

## **The Development Worldview of the Ban Nua Community in Hatyai, Thailand**

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**Abstract:** The Ban Nua Muslim community is situated in the middle of the Buddhist community in Hatyai, Thailand. Although, it is a small group placed in such a predicament, it is still able to implement various development programs either in the form of physical or spiritual development. Hence, it is evident that there exists a particular model that develops the Ban Nua community. This model refers to the worldview that has become an avenue for practicing humankind's beliefs. The question is what kind of model designs their development. How did their development model form? In order to answer both these questions, this working study had two objectives. The first was to determine the model that designed the Ban Nua Muslim community's development. The second was to analyse the elements of the development model used for the Ban Nua Muslim community. Lastly, this study found that the Ban Nua Muslim community's development was designed according to Islamic worldview. It had three main elements such as 'Ibadah (religious obligations), 'Imarah (develop on earth) and khalifah (vicegerent on earth).

**Key words:** Model, development, community, worldview, grassroots

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Ban Nua village is a small village located near North Hatyai in Thailand and the majority of its inhabitants (99%) are Muslims. Most of them are fishermen, farmers or businessmen. They are surrounded by a Buddhist majority and are also under the rule of non-Muslims.

However, under the leadership of Tabrani (2014) (Wisoot Lateh) since 1997, they have endeavoured to implement, substantiate and sustain development starting from the grassroots level. In more explicit terms, the Ban Nua Muslim community has independently succeeded in developing their village from the bottom-up (The 'bottom-up' approach is an effort by the grassroots community that possesses the self-awareness to create an Islamic system. This approach has a concerted and deep effect because it begins from within a person and is initiated by an integrated soul that intends to practice the actual Islamic system (Salleh, 1999) starting from the grassroots level. Now, the Ban Nua village has a mosque, school, a cooperative, a zakat (tithe) office, clinic, library, homestay services, property services etc and many from the community are working full time with the village organization (Tabrani, 2014).

Based on the success of developing the Ban Nua Muslim community, there must surely be a specific model

that had designed it. The question is what kind of model had designed the development of the Ban Nua Muslim community and how was the development model formed. In order to answer both these questions, this working study has two main objectives. The first is to determine the model that designed the development of the Ban Nua Muslim community, while the second objective is to analyse the elements found in that particular model.

In order to achieve both these objectives, this qualitative study involves two types of data, namely primary and secondary data. The primary data was obtained from speeches delivered by Tabrani Lateh (Imam of the Ban Nua Mosque and leader of the Ban Nua Muslim community) and unstructured interviews with him. Meanwhile, the secondary data were obtained through library research.

All these data were analysed using the content analysis method. Generally, the results of the analysis were divided into four main sections. The first section discusses the background of the development enjoyed by the Ban Nua Muslim community. The second section involves the justification for selecting the Ban Nua Muslim community for this case study, while the third discusses the development model of the Ban Nua Muslim community and the fourth is about the analysis and discussions.

**The background of the development involving the Ban Nua Muslim community:** Previous discussions have shown that Ban Nua is a Muslim community village. Ismail Lateh had explored and developed the village and eventually became the first imam of Ban Nua village. With a staunch belief in Islam, he endeavoured by preaching about Islam (Dakwah) in order to correct the religious practices in the Ban Nua Muslim community (Interview with Tabrani Lateh, 9 November 2013).

Actually, the level of Islamic religious knowledge among the Ban Nua Muslim community at that time was very shallow. They were only committed towards the obligatory prayers (solat fard) without making an effort to understand the other specific religious obligations. The Ban Nua Muslim community was also said to practice religious obligations privately, such as performing prayers at home instead of in the mosque. Hence, among the main efforts by Imam Ismail Lateh to preach Islam was to build a mosque to perform religious obligations and a place for the inhabitants of Ban Nua to hold meetings (Tabrani, 2014). According to Wafdi Auni Mohamed, Imam Ismail Lateh had focused his dakwah on building the fundamentals of Islam, such as the Pillars of Faith (Rukun Iman) and Islam (Rukun Islam). Besides the aspects of belief (Aqeeda), praying as a congregation (Solat jama'ah) is emphasized on all members of the Ban Nua Muslim community. Although it took a long time to explain the importance of praying in a congregation, the Ban Nua Muslim community finally accepted it and made it their main practice.

