

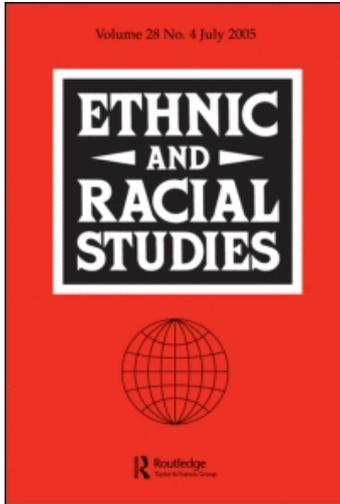
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# Informal citizens: graduated citizenship in Southern Thailand

Duncan McCargo

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## Abstract

Drawing on extensive fieldwork conducted in the Southern border region of Thailand, this article explores ways in which Malay Muslims understand their place in Thai society. It argues that a new conception of 'informal citizenship' is needed in order to characterize such relationships between ethnic minorities and the state. The informal Thai citizenship neither sought by, nor granted to, Malay Muslims has parallels with earlier forms of 'graduated citizenship' that applied to the Sino-Thai community for much of the twentieth century. Citizenship is not an either/or, but a matter of degree.

**Keywords:** Pattani; Malay Muslims; Thailand; ethnicity; minorities; citizenship.

Citizenship is often seen as a simple question of nationality: people either are, or are not, citizens of a given country. This article seeks to question that assumption, arguing instead that informal notions of citizenship may loom just as large as formal notions. In Thailand, the Chinese minority experienced forms of 'graduated citizenship' for much of the twentieth century, enjoying Thai nationality but deprived of voting and other rights. Today, Malay Muslims in Thailand's Southern border provinces are Thai nationals, but do not meet the informally-understood criteria for full Thai citizenship.

## Malay Muslims and the South

Around 1.3 million Malay Muslims reside in the Southern 'border' provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, which have a total population of around 1.8 million. Malay Muslims form a majority within their own quite sizeable region, which Chaiwat Satha-Anand

has described (echoing Benedict Anderson) as an ‘imagined land’ (Satha-Anand 2009). Yet, despite their majority status locally, Malay Muslims are permanently labelled as a minority within Thailand’s 65 million population, which is more than 90 per cent Buddhist. In fact, ‘Malay Muslim’ is far from being a homogenous category, but a catch-all and constructed identity (Barnard 2004; Montesano and Jory 2007). These Southern provinces have been the site of a major insurgency since 2004, in which more than 4,200 people have been killed; the imagined land is closely associated for many with serious political violence (for background see International Crisis Group 2005, Askew 2008, and McCargo 2008).

Malay Muslims form a minority group within Thailand’s wider Muslim minority, numerically significant but structurally marginalized. Malay Muslims are alienated from so-called ‘Thai Muslims’ in other parts of the country. Thai Muslims are an influential group in Bangkok, closely tied to political and other elites. The Bunnag family, Shia Muslims of Persian descent, played central roles in Siam’s administration and the economy for much of the nineteenth century. General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, a Thai Muslim, commanded the Royal Thai Army (2005–2007) and led the 19 September 2006 military coup against the government of Thaksin Shinawatra. The Chularajamontri – the royally appointed ‘spiritual leader’ of Thailand’s Muslims – always came from central Thailand, and before 1945, office-holders were all Shia rather than Sunni (Yusuf 2010, pp. 37–40).<sup>1</sup> Through institutions such as the Chularajamontri and a structure of provincial Islamic councils, the Thai monarchy and state have sought to secure the loyalty of the Muslim minority and to manage its participation in wider Thai society (McCargo 2010, pp. 94–7). Yet, while such mechanisms have been relatively successful in respect of Thai Muslims, they have largely failed in respect of Malay Muslims.

Malay Muslims see Thai Muslims as over-assimilated, less devout, and too willing to embrace or tolerate negative features of Thai society. One informant told me that if his daughter married a Muslim from Bangkok, it would be almost as bad as her marrying a Buddhist.<sup>2</sup> The Southern border provinces constitute what another informant referred to as a ‘dinosaur island’,<sup>3</sup> a region characterized by a powerful concoction of pride and parochialism. Viewed as *khaek* (a broadly pejorative term for South Asian or Malay foreigners) by Bangkok Thais, they were typically regarded as ‘Thai buffaloes’ by Malaysian Malays. In other words, rejected as marginal by both fellow Thai and by fellow Malays, Malay Muslims of Thai nationality have fallen back on their self-generated identity resources, choosing to assert their specific regional characteristics rather than subordinate themselves to broader notions of nationality.

