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## **THE ADMINISTRATION OF ISLAMIC INSTITUTIONS IN NON-MUSLIM STATES The Case of Singapore and Thailand**

**W. K. Che Man**

**Teaching and Research Exchange Fellowships  
Report No. 10**

# **Southeast Asian Studies Program**

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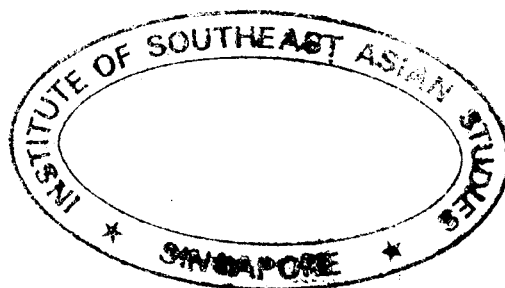
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PUSTAKA PERDANA



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# THE ADMINISTRATION OF ISLAMIC INSTITUTIONS IN NON-MUSLIM STATES:

## THE CASE OF SINGAPORE AND THAILAND

*W.K. Che Man*

Singapore and Thailand are non-Muslim states that provide legislation on Muslim religious and legal matters to accommodate different Islamic institutions required to serve the Muslims who constitute about 17 and 5 per cent of the total population of the two countries, respectively. This paper is a review of the nature and role of Muslim religious council (*majlis ugama Islam*), Islamic court (*mahkamah syariah*), mosque (*masjid*), and Islamic religious school (*madrasah*) which are regarded as essential to the existence of Muslim community.

### **Muslim Religious Council (Majlis Ugama Islam)**

Muslim religious council or *majlis ugama Islam* is regarded as an important religious body for Muslims living in a non-Muslim society. It symbolizes Muslim identity, apart from serving Muslim religious interests and aspirations.

### **Muslim Religious Council Singapore or Majlis Ugama Islam Singapore (MUIS)**

The history of Majlis Ugama Islam Singapore (MUIS) has its roots from the establishment of a Muslim and Hindu Endowments Board in 1906 to administer Muslim and Hindu religious endowments. The actual formation of MUIS as a statutory body, however, did not occur until 1968, after the Administration of Muslim Law Act of 1966 was introduced by the government of the Republic of Singapore. The Singapore government gave high priority to the institutionalization of Islam because the Malay minority was still viewed as politically significant community after the country's withdrawal from Malaysia in 1965. MUIS was declared the successor to the powers and duties vested in the Muslim and Hindu Endowments Board in respect to the Muslim part of the endowments (Hooker 1984, p.110). As a corporate body, MUIS is able to sue and be sued, enter into contracts, and act as the administrator of a Muslim estate in its corporate name.

As described by the Act, MUIS, which is administered within the Ministry of Community Development, consists of (1) a President, (2) the Mufti, (3) not more than five members appointed on the recommendation of the Minister, and (4) not less than seven members appointed from the list of nominees submitted by MUIS present. They are appointed by the President of Singapore on a three-year term and are eligible for reappointment. Only the Mufti serves on contract basis. To be eligible for the appointments, one must be a Muslim above the age of twenty-five and a citizen of Singapore. The membership of MUIS terminates by resignation, cancellation of the appointment by the President of Singapore, absence from the Republic for three months without proper permission, and upon death.

Structurally, MUIS forms different devices to carry out its duties and responsibilities, they include MUIS council, Secretariat, and permanent committees. MUIS Council is a

policy-making body consisting of all members of MUIS who are appointed by the President of Singapore. Secretariat, on the other hand, serves as administrative organ which implements policies and programmes formulated by MUIS Council. The Secretariat comprises at least nine permanent committees of various functions.

There are three main responsibilities of MUIS: to advise the Singapore government in matters relating to Muslim affairs; to issue *fatwa* (religious ruling) on any point of Islamic law; and to promote Islam and look after the interests of Muslim community. MUIS has been active in carrying out its responsibilities mentioned. It has been providing valuable advice to the government in matters concerning Islam and aspirations of Singaporean Muslims. Such advice has enabled the government to pursue more realistic policies and programmes on minority issues which in part have contributed to the continued harmonious co-existence among the Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Singapore.

Issuing *fatwa* has been one of the major tasks of MUIS. Though issuing *fatwas* deal largely with Muslims in the community, improper or controversial *fatwas* could easily trigger disunity among the Muslims. The Fatwa Committee headed by the Mufti meets regularly on a monthly basis. The *fatwas* are issued on a unanimous decision of the Fatwa Committee. From October 1986 to December 1989, it has issued 57 *fatwas*. MUIS is also responsible for hearing and delivering judgments on appeal cases received from the Shariah Court and the Registry of Muslim Marriages. An Appeal Board was formed to serve the purpose. During 1989, for instance, the Appeal Board delivered ten judgments of fourteen cases received (MUIS 1989, p.18).

The third main task of MUIS - to promote Islam and look after the interests of Muslim community—has been the role of the permanent committees. The Administration and Finance Committee, for example, has been involved in the construction of mosques since the launching of the Mosque Building Fund (MBF) in 1975.

A campaign was launched by the committee at the end of 1989 to appeal to Singaporean Muslims to increase their contributions to the MBF in order to cover the cost of construction of the remaining and new mosques under the mosque building programme.

The Zakat and Fitrah (Alms) Committee has appointed more than 200 *amil*s (representatives) to manage more than 90 *fitrah* collection centres during the month of Ramadan (Muslim fasting month). In the case of *zakat harta* (alm of property), there have been at least 14 centres throughout Singapore where Muslims can go to remit their alms. During 1985-89, *fitrah* (alm of individual required during the fasting month) and *zakat harta* collections totalled S\$2.4 and 4.2 millions, respectively. MUIS distributes alms collected yearly to the eight categories of qualified recipients specified by the Islamic law.

Preaching is another major activity of MUIS. The Dakwah Committee carries out religious lectures and co-ordinates religious activities organized by other Muslim organizations. In 1989, for example, more than 200 applications were submitted by different groups to MUIS to obtain its support to conduct religious activities. There were at least forty foreign speakers invited to give religious lectures in Singapore. MUIS also keeps a register of persons converted to Islam and conducts a course on the fundamentals of Islam for new converts.

With respect to education, the Education Committee of MUIS has been active in promoting and implementing programmes of Islamic education. For instance, several training courses are given to religious teachers from time to time. A common curriculum for part-time religious schools was introduced in 1989. Various categories of scholarships are awarded yearly to Muslim students. In 1988 and 1989, the awards totalled to S\$307,333 (MUIS 1988 and 1989).

In welfare area, the Welfare Committee has been working diligently to help the less privileged Muslims. In 1989, for instance, it provided a total of S\$270,313 financial assistance to 586 needy Muslim families; it distributed a total of S\$ 153,195 to 4,915 poor Muslims during the Ramadan; and it granted a total of S\$ 68,900 to religious teachers and mosque functionaries. In addition, S\$ 250 were given to each mosque which provided free breakfast during the fasting month. Closely related to the Welfare Committee, the Pilgrim Committee involves in pilgrimage (*haj*) welfare. It offers courses on pilgrimage to potential pilgrims before they depart to Makkah. In Makkah, it provides Singaporean pilgrims with a medical team, an ambulance, and a group of welfare officers. There were 2,953 Singaporeans performed *haj* in 1989; it cost MUIS about S\$ 277,582 for its services to the pilgrims (MUIS 1989).

In public relations, the Community Relations and Information Committee produces a monthly newsletter, WARTA, to inform the Muslims about the activities of MUIS, mosques, and other Muslim organizations. Other publications are mainly in the form of booklets of different topics such as *Hari Raya Sermons*, *Deviant Teaching*, *Haj Medical Guide*, etc. Another permanent committee of MUIS is the Wakaf (Endowment) Committee. The committee is responsible for keeping and developing endowment properties. It also gives advice to other Muslim organizations regarding endowment property matters.

To obtain a better picture about MUIS activities, Table 1 shows income and expenditure of general endowment fund (*bait-ul-mal*) for the year 1989.

