# Malayness in the Thai South: Ethnonym Use and Cultural Heritage among Muslims in Chana District, Songkhla

Graham H. Dalrymple, Christopher M. Joll and Shamsul Amri Baharuddin

This article explores the themes of Malay cultural heritage and attitudes towards ethnonyms promoted by the Thai state among Muslims in Chana District, Songkhla Province, Thailand. It addresses the Malay cultural heritage of Muslims north of Pattani Province, the use of the term khaek for Muslims throughout Thailand until the end of the Second World War, and its subsequent replacement with thai musalim or thai isalam as Bangkok's exonym of choice. Our treatment establishes the Malay cultural heritage of Muslims in present-day Chana and documents the employment of the term khaek for these Malays. The article then introduces ethnographic data based on fieldwork in Chana District, including interviews with a range of Muslim informants. It argues, first, that the material presented reveals the deficiencies in contentions that Chana represents a border between Peninsular Thailand's Thai- and Malay-speaking Muslim communities. Second, it argues that language use and autonym preference among Muslims are not necessarily linked to latitude.

Keywords: Thailand, Songkhla, Chana, Malay, thai musalim, ethnonyms, ethnogenesis.

As the past century has witnessed the formation of numerous nationstates around the globe, many of these have sought to integrate diverse ethnic groups, including those concentrated in their border regions (Emberling 1997, p. 309). In this context, the political power of naming and identification systems is immense (Scott 2009, p. 238). The Bangkok-centred Thai state has sought to harness such power in prescribing new ethnonyms for segments of its diverse population. This process is evident in Chana District, located in Thailand's southern border region. Lying in Songkhla Province, which is immediately north of Pattani Province, Chana has been proposed as the cultural and linguistic border between Thai- and Malay-speaking cultures (Imtiyaz Yusuf 2003, p. 136).

Ethnic studies specialists refer to ethnonyms employed by nonmembers of ethnic collectives as exonyms. According to Shamsul Amri Baharuddin's conceptual framework, exonyms are "authoritydefined" terms imposed in modern nation-states. He contrasts them with "everyday-defined" ethnonyms that citizens voluntarily employ, and to which we refer below as autonyms (Shamsul 1999, pp. 54-55; 2001, pp. 78–79; 2015, pp. 6, 16, 19, 23–24). Other scholars writing on ethnonym use in the Malay World refer to the phenomenon of using multiple ethnonyms as "ethnic oscillation". I Joll's work on attitudes towards the Thai exonym thai musalim (Muslim Thai) or thai isalam (Islamic Thai) among bilingual Malays in Pattani's provincial capital argues that autonym and exonym use in that setting depend on location of interaction, the language spoken at the time, and the real or perceived ethnicity of interlocutors (Joll 2012, 2013; Joll and Srawut 2021).<sup>2</sup> In Thailand's Lower Southern provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat—and, as argued below, in Chana District—place of interaction and language used in interactions inform the choice of ethnonyms used by Malays. The level of their willingness to use a government-sponsored ethnonym is often related to their educational background, occupation and contact with and benefits derived from engagement with Thai modernity.

In addition to comparing ethnonym use in Chana District with that in Thailand's three southernmost provinces, the analysis presented here responds to Rogers Brubaker's call for constructivists convinced by critiques of primordialist conceptions of ethnicity to pay more attention to "the processes, causes, and consequences of differing patterns of crystallizing difference and forging connections" (Brubaker 2004, p. 51). New ethnic identities might emerge in the course of such crystallization and forging, but what are the political, economic, geographic and social forces involved? These forces operate most

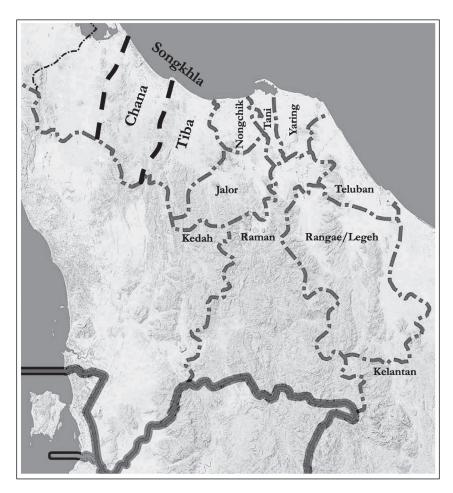
often on the borders of newly formed nation-states integrating ethnic minorities. Such integration often requires either the coining of new exonyms or state support for the use of specific existing ethnonyms, in a process of ethnogenesis.<sup>3</sup> The focus of the present article is on attitudes among Muslims in Chana towards the exonym *thai musalim* or *thai isalam*, which the Thai state introduced to South Thailand in the 1940s.

The next section of the article establishes the Malay cultural heritage of Muslims in Chana. It is followed by a section addressing the use of the term khaek to designate both Malays in South Thailand and Muslims throughout Thailand until the end of the Second World War, and the subsequent introduction of thai musalim or thai isalam to replace khaek as Bangkok's official exonym of choice. In fact, Muslims north of Chana were regarded as Malays in the early twentieth century, and one of the autonyms employed by some of them was khaek. A third section introduces ethnographic data from fieldwork in Chana District, including interviews with a range of Muslim informants. The historical and ethnographic perspectives developed in the article call into question the contention that in South Thailand the "Malay form of Islamic religiosity" reached as far as Chana and that the district represents the "culturo-language border between the Thai and Malay speaking cultures" (Imtiyaz Yusuf 2003, p. 136).

