Heritage Interpretation and Spirit of Place: Conflicts at Krue Se Mosque and Thailand Southern Unrest

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ABSTRACT

There have been several discussions taken placed internationally about the Islamic world. The prominent figure, Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) organises conference to stimulate interests and understanding between people in Islamic societies as well as to the rest of the world. Arguments from meetings are the lacking of expertise in such fields as well as the lacking of respect to human rights and cultural rights in practice. As consequence, interpretation on Islamic culture often being neglected, misinterpreted or swept out by a mainstream cultural identity.

The massacre of thirty Muslims at Krue Se Mosque by Thai military men in 2004 and the ongoing Thailand Southern Unrest is a case of how a spirit of place has been influenced by interpretation. Once there is an attempt to diminish a spirit of place of minority group's religious icons by a mainstream cultural identity, a self-protection to survive their culture takes place in several forms. This paper attempts to make investigation on unnecessary conflicts that take place in the southern part of Thailand by using interpretation of Krue Se Mosque to link to other conflicts.

FULL PAPER

Since January 2004, the insurgency in the three southernmost provinces of Thailand, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, has resulted until now in the deaths of more than 2,500 people. The emergence of such a situation has threatened peaceful development of Thailand as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation. Thai Muslims constitute about 4 – 5 % of Thai population, making up the largest religious group after the Buddhist majority. The unrest in the South has raised national concern about how to bring about peaceful

resolution to the crisis, how to rebuild peaceful relations between the Buddhist and Muslim sections of the country and continue on the path of building civil society in Thailand.

Moreover, the conflict in Southern Thailand has attracted international attention, raising concerns that the situation will be exploited by international terrorists as a reason to launch a jihad in Thailand. The main problem facing Thailand at the present is how to bring about peace through national reconciliation, which recognises the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic characters of Thai polity at national level and would lead to the end of conflict and bloodshed.

The Thai government has been trying to find solutions to the crisis in a multi-pronged manner undertaking political, security, cultural and religious initiatives: Building reconciliation by peaceful means, reducing use of military force and considering establishment of a self-administrative zone in the restive provinces. All of them are still being studied, and many of them are under debate.

This paper will not attempt to recite the conflict and atrocities that occurred according to the conflict. But it intends to canvas causes of the conflict, which the author believes that might help us to find the most appropriate means to solve the problem.

Background to the place

Pattani was a small town, which established itself on the estuary. From its location that situated on the Thai gulf and on the upper part of Malaya peninsular that was a good stopping post for ships. The town developed to be an important port centre on the coast around the 13th century. In the beginning the local religion in Pattani was Hindu-Buddhism under the patronage of king or queen. Later traders arriving in Pattani, who mainly were Muslims, Chinese and Siamese. They formed their settlements and become communities. The biggest community was Muslims and later the king had adopted Islam to be the religion in Pattani. According to this the Krue Se Mosque was ordered to be built for traders and the local Muslims to make worship. From 16-17th century, there were merchants from several places arrived in Pattani, such as Portuguese, Hollanders, British, French, Chinese and Siamese. This period was the highest point of Pattani as a trading port in reaching its power and prosperity. Regular maintenance and renovation of Krue Se Mosque took placed during this time.

Krue Se Mosque located at Baan Krue Se about 6 kilometres from the present Pattani town. It was the first mosque of Pattani and of the whole Southeast Asia that built in the Middle East style. At that time it was called Masjid Pintu Gerbang and later changed to be the same name with the location. It stood in front of the old palace gate on the west. From archaeological remains, it might have built in 1514 during the reign of Sultan Ismail Shajl and completed in the next reign. There were renovations and the biggest renovation was during the reign of Queen Hi Yao (1584-1616), which

is at the reign of King Naresuan the Great of Ayutthaya. The Chinese builder (Lim To Kiam) was commissioned to enlarge the mosque and added more decorations inside.

From its importance as the royal mosque, it was destroyed several times by the attack from wars (wars with neighbouring kingdoms like Palembang and Ayutthaya). After each war renovation took placed, unfortunately it had never finished completely. In 1786, Siam was powerful and took control over Pattani. The sacking of Siam had brought the end to Pattani as a kingdom. Most of palaces and important buildings were destroyed. Few sultans of Pattani (under the governing of Siam) have put their efforts to re-establish the Pattani old town, but never succeeded. The Pattani new town (present town) was erected 1832 and the Krue Se Mosque was left behind since then.

