Approaches to maintaining security in Malaysia-Thai relations: Analysis

While KL was expected to be sympathetic to the Muslim cause and the Thai state, on the other hand, expected to suppress violently the Islamic revivalism, both governments namely the elite of the ruling government took a "secular" approach and exercised caution in the matter. The political elites were also mindful of the threat the situation presented to their respective governments as well as the domain in which the ruling governments operated. The domain in this case refers to the multi-ethnic, multi-religious composition of its citizenry as well as the larger forces of globalization. In the case of Malaysia, its chairmanship of the OIC (Organization of Islamic Countries) is yet another domain in which it operates and can be held accountable for the kind of Islamic leadership it portrays. Malaysia can also influence or use the OIC as a channel in dealing with some of the issues pertaining to Islam both at the domestic and international levels.

In trying to understand the security culture of Asian countries, Muthiah Alagappa proposes a framework for Asian security that comprises three main components: (i) referent (ii) scope or domain and (iii) approach.[11] The discussion on Thai-Malaysia relations in this paper, in particular the main issues/incidents pertaining to bilateral security tend to concur with Alagappa's framework. The referent refers to the regime, nation-state or dominant grouping/party that is being discussed, while the scope or domain identifies the core values of the particular regime and the threats facing that regime. The final component is approach, namely the manner in which the respective nations/regimes deal with the given security issues. These components are useful in trying to understand the security culture of Asian countries. Besides, Alagappa's framework is non-ideological and most importantly it takes into account the multiple facets of the political milieu of a particular regime or nation, making it an apt framework for Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia and Thailand.

Conclusion

The spirit of alliance and friendship in ensuring peaceful co-existence among neighbors demonstrated by both the Thai and Malaysian governments is one of the salient aspects in Thai-Malaysia relations over the past 50 years, if not longer.

While security has been the prime concern in Thai-Malaysia relations, there are other aspects of cooperation as well. These include economic cooperation and various aspects of functional cooperation namely in the areas of environment, health and education. However, the latter appear secondary compared to co-operation in the field of security. Both the Thai and Malaysian governments priority concerns for the last 50 years and in the next few decades is in maintaining geopolitical security, both terrestrial and maritime security.

ENDNOTES

[1] See Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian (1998). *Thai-Malay Relations: Traditional Intra-regional Relations from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieeth Centuries*, Singapore: Oxford University Press: pp. 56-57.
[2] See CO 717/156/4/F 15736, S.G. Thompson (British Legation Bangkok) to R.H. Scott Esq. (Southeast Asia Department, Foreign Office), 10 Oct 1949.
[3] Thailand had long suspected that the Malayan government knew of individuals/groups in Malaya supporting the secessionist movement in the Pattani region and at times accused the government of backing the anti-Thai groups. For details see FO 371/69999 [F 14816/21/40].
[4] For details on Thai-Malaysia disputes during this period see, Hans. H. Indorf (1984). *Impediments to Regionalism in Southeast Asia: Bilateral Constraints among ASEAN Member States*), Singapore: ISEAS: pp.38-42.
[5] *Asiaweek*, 24 Dec 1982, quoted in Michael Antolik (1990). *ASEAN and the Diplomacy of Accommodation* New York: ME Sharpe Inc.: pp. 59-60.
[6] *New Straits Times*, 25 September 1993.
[7] K.S. Nathan, "Malaysia: Reinventing the Nation", in *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences* Muthiah Alagappa (ed). (1998). Stanford: Stanford University Press: pp 526-527.
[8] A. Suhrke and L.G. Noble, "Spread or Containment: The Ethnic factor", in A. Suhrke and L.G. Noble (ed.) (1977). *Ethnic Conflicts in International Relations.* US: Praeger Publishers: p. 221.
[9] Panitan Wattanayagorn, "Thailand: The Elite's Shifting Conceptions of Security", in *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences* Muthiah Alagappa (1998):p. 417.
[10] S.P. Harish, "How Malaysia sees Thailand's southern strife", *Asia Times*, 12 Feb 2006, http:// atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia.
[11] Muthiah Alagappa (1998). *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences, p.15-17.*

MAHIDOL-UKM 3

DIFINING HARMONY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: COMPETING DISCOURSES, CHALLENGES AND INTERPRETATIONS

The Third International Malaysia-Thailand Conference on Southeast Asian Studies

29 November – 1 December 2007

THIRD PLENARY SESSION

Chairperson: Dr.Wariya Chinwanno

1. Harmonious Echoes from the Past: An Esoteric Interpretation of Hang Tuah's Journey to India - *Lalita Sinha*

PLENARY PAPER 3

Harmonious Echoes from the Past: An Esoteric Interpretation of Hang Tuah's Journey to India

Lalita Sinha
QUEST Services

> So Kisna Rayan too was pleased upon seeing the mannerisms of the admiral who spoke in the Keling language, the eloquence of his tongue and the sweetness of his countenance and the melodiousness of his voice, so harmonious with his words (*Hikayat Hang Tuah*, 423).[i]

Abstract

Classics of the world typically portray great warriors who literally and metaphorically "sail the seven seas" in quest of Enlightenment. This centrifugal motion engaging the protagonist with new, or alien, experiences not only involves plunder and dominance, but often epitomises a spontaneous reaching out that results in harmonious encounters that enrich and deepen not only their own, but also the other, cultures. This element abounds in the *Gilgamesh* of Mesopotamia, the Greek *Odyssey*, and the *Ramayana* of India, to name just a few. From Southeast Asia, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (The Story of Hang Tuah) is little known outside the Malay world. Extolling the exploits of Hang Tuah the Malay warrior par excellence, the text is of no mean stature in comparison to the great classics.

Beyond interest in *Hikayat Hang Tuah* as a historical, political, social, or literary model of distinction, the traditional worldview reflected in the text has an added dimension: it embraces a sacred universe. From this arcane dimension, mythical and metaphysical shared "secrets" of harmony between different religious and cultural traditions shine forth. If only one cares to delve into an esoteric or essential interpretation of the text, one finds harmony of an innate, artless and spontaneous character (Sk. *sahajja*, natural), so distinct from the often necessarily contrived, and agenda-driven religious "tolerance" prevailing today.

Based on a Hermeneutical reading of the text, and informed by a perspective of Traditionalism, the essay will attempt to bring to light the esoteric meaning of the experiences of Hang Tuah on a particular journey to India, and to argue that the wisdom of the past, and the traditional realities embodied in the character of Hang Tuah have much to show us of the way to unity and accord that has been forgotten, and to sound a clarion call to reclaim it.

INTRODUCTION

Classics of the world typically portray great warriors who literally and metaphorically "sail the seven seas" motivated by quest and conquest. This centrifugal motion engaging the protagonist with new, or alien, experiences may not only involve plunder and dominance, but also epitomise a spontaneous reaching out that results in harmonious encounters which enrich and deepen not only their own, but also the other, cultures. This element abounds in the *Gilgamesh* of Mesopotamia, the Greek *Odyssey,* and the *Ramayana* of India, to name just a few. A tale of similar import from Southeast Asia, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (The Tale of Hang Tuah) is little known outside the Malay world. Extolling the exploits of Hang Tuah, Malay warrior par excellence, the text is of no mean stature in comparison to the great classics of the world.

Beyond any interest in *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (HHT) as a historical, political, social, or literary model of distinction, the text has an added dimension: it embraces a sacred universe. From this arcane dimension, mythical and metaphysical shared "secrets" of harmony between different religious and cultural traditions shine forth. This affinity, intimated in the epigraph to this paper, involves in the present case specifically the Malay-Muslim tradition (or the starting point), and Indian-Hindu tradition (or the destination) of Hang Tuah's traverse to India. Kisna Rayan, the Indian king is won over completely by the charm and grace of the speech of the Malay admiral, not only because he speaks the "Keling" or Indian language, but also because of the harmony of his personality with his words. However, one has to know affinities exist, in order to see them. In other words, "Believing is seeing." This "seeing" can be a grace, which springs from a profound love of God (McDonald 2003). If only one cares to "see" the esoteric import of the text, that is, delve into its essence, one finds accord of an innate, uncontrived and spontaneous character (Skt. *sahajjiya*, natural) typifying the traditional worldview[ii] that is so distinct from the often necessarily contrived, and agenda-driven religious "tolerance" prevailing today, as this paper hopes to show.

Hang Tuah's extraordinary capacity of language and speech is a marked phenomenon that offers rich dimensions for study. For this flair for speech, he is sent as an ambassador of peace to places near and far, among them Majapahit, India, China, Siam, and Turkey. These missions are well-deliberated by scholars as being primarily political in agenda. I wish to argue, however, that that is only one aspect of the nature of the missions. I would go so far as to say that the preoccupation on the perceptible issue of politics is a superficial and limited view of Hang Tuah's journeys. It does not do justice to the fullness of a work that exhibits a universe that is quite different from the predominantly secular view of the work. This lens shows a traditional religious and spiritual society that is holistic, and entirely in harmony with the environment, both physical and metaphysical.[iii] Thus the present view draws from dimensions ranging from the magico-religious, to the mystico-spiritual.

Informed by the perspective of Traditionalism, the esoteric meaning of the experiences of Hang Tuah on his journey to India may come to light. To support the argument for the esoteric dimensions of the HHT, I will refer to and interpret three extracts of the episode of Hang Tuah's presence in India: Firstly, the origin of the mission; secondly, the voyage to India, and thirdly, the "performance" of the horse ride before the Indian ruler. In these cases, the diction - both Hang Tuah's and the story teller's - represents the "data" of analysis, which convey "veiled" truths. Here it is only

possible to deal with a limited selection of these, and address a few salient features to suit the limited confines of a paper. It must be mentioned that the phenomena selected are not isolated occurrences in the text of HHT. The main concern, the uncontrived and spontaneous consonance between the two cultural systems, and between man and his environment, is abundant and consistent in the entire chapter of the visit to India, as it is in most parts of HHT. The approximately 43 pages of the chapter in question are heavily laden with diverse occurrences that may be brought to bear as witness to the truth of this claim: the depth and richness of the descriptions, the images of plenitude and magnanimity of conduct, the purpose and significance of numbers and signs, the miraculous and superhuman encounters, the kinship-centered relationships - these are a few of the dominant elements in the text. Many of these elements defy the logic of reason, belonging to the dimension of marvel and magic. Since they do not belong to the realm of reason, or of the secular, a positivistic approach in assessing them would be inappropriate and inadequate. Rather, a holistic, esoteric approach can reveal ample evidence of the spiritual truths they convey, and of the goodness and harmony of an inclusive, universal worldview of the Malay and Indian peoples and their interaction, that echo from the past.

CONCEPTUAL CONSTRUCTS AND DEFINITIONS

Prior to the textual understanding and interpretation which forms the thrust of the paper, some concepts and terms as they are specifically applied to the discussion are briefly explained in this section.

Traditionalism: Realities and worldviews

Traditionalism, also known as the perennial philosophy (Latin, *Sophia Perennis)*, refers to a school of thought propounded by an outstanding French metaphysician, René Guénon (1886-1951). Contemporary scholars such as Ananda Coomaraswamy, Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, Huston Smith, William Chittick, Harry Oldmeadow, James Cutsinger, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr have advocated Traditionalism "as an alternative to the secularist approach to religious phenomena" (Wikipedia 2007). Nasr has largely been responsible for its acceptance in Western academia and for its application to the comparative study of religions (Hahn et.al. 2001).

Although influential in the 20th century, the main ideas of the Traditionalists are based on the eternal principles present in all authentic traditions, originating from the Primordial Tradition itself. The conception of "Tradition" is based on the idea of *tradere,* transmission, of revealed principles that bind man to his divine origin. This is the foremost function of religion (Latin *religare*) – literally, "to bind" – man to his Creator. This principle is present in the *dharma* (Skt. *dhar*, to hold) of Hinduism which is loosely translated as the "eternal religion", and also recognizable in the *al-Hikmah al-Khalidah* or perennial philosophy of Islam.