After succeeding in explaining about the prayers to the Ban Nua Muslim community, he focused his dakwah on the mandatory obligation of paying zakat. At that time, most of the Ban Nua Muslim community members were not aware that paying zakat was a mandatory obligation demanded on every Muslim. Although, there were some who understood the implications, they only paid zakat that were then divided among their relatives instead of giving it to the needy and poor (Asnaf) who rightfully deserve to receive them. This is where Imam Ismail Lateh effortlessly tried to change the thinking and understanding of the Ban Nua Muslim community so that it was in accordance with syariat Islam. He endeavored to create awareness among the Ban Nua Muslim community about the mandatory need to pay tithes and the method of distributing it correctly. Although, he succeeded in educating the members of the Ban Nua Muslim community on the correct understanding; hence, a majority of them refused to accept it because they assumed that what Imam Ismail Lateh preached was something new and it threatened the traditional practices of the Ban Nua Muslim community.

Pursuant to that, Imam Ismail Lateh received resistance from the village folks. Among the forms of resistance faced by him were abstinence from congregational prayers, boycotting his classes and spreading false accusations. Hence, due to all the resistance he received, he finally failed to change the mindset of the Ban Nua Muslim community regarding the zakat and eventually the job of preaching Islam was taken over by his grandson (Tabrani Wisoot Lateh) who happened to be the third generation of 'Bin Lateh'. Tabrani Lateh obtained a Bachelor's degree (B.A Hons) from the University of Al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt. He then furthered his education to the Master's level (M.A) at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and later his Doctoral degree (Ph.D.) from the University of Thaksin in Thailand. Presently, he is the First Imam of the Ban Nua Mosque. Besides that, due to his high educational status, he was given two other responsibilities. The first was the Head of the Academic Section and Foreign Affairs at the Islamic Religious Council of Songkla Territory; while the second as the Director of the Syeikhul Islam (Mufti) and Center for Coordinating Islamic Religious Affairs for the Territory of Southern Thailand (Interview with Tabrani Lateh, 9 November 2013).

Imam Tabrani Lateh initiated a comprehensive effort to develop the Ban Nua Muslim community in 1997 which was soon after he finished his Master's degree at IIUM. The development approach he used was the bottom-up approach. The development plan for the Ban Nua Muslim community was successfully implemented using this approach because it started from the grassroots before it was expanded and developed.

The efforts of Imam Tabrani Lateh had a positive effect on the Ban Nua Muslim community's development. He had succeeded in changing the way of thinking and understanding of Islam formerly held by the Ban Nua Muslim community. The changes saw prayers (Solat) and zakat becoming the basis for development; schools were built that inculcated the Islamic education system; the mosque became the center of all social activities and a Mosque-based cooperative was formed and it functioned as an Islamic financial institution.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**The justification for choosing the Ban Nua Muslim community:** The Ban Nua Muslim community in Hatyai, Thailand was chosen for the case study because they were a minority community living in the middle of a majority Buddhist society. Besides that, they were also living under the rule of a non-Islamic government.

Nevertheless, they tried to develop their village based on local knowledge and the dynamic religion they believed in. Beginning by realising the verse in the Al-Qur'an that commanded its subjects to pray and pay zakat (Al-Baqarah, 2), the Ban Nua Muslim community had implemented various Islamic-oriented development projects such as mosques, schools, cooperatives, tithe collecting centre (Baitul Zakat), clinics, library, homestays, property trading, etc (Tabrani, 2014).

