The Relationship Between Muslim Peasant Religion and Urban Religion in Songkhla

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship among ideology, ritual and economics has been a source of scholarly controversy since the time of Marx, if not before. The case study presented here examines the relationship between Muslim peasant religion in two Thai speaking Southern Thai coastal fishing villages and urban Muslim religion in the neighboring town of Songkhla. It aims to shed further light on this relationship particularly as it applies to the interconnections between peasant and urban religious belief and practice.

In social anthropology, the relationship between peasantry and town has in fact been a source of increasing academic interest in recent years. Geertz's still influential seminal work on Javanese religion (1959) has shed a great deal of light on the relationship between peasant and urban religion in Modjokuto, a town in Java. The present study in Songkhla province provides an interesting case study for testing the wider validity of some of Geertz's insights into Islam in Java. In so doing it will reveal a number of inter-connections between ideology, ritual and economics which do not appear in Geertz's study.

I will first discuss Muslim peasant religion, referred to by both Muslim peasants and town dwellers alike as " Phuak Kau " (the Old Group). This will then be compared with urban religion in Songkhla, in particular with a new religious movement that has grown up there, referred to by both Muslim peasants and urban dwellers as " Phuak Mai " (the New Group). This paper will focus on the relationship between Phuak Kau and Phuak Mai.

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PHUAK KAU (THE OLD GROUP)

Muthinung and Muthisong, the two Thai speaking coastal fishing villages in which this research into peasant Islam was carried out, are mixed Thai Buddhist and Muslim villages. They are situated in a culturally Thai area some two hours drive up a wet weather road north of Songkhla town. The Muslim community in Muthisong is a relatively recent settlement, but the Muslim community in Muthinung is much older—at least a hundred years and perhaps more. Not surprisingly, bearing in mind that both villages are encapsulated in a culturally Thai area, the Muslim villagers have become very Thai-ized. Indeed, as I have shown elsewhere (Burr 1972: 74), they share with their Thai Buddhist neighbours a common southern Thai peninsular social structure and culture, including a belief in a shared local spirit world.

Although the Phuak Kau's religious institutional form is strongly Muslim, its content has taken on a Thai Buddhist tone. The Muslim communities in both villages are small, but both villages have quite substantial mosques (*mosyit*), a mosque committee and several mosque officials, including an *imam* who heads the community and leads the faithful at prayer, a *bhilal* who calls the faithful to prayer and a *katep* who reads the lesson at Friday prayers (*samayang wan suk*), the Muslim holy day.

The " Five Pillars of the Faith," the heart of Islam, are also present and upheld in both villages. Prayer (*samayang*), the basic pillar of the faith, is performed the regulation five times daily by many Muslims, both men and women. Communal prayers (*samayang wan suk*) are also held at each mosque every Friday. They are usually attended by male representatives from most households. Fasting (*khaubuat*), another pillar, is practiced by the majority of Muslim villagers during the month of Ramadhan, the most important orthodox festival of the year. Several other major festivals are also recognized in both villages. These include Muhammad's birthday (*Mulot*) and *Khau Buat Ik* (*Hari Raya Haji* in Malay), a festival held to honor Meccan pilgrims. The *Haji*, or pilgrimage to Mecca, is the ideal for all Muslim villagers. But so far, because of the expense involved, only three villagers from Munthinung have managed to make the pilgrimage. Finally, almsgiving (*yakat*), a major Islamic institution, is present in both villages in the form of an institutionalized annual payment to the religious leaders. Circumcision, the hallmark of the Muslim male, is performed on all males, usually between the ages of 12 and 16 years.

The most important core religious institution in both Muslim communities, however, is a ceremony which Muslim villagers refer to as *phitti tham bun* (merit-making ceremony) and which, for reasons

which will later become clear, will be referred to here as a communal prayer group feast. Rituals similar to communal prayer group feasts are found in other parts of Southeast Asia. The *slametan* rituals described by Geertz (1959) appear to be of the same type, as do the *makan pulot* feasts discussed by Fraser (1960, 1966), though their cultural content and relationship to Islam appear to vary from one cultural area to another.

Geertz (1959) refers to Modjokuto peasant religion as *Abangan* and views *slametan* as its core religious ritual. He sees it as a primarily animist rather than Muslim ritual. The situation in Muthinung and Muthisong, however, is rather different. The *phitti tham bun* or prayer group feast is much more Muslim in orientation. Although it is sometimes utilized in an animist context, it is used precisely because it is viewed by villagers as being a Muslim institution and therefore having the power to control the less powerful animist spirit world.