At the heart of the Southern violence lie contrasting views of identity and citizenship. Many Western views of citizenship are heavily indebted to T. H. Marshall's arguments, which classify citizenship into three core components: civil; political; and social (Marshall 1950). Marshall's is a richly historically-informed analysis, viewing citizenship as emerging in phases through a series of compromises and developments. However, Bryan Turner has argued that Marshall's view of citizenship reflects his experience in a relatively homogenous society, and does not capture the complexity of a modern state characterized by ethnic divisions. Nor does Marshall distinguish between active and passive citizenship (Turner 2001, p. 191). Turner argues that recent socio-economic and political changes, including globalization, have led to an 'erosion' of earlier notions of citizenship in societies such as Britain (2001, p. 203). He calls for a re-expanded notion of citizenship that includes a broader range of rights. However, many countries have yet to construct the kinds of citizenship that are now declining in the developed world. It will be argued here that a legal-rational definition of citizenship, even the kind of updated and highly-nuanced version articulated by Turner, is inadequate to explain the realities of countries such as Thailand. In these countries, Marshall's three elements – which might collectively be termed 'formal' citizenship – fail adequately to capture the relationship between the individual and the state. While some scholars have sought to isolate 'cultural citizenship' as an additional component of citizenship based on ideas of multiculturalism, this model originates in a Western context, and is primarily designed to address issues such as immigration and rights of indigenous groups (Miller 2002). In non-Western societies, equal attention must be paid to informal citizenship, notions of identity that supplement legal-rational criteria for being considered a full citizen. While much of the more radically-inspired debate about citizenship addresses questions concerning the 'right to have rights', linked to notions of 'inclusive citizenship' (Kabeer 2005), such perspectives are often essentially normative. Other authors argue that ethnic and social diversity should be reflected in 'differentiated citizenship' (Young 1989, p. 258), an argument normally linked to calls for special treatment and recognition of marginalized groups and communities. Critics of these calls suggest that differentiated citizenship will undermine national and social cohesion, and have detrimental long-term consequences (Kymlicka and Norman 1995, pp. 306–7).

The case of Malay Muslims in Southern Thailand offers a means of elucidating issues often occluded in most of the literature on citizenship. While the literature often assumes, rather idealistically, that minority groups would like to exercise full citizenship rights, many Malay Muslims in Thailand are rather reluctant to participate in a broader society from which they feel deeply alienated. Thai Buddhists (generally known in the deep South as *Thai phut*) are distinguished

verbally and often in terms of language choice from Malay Muslims (*nayu*, in local Pattani Malay, *khon melayu* in Thai). These linguistic devices illustrate the identity cleavage between the two communities. Thai Buddhists persistently claim that elements of the Malay Muslim community are disloyal to the Thai state, failing to appreciate the benefits of what Buddhists generally construct and perceive as benevolent and positive rule from Bangkok. Buddhists are generally critical of these ‘separatist’ tendencies, and view religious and social practices (such as veiling) as evidence of a policy of differentiation and separation practised by Malay Muslims. Reciprocally, for Malay Muslims the discourse of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is one derived from Thai Buddhist attitudes and behaviours. Malay Muslims are invited and expected to partake in a wider Thai society which they find unwelcoming, suspicious, patronizing, and deeply unsympathetic. Under such circumstances, it is unsurprising that Malay Muslims are often preoccupied with delineating their own religious and cultural space, seeking to curtail what they see as the intrusions of the Bangkok Buddhist nation-state into their own sphere. For them, neighbouring Malaysia offers an important non-Western example of differentiated, consociational citizenship, in which ethnic Malays and *bumiputera* (‘sons of the soil’, or indigenous peoples) have been granted explicit economic and employment privileges under the New Economic Policy. These policies reflect what former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad termed ‘The Malay Dilemma’: without some redistributive privileges, ethnic Malays would remain economically marginalized, yet a systematic process of positive discrimination could have negative consequences in the longer term, creating a privileged and enfeebled group (Mohamad 1970, pp. 113–14). By contrast, Thai Buddhists profess to advocate undifferentiated citizenship, in which there are no explicit ethnic privileges, but in practice, Thailand is characterized by sharply-differentiated modes of (albeit, informal) citizenship that privilege certain groups.

