

Islam as Understood and Practiced by the Muslims in Indochina

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ABSTRAK

Orang Islam di Indochina terdiri daripada orang Cham dan Melayu. Orang Cham adalah keturunan dari sebuah kerajaan Melayu yang termasyhur iaitu Kerajaan Champa. Kewujudan Kerajaan Champa telah dikenal pasti sejak abad ke-2 hingga ke abad ke-19 dan terletak di timur Semenanjung Indochina. Orang Melayu pula berasal dari Nusantara. Tamadun awal kerajaan Champa dipengaruhi oleh tamadun India, iaitu tamadun Hindu-Buddha. Pada abad ke-9 telah ada kesan kedatangan Islam di bumi Champa dan sedikit demi sedikit Islam menjadi sebahagian dari tamadun Champa. Pada abad ke-15 barulah Islam menjadi agama rasmi kerajaan. Orang Champa yang telah masuk Islam memanggil diri mereka orang Bani. Ajaran agama Islam berkembang maju sepanjang masa. Kini hanya sebilangan kecil orang Bani yang hidup di Phanrang dan Phanri (Vietnam) serta di O Russei (Kemboja) masih mengamalkan Islam seperti difahamkan beberapa abad dahulu. Makalah ini memperlihatkan bagaimana amalan Islam seperti sembahyang harian, sembahyang Jumaat, puasa bulan Ramadan dan beberapa praktis harian yang lain yang dilakukan oleh orang Bani dan orang Khmer Islam. Makalah ini juga memperlihatkan perkembangan pengajaran agama Islam kini di Vietnam dan Kemboja yang menganut semula ajaran Islam yang benar. "Penganutan baru" ajaran Islam ini disebabkan oleh penyebaran ajaran Islam yang benar yang dibawa oleh mereka, termasuk anak muda orang Bani sendiri, yang belajar di Malaysia atau di Asia Barat.

ABSTRACT

The Muslims in Indochina consist of mainly the Chams and the Malays. The Chams are descendents of once famous kingdom, the Kingdom of Champa, whose existence was proven to be from the 2nd century on the eastern part of the Indochinese Peninsula and lasted until the 19th century. The Malays, on the other hand, were from the Malay Archipelago. The Indian namely the Hindu-Buddha civilization influenced the early civilization of Champa. By the 9th century, traces of the Muslim influence appeared on its soil, and progressively the Muslim civilization has become part and parcel of the Champa civilization; and by the 15th century Islam has become the official religion of the kingdom. Upon conversion to Islam, the Chams called themselves Bani.

The Islamic practices evolved as time passed. Nowadays only a small number of them, the Bani, living in the Phanrang and Phanri (Vietnam) areas and in O Russei (Cambodia) are still practicing a form of Islam, as it was understood and practiced some centuries ago. This article gives an inside view of the basic practices of Islam like the daily prayers, the Friday prayer, the fasting of Ramadan, and some other daily practices of the Cham, the Bani and the Khmer Islam. It also brings forward the evolution of the teachings of Islam in the present day Vietnam and Cambodia as some of them have "converted" once again to the orthodox teaching. Some Islamic teachers, including some Bani young men, who studied in Malaysia or in the West Asia, were responsible to the spreading of the true teachings of Islam, which brought about this "new conversion"

ISLAM AS UNDERSTOOD AND PRACTICED BY THE MUSLIMS IN INDOCHINA

Champa, an Indianised kingdom existed on the coast of central Vietnam from the 2nd to the 19th century (Po Dharma 1988: 59-70). The kingdom disappeared under the blow of the famous Vietnamese March to the South, the *Nam Tien*. Only its archeological remnants are found on its once famous land. Some of its people continue to live on their land which is now known as Vietnam. Some others have fled the kingdom through centuries and established themselves elsewhere. One of the Champa people is known as *Cham*. They now live in the South of Trung-Viêt (Central Vietnam), in the west of Nam-Viêt (South Vietnam) and in almost every part of Cambodia. The Cham people living in Cambodia are the descendents of those who left their country, the kingdom of Champa, when it was continuously invaded by the Vietnamese (Lafont, P. B 1964: 157-171). A very small number of them is found in Vientiane, Laos. Since the fall of Indochina to the communist regimes in 1975, some of them have left for other countries like France, the United States and Malaysia.

In this article, Indochina refers to the French Indochina which consists of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam but does not include Thailand and Myanmar. A few articles about the Muslims in Indochina have been written in late 19th and early 20th centuries by some French scholars like A. Cabaton, M. Ner, P. Rondot. Since the 1960's, P. B. Lafont, Po Dharma, Bernard Gay and Mak Phoeun have produced quite a number of new findings on the Malay and Cham people. This paper tries to bring forward some of the basic Islamic tenets as practiced by the Muslims of Cham and Malay origin in Indochina. Besides we also try to show some changes that have been taken place since.