A communal prayer group feast is both complementary to and an essential part of Muslim religion and social organization in both villages. A prayer group feast involves the holding of a feast, to which village males and religious leaders are invited. After the feast prayers are said in Arabic by the religious leaders. A prayer group feast may be held at home, at the mosque or even at the cemetery. If held in the home, the sponsor will invite both male relatives or friends who are household heads, as well as important religous leaders to come and pray in his house. Usually on the occasion of major Muslim festivals a communal prayer group feast may be held in the mosque, involving both middle-aged and older household heads. The host and his family will supply the best food that they can afford, often to as many as twenty or thirty people. The rich may invite as many as fifty people. If held in the mosque, each household which wishes to do so donates a tray of food. Frequently as many as ninety dishes are brought to the mosque when a feast is held there.

The prayer group feast is held on a wide variety of occasions. These occasions include not only major Muslim festivals but also household rituals such as the New Rice ceremony, and *rites de passage* such as marriage, death and circumcision. Generally, because of the enormous cost, prayer group feasts held at household rituals and *rites de passage* are multi-purpose. They always include prayers asking for God's blessing (*kho phrachao hai phon*) for household members and dead relatives. Often, at the end of a major rite such as circumcision or a death ceremony, the *khon plae*, or Muslim baby naming ceremony will also be held.

Although Muslim in form, however, these communal prayer

group feasts have taken on a new meaning in the Thai context. Merit making is the focus of everyday Thai Buddhism and, as has been described elsewhere (Burr 1972), Muslim villagers '*tham bun*' (make merit) like their Thai Buddhist counterparts. Indeed, a Buddhist merit making rationale has been grafted onto the Muslim communal prayer group feasts. Moreover, the ritual itself has been structured to parallel the Buddhist *tawaay phra* merit-making rituals whereby the Buddhist laity supports the monkhood financially as a means of obtaining merit.

At all communal prayer group feasts an essential ingredient and the central focus of attention is always to make merit. In fact, Muslim villagers consider these feasts to be merit making occasions par excellence, and it is in recognition of this fact that they always refer to prayer group feasts as *phithi thambun* (merit-making ceremonies) or as just *thambun* (to make merit). Whenever a prayer group feast was to be held, the author was frequently asked, "Are you going to 'thambun' today?" Only those rites which included merit making were referred to as *phithi thambun*. Similar rites for purely social occasions were not held. Muslims also regard *thambun* and giving away food as synonymous. This attitude is shared by the Thais, who regard *thambun* as synonymous with feeding the monks. When asked about *thambun*, Muslim informants usually replied, "Oh, that's when you feed the *tochi* (religious leaders)."

Thais believe that by feeding the monks they will gain merit. Muslims also believe that any household which holds a prayer group feast and feeds the participant members will attain merit and Allah's blessing too. Thais also hold, as do Muslim villagers, that merit made by one individual can be transferred to another. Intercession with God on behalf of another is a fairly universal belief in Islam. Muslim villagers believe that they can attain Allah's blessing by asking other people to come and pray and ask for Allah's blessing on their behalf (*kho phrachao hai phon*). Moreover, they agree with the Thais that merit gained from donating food can be transferred to others. Like the Thais, they think the greater the number of people who pray and intercede, the more merit will be attained.

A major feature of all prayer group feasts is to make merit for the ancestors (*thambun pho mae ta yai*). Whenever Muslims were asked the reason for holding prayer group feasts, one of the first reasons always given was that it was being held to make merit for the ancestors. The major Muslim festivals—*Ok Buat*, to celebrate the ending of Ramadhan, *Ok Buat IK*, (*Hari Raya Haji*) and *Mulot* (Muhammad's birthday)—are primarily merit-making festivals for the dead. At each

major festival, in one or other of the cemeteries of each Muslim community prayer group feasts are held to make merit for the souls of the dead. Over the course of the year all the cemeteries in each village will be visited. As is the case with household prayer groups, food will be taken to the cemetery to be eaten. Muslims believe that the souls of dead relatives will return and " eat " the food. After the *thambun* rites the graves of the dead are cleaned and weeded by relatives. Major Muslim festivals in Muthinung and Muthisong are thus essentially rituals focused on death.

