



History of Minority Islam in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam and Its Development in Contemporary Times

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Abstract

This research discusses the history of the entry of Islam, the development of Muslim communities, and the challenges faced by Muslim communities in the Indochina region, which includes Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Despite being a minority, the region's Muslim community has a rich history, from the role of the Kingdom of Champa as a center for the spread of Islam to the influence of colonialism and political conflicts, such as the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia and forced assimilation in Vietnam. The methodology used in this study is a qualitative approach with a library research method. Data is collected from a variety of historical sources, such as academic literature, colonial archives, reports of international institutions, and local historical documents related to the development of Islam. The analysis is conducted descriptively and historically to uncover the roles, transformations, and challenges of the Muslim community over time. The results of the study show that the Muslim community in Indochina faces various dynamics, ranging from cultural integration, political pressure, to identity marginalization. This research confirms the importance of preserving Islamic cultural heritage and manuscripts, as well as the need for international support to strengthen Muslim communities as part of social diversity in the Southeast Asian region.

Keywords: History; Islam; Minority

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas sejarah masuknya Islam, perkembangan komunitas Muslim, dan tantangan yang dihadapi oleh komunitas Muslim di kawasan Indochina, yang meliputi Kamboja, Laos, dan Vietnam. Meski menjadi minoritas, komunitas Muslim di wilayah ini memiliki sejarah yang kaya, mulai dari peran Kerajaan Champa sebagai pusat penyebaran Islam hingga pengaruh kolonialisme dan konflik politik, seperti rezim Khmer Merah di Kamboja dan asimilasi paksa di Vietnam. Metodologi yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka (library research). Data dikumpulkan dari berbagai sumber sejarah, seperti literatur akademik, arsip kolonial, laporan lembaga internasional, dan dokumen sejarah lokal yang berkaitan dengan perkembangan Islam. Analisis dilakukan secara deskriptif dan historis untuk mengungkap peran, transformasi, dan tantangan komunitas Muslim dari masa ke masa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunitas Muslim di Indochina menghadapi berbagai dinamika, mulai dari integrasi budaya, tekanan politik, hingga marginalisasi identitas. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya pelestarian warisan budaya dan manuskrip Islam, serta perlunya dukungan internasional untuk memperkuat komunitas Muslim sebagai bagian dari keberagaman sosial di kawasan Asia Tenggara.

Kata Kunci: Sejarah; Islam; Minoritas

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INTRODUCTION

One of the largest Muslim populations in the world is in Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam, Islam is the majority religion. Meanwhile, in Myanmar, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, Islam is a minority religion. Currently, there are about 240 million Muslims in Southeast Asia or as much as 42% of the total population in Southeast Asia. This means that the number is around 25% of the world's total Muslim population of 1.57 billion people. The entry of Islam into Southeast Asia was through a peaceful process that lasted for centuries, namely through trade, marriage, da'wah, and the renewal of Arab, Persian, and Indian Muslim communities with indigenous peoples. As a religion, Islam can be easily accepted, because it teaches tolerance and equality of degrees among fellow human beings, in contrast to Hinduism which emphasizes differences in degrees among fellow human beings.¹

Islamization in the Indochina region known as the region is dominated by Buddhism. The Indochina region itself is divided into three main regions, namely Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Indochina is also called the *Indochina peninsula (Indochinese peninsula)* is a mainland area or large peninsula in the Southeast Asian region because it is located in Eastern India and South China, Indochinese culture is very early with Chinese and Indian culture. However, Vietnam, for example, shows the influence of China, because this region was once part of Chinese dynasties. Meanwhile, the names Cambodia and Laos show the influence of India. The selection of Indochina is based on the combination of Indian and Chinese (Chin) cultures that are very evident in society². Muslim minority communities in mainland Southeast Asia, especially the Indochina region (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam) are small, marginalized, and sometimes forgotten communities when compared to Muslim communities in the maritime region of Southeast Asia, such as Malaysia and Indonesia. In addition to these two countries, Brunei Darussalam also appears as a Muslim country in Southeast Asia, followed by the Philippines and Singapore which used to be the glory region of Muslims, although now they are a minority. Meanwhile, Myanmar and Thailand have a concentration of Muslim minorities in the South that are ethnically different.

Regarding the development of the Muslim community in the Southeast Asian region, which used to be a cross-international trade area, to the area of struggle for ideological influence during the Cold War, so that each country in the Southeast Asian region has a different view in regulating the plurality of their society because of the difference in the pattern of historical events, especially if Muslims are a minority.³ These differences certainly cause differences in the political attitudes of each country and the Muslim community in the development of the Muslim community in each Southeast Asian country. Cambodia or commonly known as Kampuchea is a country located in the Southeast Asian region located on

¹Asri Jaya, Indo Santalia, dan Wahyudin G, "Tinjauan Sosial Ekonomi Lahirnya Islam Di Malaysia, Patani Dan Mindanao," *JBKPI: Jurnal Bimbingan dan Konseling Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 01 (2022): 97–110, <https://doi.org/10.26618/jbkpi.v2i01.9784>.

