

Burmese-Muslim Social Networks in the Borderland

A Case Study of Islam Bamroong Muslim Community
in Mae Sot, Tak, Thailand

Wahyu Kuncoro



Critical
Perspectives
on Regional
Integration

06

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Series Foreword

The monographs that comprise the Critical Perspectives on Regional Integration series have emerged from dissertations based on original primary field research, and written as a major part of the requirements for the Master of Social Science (Development Studies) program of the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University.

As Senior Editorial Adviser, I was engaged by the Center to conduct an overview of the dissertations—dating back to 2001 and now well over 100 pieces of work—and select which of them would best illustrate the quality of graduate student research. This was by no means an easy task, but it was decided to choose primarily those written in the past few years, given that empirical research in social science tends to date rapidly. Another consideration was that the monographs should give expression to the main theme of the series of Critical Perspectives on Regional Integration.

As the selection and editorial work proceeded it was then decided to organize the publications into sub-series focused on different parts of mainland Southeast Asia. The first several volumes focus on Myanmar, covering such subjects as livelihood strategies, changing ethnic identities, borders and boundary-crossing, and the commoditization of culture within the context of ethnic tourism. Following volumes are devoted to Thailand, Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

The series also illustrates the concern to bring together social science and natural science knowledge in order to further the understanding of sustainable development issues. Over some 20 years Chiang Mai University has developed considerable research expertise in such fields as resource management, environmental impact assessment, upland agricultural systems and indigenous knowledge, health, and ethnic and gender relations. Teaching and research in development issues also deploys social science concepts within the development field to address decision-making, policy and practice, and the responses and adaptations of local populations.

This current monograph series also focuses on the processes of social, cultural, economic, political and environmental change among populations and territories undergoing rapid transformations within the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).

Victor T. King

Senior Editorial Adviser, Critical Perspectives on Regional Integration Series

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Burmese-Muslim Social Networks in the Borderland:

A Case Study of Islam Bamroong Muslim Community in Mae Sot, Tak, Thailand

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The success of the Burmese Muslims' socio-economic adaptation in Mae Sot has been influenced by their flexibility towards ethnic identity. When they first arrived, family and ethnicity relations were their fundamental social network, and this helped them access many needs, such as shelter and work. This social network has since broadened with their participation in religious activities alongside other Muslim communities. To some extent, being Muslim has positioned the Burmese Muslims as insiders within the community of Mae Sot Muslims; allowing them to access various kinds of facility provided by Nurul Islam Mosque, whether religious, social or cultural. On the other hand, religious identity has also allowed Burmese Muslims to connect with a transnational Islamic network called Tablighi Jama'at, which is spread throughout many regions of Thailand. Faith is; therefore, a fundamental factor in motivating Burmese Muslims to become involved in this movement, although some of them also manipulate this network, as an adaptive strategy, to negotiate with state agencies and/or access and accumulate multiple forms of capital. Throughout its chapters, this thesis argues that ethnic identity is a product of state construction, which is then re-worked and re-presented in a variety of ways by different people and groups (see also King and Wilder, 2003). As a result, the meaning of ethnic identity is not only related to the imagination of ethnic boundaries, but is also a cultural capital that connects people or units with a broader socio-cultural, economic and political network.



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Chapter 1

Introduction: Islam on the Move: The Intersection of Faith, Identity and Social Network

With a population of 10,000 people¹ (including documented and undocumented), the Burmese Muslim² community is one of the most prominent communities in Mae Sot, a town in northwest Thailand that is close to the border with Burma. The Burmese Muslims started to arrive in Mae Sot in the mid-1960s, due to outbreaks of violence against Indian migrants in Burma³, including Muslim and Hindu communities. The ongoing unstable socio-political situation in Burma at that time, including a series of attacks by the Burmese Military in Kawmoora, along with the curtailment of black market activities in Phalu and Wangkha, resulted in a surprisingly large number of

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- 1 Information collected during an interview with a Thai Muslim, a committee member at Nurul Islam Mosque in Mae Sot. He mentioned that the total number of Muslims from Burma has reached over 20,000. This number is only a rough calculation, which places Muslims from Burma as one single community. In fact, this population contains a number of different Muslim communities with different cultural backgrounds, such as Burmese Muslims, Arakan Muslims or Rohingyas, Karen Muslims and Mon Muslims.
 - 2 In this book I use the term “Burmese” to refer to the group who identify “Burma” as their native land. The term “Burmese Muslim” is not used to refer to every Muslim from Burma; it only refers to one Muslim ethnic group in Burma (which is not officially delineated).
 - 3 In this book, I use the term “Burma” instead of “Myanmar”, not due to any political issue but to maintain consistency in the language. Likewise, “Rangoon” will be used instead of “Yangon”.

