

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **UNDERSTANDING BURMESE MUSLIMS IN THAILAND**

Burmese Muslim migrants are an integral part of the history of northern Thailand in the economic and religious contexts, but their stories are rarely mentioned and studied. The focus of this particular study is the Burmese Muslim female migrants living in the Chang Klan area of Chiang Mai city, and this chapter provides an historical and contemporary understanding of the Burmese Muslims living in Thailand. The discussion in this chapter is divided into four main parts: the Burmese Muslims in Burma, the Burmese Muslims and their migration routes into Thailand, the Burmese Muslims in Chiang Mai and their descendants, and the Chang Klan Muslim migrant community living at my research site.

#### **3.1 Burmese Muslims in Burma**

The rise of Islam in the Middle East and increased contact between Europe and the Far East gave Muslims a monopoly on Asia's trade with the West in the past, and as a result, Muslim, Arab and Persian colonies also rapidly spread eastward. By the middle of the eighth century, the number of Muslims living along the southern coastal areas of China had increased for two main reasons: commerce and the Shi'a<sup>1</sup>-Sunni<sup>2</sup> conflict. Persians constituted the majority of the Shi'a migration to China and in around the fourth to seventh centuries, the Chinese came to know and establish contact with the Arabs. By the ninth century, the Muslims monopoly of trade had increased the Muslim population along the coasts of China and other areas of Asia, and this expansion continued until the end of the fifteenth century. Muslim merchants also spread-out along the coastal regions of India, from a center in Bengal<sup>3</sup>; trading

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<sup>1</sup> Shi'a Islam is the second largest denomination of Islam.

<sup>2</sup> Sunni Islam is the largest branch of Islam.

with Burma, Malabar<sup>4</sup>, Ceylon<sup>5</sup> and Malacca<sup>6</sup>, and in many of these places they settled down and set-up trade colonies (Yegar, 1972: 1).

Muslim seamen first reached the coastal regions of Lower Burma and Arakan<sup>7</sup> in the ninth century. Many Muslims travelers also wandered eastward hoped to reach China; however, among them some managed only to get to Burma. In Burma, the Muslim trade colonies were established in Pegu<sup>8</sup> in the ninth century, and afterwards Arab merchants often visited them. At the southern end of Burma, the coastal regions of Arakan, the delta of the Irrawaddy River<sup>9</sup>, Pegu and Tenasserim<sup>10</sup> were known to the Muslim sailors of the period who traded in the eastern waters. The first Muslim colonies in Burma were thus colonies of traders (Yegar, 1972: 2).

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<sup>3</sup> Bengal is a historical and geographical region in the northeast region of the Indian subcontinent, at the apex of the Bay of Bengal. Today, it is mainly divided between the People's Republic of Bangladesh (previously East Bengal/East Pakistan) and the Indian state of West Bengal, although some regions of the previous kingdoms of Bengal (during local monarchical regimes and British rule) are now part of the neighboring Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Tripura and Orissa. The majority of Bengal is inhabited by Bengali people who speak the Bengali language.

<sup>4</sup> Malabar District was an administrative district of the Madras Presidency in British India and independent of India's Madras State. The British district included the present-day districts of Kannur, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Malappuram, Palakkad (excluding the Alathur and Chittur Taluks), and Chavakad Taluk of Thrissur District (former part of Ponnani Taluk) in the northern part of Kerala state. The district lay between the Arabian Sea on the west, South Canara District to the north, the Western Ghats to the east, and the princely state of Cochin to the south.

<sup>5</sup> Ceylon is the former name of Sri Lanka, and was used until 1972. Sri Lanka is a country off the southern coast of the Indian subcontinent in South Asia.

<sup>6</sup> Malacca is the third smallest Malaysian state, after Perlis and Penang. It is located in the southern region of the Malay Peninsula, on the Straits of Malacca. It borders Negeri Sembilan to the north and the state of Johor to the south.

<sup>7</sup> Arakan (the former name of Rakhine State) is situated on the western coast of Burma; it is bordered by Chin State to the north, Magway Region, Bago Region and Ayeyarwady Region to the east, the Bay of Bengal to the west, and Chittagong Division of Bangladesh to the northwest.

<sup>8</sup> Pegu is the capital city of Pegu Division in Burma. It is located 50 miles (80 km) from Yangon.

<sup>9</sup> The Irrawaddy River is a river that flows from north to south through Burma. It is the country's largest river and its most important commercial waterway.

<sup>10</sup> Tenasserim Division is an administrative region of Burma, covering the long narrow southern part of the country on the Kra Isthmus. It borders the Andaman Sea to the west and the Tenasserim Hills, beyond which lie Thailand, to the east. To the north is Mon State. There are many islands off the coast; the large Mergui Archipelago in the southern and central coastal areas and the smaller Moscos Islands off the northern shores. The capital of the division is Dawei (Tavoy). Other important cities are Myeik (Mergui) and Kawthaung. The division covers an area of 43,328 km<sup>2</sup> and had an estimated population of 1,455,000 in 2002.

With the passing of the years, those Muslims living in Burma married Burmese women, and these descendants of the Arab, Persian and Indian Muslim traders formed the original nucleus of the Burmese Muslim community, known by locals as the *pathay* or *kala*. As the years passed, the number of Muslims in Burma increased, partly because of the arrival of a growing number of Muslim traders and adventurers, and also due to the growing number of descendants of mixed marriages. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the number of Muslims in Burma increased through conversion, as happened in other places such as Malaya or Indonesia. It therefore seems more likely the growth in the number of Muslims in Burma was due to immigration and the progeny of mixed marriages (Yegar, 1972: 7).

Nowadays, there are around five million Muslims living in Burma out of a total population of 55 million. There are two majority descendant groups of these Muslims in Burma: the Sunni and Shi'a - who are both descended from South Asians, and the Yunnanese Chinese Muslims. These Indian and Chinese Muslim descendants are key minorities, both economically and religiously, inside Burma (Berlie, 2008: 2).

