The Autonomy Questions:
Conflict Transformation in the Three Southern Border Provinces[1]

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Abstract

Political resolutions have been avoided and became a taboo for the Thai state in handling violence in the southern border provinces. Through out a long period of up and down in the bitter relationship between the central government representing Thai state and the peripheral southern most provinces, security control and public administration has been the primary measures. This paper interprets the recurrent violence as a critical turning point to conflict transformation. While multiculturalism and conflict transformation might lead to several ideas like power sharing, identity and symbolic representation, and resources allocation, there are a number of challenging factors to be considered ranging from the unity and visibility of the armed struggle groups, the strength of the current local government system, the center-peripheral relations, the democratic politics of the south, to the nationalist sentiment of the majority Thai. This paper argues that how the public intellectuals of the Malay Muslim community find their way to become more assertive and overcome the atmosphere of distrust turns out to be a critical question determining the future of conflict transformation.

Interpreting the Escalation of Violent Conflict

The historical grievances of the southern border provinces (Deep South) during the configuration of the Thai modern state could be the root cause of the insurgency and recurring violence. Yet, for more than a hundred years, people of the region have mutually proved a peaceful co-existence among different ethnic identities. The recurring violence has been determined to a large extent by the unhealthy relationship between the central state and the border communities. The past experiences have demonstrated that the more peaceful periods in the history were the time that the local provinces were able to maintain its political and administrative practices of the Malay-Muslim culture.

The fact that social injustice and the gap between the state and local communities also prevailing in most part of the country are quite valid. Yet, the people in the Deep South, with the history and the identity complex, face with more difficulty in dealing with the state apparatus in the public sector. The long and unraveled history of the state suppression and the people's resistance contribute to a considerable degree of distrust between the state and the people over a long period of time, reinforcing the "we-them"

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syndrome. The recent escalation of conflict, with the new pattern of violence against innocent people and the return of the military's omnipresent within the areas, has exacerbated the element of identity politics in the South. This has gone beyond the debate whether identity playing an important part in violence explanation. It indeed reiterates that identity politics interweaving with the issue of social justice, so it has a certain implication on how the problem should be solved.

The cultural specific of Malay-Muslim of the majority population in the Deep South and the unsettling memory of the past grievances explain why cultural assimilation and integration does not always work well with the people there. The incompatibility of minority cultural expression (Malay-Muslim) in the public sector operated under the majority's cultural scheme (Buddhist-Thai) is now a revealing truth. The incompatibility is not only an issue of cultural freedom and discrimination which are not considered a pressing problem in Thai society. Surin Pitsuwan's proposition is the *cosmology of conflict* in which he states that "*there are fundamental differences in the two cosmological orders being perpetuated and followed by the Thai government officials and the Malay Muslims in southern Thailand today. They are two different cosmologies. The Thai government officials perceive themselves as eyes and ears of the Thai state whose rituals and value systems are based and informed by a totally different religious worldview. ...not prepared to understand the differences within the cosmological outlook of the south.*" (2007:284-5)

Provided that the on-going violent conflict in the south is more complex than what the public generally imagined, it is now imperative to ask if Thailand is at a turning point toward an option for sustainable peace or it is just another business as usual. The paper raises the questions if some kind of arrangement for more autonomy for the communities of the border provinces will be necessary in order to move forward, if the current decentralization and local government scheme will be able to accommodate the need for a greater recognition of cultural identity, and the pivotal role of local communities in accomplishing it. The paper contends that the choice and the scheme for more autonomy will require multi-stakeholders engagement

Conflict transformation: Choices of Resolutions

The recurrent and escalation of violence to a large extent indicates that conflict of the past 100 years has not really been transformed despite constant interventions. The problem once was contained by the institutional mechanism that provided a negotiation platform outside the existing political and administrative structure at the time; it included the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC), and the Military-Police-Civilian Force. Such institutional arrangement has been vulnerable because of the uncertainty of the different government policies. It reflects as if the destiny of the relationship between the Malay-Muslim in the south and the rest of the society including the state, is in the hand of a referee. This can be managed and contained only for a certain period of time. In the long run, there is a need to settle the incompatibility. Furthermore, the previous arrangement could not survive the rising global religious or even neo-liberalist fundamentalism and it was vulnerable to the internal politics of political rivalry.