The Muslims in Indochina consist of mainly the Cham and the Malay people and some Indians and Arabs. The Malays who are also known as *Melayu* or *Chvea* are those who came from the Malay Peninsula, Patani and from some

other islands of the Malay Archipelago like the island of Jawa and Sumatra (the Minangkabau). The Indians are those who came from the Indian sub-continent, like the Indians (from the present India), Pakistanis and those from Afghanistan who called themselves the *Kabouls*. Where as the Arabs are those who came from North Africa (Ner 1941. 151-152 & 174).

THE COMING OF ISLAM TO THE INDOCHINESE PENINSULA

At this point in time it is still very difficult to ascertain as to when and how Islam arrived in Indochina. We have so far some documents like stories by the Arab wayfarers, Cham historical legends and the Khmer, Vietnamese and Chinese annals. The Chinese annals are more precise (Cabaton 1906: 29). Together these annals provide a great deal of information.

Two hypothesis have been forwarded. One is that Islam was brought to Indochina by the Arabs and Persians merchants during the great expansion of Islam in the world by the tenth to twelfth century; and the second hypothesis is that this religion was brought in by the Malays who migrated to this area by the end of the 14th century.

It is doubtless to say that the Arabs knew Indochina at the very early time as the relation between the Arabia, India, the Malay Archipelago and China has started since the 7th century. As proof of this we found that when I-tsing who was zealously religious and wanted to study Buddhism in India, addressed one of the Ta-she in 671 A.D. for help. In the 7th century, the Arabs was referred to as Ta-shi by the Chinese (Cabaton 1906: 30). In 758 A.D. there were so many Arabs and Persians in Canton and they were strong enough to burn the city; in the 9th century, in Khan-fou, they created disorder that 120,000 of them included Christians and magus were killed. One cannot imagine that being so strong they would ignore Indochina. By the 9th century, Aboul Feda and Edrisi spoke of the Senf, on the west of which is Comar. Senf is the Kingdom of Champa and Comar is the Kingdom of Cambodia (Cabaton 1906: 31). Both of these countries were very rich in aloes-wood, a produce that the Arabs would pay high price to obtain. Following this in 987 A.D. an embassy from Panduranga, a state in Champa, met an Arab embassy in the court of China.

It has been also recorded in the *Song Annals* that the Cham people used buffalo only for sacrifice, not for any other purposes. And at the moment of immolation they pronounced the word *A-lo-ho-lei-pa*. This word is none other than the Muslim's *Allahu Akbar*. Therefore it is not wrong to say that some Cham have already converted to Islam at the time of the Song dynasty. The Song dynasty reigned in China from 960 to 1280 A.D. It has eighteen emperors; the last of those was beaten by Kubilai. In another passage it is learned that "the customs and the dresses of the Cham resemble those of the kingdom of the Tachi" (Huber 1903. 55). In a story related by Masoudi and Abu Zeyd, collected in

the 10th century, mentioned an event probably happening in the 8th century, that “A Comar (Khmer) king who with imprudence spoke lightly of the mighty king of Zbedj (Jawa), was dethroned and killed by the offended who ravaged his kingdom” Therefore there is a good reason to believe that Islam was introduced to Indochina in the 11th century by the Arab and Persian traders who at the same time introduced it to the Malay Archipelago. But the progress of the acceptance of Islam in Champa was very much faster than that in Malay Archipelago as vestiges about Islam were found only in the Cham area.

These records are corroborated by Cham manuscripts which, studied by Po Dharma (Po Dharma 1978), showed that the Cham had their first king named *Po Uvalvah* or *Po Ovlah* (or The Seigneur Allah) reigning in *Sri Banay* for 37 years, from the year of Mouse to the year of Mouse (1000-1036). The year of Mouse is one of the twelve animals year system, that are known as the year of Rat, Buffalo, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig. The only question is that whether, by giving Islamic name to their first king, the Cham tried to bring the level of their kings at par with the one who brought the teaching of Islam to their land. In any case, the two sources, Chinese and Cham, seem to corroborate very well in respect to what could have happened at that time (around the 10th or 11th century) pertaining to the introduction of Islam in Indochina. G.E. Morrison dated the introduction of Islam in Champa as by the year 1039 (Marrison 1985: 60).

