

**RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY—SOCIAL
STRUCTURAL AND CONCEPTUAL UNITY :
ISLAM AND BUDDHISM IN A SOUTHERN
THAI COASTAL FISHING VILLAGE**

by

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Although Thailand adheres officially to the Lesser Vehicle or Theravada School of Buddhism, the four southernmost provinces—Naratiwat, Saton, Yala and Patani—have large Muslim Malay populations. Further up the peninsula too, large towns such as Nakorn Sri Thammarat, Surat Thani and even Bangkok have Muslim communities. Dotted along the Thai peninsula, generally on the coast, are also found Muslim settlements in villages; these rural communities' mother tongue usually being Thai. Muuthiinyng,¹ the village which will provide the data for this article, is one such rural coastal community, inhabited by both Thai Buddhists and Muslims. The Muslims however predominate, making up some 68 percent of the households². This village is situated in Songkhla province, an area that is predominantly Thai Buddhist, to the north of Patani, the Malay cultural heartland in southern Thailand.³

These Malay communities in the south have their origins in and are generally associated with Malay culture. Since the rise of Malacca in the fifteenth century, there has been Muslim Malay influence in the peninsula, control over it since this period fluctuating between the rulers of Ayuddhia, Bangkok, the Malay States and local rulers. Nowadays the four southernmost provinces belong to Thailand; a nationalist movement has arisen and attempts have been made by some sections of the Malay Muslim community to break away and join Malaysia. Much has been written on the southern Thai Muslim secessionist aspirations, nationalist movement and the Malay Communities' relationship to the Thai nation state, but virtually nothing of scholastic importance has been written on the *actual relationship* between southern Thai

1) Muuthiinyng (village number one) is a pseudonym.

2) 299 households of which 203 are Muslim and 96 Thai.

3) I did anthropological field work in Thailand from April 1970-July 1971 under the auspices of the London-Cornell Committee for South & Southeast Asia.

Muslims and Thai Buddhists at the local level, at the grassroots.⁴ It is often assumed that Muslims in the south are very different from Thais, perhaps because of their associations with Malay culture, and also because Islam doctrinally is very different from Thai Buddhism. But no anthropological study has been made of the actual relationship between the two groups, their forms of interaction, or the way in which Muslim peasants in any community have adapted to, and come to terms with the Thai host society. Whilst Muuthiinyng is not a typical Muslim community, in that it is Thai speaking and situated north of the Malay heartland in southern Thailand, nevertheless a comparative study of the Thai-Buddhist and Muslim inhabitants of the village, and the way they have adapted to each other, may shed some light on the relationship and also provide a theoretical orientation and the key for further study not only of Muslim communities further south, incapsulated in a Thai-Buddhist hinterland, but also for studies of Muslim-Thai Buddhist interrelationships in the Malay heartland in the Patani, Naratiwat and Yala areas too.

Archaeological finds, generally assumed to be of the Sri Vichaya period, at Setingphra (some fifteen kilometres from Muuthiinyng) bear witness to the antiquity of Buddhist influence in this area. But owing to the paucity of historical evidence it can only be a matter of pure conjecture whether the peasantry were ever converted to Mahayana Buddhism or when the later Theravada school was popularised in this area and the masses converted. Similarly with Islam, whilst this area has had contact with Islam and Malay culture for several hundred years, due to the paucity of historical evidence, it can only be a matter of

4) Fraser's two studies (1960, 1966) of Rusembilan, a Malay village in the Patani area partly reflects this kind of orientation, an orientation to the supra-local rather than grassroots level. His is a community study 'the total socio-cultural organization of a Malay community.' It is centred essentially around the community itself. But he does discuss Rusembilan's relationships and interactions with the outside world. However, he gives little space, only a few pages in all, to interaction with the local Thai peasantry at the grassroots level. Rather he looks at the Malays in 'the framework of the Thai nation' (1960 : 2) and tries to determine the degree to which the 'Malay community in Southern Thailand form(s) part of a regional and national whole and how it may be said to be discontinuous from such a whole'. This leads him to concentrate on the communities relations with the nation state, the national economic and political structure and with the bureaucratic administration, as some of his chapter and section headings clearly reveal : Rusembilan as part of the Thai nation (Chapter 7, 1960), Minority Groups and National security (1966 : 100), District, Changwad and Nation (1966 : 49) and The Government and Planned Change (1966 : 97).

conjecture when Muslim movement north of Patani and the setting up of coastal communities took place. Village tradition maintains that the Muslims first came 'two or three hundred' years ago to the village. But at any rate Muslims have lived in the village for at least a century, for the oldest Muslim inhabitant, a woman who was born in the village, is 'one hundred' years' old. Her mother tongue is Thai, which suggests that the Muslims in the village have been Thai-speaking for at least her lifetime.

It must be taken into account, however, that the present Muslim population may be the product not only of migration but also of inter-marriage and conversion, the offspring of such marriages and converts adhering to Islam.⁵ If this is the case then perhaps the ancestors of large sections of the Muslim population always were Thai-speaking. But while there is no conclusive evidence to determine the origins of the Muslims, a study of genealogies does reveal an increase in the Muslim population towards the end of the last and the beginning of this century due to migration into the village and intermarriage with local people. Almost all the cases of conversion that have taken place in living memory have been the result of such intermarriage: Muslim men marrying Thai or Chinese local women, with the women converting to Islam. Children of mixed marriages do not have dual alliance. They affiliate unambiguously with one or the other group.

Nowadays, due to endogamy and unambiguous group membership, the Muslims and Thais form separate groups. This 'groupness' is an expression of social identity, being the product of, and stimulated by, a boundary situation, being symbolically expressed in cultural terms. These identity symbols provide distinct clearcut boundaries to each group.

Each group views itself as being separate and different from the other. Muslims refer to themselves and are referred to by The Thai-Buddhist villages as *khon khaek* (Malays/muslims)⁶; whilst Thai Buddhists

5) There have been a handful of cases of conversion during this century. The origin myth tends to symbolise and validate conversion too. In this myth, Jee, a Thai Buddhist, who was born either in Muuthiinyng or a sister village nearby is kidnapped and taken to Kelantan where she marries a Muslim and later returns to the village with her family.

6) Thais in general refer to Malays and Muslims & Indians too anonymously as *khaek* (*khon* means people or person). This term is synonymous with the term 'visitor'. But Malays and Muslims alone are referred to by it, never the Chinese immigrants. The term has derogatory overtones and the more educated town Muslims resent its use. The villagers in Muuthiinyng, however, do not. In fact they use the term with pride.

refer to themselves and are referred to by their Muslim co-villagers as *khon thai* (Thais); a custom which I will follow in the following pages.

Although there is an undercurrent of goodwill and the two groups co-exist peacefully, friendship across group lines being frequent, each group's social identity is partially a product of, and stimulated by, their derogatory views of the other group. Both *khon thai* and *khon khaek* operate clearly defined stereotypes of the other. *Khon khaek* view *khon thai* as pig eaters, to them an abhorrent and defiling custom, and because of this, for fear of defilement, they will not eat in Thai houses contaminated by pigs. They also consider *khon thai* as generally being prone to violence, gambling, drunkenness, dishonesty and usury, all of which, especially the latter, are an anathema to them. Conversely, they view themselves as being morally more upright, honest, abstemious and peaceful. *Khon thai's* stereotype of *khon khaek* on the other hand is of a group who habitually live in filthy conditions, who do not eat pork⁷ and perform the (to them, barbaric) custom of circumcision.

Their stereotypes of each others' religion also provide much of the stimuli for group identity. But generally these stereotypes are not based on conceptual differences; they do not involve pointing to differences in each others' beliefs. But, rather, they are based on differences in religious institutional organisation. *Khon khaek*, villagers say, perform religious rites at the mosque, they read 'the book',⁸ (meaning the koran), whereas, they maintain, *khon thai* 'waay phra',—attain merit by providing material support for the monks and the temples. *Khon khaek*, they also point out when stressing the differences, always bury their dead, whilst *khon thai* burn theirs.

