The Careers of Islam's Transcultural Trendsetters in Central and Southern Thailand

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Abstract—Muslims in Thailand, as with those across the Muslim World, have been influenced by modernist, reformist, and revivalist trends from the Middle East and South Asia, challenging traditional religious leadership. This article applies Nile Green's religious economies model to Thai Islam, focusing on five key figures: (1) 'Ahmad Wahab, (2) Direk Kulsiriswad, (3) and Sheikh Rida 'Ahmad Samadi in Bangkok, and (4) Ustadh 'Abdullah Chinarong and (5) Ismail Lutfi Japakiya in the far South. We document the impact of transnational Islamic movement, the connections between them, and how all these were multilingual, cosmopolitan middlemen that reshaped the local practice of Islam in Thailand's diverse religious landscape.

Keywords: Bangkok; Islam in Thailand; Islamic Movements; Muslims in Thailand; Southern Thailand

Introduction

As elsewhere in the Muslim world, Muslims in Thailand—the vast majority of whom are scattered in central and southern Thailand—have been impacted by a range of 20th century Islamic trends produced by Muslim activists in Indonesia, South Asia, and the Middle East. This article reconstructs the careers of five of the most influential Thai trendsetters who have shaped Islamic thought and practice since the late 1920s. Our interests are neither in doctrinal details, nor confessional politics. Instead, we document the multipolar origins of these transnational trendsetters, overlooked connections between them, and their transcultural credentials. We also point out some overdue analyses about connections between central and southern Thailand that have become more important since the 1980s when Thai became more widely read and spoken by Thailand's southern Malays (Joll 2011: 75-78; 2014).

We begin with a short theoretical prolegomenon introducing readers to Nile Green's application of the "religious economies" framework to the Muslim world. In the sections that follow, we explore ways that Green's work provides fresh insights into these five influential local shapers of Islam. We have interacted with some empirically rich recent studies by Muslim religious historians based in Thailand sharing our interest

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Figure 1: Cabinets at the Haji Sulong Foundation containing Haji Sulong's personal collection, Pattani © Christopher M. Joll

in importers of ideas that challenged the confessional hegemony of local "traditionalist" establishments.[4] By beginning with developments in central Thailand, we seek to both correct the widespread neglect of Metropolitan Bangkok in Muslim Studies and connections between central and southern Thailand.[5]

The initial inspiration for this article was by a serendipitous discovery when a team of local researchers undertook to catalogue the contents of the personal collection of Haji Muhammad Sulong bin Haji 'Abd al-Qadir bin Muhammad (ฮัจญี มุหัมหมัด สุหลง บุตรของ ฮัจญี อับดุล กอดิร บุตรของ มุหัมหมัด; بن الحاج عبد القادر بن محمد الحاج محمدسلوم; 1895-1954), also known as Haji Sulong, at the Haji Sulong Foundation (มูลนิธิอาจารย์ฮัจยีสุหลง) in Pattani's provincial capital in February 2020 **[Figure 1]**. Haji Sulong has been dealt with by others elsewhere.[6] These include commenting on his connections to what Francis Bradley (2010) has referred to as Mecca's "Patani School", connected to Sheikh 'Ahmad bin Muhammad Zayn al-Fatānī (الفطاني الشيخ أحمد بن محمد زين; 1856–1908). However, among the hundreds of Arabic and Jawi manuscripts in his personal library was only one Thai language publication. This was an issue (no. 75–76) of *Al-Islah Association* (อัล-อิศลาหฺ สมาคม) published in 1948 [1368 AH/2491 BE]. This journal had been published by the Al-Islah Foundation (มูลนิธิอัลอิสลาหฺ) in Bangkok Noi since 1928 **[Figure 2]**.

[4] In this article, it has not been possible to include the impact of the Tablighi Jama'at throughout Thailand which have been dealt with elsewhere (Braam 2006; Horstmann 2007; Noor 2007, 2012).

[5] Documenting connections between reformist movements in central and southern Thailand was one of the (many) seminal contributions of recent doctoral dissertations to Thai Muslim scholars (e.g., Amporn Marddent 2016; Hafiz Salae 2017).

[6] On Haji Sulong, see *inter alia* the following: Liow 2010; Ockey 2011; Husam Lamato et al. 2017; Daungyewa Utarasint 2018: 41–55; Bruckmayr 2019: 186–187.