**Table 1**  
**Income and Expenditure of General Endowment Fund, 1989**

Income	S\$	Expenditure	S\$
Pilgrimage affairs	3,324,567	Pilgrimage affairs	2,747,787
Interest from bank	538,926	Salaries and staff benefits	275,064
Contributions from <i>fitriah</i>	276,422	Depreciation	257,222
Inheritance from Muslim estates	181,869	General and administrative expenses	117,689
Donations	57,297	Public utilities	56,109
Establishment charges	28,969	Contribution for breakfast	17,750
Rental of premises	28,983	Quran reading competition	15,227
Profit on Sale of fixed assets	12,426	Grant to Muslim Trust Fund Association	11,400
Miscellaneous income	10,750	Service charges	14,476
Government operating grant	492,325	Assets written-off on purchase	7,963
Deferred capital grant amortised	19,781	Disposal of fixed assets	3,285
		Secretariat expenditure	653,091
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,972,315</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>4,177,063</b>

Source: (MUIS 1989, p.32)

From the activities described above, it is clear that MUIS has played a major role in the affairs of Muslim community in Singapore. It has brought many of Muslim organizations and groups under its purview. MUIS is also viewed by many Singaporean Muslims as governmental Islamic institution that they have to rely upon for certain issues in Islamic matters. Criticisms of MUIS policies or programmes are usually not expressed openly. Some influential Muslim organizations such as JAMIYAH ( Muslim Missionary Society) have chosen their own different approaches to express their opinions on specific MUIS policies. Though MUIS can be considered as the heart of Islamic institutions, the allegiance of Singaporean Muslims seems to be with non-governmental Islamic institutions like JAMIYAH (see Siddique and Kassim 1987; Weyland 1990, p.244). This holds true with many governmental Islamic institutions in other non-Muslim states.

### **Muslim Religious Council (Majlis Ugama Islam) in Thailand**

In Thailand, unlike in Singapore, there are different levels of Muslim religious councils. Figure 1 shows the hierarchical structure of the existing Muslim religious councils. The administration of Islamic affairs as shown in figure 1 is sanctioned by the Royal Decrees of 1945 and 1948 and the Royal Act of 1947. A Chularajmontri or Sheikhu Islam is appointed by the king as the highest Muslim authority to advise the Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education and the Local Administration Department, Ministry of Interior in matters relating to Islam.

Historically, Chularajmontri was first appointed in the reign of Phrachao Songtham (1620-1628). Since then fourteen persons had been appointed to the position of Chularajmontri. Table 2 gives the names of Chularajmontri in order of succession and the highest title acquired by each person. It should be noted that after Thailand became constitutional monarchy in 1932, Chularajmontri was no longer bestowed a traditional title of Phraya or Chaophraya. The direct appointment of Chularajmontri by the king was also changed. Beginning in 1947, a candidate for the position was elected first by members of the National Council for Islamic Affairs (NCIA) and by presidents of the existing Provincial Council for Islamic Affairs (PCIA). His name was then submitted to the king for final approval to the office for life. Perhaps, the indirect appointment was due to the fact that Chularajmontri was since then recruited from the general public rather than from senior civil servants as had been practiced in the past. Every Chularajmontri had served for life except Nai Chem Promyong who resigned for political reason after two years in the office.

The contemporary Chularajmontri has dual functions, as head of Muslim religious authority in the nation and as president of the National Council for Islamic Affairs. These functions include to give advice to the Thai government in the affairs of Islam, to issue *fatwa* to Muslims, and to co-ordinate and assist various governmental and non-governmental agencies with regard to Islam. The Office of Chularajmontri in Bangkok is equipped with permanent staffs to carry out daily administrative activities, including arranging meetings of the National Council for Islamic Affairs, receiving local and foreign visitors, and handling translation tasks. In addition to its daily duties, the Office of Chularajmontri sends a delegation to Makkah, Saudi Arabia each year to assist the Muslims from Thailand who perform *hajj*. It also publishes handbooks of different issues to inform the Muslims about the activities of the institution.

Figure 1

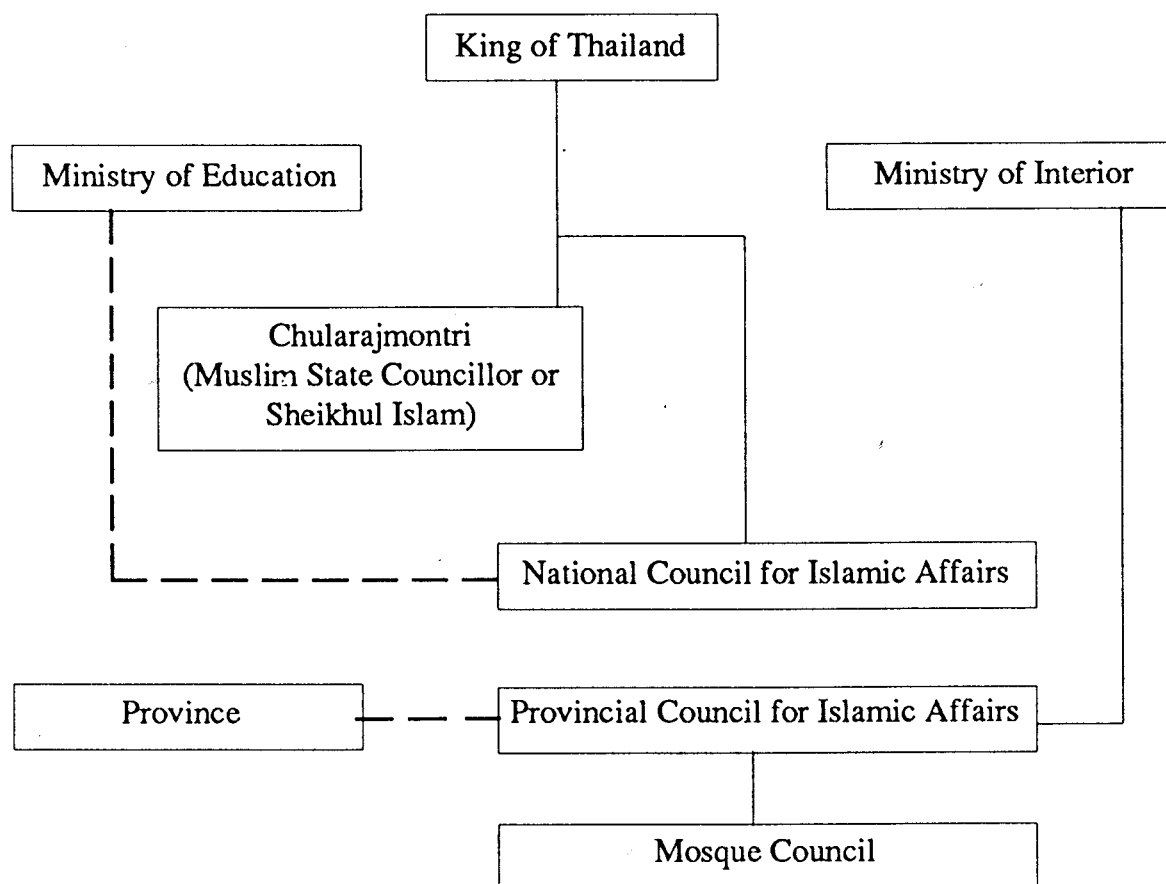


Table 2

## Name and Title of Chularajmontri

Name	Title
Sheikh Ahmad Kaew	Chaophraya Bowonrajnayok
Sun Chen	Phraya
Konaew (Muhammad Matsum)	Phraya
Thuen	Phraya
Nam(Mirsa Muhammad Taki)	Phraya
Sin (Mirsa Ghulam Hussien)	Phraya
San Ahmadchula	Phraya
Kasem Ahmadchula (Muhammad Raja)	Phraya
Son Ahmadchula	Phraya
Chem Promyong (Shamsuddin Mustafa)	—
Tuan Suwannasat (Ismail Yahyawi)	—
Prasert Mahamad	—

Source: (Office of Chularajmontri 1987, pp.39-55)

For the Thai government and Muslims in Bangkok, Chularajmontri is considered as the highest Muslim religious authority comparable to that of Somdej Prasangkarat, the Buddhist patriarch of Thailand. But for many Malay-Muslims in the four southern provinces, the institution of Chularajmontri is a creation of the Thai government; it is not a provision of Islamic traditions. This view is often expressed in different ways. For example, the Muslim leaders of the four provinces refused to receive and welcome Chularajmontri who paid an official visit to the area during the 1976 Muslim protest against the Bangkok government. In 1991, the Malay-Muslims in the provinces of Patani, Narathiwat and Yala failed to comply with the authority of Chularajmontri when they celebrated Hari Raya Aidil Adha a day earlier than the day officially set by the Office of Chularajmontri.