Conflict transformation generally implies changes or reforms rising from the dynamics of conflict and resolutions. It can begin from changing perspective of conflict parties as well as the society at large to become more collaborative, open minded or self-regulated; a reform of institution and politics to accommodate the incompatibility; and realization of culture of peace, justice and toleration (see Austin, et al, 2004). In this case, it requires a new arrangement of the central state vs. local community relationship, and the recognition of minority rights in the democratic system. As the society opening more to globalization, its contradictory impacts are higher in Thailand, particularly in the southern borders. The reconfiguration of ethnic and religious identity is taking place, due to the expansion of global and cross-border social networking, while the public sphere within the country is not opening up enough for ethnic minorities and perhaps subjects to a higher control by state nationalism. It is contended that for conflict transformation in the south, conflict parties must come to terms with state vs. regional nationalism, and move on to a new shared value of multiculturalism. It is also mostly important that peace building process does not imply a giving up of individuals' or groups' aspirations, but expressing them through a peaceful political process.

For southern Thailand, this will need a re-assessment of conditions for a multicultural society, that is, access to public sphere including public spaces, institution, media, symbols and school curricular (Pieterse, 2006:12). In so doing, the management of public sector in consideration of ethnic representation is a primary concern. The notion of representative bureaucracy is noteworthy in the environment of the Buddhist ethnocracy[2] in Thai public administration. This might have to take into consideration of both the structure and behavior of public organizations in regarding ethnicity.

Conflict transformation can still be initiated amidst the on-going violence by redressing grievances and managing social and political environment to allow healthy co-existence of different ethnic identities. The components of multiculturalism that could provide a framework for policy development includes power sharing, economic/resource development, public institution access, and symbolic recognition. The paper puts the primary question forward if the existing political and administrative structure in the southern border provinces has facilitated local people's ability to express their ethnic identities and live their way of life. This question might bring us back again to the issue of choices of conflict transformation, between multiculturalism and (regional) nationalism, between Islamic and multicultural province. What remains to be tackled is the kind of political space or arrangement to materialize a common desirable society.

Since 2004 when violence broke out in the south, there has been countless recommendations for measures/strategies and guidelines to resolve violence.[3] In general,

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[2] Ethnocracy was referred to as the cultural control of state apparatus, in this case is Buddhist ethnocracy, by Jan Nederveen Pieterse at the Political Science Colloquium on Shaping Multiculturalism in Southern Borders of Thailand, October 7, 2006, PSU, Pattani.

[3] The Peace Building Council, Special Border Provinces Administrative Center, reported on proposed resolutions gathered during 2004-8, and came up with 135 measures/guidelines/strategies from 23 documents by individual thinkers, academic, government agencies and politicians.

most proposals are concentrated on the management of conflict including measures against the insurgency, management of information and media, coordination and organization. Grievances are recognized and social and economic measures are suggested. Civil society and public intellectuals have called for a better understanding and awareness of ideas of cultural diversity, peace, and non-violence.

There are cliché used in the resolution discourse, among others two important indicators of conflict transformation, "using political strategy over the military tactics" or political primacy strategy, and "non-violent approach". This creates wide criticism of being rhetorical. Jaturong Chaisang, former Deputy Prime Minister under the Thaksin regime in 2004, advocates the primacy of political strategy and conveys the meaning of the political over military tactics as being sensitive to the feeling of the people, taking into consideration of cultural differences, and redressing grievances. The suppression of the insurgents should be secondary and confined within the legal framework. Jaturong's proposal was overlooked and not implemented, so the political primacy became rhetorical. As well, non-violence was preached by most governments with no implications on the practical level due to officials' perception of its incompatibility with the army's conventional approach to suppression of the insurgence. The policy was blamed by most security officials as causing confusion for their day to day operation. In this regard, the political will and leadership to adjust the conventional strategies are to be questioned seriously.