Cabaton in his *Indochine*, has noted that M. van Ronkel (Tijdschr. v. Ind. Taal-Land-en Volkenk., 1914, p. 131) argued that since the word *lebei*, which is of Tamil origin meaning *Muslim merchant*, was widely used by the Muslim Indochinese community, it strengthens the thesis that Islam in Indochina and Indonesia came through Indian people not through the Arabs. Anyhow till present time no conclusive evidence has been put forward as to how and when Islam was introduced to Indochina. But by the 11th century and by the Arabs and Persians to be probably the answers to those questions.

ISLAM AS UNDERSTOOD AND PRACTICED BY THE CHAM

The practice of Islam among the Cham people faded due to wars between Champa and Dai Viet from the 10th century which saw the victory of the Viets in the 15th century. But by that time, the arrival of the Malay traders in Indochina particularly in the kingdom of Champa, who brought along the teaching of Islam saw the revival of the religion. That was due to the fact that upon arrival in Indochina (Mohamad Zam bin Musa 1991. 3-13), the Malay and the Cham have the affinity for one another. Since then they formed a homogeneous society as they belong to the same ethnic group of Malayo-Polynesia (Cabaton 1907: 130). G. M. Marrison (1951. 90) has concisely said “The Chams are akin to the Malays, and history has chanced to bring the two peoples together in various ways”.

According to Vietnamese annals, the Malays who had not been seen for a long time appeared in the seas of the kingdom of Champa in 1394. They came as traders. They worked closely with the Cham people for two main reasons, Race and Religion. The latter was a very strong reason that bonded them together. The religion that the Malay traders brought along with them was apparently no other than Islam. The relation between the Malays and the Cham was extended to marriage, not only between the commoners but also between the kings of Champa and princesses of Jawa as noted in the inscriptions on the stele of Po-Sah (Finot 1903: 636). This relation continued to exist until the 19th century where the Cham people lead by Katip Sumat together with the Malay fought a lost war against the Vietnamese occupation.

In Cambodia the Malays together with the Cham they played very important roles in the Khmer kingdom (Mohamad Zain 1991. 3-13). They have been accorded the highest ranks in the administration. They contributed to the development and security of the Khmer nation in various capacities such as traders, farmers, fishermen and soldiers in the Khmer armies; they were appointed to the posts of ministers in the XVII-19th centuries, as mentioned in the Khmer Royal Chronicles (Mak Phoeun 1988: 83-93 & Mak Phoeun 1990: 47-68).

The Cham in the South of Trung-Việt are those who did not leave their homeland after the Vietnamese invasion. They are concentrated in the provinces of Ninh-Thuân and Bình-Thuân, in the districts of Phanrì and Phanrang. They were there as a result of the emperor Minh Menh's policy to group them together in 1833-1834. About two third of these people practices Brahmanism, and the rest practices a less orthodox Islam. This belief duality gives rise to two exteriorized communities even though to a very lesser degree – as the two small religious communities living in a majority of Vietnamese society realize that they can't afford to be divided otherwise they will disappear. Those living in the western Nam-Việt (Tay-Ninh) as well as those in Chau-Doc are all of orthodox Islam. Those in Cambodia are generally orthodox except those in the area called O Russei (Baccot 1968) who are of the less orthodox.

With regard to their numbers, there were approximately thirty thousand of Cham people in Bình-Thuân by the end of the 19th century. About one third of them were *Bani* and the rest were Brahmanists or *Akafir*. Those in Cambodia were numbered at about sixty thousand. They were all Muslim and practiced a more orthodox Islam (Aymonier 1890: 145). Both of these groups differ not only from the language point of view but also their *mode de vie*. The Cham Muslim in Cambodia were more advanced in their knowledge in Islam than their brothers in Bình-Thuân and received the influence of Khmer customs as the Khmer civilization was very close to that of the kingdom of Champa. As for those in Bình-Thuân they still kept their customs alive by refusing to accept the Vietnamese moral influence as summarized by Aymonier as “a group that the Vietnamese has eaten away without modifying its nature” (Aymonier 1890: 146). The 1905 statistics showed that there were 230,000 Muslims in Indochina over a

population of 12 millions (Cabaton 1906: 28). It should also be noted that by the year 1940, the French protectorate has called these people as 'Malay' (Ner 1941: 152).

Islam which was practiced by the Chams and the Malays in Indochina is of *Shafie* from the Sunni school. An *aide-mémoire* most likely inspired by the Aboul Laith al-Samarkandi's catechism which was then widespread in Jawa and Malaya was found among them. It described briefly the basic teachings of Islam in the form of purification (ablution), the prayers and *Zakat* (taxes for the poor) but not the pilgrimage. There existed also collections of texts of *Akidah*, *Hadiths* and Koran which constituted their religious literature. However, the Muslim in Indochina performed their pilgrimage in Mecca too. But if there was no one who could afford the voyage, they clubbed together to send one as a delegate (Cabaton 1906: 43-44).