Be that as it may, the question to be asked is that why such defiance to the authority is permissible. The answer is that religious activities such as Hari Raya celebration are dictated by the *shariah* (Islamic laws), and in certain areas the laws are flexible and can be interpreted different ways. In non-Islamic states, the authority to interpret the *shariah* laws rests upon *ulama* (religious scholars) in the community. Thus, when the Muslims in Bangkok and in the south decided to celebrate their Hari Raya Aidil Adha of 1991 in separate days, the decisions were permissible because they were made by qualified *ulama* of the respective communities.

Together with the appointment of Chularajmontri, the National Council for Islamic Affairs (NCIA) has been formed to serve as an advisory council to the Thai government in matters relating to Muslim affairs. Presently, there are 36 members of the NCIA. They were appointed for life by the king from among Muslim leaders in Bangkok and other provinces whose names were nominated by the Interior Ministry. However, Chularajmontri, an ex-officio president, dominated the activities of the NCIA. Most *fatwas*, for instance, were issued in the capacity of Chularajmontri rather than of the NCIA. The domination of Chularajmontri over the NCIA is not only because he is the head of the organization but also because many of its members have no religious background. In my interview with Chularajmontri in August 1991, he at one point mentioned that he would usually respond to the concerned parties in his capacity as Chularajmontri, unless they specifically address their enquiries to the NCIA. Advice given by Chularajmontri were concerned mainly with religious activities of the Muslims. For example, Chularajmontri was recently asked by the government authority to give his opinion on whether or not Muslim preachers (*duah*) should obtain permission from the local authorities concerned before they conduct their preaching activities. He reflected that in Islam preaching activities are viewed as religious duties commanded by God. It is not "proper" if a permission must sought to perform God's duties. Instead, Chularajmontri suggested that Muslim preachers should inform the authorities before conducting their preaching activities.

Another level of Muslim religious council is the Provincial Council for Islamic Affairs (PCIA) or Kanakammakarn Islam Pracham Changwat. Presently, the PCIA exists in 28 of the total 73 Thai provinces. The formation of the PCIA is based on the number of Muslim population in the province concerned. The provincial governor is given the authority by the Interior Ministry to appoint and remove members of the PCIA. There are fifteen members of the PCIA in each province; they must be elected by the *imam* (head of Mosque Council) in their respective districts before they can be appointed as members of the council for life. There are about 420 members of the PCIA altogether, some of whom are also members of the NCIA.

The PCIA functions as an advisory committee to the provincial authorities in matters concerning Islam and Muslim affairs. It also serves as co-ordinator and supervisor of Mosque Council. Other main duties of the PCIA are those that relate to the activities of Muslim affairs such as collecting alms, issuing marriage certificate, and giving *fatwa*.

The members of the PCIA are recruited from local Muslim leaders of different backgrounds; many of them have little formal education and knowledge of Islam. The lack of qualified and educated members has crippled the PCIA. It has been unable to provide effective advice to Thai authorities and to issue proper *fatwa* to the members of the community. In the early 1980s, a twelve-member Committee of Religious Scholars, consisting of experts in various religious fields, was formed by each of the PCIA in the four Muslim provinces. The role of the committee has been to assist the PCIA in its formulation of *fatwas* and giving advice to provincial authorities on Muslim affairs.

Various reasons have been given to explain the lack of qualified religious men in the PCIA in the four Muslim provinces, despite the fact that the area is dominated by religious scholars. Among these reasons are that many Muslim religious leaders are politically suspicious of Thai authorities and view the PCIA as an institution created to bring about integration and control. Some perceive it as not having true discretionary powers. Moreover, the PCIA has no regular budget; it operates on financial contributions from different government agencies and on other sources of income collected from members of the community. The PCIA provides no salary but small allowances to its members. With little powers and financial incentives, the PCIA has naturally been unable to attract highly qualified religious scholars to involve in the organization.

In the provinces outside the Muslim region where religious learned men are scarce, the PCIA is the only authoritative source of *fatwa* and religious information. On the other hand, the Malays of the four provinces seldom seek advice and *fatwa* from the PCIA. This is because there are better qualified religious scholars in the community, and they are less vulnerable to the influence of Thai authorities. The advisory role of the Committee of Religious Scholars mentioned earlier has, however, enhanced confidence among the local Muslims in the PCIA.

In brief, the PCIA is a religious body created to serve the government authorities at provincial level. Its main duties include to give advice to the provincial officials in subjects concerning Islam, to disseminate government policies in the community, and to administer certain affairs of Islam. However, the general impression of the Muslims, particularly those living in the four southern provinces, about the performance of the PCIA has been less than favourable. Nevertheless, most Muslims see it as an important symbol of Muslim identity.

### **Muslim Religious Councils Compared.**

Muslim religious councils in Singapore, MUIS, and in Thailand, NCIA and PCIA, are functionally similar. MUIS, however, seems to play more active and comprehensive role than its counterparts and thus is able to yield greater impact on the Muslim community. MUIS faces less restricted religious control in a country with no stated official religion such as Singapore as compared to NCIA and PCIA in Thailand which is considered as a

strong Buddhist dominated nation. The religious councils in Thailand are structurally divided into national and provincial levels. Their structural division weakens them. MUIS, on the other hand, enjoys the status as a single institution sanctioned by the law to deal with Muslim religious affairs. As governmental Islamic institutions, MUIS as well as NCIA and PCIA experience more difficulty in securing Muslim allegiance than other non-governmental Islamic institutions in the two countries.

### **Shariah Court (Islamic Court)**

In non-Muslim states where there are significant numbers of Muslim population, *Shariah* court plays important role as an instrument of justice in protecting the legal rights of Muslims pertaining to family.

### **Shariah Court and Registry of Muslim Marriages in Singapore**

In Singapore, the administration of Islamic law on family matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance involves the following parties: Shariah Court, Hakam (Divorce Arbitrator), Registry of Muslim Marriages, Legal Representation, and Appeal Board. Figure 2 illustrates the structural relationship of different parties.

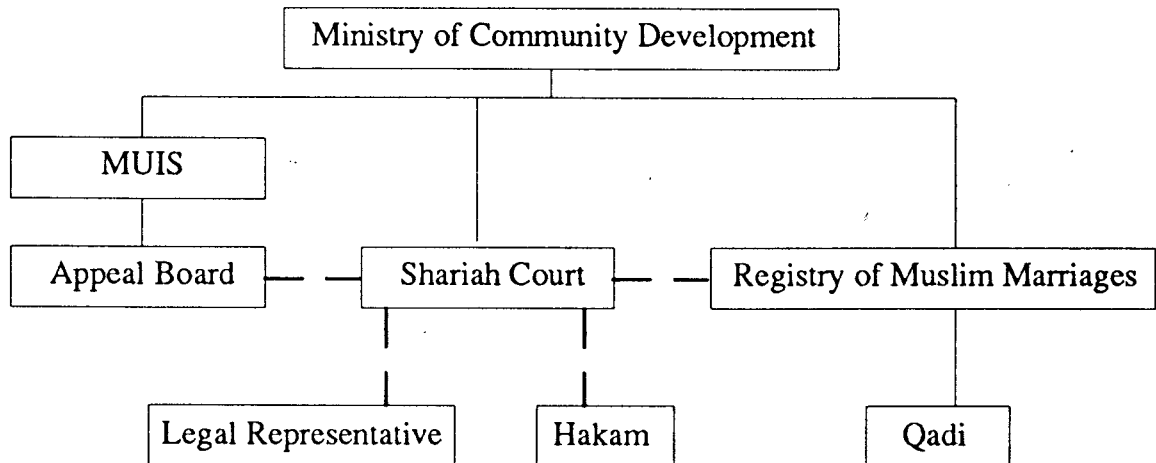
Section 35(2) of the Administration of Muslim Law Act of 1966 (AMLA) provides the jurisdiction of the Shariah Court in Singapore. It stipulates that the court shall hear and determine disputes involving Muslims on matters relating to marriage, divorce, and division of property. The Shariah Court is headed by a President who is appointed by the President of Singapore. Certain qualifications are required for a person to be appointed to the post. They include a degree in Islamic Studies or Islamic Law with good knowledge of the four *mazhabs* (schools of Muslim law), an ability to read and write Arabic and Jawi, and some understanding of English. Before assuming his duty, the head of the Shariah Court is attached first to the Civil Courts for a short period of time to familiarize with the judicial rules and procedures of the courts.