# Malay Cultural Heritage and Exonym Use between the Early Bangkok Period (1767–1851) and 1948

In ways resembling the use of the term *farang* as the default Siamese exonym for Westerners from the Ayutthaya period, which ended in 1767, Thais referred to darker-skinned foreigners from the Middle East, the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia as *khaek*. Adis Idris Raksamani points out how religious distinctions among *khaek* were made through reference to *khaek isalam* or *khaek musalim, khaek chao sen* (Shi'a), *khaek phram* (from the Thai for "Brahmin") and *khaek hindu*. Similarly, use of the terms *khaek melayu, khaek chawa* (for

Javanese), khaek kham, khaek india, khaek arap (Arab) and khaek poesia (for Persia) further clarified ethnic differences (Adis 2019, p. 7). This exonym also appeared in the denotation of khaek chet huamueang to refer to the people of seven "tributary" or "Malay" provinces into which Rama I (r. 1782–1809) divided the Sultanate of Patani to punish it for its refusal to continue tributary relations



**FIGURE 1** Separation of Chana (Cenak), and Tepha (Tiba) from the Sultanate of Patani following the creation of the *chet huamueang* in the late-eighteenth century. Map created by Christopher M. Joll.

and weaken it (Tej 1969, p. 58). The seven *mueang* in question were Nongchik, Tani, Yaring (Jaring), Saiburi (Taluban), Yala (Jalor), Raman and Ra-ngae (Legeh).<sup>4</sup> All were ruled by Malay rajas appointed by Bangkok and given the status of "frontier provincial governors answerable to the governor of Songkhla".<sup>5</sup> Neither Chana (Cenak) nor Thepha (Tiba) was included in this list as these territories were administered directly by Songkhla (KijangMas Perkasa 2010, p. 38).

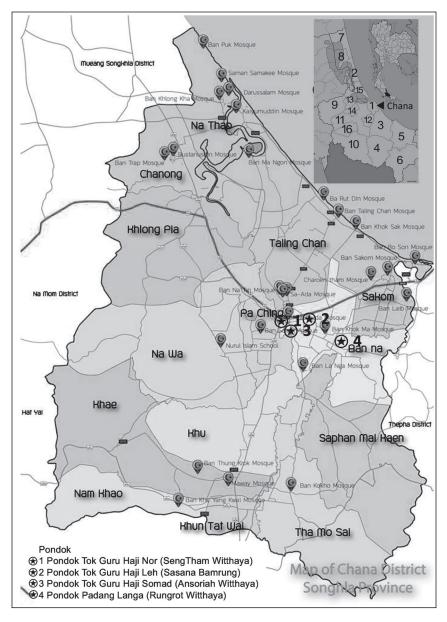
Bradley's reconstruction of the wars between Patani and Siam from the 1780s to the 1830s mentions Chana or Cenak on several occasions (Bradley 2010, pp. 155, 162, 177, 321–22; 2016, pp. 52–53, 55). Evidence that it continued to have a raja following its official separation from the Patani Sultanate includes the seal of Umar ibn Muhammad Taha (Figure 2), who corresponded with Francis Light in Penang. Cyril Skinner's translation and analysis of the *Syair Sultan Maulana*, which includes an account of the assistance rendered by the Sultan of Kedah to Rama II (r. 1809–24) in his 1809 campaign against the Burmese attack on Phuket, also mentions the Malay polity of what Skinner translates as Chana (Skinner 1985, pp. 7, 17–18, 25–26, 59–61, 171). His analysis of troops sent from local rulers groups those from Chana with subjects of the Chinese ruler of Songkhla (Pimpraphai and Sng 2019, p. 55).



**FIGURE 2** The Seal of Umar ibn Muhammad Taha, Raja of Chana or Cenak. Source: Koleksi Surat-surat Francis Light (https://suratlight.blogspot.com/2018/11/).

The dispatches of Luang Udomsombat, first edited by Prince Damrong in 1906, record detailed discussions between Rama III (r. 1824-61) and his ministers during his military campaign against the Kedah uprising between 1838 and 1839. Luang Udomsombat was an assistant of Phaya Si Phiphat, appointed by Rama III as the commander of expeditions to pacify the South (Skinner 1993, p. vii). Although Skinner's translation of these letters mentions Malays in dispatches from 1839 dated 14 February (Corfield 1993, pp. 48–49), 28 February (ibid., p. 61) and 12 June (ibid., pp. 208-209), the exonym khaek appears in the Thai originals. Khaek from Chana and the township of Chana are mentioned in these dispatches from 1839 on a number of occasions (ibid., pp. 40, 42, 44, 50, 73). Skinner also uses "Malay" in translating Rama III's reference to his "nine khaek states" (ibid., pp. 62, 136, 141-42, 145, 149, 168-71, 178, 187-88, 208, 247). Skinner furthermore assumes that, in addition to the aforementioned seven divisions, this reference took in Cenak and Tiba rather than Kelantan and Terengganu (ibid., pp. 68–69, 82–83).