The Cham who believe in Brahmanism – their practices had so little resemblance with that in India (Cabaton 1907: 136) – called themselves *Cham Jat* or *Cham Harat* (*Pure race*). By calling themselves such name, they mean to differentiate themselves from the Muslim Cham. They were also known as *Akafir* or *Kafir* (Impure) (Aymonier 1890: 145), a deformation from an Arabic word *Kafir* which means *infidel*. In fact the name *Akafir* was given to them by the Muslim Cham without having a sense of animosity or prejudice. And we could also find that in certain Cham manuscripts, they are known as *Cham Pak* or *Cham Muk* (Lafont 1964: 158).

On the other hand, the Cham who had converted to Islam are called *Cham Bani* or *Cham Asalam* by their counterparts. The word *Bani* is from an Arabic word *beni* which means *son*, or *son of the true faith*. These peoples form a unified religious community and practice a less orthodox Islam. This practice is a syncretism of the Koranic faith, local cults of spirit and of a certain forms of Brahmanism.

With the exception of religious practices, there is no differences between the Cham *Akafir* and the Cham *Bani*. The difference lies only in the practice of their religion but not in either their *mode de vie* or their social organization. Generally, the Cham *Bani* do not care much who he marries, a Muslim or a non-Muslim, neglects their ablution and the five daily prayers, do not practice circumcision. Their conducts are more like an unbeliever than a Muslim. For them the respect of the obligations and the interdictions of the Koran is not very important as they believe that when they do the purification (*atâu ra*) they would obtain the pardon of all their faults or misdeeds from the Almighty, no matter how serious these faults or misdeeds were (Lafont 1964: 158 n 2).

In Cambodia, there were three groups of Muslims namely *Trima*, *Kaboul* and *Bani*. The *trima* group was referred to the Chvea or Jawa people that is people of Malay origin, whereas the *Kaboul* or *Kabul* group referred to the people originated from Kabul of Afghanistan; that might include also some Pakistanis (Ner, M. 1941: 169 & Po Dharma 1982: 104). According to Haji Mohd

Salleh bin Abdullah and Haji Nik Sulaiman bin Haji Wan Nor (1993), some of those who belong to this group, some times claimed that they are Pakistanis and some other times said their great-grand-fathers were from Kabul. The *trima* or *trimeu* group consisting of about one third of the total Muslim population practiced an Orthodox Islam. They were more open to changes and active in every field. The second group practices an less orthodox Islam. This group is less open and more traditionalist. The third group, very small in number and concentrated in the village called O Russei, practices *Islam Bani*. Since early 1950s, since after the arrival of two Cham named Imam Musa, a graduate from Kelantan, and Imam Ahmad India, the Muslims in Cambodia were divided into two groups called Kaum Muda and Kaum Tua. Imam Ahmad was named Ahmad India for his Master degree, the first Cham to obtain a Master's degree in India after his first degree in Kelantan. Since 1954, the Muslim Cham together with their Malay brothers in Cambodia are known as Khmer-Islam. Prior to 1970 these two groups, Kaum Muda and Kaum Tua had engaged in many conflicts regarding their religious practices.

The strong impact of this teaching was brought into Cambodia by a Cham graduate from Kelantan, Malaysia, named Ali Musa who returned home in late 1940's. In early 1950's, he started preaching what he had learned to the then orthodox Cham, Kaum Tua. This term was not in existence prior to this date. Slowly he gained his footing and many "converted" and joined this Kaum Muda group. As time passes the number of followers of Kaum Muda grows bigger and bigger. In late 1960's, just before Cambodian civil war (1970-1990) broke out there were quite a number of Kaum Muda followers residing along the Mekong river, from Kratié to Kompong Cham. The Kaum Tua group spread over in the rest of the country, except of course O Russei where people practice *Islam Bani*. The spark of the split was from what Imam Musa said that there were mentioned in the Koran of only 23 *Rasul* not 25; and then followed by a series of new interpretations of Koran and quotations of Hadiths which Kaum Tua hadn't heard of before.