As the Muslim population comprises only around 8% of the total population in Burma, Muslims are considered a minority group in the country. More importantly is that this figure of five million Burmese Muslims does not include the Arakan Muslims, as they are denied citizenship in Burma. As the modern nation state has emerged, the Burmese government has emphasized 'one dominant ethnic group (Burman), one united country (Burma) and one religion (Buddhism). As result, Muslims and other religious minorities have found themselves less well protected by the state and subject to 'Burmanization' (Berlie, 2008: xi)

There have been several socio-political Burmanization strategies followed in order to assimilate Burmese Muslims into Burmese society, including linguistic integration, assimilation through mixed marriages, education in public schools (stimulating young Muslims to adopt Burmese as a language), and promoting the instruction of Buddhist ethnicity within civic education. This policy has many negative aspects, especially when it comes to the exclusion of Arakan Muslims

(Rohingyas) from citizenship<sup>11</sup>, meaning they have become a stateless peoples, who, even though they have lived in the area for hundreds of years, have no identity cards and must send a request to the authorities when they wish to travel, requests often denied, even when wishing to go to a parent's funeral.

This stateless status of the Rohingyas prevents them from traveling outside of their villages in Rakhin State; children are excluded from official schools and girls aged fifteen to eighteen are separated from their families to receive instruction. This female training is used to select future wives for Buddhists and to assimilate Muslim women in a region where it is necessary to receive official permission to get married. More important is that most of their places of worship have been destroyed. All of these factors have led to resistance movements developing within the Rohingya community.

### 3.2 Burmese Muslims and their Migration Routes

The historical context of the Burmese Muslims has not been directly studied; however, some information can be gleaned from the work of Jean Berlie (2000: 222), who studied the identities, economic networks and cross-border links of the Muslims in Yunnan and northern Thailand. He found that the Yunnanese Muslims have long been involved in trade with Thailand and Laos, and can be found living in Keng Tung<sup>12</sup>, Burma, and in Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai in Thailand. These Yunnanese Muslims are known by the locals in Thailand as *khon Islam* or simply *ho*, though in China, their common and official designation is *hui*<sup>13</sup>, which is a puzzling name as the character also means 'return' in Chinese. The general and longer term *huimin* refers to all Muslims in China, but the *hui* themselves prefer the term 'Muslim Chinese'. Inner

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<sup>11</sup> The Rohingya is a predominantly Muslim ethnic group of disputed origin which lives in Arakan State, in western Burma. The Rohingya population is mostly concentrated to the cities of Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Akyab, Rathedaung and Kyauktaw.

<sup>12</sup> Keng Tung Township is a township in Keng Tung District in Shan State, Burma.

<sup>13</sup> The ethnonym 'Hui' was probably mentioned for the first time in 917, in the records of the Liao. Later, publications mention this ethnonym in the eleventh century, during the Northern Song dynasty; and then two centuries later, during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), when the ancient Chinese links with so-called 'mainland Southeast Asia' developed through maritime and also land relations. Later still, the Chinese Muslims Ma Huan and admiral Zheng (Ma) He (1371-1435) sought trade with Southeast Asia (Berlie, 2000:223).

mainland Southeast Asian Islam has been influenced by the Yunnanese Muslims, while in Malaysia, Singapore, the south of Thailand, Cambodia, south Vietnam and (partly) ancient Hainan, the Malay and Champa populations constitute the dominant Muslim group (Berlie, 2000: 223).

Islam is well documented in the Thai and Malay-speaking southern Muslim provinces of Thailand, but in northern Thailand the significance of Islam is limited. However, as mentioned by Berlie (2000: 223), Muslims have been involved in cross-border trade for many years in this area, even before the 1950s. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-70) in China, some Muslims from Dali<sup>14</sup> and Mojiang<sup>15</sup> in China escaped the danger and followed the old Muslim caravan routes, moving southwards to Simao<sup>16</sup> as well as on to other areas. The former Yunnanese caravan routes linked China with present-day northern Thailand, and Berlie (2000: 224) notes that the first Muslims from Yunnan came to the area after the conquest of Dali in 1253, as well as the Islamization of Kunming<sup>17</sup>, Weishan (the former Mangshi) and the southern principality of Nanzhao<sup>18</sup>, in 1257. Guangdong<sup>19</sup> and Fujian<sup>20</sup> provinces had been part of an earlier maritime Muslim network, and this period was a turning point for movement inland of Islamic influence in south China and Southeast Asia.

In Chiang Mai, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the average economic impact of the former cross-border caravan trade was significant, for

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<sup>14</sup> Dali city is a county-level city and the seat of Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture in northwestern Yunnan Province, Southwest China.

<sup>15</sup> Mojiang Hani Autonomous County is an autonomous county under the jurisdiction of Pu'er Prefecture, Yunnan Province in China.

<sup>16</sup> Simao District is a district under the jurisdiction of Pu'er Prefecture, Yunnan Province in China. It is the seat of Pu'er Prefecture. In 2007, the city of Simao changed its name to Pu'er city.

<sup>17</sup> Kunming is the capital of and largest city in Yunnan Province in Southwest China. It was known as Yunnan-Fou until the 1920s. A prefecture-level city, it is the political, economic, communications and cultural center of Yunnan, and is the seat of the provincial government.

<sup>18</sup> Nanzhao (alternate spellings Nanchao and Nan Chao) is in southern China.

<sup>19</sup> Guangdong is a province on the South China Sea coast of China. The Province was previously referred to using the alternative English name 'Kwangtung Province'.