²Hidayat, Asep achmad, 2023, *Islamic History in the Indochina Subregion*, Banndung: Nuansa Cendikia Publisher.

³S. Yunanto, *Gerakan Militan Islam: di Indonesia dan di Asia Tenggara* (Jakarta: FriedrichEbert-Stiftung (FES), 2003).

the Indochina peninsula in the Southwest, bordered by Thailand to the northwest, bordered by Vietnam to the east and southeast, and bordered by Thailand to the southwest. the Catholic minority, and about 1% or 700,000 of the population embraced Islam.² The entry of Islam into Cambodia gave little color to Cambodia's culture and religion.

Laos is the only country in the Indochina region that does not have a sea. Laos is bordered by Vietnam to the west, bordered by China to the north, bordered by Thailand to the south, and bordered by Myanmar to the northwest. The Islamic religion in the Laos region is called the Muslim community where this community is a small minority community in the Laos region with a population of about 0.01% of the total population of Laos. The religion that dominates the country of Laos is Buddhism. The Muslim community in Laos lived in the Jami' mosque in the capital of Laos, Vientiane.⁶ This community was engaged in trade and the management of butcher shops. In addition to the Muslim community from Laos itself, in this country there can also be other Muslim communities from Cambodia who escaped the Khmer who live in the urban areas of the country of Laos. Vietnam is one of the French colonies that is included in the Indochina region besides Laos and Cambodia. Vietnam is bordered by China to the north, bordered by Laos and Kampuchea to the west, and bordered by the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin to the south and east.

Vietnam grew as an independent country in the second century BC. Vietnamese tribes such as Tonkin, Annam, Cochin, and China already inhabit historical areas in the region. In the first century BC, the Tonkin and Annam tribes were conquered by the Chinese and then in the second century the Kingdom of Champa emerged in Central Vietnam. In 939, the Chinese tribe was expelled and the Anam Kingdom grew and flourished again after defeating the Champa kingdom in 1471 and its power extended to the southern region of Cochin China. Merchants and westerners began to land in Vietnam in 1500 and in 1859, the French seized Saigon and Cochin China from Vietnam. After the outbreak of World War II, Ho Chi Min proclaimed the independence of Vietnam in 1945 and after that several beliefs emerged in the Vietnamese state. In addition, Islam also entered several areas there and experienced quite rapid development.⁴

Several previous studies have tried to examine the dynamics of the presence of Islam as a minority religion in the Indochina region, particularly in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. One of them is a study by Anthony Milner, which traces the process of Islamization in the three countries, by highlighting the role of the Champa Kingdom in the early spread of Islam and how colonialism and modern political conflicts affected the existence of Muslims there.⁵ In addition, research by Imtiyaz Yusuf dan Arthit Thongin reviewed more specifically the condition of the Muslim community in Laos. They found that Muslims in the country face challenges in the field of education and limited Islamic literacy, but still strive to preserve the teachings of Islam

⁴D.G.E Hall, *Sejarah Asia Tenggara* (Surabaya: Usaha Nasional, 1988).

⁵ Anthony Milner, "The Timing of Islamization in Southeast Asia: Local Agency, and the Challenge of Analysing Religious Conversion," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 96, no. 1 (2023): 21–49.

through local initiatives.⁶ On the other hand, popular articles such as those written by Danny Wong Tze Ken mention that the Muslim community in Laos, despite being a small minority, still lives peacefully and has places of worship that are actively used today. Meanwhile, the history of Islam in Vietnam is largely attributed to the Cham Muslim community that once rebelled against the rule of the Nguyễn dynasty in an event known as the Katip Sumat rebellion (1833–1834), which showed the spirit of defending Islamic identity amid political pressure. As for Cambodia, various sources show the revival of Islam after the Khmer Rouge tragedy.⁷ The Cham Muslim community is now rebuilding religious and educational infrastructure, and experiencing the development of da'wah through transnational networks such as the Tabligh and Salafi Jamaah.

Other research by Hong Suk Jung also strengthens the understanding of Islamic history in Cambodia. They explain how the migrating Champa and Malay communities formed the Muslim community that came to be known as Khmer Islam. The study revealed that despite heavy pressure during the Khmer Rouge regime, the Cham Muslim community managed to bounce back and build religious infrastructure as well as Islamic education.⁸ Meanwhile, Christopher M. Joll through a case study of Madrasah Al-Nur and the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in southern Vietnam shows how Islamic education is still carried out in the midst of communist government policies that suppress religious practices.⁹ He noted that the Cham Muslim community in Vietnam was able to survive and even show a strong adaptation to socio-political changes, despite the very limited access to education and da'wah.