With this belief the animosity between the two groups widened until a point where a *fatwa* (rulings) was promulgated by the Kaum Tua announcing that the two groups cannot mixed together as the Kaum Muda was a kafir, infidel. The consequences were very serious. Husbands and wives were separated, new mosques and *surau* were built to cater for one group or the other, depending on the size of the group. This means that in a village, the group having more members had the rights to the existing mosque or *surau* and the minority, usually the Kaum Muda, would be forced to build a new one. The difference between the two groups sometimes were very strong until the matters were brought to court of law or authority. It happened so many times in the 1960's to Ali Musa where he was brought to the court of the Ministry of Cults, accused of spreading wrong teaching of Islam. According to Haji Mohd Salleh bin Abdullah (1993). The last case against him was that he was accused of creating troubles in the

country by spreading the wrong Islamic teachings and organizing Islamic classes without permission. He was then deported but later found his way back.

This phenomena continued until 1970 after which date, as Cambodia went into civil war, both of these groups seemed to put aside their misunderstandings and worked together for the betterment of Cambodia as a whole for many of their members became soldiers of the famous 5th Cambodian army division known as 5 BIS (*Brigade d'Infanterie Spéciale*) headed by a Cham, General Les Kosem.

It is not possible to dissociate the organization of the school with the religious life of the Cham and Malays. During the French protectorate a very small number of their children attended government schools. The mosques were essentially the education centers, basically for Koranic teaching. A child learned at home, alone or in small group, the basic practice of Islam that is the prayer and the first lessons of Koran. Then they went to an elementary schools which were held at *surau* or at the teacher's house. Some of these schools called *madrasah* or *skolah* (from Malay words *madrasah* and *sekolah* meaning school) had less qualified teachers. Some very qualified teachers who were called *Tuan* or *Guru* were graduates from schools in Chau-doc, Chruoy Changvar or Trea. Some were graduates from Kelantan or Mecca (Ner 1941. 189). This trend continued until the fall of Republic Khmer in 1975 where some of the students were pursuing their education in other universities like Al-Azhar in Cairo, or Medina University in Saudi Arabia. The age of those who departed for Kota Bharu, Kelantan (on the East coast of Malaysia) varied from 10 to 20, and the length of their studies depended on the resources of their parents.

ISLAM IN CENTRAL VIETNAM

Islam Bani is the Islam as seen and practiced by the Cham Bani. In the early 20th century Cabaton has noted that the Muslims in Annam remain as Muslims not because of the believe but because of the will of being so. He found a strange representation of some very important personage of Islam in one Akafir tract that shows: "*Alwahuk* (Allah, the God self-made) is placed on the forehead, *Olwah* (Allah, the demiurge) on the left eyebrow, *Mahamat* (Mohammad) on the right eyebrow, *Jibaraellak* (Gabriel) on the left eye, *Ipburahim* (Ibrahim) on the right eye, *Açan* (Hassan) on the left nostril, *Açai* (Hossam) on the right nostril, *Hava* (Eve) on the left ear, *Adam* on the right ear" Besides a phrase "Sitdik Svatthik Sikariya" meaning "Happiness! Perfection! Good!" has been found at the beginning of some Cham books on Islamic knowledge. For example in one book, it begins with "Sitdik Svatthik Sikariya. This is the book where we learn that there are seven levels in the heaven of *Po Mahamat*. There are also seven levels in his *tanōh rıya* (hell, in Cham) ... It must not believe those who say anything to the contrary" (Cabaton 1907: 139-140).

We find that there are also some incoherencies in the names of their ministers:

Po Gru or Ong Gru the masters of the sacerdotal classes,
 imöm (*imam*, in Malay) the officiants of the prayers
 katip (*khatib*, in Malay) preachers on Friday prayers
 mödin muezzı achar (*acarya*, in Skt.) religious teachers at a mosque.

Mr. Sany bin Abdullah (1993) said that Po means Seigneur in Cham and *Ong* means Mister or Master. While the word *achar* is mainly used by the Cham-Bani and *baçaih* for the Brahmanist priest. As for religious books they have *Kitab Coran* (the Koran), *tapuk asalam* (the book of Islam), *tapuk Mahamat* or *tapuk nabı Mahamat* (the book of the Prophet Mohammad), *kitab alamadu* (Arabic Al-hamdu, the book of praise), *tapuk sakıray* (religious texts or religious story book).

As for the practice of the five compulsory daily prayers, the Cham Bani leave it to their imöm. According to Mr. Sany bin Abdullah, they understand that it is compulsory only for all the imöm to perform it for themselves and for the rest of them. The five daily prayers are:

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| 1. çâbahik or çobahik (Arabic, Phfw çabâh) | early morning prayer |
| 2. vahçarik (Arabic, v93 zuhr) | noon prayer |
| 3. asarik (Arabic, vwu açr) | afternoon prayer |
| 4. mögarıp (Arabic, Fv7l maghrib) | sunset prayer |
| 5. ihsâ (Arabic, Hhau ishâ) | night prayer |

As to how they pray, it is the same as the rest of Muslims do, that is two rakaat for the early morning prayer, four for the noon prayer, four for the afternoon prayer, three for the sunset prayer and four for the night prayer.

