

CHAPTER 7

Multi-Layered Tablighi Jama'at: the Link between Faith and Social Network

7.1 Introduction

One Thursday evening, there were six men wearing Islamic clothing on a truck heading to the yard of Nurul Islam Mosque. After a while, they got off and carried some goods from the truck to the first floor of the mosque. Among those goods, there seemed to be some cooking equipment and some bags carrying personal tents. The entire mosque then filled with men wearing the same clothes and of varying ages, from young to old. They had long flowing robes on called *kurta*, a long sleeve garment to the knees combined with a set of pants or *longyi*, and on their heads they wore skull caps. While waiting for the *azan* to call *Ashr'* prayers, they sat in group and shared stories on the veranda and inside the mosque. After prayers, the men stayed at the mosque, sat with their legs crossed and formed a circle. They seemed so serious listening to the *bayan*⁸³ (generally about the Prophet Mohammad⁸⁴ or other religious stories), as told by a man sitting among the circle but on a chair.

The above describes the routine of the members of Tablighi Jama'at, one religious movement popular among the Burmese Muslims in Mae Sot. This activity is called “*markaz*⁸⁵ day”, and is held every Thursday. On that day, every member of Tablighi Jama'at from all parts of Mae Sot town will stay overnight at Nurul Islam Mosque. After the *Ashr'* prayer, the activities continue with a *bayan* given by a competent member. This man usually has a better knowledge of and experience with Tablighi Jama'at when compared to the others. The evening I visited, I listened to a speech given by a Burmese Muslim who lives in Mae Sot. When compared to other members, he has got quite a lot of experience, since he has visited the three member countries of Tablighi Jama'at: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. As well as the members living in Mae Sot, I met members of Tablighi Jama'at from other countries,

⁸³ Religious piercing.

⁸⁴ The last Prophet mentioned in the holy Koran was the Prophet who introduced Islam to the world.

⁸⁵ Tablighi Jama'at center.

such as Sri Lanka, each of who were doing their *da'wa* (missionary work) in Southeast Asia.

The *bayan* usually lasts between 30 minutes and an hour, and will end just before the *Maghrib*. The talk will then be continued afterwards, but by another member. Some members listen to the lecture until it is done, while others leave the circle in the middle of the talk. At the same time, there are many people at the first floor of the Mosque who are busy preparing rice and curries on big trays. After the lecture, all the members go downstairs for dinner, where they eat communally in a row. One big tray serves four or five people. They eat without spoons or forks, and some even bring their own dishes to share with the others. However, not all members join the dinner, some have already had dinner while others prefer to go home and return to the mosque later.

The activities on *markaz* day are not only religious; they also discuss the weekly progress of the organization. After the first *bayan*, a man comes forward holding a small notebook and a pen, and counts the number of members present. He mentions the names of the mosques or *mahala*⁸⁶ in Mae Sot, and the group's members from these mosques will raise their hands. If the number of members there is less than the previous week, he will question why the others did not come. Next, he will make comments designed to encourage those present to improve their efforts at inviting Muslims in Mae Sot to join the Tablighi Jama'at. *Markaz* day can also be seen as a space in which every member of Tablighi Jama'at from all parts of Mae Sot town can gather. Through this meeting, members get a chance to interact, socialize and even build networks with one another, across Muslim communities. Many communal activities, from dining together to group discussions, also contribute to the feeling of closeness and solidarity among fellow members of Tablighi Jama'at in Mae Sot.

Fundamentally, Tablighi Jama'at is a religious praxis established for the first time in India in around 1926/1927. This religious movement appeared as an attempt to secure Muslim India from the increasing number of Christian missionaries and Hindu revivalists (Noor 2012). On its progress, Tablighi Jama'at can also viewed as a part of

⁸⁶ *Mahala* is a term Tablighi Jama'at use to describe their activities at the local level, usually held at mosques.

religious discourse, since its movements are considered an attempt at Islamic purification of an internal Muslim community. Tablighi Jama'at believes there has been a degradation in terms of devotion among Muslims and that a movement is needed to increase and grow their faith in Islam. Besides following the interpretations of the holy Koran, the ideology and routines of Tablighi Jama'at also refer to the customs and traditions of the Prophet, as mentioned in the *Hadith*. The aim of this movement is to invite every Muslim to improve their religious practices for the sake of their after life, rather than focus on the worldly life. In this case, increasing the number of members of Tablighi Jama'at depends on personal members showing loyalty and being actively involved, by visiting and inviting other Muslims to join the organization.

The first Tablighi Jama'at delegation first visited Southeast Asia around 1952, and through three different seaports: Penang, Singapore and Medan (Noor 2012). The development of Tablighi Jama'at in Singapore and Penang was helped by Indian Muslim communities in those locations. In addition to sheltering Tablighi delegates, the network of Indian Muslims in both regions is also used to recruit new members. In the late 1970s, Tablighi Jama'at began to enter Thailand, brought by Indian Muslims using two different networks, in Bangkok and Sungei Golok⁸⁷. From Bangkok, Tablighi Jama'at moved to some provinces in the south of Thailand, whereas the network in Sungei Golok kept growing closer to that area. Yala province became a focal point for both networks, so a "*markaz besar*" (big *markaz*) was built a year later, known as the center of Tablighi Jama'at in Thailand. According to Liow (2011), the opening of the Thai state towards Tablighi Jama'at activities within their borders cannot be separated from political interests. He argues that using this religious movement, the state has attempted to decrease ethno-nationalism in the three southernmost provinces. The state believes that the presence of Tablighi Jama'at will ensure Muslims focus more on their faith than political issues. For instance, if Tablighi Jama'at precisely resolves the tension between the Muslim internal community and the state in southern Thailand, so militant actions will be resolved.

⁸⁷ Sungei Golok is a Thai border town in Narathiwat Province. It borders the state of Kelantan in Malaysia.

In the 1980s, Tablighi Jama'at started to expand into the northern parts of Thailand, brought by *Haji Yosouf Khan*, a charismatic figure from Mae Sot. Through his family and ethnic network, he extended Tablighi Jama'at from Mae Sot into some other northern areas like Tak, Lampang, Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. After that, Mae Sot was considered the center of Tablighi Jama'at activities in northern Thailand. As mentioned by Zubaidi (45 years-old), one of the *shura*⁸⁸ of Tablighi Jama'at in Mae Sot, the total number of active members in Mae Sot district is 3,400 people. He claimed that 90% of Tablighi Jama'at members are from Burma, consisting of Burmese Muslims, Karen Muslims and Arakan Muslims. From this number, 3,000 are refugees from Burma who live in three different refugee camps located on the outskirts of Mae Sot. In town, there are only about 400 members recorded as being active, of which 90% are Burmese Muslim migrants. Through various annual activities, the level of interaction between and solidarity of its members is maintained, among those who live in town and beyond.