Thailand Fine Arts Department made the first survey of the mosque in 1935 and started a minor renovation two years later. In 1962 on the occasion that Thailand celebrated two centennial of Bangkok capital, the major renovation of Krue Se mosque was taken placed. Even the renovation was completed there has not been interpretation of the mosque nor in the school's curricula of the importance of Pattani and the mosque. Not many people know that this was the mosque of one of the richest town-state in the Southeast Asia and it was used as a royal mosque for more than 300 years.

Analysis the cause of the conflict

1. Interpretation the concept of 'Thai-ness' denies diversity in Thai society

Thailand has changed a political system from an Absolute Monarchy to a Constitutional Monarchy since 1932. More than seventy years the country has been struggling to find itself through a democracy system, which has not always been smooth. There has been a rising concern, discussion and debate of Thai democracy in a national and international level widely. Apart from the political path to democracy, there is also another urgent matter —the deconstruction of the mainstream Thai-ization or the re-conceptualization of being Thai. With an insurgency in the south it is obvious that Thailand needs to re-think about the concept of Thai-ness before social unrest or an ethnic uprising similar to that in the Deep South spreads to other regions.

While the need was tangible for the deconstruction to better reflect plurality or diversity in Thai society, there required a wise selection of what concept various groups within Thailand would like to maintain. Thai-ness has been created through assimilation and integration measures, therefore it was not easy and no short-cut was possible.

The concept of Thai-ness and the Thai-ization which has been constructed and dominated Thailand for some 40-50 years ago has been attributed to the southern insurgency. Giving Thai ethnicity a dominant role

and centralizing political power has come with the blessings of Buddhism, which has been interpreted as bestowing social recognition of the higher dominating class, adding that the solution was therefore a re-interpretation of Buddhism in a more democratic manner for peaceful and equal co-existence. Thai-ness is also linked to militarism. Thailand's underlying ideology signifies the glory of heroism and militarism. To solve the southern unrest, economic and political power and bargaining chips needed to be provided to the southerners. The government should allow southerners to have more says in dictating their own future.

Being Thai was fine unless it created frustration and led to exploitation of others who were not so Thai or not Thai at all. Not only academia but also the public needed to accept differences within Thai society and the idea that they were not divisive. The southern problem was rooted in the conceptualisation of mainstream Thai-ness and the collective memories of the local Malayu Southerners about their cultural identity. Not only did different ethnicities interpret their identity differently, but the social class they belong to was also a decisive factor for the construction of their identity. Educated Muslims and villager Muslims have different world view.

There were problems not only from the Buddhist perspective but also from Muslim perspectives. While the Buddhist Thai cling tightly to their Thai-ness, the Muslims in the south also hold their Malayu-ness very fondly. Muslim villagers could not relate to religious leaders or officials as they consider them a different class. The Muslim poor and Muslim rich do not relate to each other. Even when there are protests and Muslim leaders are sent to disperse the crowd, they find no reception or welcome from the Muslim protestors. De-construction of racist nationalism and identity must work both ways.

2. The Change in social context

Another main reason that brought a conflict to the south can be the sudden shift of social economic from a Peasant Society to be an Industrialised and Urbanised Society. Local people used to enjoy their peaceful way of living by helping and supporting each others. There were different kinds of agriculture; rice-farmers, salt-farmers, fishermen, vegetables-growers, fruit-growers, cattle-keepers, etc that kept the Peasant Society system complete. Once the system changed to become Consumerism, new products and way of life were introduced and brought new occupations and jobs to the communities. People became more independent and lesser patronized to other members in society. The competition in business between communities followed as consequence of the system. There is a clearer division in communities and their social status (based on economical interest). The Muslims continued to do fishing and vegetations while the Chinese controlled the secondary business and turned to have a higher financial status to the Muslims. There is a Culture Lag as a consequence. The

Muslims couldn't adapt to the social, political and economical process from outside.

