

THE GREEN BODY IN RED SHIRT YELLOW PANTS: A RELIGIO-POLITICAL DISCOURSE OVER YELLOW-RED CONFLICT WITHIN MUSLIM THAI (CYBER) SOCIETY¹

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Abstract

This paper examines the religio-political values among Thai Muslims through their cyber discourse over “Yellow-Red” political conflict during November 2008 to April 2009. The research shows that the two underlying stances of civic religion were controversial. Muslims who took the side of the “Red Shirts” proclaimed to have their “civic religion” in line with pro-democratic ideas—people’s sovereignty and liberty, freedom through election, and sacrifice in the name of democracy; the group was inclined to extract “politics” from “religion” and “Muslim” from “Islam”; and they pursued strong profound support to the ousted PM, Thaksin Shinawatra, whom they valued as a democratic hero who was wrongfully and unjustly treated by the aristocrats. The other Muslims insisted that God is Sovereign and He alone is deserving of sacrifice from Muslims; the only Muslims’ civic religion is civil Islam; and that the ousted PM himself is an unjust and corrupt ruler to those Muslims in the deep south of Thailand.

Keywords: Islam, Civic religion, Sovereignty, Democracy, Thai politics

Introduction: The Green Body in Thai Polity

Muslims are the minority among 63 million of the Thai (mainly Buddhist) population,² but they are the majority in southernmost region with little influence over (national) political decisions and policies. Despite their being branded as ‘terrorist’ or ‘separatist’ has firmly reiterated by the 9-11 incident and a new phase of years-long southern insurgency triggered since January 2004, their electoral vote proportion in most elections are quite high and worth noticing.³

Most of Muslims in the south are of the Malay origin, where in the other parts of Thailand there are a mix of races and origins including Thai, Chinese, Indian, Arab, Persian, Java, Cham, and so on.

However, Muslims, or precisely the whole humanity, are only one nation under God in which races and origins are insignificant. They all are Muslims and they are all (one body of) “green⁴.” They each have their own free will to choose how to live one life—whether to rest it in God and eternity or in this temporal and

worldly life. To rest their life in God and eternity means they are aware that everything is under God and has to return to God alone with no exception.

Under God in the Islamic path, nothing is left behind nor is it an absolute and independent. Be it social, legal, political, philosophical, or environmental and science matters, all are related and well directed under One Supreme and Absolute Possessor of all. Unfortunately, not many “Muslims” deem to realize or recognize these basic principles. Controversy over “democracy” and its “sovereignty” has then arisen amid the Yellow-Red Shirts political conflict in the so called “Land of Smiles.”

When People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD)—after a series of informal gatherings on a weekly mobile talk show, ‘*Muang Thai Rai Sapda Sanjorn*’ (Thailand Weekly Road Show), that held outdoors every Friday since the year 2005⁵—had formally established in firm rallies against by then Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, for his alleged corruptions in February 2006, a number of Muslims joined in (protesting and encamping).

Since early 2006, before the King’s Sixtieth Anniversary of Accession to the Throne scheduled June 9th, there was already a widespread yellow-shirt donning phenomenon (at least on every Monday) aiming to show both love and respective devotion to the king for his 60th Ascension Celebration in 2006 onward to his 80th birthday in 2007. A coalition of (royalist) protesters—initially consisted of middle and upper-class residents of Bangkok, in concert with prominent socialites and some lesser members of the royal family, yet later expanded to include elites, civil servants, state enterprise labour unions, the urban middle class, conservative Buddhist groups and *Southerners*—that arose in the wake of yellow-sentiment and celebrated years had thus no doubt took chance of having used yellow as its symbolic colour.

Contrarily, United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), a political pressure group that allies itself with For Thais Party (an incarnation of the dissolved People’s Power Party or PPP) and deems exclusively oppose to the PAD, is composed of mostly (rural) *Northerners* and *North-easterners* with some urban supporters, including celebrities and actors, and the anti-coup (scholar) group. It was first formed as the Democratic Alliance against Dictatorship (DAAD) in opposition to the coup that overthrew Thaksin, the interim government that ruled during 2006-2007, and the new 2007 constitution. After the first general election following the 2007 constitution in which the PPP (an incarnation of the dissolved Thai *Rak* (Love) Thai Party) won, DAAD had its name changed to UDD and became the main supporting group of the two so-called Thaksin⁶ nominated governments administrated under Samak Sundaravej and Somchai Wongsawat respectively. Later, in a response to the PAD’s anti-government rallies and occupation of the Government House, UDD organized counter demonstrations that finally marched to directly attack the PAD’s gathering on the very early morning of September 8th 2008. The clash ended up with injuries and death. When Abhisit Vejjajiva came to power in December 2008, the UDD accused him of being illegitimately stepping in under the supreme patronage of aristocrats and Chief

Privy Councillor, General Prem Tinnasulanont. It led to major anti-government rallies in April 2009, which had once again a number of Muslim participants.

There is no vivid proof as to the reason for UDD to hold red as symbolic colour, but it is presumably because red is simply and explicitly contrast to yellow. Moreover, while yellow has been accepted as the throne or royal colour, along with other countries in Asia, it is also the King's symbolic birthday colour, which is hostile to red, according to Thai astrology.

