

เรื่อง

สู่สังคมสมานฉันท์

กลุ่มที่ 1

ความสมานฉันท์บนความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรม และชาติพันธุ์

Maintaining Peace in a Neighborhood Torn by Separatism:

The Case of Satun Province in Southern Thailand

By Thomas I. Parks

“ลาว” ในทัศนะของไทย

โดย ทวีศิลป์ สืบวัฒนะ

เจ๊กและแขกกับสังคมไทย: ปัญหาคนไทยมุสลิมเชื้อสายมลายูจากประสบการณ์คนไทยเชื้อสายจีน

โดย เกษียร เตชะพีระ

ร่วมจัดโดย

มูลนิธิชัยพัฒนา

สำนักงานคณะกรรมการพัฒนาการเศรษฐกิจและสังคมแห่งชาติ

สถาบันพัฒนาองค์กรชุมชน

กระทรวงทรัพยากรธรรมชาติและสิ่งแวดล้อม

กระทรวงแรงงาน

และ

มูลนิธิสถาบันวิจัยเพื่อการพัฒนาประเทศไทย

เรื่อง

สู่สังคมสมานฉันท์

กลุ่มที่ 1

ความสมานฉันท์กับความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรม และชาติพันธุ์

Maintaining Peace in a Neighborhood Torn by Separatism: The Case of Satun Province in Southern Thailand

by

Thomas I. Parks

Southeast Asia Studies
Johns Hopkins University
School for Advanced International Studies
Washington, DC

November 11, 2005

ร่วมจัดโดย

มูลนิธิชัยพัฒนา

สำนักงานคณะกรรมการพัฒนาการเศรษฐกิจและสังคมแห่งชาติ

สถาบันพัฒนาองค์กรชุมชน

กระทรวงทรัพยากรธรรมชาติและสิ่งแวดล้อม

กระทรวงแรงงาน

และ

มูลนิธิสถาบันวิจัยเพื่อการพัฒนาประเทศไทย

CONTENTS

SUMMARY	1
RESEARCH OVERVIEW.....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	3
INFERTILE GROUND FOR SEPARATISM	4
SATUN AND THE “GREATER PATTANI REGION”	7
SATUN’S UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS.....	11
<i>Lack of Malay Identity.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Language Use and Transition from Malay to Thai as Primary Language.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Non-Porous Border and Few Cross-Border Linkages</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Muslim-Buddhist Integration and Peaceful Relations.....</i>	<i>19</i>
HISTORICAL FACTORS THAT EXPLAIN SATUN’S DISTINCTIVENESS AND STABILITY.....	20
<i>Satun Muslim Elites Choose Cooperation Instead of Resistance</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Lack of an Alternative Malay History</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Vulnerable Existence Along the Periphery of Multiple Power Centers</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Benign Neglect of Thai Government.....</i>	<i>30</i>
CONCLUSION.....	30
REFERENCES.....	32

Summary

The history of cooperative state-minority relations and relative stability in Satun, a Muslim-majority province in southern Thailand, represents a remarkable contrast to the other provinces in the southern border region. While separatist-related unrest has re-emerged in the neighboring provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and southeastern Songkhla, Satun is conspicuously removed from the conflict. Satun shares many similarities with these provinces, including historic ties to the Malay world, majority Muslim populations, a legacy of Malay-Muslim culture and language, and close geographic proximity. However, while the other provinces have been the site of intermittent separatism and resistance to Thai rule for more than 100 years, Satun has never had a separatist-related violent incident. This research project sought to determine how Satun is different from the other provinces, and whether these unique characteristics can explain the lack of separatism in Satun. The findings presented in this paper are based on a series of interviews conducted in Satun and other southern provinces, in July and August 2005.

Research findings revealed the extent of Satun's distinctiveness in comparison to the other provinces along the border with Malaysia. Satun's unique characteristics include a lack of Malay identity among the Muslim population; widespread fluency in the Thai language; minimal linkages with Muslim communities in Malaysia and the rest of southern Thailand; and the integration and peaceful relations between the Muslim and Buddhist communities in Satun. While these characteristics are helpful in explaining why Satun has been removed from the recent separatist unrest, further investigation was required to determine how and when Satun came to be so different. From 1900 to 1932, Satun and the Pattani region (including Yala and Narathiwat) went through a defining transition period, as these predominantly Malay-Muslim areas were incorporated into Siam, and placed under direct rule by the Siamese Government. During this transition, Satun's local leaders were allowed to continue their role in governance, while Pattani's local elites were completely removed from power. Over the next 30 years, Satun took an entirely different path from the other provinces, by undergoing a remarkable transformation in terms of education, language use, and political integration with Siam. During this same period in the Pattani region, the seeds of separatism and resistance were taking root, as the Thai-Buddhist dominated state increasingly came into conflict with the local Malay-Muslim population. Based on interviews and historical evidence gathered, this paper identifies four likely explanations for the divergence of Satun's experience from the other provinces during this period. The most important factors were the leadership of Satun Muslim elites and their tendency to cooperate with the state instead of resistance; the absence of an alternative Malay version of local history; the vulnerability of living on the periphery of major Southeast Asian centers of power; and the benign neglect of the Thai government throughout the 20th century.

Satun's history contains some important lessons that may be applicable to the current unrest in southern Thailand. Satun provides a useful example of a minority population in Thailand that has managed to find its place within the overwhelmingly Thai-Buddhist system. In the case of Satun, the Government of Siam/Thailand allowed relative autonomy in local governance, effectively worked with local elites, and avoided heavy-handed assimilationist policies and repressive security measures. Whether a case of enlightened policy or benign neglect, this approach by the Thai Government facilitated more cooperative long term relations with Satun's local Muslim population that was essential for maintaining stability and encouraging political and economic integration.

Research Overview

Recognizing the potential significance for southern Thailand as a whole, this research project sought to determine how Satun province is distinct from the other majority Muslim provinces of southern Thailand, and how this distinctiveness might explain the notable lack of separatism. In July and August 2005, a small research team conducted a series of 24 interviews in Satun province, and two interviews with Satun natives living in Pattani. In total, 66 residents of Satun were interviewed including Muslim and Buddhist community leaders; academics and historians from Satun; teachers, school administrators, and local government officials working in Satun, including native residents and more recent arrivals transferred to Satun; Muslim and Buddhist religious leaders; business owners, farmers and fishermen. The research team conducted interviews in Satun province between July 19 and August 17, 2005, in the following places: Satun (Meung district), LaNgu, Ban Chalung, Khuan Don, Ban Che Bilang, Ban Ketree, and Ko Ya Ra Tot Yai (Ko Sarai). Additional interviews were conducted in Pattani, Songkhla, Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Singapore.

The research team included the author, and research assistant Shumpol Sasnasopa, a Muslim resident of LaNgu. Supanee Sasnasopa was also extremely helpful in the field research phase of the project.

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, increasing attention has focused on internal conflicts, separatism, and inter-communal violence in developing countries. Most analysts have sought to determine the underlying causes of these conflicts, while seeking policy strategies for de-escalation and prevention of future conflict. This kind of analysis is urgently needed, in light of the rising frequency and intensity of internal conflicts, which often brings terrible consequences to local populations. Furthermore, many policy-makers and conflict analysts have correctly argued that the insecurity and humanitarian problems emanating from these conflicts can spread well beyond the borders of the affected areas, threatening nearby populations and neighboring states.

While the focus on conflict zones has intensified, few analysts have considered the surrounding areas that have managed to avoid being drawn into the conflict. How have these places maintained stability? In what ways are these surrounding areas different from the conflict area that can explain their separation from the violence? There are important lessons to learn from the places where conflict seemingly could have happened, but did not. Understandably, analysts usually focus on places where violent conflict has erupted, and ask “why.” Rarely do they look at neighboring regions – which often have similar minority populations, historical context, religious practices, and governance-related concerns – and ask “why not.” There are very few examples of regions where the characteristics between conflict-prone and neighboring conflict-free zones are similar enough to warrant a meaningful comparison. However, such an example could be useful for understanding the dynamics of the conflict area, and determining the pre-requisite conditions for peace.

Satun province in southern Thailand presents such a case. While political conflict has plagued the Muslim-majority provinces of Narathiwat, Yala, Pattani, and southeastern districts of Songkhla provinces for generations, the situation in neighboring Satun province is quite different. Throughout the latest round of conflict, Satun has been conspicuously removed from the separatist movement. Satun is a rare example of a peaceful province that has obvious similarities to neighboring provinces wracked by separatist violence. Considering the centuries of intermittent conflict in neighboring provinces, it is truly remarkable that not a single violent separatist-related act has ever occurred in Satun.¹ What is different about Satun that has allowed the province to maintain its stability? How can this apparent anomaly be explained?

Satun is a relatively small province,² situated on the western side of Thailand’s border with Malaysia, along the coast of the Andaman Sea (Indian Ocean). Of Satun’s 278,876 residents, approximately 70% are Muslim.³ Historically, Satun was the northernmost point of the Malay-Muslim world, and once part of the Malay Sultanate of Kedah. Lingering signs of Malay influence remain including numerous names of Malay origin;⁴ cultural

¹ While violence has occurred in Satun, there has never been a confirmed separatist-related violent incident in Satun. This statement has been confirmed in numerous interviews with local historians, academics, and scholars from Satun, elderly residents of Satun, local officials, and sources in the Thai military. In all cases, interviewees cannot recall a single violent separatist-related incident.

² Satun’s geographic area is 2,478.9 square kilometers. The province contains 6 districts (amphur), 36 subdistricts (tambon), and 276 villages (moobaan).

³ The population figure is based on 2002 (2545 BE) government census figures.

⁴ The name Satun (pronounced “S-toon”) is derived from the original Malay word “Pekok Setul,” a type of tree found in abundance in the province. Most of the major towns and islands along the coast have Malay names, including Langu, Chebilang, Ko Tarutao (Tarutao Island), Sarai Island and Tammalang. Bakkar, Harun, “The Story of Negeri Setul: Satun 5 Monarchies (1813–1914)”, date unknown, p. 1.

similarities with Muslims across the border; and a sizeable population that continues to speak Malay.

Satun has evolved into a region that is infertile ground for separatism and political violence. Malay-Muslim⁵ separatist movements emanating from Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala provinces have attempted to create a following in Satun, but their efforts have yielded very little. Satun's Muslim population has a number of important characteristics that have prevented the growth of popular resistance to the Thai government, including: a lack of Malay identity among the Muslim population; widespread fluency in the Thai language; minimal linkages with Muslim communities in Malaysia and the rest of southern Thailand; and the integration and peaceful relations between the Muslim and Buddhist communities in Satun. In all of these factors, Satun presents a stark contrast to Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala provinces.

Satun's distinctiveness is not a recent development. During the first half of the twentieth century, Satun went through a remarkable transformation. In 1900, Satun shared many similarities with Pattani and the other Malay-Muslim communities to the east. By the latter half of the century, Satun had become a place altogether different in terms of integration into the Thai political system, use of Thai language, and relations between the local Muslim and Buddhist populations.

Where did the paths of these two Muslim-majority regions with similar historical origins diverge and what factors can explain this divergence? Research findings and historical evidence indicate that the most important factors were: the leadership of Satun Muslim elites and their tendency to cooperate with the state instead of resistance; the absence of an alternative Malay version of local history; the vulnerability of living on the periphery of major Southeast Asian centers of power; and the benign neglect of the Thai government throughout the 20th century.

This combination of factors lead Satun's Muslim population to generally adapt to Thai rule, learn the Thai language, and integrate into the Thai political system. By the time the separatist movement in the neighboring provinces became a major force in the 1970s, Satun's Muslim community had developed a relatively cooperative relationship with the Thai government, and had very little incentive to revolt.

Infertile Ground for Separatism

The Muslim majority provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and portions of Songkhla have been the site of frequent armed uprisings, and vigorous resistance to Thai influence for more than 100 years. Since the beginning of direct rule by the Thai (or Siamese prior to 1932) Government in 1902,⁶ armed resistance movements in southern Thailand have re-appeared

⁵ The term "Malay-Muslim" is intended to refer to ethnic Malay, Muslims living in Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and portions of Songkhla. For the purpose of this paper, the term Malay-Muslim will be used to identify those Muslims in southern Thailand that maintain a strong sense of Malay identity and primarily speak the Pattani Malay dialect. The Thai Government uses the term "Thai-Muslim" for this population, as well as for all Muslims living in Thailand. The term is not intended to indicate citizens of Malaysia.

⁶ According to Surin Pitsuwan, in 1902 the Thai Government began the process of transferring power from local elites in the Malay-Muslim provinces to Thai-Buddhist bureaucrats. The process was mostly complete by 1906. (Pitsuwan, op. cit., p. 33) In addition, the Siamese government began to incorporate the local system of Islamic law into the national judicial system, placing Thai secular and Buddhist law over Sharia law, and reducing the scope of cases heard by Islamic courts. (Christie, Clive J., *A Modern History of Southeast Asia: Decolonization, Nationalism, and Separatism*, I.B. Tauris, London, New York, 1996, p. 175)

with each generation (approximately every 20 to 25 years).⁷ In January 2004, the conflict re-emerged with an attack on a military base in Narathiwat. Since that incident, the region has seen daily assassinations, bombings, and other violent attacks. In this latest round of violence, more than 1000 people have died in less than two years. The current violence seems to be the latest incarnation of an long-standing resistance movement against Thai rule in the Muslim population of southern Thailand.⁸

Incredibly, Satun has managed to remain outside of the current conflict. Throughout the latest round of separatist violence, with daily attacks in Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and even Songkhla, Satun has not had a single separatist-related attack or major incident. While Satun is not located in the center of the conflict area, it is directly adjacent. Recent attacks have struck Hat Yai and Chana⁹ in Songkhla province, which are located less than 120 kilometers from Satun town, and 80 kilometers from the Satun-Songkhla provincial border. In fact, throughout the past century of resistance movements in southern Thailand, with at least six major armed uprisings in the three provinces to the East, Satun has remained outside the conflict, and has never had a confirmed separatist related attack.¹⁰ Protests against Thai government policies have been extremely rare, and have never reached the point of violence.¹¹

While there have been some reports in the past of separatist-related activities in Satun, in every reported case, the activities were carried out by external groups. In a 1989 article, Ruth McVey briefly describes some evidence of past separatist activity:

“From time to time Songkhla and Satun have appeared as centers of insurgent action, but this engagement has usually been engendered by groups originating elsewhere, who moved into those states because of their terrain, proximity to the Malaysian border and/or areas of support for rebellion, or the need to flee government sweeps.”¹²

Carlo Bonura also suggests that there have been a limited number of separatist activities in Satun, and that the politics of separatism have found some sympathy among Satun’s Muslims, though on a limited scale. He argues that Satun and other provinces in close proximity to the separatist conflict have not been able to entirely escape the conflict:

⁷ After the imposition of direct rule, there have been numerous armed resistance movements against Thai authority in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Major periods of protest and armed revolt have occurred in 1903, 1922-1923, 1947-1948, late 1960’s 1975, 1979-1981, and 2004-2005. Separatist-related conflict occurred sporadically between 1963 and 1990, with periods of notable intensity.