Given the predominant discourse of ‘Thai-ness’ and the determination of the country’s nation-building elite to suppress all notions of ethnic difference, ethnic minorities fit uncomfortably within modern Thailand (Connors 2007, pp. 128–52). Since ‘ethnic Thais’ (whatever that means) can only constitute a minority in a nation where those of Lao, Chinese, Malay, Lanna (Northern Thai/Lao), Mon, Vietnamese, Khmer, and other groups are so numerous, the construction of Thai identity is a quietly repressive process, forcing much of Thailand’s population to conceal, deny, or play down their underlying cultural and ethnic origins. All of these groups have actively or at least passively subsumed their culture and identity to Thai-ness, which serves as a totalizing discourse. Not for Thailand were Indonesian notions of ‘unity in diversity’; for most of the twentieth century, the

Thai equivalent would have been ‘unity in similarity’, despite the highly-constructed nature of that similarity. However, cultural diversity has been widely recognized as official policy in the 2000s.

### **The contrast with Chinese-ness**

Until recently, there was widespread popular insistence that ethnic differences do not exist in Thailand. In 2000, I organized a seminar in Leeds at which a visiting Thai academic presented a paper on the ethnic Chinese in Northeast Thailand (Nareerat 2000). The seminar was attended by a number of Thai students from the engineering and science faculties, several of whom protested that there were no ‘Chinese’ people in Thailand: ‘everyone in Thailand is Thai’. The students making these claims – mainly university lecturers studying at the doctoral level on government scholarships – all had strikingly Sino-Thai features. The event was an example of the homogenizing, totalizing form of state and popular discourse about Thai-ness. Viewed negatively, the episode illustrated the extent to which young Sino-Thais were in denial about their ‘real’ ethnicity; at the same time, it revealed the remarkable successes achieved by the promoters of ‘Thai-ness’.

While Thailand is often held up as a positive example of Chinese assimilation into a Southeast Asian society, the reality is rather more nuanced and complicated. In fact, Thailand long had a system of ‘graduated citizenship’ for those of Chinese descent, captured by the differences between terms such as ‘*chuea chat*’, ‘*sanchat*’, and ‘*tang dao*’.<sup>4</sup> Thai laws on naturalization and nationality were rather liberal; during the early decades of the twentieth century, locally-born Chinese gained automatic Thai nationality and after five years of residence, a Chinese migrant of ‘good character’ and financially secure could apply for naturalization (Skinner 1957, p. 250). But this was not the whole story: after the end of absolute monarchy in 1932, only those Chinese meeting stringent educational or employment requirements were entitled to vote or to stand for electoral office (Coughlin 1960, pp. 177–81). During the Phibun era non-Thais, which meant primarily the Chinese, were excluded from various trades and professions. Between 1953 and 1956 short-lived, legal changes meant that children born to two Chinese parents were now non-Thai, while those born to an alien father were no longer eligible for military service. Thus the rights to vote, to run for electoral office, to enter military service, and to pursue particular professions were all contingent and graduated rights, which were not identical with the holding of Thai nationality; even Thai nationality itself was subject to revocation. However, as Skinner (1957) tellingly observes: ‘It is an interesting feature of Thai psychology that no matter how strong the prejudice against “those Chinese”, the Thai are never inclined to reject anyone of Chinese

ancestry who speaks and behaves like a Thai' (p. 381). In other words, Thai citizenship might be viewed on two parallel and graduated dimensions: a legal dimension based on formal status and rights, and an informal dimension based on attitude, self-presentation, and behaviour

Kasian Tejapira has argued that the ethnic Chinese in Thailand suffer from what he terms 'Thai deficiency syndrome': they feel their own identity to be inferior to Thai identity, and are constantly aspiring to increase their own sense of Thai-ness (Tejapira 2009, p. 271). At the same time, since the 1980s there has been a resurgence of pride in being of Chinese descent. Many have intermarried with Thais and become *lukjin*, literally 'descendants of the Chinese', a 'culturally intermediate Sino-Thai community' (Kasian 1992, p. 117). Prominent historian Suchit Wongthes memorably described this identity as '*jek bon lao*', Lao-ness overlaid with Chinese-ness.