In the meantime, development from outside is lacking of internal understanding of social and culture. The process of enforcing the mainstream culture can be put as followings;

- In 1932, the then Prime Minister Marshall Phibulsongkram announced the policy, 'One Race One Nation' to be civilized like the western world.
- This policy gave a pressure to a cultural diversity. Culture of ethnic groups were inferior to Thai culture, which brought them some disadvantage in politics and economic later.
    - Based on a mainstream history of Siam/Thailand from Centralism approach,   especially the policy of 'One Race One Nation'. There is a clear division between Thai world and Malay world, which brings ongoing conflict.
- There were several political demonstrations by Muslim leaders to gain back, what they called, their rights and dignity. The most talk-about demonstration was the 'Du Zong Yor Rebel' in 1957, which there were more than hundred of deaths. This demonstration was accused by the Thai government that was an act of territorial separation. Since then, the Thai government imposed a military force to the South.
- As well as imposed Thai educational system (via schools) to Muslim society (Thai education system is Secularisation like in the west) with student's uniform that contradicted to Muslim tradition. Students were not allowed to wear a burka. This effected to Muslim society in general and it has brought more conflict and violence occurred.
- After violence happened, Thai government used the same accusation to the Muslims of being a separatist.
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3. Heritage Interpretation at Krue Se Mosque

3.1 Interpretation of local myths: the myth of Krue Se Mosque and the myth of Lim Ko Niao

The study of a local history is a study of a local myth. Myth has a basic story but develops through time and space according to the ways of life of people. Thus a myth is not a history (which aims to search for facts) but myth is a symbolic imagination that made for each society to believe that it exists. Myth is a 'Charter of Action' in a belief through tradition, ritual and dynamic of society and politic. Thus myth is an imagined history of society to create a sense of belonging to build up their identity. Myth also uses in smaller community which is more concern to a social reality. Here, myths are used in between groups to claim their right as a group and use it in dissemination with other groups. Myth helps to integrate society and culture together in the middle of conflict between groups.

A good example is the myth of Krue Se Mosque. From historical and archaeological remains and archives it is a royal mosque of Pattani capital since 13th century onwards. Pattani was a port centre that attracted international traders and people from several places all over the world. One main group is the Chinese that came to trade in Pattani and later made their settlements. As a new settler to the capital as well as to find heir ways through the old settlers- the Muslims- the Chinese invented their own myth to connected to the local communities. The myths of Lim To Kiam (Chinese builder of the Krue Se Mosque who was commissioned by Queen Yi Hao for a renovation) and Lim Ko Niao (the sister of Chinese builder, Lim To Kiam) from Chinese community obviously occurred from their sense of belonging in the society.

It is necessary to give a brief background to the myth Krue Se Mosque from two sources. The first source said that the most significant aspect of the mosque is the unfinished domed roof. Legend said that it could never be completed because of the curse placed on it by Chao Mae Lim Ko Niao. She came in the ship from China with the order from the parents to find her brother and bring him home. Lim To Kiam, the brother, arrived first in Pattani and got married to a local Muslim woman and converted himself to Muslim. Later he was commissioned by the Queen to make a renovation and to finish the Krue Se Mosque. Lim Ko Niao arrived in Pattani and found her brother and asked her brother several times to go back where their parents were waiting. But Lim To Kiam refused with a reason to complete the Mosque. She was sad and disappointed that her brother was not grateful to his own parents and family. At the end she hung herself under the cashew nut tree with the cursing to her brother not to finish the renovation.

The second source said that Lim To Kiam arrived in Pattani and fell in love with a Muslim woman. He decided to married her and wanted to spend the rest of his life in Pattani where he found that it is a place for home. What he brought with is the Chinese technique of building construction and making of a canon. He was commissioned by the Queen to complete the Krue Se Mosque. Unfortunately, there was a lightening to the roof dome and destroy what he had built. In the meantime, he was commissioned to make canons and there were three canons that he made. One is called 'Nang Phaya Tani' that is now standing in front of the Defend Ministry in Bangkok. It was taken from Pattani after the sacking by the Siamese during the reign of Rama I of Rattanakosin Era.

The myths of Krue Se Mosque show us that understanding the importance and significance of myth in relation to local history is dynamic. It is a living history that uses by several groups in the community to interact in living together. It might not be appropriated to study the existence of the myths as there are some Thai scholars trying to do. On the contrary, if we observe well in sociological approach, we will see that the myth of Krue Se Mosque is used as a dialogue and discourse between the Malay Muslim and Chinese society in Pattani to coop with the development of economics, social and politics.

