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Islamic Public Value

Theory, Practice, and
Administration of Indigenous
Cooperative Institutions

OPEN ACCESS

POLICY, ADMINISTRATION,
AND INSTITUTIONS

Islamic Public Value

POLICY, ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Series Editors: Giliberto Capano, *Professor of Political Science, Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy* and Edoardo Ongaro, *Professor of Public Management, The Open University, UK*

Change is the main explanatory challenge for the social sciences. Stability and persistence are simpler to understand and explain than change; at the same time, change is not separated from stability, and, from this point of view, any approach to change (in whatever field) should be able to account for both ‘constancy and change’.

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Indigenous Cooperative Institutions

Edited by

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POLICY, ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE



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إِنَّ الْجَمَالَ جَمَالُ الْعَقْلِ وَالْأَدَبِ
لَيْسَ الْجَمَالُ بِأَثْوَابٍ تَزِينُنَا
لَيْسَ الْيَتِيمُ الَّذِي قَدْ مَاتَ وَالِدُهُ
إِنَّ الْيَتِيمَ يَتِيمُ الْعِلْمِ وَالْأَدَبِ
[علي بن أبي طالب]

*Beauty is not in garments that adorn us,
true beauty is the beauty of knowledge and character.*

*An orphan is not one who has lost their parents,
the true orphan is the one deprived of knowledge and character.*
[Ali ibn Abi Talib]

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16. The role of Islamic education in building of Islamic public value of multicultural citizenship in southern Thailand

Imtiyaz Yusuf and Arthit Thongin

INTRODUCTION

Religion-based value administration has been an integral part of all societies since ancient times. The recorded history of past kingdoms and empires offers information about how they organised, governed and administered their societies, rooted in religious values. Sometimes, the history of religions is divided into different epochs – the first referred to, for instance, by Henri Frankfort and his colleagues as the age “Before Philosophy” (Frankfort 1946), being the worldviews of the two important “pre-Greek” civilisations of Mesopotamia and Egypt. The second is what Karl Jaspers calls the Axial Age, viz., the period between the 8th and the 3rd century BCE during which the great intellectual, philosophical, and religious systems that came to shape subsequent human society and culture emerged – with the ancient Greek philosophers, Indian metaphysicians and logicians as articulated in the traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism; Persian Zoroastrianism; the Arabian and Hebrew Prophets representing the monotheistic stream of being; and the religion-philosophical and ethical schools of Confucianism and Daoism of ancient China (Jaspers 2021). The Axial Age arguably marked a religio-philosophical move away from more predominantly localised religions and towards transcendence, which laid the foundation for modern thought (Arnason et al. 2004; Bellah and Hans 2012). Hence, the concept and the application of religion-based administration and management, as referred to in the modern age, in this particular context, as Islamic Public Value, has a long historical antecedent (Drechsler 2015).

In fact, one can say that engagement in Islamic public administration or, for that matter, religious public administration and management has been a

missing dimension in modern educational and public administration and management studies in Anglo-American and Western studies of statecraft (Drechsler 2015, 63). The currently implemented models of public administration, management, and public value in the global South are largely a continuation of the colonial legacy.

Therefore, there really is no reason to believe that if one transfers what works in Liverpool (if it works) to Dhaka, it will work there as well. In fact, the track record of PM transfer, rather than PM learning, often pushed by the international organisations, has at least been mixed; histories of failures abound, and it may even well be that there are more of these than successes. (Drechsler 2015, 63)

Drechsler therefore posits that contemporary studies in Public Administration, Public Management, and Public Value must suspend the assertion that the Western model of public administration should be the sole base for other systems as well. Otherwise, research and policy will be counterproductive because there are many varied, good models of non-Western public administration implemented around the world, including the Islamic model (Vintar et al. 2013, 58–70). Hence, there is an urgent need to recognise the obvious: that as well as European, there are non-Western models of public administration, such as Kautilya or Chanakya's (375–283 BCE) in India and also Buddhist, Confucian, and Islamic treatises on public value administration, which are rich in terms of theoretical literature and long histories of practice whose relevance is not outdated today (Drechsler 2013; Tambiah 1977; Yang and Rutgers 2017). In other words, public administration does not have to be modelled on the Western paradigm, since it is not universal. In this case, Chulalongkorn (Rama V; reigned 1868–1910 CE), known as the moderniser of Siam, embarked on administrative reform of Thailand based on Western standards, yet did not entirely remove at least the symbolic Theravada Buddhist roots of the kingdom (Engel 1975; Keyes 2019; Peleggi 2002; Rhum 1996).

Tamara Loos argues that in uncolonised Siam, whose sovereignty was impeded by the imperial powers of the region, its leaders pursued European-style colonial strategies of juridical control in the Muslim south, which (already) then belonged to Siam. The creation of family law and courts in that region and in Siam proper most clearly manifests Siam's dualistic position. The language of modernity was not associated with a foreign colonial overlord, she argues, and in this way, its elites favoured the continuation of existing domestic hierarchies against those advocating political and social change (Loos 2005).

Nearly all of the countries of contemporary South East Asia are largely semi-secular states in which religions and cultures form the basis of their public administration and management. They are still secular in terms of their

bureaucratic functioning, while being religious in terms of public values and political cultures based on Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam (Peters 2021). The majority of their constitutions either mention an official religion, highlight the prominent status of one religion over the others, or imply it by reference to religious demography – with the only exceptions being Singapore and Vietnam, which have clear Confucian elements (Drechsler 2018) that call for “accommodative secularism” (Li-ann 1995) in the former and that “all people have the right to freedom of belief and religion, and have the right to follow or not follow any religions” in the latter (*Open Development Vietnam* 2023).

For *Melayu*-speaking communities of Buddhist-majority Thailand, a long-standing challenge for both the state and public has been how to construct and preserve the notion of genuine citizenship in a nuanced way without compromising ethno-religious identity. This chapter analyses the role of *Rong Rian Ekkachon Son Sasana* (Thai: โรงเรียนเอกชนสอนศาสนา) – Islamic Private School – amidst the conflict provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat in the Deep South of Thailand, and concludes that not only have they successfully navigated the challenge of citizenship, but in doing so represent a notable case of public value creation from an Islamic context.