Based on the explanations above, this chapter focuses on the activities of Burmese Muslim members of Tablighi Jama'at in Mae Sot. After it first arrived in Mae Sot, as brought by *Haji Yosouf Khan*, the number of members increased gradually, either through family or ethnic networks. This growing number of members was reflected in the broad network built by Tablighi Jama'at through new *mahala* and educational institutions, those based on its ideology. This chapter will also describe Tablighi Jama'at's activities, from the *mahala* routines to how they send missionaries into Muslim society. In the last part of this chapter, I will seek to answer the main research question in terms of what has made Tablighi Jama'at so successful at recruiting Burmese Muslims in Mae Sot. To answer this question, I will deal with the presence of multi-layered motivations, as I believe this is the fundamental reason why Burmese Muslims join this movement. Though their faith is the main motivation, it is true that being a member of Tablighi Jama'at helps the Burmese Muslims accumulate cultural and social capital, as well as opens the door to a wider economic network.

⁸⁸ Councils of elders or the highest council of the Tablighi Jama'at organization in Thailand (at every level from the local and regional to the national). It convenes on matters of common interest, to reach a consensus.

7.1 The Beginning: Haji Yousuf Khan and his Charismatic Leadership

The story of Tablighi Jama'at in Mae Sot begins 40 years ago, when a Muslim known as Haji Yosouf Khan met a group of Tablighi Jama'at from India in Bangkok. He was a descendant of India and Pakistani Muslims and was born in Kokrit (Karen State in Burma). When he was eighteen, he decided to work in Mae Sot, where he then worked as a laborer at a textile factory belonging to a famous Indian Muslim, Meybug Khan. Due to his hard work and integrity, Meybug Khan arranged a marriage for one of his daughters, with Yosouf Khan. He then gradually became known as a successful textile businessman in Mae Sot. Feeling satisfied enough with what he had achieved on earth, he decided to focus more religious activities. He was the first member of Tablighi Jama'at from Mae Sot to become active in various group activities based in Aslam Mosque, in Bangkok. He started the *da'wa* in southern Thailand and then continued to visit the three main *markaz* of Tablighi Jama'at in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. After got back from his religious journey, he returned to Mae Sot and invited his relatives and friends to become members of Tablighi Jama'at.

The first contact Muslims in Mae Sot had with a member of Tablighi Jama'at from India was around 35 years ago, and their coming was welcomed by Yosouf Khan and other Tablighi Jama'at members in Mae Sot. Since then, the activities of Tablighi Jama'at in Mae Sot have grown in terms of members and area covered. As explained by Haji Ayoub Khan, the *Shura* of Tablighi Jama'at in Thailand who is also the son of Yosouf Khan, Tablighi Jama'at strengthens the faith of Muslims in Mae Sot. He also mentioned that before Tablighi Jama'at existed, the *azan* from Nurul Islam Mosque was only heard sometimes or was even not available for prayers. Since the Tablighi Jama'at was formed, the *azan* regularly calls out right before prayer time, and the number of jama'at has increased. Tablighi Jama'at has also had a positive impact on the number of mosques in Mae Sot, as there used to be only one mosque - Nurul Islam, whereas now there are fourteen mosques (both small and big). These mosques become places for local Tablighi Jama'at activities or *mahala* to take place.

The name Yosouf Khan is famous among the Tablighi Jama'at, because he used to be the *emir*⁸⁹, between 1986 and 1996. He was the first *emir* for Tablighi Jama'at in Thailand. During his duties as an *emir*, Tablighi Jama'at grew rapidly, in terms of both the number of members and the number of *mahala*. The establishment of *mahalas* from the north to the south of Thailand made regional members more connected with each other, and this facilitated their activities, which are the same from one community to another; doing *da'wa* or *khuruj*. In addition to growing the network, Yosouf Khan also paid attention to the development of the educational sector. In Mae Sot, he built Hafiz school (the first in Thailand), which has lately attracted many Muslims from southern Thailand, who come to study. Due to the desire of Muslims from southern part of Thailand to study at the Hafiz School, a new Hafiz School has been built in Yala. Moreover, in order to improve the knowledge of its members, he also supported some Hafiz students and *alim* (a scholar of religion) to gain a further education in religious studies in India, Pakistan and the Middle East.

Yosouf Khan is; therefore, known by the Muslims in Mae Sot as a leader who had charisma and who was wise. Some people acknowledge that Yosouf Khan was the first non-Thai Muslim to be awarded Thai citizenship, and also the first Muslim in Mae Sot who did the *Hajj*. He was the central character in the building of Nurul Islam Mosque, for its second expansion, and founded the committee. His closeness with the state made him an effective mediator between the Muslim community and the government on many aspects of life. Within a ruling era of naturalization policies, he vetted all Mae Sot Muslims who met the requirements and handed their names to the government to be registered as Thai citizens. Among the Burmese Muslim migrants, Yosouf Khan is known as having been a kind-hearted leader. When the ethnic violence occurred around the Burma border in the late 1980s, many Muslim migrants crossed the border to Mae Sot seeking refuge. At that time, he turned Nurul Islam Mosque and Islam Suksa School⁹⁰ into temporary shelters, sheltering Muslim migrants before they were relocated to refugee camps.

⁸⁹ A term which refers to the highest leader of Tablighi Jama'at.

⁹⁰ Thai formal school that also teaches Islam under the management of Nurul Islam's institution.

Haji Yousuf Khan decided to resign as an *emir* in 1996, due to his age. After him, Tablighi Jama'at in Thailand had no other *emir* to replace him. *Shura* subsequently became the highest council of Tablighi Jama'at, and this consists of fifteen people who represent the different regions. On December 31st 1999, three years after he left his position as the *emir*, Yousuf Khan passed away at the age of 76. He was buried in the Muslim public cemetery in Mae Sot. The funeral itself was attended by thousands of Tablighi Jama'at members from across Thailand. The impressive life story of Yousuf Khan and his leadership of Tablighi Jama'at is not only famous in Thailand, but throughout Burma. Many Burmese Muslims told me that they came to Mae Sot because they were inspired to the story of Yousuf Khan. They wanted to work for Tablighi Jama'at and follow in his footsteps.