But this clearly defined sense of social identity of each group is, in a sense, a veneer. 'Groupness' is a product of social identity alone, it has no structural substance or content. Neither group forms a bounded distinct on-going group with a clearly defined separate socio-economic and political structure. Thus social identity is not rooted in separate social, economic and political groupings. It is surprising that this is so. One would tend to assume that because each religion is doctrinally so different from the other, and the origins of the group are so different

7) Pork is highly prized by the Thais and eaten with relish. In a sense it is almost a "national" dish. The Thai villagers have great difficulty understanding, and find it rather strange, that anybody could not like and not eat pork.

8) an nangswu (to read the book) is a colloquial term frequently used by Thais when referring to Muslim version.

too, there would tend to be a correlation between the boundaries of religious affiliation and socio-economic and political groupings. But in fact this is not the case; socially, economically *khon thai* and *khon khaek* are not differentiated.

In fact, they share a common social structure. Although Malay Muslim customary law is utilised in the Malay communities further south,⁹ especially in the domestic sphere, *khon khaek* in Muuthiinyng have only a limited knowledge of it and it is rarely utilised.¹⁰ In practice, they generally adhere to the Thai social structural pattern. There are some 'cultural frill' differences,¹¹ but in practice *khon khaek* and *khon thai* have similar bilateral kinship systems, arranged and preferred marriage rules, systems of bridewealth, residence patterns, inheritance patterns and stem family system.¹²

9) Whilst the law, legal system and courts in the Malay homeland in Patani are part of, and under the jurisdiction of, the Thai national legal system, Malay customary law may be invoked in court cases relating to the domestic sphere.

10) For instance, *khon khaek* in Muuthiinyng, are aware that according to Muslim inheritance laws, male siblings inherit two portions to their sisters' one. But in practice only a few families, the very richest, have divided their landholdings according to this principle. Most families, with little or nothing to bequeath, prefer to divide what they do own according to the bilateral Thai system so that all children should inherit something.

11) For instance although *thai* and *khaek* houses are of similar designs, a *khaek* house, can be generally distinguished by the pictures on its walls. These pictures generally depict Muslim scriptural scenes, Muslim symbols or sayings in Arabic writing. Also, although long hair tied in a bun at the back and short styles are worn by both *khaek* and *thai* females, generally the *thai* custom of old ladies having a 'short back and sides' style is not followed by *khaek* old ladies, who prefer a bun. Lastly, traditionally *khaek* women wore sarongs with different designs on them to those of *thai* women. But nowadays it is a matter of individual preference. A *thai* lady may wear a print traditionally considered *khaek* and vice versa.

12) Some Malay kinship terms are used: m-ma, f-ba, grandparents-chaay, parents elder siblings-wa, parents younger siblings-ju. But the underlying ego-oriented cognatic kinship structure with its emphasis on age and generation is the same. All other kinship terms used are Thai i.e. children-luuk, cousin, grandchildren-laen, female in law-saphaay, male in law-khooy.

For both *khon khaek* and *khon thai*, marriage with parents elder siblings daughter is proscribed whilst marriage with parents younger siblings daughter is preferred. Both *khaek* and *thai* marriages are arranged. Often the couple will not meet until the wedding day, especially if one of the spouses is from outside the village. *Khon khaek* are believed to coerce their daughters even against their will into marriage. *Khon thai* maintain that they don't. But there is evidence of cases where *khon thai* have forced their children into marriages. Bridewealth ranges generally from 2000-5000 baht for both groups. Matrilocal residence is preferred, it being believed that girls can live in closer harmony with their own mothers than their mother-in-laws. But expediency in fact dictates actual choice.

In the economic sphere all Muuthiinyng villagers consider the village first and foremost a fishing community; and, in the last ten-fifteen years, with the introduction of engines, ice for storage, and light weight nets, cash crop fishing on a large scale has arisen. But paddy at a subsistence level is also cultivated.

Except for a few holdings, notably those of the two village moneylenders of Chinese descent, most landholdings are small, the majority being around five-ten rai, and providing the owners with subsistence only. Of a sample of 80 percent of the household 36 percent were found to be landowning; about half the *thai* households and half the *khaek* being landholders¹³. Thus on a percentage basis, land is about equally distributed between each group. Landholdings being small, labour for cultivation is generally recruited from the nuclear or stem family, although if need arises one or two neighbours or friends may be called in for wage labour, or it may be share-cropped.

Similarly with boat ownership and labour. Both groups have taken advantage of cash crop fishing with equal vigour. The fifty-six or so seaworthy boats in the village are primarily of two types: *pramong naam luk* (deep sea fishing boats) or *rua yaay* (big boats), as they are referred to by the villagers, generally being over forty-five horsepower and about fifty feet long, and *rua lek* (little boats), open small boats. Thirty-seven of the small boats and five of the deep sea fishing boats are owned by *khon khaek*. Although these figures show that *khon khaek* own more small boats than *khon thai*, it is only a small percentage difference, difference of little sociological significance. Deep sea fishing boats however are about equally distributed between each group. Deep sea fishing boats need 6-8 crew. *Khaek* owners tend mostly to recruit their crew from their immediate consanguines and affines. *Khon thai*, partly due to lack of eligible relatives, recruit their crew mainly from outsiders.

All boatowners are heavily in debt to moneylenders from whom they borrowed the capital to buy their boats; the deep sea fishing boat owners are in debt to moneylenders in the towns at Songkhla and Na-

13) one rai is equal to two-fifths of an acre.

	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Thai</i>	
landowning households	90	37	
landless households	93	32	
unknown	20	27	
	203	96	= 299
			total households.

korn Sri Thammarat, whilst the little boat owners are in debt to Muuthiinyng moneylenders to the tune of 1-3000 baht. In return for these loans the borrowers sell their high quality fish to the moneylenders at cheaper than market price. Economic power in Muuthiinyng in practice is in the hands of the two or three moneylenders of Chinese descent.

Neither *khon khaek* nor *khon thai* form an interest group. They do not enter into competition with each other for control over economic and political resources. Whilst factions that cut across religious group lines exist,¹⁴ political groupings have never formed along religious lines. A number of historical cross-cutting ties (which unfortunately I do not have the space to describe here) have been a major factor in inhibiting the formation of political groupings along religious lines. But perhaps the local economic situation has been a contributory factor too. The fact that, for all practical purposes, control of the village economy is in the hands of Chinese moneylenders to whom many of the villagers are indebted and that the majority of village holdings are small subsistence units means that neither group is endowed with economic resources favourable to the formation of longterm large-scale political groupings based on religious affiliation.

The atomisation of village society is perhaps a contributory factor too. Since village social and economic behaviour is oriented around the nuclear and stem family alone, there are no large-scale economic or social groupings such as kinship or labour units which would facilitate wide scale political groupings. In sum, socially, economically and

14) For instance, although it is now in the process of dying out, factionalism existed within the *khaek* group itself: between the "modernists," who are keen on innovation and adapting to the ways of the modern world, and the more traditional conservative elements who place great emphasis on Islam and want to retain the old ways. The former's most politically powerful faction is centred around the *kannan* (community headman), the latter around the mosque officials. In the heyday of this factionalism the *thai* villagers supported the modernists and belonged to their faction, but many of the *thais* have now turned to the Chinese moneylenders for support.

In the past too, in the days of sailing boats, perhaps political factionalism formed around the labour units. Sailing boats and heavy nets required a great deal of manpower (over 20 men or more). Such large economic groupings would tend to favour factionalism and large scale political groupings. But there is no conclusive evidence that such groupings ever existed or that they formed along religious lines.

politically, there is not much difference between *khon khaek* and *khon thai* in Muuthiinyng.

Culturally, too, they are similar. Although southern Thai Muslims are generally associated with Malay culture, very different in many respects from that of the Thai, *khon khaek* in Muuthiinyng share with *khon thai* a similar view of nature; for instance, they have similar beliefs as to the nature of the stars and the wind and the ocean. They also share similar views as to the nature of human physiology—conception, disease, the structure of blood and so forth. But most importantly, especially as far as *khaek* adaptation to the Thai host society is concerned, *khon khaek* share with the Thai host society, with only one or two exceptions,¹⁵ a similar sacred and malevolent spirit world.