THE ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS OF SOUTH EAST ASIAN SOCIETIES

South East Asia consists of 11 countries divided into “mainland” and “maritime” zones. The mainland comprises Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The maritime zone includes Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, and East Timor. The political profile of South East Asian states comprises constitutional monarchies, military dictatorships, and native forms of democracies which are neither totally liberal nor illiberal as per the Western political classifications (Aljunied 2022; Bowring 2020; Zhouxiang 2023). Ethnicity and religions are important identity markers of South East Asian people: Catholicism in the Philippines, Islam in Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia, Buddhism in Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos, and Confucianism and Buddhism in Singapore and Vietnam. The church, mosque, or *wat* (Thai: วัด – Buddhist temple) play important roles in the shaping of ethno-religious and political cultures by providing education and social meanings (Liu and Ricks 2022; Ooi and Grabowsky 2017; Tarling 1998; Yusuf 2018 and Goh 2009). Beyond ritual worship, various religious organisations play important roles in the areas of education and social welfare activities, and even influence political policies (Bonura 2023; Cheng and Brown 2006).

The unique politico-religious character of South East Asia is that the world religions more or less operate along ethnic lines (Turner and Salemin 2014). Therefore, for instance, in the popular mind, generally speaking, a

Malay is a Muslim; a Thai is a Buddhist; a Filipino is a Catholic; and the immigrant Chinese can be Taoist/Confucian/Buddhist or Christian. In spite of political problems, South East Asians are culturally and also religiously inclusive, broadly speaking (Lai 2008; Crouch 2016); certainly with various exceptions, for example, conflicts in the Philippines (Man 1990a; McKenna 1998), Myanmar (Holt 2019; Ibrahim and Yunus 2018), and southern Thailand (Jerryson 2011; McCargo 2008).

South East Asian states are therefore semi-secular nations where religions are important identity markers (Hefner 2001; Liow 2016; Swearer 2010). Even political cultures are religion-based: Buddhist political culture in Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia, where the kings and political leaders aspire to be models of *Dhammarajah* or good Buddhist leaders by respecting the *Sangha* and the *Dasa-rājādharmma* / 10 Royal Virtues (Baker and Phongpaichit 2005, 2016, 2017; Ishii 1986); Muslim political culture in Malaysia and Brunei, where sultans are custodians of Islam (Allers 2013; Mutalib 1990; Schottmann 2019); Catholic values inspire social and political developments in the Philippines (United States Congress House Committee on Insular Affairs 2023; Cornelio 2016; Lee 2021); Indonesia operates on the ideology of *Pancasila*, in which belief in God is the first principle, yet the national motto is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* or “Unity in Diversity” (Azra 2004; Hefner 2000; Liow 2022; Ricklefs 2008). The minority conflicts with the states in the region are ethno-religious: Karennis of Myanmar are Baptists or Roman Catholics, while Rohingya of Myanmar, Pattani Malays, and Mindanao Moros are Muslims (Yegar 2002; Yusuf 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is based on research about the, perhaps unconscious, application of Islamic Public Value as an administrative policy. More specifically, the focus is on the role of education in building multicultural citizenship in Thailand’s Muslim minority context located in a conflict zone (a place of distrust). Therefore, conducting fieldwork on the topic of this research was and is a sensitive matter, as it raises concerns for security of the researchers, the target institutions of research, and the interviewees (McCargo 2008). Hence, this research was conducted with the above-mentioned concerns in mind, and naturally required, as a first step, building rapport with and the confidence of the research targets.

There are four types of educational institutions in southern Thailand:

1. *Tadika* – Islamic kindergartens.
2. *Pondok* – private traditional religious madrasa-type boarding schools.

3. *Rong Rian Ekkachon Son Sasana* – Islamic Private Schools recognised by Thailand’s Ministry of Education.
4. Public and Private Universities.

Our research examined three *Rong Rian Ekkachon Son Sasana*: (1) Attarkiah Islamiah School in the Narathiwat province; (2) Phatna Witya School in the province of Yala; and (3) Saiburi Islam Wittaya School in the province of Pattani. In order to obtain the trust of the targeted institutions and the informants, the data for this chapter were collected from both desk research and ethnographic fieldwork throughout May to October 2023, which allowed rapport building and, eventually, social acceptance with ease within the research environment.

The objective was to collect detailed, informative data about these schools using methods of informal interviews, focused group discussions, observation of the school’s *modus operandi*, and the roles of the students in attendance. Most importantly, the study aimed to understand the roles of these schools in shaping and creating Islamic public value in the context of multicultural citizenship in southern Thailand.

ISLAM IN THAILAND

As for Islam in Thailand, a Theravada Buddhist majority country with a constitutional monarchy political system (but not in practice), the population of Thai Muslims stands between five and seven million out of Thailand’s total population of about 71 million (Thailand Population (2024) – Worldometer 2024). The mono-ethnic and mono-lingual Malay–Muslims of the Deep South of Thailand, which in the past were independent Malay sultanates, constitute about 44 per cent of the total rural Thai Muslim population (Selway 2007, 61).

Islam in Thailand is generally divided into three configurations defined by history and location. The first type of Islam in Thailand is made up of ethnic Malay-speaking Muslims residing in the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala in the Deep South; they been largely resistant to integration within the Thai polity. The majority Malay–Muslims of the Deep South refer to themselves as *orae nayu* (Malay Muslim) who *kecek nayu* (speak local Jawi–Malay), distinguishing themselves from the *orae siye*, that is, ethnic Siamese Buddhists who are the minority in the south. The *orae nayu* feel offended if referred to as “Thai Muslim”, a term often interpreted ethnically because the common understanding is that a Malay cannot be anything other than a Muslim and a Siamese is always a Buddhist. Therefore, they also see the term “Thai Muslim” as a sign of forced assimilation by the Thai state (Selway 2007; Tsukamoto 2021, 61–70). On the other hand, the rest of the Thai Muslims,

belonging to diverse multi-ethnic identities residing in the different parts of Thailand, do not take any offence to the term “Thai Muslim”. Rather, they see themselves as part of a Buddhist multi-religious country where Islam is a minority religion (Yusuf 2007a, 2022).