The inavailability of training facilities for the Shariah Court has created misperception that the Shariah Court is not of the same status as those of the Magistrate Courts. Its procedural practices are viewed as different from those exercised by the Civil Courts. This, however, does not mean that the Shariah Court is less effective and presided over by a less qualified judge. The decisions of the court are always based on sound premises of Islamic law. In fact, power is given to the Shariah Court to issue a warrant in lieu of or in addition to a summons as given to a Magistrate Court under the Criminal Procedure Code (Ahmad Ibrahim 1979, p.49)

In executing its duties, the Shariah Court may appoint *hakam* to act as arbitrator to the parties involved in marital disputes, should the attempts to resolve the disagreements fail. *Hakam* is preferred to be appointed from among close relatives of the conflicting parties; for they have better knowledge of the circumstance of the case. *Hakam* is responsible for finding acceptable solutions to the parties concerned and must conduct their arbitrations according to the directions of the court. Likewise, the disputing parties must bestow full power upon the *hakam* to act and decide on their behalf. The court may remove and

replace *hakam* if it does not satisfy with their conduct of the arbitration. The result, either a reconciliation or a divorce, must be reported to the court (Pasuni Maulan 1988, pp.35-7). *Hakam*, therefore, plays an important role in the Islamic judicial process. However, the Shariah Court in Singapore has experienced difficulties in attaining *hakam* from among close relatives of the disputing parties as preferred by the law.

Figure 2



Instead, the court has used the services of religious teachers to perform the task of *hakam*. It has been suggested that *hakam* should be provided with relevant facilities and records of past decisions to enable him to perform his duties effectively (Pasuni Maulan 1988).

The judicial process of the Shariah Court also involves legal representatives. Section 38 of the AMLA asserts that parties to any proceedings in the court may appear in person or by authorized solicitors. Solicitors can be divided into two categories: conventional and *sharie*. The former is solicitors with conventional legal training. The latter, known as *sharie* solicitors, has not been provided with clearly defined qualifications in the provisions of the AMLA. In Malaysia, *sharie* solicitors are defined as Malaysian Muslims of good character who are knowledgeable in Islamic law, proficient in Bahasa Malaysia, in possession of Tauliah (official permission) to teach Islam, and knowledgeable in court procedure. There are rooms for improvement for both categories of solicitors. Many conventionally trained solicitors are, for example, less equipped with Islamic knowledge, while *sharie* lawyers need more exposures to court procedure and the law of evidence. This has rendered the Shariah Court to be more difficult to arrive at sound decisions without distraction and delay.

Another institution that plays a major role in the administration of Muslim family law is the Registry of Muslim Marriages. It was originally housed together with the Shariah Court and were jointly administered. After 1978, they have been housed and administered separately. Its main duty is to administer marriages of Muslims domiciled in Singapore. All issues relating to marriage such as registry, polygamy, guardian, revocation of divorce, and under-age marriage are managed by the Registry. Though Islamic law is employed as the basis of all decisions of the Registry, there are cases where civil law is involved,

especially when dealing with marriages of converts.

The Registry of Muslim Marriages is headed by a Registrar and assisted by two *Qadis* (Muslim Judges). They are appointed by the President of Singapore. The qualifications for the two posts are similar to those of the post of president of the Shariah Court discussed earlier. Like the case of the Shariah Court, a relevant Training to upgrade the skill of certain officials in the Registry would help the institution to deal with the increasingly complex and challenging duties.

As mentioned earlier, an Appeal Board, the highest Islamic judicial body in Singapore, is provided under Section 55 of the AMLA. Its function is to confirm, vary, reverse, or order a retrial the decision of the Shariah Court. The decision of the Board is final. The President of Singapore, acting on the advice of MUIS, nominates annually seven Muslims from among whom the President of MUIS chooses to constitute a three-member Appeal Board. The Board's members are usually solicitors who possess knowledge of Islam and command the respect of Muslim community. However, there are still rooms for improvement in the over-all performance of the Board, particularly the quality of its *sharie* articulations.

In summary, Singapore is a non-Muslim state that accommodate Muslim family law in a fashion as the Islamic legal and constitutional theory provides for non-Muslim community within a Muslim state. However, the scope of application of Muslim family law remains limited. Certain disputes and matters pertaining to relations within Muslim family unit are still handled by the secular court. The administration of Muslim family law involves peoples with different backgrounds. Those with religious education need improvement in the area of court procedures and law of evidence, while the persons with secular background seem to be lacking knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence. Ustaz Pasuni Maulan, the present Registrar of the Registry of Muslim Marriages, has suggested that trainings to acquire necessary knowledge for both categories of people mentioned are required in order to obtain maximum efficiency in administering Muslim law in Singapore.

### **Institution of Dato' Yutitham in Thailand**

In Thailand, the establishment of the institution of Dato' Yutitham (Muslim Judge) is sanctioned by the Royal Act of 1946 which provides special concessions allowing the application of Islamic law in matters concerning family and inheritance. Unlike the Provincial Councils for Islamic Affairs which are existed in 28 provinces throughout Thailand, the Dato' Yutithams are appointed only in the four Muslim provinces of Patani, Narathiwat, Yala, and Satun. There are two Dato' Yutithams in each province whose duty is mainly to formulate and deliver judgements on family and inheritance cases involving Muslims. Though the actual judgement must be delivered by a Thai judge, Dato' Yutithams countersign it.

Dato' Yutithams are civil servants eligible for pension after retirement age of sixty. However, special procedures must be observed before the appointment of Dato' Yutithams are made. The vacancy of the post has to be announced by the regional director-general of judges, and interested Muslims are invited to submit their applications within a specified period. The regional director-general then consults the provincial chief judge and the provincial governor of the respective province to determine the qualifications and suitability

of each applicant before they are to sit for religious proficiency examination. The general guidelines to be qualified for the position of Dato' Yutitham are: (1) a Muslim of Thai nationality who is not less than twenty-five years old; (2) capable of formulating judgement on cases relating to Muslim family and inheritance; (3) received a minimum Thai education equivalent to lower level of secondary school. The successful applicants must stand for election which they will be elected by the *imams* in their respective province. (The numbers of the *imams* in each of the four provinces in 1991 are as follows: Patani, 526; Narathiwat, 397; Yala, 304; and Satun, 145.) The final authority to appoint a Dato' Yutitham, however, is left to the Minister of Justice after the regional director-general of judges submits the name of the elected candidate to him.

In theory, Dato' Yutithams play an important role in settling disputes on family and inheritance among Muslims. In practice, however, they receive only very few cases of disputes in a year. There are many reasons for this. For instance, the disputes concerning family and inheritance can be settled by local religious functionaries such as members of the PCIA, *imams*, and *tok guru*. Bringing the case to Dato' Yutitham involves the investigation procedures of the Thai court which in many instances produced different verdicts as compared to similar cases settled elsewhere. It requires financial expenditure and time to settle disputes in court. And Muslims who prefer their disputes on family and inheritance to be settled by civil court can do so by moving their cases to the court outside the four Muslim provinces.

The institution of Dato' Yutitham is created in the four provinces to "soothe" the Malay-Muslims who have from time to time demanded more autonomous rule of the area. For the Muslims who are living in the provinces where there are no institutions of Dato' Yutitham, they employ local religious functionaries to settle their disputes on family and inheritance. There are no serious demands from the Muslims outside the four provinces for the formation of the institution of Dato' Yutitham. Some Muslims even view its attachment to the Thai court (non-Islamic court) as against the provision of the *shariah*. Nevertheless, the existence of the institution of Dato' Yutitham symbolizes the Muslim identity.

In short, the establishment of the institution of Dato' Yutitham in the four Muslim provinces is mainly to serve political purposes. It creates an impression that the Malay-Muslims in the area are given appropriate autonomous authority to administer the affairs of the Muslim community. For the Malay-Muslims, the institution symbolizes the persistence of their identity, though in practical purposes they can do without it.