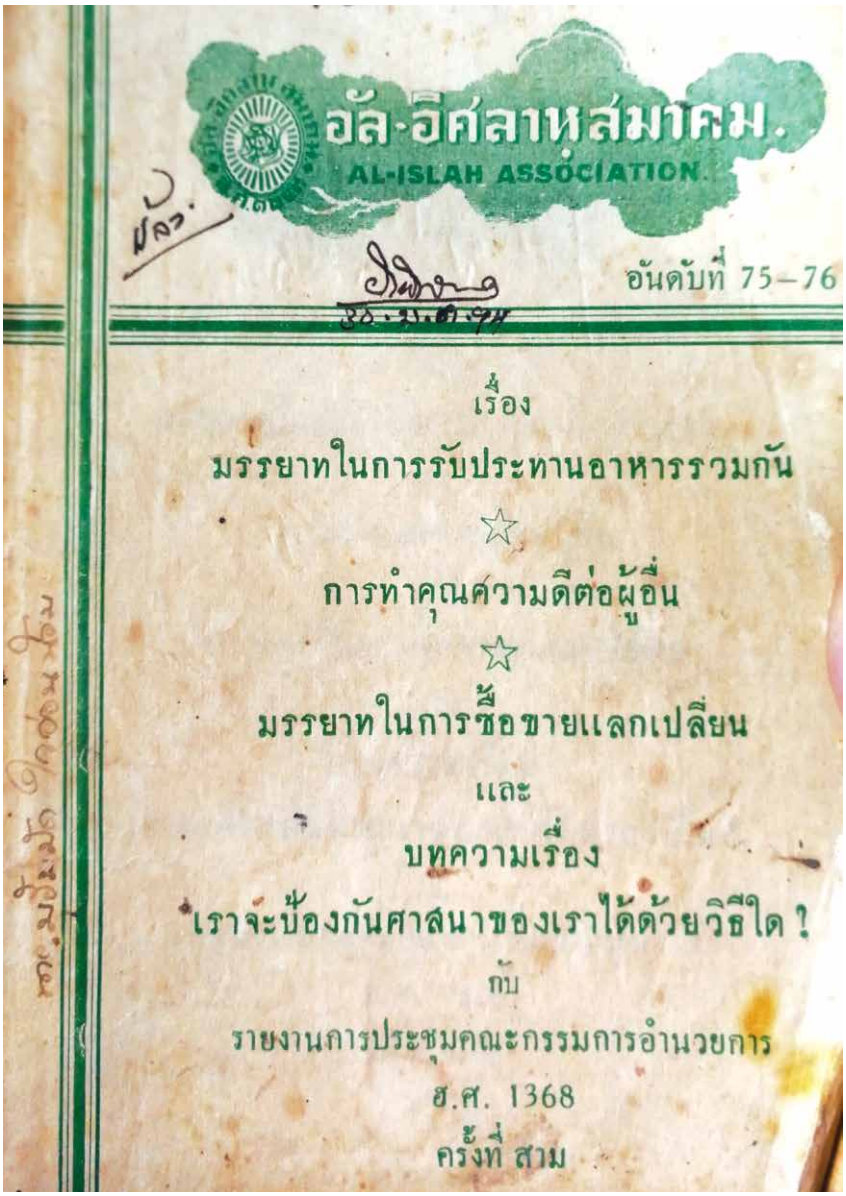

Figure 2: 1948 issue of *Al-Islah Association* included in Haji Sulong's personal collection, Pattani © Christopher M. Joll

We have no intention of attempting any misguided attempt to construct some sort of concrete skyscraper upon such bamboo-like piles. Rather, we argue that this document represents long-overdue, reliable documentary evidence of Haji Sulong having been aware of the reformist activism of the organization established in Bangkok by ʻAhmad Wahab (อะหมัด วาฮับ; 1883–1956). We have yet to have come across any correspondence among them between the 1930s and 1950s. Nevertheless, we describe below that both these religious entrepreneurs arrived in Siam in the late 1920s. We assume their arrival was connected to the final Wahabi capture of the Hijaz—which included the holy

cities of Mecca and Medina. From the early 20th century connections developed between later generations of reformist activists. Before this, central and southern Thai Muslims depended on Islamic influences they had been exposed to in Indonesia, the Indian subcontinent, and the Middle East. In southern Thailand ʻAbdullah Chinarong (อับดุลลอฮ์ จินารง; b. 1931) had studied with Haji Sulong before he was abducted in 1954. In Bangkok, Direk Kulsiriswad (ดิเรก กุลสิริสวัสดิ์; 1922–2005) developed the reformist activism initiated by ʻAhmad Wahab before ʻAbdullah Chinarong returned to Yala in the late 1960s. Other religious entrepreneurs in both central and southern Thailand developed their challenge to Thailand's traditionalist Muslim establishment in the decades that followed.

Theoretical Prolegomenon

Over the past decade, Nile Green has applied Roger Finke and Rodney Stark's (2005) the concept of religious economy to the Muslim World. Green's *Bombay Islam* referred to Stark *et al.* shedding new light on relations between "large numbers and varied types of religiosity" (2011: 8). Religious groups—which Green refers to as "firms"—resemble commercial companies in the following ways: both are established by "entrepreneurs" and are highly competitive (Ibid.: 8). Religious economies develop wherever religious "producers" and "consumers" interreact, but these may be "monopolistic or liberal, active or stagnant, closed or connected" (Ibid.: 122, 142).

While Weberian analysis of Western religious history argues that modernization led to disenchantment—and secularization—Green demonstrates that the impact of modernity upon Indian Muslims led to "re-enchantment and [the] personalization of [...] religiosity" (Green 2015: 12). We follow Green's emphasis upon "space and geography" when considering concrete case studies (Ibid.: 8). This demands as acceptance of the "uneven character of global historical developments", which lead to a "multiplicity of outcomes" in locales he refers to as "terrains of exchange" (Ibid.: 12). In these, religious entrepreneurs respond to the "changing demands of their followers" by producing (religious) products and delivering (religious) services. Finally, Green's case studies reveal religious firms either "competitively co-exist" or sequentially "displace one another" (Ibid.: 9–10). As with any competitive marketplace, religious products and services are impacted by the interplay between the resources possessed by producers and the demands of the consumers in the (religious) economy (Green 2011: 197).

Four years after *Bombay Islam* (2011), Green looked at "the same things in several places", by developing his religious economies model in *Terrains of Exchange* (Green 2015). This documented ways Islam was "remade, circulated, reorganized". *Bombay Islam* explored "productive and distributive" processes. *Terrains of Exchange* interrogated "interactive, adaptive, cooperative and competitive" dynamics. In different religious economies, religious developments took different trajectories. This was due to different religious'

"impresarios" and "entrepreneurs" establishing religious firms that produced, marketed, and distributed differing religious products such as print media. Nevertheless, religious economies also supply services such as blessing, healing, salvation, protection, and belonging. All these are inexplicably connected to a range of—often competing—mosques, Sufi brotherhoods, and Islamic organizations (Green 2015: 9). Another important argument developed by Green in *Terrains of Exchange* relevant to our analysis of central and southern Thailand is that new religious firms were disproportionally established by "transcultural middlemen".[7] Although in different ways specific to the contexts in which they worked, all these reshaped their social identities through combinations of "religion, language, dress and behavior" which facilitated their assimilation into Western Christian contexts (London, Malta, Milan) or important imperial outposts (Bombay, Calcutta, Malacca, Singapore).