Generally, where great world religions exist in rural areas folk beliefs and practices flourish and co-exist alongside, and this is true of Muuthiinyng. One would tend to assume, because of the marked difference between Malay and Thai spirit beliefs and practices, that since *khon khaek* have their cultural origins in the Malay culture they would adhere to, or at least retain, some of the spirit beliefs and practices of their cultural origins. Certainly, in Kelantan, where a similar, albeit converse, situation seems to exist, Thai communities being scattered in a Malay cultural area, it can be inferred from Kershaw (1969) that the Thai-Buddhists have retained a number of their traditional spirit beliefs and practices. But in Muuthiinyng, even if the forebears of the presentday *khaek* villagers adhered to Malay spirit beliefs and practices, nowadays *khon khaek* share a common spirit world with their *thai* counterparts in the village, albeit a spirit world that has been adapted in certain respects to fit in with the basic tenets of Muslim doctrine.

Buddhism does not deny a spirit world. A supernatural world is incorporated in and finds justification in Buddhist scripture with both good and bad spirits of all degrees being accounted for in the religious hierarchy.

15) The only differences are that *khon thai* believe that each compound land is protected by a *jauthii*, the spirit of the first inhabitant of the land. *Khon khaek* do not believe in *jauthii*. In fact *khon khaek* view *jauthii* as a *thai* "identity symbol". Muslims on the other hand adhere to a belief in *jins* (*yin*). But this is a very vague category and plays a very insignificant part in the *khaek* world view. I never once during my field work heard the *yins* involved as causal explanation; actually unless I brought the subject up they were never discussed. In fact *jins* were subsumed to the *thai* world view.

Certainly, *khon thai* in Muuthiinyng people the world around them with *phii* (spirits). Much has been written on the Thai *phii*. Suffice it to say here that Thais view the *phii* as being both anthropomorphic and incorporeal in form, ranging in category from spirits of the dead and certain types of "Buddhist Saints"¹⁶ to permanently existing categories that have never been part of the karmic cycle, such as nature spirits and *thewada* (angels).

Khon thai in Muuthiinyng believe that these *phii* have power over human affairs. Some *phii*, generically referred to as *phii saksit*, are viewed as being essentially benevolent and benign in nature. Some *phii saksit* are believed to act as guardians and protectors. As is to be expected in a village which sees itself first and foremost as a fishing community, the most important guardian *phii saksit* is associated with fishing. Each boat, big and little, *khon thai* believe, is inhabited by a *yaanangrūa*, by a tree spirit (*phii mai*), a beautiful young girl who, I was frequently told, looked like Petchara, a famous Thai actress. *Yaanangrūa* is believed to act as the guardian and protector of the boatowner and his crew, protecting them in bad weather and helping them to attain good catches. *Yaanangrūa* in fact provides the central focus for Thai villagers' spirit cosmology. Houses are also believed to have guardian *phii saksit*—*sau mae rwan*, the spirit of the houseposts; so, too, does the houseland which is believed to be protected by *jauthii*, the spirit of the first inhabitant of the land. Children, too, are thought to have protective *phii* called *Mae Suu*.

Some *phii* however are thought to act ferociously, malevolently, capriciously and with complete self-interest. These *phii* are generally referred to as *phii thamadaa* (ordinary spirits) or in the case of the more ferocious and malevolent as *phii kin* (man eating spirits). These *phii* are used as explanations of causation. They are believed to cause personal misfortune, death, illhealth and luck. Madness and psychotic and hysterical behaviour are explained with reference to the *phii* too. The *phii* are believed to possess (*phii khau*) people, madness and psychotic behaviour being considered symptomatic of possession. Some spirits, such as *phii poob* and *phii krasū*,¹⁷ incorporeal in form, are believed to

16) Bodhisathva.

17) *Phii krasū* for instance, are notorious for eating *faeces* and rubbish.

live on people, causing their hosts to commit socially obnoxious acts and/or bad deeds.

But the most feared and frequently mentioned *phii*, and the one which provides the central focus for malevolent spirit belief in the village, is *phii tai hoeng* (spirit of unnatural or abnormal death). A *phii tai hoeng* is someone who has died an unnatural or violent death, such as by drowning, murder, in childbirth, suicide or during an epidemic. For such people, the villagers believe it is difficult, if not impossible to get to heaven: unable to go to heaven on death, they wander on earth taking their revenge and causing mischief to humans. The most feared and most frequently mentioned spirits of abnormal death in the village are those of women who have died in childbirth (*phuying tai thong klom*) and those of people who have drowned (*phii plaay*).

But although Buddhism legitimizes much of the spirit world, Muslim doctrine denies a spirit world. Many *khaek*, especially the more knowledgeable mosque officials, were aware of this and, whenever I brought up the subject, would quickly state *khon khaek mai khooy nabtoe phii* (*khon khaek* never worship and/or believe in the *phii*). They maintained *khaek* spirits of the dead never haunted (*mai khooy lawk*) or caused people misfortune or harm. *Khon khaek* who died violent or abnormal deaths, they held, did not become *phii tai hoeng*; in fact such deaths were 'good deaths' (*tai dii*). Such people, because of the unfortunate circumstances of their death and the suffering they had undergone, would go straight to heaven (*sawan*) and not have to wait until the Day of Judgement (*Wan kiamut*). Death resulting from circumcision (*khausuunut*) is frequently cited as an example of *tai dii*.

Yet although *khon khaek* were often vehement in their denial of the *phii* and in their statements that dead *khaek* never haunted, it was soon apparent to me that they, too, utilised spirit beliefs to explain illness and misfortune. *Khon khaek* were haunted and possessed by spirits as much as their Thai-Buddhist counterparts. But whilst logical rigour is not a common feature in any society it was clear that this apparent contradiction was not just the manifestation of logical inconsistency. *Khon khaek* did believe that whilst the spirit of dead relatives might return to their former abodes if a rite in their honour was being held, they did *not* haunt

or behave malevolently. Once dead, it was believed *khaek* gave up their commitment to and participation in this world for ever. Rather *khon khaek* laid illness, misfortune and hysterical behaviour at the door of the *thai* spirit world. It was *thai* nature spirits such as *phii baa* (spirits of the forest), *phii chin*, that dwelt in caves and *phii tai hoeng* that caused *khon khaek* harm and possessed them. It was the *thai* spirit world that was used as an explanation of causation by *khon khaek*. *Thai phii saksit* were believed to protect *khon khaek* too. *Khaek* boats were guarded by *yaanangrua*, their houses by *sau mae rwan* and their children by *Mae Suu*. *Phii poob* and *phii krasū* were also believed to live on *khaek* boats too.

Thus, in what must be considered a superb piece of rationalisation, *khon khaek*, in their own fashion, reconciled their own denial of a spirit world with the spirit world of the host society, on so doing successfully grafting their own world view onto the belief system of the local host society.

The only real difference between each group's relationship to the spirit world lay in propitiation. Like *khon thai*, *khon khaek* solicited favours and propitiated guardian *phii* both on an adhoc basis and at institutionally prescribed times. But they used different institutions for this propitiation. Whilst *khon thai* used traditional functionaries e.g. *mau tham khwan* (soul tying doctor) to propitiate *yaanangrua*, *jauthii* and *sau mae rwan*,¹⁸ *khon khaek* used a *khaek* religious institution, the prayer group feast (which I will go into detail about later) for this propitiation. This rite included village mosque officials reciting arabic prayers derived from the koran.

But interestingly, exorcisation, unlike propitiation of the *phii* may be carried out by individuals (*mau phii*) of either group for the afflicted of either group. The village has four *mau phii*, two of whom are *thai*, two, *khaek*. The most famous *mua phii* is in fact a *khaek*, Naay Matlen. But even Naay Matlen has so far been unsuccessful in his attempt to exorcise (*laay phii*) the most famous case of long term spirit possession in the village, that of a middle-aged *thai* woman.

18) The propitiation of *yaanangrua*, *jauthii* and *sau mae rwan* are separate rites and may be performed by different functionaries. But in Muuthiinyng they were all performed by one traditional functionary, Naay Pan, referred to as *mau tham khwan*.

The comparison of *khon khaek* with *khon thai* in the last few pages has clearly demonstrated the lack of differentiation between the two groups at the grassroots in Muuthiinyng. In fact the only real difference between them lies in the religious sphere. The 'other-worldliness' of Buddhism, its negation of 'this world' and its 'salvation' and death-orientation have been a recurrent theme in the literature.¹⁹ It is frequently argued that Buddhism has little to say about the practicalities of everyday life, being geared to transcendental and supramundane ends. But such a viewpoint is essentially a 'Great Tradition' interpretation, based on the scriptures alone. In 'Little Tradition' terms, at the local grassroots level, the kind of Buddhism practiced by the peasantry is very different from that spelled out in the scriptures. In the *Ideology of Merit* (1968), Tambiah clearly demonstrates that in N.E. Thailand, in 'practical religion' terms, far from being a cult for the dead, village Buddhism is a cult for the living, for the practical implications of karmic theory in everyday life lead to a central focusing on meritmaking. This is true of Muuthiinyng too.

