



บทความวิจัย

วิถีชีวิตชาวไทยพุทธที่มีเชื้อสายกัณฑ์มาเลเซียภายใต้บริบทวัฒนธรรมพหุนิยม
ในจังหวัดนราธิวาส ประเทศไทย

The Lifestyles of Thai Buddhists of Malaysian Kelantan in the Setting of
Cultural Plurality in Narathiwat Province, Thailand

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ สำนวณวิถีชีวิตของชุมชนไทยพุทธเชื้อสายมาเลเซียภายใต้บริบทกรอบแนวคิดวัฒนธรรมพหุนิยมในในจังหวัดนราธิวาสของประเทศไทย การศึกษานี้ใช้วิธีการเชิงคุณภาพ ได้แก่ การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก การสัมภาษณ์ทางโทรศัพท์ และการสนทนากลุ่ม จากนั้นจึงทำการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหาและเชิงพรรณนาข้อมูล โดยอาศัยการอธิบายผลการศึกษาวงชีวิตของชุมชนไทยพุทธเชื้อสายมาเลเซียภายใต้กรอบวัฒนธรรม เศรษฐกิจและสังคมวิทยา

ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ความรุนแรงที่เกิดขึ้นทำให้เกิดความหวาดกลัวและความสงสัยในหมู่ชาวพุทธว่าเหตุใดความรุนแรงจึงเกิดขึ้นอย่างต่อเนื่อง และรัฐไม่สามารถจัดการได้ อย่างไรก็ตาม ชาวพุทธเชื้อสายมาเลเซียได้มีการปรับตัวทั้งในด้านการใช้ชีวิตและเศรษฐกิจ เพื่อให้สามารถอยู่ได้อย่างมีความสุขและปลอดภัยภายใต้สถานการณ์ความรุนแรง รัฐบาลไทยใช้แนวคิดเรื่องพหุนิยมเป็นกลไกในการจัดการกับข้อขัดแย้งและประเด็นความรุนแรง อย่างไรก็ตาม รัฐบาลไทยควรให้ความสำคัญกับโอกาสที่เท่าเทียมกันสำหรับทุกคนโดยไม่มีการเลือกปฏิบัติ

คำสำคัญ: ชาวไทยพุทธ, วิถีชีวิต, พหุวัฒนธรรม, เชื้อสายมาเลเซีย

Abstract

This article examines the lifestyle of the Kelantan Malaysian Thai-Buddhist community within the framework of pluralistic culture in Narathiwat province, Thailand. This study employed qualitative methodologies, including in-depth interviews, telephonic interviews, and focus groups. Subsequently, we conducted content and descriptive analysis of the data. This study elucidates the lifestyle of the Kelantan Malaysian Thai-Buddhist community within cultural, economic, and sociological frameworks. The violence has caused fear and doubt among Buddhists as to why it continues, and the state is unable to deal with it. However, Malaysian Buddhists have adapted both in life and economics to be able to live happily and safely under violent situations. So, the Thai government employs the concept of pluralism as a mechanism for addressing conflicts and issues of violence. Nevertheless, the Thai government ought to prioritize equitable chances for all individuals, devoid of discrimination.

