

Islamic Education in Southern Thailand:

A Photo Essay

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Islamic education in southern Thailand can generally be divided into three types. The first type is the government-sponsored school. This type of schooling offers Islamic education in conjunction with the national curriculum. The language of instruction is Thai. The second type is a private Islamic school. In some areas, this school is referred to as a *madrasa(h)*. The

private Islamic school may offer non-Koranic subjects such as science and math, as well as the teaching of foreign languages (Arabic and English). These schools are usually registered with the

government. The third type is a *pondok*. This school is very simple in structure; generally, it is attached to a mosque. The name, *pondok*, refers to the huts that the boys stay in while pursuing their studies. A *pondok* school is deeply personal and intimate, and is traditionally built around its teacher, the local *imam*, or its founder (who could be both). The language of instruc-



Islamic schools in southern Thailand often appear, architecturally, just like government schools. This Islamic school in Nakhon Si Thammarat had an administration office, a flag pole, a library, a courtyard, and a dorm for boys.



Girls in class at a madrasa in Nakhon Si Thammarat

tion at many *pondoks* is Malay. The teaching of Malay and *Jawi* are important features of the cultural heritage of Islamic education in southern Thailand. At all the Islamic schools in Thailand, it is required that girls wear *hijab*, or headscarfs. Boys are expected to wear *kopiahs*, or caps.

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Top: In Malay, "pondok" means hut. Pondok function as homes for many of the boys studying at this traditional Islamic school in Nakhon Si Thammarat.



Bottom: An important cultural aspect of Islamic education in southern Thailand is the ability to learn Jawi, an Arabic script historically used for writing in Malay.

Boys at an Islamic school in Nakhon Si Thammarat. Like boys at any other school in Thailand, they occupy their in-between time with games, stories, and jokes.

