

HARMONIOUS SOCIAL RELATIONS BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND NON-CATHOLICS ACCORDING TO THE PERCEPTION OF THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN THE TOWN BETONG, YALA, SOUTH THAILAND

W.M.F. Hofsteede, ofm.

Kirti Bunchua, Prof.

I. INTRODUCTION

This is a report about a field study on harmonious social relations in Betong, a small city in South Thailand, about five kilometers from the Malaysian border. Initially Prof. Kirti Bunchua of the Religion and Culture Research Center under the Auspices of the Episcopal Conference of Thailand would accompany me and introduce me to the Catholic community in South Thailand. Besides one of his assistants would accompany me during my visits to Yala, Sungai Golok and Pattani. In the wake of the turmoils in Bangkok, however, Prof. Bunchua could not leave his responsibilities at Assumption University and his research center in Bangkok, also his assistant could not join me. I was informed about these developments about one week before I arrived in South Thailand on June 19, 1992. I arrived in Yala on that day and was welcomed by the sister of the Catholic school. The following day Fr. Michael sdb arrived from a trip to Bangkok. He just arrived in the parish of Yala ten days before. He explained to me that he could not tell me much about social relations in South Thailand. He invited me, however, to join him in his trip to Pattani, Sungai Golok, Narathiwat, Sukhirin and Ruso. Besides I had the opportunity to visit the small city of Betong, where I was welcomed by the parish priest Fr. Sumet. These visits and a one day trip to Songkhla, Haadyai and Satun gave me the opportunity to obtain an overall impression of the church in the five Southern Most Provinces of South Thailand. I decided to select Betong as the small town of this case study, as the "biggest" concentration of Catholics could be found in this town and its surroundings, apart from Haadyai. I did not choose Haadyai, the biggest city in the province of Songkhla, because the percentage of Muslims in this province is below twenty percent. Besides Haadyai is not a small city any more.

According to the results of a census in 1980 the total population in the five Southern Border Provinces of Thailand is as mentioned in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Population in the Five Southern Border Provinces of Thailand in 1980

No.	Province	Total population	In Municipal Areas
1.	Songkhla	818,327	172,604
2.	Narathiwat	397,840	48,937
3.	Yala	265,276	63,547
4.	Pattani	418,932	37,647
5.	Satun	156,485	15,652

Source : 1980 Population and Housing Census Southern Region, National Statistical Office, Office of the Prime Minister of Thailand, pp. 2-7

Mr. Apierat Samail at SBPAC, Southern Border Provinces Administrative in Yala provided me with the percentages of Muslims in these five provinces :

- Songkhla : 18,1 percent
- Narathiwat : 75,... percent
- Yala : 73,... percent
- Pattani : \pm 75 percent
- Satun : 68,... percent
- the five provinces : 52,1 percent

The total estimated number of Catholics in the five Border Provinces of South Thailand is 855 or only 0.033 percent of the total population of 2.6 million. The only parish priest in Haadyai, Fr. Sacco sdb is responsible for pastoral care in the provinces of Songkhla and Haadyai. Fr. Sumet is in charge of the parish of Betong, whereas Fr. Gustay Roosens sdb and Fr. Michael sdb, both living in Yala, serve the Catholic communities in Yala, Pattani, Sukhirin, Narathiwat, Sungai Golok and Ruso. Included in the numbers of Catholics are boarders, pupils in the Catholic primary and secondary schools : about 25 in Betong, 15 in Yala and some in Pattani and Yala.

I was in South Thailand from June 19, to July 15, 1992, except for a short visit to Prof. Kirti Bunchua in Bangkok and Mgr. Caretto in Ratchaburi. I visited all five provinces and all Catholic communities mentioned in Table 2. Observations and interviews in Betong were held on June 23, 24, 25, 28, 29 and on July 9-15, 1992. We were also able to visit a small number of Muslim intellectuals in Pattani, Yala and Betong at the suggestion of Mr. Paisal Yingsaman in Yala, a Muslim Member of Parliament.

Almost all families have Buddhist relatives. I asked two parish priests whether they were losing Catholics because of mixed marriages. Fr. Michael in Yala answered : "Yes . . . Buddhism is so much easier especially in the South". Fr. Sumet in Betong answered : "Many, they get absorbed in the Buddhist environment". Other informants, however, told me that the Church is also gaining Catholics through mixed marriages.

The percentage of Muslims in the municipal areas may be about 50 percent. The town picture seems to be dominated by non-Muslims. Most of the Catholics are living in these municipal areas. All Catholic churches, chapels and other places of worship are located in an urban environment except for the chapel in Sukhirin, which is located in a rubber growing area.

The number of Catholics in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand is very low, as can be seen from the following Table 2.

TABLE 2. Estimated Number of Catholics in the Five Southern Border Provinces of South Thailand

PROVINCE	Place	Number of Catholics	Place of worship	Distance from parish priest's residence (kilometers)
SONGKHLA	Haadyai	400	church	--
	Songkhla	25	small church	30
SATUN NARATHIWAT	Satun	2	none	100
	Narathiwat	10	upper floor of hardware shop	100
	Sungai Golok	60	ground floor of beauty parlour	300
	Sukhirin	28	chapel	350
YALA	Ruso	10	chapel	60
	Yala	80	church	--
	Betong	150	church	--
PATTANI	Pattani	100	church	50
TOTAL		855	--	--

Source : Information obtained from the parish priests in Haadyai, Yala and Betong and personal observation.