The second and third configurations are more open to integration. They comprise ethnically Malay but Thai-speaking Muslims of the upper southern provinces of Satun, Krabi, Nakorn Si Thammarat, Phangnga, Phuket, and Songkla. They are mostly migrants from the Malaysian states of Kedah and Perlis (Yusuf 2007a). Last but no less significant are the multi-ethnic Thai-speaking integrated Muslims of the central Thai provinces of Bangkok and Ayudhya and also those residing in the north and northeast parts of Thailand, comprising Muslims of Bengali, Cham, Chinese, Indian, Indonesian, Malay, Pathan, and Persian ethnicities. These Muslims from neighbouring and far countries settled in Thailand after fleeing religious persecution at the hands of the communists in China or the genocidal junta in Myanmar. There are also Thai converts to Islam either through marriage or religious conversion (Yusuf 2022).

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS ISLAM IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

In his 1988 study of Islam in Thailand, Omar Farouk distinguished between two types of Muslims in Thailand, namely the “assimilated” and the “unassimilated”. The former constitutes “a whole diversity of ethnic groups such as the Muslim Siamese, the Thai-Malays, the Haw Chinese, the Bengalis, the Arabs, the Pathans, the Punjabis and the Samsams. The ‘unassimilated’ are predominantly Malay ‘who reside in the deep southern provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat’” (Farouk 1988, 5).

Since the 1980s, the Thai government has undertaken several efforts to accommodate its Muslim population into the mainstream and has had some success in this effort, as seen through those who identify themselves as “Thai Muslims”. However, there are still sections who see themselves differently in ethno-religious terms (Pitsuwan 1985, 13). The unassimilated are inspired by the contemporary politicisation of religion; they engage in the “politicisation of ethnicity” or “ethno-religious nationalism”, or what is referred to as “regional or subnational reactions and resistances to what is seen as an over-centralised and hegemonic state [...] to achieve their own regional and local sociopolitical formations” (Tambiah 1997, 16).

ISLAMIC PUBLIC VALUE IN THAILAND

The integrated meaning of public value covers various dimensions, that is, governance, education, and civil society organisations in a networked manner

(O'Flynn 2021). In the context of southern Thailand, public value in an Islamic context plays a significant role in helping the Malay-speaking Muslim minority contribute towards the common good and, in doing so, realise their distinct native identity in all spheres of life and practice.

This is both a legal and normative case for the Thai state to address, and the 2017 Constitution is clear in this context regarding directive principles of state policies:

- “Thailand is one and indivisible Kingdom” in which “human dignity, rights, liberties and equality of the people shall be protected”.
 - “The King is a Buddhist and Upholder of religions”.
 - “The State should support and protect Buddhism and other religions”.
- (Government of the Kingdom of Thailand 2017)

In supporting and protecting Buddhism, which is the religion observed by the majority of Thai people, the State should promote and support the education and dissemination of dharmic principles of Theravada Buddhism for the development of mind and wisdom, and shall have measures and mechanisms to prevent Buddhism from being undermined in any form. The State should also encourage Buddhists to participate in implementing such measures or mechanisms. In this sense, public value as a non-Western governance policy in the context of Thailand can be summarised as the duty of the Thai people, “to protect and uphold the Nation, religions, the King, and the democratic regime of government with the King as Head of State” (Government of the Kingdom of Thailand, Thailand Constitution 2017, Chapter IV. S.50).

This means that public value creation in the case of Thai Muslims has to be understood, analysed, and evaluated in light of the ethno-religious makeup of their communal identity with special reference to the role of education in its construction. Hence, this chapter is an analysis of how the *Rong Rian Ekkachon Son Sasana* (Islamic Private Schools) navigate cultural similarities, interreligious differences, and psychological experiences in the context of southern Thailand to build, foster, and maintain multicultural citizenship in Thailand as an important case of Islamic Public Value.

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS AND HISTORICAL-POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THAILAND'S DEEP SOUTH

In 1906, Siam annexed the Malay Muslim provinces of Nong Chik, Ra-ngae, Raman, Sai Buri, Yala, and Yaring, which were parts of the independent Malay Muslim vassal states of Patani. The annexation was formalised through the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. The former *negara* of the Patani state was

divided into three provinces – Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala – which now make up the three Malay Muslim majority provinces of southern Thailand, while Siam relinquished its claims to sovereignty over the Malay Sultanates of Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, and Terengganu to Great Britain. The British colonial logic for sanctioning the continued Siamese occupation of the northern half of Malaya was its perceived notion of Siam being a friendly buffer kingdom against the French in Indochina. The currently named province of Pattani is the Thai spelling of the newly constituted province, an outcome of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. The original Malay-Jawi refers to the region as Patani, which is still current among the local Malays and the separatist movements when making reference to the region (Klein 1969; Numnonda 1968; Pitsuwat 1985).

Since incorporation, there has been an ongoing cultural clash between the Malay Muslims and the Siamese Buddhists. Initially, the Thai state adopted the policy of integration nested within a larger process of statism led by the then military strongmen Major General Plaek Pibulsongkram, who ruled between 1938–1944 and 1948–1957, and Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, who held power between 1958–1963. Military strongmen like Pibulsongkram and Thanarat imposed the policy of cultural nationalism, that is, Thaiisation, across the entire country (Baker and Phongpaichit 2022; Haberkorn and Winichakul 2011; Phillips 2018; Suwannathat-Pian 1995, 2014).