In Muuthiinyng, *khon thai* have only a limited knowledge of Buddhism for several reasons. The language of the scriptures, Pali, is a foreign language. The educational standard of the monks and laity is low. Lastly they have little contact with and receive little stimulus from theological centres. In practice, a very simplified version of Buddhism is adhered to, which is operated around the concept of *kam* (karma), *bun* (merit), *baab* (sin), *sawan* (heaven) and *narok* (hell). According to karmic theory, meritorious acts are weighed against evil acts and an individual's position in this, and successive lives, is dependant on their *bun* merit/*baab* demerit balance. If a person has committed more sinful deeds than meritorious, he will be consigned to hell and to a lower social position in later existences on earth. If a person has committed more meritorious deeds than evil, on death he will be consigned to a heaven and in future lives attain a higher status. Whilst karmic theory is essentially 'other worldly' in orientation, in everyday terms it orients people to perform good deeds (*tham bun*) and avoid bad (*tham baab*). 'Tham bun' has become institutionalised in Thailand. Materially supporting the temples and the monks (*waay phra*) in their striving for a 'higher'

19) e.g. see Harper (ed.) (1964), Spiro (1967), Leach (1962).

life is considered the meritmaking act *par excellence*. Thus in practice, popular Buddhism in Muuthiinyng, as elsewhere in Thailand, has become focused on meritmaking (*thambun*), religious activity being oriented around the temples and monks.

Khon khaek adhere to the Shāfi'i school of Islam which predominates in Southeast Asia. As with Buddhism, the coded doctrinal beliefs of this school differ markedly from the popular form of Islam practiced in Muuthiinyng by *khon khaek*. In Songhkla and Haadyai, the major towns of the province, live reformist Wahabis, referred to locally as *phuak mai* (new sect) whose aim is to purge Islam of its traditional non-orthodox elements such as spirit worship. Generally Wahabis are drawn from the more prosperous and educated elements of the Muslim communities, usually being most oriented to the modern western world. But in the country and in Muuthiinyng too, Muslim peasants tend to adhere to a more traditional form of Islam known locally as *phuak kau* (old sect).²⁰

Phuak kau, in Muuthiinyng, is essentially traditional in outlook, in that it requires belief in a spirit world, and is not reformist. Nevertheless, it is remarkably Islamised on an institutional level in terms of the number of Muslim institutions and functionaries represented and rites performed. Although the community is small the village has quite a substantial mosque (*mosyit*). The village also has several mosque officials, an *imam* who heads the community and leads the faithful at prayer, a *iöbay* (assistant *imam*) who also performs the role of religious teacher (*iökhruu*), a *bhilal* who calls the faithful to prayer, and a *katep*, who reads the lesson at Friday Prayers (*samayang wan suk*), the Muslim Holy Day. The mosque also has an elected committee to run it. All these officials act as moral guidance counsellors and leaders in religious affairs.

The 'Five Pillars of the Faith', the heart of Islam, are also present and upheld in the village: prayers (*samayang*), the basic pillar of the faith, being performed the regulation five times daily by many villagers—both men and women. Communal prayers (*samayang wan suk*) are also held at the mosque every Friday, usually attended by male representa-

20) First and second generation peasants who live in the towns also tend to adhere to the traditional *phuak kau* sect and tend to hold their festivals and bury their dead in outlying *phuak kau* villages.

tive from most households. Fasting (*khaubuat*) another pillar, is practised by most villagers during the month of Ramadhan, the most important orthodox festival of the year. Ramadhan in fact is the most important *khon khaek* in the village and a time for great manifestations of social festival for solidarity. Several other major festivals are recognised in the village too, including Muhammed's Birthday (*muloot*) and *khau buat iik* (Hari Raya Haji in Malay), a festival to honour Meccan pilgrims. The *haj*, pilgrimage to Mecca, is the ideal for all *khaek* villagers, but so far only three villagers have managed to go, because of the expense involved. Lastly, almsgiving (*yakat*), a major symbol of Islam, is present in the village in the form of an institutionalised annual payment to the religious leaders. Circumcision, the hallmark of the Muslim male, is performed on all males, taking place usually between the ages of 12-16 years.

Alongside the pillars of the faith and underlying them is an institution *phitti tham bun*, which I will translate, for reasons which will become very apparent later, as 'prayer group feast'. This prayer group feast, while not part of Muslim orthodoxy, is complimentary to, and an essential part of, Muslim social organisation and belief in the village. Prayer group feasts may be either held in the home or at the mosque. If held in the home, the instigator will invite male relatives and friends who are active household heads and important religious leaders to come and pray in his house. Usually, on the occasions of major Muslim festivals, a communal prayer group feast may be held in the mosque, involving both the middle-aged and elder household heads. After prayers have been said, a feast of the best food that can be afforded will be served to member of the prayer group. If held in the home this feast will be supplied by the host and his family, often to as many as twenty to thirty people. If held in the mosque, each household who wished will supply a tray of food, often as many as ninety dishes being brought to the mosque.

The prayer group feast²¹ is held in the village for a wide variety of occasions, not only for major Muslim festivals but for household rituals

21) Similar prayer group feasts are found in other Muslim areas in Southeast Asia. In some of these areas and in Muuthiinyng too, these prayer group feasts are also held for magico-religious rites. But as I argue in my doctoral thesis these prayer group feasts in Muuthiinyng, and perhaps elsewhere too, are primarily Muslim in religious orientation, not magico-religious. Rather I maintain that this essentially Muslim rite is used at magic religious occasions precisely because of its Muslim religious associations. Muslim prayers and officials are believed to have 'power' and as such are appropriate for dealing with and controlling the spirit world.

and rites de passage. Generally, because of the enormous cost, household rituals and rites de passage are multipurpose. They always include prayers asking for God's blessing (*khaw prajau hai phon*) for household members and dead relatives, and often, at the end of a major rite such as at circumcision, or a death ceremony, the *khon plae*, or Muslim baby naming ceremony may be held.

This overt degree of Islamisation in the village is impressive and remarkable when it is taken into account that until recently the village was very remote and inaccessible, with few and infrequent links with the major towns in the province or the Muslim theological centres. But a closer scrutiny reveals that this Islamisation is very much a 'vener'; whilst a Muslim religious institutional form may be present in the village, it lacks substance and content. Except for the Five Pillars of the Faith, *khon khaek* have only a limited knowledge of Islam.

For instance, the only prayers most villagers know are the short prayers which they use for all occasions such as *lā ilāha illa' ilah* (there is no God but Allah) and *bismi'llāh irrahmān ir-rahim* (in the name of God, the Compassionate One, the Merciful). Watching participants at rites where these are said, it is apparent that many lay Muslims do not even know these prayers and have to be led by the mosque officials who officiate, the religious leaders themselves being little better versed in their knowledge of prayer than the average layman. What is more, villagers do not know the meaning of these prayers. A survey showed that even the meaning of *lā ilāha illa'ilāh* was not known by the villagers, most villagers believe that it signifies thinking of God (*khittyng prajau*). The villagers' limited knowledge and understanding of prayers is expressive of their limited knowledge of Islam in general.

Khon khaek, in Muuthiinyng, like *khon thai*, are faced with the problem that the sacred scriptures are in a foreign language. A major reason for the dearth of prayers and lack of understanding of them is that the villagers have no knowledge of classical arabic, the language of the Koran, the language in which God revealed his thoughts to Muhammed. Nor do they know Malay, the local medium of koranic studies, in which several commentaries on the Koran and many books on Islam have been written. Thai is the mother tongue of the villagers. Recently

the koran has been translated into Thai but the villagers are not aware of this. Nor are there any books in Thai on Islam available for them to read. Moreover there has been no missionary activity from which the villagers could have gained a deeper knowledge of Islam by Thai-speaking Muslim teachers from the south. Thus the only means the villagers have of attaining first-hand knowledge of Islam is by learning Arabic or Malay. Knowledge of the latter is more easily obtainable. Only one or two villagers have been to Malaysia, and speak passable Malay, but they have little more knowledge than other villagers who have learnt Malay and studied religion in the local area. Malay, Arabic, and Islam can be studied at *bonaw* or *bondoks* (Muslim religious schools). But those *bonaw* situated in rural areas further south have a low religious educational standard. A student at a *bonaw* gains familiarity with the Koran and Muslim rituals, but learns little about Muslim belief and local orthodoxy. Emphasis is placed on teaching the Koran by rote rather than on teaching orthodox Muslim beliefs, primarily because the teachers themselves are country people with little orthodox knowledge.