A small number of Catholic children, boys and girls, are living in a boarding connected to the Catholic schools in Haadyai, Yala and Betong. Fr. Michael explained to me the reason of this policy :

"We try to collect boys and girls who have some Catholic in the family, father or mother or grandfather or grandmother. We have them in a boarding. For instance, in Yala we have 7 boys and 9 girls. About half of them are Catholics. The other half eventually may become Catholic. We give them a Catholic education. They pray together, go to Mass, go to church, etc. They are living in a Catholic environment. They get to know the Sisters and the Fathers and get accustomed to a Catholic environment."

Mother Rita, a sister, runs a home for the aged in Betong. Besides she has about twenty children in a boarding, some of them Catholics.

The children in the boarding in Yala and Betong contribute to the celebration of Holy Mass. They are about half of the people attending Mass in the weekends. They sing and pray and contribute to the feeling of being a parish community.

The parish in Betong has about 150 Catholics, about 100 of them living in the town. Formerly there were about 300 parishioners. Their number decreased because Communists were trying to force their children to become soldiers in the Communist guerilla units, hiding in the jungle around Betong. Some families moved to Bangkok, Haadyai, Penang and other places.

The parishes remain small because children continue their education in bigger cities, find there some jobs and do not return to their city of origin. The result is that the number of Catholics in these small towns tends to be stable.

II. PERCEPTIONS OF THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN BETONG CONCERNING LOCAL HARMONIOUS SOCIAL RELATIONS WITH NON-CATHOLICS

The concept of harmonious interreligious relations is the same as explained in my report about the Indonesian case-study. I will report here on the respondents and their answers to the questionnaire.

1. The respondents

The respondents were eight Catholic families, represented by either the husband or his wife. We could not find other families in Betong, because the other families are living outside the city. The duration of the marriage of the families interviewed is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3. The Families According to the Duration of Their Marriage

No.	Duraton of Marriage
1.	8
2.	13
3.	15
4.	22
5.	29
6.	30
7.	44
8.	never married

Note : one respondent never married, but adopted a few children.

All but two families were of Chinese or Thai-Chinese origin. One family was Thai and one family Thai-Ceylonese.

Occupations and sources of income of husband and wife are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4. The Families According to the Occupations of the Husbands and the Wives

No.	Occupation	Husban	Wives
1.	Housewife	-	3
2.	Government official or pensioned	2	1
3.	Entrepreneur	-	-
4.	Trader/shopowner	2	1
5.	Private employee	1	2
6.	Labourer	-	-
7.	Other private teachers rubber gardeners restaurant owners	1 1 1	1 1 1
TOTAL		8	9

It attracted my attention that in four of the eight families there was a teacher, two government teachers, one private teacher and one privately employed.

Four other families has their own private enterprise, as traders /shopowners or restaurateurs.

No one family mentioned religion as their motivation to earn their living, whereas six families said that they earned their living in the interest of the family, as is show in Table 5.

TABLE 5. Motivation of the Families to Earn Their Living

No.	Motivation	Families
1.	In their own interest	1
2.	In the interest of the family	6
3.	I just do it	1
4.	Religion	-
TOTAL		8

2. The perception of the Catholic community of Betong concerning several aspects of harmonious social relations with non-Catholics

We report here the results of the interviews with eight families in Betong using the questionnaire of APPENDIX A. We experienced some constraints in interviewing these families, mainly because of language difficulties. Besides we had the feeling that these families are not used to being interviewed and apparently were not used to talking about social relations with non-Catholics.

2.1 HYPOTHESIS 1 : There exists a peaceful co-existence in the fields of faith and religious services: the Catholic community has its own religious services and respects but does not participate in the religious services of the other religious communities.

All families stated that they attend the Sunday Mass, five of them every Sunday and three "sometimes". Some families participated also in praying together with other families (3) or were members of the parish council, as is shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6. Participation in Parish Activities

No.	Parish Activities	Families
1.	Sunday Mass	8
2.	Prayer with other families	3
3.	Meetings of parish council	2
TOTAL		13

Some families told that occasionally they may attend Buddhist ceremonies in the Buddhist temple. On the other hand, some Buddhists attend the ceremony in the Catholic Church on Ash-Wednesday.

Msgr. Caretto, the former Bishop in South Thailand, told that it happens that Catholics take part in Buddhist ceremonies and Buddhists in Catholic ceremonies :

“For Buddhists every religion is good. The Buddhists are very tolerant. Catholics take part in the Buddhist processions and Buddhists take part in Catholic processions. On Ash Wednesday many Buddhists receive the cross with ash on their foreheads. They like it. Catholics attend any Buddhist ceremony. Their Buddhist family takes part. They join. The Buddhists’ attitude is : live and let live.”