Traditionalists discern between two dimensions of this pre-eternal bind. As pointed out by a foremost Traditionalist, Frithjof Schuon, one dimension is the exoteric or outward, phenomenal dimension of diverse religious traditions, also referred to as the "letter" of the Law or Doctrine of an individual religion. The other is the esoteric or inward, nuomenal significance beyond the diversity of religious forms, which is the

"spirit" or Essence of the Law. In the view of Schuon the unity or shared principles which he refers to as the "transcendent unity of religions" lies at this esoteric dimension or Tradition. In this view, "the historically separated traditions share not only the same divine origin but are based on the same metaphysical principles (Wikipedia 2007). Thus correspondences and affinities are detectable because they originate from shared metaphysical principles. The origin of these principles is the Absolute or Ultimate Reality which is the unknowable, supra-personal Beyond-Being, expressed as *Brahman* (Skt. literally, "no two", and "the One without a second") in the Vedantic tradition of Hinduism.

The approach of the Traditionalists may be applied to the study of literary texts, or more specifically the study of symbols in literary texts, to reveal the spiritual dimensions and essential truths inherent in symbols.[iv] The relevant ideas which are adopted to the needs of the present study may be summarized as follows: Firstly, higher levels of reality are expressed in symbolic language. Secondly, different traditions represent these realities by different symbols. Thirdly, and consequently, the meanings of traditional symbols are determined by the individual traditions. In the context of these ideas, the literary elements of the HHT text will be interpreted in order to understand the symbolism at the highest level. However, it must be stated that the application of these ideas is specifically to augment our understanding of the forms of expression, rather than to address issues of doctrine and metaphysics of the differing mystical traditions.

The main distinction made between conventional literary symbols, and traditional, spiritual symbols is that the former are subjective, arbitrary, individual, or creative expressions of the poet, whereas the latter is objective and has a precision in reference that is determined by its particular tradition. In fact, in the Traditionalists' view, symbolism is seen as an "exact science," and symbols represent the "technical" terms that authors employ in their works, and members of that tradition recognise. It is this recognition that facilitates the interpretation of symbols that are specific to a culture and religion.[v] Thus the interpretation of spiritual meaning takes place not arbitrarily or subjectively, but bound by the authority of the specific tradition.

In the traditional worldview, man, projected and manifested in the earthly domain, embodies primordial perfection and divinity. In Schuon's terms, Adamic,[vi] or primordial man is "relatively absolute" in relation to the Absolute. In this worldview,

> ... man affirms the Divine Principle in the human form by virtue of his being made 'in the image' (Latin *imago Deī*) of a Divine Being ... , his human nature expressed totality and completeness. ... he could see things directly ... and he symbolically walked with God (Herlihy 2003).

Thus the fundamental proposition is that traditional, or , "Primordial man saw God everywhere, ... and he was not enclosed in the alternative 'flesh or spirit'" (Schuon 2003). This is the particular context in which a classic text set in bygone times such HHT may be understood esoterically. And thus the diction and descriptions may take one beyond the direct and literal understanding, to a symbolic and allegoric one.

Tolerance - or encounter and engagement?

The word "tolerance" has been widely touted as the answer to conflicting religious and cultural differences. I would soundly dispute this. Such an expectation is fundamentally flawed if the anticipated result of tolerance is harmony. The definition of the verb, "to tolerate" is as follows: "Endure or bear (pain or hardship)" (NSOED 1997).[vii] While such an approach might augur well for Stoics of 300 B.C. Greece, the negativity attached to this understanding in the context of human diversity in the present, globalised context, is self-evident. In a different sense, to tolerate means: "to allow the existence, occurrence, or practice of (esp. a particular religion) without authoritative interference".

While this appears to be a more neutral, even conducive stance, the flaw lies in the fact that it involves no understanding or interest at the level of the individual, but rather, the placing of responsibility squarely upon authorities. For the individual, the approach bears connotations of the endurance of an inconvenient fact(or), precisely that of cultural diversity. Similarly, a further definition: "Treat with forbearance; find endurable, adopt a liberal attitude towards; accept without protest" is similarly flawed and insufficient, because the freedom of a "liberal attitude" does not guarantee the far-reaching demands of responsibility, besides being stoical in acceptance. Thus it may be said that on the whole, tolerance may be rejected as an attitude that falls far short of expectations. It is inadequate and ineffective in overcoming grave challenges of diversity between different cultural and religious communities of the world, especially in the context of globalisation.

On the other hand, if one looks to "engagement" and "encounter", the challenges of human diversity may not only be adequately met, but also yield a fruitful and harmonious coexistence.[viii] Engagement and encounter involves a number of deeply ingrained principles such as the aprioristic *acceptance* of human diversity, the *conviction* that diversity is a purposeful act of pre-ordained divine Will, and the *celebration* of diversity by recognising and highlighting differences as well as shared values. Towards this end the revealed texts of the world provide ample direction. The Qur'an states that the human race has been deliberately cast in different communities so that they can interact, understand, and learn from each other (xxxix:13). In another verse it is said, "... If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single People, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you; so strive as in a race in all virtues" (v:51). The words of the Bhagavad Gita resonate with similar principles:

> One who sees the Supersoul in every living being and equal everywhere does not degrade himself by his mind. Thus he approaches the transcendental destination ... When a sensible man ceases to see different identities, which are due to different material bodies, he attains to the Brahman (13:29-31)

The priceless message of these two traditions, echoed by other major religious traditions of the world, is that both diversities and commonalities of humanity may be fused harmoniously, not by merely tolerating, but actively engaging, encountering, and relating with other cultures and religions. It does not mean the homogenising of cultures but on the contrary, the recognition and maintenance of heterogeneity and plurality. Thus the richness of individual cultures may be shared and understood *on their own terms* rather than by being held up to designated templates and norms. This can engender a

meaningful dialogue, sensitise one's sense of human relatedness and interdependence, and heighten the highly-desired awareness of the "self" in the "other". This principle is noticeably embodied in the Malay word *kami*, the inclusive "we" which encompasses a sense of "you-me". In this regard, literary texts, particularly those of an uncontrived, traditional worldview that directly nourish the mind and imagination, are indeed catalysts in nurturing understanding and harmony.

ENCOUNTER WITH INDIA

The event of a mission to India comes about through a royal command. The Ruler of Melaka, Tuanku Syah Alam, is troubled by the enmity with, and threat from, the nearby kingdom of Majapahit.[ix] It is hoped that alliance with India (Bijaya Nagaram, (meaning, City of Victory)[x] will serve the safety of Melaka, and the choice of envoy falls on Hang Tuah because he "knows the Keling (assumed, Tamil) language, and besides he knows the protocol of all kings" (HHT 410).[xi] A letter to the Indian king is composed, supplies for the trip are arranged, gifts duly organized, and the party of Hang Tuah sets sail for its destination. All said and done it is an apparently politically motivated, diplomatic mission.

Details of the depiction, and the diction however, allow an interpretation that it is much more than the apparent. This may be evidenced by several factors. Firstly, in this episode the protagonist is always referred to as *laksamana* (never Hang Tuah). This begs the question, why does the teller of the tale do so?[xii] The persona, definitions, and associations of the word, might provide the answer. At the mythological level, *laksamana* is prefigured in ancient Hindu scriptural texts precisely as Lakshmana. According to the *Puranas,* Lakshmana is an incarnation of Naga (Lord of Serpents), and an inalienable part of Rama, The Perfect Man (*Purushottama*). In the *Ramayana*, Lakshmana is an invincible warrior totally devoted to the service of Rama, never coveting the throne of Ayodhya nor hesitating to join his brother in exile, serving him with unswerving loyalty, love and commitment. Thus Lakshmana symbolizes selflessness and due respect of a man for elders and superiors.[xiii] The characterization of Hang Tuah in HHT accurately reflects each of these aspects: of warrior, of respectful disposition, of selfless loyalty and service, of *kembara* (Malay, to roam, wander), corresponding to the idea of *pravrajana* in Sanskrit, meaning to go forth, set out for, exile or banishment.

The word, *laksamana* literally means admiral in Malay and in Sanskrit. In the Malay naval tradition, a *laksamana* personifies the function and power of one who has command of a ship.[xiv] Especially in the traditional worldview, this persona is connected to spiritual navigation, as will be shown in a subsequent example. At the lexical level, *laksa* means one-hundred thousand, indicative of abundance, and symbolic of spiritual plenitude and treasures of the spiritual "mansions". It also means, a sign, a mark to aim at, target, etc. Thus, the association with Laksmi, Goddess of Fortune and Prosperity, *laksana*, intellect, sight; *laksabhuta*, that which has become the aim or object (of all). Or *laksanika*, meaning "acquainted with signs, an interpreter of marks or sign; indicatory, expressing indirectly or figuratively." A search for substrings of *laksa* shows more exciting results: *ahitalaksana* noted or known for good qualities; or *buddhilaksana* a sign of intellect or wisdom.

Next, *mana/maan* means mind, intellect. Also, devotion, regard, respect, honour, or proof, demonstration. Thus, as a prefix, it conveys positive meanings, as in *manaapa* gaining the heart, attracting; *manahputa,* pure in heart, mentally pure. Thus the collocation or combination of *laksa-* and *-mana* produces not only many positive significances, but also refers directly to qualities and attributes of Hang Tuah. In this context, it may be that for the teller of the story, the choice of *laksamana* as term of reference to Hang Tuah indicates that it personifies and embodies the positive qualities mentioned. Thus the reference as *laksamana* is a purposeful, rather than random, choice in diction.

The contention here relates to the traditional worldview of a warrior. A consummate warrior (Skt. *viraha*; Malay, *wira*)[xv] not only engages in war at the physical level, but most importantly at the inward level. In Islam this principle is referred to as "the Greater War" (*jihad*) and in Hinduism epitomized by the warrior castes (*kshatriya*) engaging in the epic Battle of Kurukshetra. This principle lies at the heart of the issues of conflict and conquest, both literal and figurative, in HHT. In this context, the restraint and control accomplished in one's utterances at all times, as Hang Tuah is portrayed to have, demands introspection and battle with the self, as well as great vigilance of mind and spirit. Furthermore, this is a spiritual trait which is a constant adjunct to the act of putting the other before the self, or even viewing the other as the self. This applies to both Hang Tuah the character as well as the worldview of the *empunya ceritera* or the "owner of stories" of classical Malay texts whose worldview Hang Tuah characterizes and personifies.[xvi]

To continue with the issue of an affirmative Malay view of Indians, the attitude displayed takes the mission of Hang Tuah beyond a diplomatic mission per se. The term *Benua Keling*, meaning the Indian Continent, indicates a positive view. The word "Continent" (rather than state, or region of Bijaya Nagaram), indicates an outlook of a geographically vast, as well as politically powerful, entity. The word, *Keling* in classical Malay texts in all probability originates from the ancient empire Kalinga on the Coromandel coast of India, and to traders from that area. Thus *Keling* refers without any negative connotations, to Indians from the south. It is also associated with Kalinga, an ancient Indian tribe that fought alongside the Kauravas in the illustrious Battle of Kurukshetra, richly portrayed in the *Mahabharata*. It is mentioned in the *Mahabharata* that the Kalingas are *highly blessed, know what the eternal religion (sanatana dharma) is* (8:45), and that during his 12-year pilgrimage, Arjuna, charioteer of Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* (popularly known as the *Gita*), a foremost scriptural source of Hinduism, *visited all the regions of sacred waters and other holy places in Kalinga, travelling the whole of ancient India* (1:127). In the period of the Islamisation of Southeast Asia, and in the context of the Melaka Sultanate, *keling* refers specifically to Indian Muslims. Today, the terms *keling/kelinga*, in Malaysia draw different responses: on one hand, some Malays are proud of it,[xvii] in some cases it is neutral.[xviii] However for the most part, it has degenerated to a pejorative term, to refer especially to Indian Tamils. Tamils take a certain degree of offence to this label, as it carries connotations of poor, uneducated, downtrodden workers from the estates. The Malay idiomatic expression, *karam keling* for example, is a disparaging form of reference to Indians, indicating noisy, unruly, melodramatic behavior and speech. This is certainly a far cry from the noble heritage of the past.