Although there have been many studies that discuss the history of the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia, most of the research is still focused on countries with Muslim majority populations such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. Meanwhile, studies of minority Muslim communities in the Indochina region — particularly in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam — are still very limited and sporadic. Most of the literature that exists focuses more on political, ethnic, or conflict aspects, without in-depth analysis of religious dynamics, Islamic cultural identity, and the social and economic role of minority Muslim communities in local societies. In addition, there has not been much research linking the history of minority Islam in the region to the developments and challenges faced in contemporary times, including in the context of globalization, minority rights, and the preservation of local Islamic heritage.

RESEARCH METHOD

⁶ Imtiyaz Yusuf dan Arthit Thongin, "The role of Islamic education in building of Islamic public value of multicultural citizenship in southern Thailand," dalam *Islamic Public Value* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2025), 281–307, <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap-0a/book/9781035333646/chapter16.xml>.

⁷ Danny Wong Tze Ken, "Vietnam-Champa relations and the Malay-Islam regional network in the 17th–19th centuries," *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 5 (2004), <https://kyotoreview.org/issue-5/vietnam-champa-relations-and-the-malay-islam-regional-network-in-the-17th-19th-centuries/>.

⁸ Hong Suk Jung, "International Holistic Mission's Impact on Well-being and Conversion of Cambodian Muslims" (PhD Thesis, Biola University, 2024), <https://search.proquest.com/openview/b03861aa49fa2678844feda01d331b91/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.

⁹ Christopher M. Joll, *Muslim Merit-making in Thailand's Far-south*, vol. 4 (Springer Science & Business Media, 2011).

The historical research methodology based on literature studies involves several stages, starting from determining the topic and formulating the problem, followed by data collection through literature or historical documents (heuristic). After the data is collected, the researcher conducts source criticism to ensure the authenticity and credibility of the information, then interprets the data (historiography) by analyzing the historical context. The results of the research are compiled into scientific writings equipped with conclusions and implications of the findings, then ended with revisions to ensure the quality and accuracy of the research. This method allows researchers to reconstruct historical events through a critical analysis of written sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Process of Entering Islam into Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam (Indochina)

The history of the entry of Islam into Indochina can be seen from 3 theories that are the source of information in this paper, namely the Chinese theory (Muslim Hui), the Melyu theory and the Arabic theory.¹⁰ Chinese theory states that the spread of Islam in Indochina originated from Islamic traders from China and they consisted of Chinese people of Persian, Arab, Indian descent and the Han Muslim tribe (Muslim Hui) in the 11th century AD. The sects brought by China of Arab-Persian descent are Shia and Hanafiyah sects. In the subsequent development, the Shia School was defeated by the Shafi'i School, because of the da'wah movement carried out by the scholars of the archipelago, especially from Java, Sumatra and the Peninsula (the Sultanate of Patani and Kelantan). The Malay theory states that Islam was brought to Indochina through Islamic traders who migrated from the Malay realm in the 12th century AD to the 14th century AD they came from the Malay Kingdom (such as Patani, Malacca), Aceh and Java. The kingdom of the Malay realm was so advanced in various fields such as politics, trade, army, religion and Islamic science, before reaching Indochina they first stopped at Ligor and Singgora. These two areas are part of the Kingdom of Langkasuka or Pattani Darussalam which is now part of Thailand.

The third theory of the entry of Islam into Indochina is the Arabic theory, which states that the spread of Islam was carried out directly by Arab traders. al-'Aṭṭas' argument that the origin of Islam in Southeast Asia came from the Arabs is consistent with the local historiographical narrative of Islamization in their world which is often mixed with myths and legends. Nevertheless, local historiographic data from a number of manuscripts/manuscripts are still relevant such as the manuscript of Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai, Sejarah Melayu, Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa, Tarsilah from the Sultanate of Sulu, Tuhfah al-Nafis, Hikayat Habīb Husin alQadrī and others. According to Azyumardi Azra, the classical historiography contains four main themes, namely: (1) Islam was brought directly from Arabia, (2) Islam was introduced by "professional" teachers and poets who intended to spread Islam, (3) the first to convert to Islam were the rulers, and (4) most of the "professional" Islamic propagators came to the archipelago in the 12th and 13th centuries. This shows the possibility that Islam was

¹⁰Ahmad Wildan Syidad, "Islamisasi di Wilayah Indochina," *AN NUR: Jurnal Studi Islam* 15, no. 1 (2023): 137–52, <https://doi.org/10.37252/annur.v15i1.426>.