Having actively participated in either camp is a clear proof showing that the Muslim *Ummah* (community), like all other (religious) societies on earth, is not solid and static as others or outsiders may have seen. Rather, they have shifted, changed, and reacted to both their fellow Muslims and non-Muslims simultaneously.

Since they are not solid and static as their "unity" appearance to outsiders, differences in thought and declaring method of "political" society among the Muslim partisans are as tense as Thai society in general. The channels they use to gain followers have progressively spread from lecturing and debating in communities and *Masjids* to cyberspace—a new distinguish and popular channel in disseminating ideas, self, identity or even the social interactions of today's world.

As a result, conflicts or reactions toward any particular matter within the Muslim community, especially those reflected on the cyber world through websites and weblogs of some "authorities" and educated Muslims, cannot be overlooked even if it might be small in size in comparison to the whole country. This low cost media is gaining popularity for spreading thoughts and ideas among youth and educated (Muslims)—the essential seeds in fostering ideology that might affect any future changes in the scheme of political movement.

The research question raised in this paper, which is a part of the research entitled "*Civic Religion: The Role of Cyber and Women Media on the Difference 'within' Muslim Thai Society and in the 'Thai-ness',*" has then focused only on the point of in which "civic religion" the Muslim Thai "civic" society (in cyberspace) holds fast to in dealing with divisive political movement in such case of the Yellow and Red Shirts. Even though data were collected from comments they posted on various Muslim forums, blogs, and sites during November 2008 to April 2009, the main retrieving site was the most popular one, www.muslimthai.com.

Some points that need to be made clear before proceeding further are the words being used in the title: green body, red shirt, and yellow pants. The green body, as mentioned above, represents the Muslim community, and in this case, specifically refers to Muslim Thai society as a whole. Moreover, Muslim Thai and Thai Muslim are being used interchangeably, though the first is preferable, due to the controversial of the two—Muslim Thai, which means the Muslims in Thailand regardless of their ethnicity, but Thai Muslim is more likely refer to and meant to be the Muslims of Thai ethnicity. Yellow and red in this paper are mainly regarded as symbolic colours of the shirt in the scheme of contemporary political conflict. While red-shirt supporters are mostly northerners and north-easterners, in which together are considered the upper or "top" part of the country (body), most of the southerners are more likely to give support to yellow-shirts. Yellow pants, in this

case, actually means the yellow-shirt supporters in the south. However, even though Muslims are the majority in the south, it does not necessarily mean that all Muslims in the south are supporters of yellow-shirt or that Muslims in the north are mostly red-shirt supporters. Lastly, during the research being conducted, the yellow-shirts had lessened their roles and political activities—due to both the (backbones of) PAD later forming as a political party and its supporters seemed to focus on other issues since the (by then) government was no longer nominated by Thaksin—most comments thus appeared mainly to regard the red-shirt’s activities rather than of the yellow or PAD.

Conceptual Framework

The underlying concept in this paper is “Civil Islam” or “*Islam Hadhari*” which is considered a civil society in the Islamic way that promulgates diversity and plurality both in terms of religion and way of life. This concept was first drawn up since the first Islamic State and Constitution settled in the period of Prophet Muhammad (saws) where each tribe, race, or religious group had individual and civil rights and could freely live one life under the common agreement or social contract.⁷

“Religion” is only a part of the whole Islamic System. The very basic idea in Islam is that *Allah* (God), the Supreme, has purposely created everything. By His Ruling alone that everything moves and makes the whole universe in harmonious and peaceful orbit. Anyone who wishes to take the true peaceful way has to wholeheartedly submit oneself to God. One who surrenders to God is then considered a Muslim.

The idea of Oneness and the Supreme power of God is the foundation and underlying ground of faith, belief, ideology and other Islamic paths mentioned in the *Qur’an*, the literal word of God that prescribes and constitutes all living doctrines, including faith; religion; philosophy; law; politics; society and sociology; business and economy; or even natural science and green environmental ideas.

Since God’s dominion has encompassed everything both in this world and the next world, the human kingdom in this worldly life is only a fraction of God’s dominion where the absolute right to rule, judge, pose or depose any human being from his or her position is His alone.

Furthermore, as a civic in God’s dominion, human beings have been given with free will to live and perform duties as God’s vicegerent or representative. Every single being or civic is equal before God. The only difference that distinguishes one from another is virtue or righteous “deed” while acting out duties as representative on earth.

Under the principle of equal right of each human being as God’s “representative,” right and duty of a human being is limited to “take care of” as given, no one is a true and absolute “owner” of such power or authority. A “worldly” ruler who has been appointed and given power has to be fully responsible not only to God, but to his fellows and society as well.

As human beings are diverse in terms of physicality, ethnicity, and living context, unity over diversity of the human kingdom, which is only a part of God's dominion, hence is the unity in accepting the Absolute Power and Oneness of God and with realization of the (Judgment and Resurrection) day when "representative" status is ceased and every single duty will be judged equitably.

When "Next World" is the destination of having lived freely and diversely in this "Temporal World," Civil Islam is definitely "Islam" that serves political objectives of having freedom, liberty, and diversity of civics as a goal, with or without being in the form of "Islamic State."

Even though having faith is a crucial embedded foundation for every living pattern, the "state" and "religion/faith" is not and unnecessarily the same.

