

The Siamese in Kedah under nation-state making

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1: Historical Background

Kedah have ever been one of the tributary states of Siam. Siam had the tributary states in the Malay Peninsula until 1909. These tributary states were Malay Sultanate states that became Islamized in the 15th century. However, Ayutthaya, the Court of Siam, have kept the tributary relations with them, sometime with military force. Because these Malay states were important and indispensable port polities for Ayutthaya's trade network.

Anglo-Siam Treaty of 1909 made the modern border between Siam and British Malaya. Satun, which was a part of Kedah, and Patani remained in Siam. And Kedah and others were belonging to British Malaya. This border was the result of political struggle between Government of Siam and British Malaya. However, Kedah had controlled wider area before this. The area spread over archipelago along the western coast of Peninsula near the Phuket Island. And Kedah had the characteristics that were different from other Siam tributary states on the eastern coast. In Kedah, many people could understand and speak Thai Language. The Influence of Thai was left well for the name of the places and the traditional entertainments as well. Then, there are people who speak Thai as vernacular at present. These Thai-speakers are " the Samsams " who are Malay Muslims, and the Siamese who are Thai Theravada Buddhists.

In this paper, I attempt to reconstruct the historical experiences of the Siamese of Kedah from 19th century to present. The source of the paper is from the documents in the National Archives of Malaysia and data from my fieldwork in Kedah in 1990's.

2: Thai-speakers in Kedah

The majority of population of Kedah is Malay Muslims. And most of them speak Kedah dialect of Malay language. However, some are speaking Thai language as vernacular.

There are two kinds of Thai-speakers in Kedah.

One of them is the people called the Samsams. They are Malay-Muslims. The Samsams were classified as one of sub-ethnic groups of Malay in the census in 1911. [Cavendish 1911] The name can find in the Journals of English explorer of 19th century, and later as an official name in the annual reports of Kedah and Perlis. The census of 1911 is the only one official census that informed about the Samsams population and residence distribution. The population of the Samsams had 5 % of the Malay population in 1911. Most of them were paddy farmers and their village concentrated in northern districts; Kubang pasu, Padang Trap, and the center district ; Kota ster (including Pendang district in it). It is hardly find in the southern district cultivated comparatively later.

On the other hand, another Thai-speaker in Kedah is the Siamese. The Siamese population distribution is concentrated more. Most of them lived in Pendang district. [see Map.2] I tried to consider since when and where the Siamese came from where and since when and how they lived there by the old materials.

3: The lists of Siamese temples and monks in Kedah and Perlis in 1890

The lists of Thai Buddhism temples and the registered monks of Kedah and Perlis in 1890, 1892 [National Archives of Kedah 1992] are in the collection of the letters of Sultan Abdul Hamid of Kedah. The original documents are written in Malay with Jawi writing.

We find 13 Thai temples in the lists, they are concentrated around Bukit Perak of Pendang. The largest temple is Wat Lamdin that 22 monks were registered. By oral tradition and some documents this temple are also the oldest , had established for several hundreds years before . However, the documents had been lost, there is no proof now. [see map. 1]

The existence of the temple is indispensable to the daily life of Siamese Buddhist. Siamese villages also may exist around Thai Temples. The Siamese distribution in the census of 1911 also shows this. It may be that the largest Siamese communities were Padang Peliang, Padang Kerbau and Tekai villages. [see Map.2]

Why have these Siamese come to live here ? Almost Siamese villagers are in the inland area. From a view of searching the route of migration, these areas are the basin of the Muda River. The Muda River is flowing from Patani, and it meanders to the South Kedah, and reaches the Malacca Channel at the end.

And more, Baling area that there is the old temple in 19th century is also the basin area of the Muda River . Topping left the report of the early 19th century that many war refugees from Patani settled in this area. By my observation the Thai-speakers are in Pendang area, there was the Samsams villages in the low carse and the Siamese villages in the hill valley higher. Among these areas, I heard, there are some Malay-speaking villages with Patani dialect [Topping 1850]. The villagers of the Siamese and the Samsam have the memories that they participated in both festival and the ceremony and interchange with the market. And about their origin, they have imperfect memory or insisted the villagers migrated several hundreds before [interviewed at kg.Nawa]. It is probably influenced from the oral tradition of old Thai temples.