Burmese Muslims moving to Mae Sot in the late 1980's⁴ (Sang Kook, 2007). Mae Sot became the main destination for Burmese Muslims seeking shelter at that time, due to its close proximity to Kawmoora. By crossing the border to Thailand, they attempted to avoid subsequent attacks along the Burmese border. As well as its geographical position, the presence of a Muslim community in the town was another reason why Burmese Muslims were motivated to move to Mae Sot. Their presence helped Burmese Muslims adapt to Mae Sot life, by accessing temporary settlements, and participating in religious routines and economic life⁵. The number of Burmese Muslims in the town increased sharply along with the economic boom of Mae Sot in the early 1990s, a reflection of the economic integration being encouraged by the authorities. The Thai Prime Minister at that time, Mr. Chatchai Choonhavan, campaigned by saying "Changing a battlefield into a market place", and reopened border gates in order to develop transnational trade between Thailand and Burma. After the establishment of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) in 1992, Mae Sot and Thailand's other international borderlands became the subject of various national economic regulations aimed at free trade (Arnold, 2006; Tsuneishi, 2005; Walker, 1999). Under a series of eight development plans (between 1997-2001), Mae Sot grew into a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) focused on the industrial and commercial sectors, which further motivated Burmese Muslims to move to Mae Sot. Many Burmese Muslims came directly from Burma to Mae Sot, but others were Burmese Muslims who relocated from refugee camps in search of work. State flexibility and the presence of agencies facilitating border crossings have also contributed to the increasing number of Burmese Muslims living in Mae Sot.

The better infrastructure in Mae Sot as compared to their hometowns has allowed Burmese Muslims to feel at home there, and most admitted to me that living in Mae Sot, has allowed them to be truly free. They can join a variety of economic activities without worrying about trouble from the local government or other communities. In addition to working in factories and

4 Phalu, Wangkha and Kawmoora are three areas located in Karen State (Burma), which is bordered with Thailand, and which previously had border gates constructed by the KNU. This was in response to the border closing regulation set by the Burmese government during its military rule. The three border gate areas subsequently developed as the centers of black market activity under the KNU before finally being destroyed by the Burmese military.

5 Islamic norms require Muslims to always assist other Muslims who are in need of help.

shops, some Burmese Muslims also engage in trade in Mae Sot. At Phajaroen Market, they can be seen everywhere selling household items, herbs, fresh meat and fish. Some of them sell from a cart or from a temporary stall, while others rent a permanent shop. Prasatwithi Road is located not far from the market, and there many Burmese Muslims are actively involved in the gems trade, either as traders or brokers. Other trade activities run by Burmese Muslims in Mae Sot include food and beverage stalls, secondhand bicycle, used car and spare parts sales, as well as passport and money transfer agencies.

The Burmese Muslim community appreciates the plurality of Mae Sot, as this gives them freedom of religious expression, while being a Muslim in Burma attracts discrimination. While in Mae Sot, they feel comfortable participating in their religious routines, and are even brave enough to show their religious identity in public. This is evidenced by the fact that there has been a Muslim community in Mae Sot since the mid-eighteenth century. Various religious infrastructures have been built, such as Nurul Islam and Bengala Mosques, which facilitate Burmese Muslim's religious routines in public. In addition, the presence of a Burmese Muslim community has allowed them to reassert their Muslim identity, such as through wearing skull caps (men) and *hijab*⁶ (women) and Burmese Muslim can easily be distinguished from the other Burmese migrants. When Burmese Muslims meets other Muslims; they will shake hands and greet each other with “*Assalamualaikum*”, then use their Muslim names to introduce themselves.