In general, by the time a student leaves a *bonaw* he will be able to read a little Malay and possibly Arabic, but he is unlikely to understand it. He will also know a few passages from the Koran by heart, including the *bang* (the call of the minaret), the *fhatiya* (the introductory passage in front of the Koran) and one or two *dua* (blessings), but he will have little further understanding of the substance of Islam.

The nearest *bonaw* is in Channa district, Songkhla province, some ninety kilometres from Muuthiinyng. Muuthiinyng *khaek* have some connections with this *bonaw* and there is a certain degree of movement between the two; the previous *imam* went to live there and frequently visits the village; so too do a few village young men who are Channa *bonaw* students.

Generally young men study for a few years at a *bonaw*, nowadays usually after they have finished four years' state education. They then return to the village and take up a job as a fisherman or farmer. In middleage, when they become mature responsible household heads (a necessary qualification for becoming a village Muslim religious leader),

their familiarity with the Koran and Muslim rituals qualifies them to become mosque officials or members of the mosque committee. But usually, by the time they have become religious leaders they have forgotten most of the little that they learnt at the *bonaw*. Yet these are the men who act as repositories of village knowledge of Islam and act as the village religious teachers. The assistant Imam (*iöbay*) who teaches the village children is a typical example. He went to a *bonaw* for three years about thirty years ago. He can still read a little Malay but has long since forgotten any but the basic prayers. Even the *katep* who states a preference for a more orthodox (*kotmaay*) way of life knows little more.

A number of the pre-adolescent village boys go to the *iöbay* every morning and evening for lessons in Muslim religion. He teaches them how to pray and the washing rituals demanded of Muslims before prayer from an illustrated Malay commentary. He also teaches the children to recite by rote a few short passages from the commentaries. In the three years that each child is supposed to attend the *iöbay*'s classes he learns enough to be able to pray five times daily and, with the aid of village religious leadership, to find his way around Muslim village rituals.

Given no first-hand understanding of Malay or Arabic (a basic barrier to the dissemination of orthodox ideas), poor religious educational facilities, physical isolation in the past, and the low standard of village religious teaching, it is no wonder that the mosque officials and the villagers had only a limited knowledge of Islam and that Islam in Muuthiinyng lacked substance.

In fact, *khon khaek* operate a much simplified system of belief compared with that advocated by orthodoxy. Whilst the villagers can recite the names of the Muslim schools on demand, they do not know the differences between schools or in what countries each school predominates. Generally they say that all the schools have the same beliefs, but use different forms of ritual. The only remarks I ever heard made as to the differences between schools was that *hanafis* were clothes-sellers, an inference no doubt derived from seeing Hanafi Indian cloth traders in Songkhla and Haadyai. Also that the Sha'fi school was more pure than Hanafi so that although a Shaf'ii Imam could lead Hanafis at prayers, it could not be done vice versa.

It is around the concept of *Allah* (God), Nabii Muhammed, *khwan* (soul substance), *chiwit* or *winjaan* (life/soul), heaven (*sawan*), hell (*narok*), and meritmaking (*thambun*) that the *khaek* belief system revolves, a system of belief that involves some concepts similar to and parallel to the Thai.

Even the smallest *khaek* child can recite *Allah's* attributes, such as there is but one God, he is incorporeal, all-pervasive, the creator of the world and the judge of all his creatures. *Allah* is a far more personal god and less remote than the enlightened Buddha is for *khon thai*. Prayers five times daily produce a feeling of nearness to God and result in the setting up of a very personal relationship, one based on the immediacy of *Allah*. It is a personal relationship that facilitates the asking of boons. Nabii Muhammed is not deified, his mortality being frequently stressed. The names of several other prophets are known—Jacob, Abraham, Moses—and one or two have heard of Jesus, but except for a few tales of their deeds, little is known about them.

Thais believe that all individuals have a *khwan* (soul substance) which if frightened (*tokjai*) may become out of condition (*sia*) or even fly away (*bin*). As a means of revitalising and/or bringing back the *khwan*, a traditional rite, *phitti tham khwan* (soul-tying ceremony), is performed. This ceremony, performed by a traditional functionary, the *mau tham khwan*, may be held on an *ad hoc* basis or at prescribed institutionalised times. e.g. at marriage or ordination. *Khon khaek* too believe they have a *khwan* and refer to it in terms of *tokjai/sia/bin* too.

The baby-naming ceremony and prayer group feasts held at circumcision, marriage and at illness were frequently referred to as *tham khwan*; the same term as used by *khon thai* to refer to Thai *khwan* rites. But whereas Thai *khwan* rites have specific rituals whose only purpose is to revitalise the *khwan*, the Muslims do not have such specific rites to revitalise their *khwan*. For example, at circumcision, marriage and at baby-naming ceremonies there are no special rites for revitalising the *khwan*; rather, *khaek* believe that the prayers asking for God's blessing and the associated ritual procedures at the prayer group feast traditionally held on these occasions will, if carried out correctly (amongst other things), result in the boosting of the *khwan* of the individual who is to be

married or circumcised. One is left with the impression that the concept of *khwan* is less important to *khon khaek*, perhaps because there are no special *khwan* rites.²²

Alongside this concept of *khwan* lies that of *winjaan* or *chiwit* or *roh* which is best translated as soul or life spirit. *Khon khaek* believe that each man has a soul which on death will ultimately go to heaven or hell, depending on the individual's actions in life. Whilst *khon khaek* might colloquially refer to this soul as '*winjaan*', following Thai usage, they are quick to point out when discussing this subject that the soul of a *khaek* is not like the soul of a *thai*, is not really a *winjaan*. They associate *winjaan* with the Buddhist karmic rebirth cycle (*kirtmai*); they do not believe that after death the soul follows the same karmic rebirth cycle as the Thais. *Khon khaek* prefer to use the term *chiwit* (life) or the Malay term *roh* to describe the phenomenon that leaves the body after death and goes either to heaven or hell.

When *khon khaek* state that good people go to heaven on death, they do not mean that on expiring a good Muslim will immediately go to heaven. What they really mean is that a man's *chiwit* or *roh* will go to the place known as *Tungmashaat*. Here all the dead will collect to await *wan kiamut* (the day of judgement). On *wan kiamut* the angels will judge each *khaek*'s actions in life and will allow those who have done more good than evil to go to heaven and enjoy its pleasures, whilst those who have sinned greatly will be consigned to hell forever.

There were two major points of view as to where *Tungmashaat* was, namely in the sky and in the cemetery (*gubo*). The latter view is most commonly held, as a result of which prayers asking for God's

22) Although concepts similar to *khwan* are found throughout S.E. Asia, in Malaysia it is called *semangat*; nevertheless it seems reasonable to assume that *khon khaek* in Muuthiinyng have not just taken over the name, but have also taken over the *thai* concept of soul substance, for the Malay form, *semangat*, is in certain respects different from that of the Thai (which I don't have the space to go into here). *Khon khaek* in Muuthiinyng adhere to the Thai definition of *khwan*, not to the Malay definition of *semangat*.

Interestingly there seems to have been some use of Thai *khwan* rites by *khon khaek*. There have been cases, more frequently in the past, of certain Thai *khwan* ritual forms, e.g. the making of lustral water, and the use of Buddhist ritual objects being used by Muslim religious leaders at circumcision and marriage rites, although I personally never witnessed it.

blessing for the dead at major festivals were usually held in one or other of the village cemeteries. As with all world views that attempt to conceptualise the ultimate in anthropomorphic space-time terms, the villagers were faced with conceptual difficulties in attempting to explain the nature of *Tungmashaat*. I once asked how it was possible for the *gubo* to hold all the dead people who had died in the village: wouldn't it be very crowded, I asked? One good lady replied that when a dead body had rotted away completely God put in its place a tiny person, the size of a finger, and it was this tiny person who dwelt in *Tungmashaat*: a superb piece of rationalization of the overcrowding problem in *Tungmashaat*.