⁸ While there is evidence that some of the attacks are being orchestrated by non-separatist groups, the vast majority of the attacks appear to be carried out by separatist militant groups. Most attacks have targeted the traditional symbols of Thai rule, such as the military and police, local Thai Buddhist officials (including teachers), and government buildings and schools. To date, no separatist group has claimed responsibility for the attacks. However, separatist messages and leaflets are commonly found at scenes of attack, and locals regularly complain about intimidation from separatists.

⁹ Davis, Anthony, “Satun escapes the grip of Thai violence that is blighting south,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, September 1, 2005.

¹⁰ See footnote #1.

¹¹ According to accounts by two respected academics from Satun, a small protest occurred in Khuan Don in 1986 (or 1987) in which a group of local Muslims protested the placement of Buddhist images or figures in the local school. The images were removed soon afterwards, and no other related incidents were reported. It should also be noted that most of the other local sources interviewed do not recall any protests in Satun, which probably indicates that the protest was small, and many people in Satun were not aware of what happened. Interview with Dr. Sukree Longputeh, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Yala Islamic College, Pattani, July 25, 2005; Interview with Assistant Professor Awang Lanui, Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani, July 25, 2005.

¹² This excerpt from McVey’s article is found in a footnote on page 35. McVey, Ruth, “Identity and Rebellion Among Southern Thai Muslims”, in Andrew D.W. Forbes, *The Muslims of Thailand, Volume 2, Politics of the Malay-Speaking South*, Centre for South East Asian Studies, Bihar, India, 1989, p. 35.

“Due to the secretive nature of separatist organizations there has been little investigation of recruitment activities, the shipment, purchase and transfer of arms, or financing schemes used to support separatist activities.... Some of these activities were carried out in Satun, Thai-speaking parts of Songkla, ethnic Malay villages in southern Pattalung as well as on the Malaysia side of the Thailand-Malaysia border.”¹³

Based on interviews conducted in July and August 2005 in Satun province, there have some reports of individuals coming to Satun from the other Muslim-majority provinces (in particular Narathiwat), that have sought to build support for Islamic fundamentalism, and resistance to the Thai Government. According to interviewees, several recent entrées were made, mostly in mid-2004. However, interviewees claimed that the visitors found very little support for their movement, and the efforts have since ended. Several interviewees claimed that the local population has consistently rejected “extremist” groups (assumed to be Islamic fundamentalists or separatists) in the past, in part because the local Muslim community maintains excellent relations with the local Thai-Buddhist and Thai-Chinese communities. Some local residents gave other explanations for this apparent rejection, such as the moderate form of Islam practiced in Satun, and fear among the local population of getting involved in the separatist movement.¹⁴ These claims have been corroborated by other sources, who claim that Islamic “dakwah” or missionary groups have come to Satun to attract followers, but have been reported to the authorities and urged to leave.¹⁵

Several experts have offered theories as to why the separatists have yet to establish operations in Satun. Because of the clandestine nature of the separatist groups, however, it is very difficult to find conclusive evidence regarding their strategy (or lack of) towards Satun. In a September 2005 article, Anthony Davis argues that it is unclear whether separatists have made a conscious decision to stay out of Satun, or whether they simply lack the capacity to expand activities into the neighboring province. Davis contends that local powerful interests in illegal border-related commercial activities have taken steps to keep the militants out to protect their lucrative businesses.¹⁶ Other well-informed security experts have argued that the separatist organizations have made a conscious decision to maintain a violence-free Satun to allow for the movement of personnel, arms, and equipment through the Andaman ports of Satun.¹⁷

Despite some signs of separatist activities by outsiders coming to Satun, it is clear that the province has never developed a homegrown separatist movement. Despite attempts to instigate separatist activities, separatism has simply not taken root in Satun. While Satun’s Muslims are concerned about the situation in Pattani, and tend to be skeptical of the government’s approach to the problem, there is no sense of outrage against the state. As a result, we can reasonably conclude that Satun is infertile ground for separatism.

¹³ Bonura, Carlo, Jr., “Location and the Dilemmas of Muslim Political Community in Southern Thailand”, (presented at the First Inter-Dialogue Conference on Southern Thailand, 13-15 June, 2002, Pattani) Department of Political Science, University of Washington, Seattle, USA.

¹⁴ These arguments are presented as an illustration of common perceptions among Satun residents as to why the separatist movement has failed to find significant support in Satun province. They are not intended to illustrate a comparison with Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, or Songkhla. Anonymous sources from LaNgu, and Satun (Meaung district), interviews July-August 2005.

¹⁵ Davis, op. cit.

¹⁶ Davis, op. cit..

¹⁷ Interview with anonymous source, Bangkok, July 12, 2005.

Satun and the “Greater Pattani Region”

Satun has remained an anomaly to many researchers, Muslim leaders, and Thai officials. How can Satun province, with its relatively close proximity to the other provinces, majority Muslim population, and Malay heritage, remain unaffected by the political conflict in southern Thailand? Satun shares many similarities with the affected provinces. Approximately 70% of Satun’s population is Muslim, a figure that is comparable to the other provinces.¹⁸ Like the other provinces, Satun is situated along the Malaysian border, and has an active cross-border trade.

A hindsight comparison reveals that 100 years ago, Satun was in a similar position to the other Muslim provinces along the border region of southern Thailand. Satun was formerly part of Kedah, an independent Malay sultanate, which had been under Thai dominance throughout the 19th century, and subject to intermittent Thai suzerainty since the Sukhothai period (13th century). The modern-day provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and portions of Songkhla made up the territory of the former Patani¹⁹ Malay Sultanate. In a 1909 treaty between the British and Siamese Governments, Satun and Patani were both caught on Thai side of the newly established international boundary, separating them from the rest of the Malay world.²⁰ As a result of its Malay history, a significant portion of Satun’s Muslim population can trace its ethnic origin to Kedah and the Malay world. Prior to 1909, the vast majority of Satun’s Muslims (estimated at more than 90%) spoke a Malay dialect, as was the case in the other provinces.²¹

As a result of these similarities, Satun has often been grouped with the other southern provinces, and assumed to be subject to the same political irritants. Malay-Muslim separatist leaders have often included Satun in their political statements. In 1947, Haji Sulong, the head of the Islamic Council of Pattani Province, and an influential Malay-Muslim leader, submitted a list of seven demands to the Thai Government. These demands included a call for self-government, protections for Malay culture and language, and re-institution of Islamic law in the Muslim-majority regions along the border. The statement included Satun as one of the *four* Malay-Muslim provinces, and by association, the Satun Muslims were presented as one of the Muslim populations petitioning the Thai

¹⁸ According to 1979 population figures from the Ministry of Interior, the percentage of Muslims in Satun’s population was approximately 70%. Comparing all of the provinces in Thailand, only Narathiwat (80%), and Pattani (77.75%) have a higher percentage of Muslims. Satun has a higher percentage of Muslims than Yala (60%), and Songkhla (less than half). (Pitsuwan, Surin, *Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of the Malay Muslims of Southern Thailand*, Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, 1985, Table 1, p. 17). Figures from 1970 show a similar pattern – Narathiwat 77.9%, Pattani 77.3%, Satun 69.3%, Yala 60.2% (Farouk, Omar, “The Muslims of Thailand – A Survey”, in *The Muslims of Thailand*, Volume 1, Historical and Cultural Studies, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Bihar, India, 1989, Table 2, p. 13).

¹⁹ The traditional transliterated spelling from the local Malay dialect is *Patani*. The transliterated Thai spelling of the province is *Pattani*. This article will use the Thai spelling when referring to the province after 1909, and the Malay/*Yawi* spelling when referring to the history of the region prior to 1909.

²⁰ The 1909 treaty between Great Britain and Siam was a compromise between the two powers who had competed for influence in the northernmost Malay regions of Pattani, Kelantan, Trengganu, and Kedah (including Satun). The Siamese were forced to cede control over Kelantan, Trengganu, and most of Kedah, in exchange for securing their hold on Pattani, and preventing further British expansion into their southernmost territories. Satun, which had been the northernmost section of Kedah, remained on the Siamese side of the border, while the rest of Kedah (including Perlis) was ceded to British control. The reason for Satun’s inclusion on the Siamese side, and the subsequent division of Kedah, is not entirely clear. However, most experts have speculated that the mountain range that separates Satun from Perlis and Kedah provided an obvious natural border.

²¹ While both regions spoke a Malay dialect, the dialects were quite different. In Satun, the local population mostly used the Kedah Malay dialect, which is very similar to the modern central Malay dialect. In the Patani area, the local dialect was unique to the region, though it was very similar to Kelantanese Malay. For more information, please see section entitled “Language Use and Transition from Malay to Thai as Primary Language.”

Government.²² A group of 55 Muslim leaders in Narathiwat submitted a similar petition shortly after the Pattani Islamic Council. Interestingly, a group of Muslims in Satun also submitted a petition to the Thai Government, though little is known about the people involved, how representative they were, or the petition itself.²³

Malay-Muslim separatist leaders and organizations have often defined a Malay homeland, or *Negeri Melayu*, in southern Thailand, that encompasses the historically Malay regions where the majority of the population is Muslim and can claim Malay ancestry. This region is often referred to as “*Patani Raya*” or “Greater Patani.” In their calls for political autonomy or separation, separatist leaders often use the concept of Greater Patani to describe the geographic parameters for the proposed autonomous region. This region usually includes Satun. Most descriptions of Greater Patani span the entire border region, from Narathiwat in the East across to Satun in the West, and include southern portions of Songkhla. In his 1990 book on the Malay-Muslims of southern Thailand, Wan Kadir Che Man, former leader of the umbrella separatist organization Bersatu, included Satun in his description of the Greater Patani region:

“Although the Malay-Muslims comprise only about 3 per cent of Thailand’s 50 million predominantly Buddhist population (pre-1990 figures), they constitute a large majority in the four southern provinces of Patani, Narathiwat, Yala, and Satun, previously known as ‘Patani Raya’ or ‘Greater Patani.’”²⁴

Political statements by separatist organizations have included Satun in their conceptualization of the Malay-Muslim region of southern Thailand. In statements, websites, and other public announcements, these groups usually place Satun squarely within the world of “Patani Raya” and conspicuously ignore the differences in history, culture, politics and language that characterize Satun’s Muslim community. One of the earliest separatist organizations, the Gabungam Melayu Pattani Raya (Greater Patani Malayu Association) or GAMPAR, included Satun in its 1948 manifesto. Its first stated objective was that the “four provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun be united under Malay Islamic state.”²⁵ The Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), and the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) also included Satun in their envisioned independent Pattani state.²⁶ In 2005, an organization called the Patani Malay Human Rights Organization, which the government accuses of being a front for PULO, posted a website that includes Satun in the description of the “Patani Malay homeland.” The website also describes the Muslim

²² The translated text for the first demand was: “The appointment of a single individual with full powers to govern the four provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun, and in particular having authority to dismiss, suspend, or replace all government servants -- this official to be local-born in one of the four provinces and to be elected by the people.” Thomas, Ladd, “Thai Muslim Separatism in South Thailand”, in Andrew D.W. Forbes, *The Muslims of Thailand, Volume 2, Politics of the Malay-Speaking South*, Centre for South East Asian Studies, Bihar, India, 1989, p. 21.

²³ The petition submitted by Satun Muslims is mentioned in Ibrahim Syukri’s book, *The Malay Kingdom of Patani*. According to this account, a group of Satun Muslims, lead by Incik Abdullah bin Mahmud Salad, submitted a set of “similar demands” to the Thai Government. However, there is no description of the demands themselves, nor is there any indication of who the people were that submitted the petition, how large the group was, or whether the group was truly representative of Satun’s population. Syukri, Ibrahim, *History of The Malay Kingdom of Patani*, translated from *Yawi* by Conner Bailey and John Miksic, Silkworm Books, 1985.

²⁴ Wan Kadir Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1990, p. 32.

²⁵ Rahimmula, Chidchanok, “Peace Resolution: A Case Study of Separatist and Terrorist Movement in Southern Border Provinces of Thailand”, Prince of Songkhla University, 2001. Also in “Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad”, International Crisis Group, Asia Report #98, 18 May 2005.