Institutionalized merit-making rites such as at death or marriage involve such enormous expense that only the very rich Muslim villagers can afford the total outlay themselves. Poorer folk need outside help. Traditionally, and from the literature it appears true of Thailand as a whole, a kind of community insurance scheme has always operated at the village level. When a death or marriage occurs, Muslim villagers make donations to the family holding the rite to help them defray the costs. When a similar ritual is held by the donor's family the gift is reciprocated. Each family keeps a little book in which, when it holds a *rite de passage*, it notes the names of donors and the amount received from each so that when the time comes the same amount can be returned. Nowadays, the average amount given is 3–5 baht, although donations from close relatives and wealthy people may be 15, 20 or even 30 baht. Generally, a family can expect to receive 150 to 200 gifts. Thus by making small contributions frequently to other villagers a Muslim villager is, in a sense, insuring himself and paying for any future *rite de passage* and merit-making ceremony that he might hold.

Geertz sees *slametan* as essentially a household ritual and as focusing on the household. But it is clear that merit-making ceremonies in these Thai Muslim communities, even though they may be instigated by the individual Muslim household, have widespread social ramifications as well. They are essentially collective rituals both in terms of the large numbers of individuals who usually participate in them and contribute towards their cost, and in the belief that individuals can make merit for others.

Phuak Mai (The New Group)

Songkhla town, the *amphoe muang*, has a long history of Islam. It was a *muang Khaek* (" Muslim town ") in the seventeenth century. Although it is predominantly a Thai town nowadays it still has a sizeable Muslim population. Phuak Mai a thriving religious movement, has developed within the Muslim community in Songkhla. Followers of this movement are also found in Haadyai, as well as further south in

Pattani and in Nakorn Sri Thammarat to the north. In fact, the movement appears to have originated further south. Although it was impossible to obtain much reliable evidence about the movement's early history it seems to have developed in the 1950s around a Haji Abdullah of Pattani. A noted scholar, he appears to have spent a long time in the Middle East, and seems to have had a great deal of influence on Phuak Mai's development. This religious grouping is of particular interest for it draws its adherents from individuals who are first or second generation migrants from the countryside.

Phuak Mai bears many resemblances to the urban movement in Modjokuto described by Geertz (1959), which he refers to as " Santri." Like the Santris, Phuak Mai's membership is lower middle class—e.g. petit entrepreneurs, clerks, primary school teachers, fire officers and taxi drivers. Like the Santri religion, it maintains that it adheres to a purer form of Islam than that believed in by Phuak Kau. As do the Santris, Phuak Mai members emphasize doctrine and underplay ritual. Also, the Santris utilize simplified versions of *slametan* or none at all. Phuak Mai adherents, although as yet they have not completely given up prayer group feasts, do operate a more simplified version of communal prayer group feasts.

Geertz (1959) describes village Abangan religion in Modjokuto and the *slametan* role in it. He discusses in detail the complex social and political structure of the Santri urban religion and its Java wide social and political ramifications. But he mentions only in passing the minor role of *slametans* in the Santri religion, he does not explain why they play such a small part in Santri ritual. However if he had attempted to look for the causal relationships between village and urban religion in Modjokuto in greater depth he would have better explained why the Santri religion has taken the form it has, why it emphasizes doctrine at the expense of ritual and why it attaches little importance to *slametans*.

Phuak Mai in Songkhla is still at an early stage of its development. Moreover, it still operates on a very small scale and, unlike the Santri religion, its internal organization is undeveloped. But it is of interest precisely because it has none of the complex social and political overlays of the Santri religion. Being simple in form it enables us to lay bare and see in microcosm the relationship between village and urban Islam in this area and to see why urban Muslim religion amongst the ex-peasant lower middle class in Songkhla takes the form it does.

Relationships between Phuak Kau and Phuak Mai

Although Phuak Mai places greater emphasis on doctrine than Phuak

Kau and professes to adhere to a purer form of Islam than its village counterparts, there appears to be only one major doctrinal difference between it and Phuak Kau. Significantly, this was related to *phitti tham bun*, the communal prayer group feasts. The immediate and first reply I was always given by members of both religious groupings when they were asked what were the major differences between them was that Phuak Mai did not *thambun*—in particular they did not hold merit-making rituals when an individual died. Phuak Mai members emphatically disagreed with the merit-making customs which the Phuak Kau held at death.