Six out of the eight families could not mention any name of a prominent Buddhist, Muslim or Protestant in Betong. One Family mentioned Bong Soe as a prominent Buddhist and another family mentioned Dam Long Sok as a prominent Muslim. Four families could appreciate the following characteristics of Buddhists :

- they help other people (2)
- Buddhists can join activities of other religions (1)
- their sincerity (1)

No family mentioned something that they most appreciated among the Muslims. On the contrary, three families stated : “The Muslims do not accept other religions.”

Four of the families could not answer the question how relations with non-Catholics could be further developed, whereas two families said that it was “difficult to explain it.” One family stated that as far as social relations concern, Buddhists, Muslims and Catholics can join together for further development. Another family said “By talking to them of the good work of God.”

2.2. Hypothesis 2 : There exist several kinds of social relations between Catholics and non-Catholics.

Five sub-hypotheses were formulated to test this hypothesis, as reported below.

2.2.1. Hypothesis 2.1 : There is mutual help between Catholic families and their non-Catholic neighbours.

Almost all neighbours of the Catholic families are non-Catholics. We assumed that this situation is conducive to many social contacts, including providing and receiving assistance. Seven of the eight families answered that they assisted or recieved assistance from neighbours during 1992. Most of these neighbours were Buddhists. None were Muslims, as is shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7. The Religion of Neighbours Providing or Receiving Assistance

No.	Religion	Answers
1.	Buddhism	6
2.	Catholicism	5
3.	Protestantism	-
4.	Islam	-
TOTAL		11

The kind of assistance given varies. Giving money to the needy is most frequent, although there is a variety in the answers given. We collected the following kinds of assistance given :

- giving money for Buddhist and Catholic ceremonies (3)
- giving money to other people (1)
- paying some money to aid poor people (2)
- helping poor children (1)
- money and work (1)
- helping them when they are desperate and talking to them (1)
- keeping the money for the children to buy something to eat (1)
- giving food for the children in school (1)
- contribution for flood victims (1)
- giving clothes to poor people (1)
- lending a bus to other people (1)

Only three of the eight families stated that they had received assistance from their neighbours in 1992. They received the following assistance :

- food from Buddhists brought to the church for the festival of St. Peter
- money for hospital expenses from Buddhists, Catholics and the government
- as friends

The assistance given to or received from neighbours occurs both between relatives as well as between non-relatives, as is shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8. Family Relations with Neighbours Who Sometimes Received or Provided Assistance

No.	Family Relations	Frequency
1.	Relatives	2
2.	No relatives	3
3.	Relatives and non-relatives	2
TOTAL		7

2.2.2. Hypothesis 2.2. : Warm social relations between Catholics and non-Catholics relatives.

Only two of the eight families had no non-Catholic relatives. Six families had non-Catholic relatives, all Buddhists. The general impression was that family relations were well kept.

2.2.3 Hypothesis 2.3. : Interaction and companionship between Catholic and non-Catholic students occurs in Catholic schools. There is no discrimination because of religion. Even friendships between Catholic and non-Catholic students can be observed.

I could not talk to the children in the Catholic school in Betong because I cannot speak Thai and the children could not speak English. Fortunately I obtained valuable information from a Buddhist English teacher at this school. She told me that in the Catholic school there are about 20 Catholic and about 20 Muslim pupils. More than 900 pupils are Buddhists. There are friendships between the Muslim children and the other children. She regarded this as a natural thing. There is no discrimination because of religion.

2.2.4. Hypothesis 2.4 : Professional relations exist between Catholics and non-Catholics, both in commerce, health care, civil government and armed forces. These relations not seldom develop into friendships between their families.

All eight families cooperated or had other contacts with Buddhists in their work. Four families cooperated and had other contacts with Muslims, two government teachers, one restaurant owner and one working in an educational institution. We have the feeling that the other four families have some social contact with Muslims, for instance Muslim customers or Muslim drivers. But anyhow they did not say so.

A Buddhist English teacher at the Catholic school in Betong told me that there are two Muslim teachers at this school, one in the primary school and the other in the secondary school. They have friendships with other teachers. But then the English teacher added :

“But they are different. Their service and activities are different, and their belief in Mohamed. They do not eat pork. Their religion is different. Good friendship. They do not marry non-Muslims.”

2.2.5. Hypothesis 2.5 : Catholics participate in community activities in their local environment.

All eight families told us that there are no activities in their neighbourhood involving families irrespective of race or religion. On the other hand, five families were members of a Chinese association. One ethnic Thai family was member of the local Lions' Club and of a Teachers' Society and of a family society, whereas their daughter was a scout leader. Only two families said that they have recreation or sports or gymnastics with other people : the families of a government teacher and the owner of a restaurant. Their motivation to do so was :

- for health (2)
- for teaching, for the government (1)

All eight families said that they knew Catholic families who were friends with non-Catholic families. All families stated that Buddhist families who were friends with Catholic families and two families mentioned Muslim families being friends with a Catholic family.

It is interesting to note that the professions and sources of income not only comprised traders and government officials, but also fruit and rubber gardeners. This is a sign that these friendships were not exclusively confined to the urban environment but also included the rural environment, although on a small scale.