According to Tabrani (2014), the Ban Nua mosque was made into a comprehensive centre of development and carried out various physical and spiritual activities. He mentioned that the mosque is the backbone of the cooperative which functions to manage and implement the Islamic financial system (Mu'amalat) until the mosque-based cooperative was formed and acted as an Islamic banking and financial institution. Even though this research does not focus on the Mosque as a religious institution; hence, it is was discussed because the Ban Nua Muslim community's development has made the mosque the centre of community and economic activities. In other words, the mosque became the most important institution for the Ban Nua Muslim community which had 372 households.

Hence, due to his noble efforts of developing the Ban Nua Muslim community, he was given due recognition by the Thailand government. The government's recognition actually focused on the socio-economic development aspect of Ban Nua. Besides that, Ban Nua was recognised as an exemplary village and became a place of reference for other villages that wanted to develop a village or community, especially Muslim villages and communities in the Hatyai district itself and other districts in Southern Thailand such as Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. Furthermore, the Ban Nua village not only attracted the attention of Muslim communities but also Buddhist communities that frequently visited Ban Nua. Besides becoming the focus of other societies in Thailand, the Ban Nua village was frequently visited by academicians such as lecturers from the Centre of Research for Islamic Development Management (ISDEV), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP) and Raja Manggala University of Technology, Srivijaya. Students taking the Master's degree in Islamic Development Management (MISDEV11, 12, 13, 14 and 15) and students from the Centre for International Language (CIL), UniMAP; and also agencies representing Islamic development institutions from outside Thailand, especially Malaysia, namely the Perlis Islamic Affairs and Malay Customs Council (MAIPs), also visited the village (Interview with Tabrani Lateh, 9 November 2013).

**The development worldview of the Ban Nua Muslim community:**

The Ban Nua Muslim community had implemented development from the grassroots. More specifically, the Ban Nua Muslim community was developed based on three main elements (Tabrani Lateh, 2014:7-11). The first element was religious obligations ('Ibadah). This was based on the exhortations of Allah, meaning:

I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me (Al-Zariyat, 51:56)

In efforts to realize the element of religious obligation in the development of the Ban Nua Muslim community, praying and zakat had become the basis (Al-Baqarah, 2:). By praying, the fitness and health of an individual is shaped as the result of the physical activities and good time management. The zikr and invocations (doa) are good for training the mind and soothing the emotions. This will be increased by recitations during praying which will open the mind with the help of a high level of knowledge. This kind of training will help the formation of a Ban Nua Muslim community that is disciplined, perseveres, physically fit, mild mannered and intelligent. Thus, the community would easily come to understand Islam from aspects such as cooperation, education, business, homestay services etc. Furthermore, if praying can transform the Ban Nua Muslim community into one that is disciplined, perseveres, physically fit, mild mannered and intelligent; hence, paying zakat would educate the community not to be overly passionate about wealth so much so to neglect the unfortunate and needy. Therefore, the Ban Nua Muslim community had worked hard in order to pay the zakat. In other words, they were trying their best to avoid receiving the zakat. Through, the zakat fund, the Ban Nua Muslim community are able to provide numerous infrastructure and facilities for the members of the community.

Therefore, it is evident here that religious obligations have become the framework for the development of the Ban Nua Muslim community. The religious obligation system has helped the Ban Nua Muslim community to avoid being separated from worldly life. This is because the community members who have nurtured their spirituality do not entirely live in the spiritual world but return to the materialistic world to cleanse and make it sacred. In other words, they do not make worldly success, comfort and luxury as the ultimate aim of life. For them, the ultimate aim of life is to seek the pleasures of Allah (Mardat Allah).

Second is the element of khalifah (vicegerent) which is based on the exhortations of Allah, meaning:

When your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth,' they said, 'Will You set in it someone who will cause corruption in it, and shed blood, while we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your sanctity?' He said, 'Indeed I know what you do not know' (Al-Baqarah, 2)

In realising the khalifah element, each member of the Ban Nua Muslim community is made to understand the duties of a human as a khalifah which refers to the responsibility and duties pertaining to management, administration and developing this earth according to the principles of Islam. The responsibility comprises the responsibility towards them, the society and to Allah. Therefore, each action carried out by the members of the Ban Nua Muslim community cannot be for personal importance or gain as it is solely for sake of the community. For example, by providing homestay services, 30-40% of the rent is donated to the Ban Nua Mosque fund for social activities. Besides that, they coordinate and cooperate among themselves doing communal work and preparing free meals, especially when receiving guests who come to Ban Nua.