Comparatively thinking with the Thai-speakers in the northern village of Kedah, the Samsams in northern area have very few memory with the intercourse with the Siamese, and about their origin, they maintained close communication with the relatives over the border, and have the oral tradition that they have come here from south of Songkhla or Patani to seek good soil about 200 years before[Kuroda 1992].

There is interesting information to thinking Thai-speakers origin in Kedah . Here, I point out the possibility that some villages of Thai-speakers in Pendang are older migrant communities than that of the northern area.

4: Thai-speakers in " Bandit Area " after setting up the border

The border by the treaty of 1909 was the first border as the modern meaning . This borderline was decided as a result of the political struggles. Actually, people flowed freely over borders like as every day job some crossed it to work as season harvesters from Patani to Kedah. Some went to make cross-border transactions from Kedah to Hatyai or Songkhla. And many are to visit the relatives across the border. Unfortunately, this condition was same for cow robbers and bandits. Robbers went across the border and had act for. The Kedah Police and Border force could not control security at the border area. By that reason, Kedah was well known as " Bandit Area" in 1920'-30's.

Cheah Boon Kheng, academically analyzed the famous robber's legends in Kedah [Cheah 1988]. Saleh Tui was the Samsam who came from Satun so that name might show it." Tui "is a short nickname of Satun (Satul), the most famous robber Nayan, was Malay Muslim. The area of his activity was the same as the hill area that included the Siamese villages of Pendang

Din Prum was a robber who crossed the border from Patani,. He was the Siamese or the Samsam, and had Thai nationality. At first, he came to steal cows, but later, he appeared to pull a robbery in Baling as well soon. After his job, he cross the border into Thailand, and ran away to the outside of the jurisdiction of the Kedah police. He was the typical outlaw whom the modern border system produced. He had a gun killed by the police of Kedah at the end. But, it became an international problem with Thailand because the police crossed the line into the Thai territory without permit .It is said that such a matter is because it was short of both border guard systems.

In the essay of Tunku Abdul Raman, there is a story of the man who converted from Islam to the Buddhist in the 1930's to marry a Buddhist's woman [Tunku Abdul Rahman 1978]. That was general image of the Samsams that was not pious Muslim. Then, Kedah people were afraid of the area of Siamese residence as " Bandit Area". This image was just left until recent years.

5: The Choice of National Identity for building Nation

Pacific war started by the invasion of the Japanese army landing on Songkhla and KotaBahru. Coast. When Japan surrender at discretion in 1945, the people under British Malaya chose a way to the independence. It was necessary to complete the system of a nation state so that Malaya might be recognized as the country that stood on its own feet internationally. But, a nation state asks to express public identity as the nation to all the people.

As for Malaysia, Anti-Japanese movement was growing in the Chinese community in under Japanese occupation. The Japanese army was doubtful about all the Chinese. The Malaya Communist Party was continuing the guerrilla activities, and the Many Chinese who have antipathy in Japan cooperated with this in the border area. After the Japanese army passed, Malay government watched the activities of the Malaya Communist Party, and watched the Chinese trend too.

However, to make a newly multiethnic nation, Malaysia, many races had to cooperate together. The people were made to elect official identity as Malaysian

The Samsam chose a way as Malay Muslim in this process. They spoke Thai, and not ashamed to have interchange with the Siamese in personally. But, it was also important to wipe away the Negative image of " Not-pious Muslim" and " the people of Bandit Area ". And more, The Samsams have closed marital relation that was limited to the Thai-speakers villages till now, because of the daily word and the their own culture. The Samsams learned Malay Language as Malaysian, and in the process to assimilated to the Malay-speaking Malay Muslims. By this, it is sure, their world may be spread for. On the other hand, festivals and customs in their own tradition were abolished as " not Islam". The Samsams choose a way to become a standard Malay Muslim by Malay education, so as a results, they got the status of Majority. [Kuroda 1992]

On the other hand, the Siamese was left in the severe situation. They were minority in Malaysia, because they were Buddhists. And the Siamese also have negative image such as " Cow Robber" for Kedah people.