<sup>20</sup> Fujian is a province on the southeast coast of mainland China. Fujian is bordered by Zhejiang to the north, Jiangxi to the west and Guangdong to the south. Taiwan lies to the east - across the Taiwan Strait. With a Han majority, it is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse provinces in China.



during the winter/dry season each year around 700 to 1,000 laden mules would travel from Yunnan<sup>21</sup>, carrying Yunnanese tea, opium, silk, iron and lead bars; silver bullion, copper utensils and pans (from Sichuan<sup>22</sup>), salt, jackets and cloth. Yunnan and Keng Tung together imported cotton, ivory, gum, European goods, gold dust and bird's nests (Berlie, 2000: 224).

Along the ancient caravan route from Kunming to Chiang Mai, the Yunnanese used a network of mosques, which often sat on dominant hills, such as those at Mojiang, Simao, and Menghai<sup>23</sup>. This Muslim network was not only religious but also economic. The starting point for these Yunnanese Muslim traders was Dali, after which they passed through present-day Burma and reached Chiang Mai, now in northern Thailand. Along this route, we can trace certain mosques which had strong links with both Yunnan and Southeast Asia, including Chiang Mai (Belie, 2000: 225). According to Berlie, mosques located along this route included: 1) Yuxi – an important Muslim center situated 100 kilometers south of Kunming, and with links as far as Guangzhou, 2) Tonghai - a Muslim center southwest of Yuxi, 3) Mojian – the seat of the Naqshabandiyya Sufi, located 100 kilometers northwest of Simao, 4) Pu'er - 50 kilometers north of Simao, 5) Simao (formerly (Da), Mengla and Ssu-mao, 6) Menghai - unique in Yunnan, as before 1950 the Muslims here were commonly fluent in Dai, Shan, northern Thai and Lao, 7) Keng Tung - Shan State in Burma; a key city along the old caravan route to Tachilek and Mae Sai, and 8) Chiang Rai – present-day northern Thailand; the last stage on the Yunnanese Muslim caravan route before entering Chiang Mai. The Yunnanese Muslims' caravan route, from Yunnan and passing through Burma to Chiang Mai, can be seen in the network of mosques used for religious and economic purposes. These Muslim traders created strong links along the route, from China to Burma, as well as from Burma to Chiang Mai.

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<sup>21</sup> Yunnan is a province in the People's Republic of China, located in the far southwest of the country and covering approximately 394,000 square kilometers (152,000 sq mi). It has a population of 45.7 million (2009). The capital of the Province is Kunming. The Province borders Burma, Laos and Vietnam.

<sup>22</sup> Sichuan is a province in Southwest China. Its capital is Chengdu.

<sup>23</sup> Menghai County is a county under the jurisdiction of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province, China.

### 3.3 Muslims in Chiang Mai and their Descendants

The Muslim population of Chiang Mai is not particularly large, for among a total population of around 1.6 million, it is estimated that only around 7,583 Muslims in Chiang Mai (Census 2000 cited from Suchart, 2010: 69). However, the Muslims in Chiang Mai can be noticed by their mosques, halal restaurants, by men sporting prayer caps and women wearing head veils.

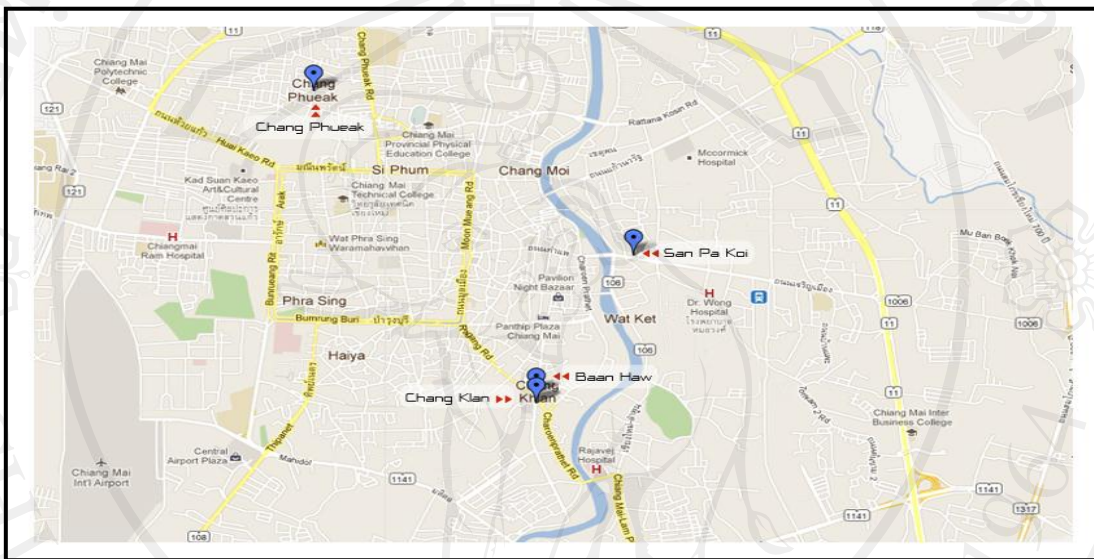


Figure 3.1: Muslim Areas in Chiang Mai City

The four main Muslim settlements in Chiang Mai are Chang Phuak, Chang Klan, Ban Haw and Sanpakoi. The Muslims in these four areas are diverse; two of these areas (Chang Phuak and Chang Klan) are predominantly made up of Bengali or South Asian Muslims, whilst the two other areas (Ban Haw and Sanpakoi) are predominantly made up of Yunnanese Muslims. Among the South Asian Muslims, Suthep (1977) documented two Pakistani Muslim quarters in Chiang Mai, the first of which, the oldest, was founded in the 1870s and is located in Chang Klan. The second quarter, developed after World War II, is situated in the Chang Phuak area. The residents of these two Pakistani Muslim quarters come from different places of origin and from different ethnic backgrounds. The first generation migrated from East Bengal, later to become East Pakistan (and eventually Bangladesh). Since 1947, with the partition of India and the establishment of Pakistan after the end of British rule,

there has been a continuous flow of migrants from East Pakistan into northern Thailand and eventually Chiang Mai city.