introduced to and existed in the archipelago in the first centuries of the Hijri and that the process of Islamization accelerated between the 12th and 16th centuries.¹¹

Islam entered the territory of Cambodia in the 15th century or 1471 AD which was marked by the collapse of the Champa kingdom due to the attack of the Annam kingdom. But according to J.A.B Wiselius, Cambodia at the end of the 11th century AD already knew the Arabs when they entered the Cambodian River using many ships and attacked the king of Ankor. In the middle of the 11th and 12th centuries there was a war between Cambodia and King Gelon. It was only after a century of warfare that trade began to advance.¹²

Most of the Muslims in Champa fled the region to areas they considered safe such as Cambodia, which is located near Vietnam. Before the attack by the Annam kingdom, Champa Muslims consisted of several ethnicities and ethnic groups such as Arabs, Indians, Pakistanis, Afghans, and Malays.¹³ After the attack and the collapse of the Champa kingdom, this ethnic group spread to various parts of Southeast Asia. The arrival of the Muslim population from the kingdom of Champa was welcomed by the people and the Cambodian government at that time, namely the king Khemr. The inhabitants of the kingdom of Champa who migrated to the territory of Cambodia were mostly ethnic Cham and ethnic Malays who then formed the Muslim community in Cambodia and survived to this day. The process of Islamization in Cambodia is different from the process of Islamization in other Southeast Asian regions. The factor that led to the difference lay in the part of the migration carried out by the inhabitants of Champa who were forced by an attack by the Annam kingdom on their territory in the 15th century. From various historical studies, the people of Champa have embraced Islam since the time of the Zoong Dynasty in China.

There are several theories that state that before the collapse of the Champa kingdom due to the attack of the Annam kingdom, the Cambodian people had established good relations by having trade relations with traders from Arabia, Persia, Malays, and Gujarat. There may be some opinions who disagree with the theory because Cambodia is not one of the international trade routes that are frequented by foreigners. However, this theory may be true because before the 15th century Cambodia was the largest rice-producing region in Southeast Asia, allowing many traders from different regions to come to establish trade relations with Cambodia.¹⁴ Subsequently, Islam first entered the territory of Laos through Chinese traders from Yunan. In addition to trading in Laos, these Chinese traders also carried a mission to spread Islamic teachings so that they were known as Chin Haw. An example of the legacy of the Chin Haw that still exists today is the existence of Muslim communities in the hills and highlands of Laos. They are the people who participate as suppliers of the basic necessities of urban society. They also built a large mosque that they boasted of in the neo-Moghul style with

¹¹Azyumardi Azra, *Edisi Perennial Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad VII dan XVIII: Akar Pembaruan Islam Indonesia* (Jakarta: PrenadaMedia Group, 2013).

¹²Hidayat, Asep achmad, , *Sejarah Islam di Subkawasan Indochina*, Banndung (Penerbit Nuansa Cendikia 2023)

¹³Musa Mohamad Zain, "Perkembangan Islam di Asia Tenggara: Kajian Kemboja," *SALAM Jurnal Studi Masyarakat Islam* 15, no. 2 (2012): 215–27.

¹⁴Anthony Reid, *Asia Tenggara dalam Kurun Niaga 1450-1680 Jilid I* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pusataka Obor Indonesia, 2014).

oriental-style minarets and located behind the Nam Phi fountain. This mosque is modern because it is equipped with loudspeakers and inside there are ornaments with writing in five languages, namely Arabic, Tamil, Lao, Urdu, and English.¹⁵

Another opinion about the entry of Islam into Laos is First, based on the writings left by a Dutch trader in the land of Indochina, Gerritt van Wuysthoff, who said that many Muslim traders brought textile commodities to the Viang Chan region in the early 17th century AD. These traders came from India, Arabia, Malay and Champa.¹⁶ The 3rd country in the Indochina Area is Vietnam. The Islamization process that occurred in Vietnam was influenced by the existence of the Champa kingdom. Islam entered Vietnam pioneered by the caliph Uthman bin Affan who at that time was the third caliph of Muslims. Uthman sent Muslim envoys to Vietnam and the Tang Dynasty of China in 650. The envoy traded and spread the teachings of Islam in Vietnam and in China, as evidenced by the discovery of documents from the Chinese dynasty containing records of the Cham people who adapted to Islam in the late 10th and early 11th centuries. At that time, the followers of Muslims increased very drastically due to their relationship with the Malacca sultanate which made the spread of Islam even more widespread. But unfortunately this did not last long because the kingdom of Champa was overthrown by the kingdom of Annam. As a result, many Muslims in Vietnam migrated so that there were few Muslims left and made Islam a minority religion in Vietnam. There are different legends regarding the entry of Islam into Vietnam, but all stories show that it was the Cham tribe who brought Islam to the region.¹⁷