Apart from the apparent historical, geographical or political associations, the assumption may be made that culturally, the Malay-Muslim Ruler of Melaka has no hesitation or bias in establishing his kinship with an Indian-Hindu king. Admittedly the Ruler of Melaka is motivated by a desire to align himself politically with the Indians, but it is interesting that the connection forged is on a basis of immediate kinship, and not as ally or associate or friend, or any of the "unholy alliances" customarily formed for fulfulling diplomatic agendas as such. Specifically, the Indian king is "our relative" (*saudara kita*) (410). When *saudara* is phonetically associated with *se-darah* (*se-* meaning the same, or similar) it means of or from the same blood. According to the narration in HHT, the Sultan of Melaka and the Ruler of Benua Keling, Kisna Rayan are siblings from the same father who is in Bukit Siguntang.[xix] However, when they were young, in Melaka, they quarreled and parted ways. The Sultan wants therefore, to restore that sibling relationship. Accordingly, the Malay ruler says, "we want to send an envoy ... to our noble younger brother (*paduka adinda*)... the ruler who is a great king" (410).

In this instance, the fraternal relationship of "the self" with "the other" is evident, as is the affirmative view of "the other", deemed "a great king".[xx] At a deeper level, the sentiments expressed hint at the original kinship of all humans, or the human race, as articulated in the *Manu Dharmashastra,* the Hindu scriptural authority of righteous human conduct. Then again, perhaps in his quest Hang Tuah has mastered that eternal "language of languages",[xxi] the spiritual means of expression that unites mankind. This assumption is based on the fact that Hang Tuah learned (*mengaji*) the Keling language from a religious teacher. The term *mengaji* is used in the original Malay text in the context of learning the language, whereas it means to read the Quran; to study; to learn knowledge. Thus all of Hang Tuah's learning is seen to be centred on a specific, religious context, opening a portal to the mystical dimensions.

A letter to the Indian king is composed in an enchanting "garland of words" (*mengarang surat*) expressing the purpose of the mission in the following terms:

> ... because your elder brother misses you extremely, and has pent up yearning (*rindu dendam*) to hear from you and from your esteemed pen (*kalam yang muazam*) ... and between Melaka and Benua Keling there should rightly be closeness and there is no artifice in that (411).

By way of explication it may be said that when a connection exists between "blood brothers" there is indeed no artifice in cultivating it. Therefore the deliberate emphasis on elements of brotherhood and benevolence vis-à-vis the relations between Melaka and India sets the tone for a journey that goes beyond artificial and superficial bonds. Yet, it is a bond that is at the same time, necessarily cross-cultural in nature.

Of immense significance in terms of inter-cultural harmony, as well as cultural plurality are the historical facts concerning Vijayanagar, an empire of southern India of the 12th and 13th centuries, and the Bijaya Nagaram of Hang Tuah's mission. According to sources,

> Vijayanagar became the greatest empire of southern India. By serving as a barrier against invasion by the Muslim sultanates of the north, it fostered the reconstruction of Hindu life and administration after the disorders and disunities of the 12th and 13th centuries. Contact with the Muslims (who were not personally disliked) stimulated new thought and creative

> productivity. Sanskrit was encouraged as a unifying force, and regional literatures thrived. Behind its frontiers the country flourished in unexampled peace and prosperity (Brittanica On-line 2007).

Of special interest here are the facts about the empire of Vijayanagar: firstly, the fact of conflict, the Muslim invasion, and that Vijayanagar served "as a barrier against" it; secondly, the fact of harmony, that "contact with the Muslims stimulated new thought and creative productivity". Between these two facts, language (Sanskrit) served as a unifying force. This concurrence of discord *and* accord between the Hindu and the Muslim cultures reflects the well-established view about the nature of centuries of Moghul rule in India, illustrating the remarkable possibilities of not just coexisting in peace *in spite of* differences, but thriving as *a result of* them. The facts encapsulate the view in the fiction with regard to the Malay perspective of the Indians. Evidently Hang Tuah's mission goes beyond "tolerance", and beyond a visit, a mission, or any label that may be appropriately diplomatic in tone. Rather, it embodies the principles of engagement and encounter. The truth of this claim will be intensified further with regard to details of the voyage *to* India, and an event *in* India.

Voyage to India

Principal facets of the voyage are the ubiquitous numbers, signs and personae featured. It is narrated that the mission comprising 12 vessels sails with *laksamana* aboard the Mendam Berahi for seven days and seven nights, steered by a pilot who is also competent in understanding signs (*melihat alamat*) (414). In this narration, *mendam berahi*, an archaic Malay expression, may be translated as *penahan nafsu* which literally means "suppressor of lust". Thus the voyage to India is on one level, a physical (sensual and sexual) test of endurance. On a spiritual level the endurance serves as and contributes to the purification from sensual and earthly desires, a crucial process in the spiritual life. The transformational power of water is a well-known metaphor of spiritual purification. Besides, on a metaphorical level the journey is a *kembara*, a centrifugal wandering forth in quest of meaningful encounters with the other or that which is strange and alien. Also metaphorically, "to sail the seven seas" may refer to the charting of new waters, a quest for the unknown. Symbolically, the vessel may be seen as the body and the sea as life experiences and challenges one engages in. On a metaphysical level it is an advancement inwards, an introspection, a journey of coming to know the self. Each one of these levels of understanding point to a harmony of intention and action, with one's environment, physical or otherwise.

The voyage takes 7 days and 7 nights for the stops on the way. The number 7 has a sacred significance in both the Indian and the Malay cultures, being invested with holy attributes (*keramat*). The journey of the ascent (*mikraj)* of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, passed through the 7 heavens. Equally important, during the Muslim pilgrimage to Mekah (*haj*), a pilgrim circumambulates the Ka'ba 7 times; and casts 7 stones at the Devil. Religious significances also hold in the Hindu religion. There are 7 levels of earth (*bhumi loka*) and 7 levels of heaven (*swarga loka*); in a happy marriage one hopes to be reincarnated in 7 lives with the same spouse etc. The narration of the total number of days taken, including stopping at places on the way (the island, the colonised territories (*jajahan*) of Benua Keling, the river mouth) is 18 (or 7+1+3+7) (413-4). In the Hindu system of numerology, the number 18 is represented thus: 7+1+3+7=18=1+8=9, with 9 being the highest possible prime number. Thus it is a celestial number – there are nine

celestial spheres, and nine degrees in the hierarchy of the angels, and nine corresponds, geometrically, to the circumference of the circle (Lings 1991). Allah provided Moses with *Nine clear Signs* of His power to show Pharaoh (xvii:101). Therefore it may be said that the numbers in the narration are not incidental or inadvertent, but a deliberate choice.

When asked by the admiral how much longer the voyage would take, the pilot of the ship replies: "until we see the signs" (414). This evokes the Qur'anic verse: *We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves* (xli:53). The persona of the pilot, in charting the journey and guiding the ship in consonance with "signs", also allows a religious application. God gives man His signs (*ayat*), for example through the elements, nature, and so on. The crossing of the waters (the seas) is a well-established feature of major religious traditions of the world as a symbol of transformation and purification. Besides, the voyage may be associated with an inward journey, as the word used for pilot, *mualim,* also includes the religious sense of the word to mean religious scholar. Esoterically, one can describe the voyage thus: the religious instruction is a preparation or purification for a spiritual path to a spiritual destination. This interpretation sees Hang Tuah as one who is well-versed in his religion. This is a fundamental prerequisite in moving upwards, or inwards to a subsequent spiritual station (Ar. *maqam)* on the path to God (Ar. *tariqa*).

Briefly, it may be said of the discussion in this section that elements regarding the mission from its initiation to the voyage itself, point towards a different, and deeper, dimension of the narrative than a purely political or secular aspect. It should be noted that all the aspects of the voyage *to* India are in fact, preparation, in terms of spiritual purification for the enormous event of Hang Tuah's meeting with his spiritual master in the person of a saint of the highest order in the Sufi tradition. Khidir, assuming the role of the master appears to him (referred to as Nabi Khidhir in the narrative) (414). The discussion of details which allows deeply religious and mystical interpretations of this encounter between *murshid* and *murid* (spiritual guide and pupil) is beyond the scope of this paper. It is sufficient to mention here that India has been called the spiritual home of the major religious and mystical traditions of the world because it has witnessed and nurtured the flowering of both indigenous (Hinduism, Buddhism) and alien (Christianity, Islam) religious systems on a sustained basis. In this connection, Hang Tuah's encounter may be viewed as testimony to the participation of the Malays in a universal belief system that was shared by cultures spreading from India, through to the Middle East and Southeast Asia. In this context the HHT contributes significantly to the innate cross-cultural harmony that existed in its time and in its originating society.

The Mounting of the Giant Horse

The idea of Hang Tuah's connection to India being of spiritual significance may be further illustrated and applied in the discussion of an event that occurs *in* India. To situate the event of the horse ride appropriately, it needs to be known that during Hang Tuah's stay in Bijaya Nagaram, he engages with Kisna Rayan, the great Indian king, Nala Sang Guna, a member of the royal entourage, and the Indian subjects, on myriad levels throughout the duration of his stay. To name only a few, the consequences and influence of the extraordinary characteristics and personality of Hang Tuah on the Indians, his materialising of an enormous tree, his unforeseen appointment as India's envoy to China, his respectful preoccupation in visiting a Hindu temple, his influence in the bearing of a

child to the childless Nala Sang Guna, his solution to the alarming problem of the shortage of firewood for cooking.

Having established his position and endeared himself to the Indians, on one occasion Kisna Rayan challenges Hang Tuah to display his skills in horsemanship. Again, beyond the apparent challenge and the display, the occasion allows interpretation of rich essential significances. Says Kisna Rayan: "Hey admiral do you know how to mount a large swift steed (*kuda tezi*) ... there is a horse of ours ... it is extremely fine, there has never been one who has mounted it" (426). This description foreshadows the skittish nature of the horse. What follows is described in the extract below:

> So the admiral bowed in obeisance (*menyembah*) saying, 'Long live my lord, your slave requests forgiveness and favour from the Dust of the Feet of your Most Noble Highness (*ke bawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia*). I know how, but only if it is on the royal command of Syah Alam (Lord of the World) is your slave bold enough to mount (426).

From the diction in the above extract it is clear that Hang Tuah communicates in deferential gestures and speech. The concept of *menyembah* applies to a physical act of deference at many levels - ordinary human, royal, or divine. The same may be said of his utterance of utmost verbal deference. The cross-cultural integration in the phrase *ke bawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia*, is displayed in the literal English translation above, of a formulaic utterance by the Malay soceity. In the traditional Hindu practice, it applies both in the royal and divine contexts, in accordance with the concept of god-king (*deva raj*). In this worldview, kings are God's representative on earth, of divine descent, and regarded as beings above ordinary mortals. In this context, a bearing and conduct of highest honour (*maha mulia*) is incumbent on royalty, and accordingly complemented by the subjects in terms of deference shown. Thus the language and the act places the whole interaction on a religious basis. The gesture and the speech is a shared practice in both the Indian and the Malay cultures of the past, and traces of it still linger in certain contexts of contemporary Malay society.

And so the command is decreed and the horse brought before the royal assembly hall. The depiction of the horse is as follows:

> ... the horse was 6 *hasta* in height.[xxii] And it appeared to be shining and as green as a beetle's wings and its bearing was as if it did not tread the earth and its disposition was that of an excited lion (426-7).

The hyperbolic and superlative description of the sight of the horse effectively conveys the picture of an exceedingly large, extraordinary animal. At a deeper level, the ferocious shining steed whose feet do not tread the ground, conveys the image of a super-normal, creature with mythical and theological connotations. The horse is a symbol of amplified energy , and has as its purpose the empowerment of the ruler as a universal monarch. Tamed, the horse symbolizes forces that can be controlled to benefit society.[xxiii] Hindu mythology is rich with the glory of horses. In the *Puranas*, the horse Vivasvat (also known as Visvakarman, Architect of the Universe) is a solar stallion, pulling the sun. According to the *Vishnu Purana*, at the end of time (*Kaliyuga*) the final incarnation of Vishnu (Kalki) will appear riding a white horse named Devaduta (Ambassador of the Gods). In the Islamic tradition, the *buraq, a* human-faced, winged horse sped the Prophet

through the seven Heavens. In this context, it may be said that in the king's challenge to Hang Tuah to tame this horse lies a much more profound significance than merely a test of his prowess as a horseman. It may be related rather, to the taming of the ego, through divine grace and intervention.