Keywords: Thai-Buddhist, Way of Life, Plural Culture, Malaysian Descent

1. Introduction

Three provinces in southern Thailand are situated along the border with Malaysia. Unrest has persisted since 2004. Certain regions were designated as "red areas"—hazardous, perilous, and associated with elevated dangers to life. Criminal incidents have persistently happened amid the many cultures in these three southern provinces of Thailand. Southern Thailand is a peninsula that has attracted numerous individuals from diverse cultures relocating from various regions. The three provinces link Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia's Sumatra Island. This region is inhabited by Thai-Buddhist individuals, Thai-Chinese, and Thai-Malay communities. The majority of the residents in this region are Melayu. They maintained tranquility until 2004; however, since that time, violent incidents have erupted with regularity (Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn, 2017). The cultures in these three provinces differ. The majority of the population adheres to Islam and follows the Melayu culture. Individuals are characterized by their cultures, faiths, ethical ideals, and educational backgrounds. Numerous religious institutions exist for Muslim students, influenced by the Melayu culture. Researchers have indicated that there are around 550 religious schools in these three provinces. The schools provide "correct" Islamic culture to the new generations of students, hence reinforcing the strength and uniqueness of Muslim culture. The education of the Melayu population in the three provinces has adhered to the traditional Islamic framework, distinct from a secular system. Two decades ago, "Islamization" emerged as the contemporary paradigm for Muslim education. Nevertheless, several Islamic religious institutions impart teachings that are "inaccurate." Consequently, criminal issues emerged in the provinces, and the diverse cultures are unable to address these challenges. In 2007, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand was employed to unify the populace in these regions, fostering peace and liberty for all demographics (Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn, 2019).

Kelantan The Malaysian Thai-Buddhist is the ethnic community residing in Thailand's three southern border provinces, which have experienced violence and criminal activities. This ethnic group resided for an extended duration in the Malaysian state of Kelantan, situated predominantly along the border with Thailand. Kelantan Malaysian Thai-Buddhist individuals emigrated from Malaysia following the British government's grant of complete autonomy to the Federation of Malaya on August 31, 1957, marking the nation's independence. They relocated from Malaysia to various regions of Thailand adjacent to the border, including Waeng, Sukhirin, Tak Bai, Su-ngai Kolok, and Su-ngai Padi Districts in

Narathiwat Province (Aryuwatthana, 1991). Furthermore, the Kelantan Malaysian Thai-Buddhist community and the Siamese population (in Malaysia, referred to as “Siamese” in relation to Kelantan Buddhists and Thai traditions) are connected to the Thai populace in southern Thailand, with some having migrated from central Thailand a century ago (Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn, et al., 2020). In 1957, the Kelantanese Malaysian Thai-Buddhist population relocated to the three southern border provinces of Thailand. During that period, Malaysia saw numerous economic challenges, while Thailand presented greater economic potential than Malaysia. Since 1957, they upheld peace through a pluralistic culture alongside the Muslim population. In 2004, violence and criminal activity commenced (Aryuwatthana, 1991).

Although the violence has continued since 2004, the relations between Buddhists and Muslims has continued to be good, and they have tried to collaborate on community protection from insurgent groups. However, many Buddhists moved to other regions of Thailand for safety reasons (Tanod, et al., 2018). Thus, the number of Buddhist people is decreasing, and the Buddhist population is approximately less than ten percent of the total population in the Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat Provinces Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn & Chandaeng, 2014). In addition, the radical Muslim group taught the wrong Muslim way of life to young Muslim people and increased suspicious between the religions. The radicals invented the idea that Buddhists were an enemy that came to occupy the Muslim’s land, Muslims were a minority ethnic group in Thailand to whom Thai’s government never gave importance, and there were unequal opportunities between Buddhists and Muslims (Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn, 2019). As previously mentioned, pluralism is a concept that many academicians and government use to solve conflicts and violent situations in the southern border provinces of Thailand (Sathayanurak, 2018). The Thai-Buddhist population in Kelantan, Malaysia, has developed numerous adaptations for conflict survival; nonetheless, escalating interreligious distrust engenders a sense of insecurity among them. This paper examines the lifestyle of the Kelantan Malaysian Thai-Buddhist community within the context of a pluralistic culture, enabling them to sustain a robust community in the three southern border provinces of Thailand amidst violent situations and Buddhism. This study examines the lifestyle of the Kelantan Malaysian Thai-Buddhist community within the framework of a pluralistic culture, which enables them to sustain a robust community in the Narathiwat province of Thailand.

2. Literature Reviews

In this paper, we used a literature review to summarize two points to gain a basic understanding of the topic: first, we explain the situation between the religions; and second, we explain the pluralist culture in the three southern border provinces of Thailand.