²⁶ ICG Report, p. 8.

population of Satun as entirely Malay-Muslim, rather than including them in the category of “assimilated” Muslims.²⁷

Most of the literature supportive of the separatist movement has included Satun as one of the “four provinces,” without any mention of Satun’s distinct characteristics and apparent lack of involvement in the separatist movements of the past. In “The Malay Kingdom of Patani” published shortly after the arrest of Haji Sulong in 1948, Ibrahim Syukri describes the assimilation efforts of the Thai government, and the attempt to erase Malay language and culture.²⁸ He argues that these efforts are ineffective, as the Malay-Muslim population in southern Thailand will continue to resist these policies, no matter how ruthless the Thai strategy to force assimilation. However, Syukri makes no mention of the situation in Satun, or that it may be somehow different from the other majority Muslim provinces.²⁹ Similarly, Wan Kadir Che Man’s 1990 book on Muslim Separatism in southern Thailand and Mindanao frequently combines Satun into the discussion of the political conflict with the Thai Government. He does not attempt to distinguish Satun from the other provinces.³⁰

Separatist organizations and leaders have an incentive to include Satun in their definition of “Greater Patani,” so these statements are not surprising. Satun’s distinctiveness presents a dilemma to the Malay-Muslim separatist cause, in that it is a predominantly Muslim population, in a traditionally Malay region, that has taken the course of integration, and has seemingly chosen to work within the Thai system instead of resisting it. Only a few Malay-Muslim leaders and scholars in southern Thailand have recognized Satun’s unique characteristics, and have sought to explain the anomaly. Carlo Bonura has identified a 1973 article entitled “The Reason there is no news from Satun” by Hasan Mardman, Pan Yuanlae, and Praphon Ruangnarong, published in the Malay-Muslim journal *Rusemilae*. According to Bonura, the article explains “the relative lack of anti-government activism and political violence in the province,” as a product of “language use, style of local administration, religious sentiment and historical differences.”³¹

Academics, intellectuals and writers, from both Thailand and abroad, have been surprisingly inconsistent in their inclusion (or exclusion) of Satun from the perceived Malay-Muslim political community of southern Thailand. In most cases, authors have briefly referred to Satun’s distinctiveness from the other provinces, and the dilemma of including Satun in a

²⁷ Website of the Patani Malay Human Rights Organization, 2005, <http://www.pmhro.org/patani.htm>

²⁸ Syukri, Ibrahim, *History of The Malay Kingdom of Patani*, translated from *Yawi* by Conner Bailey and John Miksic, Silkwood Books, 1985

²⁹ While the extent of Satun’s assimilation was probably not widely recognized in 1948, there is strong evidence that the process of adopting the Thai language was well under way by this point, and that Satun’s local political leaders were already participating in national Thai politics. For more information, see sections in this paper entitled, “Language Use and Transition from Malay to Thai as Primary Language,” and “Satun Muslim Elites Choose Cooperation Instead of Resistance.”

³⁰ Only on one occasion does the author indicate that Satun may be an exception. When describing the exclusion of Malay-Muslim elites from senior government positions, he concedes that Termsak Semantarat, a member of the Muslim secular elite who served as Governor of Satun, was an exception to this trend. However, he explains this anomaly as an attempt by the Thai government to “appease the Malay people after the so-called Patani Massacre of 1975.” Wan Kadir Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1990, p. 133.

³¹ The article was translated by Carlo Bonura, and described in his 2002 article (op. cit.). The following translated passage illustrates the central question as posed by the authors: “Previously, Satun was considered one of the four southern provinces because it borders Malaysia and has a similar percentage of Thai-Muslims to that of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Currently, though, Satun has almost disappeared from the ‘four southern provinces’ with the [new] term ‘three southern provinces.’ Why is this the case, and what is the reason for the lack of news of unrest related to terrorism as in the three [southern] provinces?” Hasan Mardman, Pan Yuanlae, and Praphon Ruangnarong, “*Heidai mai mii khaw (rai) jaak Satun*”, *Rusemilae* Vol. 3, No. 4, 1973, 6-12. Source: Bonura, op.cit.

discussion of the political conflict in southern Thailand. However, beyond a brief mention, most authors provide scant details on why Satun is unique, or how it has come to its present situation. Carlo Bonura describes this omission in a 2002 article on Muslim political communities in southern Thailand, and the role of geographic location in determining the nature of local politics. "Treatment of Satun's exceptional character among the southern provinces appears with regularity, and often sparse detail, among academic and non-academic works written by Thai and international scholars."³² Citing several influential studies of southern Thai politics, Bonura highlights the dilemma that Satun presents in the concept of a "Greater Pattani Region." He argues that "Satun possesses a marginal status in these dilemmas of political community, one that must be recuperated or excluded in the 'ideas' of nationhood, national identity, or Malay-Muslim political community."

Surin Pitsuwan's "Islam and Malay Nationalism" includes Satun in the discussion of political separatism in southern Thailand, and the role of Islam in this movement. In the beginning of the book, he provides a "Map of the Greater Patani Region" which includes Satun in a geographic representation of an independent Pattani state, apparently as envisioned by supporters of the separatist movement.³³ However, he goes on to describe the distinctiveness of Satun, in particular the predominant use of Thai language, and the local population's participation in the Thai political system:

"Stun's (Satun) population generally spoke Thai, and their ability to communicate in Thai led them to participate more easily in the Thai political process. Although predominantly Malay-Muslims, the people of Stun were not as sharply polarized along ethnic lines as those of the other three provinces."³⁴ "...The level of conflict was less in Stun, whose population, although Malay-Muslim, generally spoke Thai and was considered more integrated into the Thai social and political structure."³⁵

In his survey of Muslim populations in Thailand, Omar Farouk includes the Muslim population of Satun in his categorization of Malay-Muslims, or "Unassimilated Thai-Islam," which includes Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat.³⁶ According to Farouk, these communities maintain active cross-border ties in Malaysia, continue to speak Malay dialects, and have retained a "considerable degree of Malayness in themselves in the sense that they have tended even at present to look towards Malaysia for psychological, cultural, and religious inspiration."³⁷ However, Farouk does mention that Satun does not fall precisely into the "unassimilated" category, and has become more assimilated into Thai culture and politics when compared to the Pattani region:

³² Bonura, Carlo, Jr., "Location and the Dilemmas of Muslim Political Community in Southern Thailand", (presented at the First Inter-Dialogue Conference on Southern Thailand, 13-15 June, 2002, Pattani) Department of Political Science, University of Washington, Seattle, USA.

³³ Pitsuwan, Surin, *Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of the Malay Muslims of Southern Thailand*, Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, 1985, Map II.

³⁴ Pitsuwan, Surin, *Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of the Malay Muslims of Southern Thailand*, Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, 1985, p. 76.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 160.

³⁶ Farouk describes nine distinct categories of Muslim communities in Thailand. Eight of the communities are considered "assimilated" including 1) Muslim Siamese, 2) Chams, 3) West Asians, 4) South Asians, 5) Indonesians, 6) Thai-Malays (Muslims with Malay ancestry that have mostly internalized Thai culture), 7) Chinese Muslims, and 8) Samsams. The ninth group is referred to as "unassimilated Thai-Islam" or Malay-Muslim. Farouk, Omar, "The Muslims of Thailand – A Survey", in *The Muslims of Thailand, Volume 1, Historical and Cultural Studies*, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Bihar, India, 1989.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 15.

“The position in Satun, which is overwhelmingly Muslim is a little ambiguous. Satun seems to be a marginal area in our continuum between the ‘assimilated’ and the ‘unassimilated.’Satun is losing much of its Malay-Muslim character because of its bilingualism.”³⁸

In general, Satun province rarely attracts the attention of influential leaders in Bangkok and the southern provinces, and as a result, very little is known about this quiet corner of Thailand. Considering the limited and inconsistent information available on Satun, it is easy to see why it is so often grouped, however inaccurately, with Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat in describing the “Four Malay Muslim Provinces” of southern Thailand.

Satun’s Unique Characteristics

In southern Thailand today, Satun’s Muslim community is remarkably distinct. A comparison with Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces reveals a number of stark contrasts in areas that are directly relevant to Malay-Muslim separatism. The inclusion of Satun in any conception of a “Greater Patani” region is misleading, and ignores the important differences between Satun and the other majority Muslim provinces in southern Thailand. In fact, Muslim leaders from Satun frequently expressed frustration that their community is so often grouped with the other border provinces of southern Thailand.

Research findings from 2005 point to several key characteristics that distinguish Satun from the other southern provinces:

1. Lack of Malay identity within the Muslim community in Satun;
2. Use of Thai language by more than 99% of the population, including Muslims (many of whom still speak Malay);
3. Non-porous border and the relatively few linkages between the Muslim community in Satun, with Muslims in Malaysia and the provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat;
4. Integration of Muslim and Buddhist communities, and the long history of peaceful relations.

Lack of Malay Identity

The Muslim community in Satun seems to have lost its sense of Malay identity. In the vast majority of cases, Muslims in Satun consider themselves Thai, and do not hold any sentimental attachment to the historical connections with Kedah, Malaysia, or Pattani. For the purposes of this study, we were primarily concerned with local Muslim *perceptions* of their identity, which in every case, revealed a strong sense of Thai identity.³⁹ Interviewees were asked whether they considered themselves Thai, Malay, or otherwise.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5, & p. 13.

³⁹ The concept of identity and the determinants of identity are a topic for considerable debate, particularly in the context of ethnic and political identity. Several authors have argued persuasively that a person or group can maintain multiple, competing identities, based on a number of factors including perceived ethnicity, nationality, religion, geography, language, history, and political orientation. For the purposes of this research project, our objective was to analyze general perceptions of identity among Satun’s population, without probing the individual’s determination of identity. Each interviewee was asked simply whether they considered themselves Malay, Thai or otherwise. Subsequent conversations shed light on the determinants of local residents’ perceived identity. However, to maintain simplicity in the interview process, and to avoid undue influence on interviewee responses, we did not seek to impose a definition of identity in our conversations with Satun residents.

Satun natives consider themselves Thai, regardless of their ancestry, language, or views towards the Thai government. When asked to define their identity, Satun Muslims use the term “Thai Muslim” or “Thai Islam” in almost all cases. When asked directly whether the Muslims of Satun have any Malay identity, or whether they were at one point in history considered Malay, the reactions are mixed. Some interviewees claimed that they were aware of historic ties to the Malay world. These respondents admitted that at some point in the past, Satun had been part of Kedah, and the people in Satun must have been considered Malay. However, most interviewees only had a vague notion of how far in the past, and many responded that Malay identity had disappeared from Satun “long ago.”⁴⁰

Even groups with the most apparent connections to Satun’s Malay past claimed a Thai identity. In the villages where the majority of the population speaks Malay as their primary language, and speak Thai only as a second language, local Muslims profess a Thai identity.⁴¹ Most of these Malay-speaking residents live in rural areas, and believe their families to be long-time residents of Satun. Their primary identification is with the local community (i.e. identity connected with their village, and to a some extent, Satun province). National identity is less of a concern for them, but still very straightforward from their perspective. Their line of reasoning tends to be “if Satun is part of Thailand, then I must be Thai.” Furthermore, we interviewed several people who are descendents of prominent Malay-Muslim families that came to Satun (mostly from Kedah) in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.⁴² While these interviewees clearly acknowledge their Malay ancestry, in all cases, they profess a strong Thai identity today. In present-day Satun, it seems that the only people who consider themselves Malay, are the very few recent emigrants from Malaysia.

These interviews indicate that national identity has not been politicized in Satun to nearly the extent it has in the other Muslim-majority provinces. Most Satun Muslims are not familiar with the political concerns and set of grievances commonly expressed by many Muslims in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Satun Muslims, particularly those in rural areas, have had little exposure to the ideas and debates within the Malay-Muslim community and separatist movements. On issues of identity, Satun Muslims seem to be unaware of the political sensitivities felt by other Muslims in Thailand. For example, when asked about their identity, some Muslims from rural Satun used the term “*khaek*” (or “*khaag*”) to describe themselves. Unaware of the negative connotations that are associated with this term in other parts of Thailand, these interviewees explained that, while the term may be a little old-fashioned, it was not an offensive term. In other cases, Muslims in Satun

⁴⁰ It must be re-iterated here that additional research is needed to verify these findings. These findings cannot be considered conclusive for a few reasons. First, the number of people interviewed was relatively small (66), and not necessarily representative of the entire population of Satun, though an attempt was made to be as representative as possible. Second, there is a possibility that responses may have been influenced by the conflict in the other Southern provinces. Satun residents are deeply concerned that the conflict may come to Satun in the future, and many believe that they are being closely watched by the government. As a result, some interviewees may have decided to proclaim Thai identity to avoid future problems. However, it is extremely unlikely that all respondents would have been influenced by this concern, and therefore, the fact that all respondents proclaimed Thai identity is significant.

⁴¹ Interview with ten local residents, Ban Chebilang, Amphoe Meung, Satun Province, August 1, 2005; Interview with four local residents, Ban Khubang Cha Mang Tai, Chalung, Amphoe Meung, Satun Province, July 28, 2005; Interview with three local residents, Ban Kok Sai, Ban Khuan, Amphoe Meung, Satun Province, July 28, 2005.

⁴² The families include Samantararat (descendents of Phraya Samantararat Burin, or Tui bin Abdullah, Governor of Satun from 1914-1932), Jaisamut, and Longputeh (descendents of Che Abdullah Longputeh, MP from Satun from 1943-1968). In only one case could we find a lingering sense of Malay identity. In one of the families, an elderly member of the family has often urged others in the family to remember that they were once Malay. Interview with Montree Samantararat, Satun, July 26, 2005. Interview with Sukree Longputeh, Pattani, July 25, 2005. Interview with Yongyot Jaisamut (Harun Bakkar), Satun, August 2, 2005.

mentioned that this term had been used in the past as a label for Muslims, but that it was no longer used.⁴³ These responses were fascinating in light of the widely recognized negative meaning attached to this term. The term has two commonly used meanings in the Thai language. The first meaning is “guest” or outsider. Second, the term is used as a broad label for Muslims, including Malays, and those from South Asia and the Middle East. For many Muslims in Thailand, the combination of these meanings has come to symbolize the conception among Thai Buddhists that Muslims are considered foreigners, even those that have lived in Thailand for generations. This concept is especially insulting in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, as it infers that Muslims living in the region of the former Patani Sultanate are somehow foreigners on the land that they have inhabited for centuries.⁴⁴

In Satun, the common term to describe the local community is “Thai Muslim.” Yet, even this term has political connotations for many Muslims in Thailand, especially those with strong Malay identity. The term is considered a product of the Thai Government’s attempts to assimilate the Malay-Muslim communities of Thailand, and to separate Malay identity from Islam. Yet, in Satun, the term is widely used, and Satun Muslims are either not cognizant of this political interpretation of the term, or they are unconvinced.

In Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, the sense of Malay-Muslim identity is widely felt, and openly expressed. The connection between Malay identity/ethnicity and Islam has always been a foundation of the separatist struggle. Muslims in this region have staunchly defended their Malay identity, and have resisted government assimilation programs, including the teaching of Thai in public schools. To them, Malay identity, Islam and the Malay language are inseparable.

Some have argued that Muslims in Satun are ethnically Thai, and therefore would be much more inclined to have a strong Thai identity.⁴⁵ However, this argument is debatable on several issues. First, it is very difficult to generalize on the ethnicity of Muslims in Satun. As a historic borderland region, Satun’s Muslim community had frequent interaction with Thai and Malay communities for more than 700 years. As a result, the ethnicity of Satun Muslims is almost certainly a mixture of Thai and Malay characteristics, and therefore cannot be easily classified in either group. Second, a theory of ethnicity based mostly on language use is an inadequate definition, as communities have been known to adopt new languages in only a few decades. In the case of Satun, the Muslim community spoke almost entirely the Kedah Malay dialect before the introduction of Thai-language schools in 1910. Third, it is not clear that ethnicity plays a major role in determining individual identity for residents of Satun. Religion clearly plays an important role, and group consciousness is primarily centered on religious affiliation. However, within the Muslim community, there is very little sense of whether they are “ethnically Malay” or “ethnically Thai.”

⁴³ Interviews with villagers in Ban Khuan Don, July 28, 2005; Interviews with villagers in Che Bilang, August 1, 2005; Interviews with villagers in Ko Ya Ra Tot Yai, August 16, 2005; Anonymous interview, Satun, July 2005.

⁴⁴ There are other reported cases of Muslims in Thailand using the term “*khaek*” to describe themselves, unaware of the perceived derogatory meaning of the term. According to Angela Burr’s study of Thai-speaking Muslims in northern Songkhla province, the Muslims are described themselves as “*khaek*”, despite the fact that the “term has derogatory overtones and the more educated town Muslims resent its use.” The villagers in the two rural towns where she conducted her field research, however, do not resent the use of the term, “in fact, they use the term with pride.” Burr, Angela, “Thai-Speaking Muslims in Two Southern Thai Coastal Fishing Villages: Some Processes of Interaction with the Thai Host Society”, in *The Muslims of Thailand, Volume 1, Historical and Cultural Studies*, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Bihar, India, 1989. Another source confirmed that the same situation was present in Samut Prakan, a town just south of Bangkok with a significant Muslim population.

⁴⁵ For more information, see Uthai Dulyakasem, “Muslim-Malay Separatism in Southern Thailand: Factors Underlying the Political Revolt,” in *Armed Separatism in Southeast Asia*, edited by Lim Joo-Jock and Vani S. Aldershot, ISEAS, Singapore, 1984, pp. 217-233.

Language Use and Transition from Malay to Thai as Primary Language

Perhaps the most notable difference between Satun and the other provinces is the significantly higher percentage of fluent Thai speakers in Satun. Today, more than 99% of Satun's population speaks Thai as either a first or second language. While there are still significant pockets of Muslim communities where Malay⁴⁶ is the primary language, in all cases, the vast majority of these Malay-speakers also speak Thai as a second language. It is very difficult to determine the exact number of Malay-speakers in Satun today, but estimates are usually between 10% to 15% of the population.⁴⁷

Malay continues to be spoken widely in six areas, including villages surrounding the towns of Chalung⁴⁸ and Ban Khuan⁴⁹ just north of the provincial capital, and four towns along the southern coast, including Ban Puyu, Chebilang,⁵⁰ Tanyong Po, and Tammalang. While there are many villages in the province with a minority of Malay-speaking residents, these are the only areas where the majority of the population speaks Malay. It is still possible to see many signs in *Yawi*⁵¹ script in these villages, as well as Mosques throughout Satun. In the Malay-speaking villages, local residents usually speak Malay in the home, and their first words were Malay. Most children from these villages learn Thai in the first few years of attending the local public school, and from children of Thai-speaking villages nearby. These villages often have a number of non-Malay speakers that have married into local families from nearby Thai-speaking villages, so children are often exposed to both languages from an early age. In almost every case, the only remaining Malay speakers that are not bilingual are the oldest members of the village – usually over 65 years old. Very few of them remain.⁵²

The geographic distribution of Malay-speaking areas is a product of exposure to (or isolation from) Thai influence over the past 175 years. Today, Malay-speakers are primarily found in relatively isolated coastal towns, and clusters of rural villages just off the major roads. These regions have long been inhabited by Malay speaking Muslims, but have

⁴⁶ The local Malay dialect is closely related to Kedah Malay, yet very different from the Pattani Malay dialect spoken in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat.

⁴⁷ Unfortunately, we could not find any detailed information on the number of Malay-speaking residents in Satun province today. However, the estimate of 10% to 15% of the population is based on interviews with several knowledgeable local sources.

⁴⁸ According to local villagers, Chalung has 14 villages, of which seven are predominantly Malay-speaking. Interviewees from the village of Ban Khubang Cha Mang Tai claimed that the village was 100% bilingual, including the small group of Buddhist residents (approximately 10%). Villagers also claimed that only 10% of residents in the main town of Chalung could still speak Malay. Interview with four local residents of Ban Khubang Cha Mang Tai, Tambon Chalung, Amphoe Meung, Satun Province, July 28, 2005.

⁴⁹ According to local villagers, of the seven villages in Ban Khuan, four are predominantly Malay-speaking. We interviewed local residents in one of these villages, Ban Kok Sai, where there are approximately 100 families, all of whom speak Malay. Interview with three local residents of Ban Kok Sai, Tambon Ban Khuan, Amphoe Meung, Satun Province, July 28, 2005.

⁵⁰ Local residents of Chebilang town claim that Malay is still spoken in about 80% of local households. Less than 10% of the population cannot speak Malay, and most of these people moved to Chebilang from Thai-speaking villages in recent years. Of the six villages in Chebilang, four are predominantly Malay-speaking. Interview with ten local residents of Ban Chebilang, Amphoe Meung, Satun Province, August 1, 2005.

⁵¹ *Yawi* is the original script used for written Malay in Southern Thailand. This script borrows heavily from Arabic and dates back to pre-British times, when the Malay script used primarily Arabic characters and written style.

⁵² In our visits to four Malay-speaking villages, we asked about local residents who could not speak Thai. In each village, there were very few non-Thai speakers remaining, usually less than 10. Despite our attempts to find Malay-only speakers, we only met two non-Thai speakers during the entire project, both from Chebilang. The first was a 73-year-old resident, born in Chebilang. The second was a 78 year old resident who moved to Chebilang from Perlis (Malaysia) in 1933 when he was six years old. Chebilang residents, op. cit.

been far enough away from Thai-speaking areas to minimize regular interaction. Satun's major towns have long been centers of Thai language, as they have been the primary location for Thai Buddhists moving into the province, often for government jobs. Thai-speaking ethnic-Chinese residents live almost entirely in the towns, and are usually shop-owners or involved in local trading businesses. Satun town has only a small minority of Malay-speakers (less than 15% based on local estimates). The other major towns in the province, including LaNgu,⁵³ Tha Phae, Khuan Ka Long, and Thung Wa, are almost entirely inhabited by non-Malay speakers. While there have been some reports of local efforts in Malay-speaking areas to preserve the Malay language, these efforts are relatively modest and have not taken on the highly politicized nature of preservation efforts in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat.

Numerous authors and political leaders have pointed to this important difference as the single most influential factor in explaining Satun's current stability. Surin Pitsuwan has argued that language was the central reason for Satun's relative stability and cooperative relationship with the Thai government.⁵⁴ Without the language barriers that have been a long-term source of friction in the other provinces, Satun's Muslim population has been able to actively participate in Thailand's democratization. Cooperation between the local Muslim community and Thai-speaking bureaucrats was greatly enhanced by the simple fact that direct communication was possible. Local grievances could be more easily heard, and acted upon by Thai civil servants in Satun and Bangkok.

In Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, language has been a major source of contention between the government and the Muslim population since the beginning of Thai direct rule in 1902. In these provinces today, the majority of the Muslim population speaks only Malay. Malay-Muslim leaders and separatist groups have identified the teaching of Thai language as a major threat to the preservation of Malay identity and heritage, and have actively sought to thwart government efforts to teach Thai to the local population. Likewise, the teaching of Thai to Muslims in the south, and the exclusive use of Thai in local government, has been a foundation of Thai government policies aimed at integrating the Malay-speaking Muslims. As a result, schools and teachers have often been a flash point of the Malay-Muslim separatist struggle, and language issues continue to create intense controversy in these three provinces.

By widely adopting the Thai language, Satun avoided these flash points altogether. The teaching of Thai has never been politicized to the extent that it has in the other provinces. Satun Muslims have studied Thai for almost a century without a major incident. While there was likely some negligible resistance in the early years of Thai language education (approximately 1910-1932), all protests quickly faded away, allowing the Muslim population to fully adopt Thai language within a matter of 50 years. From the Thai Government's perspective, Satun was the ideal outcome of education policy towards the south. According to Clive Christie, Thai policy "in its purest form... has been aimed at the creation of a Thai-speaking population that uses Arabic in the mosques and in the pursuit of Islamic studies, with Malay withering away as a quaint local dialect."⁵⁵ The description closely resembles what has happened in Satun over the past 100 years.

⁵³ According to numerous local sources, the only residents of LaNgu town (the second largest population center in Satun province) who speak Malay are those that were born in Malay speaking areas, and subsequently moved to LaNgu. We can safely assume that less than 1% of the native population in LaNgu speaks Malay.

⁵⁴ Pitsuwan, Surin, op. cit.

⁵⁵ Christie, Clive J., *A Modern History of Asia: Decolonization, Nationalism and Separatism*, I.B. Taurus, London, New York, 1996, p. 186.

Satun has been the site of a remarkable transition from Malay to Thai as the predominant language in a relatively brief period of time. Around 1900, the vast majority of the population spoke Malay only. While there are no good figures on language use from that period, most estimates indicate that more than 80% of Satun's residents spoke Malay only. Many elderly residents of Satun remember a time when almost everyone spoke Malay, and very few local residents spoke Thai. At that time, there were only a few pockets of Thai-speaking minorities in the area. For example, a small population of Thai administrators was sent to Satun, usually from Songkhla or Nakhorn Si Thammarat. These Thai-speakers lived primarily in the provincial capital, and probably had minimal interaction with Malay-speaking Muslims in rural areas. The "*Sam-Sam*" people, a Thai-speaking minority population that practiced Islam, could be found in isolated pockets of Satun, Kedah, and Perlis (Malaysia).⁵⁶ However, in 1900, Malay was clearly the predominant language at the time, and had been for hundreds of years.

The transition from Malay to Thai language mostly happened over a 60-year period, beginning in 1910. By the late 1960's, most of Satun's citizens were Thai-speakers, and the percentage of Malay speakers was beginning to decline sharply.

One case study is illustrative of the timing of the transition. In an interview on Ko Yaratot Yai,⁵⁷ in the village of Ban Thaaalee on the northern side of the island, we met three generations of a Muslim family native to the island, that illustrate the period of language transition in Satun. The grandmother is 76 years old, and was born on the island in 1929 (2472 BE).⁵⁸ While she speaks enough Thai to conduct a simple interview, she is far more proficient in Malay. Her parents, who were also born on the island, spoke only Malay. When she was a young girl in the 1930's, she recalls other children in the village learning Thai in the island's school, which had been opened by the government in 1921 (2464). She could not attend school because of household chores, but learned some Thai from other children. Her daughter, who also joined the interview, was born on the island in 1955 (2498). The daughter learned Thai at school in the early 1960's, but her first words were in Malay. She has been fluent in both Malay and Thai for most of her life. The grandson of the 76-year-old woman, who also joined the interview, was also born on the island and was approximately 25 years old (most likely born around 1980, or 2523). He speaks only Thai, and has no interest in learning Malay.⁵⁹ The island has only two villages. In the larger of the two towns, Ban Yaratot Yai, the residents are mostly Thai-only speakers. They refer to Ban Thalee as the "Malay-speaking village."⁶⁰ Yet, according to the family interviewed in Ban Thalee, less than 20 people remain in the village who speak Malay as the primary language (out of a population of approximately 140 families), and they are only the very oldest people. Therefore, over the course of the grandmother's lifespan (76 years), the village has apparently gone from 5% Thai-speakers to 95% Thai-speakers. By the time the daughter of the 76-year-old women had completed school in the late 1960s, she and her classmates were almost certainly bilingual. By the time of the birth of the grandson around

⁵⁶ For more information on the "*Sam-Sam*" people, see Ryoko Nishii, "Emergence and Transformation of Peripheral Ethnicity: Sam Sam on the Thai-Malaysian Border," in *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States*, A. Turton, London, Curzon Press, 2000.

⁵⁷ Ko Yaratot Yai is an island 12 kilometers west of the port of Chebilang, which is also called Ko Sarai.

⁵⁸ During the interview, dates were provided in the official Thai calendar, indicated in parentheses.

⁵⁹ Interview with Saaraa Choobwat (grandmother) and family, Ban Thalee, Ko Yaratot Yai, August 16, 2005.

⁶⁰ Interviews with five local villagers, Ban Yaratot Yai, Ko Yaratot Yai, August 16, 2005.