Fragments from secondary literature help complete the picture of the Malay cultural heritage of Chana offered in the Thai and Malay primary sources. Bradley's reconstruction of the Patani School established in Mecca by Shaykh Dā'ūd bin 'Abd Allāh al-Fatani refers to "satellite learning centres" outside of Patani (Bradley 2010, pp. 298–300, 320). He argues that between 1844 and 1869 this network "attained its broadest reach" before facing the impact of Siamese colonial interference. Malay scholars involved in this scholarly network revitalized existing satellite learning centres—including Cenak—during these decades, when Malays were struggling to "rebuild after over 50 years of intermittent warfare" (ibid., p. 321). Bradley cites evidence showing that, as early as 1845, Cenak was "among the most active" of these satellites. It maintained a "high level of manuscript production throughout the 1850s and 1860s up to the rise in print". Bradley specifically mentions the scholars Harun al-Fatani, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Fatani and 'Abd al-Rashid Canak (ibid., p. 321). Pondok schools<sup>7</sup> had been active in Chana between the 1840s and the 1860s, and from the early 1870s, that



**FIGURE 3** Map of Chana District, its location in Songkhla Province, location of specific research sites, and pondok schools mentioned by Hasan (1990). Map prepared by Graham H. Dalrymple and Christopher M. Joll.

district had a reputation as the site of a *pondok* specializing in *fiqh* or Islamic jurisprudence (ibid., p. 322).

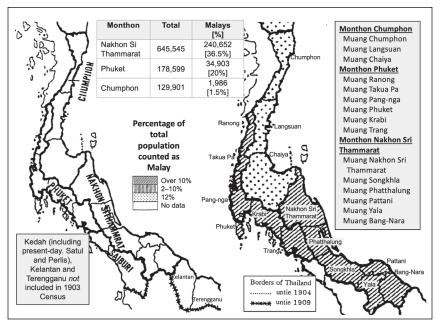
Hasan Madmarn also notes that between the 1930s and the 1950s Chana became "very popular with the Muslim communities". As a locale providing a traditional Islamic education, it attracted both young Malay- and Thai-speaking Muslim students (Hasan 1999, p. 17).8 By 1955, the most important pondok in Chana town, mostly named after their tok guru or teachers, were Pondok Tok Guru Haji Nor (also known as Muhammad Nur or Ayah Nor), Pondok Tok Guru Haji Leh or Salih, Pondok Tok Guru Haji Somad (also known as Haji 'Abd al-Samad) and Pondok Tok Guru Ghani (also known as Pondok Padang Langa). While the last school was aligned with modernist ideas, the first three were led by local 'ulama well-versed in classical Islamic works, referred to as Kitab Jawi. Most of these had been written by the aforementioned Shaykh Dā'ūd bin 'Abd Allāh al-Faṭānī and Shaykh Wan Ahmad al-Faṭani and were restricted in their coverage principally to "settled opinions on correct Islamic conduct as found in the 'ulama of the Shafi'i school of Islamic law" (Hasan 1999, p. 17).

As this discussion makes clear, Chana or Cenak has lain firmly within the Malay cultural zone of the Thai-Malay Peninsula. This is despite its separation—along with that of its immediate neighbour Tiba, present-day Thepha—from the *chet huamueang* created by the Bangkok state in the early nineteenth century. A wide range of Malay and Thai sources mention Chana's Malay raja, and sources on Siamese military campaigns between the 1780s and 1830s also include references to Chana's Malays. In referring to Malays, Thai sources invariably use the default exonym *khaek*.9

# Wider Use of the Exonym khaek through the 1940s

Muslims living in Thailand's Upper South, where most are now Southern Thai speakers, share the cultural background of the Malays of Chana. Volker Grabowsky's analysis of the 1904 partial census commissioned by Rama V (Grabowsky 1996) is instructive. As

the last census quantifying Siam's Chinese, Khmer, Lao and Mon ethnic minorities, it offers a remarkable account of Siam's cultural geography in the early twentieth century (Joll 2017, p. 337). Malays were counted north of Chumphon Province, including Ayutthaya. Had Bangkok been included, the census would have revealed the presence of a large Malay diaspora in the country (Joll 2022, p. 5). In Siam's three southern *monthon* or administrative circles of Chumphon, Phuket and Nakhon Si Thammarat there were a total of 277,541 Malays, approximately 34 per cent of the total population; that latter *monthon* included Siam's Malay-dominated Lower South. The census did not include the "Siamese Malay States" of Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu (Joll 2022, pp. 275–76). Figure 4 reveals the size of Malay presence in the *monthon* of Chumphon, Phuket and Nakhon Si Thammarat.



**FIGURE 4** Distribution of Malays in the *monthon* of Chumphon, Phuket, Nakhon Si Thammarat as counted in Siam's 1904 census. Prepared by Graham H. Dalrymple and Christopher M. Joll, drawing on Grabowsky (1996, pp. 64, 66, 70, 72, 75).