This theoretical prolegomenon has summarized most of the elements of Nile Green's innovative conceptual framework and his theoretical vocabulary possessing the potential to shed new light on the five trendsetters introduced below. Green refers to his "new analytical vocabulary for interpreting the social operations of Islam" (2015: 10), by providing a "rhetorical antidote" defamiliarizing his readers and creating "analytical distance" between them and the social entities and actors that they assume they already know (Ibid.: 12). He states his objective as assisting his readers to perceive familiar things in new ways, including recovering the "empirical texture and ethnographic terrain" that shapes religious exchanges (Ibid.: 13).

Thailand's "Transcultural" Trendsetters of Islam

This section presents the careers of the most influential trendsetters of Islam in central and southern Thailand during the 20th century. We explore the utility of Green's work to Muslim Studies in Thailand. These include competition between (traditionalist and reformist/modernist) "firms", in these terrains of exchange. All these imported ideas and practices trending in the religious economies of Indonesia, the Indian subcontinent, and the Middle East, but their cross-cultural/multilingual backgrounds and transnational connections contacts fit the description of Green's transcultural middlemen/religious entrepreneurs/impresarios. We begin by documenting the contributions in central Thailand (specifically Metropolitan Bangkok).

'Ahmad Wahab (1883–1956)

In the 1970-1980s, American anthropologist Raymond Scupin (1978, 1980b, 1980c, 1987) pioneered the study of what Green refers to as Bangkok's reformist "firms". Scupin (1980a: 2) relates that a Minangkabau exile (originally from eastern Sumatra) by the name of 'Ahmad Wahab (age 43) arrived in Bangkok in 1926. Soon after his arrival, he taught in Ratchakarun School (โรงเรียนราชการุญ), Bangkok's first private Islamic School, established by local descendants of Arab immigrants

[7] This has been developed by Green (2009) elsewhere.

and Indian merchants (Muhammad Ilyas Yahprung 2014: 4). 'Ahmad Wahab had been an active member of the Muhammadiyah movement, the first and largest mass modernist movement in the Dutch East Indies. He had spent a considerable amount of time in Mecca as a student, but due to his anti-colonial activities, he was barred from returning to eastern Sumatra and was invited by Thai Muslim students he had met in Mecca to relocate to Bangkok. According to Hafiz Salleh (Hafiz Salae 2017: 108), while in Egypt Wahab met the influential Muhammad Rashid Rida (رشيد رضا محمد; 1865–1935) who edited *Al-Manar* (المنار), published between 1898 and 1935. Indeed, 'Ahmad Wahab contributed articles to *Al-Manar* under the pseudonym 'Bangkok'. Amphorn Mardent (2016: 96) adds that he was also connected to another nationalist movement in present-day Indonesia, Sareket Islam.[8]

Details about the confessional, cultural, and ethnolinguistic geography of Bangkok's Muslim minority explain how a professional stranger and religious sojourner such as 'Ahmad Wahab could become a pioneering trendsetter. As multilingualism represents one of the most important characteristics of transcultural religious middlemen, entrepreneurs, and impresarios, Hafiz Salleh persuasively argues that 'Ahmad Wahab's familiarity with both Arabic and Jawi sources was central to his local impact. Studies of Muslim minorities in Siam before the tumultuous 1930s tend to overlook the important detail that Malay was once widely spoken there; this had occurred because most were descendants of Malay prisoners who had been relocated to Bangkok during the reigns of Rama I (1782–1809) and Rama III (1824–1851).[9] From his new home in Bangkok Noi **[figure 3]**, this mobile Minang—capable of conversing in Malay and Arabic—began modernist and reformist criticisms of Southeast Asian traditionalist "firms". At the time, most Muslim communities in Bangkok were located along either the Chao Phraya River or Bangkok's extensive canal network—the most important of which was the Saen Saep Canal. All of these 'Ahmad Wahab could comfortably visit by boat. 'Ahmad Wahab established connections with a number of mosques. In Bangkok Noi, the first was Masjid Mai Thanon Tok (มัสยิดใหม่ถนนตก) in Charoen Krung road. This was registered as As-Salafiyyah Mosque (มัสยิดอัสสละฟียะฮ์), the same name of the school that 'Ahmad Wahab was involved in establishing. The mosque was later renamed the Ansorit Sunnah Royal Mosque (มัสยิดอันซอริซซุนนะห์), roughly translated as "the helper of the Sunnah".[10]

[8] Merle Ricklefs (2001: 105) related that between 1919 and 1926, the Dutch sought to balance colonial budgets by cutting services and increasing taxes; they responded to political activism with a policy of arresting, imprisoning, and exiling political provocateurs. Howard Federspiel adds that members of Sareket Islam represented the full range of the political spectrum. While most of its leadership subscribed to "modernist Muslim principles", between 1914 and 1926 a mixture of "communists, nationalists and Muslim activists" also joined. Although Sareket Islam sought concessions through industrial action, these led to the arrest and exile of many of its leaders (Federspiel 2001: 30–31).

[9] On the topic of Malay prisoners of war between the 1780s and 1830s, see Joll 2022. For more on Malay language use in Siam before the 1940s, refer to the following: Tadmor 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 2004.

[10] This detail is mentioned by the following: Songsiri Putthongchai 2013: 83; Amporn Marddent 2016: 47; Hafiz Salae 2017: 110.