Nonetheless, God's dominion is not limited only to "religious institution" but inseparably encompasses and rules over as basic kingdom in every kingdom and human body. Human religion (that is about spirituality and pure religion according to Rousseau) and civic religion are not different from the Islamic viewpoint since standard teaching of human religion is the moral ground of being a good civic of the state (even though interpreting the teachings somehow varies according to the status and condition of being religious, tradition, culture, or domicile). Moreover, as human religion, which exists within the unity of God, is a key foundation in maintaining the unity of human society, human religion and civic religion are unnecessarily have to be harmonized as they have never been separated. Having faith yet never practicing it is not considered a true belief in Islam. Islamic teachings and doctrines are not only for reading or learning to elevate one's spirituality. Spiritual development can only take place when practiced as prescribed. Just as body and mind/soul are inseparable, religion and being a civic cannot stand apart.

Both the level of being a civic in God's dominion and of the temporal state are measured through one's acceptance and abidance by laws. Civic religion is thus a necessity for every human being either Muslim or non-Muslim. The only difference is that non-Muslims may not accept and abide by the Muslim's code of belief, but a Muslim has to admit and abide by laws of both God and state as long as the state laws and regulations do not conflict with God's laws and commandments.

Nevertheless, a Muslim who is a state civic must not transgress or be hostile toward non-Muslim civic. Such acts are truly against God's mercy in having endowed human beings with free will to choose how to live one's life on this world, either with or without having believed in God and His messages.

Since being a state civic is part of being a civic in God's dominion, being a "Muslim" or "human being" is then a bigger unit than a state civic. However, being a good Muslim with the "Next World" as destination must begin in accordance with being a good civic of the state in this world. Even though performing one's (religious) duty is a human-to-God affair, the "representative" mission is also a human-to-human affair that indeed must conform to God's commandments as well.

While the civic religion of being a “Muslim” is bounded by the teachings in human equity as God’s vicegerent and a body of free will believers that represents a diverse society, the realm of civic religion in “Muslim’s life” cannot concretely be separated from “Islam.” The Muslim’s civic religion must be an interweaving of religion or awareness of being Muslim; state civic awareness; social consciousness; and beliefs and values that construct a state civic. “Islam” of “Muslim” as a state civic is so differs in each society’s context.

Thai Muslims and their Cyber Discourse over the Yellow-Red Shirts

It might be said that “Muslims,” as a unit in Thai society, have been involved in political movement and ruling of the kingdom presently called Thailand since the *Sukhothai* regime. When *Siam* had transformed from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy, Muslims were apparently engaged all along the road to development of democracy since the revolution in 1932 onward to October 14, 1973 and October 6, 1976 incidents through the Bloody May 1992 up until the civil uprising and street protesting of today.

In recent political conflicts and crises, a number of Muslims have participated with either the Yellow-shirt or Red-shirt protests and demonstrations, both on the streets and on web forums. Only under this macro-dividing circumstance that being a “Muslim” is overcome by the being of either the “yellow-shirt” or “red-shirt” group. The myths of “*Khaeg*” and “otherness” are temporarily dismissed and remained only in being “Thai (nation),” at least among the protestors of each group.

As political divides and conflicts have broken down society from the wide and top levels as the nation deep down to family level, there was a post asking the “*Ulama*” on such web-boards of Muslim cyber society as www.alisuasaming.com as to what colour the Muslim truly is or how Muslims should deal with the “colour” dividing situation. The reply was that Muslim has no “colour,” or if it does, then it should be “white,” the colour of shroud and the only piece of cloth that would be wrapped around and be with a Muslim when the mission of being a “representative” of God on this world is terminated and while waiting for a journey to the Next World where every single tiny deed will have a return.

Such a question and answer, which signifies a warning (though it might be regarded as eschewing a problem), was not often reposted or referred to in other Muslim sites, especially on the site that claimed to be the first and biggest in number of (Non-Muslim) visitors as www.muslimthai.com, or on websites outside the Muslim community. This is quite different from when the comments or views of Muslims are in line with each group and the posts would be linked and referred to widely.

When yellow-shirt protestors blocked the traffic, occupied and forced the closure of *Suvarnabhumi* International Airport for several days, while some groups of pilgrims were inside awaiting their journey, a Muslim claimed to represent the Shiekul Islam and the Central Islamic Committee of Thailand, announced via nationwide media that the yellow-shirt protestors needed to cease creating violent

trigger conditions. The claimed representative also announced if the pilgrims were blocked and not able to perform their *Hajj*, not only Thailand would be viewed as having religious discrimination, but all the Muslims of Thailand would also be angry and millions of them might make a big move that would finally elevate the violent situation in the south to a higher degree.⁹

Such threatening announcement in the name of “Muslim fraternity” was not only exaggerated but also reinforced the bad image of Islam and Muslims as inclined to violence or violence-oriented. Moreover, it was widely and deliberately spread on purpose around sites and blogs of the red-shirts to affirm the unjust and illegitimate acts of the yellow-shirts as troublesome to the country and paved the way for conflict to move to religious bigotry and at an international level.