Burmese Muslims believe that Islam not only has a religious meaning, but is also a part of their ethnic identity, as shown through their use of various Islamic attributes during their everyday lives. Fundamentally, the impact of religion on Burmese Muslim identity has a strong relation to two different factors: their ancestors' history and the building of national identity in the modern state era. The first factor is a part of their “self-ascription”, in which Burmese Muslims view themselves in accordance with genealogical traits. However, the Burmese Muslims also define Islam as a key part of their way of life, so that many Burmese Muslims' cultural products are interpreted based on their Islamic knowledge. The second factor is associated more with the

6 Cloth to cover head and chest for Muslime female, it is believed as an attempt to apply the Islamic value and it is required by the religion. The use of *hijab* is unlike the *burkha* or *chador*, because *hijab* does not need to cover the whole face. Both *burkha* and *chador* are the long clothes to cover the whole parts of body including face.

power relations that exist between the self and the state, which tends to contain political identity. In Burma, the state has tried to create a single Burmese identity aligned to the Burman majority, and choosing Buddhism as the national religion. In this case, the state would seem to exclude Burmese Muslims from the Burman majority through religious differences, even though both of them actually share similar origins and some cultural attributes.

In this study, I refer to Burmese Muslims as an ethno-religious community because their identity is shaped through the conflation of ethnic and religious identity. As I mentioned previously, Burmese Muslims are culturally similar to the Burman majority in some respects; for example, Burmese is used as their daily language and it is also the mother tongue of both communities. Betel nut and *thanaka* (cosmetic paste used by women) are two cultural products that are consumed on a daily basis; moreover, Burmans and Burmese Muslims also wear similar traditional clothes, in particular the *longyi* (a cloth sheet or sarong). However, Burmese Muslims in Mae Sot can easily be distinguished from Burmans as they have Islamic names and they wear some Islamic clothing on a daily basis. While visiting a Burmese Muslim's house, one can also see items hanging on the wall, such as a calendar with Arabic calligraphy or mosque photographs. In terms of food, both communities actually eat similar types of food, though the use of *halal*⁷ food by the Muslims creates a differentiation between the communities in this respect.

As well as its function in terms of identity, I also argue that Islam, or religion, is considered by the Burmese Muslims to be a social network, as it helps them survive in Mae Sot. Through religious activities at the mosque, Burmese Muslims can meet, socialize and maintain relationships with other Muslims from other communities in Mae Sot. As a result, Burmese Muslims have the chance to access a lot of information related to house rentals or job vacancies. Nurul Islam Mosque not only accommodates their religious needs, but also helps them in various other ways. The educational institution at Nurul Islam allows every Burmese Muslim to access formal Thai education and a religious education. The resettlement process in Mae Sot is also assisted by the fact that Nurul Islam rents rooms at affordable rates. Eventually, Burmese

7 *Halal* is an Arabic term defined as "to be allowed" or "permitted". *Halal* is commonly used in the context of foods, whether it could be consumed or not by a Muslim. Based on what it is written in the Koran, a Muslim is prohibited from eating food that is contaminated with pork, reptiles, fanged animals, amphibians, and/or blood.

Muslim arrivals can expand their social networks by becoming members of Tablighi Jama'at, which is based in Nurul Islam.

The success the Burmese Muslims have had at reconstructing their ethnic identity in Mae Sot leads me to argue that we cannot simply say that cultural contact and assimilation pressure regarding identity in the host country always result in the degradation of a migrant group's identity. Throughout this study, I will argue that the transformed or sustained ethnic identity of a migrant cannot be separated from the structural power in the new location. Burmese Muslims have been able to reinvent their ethnic identity due to a long migration history in Mae Sot, which is an area conducive to the development of plural identities. The second factor is the territory of Mae Sot, which is located near a border between Thailand and Burma, which has facilitated the Burmese Muslims' imagining their ethnic identity. In addition to this, I do not deny that migration has had a significant impact on the shifting meanings of ethnic identity in the study area, for as in the Burmese Muslim context, the reinvention of ethnic identity in Mae Sot is not only related to boundary maintenance, but also reflects an attempt to draw-upon social capital.

Research Questions and Objectives

Research Questions

- The economic integration regime set up around the international border has led to flexibility from the Thai state in Mae Sot in relation to the flow of goods, people and ideologies. How have the Burmese Muslims manipulated state flexibility for the sake of their own socio-cultural and economic survival?
- How has the Burmese Muslim community in Mae Sot shaped itself and been reshaped by the multiple forms of power that exist in the study area, i.e. the local Thai authorities and local residents?
- How has the Burmese Muslim community in Mae Sot cultivated a Muslim identity into its social network, for its own benefit?