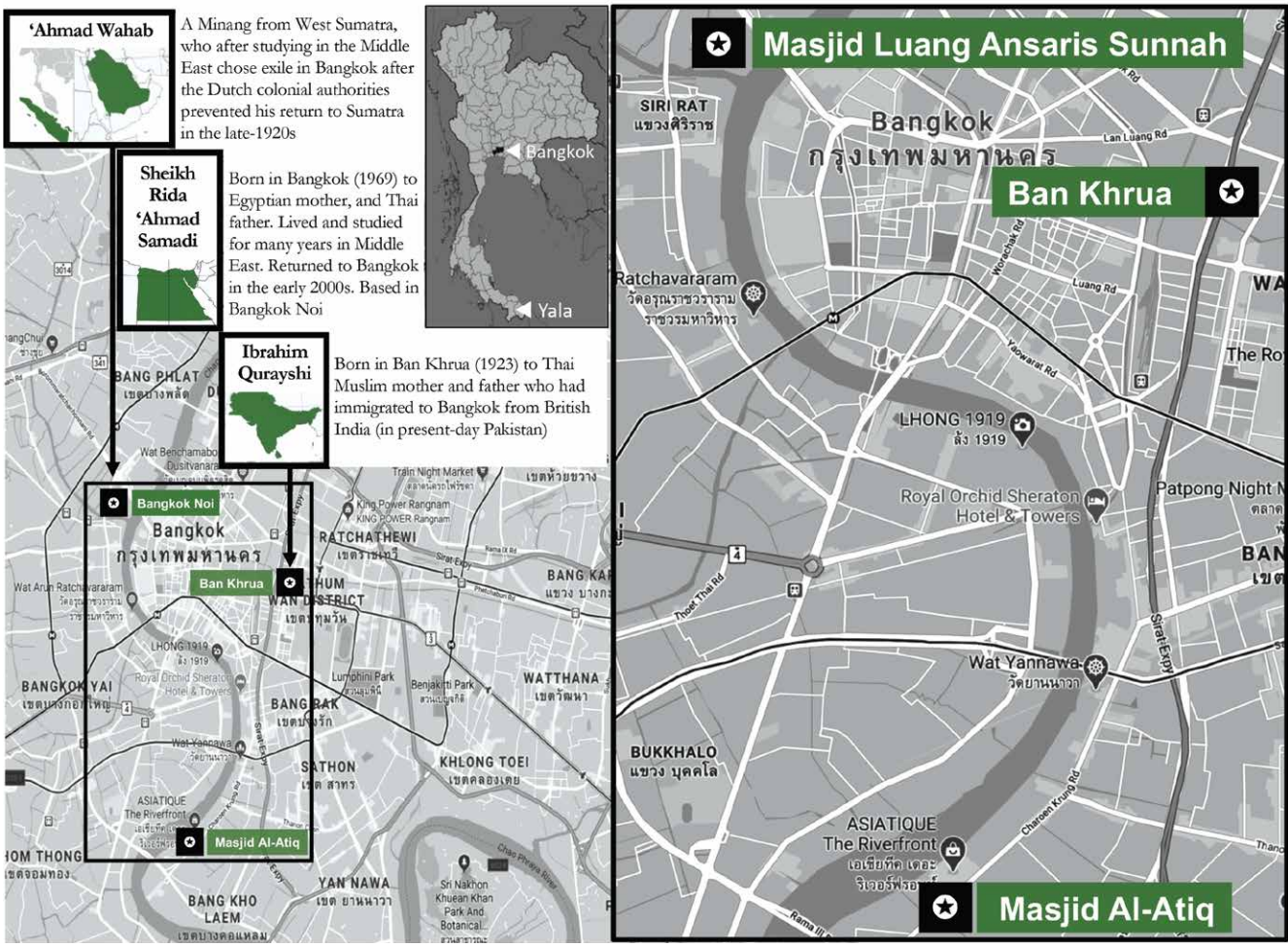

FIGURE 3: Bangkok Noi, Ban Khrua, and Masjid Al-Atiq in Metropolitan Bangkok connected with the careers of central Thailand's trendsetters and their connections with Indonesia, South Asia, and the Middle East © Christopher M. Joll

Wahab's operational base eventually shifted to the Al-Atiq Mosque, downstream from Bangkok Noi near the eastern bank of the Chao Phraya River **[FIG. 3]**. Winyu Ardrugsa notes that 'Ahmad Wahab was also involved in this mosque, changing its name from Surao Kao Suan Luang (สุเหร่าเก่าสวนหลวง) in 1952. Although his funeral was organized at Al-Atiq Mosque (มัสยิดอัลอะตีก), he was buried in Bangkok Noi (Winyu Ardrugsa 2012: 95).

In addition to leading regular study groups that attracted new "consumers", this mobile, multilingual trendsetter established local Islamic associations and Islamic publications. These included the *Al-Islah Association* in Bangkok Noi in 1928 and the *Ansorit Sunnah Association* (สมาคมอันซอริซซุนนะห์) in the 1930s (Winyu Ardrugsa 2012: 95). The Al-Islah Foundation printed the aforementioned monthly periodical

Al-Islah Association. This was financially supported by members of the Muslim community and initially edited by ʻAhmad Wahab (Scupin 1998: 251). As revealed below, Sheikh Rida ʻAhmad Samadi's family had connections with these institutions in Metropolitan Bangkok that he continued following his return to Thailand, in the early 20th century.

Direk Kulsiriswad (1922–2005)

In addition to Bangkok Noi and Masjid Al-Atiq Mosque—both connected with ʻAhmad Wahab—the third important "terrain of exchange" in Bangkok was Ban Khrua **[Fig. 3]**. This was the birthplace of Direk Kulsiriswad also known as Ibrahim Qureshi (อิบรอฮีม กุเรชี) and Achan Direk (อาจารย์ดิเรก). Ban Khrua (บ้านครัว) is a cosmopolitan Muslim community located on the Saen Saep Canal (คลองแสนแสบ) near the intersection of the Chao Phraya River and the Bangkok Noi Canal. ʻAhmad Wahab might have imported reformist/modernist franchises, by Achan Direk was his most important disciple. ʻAhmad Wahab's credentials as a transcultural trendsetter might have been related to his multilingualism and mobility, but Achan Direk was a polyglot local with a multicultural background. In contrast to ʻAhmad Wahab who locally leveraged his ability to interact with a range of Jawi and Arabic sources, Achan Direk's impact was as a native speaker of Thai.