Later on the Thai New Year day of April 13, 2009 when some red-shirt protesters retreated in disarray from the dispersed rally at *Din Daeng* junction and the Victory monument to *Urupong* junction, they ended up encountering the mass of dwellers in (nearby) *Nangleng* and *Petchburi Soi 5-7*. The incidents caused the deaths of two dwellers at *Nangleng* while shops and properties of *Petchburi Soi 5* and *Soi 7* communities were destroyed and a *Masjid* was shot at whilst some were performing “*Salat*” (saying a prayer) on ground floor. On the following day, once www.muslimthai.com presented the news regarding Bangkok Central Islamic Committee (BCIC) in conjunction with Board of *Masjid Soi 7* denouncing the red-shirts riot, websites and blogs of pro-yellows were prompt to respond with further disseminated news on “the BCIC gathered in denounce and will pursue the matter to Dubai.” Yet, only few websites and boards had linked back to its full transcript, “Word by word denounced statement, (and blamed on) Thaksin as head of the terrorist and subverting Islam,”¹⁰ in which between April 16th and 23th, only 40 visitors had posted (43) comments that explicitly fell into three groups: anti-red shirt (composed of both pro-yellows and non-yellow shirts); the (seeming to be) neutral and rational oriented non-partisan; and the red-shirts claiming that the incidents were all set up. Of all 43 comments, only one (visitor) affirmed the statement’s content and claimed to be an eyewitness.

On the next morning (April 15th), www.muslimthai.com further presented its interviewing transcript entitled “Scholar, Muslim politician, (and) civil society activist warned not to relate religion with politics,”¹¹ which incredibly made the contestants of the incident shifted from “red-shirts” and “the community” to “red-shirt Muslims” and “yellow-shirt Muslims.” It had widely been disseminated among pro-reds’ sites and blogs¹² by both the “Muslims” who meant to affirm their red-shirt memberships and to point out that even high-ranking Muslims, who served as scholars and civil (society) activists, did not believe the incident was done by the reds; and by other red-shirts (non-Muslims), who wanted to confirm that what was happened had nothing to do with the reds who take “red-shirt Muslims” as their compatriots and ideological brothers.

A discourse over the incident at *Darul Amaan Masjid* at *Petchburi Soi 7* is a clear example reflecting the differentiated concerning ideas over the term “religion” and “politics” of the Muslim “civics” in Thailand.

In the interviewing report of April 15th, in which www.muslimthai.com seemed to conduct right after posting its news on the BCIC's press conference on denouncing (the reds riot) and submitting a letter of request to the UAE embassy to stop granting residency to Thaksin Shinawatra, the only interviewed scholar said,

"I don't want the politician to bring in the pure religion of Islam to relate with political struggle... especially in that area of *Phayathai Masjid*¹³ in which many who used to live in that area known very well that it is the dominant area of Mrs. Nattaya Benjasiriwan, a Democrat Party's MP for Bangkok, ... Bringing the mass to destroy others by using religion as a tool is truly inappropriate."

At first, "Islam" in this scholar's opinion has only one dimension, religion, which is so pure and in order to keep Islam at her purity (as human religion in Rousseau point of view), it is very improper to bring in "religion" (in a form of ritual and object, which in this case is the shooting and shot at *Masjid*) as a tool in political struggle. But his later address that the Democrat Party's MP for Bangkok was the one who dominated behind the scenes and brought in the masses and religion to discredit and destroy the opponent, is clearly a political accusation.

Without emphasizing the details or showing concern as to whether or not such people were doing their duty as "*Ummah*" in protecting both the community and the "religion," which all Muslims regard as "House of God," he further stated,

"Anyone who follows up the situation or previous news would have seen that a number of Muslims have joined in the red-shirt protests... Coincidentally, Muslim brothers from upcountry were not aware that the *Masjid* and this *Gingpetch* are spheres of influence for the Democrat Party and the PAD or yellow-shirts group, this incident has thus occurred.

Before this incident, prior to the coming of *Songkran* (festival), many Muslims that are red-shirts had made their *Salat* there (at the *Masjid*). But a red-shirt Muslim, after coming out of the *Masjid*, was hit in the head and punched in the arm, ..., neither the *Imam* nor anyone in the community were concerned that a Muslim being hit at his head after coming out of the *Masjid*. Or was that because he wore red-shirt and agreed with the protest of the UDD that made him deserved a free hit? ..."

Having said all that he finally concluded,

"...In the wake of situation where people in society are dividing into groups and parties, having relate the religion with politics, in my opinion, is more negative to the religion than positive. As what has happened would make Muslims who are the red-shirts and the public

misunderstand Islam. I thus would like to call for the seniors in this Muslim society to please come up to clearly prove the truth as to what actually the cause that originating such incident was ... It is impossible that the red-Muslim partisan would have shot at the *Masjid* or destroyed its nameplate ... We should not create such a situation that leads to breaking down the society by having used Islam as political tool in serving either each particular group of people or political party."

Even though the "truth" and cause of the incident remained unclear, all other damage to the community as key contexts of the situation are naively dismissed. Moreover, after first bringing in the Democrat Party, the PAD is next in line of sharing responsibility over the incident. Besides, his observation of having related religion with politics, such as in issuing the denunciation statement, would make the "Muslims who are the red-shirts" misunderstand Islam, has no clarification as to what and how it could be as such. Yet, he signifies his own beliefs in extracting the "kingdom" from "religion" and "Muslim" from "Islam." Nonetheless, being a "red-shirt Muslim" is obviously appending "Islam (Muslim)" to "politics (red-shirt)," which at the same time has reduced Islam to a civic religion only. This is truly contradicts to what he has said above about the purity of Islam as human religion.