TABLE 9. Profession and Source of Income of Befriended Non-Catholic Families

No.	Profession/Source of Income	Husband	Wife
1.	Housewife	-	1
2.	Government official	3	1
3.	Entrepreneur	1	-
4.	Trader/shopowner	2	2
5.	Private employee	3	1
6.	Rubber gardener	3	3
7.	Fruit gardener	1	1
TOTAL		13	9

2.3. Hypothesis 3 : The relations mentioned in the second hypothesis show "cross-cutting loyalties" that support the integration of the Catholic community of Betong into the society of the city of Betong.

The results of the field study as reported in the foregoing pages show many examples of cross-cutting affiliations and cross-cutting loyalties among the Catholics and Buddhists. There are only few examples of cross-cutting affiliations between Catholics and Muslims, mostly restricted to cooperation in trade or in the teaching profession and some friendships between Catholic and Muslim families.

It appears to me that Betong society shows some dichotomy between Muslims on the side and non-Muslims, mostly Buddhists and some Catholics and others on the other side.

III. RELATIONS BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND BUDDHISTS IN THAILAND

Sister Sompone Thabping Sihm in Ratchaburi gave some information about the development of relations between Catholics and Buddhists:

"In the beginning relations with Buddhist monks were very good. But after sometime part of the monks became suspicious towards the Catholics, although there were only a few conversions. Some publications by Buddhists spread these suspicions and gave unfavourable information about Catholics. There seems also to be a feeling among Buddhists that only Buddhism is the national religion. The government favours the Buddhists the most, although

according to law Buddhists and Catholics have the same rights. Some Catholic government officials keep quiet about their Catholic faith. Part of the children have inferiority feelings in relation with the Buddhists. After sometime contacts with Buddhist monks were renewed. But relations became not so cordial any more as had been the case formerly. The Catholics are a bit more careful. Not all Buddhists show these suspicions. Educated Buddhists have a more liberal attitude and with the common people there are no problems. Catholic children in the Catholic schools are a small minority. In the school of the sisters in Ratchaburi there are about 2,400 children. Only about hundred of these children are Catholics."

The sister spoke foremost about relations between Catholic and Buddhist religious people. She said, however, in the end that educated Buddhists have a more liberal attitude and that with the common people there are no problems. We obtained the same impression during our field study in Betong, where we interviewed educated and common Catholic people. There seemed to be no problems. On the contrary, there was a variety of social communication between Catholics and Buddhists because of family relations, kinship, the Chinese association and a shared common cultural background. Most Catholics are of Chinese or Vietnamese origin. Some are ethnic Thai people, as some rubber gardeners in Sukhirin. There Catholics of Thai origin generally come from the Northeast of Thailand.

IV. RELATIONS BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND MUSLIMS IN SOUTH THAILAND

I will not restrict myself in this section to the town of Betong. I will use some background information that I collected in other towns of South Thailand and from Msgr. Caretto, a former bishop of the diocese in South Thailand. Msgr. Caretto told me:

"There is no contact. Muslims are a minority in Thailand. The Muslims are suspicious that Buddhists will influence them. Especially the girls are controlled by the imams. The same applies for the Catholics. No contact, the Muslims take aloof. There are no Muslim children or teachers in the Catholic schools."

This information provided by Msgr. Caretto is very important, because it is indicative for relations just after the second World War, when the Catholic church started its activities in the five Southern Border Provinces of South Thailand. My observation and the information I obtained during my visits to the five provinces and the main towns in this area provided evidence that the situation is changing : slowly and gradually social contacts are developing between Muslims and non-Muslims, Catholics included.

The Muslim people in the five Southern provinces are foremost of the Malay ethnicity and speak a local dialect of the Malay language. A lecturer at Pattani Campus of the Prince Songkhla University told me that fourty years ago the Thai government introduced the term "Thai Muslims". This lecturer in social sciences told me that very much has been changing

during the last fifteen years. All children in Thailand have to attend the primary school, where the Thai language is the medium of instruction. This makes it possible for the Muslim children to communicate with non-Muslim children. Besides economic development was boosted. Modern roads and irrigation schemes were constructed, trade and communication developed.

Social contacts and communication between Catholics and Muslims are gradually and slowly growing, sometimes a little bit hesitatingly. We collected the following relevant information :

1. In 1992 there was a small number of Muslim children in Catholic schools in the five southern border provinces :
 some in the city of Pattani
 some in Yala
 about 15 in Betong
 a few in Haadyai
2. There were some Muslim teachers in Catholic schools, six in Haadyai, both men and women
 at least one in Pattani
 two in Betong
 two in Yala
3. There do exist personal friendships between Muslim and Catholic children as well as between Muslim and non-Muslim teachers in the Catholic schools of Haadyai and Betong. Our information about Pattani and Yala is in this respect incomplete.
 The principal of the Catholic school in Haadyai told me that there are friendships between Muslim and non-Muslim teachers, including Catholic teachers. He spontaneously and convincingly added :
 "These friendships develop spontaneously, because they have the same concern. They have a common interest to educate the children."
4. In Betong some Catholic families are befriended by Muslim families.
5. A Muslim lecturer at the Pattani Campus of the University of the Prince Of Songkhla told me that the university would provide space for me at their campus, if I would like to study one or two weeks in this place. In that case the Rector of my university should write an official letter to the Vice President on the Pattani Campus.
6. Msgr. Carretto told the author that Father Danieli sdb had personal contacts and had Muslim friends when he was the parish priest in Yala. Msgr. Carretto added