### **Shariah Court and Institution of Dato' Yutitham Compared**

The Shariah Court in Singapore and the institution of Dato' Yutitham in the four southern provinces of Thailand are governmental Islamic institutions created to serve as Islamic court to deal with disputes involving Muslims in matters relating to family and inheritance. However, the former is established as a separate entity and has jurisdiction throughout Singapore. The latter is attached to the Thai court and confines its authority to four specific provinces. The appointment of the head of the Shariah Court is made directly by the President of the Republic. On the other hand, the appointment of Dato' Yutitham is made after the election process. Perhaps, this is to provide a sense of democracy and of non-interference in religious affairs of the Malay-Muslims.

The Shariah Court has an Appeal Board formed by MUIS to deliver final decision to any appeal. The decision of the institution of Dato' Yutitham which is jointly made with the Thai court is final.

## Mosque (Masjid)

Mosque or *masjid* has always been regarded as one of the most important institutions in the Muslim community. It has been part of the Muslim life since the beginning of Islam. No Muslim community exists without mosque. For Muslims, building a mosque is not only pious work but also necessary. A Prophetic Tradition (Hadith) affirms that "For him who builds a mosque, God will build a home in Paradise" (quoted in Gibb and Kramers 1953, p.335).

## Mosque in Singapore

In Singapore, there are some 92 mosques built to serve Muslims of about 412,000. They can be divided into "old generation" and "new generation" mosques. The old generation mosques were constructed during the period since the last century up to 1975. They are totalling about 77; many of them are small, designed primarily to serve as places of worship. They were built from funds collected from different sources of donations. Each Muslim community was able to raise funds through localized scheme to build its own mosque.

The new generation mosques were built during 1975 to the present-day, under the centralized scheme known as Mosque Building Fund (MBF). Each mosque built under this scheme usually consists of a three-storey modern structure with facilities such as prayer hall, funeral parlour, multi-purpose hall, conference room, library, and institutional quarters for *imams* and their assistants. It is designed to be a centre of religious and social activities for Singaporean Muslims. Each mosque is capable of accommodating 1,000-2,000 persons at one time. There are at least 15 new generation mosques constructed to serve more than 80 per cent of the total Muslim population who live in housing estates. Table 3 shows the distribution of new mosques in major housing estates.

The new generation mosques shown in table 3 were built as an integral part of the broader national development. Since 1969, large scale developments in Singapore had changed old settlement areas into industrial and commercial housing complexes. By the early 1985 more than 82 per cent of the total population, including 80 per cent of Muslims, were resettled into these housing estates. The need to provide adequate numbers of community institutions such as schools, towncentres, and places of worship (including mosques) becomes necessary.

In the case of mosques, the Singaporean government initiated a policy that brought about systematic construction of mosques by amending the AMLA in 1975 to authorize MUIS to collect funds for the purpose through the MBF scheme. The scheme is to collect monthly contributions made by Muslim employees through the Central Provident Fund board. Those Muslims who are self-employed make their contributions to the Mosque Management Committee (MMC). Though the scheme is purely voluntary, the minimum monthly donation per person was fixed at S\$0.50 in the beginning years. It was raised to

S\$1.00 in 1977 and to S\$2.00 in 1990 to cope with the high cost of construction. From 1984 to 1989 the average annual contribution to the MBF was S\$3.70 million.

Table 3

Distribution of New Generation Mosques  
in Major Housing Estates

Mosque (S\$)	Cost (All races)	Housing Estates	Population
Al-Amin	—	Telok Blangah	70,000
Al-Ansar	1,371,725	Bedok	237,500
Al-Mukminin	3,216,166	Jurong East	67,000
Al-Muttaqin	1,641,563	Ang Mo Kio	245,000
An-Nur	1,599,489	Woodlands	290,000
Ar-Raudhah	—	Bukit Batok	130,000
Assyakirin	996,626	Jurong West	70,000
Darul Aman	2,813,707	Kampong Ubi	70,000
Darul Ghufuran	—	Tampines	225,000
Darul Makmur	2,733,293	Yishun	200,000
Darussalam	3,544,072	Clementi	122,500
En-Naeem	2,589,848	Hougang	120,000
Muhajirin	703,165	Toa Payoh	190,000
Mujahidin	794,073	Queenstown	150,000

Sources: (MUIS 1989, pp.48-9; Mansor Haji Sukaimi 1982, pp.37-8)

The building of large modern mosques in major housing estates through collective efforts has enhanced a sense of commitment and cooperation among Singaporean Muslims on religious and community affairs. This has been indicated by the increase in mosque activities and participation. For example, Mansor Haji Sukaimi (1982, p.11) identified 31 different kinds of regular activities provided by six new mosques (Al-Ansar, Al-Muttaqin, An-Nur, Assyakirin, Muhajirin, and Mujahidin). The average monthly donations received by the combined six mosques mentioned exceeded the average operational expenditures. This suggested that the mosques in the developed housing complexes in Singapore are to become the main centres of Muslim activities. They are being seen as a "dynamic institution" that is active and multi-functional.

Under the provisions of the AMLA, all mosques are vested in MUIS. This means that MUIS is given the authority with legal standing powers to build, manage, and develop mosques. Each mosque is managed by the MMC. It consists of 25 members appointed by MUIS. Through the recommendation of the Mufti and members of the Fatwa Committee, MUIS appoints the *imams* (mosque prayer leaders). Other mosque functionaries such as *khatib* and *bilal* may be recruited by mosque trustee or *mutawalli*. MUIS also decides upon the boundaries of mosque district (*daerah masjid*).

Financially, most operational expenditures are borne by funds raised by the individual mosque. Each mosque receives nominal subsidies to supplement the allowance of *imams*

and other mosque functionaries. This has given rooms for each mosque to develop its own programmes of activities to suit the needs and the taste of the dwellers in particular mosque district. The activities which are conducted by the MMC include Kindergartens, courses for *haj*, Arabic language, family counselling, collection of *zakat*, library services, religious classes, etc. However, there are two religious functions that has to be conformed with the direction of MUIS. They are weekly sermons for Friday prayers and religious talks to commemorate Muslim festivals. These two functions can shape the opinions of the public. In fact, in the early years of Islam, Friday sermons were usually delivered by the caliphs or the rulers.

It is clear that many mosques in Singapore have developed and become a multi-functional institution that provides religious and social services to the Muslim community. There are reasons for such positive developmnt, including the conduciveness of Singapore's socio-political climate; the establishment of effective administrative mechanisms for mosque; the adoption of suitable religious policies by the government; the strength of collective effort of Singapore Muslims; and the resurgence of Islam. This Singapore experience has indicated that mosque, an essential Islamic institution, is able to grow in a non-Muslim state, provided that socio-political environment in the state in question is conducive. With the growth of mosque, Islamic values and traditions will continue to persist.

## Mosque in Thailand

Mosque in Thailand are concentrated in two main regional areas: the southernmost and central regions. In the southernmost region or the Patani region, mosques have been in existence since the kingdom of Patani embraced Islam in the middle of the 15th century. In the central region, it was observed that mosques were already existed in the reign of Phrachao Songtham (1602-1627). Most mosques were constructed by the efforts of local Muslim leaders and villagers (Office of Chularajmontri n.d., p.104). They have served as a place of worship and a centre of community activities where Muslim traditions and values are transmitted from one generation to another. Mosques are therefore viewed as a "protector" of the *ummah* (Muslim community).

Presently, there are about 2,569 registered mosques in Thailand. Some 1,628 are in five southernmost provinces: Patani, 526; Narathiwat, 397; Yala, 304; Songkhla, 256; Satun, 145. The capital city of Bangkok (central region) comprises 150, and the remaining 791 mosques are in the provinces throughout the nation (Education Region II 1991). The Royal Act of 1947 requires all mosques to be registered and places them under the supervision of the PCIA or the NCIA (for mosques located in the provinces without PCIA) as part of the government administrative structure. Though mosques are placed under PCIA, the link between the two institutions remains very weak. Mosques are actually managed and maintained by the members of respective village community.

All registered mosques are required by law to form Mosque Council. A Mosque Council consists of 7 to 15 members elected by adult Muslims in the community. Members of Mosque Council must be devout Muslims of not less than 20 years of age. They are entrusted with the management of mosque affairs and performance of religious rituals. A Mosque Council is headed by the *imam* who is assisted by the *khatib* and *bilal*. They are elected to these three functions for life. The rest of the council members who are not

considered as religious functionaries serve for a four-year term. Administrative positions such as registrar, bursar, and secretary are appointed among them. In many cases, Mosque Council forms several subcommittees to carry out different tasks including collecting *zakat* and conducting religious classes. Members of subcommittee usually consist of volunteers recruited from members of the community. There are mosques which own properties such as lands, houses, and religious schools. Such mosques require special efforts and ability of their council members to manage different properties.