This may be further substantiated by events that follow, and especially by the diction of the account. The admiral pays obeisance to the king, and adjusts his *keris* (or kris, a double-bladed dagger) to the fore in a symbolic gesture of acceptance and preparation. Approaching the horse he takes hold of the reins and whispers to the keeper of the horse to teach him the secret to the mounting of the swift steed (427). Here again Hang Tuah finds recourse in the subtle and spiritual realities. Firstly, in the Malay culture, the kris of Hang Tuah, *Taming Sari*, is an illustrious emblem of the Malay race, believed to possess *sakti* (energy and power) and *keramat* (sacral attributes). Secondly, the whispered request and instructions between Hang Tuah and the horse keeper is suggestive of a spiritual method, the whispered instructions of the *murshid* to his *murid* in revealing the secret of the invocation of the Supreme Name. It may also refer to a divine self-Disclosure by God to a purified and beloved servant (Ar. *al-sirr*, secret; Skt. *guhya-tamam*, confidential knowledge). Thirdly, the word *syarat* in the text, apart from the mundane meaning of "condition", has many other senses: stipulation, assurance, requirement, fees given to martial arts teacher or shaman, and thus means more than a physical method of riding a horse. All the elements mentioned provide a deeper dimension to this action of Hang Tuah.

Besides, the word *tezi/teji* in Malay (describing the horse) may be etymologically related to the Sanskrit term *tej* or *teja*, a concept which has spiritual associations. *Tej* means sharpness. In the spiritual context this relates to spritual discernment or discrimination between the Real and the unreal, and *tejas* is splendour, brilliance, light, energy, spirit, spiritual or moral or magical power or influence, majesty, dignity, glory, etc. In the *Rig Veda* it is fire. In the context of commencement of instructions from a guru to his student, a line from a well-known *sloka* (verse) of the *Katha Upanishad* includes the petition, *may we acquire the capacity for brilliance* (*tejasvina vadhitamastu*). In the Gita, a reference to Krishna's power is referred to as *tejomayam visvam*, meaning, My universal divine splendour (11:47). Thus the spiritual associations are copious, and consistent with the symbolism of the horse as discussed above.

Once he has received the special instructions for mounting the horse, the admiral leaps onto its back and speeds away. What follows of the horse-ride is described thus:

> ... the horse jumped like lightning, moving as if it did not touch the ground. And the garments of the admiral were rent to shreds, flying in pieces behind him. Then the admiral remembered what had been taught by his *guru* the keeper of the horse (427).

Whereas on the surface this is apparently a description of a man riding a very fast horse, esoterically interpreted it yields different levels of meaning. The association of the horse's movement with lightning heightens the image of swiftness as well as indicates immediate participation in the elements and/or nature. The description of the horse not touching the ground amplifies the surreal effect of speed of the event, indicating acceleration and force in a spiritual context. This is associated not with temporal speed but rather suggests a "quantum leap" from the physical context of time, into the "time

warp" of physics, that corresponds to the metaphysical context of eternity. Thus Hang Tuah participates in the subtle realities where "time" is "timeless". Hang Tuah's clothes being rent is evocative of the Sufi concept of rending of the garments as a metaphor for the shredding of the ego (*nafs*) in purification for union with God, or shedding of personal vanity. This is further intensified with the information that pieces of his garments are flying behind him, interpreted as symbolic of the leaving behind, or shedding of, the last vestiges of the "self" or the individuality of Hang Tuah, to attain awareness of his state of annhiliation (Ar. *fana*) or nothingness before God. Finally, the mention that he "remembered" what he had been taught by the *guru* evokes the mystical practice of *zikir*, the remembrance of God through the unceasing recitation of the Divine Names as practiced by the Sufis. The fact that Hang Tuah "remembers" the "teachings", with specific mention of his "guru" or spiritual teacher, situates the incident equivocally and expressly in mystical circumstances.

To summarise, this act of Hang Tuah's, as well as all the other aspects of the event of his victory over of the great horse shows clearly that it is more than a proof of his manliness, or horsemanship, or heroism – it is a spontaneous reflection of his religiosity, and the centrality of God to his every act. Hang Tuah is a traditional man for whom every act is an act of worship and every human endeavour a remembrance of, and praise of, his Creator. This view or interpretation harkens back to the original premise of understanding of the text in this paper, "Believing is seeing." This is associated with the reason for Creation, expressed in the beautiful "holy utterance" loved by Sufis: *I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be known, and so I created the world* (in Lings 1991). In a similar metaphor of treasure the Gita expresses the purpose of man's existence, that is, to gain spiritual realization in the knowledge that: *Of the splendid I am the splendour/ ... of the Pandavas I am the winner of wealth* (10:36-7). The view of the purpose of life for traditional man mirrors the Qur'anic verse: *The seven Heavens and the earth and all that is therein glorify Him, nor is there anything but glorifieth Him with praise; yet ye understand not their glorification* (xvii:44). A correspondence in the Hindu scripture is not difficult to find: *Whatsoever being there is, endowed with glory and grace and vigour, know that to have sprung from a fragment of my splendor* (10:41)

CONCLUSION

By studying a text in that is set in traditional Melaka and India, and in the mythical past rather in the contemporary world, it is possible to contextualise the principle of harmony with a certain detachment and objectivity. Certainly it is admitted that in current times conditions have changed that perhaps make it too challenging to practice or foster harmony at a level and scale that has been shown to exist in HHT. Be that as it may, the wisdom of the past gives us a template for observing principles that are immutable, as well as for practices that are certainly adaptable to suit the contemporary milieu.

Based on the textual study and interpretation, the insights gained into the worldview that is embodied in the character of Hang Tuah and in his deeds, argue for the wisdom of the past and the traditional realities. If this dimension is not addressed, the fullness of the text is bound to be overlooked, and the richness of the work undermined.[xxiv] Besides, as far as the harmony of cross-cultural relations is concerned, the overall portrayal and the diction spell an inherent accord. The nature of this accord between two different cultural and belief systems, the Indian-Hindu and the Malay-

Muslim, is not incidental or accidental or even coincidental. Rather it is spontaneous and unconscious, lending itself easily to the identification of valid parallels, and having much to show us of the way to unity and accord that has been forgotten. Ultimately it epitomises the profound truth that the Traditionalists call the transcendent unity of religions.

ENDNOTES

[i] In Kassim Ahmad 1992.

[ii] All the extracts used in this paper are taken from Kassim Ahmad's transliterated Malay version of the text of the HHT in the Jawi script. I have translated them into English deliberately to preserve and reflect the worldview and language in the original Malay text. The innocence and simplicity of the society is mirrored in the unconscious artlessness of the language of the period. There is currently no English translation of the work published as yet, although Malaysian National Laureate, Muhammad Haji Salleh has recently completed translating the text of HHT into English. The *Kamus Perwira* Malay-English Dictionary (1998) was consulted for translating the extracts for this paper.

[iii] An approximate time frame of the society portrayed is the "Golden Age" of Melaka, c.1456-1511 (Kassim 1992).

[iv] The explanation in the following paragraphs is extracted from the author's upcoming book, *Unveiling the Garden of Love: Mystical Symbolism in* Layla Majnun *and* Gitagovinda, currently in press with World Wisdom publications, Indiana U.S.A.

[v] See, Coomaraswamy, 1989, p.131. For an excellent elucidation of the particularity in meaning of sacred symbols, see Ghazi bin Muhammad 2001.

[vi] In Sanskrit, *Adi* meaning First or Foremost, and the Hindi/Urdu *aadmi* meaning man or person, have equivalent semantic significance.

[vii] All definitions in English are extracted from a digital version of the New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, January 1997. Version 1.0.03. Oxford University Press, London, and Electronic Publishing B.V. Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

[viii] This discussion draws heavily from Md. Salleh Yaapar's essay (2007).

[ix] The Sultan of Melaka is the son-in-law of the Ruler of Majapahit; the ruler is angry because the sultan has taken another wife, Tun Teja of Indrapura/Pahang.

[x] As referred to in the text. Bijaya Nagaram refers, in all probability, to Vijayanagar, (previously of the Mysore kingdom), a city of great ruins in present-day Andhra Pradesh, south India. See "Britannica Online Encyclopaedia", http://www.britannica.com/ eb/article-9075336/Vijayanagar (accessed on 25 September 2007).

[xi] All further quotations from the text of HHT will state only the page number in brackets.

[xii] Special thanks to my mentor and friend Professor Md. Salleh Yaapar for his unreserved generosity in sharing ideas and for the enthralling discussions on relevant cross-cultural significances.

[xiii] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lakshmana (accessed on 25 September 2007).

[xiv] Laksamana Abdul al-Jamil, the powerful Johor courtier who in retaliation captured the capital of Jambi in 1679, is possibly a model for the character of Hang Tuah (quoted in Md. Salleh 2007).

[xv] All terms in Sanskrit are quoted by reference to the "Cologne Digital Sanskrit Lexicon." http://sanskritdocuments.org/dict/ (accessed 24 September 2007); specific Islamic terms or those of spiritual significance in Malay, where synonymous with the terms in Arabic, are from the *Kamus Dewan* (1989) Malay dictionary. If they are not found in this dictionary, Arabic terms are used as they appear in the different sources of reference.

[xvi] The HHT originates from the oral tradition of the Malays.

[xvii] Some have it as part of their names, e.g. Professor Zainal Keling.

[xviii] As place names, e.g. Tanjung Keling.

[xix] Referring to Siguntang mountain as well as the mythical, sacred Mount Mahameru, which symbolizes the divine origin of Malay kings.

[xx] The use kinship terms as deferential terms is reciprocal between the Indians and the Malays and prevalent in the speech of all the characters. For example, at the level of the commoner: "...the admiral conveyed his respects, invited the harbour master to sit down '... you are like a father to us, your slaves.' And the harbour master felt love for the admiral for he spoke so humbly and words that came forth from his lips were so sweet. The harbour master said, 'what would be wrong if my children were to accept me as your father. It is true these children are my children'" (415). Higher up the social hierarchy, Nala Sang Guna's wife says to Hang Tuah's men 'these sir, are a mother's gift of outfits. Make no mistake; it is nothing but as a sign that mother takes you sirs, as children, because father and mother do not have children; sirs will be our children." To this, the admiral replies: 'In the heart of this enslaved one (*diperhamba*) it is the same; the father of mother, in the afterlife is the father of this slave, there is no doubt, in the name of Allah!" (426). At the level of royalty, Kisna Rayan says: 'Hey admiral, what news of my father in Mount Siguntang and my royal elder brother in Melaka?' (423).

[xxi] In the ancient civilizations referred to as "green language" and the "language of the Birds." It refers to the oblique writing styles used by alchemists, magicians, and other mystical initiates to communicate with one another publicly while 'concealing' the information from the hostile or unworthy. In the Christian tradition it appears in the following context: And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? (King James 2:8). http://altreligion.about.com/library/glossary/symbols/bldefgreenlanguage.htm (accessed on 30 September 2007).

[xxii] One *hasta* (from elbow to tip of middle finger) is approximately 20 inches, which makes the horse about 10 feet tall.

[xxiii] In physics, using the British system, the unit of work is HP, horse-power. http://www. khandro.net/ animal_horse.htm (accessed on 20 September 2007).

[xxiv] In this context I disagree with Kassim Ahmad, eminent Malay scholar, that: "We certainly do not intend to compare those great epics (the *Illiad* and the *Odessey*) with this simple Malay epic".