Scupin (1998: 244–245) relates that Achan Direk first came into contact with ʻAhmad Wahab through his father, a British subject from the Indian subcontinent who migrated to Bangkok after 1855.[11] His father worked in the Thai postal service—as one of their English-speaking employees—and married a member of the local (Cham) community in Ban Khrua established in Siam since the early Bangkok period and connected to Bangkok Noi via Bangkok's waterways. Achan Direk was a native speaker of Thai and proficient in Arabic, English, and Urdu—a relatively rare form of multilingualism in Bangkok at the time. The Urdu taught to him by his father assisted learning Arabic later. He also acquired English while an interpreter in the British Field Security Service in Bangkok at the end of the Second World War. After 1945, he worked for a bank and several other firms as a salesman. In 1956, he set up his own successful silk screen printing and textile printing ink business (Scupin 1998: 252). In other words, unlike ʻAhmad Wahab, Achan Direk was more than a religious scholar. In this respect, he resembled Abdullah Chinarong (see below).

Achan Direk's ability to read English, Arabic, and Urdu enabled him to access a range of Islamic literature. In addition to ideas encountered through direct contact with ʻAhmad Wahab, his omnivorous diet of reading convinced him that Islamic reform was also required in Thailand. Amongst Achan Direk's most enduring contributions to the local religious economy were

[11] Edward van Roy (2016: 183) describes steamers from Singapore bringing a "steady trickle of Indian immigrants" seeking to benefit from the new economic opportunities in Siam. They could benefit from the extraterritoriality provisions in the Bowring Treaty (1855) as British subjects. Their presence was recorded as early as 1883 and continued into the 1920s.

his many publications (in Thai) that he personally funded through his silk printing business—the first of which was published in 1949 (Scupin 1980a: 3). Although some addressed "folk Islam", a history of Muslims in Thailand, and a study of Muslim influences on classical Siamese literature, after ten years he published a four-volume Thai translation of the Qur'an which solidified his reputation as the "foremost intellectual leader of the reformist movement" between the 1950s and 1970s (Scupin 2001: 38).

While the mosques and associations located in Bangkok Noi and Al-Atiq Mosque associated with 'Ahmad Wahab furthered his impact, Achan Direk was also connected with a number of other Islamic associations. The first, Jamiyatul Islam (สมาคมญามิอะตุลอิสลาม) was, in the 1950s, associated with the local South Asian migrant community in central Bangkok. This was modelled along the lines of the Jama'at-i Islami (جماعت اسلامی), which played an important role in Indo–Pakistani politics (Liow 2009a: 163). While initially an ethnically Indian association, Jamiyatul Islam opened its ranks to Muslims in Thailand regardless of their ethnic origins (Scupin 1980a: 4; Liow 2009a: 80). Jamiyatul Islam actively promoted reformist messages from global reformist thinkers and movements through its *Al-Jihad* (อัลญิฮาด) and *Al-Hidayah* (อัลฮิดายะฮฺ) magazines (Hafiz Salae 2017: 110). Jamiyatul Islam later played an instrumental role in the formation of the Young Muslim Association of Thailand (YMAT). Established in 1964, by 1967 its membership comprised mostly reform-minded Thai youths and intellectuals (Liow 2009b: 192).

Sheikh Rida 'Ahmad Samadi (b. 1969)

The third trendsetter credited with diversifying Bangkok's religious economy is Sheikh Rida 'Ahmad Samadi (เชคริฎอ อะหมัด สมะดี); his contributions as a transcultural middleman have been analyzed by Winyu Ardrugsa (2012), Hafiz Salleh (2017), and Amporn Marddent (2016). Like 'Ahmad Wahab, Sheikh Rida was a mobile religious entrepreneur before relocating to Metropolitan Bangkok in the late 20th century. Resembling Achan Direk, Sheikh Rida came from a multicultural family. His father was a Thai Muslim employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs while his mother was an Egyptian. Although he was born in Bangkok in 1969, his maternal grandfather was a shariah court judge in Egypt; in addition, the origins of his father's lineage comes from Songkhla's Sultan Sulaiman.[12] Sheikh Rida's paternal grandfather served as the Imam of Bangkok Noi's Ansorit Sunnah Mosque and was the editor of publications produced by the Al-Islah Foundation.

Sheikh Rida's mobility and multilingualism came from travels with his father who was posted to Thai embassies abroad. In addition to living in Malaysia (for two years), he lived in Saudi Arabia (for eleven years), and his mother's homeland, where he lived for fifteen years. He first graduated from Egypt's Al-Azhar University (جامعة الأزهر الشريف), was deported from Egypt to Thailand in mid-1999 for his involvement in Egyptian Salafi groups, and post-graduated from Al- Qurawiyun University

[12] On the Sultan Sulaiman lineage, see Thanin Salam 2004, and Dalrymple & Joll 2021, 2022.