Claudia Merli's work sheds light on ethnonym use in Thailand's Upper South. Her ethnographic fieldwork in Satun Province in the early 2000s found that Thai government officials refused to recognize Malay ethnic identity, with the result that thai musalim served as one of the autonyms employed in a province in which most Muslims are now monolingual Thai speakers. Some Muslims in Satun also employ khaek as an autonym (Merli 2009, p. 13). Merli relates a conversation with a Thai-speaking Muslim that illustrates the multiple meanings of khaek. The informant's statement, "I am khaek but cannot speak khaek", meant, "I am a Muslim who cannot speak Malay". The same informant continued, "If I stayed in the khaek country, I could speak khaek", meaning, in Merli's view, "If I stayed in Malaysia, I could speak Malay" (ibid., p. 14). Similarly, conversion to Islam is referred to in the Upper South as "khao khaek" or "to enter the status of being a khaek (Amporn 2008, p. 201; Horstmann 2011, p. 497). 10 The Muslim minority in Thailand's Upper South is far from homogeneous in its understanding of ethnicity and cultural heritage. Amporn relates how her Southern Thai-speaking grandmother declared that despite differences between khon khaek or Muslims and khon thai or Thai Buddhists, they were "khon phasa diaokan" or people using the same language. She adds that, from the early nineteenth century onwards, Muslims in Phuket and Nakhon Si Thammarat were bilingual in Kedah Malay and Southern Thai (Amporn 2008, p. 199)—a reality that may explain the continued widespread use of Malay kinship terms (ibid., p. 200).

Between the reign of King Vajiravudh (r. 1910–25) and the start of the second administration of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram (1948–57), Bangkok's exonym of choice for Muslims in Thailand changed. The period from 1910 to 1948 concluded with the introduction of the new exonym *thai musalim* or *thai isalam*. In 1908, Siam's *Royal Gazette* announced the appointment of Malay headmen, with names including "Khaek Wan Duerek", the new headman of Tanyonglulo Subdistrict, and "Khaek Wan Yuso", the new headman of Ano Ru Subdistrict (Chaengkhwam krasuang mahatthai 1908). Similarly, in 1919, a Ministry of Agriculture document referring to

two Malays' applications for mining concessions in Yala gives their names as "Khaek Tuan Ismael and Khaek Che Umar", illustrating the absence, according to one author, of the term "Malay" in official correspondence (Sathian 2004, p. 60). Likewise, when implementing new guidelines for the administration of the Malay population of South Siam, King Vajiravudh referred to them as being of *chat khaek* or *khaek* ethnicity (Tsukamoto 2020, p. 66).

The first administration of Field Marshal Phibun (1938-44) saw the introduction of twelve "cultural mandates" or ratthaniyom. The very first of them, dated 24 June 1939, changed the name of the country from Siam to Thailand (Ratthaniyom chabap thi 1 1939). Issued on 2 August of the same year, the third mandate ordered the use of "Thai" as the official ethnonym for citizens of Thailand. It also contained specific prohibitions on Thais referring to themselves as "Northern", "Southern" or "Muslim" Thai; they were simply "Thai" (Ratthaniyon chabap thi 3 1939). Malays were affected by the mandates on learning the Thai language (Ratthaniyom chabap thi 9 1939) and on the adoption of Western-style dress (Ratthaniyom chabap thi 10 1939), and the third cultural mandate was the first Thai source to mention the state-endorsed exonym thai musalim or "Muslim Thai" central to Bangkok's project of ethnogenesis. Ironically, the immediate context for the earliest occurrence of the term was the prohibition on Muslims in Thailand referring to themselves as Thai Muslims.

Both during and immediately after the Second World War, the Bangkok state persisted in regarding Malay identity as a threat to the implantation of Thai consciousness. Between the fall of the first Phibun administration in July 1944 and the field marshal's return to power in April 1948, Thailand saw seven premierships. On 15 January 1945, during the first premiership of Khuang Aphaiwong, former Pattani governor Thiang Janyawiset Bunyanit informed the minister of interior that many Malay religious leaders "encouraged local Malay-Muslims to support a separate state" in the South and noted the challenges of transforming "Pattani Muslims into Thais". Eighty-five per cent of them were Malay-speaking Muslims who

refused to speak Thai. The former governor noted that they "think that they are Malay", not Thai, and their "traditions, cultures and way of life are *khaek malayu*". This was the case despite that population enjoying "rights of freedom" like other "Thai people". The former governor's conclusion was that Bangkok had "not helped Pattani people feel Thai" (Tsukamoto 2020, p. 80). It was also under the Khuang Aphaiwong government that the Patronage of Islam Act was promulgated (Phraratchabanyat upatham isalam pho so 2488 1945). The text of this act contains no references to the ethnonym thai musalim. Rather, it mentions Thai citizens who believed in the religion of Islam. Citing Prayurasak Chalayonadecha (Prayurasak 1996, pp. 263-64), Tsukamoto claims it was in 1945 that Bangkok officially discontinued the policy of referring to Malays by the default exonym of khaek (Tsukamoto 2020, p. 71). It was replaced by another exonym, thai musalim, denoting "Thai people believing in Islam". Malays were therefore grouped with Thai-speaking Muslims in ways that ignored the "complex relationship between Malay identity and Islam" (ibid., p. 71).