Michelle Tan has suggested that the wealthy Sino-Thais seek to 'boost' their Thai-ness through engaging in donations to royal charities, and to leading Buddhist temples (rather than 'Chinese' temples), and through marriage with elite Thais, especially Thais descended from royal lineage or noble families (Tan forthcoming). In other words, Chinese-ness remains an unsatisfactory basis for identity, one in need of modification and refinement. However, through hybridization, re-branding, and strategic alliances, being *lukjin* has also become a form of cultural asset, one which is essentially compatible with Thai-ness, although it remains a structurally-subordinate form of identity. Kasian Tejapira has discussed how the People's Alliance for Democracy, a pro-monarchist movement which played a pivotal political role between 2006 and 2009, mobilized Sino-Thai support using the slogan '*lukjin rak chat*' [Sino-Thais love the nation] (Kasian 2009, p. 264). Implicitly, Sino-Thais were urged to demonstrate their Thai-ness by defending the monarchy against forces associated with former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, many of whose supporters were Laos and Khmers from the Northeast of the country. These recent developments support an important argument by Callahan, who previously suggested that 'neo-nationalism now not only includes Sino-Thai but is largely formulated by them' (2003, p. 510).

As Saskia Sassen has argued more broadly, individuals 'can move between multiple meanings of citizenship' (Sassen 2006, p. 188). Some aspects of citizenship 'do not fit the categories and indicators used to capture participation in political life' (2006, p. 193). This article responds to Sassen's call to bridge the considerable distance between theories of citizenship and empirical realities. In the end, Thai-ness is a be-all-and-end-all, an identity that trumps mere Thai nationality. Nationality and citizenship are legal notions, but to understand how sense of belonging and affinity actually work, legal concepts are quite

inadequate. Most minority groups in Thailand do enjoy legal citizenship rights, but 'Thai-ness' remains a less accessible status. Other ethnic groups in Thailand experience Thai deficiency syndrome to varying degrees. Northerners, for example, often seek to tone down their Lao-ness, adopting the hybridized, recently-constructed identity of *khon isan*, which does not challenge the overarching superiority of Thai-ness. The Northeast was a site of resistance to Bangkok during the immediate post-war period, but this resistance eventually grew muted and largely rhetorical (Somchai 2006, pp. 38–52). Thailand's more than a million speakers of Northern Khmer, who are the major linguistic and identity group in Surin, Srisaket, and Buriram provinces, maintain such a low and subordinated profile as to be virtually invisible (Vail 2007). Muslims in Bangkok and in most of Thailand have accepted the hybridized status of 'Thai Muslims', Muslims whose 'Muslim-ness' is incorporated into a broader Thai identity, which in no way threatens or criticizes the dominant group, discourse, and ideology of the nation. But Malay Muslims in the Southern border provinces offer a resistance to the hegemonic discourse of Thai-ness that clearly distinguishes Malay Muslims from all other groups in Thailand. As Jory has argued, in response, the Thai state has simply refused to recognize their distinctiveness, placing them instead within the lumpen category of 'Thai Muslims': 'within official discourse of Thai-ness while there is a place for Muslims, it seems there is no place for Malays' (Jory 2006, p. 43).

### **Managing the Malays**

In recent decades, the Thai state has used a combination of approaches to address the issue. Leeway granting was the primary theme of the post-1980s elite pact through which the South was managed, as a result of actions by the Prem Tinsulanond governments of 1980 to 1988. A central plank of this approach was the creation of certain special governance and consultative arrangements symbolized by the establishment of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC).

At the same time, leeway granting went hand-in-hand with minority management. While Malay Muslim elites were allowed to benefit from the ownership of private Islamic schools, and to enter a wide range of political roles including those of MP and minister, this granting of leeway did not mean a real diminution of Thai suspicions regarding Malay 'loyalty'. When political violence in the deep South re-emerged in 2004, elements of the Thai state were quick to blame the very same Malay Muslim elites who had been their closest collaborators. Wadah group politicians (who then formed part of the government Thai Rak Thai Party) were widely believed by the Thai security forces to be

behind the violence. One Wadah MP, Najmuddin Umar, was actually charged with treason by the Thai authorities, though the charges were later dropped (Prasert 2009). Especially after 2004, the military engaged in close scrutiny of local elites, who were subjected to regular visits, interviews, and various forms of harassment. Despite an apparent willingness to cut Malay Muslims some slack, the Thai state ultimately harboured deep misgivings about the trustworthiness and reliability even of those it had selected as its primary operatives in the community. Wherever granted, leeway needed to be policed, monitored, and tightly managed.