After the 19th September Coup in 2006, there was less countervailing public action to monitor the policy on the south, so the overall management and operation has been in the hand of the army. This coupled with the establishment of tools (the emergency decree and the martial law for the sake of impunity) and organization, that is, the renew SBPAC under the command of the army chief. Srisompob reported that huge budget was allocated for solving the trouble in the south. In 5 years time 109,000Million Baht was spent (2009, Deep South URL), but high proportion of the budget went into the security sector. Despite some improvements of the operation procedure in both the military and the police, the atmosphere of conflict resolution under the control of the military is far from the idea of conflict transformation.

It seems what come out of the numerous efforts to fix the problem down south are not mostly leading to the change for a reform. The National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) Report as well as Mr. Jaturong's proposal attempted for a transformative approach with a few critical recommendations:
- emancipating Islam education,
- liberating cross-border migrant workers,
- installing a proportion of Malay personnel in the public sector, and
- recognizing Malay as another working language.

Unfortunately, not many good policies were carried out since they could not win the opinions of those higher ranking officials in Bangkok (see Jaturong 2009). So far the favorable response to conflict resolution is the positive discrimination measure for the Malay Muslim such as a quota system, not without criticism, for university enrollment

and the personnel recruitment of some public services. Yet, inconsistency and unsystematic manner in the policy implementation are evident, which unfortunately can be interpreted as insincerity of the government part.

In the NRC's comprehensive recommendations, long term resolutions were also proposed with an establishment of an organization like the previous SBPAC and the mechanism to get community involvement. They seem to opt for an incremental approach to change. Improvement of local government is also suggested for a possibility of locally elected governor in the future (see NRC URL).

Can the NRC recommendations accommodate what Surin Pitsuwan called "a need for a cultural space" to fix the problem in the deep south? Certainly he seems to recognize a boundary of the possible resolution when NRC implies that autonomy is not an option (Pitsuwan 2007: 293). If the resolutions were made from the Thai government side alone, the thinking of an unthinkable would not happen. Conflict transformation requires conflict parties to be involved.

Autonomy Debates

The most controversial idea for resolving a century old conflict in the deep south, if not self-determination or separatism, is to treat the area as an "autonomous region" [เขต ปกครองพิเศษ].   This has become a very sensitive terminology, even the National Reconciliation Commission has tried avoiding it. The argument put forward by the opponent is its being unconstitutional for it might jeopardize Thailand as a unitary state. In another dimension, the idea of autonomous region has challenged Buddhist nationalist ideology. The general public is skeptical about it, and to a certain extent sees this as a threat to the national security rather than a resolution.

Different fora[4] on the directions of local government have captured a variety of ideas. *The most extreme idea* of local autonomy is the ability to apply Islamic law, Shari'ah. This means the area should be governed by different laws so that the Malay-Muslim culture can be expressed in terms of language, legal system, public administration, social and economic development as well as local politics. Proponents of this position partly are intellectual, religious leaders, Malay Muslim and political elites, and progressive youth groups.

A moderate view believes that things can be solved in a long term manner by making people's aspiration expressed in local politics regardless of their cultural identity which will require the people in the provinces to be able to choose the provincial governors. The election of governors might follow the model of Bangkok Metropolitan, Pattaya city or having a special legislation. This contributes to the recognition of political representation at important political and official positions. Those who support

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[4] A research project on Multi-ethnic Democracy and Local Government for the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand supported by National Research Council, 2005-6, and a similar project carried out by Mahidol University, 2005-7.

this view are for instance, national and local politicians, progressive civil society, and academics.

Lastly, the autonomy under the scope of existing *decentralization scheme* is seen as adequate to address local needs. This view can be claimed to be the majority. It is believed that with the existing local government be fully implemented and strengthened, changes can be made within the existing system, for instance, reorientation of public personnel, reform of security and justice system, establishing a mediating and coordinating institution, and social and economic development programs. This view is popular among bureaucrats, academics and perhaps urban middle classes as well as local politicians.