7.3 Working on *Deen*⁹¹: “They” Believe in Allah, but Never Act to Allah

Tablighi Jama'at is one religious praxis whose mission is the purification of Islam within the Muslim community. It was established in India in 1926/1927 by Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi. Tablighi Jama'at is classified as an Islamist fundamentalist group with links to the *Salafi* movement from the Arab Peninsula. In his book, “Islam on the Move”, Noor mentions that Tablighi Jama'at is the biggest missionary movement in the world at the moment (2012). This religious movement aims to transform Muslim society and bring Islam back on the right path. The ideology of Tablighi Jama'at is to follow strictly what is taught in the holy Koran, Hadith and the *Fadhilah Amal* were arranged by the founder. Basically, there are six principles Tablighi Jama'at expects its members to follow: 1) a belief in Allah and to practice according to the Prophet's way of life (*Kalimah Tayyibah*), 2) to pray with attention to Allah (*Shalat ma'al-khusu wa'l khudu*), 3) to be knowledge of Islam and remember Allah (*'ilm ma'a dzikir*), 4) to be respectful to others, both Muslims and non-Muslims (*ikram al-muslimin*), 5) to serve Allah without benefit (*tashih al-niyyah*), and 6) to allocate time to *da'wa* (*da'wah wa al-tabligh*).

Today, the number of members of Tablighi Jama'at in Thailand is estimated to be over 20,000 people, spread-out from the north to the south (Braam 2006). Starting

⁹¹ Semitic word often translated as ‘religion’. In the Koran, Islam itself is often described as *deen*.

from the Indian Muslim community, Tablighi Jama'at was joined and has spread among Thai Muslim society, and its members have tried to introduce their ideology to Thai Muslim community as a whole, as it is assumed this community still practices a different version of Islam. However, the other existing Muslims' movements are quite radical in terms of judging Muslim activities, and this is in contrast to the ideas of Tablighi Jama'at. They seem concerned more toward with internal issues, in order to grow Islam and become a solid community. In the south of Thailand, negative views of Tablighi Jama'at are held in some quarters, both by Thai Muslim traditionalists and other Islamic fundamentalist movements. Many critics have attacked Tablighi Jama'at in terms of its practical, epistemological and theological doctrine (see Liow 2011).



Figure 7.1: Members of Tablighi Jama'at wearing Muslim clothes

Tablighi Jama'at can be easily found through the clothes its members wear, such as a *turban*⁹² and *kurta*. In Mae Sot, Tablighi Jama'at is the only Islamic fundamentalist movement that is visible. Unlike in the south of Thailand, Tablighi Jama'at in Mae Sot has no critical rivals, other than the Thai Muslim traditionalists. The historical background of Islam in Mae Sot, related to Indian Muslim traders, is a significant reason why Tablighi Jama'at is approved of and has grown in the town. The Tablighi Jama'at recruitment process has been facilitated by many Muslims of Indian extraction (included Pakistani and Bangladeshi) in Mae Sot. Starting as a conversation among Indian Muslims, Tablighi Jama'at has been able to recruit Muslims from other

⁹² A cap used by the Indians and Pakistanis, or those from the Middle East.

communities, without worrying about their social status. Nowadays, the membership of Tablighi Jama'at in Mae Sot is multi-ethnic and from a variety of social backgrounds⁹³.

Burmese Muslims are the majority members of Tablighi Jama'at in Mae Sot today. Some have been members since they lived in Burma, but others are quite new, joining after they moved to Mae Sot. The ideology of Tablighi Jama'at itself is approved of by some Burmese Muslims, because they have a cultural link to India and its Islam. Burmese Muslims are quite active members in Mae Sot, and each day I met them practicing their routines in Nurul Islam or at Bengala Mosque. Tablighi Jama'at activities start in the early morning after the *Shubuh* prayer. The members stay in the mosque for about 30 minutes, to sit and listen to the *bayan*. The *bayan* is usually done in Burmese, since the membership is dominated by the Burmese Muslims. The Thai Muslim members usually make their own smaller circle, separate from the other and listen to one of them who translate the *bayan* into Thai.

As I observed while with the Tablighi Jama'at, the number of members who listen to the *bayan* after the *Shubuh* prayer varies. The *bayan* itself contains the life stories of the Prophet and his friends, and these are linked to the situation regarding Islam at any given moment, based on Tablighi Jama'at's perspective. Through these stories, the speaker of the *bayan* calls upon every member to improve his faith and reminds others on *da'wa*. The Tablighi Jama'at routines in the mosque are continued by the *taklim* at 11 a.m. and until 12 midday, though less members are present by this time. Usually, the members sit in a circle to listen to another member tell the story about the Prophet, as written in *Hadiths*. The atmosphere is more informal and flexible at this time, and every member gets the opportunity to ask questions. A leader will stop for a while in the middle of his *taklim* to ask members to find other Muslims. Every member then visits his friends' houses (members or non-members) and invites them to the

⁹³ Members of Tablighi Jama'at are from the entire Muslim community in Mae Sot, such as Pathans, Bengalis, Thai-Malays, local Thais and Burmese. They also come from various social circles, such as businessmen, merchants, teachers, workers and laborers.

Mosque to listen to the *taklim*⁹⁴. The *taklim* runs again between the *Ashr'* and *Maghrib*, of course with more people present⁹⁵.



Figure 7.2: Jama'at after doing the *khuruj* at Nurul Islam Mosque

Based on my discussions with some members, Tablighi Jama'at in Mae Sot works every day; the routines start with the deliberation on a Wednesday, at which every leader of the *mahala* visits Nurul Islam Mosque to discuss the following week's program. *Markaz* day is the first communal activity for Tablighi Jama'at, held the next day or on a Thursday. As explained previously, this activity is held at night, at which all members follow the *bayan*, hold a meeting, or just socialize and interact with each other. Not every member attends *markaz* day⁹⁶, and those who always attend are usually those on the board or committee of Tablighi Jama'at, plus the very active members. On *markaz* day, the Tablighi Jama'at board will collect information on those who are due to do the *khuruj*, and at which mosque. *Khuruj* is one core activity of Tablighi Jama'at, at which a member stays at the mosque for a number of days in order to focus on prayer and performing the *da'wa* for other Muslims. As taught by Tablighi Jama'at, every member is required to do the *khuruj* for three days a month, 40 days in a year, and at least one *khuruj* for four months in his life.

⁹⁴ They invite other Muslims without forcing them, so it is common to see a member comes back to the Mosque without bringing anyone with them. The invited people are generally still working, so they cannot join, but will do next time.

⁹⁵ The number of members who attend Tablighi Jama'at during the afternoon routines is less than in the evening because they are working.