In Thailand, Muslims constitute a minority ethnic group, although in three southern border provinces, Buddhists represent the minority ethnic group. Following the tumultuous events of 2004, some Buddhists endeavored to acclimate to endure disputes and illegal circumstances. The government offered additional chances to Muslims, including the recruitment of government officials, enhancement of educational prospects, and financial support for those impacted by violence. The augmented opportunities and governmental initiatives for Muslims have led to diminished prospects for Buddhists in Thailand's three southernmost provinces (Tanod et al., 2018; Suwanabubpa, 2016). Furthermore, extremist Muslims propagate and impart knowledge on Melayu nationalism that underscores animosity against other faiths. They aim to segregate the territory and designate Thailand's three southern border provinces as Muslim territory. The discourse around the Pattani Sultanate is perpetuated over generations to incite radical Muslims to oppose the Thai government and advocate for the region's governance under Muslim authority (Piyasiripant, 2018). The ongoing disputes and bloodshed have diminished the pluralist culture in the three provinces, as well as inter-religious engagement and the plural community (Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn & Tepsing, 2013; Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn et al., 2013).

Numerous research has been undertaken regarding the application of pluralist culture to address disputes and violence in the three southern border provinces of Thailand. Pluralism is a concept employed by the Thai government to develop solutions for conflict management; nevertheless, the plural cultural framework of the Thai government has limited operational rules and lacks adaptability (Sathayanurak, 2018). The Thai government's idea of cultural diversity serves merely as a negotiation mechanism for dispute resolution, devoid of genuine involvement by individuals of diverse cultures and religions [10]. Furthermore, several community-supported governmental initiatives are unsuitable due to officials' lack of comprehension of the Islamic way of life, as the majority of policymakers and local officials adhere to Buddhism (Laeheem & Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn, 2020). Consequently, to address violence and conflicts, the Thai government prioritizes local culture, particularly the Islamic lifestyle and traditions, and adopts a flexible

approach to managing heterogeneous cultures. The Thai government should facilitate public forums for dialogue between Buddhists and Muslims and provide education for young Thai Muslims and Buddhists to foster coexistence in a pluralistic society (Tuansiri & Koma, 2019). Furthermore, a pluralistic culture provides equitable possibilities for all stakeholders and facilitates the comprehension of one another's identities (Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn & Tepsing, 2013).

3. Methodology

This study was conducted in the year 2020, and this study applied qualitative methods with in-depth interviews, phone interviews, a small group discussion, and a fieldwork survey.

Methods

In this paper, we use a qualitative approach through eight in-depth interviews, 10 phone interviews, and a small group discussion with six people, who were Kelantan Malaysian Thai-Buddhists in Waeng, Sukhirin, Tak Bai, and Su-ngai Kolok Districts in Narathiwat Province. For this study, we selected participants through purposive sampling and snowball sampling. In addition, we used content from interviews and focus groups.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, this study investigator and methodological triangulation techniques to check and compare the data. Then, it used content and descriptive analysis to analyze the full data set.

4. Result

Under this conflict situation, we have discovered the high value of religious identity and way in which people become aware of their cultures, such as when Muslims highly value their identities. Similarly, the Buddhists assert their identities by holding festivals to preserve Buddhist culture and refusing to allow Muslims to dominate. When the Buddhist village received news about terrorists killing a monk, the Buddhist people took defensive measures to protect monks. We collected field data in Thai-Buddhist villages in a rural area of Narathiwat Province, which closely borders Thailand and Malaysia. The Thai-Buddhist villages are less than five percent of Narathiwat Province, and this village is one that remains in Muslim society. People in this village are migrants from the Malaysian state of Kelantan to Thailand, after Malaysia became independent from Great Britain in 1954. They moved to Thailand to live under the Buddhist state because the Malaysian government valued

Bumiputera. In addition, Bumiputera is meant for Muslim who were born in Malaysia; if you were not a Muslim or Bumiputera, how could you survive? This is what people thought in the past.