Interestingly, *khon thai* beliefs concerning the immediate fate of the soul after death were also incorporated into the village *khaek* world view. Local orthodox doctrine holds that when an individual dies his soul departs from his body to 'heaven'. When an individual is about to be buried a mourner will whisper the Muslim creed into the corpse's ear so that he can remember what to say on Judgement Day. At this point God inserts a substitute soul for a moment into the corpse in order that it may hear and remember the creed. But only one or two of the Mosque officials had heard of this belief. Most villagers held similar beliefs to *khon thai* as to the immediate fate of the soul after death. *Thai* villagers believed that the soul hovered around the dead body until it was buried, and that on the third night the spirit would return to its home on earth because it was homesick. *Khon khaek* too believed that the soul hovered around the corpse, but for seven days only; on the seventh day they believed it 'rose'. On this day *wan jet*, a big prayer group feast, is held to pray for the soul of the dead. Ideally each evening during the previous week a prayer group to pray for the dead person is held at the *gubo*, at which many of the responsible male household heads in the village, often as many as fifty, attend. *Khon khaek* too believe that the soul reverts to its home on the third night, and there are many tales told by both Muslims and Thais of people seeing dead relatives crying at the window.

For both *khon khaek* and *khon thai*, heaven is a place of sensual pleasures and abundance. But opinions differed as to whether Thai and Muslim heavens were the same. One point of view maintained that

since *khaek* corpses were buried but *thai* bodies were burnt heavens and hells must be different. Another view held that there was only one heaven and hell but that each group inhabited different abodes there. Only one *khaek*, the rather bigoted wife of the *katep*, said that there was only one heaven and hell and that Thais, since they were unbelievers, would surely be thrown into hell. In general, *khon thai* and *khon khaek* not only viewed their social groupings as being mutually exclusive and endogamous, but viewed life after death in this way too (no doubt). This is primarily because each group perceived the progress of the soul after death differently: *kirtmai* (rebirth) versus *wan kiamut* (Day of Judgement).

But although *khon khaek* and *khon thai* view the idea of the fate of the soul after death so differently, they both view the means of getting to heaven and avoiding hell in the same way. Orthodox Islam postulates two opposing and contradictory views as to man's responsibility for his actions, predestination and free will. On the one hand, Islam is essentially deterministic and fatalistic in orientation, holding that God made all things, that man is part of a great design and that as such his life is predetermined and mapped out for him. On the other hand, Islam also maintains that God gave man freewill to choose his own actions, to choose between good and evil. However, on *wan kiamut* (Day of Judgement) all a man's actions will be judged; a person who has led a good and virtuous life will be allowed to enter heaven and enjoy its pleasures, but if a Muslim has sinned more than he has done good he will incur God's wrath and be consigned to hell for ever.

It can be no accident that when this subject was discussed in Muuthiinyng informants would bring up the Adam and Eve creation myth and point out that God gave Adam and Eve freewill. In 'practical religion' terms it was 'freewill' and associated ideas that provided the central focus and orientation for all *khaek* religious beliefs and actions in the village. Determinism was not stressed in the *khaek* worldview. An indicator and reflection of the lack of emphasis laid on determinism in the *khaek* worldview lies in the absense of the use of the fatalistic Malay/Arabic term "insha'allah" (God willing) or a Thai derivative. In Malaysia this term crops up frequently in conversation, being tacked on

to even the most innocuous remarks. But whilst *khon khaek* in Muuthiinyng use many Malay loan words I never heard this term or a Thai derivative ever used.

Looked at from the freewill point of view, man's progress on the road to heaven or hell resulted in *khon khaek* evaluating all actions in terms of good and evil. The view that 'one reaps what one sows' (*tham dii dai dii*) provides the focal orientation for action. It must be apparent that this view is similar to the *thai* belief as to man's responsibility for his actions and to the karmic belief that one reaps what one sows. Thus the *khaek* major orientation, like the *thai*, is to do good and avoid evil. In fact, *khon khaek* and *khon thai* evaluate actions and have similar orientations to life: they operate a moral code whose content has striking similarities.²³

Khon khaek used the same terms as *khon thai* to describe good deeds (*bun*) and sin (*baab*). They in fact made merit like *khon thai*, a logical offshoot of their belief that one reaps what one sows. Meritmaking being just as important and institutionalised for them as for the Thais; and they too referred to meritmaking as '*thambun*'. Informants also stated that their views about '*thambun*' were the same as the Thais. Often *khon khaek* would ask me whether, like them (and the Thais), we made merit (*thambun*) in England.

As with *khon thai*, all actions were evaluated as being meritorious or sinful but some activities were considered as being more meritorious than others. For *khon khaek* the most meritorious acts were the Five

23) *Khon khaek* and *khon thai* also (often) define what is considered "good" behaviour and what is considered "bad" similarly. The teachings of the koran and the Buddhist "precepts" specify what is "good" behaviour and what is "bad" behaviour for each religion. But in practise Buddhist and Muslim moral codes adapt to their host societies taking on traditional indigenous elements. Also these codes do not cover all areas of social behaviour; in areas where they are absent, often purely traditional standards exit. This is true of Muuthiinyng, where both Buddhist and Muslim codes have adapted to and taken on elements of the local tradition. In many areas, such as their attitudes to bureaucracy, children and the spirits, *khon khaek* and *khon thai* specify good and bad behaviour similarly.

Pillars of the Faith. But interestingly the ranking order of the Five Pillars of the Faith were less institutionalised than the ranking order of the *thai* merit making acts. A survey of older household heads showed that there was more agreement amongst the Thais as to the order of importance of merit making acts than amongst the *khaek*, *khon khaek* have widely differing views.

Khon khaek have also evolved an institutionalised merit making system similar and parallel to the Thai *waay phra* (financially supporting the monkhood as a means of making merit) system. The *khaek* institutionalised merit making system is oriented around the prayer group feast structure. This essentially Muslim or at least non-Buddhist structure has taken on new meaning in the *thai* context. It has been adapted, both conceptually and ritually, to fit in with the Thai *waay phra* system. The underlying rationale of the *waay phra* system has been grafted into the prayer group feast.

Although prayer group feasts are multi-purpose in their aims, an essential ingredient and the central focus of attention is to make merit. In fact, *khaek* villagers consider them to be merit making occasions *par excellence*. As has been mentioned (and is perhaps now understandable) prayer group feasts are referred to by *khon khaek* as *phitti thambun* (merit making ceremonies) or as just *thambun* (to make merit). If a prayer group feast was to be held I would be frequently asked: are you going to 'tham bun' today?

Intercession with God on behalf of another is a major tenet of Islam. Villagers believe that they can attain God's blessing by asking people to come and pray and ask for God's blessing on their behalf (*khaw prajau hai phon*). But more importantly, in the same way that *khon thai* believe that by feeding the monks they will attain merit, *khon khaek* believe that by holding a prayer group feast and feeding the participant members the household holding the rite will attain merit too. But whilst Thais believe that making merit will obtain for them a better rebirth in the next life, *khon khaek* believe that *tham bun* will incur God's approval and will result in good fortune in this life and weigh in their favour on Judgement Day (*wan kiamut*).

Like Thais, *khon khaek* believe that merit can be made for other people too, and a major feature of all prayer group feasts is to make merit for the ancestors (*thambun paw mee daa yaay*). Whenever I asked the reason for holding a prayer group feast, one of the first reasons I would be given was that it was being held to make merit for the ancestors. The major *khon khaek* festivals, *ook bwat*, to celebrate the ending of Ramadhan, *ook bwat iik* in honour of Meccan Pilgrims, and *muloot* (Mohammed's birthday), were primarily merit making festivals for the dead. At each major festival, prayer group feasts were held in one or other of the village cemeteries to make merit for the souls of the dead; and over the course of the year all the village cemeteries were visited. As in household prayer groups, food would be taken to the cemetery to be eaten and it was believed that the souls of dead relatives would return and 'eat' the food. After the *thambun* rites the graves of the dead are cleaned and weeded by relatives. Major *khaek* festivals in Muuthiinyng are thus essentially death oriented.