Unlike Phuak Kau's essentially collectivist view that individuals can together make merit for others, Phuak Mai members adhere to a very individualistic ethic, for which they seek sanction and support in the qur'an. They hold that their beliefs have been derived from the qur'an itself, in contrast to those of Phuak Kau, and that their beliefs are therefore true. They maintain that the qur'an teaches that individuals cannot make merit for others. Whether an individual goes to heaven on death is dependent on his actions alone and not those of other people. Other people cannot help him. "You cannot receive *bun* (merit) that you don't make yourself" stated Nai Dunroman, a 37-year-old debt collector with MS6 education and a former religious teacher. "Allah is not corrupt, he cannot be bribed."

Entrance to heaven is believed to be on individual merit and dependent on a person's own accumulated balance of good and evil, and his alone. On death, Phuak Mai members hold a person's "account" is closed—the angels weigh up his good deeds against his bad and decide his fate. Thus there is no point, Phuak Mai adherents maintain, in making merit for the dead. Phuak Mai followers apply the same principle and rationale to other occasions at which merit-making rites for the participants are held, including marriage and circumcision as well as to the annual New Rice ceremony, *phithi Khao Mai*, and to *OK Buat* and *OK Buat IK*, the Great Tradition Muslim festivals, which in this area center around merit-making rites for the ancestors. In practice, this means that Phuak Mai members do not have to invite large numbers of people to merit-making rites, and thus they are able to drastically cut down the cost of these rituals. Significantly, Phuak Mai adherents cut conspicuous consumption at all these merit-making rites to the minimum. Few people are invited to pray at merit-making rites and little money is spent on them. As one lady remarked, "Muhammad taught that we shouldn't spend money on these things."

In fact, the only other difference between the two groups that came to light in my research was also related to cutting down on conspicuous

consumption. Controversy raged between Phuak Mai and Phuak Kau as to the size and type of commemorative stones allowed in Muslim cemeteries. It was customary in Muslim villages when rich notable figures died, especially religious teachers, for their families to erect large and expensive stone monuments in their honor in the local cemetery. The Phuak Mai leader, Haji Abdullah of Pattani, held that these large monuments were against the teaching of the qur'an and argued that only a small stone to indicate the position of head and foot should be placed over the body. To build such a large longlasting monument was selfish, he stated, because it took up a great deal of space and left no room for others. Moreover, it prevented the area on which it was situated from being used again.

It is difficult to believe that two clearly differentiated and separate groups such as Phuak Mai and Phuak Kau could exist independently of each other on such minimal cleavage in belief as differences in attitude to merit making. It is significant that underlying these minor differences of belief were totally different attitudes toward conspicuous consumption. A number of reasons appear pertinent to explain this change from Phuak Kau's collective merit-making ethic based on conspicuous consumption to the individualistic merit-making ethic of Phuak Mai, in which conspicuous consumption is notably absent.

The better education and wider knowledge of Phuak Mai urban adherents and a genuine and sincere desire for a more " pure " form of Islam are no doubt reasons underlying their austere attitude to merit making. But such an explanation does not explain why Phuak Mai followers only attack traditional Phuak Kau village customs oriented around conspicuous consumption and not others, when Phuak Kau members adhere to many other traditional peasant beliefs and practices which it could be argued are not Muslim. Why should Phuak Mai desire for reform and a more pure Islam center primarily on these beliefs alone and not a wide range of beliefs? The minimal differences between each group and their attitudes toward conspicuous consumption are in fact directly related and are of crucial significance. The answer would seem to lie in the economic and social ramifications of the belief system of both religious groupings and the overall social structure of each group.

Phuak Mai's individualistically oriented austerity ethic, which views man's store of merit as being achievable only by the individual alone, and its denial of lavish spending on feasting, are correlated with and rooted in the urban social structure of Songkhla and the other towns where Phuak Mai has a following. These urban social structures are part of a capitalist system which demands capital accumulation and

investment. Moreover, Phuak Mai's members are geared to social mobility and its symbols of status and prestige are defined in terms other than lavish display and conspicuous consumption. On the other hand the collective merit-making ethic of Phuak Kau, which is based on the assumption that others can add to an individual's store of merit, is expressive of, rooted in, and made possible by the strong sense of community and social groupings which exist at the village level.

Village life in Phuak Kau communities focuses around the stem and limited extended family. The individual moreover is incorporated in widespread kinship and friendship networks in which there are many cross-cutting ties, and in which network solidarity and integration are strong. Collective merit-making rituals are rooted in and are made possible by these overlapping networks and groupings. Without them it would be impossible for prayer group feasts to continue to be held. The reciprocal insurance schemes operating in both Muslim village communities which underpin and make financially possible the merit-making rites there, are examples of this network system in action.