Eventually, when (he believes that) Islam has only the value of a religion (of human or as sacred ritual), the discourse over using Islam as a political tool has then ended up with naively insisting that "red-Muslims" were impossibly the rioters. This "accusing" conclusion has totally averted the cause of "Muslim" as "victim/object" to the "doer/rioter" though no one has ever mentioned, both in news and the denunciation statement, that the "red-shirts," either fake or real, who committed the riot in the area of *Petchburi Soi 5* and *7* communities were "Muslims."

In line with the interviewed scholar were a politician, a strategic thinker of the civil society sector, and a *mosquegoer* of the nearby community's *Masjid* whose statements in the interview were no different from the scholar. They are all pro-reds and well aligned in terms of viewing the situation as improperly relating religion to politics; jumping to the conclusion that misleading the cause of the incident from red-shirts to red-shirt Muslims; accusing the Democrat Party (and PAD) of having set the incident up; and denying that it was not the reds' doing.

Having taken from the "Muslim wearing red-shirt" was hit in the head "prior to" the *Songkran* festival as the interviewed scholar previously said, the politician had somehow extended the story and said that such person later brought back his men and then a series of scuffles had led to a religious matter by MPs of Democrat Party. He pointed out also that blaming the *red-shirt Muslims* for having shot at the *Masjid* is considered *Fitnah*, a sin Muslims should not have committed.

The clash at *Petchburi Soi 5-7* from the beginning, no matter what the background cause was, was precisely all about group of people "wearing red-shirts" and "the community's self- and religious place or *Masjid*- protection." The

statement issued by the BCIC, that some of the Democrat politicians apparently joined in, might be a political “clutch at” and a rush in striking the opponent as a wire-puller. They at least claimed to have protected the Muslim community as representatives of “Allah’s Party” not as politicians. On the other hand, none of the four interviewees witnessed the incident. They have not only drawn the picture of using religion as a tool in political society that divides the state from religion to an obvious stage, but also narrowed down the problem to a conflict within the Muslim community only. It thus widens the difference “within” instead of reducing it for a better mutual understanding of the *Ummah* and the society.

Thai Muslims and Their Discourse over Democracy and Sovereignty

The issue of political divide and conflict over the “yellow-red shirts” within Muslim Thai society has not just begun with the incident at *Petchburi Soi 7* during the “bloody *Songkran*.” Rather, the discourse or construction of the word “yellow/red-shirt Muslim” might have gained its place from a group of Muslims within the pro-UDD or even by the muslimthai’s website itself.

The word “red-shirt Muslim” seems to be first appeared on the muslimthai’s news disseminated on April 7th 2009, “Various views from the red-shirt Muslim blockaders,”¹⁴ in an attempt to present some Muslims encamped with the red-shirts in the Government House blockade protest. Previously, topic references and labelling for the pro-yellows on its member forum, including guest’s comments over news topics on this site, was just “พันธมิตร/พันธมิตร¹⁵.” Even though some might have called them yellow-shirts or the yellows, none of them were attached to “Muslim.”

The script of the blockaders’ interview attracted a number of both pro- and anti-comments. On one hand, a red-shirt referred and linked back to this page and cried out, “Help, our red-shirt Muslim brothers are being scolded, attacked, and insulted in muslimthai.com’s website, our brothers (here) please help go post a polite reply...”¹⁶ Yet, another weblog also posted and reproduced this same news script with the following added comment: “I could only pray for these people to realize that they are on the wrong side. That side had killed over 70 Muslim brothers at *Taakbai*, (my) brothers.”¹⁷ The latter is almost identical to opposing comments posted in response to what they (red-shirts) have said in the interview:

“I bear not on the social unjust ... (I) bear not on letting one who so beneficial to people be bullied ... (I) bear not on seeing one who did for society’s sake fall into this status quo ... Seeing him being bullied, how could we stand still? ... This fighting, if skimmed over, might seem as though a fight for Pol. Lt. Col. Thaksin, but we indeed are fighting for democracy. Pol. Lt. Col. Thaksin is only a symbol, a mechanism, or a tool in demonstrating democracy. ... If any power comes to intervene, override, and dominate democracy, we who own the sovereignty have to exercise our power to resist and cry out for bringing back our legitimate rights. ... Democracy is so important for

us. People who don't know the word 'democracy' wouldn't understand ... Civil societal politics has no need to destroy the nation by seizing the airport and the Government House. This blockade without having made the House damaged is (truly) *ahimsa* ..."

"Ever since I was born, I have never seen any PM being so good to the people as PM Thaksin ... I am here sleepless and rained on to get back my democracy because I think the true sovereignty is of all Thais and no other powers should have intervened ... (they) should have not intervened or sneaked what we have already determined ... why steal our democracy?"