: "Personal contacts are very important." Fr. Danieli was sometimes invited to meetings of Muslims. The author remembers that he, during a transit visit in Yala about six years ago, was introduced by Fr. Danieli to Mr. Paisal Yingsaman. This man has many social contacts in the Malay Muslim community and today he is a Member of the Parliamant in Bangkok. The author phoned him when he arrived in Yala in June 1992 and could have a short but cordial talk with him. Mr. Paisal Yingsaman suggested me to pay a friendship visit (silaturahmi) to Haji Harun Sulong at the Thama Witya Mooniti High School in Yala, Haji Ibrahim Dadi, imam of the mosque in Betong, some other influential Muslims and some Muslim lecturers at the Pattani Campus of the Prince of Songkhla university. Everywhere I was received very well and had an interesting and fruitful conversation. I really experienced that they enjoyed and appreciated my visit and so did I. They used the Malay language, not the local dialect, and I spoke Indonesian, but we could communicate.

7. My visit to Haji Harun Sulong, who is a relative of Mr. Paisal Yingsaman, was very instructive. Therefore, I will elaborate a little more about this visit on June 25, 1992. Haji Harun Sulong is one of the founders of the Thama Witya Mooniti High School in Yala. The school has about 3,000 Students, half of them boys and the other half girls. The number may grow to 5,000 and new buildings will be constructed in the near future. About 200 boys and 200 girls are living in the boarding. Haji Harun Sulong is 72 years old. He is not teaching any more, but he is still active in developing the school. His son in law studied in Tunis for 10 years and obtained a licentiate degree. Haji Harun Sulong showed me around in the school, invited me to have tea with him and have a chat at his home. He had studies in Arabia. I asked him about the difference between Islam in Arabia and South Thailand and he answered that the religion is the same but the customs and code of behaviour (adat) are different. Then added that the Arabians are rough (kasar) but the Muslims in South Thailand are well mannered (halus). He said also, when in passing by I mentioned Christians, that all people are descendants from Adam and Eve and form one big family. After a while Mr. Abdurachman, an "ustaz" or teacher of religion in the school, dropped in. He had studies in Tunis, including comparative religion. He asked some questions about similarities and differences between the Islamic and the Christian faith, such as the death of Prophet Isa (Jesus), the virginity of Mary or Miriam, the coming of the Prophet Isa (Jesus) at the end of times. Very sympathetic and not apologetic. He also mentioned the difference of attitude of Muslims towards Jews and Christians. The Muslims do not like the Jews, but Christians are very close to the Muslims. Apparently he was referring to Surah Al Maedah, verse 82 :

"Thou wilt find the most vehement of mankind in hostility to those who believe (to be) the Jews and the idolaters. And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe (to be) those who say : Lo! We are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud."¹

He also talked about marriages between Muslims and Christians. In Tunis, he said, Muslim men are allowed to marry Christian women, but the Muslims do not like these marriages since the crusades. Mohamed Soleh Wading, who had been listening to my talk with Abdurachman, told that some time ago three sisters came and had a long talk. They promised to send the Bible, but they did not show up any more. He insisted then that I should send him a copy of the Indonesian Bible (Injil). I could only promise to do so.

8. Sister Sompone Thabping in Ratchaburi told me that she together with two sisters had visited some Muslim schools. They were very welcome and were received very cordially. One of these schools was the Thama Witya Mooniti High School in Yala. I told her that Haji Harun Sulong and Mr. Mohamed Soleh Wading were disappointed that the sisters had not sent a copy of the Bible. She also regretted it, but explained that the sisters had been given new assignments and had not paid enough attention to this request.

9. There are some signs of positive appreciation towards Muslims. The personal contact of Father Danieli with Mr. Yingsaman and his friendship with some other Muslims point to his positive appreciation of at least some Muslims. The talks of the author with Haji Harun Sulong, a relative of Mr. Paisal Yingsaman, and with some teachers at his high school point to some positive appreciation of influential Muslims towards Catholics who are sympathetic to them. Their hospitality towards the three sisters who visited the Thama Witya Mooniti high school in Yala seem to suggest that intellectual Muslims are becoming more open to Catholics. Here are some starting points for the development of more social contacts between Muslims and Catholics. One sister in Ratchaburi, who had been working in South Thailand for a number of years, appreciated the Muslims because "they are not after money". Fr. Michael in Yala confirmed this and he said that Muslim teachers in Muslim schools often get paid far less than in government or Catholic schools, but they are still willing to do it.

One sister said that she admires the Muslims, because they behave more independently towards the government: The government has to please them, so that they do not revolt or join in secession movements. The principal of the Catholic school in Haadyai made a trip to Penang and he "discovered" that they (the Muslims) respect teachers.

On the other hand, negative appreciation could also be observed. One of the religious was of the opinion:

"... there is no communication. There is co-existence, peaceful co-existence. Better no communication. If one of them is killed they will kill ten of the non-Muslims. In Narathiwat they sometimes stopped a car requested the passengers to speak "Jawi" (Malay). They killed those who could not. Until a few years ago."