After they came to Thailand and lived under the King of Thailand, they were very happy because the King and the Thai government valued all religions. In Thailand, they could live with different cultures and religions. However, since 2004, we have had a terrorist situation in the Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat Provinces in the lower south of Thailand. Consequently, the way of life for Thai-Buddhists is changing, and many Chinese and Buddhists have moved to other regions because the Thai government cannot bring back peace. Until now, this village was an ethnic minority that lived in a Muslim environment. From interviews with villagers from 2012 to 2022, they now think Malaysia is a good and peaceful country, that no Bumiputera policy is implemented currently, and Malaysia has established a new “One Malaysia” policy to reduce religion tensions. Furthermore, the Malaysian government recognizes all religions. Now, Buddhists who stay in Malaysia are happier than Buddhists are in the lower south of Thailand. Therefore, they want to move back to Malaysia, but they cannot. In addition, in their opinion, the Thai government values the Muslims in the lower south and neglects the Buddhists and the Thai-Buddhists who live in the “Red Zone.” Finally, in real life, the conflict is not between Buddhists and Muslims, as the Buddhists, Chinese, and Muslims still have good relations and social interactions. However, it is difficult to explain why a terrorist car bombing still happened and why people always die from shootings. In this study, explain the existence of culture, religion, and traditions, including their transmission from generation to generation, family is very important to transfer Thai culture from generation to generation, Thais family will taught their children about basically of Thai language, Thai culture and tradition, also taught about Thai manner. In addition, family also bring their children to temple for meeting another Thais and learning about Thai culture, Buddhist, Thai language outside family at temple.

The Way of Life in a Cultural Context

We found that most Kelantan Malaysian Thai-Buddhist people could speak the Thai and Melayu languages well. However, in Thai, the language accent is typical “Tak Bai language and/or Je-He language,” which is an ancient language related to the language of the Sukhothai era. Under the plural culture of coexisting with Muslim society, the Kelantan

Malaysian Thai-Buddhists also use the Melayu language mixed with the Tak Bai language. In addition, Kelantan Malaysian Thai-Buddhist people also enjoy Melayu's performing arts and culture. For example, a Thai-Buddhist elder explained, *"In the past, when Buddhists had some culture or tradition festival, they invited Muslims to make a show in the temple, such as a dance drama in front of the Buddha statue"* (personal interview, December 2019). The interview shows that Thai-Buddhists and Thai-Muslims in Narathiwat Province have a long and amicable relationship between the cultures, and they exchange culture through the performing arts. However, since the 2004 violence by Muslim radical groups, the relationship between the cultures has decreased, and they are scared to participate with other religions. Furthermore, the Thai government has a policy of giving more opportunities and priorities to Muslim people and has a larger financial budget for taking care of the Islamic religion than Buddhism.

Therefore, Thai-Buddhists in the three southern border provinces have sought to take care of their own culture and traditions. To preserve the Thai identity, people hold traditional and cultural festivals, such as worshiping the ancestors' relics or the Songkran Festival in the heart of the Thai-Buddhist villages. In addition, the Songkran Festival is the Thai's traditional New Year, which starts on April 13 every year and lasts for three days. The activities at the Songkran Festival begin in the morning as people go to the temple to offer food to monks and novices, observe the precepts (five or eight precepts), and listen to the Dhamma talk. In the afternoon, they perform a bathing ceremony for the Buddha images, monks, and novices who live in a temple. During this time, the younger people ask for blessings from the elders. This is known as the Water Splashing Feast. It might be said that the Songkran Festival is a respected festival for the elders or a family day. The temple is now the center of Buddhism for the people in the "Red Zone." The temple is the place for interaction, a place for prayer and blessings, and a place to transfer culture and tradition from generation to generation. However, this area is not safe. Since 2004, Thai-Buddhists have been under soldiers' watch, and they need soldiers to go with them everywhere they go. An army camp was set up close to the temple. For now, the Buddhist culture and traditions can continue under the Thai Army's protection against terrorists.