The southern Muslim mono-ethnic and mono-cultural Malay community felt the brunt of it. The Thai official bureaucracy was accused of being culturally insensitive to the local Malay Muslim culture. Indeed, the Malay Muslims of the Deep South did not welcome the Thaiisation policy as it sought to remove their ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious identity (Man 1990a; Pitsuwat 1985). Contemporarily, Asian Islamophobia remains a reality in the Buddhist-majority countries of Sri Lanka, Thailand, and especially Myanmar in relation to Buddhist–Muslim–Christian relations in these countries (Pathan et al. 2018; DeVotta 2007; Yusuf 2017; Jerryson 2010; Juergensmeyer et al. 2015).

Back in 2004, with the rekindling of violence in the Deep South, the International Crisis Group had clearly described the southern Thailand conflict as “insurgency and not a *jihād*” (Crisis Group 2005). This stance holds true today because the southern conflict, since the annexation of Patani in 1909, has always been about Patani nationalism and not a religious war. Currently, in spite of seven rounds of talks between the Thai state and Patani nationalists (led by Barisan Revolusi Nasional, i.e. National Revolutionary Front), the conflict and different attempts to bring peace in the region remain unresolved, and peace is still not at hand. Although Islamic politico-religious rhetoric is employed for nationalist motivations, the insurgents remain steadfast against their political struggle becoming religious (Crisis Group 2005). This is due to the fact that distinct ethnic identity, language, and culture are the main forces

superseding religion and driving the Patani Malays to contest the Thai state (Harish 2006).

To return to 1909, there has since been an ongoing tussle between the Thai state and the Malay Muslims of the Deep South over the character and administration of education. The Compulsory Education Act, 1921, declared the transformation of the educational system all over Thailand. It proposed the introduction of Western education into Thai society, compulsory learning of the Thai language, along with the teaching of Buddhist ethics. The Malay Muslims of the Deep South felt offended by this policy; they saw this move as a way to erase their ethno-religious identity and culture (Aphornsuvan 2007; Kukreja 2016; Pitsuwan 1985, 13). In their view, the centrist and unitary political and educational policy of the Thai state was an attempt to assimilate and not integrate them into the Thai polity. The Compulsory Education Act, 1921, called for the derecognition of the *pondok* – the traditional religious madrasa-type schools – and made the compulsory enrolment of young children into government public schools, in which there was no recognition for the place of Malay history, culture, language, and *Shafi'i* Islam – the religious and jurisprudential identity of the Malay Muslims of the Deep South. The enactment of the Compulsory Education Act, 1921, was one of the key contributing factors to the rise of violent rebellious insurgency movements in the Deep South, which continues until today (Man 1990b; Yusuf and Schmidt 2006, 2010, 2022).

The Malay Muslims of the Deep South viewed traditional *pondok* as the bedrock for preserving their ethno-religious identity. It should be noted here that Thai Muslims residing in the upper south, central, northeast, and northern provinces of Thailand have different ethno-religious configurations and, accordingly, political identity. It is often said that the Malay Muslims of the Deep South look upon their religious brethren residing in the rest of Thailand as practising a diluted or Bangkokian version of Islam (Scupin 1980b, 1980a; Yusuf 2007a).

In the face of forced assimilation through various measures by the Thai state, the Patani Malay Muslims of the Deep South have faced the challenge of maintaining their distinct identity, which is different from both the Thai Muslims residing in other provinces of Thailand and the *orae siye*, that is, the Siamese. In this venture, their educational response has played an important role, yet they have not been able to withstand the influx of the Thai language among the younger generations, who now speak both *Jawi* and Thai. Indeed, both languages represent their different identities in both their private and public lives.

Education policy and the responses of Malay-speaking Muslims of the Deep South in Thailand have been the subject of many studies addressing different research questions, such as: does Thailand's Constitution mention *chat* (Thai: ชาตติ – people) and *sasana* (Thai: ศาสนา – religion) to refer exclusively to Thai

ethnicity and Buddhism; the role of government support for the development of the Muslim community and protection from discrimination; and a constitutional solution to the Pattani question or the status of the people of Pattani (Azizah and Raya 2021; Hifza and Aslan 2019; Liow and Raya 2020; Raihani 2017; Raihani et al. 2016; Salaeh 2023).

In the course of 115 years of the southern Thailand conflict, from 1909 until the present time of writing, the Malay Muslims have engaged in constructing and shaping curriculums in public and private schools to meet their needs of preserving and promoting their identity and community, and enabling it to flourish. The initial phase from 1909 until 1932 saw Siam become Thailand and the political transformation from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy (Mead 2006; Rajchagool 1994). During the first democratic era of constitutional monarchy, Prime Minister Pridi Banomyong was at the helm of power for only five months in 1946. His premiership ended abruptly due to a military coup led by the ultra-nationalist military general Plaek Phibunsongkhram, who served as Prime Minister of Thailand from 1938 to 1944 and 1948 to 1957 (Suwannathat-Pian 1995; Connors 2007). Phibun was in turn overthrown by another military general, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, who ruled from 1957 to 1963, setting the track for Thailand to become a military dictatorship with short intervals of democratic rule (Hewison 1997; Keyes 2015). However, with the end of General Suchinda Kraprayoon's rule in 1992, the southern Malay Muslims pinned much hope on political freedom after the promulgation of the 1997 People's Constitution. With the rise of Thaksin Shinawatra to power and subsequent military rule, their hopes were dashed. This resulted in the forceful return of the Pattani insurgency since 2004, and political turmoil continues to this day (Connors and Pathmanand 2021; McCargo and Chattharakul 2020; Van Praagh and Solarz 1996).

ISLAMIC PUBLIC VALUE AND ETHNICITY IN THAILAND

In the case of Thailand in particular, and South East Asia in general, there is a need to address the relationship between ethnicity, race, and religious denomination. In the present context, the connection between the Shafii school of *fiqh* – jurisprudence adhered to by Malays – and its ties with their ethno-religious identification should be examined. It is important to note the difference between *Sharia* and *fiqh*: the former constitutes the broad principles of law mentioned in the Qur'an, while the latter consists of schools of Muslim jurisprudence formulated upon and drawn from the principles of *Sharia*. *Sharia* is macro in orientation, while by contrast, *fiqh* is micro, as it is determined by space, time, and context (Hasan 2013; Rahman 1979, 100–116).