At that time, the toughest issue for Malaysian Government was to find a way to coexist with main 3 ethnic groups. The social status of the Siamese in Kedah was a local problem, it hardly reflected.

Therefore, the problem of the Siamese of Kedah brought to light was discussed as not a race problem but a poverty problem in the 1950's [K/SUK/SEC 824/68]. By a report about the Siamese of Naka in 1948, though the Siamese of Kedah is the native of Kedah for several hundred years, they were almost forgotten the existence from the Malaysian education and the administrative aid, a reporter warned the Government to help them immediately.

6: The Siamese as "the Poor" and New Village resettlement

At that time, Kedah had trouble with the activities of the guerrilla of the border area. Kedah was worried about robber's activities, the movement of Islam separatists of Thailand and the armed fights of the Malaya Communist Party. The border area was still in "the Alsatia". The Kedah government was watching out the Malaya Communist Party had many cooperators in Chinese communities. Then, it was that the poor persons of the border area might cooperate with them. The Government has to take necessary countermeasures immediately.

Malaysian government made the series of operations to control the activities of the guerrilla. First, the inhabitant of the border area is made to migrate forcibly. And The Border Force made wide restricted area along the border and watched there. That purpose to make these " no-man's-land " was to cut off the military pipeline of the guerrilla. The inhabitant made to migrate was transferred to resettlement. This resettlement camp was New Villages. This program was enforced from 1952 to 1960 years.

About 400 New Villages were made nationwide. It was said the resettlers to New Villages was squatters and possible collaborators with the Communist Party of Malaya. 85% of resettlement villages were Chinese villages, it was said that it was a kind of race policy.

In Kedah, what kind of village was made the target of the program? In the list of New Village in 1953, there are 50 villages, and Chinese villager are 27. most are in the southern area. In the northern area and the central area, we find the New Villages such as Sintok in "Bandit Area", and Padang Senai and Pendang also. We find 7 Siamese villages and 4 Samsam villages. [see Map.3]

Small Siamese villages without temple near the border also resettled to New Village with the bigger village. But, many people had to leave most of their property. Therefore, Kedah government held cultivation guidance and the course because of the stability of the life to the villager of Siam for 1955 years. [K/SUK 1915/72]

Moreover, the border crossing way at Durian Belung which was old overland route connected with Patani and Kedah was sealed off and put under the watch of the Border Force by the reason of the defenses. The way is still closed in 2001.

7: The Trouble of Burning Thai temple, Wat Lamdin

However, some villagers rejected to remove the resettlement from their village. The reason is that most of them had to give up their property, for example, cows and rice field. So, many troubles happened with the border police. Some farmer came back to the village without notice, and had gone far inland more to escape from police and army. And, as some case in Lenkas, all

villagers have escaped anywhere. It was not clear they were afraid of bandit or guerrillas or border police.

The most unfortunate trouble is the cases of burning Thai temples by Malay soldiers. This trouble developed into a political issue between Government of Siam and Kedah.

In the case of Lamdin, this trouble occurred in April 1953 [K/SUK 1916/72]. Siamese villagers of this area remained in the village still though they received removal orders more than three months ago., on the day , Malay Security Forces found the Thai temple of Lamdin on an operation. Security Forces was ordered to find the terrorist's hiding place and to destroy it. Unfortunately, Thai monks were accidentally absence. Security Forces found the rice and the kerosene oil were stored in a building of the temple. So, Malay soldiers considered this place a terrorist's storehouse, and set fire to the building . And old Thai temple, Wat Lamdin had burned down with its precious properties and manuscripts that was said kept for several hundreds years.