3.2 Using of social and economical advantage to change physical settings and humiliate other cultures

As we know, heritage and its designation are inherently political concepts. Societies, cultural groups and governments collectively interpret the past in a subjective manner to meet their own ideological goals (Lowenthal 1985). Heritage is a representation of values and is commonly used to manipulate, exclude and reinvent the past. According to Ashworth (1995), all heritages involve choices from a vast array of pasts, many of which will not be selected. Ultimately, what heritage will be conserved depends on the ideological issues of those in power. Some artefacts will be heritage, while others will be discarded.

Thus, heritage tourism is not just a set of commercial transactions, but the ideological framing of history and identity. The heritage portrayed to tourists in many locations reflects what some observers call collective amnesia. This has a connotation of the deliberate forgetting of some aspects of the past, referring to the fact that entire societies elect to disregard, exclude or suppress certain aspects of history because they are uncomfortable, embarrassing, or by so doing, the society or its leaders can achieve some political/ideological objective(s), often with a racist slant. Ashworth (1995) terms this 'disinheritance' whereby some social and ethnic groups are written out of the script of history. This societal memory loss has resulted in many diverse heritages throughout the world being excluded from conservation and interpretation, and being hidden from tourist.

This is very much the case to what have been happening with the Muslims in the south and especially the way the Krue Se Mosque was handled. The varied cultural history of Patani State has resulted in multidimensional views of heritage. Different communities were influenced in different ways, which has now resulted in complications in current heritage meanings and perceptions. For example each of the dominant ethnic communities-- Thai-Muslims, Malay-Muslims and Chinese—had its own experience with the war between Pattani and Ayutthaya and later political, social and economical developments of Pattani under the governing of Siam. The later generations of all these communities believe it to have more or little relevance to their own lives, much depend on individual. This has resulted in various interpretations of the Pattani state, war and related-political developments of Pattani under Siam/Thailand through tourist attractions that favour different ethnicities.

The lack of understanding in cultural diversity of Thai government was not the only cause of the conflict. There is clearly a usage of social and economical advantage of one group to humiliate another group. The idea to build a new shrine of Chinese Goddess Lim Ko Niao next to the most import Mosque in Pattani was initiated by the Chinese community and approved by Thai government. Furthermore the myth about the unfinished Krue Se Mosque from the Chinese community (with the cursing of Lim Ko Niao) was

being promoted because it attracted more tourism to the province. The Fine Art Department as well as Tourism Authority of Thailand officially used this version of myth in their interpretation and tourism promotion.

There was an old shrine of Lim Ko Niao not far from where she hung herself. The new Chao Mae Lim Ko Niao Chinese Shrine or Leng Chu Kiang Shrine is located within the municipality of Pattani on A No Ru Road. Adherents of the Lim Ko Niao Goddess in the province fashion her image in a cashew nut tree (the same type of wood on with the Goddess hung herself) and place it in the shrine. Mainly Chinese form the townspeople, neighbouring townships and neighbouring countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong revere it. Ceremonies to pay respect to the Goddess on the day of the 3rd lunar month every year featuring a colorful procession carrying Chao Mae's sculpture along several roads in town, walking on fire in front of the shrine, and swimming across the river near Dechanuchit Bridge. The city had welcomed numerous worshippers every year until the last 4-5 years that the amount has decreased.

After a rising amount of worshippers pilgrimage tourism to her shrine was promoted broadly by Tourism Authority of Thailand. Shops and tourist amenities owned by Chinese people had increased in the town to serve a mass tourism. And it was decided by the Chinese community to build another shrine of Lim Ko Niao next to the Mosque for a convenient reason to visit both places in the same time.

The reaction of the Muslim community to this decision is the request to the Thailand Fine Art Department to have a re-use of the Mosque for their daily worshipping (it is in the National Monument List and the daily usage is prohibited). The Muslims succeeded in putting back the original function of the Mosque until there was a massacre of Muslims by the Thai military in the Mosque in April 2004.

