

CHAPTER V

BIRTH OF THE MODERN SEPARATIST MOVEMENT

5.1 Modernization and Assimilation

Haji Sulong's seven points appeared to be a call for secession. Outbreaks of rioting in the south were evidence of mass mobilization. Groups such as the PPM and GAMPAR demonstrated that the two sides of separatism; one that was led by the exiled sultanate families seeking the restoration of their power, and the other led by religious teachers seeking to rally popular struggle based on Malay ethnicity, were consolidating against a Buddhist Thai nationalist assimilationist policy initiated by Bangkok.¹ The Thai government perceived the Malay Muslims as demanding separation, rather than calling for self rule and cultural and linguistic rights. They saw the Malays as engaging in rebellion, rather than protest to achieve their ends. As Thailand began to modernize economically against the backdrop of the cold war, the idea of a strong separatist movement and rebellion in the south was an immediate threat to Thailand's territorial integrity, and one that would be dealt with using suppression and assimilation.

Thailand's economy improved on a large scale during the 1950s in the last years of Pibun's reign and continued under the leadership of Sarit. The main theme of government policy was "socioeconomic development aimed at internal peace and unification of various classes and ethnic groups ...under the ideology of nation, religion and king."² On a macro scale, exports of rice, rubber and tin stimulated by the Korean war contributed to a GNP annual growth of 4.7 % from 1951 to 1958. The following

¹ "No One Is Safe: Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Thailand's Southern Border Provinces" Human Rights Watch (HRW) vol. 19, no. 12(C) New York, N.Y., Aug. 2007: p.14.

² Thanet Aphornsuvan, "Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories," Policy Studies 35 (Southeast Asia) Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.56.

decade would see a GNP annual increase of 8.6% largely the result of stronger centralized planning under the National Economic Development Board's Five Year Plans. US assistance to Thailand, seen as a stable ally in the Southeast Asian Cold War arena amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars in economic aid. This aid included work on the expansion of port facilities, improvement of highway and railway lines as well as technical assistance in the fields of agriculture, education, irrigation, economic planning and so on.³

With respect to the Malay Muslim provinces specifically, Sarit's national development policy aimed to "raise social and economic conditions in order to convince the locals of the good intentions of the Thai government."⁴ Speaking to particulars such as rubber and tin which contributed to economic growth however, a study conducted by Tomas Ladd in 1975 points out that "Thai Buddhists as well as Chinese own most of the tin mines and the larger rubber plantations...much of the wealth of the region is in other than Thai Muslim hands."⁵ In addition, Ladd comments that there was a definite lack of paved roads in the south indicating a certain amount of overlooking or deliberate neglect of southern transportation infrastructure at the time.⁶ Sarit's development policies did less to improve the economy and infrastructure of the southern provinces than to integrate the Malays into the Thai nation. Two specific policies stand out to illustrate this.

5.2 Self Help Land Settlement Project

As early as 1954, the government had sponsored a program to settle Malay border villages with Thais from areas further north.⁷ When Sarit came to power, he again called

³ David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003), p.262-272.

⁴ Thanet Aphornsuvan, "Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories," *Policy Studies* 35 (Southeast Asia) Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.56.

⁵ Thomas M. Ladd, *Political Violence in the Provinces of Southern Thailand. Occasional Paper 28*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. 1975: p.7.

⁶ *Ibid.* p.2.

⁷ Andrew Cornish, *Whose Place is This?* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1985), p.6.

for transmigration of landless Thai Buddhists to migrate into the south, offering free land as an incentive.⁸ To the Malays, the project was an obvious attempt at equalizing the population ratio, as the settlements became increasingly inhabited by Thai Buddhists. And as most government officials were Thai Buddhists, these new immigrants received financial and technical assistance to a greater degree than their Muslim neighbors.⁹¹⁰ The Self Help Land Settlement Project stands as a government sponsored policy of internal colonization, and contributed to the questioning of the legitimacy of Thai rule. Horowitz writes, "Migration and incomplete conquest also gives rise to different kinds of lingering historical grievances...and indigenous group that was colonized and forced to abide the entry of ethnic strangers for colonial economic purposes may later regard their presence as illegitimate ab initio"¹¹

5.3 Pondok Educational Improvement Program

In 1961 Sarit introduced the Pondok Educational Improvement program whose aim it was to implement secular education to students at the religious schools. The underlying intent was to allow the Thai government some measure of control over the Pondok curriculum as well as develop locally educated people who might one day occupy administrative posts within the south.¹² The program forced all the ponds to convert into Private School Teaching Islam (PSTIs) and placed them under the Ministry of the Interior, implementing the secular national curriculum and providing additional

⁸ Chandra-naj Mahakanjana, "Decentralization, Local Government, and Socio-political Conflict in Southern Thailand" Working Papers No 5. Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2006: p.9.

⁹ Thomas M. Ladd, Political Violence in the Provinces of Southern Thailand. Occasional Paper 28. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. 1975: p.7.

¹⁰ Thanet Aphornsuvan, "Rebellion in Southern Thailand: Contending Histories," Policy Studies 35 (Southeast Asia) Washington D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007: p.57.

¹¹ Horowitz cited by William G. Cunningham. Theoretical Framework for Conflict Resolution. Available from: <<http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk>> [15 Jan 2008].

¹² S.P. Harish, "Ethnic or Religious Cleavage? Investigating the Nature of the Conflict in Southern Thailand" Contemporary Southeast Asia. 1 Apr 2006: p.5.

Islamic instruction.¹³ Those that resisted the change were closed down, and the number of pondoks declined dramatically.¹⁴

While Sarits national development policy claimed to have been aimed at achieving internal peace and unification, in fact the two above mentioned policies did much to further alienate and marginalize Malay Muslim society with respect to the Thai government. With the incorporation of pondoks into the state system, a number of traditional religious teachers, tok guru or ustaz, chose to operate their schools underground.¹⁵ Patani's position as a center for Islamic education began to decline, and there was an exodus of students to Islamic countries in the Middle East to receive religious education. As these students returned to their villages, their exposure to the religious instruction abroad served to "amplify the religious identity...and heighten the Islamic consciousness of the southern provinces."¹⁶ The Land Settlement Project, which by 1969 had brought as many as 169,000 Buddhists into the region, helped generate further local resistance, including more radical and organized groups. Separatism continued to grow at an alarming rate the 1960s and 1970s.

¹³ "Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency". Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Policy Paper No. 20. September 2007: p.21.

¹⁴ Chandra-naj Mahakanjana, "Decentralization, Local Government, and Socio-political Conflict in Southern Thailand" Working Papers No 5. Washington D.C: East West Center Washington, 2006: p.9.

¹⁵ "Conflict in Southern Thailand: Islamism, Violence and the State in the Patani Insurgency". Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Policy Paper No. 20. September 2007: p.21.

¹⁶ S.P. Harish, "Ethnic or Religious Cleavage? Investigating the Nature of the Conflict in Southern Thailand" Contemporary Southeast Asia, 1 Apr 2006: p.5.