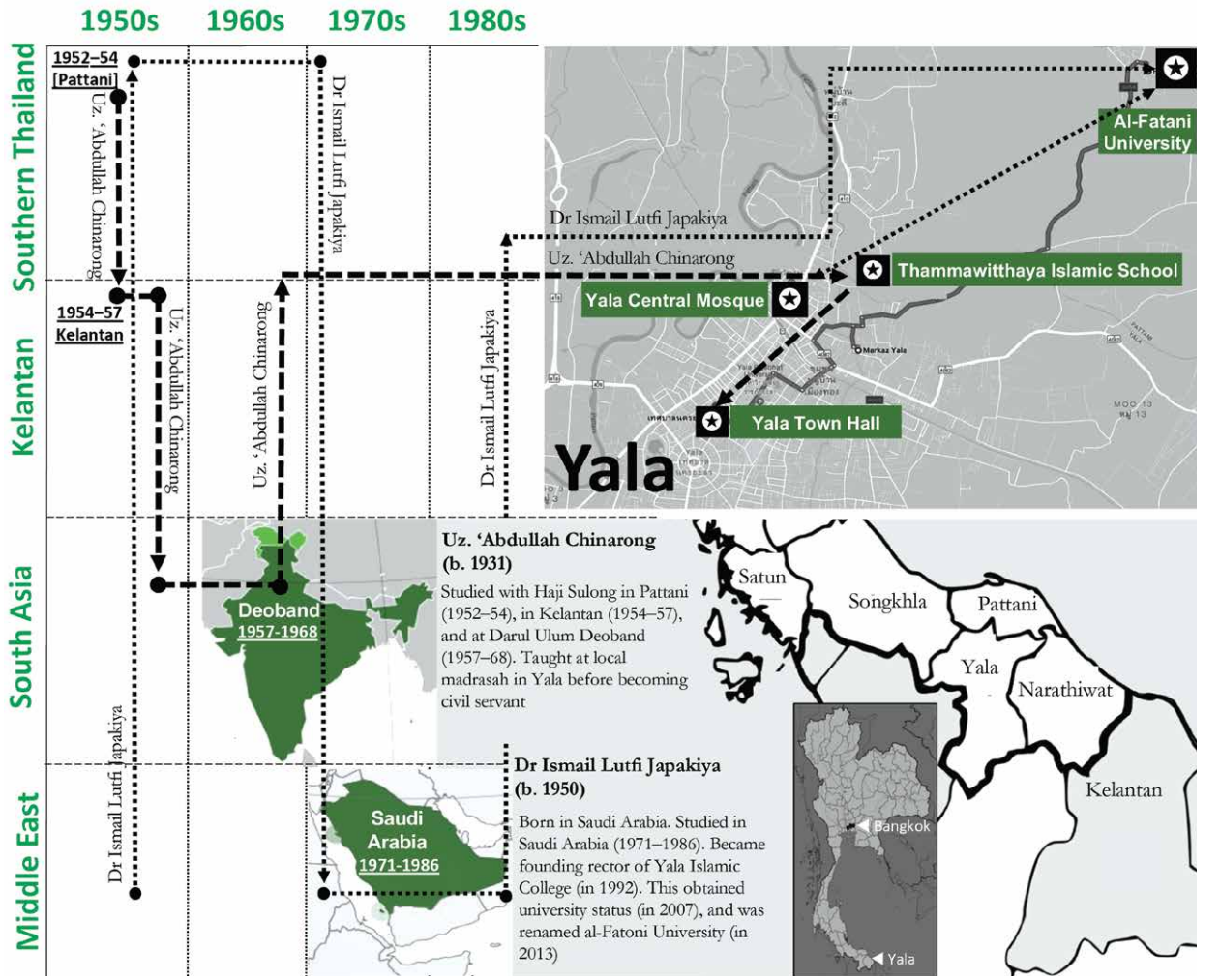

FIGURE 4: Transnational connections between southern Thailand (specifically Yala), the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent © Christopher M. Joll

(جامعة القرويين) in Morocco in 2001. As an exile with links to the Arab World and Bangkok Noi, Sheikh Rida most closely resembles 'Ahmad Wahab. After completing his master's degree in Morocco in 2001, Sheikh Rida taught at the Muslim Wittayakhan Islamic School (โรงเรียนมุสลิมวิทยาคาร) in the province of Chachoengsao, east of metropolitan Bangkok, lectured at the Al-Islah Foundation, and took over from his father as publishing editor of *Al-Islah Association*. In 2001, Sheikh Rida also established the Muslim Group for Peace (มูลนิธิมุสลิมเพื่อสันติ; Hafiz Salae 2017: 99–164). He eventually married a local Thai Muslim woman in 2002. After becoming proficient in Thai, he began accepting public speaking invitations in Bangkok. In contrast to the more conventional face-to-face study circles or print media, the most influential Islamic association that Sheikh Rida contributes to is the enormously influential White TV Channel (established in 2014). He also contributes to Muslim radio broadcasts over community radio station and directly over the internet.

Ustadh 'Abdullah Chinarong (b. 1931)

Having introduced readers to the range of transcultural Islamic trendsetters who established religious "firms" in Metropolitan Bangkok from the 1920s, our focus here is on the contributions of Ustadh 'Abdullah Chinarong (อุสตาซ อับดุลลอฮ์ จินารง), and Dr Ismail Lutfi Japakiya (see further below). These trendsetters appeared following the disappearance of Haji Sulong in 1954. We wish to reiterate the important point that some of the developments documented above preceded those dealt with below. **Figure 3** drew attention to the importance of geography in Bangkok, where the most important terrains of exchange were cosmopolitanism, multilingual communities that produced—or were open to—importers of Islamic trends originating from elsewhere in Southeast Asia, South Asia, or the Middle East. We have previously argued elsewhere that the success of local Islamic trendsetters could conceivably be attributed to their cumulative impact and—perhaps accidental—division of labor (Srawut Aree & Joll 2020: 293). Our reconstruction of southern Thailand's Islamic trendsetters (summarized in **Fig. 4**) pays attention to their transnational movements, the Islamic trends they imported and the operational bases eventually established by them. Notwithstanding the linguistic and cultural geography of present-day Bangkok as more complex than that of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, **Figure 4** also highlights the centrality of Yala's (compact) provincial capital—not Pattani—that we argue can be explained by the strength of the traditionalist leaders of local *pondok* and the Islamic Council in Pattani.

Throughout southern Thailand, Ustadh 'Abdullah Chinarong is commonly referred to as "Loh India", connected to his 9-year educational sojourn (between 1956 and 1968) at northern India's famous Darul Ulum Deoband Madrasah, located approximately 150 km north of New Delhi. Before travelling to India in 1957, he was a member of Haji Sulong's final cohort of students in Pattani before Sulong's abduction and disappearance by the Royal Thai Police in 1954. Haji Sulong had close connections with Muhammad bin Yūsuf bin 'Ahmad (محمد بن يوسف بن أحمد), also known as Tok Kenali (1868–1933), who was one of Shaykh 'Ahmad bin Muhammad Zayn al-Fatānī's (1856–1908) most influential students in the Malay World. This, in part, explains Chinarong's decision to study in Madrasah Ahmadiyyah located just outside Kelantan's capital of Kota Bharu in Malaysia. Three years later, he enrolled at the Darul Ulum Deoband Madrasah (Muhammad Ilyas Yahprung 2014: 109). It is worth noting that Hafiz Salae's empirically rich analysis of Islamic trendsetters between central and southern Thailand mentions that while in northern India, he came into contact with Thai Muslim disciples of 'Ahmad Wahab (Hafiz Salae 2017: 118).