For Friday prayers, it is also the duty of all the imöm to gather and pray in the mosque without having to consider if there are forty believers or not (Cabaton 1907: 144). This consideration of not respecting the minimum number of members, that is forty, for them to be allowed to congregate for a Friday prayer explains that they do not belong to the Shafie school as it was known before. A Friday prayer lasts normally one hour after which all the members of congregation have a meal together, a meal which they washed down with rice wine (Cabaton 1907: 144). Nowadays there is no such drinking of alcohol after Friday prayers by imöm or any other followers.

The fasting in the month of *ramvön* (Ramadan) or *bulan ök* (litt. fasting month) is observed by the whole population for only the first three days, the rest of the month is done by only the imöm. The imöm, usually eleven of them, gathered in the mosque and stayed there like in their own houses, day and night, for the whole month. They went out only for the call of nature and ablution. The *terawih*, the commendable prayer at night after *ihsâ* during the month of Ramadan, is carried out only by the imöm.

The circumcision or *katan*, *katat* (Khjo khıtân) is purely symbolic. Mr. Sany bin Abdullah (1993) says that the katan ceremony is held for the boys when they

reach eleven or twelve years of age. Cabaton (1907: 145) says it is held when the boy has reached five years of age. However a grand ceremony is held to declare a girl's nubility or *karöh*. The *karöh* happens when a girl has three consecutive menses. The *karöh* ceremony presided by an *Ong Gru* aided by the *imöm* lasts two days and is held for a group of girls rather than for one girl (Cabaton 1907: 145-154).

As for the relation with their brothers Akafirs, the Muslims, particularly the *imöm* do not hesitate to participate in ceremonies or festivals organized by the Akafir Brahmanists for example the one in honor of the Goddess *Po Sah Inö*. But the Muslim *imöm* officiated themselves by invoking Allah before the *Po Yang* and the spirits of the dead, and eat the meals prepared by the *Bani* women. The only ceremony to which the *imöm* do not participate is the Brahmanist cremation as they have a dislike the rituals for the corps. This aversion as in a Cham saying (Marrison 1985: 61):

Cham matai lwai bruk blauh cuh,
 Bani matai page byar harei dar, which means
 [When a [Hindu] Cham dies, they let his body decompose, and later
 cremate it;
 when a *Bani* dies in the morning, they bury the body in the evening.]

To reciprocate the honor given by the *Bani* to their *Po Yang*, the Akafirs placed Allah, Muhammad and the prophets of Islam in their pantheon.

Both the Muslims and the Brahmanits of Binh-Thuân believed in black magic, bewitchment, sorcery and superstitions. These were proven by the absence of greenery in their village as they believed that "the shadow of a living tree brings misfortune to the house" According to Mr. Sany, these beliefs do not exist any more. The *Bani* as well as the Akafir also believed in lucky and unlucky days and would not undertake any important act, for example marriage, without consulting a guru who could presumably tell them when is a favorable moment.

Marriage ceremonies usually are very simple both in the Cham *Bani* and Akafir. Boys or girls get married at very early age, normally between fifteen and eighteen. Furthermore they mix very freely and have the freedom to choose the person they like. It is for these reasons that seldom there are pregnant girls before marriage. If it is the case she is invited to give the name of the man responsible for her pregnancy. If this man admits of his doing he will be given a small fine and is allowed to marry the girl. On the other hand if the girl refuses to tell the name of the man, she will be punished by caning fifty times but with the consideration of not harming her pregnancy.

The position of woman in this society is highly respected as there is still some influence of the practice of matriarchy. Anyhow she still plays a very important role in the household decision. On the other hand even though the

Bani men who know they have the right to marry up to four wives, they rarely are polygamous.

ISLAM IN CAMBODIA

It should be noted that in Cambodia all Chams and Malays are Muslims. The term Bani is not then affixed to the Cham or Malay. The term 'Islam in Cambodia' is referred to Islam practiced by those other than the *Bani*, that is those in Cambodia, with the exception of those in O Russei, and include those living in the west of Nam-Viet (Tay-Ninh), Chau-Doc and Hochiminh Ville.