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MAHIDOL-UKM 3

DIFINING HARMONY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: COMPETING DISCOURSES, CHALLENGES AND INTERPRETATIONS

The Third International Malaysia-Thailand Conference on Southeast Asian Studies

29 November – 1 December 2007

SESSION 3
Religion and Ethnicity

Chairperson: Dr.Wariya Chinwanno

1. Religious Tolerance in Multi–Ethnic Malaysia. - *Jayum A. Jawan, Zaid Ahmad, Mohd Mahadee Ismail* & Ahmad Fauzi Hj Morad

2. Challenges to Ethnic Harmony in Burma: A Historical Overview. - *Marja-Leena Heikkilä-Horn*

3. Marginalization as a Result of Statelessness: A Case Study of the Thai Undocumented People from Rom Thai Village. - *Thanida Boonwanno*

4. Historical Ethno-Symbolism and the Study of the Mon Ethnicity in Thailand. - *Patise Chuaykunoopakan*

Paper 1 Religious Tolerance in Malaysia: A Case Study in the Peninsular

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Abstract

Religious Tolerance: A Case Study in Peninsular Malaysia is a two-year, national research project sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE), Malaysia. The research attempted to gauge the level of understanding as well as the degree of tolerance among the various ethnic communities towards each other's religions and religious practices. In this respect, the study is a pioneering attempt to measure the level of understanding and degree of tolerance in the Peninsular. Previously, literature on and opinion expressed by various quarters on this subject have largely being based on general, isolated empirical evidences. In most instances, the general conclusions have been that there is a certain degree of tolerance among the various multi ethnic societies of Malaysia. But, on the continuum or scale of 0 to 10, where zero signifies the absence of tolerance and 10 being most tolerance, where exactly would the various ethnic communities be in that scale? This is the major question that this research addressed.

INTRODUCTION

The peoples of Malaysia are noted for being tolerance. This is one of a few characteristics that have frequently been ascribed to the Malay, Chinese, Indian, Kadazandusun and Dayak peoples that have helped them to peacefully live side by side since the formation of Malaysia in 1963.[1] As mobility and inter-connectedness increase as the year goes by, various incidents have from time to time flared up to challenge this basic assumption. Are contemporary Malaysians really tolerance as their forebears have been? Have this character waned as the degree of inter-connectedness increased? These are the basic questions that guide the formulation of this research.

This paper presents an extract of a result of a two year nationally-funded research on "Religious Tolerance in Malaysia". The case study was based on samples drawn exclusively from the Peninsula. The presentation of the study is organised into four sections. Firstly, the next section discusses some conceptual matters, including identifying the need of the study and discussing some concepts related to the study. In this section, the objectives of the study are also outlined. Secondly, the paper briefly discusses the research design that guided the collection of primary data especially. This

[1] Terms of the "Social Contract" of the Federation of Malaya (1948 and 1957) can attest to this, as well as the Malaysia Agreements that formed a unique federal state. For same details see Zaitul Himmah Adnan. 2006. Kontrak Sosial dan Perlembagaan Malaysia (Chapter 5) and Jayum A. Jawan. 2006. Perjanjian Malaysia dan Perlembagaan Malaysia. Both in Jayum A. Jawan & Zaid Ahmad (ed). Hubungan Etnik: Panduan Pengajaran & Pembelajaran. Serdang: Jabatan Pengajian Kenegaraan & Ketamadunan.

was the core of the whole study as the findings were based on them. Thirdly, the paper discusses some of the main findings related to religious tolerance among the three major ethnic groups in the Peninsula.

NATURE OF THE STUDY

This section discusses the basic concept of tolerance that is the central theme in this study. This is to clarify the concept so that the formulation of questions to be administered to randomly selected respondents may be done accordingly.

The Concept

What is Tolerance?

The term "tolerance" is too frequently used to describe perceptions and reactions of one ethnic community toward another. Malaysia prides itself in the fact that there is some degree of tolerance that has been exercised by one ethnic community towards another, be that among the Malay toward the Chinese or Indian and vice versa. In this context, tolerance is therefore associated with the withholding of some outbursts or objections at the way the other ethnic person or community do things that the former finds highly objectionable or even repulsive. The objection or repulsiveness could be associated with the ways one ethnic person or community does things, religious, cultural or political.

Religious Tolerance

Religious tolerance is one specific dimension of tolerance. It is about tolerating or the withholding of direct outburst or objections to those practices related to a particular religion. A resident may find objectionable his neighbour's practice of erecting a huge shrine in his lawn, but does nothing about it-i.e. does not complain. A resident's practice of holding feast outside his or her home in a residential area may be objectionable as it normally span several lawn areas and directly encroaching into frontal portion of his or her neighbours' spaces. Rearing of animals as pets such as dogs and cats can also be quite religiously sensitive to some people.

Religious tolerance study looked at these dimensions of behaviours, instead of the general tolerance of a non-specific nature.

The Problem

Religious tolerance is part of the overall problem and challenge relating to the question of nation building, integration and unity in plural Malaysia. In fact, it is one of the more important components that contribute to social harmony necessary to generate political stability that would continue to ensure economic prosperity. Understanding the nature of this problem is very important as a pre-condition to be able to better manage the delicate problem. The stakes, social harmony, political stability and economic prosperity, are too high not to undertake to better understand this problem and challenge.

The Nature of the Problem

The basic problem relating to religious tolerance, like other related problems of nation state building in Malaysia, is that Malaysians do not know precisely the nature and extent of the problem. Neither do they really know where their nation state stands in term of the degree of religious tolerance. This is in spite of the fact that this problem is fundamental to the very existence of the plural nation state.

For example, on a scale of 0 to 10 ("0" representing absolute absence of and a "10" a state of perfect religious tolerance), where do Malaysia and its plural society stand? Are Malaysia and its peoples merely hovering just above the minimal mark or level? If different opinions about Malaysia's state of affairs relating to nation building processes are any indication, then the situation is not that rosy.[2]

The Objective of the Study

This study is attempting something bold, that is, to measure the state of religious tolerance among the diverse ethnic communities in Malaysia. For a start, the study is confined to the Peninsula. More specifically, the study sought to measure (1) the level of understanding (knowledge) of selected respondents (a) about their own respective religion, (b) as well as religion of others, and (2) the level of religious tolerance of one ethnic community of the religious practice of another.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research utilises quantitative approach – which requires survey to be carried out among respondents using close-ended questionnaire. There were a total of 90 questions to be answered by respondents. Apart from answering close-ended questionnaires, an in-depth interviews and observations were also carried out among selected informants from the samples.

Population, Location and Sampling

In this research, the target population is the whole peninsula population. Altogether, there were 743 respondents randomly selected as samples (refer to Table 1).

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[2] See for examples, Jayum A. Jawan. 2006. Perpaduan Masyarakat Pelbagai Etnik dan Kesejahteraan Sosial. Paper presented at the Konvensyen Kebangsaan Pembentukan Masyarakat ke arah Masyarakat Sejahtera dan Saksama. Jointly organised by Institut Sosial Malaysia & Universiti Sains Malaysia, Prince Hotel, KL, 1 -2 June 2006, and "The Lonely Bridge Builder", New Straits Times, 19 February 2006 in which Khoo Kay Kim, a leading historian was reported to have said that the current state of affairs relating to inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia is "deplorable" especially in comparison before.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by State/ Region

State/Region	Population ('000)	Estimated Sample (%	Estimated Respondents	Actual Respondents
Johor	3101	4	119	89
Kedah	1848	4	72	31
Kelantan	1506	4	57	61
Melaka	713	4	28	31
Negeri Sembilan	946	4	38	26
Pahang	1427	4	56	49
Perak	2256	4	89	106
Perlis	225	4	9	30
Pulau Penang	1469	4	57	35
Selangor	4736	4	181	181
Terengganu	1017	4	39	38
Kuala Lumpur	1556	4	60	66
Total	**1585**	**48**	**805**	**743**

Source: Survey Data.

Samples were collected from both urban and rural areas. Particular attention was paid to the fact that priority of areas selected for the study was mixed residential ones. Areas selected and respondents targeted were based on a number of methods such as random sampling that was also supplemented by snowballing technique.

Field Work

Main data were collected using a set of questionnaire that were tested prior to the real/ actual data collection. In many instances, enumerators were hired. All were trained before being sent out to villages throughout the Peninsula. Random supervisions were carried out among all enumerators. This was done to ensure that they were doing their work according to briefing as well as schedule and pace that have been set for them. Furthermore, the appearance and involvement of research in fieldworks also contributed to respondents' responsiveness as the latter knew that they were dealing with peoples from the university. Furthermore, researchers were also interested in in-depth interviews among selected respondents in order to extract more details about personal experiences relating to the subject matter.

Analysis

The study set out to be a simple one and at best exploratory in nature. This was bearing in mind that this study was probably one of a few pioneering ones dealing with the "highly" sensitive issues in ethnic relations in Malaysia. Hence, the analysis was basically confined to the analysis of responses in term of percentage or frequencies.

The standard Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) programme was used to manage and analysed the data. It is from this analysis that responses in the form of frequencies were extracted and presented in the section on findings.

FINDINGS

Selected findings of the study are as presented below and under separate headings. These are extracts, and the full research findings may be referred to from the report already submitted to Universiti Putra Malaysia and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, Malaysia.

Knowledge of Own Religion

According to the survey, the majority of West Malaysians know about their own religion, whether that is of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism or Buddhism. The survey found that about 49% of the respondents confessed to having high level of knowledge of their own religion, while another about 44% to having an average level of knowledge. Only about 7% .31 admitted that they knew very little about their own religion.

Selected Indicators of Religious Tolerance

This sub-section presents selected indicators of religious tolerance. Understandably, these indicators will be subjected to debate. Nevertheless, they do provide some basis for initial discussion before more concrete ones may be acceptable and be able to contribute to better understanding this phenomenon in Malaysia.

Open House

One's willingness to attend open houses held by people of another religion is in fact a good first indicator to measure his or her tolerance of other religious practices. In this aspect, Malaysians have generally been quite a tolerance lots. A majority of about 62% of the respondents said that they were willing to attend open houses held by peoples of other religions, especially those celebrations held by their friends, colleagues and family members (Table 2). Only about 15% expressed strong feeling that they would not participate in such activities.

Table 2: Open Houses

Responses	Number	Percentage
Strongly Agree	126	17
Agree	334	45
Uncertain	171	23
Disagree	59	8
Strongly Disagree	52	7
All Responses	**742**	**100**

Source: Survey Data

"Open houses", a uniquely Malaysian tradition, is definitely a good start to promote better religious understanding, not just religious tolerance. Since early 2000s, the federal government has taken this tradition a step further when it decided to host them at federal level. This federal government's move was soon followed by some state government. It augurs well for not only religious diversities, but also cultural plurality that existed in contemporary Malaysia. However, lately, this tradition could have suffered a major setback when a Conference of Ulama (religious scholars) called for its review,

especially the 'Kongsi Raya" celebration[3]. The call for review would affect not only Kongsi Raya (shared celebrations), but others such Deepavali, Christmas, Gawai Dayak & Tadau Kaamatan as open celebrations celebrated by Malaysian of all faiths.

Inter-ethnic Relations

"Love is blind" says an adage. Well, how blind is it for Malaysian? At least 64% of the respondents said that they were willing to build friendship across the ethnic divide (Table 3). Only about 2% said that they would certainly not, while another 28% were undecided or unsure if they would. This is rather encouraging considering the facts that the various ethnic communities in the Peninsula have been divided during the long colonial rule and that inter-ethnic relations were harmed by numerous unfortunate incidents during the immediate pre-independence period-e.g. the Malayan Union, the communist insurgencies of the late 1940s, the emergency of 1948 and the ethnic riot of 1969.

Table 3: Acceptance of Friends from Other Religions

Responses	Number	Percentage
Strongly Agree	208	28
Agree	475	64
Uncertain	44	6
Disagree	14	2
Strongly Disagree	0	0
All Responses	**741**	**100**

Source: Survey Data

Ready to Discuss Religious Matter

The survey shows that the majority of the respondents indicated that they were not ready to openly discuss matter relating to religion. Only about 41% of the respondents said that they were ready for the open discussion about religion, while about 21% were certain that they were not ready then (Table 4). About 29% were unsure if they were then ready to take up the issue. Many cited that the matter was highly sensitive and that rationality may not rule the day although the intention may be good in wanting a religious dialogue between various followers of different religions.