Several versions of this debating myth are vital to learn and make an understanding of a dynamic local history. It is a living history that reflects several aspects in social development. The study of myth from recordings and books is thus too static. There is a need to have a discourse from inside. Thus to make heritage interpretation of the Krue Se Mosque by focusing on oral history from local people-- the Chinese, Muslims and Buddhist-Thai might be a good solution to minimize the conflict. These oral histories can be about villages, place-name, important people-names, cultural landscape and historical landscape as well as social, political and historical developments.

The public-sector manipulation of heritage to create and image and instill nationalism has also been a part of heritage politics in Patani. In fact much of the town's heritage concerning Muslim world was destroyed and then re-built buildings and monuments to fits in an idealised notion of what the mainstream identity should be. The racial and cultural diversity of ethnic groups had been ignored.

One of the primary methods used to exclude certain pasts is through education and official curricula. Four primary reasons why and 'excluded past' exists in education;

1. School curricula are already overcrowded, and educational leaders argue that time cannot be used up on 'new' subjects when the survival of many long-established (e.g. mathematics and social studies) disciplines is in question.
2. Teachers' own ignorance has allowed some important aspects of the past to be excluded. Many textbooks, for example, ignore contemporary understanding of the past.
3. Studying some pasts is commonly seen as an extravagant luxury that has little direct relevance to today's society.
4. Aspects of the past are sometimes excluded intentionally for political or ideological reasons.

While all of these reasons have some political undertones, it is the last element that is of most concern in this chapter. Through education, dominant institutions can, based on their ideological goals, reveal only what is congenial and disregard what is inconvenient or what they want the public to know. In addition to race, the pasts of other sectors of society have also long been held from the purview of interpreted or even accepted heritage. The heritage industry has traditionally promoted the dominant power base, focusing of its own version of myth while overlooking to the Muslim myth. Their past is no past at all in an official interpretation, where they are generally excluded from mainstream history and heritage interpretation. This selective version of heritage demonstrates a history of hegemonic notions about race, class, religion and ethnicity.

Krue Se Mosque: heritage divisions within one group

Very often within one broad group of people, contestation occurs between various factions who interpret their common history in different ways. Because many groups are heterogeneous, divergent views are to be expected. Since there is no single culture common to all members of a society who reside within the territory of the state, nationalism is always an artificial construct, a myth or ideology created by state intellectuals. The dominant does not necessarily have to be the majority, but it typically moulds the city according to its unconscious (or conscious) bias. This results in dissonances between various ethnic groups regarding their heritage representation.

It is not uncommon for presiding governments to utilize heritage in one form or another to shape public opinion, to build nationalism and to create images that reflect their political ideals. This is typically done by destroying or forgetting heritage, creating pasts that never existed, and manipulating history and heritage. Heritage and its material objects can be used as a means of affirming and reinforcing national identities both for tourists and for citizens (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Rogers 1996). Such an approach has long been used by Thailand, where leaders have attempted to unify and manage their new national populace by manufacturing nationhood,

national identity and patriotism through special events, re-creations of culture and developing xenophobia and public disdain towards other ethnicities.

This collage of cultures within such a small province has created various levels and types of heritage contestation. Race is a major source of tension in this. Particularly between the Malays and Chinese-Thai and give a result to the Thailand as the country that hosts the heritage and the people. The conflict started when Thai government allowed the Chinese community to build up the Shrine of Lim Ko Niao. Between these two groups, tensions have emerged throughout the years owing to conflicting ideas about who has the right on heritage and its interpretation.

Several different accounts of individual interests to exist as different groups interpret them. There are also differing views about the conservation and use of the site, especially for scientific, religious and tourism purposes. The Muslim has claimed the site as their own spiritual heritage want to have full access and total ownership while curious tourists desire access for heritage enjoyment.

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Biography

Apinya Baggelaar Arrunnapaporn, has worked in museum and art institute for several years in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She has been giving lecture in Museum Studies and Cultural Management as Visiting Lecturer at several universities in Thailand. As well as taking heritage preservation projects and academic coordinator for international programme. She is one of prominent Thailand/ICOMOS members and represented as member for International Committee for Interpretation and Presentation (ICIP). Currently, she is a PhD Candidate and working on the topic of Interpretation of Atrocity Heritage: the 'Death Railway' over the River Kwai.