The lifestyle of the Thai-Malay population in Narathiwat province, Thailand, is profoundly shaped by the amalgamation of Thai and Malay cultures, resulting in a distinctive fusion of traditions, language, and rituals. The predominant demographic in

Narathiwat is Muslim, and they adhere to Islam, which significantly influences their daily existence. In this location, the populace is bilingual, using both Thai and Malay, with Malay serving as the predominant language in numerous communities. The economy predominantly relies on agriculture, with rice cultivation, rubber plantations, and fishing serving as the principal means of subsistence. Numerous families participate in small-scale enterprises, including retail establishments and food vendors. The rural lifestyle is tranquil, characterized by cohesive groups with robust familial and social connections. Moreover, cuisine is integral to the daily existence of Thai-Malay individuals, with their culinary practices significantly shaped by both Thai and Malay cooking traditions. Dishes like nasi lemak, satay, and an array of curries are frequently savored. During religious occasions and festivals, individuals frequently don traditional garments, akin to Muslim clothes for both women and men. Religious rituals are fundamental to their lifestyle, with daily prayers and mosque attendance being essential to their routine. Muslim festivals, including Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, are commemorated with banquets, prayers, and communal gatherings. Elders are shown significant respect, and family constitutes the foundation of social life. A significant number of individuals in this region reside in multigenerational families, where several generations coexist. The community places significant importance on hospitality and mutual assistance. The region possesses a rich cultural heritage, characterized by traditional music, dance, and arts that embody both Thai and Malay elements. Although part of Thailand, the cultural identity of the Thai-Malay population of Narathiwat is unique and profoundly linked to their Malay background.

The Way of Life in an Economic Context

Most Kelantan Malaysian Thai-Buddhists farm and work in agriculture, such as growing Para rubber, raising animals, fishing in the pond, and a few work as government officials, such as school teachers. In addition, Para rubber is the main economic activity for the Buddhist community, and government has many policies to support farmers growing Para rubber and for marketing channels. In addition, most Buddhist farmers employ Muslims for Para rubber tapping. Consequently, Thai-Buddhists have economic relations with Muslims as employers and employees. However, Thai-Buddhists have relations with the Chinese as customers and traders (most Chinese are businessmen and traders). Since the 2004 violence, the economic relations have changed because they do not trust each other as they did before 2004 and are suspicious of working with the other religions in the area.

The Buddhist way of life has changed; they cannot stay alone on farms or live on farms far from the Buddhist community because there is a risk of criminal activity and murder. An elderly Buddhist woman stated, *“I moved from my house that I stayed in with my husband more than 30 year to live with my daughter and son-in-law because my daughter’s house is in a Buddhist community and it is [safer] than staying at my house in the para rubber plantation”* (personal interview, December 2019). In addition, most Chinese traders moved out of the violence zone, and some Chinese moved back to stay and have new businesses in north Malaysia for safety reasons. Although the violence situation is better, many Buddhist gardeners and owners of Para rubber plantations choose to sell the land that was far away from Buddhist communities.

The Way of Life in a Social Context

The community of Kelantan Malaysian Thai-Buddhist networks with other communities, including the Siamese in Kelantan, Malaysia. They interact with Buddhist external organizations, particularly from southern and central Thailand, to save traditions and cultures and to cooperate with other Buddhist groups for festivals and activities. They collaborate with government officials to execute security responsibilities for community safety. Interactions in this region are complex, as the police and military maintain alliances and exhibit amicability towards both Buddhists and Muslims; nonetheless, a significant portion of the populace harbors distrust towards these forces. Police officers and troops are targets for gunfire and terrorism. If they remain near residences and convenience stores, this area may become a perilous zone susceptible to lethal incidents. Furthermore, our interviewees revealed that several families encountered issues with numerous soldiers from northeastern Thailand engaging in extramarital relationships with their daughters without marrying them, which incited familial anger and undermined traditional conservative values. Beyond the social dynamics between Buddhists and Muslims, they can coexist within a pluralistic society due to the proximity of southern Thailand to northern Malaysia, which shares a comparable cultural framework. Thai Buddhists and Muslims possess relatives in Malaysia and Thailand. The heightened distrust of engagement with other religions originates from extreme Muslims who employ violence and intimidation to dominate other Muslims seeking neutrality.