A comparison with the rationale for holding prayer group feasts in purely *khaek* or at least non-Buddhist areas tends to support my theory that a Buddhist merit making rationale has been grafted onto what is essentially a non-Buddhist prayer group structure, for prayer groups in non-Buddhist areas do not have a merit making rationale. Although it is not known how representative the following studies are, neither Geertz' (1960) study of the *slametan* in Modjokuto in Java nor Fraser's (1966) study of *makan pulot* (eating glutenous rice) feasts, which has a similar structure to Muuthiinyng *thambun* rites, in Rusembilan, a Malay village in southern Thailand in the Patani area, mention a merit making ethos. Geertz in fact states that they are held to attain *slamet* (mental equilibrium) as protection against the spirits and to act as social levellers. Stevens (in communication 1970) states that in Mesjid Tua, the village in Malacca State, southern Malaysia, in which he did his field-work, there was no merit making ethos either. Prayer group feasts were held to *beyar niit* (to give thanks to God). He gives examples of a man who married a proscribed cousin in another village giving a prayer group feast to atone for his actions, and of another man who held a prayer group feast to give thanks when his son got a job. When Stevens was invited to the prayer group feast to give thanks for the man's son getting

a job, the host said to him: "My son has got a job; we are having a bit to eat tonight—would you like to come?" This he states is the general form of invitation to a prayer group feast in Mesjid Tua.²⁴ This essentially social invitation is a far cry from the religious invitation form used in Muuthiinyng (are you going to make merit today?).

Stevens says that rapid Islamization has taken place in Malaysia in recent years. But within this Muslim context Stevens lays emphasis on the social side of prayer group feasts and sees them as being essentially social occasions; the prayers (*do'a*) he sees as being a kind of grace. Certainly in Modjokuto and Malaysia they are held for non-religious and social occasions. Geertz for instance states that ritual feasts may be held to celebrate the opening of a factory or a political meeting. In Muuthiinyng prayer group feasts, except for certain spirit propitiation rites, are only held for occasions the villagers consider part of Muslim religion (*sasanaa khaek*), reflecting the religious merit making orientation that the rite has taken on in the Thai context.

Not only is the merit making rationale underlying the prayer group feast the same as that articulating *waay phra*, but when watching the prayer group one is immediately struck by the similarities to the rituals and symbolic structure of the *waay phra* structure. An analysis of the ritual symbolism of the prayer group structure reinforces my view that the prayer group structure has acquired new meaning in the Thai context, for its ritual form reflects and symbolises the merit making ethos of the prayer group feast. In fact its structure has been adapted ritually and symbolically not only to fit the meritmaking ethos but to parallel the rites involved in lay meritmaking and gift-giving to the monks.

An analysis of the rites clearly suggests that participants in a prayer group feast are conceived of and treated as though they are 'mock monks', that the host household acts towards the participants as the laity does to the monks, and that the prayer group rites follow the same sequence of events as the ceremonies where the laity makes merit and gives gifts to the monks. An analysis of prayer group feasts in other areas gives support to my argument for in other areas the ritual forms are different and do not symbolise merit making.

24) In the past the prayer group feast was used in Mesjid Tua to propitiate the spirits. But it is not used for this purpose nowadays.

Laying emphasis on the social nature of the prayer group feasts in Mesjid Tua, Stevens (1970) states that on arrival the host and/or family welcomes the guests and the guests greet each other with the formal greeting: shaking hands and then placing the hand on the heart. In Modjokuto, according to Geertz, there is no greeting; guests come and sit down quietly to await the commencement of the ceremony. But at the beginning of the ceremony the host makes a formal speech and invokes the spirits. The host, he (1960: 12) says:

"expresses his profound gratitude for his neighbors' attendance. He regards them, he says, as witnesses to the purity and the nature of his intentions and to the fact that he is holding the required rite in order to realize these excellent intentions, and he hopes they will share in any benefit the ceremony brings."

But in Muuthiinyng the arrival of the participants at a prayer group feast follows the same pattern as in Modjokuto and, significantly, the same ritual form as that followed by Buddhist monks when they go to a house to perform a household rite: they enter the main room of the house, sit down and perhaps talk quietly to other participants until the ceremony begins. No formal greeting, welcoming speech or invocation to the spirits on 'Great religion' occasions is made either in a prayer group feast or at a *thai* household merit making rite in Muuthiinyng. Although not too much should be read into this the absence of greetings, welcoming and invocation in prayer group feasts, when viewed in terms of the context of the total rite, tends to suggest that the form of the beginning of the rite has been adapted to fit in with the sequence of events followed by monks at the beginning of a Buddhist merit making rite. As at a Buddhist merit making rite, a subdued, tense, what might best be described as a 'religious' atmosphere pervades Muuthiinyng prayer group feasts. The absence of welcoming etc., combined with the religious atmosphere, tends to symbolise and reflect the fact that *khaek* villagers, like Thai Buddhists on merit making occasions, do not view the prayer group merit making rites as social occasions but as an essentially religious rite, as demonstrated by the fact that both groups refer to merit making rites as *sasanaa* (religion).

In fact, participants in prayer group feasts symbolically and ritually act as though they are 'monks' and are treated by the *khaek* host household as such. In Buddhism only monks, i.e. males, take part in merit making rites,²⁵ so too with Islam in Muuthiinyng. Although the Sha'fi school treats women quite liberally and allows them to *samayang* (pray) at the mosque, they are not allowed to participate in village prayer group feasts.

There is no mention in either Fraser or Geertz of whether the participants perform the washing rituals demanded of Muslims before prayer. Stevens categorically denies that Muslims perform these rites before household prayer group feasts in Mesjid Tua. But in Muuthiinyng they are a very important part of the ceremony and are very ostentatiously, if somewhat perfunctorily, performed. After washing, the participants don the clothes they wear for formal religious occasions,—their best sarongs, and a Malay-style shirt and *muak khaek* (Muslim hat or topi). It is taboo and polluting for a Buddhist woman to touch a monk, and likewise women may not touch participants in prayer group feasts after they have washed; nor may women share with a participant the same banana leaf mat used at these rites for to do so would be to defile it. These washing rituals, special clothes and prohibitions on women touching men, tend to suggest that the villagers view the participants as having attained through washing a 'pure' state akin to that of the monks. Thus the participants' similarity to Buddhist monks is only too obvious, and as such to describe the participants in prayer group feasts as 'mock' monks seems reasonable.

The structure of the food offerings and the seating arrangement further symbolise the structural similarity of the prayer group feasts to the monk/laity merit making ceremonies and reflect the new meaning it has acquired in the Thai context—a merit making rationale. For those who serve and eat the food in the *khaek* rite are similar to those who serve and eat in Buddhist merit making rites. It is unlike Mesjid Tua where, Stevens says, although young men bring the food to the veranda where the rite is held, guests may serve themselves. It is also unlike Modjokuto where, Geertz (1960: 13) states;

25) Actually women may become nuns (*nangshii*) but generally they do not take part in merit making rites. Monks are preferred.

"The food is not served by the host but by one or two of the guests, who hop into the middle of the circle and fill the various dishes. When everyone has his filled dish, the host bids them eat."

In Muuthiinyng the same serving pattern is followed as that used in Buddhist ceremonies. As in Buddhist *waay phra* ceremonies, food is served to the participants, by those people who are donating the food and want to make merit; that is by members of the host household. To prevent women defiling the participants it is the male members of the household who serve the participants. Reflecting the nature of the merit making ethos, neither the participants nor the monks serve themselves: their role is to eat the food and thus make merit for the suppliers of food.

Stevens says that in Mesjid Tua the host and members of his family may take part in, and eat the food too. But in Muuthiinyng, as happens in Modjokuto *slametans* and in Thai merit making ceremonies, the host and/or members of his family do not eat or take part in the rite. Members of the host household either help refill the plates during the feast, watch what is going on, or do the washing-up on the side. It seems reasonable to assume that, as with the Buddhist laity members, the host household do not eat too because the merit is made in the participants eating the food, not them. The act of donation is the significant point. As happens in *waay phra* ceremonies, the members of the household only join in towards the end of the ceremony when a short prayer, a blessing, is said by the ritual leader. The members of the host household only eat, as is the case in *waay phra* rites, after the ceremony is over. Moreover, as often happens in Buddhist merit making household rituals, members of the host household do not bother to participate in the rite at all.