An alternative approach to the problem was to redefine the nature of the relationship between Bangkok and the deep South with reference to a new doctrine of multiculturalism. Such a doctrine was laid out by former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, who chaired the 2005–06 National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) to examine possible solutions to the Southern Thai conflict. In a televised conversation with then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in July 2005, Anand pointed out that Thailand was characterized by considerable ethnic and cultural diversity: Thaksin was of Chinese descent, and he himself had Mon origins. He argued that embracing and celebrating this diversity would create a more comfortable space for Malay Muslims within Thai society.<sup>5</sup> While the NRC's political proposals for addressing the violence were very modest – and widely criticized – Anand's most distinctive achievement was to shift the discourse towards models of multiculturalism, itself a significant change.

In a September 2005 speech, Anand took the argument a stage further. There he argued that Thais had lost many of their traditional values, including notions of 'sufficiency economy' (an important royal theme) and self-help (Anand 2005, p. 16). By contrast, Malay Muslim villages often lived very simple lives that were close to such values, since they 'don't aspire to use more money than necessary, they have a sense of satisfaction in sufficiency, they are not attached to consumer culture' (p. 16). In other words, Malay Muslims could be more Thai than the Thai, offering a potential 'way back' to Thai-ness for those who had lost sight of their original identity. Anand's view implied a romanticization of the village and 'traditional' self-help culture framed by royalist ideas of the sufficiency economy. This was a radical, indeed quite an extraordinary, claim which could be evaluated in different ways: as an excess of political correctness, or as a remarkable critical insight. Anand's support for ideas of multiculturalism – always subtly tied to quasi-essentialist notions of Thai-ness – represented an emerging theme for 'royal liberalism' (see Connors 2008, 2009a), a stance adopted by leading actors closely affiliated with Thailand's influential monarchy. Nonetheless, as Michael Connors has argued, it was a shift nestled within historical changes that had taken place in

Thailand over more than twenty years, and reflected the gradual rise of cultural diversity discourses (Connors 2009b). In effect, Anand advanced multiculturalism as a re-totalizing discourse to replace hard-line Thai nationalism, offering a new seating plan for the country's various minority populations. Ultimately, however, Anand's Thai-style multiculturalism was a top-down paternalistic project based on an expanded concept of Thai-ness. It did not amount to a real acknowledgement of difference, but was more a quest for the lowest common denominator and enlarged shared ground. As Connors (2009b) has argued, 'Thai-ness cannot escape its origins as an ethno-ideology, and while subordinate identities can flourish under it, none can stand equal to it' (p. 113).

### **Subjects, citizens, or what?**

In theory, Thais are citizens with rights based on successive constitutions. The 1997 and 2007 constitutions, for example, offer detailed specification concerning citizen rights. However, in practice, the nature of the Thai monarchy perpetuates a sense of subjecthood amongst Thais. Contrary to some claims, Thailand does not have a constitutional monarchy, but an extra-constitutional monarchy in which the palace – which may include royal advisors, courtiers, and an extended network of those who invoke their loyalty to the monarchy – enjoys considerable informal, unspoken, and unwritten authority. In other words, understanding the nature of power and social relations in Thailand involves moving beyond purely legal notions and engaging with more complex, ambiguous, and non-formal realities. I will argue here that this approach involves critically unpacking legalistic understandings of citizenship and engaging with notions of 'informal citizenship'. In other words, being a citizen of a country such as Thailand is not an either/or matter, but a question of degree. All Thai people may be citizens, but some Thai people are more 'citizenly' than others. While the legally-constituted graduated citizenship experienced by Thailand's Chinese minority in the 1950s may be a thing of the past, informally-graduated citizenship is a persistent reality, especially for Thailand's Malay Muslims. Malay Muslims have not been exempted from conscription because of fears about their disloyalty – as the Chinese were between 1953 and 1956 – but under an informal policy, conscripts from the Southern border provinces were deployed only in other regions of Thailand.<sup>6</sup>

For those living in western countries, citizenship may seem a relatively uncomplicated issue, but for many millions of people in Southeast Asia, citizenship is fraught with ambiguity and complexity. As Stefan Ehrentraut has argued (Ehrentraut 2009), Cambodians operate on a continuum of citizenship categories, compounded by

the lack of proper census data and birth registrations: some genuine citizens have genuine citizenship papers or ID cards; some genuine citizens have fake papers; and many fake citizens have fake papers. Those without proper papers may be subject to harassment, may need to pay bribes, and may be extremely vulnerable to changing regimes of regulation or simply to the transfer of individual officials between posts. Similar concerns apply in respect of many ethnic minority groups in Northern Thailand, including hundreds of thousands of 'stateless' Karen, as well as to huge swathes of the Burmese population. For such people, citizenship is always a question of negotiation. Even Thailand's most liberal constitution (that of 1997) explicitly assigned rights only to citizens: non-citizens had no constitutional rights.