Third is the element of imarah (develop) which is based on the exhortations of Allah, meaning:

And to Thamud We sent ali, their brother. He said, 'O my people! Worship Allah. You have no other god besides Him. He brought you forth from the earth and made it your habitation. So plead with Him for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently. My Lord is indeed near most and responsive (Hud, 11)

Actually, the element of imarah is one of the functions of humans as a khalifah. In the context of the Ban Nua Muslim community's development, they are required to develop the Ban Nua Mosque, the cooperative, the Zakat Centre (Baitul Zakat), schools and homestay services.

These three elements are the mould or worldview that designs the Ban Nua Muslim community's development. This clearly proves that the Ban Nua Muslim community's development is grassroots development.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the earlier discussion, it was found the Ban Nua Muslim community's development was designed according to Islamic worldview. Islamic worldview is formed based on three elements.

**Ibadah (Servitude and Worship to Allah):** By making Al-'ubudiyah (servitude and worship to Allah) the

methodology for developing the Ban Nua Muslim community, it complements the human promise made in the spiritual world that humans are the subjects of Allah (Al-A'raf, 7; Al-Hadid, 57). Moreover, Allah also stated that humans were created only to be subjected to HIM (Al-Zariyat, 51). Besides that, there are numerous commands regarding the subjection of humans to Allah (Al-Tawbah, 9; Al-Zumar, 39; Al-Bayyinah, 98) and the prohibition of ignoring HIS commands (Ghafir, 40; Al-Isra', 17).

As a subject of Allah, humans must always subject themselves or more specifically, carry out their 'Ibadah towards HIM. Showering 'ibadah towards Allah means to focus the worship solely towards Allah by carrying out and planning every aspect of life on earth, both internally or spiritually and externally or physically, so that it is in accordance with the syari'at. This element could emerge in the relationship between an individual and Allah as being HIS subject or amongst humans, as members of society (Salleh, 1999). More explicitly, Al-Qaradawi stated that 'Ibadah are a part of syariat commanded by Allah and adheres to all matters conveyed by Rasulullah SAW which includes all commands and prohibitions, as well as what is halal and haram. Hence, these are matters that constitute the elements of obedience and allegiance to Allah. A more liberal meaning of 'Ibadah was given by Al-Rajhiy and Al-Asyqar. According to them, 'Ibadah refers to all matters that are preferred and blessed by Allah, whether it is in the form of words and practices or whether it is physical or spiritual.

Hence, it is clear that 'Ibadah have a wide scope (Ghazali, 2001). It is not limited to religious rituals but comprises all aspects of human life, including the implementation of Islamic-based Development (IbD). Implementing IbD would not become an 'Ibadah if it does not adhere to the stipulated methods. Therefore, 'Ibadah has specific methodologies, thus, it also becomes a methodology for IbD, just as for all human activities on this earth.

According to Ghazali (2001) and Safaee Zakaria and Mohd Zin Daud, 'Ibadah is divided into two types, namely general and specific 'Ibadah. The distinction is made according to the aim and type of practice that is performed. Specific religious obligation ('Ibadah khas) is all forms of specific practices stipulated by Allah, either it is compulsory or optional (sunnat) such as praying, fasting, paying zakat, performing the Hajj, invocation (Doa), Zikr, reciting the Al-Qur'an, preaching (Dakwah) and to jihad. General religious obligation ('Ibadah 'am) is all forms of noble practices stipulated by Allah with the intention of relating humankind with a society for the sake of betterment and harmony of co-existence. The

noble practices could be in the form of compulsory personal duty (Fard 'ayn), sufficiency duty (Fard kifayah) or optional practices (Sunnat). For example, a general religious obligation in the form of fard 'ayn is to seek knowledge and work to earn a living. Whereas, in the form of fard kifayah is to implement development, carry out research, do business and protect the country and noble practices in the form of optional practices (Sunnat) are visitations (family members, neighbours, the sick, the poor, etc) helping one another, being cooperative and considerate, etc.