One religious used to express his appreciation for Muslims by saying : "This is a Muslim". When suddenly somebody on a motorbike entered the highway without looking back and left first. The information collected above does not indicate that there is much frequent social communication between Muslims and Catholics in South Thailand. But there are starting points. Besides it should be mentioned that there are no Muslim-Christian tensions. South Thailand is one of the few countries where tensions between Muslims and Christians are virtually absent. One of the reasons may be that South Thailand was never colonized by western people. One of the Muslim scholars I met agreed to this, but he added another reason pointing to the Buddhist culture of tolerance. Social relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, he said, can be **characterized as "peaceful co-existence"**, the virtual absence of social contact as well as absence of conflict and tension. Apieret Samail at SBPAC in Yala explained that in problematic situations "musyawarah" (deliberations) is used :

"Musyawarah if difference of opinion occurs between Muslims and Christians, for instance, the "hijab" (veil). Some say this is Iranian influence. But this is not true. It goes back to own roots, Islamic roots of the people."

V. INTEGRATION OF MUSLIMS IN THAI SOCIETY

Relations between Buddhists and Muslims as well as between Catholics should be seen against the background of integration of the Thai Muslims in Thai society. We included, therefore, this chapter. Surin Pitsuwan described in his dissertation ² that the Malay people in South Thailand were "subjected to all forms of exploitation and discrimination that are so typical of internal colonial society". ³ Muslim resistance and revolts against the Thais developed ever since Pattani was conquered in 1789. "The desire to break away from Thai domination was strongly stimulated by Thai policies of forced assimilation which began in the early years of the twentieth century after the formal colonization of Pattani was completed in 1909.⁴ Uprisings occurred and in 1960 an organized national liberation front emerged and in the same decade two more fronts were organized. Separatist activities, although on a very small scale, were still reported in 1992. We quote here the Bangkok Post of June 25, 1992 :

"Songkhla - Thailand is to seek Malaysia's assistance in trying to fight separatist activities by groups operating in the five Southern most Muslim-dominated provinces."

Development policies since the last forty years seem to have positive results in integrating the Malays from South Thailand into Thai society. The Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC), comprising the provinces Yala, Songkhla, Satun, Pattani and Narathiwat, was set up in 1982. It was formed "in order to solve local problems in the area and subsequently maintain the well-being of the people, peace and national security."⁵

The Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) formulated policies in the South as follows :

1. The promotion of Thai national language among Thai Muslims in the area to create better understanding and develop better quality of life.
2. The strengthening of cross-cultural contact among groups of people with different culture and religious background.
3. The consultation with Thai Muslim leaders in all aspects of administration.
4. The unification and rationalization of all administration in the Southern area.
5. The creation of a better understanding with Muslim countries and the seeking of cooperation in suppression of radical movements.
6. The implementation of economic and social development plans to upgrade the standard of living of the Thai Muslim population and to enhance cross-cultural contacts.
7. To safeguard the southern Border Area from all kinds of terrorism.⁵

Respect for the Islamic religion was explicitly stated by the King of Thailand in his speech at Suan Tham Monastery, Tombon Ruesah, Amphur Ruesah, Narathiwat on September 28, 1977 :

"May everyone believe in virtue, good conduct, morality and good deeds. Either temples, mosques or schools purposefully teach the people to be good. Don't discriminate Buddhists or Muslims. Every religion teaches us to be good people. Islam also teaches us good conduct. We ought to keep together to behave righteously."⁶

His Majesty the King, Her Majesty the Queen, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, Her Royal Highness the Crown Princess and her Royal Highness Princess Chulabhorn stay in the Muslim Southern Thailand at the Taksin Royal Palace in Narathiwat every year. They visit then several places and give many suggestions for the development of irrigation, agriculture and cooperatives.⁷ In Thailand there is no conflict between religions. This was not only expressed by several key-informants. This was also formulated in a brochure of the SBPAC :

"In Thailand there is no conflict between religions....The government does not decree any rules from any religion to control the followers of other religions, because it is against the basic human rights stated clearly in the United Nations' regulations and also in the Constitution of Thailand."⁸

One informant told me that forty years ago the government introduced the term "Thai Muslims", including also the Malay people in the south. Today all children have to go to the

primary school where the Thai language is the medium of instruction. A lecturer on the Pattani Campus of the Prince of Songkhla University explained to me that much progress had been made since the last fifteen years. She pointed to the social communication in schools and in the university since all students can talk the Thai language. Paisal Yingsaman also stated that there is social communication between Muslims and non-Muslims. He said :

“Yes, there is communication, but not in religion. There is social communication, for instance :

- Malays trading fruits to Chinese merchants
- in schools, between children and their teachers and between the teachers
- (Buddhist) government officials who go to the villages for development
- sending food : at Idul Fitri Muslims send food to their non-Muslim neighbours; at Imlek Chinese send food to their Muslim neighbours.”

The respondents in the town of Betong mentioned also some forms of social communication:

- in the schools, between children and teachers and between teachers and even friendships developed,
- two Catholic families were known to be friends with Muslim families.

We observed in Betong that most of the taxi drivers are Malays, Muslims, and we assume that the Buddhist and Catholic shop owners have Muslim customers. The general impression is that the minds of the people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, are opening up. Transport and communication are very much developed by the construction of new modern roads throughout Southern Thailand. Television sets were distributed to all Muslim villages by the military around 1990. Some Muslims already bought television sets themselves. There are some radio programs in the Malay language and Malay television programs may follow. Social interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims is increasing especially in the towns and the suburbs through trade and school education.