1980, the primary language in the house had switched to Thai. On Ko Yaratot Yai, we can therefore surmise that the major transition happened from 1921 to around 1970.⁶¹

This case study is illustrative of the majority of Muslim villages in Satun that have transitioned from Malay to Thai as the primary language. In the villages and towns where Malay is still spoken, the language spoken in the home is usually Malay, but everyone in the village between early school age (about 10) and 60 can speak Thai fluently. In most cases, this situation began with the opening of a local public school in the 1930s or 1940s.

This case leads to some important questions. How exactly did this transition occur? What factors allowed the transition to occur without major resistance from the local Muslim population? Even during the periods of forced assimilation policies under the governments of Phibun Songkhram (1938-1944, 1948-1957), and Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat (1957-1963), there is no evidence of resulting civil strife in Satun. The heavy-handed assimilation policies of that time, which included the banning of Malay in local government and schools, created many problems for Muslims and other minorities throughout Thailand, and pressure to learn Thai increased significantly. Yet, by the time these policies were enacted, Satun's transformation to Thai language was already well under way. So, while these policies clearly exacerbated the situation in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, the impact in Satun was marginal and did not garner any protest from local Muslims. There is some evidence of government policies forcing the population to learn Thai during those regimes, but very little evidence of problems or resistance.⁶²

The most important explanation for the lack of resistance was the support of Thai language education by the local Malay-Muslim elite, beginning in 1910. The Governor of Satun from 1900 to 1914 (2443-2457) was a Malay-Muslim from Kedah, named Tengku Baharuddin bin Ku Meh (later given the Thai name Phraya Phumminart Pak Dee).⁶³ Tengku Baharuddin supported Thai language education, and established the first school in Satun, Satun Witthaya School, just north of Satun town in 1910 (2453).⁶⁴ The next governor of Satun was Tui bin Abdullah (Thai name Phraya Samantararat Burin) who held the position from 1914 to 1932 (2457-2475). Governor Tui bin Abdullah was a bilingual Malay-Muslim, and was educated in Bangkok, where he developed many connections with the Thai elites. He was also supportive of Thai language education, and accelerated the opening of new schools in Satun. Soon after coming to Satun, Governor Tui bin Abdullah opened the following schools: Thung Wa in 1916 (2459); Satun Mambang District in 1916 (2459); another in Satun Mambang District in 1919 (2462); Ko Yaratot Yai in 1921 (2464); and LaNgu in 1922 (2465).⁶⁵

Another likely reason for the minimal resistance to the establishment of Thai schools was the lack of previous educational opportunities in the province. When Tengku Baharuddin opened the Satun Witthaya School in 1910, it was the first public school in the province.

⁶¹ Due to the remoteness of Ko Yaratot Yai, it is likely that the transition happened slower and later on the island, compared to the rest of Satun. Therefore, this example provides a relatively conservative example of the timeframe of the transition from Malay to Thai in Satun.

⁶² In one interview with a local Muslim historian, he recalled no feeling of bitterness during the period of Phibun Songkram's regimes in regards to education. However, he remembers the period under Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat as much more difficult for the local population. Interview with anonymous source, Satun, August 2, 2005.

⁶³ He received the title of Phya from King Chulalongkorn (Rama 5), and is commonly referred to as Phya Phuminat Phakdii. Boonserm Rutaaphirom, *Prawatsat Meung Satun (History of Satun Town)*, Sammakpim Awdiansataw, Bangkok, 2003 (2546).

⁶⁴ Interview with School Principal, Satun Witthaya School, Satun, July 27, 2005.

⁶⁵ Interview with Boonserm Rutaaphirom, Satun, August 17, 2005.

Most of the Muslim population welcomed the schools because it was the first opportunity for local children to receive education beyond the basic religious training at the mosque and *ponoh* (small, informal, private, Islamic schools). While under Kedah rule, Satun received very little support from the Sultan for local education, and certainly no system of public schools. The situation in Satun was a stark contrast to Pattani where a long tradition of education, particularly in Islamic scholarship, had thrived for centuries.

According to interviewees that attended Thai schools in the early years of education in Satun (before 1940), the schools were generally perceived as a sign of progress and development, and not a sign of assimilation. Furthermore, many interviewees claimed that their Malay-speaking parents recognized the rising Thai influence, and concluded that learning Thai would help their children in the future. At first, the schools taught in both Thai and Malay. But teaching in Malay only lasted for the first few years. By the 1930's, most schools taught only in Thai.⁶⁶

Today, Malay is taught in many of the schools once again. However, it is taught as a foreign language, along with English, Chinese, and other languages, to an almost entirely Thai-speaking student population. Even in *ponoh* schools, the primary language of teaching is Thai, and most *ponoh* use Thai language versions of the Qur'an, along with Malay and Arabic versions.

Non-Porous Border and Few Cross-Border Linkages

In contrast to the other border provinces to the east, cross-border linkages have played very little role in Satun politics or local sentiments of identity. A chain of mountains and dense jungle runs along Satun's border with Malaysia, with very few passable trails. In the past, the terrain made land crossings hazardous, limiting the flow of people between Satun and the Malay states of Perlis and Kedah. Before the overland border crossing was established at Wang Prachan in 1984, the only possible route for most travelers was by ship to the ports at Tammalang or Chebilang.

The difficulty in crossing the border tended to minimize the links between the Muslim communities on either side. While portions of Satun's population can claim historical links to Perlis, Kedah, or Penang, very few maintain active links with distant relatives across the border. Most interviewees were not aware of any connections across the border. Usually, those who have family across the border rarely visit them, or have lost contact altogether. In almost every case, the only cross-border links were with recent emigrants from Satun who went to Perlis or Langkawi to find work. Some interviewees claimed that the ethnic Chinese residents in Satun have a much higher frequency of cross-border linkages, especially with Penang, when compared to the Muslim population.⁶⁷

This situation is notably different from the cross-border relations on the eastern side of the peninsula. Narathiwat and Yala share a long, porous border with the northern states of Malaysia. The border between Narathiwat and Kelantan is particularly porous. In the period before incorporation into Thailand, the Sultanates of Patani and Kelantan maintained very close ties, with significant intermarriage. The Malay dialects are extremely similar,

⁶⁶ One 77 year old interviewee in Ban Ketree, who has spoken Thai his whole life, remembers helping Malay-speaking students with lessons when he attended school in Ban Khuan in the 1930's. Interview with three local residents, Ban Ketree, Tambon Ban Ketree, Amphoe Meung, Satun, August 15, 2005.

⁶⁷ Focus group session, LaNgu, July 22, 2005.

and the history of these two places are intimately intermingled. During separatist uprisings on the Thai side of the border since 1909, Malay-Muslim separatists have relied on these cross-border ties to find sanctuary or support.

While dual citizenship is very common among Malay-Muslims in Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala, there are far fewer instances of dual citizenship in Satun.⁶⁸ Some Satun residents, especially those in southern coastal towns, seek work in Malaysia as the earning potential for Thai workers is much greater on the Malay side of the border.⁶⁹ It is extremely rare that a Satun Muslim would seek Malaysian citizenship for political reasons, or because of a sense of Malay identity. According to local immigration officials, there is no law against dual citizenship, but in practice it is very difficult to attain. Thai workers crossing the border with employment passes find it difficult to acquire Malay citizenship unless they speak perfect Malay, or marry into a Malay family (the most common scenario). Very few Malaysian citizens come across the border seeking Thai citizenship.

Muslim-Buddhist Integration and Peaceful Relations

Satun's Muslim and Buddhist communities are well integrated, particularly in the larger towns. This situation is very different from Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and southeastern parts of Songkhla where Muslims and Buddhists tend to live in separate communities, and have long maintained a physical separation between their settlements.

In Satun, Muslims and Buddhists live side-by-side, and interact regularly in personal and business matters. Many Muslim interviewees described how their children played with Buddhist children in the neighborhood, and how Muslim and Buddhist homes were intermingled.⁷⁰ In rural areas, the percentage of Buddhist residents is much lower, but Buddhist families can be found in almost every village in Satun. Today, it is rare to find an all-Buddhist or all-Muslim village in Satun. Some villages are predominantly Buddhist, and mostly populated with descendants of Buddhist families who moved to Satun under government transmigration programs, or to take government jobs.⁷¹ But in the long-populated areas of Satun – from along the coast to approximately 20 kilometers inland – it is rare to find a majority-Buddhist villages. Therefore, even the in-migrating Buddhists over the past 100 years have tended to settle in Muslim areas, instead of setting up separate, isolated communities.

The integration of the two religious communities is an apt illustration of the long history of peaceful relations. Nearly every interviewee confirmed that he or she was not aware of a single violent encounter between the local Muslim and Buddhist communities. Satun's residents are proud of their history of cooperative and peaceful inter-religious relations, and are quick to point out that relations are good, and have always been good.⁷²

⁶⁸ Alexander Horstmann has studied several communities of Thai-speaking Muslims in southern Satun province who regularly send people to work in Malaysia. His work has focused on the trends of cross-border linkages, border-crossing practices, and the implications for citizenship and identity among these Muslim groups in Satun. For more information, see Horstmann, Alexander, "Dual Ethnic Minorities and the Local Reworking of Citizenship at the Thailand-Malaysia Border," CIBR Working Papers in Border Studies, 2003.

⁶⁹ Interviews in Ko Yaratot Yai, op. cit., Ban Ketree, op. cit. and Chebilang, op. cit.

⁷⁰ Interviews in Satun town, LaNgu focus group, Ko Yaratot Yai, and Chalung, op. cit.

⁷¹ Most of these villages can be found in Manang and Khuan Ka Long, in the northern section of the province, and along the border with Songkhla.

⁷² Interviewees in LaNgu, and Ban Khuan claimed that Muslims would often bring food or other gifts to their Buddhist or ethnic Chinese neighbors for religious festivals, and vice versa. LaNgu focus group, op. cit., Interviews with residents of Ban Khuan, op. cit.

While perceptions of inter-communal relations are overwhelmingly positive, a few interviewees expressed some concerns about recent trends. Some interviewees have noticed a growing separation between the communities, beginning around 20 years ago. According to these sources, the small but increasingly noticeable separation is a result of recent trends within the Muslim community towards more traditional interpretations of Islam that forbids many types of inter-religious interactions. For example, one interviewee mentioned that in the past, Muslims would participate in Buddhist ceremonies for important events. Today, this practice is increasingly uncommon.⁷³

Historical Factors that Explain Satun's Distinctiveness and Stability

How did Satun come to be what it is today? Despite its similar position a century ago, Satun has taken an altogether different path from the provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. The stability that Satun enjoys today can largely be attributed to a set of historical factors, all of which are clear departures from the situation in the other border provinces. Based on research findings, the most important period of transition was between 1900 and 1932 during the transition from Kedah to Siamese rule, and the first few decades of inclusion in Siam.

Based on research findings, four historical factors are essential for explaining why Satun has come to be so different from its neighbors, and has managed to maintain peace and stability since the onset of direct Thai rule:

1. Satun Malay-Muslim elites choice of cooperation over resistance;
2. Lack of alternative Malay history;
3. Vulnerable existence along the periphery of multiple power centers;
4. Benign neglect of the Thai Government.

Satun Muslim Elites Choose Cooperation Instead of Resistance

The period from 1902 to 1932 was a critical transition period for the Muslim regions of southern Thailand. During this period, these formerly autonomous regions were subject to Thai direct rule, and eventually to full annexation by Thailand and incorporation into the Thai political system. During this crucial time, Satun was governed by Muslims who were both acceptable to the local population and Bangkok.

In 1902, the Malay-Muslim nobilities in Satun and Patani found themselves in very different positions vis-à-vis the Government of Siam. Satun's small group of Muslim elites were only moderately affected by the extension of direct rule by Siam and in no position to resist, while the Patani elites had lost power and could only maintain their influence through resistance. Confronted with their options at the time, the Patani elite decided to revolt against Siam, while Satun's elite elected to work within the Thai system. This divergence in strategy is perhaps the single most important reason for the divergence in local politics.

In Patani, the Malay-Muslim nobility had been in power for most of the previous 400 years. A complex network of intermarriages ensured that the Patani nobility had connections to

⁷³ Furthermore, this interviewee suggested that the Muslim headscarf (*hijab*) is worn much more widely today than 20 years ago. However, it is important to note that this description of Satun is a minority perspective, as nearly every other interviewee provided a much more positive version, including Buddhists. Anonymous interview, Satun, August 2005.

local leaders throughout the region, and to other Malay Sultanates, such as Kelantan, Terengannu, and Kedah. With the imposition of direct rule in 1902, the dynasty of Patani Sultans, which dated back to the late fifteenth century, was completely removed from power, and replaced by Thai Buddhist bureaucrats that knew very little about local customs or religious beliefs. During King Chulalongkorn's reign, the Siamese government centralized administrative powers, and the peripheral regions that had formerly enjoyed relative autonomy were forced under Thai direct rule. Once removed from power, and denied many of the privileges they had previously enjoyed, the Patani nobility found little incentive to cooperate with Siam. Instead, they found new legitimacy and influence in mobilizing local resistance to Thai rule, planting the seeds of separatism and armed revolt. As a result, the Malay-Muslim elites became the leaders of the fledgling resistance movement. According to Surin Pitsuwan:

“The attempted reforms of 1902 by the Bangkok government had brought disruptions to many of the long-established institutions of the Malay-Muslims (in Patani). The disparagement of their royal families was probably the most destabilizing act, which has continued to have adverse repercussions on the affairs of the area for decades thereafter.”⁷⁴

In Satun, the Malay-Muslim elites that administered the province were mostly outsiders (i.e., not born in Satun). They mostly were sent to Satun from Kedah, and could not claim the legitimacy of being a native son of Satun. They relied on outside powers for their position, in particular the King of Siam, the governor of Songkhla or Nakhorn Si Thammarat, and the Sultan of Kedah. In some cases, Satun's elites had very close connections to the Royal Court of Siam and Thai elites in Bangkok, Songkhla, and/or Nakhorn Si Thammarat. Satun's elites benefited personally from these ties, and often attained their position through the direct intervention of Siam.⁷⁵ After 1909, some of Satun's Malay-Muslim elites went back to Kedah. Those who stayed probably had little sentimental connection with Kedah, and were more willing to accept Thai rule. As a result of all of these factors, Satun's elites were much less likely to revolt against Thai authority, and were much more likely to accept Thai influence.