It is true that the idea of local autonomy or some forms of autonomy for the south, whether we understand it or not, is out of the question. To be fair, under Thaksin regime, Thailand used to grant special privileges to some designated areas for tourism promotion not to comply with certain laws such as environmental impact assessment and other related regulations on revenue and taxes. The area was under the command of a special autonomous organization that has the authority to overrule other department and ministry mandates. This has created a lot of protests from the NGO activists for fear of people would not be protected from the government large scale projects. Some people call it one country two systems model. When this similar idea applied to the Deep South, the government finds it a threat. There is a general misconception about threats to national security indeed.

A sensible comment on the issue of the deep south's autonomy, which can not be overlooked, is whether more autonomy is the right answer to the call. High ranking officials often asked if the country having a structural or a personnel problem in regarding to the deep south? Would this lead to other similar groups in other part of Thailand demanding more autonomy as well? Is this justified to satisfy one minority group? [5] These seemingly simple questions but difficult to answer indicate a certain degree of mystifying perception about the changing feature of national security and its relationship with territory, the majority-minority complex, Thai identity or Thai's shared loyalty. These questions must be transcended and will require a social process to come to terms with mutual understanding.

The recent public discussion began to probe into the value behind Thainess particularly when applied to the deep south. Saichon Sattayanurak argues that the term "Thai" has not a definite meaning but, on the contrary, being used negatively to discriminate the others. The phrase Thainess therefore should be dropped (Sattayanurak 2008, 109).[6] Interestingly enough, the most comforting definition of Thainess found in

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[5] Group discussion, Peace Building Program 1, King Prachadhipok Institute, 27 December 2008.

[6] Recent works demystifying Thai Identity are for example เวทีสาธารณะ มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล ครั้งที่ ๑ ความหลากหลายทาง วัฒนธรรม ภาษาและ ชาติพันธุ์ [The 1st Mahidol University Public Forum on Cultural diversity, language and ethnicity] 4 August 2005; Krtitaya Achavanichkul, editor, จินตนาการ ความเป็นไทย [Imagining Thainess]. Bangkok: Institute for Population and Social Studies and the Center for the Promotion of Peace, Mahidol

the popular folk singer, Ad Karabao's commercial song when he sings, "who's a Thai, a considerate and generous person is definitely a Thai" [คนไหนคนไทย ถ้ามีน้ำใจ คนไทยแน่นอน]; there is nothing about ethnic identity.

Perhaps one concern can be addressed here is whether the insurgent find autonomy issue a common goal and if it can substitute the independence cause. Perhaps the most constructive message from the independent movement is from Haji Sulong Audul Kadre who was the President of the Pattani Islam Committee in 1947.

1. The Government appoints elected Muslim leaders as Governors of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwas, and Satoon, who have authority to discharge or transfer officials in the areas.
2. Eighty per cent of local officials in the public sector must be Muslim
3. Use Malay as another official language in addition to Thai language.
4. Use Malay as medium in elementary school.
5. Use Islamic Law in religious court separating from the provincial criminal court where joint judges used to be applied.
6. Taxes collected from within the locality must be allocated for welfare of local people only.
7. The Provincial Islam Committee will have the highest authority over issues related to Islamic laws and the leaders mentioned in Point 1 (Muslim governor) have the highest authority over Muslim matters and traditions.

Haji Sulong's propositions were once sympathized by the Thai government during Pridi Panomyong but it was doomed to failure with the political uncertainty in that period. Wan Kadir Cheman, the former Bersatu's leader, reaffirms similar propositions, expressed his comments after the Kru Se incident in June 2005. He trusts that if the Thai government is concerned and responsive to the proposals, the armed movement might be convinced to end their struggle. He referred to two broad points.