In addition, there are several theories that explain the entry of Islam in the territory of Vietnam, namely: First, Al-Dimasqhi in 727 AD said that the Muslims who first came to Vietnam were envoys from the caliph Uthman bin Affan who was then followed by the people of the Umayyads and Al-Hajjaj. They were the people who fled the oppression and mass murder carried out by the Alawite descendants against the Umayyads. Second, In the 10th century, Muslim traders from the Middle East stopped at the port of Sanf before traveling to China. One of the factors for the entry of Islam in the kingdom of Champa also started from this because based on this theory it is said that in addition to merchants from the Middle East, it turns out that there was also a crew of the Champa kingdom ship that also stopped at the port of Sanf. The merchants who knew about it formed a relationship with the ship's crew and taught them a little about Islam. Third, based on Champa's theory, it is said that Islam has been there since ancient times. This is marked by the discovery of a tombstone inscribed with the date 431 in the Pang Rang area or commonly called the Pandurangga area which is a former port in the Champa area because there used to be a place for the spread of the Alawite Shia sect.

The Development of Islam During Colonialism and Post-Colonial Government in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam (Indochina)

¹⁵Syidad, "Islamisasi di Wilayah Indochina."

¹⁶Farina So, "An Oral History of Cham Muslim Women in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge (KR) Regime," (A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Center for International Studies of Ohio University, 2010).

¹⁷Syidad, "Islamisasi di Wilayah Indochina."

In 1864 or around the 19th century, Cambodia was colonized and controlled by the French. France assisted Cambodia in stabilizing the country's politics and made Cambodia a protected country until 1970. France also has excellent relations with Cambodia's religious people such as Buddhism and Islam and upholds the value of tolerance. The religious people in Cambodia were not disturbed by the French at all, in fact they had good relations and mutual benefit to each other. France embraced the two religions and brought them together to respect and appreciate each other.¹⁸ On November 9, 1953, Cambodia gained independence from French occupation under the leadership of Norodom Sihanouk. However, the Malay-Campa community is no longer known from its ethnic point of view, but is known as Khmer Islam.¹⁹ This aims to make their status officially Cambodian citizens. The Muslim community was then under the command of five members of the official assembly in which there were representatives from various Muslim communities. Each Muslim community has a judge who serves as the leader of the mosque as well as an imam.

From 1975 to 1979, the Khmer Rouge regime declared itself the ruler of Cambodia with full power.²⁰ This regime acted arbitrarily by removing laws on religion and it was at this time that the persecution of Muslims in Cambodia began. Not only Islam feels the pressure, but all religious people in Cambodia feel the same way. As a result, many places of worship and symbols symbolizing religion were abolished and destroyed by the regime. About 70% of the Muslims in Cambodia were slaughtered and killed by the Khmer Rouge regime. In addition to Muslims, there are also remnants of politicians from the previous regime and some civilians who disagreed with the Khmer Rouge regime, all of whom also did not survive the massacre. Based on statistical data, it is estimated that 1 to 3 million Cambodians have lost their lives due to murder or lack of food (1 million of them are Malay-campa Muslims) and approximately 6 million others suffer from trauma due to fear. Due to religious and ideological reasons and their status as immigrants, Cambodian Muslims became the group that suffered the most during the Khmer Rouge regime. Some of them were forced to separate or driven into the forest, and others fled to Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, and so on.

In response to the regime's treatment, Cambodian Muslims did not stay silent. Led by Dr. Abdul Kayoun, they then held demonstrations to demand their rights and freedoms in the scope of religion on a large scale. After the fall of the Khmer Red regime in 1979, Cambodian Muslims managed to regain their religious freedom as before. They then slowly rose, marked by the rebuilding of mosques and mushallas as well as madrasas as a means of Islamic shari'ar and science in Cambodia.²¹ After the collapse of the Red Cross government and the government passed into the hands of a new government supported by Vietnam, the general situation of the Cambodian population began to improve. So do the Muslims.

¹⁸Syidad.

¹⁹W. d. Arisman, *Sosiohistoris Islam Asia Tenggara, cet. 1*. (Yogyakarta: Kalimedia, 2021).

²⁰Ananda Fitrah Akhbar Cholik, "Sejarah Dan Perkembangan Islam Di Kamboja," *Journal of Islamic History And Civilization* 2 (2023): 171–74.

²¹Rini Afriantari, "Pemilu Di Laos: Dominasi Partai Rakyat Laos (LPRP) Dalam Menentukan Politburo Dan Komite Pusat Meski Secara Ekonomi Mulai Menerapkan Nilai-Nilai Pasar Bebas," *Jurnal Online Westphalia* 12, no. 2 (2013): 406–17.