"Normally my wife and I follow up on the fighting of red-shirt brothers from the internet ... I live in *Narathiwat*. I am very much an admirer of Pol. Lt. Col. Thaksin. ... Things that Pol. Lt. Col. Thaksin has done for people are all good ... They thus rallied in resistance and finally colluded in seizing power. ... I am not here for Pol. Lt. Col. Thaksin, but I am here for righteousness, for demanding to have our rights back ..."

"... We are not fighting for anyone, but we are fighting for our freedom and liberty. *Satul* people believe that in order to have gained freedom, only democracy could have met (such) people's demand ..."

"... The backwardness of Thailand is all about the aristocrats. Each fight has then pointed towards them ... For the Muslims, besides freedom and liberty which are the basic rights, it has also a little condition that 'if the ruler or state authority is a homosexual ... it is *Haram* for the Muslims to accept such ruling' since this sort of thing in Islam is considered a violation of the principle and doctrine."

As a result, there were more comments posted against the above interviews than in support. Above all, most of the objections and opposing comments regarded the doings of Muslims who joined in the protest as not belonging to or relevant to the true Islamic path.

"... Have you ever got up for *Fajr* while being so good at overnight protesting?"¹⁸

"... I beg all Muslims to not engage in politics so deep down to such a degree that we have to fight with sorrow or even to sacrifice our life. The way He wants for us is not this. ... Having donated to our oppressed brothers is better than fighting for just anybody..."¹⁹

"I am asking for all grateful children to call their parents back home ... When the Israelis bombed over our Palestinian Muslim brothers, all you seniors never came out in protest. Yet just for the sake of the cheated/corrupted *Maew*²⁰ who killed lawyer Somchai and our *Taakbai* brothers, you come out doing *Ihtigaf* with them comfortably ..." ²¹

"... What does democracy mean? Does it conform to Islam? So pitiful! Being sleepless and sacrificing to one's death for democracy, have you ever done anything for the Creator?" ²²

"*Salaam* ... Please consider what to conform to and what is against the Islamic principle ... Don't forget that this world is a world of testing ... Be thoughtful, red-shirt Muslims, and go ask Thaksin where the lawyer Somchai and *Taakbai* brothers are ... We are all brothers and sisters, *wassalaam*." ²³

"... Are you sure this striving is for the cause of *Allah*?" ²⁴

"(I) disagree with Muslim brothers and sisters who join in the protest ... Why don't we fight for the cause of *Allah*? If (you) really want to fight, then the red-shirts have to bring back Thaksin just like (what he had done to) our brothers" ²⁵

"...His acts of provoking those who claimed to do in the name of Islam and Melayu nationalist but then have our brothers killed, including all his other fraudulences ... Thaksin does not deserve to be a leader ... (I) cannot forget he had our brothers killed." ²⁶

"Secular government is not the way of Islam and it will never be accepted by *Allah*. The only government we should be interested in is a *CALIPHATE*. Those who support Thaksin are traitors to their Muslim brothers and sisters. Do you have such a short memory that you've forgotten *Taak Bai* and *Krue Se* (incidents) already?! You make me sick!" ²⁷

"Is democracy, as a governing system, included in Islamic principle? ... Muslims should have not accused others ... Islam does not support the immoral and sleazy leader ... Islam teaches us to be of benefit to our hometown, but having gone in this direction (of encamping protest) is against religious doctrines ... This fighting is truly persona-ism ... Is it right having fought for the one who killed our brothers? ... I am more fearful of *Allah* (than anything else)." ²⁸

"... If you love such a bastard as Thaksin more than Islam, then go for it ..." ²⁹

“... (Being) Muslim in heart, Muslim in thought, having just gone out and done what is not in *Allah's* guidance, your being as a Muslim is finished ...”³⁰

“Brothers and sisters, who dictates the predestination? Who specifies the decree and bringing forth of destiny? Our life is better up or worse off, not by or from any (political) party, but *Allah* ...”³¹

“... The most important thing is *Allah's* guidance ...”³²

“...Our Muslim brothers should not join in the protest with the red-shirts. It's not a religious matter. Have you forgotten that he (Thaksin) once said Muslims are nonsense for having believed that God does exist? Why didn't this group of Muslim brothers and sisters bother joining in the walk rally when Prophet Muhammad was insulted by the Danish? May I ask Muslims who are encamping whether you love Thaksin more than the Prophet?”³³

“Have you ever thought of what political system Thaksin has? ... I am not with either yellow or red, I am with *Allah* (swta) and Prophet Muhammad (saws).”³⁴

“... Muslims should not be drugged in with anyone. Muslims should only be in the guidance of Allah (swta).”³⁵

Both the interview and corresponding comments given above significantly reflect the difference between “civic religion” of the Muslims who supported or joined the red-shirts and Muslims who oppose the red-shirts (which does not necessarily mean that this whole group supports yellow-shirts), especially in terms of placing priority for “Islam” and their understanding of “Islamic system” and “justice.”

While “civic religion” of the Muslims who claimed themselves as reds or red-shirt supporters is “democracy” with Thaksin as their “prophet,” the other (ordinary) Muslims, especially those who gave opposing comments, strictly insist on their devotion to “God and Islam” with Prophet Muhammad as the only forever “prophet” in all circumstances.

Conclusion

In Islam, every single “Muslim” civic can directly contact the most important religious sacred One and the only Sovereignty, which is God.