⁹⁶ My friends, who routinely joined the *bayan*, usually skipped the overnight stay at the mosque. They made a joke, saying "sleeping at home is much more comfortable than sleeping at the mosque; it is cold and there are many mosquitoes."



Figure 7.3: Bayan (study circle) at Nurul Islam Mosque

The first *ghast* is the next Tablighi Jama'at activity, held on a Friday evening. *Ghast* has the same meaning as *da'wa*, in which some members visit other Muslim's houses and invite them to the mosque to do the Maghrib praying. *Ghast* starts after the *Ashr'* prayer and begins with the *bayan*. Before visiting the houses, the members of the *ghast* first will make a circle in front of the mosque and do the rites together. The first *ghast* ends with the *bayan* after the *Maghrib* prayer. Another Tablighi Jamaat activity in Mae Sot on a Friday evening is a three-day *khuruj* held by the jama'at. Before the *Ashr* prayer, the jama'at usually prepare their activities in the selected mosque. They will stay there and do the *da'wa* to Muslims who live around the mosque for an entire three days (Friday, Saturday and Sunday). The Tablighi Jama'at activities continue on a Tuesday with the second *ghast*. This is scheduled very well, but some members still do not follow it. The committee assumes that its flexibility means some lazy members do not fully engage with the activities, even though they are registered. There are still many passive members in Mae Sot; members who only join-in with some activities if they have the free time.

By its nature, which is framed by the phrase “calling the Muslim”, missionary practices are limited to the Muslim community in Mae Sot. According to Kis⁹⁷ (35 years-old), an active member, Tablighi Jama'at concentrates on the Muslim community,

⁹⁷ Concerning my informants' security, the original names of the informants have been replaced with fake names.

since it is aware that many things need to be fixed within the body of the Muslim community. He quoted a saying: “look at yourself before you change people around you”, ‘yourself’ referring to Muslims and ‘people’ to non-Muslims. In this sense, Tablighi Jama’at sees that there are many Muslims who do not embrace Islam in accordance with their practices, or not in a proper way. Tablighi Jama’at therefore believes that fixing its own community (Muslim) is more important, before inviting other communities to follow them. “When people look at us doing the right and good things, they will naturally follow us, without pressure”. Daud (32 years-old) mentioned this, that Tablighi Jama’at focuses on the Muslim community first, because many Muslims still lack faith. In Mae Sot, every Muslim believes in Allah, but there are many of them who do not devote themselves to Allah. The duty of Tablighi Jama’at is to open the heart of all Muslims; to strengthen their faith, so they will not only work for their worldly life, but also for Allah.

Besides inviting Muslims to improve their faith, Tablighi Jama’at also persuades them to follow the habits of the Prophet and asks them to stop any activities that betray him. Some Muslims in Mae Sot still practice the tradition of *fatayan*, and it is one activity that needs to be clarified by Tablighi Jama’at. They assume that *fatayan*, or sending prayers for the dead on the third, seventh and 40th day after the death, is *bidah* (prohibited) for Muslims, because it is not mentioned on the Holy Koran. They say that giving a prayer for the dead is suggested by Islam, but it is not dependent on particular days, since it can be done anytime, particularly after *shalat*. On the other hand, *fatayan* has become *bidah* because it is at odds with the behavior of the Prophet. When a person dies, the Prophet always comes to visit, brings food and comforts the family of the bereaved, in order to make them feel better. While in *fatayan*, people those grieving have to prepare food for the invited guests, and it is felt this may cause pain to the family, though it is their own will.

In order to avoid conflict, Tablighi Jama’at aims to take a smooth path to resist *fatayan*, which is a tradition inherited over generations among the whole Muslim community in Mae Sot. They do not directly oppose it in public, and so not force Muslims to leave it. They prefer to conduct a personal approach by visiting Muslims’ houses and then slowly explaining to them that *fatayan* is considered to be *bidah*. On

this matter, the role of the members is significant here, because they themselves spread the doctrines through their families or friends. The success of Tablighi Jama'at in Mae Sot cannot be separated from the doctrine it has implanted since its early days. Since arriving in Mae Sot, Tablighi Jama'at has kept expanding Islamic educational institutions aimed at children, like the Hafiz school and Madrasa. With the curriculum developed by Tablighi Jama'at, these institutions help build people who will be loyal to the movement. The presence of these institutions is also believed to help progress Muslims in Mae Sot, where many used not to obey the religion.

As a religious movement based on Islamic fundamentalism, Tablighi Jama'at often receives a negative response from traditionalist Muslims in Mae Sot (who localize Islamic values with local traditions). This response usually comes from the local Thai Muslims, but is still low-key when compared to the strong response in the south of Thailand (see Liow 2011). As mentioned by Aslam (65 years-old), a Thai Muslim from Narathiwat, although it seems religious, Tablighi Jama'at lacks understanding of the core of Islamic teachings, which is basically dynamic. A good Muslim who knows Islam well will definitely balance both the worldly and the next world. As a result, such Muslims see Tablighi Jama'at as too strict in terms of seeking rewards from God, meaning it often forgets worldly necessities. He gave an example; how many members of Tablighi Jama'at, who regularly visit the Mosque and always do the *khuruj*, forgot their main duty of a husband, which is to feed their wife. He said "They leave home for three days - 40 days in four months; they leave their wives and children. Who works and makes money to meet the family's daily needs and school fees? Money does not come suddenly after we pray; we also have to work".

Suan (50 years-old), a Mae Sot Muslim, criticized the domination of Tablighi Jama'at at the Mosque. He said that its activities in Mae Sot last from morning until late at night, and they don't care about the surrounding community. He believes that many Muslims are actually disturbed by this, but prefer to keep quiet. There are some Muslims who go to Tablighi Jama'at and ask them to turn down the volume, as they use a loudspeaker during their activities at the mosque. He added that overall, there has been no serious conflict between Tablighi Jama'at and the Muslims in Mae Sot. Kis (35 years-old) also shared the same views with me, that relations among Muslims in Mae

Sot are good. He said that Tablighi Jama'at dominates various activities at the Mosque indeed, but never forces Muslims to join them; every Muslim can visit the Mosque for his own purpose. If Tablighi Jama'at runs activities after *shalat*, then the Muslim non-members prefer to go back home.