Research Objectives

- To understand how Burmese Muslims negotiate with and manipulate the flexible economic system set up around the border, for their survival

in Mae Sot.

- To understand what external factors have influenced the re-construction of the Burmese Muslim migrants' identity in Mae Sot.
- To elucidate how Muslim networks have helped the Burmese Muslim migrants in their socio-politic-economic lives in Mae Sot.

Literature on Burmese Muslims and Muslim Studies in the Thai context

It is important to review the literature on Burmese Muslims, both in the Burmese and Thai context. So far, only two books have been published in English that focus on the notion of Burmese Muslims amid the complexity of Muslim identity in Burma (Berlie, 2008; Yegar, 1972). Most of the social studies on Muslims in Burma tend to concentrate on the violence perpetrated against Rohingya. Moreover, scholars, NGOs, and the mass media, have also tended to focus on the issue of Rohingya. This imbalance in the foci of the literature could lead to generalizations in terms of viewing the Muslim community in Burma as a single entity, that is, as the Rohingya. While acknowledging the Rohingya⁸ issue, this literature review will describe Muslim diversity in Burma and the complexity of ethnic classifications within this group. Moreover, I will focus on Burmese Muslims, since this community is spread all over the world. For most Burmese migrants, Thailand is the key migration destination. From Thailand, Burmese Muslims move on, to Malaysia and Singapore, and some have even used the United Nations (UN) resettlement program to move to Japan, Australia and the United States of America (USA).

Muslim Settlement in Burma

The history of Muslims in Burma can be broken down into three different time periods: the traditional state era, during British colonial rule and the modern nation state. The first Muslims to reach the coastal regions of Lower Burma and Arakan were the Arabs and Persians in the ninth century. According to a Burmese chronicle, during the reign of King Anawratha (1044-1077), two

8 In this book I use the term Arkanese Muslim instead of Rohingya since the latter is more similar to political identity, while the first has more obvious definition based on either geographical background or cultural traits.

Arab merchants became stranded on the shores of Martaban, and they were taken to the Burmese interior to service the King as horsemen. Another chronicle mentions that the nucleus of the Muslim community in interior Burma was Indian captives (including Muslims) who were brought there during the reign of Kyanzittha (Yegar, 1972). From their first arrival in the twelfth century, no reports mention Muslims having significant power in Burma. Then, around the thirteenth century, this story changed with the emergence of another Muslim group, the Tartart warriors from China, who headed to the interior of Burma. It is understood that the Tartart warriors were sent to expand the Chinese region from the city of Bhamo, and then told to attack and destroy Pagan. In another part of Burma, the Kingdom of Arakan, the influence of Bengal Muslims entered the region around the fifteenth century, with the coming of the Bengal Sultanate's army under General Veli Khan, who helped Narameikhla reclaim the throne from the Burmese Court of Ava.

The wars that occurred during this period led to Muslims in the interior of Burma working as soldiers or being caught as prisoners. In addition to these groups, Muslim merchants from the Arab Peninsula, India and Persia also visited Burma's coastal regions and dominated the sea trade up to the early sixteenth century. These merchants married Burmese woman and lived in these areas temporarily before continuing their trade journeys to other regions⁹. Since then, the Muslim population in Burma's coastal areas has gradually increased. Many of them believe that inter-marriages such as these were the embryo of Burmese Muslims in the country. Through Muslims' expertise at seafaring, they were often trusted by the local authorities to occupy strategic positions. Some of them later moved to Burma's coastal towns (such as Rangoon) and joined in with commercial trade with Burmese natives. Muslims in the interior of Burma and in the coastal areas (especially from India) quickly became Burmese, except for their religion. However, the local people continued to consider them foreigners, meaning they were (and still are) referred to as '*kala*'¹⁰.

9 The cruise departure depended on the timing of the monsoon.

10 Since the Burmese Chauvinism movement in 1932, the term *kala* has been used to support discriminatory practices against non-natives. Being called *kala*, means a person is excluded from Burmese life.