In 1968, Chinarong returned to southern Thailand. He initially taught at some of Yala's largest private Islamic schools, including Thammawitthaya Islamic School (โรงเรียนธรรมวิทยามูลนิธิ), where he became a vocal critic of aspects of Islam advocated by local Malay traditionalist firms (Muhammad Ilyas Yahprung 2014: 110). After five years, Loh India became a Thai civil

servant, working at Yala's Education Development Center. In this, he resembled Direk Kulsiriswad who was both a businessman, Muslim educator, and Islamic activist. Resigning as a full-time religious teacher increased his freedom to articulate concerns about inconsistencies between local customary Islam, the interpretations of the Qur'an, and the corpus of prophetic traditions referred to as the *hadith* had been exposed to in northern India. He also began to regularly preach on Sunday mornings—although he chose Yala's city hall over Yala's Central Mosque. Thai scholar Muhammad Iylas Yahprang comments that those attending Chinarong's lectures included "civil servants, college and university lecturers, private company workers, businessmen, university students" (Muhammad Ilyas Yahprung 2014: 111). His following among Malay university students and involvement in education led him to increasingly function as mentor to Muslim youth movements. These emulated both the Egyptian Ikhwan al Muslimūn (الإخوان المسلمون) established in 1928, and the South Asian Jama 'at-i-Islami (جماعت اسلامی پاکستان) established in 1941 (Muhammad Ilyas Yahprung 2014: 113). Hafiz Salae (2017: 118) notes that, after two years, his public preaching portfolio ended and he established Islam Prasanwit (โรงเรียนอิสลามประสานวิทย์), an "Islamic-integrated school" on the outskirts of Yala. It is worth mentioning at this juncture that South Asian influences imported by Loh India to southern Thailand, the activism had already begun to be popularized by Direk Kulsiriswad in central Thailand.

Ismail Lutfi Japakiya (b. 1950)

The well-known Saudi-educated Dr Ismail Lutfi Japakiya (ดร อิสมาอีลลุตฟี จะปะกียา) is widely acknowledged as the most influential reformist activist in present-day southern Thailand.[13] Lutfi's local influence can be attributed to Arabic language credentials connected to having been born in Saudi Arabia (in 1950) and his Saudi education (1971–1986). Lutfi has a doctorate in comparative Islamic jurisprudence from the Islamic University of Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud (جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية) in Riyadh, where he also completed his master's degree in comparative *fiqh* (الفقه; Islamic jurisprudence). Before this, he had graduated with a bachelor's degree in *usuluddin* (أصول الدين; religious principles) at Madinah University. He initially leveraged the cultural capital of his family who had established Bamrung Islam Witthaya School (โรงเรียนบำรุงอิสลามวิทยา) in the village of Brao, 15 km from Pattani on the road to Yala's provincial capital. Under the leadership of his father Babo Abdurrahman Japakiya (بابا عبدالرحمن جافاكيا), this school was one of a number traditionalist Islamic boarding schools referred to in Thailand and Malaysia as *pondok* (ڤوندوق): registered as private Islamic schools (PSTI) that taught the Thai national curriculum alongside elements of a traditional Islamic education.[14] Under Lutfi's

[13] For more on Lutfi, see Liow 2009a, 2010; Braam 2013; Muhammad Ilyas Yahprung 2014.

[14] The following have provided the most comprehensive summary of changes in Islamic education in southern Thailand, Liow 2009a, 2010; Hasan Madmarn 2011; Hafiz Salae 2017.

leadership, Bamrung Islam School has functioned since the 1980s as the principal conduit of his Saudi-style reformist firm in Malay-majority southern Thailand. In the local Pattani Malay dialect, *Orae Brao* is employed by local traditionalists when referring to these local "Wahhabis" from the village of Brao located approximately 10 km from Pattani's Provincial capital. Last, but not least, Lutfi's local status is heightened as the founding rector of Yala Islamic College (วิทยาลัยอิสลามยะลา), established in 1992. This became Thailand's first private Islamic university. Although initially registered in 2007 as Yala Islamic College, its name was changed in 2013 to al-Fatoni University (มหาวิทยาลัยฟาฏอนี). Yet another important detail mentioned by Hafiz Salae (2017: 131–133) is that Lufti actively recruited Malays from Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat while they were studying in Pakistan. In other words, although Lufti was educated in Saudi Arabia and the construction of al-Fatoni has been primarily funded by Middle Eastern donors, a range of South Asian reformist influences have also influenced this new religious "firm" in southern Thailand. In present-day Thailand, Lufti and Rida are the highest profile proponents of the Saudi-style Salafi (السلفية) reformist franchise.

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Details about the transnational connections and operational bases in Metropolitan Bangkok and Yala of Thailand's five trendsetters of Islam are summarized in **Figures 3** and **4**. **Figure 5** summarizes the careers of these transcultural religious entrepreneurs highlighting the connections between them.