Ethno-religious heterogeneity as an identity marker affects the shaping of policy in relation to interpretations about what constitutes state identity, namely, whether it is monist or pluralist. “Monists claim that there is only one ultimate value. Pluralists argue that there really are several different values, and that these values are not reducible to each other or to a supervalue” (Mason 2023). However, this binary may perhaps be too reductionist:

Ethnographic research demonstrates that both monist and pluralist tendencies exist in the value relations of all societies and that the key analytic task thus becomes not determining whether a society is monist or pluralist, but rather documenting which kinds of configurations of monist and pluralist relations we tend to find in actually existing societies. (Robbins 2013, 99)

Therefore, the increasingly studied approach of public value cannot escape addressing the dynamics of ethnic heterogeneity and its implications for societies in which multiple religions play a significant role. Indeed, non-recognition of ethnic heterogeneity is an effective course for corruption, political instability, slower economic growth, and lack of cooperation across the world (Christie 1996; Munirah 2018; Prabhakar 2023). The broad question becomes whether the application of Islamic, Buddhist, Confucianist, and Christian approaches to public value can assist in bringing about conflict resolution in heterogeneous ethno-religious countries. And more specifically for southern Thailand, what role can public and private Islamic schools play in contributing towards building the common good in a multicultural country (Tuntivivat 2016)? As such, the application of Islamic Public Value amidst the conflict zone of the provinces of Thailand’s Deep South relates directly to two points: (1) negotiated ethno-religious political dynamics between the Thai state; and (2) the ethno-religious identity of the Malay-speaking Muslims of the Deep South.

TYPES OF MUSLIM EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

The study of the role of Muslim educational institutions in the formation of Islamic public value in southern Thailand exemplifies the blending of both Thailand’s national policy of education alongside the objectives of understanding and building peace and conflict resolution in the restive south (Yusuf and Schmidt 2006). The Malay Muslims have engaged in shaping and implementing integrated curricula both in public and private schools, which include the study of general subjects and also Islamic religious studies of the confessional type. These latter studies are aimed at preserving, promoting, and developing Malay ethnic identity coupled with the Shafii school of Islamic jurisprudence (Wekke 2018; Wekke 2019).

It is noteworthy that the 1990s featured the appearance of Wahhabi-Salafi educational and Saudi Arabian-funded religio-cultural initiatives in southern Thailand, brought in by student returnees. Subsequently, there were student returnees who went on to study in religious and educational institutions in Egypt, Kuwait, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, and other Muslim-majority countries (Liow 2009, 2010; Varagur 2018).

EXPLORING THE *RONG RIAN EKKACHON SON SASANA*: THREE CASES

This research focuses on the role of three *Rong Rian Ekkachon Son Sasana* – Islamic private schools in their role of creating Islamic public value in the form of multicultural citizenship in southern Thailand: (1) Attarkiah Islamiah School in the Narathiwat province; (2) Phatna Witya School in the province of Yala; and (3) Saiburi Islam Wittaya School in the province of Pattani.

Attarkiah Islamiah School, Narathiwat Province

Attarkiah Islamiah School is the largest Islamic private school in southern Thailand, operating under the Office of Private Education, Narathiwat Province. The school was founded in 1961 by the chairman of the Narathiwat Provincial Islamic Committee, Mr Hayidaoh Hajimadeeyo. In its early days, the school was under the patronage of the Provincial Islamic Committee, which was necessary for the mobilisation of funds from the public for the construction of school infrastructure. This included obtaining funding from overseas, such as the King Faisal Foundation in Saudi Arabia. In 1975, the school established a foundation named the *Islamic Foundation for Education* to obtain additional international funding. The school is able to raise funds from different sources for the development of new school initiatives. Currently, the main source of the school's budget is Thailand's Ministry of Education programme of subsidising Islamic private schools, as well as donations from Thai Muslims and financial grants from the kingdoms of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and the Islamic Development Bank, Saudi Arabia.

The vision of the school aims at moulding its students to become models of *insan al-kamil* – perfect human beings modelled on the example of the Prophet Muhammad. It lays emphasis on the practice of Islamic ethics, being disciplined, creative, and dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge in modern sciences.

The school's mission is based on three principles: Faith, Discipline, and Modern Knowledge. This mission and vision have enabled the school to produce graduates who possess integrated personalities within society and are equipped with skills to earn their own livelihood and also practise the Islamic

way of life. The school lays stress on being open-minded towards others in order to building a cohesive and integrated society.

In the years 2007 and 2008, the school received Royal Awards from then-Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn of Thailand, the current King of Thailand, for being an outstanding educational institution in southern Thailand. In addition, many prominent personalities have visited and supported the school, such as the Minister of Justice of Kuwait in 2009. During the same year, then-Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and then-Malaysian Prime Minister Abdul Razak jointly visited the school, which led to the establishment of the school's educational radio station on the frequency band 104.00 MHz. Meanwhile, the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC), which is a government body, has supported the school's educational programmes immensely. In 2012, Pol. Col. Tawee Sodsong, Secretary-General of the SBPAC, presided over the opening of the museum room in memory of the late Umar Toyib, the first principal of the school. Umar Toyib was a respected educator in his own right, and the museum houses his memorabilia, photographs, and awards for public viewing.

The success of the Attarkiah Islamiah School is an outcome of its educational curriculum, which integrates both Islamic and general education curricula with emphasis on Islamic ethics and values of peace and social harmony, which are the core values of Asian social philosophy.

With a large student body of 3,500 students, this Islamic private school recognises the importance of obtaining modern knowledge and provides the teaching of general subjects like other general schools. Students study general subjects such as science, mathematics, English, and Mandarin. The school's curriculum also includes courses in business management and computer programming.

