and Isan [Northeastern Thai]-based abbot; and Phra Khru Dhammadharanipala Jotaka, the abbot of Wat Thongkoi, Pattani, who had been born in Nakhorn Si Thammarat and was a long-time advocate of inter-faith dialogue in the south." He adds that while it was understandable why local monks might have

been excluded given that "these individuals were highly inimical to ideas of conflict resolution and reconciliation – but their exclusion opened up the NRC to the criticism that the body was excessively pro-Muslim." His characterization of the two monks who did join seems very dismissive of the roles they have assumed in advocating, from their Thai Buddhist perspective, for peace and inter-faith dialogue.[29]

While it is clearly the case that such a perspective has been very much overshadowed by those advocating militant Buddhism in the period since 2004 since the conflict in the southern Thailand has intensified, recognition that it is a significant aspect of Thai Buddhism cannot be dismissed as being a "romanticized view". On the contrary I find that this perspective is one that has deep roots in Buddhist thought and is also advocated by respected monks and other Buddhist leaders in the other countries of the Buddhist world in which violence has been pronounced.[30] The tension between such peace activist Buddhism and militant Buddhism is an aspect of the dialectical process at work in the relationship between Buddhism and politics in Thailand.

Because I have given so much attention in this paper to how *khâçk Mâlayû* have been demonized by Thai, I believe it is only appropriate to quote Phra Paisan, a leading advocate of Buddhist tolerance in Thailand. In a long op-ed piece that appeared over two days in the *Bangkok Post* in July 2006 he wrote:

> Both Buddhism and Islam recognise the unity of humanity, seeing every human being as a friend or a fellow sharing the earth. …
> However, quite a number of Buddhist and Muslim devotees divide and classify other human beings in terms of religion, race, nationality, language, etc. This has not only led to division between "us" and "them" but also to indifference or callous disregard for others – even to the point of seeing the other as the enemy. …
>
> The religious devotees who worship violence are willing to die in order to take the lives of others. At present, a question that is worth pondering is: To what extent is Buddhism or Islam able to serve as a powerful inspiration for its followers to sacrifice their lives to save the lives of others? Or at least to convince followers to struggle for global justice and peace through non-violence without being anxious for their own personal safety? This will be possible when there is no 'us" versus 'them'. ….
>
> Through open and continuous dialogue, I believe there will be improved understanding between Buddhists and Muslims. We will find that a lot of the differences between us have been exaggerated by a great magnitude, and that the differences between us serve as no legitimate reason to divide us into 'us' and 'them.' (*Phra* Paisan Visalo 2006)

Notes

[1] This paper was first presented at a conference on "Buddhism and Islam: Encounters, Histories, Dialogues and Representation," sponsored by McGill Faculty of Religious Studies, The McGill Institute of Islamic Studies, and the Centre for Research on Religion, Numata Conference Center, McGill University, May 29-30, 2009. I am grateful to the organizers of the conference for giving me the opportunity to reflect on broader issues of Buddhist-Muslim relations. I am also grateful to questions and observations made by some participants in reaction to my presentation. I have also benefitted very much from comments on my paper by Anusorn Unno, Chaiwat Satha-anand, Pattana Kitttiarsa, Thongchai Winichakul, Craig Reynolds, Alexander Horstmann, Donald Swearer, and Jane Keyes.

[2] Although I have carried out ethnographic research in Thailand for extended periods beginning in the early 1960s, I have only made brief visits to southern Thailand and none to the Malay-speaking Muslim area. When the conflict in the region escalated, I considered making a research trip to what is sometimes referred to as the 'deep south'. However, I did not feel that I could as a *farang* (Westerner) who does not speak Pattani Malay or read Jawi even though (perhaps because) I do speak, read and write Thai gain sufficient rapport on my own to carry out meaningful fieldwork. Instead, I have depended for my understanding of Malay-Muslim relations with the institutions of the Thai state and the Thai Buddhist nation on the work of others who have achieved such rapport. I am particularly indebted to Anusorn Unno, a PhD student in anthropology at the University of Washington, who in 2007-10 has carried out field work in Narathiwat province, from whom I have learned much from reading together some of the literature on the area and in following the development of his dissertation proposal and research. I believe that I can add to the understanding of the conflict in southern Thailand from the perspective of one who has been engaged over many decades in the study of ethnicity and ethnoregionalism and the study of Buddhism and politics in Thailand.