Such similar events happened even in that neighborhood. The trouble that other Thai temples were burned down by Malay soldiers had happened frequently. Wat Chamdin temple was burned on 26 March, this Wat Lamdin temple and Wat Pakhla temple was burned on 27, and Wat Kebang Kesom temple was burned on 30 March by Security Forces. Then, the sacred book that showed the history of these old temples, and property such as image of Buddha were destroyed by fire.

The Thai Buddhist society of Kedah and Perlis send a report immediately to the Consul of Siam in Penang and fixed an apology and made a claim for damages against Kedah government .

Kedah government insisted that anyone who did crop work in the applicable area against the order for removal at the time was "terrorism- supporter".

Thai Government and Thai Buddhist Society of Kedah insisted that Thai temple as terrorist hideout is an unfortunate misunderstanding, and rice storage and oil was kept as the monk's daily necessities in Thai temple. And more Thai government insisted, as for this border operation, Thai government got agreement of September, 1952 that Thai temples of the area such as Titi Akar, Pendang and Lampan were set outside of the object of the operation. Notwithstanding, this agreement weren't kept, it is insult to the Thai government .

Kedah government apologized to the Thai government for this trouble, and it was settled with the thing that indemnities 8000 dollars were paid for the Siamese temple .

On the background of this case, the Chinese came in the Thai Buddhism temple. Assimilation by the wedding ceremony of the Chinese and the Siamese was often seen in this area, too. A Thai temple was made the target of the daily faith of Chinese both as a Buddhism temple with the Thai. It might think that all the Buddhists of this area were doubtful for Malay person force.

8: Siamese after 1960's to present

After the census in 1911, it is difficult to find the number of Samsam and Siamese in Malaysian official census. But, Thamrong sakdiAayuwatthana visited Malaysia in 1974, and left a detailed record about the population of the Siamese villages and the scale of the temples.[Thamrong 1976]

By this report in 1974, in Kedah ; not included in Perlis;, there were 26 Thai temple, 27 Siamese Villages, about 3500 families and 17030 persons. the largest population is gathered in Pendang Area, and there are villages of each 1200 person in adjacent Padang Peliang and Padang Pusing . The secondary large population is 3850 persons in Sik area and Baling area 3000 persons, and 2600 persons of the Kuala Nerang area follow them. The largest population in the villages, there are most 2000 people in Naka village of the Kuala Nerang area. However, this Naka village is the resettlement village with other small villages

When the public order of Kedah improved, some villager came back to the former village, and cultivate again. But, some gave up to return because the village damaged by a wild elephant. In some villages, Thai school was established in the temple in help of the Thai government..

And, in 1985 , there is the list of the Thai temple by the Malaysian Thai Buddhism society exists [WatBodhiyarram 1985]. The number of Thai temples of the whole Malaysian country shows that, too. In this list, there were 37 temples in Kedah. This is the largest number of Thai temples in Malaysia [see Table 1]. Though the distribution of the village can be thought to be in the nearest place with the distribution of the temple. [see Map.1]

And there is a report of the visit to Padang Kerbau (Thung Khwaai) village by the member of Prince of Songkhla University Patani Campus in 1987 [salatan 2529]. I did the investigation of the Samsam village of Kubang Pasu in 1990 and 1991. Whereas, it visited the Thai temple of Padang Sera and Titi Akar, and have some talks about the present conditions from the monks [Interviewed at Pdg Sera 1992]

Since the Malaya Communist Party gave up an armament fight in 1990, the public order of the border area improves and various limitations are being deregulated. And, the progress of the permeation of Malay education and Islamization brought a considerable change to the life of Thai-speakers. The people called " the Samsam " before got Malay identity, and came to have a favor caught economically by becoming Malaysian Majority ethnic group . On the other hand, they became estranged with the Siamese in the neighborhood , and there very few opportunities to play the public entertainments which it thought about with non-Islam. The younger generations who can understand Thai are decreasing year by year.