The government is preparing the population along the border with Malaysia for tourism to raise their income.

With this background information we can understand the opinion of one of my key informants that “the younger generation is opener; the older generation is very closed.” “Most villagers understand the Thai language now, except those who are older than forty years” said Paisal Yingsaman. However, prejudices still exist. Paisal Yingsaman told the author :

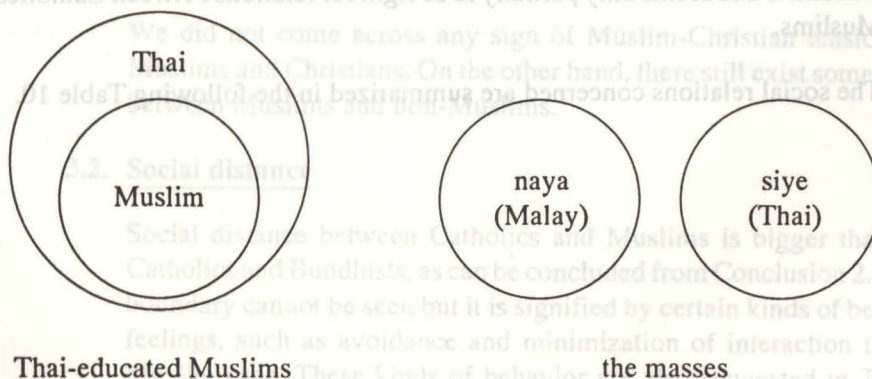
“No difference between Muslims and the others. Muslims and Thais and government officials still have prejudices. We have to improve the feelings, both Muslims and Thais.”

The integrative processes mentioned above do not mean that there is no social distance any more between Muslims and non-Muslims. Interreligious marriages are impossible. A non-Muslim man or woman who likes to marry a Muslim has to become a Muslim. He might be killed if he would not do so said some of the key informants. Also the kitchen is a sensitive thing. Muslims like to be certain that the food they are consuming is not pork. The kitchen is also a problem in the Catholic schools. The problem was solved in the Catholic school in Yala, where the school lunch for the Muslim children is prepared by their Muslim parents. In elections Buddhists and Chinese do not elect Muslims. Most Muslims elect Muslims; Muslims sometimes elect Buddhists.

New problems may be caused by the integrative processes going on. The imam of the mosque in Betong told me that today not all Malay children can speak the Malay language fluently any more, because in the schools everything is in Thai. I talked about this with a Malay lecturer at the Pattani Campus of the Prince of Songkhla University. I mentioned the progress made in the integration of the Malay population into Thai society and then I asked him, whether this would not cause an identity crisis of the Malays. He answered:

"Identity crisis for young people who are conscious (sadar) for what is happening. The Malay language is not taught in the schools with the result that many young Malays cannot speak the Malay language fluently any more. The policy of the government of Thailand is "nation-building." Therefore, all citizens should learn the Thai language."

The slow start of social communication between Muslims and non-Muslims, including Buddhists, Catholics and others, can be explained by the difference of identification of the Thai Muslims as was done by Chavivun Prachuabmoh in her dissertation.⁹ The abstract of this dissertation is attached in Appendix B. The following quotation from this dissertation summarizes her opinion: "The difference in ethnic identification between the Thai educated Muslims and the rest of the population can be simplified and represented in the following diagram.



It seems that for those with a Thai education, their Muslim identity is encapsulated within a veneer of Thai nationality, to which also have some degree of commitment. For the remainder of the population the identities of "nayu" (Malay) and "siye" are exclusive. The major source of this differential ethnic identification can be found in the processes of socialization."¹⁰

Social distance between Catholics and Muslims is bigger than between Catholics and Buddhists. Social distance between Muslims and non-Muslims is reflected in an ethnic boundary. This ethnic boundary "cannot be seen but is signified by certain kinds of behavior and feeling, such as avoidance and minimization of interaction in the Thai Muslim case."¹¹

VI. CONCLUSIONS

1. Hypothesis 1

This hypothesis seems only partially to be right. The findings of our survey related to this hypothesis can be summarized as follows :

- there exists a peaceful co-existence between Catholics and non-Catholics in the fields of faith and religious services. However, sometimes Buddhists do participate in Catholic religious services and Catholics sometimes participate in Buddhist and/or Chinese religious services. Catholics do not participate in Muslim religious services. Besides Muslims regard their religion as superior to other religions.
- the Catholic community has respect for Buddhists and Muslims, although they are not accustomed to thinking and talking in these terms. Part of the respondents, however, could formulate their positive feelings after they were given some minutes to think it over.

2. Hypothesis 2

This hypothesis seems to be right for social relations between Catholics and Buddhists and seems only partially to be right for relations between Catholics and Muslims.

The social relations concerned are summarized in the following Table 10.