After the coup d'état of April 1948, Phibun returned to the premiership and appointed Phraya Rattanaphakdi (Chaeng Suwannachinda) as the governor of Pattani Province. This man had held the same post previously, before being removed by the People's Party government in 1933. Reiterating the adverse impact of Phibun's policies on Malays, he also shared local reactions to the specific policy of referring to them as thai musalim or thai isalam. He noted how it had been interpreted as yet another attempt to transform them into Thai-Buddhists (Phraya Rattanaphakdi 1966, p. 45), like those attempts that had been common during the Second World War (Joll 2021, p. 10; Joll and Srawut 2022, p. 258). A related factor was the local Malay conception that "Thai" was a specifically ethnoreligious designation. Bangkok's new exonym, thai musalim or thai isalam, thus struck Malays as oxymoronic. The influential ethno-nationalistic historiography of Patani published under the pseudonym Ibrahim Syukri mentions the important event of 24 August 1947, which saw Haji Sulong submit his now famous seven demands to the

government investigatory commission visiting from Bangkok with Phraya Rattanaphakdi present. Immediately afterwards, Haji Sulong voiced the following grievance:

We the Malay people realize that the true reality of our condition under the government of Siam is indecent and miserable whenever we are called "Thai Islam". With such an appellation it is made clear that the question of our nationality as Malay people is not recognized by the Kingdom of Siam. Because of this, we, in the name of all of the Malay common people in Patani, unanimously demand that the Kingdom of Siam consider us as Malay people of the Islamic religion so that no longer will the world view us as "Thai Islam". (Ibrahim Syukri 1985, p. 95)

### Ethnonym Use among Muslims in Chana

Interviews conducted with a range of Muslims between September and November 2019<sup>12</sup> shed light on attitudes towards autonym use in Chana District. Bangkok's new exonym of choice has played a role in the Thai state's project of ethnogenesis. The most important factors affecting autonym preference are age, location, language spoken and changes in education policies.

Muslim interviewees between 30 and 40 years of age employed the official ethnonym thai musalim or thai isalam. Yusof, a 32-year-old businessman, was one of a number of interviewees who explained that thai musalim or thai isalam was a "neutral term". He was a "Thai citizen..., but my religion is Islam". Such younger informants were primarily Thai-speaking, but some were able to speak Malay after studying in the Malay-majority Lower South or in Malaysia. Nevertheless, rather than regarding themselves as ethnically Malay, they saw themselves as Thais who followed the religion of Islam. Expressing sentiments similar to Yusof's was Salman. He was in his mid-thirties and worked as an administrator at a local private Islamic school. He explained, "I would identify as thai musalim or thai isalam because I am a Thai person who follows the religion of Islam. Although I can speak Malay, I would not identify as a

Malay."<sup>14</sup> Some of these younger informants recognized similarities with Malays in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. Nevertheless, there were also differences. The most important of these was that Muslims from Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat had greater loyalty to the Malay language than did those from Chana. This contrast highlights the success of Bangkok's language policies, which have led to local shifts in autonym preference.

Older Thai-speaking informants, those between 40 and 70 years old, also employed the *thai musalim* or *thai isalam* autonym. At the same time, they had a greater awareness of the Malay heritage of Chana District as described above. For instance, a 41-year-old local businessman by the name of Ishaq shared his personal journey with ethnonym preference while growing up in Chana.

When I was younger, I used the phrase "thai musalim" to identify myself. But, when I went to study in Malaysia, the lecturers often asked me, "why did I check the ethnic group as Thai", when I was a Malay. They said I looked like a Malay and many people mistook me for a Malay from Malaysia. At first, I was resistant to these comments and affirmed my Thainess, but later these incidents caused me to reflect on and become open to my Malay heritage. Now I am fond of identifying myself as a Malay from Songkhla when I am in Malaysia. 15

Ishaq later mentioned once again that, although he referred to himself as *thai musalim* or *thai isalam* while in Thailand, he also identified as a Malay. He leaned back in his chair, sighed and stated how "within Thailand, there is no space for other ethnic identities". Other older informants considered themselves ethnically Malay, and expressed a desire to use the term *thai melayu* or "Malay Thai" in Thailand at some time in the future. Nevertheless, self-identifying as Malay was not permitted by the Thai government, in their view. Rashid, a 52-year-old small businessman, expressed some of the difficulties with which he struggled.

Although I can still speak some local Malay dialect and I know Muslims in Chana are ethnically Malay, I would not identify myself as *melayu* because I am a *thai musalim*. If I could, I would

identity myself ethnically as a Thai Malay or a Malay from Thailand, but the government only allows citizens to identify by their nationality and religion.<sup>17</sup>

Muslims from the Malay-speaking communities of Chana District identified as *melayu*; they were aware of the district's historical connections with the former Sultanate of Patani, of which Chana had once been a part. Despite the importance of their Thai citizenship, they maintained strong connections with the Malay World in which they travelled, conducted business or studied. These older informants preferred *orae nayu*—a shortened version of *melayu*—as the primary ethnonym they employed when in Malay-speaking contexts. <sup>18</sup> This preference was articulated succinctly by Suleiman.