Suthep (1977) also describes the first group to settle in Chiang Mai – the Patan Muslims, who migrated into Chiang Mai from Afghanistan, Pakistan or Burma, and these Muslims mainly settled in the Chang Phuak area it first, working as cattle breeders and as traders. Some Muslims from India and Ceylon also settled in the Chang Phuak area. The second group living alongside the Pakistanis was the Malay Muslim refugees, those resettled from southern Thailand by the Thai government around 1895. Apart from the South Asian Muslims, the other group is the Yunnanese Muslims. In Chiang Mai, there are two Yunnanese Muslim quarters. The first quarter was established by the Yunnanese Muslim traders in the mid-nineteenth century and is located in the Ban Haw area. The second quarter was developed in the late nineteenth century and is situated in the Sanpakoi area. The Yunnanese Muslims in Ban Haw are the descendants of Yunnanese long-distance traders who travelled between Yunnan Province in Southwestern China and Burma, Laos and northern Thailand. Known to the local northern Thais as *haw* or *ho*, they distinguished themselves on linguistic and cultural grounds from the other overseas Chinese, and as early as the 1890s were recognized as a permanent community of a few dozen persons. After that, the Yunnanese population steadily increased and by 1965 they comprised almost 1,000 people, with a continuous flow of migrants arriving from neighboring areas of Burma and Laos, as well as from other Yunnanese communities within the northern region. With the increase in migrants, the Ban Haw area could no longer accommodate the newcomers, so another quarter then developed in Sanpakoi.

The history of Pakistani and Yunnanese Muslims has been well documented by Suthep (1977) and Suchart (2010); however, the Burmese Muslim migrants in Chiang Mai have been left out from both these studies, as well as from other studies into ethnic minority groups in Chiang Mai. In order to fill this gap, I will provide a contextual background to the Burmese Muslim migrants, focusing mainly on the Burmese Muslim female migrant domestic workers who, as far as I am aware, have never been mentioned or studied before. However, these migrants will be the main focus of my study.



### 3.4 The Setting of Chang Klan Muslim Community



Figure 3.2: Chang Klan Muslim Community

Chang Klan Muslim community is a multi-ethnic community and is the largest Muslim community in Chiang Mai city. In the Chang Klan area live Pakistani Muslims who originally migrated from Eastern India in around the 1870s, and Yunnanese Muslims who have been migrating from Yunnan Province in southern China since the nineteenth century. More recently, around three decades ago, Burmese Muslims began to arrive in the community, to work as wage laborers, construction workers and domestic servants. Nowadays, the Pakistanis and Yunnanese Muslims are Thai citizens, just like the northern Thais, leaving only the Burmese Muslims, as relative newcomers - as ‘aliens’ in Thailand, and as ‘undocumented migrants’ and ‘low-skilled workers’.

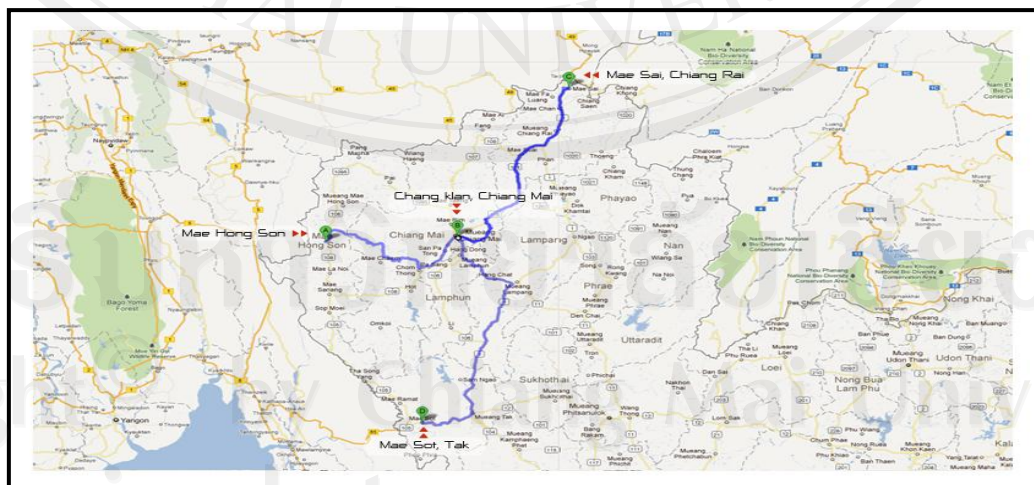


Figure 3.3: Migration Routes from Burma to Chang Klan Community in Chiang Mai, Thailand

I estimate that there are about 2,000 Burmese Muslim migrants in Chang Klan nowadays, arriving in the area via three routes: (i) from Mae Sot in Tak Province, (ii) from Shan State in Burma, then to Mae Sai in Chiang Rai Province and on to Chiang Mai, and (iii) from Mae Sam Laep in Mae Hong Son Province, then to Chiang Mai. In Chang Klan, they work as wage laborers, food sellers, cleaners or beggars. Among the thousands of Burmese migrants in Chiang Mai, I estimate that around 100 women work as domestic workers.

Chiang Mai's Muslim communities were studied by Suthep in the late twentieth century, and his focus was on the Pakistani and Yunnanese Muslims. According to Suthep (1977), Pakistanis migrated from Eastern India (later to become East Pakistan and then Bangladesh), while the Yunnanese Muslims migrated from the southwestern part of Yunnan Province in southern China. After arriving in Chiang Mai around the second half of the nineteenth century, the majority of both the Pakistani and Yunnanese Muslim migrants married local Thai women, adopted northern customs and ways of life, and identified themselves closely with their northern Thai neighbors, though always retaining their Muslim faith.