For the Siamese here, the serious problem is that the advantages for the Siamese of Kedah to learn Thai language were decreasing. The understanding of the Thai character is difficult for younger generations, and it is said that the chance to use Thai Language have been decreasing more by the results of the permeation of Malay education. From there, A Thai television program can be picked up, and it is said that it can be hardly understood in this area in the house which has a television about the word being spoken to the character though it is enjoying the broadcasting of MuoiThai. Monk who comes from Bangkok is worry about the Siamese here became loss of Thai (language) identity .

The Siamese is still minority as non-Muslim in Malaysia. However, the Siamese in Kedah are the native in Kedah. They do not have national identity to Thailand at present. They can see rather deepening friendship with the Chinese as a Buddhist more.

9: Conclusions

Before the modern border was set up, the exchange and distribution of the things and people have ambiguity, and that identity was unstable, too. In the process of making nation state, people were often asked to show their identity more clear.

The historical experience of Thai-speaker of Kedah is one of the examples.

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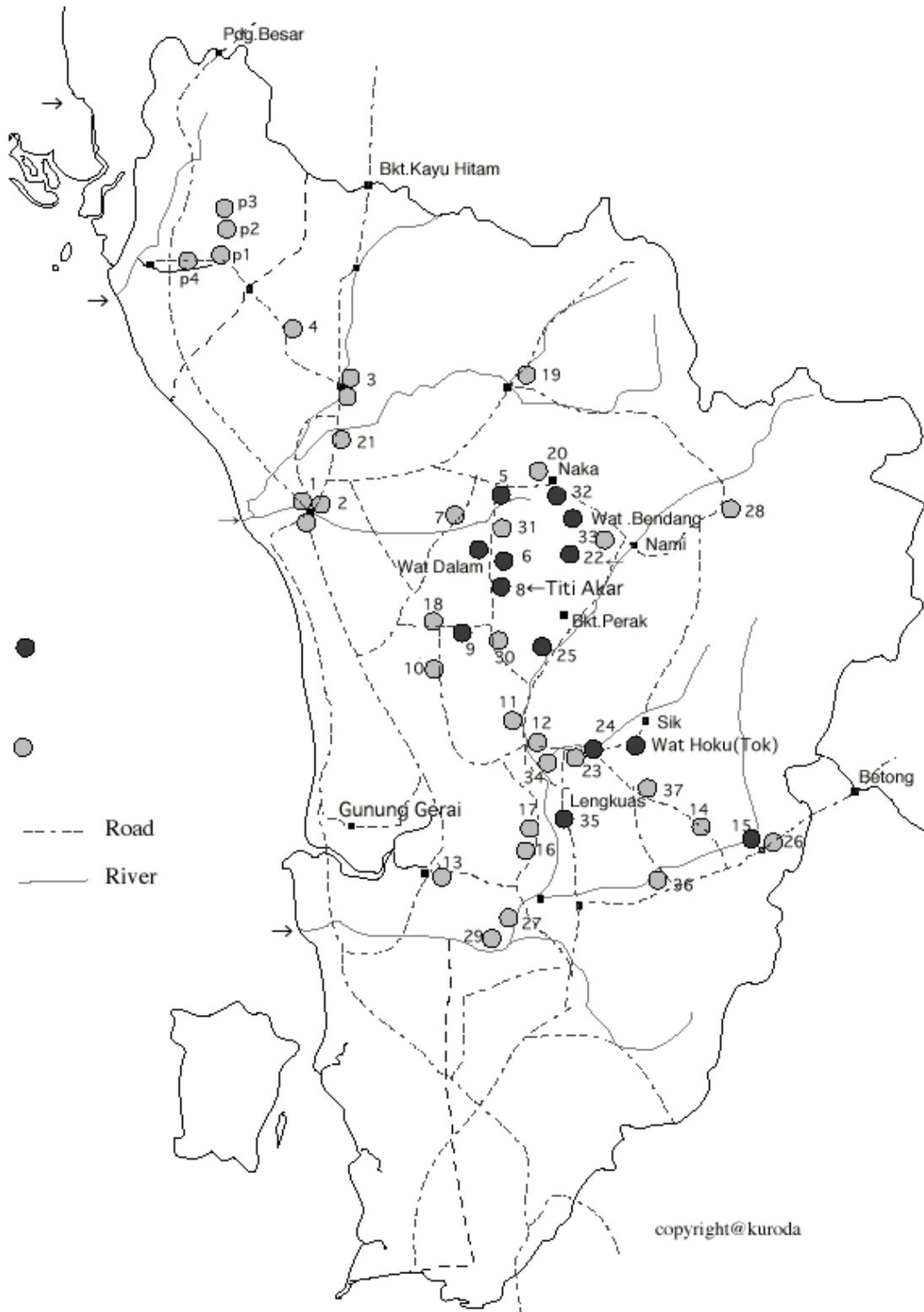
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Tables and Maps