Since all human beings are equal before God, the divided or ranked social system is unacceptable. The “*Kalifah*” or ruler which is considered a “worldly” sovereignty has to be in the frame of faith and under the will of the nation. Both the

“worldly” sovereignty and civic always have to exercise their rights and power in concord while having concern for the political society. The meaning of not having separated “religion” from “politics” in Islam clearly means that the ruler in either society has to have faith, be conformed to the principles and doctrines, be righteous, and possesses good merit and morality. It does not, by no means, refer to not being distinguished the duty of “religious institution” from “political institution” as the two apparently each have their own key roles and duties.

Moreover, the unity in Islam is truly not unity in thought and generic practice, but in fundamental set of beliefs like the Oneness of God, yet with various ways to follow His Guidance and the footsteps of the Prophet.

However, because the Muslims are probably grounded on the same text and principle, their political reactions thus, are not so different or out of expectation.³⁶ Muslims in Thailand are no exception. No matter what conflicts or different arguments they have, there will always be at least someone or comments representing the very basic and common ground in Islam. The “civic religion” of true Muslims, not nominal, must always in the realm of Islamic path as “a body of believers” and “only rely on and hold fast to God alone.”

“...Islam is not just performing *Salat*, Fasting, and *Hajj* ... Everyone has to responsible before God on the Resurrection. Islam must be in every affair of the Muslims ... all that are seeking for benevolence from *Allah*, God of the universes, God of you and me, thus not accepting Him is all yours (responsibility). ...”³⁷

... Politics is all about a vested group. No human being is my God. Because I have only One God, I thus cannot be a slave underneath anyone’s feet but I accepted (him) as a leader in governing the country, a master in ruling the kingdom ... (I do) believe in equality. (I do) believe in fraternity. (I do) believe in a unified nation (*Ummah*). I prostrate only to *Allah*, do follow only *Rasul* and ones who righteously follow his footsteps. My *Giblat* is *Al-Qabah*. My life guidance is *Al Qur’an*. ... Wishes all Muslims love each other because we are brothers and sisters. Our father is Adam. Our destination is *Allah*, ‘Truly we are from *Allah*, and truly we have to return to Him.’ ...”³⁸

Thus while the Muslim red-shirt supporters have placed Islam aside and put their “Islam” only in a fraction of “(human) religion,” yet at the same time give very much priority to the so called liberty and democracy along with praising Thaksin as an equal. Their most important claim concerns only how “just/unjust” Thaksin and their group have been treated by who they refer to as unjust aristocrats. The anti-group has tried to say otherwise, that in being a “Muslim” one cannot put “Islam” aside from living. In pattern and terms of both liberty and democracy, what the reds are acting or seeking for are not of and in the Islamic way. As a result, even though taking the same principle on “just/unjust,” their subjects and objects are totally different. In view of the anti-red group, Thaksin

himself is the traitor and ruler who has done the “unjust” to “Muslims brothers,” especially those in the three southernmost provinces.

Eventually, the green body of Muslims in Thailand either chooses to mix wearing red shirt with yellow pants or in yellow shirt but red pants, neither of which could do any harm to the “body” as long as they are well aware that they have only one body, and the acts of this one body not clothes, will definitely be judged by the Only Sovereignty.

Endnotes

¹ This paper is based on the author recent research entitled “*Civic Religion: The Role of Cyber and Women Media on the Difference ‘within’ Muslim Thai Society and in the ‘Thai-ness’ (ธรรมวิทยาแห่งพลเมือง: บทบาทสื่อสตรีและไซเบอร์กับความต่าง ‘ใน’ สังคมมุสลิมและในความเป็น ‘ไทย’)*,” which is a part of the main research project, “The Crisis of Competing Civic Religion: A Study of Contemporary Prophets and their Teachings,” that fully supported by the Thailand Research Fund and led by Professor Dr. Sombat Chantornvong, Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University.

² According to the statement His Excellency Mr. Panich Vikitsreth Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand given at the 36th Session of the OIC’s Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM 36) Damascus, the Syrian Arab Republic 23-25 May 2009, only 20% of 8 million Thai Muslim populations are reside in the southernmost. (Retrieved from <http://breakingnews.nationchannel.com/read.php?newsid=383056>;
<http://news.siamjobit.com/News-detail-86605.html>;
<http://www.mfa.go.th/web/200.php?id=22476>)

³ As according to the Office of Election Commission of Thailand statistical data and some survey researches. (Retrieved from <http://www.ect.go.th/newweb/th/election/index4.php>;
http://www.wport.org/thai/data_detail.asp?id=4)

⁴ Even though the colour of green has been associated with Islam for centuries, this symbolic colour has no cleared evident on the Islamic ground besides a verse in the *Qur’an* (76:21) mentioning that the inhabitants of Paradise will wear green garments of fine silk. Some says that favourite colour of the Prophet (saws) was green while some says otherwise that his mostly worn cloak and Turban were white so his true favourite colour was white indeed.

⁵ Prior to these outdoor shows, “Thailand Weekly,” a regular TV show which started airing every Friday night on 7 July 2004 in form of political talk show (initially pro-Thaksin and his government, to put it straightforward) was getting high attention as the host attacks and denunciates on Thaksin grew steadily throughout the year 2005. But under pressure from the government, it was totally taken off the air in a sudden on September 15, 2005. Subsequently, the show was on roads and started broadcasting via satellite ASTV and webcasting on the “Manager Online” website. The road talk shows and broadcasting protests with the slogan, “We love the King/We Fight for the King,” gained lots of public attention.