Contributions to village merit-making rites are voluntary. Individuals set up their own systems of reciprocity. To function smoothly, such an insurance scheme needs a system of stable long lasting social relations and trust in others. The social structure of both Muthinung and Muthisong fosters these features. Whilst there is some geographical movement, the population in both villages on the whole is fairly stable. Thus, the setting up of long term relationships is possible. Individual Muslims in both villages can expect that when their turn comes to hold a merit-making rite, the people they have made donations to previously will still be there to reciprocate. Also, relationships in both villages are rooted in kinship and tend to be multiplex, and face to face. Villagers frequently meet and interact with each other. Thus social relationships are continuously being validated, strengthened and revitalized. Such a situation, in which everybody knows everybody and their business, facilitates mutual trust. The village insurance scheme also has its own inbuilt safety mechanism. Fear that contributions would not be made to offset their own rites acts as an incentive to people to reciprocate donations. Also Muslims have a strong sense of community solidarity which acts as a control. Fear of public gossip and disapproval leads villagers to honor their obligations. Thus, the structure of the village social network system is supportive of a collective merit-making ethic and ritual system.

The status and economic system in Muthinung and Muthisong and certain by-products of these merit-making rites also foster and act as an incentive to the holding of merit-making ceremonies on a grand

scale and in indulging in massive conspicuous consumption. Traditionally, Thai villages have always been nominally egalitarian and this is true of Thai and Muslim coastal communities alike. But some villagers, the rich, are more " equal " than others. Power and wealth at the village level go hand in hand. Traditionally, wealthy village people had little to spend their surplus wealth on, and large scale merit-making prayer group feasts were held precisely because they provided such individuals with a means of demonstrating their wealth, power and high status. Personal feuds and factions were also reflected in the composition of merit-making rituals. Village " big " men, by including their supporters and excluding their opponents from their guest lists, were able to demonstrate their following and define its boundaries vis-à-vis other groups and networks. Also, by inviting their followers to come and make merit, they were able to foster, strengthen and validate their ties with them and repay their debts.

Conversely, villagers were motivated to desire an invitation to a merit-making feast not only because they genuinely wanted to help another person attain merit, but also because on big occasions such as the seventh day death ceremony *phithi wan chet* the meal provided was delicious. In villages such as these, where the general diet is rather spartan, merit-making feasts were looked forward to and invitations desired because they provided relief from a poor diet.

Moving into a town such as Songkhla or Haadyai, however, means leaving behind the large scale networks based on kinship and the systems of mutual reciprocity that exist in the outlying Muslim village communities. Unless an individual frequently revisits his natal village and his ties there are continuously revalidated and revitalized, they will break down and fall into disuse within two generations. It is significant that Phuak Mai members tend mostly to be second generation town dwellers who have limited connections with the countryside. Such people, since their ties with their village have mostly either broken down or fallen into disuse, cannot fall back on the village reciprocal donation insurance scheme as a means of defraying the major part of the expense when the need for holding a merit-making prayer group feast rite arises. Although an insurance scheme similar to that of the village exists in the town, it nowhere near covers the costs of these feasts, partly because the higher cost of living in urban areas makes them more expensive.

Also moving to Songkhla involves the setting up of new types of social relationships. In Songkhla, Phuak Mai member's social relations center around smaller less complex social networks oriented around the small nuclear and limited extended family. In the town, multiplex

roles and cross cutting ties tend to be minimized. An individual has only a limited range of roles and relationships outside the immediate family. Moreover, these are usually single stranded and often non-overlapping, being based on economic transactions or religious affiliation and activity. The town Muslim can only hope to receive a fraction of the donations village Muslims receive for a merit-making rite. It is doubtful that any single urban Muslim could hope to receive donations from more than one hundred and fifty people as is common in the villages. Generally in the towns, and this is true of Songkhla and Haadyai, reciprocal donation networks are oriented solely around the immediate family and a limited range of outside connections, relationships which are close and stable enough so that both sides trust the other to reciprocate.

Further the structure of social relations in the towns is conducive to mutual distrust. Since townspeople's relationships are single stranded and non-overlapping, they tend to meet less frequently and develop weaker and less close bonds, which promotes a situation that inhibits the development of mutual trust. Since the reciprocal donations to cover the cost of *rites de passage* are made on a voluntary basis and are dependent on close, frequently validated relationships and mutual trust, this suspicion and lack of closeness in town Muslim relations is a hindrance to the setting up vast reciprocal donation networks as occur in the villages. Such networks would mean making donations to large numbers of people whom the individual would not know well and from whom he/she could not be sure of getting a return.