[3] "Ulamas want kongsi raya celebrations reviewed", The Star, 14 June 2006. "Ulama (Islamic Scholars) Conference 2006" working committee chairman, Harussani Zakaria was reported to have said that "kongsi raya" celebration needed to be reviewed because the National Fatwa Committee had decided that celebrating the festivals of other religions could erode the faith of Muslims and that could lead to blasphemy. The Fatwa Committee's decision, however, was then still in its written form and has yet to be forwarded to the Government for action. The conference also came up with 22 other resolutions which would be presented to the Sultan of Perak, state government, Federal Government and the Council of Rulers. Harussani, who is also the Perak Mufti, said that the resolutions passed included asking all state Fatwa Councils to set up their respective action committee specifically to respond to views put forward by practitioners of liberalism and pluralism, which, he argued, attack the faith of Muslims.

Table 4: Readiness to Discuss Religious matters

Responses	Number	Percentage
Strongly Agree	67	9
Agree	297	40
Uncertain	215	29
Disagree	104	14
Strongly Disagree	52	7
All Responses	**735**	**99**

Source: Survey Data

However, while majority felt that religion can be discussed, many also felt it at the same time that the subject is rather too "sensitive" to be openly discussed. About 68% of the respondents were of the opinion that religious matters were too sensitive for open discussion (Table 5). Only a small proportion of about 13% felt that they are ready for the open dialogue on matters pertaining to religion. This finding appeared to contradict their earlier sentiment that it was alright to have some discussion over them.

Table 5: Religion too Sensitive for open discussion

Responses	Number	Percentage
Strongly Agree	223	30
Agree	275	37
Uncertain	141	19
Disagree	67	9
Strongly Disagree	30	4
All Responses	**736**	**100**

Source: Survey Data

The general findings indicate that the level of religious tolerance is not that high up on the scale. Feeling of "openness" is one thing but that feeling is not matched by overt action or behaviour of tolerance. Undoubted, it can be argued that there is a general all round tolerance among the various ethnic communities on various issues ranging from politic to economic as well as socio-religious ones. But until they are discussed, tolerances of them merely represent the suppression of these contending and contesting problems. It is not their solutions.

PERSISTING CHALLENGES

The major challenge in promoting religious tolerance and therefore understanding must be in the promotion of open and matured dialogues between relevant segments of the multi ethnic society. This is normally easy said than done. On one hand, when asked many Malaysians would readily admit that there is much to be done in this area. But when it comes to the unravelling and the promotion of dialogues, very few would think that such encounters could reasonably come about. Respondents' receptiveness to open dialogues between religious divides were rather high but on the other hand they also felt at the same time that the time was probably not fitting yet to hold one. After 43 years of Malaysia, when would then time be ever suitable and appropriate? The answer to this is held by Malaysians of various faiths. Are they really willing to come together to talk?

CONCLUSION

Religious tolerance is one cornerstone of the formation of the Federation of Malaysia. Before that, it was also important factor in the formation of the Federation of Malaya. Until religious understanding is promoted and valued as well as practiced by Malaysians of all faiths, religious tolerance is the next best guarantee of a religious harmony for the multi ethnic, multi religious Malaysia. This value will continue to be nurtured, although religious understanding would have been the natural progression of tolerance. Malaysia's propensity to withdraw or retreat from religious discourses can be seen in the exercise of moderation that is generally held by the majority. For example, when "Kongsi Raya" emerged recently to become a potentially divisive issue, it was the quick response from the "moderate" leaders of the federal government that put the matter to rest. If the action of the federal government do not amount to closing the issue altogether, the former certainly succeeded in putting it to rest for now.

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[i] Note: The full research team of this MOSTE-sponsored project were as follow: Ahmad Tarmizi Talib (Project Leader); Jayum A. Jawan (Project Advisor); and Zaid Ahmad, Hj Ahmad Fauzi Hj Morad, Mohd Mahadee Ismail, and Mohammad Agus Yusoff (Project Members). Except Mohammad Agus who is from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, all others are from Universiti Putra Malaysia. The project runs between 2004-2006. A full report has been filed with UPM and MOSTE.

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Paper 2 Challenges to Ethnic Harmony in Burma: A Historical Overview

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Abstract

Burma faced independence in 1948 as a deeply divided country. The British had ruled the area, which now was declared as "Union of Burma" in two entirely different administrative systems. The southern parts of the country were taken over gradually after the wars in 1824-1826 and 1852, and became the main geobody of "Burma Proper" or "Ministerial Burma". The rest of the country was taken over in a war in 1885-1886, and much of this area was administered indirectly through the local Shan and Kachin chiefs as an administrative entity known simply as "Frontier Areas" or "Scheduled Areas". Like in the Indian Subcontinent and in the Malayan Peninsula the British administrative arrangements created a serious challenge to the leaders of the new independent country.

Burma Proper was basically populated by the ethnic Burmans, Arakanese, Mons and Delta Karens, whereas the Frontier Areas were populated by the Shan people, Salween Karens, Kachins, Karennis, Chins and various subgroups of the aforementioned. The same year, as the independence was granted, the Union of Burma plunged into a civil war, which still continues.

This paper discusses the ethnic categories created by the colonial authorities and it looks into how these ethnic categories have been – and continue to be - imagined, invented, manipulated and politicised for economic purposes. The paper is mainly a historical overview but points out a few continuities to the present time. The paper looks into how the Burmese authorities dealt with the ethnic diversity in the first constitution of 1947 by dividing the country into ethnically based "states" and "divisions", and how the international community of today continues supporting these ethnic categories.

1. Introduction

The British had geographically and ethnically divided the area, which later was to be known as Burma.

The area was occupied gradually as a result of three Anglo-Burmese wars – which all were won by the British – and within this time range from 1824 to 1886, the British started the mapping of an administrative unit, which later was added to the British Indian empire under the name Burma.

What the impact of this gradual colonisation of the area was, needs to be reassessed in relation to the fact that the central government of the Union of Burma has never been able to fully control its present geobody, particularly its border areas, and some ethnic groups have been fighting against the central government since 1948.

This article uses contemporary government sources, such as the Census of India, compiled by the British every ten years while ruling the Indian Subcontinent. The Census divides British Burma into arbitrary ethnic, geographic and administrative units when imagining Burma. These divisions remain a major obstacle for the unity of independent Burma. The Burmese continued the tradition of compiling censuses, albeit somewhat less efficiently. In 1953 and 1954 two volumes of censuses were published, both covering some of the same issues as the original British Indian Censuses. Another useful source is the bilingual print called "Constitution of Union of Burma" from 1947.

2. Mapping the Geobody of British "Burma"

In the Census of India 1931, the area known as Burma was divided geographically into different "divisions". The primary division was "Burman Natural Division" which included four different geographic areas: Delta, Coast, Centre and North.

The Delta area included the that-time capital city Rangoon and the surrounding areas such as Insein, Hanthawaddy, Tharrawaddy, Pegu, Toungoo and Thaton. The interesting thing with this geographic division is, that it regards non-Burman areas as Burman. Insein is a northern suburb of present-day Rangoon, and is well known as a home to tens of thousands of ethnic Karen. Several Christian churches can be found in Insein, most of them built during the colonial era. A seminar for aspiring Karen priests known as Burma Divinity School, established in 1927, was located on the Seminar Hill in Insein[1]. Despite the ethnic composition of the population in this area, it was included in the "Burman" division. This decision further complicated the remapping of Burma in the eve of independence.

Pegu is a well-know centre of the proud Mon kingdom known in history as Hamsavati. Thaton is another famous centre of early Hindu-Buddhist civilization, which, usually, in the colonial scholarship, has been branded as "Mon", and not "Burman".[2]

The "Coast" as an administrative, geographic unit, included cities such as Akyab, Sandoway, Amherst, Tavoy and Mergui. These were the first possessions that the British gained after the war 1824. Above-mentioned areas have been populated by people regarded as non-Burmans, i.e. the Arakanese and the Mon. Akyab is located in northern Arakan and populated by Arakanese, whereas Amherst – with its rather British name - was an important centre for the Mon. Tavoy is a mixed Burman and Mon city, whereas Mergui is generally regarded as being "Burman".

The geographic "Centre", according to the British mapping, included Prome, Pakokku, Magwe, Mandalay, Shwebo and Sagaing, which, indeed, until very recently, have been regarded as the heartlands of Burmese culture and monasticism.

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[1] The origins of Christianity amongst the Karen groups can be traced back to the introduction of Christian beliefs by Adonikam and Ann Judson from the American Baptist Mission in 1813. Nowadays approximately 20% of Karen are Christian.

[2] See Michael Aung-Thwin's controversial thesis according to which, the colonial scholars, particularly Gordon Luce exaggerated the role of the Mons in early Burmese history. Aung-Thwin 2005.

The category "North" in the British mapping of Burma is baffling; the "North" includes cities like Bhamo, Myitkyina, Katha and Upper Chindwin. Myitkyina is an important centre for the Kachin people, albeit the character of that city may have changed through the years.

One is tempted to draw the conclusion that most of the geographic "Burman Divisions" were far from being Burman, but at the eve of independence in late 1940s the Burmese anti-colonial nationalists simply followed these colonial divisions created some 60 years earlier.

The other geographic divisions outside the "Burman Natural Division" were called Chin, Salween and Shan, a mish-mash of ethnic and geographic definitions.

Chin Division included the districts of Arakan Hill Tracts and the Chin Hills. These areas were populated by both Arakanese and Chins.

Salween is the name of a river at the present Thai border, and not of an ethnic group, but, according to the British colonial administrators, Salween division included the river district and an ethnic Karenni district. Geography and ethnicity had again been intertwined in a fatal way.

The fourth division was called Shan, and was divided into Northern Shan State and Southern Shan State. The ethnic Shans predominantly populate the Shan states, but there are also numerous smaller ethnic groups in the Shan states.

The British used partly geographic, partly ethno-linguistic names when mapping Burma. The original purpose of this might have been entirely practical and totally apolitical. At the same time, however, the British colonial administration was carefully categorising the population into different ethnic groups and openly favouring one ethnic group against another. The categories thus became highly politicised.

3. Creating the racial categories

Additionally to the "natural division" of the administrative entity, the population was also classified according to different "races" invented by the Census compilers. The British divided the population of Burma into nine different races: Burmese; other indigenous races; Chinese; Indians born in Burma; Indians born outside Burma; Indo-Burman races; Europeans and allied races; Anglo-Indians; and other races.

One can notice that there are four different categories of Indians, which one could interpret as reflecting the importance of the people classified as Indians in the British administration and in the overall colonial economy.

The Census of India from 1931 compares the figures of same ethnic or racial group each decade starting from 1901. It is obvious that the number of Chinese had doubled from 1901 to 1931, whereas the number of "Indo-Burmans" had quadrupled from 1901 to 1931 from 0,3% to 1,24%. (Census of India 1931, 224)

The largest racial group is the "Burma group" with 65% of the entire population. The second largest is the Karen group with 9,3%, the third is "Tai" with 7%, and the fourth is Indian with 6,9%. Among the smaller groups there are Mon with 2,3%, Indo-Burman, Chinese and Kachin groups each with about 1,2%.[3]

The Census of India 1931 discusses in detail how some of the changes in the numbers of different racial groups might have taken place. The Arakanese Muslims for instance have been added into the category of Indo-Burmans in the Census of 1931. In 1921, the Arakanese Muslims had declared themselves as "Indians", but were now transferred by the British to another category. The number of the Indian population had rapidly increased from 881.357 in 1921 into 1,017.825 in 1931. (Census of India 1931, 224) The British compilers might have felt that some of the "Indians" needed to be disguised as "Indo-Burmans" in order not to alarm the Burmese. This decision, however, has haunted the Arakanese Muslims since the independence.

The geographic division of the Indian immigration inside Burma is also detailed; largest numbers of Indian immigrants can be found in the "Centre", but also the number of Indian immigrants into the Shan States doubled from 1921 to 1931, i.e. from 16.733 to 32.604. According to the Census, many of the Indians who moved to the Shan States are Gurkhas[4]. (Census of India 1931, 226)

The British compilers of the Census admit, that they have struggled with the concept of "Indians" for decades, ever since the work was started in 1891. In the earlier censuses, the Hindus had been classified by caste, whereas Muslims had been classified by tribe. This, according to the compilers, was not "satisfactory"; consequently in the Census of 1931, Indians are classified by "race". (Census of India 1931, 228)

Earlier, Chulias had been classified as a Muslim tribe, whereas according to the new system, Chulias would be classified as Tamils. The "cloth-selling moneylenders known as the *Kabulis*", have been now included in the figure of Pathans. (Census of India 1931, 229)

The group now known as "Rohingyas" is an interesting case, as according to the British, the Chittagonians could have been included in the group of Bengalis, but for the British there was "no harm done by giving separate figures of the Magh" – one name the Chittagonians are known by in Burma. According to the Census compilers, Magh are "Buddhist cooks from Chittagong", whereas in Bengal language "Magh" is a word for Arakanese. (Census of India 1931, 229)[5]

Christian denominations were also broken down by the Census compilers, thus emphasising, for instance, that the largest numbers of Christians in Burma were Baptist – over 200.000. The second largest Christian group was the Roman Catholic

[3] These figures are based on the Census of India 1931, Table 2, where the number is given of " persons belonging to each race group in 10.000", i.e. Burma group 6.500, Karen group 934 etc.