In the nineteenth century, Satun had the beginnings of a minor line of sultans. A string of four sultans ruled in Satun from 1811-1813, then from 1839-1897, and all came from the same family with direct links to the Kedah Sultan's family. In 1897, the last of the four sultans, Tengku Abdul Rahman died without an heir. Despite a succession claim by the uncle of the last sultan, Tengku Ahmad, King Chulalongkorn appointed the Raja Muda (viceroys) of Satun to be the next sultan. The new sultan was a non-royal, Malay-Muslim from Kedah named Tengku Baharuddin bin Ku Meh. In response, the former sultan's family led an unsuccessful protest to Alor Setar in Kedah.⁷⁶ Afterwards, the family of Tengku Abdul Rahman faded quietly into history, and did not play any major role in Satun politics henceforth.

⁷⁴ Pitsuwan, op. cit., p. 44.

⁷⁵ Even in Kedah, there was a history of local Muslim nobility seeking Siam's help in their claim for power. In 1802, Tengku Pangeran traveled to Singora (Songkhla) to persuade the Thai governor to support his claim to the Sultan of Kedah. Tengku Pangeran eventually obtained an audience with Rama I, and successfully argued his cause. In 1803, he returned to Kedah with an army of 5,000 Siamese troops, and was installed as Sultan. Tengku Bisnu's attempt to claim the throne of Kedah less than 10 years later, was very similar to Tengku Pangeran's attempt. Bonney, R., *Kedah 1771-1821: The Search for Security and Independence*, Oxford University Press, London, 1971, p. 110-111.

⁷⁶ Bakkar, op. cit., p. 2-7.

When Tengku Baharuddin (or Phraya Phumminart Pak Dee) formally took power in Satun in 1900, he owed his position to the favor of King Chulalongkorn. In 1902, the Siamese allowed him to stay in power in Satun while they were ousting the Malay-Muslim rulers of Patani. According to Sukree Longputeh, Satun did not go through the turbulence and political upheaval experienced in Patani.⁷⁷ Tengku Baharuddin had very little reason or incentive to rebel against Siam, as the government allowed him to continue to manage local affairs. He was also reasonably acceptable to the population of Satun. He was a Malay-Muslim, spoke fluent Malay (and very little Thai),⁷⁸ and had developed relationships with the local leaders and Muslim population during his years as Raja Muda (1895-1900). Throughout his tenure (1900-1914), Tengku Baharuddin cooperated with the Siamese, and did not resist the rise in Thai influence in the province. In return, the Siamese gave him significant autonomy.

In 1914, another Muslim of Malay ancestry was appointed governor of Satun. Tui bin Abdullah (or Phraya Samantararat Burin) had close connections in Bangkok. He had been educated in Bangkok, spoke both Malay and Thai fluently, and had taken on assignments for the King of Siam on previous occasions. The position of Satun governor was considered a reward for prior service to the King.⁷⁹

Throughout the period of transition (1902-1932), Tengku Baharuddin and Tui bin Abdullah were instrumental in encouraging the local population to learn Thai, and accept Thai suzerainty. Governor Ku Baharuddin established the first school in Satun (as described previously), which taught Thai language, and Governor Tui bin Abdullah set up a number of additional schools.

Satun's local elites were known for their pragmatism and ability to work within the Thai political system to get concessions, development assistance, and to overturn policies that discriminated against Muslims.⁸⁰ Today, they are remembered for their leadership in harnessing the Thai political system to defend Muslim rights. Che Abdullah Langputeh, a minister of parliament from Satun from 1946 to 1968 (2489 to 2511) was the first southern Muslim to rise to a prominent position in the Thai Government, serving as Deputy Minister of Education. In Satun today, he is remembered and revered as a Muslim who broke down barriers in the Thai political system, and successfully prevented a number of harsh measures from being enacted in Satun.

Lack of an Alternative Malay History

In Pattani, local Muslims have a strong sense of Malay history. History plays a major role in separatist ideology, as it re-affirms Malay-Muslim identity, and reminds local Muslims of the former glory of the Patani Sultanate. Omar Farouk argues that in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, the "collective memory of their history indeed binds the Malay-Muslims into viable and cohesive ethnic entity." Furthermore, "for the Malay-Muslim separatists particularly, the issue of Pattani's history invariably serves as a rallying point for their

⁷⁷ Professor Sukree Longputeh was born and raised in Satun, and is the grandson of Che Abdullah Longputeh, the MP from Satun in the 1940s and 1950s. Interview with Sukree Longputeh, Dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences, Yala Islamic College, Pattani, July 25, 2005.

⁷⁸ A picture in the National Museum of Satun shows Tengku Baharuddin with his many translators.

⁷⁹ Interview with anonymous source, Satun, July 2005.

⁸⁰ Interview with Imam Mahama Saale and Khun Chavalit, LaNga, July 20, 2005; Interview with Sukree Longputeh, op. cit..

political cause.”⁸¹ The history of the Patani Sultanate is also intimately connected with Islam in the region. According to Surin Pitsuwan, Patani was considered the “Cradle of Islam” in Southeast Asia, during its height of affluence and power in the early seventeenth century.⁸² Islamic scholarship prospered and Patani’s influence extended across the Islamic world through its substantial presence at the holy sites of Mecca. As a result, the resilience of the Malay identity in the modern-day provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, can be directly linked to a shared nostalgia and pride in the long and influential history of the Patani Sultanate.

In Satun, however, there is very little sense of Malay history.⁸³ Most Satun Muslims have only a vague notion of Satun’s historic connections to the Malay world - that Satun was once part of the Kedah Sultanate, that the province was once a Malay-speaking region, and that the Thais are relative newcomers. Personal identification with the Malay history is almost nonexistent, even among those Satun Muslims with the most apparent connections to the Malay history of Satun, such as those with known Malay-Muslim ancestry, or those that speak Malay as a primary language.

Even if someone were interested to learn about the Malay history of Satun, it would be nearly impossible to find information without looking outside of the province. Satun’s local history is relatively obscure, and very little information is available for the period before 1902. Whereas Patani history is passed down through a rich tradition of oral history, and widely known stories of important historical figures and major events, Satun’s local history is mostly forgotten. The local history that is taught in Satun’s primary and secondary schools begins with the period of Thai rule (post 1902). According to local teachers, the fact that Satun was once part of Kedah is mentioned in the context of local history, but very little information is provided beyond this brief mention.⁸⁴ Even the *ponoh* schools in Satun do not teach about local history before 1902.⁸⁵ The National Museum in Satun does not describe the history of Satun’s connection to Kedah, or any connection to the Malay world. Information on Satun’s history from the pre-1902 period, and its historic connection to Kedah, is extremely difficult to find, especially for those unable to travel.

Several literary works portray the history of the Patani Sultanate, and continue to play a role in keeping that history alive. Historical works such as the *Hikayat Patani* (Story of Patani),⁸⁶ and Ibrahim Syukri’s *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani* (History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani)⁸⁷ have been highly influential.

⁸¹ Farouk, op. cit., p. 26-27.

⁸² Pitsuwan, op. cit. p. 47-51.

⁸³ Satun’s Malay history is defined as the period before the beginning of direct Thai rule (beginning in 1902) when Satun was a district/province of Kedah.

⁸⁴ Interview with administrator and teacher at Satun Withaya School, Satun, July 27, 2005; Interview with Assistant Principal and teachers at LaNgu secondary school, Gampang Withaya, LaNgu, July 29, 2005.

⁸⁵ Interview teachers at Darulma’aref School, Ban Khuan Don, Satun, August 17, 2005.

⁸⁶ This work was written in the Malay Chronicle style, probably around the early eighteenth century. According to David Wyatt, this “composite text” was the first attempt to capture the history of Patani in the traditional chronicle genre, similar to the *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals). Wyatt, David, Foreword, in Ibrahim Syukri, *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani* (History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani), translated by Conner Bailey and John Miksic, Silk Worm, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 1985. For more on the hikayat/sejarah genre of historical chronicles, see Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, “Dialogue of Two Pasts: ‘Historical Facts’ in Traditional Thai and Malay Historiography” in *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History*, edited by Abu Talib Ahmad and Tan Liok Ee, Singapore University Press, 2003. For a translation of the original *Hikayat Patani*, see the two-volume set, A. Teeuw, and David K. Wyatt, *Hikayat Patani: the Story of Patani*, 1970.

⁸⁷ Written under a pseudonym, this book was written in the aftermath of the 1947-1948 Malay-Muslim uprising and the violent Dusung Nyior incident. It offers a distinctly Malay version of events, and consistently portrays the Thais as the enemy and oppressor. Due to its political content, the book was banned in Thailand for many years. The original was written in *Yawi* script, and translated to modern Malay and English. It has never been translated into Thai. Ibrahim

Satun has no such historical works. While the history of the Kedah Sultanate was captured and glorified in the *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa* (Kedah Annals), Satun is not mentioned.⁸⁸

Many scholars have argued that the historical accuracy of these books is questionable. The historical accounts of Patani were written with a clear intention – to glorify the history of Patani Muslims and the Patani Sultanate, and demonize Siam. Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian writes that works in the style of “*phongsawadan/tamnan* and *hikayat/sejarah* generally belong to the chronicle style of writing, a style that pays little attention to the accuracy of historical facts or events as they actually occurred.” Instead, these works were intended to preserve the identity and heritage of the society.⁸⁹ The chronicles of Patani have arguably succeeded in this objective, as their ability to inspire and reinforce Malay identity continues to have an impact even today.

The history of Thai influence and control over the Muslim regions in the central Malay Peninsula is a controversial topic for many Muslims in southern Thailand. Many of the “historical facts” from the history of Siam’s interactions with the Malay-Muslims of Patani and Kedah are disputed. At least two different versions of history have emerged – a Thai version and a Malay version. These two versions of history, both inherited from their respective chronicle traditions, have clearly divergent views of history, as well as conflicting accounts of historical facts.⁹⁰

In Satun, however, the Thai version of local history has entirely replaced the Malay version of local history.⁹¹ The Thai version of local history stresses that Satun has always been part of Thailand (or Siam). Even though Satun was once part of the Kedah Sultanate, Kedah was under Siamese control. Central to this version of history is the conviction that Siam controlled Kedah, Patani, and much of the Malay Peninsula since the Sukhothai period. For much of its history, Kedah was forced to send tribute to Siam, in the form of the *Bunga Emas dan Perak*, or gold and silver flowers, a tree-shaped decorative figurine, made of pure gold or silver.⁹² The sending of this tribute was interpreted as a symbol of Malay submission to Siam, and therefore proof that Kedah was ruled by Siam.

For educated elites in Satun, both Muslim and Buddhist, the Thai version of history is the accepted version of local history. Some interviewees went so far as to say Kedah was “a part of Siam” since King Ramkhamheang (1279-1298) in the Sukhothai era, long before the

Syukri, *Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani* (History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani), translated by Conner Bailey and John Miksic, Silkwood, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 1985.

⁸⁸ *Marong Mahawangsa* (The Kedah Annals), Translation by Lt. Col. Jawes Low, Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia, Vol. III, printed at American Presbyterian Mission Press, Bangkok, 1908.

⁸⁹ Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, “Dialogue of Two Pasts: ‘Historical Facts’ in Traditional Thai and Malay Historiography” in *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History*, edited by Abu Talib Ahmad and Tan Liok Ee, Singapore University Press, 2003, p. 200.

⁹⁰ Suwannathat-Pian, op. cit., p. 203.

⁹¹ However, it is not clear if a Malay version of history was ever a major factor. During the course of this research project, we found no reliable evidence that an alternative Malay version of history had ever been taught in Satun.

⁹² The beginning of this tradition of Malay states sending *Bunga Emas dan Perak* is not entirely clear. However, it is likely that Kedah and Patani sent the first tribute in the late sixteenth century or early seventeenth century. Kedah and Patani sent the tribute to Siam intermittently for more than 300 years. The practice ended with the Anglo-Siamese treaty of 1909. Andaya, Barbara, and Leonard Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, Second Edition, Palgrave, Houndsmill, Basingstoke, and Hampshire, 2001, p. 68-69.

region that is now Satun was settled. Therefore, they conclude, “Satun has always been a part of Siam.”⁹³

To illustrate the similarity of local versions of history, the research team interviewed two respected local historians, one Muslim and one Buddhist. While there are some differences on minor points, on the issue of Thai control over Satun and Kedah, both historical accounts are in agreement. Harun Bakkar (Thai name Yongyot Jaisamut) is a well-educated, respected local Muslim whose family has lived in Satun for generations, and is widely considered an excellent source for local history. He is the Chairman of the Provincial Cultural Council, the organization that determines how local history is taught in schools and presented in the National Museum of Satun. Bakkar recently produced a paper entitled “The Story of *Negeri Setol*: Satun(s) 5 Monarchies (1813–1914),” written in English, which he shared with us during the interview. The following passage illustrates Bakkar’s interpretation of the history of relations between Satun, Kedah, and Siam:

“Satun or ‘*Setol*’ used to be a parish (*tambon* or *mukim*) of Kedah (*Saiburi*) under control of the Kingdom of Siam since the period of Sukhothai. So the people of two towns concerned (Satun and Kedah) were friendly as they were in the same family. They spoke same language and adhered the same culture. Unfortunately, on 10th March 1909, the treaty about border controversy between the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Siam, forced Siamese Government to designate this beautiful land (Kedah) to British Government including Kelantan, Trengganu, and Perlis.”⁹⁴

Instead of blaming the Thai government for splitting Satun from Kedah - people that were of “the same family...spoke (the) same language and adhered to the same culture” - Bakkar describes the split as an unfortunate product of geopolitical forces. He does not suggest, as many in Pattani would likely argue, that the inclusion of Satun on the Thai side of the border was a tragedy for Satun’s Muslim population. In fact, throughout the paper, Bakkar’s description of the Thai role in Satun history is neutral. Clearly absent is the bitter and fiercely nationalistic tone found in Ibrahim Syukri’s account. Furthermore, Bakkar confirms the Thai version of history that Kedah was under the control of Siam since the Sukhothai period.