In aspiring to form its students and graduates to become *good persons*, Paisarn Toyib, the president of the school, explained that the definition of a *good person* in Attarkiah's philosophy is one who has a socially integrated personality founded on the integration of both Islamic and general education. This process takes place through the combination of both curricular studies and extra-curricular activities. A good person is one who is able to distinguish between good from evil based on knowledge and practice of living Islam in a dynamic society and a globalising world. Furthermore, a good person is one who has leadership qualities to contribute to the social welfare of the community and the country. In addition, such an integrated learning approach helps in the development of human resources for the earning of livelihoods, which is missing in the lives of many youngsters in southern Thailand who opt solely for religious education. The Attarkiah Islamiah School seeks to enable its graduates to adapt to living in the modern age amidst constant social change and new challenges.

Thus, Attarkiah aims at producing graduates who are both rooted in their ethnic Malay identity and are able to respond to the state project of Thaiisation with an open mind, thereby overcoming the binary trap of being either a Malay or a Thai person. The school emphasises balancing Malay identity and Thai citizenship along with the added value of an Islamic religious identity. In other words, it aims to produce “glocalised” Muslims. In our interview, Paisarn Toyip, the vice-president of the World Association of Private Religious Schools, stated that:

I want people to leave out of the shell. Muslim populations exist all over the world and are highly diverse. Why do we have to let children learn to be limited to a narrow body of knowledge in Patani and then think that the world must become like us? On the contrary, the problem that children have to learn instead is why we are not like them.

Hence, the essence of Attarkiah’s learning philosophy is to create graduates who learn and understand worldwide diversity and also see its opportunities and benefits. In order to obtain this, the school has engaged in educational exchange programmes with schools and universities in Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, and even the United States. The school has set five criteria for selecting students for this program: (1) Being knowledgeable in the language of the host country at a communicative level; (2) Possessing cultural understanding of the host society; (3) Being disciplined; (4) Not creating trouble while engaging in the exchange program; and (5) Having a hospitable personality.

In contrast to the traditional *pondok* institutions which place great emphasis on possessing knowledge of the Patani Malay dialect, especially the *Jawi* script, and preserving ethnic racial identity, Attarkiah has a different vision of the language, reflecting that they are a “modern *pondok*”. The school believes that, on the one hand, language marks ethnic identity, helping to preserve local culture and identity and fostering the learning of the local Islamic legacy. But that is not enough; therefore, the school provides opportunities for the learning of several foreign languages by employing teachers who are native speakers of English, Chinese, Arabic, and Malaysian Malay.

At the domestic level, Attarkiah demands that students appreciate the value of social principles in line with Islamic principles. They emphasise learning the teachings of “Sufficiency Economy” put forth by King Rama IX (Drechsler 2016), seeing them as compatible with Islamic principles of being humble, non-arrogant, and self-reliant, as well as the cultural values of the Patani Malays (Jatchavala and Vittayanont 2021). Therefore, the strength of the Attarkiah school’s educational approach is its ability to integrate Islamic values, for example, getting to know each other or promoting the good and

forbidding the evil, alongside other socio-economic and cultural values, as long as they are not contrary to Islamic principles.

Attarkiah thus serves as a model educational institution that balances Islamic public values with different yet compatible values of society at large at both the local and global levels. This enables the graduates of Attarkiah to live and flourish in a harmonious way, integrating the religious way of life with secular ways in a dignified way, as social leaders and efficient members of society.

Phatna Witya School, Yala Province

The Phatna Witya School in the city of Yala, the capital of Yala province, was established in 1958. Its mission is the educational and moral development of young people by combining and balancing the contents of both general and Islamic religious education. The school also focuses on preserving the Malay identity of the students. The school's mission is directed towards developing its student body so that they can earn a livelihood by meeting the changing challenges of the labour market. This approach was borne out of the realisation that the exclusive study of the Islamic religious sciences in the traditional way is not sufficient for earning a livelihood and being good citizens. The Deep Southern provinces, besides being a conflict zone, face an endemic problem of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS, which is widely spread among the Muslim youth (Al Jazeera English 2010; Sateemae et al. 2015). In other words, a large number of young people have lost opportunities to live happy and flourishing lives in the age of globalisation.

Mr Rosdee Mangkaji, the director of the school, remarked that the students of his school should be prepared to perform successfully in both the religious and professional worlds. Thus, the school is dedicated to achieving this objective. In Mr Mangkaji's perspective, an ideal Phatna Witya graduate is one who possesses both professional and social leadership qualities. Therefore, the school offers a combined curriculum approach to education to form its students as social actors. In addition, the curricular training and activities at Phatna Witya emphasise building strong social relations between senior and junior students, whereby the seniors serve as role models of responsible citizens for the younger generation. Through this mechanism, it is possible to cultivate a culture of socially creative and activist qualities in the students, which is the core identity of Phatna Witya graduates.

For example, Dr Giflan Doloh, a Phatna Witya graduate who is the president of the Thailand Islamic Medical Association (TIMA), an organisation which plays a significant role in providing public health assistance to people in the southern border provinces during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, initiated the "*Change Classroom*" project. It prepares the students as future tutors

and social workers. The “*Change Classroom*” project has high potential for intensive academic learning and training. Its unique feature is that it integrates both Islamic religious studies and the study of modern sciences and skills. For example, in the study of mathematics, the “*Change Classroom*” project is designed to combine modern mathematics along with Islamic religious knowledge. In this way, students will be prepared to apply the rules of Islamic *Sharia* laws of inheritance, marriage, *zakat*, etc., to meet the needs of society at large. This integration of secular and religious knowledge eliminates the need for students to learn and apply both religious and general subjects in a binary way, thereby creating or forming integrated students who are able to function and contribute to the world productively. This approach creates many learning opportunities for both teachers and students to contribute to the human resources development of their community in both a religiously faithful and socially worthy manner, as modern, developed, and good Muslims.

Another important aspect of the “*Change Classroom*” project is that it changes the mindset of both the students and their parents in a complementary way. It prepares both parties to work and contribute mutually to learning and participate in school and social activities. The integrated curriculum implemented at Phatna Witya views the world as a competitive place for which its graduates should be prepared in an appropriate manner.