Actually, specific religious obligations lead the way to spiritual development while general religious obligations lead to material and physical development. In other words, spiritual development is the outcome of practising specific religious obligations; meanwhile, material and physical development is the consequence of practising general religious obligations. Since IbD is the combination of spiritual and physical development; hence, IbD is actually the consequence of practising both forms of 'Ibadah (Salleh, 2003).

In order to ensure that Allah accepts every form of 'Ibadah and development, it must follow the method of implementation and regulations set by Allah. If the method and regulations were not adhered to, then the development would not be considered an IbD (Salleh, 2003).

For specific religious obligations that lead to spiritual development, it must contain aspects of oneness of Allah (Tawhid), Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) and morality (Akhlaq) which are the fields of knowledge in Fard 'ayn. By performing the specific religious obligation, these three elements must be implemented in an integrated manner (Salleh, 2003). The feeling of tawhid towards Allah (Al-Bayyinah, 98) is considered the core while fiqh outlines the regulations and akhlaq creates a feeling of pleasure and appreciation in performing 'Ibadah.

As for the general religious obligations which leads to physical development, Salleh (2003) and Fatimah Sulaiman stated that the method is determined by five conditions. The efforts to develop are considered a religious obligation when it fulfils all these condition. Firstly, it must be done with sincere intentions in the name of Allah and with the hope of obtaining HIS blessings. Secondly, the contents of the efforts and duty do not contravene the syariat. Thirdly, the implementation is according to the syariat, meaning that it is carried out in accordance with the principles of Islamic syariat and akhlaq such as trust, justice, responsibility etc. Besides that, it must adhere to the method or manner stipulated by syarak, such as beginning with the utterance of basmalah and do'a; fourthly, the outcome or product should not

contradict the syariat. Lastly, all the efforts and duties should not distract them from performing their specific religious obligations.

The methods for implementing each form of 'Ibadah are based on tawhid or the intention of worshiping only to Allah. Other elements found in these methods for implementing each form of religious obligation come under the concept of Tawhid.

Based on the overall discussion, it was found that the combination of the methods of specific religious obligation and the general religious obligation forms a single method of implementing IbD. Hence, it is clear that 'ibadah are one method of implementing IbD. Therefore, development is a tool humans use to show complete allegiance to Allah. This is compatible with the function of creating humankind on this earth which is to offer religious obligations to HIM (Al-Zariyat, 51). Moreover, 'ibadah is a method used in IbD because humans must constantly live by offering 'ibadah to Allah in every aspect of life and at every moment of it.

**Khalifah (Vicegerent on Earth):** Humans have the physical, spiritual, mental and natural inclination (nafs) aspects. They function as subjects (Al-Zariyat, 51) and khalifah of Allah on this earth (Al-Baqarah, 2; al-An'am, 6). As subjects, humans are required to worship Allah, who is all-powerful in creating and commanding nature; meanwhile as a khalifah, humans have the duty to develop, harmonise and manage nature. According to Mustapha Hj. Mohd. Jar in concordance with the functions of humankind as a subject and khalifah of Allah, humankind are bestowed with two types of natural inclinations (Nafsu). First is al-nafs al-natiqah (a high level of rational natural inclination). Second is al-nafs al-hayawaniyya (a low-level animal-type natural inclination). In order for humankind to implement their functions as subjects and khalifah of Allah, hence, a high level of rational natural inclination must defeat the low-level animal-type natural inclination. The combination of these two main functions of human creation is actually the human reality that functions as the agent of IbD, generally and as the agent of development for the Ban Nua Muslim community, specifically.