The membership of Tablighi Jama'at not only contains men, but also has some women who are actively involved to the religious movement. The female members, or so called *Jama'at Mastoorat*, appear almost invisible, because many of their activities are limited to the private space⁹⁸. Most members of the *Jama'at Mastoorat* are the wives or daughters of Tablighi Jama'at members. The core of their activity is to strengthen their faith through study groups (*bayan* and *taklim*) conducted alternately at the houses of each member. The selected host has to prepare a room, to run the *mastoorat* activity, which is not open for males. However, this activity mostly depends on the roles of the males. This can be seen from several things. First, each woman who is about to do the *mastoorat* has to be sent and assisted by her male *mahram*. Second, during the study groups (especially *bayan*), women are only allowed to listen, and the speaker is a male⁹⁹ (usually the leader of Tablighi Jama'at). There is a curtain set up to separate the speaker and the female members, since they are not allowed to see each other.

As a consequence, members have to acquiesce to join in with Tablighi Jama'at's busy agenda; and save money to cover their needs while joining in its activities, because the movement is self-funded. For example, a jama'at usually prepares the groups needs in advance (including estimating the budget) before doing the *khuruj*. All the needs and costs are divided equally based on the number of members participating. The money is collected by one of the members, to buy food and pay for other expenses during the *khuruj*. As told by Kismatullah, one of the Mae Sot Muslims who prepared for a four month *khuruj* in southern China, the entire cost of the time in China, including transport

⁹⁸ Tablighi Jama'at believes that it is not good for a woman to leave home by herself. To avoid any sins, a woman has to be accompanied by her *mahram* when going outside. This is why *Jama'at Mastoorat* does not use the Mosque as the center of its movement. The core of *Jama'at Mastoorat* itself is not its missionary practice among the women, but is more a study circle; to strengthen the faith of the members.

⁹⁹ In Tablighi Jama'at, men are required to learn the religion and teach their women. On this matter, Tabligh or *Da'wa* are only conducted by the men, while the women seemed to play a more passive, as they are only receivers of the *da'wa*.

and food, was covered by himself. The board of Tablighi Jama'at only helped get permission and obtain documentation during the *khuruj*. Since he is a teacher, he preferred to conduct the *khuruj* during the school break. Not only did he have to spend his own money he also had to leave his family, but he did not object since it is work on behalf of Allah.

7.4 From Negotiating Identity into Helping on Mobility

Many studies on missionaries' practices argue that the motivation of people to convert others is not merely faith, but also related to their access to development and better financial conditions. Platz (2003) argues that the success of Christian and Buddhist missionaries among the Karen ethnic group in northern Thailand cannot be separated from the image construction behind the two religions. Conversion to Buddhism is used by the Karen ethnic to show their loyalty towards Thai state, whereas conversion to Christianity is more related to access to development, to seek an imagination of modernity. On the other hand, the success of missionaries cannot be denied, as shown by the significant role played by charismatic missionary figures such as Haji Yousuf Khan, who played a significant role at the beginning of Tablighi Jama'at in Thailand, especially in Mae Sot. Yousuf Khan was a successful businessman and had good relations with the government. He was considered by Muslims in Mae Sot, and especially the Burmese Muslims, to be a charismatic figure, since he helped many people around him, whether materially or through the networks he had. As a result, Burmese Muslims see him as an inspiration, joining Tablighi Jama'at to follow in his footsteps.

In the context of Mae Sot, the motivation of Muslims to become members of Tablighi Jama'at is definitely not related to financial access or modernity. The activities of Tablighi Jama'at are self-funded, meaning members must spend their own money. This is one indication that a member who joins the religious movement has no financial orientation or purpose. In addition, being a member of Tablighi Jama'at also requires every Muslim to adopt the Prophet's way of life, which is very far from what might be called modernity. Tablighi Jama'at believes that through performing and acting like the Prophet did, is a part of maintaining the authenticity or purity of Islam. Based on what

is stated by some members, *kurta* has its own ordinary meaning, and this became one of the main characteristics of the Prophet. The members wear these clothes, not because they cannot afford better clothes like jeans or shirts, but because it is their will to be closer to the Prophet. There are also some fanatical members who stay away from modern products, because such products reflect the Western culture, which is at odds with Islamic values.

Everybody in Mae Sot knows that a robe, *kurta* and *turban* are the identity markers of Tablighi Jama'at members. It is true that the members intend to follow the Prophet's way of life by wearing these clothes, and in order to maintain the essence of Islam. However, Ali, a 25 year-old Tabligh Jama'at member, told me that some members from Burma wear them for security reasons. He added that if a man wears those clothes, he will probably not get into trouble with the police; not be stopped and asked for his identity, because there is a good relationship between the board of Tablighi Jama'at and the Thai government. This has become another motivation for members from Burma to wear the robe, *kurta* and *turban* on a daily basis in Mae Sot. On the other hand, many members believe that the good reputation Tablighi Jama'at has gives them a reputation in the eyes of the Thai government. This positive image is based on the good relations that existed between *Haji* Yousuf Khan and His Majesty the King of Thailand. According to one member, Yousuf Khan was a figure in Mae Sot who welcomed the King of Thailand on his visits. The King asked Yousuf Khan to let him know personally anytime the Muslim community got into trouble. As a result of this, the members of Tablighi Jama'at feel they have a special position within the Thai state.

Despite the above, faith is the main reason why Muslims in Mae Sot join Tablighi Jama'at. The intensity of the *da'wa* conducted by the members gradually makes the others become more involved in religious activities (*shalat*) themselves, and means they begin to prioritize the after-life rather than the worldly. There are some other significant factors as to why a Muslim in Mae Sot becomes a member of Tablighi Jama'at. The first factor is the family network, where parents are members, so their children follow. A father will start by sending his children to an Islamic school under the Tablighi Jama'at ideology (the Hafiz school or Madrasa). Growing up with this ideology, the child will be expected to become a member and to have a strong loyalty.

Beginning with this family relationship, recruitment then spreads throughout the ethnic network. This is similar to how Tablighi Jama'at spread from Singapore into southern Thailand, as this was helped by the Indian Muslims settling along the route between the two states (see Noor 2012).



Figure 7.4: Religious books used by Tablighi Jama'at and translated into Burmese

Family and ethnic networks were also significant in the early development of Tablighi Jama'at in Mae Sot, as led by Yousuf Khan. He started to recruit a new member from his family first, then it spread among his relatives and the same ethnic group. Today, the ethnic network can be considered the key to the success of member recruitment in Mae Sot. This is the case with the Burmese Muslims, many of whom become members after being invited by their Burmese Muslim fellows. After joining Tablighi Jama'at, they want to find a comfortable space in which to socialize and interact, since the majority of the members are Burmese Muslims. The Burmese Muslims never have a problem with Tablighi Jama'at's activities, because Burmese is the main language used. In addition, the Burmese versions of the Koran and *Hadith* help with religious matters, and there are other holy books available in Burmese also. This helps reduce the cultural distance between home (Burma) and the host country (Mae Sot), so that the Burmese feel less like a minority. Although they physically live in Thai territory, every time they join the activities at Tablighi Jama'at, they meet fellow Burmese and are able to socialize in the Burmese language.