Boonserm Rutaaphirom is a Buddhist civil servant in Satun, who moved from Phatthalung around 1970. He has written several books on local history, including *Prawatsaat Meung Satun* (History of Satun Town).⁹⁵ He is extremely knowledgeable about local history, and is currently working on a history textbook that will be taught in all of the local schools in Satun.⁹⁶ Boonserm is also the Director of the National Museum of Satun located on Thanon Satun Thani, Soi 5, which is the only public museum in the province. Boonserm’s version of local history is strongly rooted in the Thai version of history. He argues that *Saiburi*, the Thai term for Kedah, was never a Sultanate, but rather a large town under Siamese control.

⁹³ Interview with Chaiwat Chaiyakul, LaNgu, July 28, 2005; Interview with Boonserm Rutaaphirom, Satun, August 17, 2005; Interview with Harun Bakkar, Satun, August 2, 2005.

⁹⁴ Bakkar, Harun, “The Story of Negeri Setol: Satun 5 Monarchies (1813–1914)”, date unknown, p. 2.

⁹⁵ Boonserm Rutaaphirom, *Prawatsaat Meung Satun (History of Satun Town)*, Samnakpim Awdiansataw, Bangkok, 2003 (2546).

⁹⁶ His new book on the history of the province should be complete by the end of 2005. Teachers in several schools expressed an eagerness to use his book in class. Teachers at the largest private Islamic school in the province are also planning to use the book. Several other local scholars have had input into the historical content of the book, including Harun Bakkar, and other local Muslims. Apparently, the oversight committee for Boonserm’s project has had very few disagreements on the portrayal of history.

He is dismissive of the independence and importance of Kedah's ruler, as the King of Siam usually had to approve the selected person.⁹⁷

While it may not be well known in Satun, there is an alternative Malay version of history for Kedah. While Satun only plays a minor role in Kedah history and is rarely mentioned, Satun's Muslims were almost certainly exposed to this version of history during the period of Kedah rule. According to the Malay (or Kedah) version of local history, Kedah was an independent kingdom with origins going back to at least the tenth century, when it was a vassal of Srivijaya.⁹⁸ Kedah had a long Islamic tradition, and was one of the first areas on the Malay Peninsula to embrace Islam, a point with which Western scholars concur.⁹⁹

According to the Malay version of history, Kedah's relationship with Siam was one of equals, not an overlord/vassal relationship. Kedah may have been under Siamese influence, but it continued to remain an independent kingdom, managing its own internal affairs. While the sending of tribute is acknowledged, the interpretation is very different. The *Marong Mahawangsa* says that the *Bunga Emas dan Perak* was indeed sent to Siam, but was intended as a sign of friendship and alliance, not as a symbol of submission. In the Kedah National Museum in Alor Setar, there is a sign describing the *Bunga Emas dan Perak* and the conflicting interpretations:

“The tributes of ‘Bunga Emas’ and ‘Bunga Perak’ gave rise to dual interpretations. The English and the Siamese considered the gifts as symbols of submission from the sender but the Malay rulers thought of the trees as gifts in securing alliance and friendship among neighbors.”¹⁰⁰

Because of its strategic position on the Malay Peninsula, Kedah was often threatened by external powers, including the Siamese, Dutch, Portuguese, Achenese, British, and Burmese. The Kedah Sultans used tribute as a tool of diplomacy between independent states, not as a symbol of submission. At various times in its history, Kedah sent tribute to other powers for the same reason it sent tribute to Siam, to prevent invasion by a more powerful neighbor.

Kedah traditional history also makes a bold, but little known claim about the origin of the Thai-Kedah relationship. According to the *Marong Mahawangsa*, the eldest son of the first Sultan of Kedah founded the country of “*Siam Lanchang*,” or Ayuthaya.¹⁰¹ While the accuracy of this story is highly questionable – and it is completely dismissed by most Thai historians – this account of history is important in what it says about Kedah's impressions of its relations with Siam. According to Bonney, “the Ayuthaya dynasty therefore came to be considered by the Kedah elite as a collateral branch of the Kedah ruling house, and even though this may seem far-fetched, it was actually cited on a particular occasion.”¹⁰²

Patani regarded Siam as an enemy, yet Kedah's relationship with Siam was more complex. It is plausible that many in Kedah believed that the royal courts of Ayuthaya and Kedah were distant relations. In Patani, compromise with the Siamese would have been considered

⁹⁷ Boonserm Rutaaphirom, Interview, Satun, August 17, 2005.

⁹⁸ Andaya, op. cit., p. 29.

⁹⁹ Bonney, R. op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁰⁰ Kedah National Museum, “‘Bunga Emas’ and ‘Bunga Perak’”, exhibit description, Alor Setar, Malaysia, 2005.

¹⁰¹ *Marong Mahawangsa* (The Kedah Annals), Translation by Lt. Col. Jawes Low, Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia, Vol. III, printed at American Presbyterian Mission Press, Bangkok, 1908, p. 72-74.

¹⁰² Bonney, op. cit. p. 12.

sacrilege in light of their absolute designation as enemy and infidel. Patani's seemingly endless uprisings against Thai rule were, in part, a product of this highly polarized version of history. Kedah almost certainly had more flexibility in its relations vis-à-vis Siam. The Sultan could justify negotiation and compromise with the Siamese, who may have been infidel and invaders, but could also be considered distant cousins gone astray.

Kedah and Patani dealt with the Siamese expansion southward in very different ways. Throughout centuries of Thai pressure, Patani frequently rebelled against the Siamese. According to David Wyatt, by the beginning Chakri Dynasty in 1782 "Patani was considered the most resistant (among the Malay states) to Siamese control, having been intermittently at war with Bangkok's king for more than 200 years."¹⁰³ Before the establishment of direct rule by Bangkok in 1902, Patani fought the Siamese nine times.¹⁰⁴ According to Surin Pitsuwan, the Malay-Muslims of Patani "persistently rebelled against Thai rule," since the first Thai claim of suzerainty in the late thirteenth century.¹⁰⁵ Kedah, by contrast, only fought the Siamese three times (1821, 1830, 1839).¹⁰⁶ Kedah was less powerful and influential than Patani, and was less equipped to resist Siamese invasion or revolt against Siamese rule. With its position on the Western side of the peninsula, Kedah was further away from the Chao Phraya River Basin, and was considered the outermost edge of Thai influence. As long as it continued to send tribute, it was usually left alone. In general, the legacy of Kedah's relationship with Siam was one of adaptability and acceptance of Thai influence as opposed to resistance.

Is it reasonable to assume, however, that Satun inherited Kedah's historical legacy? Kedah controlled the region of modern-day Satun for several hundred years. The region of Satun and LaNgu¹⁰⁷ was the northernmost district of Kedah for most of its history, until it was separated by the treaty of 1909. The historic boundaries of Kedah stretched from southern edge of the Sungai Trang basin in the north, to the Sungai Kerian basin in the south. For our purposes, the northern frontier is the key piece of information, and most scholars and period maps agree that Kedah territory reached to just beyond seven degrees North latitude, which is just south of the modern location of Trang's provincial capital.¹⁰⁸ These boundaries place all of modern-day Satun province squarely within Kedah's territory, or region of influence, from at least the sixteenth century. Similarly, these European sources also indicate that the population in the region was ethnic Malay and Muslim.

For almost all of Kedah's history, Satun was a sparsely populated area, with few major settlements. In 1811, Satun received its first ruler or sultan, Tengku Bisnu, who was sent from Kedah. The sending of a sultan to Satun did not necessarily reflect the growing importance of the area. Rather, the move was a compromise to end a long feud over the royal succession in Kedah, by giving the ambitious former Raja Muda (or viceroy) of

¹⁰³ Wyatt, David, *A Short History of Thailand*, Second Edition, Yale University Press, 2003, p. 143.

¹⁰⁴ According to Syukri, Patani fought the Siamese in 1603, 1632, 1633, 1638, 1784, 1791, 1808, 1831, and 1838. Syukri, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁵ Pitsuwan, *op. cit.* p. 16.

¹⁰⁶ Bonnie, *op. cit.*, Syukri, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁷ LaNgu is the only other town in the province with a known history prior to 1900. Some European maps from the eighteenth century show either LaNgu (or Lungu) or Satun (or Setool), but most maps show neither town. One local historian claims that LaNgu is actually older than the town of Satun itself, by as much as 300 years. (Chaiwat Chaiyakul, *op. cit.*) However, Boonserm argues that there is no evidence for this claim.

¹⁰⁸ This determination was most likely based on the "ethnic frontier" or the beginnings of the Malay-Muslim population along the Western side of the Malay Peninsula. According to Blagden, this frontier shifted southward in the sixteenth century, though it is not clear how far. Based on Eighteenth century maps, it seems that Kedah's (or Quedah) boundaries reached just north of Thung Wa, which is the current boundary between Satun and Trang provinces. Blagden, C.O., "Siam and the Malay Peninsula" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1906, p. 108-109. Found in Bonney, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Kedah, Tengku Bisnu, a region to rule and ending his attempt to claim to the sultan's throne.¹⁰⁹ From 1811 to 1898, Satun was ruled by a string of four sultans that were sent from Kedah, but had to be approved by Bangkok.

There is very little evidence of any armed resistance to the Siamese in Satun. Beginning in 1818, there was a Siamese military presence in Satun, which remained during the years of war between Siam and Kedah (1821-1839).¹¹⁰ Local historians have talked about local Satun Muslim villagers fleeing to the rural areas from the towns to avoid the Siamese army. Yet, we found no evidence that the Satun population resisted Siamese control. The most likely scenario is that Satun's Malay-Muslim population simply focused on surviving and did not dare to resist the powerful Siamese presence. By the late nineteenth century, Siamese military presence was significantly reduced.

Satun's weak sense of Malay history can be explained, in part, by relatively weak linkages to Kedah and the ever-present Thai influence during Satun's formative years in the 19th and early 20th centuries. While Kedah administered Satun from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century, it is difficult to determine how closely they were linked in politics, economic activity, and family connections during this time. Satun only became an area of minor importance in the early nineteenth century, particularly during the wars between Kedah and Siam. By 1839, Siamese rule over Kedah was firmly established. Therefore, for most of Satun's political existence, Siamese rule was a constant. Satun had no period of independence from Siam that would even compare to the centuries of relative independence in Patani or Kedah. Satun's local history was easily overwhelmed by the Thai view of history, in large part because the constant presence of Thai influence in Satun's formative years.

Vulnerable Existence Along the Periphery of Multiple Power Centers

Throughout Satun's history, the local Muslim population was vulnerable to much larger external forces. Satun's population was also exposed to culture, language, and trade from multiple power centers. This vulnerability and exposure to multiple sources of influence forced Satun to be more adaptable to external forces, and relatively autonomous from any particular power center, including Kedah.

Satun has always been located on the periphery of external power centers. Even though Satun was under the control of Kedah, it was on the northernmost periphery of Kedah's power center at Alor Setar. The Siamese cities of Songkhla and Nakhon Si Thammarat were a short distance away, bringing both Thai influence and the ever-present threat of military invasion. European powers, in particular the British, controlled nearby territory, patrolled off the coast, and traded with the local population. Even the Burmese would have been considered a threat during the late eighteenth century.

Satun's geographic isolation from Kedah was a key determinant in its history. The mountains that separate Satun from Perlis and Kedah made it extremely difficult for armies

¹⁰⁹ Satun's administrative status was likely changed at this point also, though there are conflicting historical accounts. Bonney argues that at this point, Rama II sent orders that the "Setul and Lungu areas were to be surrendered by Kedah and annexed to Singora (Songkhla)." This move was likely an attempt to carve out a region for Tengku Bisnu separate from Kedah. However, Tengku Bisnu dies within two years (1813), and Satun's status was in limbo for many years afterwards. Bonny, op. cit., p. 125. Also, Bakkar, op. cit., p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Bonney, op. cit., p. 153.

to move between the two regions.¹¹¹ Kedah was not in a position to defend Satun from external powers, such as the Siamese. When the Siamese invaded in 1821, 1830, and 1839, Kedah focused all of its resources in defending the center, and left the peripheral regions to fend for themselves.

Kedah itself was forced to balance competing powerful neighbors through diplomacy and strategic use of tribute. Kedah was never a major military power. According to Bonney, Kedah's strategic location, and relative weakness compared to Siam, Burma, the Dutch, and the British, forced the Sultan to frequently seek protection or submit to its more powerful neighbors. During Siam's expansion in the Malay Peninsula during the early Chakri dynasty period (1782 through the early 19th century), Kedah frequently sought protection from the British governor at Penang, though no assistance was ever provided.¹¹²

Satun's sense of vulnerability by being situated on the periphery of major powers was common in the pre-modern history of Southeast Asia. Prior to the arrival of European powers, political power was organized around city-states, with circles of influence extending out into the periphery. Borders were nonexistent, and the local population in remote areas was only under the nominal control of distant power centers. As city-states would rise and fall, their ability to exert their power and influence on the peripheral regions ebbed and flowed accordingly. Peripheral regions would usually give allegiance to whichever power center posed the greatest threat, though they often looked to more than one at time. While living along the periphery brought vulnerability, it also brought autonomy and diversity. Local populations and cultures were often a mixture of surrounding dominant cultures.