The “*Change Classroom*” project instils in the students respect for social and religious diversity, which does contradict the worldview of Islam. From the human resource perspective, the school sees the world as a broad labour market. The only risk or concern of the project implementers is that due to the unending conflict, the school’s graduates may relocate to other provinces outside Yala or southern Thailand for better prospects and opportunities. In order to prevent this from happening, the school lays great emphasis on the importance of preserving the values and cultural aspects of Malay identity, language, and culture, and its transmission to future generations. Mr Mangkaji remarked that a concern for promoting the Malay spirit will make the students resist relocation to other provinces of Thailand. He expects that this normative factor would help link the young people with southern Thailand as their homeland within the Kingdom of Thailand.

The Phatna Witya School also lays emphasis on learning the Thai language, which is the official language of Thailand. Phatna Witya School also lays stress on learning Arabic and Malay so that its graduates can participate in student exchange programmes in different countries. Recently, realising the potential benefit of learning the Chinese language, the school has also introduced the learning of Chinese. The school has established a preliminary approach by encouraging students to compete for intercultural programmes or the American Field Service international youth exchange program (AFS). Previously, some of the past students of Phatna Witya received scholarships

and opportunities to engage in student exchange programmes in Hungary and Singapore.

The Phatna Witya School has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Indonesian universities so that its graduates can pursue their bachelor's degree studies in Indonesia. There are two main reasons for choosing Indonesia as a partner. First, from an economic aspect, Indonesia offers a large number of free full scholarships and has lower living costs. Additionally, it is a Muslim country, which is a significant factor for parents. Second, due to its geographic proximity, Patani is a part of the *Nusantara* maritime culture. Thus, Phatna Witya graduates who go to study for bachelor's degrees in Indonesia will be able to access opportunities to build their own social and business networks, further expanding their entrepreneurial ventures in the future. The school administrator instructs their students that "The Muslim world is broader than Patani Malay Muslims. Network and language are the keys to reach". Hence, in this way, the Phatna Witya School engages in the development of an alternative model of public value with an Islamic essence and a globalised perspective.

Saiburi Islam Wittaya School, Pattani Province

The school was established in 1968 by Dato Nide Waba as a full-fledged Islamic educational institution. During the 1960s, the local people did not prefer to send their children to study general education in public schools with Thai as the medium of instruction. They preferred to send their children to study in the traditional *pondok* schools to learn only religious sciences. The 1960s was an era of strong anti-Thai state sentiment. People feared that learning Thai would lead to losing their faith and their Patani Malay ethno-linguistic-cultural identity. In the face of such an environment, Dato Nide Waba took the bold step of applying for a licence to open an Islamic private school with an integrated curriculum. Despite strong opposition, Dato Nide Waba decided to deal with the biased Thai bureaucracy of the Saiburi District Office, which had only two Malay Muslim officers. Dato Nide had witnessed that local people who lacked Thai language skills were discriminated against and insulted by the Thai officers, and often not provided with the services due to them. Therefore, Dato Nide was determined that only by building an Islamic private school that would equip the local children with literacy in the Thai language and offer modern education would their condition be able to improve. The school would also prepare graduates proficient in different subjects who could enter various careers and also enter into government service. Currently, the Saiburi Islam Wittaya School has a student body of around 3,800 students ranging from the ages of 3–18 years old. Approximately 100 students live at the school full-time (60 girls and 40 boys). It was established in 1968 with local *zakat* funds

and started receiving government financial support from 1992 onwards. It also receives regular financial funding from its alumni.

About 90 per cent of graduates from Saiburi Islam Wittaya School further their studies in public universities within Thailand, while the rest go to study abroad in various countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Sudan, and Pakistan. The school provides buses for pickup/drop-off, free lunch, and also scholarships and stipends to deserving students who have an upright Islamic character. This is conditional on character requirements, that is, they must be upright individuals by Islamic standards. The school also holds Islamic activities such as the *khutba* club – to improve knowledge of Islam and public speaking skills. Notably, Saiburi Islam Wittaya also receives awards from the King of Thailand every two years for the school, its teachers, and students. Dato Nide Waba's achievement as the founder of the successful Saiburi Islam Wittaya School has earned him much respect, and he is consulted by the king, prime ministers, and others in matters concerning bringing peace to the southern restive provinces of Thailand. The founder actively attempts to bring peace to the region.

The ethos of the school reflects a focus on following the example of the *Sunnah* or practice of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Another success of the school is that most of its graduates return to the Deep South after obtaining higher education and professional careers such as medical doctors, engineers, etc. One of the oft-quoted sayings of the school is, "Islam is not to be separatist forever [الإسلام ليس الانفصال للأبد]". In other words, perennial separatism is not the end goal of the life of a Muslim citizen from the Deep Southern provinces of Thailand.

Since 2003 until today, the Saiburi Islam Wittaya has implemented an integrated school curriculum that includes both the Islamic sciences and general courses in sciences, mathematics, English, Thai, Malay, etc. Under this curriculum, the school provides religious education in the morning and general subjects in the afternoon. The school focuses 50 per cent on general education, with an emphasis on science and mathematics, and 50 per cent on religious education. Simultaneously, the school offers two programmes for high-achieving high school students: the Talent Science Program and the Science-Math Program in which 70 per cent of class time is allocated to general education and 30 per cent to religious education. This development reflects that the school focuses mainly on teaching general subjects. The use of the general subject structure and textbooks from the Ministry of Education indicates the school's ambition to create quality graduates who meet national standards.

Therefore, the essence of Saiburi Islam Wittaya's educational approach is its motto as a "national standard". The school developed a programme on their own internet portal named the *SaiburiGPA application* to be a real-time information system in all areas of education. For example, it can be used to check

class attendance and grades of students, where parents can access the information in real time. Furthermore, the school uses a university entrance exam-style scanning system for students from Grades 1–6 so that the students are prepared for university entrance exams at an early stage. Special classrooms from Kindergarten/Early Childhood to Grade 6 are designed by the school to provide specialised external tutors to coach the students who choose this programme.