1. Recognize the importance of the people's history, Muslim identity and the specific needs of Muslim on politics, economic and culture.
2. Apply article 282 to 290 of the 1997 Constitution rigorously and efficiently, for those provisions in the constitution will allow local executive to be established and authorized to be in charge of their own destiny.

Taking the above two demands seriously, there is a degree of specificity of the Deep South and a flexible autonomy setting (different from other provinces in Thailand) is required. Yet, both Haji Sulong and W. K Cheman do not imply a separation. In deed the appreciation of the previous 1997 Constitution was shown in his statement. In the 2008 Constitution, despite commencing in the period of the military coup, a higher degree of decentralization of local government can be achieved.

Univesity, 2008; and the Thai translated version of UNDP Human Development Report. Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World, 2004.

Those above messages were no secret to the state. Some of the provisions mentioned in Haji Sulong's demands were applied before in the history. The question now is if the central government has given any legitimacy to those demands. There has been a denial to pursue a negotiation between the insurgent and the government but unofficial dialogues have been initiated particularly under Surayuth government (Crisis Group 2007).

The autonomy debates entered public and national attention by an introduction of academic discussion on a special model of local government for the deep south (see Srisompob and Langputeh, 2008, Banpasirichote 2008, and Srisombon and McCargo, 2008). The national politicians with Malay Muslim identity picked up the issue positively. The short lived Minister of Interior during Samak Suntaravej's government, Chalerm Yoobanrung, triggered the public criticism with an idea of considering a special area for the deep south. Further exploration of the ideas by a few study trips of high ranking officials to different countries such as Zinjian of China, Aland of Findland, Spain, Northern Ireland which initiated by a few efforts of a foundation from a European country, some standing committee of the National Legislative Council during the coup government, the National Security Council during the Thaksin regim, and the King Prachadhipok Institute. Mixed responses are not beyond expectation reflecting a contested discourse on national unity and the indivisibility of Thailand.

The Autonomy Questions

The World's Working Regional Autonomies by Thomas Benedikter (2007) can be a convenient and comprehensive source for a better understanding of autonomy from the practical ground. There are many possibilities to apply certain degree of autonomy and not necessarily equivalent to a separate state like other power-sharing models might suggest. There are ways of linking an autonomous community/region to the national government. There are four main categories of definitions or approaches to autonomy (Benedikter, 2007:16).

1. Autonomy as a right to act upon one's own discretion in certain matters, whether the right is possessed by an individual or public body.
2. Autonomy as a synonym for more independence
3. Autonomy as a synonym for decentralization
4. Autonomy as a quality providing for exclusive powers of legislation, administration and adjudication in certain areas.

The forms of autonomy can also be different, ranging from territorial (area based region), cultural (based on personal identity), to local autonomy (or administrative autonomy). It seems that the territorial and local autonomy can provide an initial ideas of what is appropriate for the deep south, provided that the Malay Muslim are mostly concentrated in the three provinces and form a majority there. A glance of what are possibilities for an arrangement of self-government provided in Table I where Benedikter has summarized from the Draft Document for Special Convention, May 12, 1994 on Autonomy Rights of Ethnic Groups in Europe (2007:4159).

A fundamental principle of any arrangement for self-government is an agreement between conflict parties and the endorsement of the local population. Benedikter points out that the procedure toward an establishment of the autonomy is equally important (2007:46-7). The current situation is problematic for an agreement to be initiated because of several unknown factors including the visibility of the legitimate independent movement(s).   This concern expressed by a Malaysian official under the Task Force 2010 to deal with southern Thailand that the unity of several insurgent groups might impede further development of peace dialogue and it does not seem to be any change so far.   This was also realized by certain parties in the independent movements.[7]   It is irony to find that not many Malay Muslim scholars have been articulated about what should be proposed. A Malay Muslim elite suggested that a form of autonomy is the answer but it is best proposed by outsiders like university scholars in Bangkok (Adulloh 2008). The issue of trust, personal security, legitimacy and representatives are yet to be unraveled.

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[7] Personal communication with a Malaysian official, and a few members of an independent movement, names not to be revealed, Malaysia, February 24, 2009.