Village houses generally have two main rooms,—a large oblong-shaped room (*rwan*) which lies parallel to an open veranda (*bing*) which generally is some two to three feet lower. As in the Buddhist household rites, *khaek* prayer groups are held in the *rwan* and the host household sits on the *bing* facing the participants. In temple rites too, monks always sit on a raised platform above the laity. Perhaps the seating arrangement is just coincidental, but when watching the prayer group

feast being performed one is immediately struck by the similarity to the seating arrangement used in *waay phra* ceremonies, and it tends to suggest an adaptation to the Buddhist form on the part of *khon khaek*.

Anyway, the actual seating arrangement of the participants in the *rwan* itself leaves no doubt in the mind of the beholder that the positioning of participants has been patterned on the Buddhist form, not only because the seating arrangement is very different in non-Buddhist areas, but because the seating arrangement of monks is highly distinctive and in the circumstances any parallel seating arrangement can only be considered an imitation of it.

According to Stevens the prayer group feast is held on the outside veranda and if there are too many guests to fit on the veranda they will sit on adjacent ground. But this never happens in Muuthiinyng, even though usually twenty to thirty people will take part in the rite. As happens with the monks, the participants sit around the edge of the *rwan* with their backs to the wall. If there are too many people to fit around the three walls, another inward-facing line parallel to the outside line will be formed, as happens when a large number of monks are invited.

Stevens states that while guests may initially sit with their backs to the wall around the veranda, when the food is served on large trays containing several small bowls they will break rank and sit in separate circles around the nearest tray, and this is also true he says, of those participants who have to sit on the ground nearby. Fraser (1966:36) too describes how guests at *makan pulot* are seated in small circles on the floor and as each group finishes a new circle of people is formed. Geertz (1960:13) too states that the food at a *slametan* is placed in the centre of the floor and the participants sit in a circle around it. Whilst sometimes monks are served large trays containing several small dishes of dainty delicacies, they never break rank but select from the bowl nearest. But it is much more common to serve the monks food in kalapongs or on separate plates which are placed in a line in front of the monks. It is this latter pattern which is utilised by the *khon khaek* in Muuthiinyng. They never use large trays but place both rice and meat and vegetables on separate dishes in front of each participant. The similarity to the positioning of food of the monks is only too apparent.

The length of time spent at a prayer group feast and the form of leave-taking also reflects the merit making ethos of the prayer groups. Stevens points out that in Mesjid Tua guests may stay on after the rite is finished for a while for a chat and generally on leaving all guests and the host household formally take their leave of each other. In Modjokuto, however, they eat hurriedly and

“After about a half-dozen scoopfuls or about five minutes, they one by one stop eating, and when all have stopped they ask permission to ‘follow my own will’ (*nuwan sakersa*) and, receiving it, depart for home.”

But in Muuthiinyng, whilst, as in Modjokuto, the food is hurriedly eaten, taking only a few minutes, as each individual finishes he jumps up abruptly and hurries away, in what seems an inordinate haste, neither saying farewell or thanking the host for the meal. To the western observer, used to complicated rituals of farewell and thanks, such behaviour seems on first observance to be extremely rude. But it is no accident that monks, too, tend to leave immediately a rite is over²⁶ and do not ‘thank’ the laity for donating food to them. It seems reasonable to infer that the monks leave immediately because *waay phra* ceremonies are considered purposeful activities, i.e. merit making activities, not occasions for dalliance, and monks do not offer thanks for being fed and materially supported because for the laity the thanks lie in the giving. As such, there is no need for the monks to thank the laity for they are doing the laity a service by eating the food and accepting gifts.

It seems to me that in the prayer group feast the hurried departure of the participants and the saying of neither farewell nor thanks has similar symbolic overtones. It is, in fact, the crucial symbol in support of my argument that the prayer group feast has taken on new meaning, merit making rationale in Muuthiinyng. It seems reasonable to see in this a parallel rationale to that of the Thais: to argue that the reason the participants eat and leave hurriedly is because it is considered

26) However monks may stay around after the merit making ceremony is over and chat to the laity, usually outside in the temple compound.

a religious, purposeful, merit making occasion too, and that they do not give thanks because, as with the Thais, the hosts are getting their reward in the giving. Geertz stresses the importance of the feast in his description of *slametan* and he was right to do this, but in Muuthiinyng the feast is important not because, as he suggests, it is considered food for the spirits *per se*, but rather the donation of food to the participants is the means by which the ordinary *khaek* villager can make merit and secure himself good fortune in this life and in the next.

This comparison with prayer group feasts in other non-Buddhist areas has clearly demonstrated that the prayer group feast has taken on new merit making meaning and ritual symbolism in the Muuthiinyng context. But even if the ritual form of prayer group feasts in other areas had been the same as those in Muuthiinyng, this would not have invalidated my hypothesis that the ritual symbolism in these rites had taken on a new merit making meaning. In fact, certain rites in Muuthiinyng prayer group feasts, such as the best food available being served, men only taking part and serving the food, intercession on behalf of the dead, the wearing of special clothes, and hurried eating, are also found in other Muslim and non-Buddhist areas. Nevertheless, if these rituals are viewed in terms of the total ritual context of the ceremony, given the merit making rationale, it seems reasonable to infer that even these similar rituals have taken on new meaning for the Muslim villagers. They are viewed in terms of, and as part of the merit making ethos, and as such, they contribute to and re-inforce the total merit making conceptualisation of the prayer group feast.

Although the 'Great Traditions' of Theravada Buddhism and Shafi'i Islam are very different, in terms of 'practical religion', *khon thai* and *khon khaek* share a common basic religious orientation to life through merit making, a basic framework of religious conceptual unity. But this conceptual unity is not just the product of syncretism alone on the part of *khon khaek*. *Khon khaek* beliefs are indeed rooted in Islam, for the origins of *khaek* merit making lie partly in the Muslim doctrine itself—in the concepts of freewill, do good and avoid evil, one reaps what one sows, and in the belief in the possibility of intercession on behalf of others. These are aspects of Islam that are similar to Thai beliefs. What has

happened is that no conceptual significance has been attached to, and no emphasis laid on those aspects of Muslim belief, i.e. divine determinism, that contradicts *khon thai* beliefs. Rather, *khaek* beliefs that are similar to *thai* have been stressed and reinterpreted and articulated to fit in with the beliefs of the host society.

Perhaps a reason for the parallelism of *khaek* and *thai* beliefs lie in the origins of *khon khaek* in Muuthiinyng. Perhaps, as was tentatively suggested at the beginning of this article, present day *khon khaek* are as much the product of intermarriage and conversion as of mass migration. If this is the case, then possibly the converts' *khaek* religion and their offspring took over and assimilated those aspects of Muslim beliefs that were similar to the *thai*, beliefs which they were already familiar with and which they could easily understand and digest, and they rejected the more alien and less familiar beliefs such as divine determinism. But whatever the origins of *khaek* belief in Muuthiinyng, it seems reasonable to view *khaek* beliefs as having Muslim form but *thai* substance and content.

Conclusion :

What has the study of the relationship between Muslims and Thai-Buddhists in Muuthiinyng taught us about the relationships between Muslims and Thais in Thailand in general ? Firstly, to throw away the stereotypes : it is apparent from this study that the stereotype views people have of Muslims and Thais, of people of widely differing culture, social structure and religion, does not necessarily hold at the grassroots. To get a meaningful view of Muslim/Thai interaction, a 'grassroots' analysis is therefore necessary, an analysis not only at the socio-economic and cultural level but at the religious level too.

Secondly, rather than assume, as is usually the case, that Muslims and Thais are very different in culture and social structure and then study both groups from the point of view of their differences, it might perhaps be better to study inter-group relations from the point of view of their similarities both underlying and overt. A study of the way in which each group has adapted to the other might be very revealing. This seems a valid theoretical framework, not only for Muslim communities

incapsulated in a predominantly Thai area, of which there are many, especially in the area further south around Satoon, but also for Thai/Muslim inter-relations in the southern Thai/Malay heartland around Patani, Yala and Naratiwat. An interesting future study would be to determine the degree to which Muslim communities in this Malay heartland are in actual practise Malay culturally and socially, and the degree to which they are Thai, both overtly and in terms of underlying form.

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