The Temple Remains a Center of Learning

The Buddhist temple serves as the mental hub of the community, and the Kelantan Malaysian Thai regard the monk as the spiritual leader of the community (Phongphan et al., 2018). Furthermore, Kelantan Malaysian Thai is associated with Buddhism and temples; Narathiwat province contains over twenty Buddhist temples, some of which are over a century old. Furthermore, the temple resembles a second home for individuals; it serves as a venue for gathering with other Thai families, as well as a site for cultural and traditional events and festivals. Thus, the Kelantan Malaysian Thai community preserves these practices. Temple with Thai architectural following Thai temple in Thailand, yet in some Buddhist temple in deep south of Thailand is mix with Buddhist Chinese architecture since Siamese is an agrarian community. Therefore, they have been given by Chinese people to restore and develop their temple. Furthermore, the Kelantanese Thai community adheres to the lifestyle of Dheravas Buddhists, where belief and religious ceremonies remain integral to their way of life. The Siamese uphold the concepts of merit, virtue, sin, and the law of karma, frequently visiting temples to pray and seek guidance and wisdom from the Buddha. Upon reaching the age of 20, males typically undergo ordination as monks and engage in Buddhist studies for a minimum of seven days.

5. Conclusion

The Thai-Malay population in Narathiwat has encountered considerable difficulties because to the persistent violence in the area. In spite of the challenging circumstances, they have demonstrated exceptional tenacity and adaptation. Numerous individuals have endeavored to preserve their traditional lifestyles, including agriculture and small enterprises, while remaining engaged with their cultural and religious customs. Furthermore, communal solidarity has been crucial in addressing the violence, since relatives and neighbors offer reciprocal support during periods of adversity. The populace has also adapted by fortifying their relationships with local officials and participating in peace-building projects. The preservation of their language and culture is crucial, as it cultivates a feeling of identity and continuity amid the prevailing instability. Furthermore, the youth are being urged to seek education and participate in constructive debates to disrupt the cycle of violence and foster enduring stability. According to the 2020 data, we found that the plurality culture in the three southern border regions of Thailand increases every year, and the Kelantan Malaysian Thai-Buddhist people feel better than a few year ago. However, the

concept of pluralism adopted by the Thai government to tackle violence and conflicts should be more concerned about providing equal opportunities for people of all nationalities, religions, and languages. Moreover, understanding between religions and cultures increase pluralist societies. In addition, respect for each other is important for bringing back the multicultural society in the three southern border provinces of Thailand. The peace in these regions has steadily increased since a few year ago. However, criminal activity has occurred for more than 15 years in these three provinces because of the cultural gaps among the groups of people. A diverse culture consists of different races, religions, traditions, and languages. Therefore, governmental officials should support multiple cultures to reduce the criminal activity and allow for sustainable development. The three provinces could be peaceful again for all people with some help from the Thai government. In addition, pluralist cultures are advantageous for Thailand's development. In particular, the Thai government wants to educate the people in the three provinces. The students who are Kelantan descendants should learn about the different cultures that lived together previously. To promote peaceful coexistence, the Thai government should do the following;

1. Promote the Melayu language through educational initiatives including the Thai, Chinese, and Melayu communities, since a shared language across varied populations can mitigate disparities among the emerging generation in this region.
2. Deliver a cultural education wherein students acquire knowledge of diverse cultures as an integral component of their foundational education. Cultural factors do not influence all religions, and students can acquire this knowledge.
3. Choose leaders from each of the many cultures, for example, the leaders should be Thai, Chinese, and Melayu.
4. Ensure that government officials has understanding of other cultures and comprehend the numerous religions, civilizations, and languages.
5. Implement uniform laws in this domain for all groups, ensuring that penalties are consistent across all factions.
6. Insist that the government assumes accountability for the illegal actions in the region.

6. Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethics approval was not required for this study

7. Conflict of Interests

Authors declares no conflict of interest.

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