More recently, in 2010, Suchart studied the transformation of Chinese Muslim identities in northern Thailand covering three periods: (i) before 1940 when Chinese Muslims were identified as traders in northern Thailand due to their economic activities, (ii) between 1940 and 1990, when they became part of the Thai-Muslim middle class due to the Thai national integration policy and their own struggle for upward mobility, while still asserting their Islamic identity, and (iii) from 1991 to the present, which has seen Chinese Muslims divided into three general groups due to the rise of transnational Islamic movements, these being: a) *Hanafi*<sup>24</sup> Muslims connected

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<sup>24</sup> The Hanafi School is one of the four Madhhabs (schools of law) in jurisprudence (Fiqh) within Sunni Islam. The Hanafi madhhab is named after the Persian scholar Abu Hanifa an-Nu'man ibn Thābit, a Tabi'i whose legal views were preserved primarily by his two most important disciples, Abu Yusuf and Muhammad al-Shaybani. This is the most prominent among all Sunni Schools and it has the most adherents in the Muslim world.

to China, *b) Tabligh Jamaat*<sup>25</sup> Muslims connected to India, and *c) Salafi-Wahabi*<sup>26</sup> Muslims connected to Saudi Arabia.

### 3.4.1 Chang Klan as a Work Place

In terms of their economic role, the Chinese/Yunnanese and the Bengali/Pakistani (Patan) Muslims have both been important in northern Thailand and Southeast Asia over a long period of time, in fact since their migrations began. For the Yunnanese Muslims, their trade routes between Yunnan and Southeast Asia can be traced backed to a period running from 1161 to the 1450s. The first contact between Yunnan and the Islamic world occurred during the Tang and Song dynasties between 1161 and 1819, a time when Muslim merchants were an important part of the Silk Road connecting Yunnan with central areas of China; helping to build a trade network that extended to the Indian peninsula (Suchart, 2011: 52). For the trade route between Yunnan and northern Thailand, this has a long history also, one that started prior to when James McCarthy, an English surveyor, was hired by the Thai government. He stated “it is not a surprise to see...Yunnanese merchants at the local market in northern Thailand.” The Muslim traders had played a key role in the long-distance trade activities with southwest China and northern Southeast Asia since before the imperialist era. McCarthy also mentioned that “...Haw Muslim traders were...great travelers in the world because they traveled by foot when compare[d] to the other groups who traveled by train and in every year there were merchants who traveled by foot with the caravan for many thousand[s of] miles from Yunnan to Yangon and to other towns in Burma to exchange [items]...” (Suchart, 2011: 53).

In the nineteenth century, the horse and mule caravans of the Yunnanese traders traded in the mountainous borders of southern China, Burma, Laos and

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<sup>25</sup> Tablighi Jamaat is a religious movement which was founded in 1926 by Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi in India. The movement primarily aims to spread Tablighi spiritual reformation by working at the grass roots level, reaching out to Muslims across all social and economic spectra to bring them closer to Islam.

<sup>26</sup> Wahhabism is a form of Salafism and a religious movement within Sunni Islam. Wahhabism was developed by an eighteenth century Muslim theologian, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) from Najd in Saudi Arabia. Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab advocated purging Islam of what he considered to be impurities and innovations. His has become the dominant form of Islam in Saudi Arabia. Its adherents prefer to be referred to as Salafis.



northern Thailand. These merchants brought products from China such as cotton, mink, fruits, nuts, carpets, salt and kitchen equipment, and brought back raw cotton, tea, opium, jewelry, and seasonal vegetables to sell in China, right up until the middle of the nineteenth century. The important trade routes developed included the route between southern China and northern Thailand - through Burma, and another route through Laos (Suchart, 2011: 53). Before 1916, the first Yunnanese Muslims began to travel through Burma into northern Thailand, trading in Chiang Rai, Tak, Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son provinces until 1916. The first Yunnanese Muslim community was set up by Khun Chawaliang Luekiet, who married Nang Nop Tongmas, a local woman from Tak Province. At that time he was a peddler and traded with Tak Province, but later on returned to live in Chiang Mai Province. Yunnanese Muslims still engaged with the caravan trade but most had started to set up businesses in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, in particular shops selling household items. These Muslims acted as middlemen, trading with people in the city and the ethnic minority groups living in the mountains along the Thailand-Burma border (Suchart, 2011: 53). In 1924, Khun Chawaliang Luekiet played a key role in collecting the money together needed to buy land for the construction of Chiang Mai Airport. He was also involved in the building of the railway in 1916. Apart from the Yunnanese Muslims, there was another clan in the Chang Klan area - the Srijundon clan, who donated land to build Srijundon road. These are examples of the roles that Muslim families played in helping to develop Chiang Mai in terms of transportation, and helping to improve the economic situation in the Province as a whole (Suchart, 2011: 56).

Suthep (1977) mentions the two dominant groups economically in Chiang Mai city, these being the Chinese and the Indians; plus two other ethnic groups residing within the city, these being the Pakistanis and the Yunnanese Muslims. According to him, unlike the Indians, who are primarily urban dwellers by origin, the Pakistani Muslims are descended from rural communities in which the people cultivated rice and managed related economic enterprises such as cattle breeding and peddling. The majority of the Pakistani Muslims in Chiang Mai engaged in cattle breeding, trading, and exporting after they arrived, while butchering, beef retailing and to some extent dairying was also in the hands of the Pakistani Muslims. Those Pakistani Muslims involved in the breeding and trading of cattle were indispensable in terms of the



region's and the country's agricultural activities. A small number of them were also employed in government and private organizations (Suthep, 1977: 31-33).

Chang Klan area is now dominated by Muslims economically; the Muslims in this community, who originally migrated in the nineteenth century, have now become owners of their own businesses, while some still work in the government sector, because for Muslims it is believed that working for the government is an honor. One can now see how these business owners try to link ethnicity and their businesses together in order to develop a niche for themselves; for example, there is a 'halal hotel' called the Romina Grand near the Night Bazaar- the first hotel in Chiang Mai to promote the halal way of life for its Muslim guests. This hotel does not serve alcohol and acts as resting spot for Muslims. In light of this the business has expanded, so much so that since the owners' children started going to school, they have hired Burmese migrants to do laboring work in their businesses and their households.