[4] Gurkhas or Gorkhas as an ethnic group are regarded as an "imagined community", invented by the British.

[5] According to Jacques Leider, "In many older writings, the Arakanese are called Magh, an injurious term of uncertain origin, used in Bengal to refer to the Arakanese pirates". Leider 2002, 53.

with some 89.000 parishioners. (Census of India 1931, 214[6]). The table also pointed out that the largest congregation i.e. the Baptist is dominated by ethnic Karen with some 168.000 members. Only some 41.000 Karens are Roman Catholic. Indians were the second largest group of Roman Catholics in Burma. (Census of India 1931, 214)

Linguistically the "Burma group" and the "other indigenous group" can be divided into smaller subgroups. The Census shows that the Burma group includes 16 different linguistic subgroups, the largest of which was the "Burmese" – i.e. people speaking Burmese. The other languages in the Burma group included for instance Arakanese, Tavoyan, Merguese and Intha. (Census of India 1931, 202-203)

The Karen group is also divided into following linguistic subgroups: Karen, Sgaw, Karenbyu, Pwo, Padaung, Karenni and Talaing-Kalasi. The last group is quite a hybrid, as Talaing[7] in the same Census is classified as a linguistic subgroup of the Mon, i.e. a Mon-Khmer language group. (Census of India 1931, 204)

According to the Census of India 1931, "Sgaw, Pwo and Paku Karens are very different from Karens who live in the hills and from a racial point of view one could place the remaining Karen races in the Palaung-Wa group."[8] Sgaw, Pwo and Paku Karen comprise 74% out of the total number of Karen. (Census of India 1931, 192-193)

4. Impact of the racial categories on Burma

The race and language theories presented by the Census compilers in 1931, have had an aggravating impact on the social and economic stability of independent Burma. Due to the colonila legacy, the idea of "Burma" is still in turmoil.

Particularly, the identity of the "Rohingyas" is problematic. There is a heated discussion going on among academics and activists, who the Rohingyas are, whether they are Burmese or Bengali/Chittagonians with deep roots in Burma, or possibly more recent Bengali/Chittagonian immigrants escaping the economic and political instability of East Pakistan/Bangladesh as the military government claims.

The many subgroups of Karen community is another issue that still engages the academic community to discuss whether the Karen should or should not be regarded an "imagined community". The border-based aid community usually rejects this entire discourse, as for them, all Karen are regarded as a monolithic "Karen", and by some donors even regarded as an all-Christian group, and *therefore* brutally repressed by the present military government.

The Burmese at the independence 1948 inherited the British beliefs in racial categories. The country was – by the Constitution 1947 – divided into four different

[6] Table 12, Christians classified by race and sect. Census of India 1931.
[7] The word "Talaing" nowadays is regarded as an old term for the Mon.
[8] Palaung-Wa group, according to the Census includes the Wa, Tai-Loi, and Palaung (Census of India 1931, 204) This racial engineering has led to some academic speculation on the origins of the Karen, a group which nowadays often is regarded as an "imagined community" *par excellence*. See Renard's article "Studying peoples often called Karen" in Delang 2003. See also Mikael Gravers 2007.

ethnically based states Kachin, Chin, Karenni and Shan states, into which later Karen, Arakanese and Mon states were added.

Burmese authorities inherited the British belief in the importance of Censuses. By 1953 the Burmese were able to produce a rather similar Census that the British had routinely been producing since the inclusion of Burma in the British Indian empire.

The Burmese census was called "First Stage Census 1953" and was followed by "Second Stage Census 1954". After the military *coup d'état* by General Ne Win in 1962, more censuses were compiled, but those are regarded as considerably less reliable than the censuses compiled during the civilian administration of Prime Minister U Nu.

The First Stage Census of 1953 was compiled in the urban areas, and the results there, in terms of ethnic categorisation, indicate that 75,8% of the population were Burmese, and only 8,3 % belonged to other indigenous races such as Karen, Shan, Chin, Kachin and Kayah (former Karenni). The Census 1953 continued including "Foreign races"; 9,8% of whom were Indian, and 5,7% were Chinese. (First Stage Census 1953, xxv)

The Second Stage Census of 1954 was compiled in the rural areas, where Burmese constituted 87,3% of the entire population, and other indigenous races 9,7%. A lesser number of foreign races resided in the rural areas; 2,3% of the rural population were Indian, and 0,5% were Chinese. (Second Stage Census 1954, 3)

Concerning religions practised in independent Burma, the census indicated that in Arakan 70% of the population were Buddhist and 22% were Muslim. These figures are from the First Stage Census from 1953 and apply to the urban areas. (p. xxvi) According to the Second Stage Census of 1954, compiled in the rural areas, 41,7% of the population was Muslim. (Second Stage Census 1954, 4)

As a conclusion, one can notice that statistics throughout the colonial period, as well as, in the first decade of independence, were extremely detailed and hence give an impression of accuracy, even if one may argue that many of the categories are "imagined". Consequently the main legacy of these detailed, racial statistics is that they are extremely divisive and manipulative, and can easily be politicised.

5. Implementing the racialisation into politics

The Constitution of Burma from 1947 tried to tackle the colonial divisions by creating a Union of Burma from the areas, which didn't necessarily have much shared history[9] with the pre-colonial Burmese kingdoms. This, however, became the pattern of creating the post-colonial states also in India, Indonesia and Malaysia.

According to the Constitution of 1947, the Union of Burma would comprise the whole of Burma – which in the colonial parlance referred to the Ministerial Burma

[9] According to Renan from 1882, "a heroic past" is "the social principle on which the national idea rests". Reprinted in Hutchinson & Smith 1994.

or Burma Proper. This was extended by clauses stating that the Union of Burma would include all territories that had been governed by "His Britannic Majesty through the Governor of Burma", and included directly to this was the Karenni State, an area which had become the borderland between the Burmese kingdom centered in Ava and the British-occupied Lower Burma as a result of the Second Anglo-Burmese War. A treaty had been signed in 1872, stating that "the State of Western Karenni shall remain separate and independent", and that no sovereignty or governing authority of any description shall be claimed or exercised over that State". In fact, the Karenni chiefs were appointed by the British ruler and they were "advised" by the British residents; same administrative pattern as was in practice in the Shan States.[10] (Maung Maung 1961, 169-170)

The new Union of Burma should also include territories earlier known as Federated Shan States and the Wa States, which together should be called the Shan State.

The smaller separate areas in the far north, Myitkyina and Bhamo, should form a constituent unit and be called the Kachin State.

The territory earlier known as the Karenni State, *viz.* Kantarawaddy, Bawlake and Kyebogyi shall become Karenni State. (Constitution of the Union of Burma 1947, Chapter I)

The Constitution hence decided to create four separate autonomous states out of the former British Frontier Areas, these four states were the Shan State, the Kachin State, the Karenni State and a proposition was given in the Constitution to create also an autonomous Karen State. The former Chin Hills District from the British Frontier Areas would become a Special Division of the Chins.

The Panglong Treaty of February 1947 had united the ruling elites of Shan, Kachin and Chin from the Frontier Areas. According to the joint declaration of the hereditary chieftains of these areas, the main rationale behind joining the Thakin leaders of Burma Proper had been that "freedom will be more speedily achieved by the Shans, the Kachins and the Chins by their immediate cooperation with the Interim Burmese Government". (Panglong Agreement as cited in Maung Maung 1961, 229)

According to the Constitution, the Shan State would simply include all the Shan States, and should be represented by the hereditary rulers or *Saohpas*. (Constitution 1947, Chapter IX, part I)

The Kachin State was recognized to actually be multi-ethnic, and hence a clause was added that the Kachin State should be represented in the Chamber of Nationalities by six Kachins and six non-Kachins from the Kachin State. (Constitution 1947, Chapter IX, Part II)

[10] According to Maung Maung, "To avoid skirmishes and border disputes it was agreed between the King and the Viceroy of India that the Karenni State should be erected as a buffer state, enjoying independence." (Maung Maung 1961, 169)

6. Territorial challenges to the politicisation of the racial categories

The Karen state was a more complex affair. According to the Constitution, "the following areas, *viz.* the Karenni State, Salween District and such adjacent areas occupied by the Karens as may be determined by a Special Commission to be appointed by the President shall, if majority of the people of these three areas and of the Karens living in Burma outside these areas so desire, form a constituent unit of the Union of Burma to be known as the Karen State." (Constitution 1947, Chapter IX, Part III)

This reflects the reality of Karen people being dispersed in various parts of the territory now becoming the Union of Burma. There was a heavy concentration of diverse Karen groups in the Salween area. "Delta Karens", however, lived in the Delta area, and many of the western-educated Karens lived in Insein, a northern suburb of Rangoon.

Until the Special Commission would be able to decide whether a state called Karen State could be formed, an area known as "Kaw-thu-lay" comprising the Salween District and such areas occupied by Karens as may become the Karen State shall be a "Special Region". When the Karen State will be established, it will have same status as the Shan State. (Constitution 1947, Chapter IX, Part III).

The Constitution continues imagining the Karen State, "if the Karen State will be created, then the Karenni State needed to be reorganised. The territory known as Mongpai in the Federated Shan States shall be acceded to the Karenni State, if the majority of the people of the territory so desire. Until the Parliament otherwise provides, the *Sawphyas* of the three special districts that had formed the British buffer Karenni State Kantarawaddy, Bawlake and Kyebogyi shall represent Karenni State in the Chamber of Nationalities. The *Saohpa* of Mongpai shall also become a representative of the Karenni State in the Chamber of Nationalities after the accession of Mongpai to the Karenni State." (Constitution 1947, Chapter IX, Part IV)

The Special Division for the Chins would include the two special areas separately administered by the British during the colonial period, i.e. Chin Hills District and the Arakan Hill Tracts. (Constitution 1947, Chapter IX, Part V)

The Karen State was subsequently formed by an amendment to the Constitution in 1951. The territory earlier known as Salween District was to be known as the Karen State. The Karenni State simultaneously changed name to "Kayah State".

Conclusion

The leaders of an independent Burma inherite,d as a colonial legacy, a wide territory that had been administered, either directly by a British governor, or indirectly by a British resident as an adviser to the indigenous hereditary chieftains. This division could not be bridged in the new state of Burma, but needed to be addressed by granting high level of autonomy to the former British Frontier Areas. The "states" would be autonomous in terms of agricultural production, "markets and fairs, public order, village police and prisons, education and public health". The Government of

Union of Burma would be responsible for defence, external affairs, communications, finance i.e. taxes and duties. (Constitution of 1947, Third Schedule, Legislative Lists I and II)

State revenues would come from the land revenues, from royalty on petroleum, royalty on minerals and taxes on mineral rights, royalty on rubber, opium, forests, and irrigation dues. (Constitution 1947, Forth Schedule, State Revenue List)

Despite the theoretically relatively autonomous position of the states, some of the ethnic leaders started an insurrection immediately after the independence. The first ethnic group to start the uprising, was the Karen in July 1948, closely followed by the Mon. (Burma and the Insurrections, 1949) The insurrection was fuelled both by economic interests of the local rulers, particularly in the former Frontier Areas, and by the Cold War strategies.

Epilogue

The international community continues imagining Burma according to the racial and ethnic categories, created by the British Census compilers for colonial administrative purposes.