According to Salleh (2003), as an agent of development, humankind must defend its status as subjects and khalifah of Allah on this earth. In regards to the relationship with Allah (Habl min Allah), humankind are the subjects of Allah. Whereas, in the relationship amongst humankind as well as with the natural surroundings (Habl min Al-nas), humankind are the khalifah. Hence, agents of development are not created solely to function in a stereotype and secular fashion

such as to utilise, to grow, to learn, work, have families, reproduce and to die. They cannot assume to be humans solely meant to reproduce or utilise based on physical and mental strength, skills as well as natural attributes. All activities concerning production and utilization are part of the human tools used to prove subservience to Allah that have been laid down before humankind were put on this earth (Al-A'raf, 7; Al-Hadid, 57). Besides that, it is also a tool used to fulfil the needs of ordinary humans. Thus, no matter what sort of human activity or action, their status as a subject and khalifah of Allah is inseparable.

In relation to that, when implementing development, humans cannot become slaves of development because actually, development is meant for humans and not vice versa (Salleh, 1999). Thus, the agents of development (khalifah) would actually get to produce development which is included in the category of 'ibadah and is blessed by Allah.

**Imarah (Develop):** The imarah element which is one of the elements of worldview in the Ban Nua Muslim community's development, is among the duties and responsibilities of a khalifah whereby the khalifah endeavours to harmonise the earth that comprises humans, animals, plants and all other creatures created by Allah (Hud, 11). This is further substantiated by the Prophet SAW's Hadith meaning:

Narrated by Abu Hurayrah (R.A) that Rasulullah (S.A.W) exhorted: *Ista'marakum means to make you the glorifier (khalifah)*" (Riwayat al-Bukhariy, No. Hadith 4684)

In line with this Hadith is the interpretation by Al-Tabariy and Ibn Kathir which states that humans were created from elements found on this earth. Hence, they are given the duty to live and harmonise the earth. All these reflect the meaning of a khalifah and the characteristics it represents (Erbe, 2007).

According to Quraish (2009), the khalifah concept has three interrelated elements. The first is that humans are the khalifah. This is found in verses from the al-Qur'an such as *inni ja'il fi al-ard khalifah* (we have created a khalifah on this earth) (Al-Baqarah, 2) and *inna ja'alnaka khalifah* (we have made you the khalifah) (Sad, 38). Although, the role of humans is not explicitly explained in the verses in Surah Hud (11) but it is referred to implicitly. The argument is that humans were given the duty to harmonise the earth as mentioned in the excerpt *wa ista'marakum fiha* (you are instructed to harmonise it). The second is natural surroundings which is reflected in the

verses *fi al-ard* (earth) (Al-Baqarah, 2 and Sad, 38) and *wa ista'marakum fiha* (Hud, 11). The third is the relationship between humans and natural surroundings and everything in it. This also includes the relationship amongst humans and is reflected in the verse *fa ahkum bayna Al-nas* (give a decision about an issue among humans) (Sad, 38) and the term *fiha* (on this earth) (Hud, 11). Although, the relationship is not explicitly mentioned in Surah Al-Baqarah (2) but it is implicit in character. The argument is that it is meaningless if the khalifah is not given duties to perform or *istikhlaf*.

All three interrelated relationships show that the duty and responsibility of humans as a khalifah. They are called upon to justly and fairly uphold the syariat of Allah on this earth. Besides that, they are also given the duty as agents of development who endeavour to develop and harmonise this earth.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the entire discussion in this working study, it was concluded that the development of Ban Nua Muslim community was founded on elements such as 'ibadah, khalifah and 'imarah. This shows that the development of the Ban Nua Muslim community is moulded according to Islamic worldview. It is clearly built from Al-adillah Al-qat'iyyah (religious references of the qat'i) which is the Al-Qur'an and Hadith. The 'Ibadah element clearly reflects the existence of a relationship between humans and Allah (*habl min Allah*) when implementing development in the Ban Nua Muslim community. Meanwhile, the elements of khalifah and 'imarah reflect the existence of a relationship amongst humans as well as humans and nature (*habl min al-nas*). Therefore, it is evident that the development implemented in the Ban Nua Muslim community is Islamic-based development.

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