[3] In my discussion of the temple painting at Wat Matchimawat, I draw on a book in a series on Thai temple-paintings published by Muang Boran Publishing (Silpchai Chinprasert 1983). The name of the wat is derived from Sanskrit, Majjhimâvâsa, a name that refers to the "Middle Way". I visited this *wat* in 1979, but did not then appreciate the significance of this mural.

[4] The term "defeat of Mâra" is used in most works in English about this episode in the life of the Buddha. The Thai term *phacôn mân*, could also be understood – as Chaiwat Satha-Anand (personal communication, June 3, 2009) has pointed out – as the 'temptation' of the Buddha by Mâra, comparable "with the Temptation of Christ." This painting, as in equivalent ones elsewhere, is divided into two parts. On the left side of the Buddha Mâra is depicted as deploying the personified temptations of the world (power, sexual desire, wealth) that the Buddha must renounce if he is to be enlightened. On the right side, the legions of Mâra are drowned by a flood unleashed by the Earth Goddess, thereby demonstrating that the Buddha has "defeated" Mâra.

[5] Among Mâra's army there are also several Negritoes, whom the Thai call *ngô pâ*, "wild rambutans". While Negritoes are found primarily in northern Malaysia, there have long been small groups of them in what is today southern Thailand. There are also a couple of

Caucasians who are identifiable from their face hair as being Westerners, whom the Thai call *farang*. It is noteworthy that although there are many depictions of Chinese in other paintings at Wat Matchimawat, there are none among Mâra's entourage.

[6] The name "Pattani" for the province differs in spelling in Thai as well as English from "Patani", the name of the sultanate.

[7] Other southern Thai provinces have large Muslim populations, but most are speakers of southern Thai and identify as Thai.

[8] See report of the National Statistical Office at http://web.nso.go.th/en/census/poph/report/adv_e.htm (last accessed 05/17/09).

[9] This distinction has been troubling to some Buddhist nationalists who have pressed, without success, to have Buddhism declared the state religion.

[10] Parnwell and Seeger (2008) distinguish between "civic Buddhism" and "civil religion" with the former being what I term "establishment Buddhism" and the latter with my "civil Buddhism." The different terminology notwithstanding, I find Parnwell and Seeger's analysis reconfirms my own earlier one.

[11] I am grateful to Thongchai Winichakul (personal communication, June 12, 2009) for pointing out that in the original version of this paper I had seemed to posit that Buddhism in Thailand is either inclusivist or exclusivist. As I wrote (in an email dated March 5, 2009) to McCargo after reading his papers, "I see Thai religio-political history in dialectical" rather than leading to a predetermined end.

[12] There are also individual monks who have significant followings, particularly if they are thought to possess extraordinary power (*saksit*) that can be tapped for this-worldly ends. While in the past some monks of this type in southern Thailand were even consulted by Malay-speaking Muslims (see Golomb 1985), today this is rarely the case, although at least one example can still be found (see Rattiya Saleh 2009). Many Thai, whatever category of Buddhists they might be fitted into, actually look to super-naturalism and magic rather than Buddhism in relating to politics (see Jackson 1999; Pattana 1999, 2002; Keyes 2006; Taylor 2002), but these Thai have no distinctive perspective on the place of non-Buddhists in their country. A recent book by James Taylor provides a detailed and insightful analysis of the "proliferation of religious practices" in late 20th and early 21st century Thailand that have arisen both because of political crisis and the "'dislocating' and intensifying implications of globalization" (Taylor 2008: 22). Elsewhere (Keyes 2007, in press-A and in press-B) I have examined at some length the relationship between "fragmented" Buddhism and political crisis in Thailand. Also see Swearer (1991, 1999).

[13] On the history of Muslim communities in Thailand, see, in addition to Gilquin, the following: Farouk (1984), Forbes (1982), Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian (2000), Scupin (1980a, 1980b, 1986), and Surin Pitsuwan (1985). On the Muslims in northern Thailand, including Chinese Muslims, see Suthep (1977) and Hill (1998).