Meanwhile, the condition of the country of Laos During the colonization by France, Laos was formed into a French puppet state in the form of a Constitutional Monarchy in 1947 and independence in 1949 under the French Union. In 1953, France granted full independence to Laos when Laos was ruled by King Sisavang Vong. The end of French colonialism in Laos has not made the country calm, other problems arise from the country's internal political problems, as there was a civil war before the region was controlled by Siam and France. The civil war after Laos' independence was greatly influenced by the condition of the political map during the Cold War. During the Cold War, the Communist Movement in Laos chose to form an alliance with Vietnam and the Soviet Union to take over the country's power. The alliance's involvement with Vietnam was also influenced by political divisions in Vietnam, where the Cold War era was also colored by brothers due to political differences in the Indochina region. The outbreak of the civil war in Laos itself produced three groups, namely: 1) Pro-Western groups under the leadership of General Phaumi Nosavan; 2) A neutral group led by prince Souvana Phouma; and 3) The Pathet Lao group under Souphanouvong who allied with the Viet Minh and occupied Northern Laos.²² The first group, which involved the Kingdom, was allied with the United States, while the third group, led by the communist Pathet Lao, had the support of the North Vietnamese side. The battle from 1964-1973 was won by the communist group and resulted in a ceasefire.

A percentage of only about 1% of the total population of Laos based on the data of the Encyclopedia Britannica, Muslims seem to have their own "advantage" position with a very minority demographic, and have no history of involvement in "resistance" against the Empire, Republican or communist governments, so their fate is still said to be much better than Christians who have been involved in political wars since the Cold War era that has had an impact to this contemporary era. Islam does not leave a "threatening" impression on the central government, given that some of the country's Muslims are those who used to be oppressed from Laos' neighboring countries, so they are like people who fled to Laos as refugees. The small number and knowledge of the status of their arrival, made the Muslim community choose the safe path.²³ From the time of the French colonial rule until the end of the Vietnam War in 1973, Muslim groups (especially Cham Muslims) have been victims of forced assimilation. The Ho Chi Minh regime had violated the janju to the Cham Muslims of ethnic autonomy and many of the Cham elite were imprisoned in the education camps of the doctrine of communism and even many of them were executed.²⁴

The Current Development of Muslim Communities in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam

After the fall of Pol Pot's regime, Cambodia was then ruled by prime minister Hun Sen and king Sihanouk. Under the leadership of the king, Muslims were delegated under the Cambodian Islamic Religious Council (MAIK) which consisted of 6 representatives.²⁵ The Cambodian Islamic Religious Assembly is led by a Changvang (mufti) which in 2007 was held

²²Desmaniar, "Khazanah : Jurnal Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Islam," *Khazanah* VII, no. 2 (2017): 1–14.

²³Afriantari, "Pemilu Di Laos: Dominasi Partai Rakyat Laos (LPRP) Dalam Menentukan Politbiro Dan Komite Pusat Meski Secara Ekonomi Mulai Menerapkan Nilai-Nilai Pasar Bebas."

²⁴Syidad, "Islamisasi di Wilayah Indochina."

²⁵Jaya, Santalia, dan G, "Tinjauan Sosial Ekonomi Lahirnya Islam Di Malaysia, Patani Dan Mindanao."

by Ustadz Kamaruddin Yusof, and assisted by two assistant mufti, namely Ustadz Irsyad bin Yusof Kadir and Ustadz Yusof bin Said. Currently, there are 320 Muslim villages in Cambodia, 110 of which are in Kampong Cham Province, as well as Battambang and Kampot Provinces. Cambodian Muslims generally live in towns and fishing villages along the Tonle Sap and Mekong Rivers and in the southern province of Kampot. Currently, Cambodian Muslims are centered in the Free China Region about 20% of the population, about 15% of the population, and in the capital city of Phnom Penh live about 30,000 Muslims.²⁶

However, due to their difficult economic conditions and also the non-standard educational curriculum in some schools, these programs then experienced obstacles. In Cambodia, many Cham people traditionally live in rivers where they make a living from fishing, which makes them poor and vulnerable. The problem of religious education for the younger generation is another problem faced by Cham Muslims in Cambodia. In addition to minimal facilities, because many madrasah buildings were burned during the Red Khmer rule, they also needed a standard education curriculum. Until 2009, the diniyah madrasahs in Cambodia were established and managed by each teacher. Each madrasah is handled by a teacher who makes his own curriculum which is generally still lacking, there are even some madrasahs that are closed because the teachers turn to look for other livelihoods.