There are about 35,865 members of Mosque Councils who involve in the management of mosques. They receive neither allowances nor salaries. However, they are given priority in medical care and a reduction of 50 per cent train fare. They are also exempted from compulsory military service. As for the *imam*, *khatib* and *bilal*, they receive percentages of marriage fees for their services.

Members of Mosque Council are recruited from adult Muslims in the respective community through election process. The election is conducted by the PCIA. It usually begins with senior members of the PCIA consulting the assembled Muslim adults whether they agree with the proposed candidates whose names are selected beforehand by leaders of the community or in some cases by members of the PCIA. If the gathering voters disagree with the proposal, a secret ballot will be employed. The final appointments, however, are left to the head of PCIA. Many members of Mosque Council are elected because of their dedications and activities. They are persons of different backgrounds recruited to perform various tasks of mosque. Figure 3 illustrates a common structure of Mosque Council.

In financial aspect, most mosques are able to generate income to cover their regular expenditures. They obtain donations from members of the community and in some cases from organizations and agencies overseas. Since 1960s many mosques have received, from time to time, small financial contributions from the Thai government in the form of assistance funds for Islamic affairs. In addition, the government built a Central Mosque in each of the four southern Muslim provinces, though many Muslims in the area view the construction of Central Mosques as politically motivated.

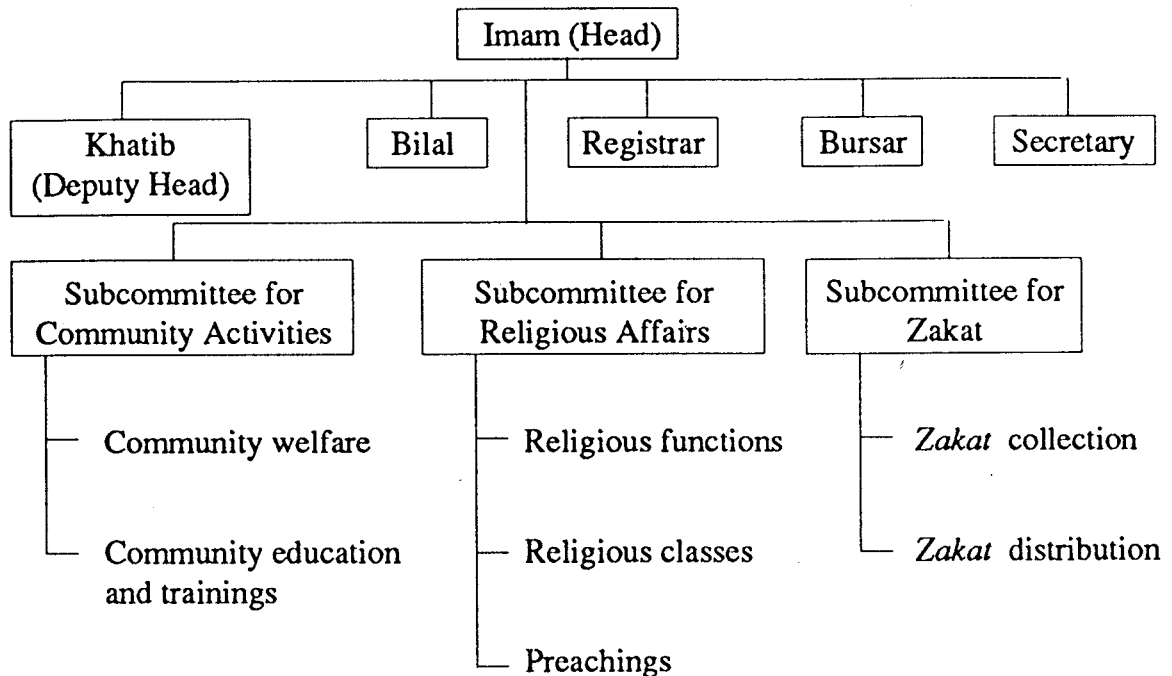
In an effort to establish closer relation with Muslim leaders as part of the overall policy of national integration, selected members of Mosque Councils have intermittently been sponsored by the government to visit the capital city of Bangkok and other major cities since the mid-1960s. By the mid-1980s, most *imams* in the five southern provinces had visited Bangkok; during such visits their opinions were solicited by Thai government authorities (Nanthawan 1977, p.104). In recent years, the Thai government has introduced a programme presenting annual awards to five outstanding *imams* in each of the five southern provinces. Each winner receives a "shield of merit" and a small amount of money.

## Preachings

Like in other non-Muslim states, mosques in Thailand are one of the most important Muslim institutions. All socio-religious activities revolve around mosques. Though mosques are viewed as part of the government administrative structure, they often act on their own initiative and more concern with the interest and welfare of the community.

Figure 3

## Structure of Mosque Council



### Mosques in Singapore and Thailand Compared

In non-Muslim states such as Singapore and Thailand, mosques play a dominant role as a socio-religious centre of Muslims. In both countries Muslims have made their considerable efforts to develop their mosques to meet the needs of the changing society. In Singapore, they seem to be able to construct certain mechanisms required for more effective management and development of mosques. These mechanisms include MUIS, MBF, and LARAS (Facilitation and Coordination Committee). The Muslims in Thailand, on the other hand, have not been able to do so; there are no centralized mechanisms created for the purpose of management and development of mosques. Each mosque initiates its own programmes. As a result, mosques in Thailand are less uniform in terms of their activities and range of development. Nevertheless, they, like those in Singapore, continue to persist and even grow.

### Madrasah (Islamic Religious School)

*Madrasah* or Islamic religious school is an essential component of the Muslim community. It provides education and produces Muslim scholars to carry out community obligations and to inculcate Islamic values and norms.

Historically, *madrasahs* began to flourish in the Middle East in the eleventh century and their role has since been closely related to the growth of Islam.

### Madrasah in Singapore

In Singapore, as in other areas of the Malay world, Islamic religious education has gradually

developed from a less formal form of schooling, conducted in mosques and in residence of individual religious teachers, to a more formal one, having specific curricula and classes. In contemporary Singapore, *madrasahs* have emerged since the beginning of this century. Today there are about 36 *madrasahs*, most of which are of primary level. Only four *madrasahs* have been operated at the level of secondary school. At least nine *madrasahs* were unable to continue their operation for various reasons. All *madrasahs* are operated under private sponsorship, including under individual, foundation, organization, and *wakaf* (endowment) sponsorships (Ahmad Sonhadji Mohammad 1987).

The four secondary level *madrasahs* are Madrasah Al-Sagoff Al-Arabiah founded in 1912, Madrasah Al-Junied Al-Islamiah in 1927, Madrasah Al-Maarif in 1936, and Madrasah Kampung Wak Tajung Al-Islamiah in 1955. They offer religious courses such as Theology, al-Quran, Islamic Jurisprudence, and Arabic Language. They have one common objective: to provide education and religious knowledge to Muslims so that they become able members of the society and carry out their religious responsibility as viceregents of God. Records show that the existing *madrasahs* have produced a fair share of graduates of the required quality. Table 4 provides a list of names of *madrasahs* which are in operation and no longer functioning.

In general *madrasahs* in Singapore are seen as underdeveloped, unable to keep with the pace of changes. Those who have been active in the affairs and the development of *madrasahs*, such as teachers and administrators believe that the following aspects of *madrasahs* are needed to be improved: facilities and building, methods of teaching, quality of teachers and rate of their salaries, administration, and financial management. In other words, material and physical aspects of *madrasahs* should be upgraded. The question remains. Is it sufficient to develop only material and physical aspects of *madrasahs* without reevaluating philosophical one?

Some *madrasahs* incorporate secular subjects into their curricula in order to produce more balanced graduates to adapt with the changing Singaporean society. They also encourage students to obtain additional government certificates such as the General Certificate of Education (GCE). And they emphasize on providing more educational opportunities for the students. Figure 4 shows educational institutes of different categories opened to qualified students of some *madrasahs*.