Nowadays, Chang Klan is an area in which local people have their own businesses, ranging from small- to medium-sized and large-scale businesses. The small-scale businesses include food stores, tea shops and grocers, the medium-scale businesses include fabric shops and motorbike repair shops, while the large-scale businesses include hospitals, schools and hotels. All these businesses demand cheap labor, especially the migrants'; moreover, in term of geography, Chang Klan is linked and close to many business areas in Chiang Mai, such as the Night Bazaar, which is around two kilometers from the community and takes only a few minutes to reach. The Night Bazaar is located in the heart of the city, and is the biggest night market in Chiang Mai. This market is well known to foreigners who visit Chiang Mai on holiday, and has many shops selling Thai handicrafts, souvenirs, antiques and so on. The Night Bazaar is also located in an area to which many ethnic minority people from the upland areas around Chiang Mai come to sell their products. This market relies heavily on cheap labor provided by the ethnic minorities and migrants, who work as wage labor there. Some Burmese Muslim female migrants are also hired to work in the market, and one major reason why many Burmese Muslim migrants choose to come to Chang Klan community is because there are many job opportunities in the area.

Another important work location for the Burmese Muslim female migrants is *Muang Mai Market*, which is about four kilometers from Chang Klan and located to the west of the Ping River. Muang Mai market is the biggest fresh night-market in the town, to which local people take their own products to sell. The market is open in the day and at night time, and opens daily. This market is also an area that has a high demand for cheap labor, and some of the Burmese Muslim female migrants from Chang Klan also work at this market, but not so many, as they are outnumbered by Shan migrants who have been working as wage laborers in the market for a long time. Some of the Shan migrants now have shops at the market, having accumulated enough some money and skills to become owners; however, no Burmese Muslim migrants have yet achieved such upward mobility

This section will discuss the example of Seeda, who has lived in the Chang Klan area for more than fifteen years and is now working at *Muang Mai Market* as a salesperson in a chili paste shop. She starts work at 4 a.m. and finishes at 11 a.m., and every day has to wake up early at around 3 a.m. to go to work by motorcycle. She earns 250 baht a day, but according to her there are not many Burmese Muslims working in the market; most are Shan. Some of the Shan own their own shops and hire Shan workers to help them. The fact that the Shan have their own shops is because they have been working at the market quite a long time. Seeda told me she hopes that one day in the future she will have enough money to own her own shop too. Seeda used to work as a live-in domestic worker in Chang Klan area, when she first arrived to the community, but after a while quit her job and found work in the market. She said she likes her current job when compared to domestic work; now she earns more money and has more freedom.

### **3.4.2 Chang Klan as an Enclave Burmese Muslim Migrant Community**

Chang Klan Muslim community has been a home for Burmese Muslim migrants for more than 30 years. Since the first group of migrants migrated from Burma to work and live in the community, Chang Klan area has developed into a focus for migrants, as jobs are relatively easy to find. This Muslim community has provided a space for the poor women from Burma (who bring with them little education, little knowledge on the Thai language and few job skills) to work as

construction workers, beggars and domestic workers, and especially for domestic work there has been an increased demand due to the growing wealth of the Muslim households in the area. The long term Muslim residents who have become business owners or entrepreneurs have similar consumption behavior to the middle class Thais; for example, they do not do their own household work. It is estimated that more than 100 women now work as domestic workers within the community itself, finding it a better option. Despite the low wages, the community has enabled them to fulfill their multiple roles more effectively, as wage earners, wives and mothers.

For many of the live-out domestic workers, their working hours are more flexible, plus employers sometimes do not mind if women take their children with them to work. The jobs are within close walking distance of this community, and the fact that these women can work and live in the same community means they can go back home during their breaks and take care of their children, cook for them and their husbands. The female migrants also have access to cheap *halal* food in the community, as there are many food shops selling such items on the streets, for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and this makes it particularly easy for the women who work as live-out domestic workers, as they can save time and do not have to cook for themselves. Such tangible and intangible benefits associated with living in Chang Klan community make a big difference and make it much better to live there than other areas.

Apart from the working and living conditions there, Chang Klan community also provides for the women's religious beliefs, as Chang Klan Mosque is close to the employers' houses, so that when the call to prayer comes, they can walk to the Mosque and pray, or pray in their houses or even pray at their employers' houses. The female employers and Burmese workers may pray together at these times, revealing a shared sense of belonging. The Muslim female migrants would not be able to practice their prayers during the day if they worked in a non-Muslim workplace, so this Muslim community allows these women to practice their religious beliefs, work to earn money and take care of their families at the same time. Chang Klan, as a Muslim enclave migrant community, therefore fulfills the needs of these women in terms of their economic, social and religious needs.

This community helps to facilitate the development of a network and the sharing of information, plus provides a place to live and cheap labor for these Burmese Muslim migrant workers. On the one hand, the community provides everything the migrants need in order to survive in a new land, such as halal food, a mosque, and living and working places, while on the other it also exploits them as cheap labor – meaning they have to succumb to low wages and poor living conditions in this underground migrant economy.

### **3.4.3 Enclave Burmese Muslim Migrant Community: An Intersection of Gender, Ethnicity, Migrant and Religious Identities**

Religious identity is important for the migrants in their place of resettlement, and is even more important than their place of origin in the way that the religious presence in the resettlement area helps facilitate the migrants' life goals in a number of ways. As Chang Klan is a Muslim community, so in this space Islam is the central belief system for the local Muslims, including the Burmese Muslim migrants, due to the fact that both ethnicities (Thai and Burmese) share the same beliefs; their religious beliefs bind them together. The space within the community; therefore, allows the religious identity of the migrants as Muslim to play a more important role than their ethnic identity as Burmese. Elsewhere in Thailand, migrant communities exist and are often not welcomed by the host societies, due to the belief that “migrants are people who come to steal the jobs of local Thai people”, “migrants are people who come to exploit Thai health services”, “migrants are problematic to Thai security since they do not honor the Thai state”, and “migrants are disease carriers”; all these stereotypes lead to negative attitudes among Thai people towards migrant workers from Burma in many areas.