Due to the high tolerance shown by the surrounding environment, there has never been a separatist movement by Muslims in this country as in other Southeast Asian countries. In addition, a number of Muslims were given the opportunity to be directly involved and work in government offices. Hun Sen himself has a special adviser tasked with improving relations between the government and the Muslim community. In addition, there are also four Muslim federation institutions, namely Samakum Khmer Islam Kampuchea (Cambodian Khmer Islamic Association), Samakum Islam Preah Reah Anachakr Kampuchea (Cambodian Government Islamic Association), Samakum Cham Islam Kampuchea (Cambodian Islamic Campa Association) and Cambodian Islamic Samakum (Cambodian Islamic Association). Various foundations such as the Cambodian Muslim Intellectual Alliance (CMIA) and the Cambodian Muslim Development Foundation (CMDf) were also born. The conditions of religious life in Laos began to show good progress with the amendment of the 1991 Constitution of Laos in 2003. The Constitution was amended to ensure the freedom of its citizens to embrace religions, although its implementation is still closely monitored by the central and regional governments. Laos' constitution gives citizens "the right and freedom to believe or not believe in religion." Decision No. 315 of 2016 with the intention of clarifying the rules for religious practice, defining the government as the final arbiter of permitted religious activities. In practice, however, there is still a practice of restricting religious activities in Laos, both in urban and rural areas, especially for Protestants.

These restrictions themselves have an impact on some of the political mindsets of the Lao people. Members of religious minorities continue to hide their religious affiliations in order to join the ruling Lao People's Revolutionary Party, government, and military and to avoid discrimination in these institutions. The central authority said it continued to travel to

²⁶Hidayat, Asep Achmad, *Islamic History in the Indochina Subregion*, Bandung (Nuansa Cendikia Publisher 2023)

provincial areas to train officials to implement Decree No. 315 and other laws regulating religion. The composition of contemporary Muslims has diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The largest group is the Chin Haw or Chinese Muslims whose population declined very quickly during the Lao civil war. The second group is made up of South Asian Muslims usually from India, Pakistan or Afghanistan. The third group is made up of Cham Muslims and is basically refugees who fled Cambodia during the civil war. This diversity of Muslims based on ethnicity also led them to establish Muslim associations based on their ethnicity, namely the Muslim Association of India, the Muslim Association of Pakistan and the Muslim Association of Cham, all of which operate in the city of Vientiane. These South Asian Muslims are spread across the Vientiane City Area, Luang Prabang, Paksedan Savannakhet. Although polarized within their respective ethnicities, this does not rule out the possibility of social interaction and da'wah between these Muslim communities and they have even formed the Lao Muslim Association in 2012.²⁷

As quoted by A. Hidayat, currently in Laos there are around 200 Muslims from Cambodia. They have their own mosque called Azhar Mosque or known by the local community as the Cambodian Mosque. The mosque is located in a corner in the Chantaburi district about four kilometers from downtown Vientiane. Although they were very few in number and classified as poor, they firmly held the religion. Generally, they are adherents of Mahzab Shafi which is different from the South Asian Muslim community in Vientiane who adheres to the Hanafi School.²⁸

Muslims in Vietnam at this time are also divided into two groups. The first group is those from the Muslim immigrants who grew up and developed in the Ho Ch Minh, Tay Ninh, and An Giang regions which border Cambodia and the majority of them are traders and businessmen from the region. The second group is the Cham Muslims who are natives of Vietnam itself. These Cham Muslims make up 1% of the population of Vietnam. Islam is still a minority religion because the Vietnamese government emphasizes more on the communist ideology in its country with very fundamental principles and it is not in accordance with the religion of Islam itself. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese government still gives freedom to Islam in its religious life just like other religions. In other words, the Vietnamese government generalizes all types of religion in its country and nothing is more favored.

In the da'wah movement, Vietnamese Muslims, especially the younger generation, have shown their vibrant activities since 2006. The da'wah movement carried out by Vietnamese Muslims takes two paths, namely the foreign route and the domestic route. Abroad they are active in tarbiyah or halaqoh da'wah assemblies and actively publish Islamic magazines and libraries. The da'wah movement carried out in the country is oriented to the teaching of the Quran and religious matters for Vietnamese Muslim children in the afternoon. Its activities are centered in mosques and madrassas as well as traditional huts.²⁹ Along with the vibrancy of the da'wah movement, mosques, madrassas and Islamic Foundations also appeared. In Ho Chi

²⁷Afriantari, "Pemilu Di Laos: Dominasi Partai Rakyat Laos (LPRP) Dalam Menentukan Politbiro Dan Komite Pusat Meski Secara Ekonomi Mulai Menerapkan Nilai-Nilai Pasar Bebas."

²⁸Asep Achmad Hidayat, *Op.cit*, 67-68.

²⁹Syidad, "Islamisasi di Wilayah Indochina."