The political theorist David Beetham has distinguished between 'procedural' and 'substantive' forms of democracy: procedural democracy is all about elections and parliaments, while substantive democracy involves questions of representation and participation (Beetham 1991). I would suggest that citizenship, like democracy, is a concept that operates on multiple levels. In Thailand, it is possible to hold procedural citizenship without substantive citizenship, since full citizenship contains informal elements that are unspoken, and yet are implicitly understood by everyone. Those who hold Thai nationality but do not participate in shared notions of Thai-ness are merely 'formal' or 'paper' citizens. Full Thai citizenship means holding formal citizenship plus embracing Thai-ness. It also means that those who do not feel entirely Thai should suffer from at least a mild form of Thai deficiency syndrome. In other words, we may provisionally distinguish between three categories of Thai citizen: full citizens who feel completely Thai; formal citizens who suffer from Thai deficiency syndrome; and paper citizens who do not suffer from Thai deficiency syndrome.

In the end, Thai-ness trumps Thai nationality (Thongchai 1994). Some non-Thais successfully 'pass' as Thai, because they speak Thai without an accent, and display outward adherence to the basic principles of Thai identity. 'Real' Thai citizens are supposed to subscribe to shared notions of identity, based on a loyalty to the three-part shibboleth 'Nation, Religion, King'. 'Nation' here implies the Thai nation as constructed during the reign of King Chulalongkorn: a centralized, unitary state subordinated to the power of Bangkok, in which all subsidiary identities are suppressed. This is problematic for many Malay Muslims, who regard their incorporation into Siam (later Thailand) as recent, arbitrary, and rather unwelcome. Many look back nostalgically to the earlier period of an independent or quasi-independent Patani state, with its own proud traditions as a centre of Islamic learning. 'Religion' actually means Buddhism, the *de*

*facto* state religion. Non-Buddhists can share Thai identity only insofar as they are willing to accommodate themselves to the dominance of Buddhism, to refrain from proselytizing, and to moderate their self-presentation and their religious demands. Of the three words, though, 'King' is the most important. Full Thai citizens are supposed both to feel and to express their unquestioning loyalty to the monarchy. Again, this is a difficult proposition for Malay Muslims living in Thailand. Patani had its own local kings (and, at one time, queens) who were co-opted, incorporated, and suppressed by the Siamese. While most Malay Muslims accept the Thai monarchy, few look upon it with unalloyed warmth. During the June 2006 celebrations of King Bhumibol's sixtieth year on the throne, Thais all over the country donned yellow shirts, wristbands, and other garb – except for Malay Muslims. In Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, with a few exceptions, only government officials and Buddhists wore yellow. Apart from adherence to the notions of 'Nation, Religion, and King', Thai-ness also implies a deep attachment to the Thai language. While most Malay Muslims, especially those under forty, have at least a decent command of Thai (virtually everyone watches Thai television), for many, Thai remains a second language, acquired for pragmatic purposes, but not a core element of their identity (Madmarn 1999, p. 75). To possess Thai-ness, fluency in Thai is not sufficient: Thai should be one's mother tongue, one's language of first choice. A poor Thai accent should be a mark of shame, rather than, as some Malay Muslims still regard it, a badge of honour.<sup>7</sup>

'Thai-ness', the informal notion which looms larger than formal legal categories such as citizenship, is essentially incompatible with the 'Malay-ness' which defines identity for the denizens of Patani. Both Thai-ness and Malay-ness are essentialist notions of identity, rooted in mythical understandings and unable to share space on equal terms. While Kasian has asked publicly why it could not be possible to be both Malay and Thai at the same time – just as it is possible to be both Chinese and Thai at the same time – the answer is clear (Tejapira 2005).<sup>8</sup> The Chinese in Thailand have been willing to subordinate their Chinese-ness to Thai-ness, because they saw themselves as immigrants who needed to adapt to the rules and mores of Thai society, and because they suffered from Thai deficiency syndrome. The Malays view themselves as an indigenous people who have been colonized, are immune to Thai deficiency syndrome, and so are unwilling to play second identity fiddle to Thai-ness. Becoming Thai is actually a dual-track process: one track concerns formal citizenship recognition, which has not been a problem for Malay Muslims in the Deep South; a second track concerns informal citizenship recognition, which Malay Muslims have not even sought, let alone been granted.