Muslim Classification during British Rule in Burma

British victory in the Anglo-Burmese War of 1824-1885 led to them conquering all of Burma, then uniting it with Greater India. While it was under British rule, the number of Muslims in Burma increased significantly, due mostly to increased Indian Muslim migration. Indian Muslim migrants quickly dominated certain jobs in sectors opened by the British in Burma, becoming teachers, clerks and engineers, as well as doing unskilled work such as working as servants and laborers. The presence of the British colonial government, along with the large-scale Indian migration, resulted in Burmese social, economic and political systems changing. As mentioned by Yegar, under British rule, “no new public, army, police, or civilian and administrative [organization] was established in Burma without Indian[s]” (1972). From the start of British rule and until 1921, the number of Indians in Burma rose to one million, with half of them being Muslim¹¹. Indian Muslims preferred to build their own settlements similar to their native lands, and they avoided assimilating with the local culture, although some of them married local women.

Under British rule, a national population census was held every ten years, with the first held in 1872¹². This national census was the first instrument used to give an overview of ethnic classifications among the Muslims in Burma. For the first national census, Muslims were categorized into two major groups: the Indian Muslims and Burmese Muslims. Indian Muslim consisted of sub-divisions based on their native locations, whereas Burmese Muslims were divided into two sub-divisions: the Arakan and Burmese Muslims. Another national census covering the whole of Burma was held in 1891, and used a more complex Muslim ethnic classification. Muslims was classified into a number of groups based on their ancestry. For the Indian Muslims, there were Saykhis, Sayyids, Moguls and Pathans, while the Burmese Muslims were sub-divided into Zerbadee¹³, Arakanese, Panthay (Chinese Muslims) and Shan Muslims. In the 1921 national census, ethnic Muslim classification in Burma was subsequently changed, along with the application of place of origin as a

11 This number does not include temporary Indian migrants who come to save money and returned to India. Their population is estimated to have reached one million, but was seasonal in nature (Yegar, 1972).

12 The first national census did not cover the upper Burma regions because they were still under the rule of the King of Burma.

13 This term was used to refer to mixed marriages between Muslims and Burman Buddhists.

data collection tool¹⁴. For the last census under British rule, Muslims were classified into four: Indian Muslims, Burman-Indians, Burmese and Panthay.

A hatred of Indians began to appear among the Burmese, as the Indian migrants increasingly dominated various economic sectors. Native Burmese seemed jealous of the success of the Indians, particularly as they were basically migrants. This hatred gradually helped foster a growing sense of nationalism among the native people, and this eventually triggered the anti-Indian riots that took place in the 1930s, which targeted Indians (both Hindu and Muslim). As a result, the Burmese began to politicize religion, to enhance nationalist feelings against Indian domination. In 1938, anti-Indian riots returned to the whole of Burma, with the main targets this time being Muslims. Burmese nationalists claimed that the Muslim marriage system was a threat to the sustainability of Burmese identity. They instilled hatred against every Muslim who had married a local Burmese Buddhist and converted them into Muslim. The impact of this nationalist movement was also experienced by Burmese Muslims, or the *Zerbadees*. Although they had blended into Burmese culture, they were still categorized as *kala* because they were Muslims, so were still the object of discrimination. During the nationalist movement, many Muslims, especially Indians, returned home or migrated to other countries, meaning their population decreased sharply.

Forming Ethno-Religious Identity: From *Zerbadees* to Burmese Muslims

In his book called *The Muslims of Burma*, Yegar gives a lot of detail on the early history and development of Islam in Burma, from the traditionalist kingdom period right up to the early modern nation state era (1972). As found, the state seemed to keep excluding Muslims as an ethnic minority, making work unclear on the issue of Burmese Muslims. This is different to Berlie, who makes firm classifications of Muslims in Burma, especially during the modern nation state era (2008). In his publication, *Burmanization of Burma's Muslim*, Berlie claims that there are four different groups among Muslims in Burma. The first group is called the “Muslims of Indian origin,” and consists of Muslims from Bangladesh, India or Pakistan. The second group is the Arakan Muslims

14 Muslim classifications used in India, such as *Sayikhi* and *Sayyid*, are no longer used in Burma.

or Rohingyas; Muslims from Rakhine state. The third group is the Panthay Muslims from Yunnan, and the last group, the Burmese Muslims or *Zerbadees*, who are the mixed marriage descendants of Muslims and Burman Buddhists. Although they are different, three of those four groups (excluding the Panthay) basically have a cultural link to India.