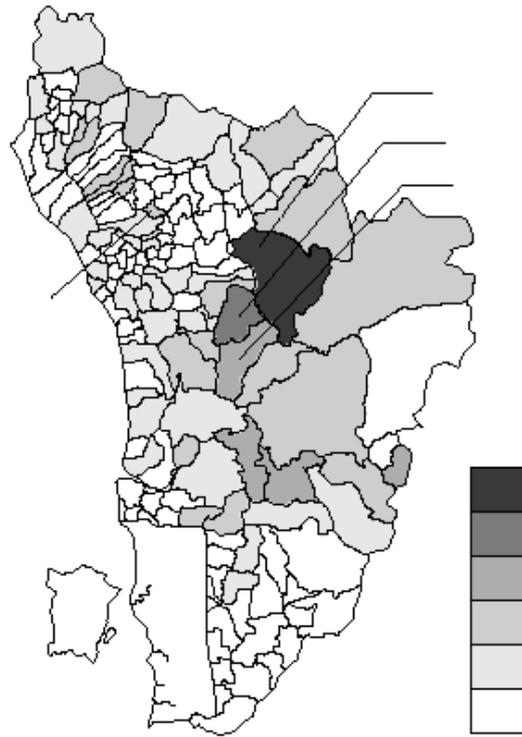
Kedah						
name		kg.	Mk			Daerah
1	Wat Samosorn- rajanupradit	lorong Wat Siam			Bakar Bata	Alorstar
2	Wat Nikrodharam	Telok Wanjah			Jln Stadium	Alorstar
3	Wat Jitraram	kg.Sungai Bahru			Jitra	Kubang Pasu
4	Wat Boonyaram		Padang Sera		Jitra	Kubang Pasu
5	Wat Lampam	kg.Lampam	Mk.Rambai	Jln Naka	Kampong Bukit	Pendang
6	Wat Bodhichethyaram	kg.China	Mk.Padang Kerbau	Jln Sg.Tiang		Pendang
7	Wat Wanaratanaram	kg.Nangka Siam	Mk.Rambai		Kubor Panjang	Pendang
8	Wat Visuthipradittharam	kg.Titi Akar	Mk.Padang Kerbau	Jln Sg. Tiang		Pendang
9	Wat Thepsuwannaram	kg.Padang Peliang	Mk. Padang Peliang	Jln Sg.Tiang		Pendang
10	Wat Thepbandit	kg.Makison	Mk.Ayer Puteh		Jenun	Pendang
11	Wat Kalai	kg.Kalai	Mk.Jeneri		Jening	Gurun
12	Wat Thai Charenn	kg.Begia	Mk.Teloi Kiri		Jening	Gurun
13	Wat Thamrongratanaram	kg. Raja		Jln Kuala Ketil	Sg.Patani	Kuala Muda
14	Wat Sribantherng	kg.Sirikor	Mk.Pulai			Baling
15	Wat Palelai				Baling Luar	Baling
16	Wat Samakkhiratanaram		Mk.Teloi Kiri	Bkt.Selambau	Sg.Patani	Kuala Muda
17	Wat Weluwanaram	kg.Tokseh	Mk.Padang Kerbau	Jln Sg.Tiang	Kampong China	Pendang
18	Wat Thamgiriwong	kg.Padang Pusing	Mk.Padang Pusing	Jln Sg.Tiang		Pendang
19	Wat Phikultharam	kg.Tanjong	Siam	Kuala Nerang	Pedu	Pdg. Terap
20	Wat Thepchumnum	kg.Naka	Mk.Tekai Kiri	A SOTM	Kuala Nerang	Pdg. Terap