Satun was a classic peripheral region, where sovereignty and loyalty were always ambiguous. According to Ryoko Nishii, the local Muslim population in Satun was a product of their peripheral location. The modern-day harmony between Muslims and Buddhists came from the centuries of Thai Buddhist influence and inter-communal interactions. The unique dialect of the "*Sam Sam*" population of Satun, that is mostly Thai but with heavy Malay influences, demonstrates the merging of these two dominant cultures.¹¹³ Nishii argues that the constant need for balancing the two cultures made the local population more adaptable to these external influences. When Kedah rule receded, and Siam became the more dominant influence, Satun's Muslims adapted to the changing situation, as they had many times before. For all of these reasons, Satun's people became more flexible and adaptable in dealing with external centers of power, and most importantly, they were never strongly rooted to Kedah. Therefore, after Satun was officially incorporated into Siam under the 1909 Anglo-Siamese treaty, the population of Satun adapted and learned to live under Siamese control instead of resisting it.

Pattani stands in stark contrast to Satun. Pattani had always been a center of power itself, and was extremely reticent to submit to Siamese influence. The population in Pattani was much less inclined to integrate, and more apt to resist rising Siamese influence.

¹¹¹ Due to the layout of the mountains that separate Perlis/Kedah from Satun, the only land route between the two valleys would have been through Singora (Songkhla) to the north. In fact, the overland journey from Singora to Satun would have been half the distance of Kedah-Satun.

¹¹² The Anglo-Kedah agreement, negotiated by Sir Francis Light, to allow the British to establish a colony on the island of Penang included a provision for British protection of Kedah.

¹¹³ Interview with Dr. Ryoko Nishii, Associate Professor, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, interviewed in Chiang Mai, Thailand, June 14, 2005.

Benign Neglect of Thai Government

The Thai Government never considered Satun a major threat to internal stability. With no history of organized resistance, and local Muslim leaders who had incentive to cooperate with the Thai government, there would have been little reason for concern over this isolated province, with a relatively small, moderate Muslim population. As a result, Satun was allowed to maintain a higher degree of local autonomy, and was not subjected to the same kind of political pressure, and military presence as Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat.

During the turbulent period from 1902 to 1932, Satun was governed by Malay-Muslim leaders. While Thai Buddhist bureaucrats played a role in administering the local government, the most visible and influential position remained in Muslim control. Without a significant local Malay-Muslim elite to displace, the incoming Siamese officials met little resistance. While Pattani was constantly in the throes of revolt, Satun remained stable. As a result, Bangkok turned its attention and resources towards Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, and paid little attention to Satun.

Since 1900, Satun has never had a major Thai military presence. While there is evidence of a Siamese army stationed in Satun in the early to mid nineteenth century, the military presence was not in response to unrest in Satun. The Siamese army was primarily using Satun as a forward position from which to support military offensives against Kedah during the three violent uprisings against Siamese suzerainty between 1821 and 1839. However, this presence most likely tapered off soon after the end of hostilities. Throughout the 20th century, the Thai military has rarely had a need to station troops in Satun.¹¹⁴

During the nationalist military governments of Phibun Songkhram, Sarit Thanarat, and Thanom Kittikachorn, Satun's Muslims would have been subjected to the same policies as other minority groups. However, based on interviews of Satun Muslims alive at the time, Satun was spared from the worst. According to Harun Bakkar, who was a young Muslim in Satun during these regimes, these periods brought some difficulties for Muslims, especially during the Sarit and Thanom period. However, there were no uprisings or protests in Satun, and no lingering sense of bitterness afterwards.¹¹⁵

Therefore, it seems that Satun was usually left alone by successive Thai governments, and was spared the pressure and over-bearing influence of assimilationist policies. Ironically, Satun became far more integrated and assimilated into Thai culture and politics (compared to Pattani), despite the neglect of the Thai government.

Conclusion

The case of Satun province presents an important example of how a local Muslim population adapted to Thai rule in the early twentieth century, and became a participating member of the Thai political system. The confluence of forces and historical factors during the critical transition period from Malay-Muslim to Thai rule pushed Satun towards cooperation with the Siamese, and away from resistance. The implications of that period

¹¹⁴ Based on interview responses, there may be two possible exceptions when the Thai military would have moved into Satun. First, military action against communist insurgents along the Malay border in the 1970s and 1980s may have spilled over the border from Songkhla. Second, the military may have pursued separatists from the other provinces who may have sought refuge in Satun during the 1970's or 1980's. However, there is very little information, beyond second-hand accounts of interviewees, to confirm these scenarios.

¹¹⁵ Harun Bakkar, op. cit.

are profound. Satun's distinctiveness has allowed it to remain outside of the separatist movement in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. The local population has benefited from the relative stability and lack of inter-communal tensions over the past 100 years. As a result, Satun's per capita income today is roughly 50% higher than Pattani, and the population is not being subjected to the terrible violence plaguing the other provinces.¹¹⁶

What lessons can be drawn from Satun's experience? First, Satun provides important evidence that the Thai government's efforts to assimilate the Malay-Muslim population by force have had the opposite effect. Satun, a province that was generally left alone, and not subjected to the same kind of pressures as Pattani, became far more assimilated than Pattani. Thai government pressure has backfired in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, leading the population to resist over the course of decades. Second, by allowing the local Muslim elites to maintain their position in Satun, and by allowing a Malay-Muslim governor to continue to rule, the Siamese Government planted the seeds for a cooperative partnership. The policy of forcibly removing Pattani elites from power created serious repercussions that still resonate today.

Admittedly, Satun's experience holds only mixed relevance for the current separatist conflict in Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and southeastern Songkhla. Most of the critical factors that lead Pattani to resist, and Satun to cooperate, occurred more than 50 years ago. Furthermore, despite similarities in language, history, culture, and religion, Satun and Pattani had very different starting points in their relations with Bangkok. These differences make it difficult to ascertain whether or not political conflict could have been avoided had the Siamese government made different choices in its policies towards Pattani in the first half of the twentieth century.

However, Satun provides a useful example of a minority population in Thailand that has managed to find its place within the overwhelmingly Thai Buddhist system. Advocates for decentralized authority, protection of minority rights, and avoidance of heavy-handed pro-Buddhist policies can look to Satun as a place where the Thai Government has done many things right, or at least avoided major mistakes. During this period of crisis in Pattani, Satun offers a potential model for how things could have gone, or perhaps even how they might still go if Bangkok decides to change its approach towards Malay-Muslim separatism in the south.

¹¹⁶ In 2001, Satun's annual per capita gross income was 65,543 Baht, while Pattani's was 47,690. *Statistical Yearbook of Thailand*, National Statistical Office, Ministry of ICT, Bangkok, 2003.

References

- Andaya, Barbara, and Leonard Andaya, A History of Malaysia, Second Edition, Palgrave, Houndsmill, Basingstoke, and Hampshire, 2001.
- Blagden, C.O., "Siam and the Malay Peninsula" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1906, p. 108-109. (Found in Bonney, R. Kedah 1771-1821: The Search for Security and Independence, Oxford University Press, London, 1971.)
- Bonney, R. Kedah 1771-1821: The Search for Security and Independence, Oxford University Press, London, 1971.
- Bonura, Carlo, Jr., "Location and the Dilemmas of Muslim Political Community in Southern Thailand", Department of Political Science, University of Washington, Seattle, USA, paper presented at the First Inter-Dialogue Conference on Southern Thailand, Pattani, 13-15 June, 2002.
- Burr, Angela, "Thai-Speaking Muslims in Two Southern Thai Coastal Fishing Villages: Some Processes of Interaction with the Thai Host Society", in The Muslims of Thailand, Volume 1, Historical and Cultural Studies, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Bihar, India, 1989.
- Che Man, Wan Kadir Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1990.
- Cheah Boon Kheng, The Peasant Robbers of Kedah 1900-1929: Historical and Folk Perspectives, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, Singapore, 1988.
- Christie, Clive J., A Modern History of Southeast Asia: Decolonization, Nationalism, and Separatism, I.B. Tauris, London, New York, 1996.
- Cornish, Andrew, Whose Place is This? Malay Rubber Producers and Thai Government Officials in Yala, Studies in Contemporary Thailand Number 5, White Lotus, Bangkok, 1997.
- Davis, Anthony, "Satun escapes the grip of Thai violence that is blighting south", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 1, 2005.
- Davis, Anthony, "School system forms the frontline in Thailand southern unrest", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, November 1, 2004.
- Dorairajoo, Saroja, "Violence in the south of Thailand," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Volume 5, Number 3, 2004.
- Dulyakasem, Uthai, "Muslim-Malay Separatism in Southern Thailand: Factors Underlying the Political Revolt," in Armed Separatism in Southeast Asia, edited by Lim Joo-Jock and Vani S. Aldershot, ISEAS, Singapore, 1984.
- Farouk, Omar, "The Muslims of Thailand – A Survey", in The Muslims of Thailand, Volume 1, Historical and Cultural Studies, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Bihar, India, 1989.

Horstmann, Alexander, "Dual Ethnic Minorities and the Local Reworking of Citizenship at the Thailand-Malaysia Border," CIBR Working Papers in Border Studies, 2003.

International Crisis Group, "Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad", Asia Report #98, 18 May 2005.

Kedah National Museum, "'Bunga Emas' and 'Bunga Perak'", exhibit description, Alor Setar, Malaysia, 2005.

Suwannathat-Pian, Kobkua, "Dialogue of Two Pasts: 'Historical Facts' in Traditional Thai and Malay Historiography" in New Terrains in Southeast Asian History, edited by Abu Talib Ahmad and Tan Liok Ee, Singapore University Press, 2003.

Kuroda, Keiko, "The Siamese in Kedah under nation-state making," Kagoshima University.

Mardman, Hasan, and Pan Yuanlae, and Praphon Ruangnarong, "*Hetdai mai mii khaw (rai) jaak Satun*", Rusemilae Vol. 3, No. 4, 1973, 6-12. Source: Bonura, Carlo, Jr., "Location and the Dilemmas of Muslim Political Community in Southern Thailand", (presented at the First Inter-Dialogue Conference on Southern Thailand, 13-15 June, 2002, Pattani) Department of Political Science, University of Washington, Seattle, USA.

Marong Mahawangsa (The Kedah Annals), Translation by Lt. Col. Jawes Low, Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia, Vol. III, printed at American Presbyterian Mission Press, Bangkok, 1908.

McVey, Ruth, "Identity and Rebellion Among Southern Thai Muslims", in Andrew D.W. Forbes, The Muslims of Thailand, Volume 2, Politics of the Malay-Speaking South, Centre for South East Asian Studies, Bihar, India, 1989.

Nishii, Ryoko, "Emergence and Transformation of Peripheral Ethnicity: Sam Sam on the Thai-Malaysian Border," in Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States, A. Turton, London, Curzon Press, 2000.

Nishii, Ryoko, "Social Memory as it Emerges: A Consideration of the Death of a Young Convert on the West Coast in Southern Thailand," in Cultural Crisis and Social memory: Politics of the Past in the Thai World, Shigeharu Tanabe and C. Keyes, Richmond, Curzon Press, 2002.

Osborn, Sherard, The Blockade of Kedah in 1838: A Midshipman's Exploits in Malayan Waters, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1987.

Patani Malay Human Rights Organization, Website, 2005,
<http://www.pmhro.org/patani.htm>.

Pitsuwan, Surin, Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of the Malay Muslims of Southern Thailand, Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, 1985.

Rahimmula, Chidchanok, "Peace Resolution: A Case Study of Separatist and Terrorist Movement in Southern Border Provinces of Thailand", Prince of Songkhla University, 2001.

Reynolds, Craig J. (ed.), National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand Today, Silkworm, Chiang Mai, 2002.

Rutaaphirom, Boonserm, Prawatsaat Meung Satun (History of Satun Town), Samnakpim Awdiansataw, Bangkok, 2003.

Satha-Anand, Chaiwat, "The Silence of the Bullet Monument: Violence and 'Truth' Management, Dusun-nyor 1948 and Kru-se 2004," Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, Bangkok, keynote presentation to presented at the Ninth International Conference on Thai Studies, Northern Illinois University, April 3-6, 2005.

Skinner, Cyril, The Battle for Junk Ceylon: The Syair Sultan Maulana Taxt, Translation and Notes, Foris Publications, Dordrecht-Holland/Cinnaminson, US, 1985.

Skinner, Cyril and Justin Corfield, "Rama III and the Siamese Expedition to Kedah in 1839, The Dispatches of Luang Udomsombat," Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, No. 30, Centre for South East Asian Studies, Monash University, Clayton, 1993.

Suhrke, Astri, "The Muslims of Southern Thailand," in Andrew D.W. Forbes, The Muslims of Thailand, Volume 2, Politics of the Malay-Speaking South, Centre for South East Asian Studies, Bihar, India, 1989.

Sugunnasil, Wattana, Dynamic Diversity in Southern Thailand, Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani, Silkworm, Chiang Mai, 2005.

Syukri, Ibrahim, Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani (History of the Malay Kingdom of Patani), translated by Conner Bailey and John Miksic, Silkworm, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 1985.

Taneerananon, Sirirat, "Poverty of the Thai Muslims in the South of Thailand: A Case of Pattani," Associate Professor, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkhla University, paper presented at the Ninth International Conference on Thai Studies, Northern Illinois University, April 3-6, 2005.

True, Linda, "Balancing Minorities: A Study of Southern Thailand," SAIS Working Paper Series, WP/02/04, Washington, DC, 2004.

Winichakul, Thongchai, Siam Mapped, A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation, Silkworm, Chiang Mai, 1994.

Wyatt, David K., A Short History of Thailand, Second Edition, Yale University Press, 2003.

Wyatt, David K., and A. Teeuw Hikayat Patani: the Story of Patani, 1970.

Wyatt, David K., Studies in Thai History, Silkworm, Chiang Mai, 1994.