The domination of Burmese Muslims often results in the perception that Burmese Muslims are superior to members from other ethnic groups. I witnessed this in the case of the *bayan* at the Mosque, where Burmese was used as the intermediate

language during the rites, since the whole room was almost full of Burmese Muslim members. I observed that there were two different circles formed with an unequal number of members. The first study circle formed the core of the rites that took the place, right in the center of the room, with the number of people half filling the room. This circle was made up of Burmese Muslims, so they used the Burmese language. The second study circle was smaller, and most of the people in this circle were Thai Muslims, with the Thai language used by them. I called the second circle a ‘shadow’ of the main study circle, because the sermon was just a translation of the sermon from the first circle. From the above I can conclude that Burmese Muslims feel comfortable at Tablighi Jama’at, because they have space to express their identity and can act like they are in their own home.

Membership flexibility due to the democratic board system, has become another attraction for Burmese Muslims in Mae Sot. Every Muslim has the right to be a member of Tablighi Jama’at, with no limitations placed on age, occupation, ethnicity or nationality. There is no specific requirement to become a member, except being able to say the *Kalimah Shahadat* and believe in it. Following the *bayan*, and doing *khuruj* and *da’wa* are absolute requirements for a member. Tablighi Jama’at is now a decentralized movement, and this has created more chances for members to become regional leaders. Zubaidi (45 years-old), one of the *Shura* members in Mae Sot, mentioned to me that the local leadership system of Tablighi Jama’at is open to all members, because there is always a rotation system used over particular periods of time. He added:

The election of the *Shura* council in Mae Sot is conducted through a forum of discussion during substantial *Ijtima* (major gatherings), which are held every 40 days at Nurul Islam Mosque. The former *Shura* council has to choose the candidates to be selected by the forum. Each member has the same right to be selected, whatever their occupation, ethnicity or nationality. Tablighi Jama’at selects the leader based on his experience and background, loyalty, and knowledge of Islam or Tablighi Jama’at. As a result, new members are usually not selected to become leaders.

He added that the use of democracy for the leadership selection begins at the lowest level of Tablighi Jama’at, which is the jama’at *khuruj*. One jama’at, which usually contains ten people, rotates its leader. At the wider level, the selection of the *emir mahala* (the regional center of Tablighi Jama’at) is conducted by a forum of

members in that region every 40 days. The democracy principle is also reflected through the main activities of the Tablighi Jama'at; for the *taklim* or study circles. The *taklim* are held every day after prayers, so not so many people join - normally about four to ten. I observed in Nurul Islam and Bengala Mosque that there are usually two or three study circles held at the same time, and each circle uses a different language (Thai, Burmese or Urdu). Study circles start with only two or three people, and one of them plays the part of a leader, and he reads the holy book. This activity is basically a space for each member to act as a leader, by reading the holy book.

Through such activities, Burmese Muslims have the same opportunity as Thai Muslims to act as leaders, whereas on a daily basis, Burmese Muslims tend to be excluded from Muslim Mae Sot, as they are not involved in the Nurul Islam committee election. This is due to their migrant status, meaning they do not have Thai citizenship or a Thai ID card. Although they are part of the Muslim majority, and are always actively involved in mosque activities, this does not grant them special powers or treatment to take part in formulating those regulations that affect the broader Muslim community. During Tablighi Jama'at activities; however, Burmese Muslims feel the same and have equal rights as other members (including Thai Muslims). A migrant who does not have with a full set of documents can gain the same right to share his opinions, as well as the same chance to become a leader of Tablighi Jama'at. Identity and social status is not the priority though, since knowledge and loyalty towards Tablighi Jama'at are the key to a member's credibility.

With respect to social interactions, Tablighi Jama'at indirectly helps Burmese Muslims maintain relationships with other Muslim communities in Mae Sot. Ethnic barrier among the members seem to disappear, because of the principal of *ummah* (a Muslim nation). During the Tablighi Jama'at daily routines, I often saw a jama'at containing Muslims from various ethnicities. Though language is sometimes a barrier, members still gather together in this way. For some Burmese Muslims, their meetings with other ethnic groups at Tablighi Jama'at are a way to accumulate various forms of capital. Besides exchanging knowledge on Islam, socializing with other members has a positive impact on their level of knowledge regarding jobs, places to live and languages. Ibrahim (19 years-old), a member of Tablighi Jama'at from Rangoon, admitted that his

fluency in Thai was not based on a formal education, but due to his friends at Tablighi Jama'at. He said:

I never learned Thai formally, because I did not go to a Thai school. I learned Thai directly from my Thai friends at Tablighi Jama'at. I always join the study circle (*taklim*) on Thai. I was also lent some books by a Thai Muslim; to learn Thai, and since then I have got used to Thai and have even led the study circle in Thai writing. The members who listen always correct me if I make any mistakes.

During my research, I also met some other Burmese Muslims who have learned a language like Ibrahim. One of them is Ahmad (35 years-old), a Burmese Muslim from Mawlamyine who had been living in Mae Sot for just six months when I met him. Though he can only speak basic Thai, he attends the *taklim* that uses Thai as its language. He admitted to me that he tries to remember every single Thai word he hears at the study circle. Once he comes across new vocabulary, he memorizes it and then asks for a translation from other members, after the study circle has finished. He added that as well as Thai Muslims, he also asks Burmese Muslims who are fluent in Thai. Ali; meanwhile, has his own way of using the study circles to improve his Urdu skills. I saw several times that he led the Urdu study circle, and other members would correct him if he mispronounced words when reading. Based on this, I argue that the activities of Tablighi Jama'at are not merely focused on religion; for through the study circles we can see how Tablighi Jama'at has also become a space to accumulate cultural capital and circulate it among other members.

Da'wa, which helps with the socialization and mobility of member communities, is at the core of Tablighi Jama'at spreading its ideology. For some members, their meetings with other Muslims during the *da'wa* and *khuruj* are also used to build their economic networks. As mentioned by Yuk (37 years-old), the wife of a member Tablighi Jama'at, her husband's decision to run a "money transfer" business was inspired by the complaints of Muslims he met during the *da'wa*. Many Muslims, especially those living in the refugee camps, told him that they did not receive remittances from their relatives in Bangkok or third countries, because they did not have bank accounts. In order to help those Muslims, he decided to start a money transfer business using his wife's bank account. He had a business card made in Burmese which

gave his phone number and his wife's bank account number. Then, while doing his *da'wa* at the refugee camp, he gave his business card to other Muslims and said he would be glad to help them in terms of sending their remittances.