21	Wat Ratpradit			Bukit Pinang	Kepala Batas	AlorStar
22	Wat Lamdin	kg.Lamdin	Mk.Tekai Kiri	Jln Nami	Kuala Nerang	Pdg. Terap
23	Wat Chong-charern	kg. Cong			Chong	Sik
24	Wat Trok Padang	kg.Carok Padang				Sik
25	Wat Dhammasiriwararam	kg.Kura	Mk.Jeneri			Gurun
26	Wat Srimahabodhi				Simpang Empat	Baling
27	Wat Sra-luang(Wat Seluang)	kg.Tanah Lichin				Baling
28	Wat Chanhom	kg.Kubang	Mk.Sok	Jln Nami		Sik
29	Wat Olamadu	kg.Olamadu	Sidam Kiri		Padang Serai	Kuala Muda
30	Samnaksangha-Rajatagiri		PadangPeliang	Bkt Perak		Pendang
31	Samnaksangha-Tharana	kg.Naka	Mk.Rambai	Kubor Panjang		Pendang
32	Samnaksangha-Plak-khla	kg.Chang Deng	Mk.Tekai Kiri	Jln Nami	Kuala Nerang	Padang Terap
33	Samnaksangha-Sungai Serkap	kg.Sungai Serkap	Mk.Tekai Kiri	Jln Nami	Kuala Nerang	Padang Terap
34	Samnaksangha-Kuala Bigia	kg.Kuala Bigia	Mk.Nejeri		Jeniang	Sik
35	Samnaksangha-Langkuas	kg.Langkuas	Mk.Teloi Kanan			Baling
36	Samnaksangha-Pegang	kg.Padang			Kuala Pegang	Baling
37	Samnaksangha-Tas	kg.Tas	Mk.Pulai		Parit Panjang	Baling
Perlis						
1	Wat Machjimaprasit				Jejawi	Arau
2	Wat Suwangiri	kg.Guar Musang	Mk.Chuping			
3	Wat Kubang Tiga	kg.Kubang Tiga	Mk.Chuping			
4	Samnaksangha-Nikhompatthanaran				Jejawi	Arau

Map 1: Thai Temples

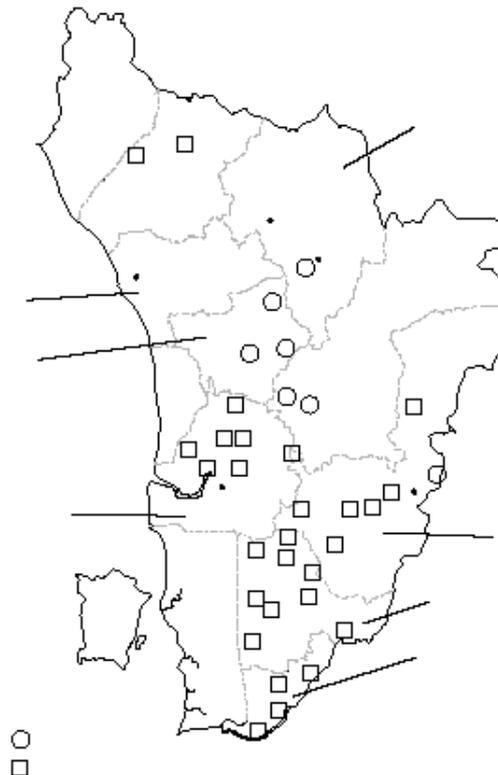


Map 2: Siamese Population



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Map 3: Kedah New Villages



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