Table 1: The Scope of Different Forms of Autonomy

Territorial Autonomy

All powers considered necessary for conducting the affairs of an ethnic group, specifically:

 - language rights and policy
 - the rights of the ethnic group national emblems, use of names and toponyms
 - the right to settle any question of possible second citizenship
 - education, including higher education
 - cultural institutions and programmes
 - radio, TV, electronic media
 - licensing of professions and trades
 - use of natural resources
 - health care, social services and insurance
 - regional transport and communications
 - energy production
 - banks and other financial institutions
 - regional and local police
 - taxation for regional purposes
 - environmental protection
 - urban planning, development programmes
 - regional economic policy, incentives for economic branches

Cultural Autonomy

All powers considered necessary for the preservation and development of the cultural identity, specifically:

 - language rights
 - culture
 - education system
 - information, including media
 - use of the etic groups national emblems and toponyms
 - participation in the settlement of possible second citizenship
 - any other matters necessary for preserving and exercising the protective rights they are entitled to

Local Autonomy

Regulation of institutional bilingualism within the local self-administration:

 - Use of names and symbols specific to the ethnic group
 - Regulation of local customs and festivities
 - Protection of local monuments and memorials
 - Local security and traffic police
 - Local health and building inspectors
 - Institutions for local teaching, media, traditions, education, safeguarding economic activities

Source: Benedekter, 2007: 59.

Local Government and Autonomy Questions

The question remains, however, if the existing scheme of local government can accommodate different ways of life of the local people, protect human security, restore justice system, and enhance co-existence among the population? Is the politics

With the long tradition of highly centralized government administration, decentralization is at the state of stagnation. It is worsen by the problem of weak political will to fully enhance the capacity of local government, the lack of trust and confidence in local leadership.

The complexity of local government development in these provinces is the fact that the lives of the Malay-Muslim are framed by Thai Buddhist ethnocracy where by the cultural domination of the state apparatus is Thai Buddhism. The political representation at the local level is not a problem since majority in the local government are local people, but ethnic representation in the public institution at the provincial and district level does not reflect the reality of the population. The practice of decentralization under supervision of provincial and central government is not genuine; and it might not necessarily facilitate the expression of cultural diversity.

The local government model, particularly the sub-district or Tambon Administrative Organization (PAO) and the Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO), has been improved by the 1997 Constitution. Election of members and head of the administration was introduced to implement local democracy. This local government is added on the existing structure of the village and the sub-district (tambon) headman under the Ministry of Interior and the religious leader under Islamic Administration Act. These are all operated under the authority of regional government namely the District Chief and the Provincial Governor appointed from the central government, the Ministry of Interior. It is quite true that the life of a Malay-Muslim is subject to different layers of state and religious authority which ironically does not make their life better.

Local government is supported by decentralization policy in which certain state functions/services and the budget allocation is in the process of being transferred to the local governments at different levels. The whole things are meant to increase local autonomy for self-government.   The Plan and Steps of Decentralization Act 2001 (พรบ.แผนกำหนดขั้นตอนการกระจายอำนาจ), local government can exercise their power to control and manage community activities. They are entitled to voice their concern over the development even outside their jurisdiction for the concern of the possible impacts. It is also possible to develop the regulations and local decree to serve the community own objectives. The problem however remains in the decentralization process which is facing some implementation obstacles, namely, the delay in personnel transfer and the budget allocation.

With the available legal framework and the fact that local governments in the three border provinces are run by the Malay-Muslim, the issue of political representation

in the local government is no longer an issue. In addition, the new development of personal recruitment at local government is in the hand of the local governments themselves. The Department of Local Administration from the central government will no longer arrange for the recruitment (Bunsueb, 2009).

The concern for political representation at the national level has also been relaxed since Malay-Muslims were present in the national parliament for quite some time. A more serious problem is on the contrary how responsive are their representatives. This is the politics within the Malay-Muslim democratic community.