Yuk believes that the business run by her husband is a part of doing what it is expected by Islam, since it helps others. On running this business, she confessed that they did not charge too much, because they do it mostly to help other Muslims. She does not charge a very high fee for the service; they make their money from the currency rate differences. Her and her husband's *da'wa* activities at the refugee camp have had a positive impact on their business, and a good reputation has developed due to their membership of Tablighi Jama'at, increasing the level of trust shown by the refugees who use the service. She said that the number of customers is increasing by the day, and not only Muslims, but also some Christians and Buddhists. According to some of her non-Muslim customers, they prefer to use the Muslim service and are happy to work with the Muslims, because they can be trusted. Her husband's attempt to promote their business has also helped her to get more customers for her grocery shop. Many families of the refugees who live in other countries place orders with her by phone; to get hold of products they cannot source, such as underwear and *thanaka*. After receiving the money via the ATM, she sends the products by post.

On its movement, the members of Tablighi Jama'at connect with other members through the *mahala* network. According to one of the board members I spoke to, there are approximately fourteen *mahalas* (either big or small mosques) that accommodate the activities of Tablighi Jama'at in Mae Sot. Each jama'at who intends to join the *khuruj* has to choose one *mahala* as his base; from where to run the *khuruj*. By following the *hijra*¹⁰⁰ concept, one jama'at will usually conduct the *khuruj* temporarily, moving from one *mahala* to another. For example, one month jama'at A will do the *khuruj* for three days at Nurul Islam mosque, so the following month they will do the next *khuruj* at another mosque. This mobility, moving from one *mahala* to another, certainly helps gather together members of the Tablighi Jama'at among Muslims living around the visited *mahala*. For some Burmese Muslims, the *khuruj* activity and the

¹⁰⁰ Indicates the migration towards Medina that Mohammad performed to save the new religion and its followers from persecution. Tablighi Jama'at takes the nature of *hijra* on doing migration (mobile) to save the religion.

presence of *mahala* (in refugee camps) has contributed towards their mobility, as they find it easier to reach the outskirts of Mae Sot while joining the jama'at *khuruj*, rather than traveling alone. Traveling alone is also considered insecure, since there are many police stops they need to pass.

The activities of Tablighi Jama'at and the *mahala* network are also utilized by some Burmese Muslims as stepping stones to further migration. For refugees, they can get out from their camp and into town by following the big *ijtima* held in Nurul Islam Mosque every 40 days. The board of Tablighi Jama'at Mae Sot usually prepares accommodation, as well as travel documents, for members from the camps. When doing this *ijtima*, the members of Tablighi Jama'at stay at the mosque for a night. After that, every member will go back home, including the refugees who will return to their camp. Even so, there are some cases in which refugees prefer to stay without returning back to their camp; they basically continue to stay in Mae Sot and live in a relatives' or member's house. Many of them get a job and continue their life in town, though some of them do return to the camp.

For some members, the activities of Tablighi Jama'at are not only used as a “way” to travel around Mae Sot, but also to reach other provinces or across the nation. *Mahala*'s networks from the north to the south of Thailand facilitate members in Mae Sot doing the *da'wa* and *khuruj* in other cities, and vice versa. During my fieldwork, I often met jama'at from southern Thailand, Burma and even Sri Lanka, who were doing the *khuruj* at some *mahalas* in Mae Sot. The enthusiasm among members from Mae Sot is proven through their involvement in activities held by those jama'at. I also found the same thing while visiting Chang Klan Mosque, one of the *mahala* as well as the *markaz* of Tablighi Jama'at in Chiang Mai. There I met one jama'at *khuruj* from Lampang. After the *dzuhur* prayer, they left the Mosque and went to the houses of local members. Then, together with local members, they did the *da'wa* for other Muslims who live around the Mosque.

Some members shared to me their interesting stories and experiences of their travels with Tablighi Jama'at. One of them was the experienced Mustafa (30 years-old), a Thai Muslim and an alumnae of Hafiz Nurul Islam, who comes from Phuket. He shared his experience of doing the *da'wa* with a jama'at from the south of Thailand in

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. As the regular *khuruj*, they had planned to stay at a mosque during the *da'wa*. They could not work the plan, because the mosque committee would not allow them to stay there, since there was a local government regulation that forbade it. They could only use the mosque during the operational times, from dawn until evening. Later on, they decided to stay at a hotel, but they still came to the mosque every morning and stayed until it closed. When I spoke to him he said he was planning to do the *khuruj* to Bandung, Indonesia. The reason he wants to do the *khuruj* there is a meeting he had with one jama'at from Bandung, when he joined *ijtima* in *markaz* Yala, southern Thailand. Since then, he has maintained a good relationship with that person, expecting to help if someday he conducts the *khuruj* in Bandung.

From the above explanation, we can see that every member builds their own social network through meetings with other members at Tablighi Jama'at. Such social networks not only help their religious life. I met two members of Tablighi Jama'at from southern Thailand at Abdullah's house, my adopted family. Sultan (32 years-old) is from Narathiwat, and had come with his wife to Mae Sot for a few days' vacation. Abdullah invited them to stay at his house during their stay in Mae Sot, and even took them sightseeing. According to him, he had known Sultan for quite a long time, as Sultan used to be one of the teachers at the Hafiz school in Mae Sot, and they were both involved in the same activities at Tablighi Jama'at. Sultan then left Mae Sot to continue his studies in Pakistan, before he finally returned to Thailand and married. Sultan is known as a religious teacher in his hometown and often goes fishing. He returned to Mae Sot just for a short vacation with his wife, who he had just married, and to visit his old friends there.

Mustafa, on the other hand, came to Mae Sot, not just for a vacation but also for business. During his three day stay in Mae Sot, he stayed at Abdullah's house, and they spent time together at the mosque or going sightseeing. Besides being a religious teacher in Phuket, he also sells secondhand commodities. He came to Mae Sot to buy secondhand padlocks from Japan, sold at the shops in pier no.9. The information related to those places came from Abdullah, whom also took there. From this pier he was able to buy some high quality products at affordable prices. After arriving back in Phuket, he sold them at two-times the price or even more. Mustafa mentioned that he was invited to stay at Abdullah's house, because he knows him well. He used to live in Mae Sot as a

Hafiz student at Nurul Islam, and was very active in Tablighi Jama'at; therefore, he knows many local members, including Abdullah. Though he is now back in Phuket, Mustafa keeps in touch with his friends in Mae Sot by mobile phone, or when they visit each other.