Both Yegar and Berlie argue that the term Burmese Muslim was controversially but continuously used during the early modern nation state era in Burma. During British rule, *Zerbadee* was the term used to describe Burmese Muslims - the mixed marriage descendants of Muslims (from India, Arabia or Persia) and native Burmans. People categorized as *Zerbadee* were not classified into the group of “Muslims of Indian origin”, because Burma was their native home. At a particular level, they were also considered to have a similar identity to Burmans, since their mother language was Burmese, and they also dressed and acted like the Burmans. The term *Zerbadee* first appeared during the third national census in 1891. However, the use of this term invited some protests from various sections of Burmese Muslim, because it was considered to have a controversial meaning (Yegar, 1972). As a result, the term Burmese Muslims was proposed by the Burma Muslim Society (BMS), in order to replace the term *Zerbadee*. After many refusals, the term Burmese Muslim was finally approved by the British colonial government, and was first used in the national census of 1941¹⁵.

According to Yegar, the Muslims categorized as ‘Burmese Muslims’ are the descendants of Indian Muslims and Burman Buddhists¹⁶ (1972). This classification means that Arakan Muslims are not classified as Burmese Muslims, although they also have a cultural link to India (and especially Bengal or Bangladesh). Arakan Muslims are separated from the Burmese Muslims because they are from Arakanese ethnic descendants, so they have their own culture

15 The results of a national census in 1941, which was the last census held under the British rule, were believed to be incomplete, and therefore were not published. This was due to the end of British rule during the census period, as a result of the invasion by Japanese forces (Yegar, 1972).

16 The nucleus of Burmese Muslims can be categorized as: 1) sons of an Indian father and a Burmese Buddhist mother; 2) sons of an Indian father and a Burmese Buddhist mother who converted to Islam; 3) sons of an Indian father and a Burmese Muslim woman; 4) sons of Burmese Muslim and Burmese woman who converted to Muslim; 5) sons of a Burmese Muslim mother and Burmese father who converted to Islam (very rare); and 6) sons of a Burmese Muslim father and mother (Yegar, 1972: p. 33-34).

that is different from the Burmese Muslim. On the other hand, Burmese Muslims also face a cultural barrier due to the identity of their ancestors, the Indian Muslims. This barrier was easily constructed, since Indian Muslims in Burma kept reinventing their identity through daily language use, other attributes and their education system. As a new group at that time, Burmese Muslims began to translate the Holy Koran and other religious texts (especially in Urdu language) into Burmese. The aim of this was to support the new generations of Burmese Muslims when learning about Islam (using their own language), and without them having to be educated at an Indian school.

The Burmese nationalist movement became widespread in the early 1930s, and this triggered internal tensions between the Burmese Muslims and Indian Muslims. This movement was based on hatred against the Indian migrants, so anything related to Indians was the target of discrimination. Burmese Muslims themselves were also the object of discrimination and were categorized as *kala* because their religion was the same as the Indians'. A campaign which ran, called "Burma for Burmese and Burmese is Buddhist" was used to exclude Burmese Muslims, though culturally they could be classified as Burmese. At that time the anti-Indian riots caused many Burmese Muslims to act like Burmans while they were in the public sphere, keeping their Muslim activities to their home space, in order to avoid violence (Berlie, 2008). As Burmese Muslims share common behaviors with the Burmans, the Indian Muslims often claimed they were not truly Muslim.

After Burmese independence, Burmese Muslims fought for their right to be recognized as an ethnic minority in Burma. This attempt never succeeded, even after the military regime (*Tatmadaw*) took over power in 1962. They were not considered a minority ethnic group, but were considered Burmese citizens and given the same rights as others. In practice, they did receive equal treatment; instead, there were many prohibitions placed on the Burmese Muslim in terms of religious matters. During the *Tatmadaw* regime, the Indian influence was removed from Burma through the construction of Burmese as the national language and Buddhism as the state's religion. For Burmese Muslims, this was a double-edged sword; on the one side an advantage and on the other side, disadvantage. The positive side was use of the Burmese language in informal