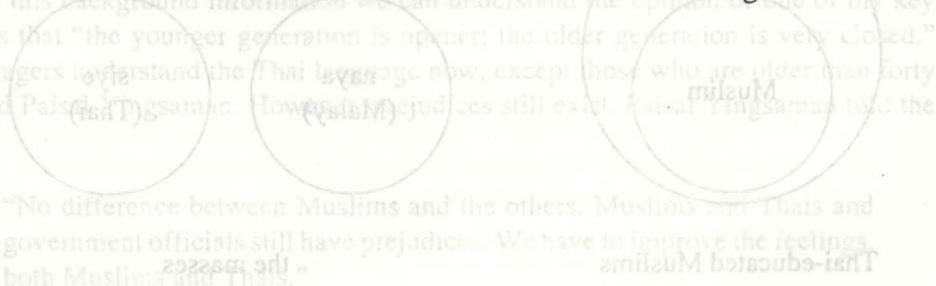


TABLE 10. Social relations of Catholics with Buddhists and Muslims in Betong

No.	Hypothesis	Relations with	
		Buddhists/Chinese	Muslims
1.	2.1.	much mutual help	no mutual help
2.	2.2.	relatives	no relatives
3.	2.3.	many friendships	some friendships
4.	2.4.	more cooperation in occupation	less cooperation in cooperation
5.	2.5.	no neighbourhood activities	no neighbourhood activities

Additionally the following information was collected: there were no neighbourhood activities with Buddhist and Muslim neighbours, but there were community activities in the Chinese association and one of the Catholic teachers was a member of a Teachers' association and one respondent is a member of the local Lions' Club.

3. Additional conclusions

We are inclined to think that conclusions 1 and 2 should be seen against the background of ethnic boundary maintenance as was formulated in the dissertation of Chavivun Prachuabmoh. We attach the abstract of this dissertation. We formulated three additional conclusions.

3.1. No Muslim-Christian tensions

We did not come across any sign of Muslim-Christian tension between Muslims and Christians. On the other hand, there still exist some prejudices between Muslims and non-Muslims.

3.2. Social distance

Social distance between Catholics and Muslims is bigger than between Catholics and Buddhists, as can be concluded from Conclusion 2. The ethnic boundary cannot be seen but it is signified by certain kinds of behavior and feelings, such as avoidance and minimization of interaction in the Thai Muslim case. These kinds of behavior are also suggested in Table 10 in Conclusion 2.

3.3. Slowly increasing social communication between Catholics and Muslims

Conclusion 2 and the data in chapters IV and V show at least some social communication between Catholics and Muslims. There are signs that this communication will develop further, such as communication in the schools, between professionals, in urban life, etc. It can be anticipated that Thai people and Thai educated Muslims will take the initiative. This group of Thai educated Muslims is growing and processes of development and social change are clearly visible in the five southern border provinces. The school, Thai language, mass media, economic development and government policies are playing an important role in this. Literature, government policies, observation, some answers of our respondents and key-informants and our experience during visits to the Muslim high school in Yala and the Pattani Campus of the Prince of Songkhla University seem to point to slowly increasing social communication between Catholics and Muslims in South Thailand.

3.4. Integration into Thai society

Catholics are more integrated into Thai society than Muslims. Muslims are slowly but steadily integrating into Thai society. However, intermarriages between Muslims and non-Muslims are virtually absent. The processes of integration of the Thai Muslims may cause an identity crisis among some groups of the young, who sometimes cannot speak the Malay language fluently any more. The Southern Thai Muslims maintain an ethnic boundary. The ethnic boundary maintained by Thai-educated Muslims, however, is much more flexible. We quote from the abstract dissertation of Chavivun Prachuabmoh to illustrate this point :

"The Southern Muslims maintain their distinctiveness through various social organizations such as family, kinship, community and friendship networks, and through religious education. The ethnic boundary maintained by Thai-educated Muslims, however, is much more flexible and less solid than that maintained by their non-Thai-educated counterparts."¹²

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

NOTES

- 1) Cited from Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, an Explanatory Translation*. Mentor Book, New American Library of World Literature, 1954, p. 104
 - 2) Surin Pitsuwan. *Islam and Malay Nationalism*. A Case Study of the Malay Muslims of Southern Thailand, a Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1982, Praepittaya, Bangkok 19...
 - 3) Surin Pitsuwan, Op. Cit., p.172
 - 4) Ibidem
 - 5) *Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC)*. an Illustrated Information Brochure provided by SBPAC, n.y., pp. 22-23
 - 6) SBPAC. *Thai Muslim in the Southernmost of Thailand*. Yala 1992. p.1
 - 7) SBPAC. *Thai Muslim in the Southernmost of Thailand*. Yala 1992, p.32
 - 8) Idem, p 44
 - 9) Chavivun Prachuabmoh. *The Role of Women in Maintaining Ethnic Identity and Boundaries : A Case of Thai Muslims (The Malay Speaking Group) in Southern Thailand*. (dissertation at University of Hawaii) 1980
- See also : Hasan Madmarn. *Traditional Muslim Institutions in Southern Thailand: A Critical Study of Islamic Education and Arabic Influence in the Pondok and Madrasah of Pattani*. (dissertation at University of Utah), Micro Film Michigan Univerity
- 10) Chavivun Prachuabmoh, Op. Cit.,P. 250
 - 11) Idem, p. 263
 - 12) Idem, p. v - vi

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