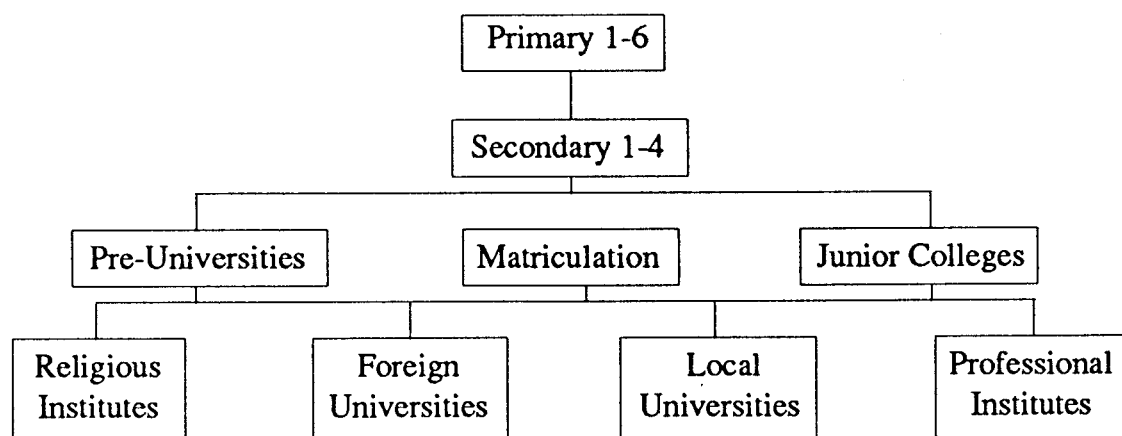
As figure 4 indicates, qualified students can choose different local and foreign institutes to continue their education. However, some *madrasahs* have their own preferences as to where their students should study. Some, for example, prefer Al-Azhar University, Egypt while others King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah.

In recent years, meetings and discussions among various parties aimed at solving different problems of *madrasahs* took place in many occasions. This has led to a proposal to consolidate and standardize the syllabus of *madrasahs*. It is intended to enhance academic performance and to produce both religious and professional oriented graduates required in modern community. The positive aspect of uniformity is that it will be less difficult to administer and to direct. The danger is that uniformity could reduce creativities and inclinations of individual *madrasah* and in the long run it might yield negative effects to the development of Islamic education as a whole.

Table 4  
Name and Location of Madrasahs in Singapore

Name	Location
Maahadul Irshad	67-8, Hinheds Road
Madrasah Abu Kassim Al-Islamiah	Lor Abu Kassim
Madrasah Addiniah al-Islamiah	Kampung Bharu Road
Madrasah Ahmad Yahya	Masjid Ahamad, South Buona Vista
Madrasah Al-Hidayah Al-Islamiah	26, Blok 24, Tanglin Halt
Madrasah Al-Islamiah Sembawang	51, Andrew Ave.
Madrasah Al-Junied Al-Islamiah	395, Victoria St.
Madrasah Al-Khariah Islamiah	152, Still Road
Madrasah Al-Maarif	14, Ipoh Lane
Madrasah Al-Sagoff Al-Arabiah	111, Jalan Sultan
Madrasah Al-Wataniah	Kampung Paya Jalan Serai
Madrasah Ar-Ridwan	Lot G, Jalan Madrasah
Madrasah Attarbiah Addiniah	27, Lor Mekola off Jalan Kayu
Madrasah Attariah Al-Islamiah	97A, Trafalgar East off Jalan Woodbridge
Madrasah Azamiah Islamiah	c/o Penjara Changi
Madrasah Islah Islamiah	Peypys Road off Pasir Panjang Road
Madrasah Khairiah	Blok 60, Canberra Road
Madrasah Tahdizibiah Islamiah	15, Jalan Ulu Seletar
Madrasah Taman Jurong	Blok 54, 45/47 Yung An Road
Madrasah Tengku Abdul Jalil	Kampung Pahang Pulau Tekong Besar
Madrasah Wak Tanjong	589D, Sim Ave.
Madrasatul Al-Saediatul Al-Islamiah	West Coast Road
Madrasatul Hak Al-Islamiah	97C, West Coast Road
Madrasatul Islamiah	2A, Kampung Berih Road
Madrasatul Mabtadi	120, Blok 14 Stirling Road
Sekolah Rakyat Islam	Jalan Eunus
Sekolah Ugama Bukit Gombak	Lor 4, Bukit Gombak
Sekolah Ugama Kampung Bedok	11, Jalan Bilal off Bedok Road
Sekolah Ugama Kampung Tengah	20, Jalan Timun
Sekolah Ugama Penjara Singapura	48, Jalan Penjara
Sekolah Ugama Pulau Seking	Pulau Seking Singapura
Sekolah Ugama Radin Mas	47A, Raden Mas
Sekolah Ugama Rakyat Jurong	Jalan Majapahit
Sekolah Ugama Rakyat Navel Base	Canada Road
Sekolah Ugama Surau Akhyar	Lor Lompany
Taman Pendidikan Islam	14, Jalan Kunyit
No longer in operation	
Madrasah Albustan	Geylang
Madrasah Al-Arabiah Al-Islamiah	2, Hillside Drive
Madrasah Al-Hidayah	Lor 21, Geylang
Madrasah Asriah	56, Lor Melayu
Madrasah Bustanul Arifin	Coronation Road
Madrasah Diniah	Ellis Road
Madrasah Geylang Serai	Jalan Pasir
Madrasah Kampung Paya Goyang	Kampung Paya Goyang
Sekolah Pendidikan Rakyat	Dairy Farm Road

Figure 4



One of the main factors effecting the performance of *madrasahs* is financial standing. Since *madrasahs* are private institutes, their main incomes are fees and tuitions collected from students and contributions received occasionally from local and foreign sources. Most *madrasahs* have had limited income and have for years operated under financial constraint. They have been organized various activities in an attempt to raise additional funds needed to cover their expenditures. Still, they are unable to provide students with facilities comparable to those obtained in secular schools and to offer religious teachers with a reasonable rate of salaries (Abu Bakar Hashim 1989, p.34)

With the combined efforts of various parties, *madrasahs* can be improved with similar vigour as that of mosques, especially when Islamic education is increasingly in demands among members of the Muslim community. This is partly due to the resurgence of Islam and to the separation of Singapore from Malaysia. Singaporean Muslims unexpectedly found themselves as minority. *Madrasahs* are among Islamic institutions that Muslims can identify with in order to preserve their identity

It can be said that *madrasahs* in Singapore have, throughout the years, produced capable religious graduates who can promote and defend Islam. The growing Islamic consciousness among Singaporean Muslims in recent decades has increased the demands for more spaces and better quality in *madrasahs*, particularly in secondary level.

The demands for spaces can be met either by increasing the number of *madrasahs* or by expanding the existing ones. In term of quality, a reevaluation of the overall objectives and programmes of *madrasahs* is needed in order to adapt to the changes.

### Madrasah in Thailand

Islamic religious schools or *ronrianrat sonsasana Islam* are concentrated mainly in the four southern Muslim provinces of Patani, Narathiwat, Satun, and Yala. There are very few *madrasahs* or Islamic schools located outside the said provinces. This is due to the historical fact that Islamic schools which formerly known as *pondoks* had played an important role in Islamic education before the region was incorporated into Thailand in the beginning of this century.

In fact, the region was considered as the most important area in the Malay peninsula in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for religious education and scholarship (see Winzeler 1974, p.266).

In the past, *pondoks* function as educational centres where full-time students live in a complex of individual huts, also called *pondok*, built around the home of religious scholar who is called *tok guru*. In large *pondoks*, there are several full-time religious teachers called *ustaz* to assist *tok guru*. *Pondok* education has no specific school term and ladder of successive "grades". Students can start their studies at any time and leave whenever they feel they accomplish enough. Normally, students would stay in *pondoks* until they are ready to work or start a family. A few who are serious in pursuing their education would remain or go overseas. During their study in *pondoks*, the students helped *tok guru* by working in his plantation and rice field or attending his livestock as a compensation for their free education.

*Pondoks* were once the most popular education institutions in the area. They provided the Muslim villagers with a knowledge of Islam, which every Muslim is required to learn. They produced religious scholars who were influential and respected within the Patani Muslim society.