Analysis of developments in central and southern Thailand from the 1920s reveals the multipolar origins of the Islamic franchises imported by these five transcultural religious entrepreneurs. These included Indonesia (famous for its Islamic institutions such as the Muhammadiyah), the Middle East, and South Asia. Secondly, some of these men were contemporaries. Both 'Ahmad Wahab and Haji Sulong came to (what was then) Siam in the late 1920s, a time which can be safely assumed to have been related to the tumultuous reconfiguration of Islamic authority in the Arabian Peninsula. While 'Ahmad Wahab imported elements of the Islamic franchises he had encountered between Sumatra and the Middle East, Haji Sulong imported the "juristic Sufism" (Buehler 1998: 224–223; Dickson 2022: 5–6) of the Meccan-based Patani School. After studying in Kelantan, Loh India studied with Haji Sulong as a member of his last cohort of students before studying in the Indian subcontinent. Direk Kulsiriswad (Achan Direk) built upon the reformist activism in Bangkok Noi before Loh India's return to Yala in the late 1960s. To reiterate, there is no evidence about any connections between these two trendsetters in Thailand—despite both having been influenced by South Asian modernism. We have argued elsewhere that later generations of religious entrepreneurs

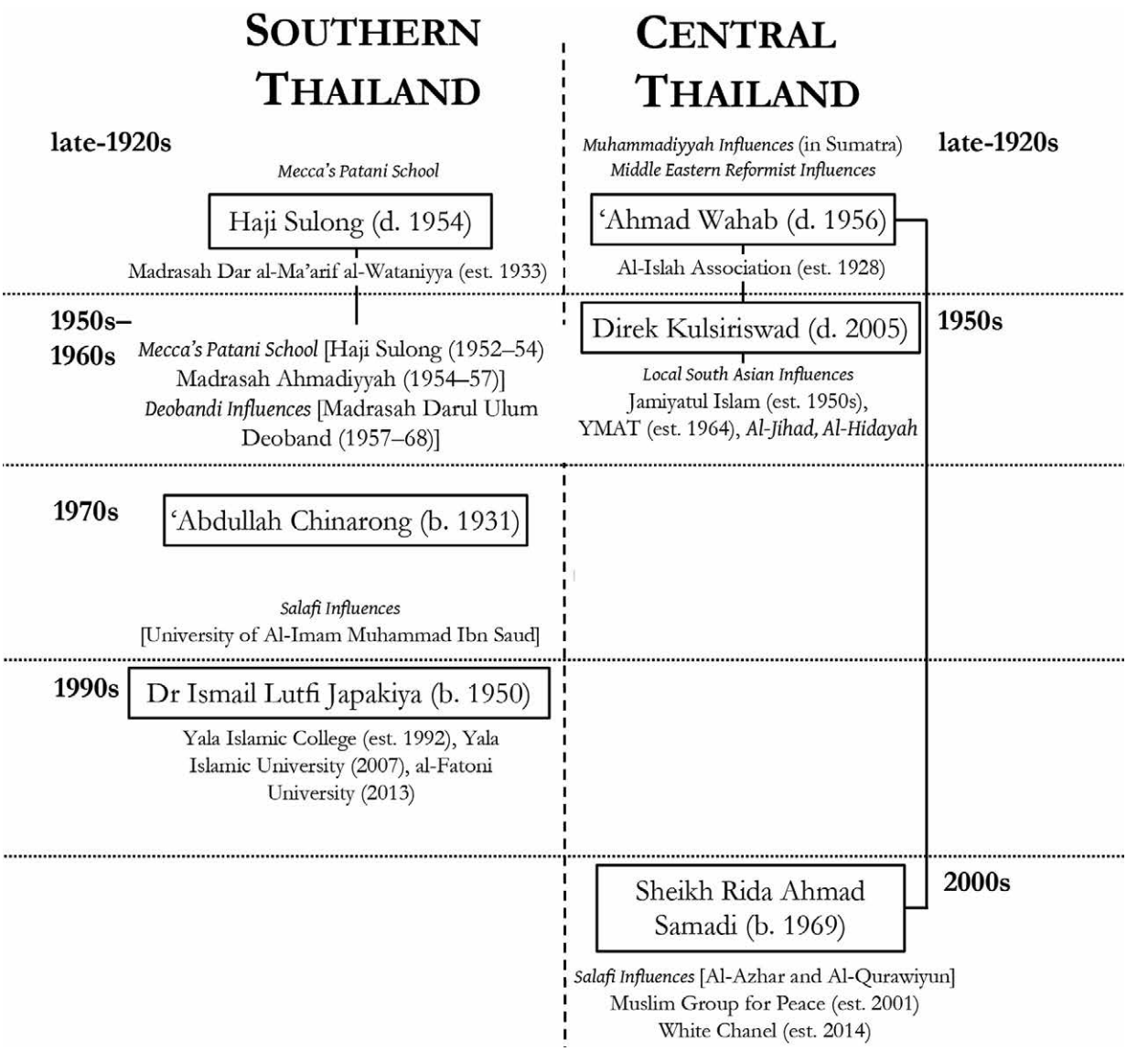

Figure 5: Islam's transcultural trendsetters in central and southern Thailand: Summary of transnational movements, influences and connections © Christopher M. Joll

in Thailand benefitted from the achievements of other local activists. The reformist franchise established by Lutfi indirectly benefitted from the Islamic activism of 'Abdullah Chinarong. We have documented connections between 'Ahmad Wahab and Direk Kulsiriswad. Similarly, the family of Sheikh Rida—the highest profile transcultural middleman of Salafism based in Metropolitan Bangkok—had long-standing connections with the Al-Islah Foundation. In many respects, his influence in central Thailand resembles that of Lutfi in southern Thailand.

Despite important differences between these five trendsetters, all these fit the description of Nile Green's transcultural middlemen/religious entrepreneurs. After all, regardless of

their backgrounds and reservations, conversative traditionalists are best persuaded to accept strange ideas articulated in local languages and dialects by someone familiar. All of these religious entrepreneurs were polyglots. As a Thai civil servant, Chinarong was a bilingual Malay who also learned Urdu while studying on the Indian subcontinent. With the notable exception of Achan Direk, all spent time overseas. Achan Direk's cosmopolitan credentials are related to having hailed from the Cham community of Ban Khrua and that his father was a South Asian immigrant. 'Ahmad Wahab was the only religious entrepreneur who can safely be described as a professional stranger. Nevertheless, we have documented that his local impact was related to having established his operations based in one of Metropolitan Bangkok's Malay-speaking communities. Equally important, the Islamic trends he introduced were disseminated, in Thai, by his local disciples—the most important of whom was Direk Kulsiriswad. He might not have had the most mobile career, but this was compensated by the cosmopolitan cultural milieu that he was born in and having become an adept polyglot.

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