In focus group discussion, members of local governments expressed their contentment with the existing system, but could not claim to be able to shape the on-going violence to a better direction, while the religious and village leaders are not satisfied with the impact of fierce electoral competitions dividing the communities. The question is raised therefore why people cannot or do not exercise their power through local government to represent people's aspiration.

The answers gathered from several focus groups organized by the National Research Council Project and the Mahidol University Project on local government reveal a number of issues worth considering.

First, the fundamental problem of local administration especially TAOs is that there has been a misconception of the local government philosophy (Kittavon, 2006). Most local government turns out to be project managers concerning more of how to propose a plan for and spend the annual budget. Local governments have not been reoriented toward the protection of people's security and rights as well as the protection of natural habitat.

Second, as much as it can exercise administrative power within their jurisdiction, local governments do not enjoy their autonomy. There are a few local governments in the country that were able to negotiate with the District Chief or Provincial Governor. The rest just simply cannot escape from the logic of centralized government. Practically, we are talking about a larger problem of the culture of the state that captures local government. Above all, people in general do not look up to the local government with some confidence and trust. Local election practices were criticized as heavily based on patronage system. Thus, we are also talking about a larger problem of new political culture in the making. Local governments will have to go through some transitional period of no less than 5-10 years to become a capable self-government, provided that some remedies are being made. This development should go hand in hand with the growing local civil society and cross provincial network.

Furthermore, surprisingly enough, democratic politics have not been responsive to people's grievances. The work Wadah political group has been rather successful before the Thanksin's regime. There are a few MP that are quite down to earth. The work of Wadah has yield a certain development for Islam institutions such as Pondok subsidy fund and other initiatives in the pipeline. However, the political partisan and

fragmentation has done some damages to the Wadah. The Deep South no longer has their collective voices in the house of parliament. Democracy, a procedural kind alone, has been short of substance and concentrated on competition and rivalry which undermined the unity of religious and local community. The liberal forms of democracy, if not by itself constitutes a cause of conflict and violence, might not necessarily reflect a good politics.

Information from interviews points to the direction that there are some problems regarding the recognition and control of local Malay language and education of Muslim children. However, these problems, as important as they are, do not so much affect the day to day life, and there have been some adjustments all along. The survey of people in the three border provinces also confirms that the majority were satisfied with their religious and traditional practices (Banpasirichote and others 2006). People have practiced multi-lingual naturally in the local communities and religious education has been organized by the communities themselves. More policy fine-tuning for example on public education might be needed, however.

The problem pertaining to the debate on local Malay language and Muslim's education is therefore an issue of symbolic recognition, and their representation in the structure of the state. The more serious problem on the contrary is social justice and state prejudice against the ethnic minorities which results in unequal opportunities in economic and political life; Malay-Muslim is only one among other examples in Thailand.

Democracy does not function well and needs to be more creative when interfacing with religious institution. There is also a discrepancy in opinion as to whether politics, i.e., elections, should be pushed back on track by moral guidance embedded in Islam. In any case, it seems that healthy democracy in the southern border provinces to a large extent relates to the strength of religious institution and active communities to ensure moral legitimacy of politics and provide traditional checks and balances. Bancha Pongpanich discovered that in the evaluation of the Social Investment Fund after 1997 financial crisis, 80% of Muslim communities by village heads have transparency and accountability problem, for most fund was channeled to families and relatives. Bancha found involving the community Mosques in the management of development fund might help solve the problem (Southern Border Area News, 2005).

Conclusions

Questions about a greater autonomy for the Deep South so far do not belong to the independent movements yet. Skepticism from the Thai public is legitimate but the changing perspective will certainly be critical for transformation of conflict. The current situation of local government does not indicate the people enjoy their autonomy. Yet, with the existing legal provision, local government has not utilized their full potential to become more autonomous. An introduction and implementation of a new form of local or territorial autonomy might suffer from the lack of authentic democratic politics. Considering the rights and responsibility that might have to be taken care of by the local

people themselves, there are a number of issues to be tackled in the interface between Malay Muslim cultural traits and modern democratic governance.

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