⁶ Calling people by first name, not last, is usual in Thai tradition. In case of the ousted PM, it is common for people in Thailand to singularly refer to him as Thaksin without adding any title.

⁷ Ahmad S. Moussalli, 1995, “Modern Islamic fundamental discourses on civil society, pluralism and democracy” in August Richard Norton (Ed.), *Civil Society in the Middle East* (Köln: Brill).

⁸ This word normally means “guest” but at the mean time also used to depict others, mainly Muslims of all nations and ethnics in Asia, including those Indian or of the Aryan ethnics.

⁹ Retrieved from Komchadluek and Matichon Online, 28 November 2008, http://www.matichon.co.th/news_detail.php?newsid=1227798731&grpId=00%3Cbr%20/%3E&c

atid=01;

<http://www.komchadluek.net/specialreport/suvarnabhumi/specialreportnews.php?id=624>.

It is, however, worth noting that the Muslim who gave such interview and proclamation was one of the core supporters in running Bangkok Governor Election Campaign for PPP's representative. He closely followed the by then PM, Somchai Wongsawat, in helping his man running the campaign at Siam Paragon. This proclamation clearly brought in religion to a game for political sake of one whom wearing the brand of "Islam."

¹⁰ Available at

<http://www.muslimthai.com/main/1428/content.php?page=content&category=20&id=2917>

¹¹ Available at

<http://www.muslimthai.com/main/1428/content.php?category=20&id=2921>

¹² Such as <http://webboard.news.sanook.com/forum/index.php?topic=2768386>;

<http://board.sae-dang.com/ReadTopic.php?no=11316>;

http://maha-arai.blogspot.com/2009/04/blog-post_20.html;

<http://www.thaihotweb.com/phpwind/upload/read.php?tid=1151>;

<http://webboard.news.sanook.com/forum/index.php?topic=2768386>;

<http://www.prachataiwebboard.com/webboard/wbtopic2.php?id=797321>;

<http://talk.mthai.com/topic/56131>;

<http://talk.mthai.com/topic/57177>;

<http://www.sameskybooks.org/board/lofiversion/index.php?t29429.html>;

<http://www.kruthai.info/board05/show.php?Category=policy&No=75>;

<http://www.bloggang.com/mainblog.php?id=romrawin&month=19-04-2009&group=24&gblog=6>;

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<http://www.nocoup.org/newwebboard/main.php?board=009187&topboard=1>; and

<http://www.uamulet.com/boardDetail.aspx?bid=179&qid=662>.

¹³ Either *Phayathai Masjid* or the *Masjid Soi 7* is the other (informal) names for *Darul Amaan Masjid*. *Soi 7* is a shorter form of *Petchburi Soi 7*, a community located on *Petchburi Road* and under the *Phayathai District*, Bangkok.

¹⁴ Available at

<http://www.muslimthai.com/main/1428/content.php?category=19&id=2859>

¹⁵ Interestingly, *Pan-ta-Mitr* (พันธมิตร) is a short form of the PAD and stands for the word "Alliance" whereas *Pan-ta-Marn* (พันธมิตร) is a pun that meaningfully switches it to "Allied-Devil."

¹⁶ Available at <http://www.clubthaksin.com/board/viewtopic.php?f=24&t=3794&start=0>

¹⁷ Available at <http://www.oknation.net/blog/sigree/2009/04/07/entry-2>.

This blog has about 12 visitors' comments during April 7-8th. Most of them saw this phenomenon as a result of taking only "one side media," which clearly a totally different set of what has claimed on "clubthaksin."

¹⁸ Comment no. 1. *Various views from red-shirt Muslim Blockaders*. Retrieved from

<http://www.muslimthai.com/main/1428/content.php?category=19&id=2859>

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, comment no. 5 and 7

²⁰ A (mimic) nickname of Thaksin

²¹ *Ibid.*, comment no. 9

²² *Ibid.*, comment no. 13

²³ *Ibid.*, comment no. 28

²⁴ *Ibid.*, comment no. 29

²⁵ *Ibid.*, comment no. 32

²⁶ *Ibid.*, comment no. 33

²⁷ *Ibid.*, comment no. 93

²⁸ *Ibid.*, comment no. 109

²⁹ *Ibid.*, comment no. 134

³⁰ *Ibid.*, comment no. 144

³¹ Ibid., comment no. 156

³² Ibid., comment no. 171

³³ Ibid., comment no. 182

³⁴ Ibid., comment no. 185

³⁵ Ibid., comment no. 187

³⁶ Fred Halliday, 1995, *Islam and the myth of confrontation: Religion and politics in the Middle East* (London: I.B.Tauris), pp.107-123.

³⁷ Comment no. 102. *Revealing the truth of Irapayae villager why the whole village is wordless*. Retrieved from

<http://www.muslimthai.com/main/1428/content.php?page=content&category=20&id=3401>.

³⁸ Comment no. 5. *The state has to caught the Masjid's shooter, the Shiekul Office's statement*. Retrieved from

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