Driven by the overall strategy of national integration, the Thai government initiated in 1961 a policy to transform *pondoks* into registered private Islamic schools. All *pondoks* were required to register and to teach a standard government-designed curriculum with Thai language as the medium of instruction. Religious subjects were allowed to teach, but they must be conformed to the requirements of the Education Ministry. In 1971, there were a total of 535 *pondoks* in the region. About 109 *pondoks* failed to comply with the government policy and they ceased to exist (Songkhram 1975, p.117).

Financial incentives of a total of US\$ 800 were allocated, during the first three years of transformation, to each *pondok* with forty or more full-time students.

*Pondoks* with healthy progress in their transformation process received additional rewards of financial assistance from time to time. It took the government twenty-five years to complete the process.

The replacement of the traditional *pondoks* with private Islamic schools has had a major impact on Muslim education in the four provinces. Most Islamic schools have been unable to raise the standard of their secular curriculum comparable to that of Thai public schools. In religious subjects, they have lost much of their academic strength used to attain by *pondoks*. Furthermore students have to pay school fees for both secular and religious education which in many cases cost more than that charged by the public schools.

While many private Islamic schools have been struggling to persist, the government has accelerated its efforts to increase the number of public schools in the four provinces. Statistically, private Islamic schools have since the beginning of their transformation in the early 1960s gradually decreased in number, from 535 to 426 in 1971 and to 189 in 1991. Of the existing 189 Islamic schools, 106 offer both religious and secular curricula; the rest provide religious curriculum.

On the other hand, there are 1,218 Thai public schools in the area, including a university,

a teachers training college, and a number of vocational schools (Education Region II 1991). Nearly every village has a primary school and every district a secondary school.

In 1991, there were 312,384 students attending schools in the four Muslim provinces. It is estimated that there were 202,972 Muslim students in Thai public schools and only 22,423 in Islamic religious schools (Education Region II 1991, p.5). Table 5 shows the population and schools in the four Muslim provinces.

**Table 5**

**Population and Schools in Four Muslim Provinces, 1991**

Province	Population	Percentage of Muslims	Number of Public Schools	Number of Islamic Schools
Narathiwat	535,953	84	399	55
Patani	517,646	74	373	83
Yala	336,501	77	268	38
Satun	209,618	71	176	13
Total	1,599,718	76 (Average)	1,216	189

*Source: (Education Region II 1990, 1991)*

The decline in number of private Islamic schools in the four provinces is expected. Some of them were unable to meet the requirement of ever-increasing rules set by the Thai government. Others have lost an essential characteristic as centres of religious scholarship. Many owners of Islamic schools have difficulties in obtaining funds needed to cover the expenses of operating a school. However, there are several large Islamic schools which are successfully upgraded to a foundation in order to secure government financial assistance, though it means more assertion of control by the government. The present formula for the annual government assistance to this criterion of Islamic schools is:

$$\frac{1720 \text{ (Thai Baht)} - \text{Student fees}}{2} \times \text{Number of students}$$

For example, if a school has 600 students and fees paid by a student is 400 baht, the annual assistance received will be 396,000 baht. Some Islamic schools receive financial donations from certain organizations overseas through their own efforts.

In the final analysis, the transformation of traditional *pondoks* to private Islamic schools can be viewed as the final stage of the government efforts to neutralize the role of *pondoks* which has been seen as an obstacle to the process of national integration. With the introduction of a secular curriculum and Thai teachers in the existing Islamic schools, Thai values and culture have been diffused in the Malay-Muslim community. Though Islamic religious

schools in the region continue to persist, they may not be able to provide the “cultural fortification” and religious scholarship for the Muslims as *pondoks* once did.

### Madrasahs in Singapore and Thailand Compared

*Madrasahs* in Singapore and in Thailand have played an effective role as Islamic institutions of education. They have contributed significantly to the religious education and the growth of Islam in the respective community. As private Muslim institutions in non-Muslim states, *madrasahs* in both countries have generally suffered from lack of funds. They are often unable to meet the demands of the communities and to adapt to the changing situations. The major differences between *madrasahs* in the two countries are that those in Singapore have faced less interference and thus less assistance from the government, while those in Thailand have encountered waves of integration efforts from the government of strong Buddhist inclination. As a result, while Muslim leaders in Singapore are attempting to improve and develop their *madrasahs*, the Muslim leaders in southern Thailand are exerting their efforts to prevent *madrasahs* from fading away.

### Conclusion

Singapore and Thailand are among non-Muslim states which recognize the necessity to accommodate and regulate Islamic institutions in their respective countries. In Singapore, the AMLA was promulgated in 1966 to make provisions for regulating religious affairs of Muslims. As a result, MUIS, Shariah Court, and Registry of Muslim Marriages are established as the governmental Islamic bodies. MUIS is provided with powers to play central role in administering the religious affairs and fostering the interests and aspirations of Singaporean Muslims. The Shariah Court and the Registry of Muslim Marriages deal essentially with the affairs and disputes concerning Muslim family and inheritance. The establishment of these institutions not only legitimizes the existence of Muslim community, but it also provides administrative mechanisms that can be employed both as development and control. Because of the dual functions—development and control—the institution such as MUIS seems to command less allegiance from members of the Muslim community as compared with non-governmental Islamic institution such as JAMIYAH.

Mosques are also legitimized and regulated by the AMLA. The collective efforts of Singaporean Muslims through administrative mechanism of MUIS have been able to transform traditional form of mosque as a place of worship to a multi-functional centre of religious and social activities. This experience has indicated that mosques are able to grow in a non-Muslim state like Singapore.

On the other hand, *madrasahs* progress very slow in non-Islamic environment of Singapore, although they have throughout the years produced a fair number of capable members of religious scholars. As private institutes, the development of *madrasahs* depends largely on the individual efforts and initiatives; the combined efforts of Muslims are needed if they are to be improved in the same vigour as that of mosques.

In the final analysis, the administration of Islamic institutions in Singapore under the provisions of the AMLA provides a sense of legitimacy and recognition to the existence of Singaporean Muslim community while at the same time it regulate and control it.

In Thailand, unlike in Singapore, the administration of Islamic Institutions is authorized by separate Royal Decrees and Acts. Each sanctions different Islamic institutions of different levels. More importantly, the authorities of the Islamic institutions created under these provisions do not extend to all Muslim population. The institution of Dato' Yutitham, for example, confines its authority within the four southern provinces; the Provincial Council for Islamic Affairs exists only in 28 of 73 provinces; and the National Council for Islamic Affairs has no direct authority over the Provincial Councils for Islamic Affairs. They are also answerable to different Thai authorities. This sectional characteristic of administration does not give the Muslims the feeling that they have to rely upon these Islamic institutions. Instead, it provides them with a sense of division and control. In other words, the administration of Islamic institutions in Thailand, unlike in Singapore, fails to provide a sense of legitimacy to the Muslims while it promotes a feeling of division and domination.

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# **SEASP**

## **TEACHING AND RESEARCH EXCHANGE FELLOWSHIPS**

The Teaching and Research Exchange Fellowships scheme of the Southeast Asian Studies Program (SEASP) is an exchange program for Southeast Asian scholars in university faculties of social science and humanities within the Southeast Asian region. This exchange program is made possible by a grant from the Stiftung Volkswagenwerk.

### **Objectives**

- To enable qualified and interested Southeast Asian scholars to teach and undertake research in other Southeast Asian countries.
- To enable Southeast Asian universities to acquire the teaching and research services of scholars from other Southeast Asian countries.

### **Eligibility**

- Open to nationals and permanent residents of Brunei, Burma, Indonesia, Kampuchea, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
- With at least an M.A. degree in any of the social sciences and humanities fields and teaching/research experience of at least three years.

### **Support, benefits and duration of the award**

- Stipends ranging from US\$850 to US\$1,250 per month.
- Travel and related expenses.
- Housing subsidy and medical expenses as appropriate.
- Duration of award may not be less than three nor more than twelve months.

### **Selection criteria**

- Availability of a host institution appropriate to the applicant's needs.
- Applicant's competency to undertake assignment in the host country and achievement in the field of specialization as indicated in a curriculum vitae.
- Significance and feasibility of applicant's proposed research project.
- Preference for applicants where supplementary support and benefits from the host institution are available.
- Preference for non-metropolitan scholars and institutions, though established scholars are welcome.

Interested scholars and institutions may obtain application forms and additional information from:

The Program Coordinator  
Southeast Asian Studies Program  
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies  
Heng Mui Keng Terrace  
Pasir Panjang, Singapore 0511  
Republic of Singapore