Minh City there is now an Islamic Foundation established in 1991, which has helped a lot in the affairs of Muslims in Vietnam. Hidayat revealed that³⁰ in 2019, as many as 41 mosques and 19 suraus had been built throughout Vietnam. Of the 41 mosques in Vietnam, there is one mosque built by Indian Muslims who traded in North Vietnam in the 18th century. Meanwhile, in Ho Chi Minh City there are 16 mosques. Some of them were built with help from Muslim countries. A plaque at the Chamami Mosque, Jamiul Anwar, for example, has a statement stating that the building was rebuilt in 2006 with funds from the United Arab Emirates and the Red Crescent.

Despite their support from the Middle East, Cham Muslims still have strong ties with Malaysia and Indonesia. This bond binds Muslims in the Southeast Asian region who share cultural and religious values. Malaysians came to Vietnam (Cham village) and supported better schools and jobs. The ties began more than 20 years ago after Vietnam began a gradual policy of economic openness. As a side note, that historically and culturally, the Cham tribe (especially Cham Muslims) is perhaps the most important minority group in the country of Vietnam today. The descendants of the Champa Kingdom, which lasted from the 2nd to the 17th century AD, still exist in Vietnam. The Cham people have a rich culture (culture) that can still be appreciated today through architecture, cultural arts, festivals, and literature. Although the Champa Kingdom was successfully eliminated by the Dai Viet Kingdom in 1720 AD, the Cham people managed to live together in a large community where their traditions and culture were well preserved.

There are about 146,000 Cham people living in Vietnam today, with the largest community being in the Ninh Thuan region (57,000 people), a province in central Vietnam. Other Cham pentin communities are located in Binh Thuan, Phu Yen, An Giang, Tay Ninh, and in Ho Chi Minh City. The majority of Cham people living in central Vietnam are Hindus, while the Cham people living in the Mekong Delta region are all Muslims. The Cham writing system is primarily based on Sanskrit, with the majority of Cham manuscripts in the form of "akhar thrar" script. Previous writings were written on palm leaves (as is the case in the archipelago, but lately there have also been written on paper. Cham manuscripts are informative, containing the customs, religious practices, literature, and daily activities of the Cham people. The manuscripts are mostly 50 to 150 years old. It is estimated that Islamic texts in the midst of the Cham people, especially in the Mekong Delta region, number thousands of manuscripts, and to this day there has been no serious research. This needs to be done by field surveys by scientists who are interested in the problem. It is estimated that as many as 3,000 manuscripts, both paper and palm leaves, are still available in Cham villages. These manuscripts are in a physical condition that is in danger of extinction and urgently needs to be preserved.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it is revealed that the Islamic Minority in the Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam Region has a Long History, the rolling of every power affects the population in the Region, from civil wars, ideological wars to colonial colonialism. Islam has been an integral part of the history of Southeast Asia, including the Indochina region (Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam). Despite being a religious minority, the Muslim communities in these three

³⁰Asep Achmad Hidayat, Op.cit, 63-65.

countries exhibit unique cultural and historical diversity. The spread of Islam in Indochina occurred through three main routes: Chinese, Malay, and Arabic theories, with the large role of traders, missionaries, and cultural interactions. The process of Islamization in Cambodia, Islam came through the migration of Champa Muslims who fled from the attack of the Annam Kingdom. The Muslim community in Cambodia has survived to this day despite severe challenges, especially during the Khmer Rouge regime. In Laos, Islam entered through Muslim traders from Yunnan, China, as well as the migration of Muslim communities from neighboring countries such as Cambodia. Laos' Muslim community remains small but survives in social harmony. In Vietnam, Islam flourished through the influence of the Kingdom of Champa and interactions with traders from the Middle East, India, and the archipelago. The Cham Muslim community in Vietnam is one of the most important despite being a minority. The Impact of Colonialism and Political Conflict, French colonialism had a different impact in each country. While France showed tolerance in Cambodia and Laos, Cham Muslims in Vietnam experienced forced assimilation during Ho Chi Minh's rule. Post-colonial political conflicts, such as the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia and the civil war in Laos, exacerbated the condition of the Muslim minority. However, Muslim communities are showing resilience by rebuilding their religious infrastructure.

In contemporary conditions in Cambodia, the Muslim community has representatives in the Cambodian Islamic Religious Assembly (MAIK) and various Islamic organizations. However, they face challenges in religious education and poverty. In Laos, small but diverse Muslim communities have managed to form associations to maintain their religious and cultural identity. In Vietnam, Cham Muslims maintain their traditions despite facing ideological pressure from the government. Support from Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia helped them maintain their cultural and religious heritage. In general, despite facing various historical and social challenges, Muslim communities in Indochina continue to demonstrate adaptability, resilience, and significant contributions to the region's cultural diversity. Efforts to preserve historical heritage, Islamic manuscripts, and improve religious education are priorities to maintain their identity in the future.

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