At the beginning of the century, there were about 90,000 Muslim people living in Cambodia. They are all Muslims. They spread over 150 densely populated villages, along Mekong river, Tonlé Sap (the Grand Lac), the Bassac. In some other areas they live together with the Malay, very much less in number (Cabaton 1907: 164), with whom they form a homogenous community. M. Ner grouped them into four big regions namely:

1. Central region (Phnom Penh and province of Kandal),
2. North and North-west region (provinces of Kompong Chhnang, Kompong Thom, Pursat and Battambang),
3. South-East region (provinces of Takeo and Kampot), and
4. North-East region (provinces of Kompong Cham and Kratié) (Ner 1941. 165).

They are carpenters, fishermen, peasants, businessmen and labourers with a great deal of dexterity. The Cham women are famous for their silk fabric production. Their clean and big houses, symbol of prosperity in the Cham community, built on stilt surrounded by verdure, as they don't share the same believe with their brothers in Binh-Thuân that shade brings bad luck. Their wealth can be seen in building of big mosques around in the country. The one in Svay Khleang, Kompong Cham province, with a beautiful high minaret was built by a rich *Okña Baurtès Reach Osman*. *Okña Baurtès Reach* is a title given by the king, Osman is his name. He was a highest Cham dignitary in the province and representing the Cham community to the Khmer and French administrative authorities (Ner 1941. 178). At the same time Him Talep, a rich wood trader also from Svay Khleang, made \$60,000.00 a year and paid \$12,000.00 in taxes.

There were some hierarchies among them, as to what responsibilities they have. They were chosen among the dignitaries. The first four bearing the title of *Okña* bestowed by the king of Cambodia represented the chiefs of the Muslims in the country. They were known respectively as *Okña Reachea Koley*, *Okña Tok Koley*, *Okña Raya Koley* and *Okña Pakê* (Cabaton, A. 1906: 45). After the Cambodian independence, the Muslims in Cambodia had at the head of the Islamic community a *Changvang* (the Supreme Chief). *Okña Haji Res Las* was

the last to hold that post in the Khmer Republic. He was seconded by two deputies (Le Martyre des Musulmans Khmers 1974: 36). At every mosque there was a *hakim* who was the village head of Islamic affairs. And since early 1994, al-hafiz Sulaiman Ibrahim has been appointed as new Changvang after almost a twenty year break. Beside the religious status of people as mentioned above, there exist another status called *Halim* or *Alim* who are Islamic doctors.

The mosques in the early 20th century were mostly wooden and raised slightly above ground level. And the particularity of these mosques was that in any one of them there was always a big drum which had a dual purpose: it was used to call people to prayer or to inform them of an emergency such as fire. A mosque or surau too plays double roles, one is for congregation or prayers, and the other is for Imam to give Islamic classes. Until 1970 there were some 132 mosques in Cambodia (Le Martyre des Musulmans Khmers 1974: 39) compared with seven each in the region of Phanrı and Phanrang, Vietnam (Sany bin Abdullah 1993).

As to the practices of Islam in Cambodia, we find that there is no different from the orthodoxy practiced, say in Malaysia. For any prayer, be it any one of the five daily or the Friday prayers, no imam can be responsible for others like it is understood by the Bani. This also goes with the fasting in Ramadan, and any other Islamic practices. Circumcision is not considered as symbolic as practiced by the Bani. In other words all Muslims in Cambodia observe strictly the five daily prayers and Friday congregation. The *bulan ök* (Ramadan) is also observed by everybody unlike the Bani of Binh-Thuân who left the prayers and fasting to the imöm alone to do it. There are more people in Cambodia who perform the Haj than those in Binh-Thuân.

Besides the religious practices there are some ceremonies. One of them is the *tamat* (Arabic, Nihj completion). It is a grand ceremony held in honour of young people who have completed the learning of Koran. Dressed in beautiful clothes, the young man or lady surrounded by their close friends goes in procession, lead by some musicians, do the round in the village where people will give them big ovations. The ceremony normally ends by a sumptuous meal.

Usually like in Annam, young people get married between the age of fifteen and eighteen. The wedding ceremony is very costly as some times it can last one whole week. Polygamy is not unusual for the well-to-do people, but the first wife remains the authority in the household. On the contrary divorce is very rare, as the society think of them as weak people who cannot solve their problem but finding the easy way out.

With the exception of Kaum Muda, the Cham and Malay Muslims in Cambodia still to a certain extent venerate many tombs of the people they considered saint. The saint places are known as *kramat* (Malay *kramat*, from Arabic Nihv; *karamat*, prodigy) which means *the saint*, the powerful, the first apostles of the Islamic faith or the one who conquered the land, water, forest in ancient time (Cabaton 1907: 171). They go there when they want to cure a

disease, to pray for help, etc. Some still believe in witchcraft, black magic and *jin Islam*. The latter is called such just to calm their religious scruples.