I would use the phrase *orae nayu* when in Chana or the Deep South, but I regularly travel to Malaysia to buy and sell clothes. When in Malaysia I would say *orae nayu dare Thailand*—Patani Malay for "Malay person from Thailand"—which would be clearly understood."<sup>19</sup>

What these informants bring into focus is how Malay-speaking Muslims in Chana District display a high degree of flexibility in ethnonym use. That use changes depending on location and language used in conversation. When outside Malay-speaking locations, these bilingual Malay-speakers used the official ethnonym *thai musalim* or *thai isalam*. They reasoned that this autonym articulated their nationality and religion. A 63-year-old Malay-speaking man by the name of Aree shared the following thoughts on this subject:

I prefer the term *orae nayu* when I am in a Malay-speaking area. But can also use the term *thai musalim*. This is because it is a neutral phrase. When I go to government institutions, I speak Thai and need to identify myself as a *thai musalim*. I am happy with both terms as I am ethnically Malay, a Thai citizen and a Muslim.<sup>20</sup>

Aree is another example of a Malay-speaking informant mentioning how context and language affected his choice of autonym. With other Malay-speaking Muslims, such people identify as *orae nayu*. When speaking Thai—especially in other parts of Thailand—*thai musalim* or *thai isalam* was the most practical and readily comprehensible term.

Age, language and location all have an impact on ethnonym choice in Chana District. Informants aged between 30 and 40 years old employed the ethnonym that Bangkok began to promote after the excesses of the military governments between the late 1930s and during the Second World War. Members of this age group reasoned that the terms thai musalim or thai isalam accurately identified them as it regarded citizenship and religious affiliation. Their view reveals the success of the Thai state's decades-long and at times belligerent—commitment to a project of ethnogenesis in South Thailand. Especially compared with older informants, younger Muslims were unaware of-or uninterested in-Chana's Malay heritage. Another factor in choice of ethnonym has been the latest chapter of Malay-led violence against Thailand's political legitimacy in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat that began in 2004.21 This violence has led to negative stereotypes about Chana residents' southern Malay neighbours. Referring to local differences, a number of younger informants stressed their Thainess, the privileges that they enjoyed as citizens, and love for their country more than their Malay cultural heritage.

Among older bilingual Malays in Chana, attitudes toward Bangkok's policies varied. But members of this group emphasized the importance of their Malay cultural heritage, identity and language. Some were also interested in seeing Bangkok soften its attitude towards acknowledging the Malay heritage and mother tongue of its Southern Thai citizens. While willing to adopt the official exonym, they also employed other autonyms. In addition to still speaking Malay, this older group of interviewees remembered what Chana District was like in the past. Most lived in the bilingual—Thai and Malay-speaking—communities of Ban Na Subdistrict or nearby. Their perspectives offered another reminder of the relationship between language use and autonym preference. Bangkok's longstanding programme of encouraging the use of Thai and the *thai isalam* 

ethnonym was, then, less successful among Chana's Malay-speaking Muslims. The range of autonyms they routinely employed resemble what Nagata terms "ethnic oscillation" in the context of Malaysia and Shamsul's authority- and everyday-defined ethnonyms (Nagata 1974, p. 346). As in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat (Le Roux 1998, p. 243; Joll 2013, pp. 135–36; Joll and Srawut 2021, pp. 326–27), autonyms used in Chana oscillate with changes in where, with whom, and in what language discussion of ethnic identity is conducted. When speaking Thai, Chana residents are *thai musalim* or Muslim Thais. When speaking Malay in either their own communities or in Pattani, Yala or Narathiwat, they are *orae nayu*. In Malaysia, they are Malays from Thailand.

Interviews with informants also bring into focus the factors that have led to local changes in preferred autonyms. Developments during the 1930s and 1940s had as much of an impact on Chana District as on the three provinces to its south. Both Thai- and Malay-speaking Muslims interviewed mentioned changes in names, dress and cultural practices. Furthermore, Bangkok also encouraged Thai Buddhist transmigrants to relocate to Chana. Benny, one of the oldest informants interviewed, had a clear awareness of the impact of these policies on ethnic change in Chana.

Government policies since the name change to Thailand have focused on making things more Thai. Names were changed, community and district names were changed, and local people were encouraged to learn Thai at a greater level at schools.<sup>22</sup>

Informants were under no illusions about Bangkok's agenda during the Phibun years: imposition of a new unitary ethnoreligious identity on Muslims throughout Thailand. While previous generations of Muslims in Chana may have resisted Bangkok's project of ethnogenesis, most now appear to accept it. Among bilingual Malays, Bangkok's official exonym is viewed as one that emphasizes their Thai citizenship and religious affiliation at the expense of their Malay heritage. Some mentioned their desire to use the ethnonym thai melayu. Anam gave voice to grievance over the fact that, while

he was ethnically Malay, "within Thailand, I cannot identify this way because the government only allows citizens to identify as Thai on (official) forms". <sup>23</sup> This reality led Kareem, a 62-year-old civil servant, to observe, "there is religious freedom in Thailand, but not ethnic freedom to identify as a Malay". <sup>24</sup> Lee agreed, "I would like to use the term Thai Malay … but Malays in Thailand have to list their ethnicity with their religious beliefs, and are not free to express their Malayness." <sup>25</sup>

This situation demonstrates the enduring power of policies promulgated by Bangkok. State-sponsored projects of ethnogenesis in emerging or expanding nation-states are most common when smaller ethnic groups are concentrated on their borders (Emberling 1997, p. 309). James Scott argues that the political power of naming and identification systems should not be underestimated (Scott 2009, p. 238), and it was such political power that the Thai state desired to harness when forming the nation of Thailand. Ethnonyms imposed by nation-states rarely match those used locally; normally they begin as exonyms, or terms employed by external actors to define a local population (Benjamin 2012, p. 206).