A second difference between Chinese-ness and Malay-ness is that the recent re-legitimation of *lukjin* identity follows an earlier period of repression. For many decades, the Chinese (labelled the ‘Jews of the East’ by King Rama VI) were obliged to adopt Thai names, banned from entering government service, and forced to kowtow to their Thai ‘betters’. Only after they had convincingly proven their loyalty were the Chinese granted full legal citizenship rights, and their participation in Thai-ness was acknowledged and credited. A period of marginalization, holding a provisional status as sojourners and interlopers, was virtually a pre-requisite for acceptance and approval. Approval was supported by the growing economic prosperity of China since 1979, as well as the warm diplomatic and trade relations between the two countries.

Yet, in the end, such acceptance and approval was on offer to those who would agree to play the game on Thai rules: the Sino-Thai were in a far better situation than the Chinese in Indonesia or Malaysia, for example, who have lived with historical burdens of formally unequal differentiated citizenship. Malay Muslims, who saw themselves as settled, even ‘original’ inhabitants of an historic homeland, were unwilling to collude with their own marginalization. In short, there are two major reasons why you cannot be Thai and Malay at the same time. First, Thais are not willing to grant Malay-ness the status of a distinct identity, not even a subordinated one.<sup>9</sup> Second, Malays are not willing to accept the dominance of Thai-ness, and since they feel no deficiency in themselves, they fail to express deference to Thai identity.

### **Obstacles to Recognizing Difference**

Thai Buddhist views of the Malay-Muslim minority form a crucial element of the problem. While the majority population typically accuses Malay Muslims of harbouring ‘separatist’ tendencies, the exclusionary attitude of Bangkok Thais towards this group has the effect of creating a considerable degree of psychological separation, one which is compounded by the location of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat at the southern extremity of Thailand. Most Thai Buddhists have no reason to travel to the Malay-majority provinces and, indeed, would not dream of doing so. Thai Buddhist designations of Malay Muslims as the ‘other’ constitute a form of implicit separatism.

In a classic distinction made by Suhrke (1975), Thais tend to classify Malay Muslims into two contrasting groups: loyalists and separatists. In effect, Muslims are viewed in stark, binary, and highly moralistic terms: good Muslims versus bad Muslims. Good Muslims are happy with Thai ‘virtuous rule’, and are loyal to the benevolence of the

monarchy, reflected in the justice system, the bureaucracy, and the security forces. Bad Muslims are untrustworthy, disloyal, and may be tacitly or actively supportive of separatism. Thai Buddhists tend to classify anyone seeking greater political participation for Malay Muslims as 'separatists', making little distinction between decentralization, devolution, autonomy, and outright independence. 'Separatism', literally a desire to tear apart the land and create a distinct Malay state, has been the central accusation of disloyalty made by Buddhists against Malay Muslims, a catch-all term covering a wide range of political positions. For Thai Buddhists, Malay Muslims are excessively attached to their own language, their traditional system of Islamic education (a major fount of disloyalty), and, of course, to their religion.

## **Conclusion**

Historically, Malay Muslims in Thailand have been construed and constructed as subjects rather than citizens. Their loyalty to the monarchy has been consistently questioned and contested by the authorities, and they have been forced repeatedly to demonstrate their worthiness and their right to be considered Thai. Being Thai involves a willingness to subsume your ethnicity, language, and religious identity to a dominant discourse and mindset of Thai-ness. Malay Muslims fail to pass this basic test, and thus are 'not Thai', despite the fact that they are born in Thailand, hold Thai citizenship, and increasingly speak Thai as a first language. Given Malay Muslim ambivalence towards 'Thai-ness' (a deep unease concerning Thai society's attitudes to sexual promiscuity and drinking alcohol, for example), proving loyalty and demonstrating a willingness to embrace wider social norms is near impossible for most Malay Muslims. In their rejection of Thai-ness, Malay Muslims constitute the main site of resistance to Bangkok's political and cultural authority. They are left with an empty choice between 'separatism' and 'loyalty', one which for most of them has no meaning (Cornish 1997, p. 113). Informal notions of Thai-ness trump formal citizenship criteria and illustrate both a basic lack of modernity and the irrelevance of legalism. Malay claims offer a way forward to reconstruct ethno-nationalist notions of Thai identity.