[14] The story of the Siamese during the reign of Rama I subjugation of Malay sultanates on the Malay Peninsula based on official Siamese sources can be found in Wenk (1968: 100-106). Wenk (*op. cit.,* p. 102n) opines that the designation of the Pattani families as *khâçk* suggests "there was an Indian upper class in these [Malay] sultanates". There is, in fact, no evidence of such an "Indian upper class". Thongchai Winichakul (1994) has shown

that in the creation of a Siamese nation (or "geo-body") Siamese rulers in the late eigthteenth and nineteenth centuries dealt with each region of the empire in a different way because of the clear recognition that each region had particular characteristics that led to different policies. However, with regard to Pattani, the Siamese authorities continued (as Thongchai has reminded me in a recent communication, date June 12, 2009) have so much trouble with Pattani that the pacification begun in 1785 in a real sense was never completed.

[15] The quotation is from a review of *Saranukrom watthanatham Thai phâk tai [The Encyclopedia of Thai Culture: The South]* (1999) by Craig Reynolds in *New Mandala*, an on-line review of Thai politics, history, and other aspects of Thailand (http://rspas.anu.edu.au/rmap/newmandala/2009/07/08/review-of-southern-thai-encyclopedia/; last accessed August 30, 2009). I am grateful to Reynolds for calling my attention to this review and the encyclopedia.

[16] This same point was made, albeit in different ways, by Chaiwat Satha-Anand, Pattana Kittiarsa, and Thongchai Winichakul in their reactions to the original version of this paper.

[17] Jan, whose mother was African-American and father was an American Jew, usually identified herself as being "hybrid" but was quite often because of her dark complexion labeled *khaek* when working in the Peace Corps in Thailand. Her dissertation is, in my opinion, the best study to date on racial ideas among Thai. Tragically Jan died of cancer not long after she finished her PhD.

[18] See for example, http://zombietime.com/thai_jihad_photos/, last accessed September 7, 2009.

[19] This quotation is taken from "BBC World News World Edition," July 28, 2004. Also see "Inquiry into the Pattani's Krue Se Mosque Killings: A Cover Up Commission of Thailand," *ACHR Review*, Asian Centre for Human Rights, May 5, 2004; http://www.achrweb.org/Review/19-04.htm, last accessed December 2, 2004.

[20] "Krue se" is based on the Thai spelling of the name while "Kru-ze" is based on the Malay spelling.

[21] Chaiwat has explored the history of the conflict in southern Thailand in great depth (see Chaiwat 2007 and 2008a; also see the volumes of essays in Thai (Chaiwat 2008b) and English translation (Chaiwat 2009) that he has edited.

[22] I draw on newspaper accounts primarily in the *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* for details about the events at Tak Bai and its aftermath. Both of the Bangkok English language newspapers provided extensive coverage, coupled with many critical commentaries and editorials. Also see especially the assessments prepared by GlobalSecurity.org (http://www.global security.org/military/world/war/thailand2.htm, http://www.globalsecurity. org/military/library/report/2004/040109- SPS-UnrestinSouthernThailand.doc, and http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2002/Muslim_Separatists_ %20Primer_Jul02.doc; (last accessed September 6, 2009).

[23] On the role of the village scouts as a right-wing mass movement, see Bowie (1997).

[24] See International Crisis Group, "Southern Thailand: The Problem with Paramilitaries," Asia Report No. 140, October 23, 2007 (http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5132&l=1; last accessed May 2009).

[25] For a semi-official English translation of the 1997 Constitution, see http://www.krisdika.go.th/lawHtmStaticContent01.jsp?frm=tmp&page=eng&lawType=law1&lawCode=%C306&lawID=%C306-10-2540-a0001. The Thai original can be found at http://th.wikisource.org/wiki/รัฐธรรมนูญแห่งราชอาณาจักรไทย_พุทธศักราช_๒๕๔๐/หมวด_๕_แนวนโยบายพื้นฐานแห่งรัฐ

[26] At the conference on Buddhism and Islam, Charles Hallisey told me that a student of his had traced the gloss of *sâtsânâ* as "religion" in general and not just the Buddhist religion to the 1920s.

[27] For an English translation of the 2007 constitution as approved in the August referendum see http://www.ect.go.th/english/files/2007-constitution-english%5B1%5D.pdf; (last accessed May 2009).

[28] The report in a semi-official translation can be found at http://thailand.ahrchk.net/docs/nrc_report_en.pdf. This quote is from page 121.

[29] He takes a similar tack in an earlier article (McCargo 2004).

[30] In my forthcoming "Buddhists, Human Rights, and Non-Buddhist Minorities" I develop this point at greater length.

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