The wider acceptance of the ethnonym *thai musalim* or *thai isalam* in Chana is related to the increased use of Thai, and changes in local use of Malay and change in the degree of loyalty to that language. Use of Malay has been affected by education policies. Informants recounted that changes in Malay language use could be attributed to the decision of more Muslim parents to send their children to government schools, and to the transformation of local *pondok* into government-supervised private Islamic schools.<sup>26</sup> The Compulsory Education Act of 1921 mandated four years of state school primary education for all children in Thailand. Few Malays in South Siam complied with this act, however (Liow 2009, p. 144), and the Pondok Educational Improvement Program of 1961 thus proved a "watershed" moment (ibid.). It offered financial aid to registered *pondok* that taught academic subjects in Central Thai. Despite initial resistance, over time thousands of *pondok* registered

with the Ministry of Education and thus became officially designated as private Islamic schools. Few traditional *pondok* remain in operation in Chana, and more and more Muslim students enter Thai universities (ibid., p. 146).

Kareem, a Malay-speaking informant, relates that *pondok* were "places that used Malay as the language of instruction and taught *Kitab Jawi*. People [educated] in these places were, therefore, able to maintain their knowledge of Malay until today."<sup>27</sup> *Pondok* schools in Chana once only used Malay. After their transformation into private Islamic schools in which secular and religious subjects were only taught in Thai (ibid., p. 145), teachers had to translate the content of Malay texts into Thai. Later, new Thai textbooks replaced the old Malay texts. Initially, this change was motivated by willingness to comply with government regulations. In time, however, it was necessitated by Muslim students' lack of understanding of Malay (ibid.).

Several Malay-speaking informants voiced concern for the future, as Malay language use decreased among members of younger generations. They attributed this development to changes in local *pondok* schools. Hanafi, a retired Islamic school director, sighed deeply before saying,

The result of bringing Islamic education under the Thai government is a sensitive issue. With more parents in Chana now sending their children to either Thai government schools, or private Islamic schools teaching in Thai, Malay language proficiency is rapidly decreasing.<sup>28</sup>

Other informants predicted that without some sort of intervention, within twenty years the process of ethnic change in Chana District would be completed, and the whole of the district would be Thai-speaking, with Muslims no longer employing the autonym *orae nayu*. Ironically, following the introduction of the Pondok Educational Improvement Program, the same Islamic schools at which local knowledge about and practice of Islam were strengthened were, conversely, also the agents of change in Malay language use and loyalty.

#### Conclusion

Investigation of Malayness and ethnonym use among Muslims in Songkhla Province's Chana District reveals the deficiencies in proposals that the district represents some sort of border between Peninsular Thailand's Thai- and Malay-speaking Muslim communities. Language use and autonym preference among Muslims are not necessarily linked to latitude. Furthermore, differences between the two communities are, for a number of reasons, more nebulous and diffuse than neatly defined. First, widespread loss of Malay language ability among Malays south of Chana, in the provincial capitals of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, has been well documented (Joll and Srawut 2021; Scupin and Joll 2020; Joll 2013, 2012). This loss is most marked among those educated in state schools and private Islamic schools, where Thai has been the medium of instruction since the 1960s. The discussion above makes clear the role that language use and linguistic loyalty play in autonym preference and in attitudes towards the use of exonyms that are part of Bangkok's project of ethnogenesis. In other words, rather than latitude, autonym use among Muslims is connected to language use in the home, and decisions that Malay parents make concerning their children's education. Malays who are most positively oriented towards the benefits of engaging with Thai modernity live in urban centres. Secondly, Imtiyaz Yusuf's contention concerning the status of Chana as a cultural border ignores the presence of bilingual Malay communities in the Upper South, both north of Chana and even much further north in Bangkok.<sup>29</sup>

References to Malays both in and north of Chana District in a range of primary and secondary sources illustrate the district's location in a portion of the Thai-Malay plural peninsula in which the cultural heritage of Muslims is Malay. The analysis of historical sources in this article documents incremental changes in Bangkok's default Thai exonym from *khaek* to *thai musalim* or *thai isalam*, which culminated immediately after the Second World War. In the period since then, the new exonym has been central to Bangkok's state-sponsored project of ethnogenesis, a project that has sought

to turn all of Thailand's Muslim citizens into thai musalim or Muslim Thais. Some Muslims north of Chana still employ khaek as one of their autonyms of choice. The northernmost corner of the Malay World is in fact in parts of metropolitan Bangkok and in Nonthaburi Province to Bangkok's immediate north, and the diffuse location of Malays north of Chana and the appearance of the term thai musalim or thai isalam in the 1940s help explain the range of attitudes among Muslim men in Chana towards both the enduring importance of Malay cultural heritage and the exonym promoted by the state. Local attitudes in Chana District were influenced by the age, location of interaction, and language repertoires of Muslim informants. Change in those repertoires represents one of the less than desirable consequences of the introduction and use of Central Thai as the medium of instruction in local Islamic schools. There is no evidence Muslims in Chana have been persuaded by the Bangkok state's propagation of the exonym thai musalim or thai isalam despite its centrality to the state's project of ethnogenesis. Rather, most informants were aware of their Malay cultural heritage but adopted Bangkok's chosen exonym following changes in Chana's linguistic landscape decades after Thai became the medium in local private Islamic schools.