At the same time, the school encourages each teacher to research at least one teaching innovation of their own, such as creating a digital textbook, so that teachers can keep improving themselves. One of the most recent outstanding teaching innovations is the *City Walk* project funded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). This social science *Blended Learning* programme brings students, mostly Muslims, to visit the Chinese communities and Buddhist temples in Sai Buri district to learn about the social and religious diversity of their community. This educational approach, which aims to develop a learning system to meet national standards, has earned Saiburi Islam Wittaya the national title, “School of the Royal Way”, which is awarded personally by the king of Thailand (both the late King Rama IX (d. 2016; reigning from 1946 until his death) and the present monarch King Rama X (b. 1952; reigning from 2016 to present)).

Saiburi Islam Wittaya also has an outstanding record in transmitting good Muslim values and conveying knowledge and information about the Patani Malay identity from generation to generation. This finally won the appreciation of the local populace for the school. Saiburi Islam Wittaya was the first school to train local students in Territorial Defence Courses. In spite of resistance from some *ulema* (Islamic scholars), the school administrators thought that such a course in the study of military defence has more benefits than drawbacks. It exempts the students from the nationwide compulsory conscript training courses for young males. Second, this course provides students with the opportunity to broaden their vision by learning military science. And finally, the format of the subject encourages students to become more disciplined, which is a key quality of social leadership.

For language learning, the school places Patani Malay as the centrepiece for religious education. However, the school uses Thai as a medium for learning modern science because it is the main language of communication in government, business, and university education. Currently, the school focuses on teaching a wide range of languages, the main ones being English, Arabic, Chinese, Malaysian Malay, and Bahasa Indonesia. In addition, the school provides a special programme for talented students with a specific interest in language learning. These special language classrooms are taught mainly by foreign teachers.

The ideal goal of the Saiburi Islam is to produce ideal graduates who are “quality Muslims”: graduates who adhere to moderate Islamic ideas and are equipped to pursue varied careers, especially in government service, thereby making a social contribution. For this reason, the educational administration plays a role as a medium connecting to a broad network to mobilise support for students. The meaning of “quality” mentioned here has two dimensions. First is the quality of modern science reflected through the school’s continuous self-improvement to meet national standards. Second is the religious qualities that the school adheres to in guiding students to live along a balanced middle path and peacefully coexist with a diverse society.

CONCLUSION

Interestingly, a book titled *Education in Thailand: an Old Elephant in Search of a New Mahout* (Fry 2018), which is an interdisciplinary critical analysis of Thai education and its evolution, does not cover the state of education in southern Thailand. This represents the broader trend of largely relegating the topic of Muslim education in Thailand to studies concerning separatism and terrorism in the Deep South. Unfortunately, the state of Muslim education in the rest of the country is also neglected, and naturally, so is the contribution of fostering and building the spirit of inclusive Thai nationalism among the rest of Thai Muslim citizens residing in the different parts of the country (Fry 2018).

Our research, therefore, is a first exploration into the role of Islamic indigenous educational institutions in contributing to the building of multicultural citizenship in Thailand. These institutions generate public value amidst a conflict milieu in building cultural identity and citizenship in Thailand. In spite of the over-a-century-old insurgency in southern Thailand, which sees no concrete end in the near future, the local Malay Muslims, who started out in staunch and total opposition to Thai government policies in the past, have over the recent decades played an important role in carving out a place for themselves as representing a distinct ethno-linguistic, cultural and religious identity vis-à-vis a centralised Thai system – in large part via these Islamic Private Schools. Furthermore, these institutions embody a community, participatory, and bottom-up approach in negotiating a space for Islamic Public Value within Thailand’s Buddhist polity.

Arguably, Islamic public value in Thailand is a critical policy goal within the framework of Thailand’s constitutional principal that the Thailand’s Buddhist monarch is also the patron of all religions within the kingdom. Over the years, this has made the Thai state recognise the existence of multicultural diversity within the country. As for Thai Muslims, many are proud of the religious freedom they enjoy in Thailand, which is not available even in many Muslim-majority countries (Yusuf 2007b).

It may be concluded that Islamic public value has inconspicuously played a crucial role in the development of the southern Malay Muslim community in synchronicity with the state-centred educational policy, the upshot of which has given recognition to the establishment of Islamic private schools as well as the establishment of public and private universities in the Deep Southern provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. In other words, the legacy of Islamic public value in terms of building multicultural citizenship in the case of Thailand's Deep Southern provinces has achieved an unlikely success in a context where political solutions to the conflict have reached an impasse.

Over the decades, it has been observed that Thailand, with its intermittent political shifts between military rule and experiments in democracy, has been progressively moving towards understanding and recognising the internal multicultural diversity present within it, especially in regard to its Malay-speaking

Table 16.1 Fieldwork bibliography

Research Methods	Informant Designation	Location
Informal interviews	Attarkiah Islamiah School President of the school Headteacher Teacher A, social studies, religion and culture department	Narathiwat
Informal interviews	Phatna Witya School Director of the school Deputy head of academic administration department Phatna Witya graduate, president of the Thailand Islamic Medical Association (TIMA)	Yala
Informal interviews	Saiburi Islam Wittaya Founder of the school Director of the school Administrative board member A Administrative board member B Administrative board member C Administrative board member D Teacher B, kindergarten Teacher C, high school Teacher D, a foreign teacher Teacher E, a foreign teacher	Pattani
Observation of the school's modus operandi	Attarkiah Islamiah School Phatna Witya School Saiburi Islam Wittaya	Narathiwat Yala Pattani

populace in the three provinces of the Deep South. Indeed, promoting the concept of multiculturalism – *lak lai wathanatam* (Thai: หลากหลายวัฒนธรรม) (Yusuf and Atilgan 2008; Yusuf and Schmidt 2006; Yusuf 2014, 2021, 2004) has positive implications for Thailand's own flourishing in the competitive world of ASEAN polities and international political economy. Surely, then, the educational institutions operating as a native and indigenous expression of the ethno-religious identity of the Thai Muslim population can serve as an important example of how to build a vibrant Thailand.

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