Their orthodox practice of Islam is explained by the fact that they are always in contact with their Muslim brothers from the Malay Peninsular, Kelantan in particular (Ner 1941. 152) or India. On the other hand in Bình-Thuân, the Cham Banı having less contact with the Malays and living with the majority of their brothers Akafir tend to practice a less orthodox Islam with a syncretism of other believes.

Intermarriages between a Cham or a Malay and a Khmer, Buddhist, are very rare as the 'infidel' is required to convert to Islam first before the marriage solemnity can be held. The 1937 statistics showed that in the Central Region, there were about 10% of mix marriages of a Cham and a Khmer or Vietnamese or Chinese (Ner 1941. 169). Besides there is little chance of fusion between the Muslims and the non-Muslims as outside big towns and cities, Muslim people live in their villages which are separated from the non Muslim's. This doesn't mean that there is no interaction between them but only because Cham villages have been there for generations. Moreover the young Cham generations would not like to build their new houses far away from their parents' Their houses are normally build within the same very limited space of the village as they believe in

matai hadip dalam sang duk aki

which means

[living and dying in the space of his ancestors] (Collectif 1989: 19).

As their villages stand isolated, but not disconnected from non-Muslim villages, it doesn't mean that they do not have contact with the Khmer and other people. On the contrary they keep very close contact with them. The children go to the same national school. They celebrate the same national festivals and participate in various Khmer non religious ceremonies. However they seem to take up jobs the Buddhists would not do, like butchering or fishing.

Besides since the 16th century they have been appointed as ministers, public servants and military people. With their fidelity they become a force appreciated by the country and reckoned with. In response to this appreciation given by the Khmers, the Cham descendents of the once powerful Champa, appreciate a lot the possibilities they have found on this new land to set up their home, perpetuate their existence. Both of these peoples form a happy symbiosis.

CONCLUSION

Nowadays the Cham Banı in Vietnam and Cambodia (in O Russei) has become a very small community as some of them have once again 'converted' to the true teaching of Islam which was brought to them by groups of *Dawah Tabligh* and

the like. They form a weak, 'apathetic, miserable [society] who vegetate', to borrow Cabaton's words, contrary to the fighting spirit of Islam. Whereas in Cambodia the Chams form a much more coherent society and their number keeps on increasing. It is due to the fact that they enjoy more freedom in Cambodia.

Even though the number of the Muslim people in Indochina is very small they form a very interesting community by "its understanding, its activities, its good customs, its virtues more religious than social, its beliefs accompanied by superstitions, which do not beget dangerous fanaticism" (Cabaton 1906: 47). There were also some Shiite. The rest are Sunnite of Hanefi or Shafie schools who share the same mosque without any hindrance (Ner 1941. 151).

After a few years of communist rule in Cambodia (1975-1990) many of the young people have forgotten they were Muslims. But since 1990, a few groups of *Dawah Tabligh*, consisting of some Chams and Malays, and *Arkam* from Malaysia started going to Cambodia and Vietnam with the hope of teaching them Islam. Since 1991, the Regional Islamic Da'wah Council of South East Asia & Pacific (RISEAP), Malaysia, under the leadership of Dato' Ahmad Nordin Mohd Zain, has been sending regularly some Cham graduates to organize Islamic classes for the young and to train old and new Hakims. Those who have been sent there were:

1. Ustaz Sulaiman Ibrahim, al-hafiz, Cairo
2. Ustaz Hussein bin Yaakob, Al-Azhar, Cairo
3. Ustaz Ismail bin Salleh, Madina University, Saudi Arabia
4. Ustaz Ismail Yusoff, Cairo
5. Ustaz Idris bin Yusof, Ummul Kurâ University, Mecca, Saudi Arabia
6. Ustaz Yusoff Abdul Rahman, Riyad University, Saudi Arabia
7. Ustazah Norlaili binti Salleh, University of Malaya, Malaysia
8. Ustaz Nasri, Kota Bharu, Kelantan
9. Ustaz Hasan Husin Basri bin Tuan Ibrahim was sent to Ho Chi Minhville.

These are all Chams. Under this program, a school has been built in Phnom Penh, a few schools have been repaired (Yakob bin Ahmad 1993). Last year one young Cham from Vientiane was given a short term scholarship to attend an Islamic course in International Islamic University of Malaysia, the course which was organized and sponsored by RISEAP. The teaching of Islam has started to flourish once again and is welcomed by all Muslims in Indochina.

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