In the case of Ibrahim, he also used the Tablighi Jama'at network to migrate to another country. I met him for the first time when I was conducting fieldwork (December 2012 to May 2013). He had just graduated from grade 12 at a migrant school in Mae Sot. Apart from the Tablighi Jama'at activities, around April 2013 he was busy preparing documents at the local municipality; he had been selected by his school to continue his studies in Chiang Mai for a year, before going to university. When I returned to Chiang Mai in early May, he was still busy with his preparations for Chiang Mai, including completing the required documents and permits.

A week after I reached Chiang Mai, Ibrahim gave me a call and said that he was already in town. He was living with his friends from Mae Sot at a boarding house provided by the school. At this time I often picked him up at his place and took him to the mosque in Chang Klan road. Once he took me to a relative's house, not too far from the Chang Klan Mosque. As we talked, he seemed to have adapted quite easily to the new environment at Chang Klan Mosque. Around Chang Klan Mosque, he said he could meet Burmese Muslims and also buy Burmese products, such as food and tobacco, at stalls run by Burmese Muslims. He felt that he could do the same activities as when he had been in Mae Sot. This kind of atmosphere would not have been found if he had stayed at a boarding house. He told me that he actually left Mae Sot together with his classmates – they are also Burmese, but they are not Muslim. Therefore, he said he felt lonely every time he stayed at the boarding house, so he preferred to spend his time at Chang Klan Mosque.

While living in Chiang Mai, he got back into his routine with Tablighi Jama'at in Chang Klan. Every Thursday evening, he always visited the mosque to join in with *markaz* day, and to socialize with the local members. He eventually seemed to enjoy it, and started to put off his school work. In the end he left his class to join Tablighi Jama'at, then I did not hear from him for almost three months, while I was on a fellowship program in Singapore. In early August, I returned to Chiang Mai and several days later I got a call from Ibrahim. He told me that he was in Yala, in the south region

of Thailand. He was there with a jama'at *khuruj* from Mae Sot who stayed for a while at Chang Klan Mosque. Eventually they continued their trip to the south of Thailand. He explained to me that he would finish the *khuruj* in Yala and then cross the border to Malaysia to visit his relatives there. Several days later, after I had had no further contact with him, he called me with a new phone number and informed me that he was in Kelantan, Malaysia. He explained that he was there because when he met up with the Tablighi Jama'at from Yala, they had been on their way to Kelantan. From *markaz* Yala, they moved to the south, into the *markaz* at Sungai Golok, then they crossed the border to Kelantan¹⁰¹.

After completing the *khuruj* in Kelantan, he decided not to return back to Thailand, because he wanted to find his aunt in Malaysia. He finally found his aunt living in Johor Baru, so stayed there and worked as a waiter in a Malay restaurant. The last time I spoke to him, he still had no intension of returning to Mae Sot. Even so, he said he still keeps in touch with his family in Mae Sot by phone, and added that one day, if he gets enough money and if he can cook Malay food, he would like to return to Mae Sot and open a Malay restaurant.

7.4 Summary

Founded in India, Tablighi Jama'at is an Islamic fundamentalist movement which at its core is on a missionary journey within the Muslim community. To support its claim of bringing authentic Islam, Tablighi Jama'at not only carries the six points adopted from the holy Koran, but also reinvites the habits and behaviors of the Prophet Mohammad, as mentioned in the Hadiths. In Mae Sot, Tablighi Jama'at is very visible and its members can easily be seen through the clothes they wear, such as robes, *kurtas* and *turbans*. In addition to being centralized in Nurul Islam Moque (the *markaz*), the activities of Tablighi Jama'at today are also decentralized into thirteen different *mahalas* all over Mae Sot. The concept of *hijra*, as the core of Tablighi Jama'at, causes each member to be mobile (*da'wa* or *khuruj*) and to meet Muslims from other communities (*mahala*). To do so, each member invites others to come to the Mosque, to

¹⁰¹ According to Liow (2011), Tablighi Jama'at network from Sungai Golok to Kelantan has been maintained very well, so that it facilitates each member to do the *Da'wa*, either heading to or leaving Thailand.

join the Tablighi Jama'at activities, such as the *bayan* and *taklim*. Through the concept of *hijra* and *da'wa* to other Muslims, the Tablighi Jama'at keeps being upgraded.

The large-scale migration of Burmese Muslims in the late 1980s is considered the turning point for Tablighi Jama'at in Mae Sot. Under the *emir* of Haji Yousuf Khan, Tablighi Jama'at was reincarnated into a space to accommodate the various needs of Burmese migrants, who are generally marginalized socially¹⁰². The decision of Haji Yousuf Khan to use Islam Suksa School as a temporary shelter for refugee, resulted in a positive image for Tablighi Jama'at in the eyes of the Burmese Muslims. With its principal of 'Muslim as nation', Burmese Muslims felt that Tablighi Jama'at treated its members equally, without differentiating along ethnic, nationality or economic lines. The democratic system which is applied, from the lowest level (local *emir* election) also gives a chance for every member to become a leader in Tablighi Jama'at. On its future, Burmese Muslims have begun to feel proud to their identity through the group's internal socialization processes. This pride to be a Burmese Muslim has appeared since the only *emir* in Thailand so far, Haji Yousuf Khan, was born and grew up in Burma. Burmese Muslims now make up 80% of the total number of members in Mae Sot, making Burmese an intermediate language among the activities organized.

For Burmese Muslims, joining Tablighi Jama'at has not only improved their faith, but has also helped their survival in Thailand. Through the activities organized by Tablighi Jama'at, Burmese Muslims can make friends with Muslims from other communities in Mae Sot. Besides making friends, various opportunities to socialize with members from other parts of Thailand also exist, plus they can learn Thai. Having Thai language skills helps the Burmese Muslims in their daily lives in Mae Sot. *Da'wa* (missionaries) for other Muslims are often manipulated by the businessmen and traders to build their economic networks. They routinely visit Muslims from other communities, and invite them to join Tablighi Jama'at. At the same time, they implicitly target those Muslims as potential new customers. Another important thing is the *khuruj* activity and the installation of the *mahala* network, which have indirectly helped the mobility of Burmese Muslims, whether on the local, national or international scale.

¹⁰² Most Burmese Muslims move to Mae Sot as refugees with incomplete documents (illegal) and under unstable economic conditions.