It would also mean, moreover, making donations to families that might be transitory, for townsfolk, especially in the first one or two generations, are notoriously mobile. The fact that the person to whom a family makes a donation is likely to move away at any time is no incentive to set up reciprocal relations in general. Also, the absence of multiple kinship ties, complex roles and close face-to-face relationships results in a lack of community solidarity. There is less fear of public disapproval amongst Muslim town inhabitants and consequently less pressure on the town Muslim to fulfil his obligations and reciprocate donations. Given these factors, it is understandable that town Muslims should be less keen on setting up reciprocal donation relationships and that these relationships should be more difficult to form. This inability to count on outside help to pay for large scale merit-making prayer group feasts is, of course, a great incentive either to give them up all together or find some reason for making them less costly affairs.

Undoubtedly, there is a political incentive for town Muslims to hold large lavish merit-making rites. As in the villages, the holding

of large scale feasts is a means of demonstrating wealth and power and thereby defining, consolidating and articulating the feuds and factions which split the town Muslim community. But this incentive is outweighed by other factors, notably the demands of the communal economic structure in which the Phuak Mai members live, and by the symbols of wealth and status to which they adhere which are not based on, or defined in terms of, conspicuous consumption.

It is significant that Phuak Mai does not draw its adherents from the richest stratum in town who could well afford to meet the total cost of lavish display. In towns this stratum generally consists of rich merchants and businessmen who are usually Chinese. For historical reasons Muslims generally do not belong to this stratum and this is true in Songkhla and Haadyai. Nor do Phuak Mai draw their adherents from the semi-literate poor peasants who have recently moved to town and still tend to evaluate status and wealth in village terms, namely in terms of conspicuous consumption. Rather they tend to be the socially mobile *petite bourgeoisie* such as small time businessmen and low grade civil servants. This group has joined and is part of a different economic system than that of the village, and its members adhere to a different lifestyle from those peasants who have just come into the town and whose ties are still primarily with the village.

Many Phuak Mai members are small merchants or have commercial interests which are occupations that need capital investment. Similarly their lifestyles in keeping with their better education, occupations and *petit bourgeois* aspirations, demand the spending of a great deal of money on a high standard of living and comfortable everyday life. This includes, for example, Western type clothes and expensive Muslim Malay clothes for religious occasions, and decent housing and education for their children. Most Phuak Mai members tend to give their children a good education, often up to college standards. All this takes a great deal of finances, leaving them with little money to spare for lavish display such as large scale prayer group feasts.

It is understandable, therefore, why the town Muslim *petite bourgeoisie* took with alacrity to a belief system that advocated reforming the merit-making prayer group feast whose economic ramifications they could no longer afford, and much substituted ideas more in line with the demands of their own economic and status system. The development of Phuak Mai was clearly an adaptation to the demands of the town capitalist economic structure. In this light, the minimal cleavage in belief between both religious groupings becomes explainable. Surplus wealth is the independent variable, and it is only beliefs associated with its usage—minimal in number—that have needed to change. What is

interesting is that the rising Muslim *petite bourgeoisie* in Songkhla should have utilized " orthodoxy " for validating their beliefs and should have waved the banner of Muslim purity to give legitimacy to their claims.

Phuak Kau and Phuak Mai merit-making ethics are open to a Durkheimian interpretation in that their belief systems can be viewed as expressive of and reflecting Muslim village and town social structures, for both villagers and town dwellers alike appear to have superimposed their social relations onto their belief systems. Village life, with its complex roles and cross cutting ties, depends upon reciprocity. Muslim villagers' beliefs about the ability of other people to help an individual in the afterlife reflect the nature of man's relationship to others in this life and his dependence on other individuals. Mutual help and dependence on others in social relations thus provides the blueprint for the belief that people can make and give merit to others in order that they may ultimately attain admittance to heaven.

Phuak Mai members are cut off from their village ties, and their smaller kinship and friendship networks mean that the individual and his family must be more self-reliant in the towns and must fend for themselves. The individualistic ethic of Phuak Mai, the belief that it is only individual merit alone that determine whether an individual goes to heaven reflects the limited kinship and social networks of adherents to Phuak Mai. It would appear to have evolved out of the social situation in which town Muslims find themselves. In sum, as with Phuak Kau, Phuak Mai beliefs and practices are essentially the product of local factors and can be explained in local terms.

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