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**Graham H. Dalrymple** is a doctoral candidate in the Institute of Ethnic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and Visiting Research Fellow in the Center of Excellence in Muslim Studies, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 7th Floor, Prajadhipok-Rambhai Barni Building, Phyathai Road, Bangkok 10330, Thailand; email: ghdalrymple@gmail.com.

**Christopher M. Joll** is Research Fellow in the Center of Excellence in Muslim Studies, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 7th Floor, Prajadhipok-Rambhai Barni Building, Phyathai Road, Bangkok 10330, Thailand, and Adjunct Research Fellow in the Institute of Ethnic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia; email: cmjoll@gmail.com.

**Shamsul Amri Baharuddin** is Distinguished Professor in the Institute of Ethnic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Level 4, Administration Building, Kolej Keris Mas, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia; email: pghkita@ukm.edu.my.

#### **NOTES**

- 1. See Nagata (1974, p. 346) and Milner (2008, pp. 200-201, 232-33).
- 2. Joll's work was based on that of Pierre Le Roux (Le Roux 1998).
- 3. Early references to state-sponsored ethnogenesis include Roosens (1989), Dunnell (1984), Whitten (1976), Goldstein (1975), Kumar (1971), Oshanin (1964) and Michael (1962). For the application of the concept to ethnic politics in Mainland Southeast Asia, see Bouté (2018), Dalrymple (2021), Leider (2018) and Scott (2009.
- 4. The toponyms in parentheses denote Malay spellings of various *huamueang* that differed from the toponyms used by the Thai state.
- 5. The *chet huamueang* lost not only their tributary status but also their geopolitical body in 1809 (Kobkua 2012, p. 228).
- 6. See Surat Raja Cenak kepada Francis Light (1787), Surat Raja Cenak kepada Francis Light (1791a) and Surat Raja Cenak kepada Francis Light (1791b). The correspondence with the raja of Cenak has been released online as part of the collection of the letters of Francis Light.
- 7. Traditional *pondok* schools were centres of Islamic education in the Malay Archipelago, prevalent throughout Southern Thailand. Students lived in small huts, and learning was centred around well-known teachers.
- 8. The latter came mostly from Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Trang, Krabi, Phang Nga, Suratthani, Phuket, Phatthalung, Chaiya, and other parts of Songkhla.
- In fact, Chana's network of pondok schools functioned as satellites through
  which Siam's southern Malay subjects recovered from five decades of
  conflict through the operation of Patani School described by Bradley.
- 10. Note the parallel with the Malay expression "masuk Melayu".
- 11. Orae Sivae in Patani Malay.
- 12. Interviews were conducted in Thai with twenty-five male informants from different socioeconomic backgrounds and age groups in the locations noted in Figure 3. Informants' names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Interview sites mentioned in the notes that follow are subdistricts of Songkhla Province's Chana District.
- 13. Interview with Yusof, Taling Chan Subdistrict, 11 September 2019.
- 14. Interview with Salma, Taling Chan Subdistrict, 11 September 2019.
- 15. Interview with Ishaq, Bang Khae Subdistrict, 13 September 2019.
- 16. ibid.
- 17. Interview with Rashid, Taling Chan Subdistrict, 7 October 2019.

- 18. For an analysis of the use of the autonym of *nayu*, see Amporn (2016), Suttiporn (2011), Chavivun (1980), Chaiwat (2017), Pakkamol (2023), Nilsen (2012) and Tsuneda (2009). The term is one of the many contractions for which the Patani Malay dialect is famous.
- 19. Interview with Suleiman, Ban Na Subdistrict, 29 October 2019.
- 20. Interview with Aree, Na Wa Subdistrict, 17 September 2019.
- 21. For perhaps the most important treatment of the earlier years of this renewed conflict, see McCargo (2008).
- 22. Interview with Benny, Chanong Subdistrict, 18 October 2019.
- 23. Interview with Anan, Ban Na Subdistrict, 29 October 2019.
- 24. Interview with Kareem, Taling Chan Subdistrict, 10 September 2019.
- 25. Interview with Lee, Ban Na Subdistrict, 17 September 2019.
- 26. Over time, and above all since the introduction of the Pondok Educational Improvement Program in 1961, *pondok* in South Thailand have been integrated into the Thai educational system as private schools teaching both Islamic and academic subjects.
- 27. Interview with Kareem, Taling Chan Subdistrict, 15 October 2019.
- 28. Interview with Hanafi, Pa Ching Subdistrict, 29 October 2019.
- 29. See Joll (2022). Malay communities in Central Thailand are the subject of Chaiwat (2017), Tadmor (1991, 2004) and van Roy (2016).

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