The refusal of Malay Muslims to embrace Thai-ness is deeply subversive to the Thai state, since it contains the potential to begin unravelling the paternalistic nature of relations between the Thai state and its subjects/citizens. Malay Muslim demands for control over their own political resources represent a profound challenge to Thai self-colonization and deep-rooted paternalism. It is for this reason that even progressive, liberal elites have tried to play down arguments for autonomy and decentralization. For a minority in Thailand to assert its distinctive identity is to demonstrate disloyalty and is readily

constructed as a prelude to overt rebellion. This is even more so when, as with Malay Muslims, that identity is linked to demands for political authority and power. Thai citizenship does not accord rights of active political participation to members of self-proclaimed minorities; such rights belong only to those who have warmly embraced Thai-ness, and are indeed the primary preserve of Bangkokians.

In the face of an ongoing violent conflict, Malay Muslims remain structurally marginalized. Two major alternatives to the status quo have emerged. One is that Thai society adopts notions of multiculturalism and becomes much less suspicious of Malays and other minorities. In other words, more leeway is granted, without the usual accompanying emphasis on micro-managing minorities and especially monitoring the Malay Muslim elite for the slightest sign of imagined disloyalties. A second alternative is that the Thai state proceeds with some form of substantive decentralization, transferring major responsibilities for governing the deep South to Malay Muslims. Schwarzmantel (2003) has argued, as a general proposition, that the global decline of homogeneity can only be addressed through solutions based on devolution and forms of autonomy (Schwarzmantel 2003, p. 108). Both of these alternatives would mark a complete break with the old models of nation-building and identity suppression that have characterized Thai approaches to ethnic minorities until now. Both routes would involve a more flexible notion of citizenship which would extend informal citizenship to Malay Muslims, over and above the formal, paper citizenship they currently hold. Both routes may have to await a new political order, perhaps in a new reign, before they can be readily pursued. A 'culturally intermediate Malay-Thai community', parallel to the 'culturally intermediate Sino-Thai community' identified by Kasian, has yet to emerge convincingly in the deep South of Thailand.

The Southern Thai case highlights the inadequacy of most recent writing about the subject of citizenship. As Sassen (2006) has argued, we need to develop a more sophisticated grasp of the available variants of formal and informal citizenship (Sassen 2006, p. 203). I have argued here that citizenship, like democracy, is not an either/or, but a matter of degree. Only by understanding citizenship as a continuum can we hope accurately to capture and to analyse how ethnic and religious minorities negotiate their relationships with the state. For much of the world's population, the status, rights, and above all the identity of the citizen remains intensely contingent and contested.

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## Notes

1. The new Chularajamontri appointed in 2010 is a Southerner, but from Songkhla rather than the Malay-majority region.
2. Interview with academic, 6 January 2006.
3. Interview 3 March 2006.
4. I owe this phrase and some of these ideas to a very useful personal communication from Michael Montesano, 15 April 2010.
5. 'Kansanthana phiset ruang kansang santhisuk nai 3 jangwat chaidaen phaktai', [Special conversation about peace-building in the three Southern border provinces], broadcast at 20.35 on 28 July 2005, on TV Channel 11.
6. Interview with Thai military correspondent, 16 April 2006.
7. Exceptions are made here for half-Westerner-half-Thais (*lukkrung*); and for celebrities of ambiguous ethnicity, such as former Miss Universe Pornthip Nakhirunkanok and golfer Tiger Woods, who are viewed as Thai because of their status and achievements, despite their lack of fluency in the language. For a relevant discussion, see Callahan 1998.
8. When Kasian raised the comparison between the Chinese and the Malays at a Hat Yai conference in 2005, he was criticized by a prominent Malay-Muslim politician for failing to distinguish between an indigenous and an immigrant minority.
9. An Interior Ministry document issued for the guidance of Thai government officials in the region actually banned them from referring to Malay Muslims as 'Malay', on the grounds that the term might 'create dissatisfaction' or 'create division' (Connors 2009, p. 121).

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*Informal citizens: graduated citizenship in Southern Thailand* 17

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