However, in Chang Klan Muslim community, even if these kinds of ideas are still retained among the local people, people in the area are not interested in such views, as people's religious identity as Muslims plays a key role – people ignore people's ethnic identity as Burmese and their migration status as migrants. The attitude among local people towards Burmese Muslim is ambiguous. On the one hand, local people do not really welcome the migrants, whilst on the other they accept that local businesses rely upon the cheap labor provided by such people, who work hard



for low pay. More important is the fact that local people understand that they (the Thai and Burmese) are all Muslims, and so need to help each other.

The ambiguous attitude towards the Burmese Muslim migrants is reflected by the local people who live in Chang Klan community; for example, one man told me:

Chang Klan is now just like Mawlamyine (in Burma); Burmese migrants are in the trees, under the ground, on the right hand side and on the left; migrants are like bees - there was only one at first but since then more bees have arrived and made their nests 'here'.

Mr. Suvit (in-depth interview: August 2010)

On one hand, local people feel like they have come to compete for their jobs, but on the other hand, when the community has events, they also come to help.

Pa Samroy (in-depth interview: February 2011)

They are very hard workers, while Thai people are very lazy.

Pa Samroy (in-depth interview: February 2011)

As can be seen, local people's attitudes towards the Burmese Muslim undocumented migrant workers are also ambiguous;

There are two ways to look at the undocumented migrant workers. On the one hand, one can look at them from a 'humanity' perspective (if we ask, are they pitied? The answer is yes, they are pitied), and on the other hand one can look at them from a 'legal' perspective (if we ask, is it wrong? The answer is yes, it is wrong).

Suvit (in-depth interview: August 2010)

Whether local people choose to hire the documented or undocumented migrants depends on a number of factors. Employers have to base their decision on the contacts they have (do they know the police or a local politician), then they have to weigh the risks; for hiring undocumented migrants is cheaper than hiring documented ones. The identities of the Burmese Muslim migrants are an intersection of a religious identity as Muslims and an ethnic identity as Burmese; moreover, their identities intersect with their class and migration status. Local people categorize the Burmese migrants by their migration status, as grade A or grade B. Some employers

prefer to hire Burmese Muslims as their employees, because Chang Klan is a Muslim community and around 90% of the Burmese migrants are Muslims. A grade A migrant is Muslim and documented, while a grade B migrant is not Muslim and is undocumented.

Table 3.1: Local People's Categorization of Burmese Migrants

<b>Identity</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Migration Status</b>
<b>Grade A</b>	Muslim	Documented Migrant
<b>Grade B</b>	Non-Muslim	Undocumented Migrant

*Source:* Household survey 2010

There are two types of migrants - documented and undocumented migrants. For the legal migrants who can obtain a work permit or Thai identity card, their wage rate is normally around 200 Baht per day, but for the illegal migrants who do not have a work permit or Thai identity card, their wage rate is very low, at around 50 Baht per day."

Suvit (in-depth interview: August 2010)

Their ethnic identity as Burmese reflects the class differences that exist between local people and migrant workers, as one respondent explained:

Burmese migrants work for anything; any job that they can earn some money. Here it is easy to earn money when compared with Burma. Even if you can earn 150 Baht a day, it is still a lot better than in Burma because there they can earn maybe around 30 Baht only, which is not enough even to cover their cost of living.

Suvit (in-depth interview, August 2010)

For the Burmese Muslim female migrants, their identities are even more complex, and the attitudes of local people towards these women are different from the male migrants:

Burmese women work hard, unlike Burmese male migrants who spend a lot of money on drinking and buying new mobile phones. The Burmese Muslim female migrants live a simple way of life; save and send money home as remittances.

Suvit (In-depth interview, August 2010)

It is true that migrants are not particularly welcome in resettlement areas, but the situation with regard to the Muslims in Chang Klan means that somehow a different type of resettlement area has developed from other places in Thailand, where Burmese migrants are not really accepted at all, but are ignored.

#### 3.4.4 Migrant Enclave Community: Can it Influence Individual Identity and Behavior (for Better or Worse)?



Figure 3.4: Armeen and his Medicines

Thailand is good. No matter whether you have money or not, doctors will treat you if you are sick, but in Burma you will not get any treatment if you don't have money.

Armeen (in-depth interview, March 2012)

Armeen is a Burmese Muslim man who has been living in Chang Klan for more than twenty years. He sometimes works as a wage laborer in the community slaughterhouse and sometimes on construction sites. He also owns his own junk shop, for which every day he collects items from households around the community, such as used papers, plastics, glass and whatever else he can sell. He keeps these items at his house at first and then he and his wife separate and classify all the items, then when he has enough he goes and sells these to places that will buy. He told me that the income from selling junk is not much but enough for him to live his life and take care of his wife - who used to work as a housemaid before, and also his children. Life for him is not easy in Chang Klan, because he needs to work and find items to sell all the

time, but he said he is happy with his life right now and likes his work because he and his wife are self-employed and can work when they want; taking a rest when they are tired. The other reason for him mentioning that life in Thailand is much better than Burma is in terms of access to medical care. At his age, he is not well and suffers from asthma. As a result, every month he needs to go to Nakorn Ping Hospital, a hospital in Mae Rim district, to buy medicine, which would cost a lot of money if he did not hold a pink identity card.

Arbi is Armeen's wife. She suffers from a heart condition and so needs to go to Nakorn Ping Hospital as well. She told me that she would not be able to afford to pay for all the medication required if she did not hold a pink card<sup>27</sup>. In this sense, the pink card is important for the migrants, not only in term of their legal status, but it ensures that they can access medical care at Thai hospitals when they are sick.

Ploypailin comes from Mae Sam Laep in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand, which in 2005 had a total population of 9,489 people covering 1,014 households and nine villages. The settlement lies near the Burmese border on the Salween River. She is now studying at Chiang Mai Commercial College. Ploypailin came to Chang Klan area around five years ago, following in the footsteps of many of her relatives who had already come to live and work in this community. The reason she came to Chang Klan was because she wanted to attend a secondary school in Chiang Mai city. Now she is studying at Chiang Mai Commercial College, doing the first year of a Bachelor's degree. She told me she is the first from her village to study for a degree. Her mother wanted her to be a nurse after she finished studying, but she wanted to be a teacher because she realizes she is the most highly educated among her fellow villagers. She also wants to be a teacher because she can then go back to her home

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<sup>27</sup> According to the Thai government, non-government organizations (NGOs) and academics, the Burmese immigrants in Thailand can be categorized into six major groups. The first group entered Thailand before March 9, 1976, and the Thai government calls this group "displaced persons of Burmese nationality". The Thai government issued them with pink identification cards and allows them to work. This group exists in nine provinces along the Thai-Burma border including Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Tak, Mae Hong Son, Ratchaburi, Kanchanaburi, Prachuapkhirkhan, Chumphon and Ranong. For security reasons, the Thai government restricts them to the provinces into which they initially entered.



village and teach the children there. She said she also wants to be a community leader or *kamnan*, because she wants to develop her village into a tourist destination. She said her village is beautiful and surrounded by mountains. It is also on the border with Burma so thinks that if she can develop the village, the quality of life of the people living there will improve. When asked where she would like to stay, between Mae Sam Leap and Chang Klan, she quickly said she would like to return to her home in Mae Sam Laep. According to her, she feels at home there, as she knows everyone and they share in many activities together like when they have a festival, and they also help each other when they have a problem, no matter whether they are Karen, Shan, Buddhist, Muslim or Christian; they stay together and help each other. But she said that in Chang Klan, people don't know and don't care about each other.

### 3.4.5 Imagined Burmese Muslim Migrant Community



Figure 3.5: Mecca on the Wall of a Migrant's Room in Chang Klan

Pictures of Mecca in Saudi Arabia can often be found hanging on the walls of migrants' rooms in Chang Klan Muslim migrant community. As the birthplace of Muhammad and the site of the writing of the Qur'an, Mecca is regarded as the holiest city in the religion of Islam, and a pilgrimage known as the Hajj is obligatory for all able Muslims once in a lifetime. Every year during the Hajj period - the twelfth and final month in the Islamic calendar, millions of Muslims visit this holy site. In the pictures of Mecca, one can see a cube-shaped building called the *Kaaba*, which is the most sacred site in Islam. This building has a mosque built around it - the Masjid al-Haram (the largest mosque in the world). All Muslims around the world face the Kaaba during prayers, no matter where they are.

One of the Five Pillars of Islam requires every Muslim to perform the Hajj pilgrimage at least once in his or her lifetime, if able to do so. For the Burmese Muslim migrants, it is almost impossible for them to dream about going to Mecca; however, living in a Muslim community like Chang Klan gives them the opportunity to go and pray at the Mosque, since they live close to it. Every day in the evening, when people go to pray at the Mosque, the Burmese women stay at home and pray, but nevertheless can hear the prayers coming from the loudspeaker at the Mosque. This Muslim community allows them to imagine they are all Muslims – part of a brotherhood and sisterhood. Even though the status of these migrants is different from the local Muslims, they always refer to the fact that both the Burmese and Thais are the same, as Muslims. Some Muslim employers also prefer to hire Burmese Muslim migrants because they feel that they should help other Muslims.

Among the women's groups; for example, they find ways to help each other, and especially give support to newcomers. They told me that even if they do not have much money, when they see poor newcomers arrive, they sometimes help them with a little money or other kinds of support. In the case that a migrant dies, the others will donate money and work at the funeral. The Islamic ideology plays an important role in the lives of these migrants, since they have to live in a land that is not really their own. Chang Klan therefore makes them feel that they are living in a Muslim area, a place in which they feel very much engaged in the sense that it has a mosque, halal food and is designed specifically for them.

### 3.5 Summary

This chapter has provided a contextual background to the Burmese Muslims in Burma and Thailand, both from a historical and contemporary perspective. Being a marginalized ethnic minority in their own country, these Burmese Muslims have chosen to migrate and search for work and a better life in the resettlement area, Chang Klan. Due to the fact that they are illegal migrants and poor women, they are often exploited as cheap labor in Thailand; however, the flow of Muslim migrants from Burma into Chang Klan continues to this day.

As this chapter has shown, the reason why Chang Klan has become a Muslim migrant community is because this area serves to facilitate the lives of men and

women migrants. In term of economics, this place provides them with the opportunity to work, and in terms of social issues, it can provide a better education for their children, as they have the chance to send their children to Thai and Islamic schools, plus older migrants can access the local healthcare services. In term of religion, Chang Klan is a place for Muslims, a place where they can belong.

Since thirty years ago when the first groups of Burmese Muslims came to the community, it has developed into a fully-fledged migrant community, as reflected by the people who live there now. In some ways, Chang Klan has become ‘Mawlamyine’ – a piece of Burma on Thai soil. Because the number of migrants living in the area is three times more than the number of locals, because they can find cheap halal food to eat on the street, buy items from Burma at grocery shops or at the local fresh market, go to the Mosque every day to pray and find cheap rooms to rent in the neighborhood; all these things make Chang Klan an ‘exceptional space’ for the Burmese Muslim migrants.