After the failed democracy uprising in 1988, Burmese politics has attracted more media attention in the Western hemisphere than before the 1988. A number of Western governments and organisations have established special funds to support the struggle for democracy – or struggle against the military junta – inside and outside Burma. The global media became suddenly aware of the decades-old civil war in the Burmese jungles, particularly, when scores of urban student activists escaped to the jungle to join the ethnic guerillas, a positive global media attention was guaranteed.

During the early 1990s the military junta signed a cease-fire with 17 armed groups, now known as "cease-fire groups". There are still a handful of armed groups continuing a low-intensity war against the central government – and against the cease-fire groups. The international community continues financially supporting many of these ethnic communities at the border areas, particularly at the Thai-Burma border areas.

A powerful US non-profit organisation, established by President Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s, National Endowment for Democracy (NED), supports 35 different Burmese groups "dedicated to bringing democracy to their country". Among these organisations are the main opposition party National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi, the government in exile in Washington (NCGUB) led by Aung San Suu Kyi's cousin Dr. Sein Win, the Oslo-based radio station Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), and the Chiang Mai- based monthly magazine "Irrawaddy".

Rest of the money, alltogether over 2,5 million USD a year[11], goes to the refugee organisations at the border areas: "The Endowment believes it is a priority to support the development of ethnic organizations so that they are better able to participate as equals in the discussions regarding the future political structure of Burma. Grants to ethnic nationality-based organizations allow them to solidify their core operations, reach more people through increased training programs, and distribute their literature to a wider audience. Assistance to ethnic groups will also complement the prodemocracy movement's efforts to build solidarity between the prodemocracy groups, most of whose members are ethnic Burmans, and the ethnic nationality forces."

The international community continues imagining Burma along the racial categories created by the British Census compilers, thus challenging the ideal harmony of Burma imagined by Aung San and other leaders of the Burmese independence movement. The Burmese independence leaders acknowledged that Burma was *de facto* multi-ethnic, but simultaneously they envisioned a unity between the ethnic groups. To quote Aung San: "A nation is a collection of many peoples, many races."[12]

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[11] Information is from the year 2003. www.ned.org/publications/staffDocs/bJoseph071803.html. Similarly Prospect Burma and Open Society Insitute have been supporting refugee students from Burma with scholarships since 1994. Preference has been given to ethnic minorities.

[12] From an address to the Supreme Council of the AFPFL, August 1946. Reprinted in Maung Maung 1962.

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Paper 3 Marginalization as a Result of Statelessness: A Case Study of the Thai Undocumented People in Rom Thai Village

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Abstract

A Thai citizen is a person with Thai nationality and with the basic civil rights required for a livelihood and access to national resources, whereas a non-Thai citizen is a person without Thai nationality and without the right to access government services. Nationality is a powerful instrument to determine who is an appropriate person to get public services and to exclude others from Thai society. If the excluded people are migrants, the problem of exclusion through nationality is not so severe. But if the excluded are Thai people born on Thai soil of Thai parents, the use of nationality to deny them Thai identification cards and Thai house registration may violate their rights.

Undocumented Thai people, meaning those people born in Thailand with no Thai documents, constitute a problem for the Thai state because there is an absence of any concrete policy or solution. The case of the undocumented Thai people in Rom Thai village, Thaton Subdistrict, Mae Ai district, Chiang Mai province, waits for the state's response to rectify their status from aliens to Thais in their legal documents such as identification cards and house registration certificates. The main reason the villagers became undocumented is that in the past they left Thaton to earn their living in agriculture at Sobyawn. The villagers perceived or imagined Sobyawn as part of the 'Thai nation' and other nationalities, particularly Burmese, did not appear there. However, Sobyawn has historically been a place of border drawing disputes and is now officially part of the Burmese state. Starting about twenty years ago, the villagers were forced to return from Sobyawn to Thaton by several confrontations between the Burmese military and ethnic minority groups. Because they left Rom Thai village before the Thai state started issuing identity cards and house registrations and because they returned at the same time as an influx of Burmese refugees, the Mae Ai district administration may have been confused or uncertain about their identity. Therefore, they issued them identity cards as displaced Burmese.

The undocumented Thai people holding cards for displaced Burmese nationals therefore face marginalization. They are marginal people not only in a geo-political dimension, in the sense that they are remote from central state power or at the margin of the country, but also because they are denied access to government social services and rights such as the right to free medical care, the right to education and scholarships and the right to practice professions. Even people born on Thai soil of Thai parents can be excluded as the 'others' in Thai society unless they are formally recognized through documents such as Thai identification cards and Thai house registration certificates.

Background: Marginalization and Statelessness

Marginalization refers to "the overt or covert trends within societies whereby those perceived as lacking desirable traits or deviating from the group norms tend to be excluded by wider society and ostracized as undesirables."[1] The idea was amply expressed by Louis Wirth speaking of a minority group as: *"a group of person who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination."*[2]

John Scott and Gordon Marshall in the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology explain that *"marginalization is a process by which a group or individual is denied access to important positions and symbols of economic, religious, or political power within any society"*. In Scott and Marshall's definition, persons who have undergone a process of marginalization are called marginal groups. However, a marginal group is not necessarily a minority group. A marginal group may actually constitute a numerical majority, as in the case of Blacks in South Africa, and should perhaps be distinguished from a minority group, which may be small in numbers, but has access to political or economic power.[3]

Terms related to marginalization include marginal area, marginal group and marginal man. According to George A. Theodorson and Achilles G. Theodorson in A Modern Dictionary of Sociology, marginal area refers to territory at the periphery of a 'culture area' where two or more cultures meet, and where culture traits of the neighboring cultures are to be found. Marginal areas are the farthest areas one can possibly include within a particular culture area. **Marginal group** means a culture group that has relinquished some of its traditions and separate identity and partially accepted the values and way of life of a culture it is in the process of adopting. And marginal man is a concept first formulated by Robert E. Park and later revised by Everett C. Hughes[4]. **Marginal man** is a person in a dilemma, or state of mental conflict, by reason of his participation in two different, distinct cultural groups. He is not fully loyal and committed to the values and standards of either, nor is he fully acceptable to either of the groups with which he identifies. Moreover, the two groups may have certain conflicting values or norms, both of which the individual accepts to some degree.[5]

In geographical terms, the marginal man or the marginal person must often move from their place of origin for natural, economic, political, cultural or social reasons. They are always denied access to limited resources and they are always excluded by the majority who has lived in that society before. In socio-cultural terms,

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This paper is extracted and adapted from my Master degree's thesis, "Marginalization as a result of statelessness of Rom Thai villagers, Mae-Ai district, Chiangmai province", Southeast Asian Studies Program, Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University.

[1] "Marginalization", Available from www.wikipedia.org

[2] Louis Wirth, The problem of minority groups, 1945, pp. 347-372. Quoted in "Marginalization", Available from www.wikipedia.org

[3] John Scott and Gordon Marshall, Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, 2005, p.380.

[4] Encyclopedia of Sociology, 1974, p.165.

[5] George A. Theodorson and Achilles G. Theodorson, A Modern Dictionary of Sociology, pp.242-243.

the marginal person's culture is not accepted by the people in the cultural mainstream. Thus, marginal persons must adapt and fight for survival in a marginal context.[6]

In this study, stateless persons form one category of marginal persons. A stateless person is "someone who, under national laws, does not have the legal bond of nationality with any state."[7] Stateless people are defined as marginal people because they lack a crucial tool to access basic human rights. That tool is nationality. Nationality is an important instrument to integrate a homogenous people while classifying people of different race, ethnicity, or religion as others. Daniel Levy and Yfaat Weiss state that "citizenship legislation may thus be viewed as a pervasive system of classification, organization society into 'us' and 'them'."[8] According to Engin F. Isin and Patricia K. Wood, citizenship can be described as "both a set of practices (cultural, symbolic and economic) and a bundle of rights and duties (civil, political and social) that define an individual's membership in a polity."[9] Aspects of citizenship should be recognized both as practice and as status. Without the latter, modern individuals cannot hold civil, political and social rights. This study links sociological concept and legal concepts because 'citizenship' is neither a purely sociological concept nor a purely legal concept. From the sociological point of view, citizenship can be defined as competent membership in a polity. But those who do not posses the civil political and social rights would be denied the chance to "become such a competent and full-fledged member of the polity in the first place."[10] A stateless person must face a plethora of problems. The stateless person falls into a condition of double marginality. To lack a nationality means not only that a person is not the citizen of any country, but also lacks the basic rights which are important for their livelihood. Stateless persons cannot vote, they cannot get jobs in many professions, and they often cannot own property or travel outside a restricted area. Stateless people also face discrimination, sexual and physical violence and socio-economic hardship. Often they are denied access to health care and education.[11]

Rom Thai Villagers and Statelessness

Rom Thai is located in Moo 14, Thaton subdistrict, Mae Ai district Chiang Mai province. The former name of Rom Thai village is Nam Yawn because most of the villagers came back from Sobyawn[12] where the Kok and Yawn rivers join. Sobyawn was previously called Nam Yawn when there had been a community in the Kok river basin. Sobyawn or Nam Yawn community is situated on both sides of the Kok and Yawn rivers. The Thaton villagers, in the past, went to set up home and farm at Sobyawn. Often, they floated rafts down the river to Thaton to trading with Thaton

[6] Surichai Wun'Gaeo, Marginalization, 2001, p.10.
[7] Lynch, M., Lives on hold: The human cost of statelessness, 2005, p.3.
[8] Daniel Levy and Yfaat Weiss, Challenging Ethnic Citizenship: German and Israeli Perspectives on Immigration, 2002, p.1.
[9] Engin F. Isin and Patricia K. Wood, Citizenship and Identity, 1999, p.4.
[10] Engin F. Isin and Patricia K. Wood, Citizenship and Identity, 1999, p.4.
[11] Maureen Lynch, "The people who have no country", Available from www.globalpolicy.org
[12] Before B.E 2499, Rom Thai villagers went to Sobyawn for seasonal work. At Sobyawn the people could grow their crops and earned a good living. Sobyawn is on a plain where the Kok river joins the Yon river which makes the land very fertile. In the past there was no clear evidence whether this place belonged to Thai or Burma. However, today Sobyawn is in Burmese territory 10 kilometers from Rom Thai village.

villagers. Sobyawn was assumed to be just a second home of Thaton villagers. In the case of the Rom Thai villagers, the important problem is statelessness. Statelessness may arise from many factors. But the origin of the stateless problem in Rom Thai village began with a mistake of civil registration.[13] In 1956, the state made a population census and house registration throughout the country. Some of the Rom Thai villagers missed this census because they went to work at Sobyawnwhich the villagers understood to be Thai territory. The Rom Thai villagers at Sobyawn were not informed about this survey. As a result, they missed the population census. 1963 was the year when identification cards were issued, and many Rom Thai villagers missed the chance to have their identification cards made. Since most of them did not realize the importance of identification cards, as a result they did not travel from Sobyawn to get their cards made. As a result of a skirmish between ethnic minority groups and the Burmese army at Sobyawn, the villagers felt their lives had become unstable and insecure. Many villagers thus took refuge back in Thaton while some of the Burmese minority group moved to Thailand as well.

In 1971, many displaced Burmese immigrated into Thailand to escape the conflict between the Burmese army and minority groups. The Thai state deicided to identify and issued pink cards to them.

Unfortunately, the villagers of Thaton who were Thai citizen but have never been registered were forced by the district officials to take the displaced Burmese cards (pink cards). The villagers were threatened with expulsion from the country if they did not consent to take the pink cards. Out of fear, they took the cards. Because of their illiteracy, they did not understand that the pink cards are for displaced Burmese. Should this blunder be attributed to the district officials or to the villagers who took the cards? The failure to report for civil registration not only made the villagers stateless, but also resulted in their children becoming stateless. Even though the villagers have tried to prove that they are Thai-born citizens through community witnesses, their pink cards officially identify them as displaced Burmese and state officials have accepted the pink cards as the main evidence. In the case of Rom Thai village, most villagers who still do not have Thai nationality hold a color card as their identity card. Some people hold orange colored cards to identify them as Thai Lue. Some of them hold green colored cards with red edges to identify them as member of a highland community. Some of them hold the blue cards of highlanders. The newcomers who have migrated from Burma hold orange or purple cards of Burmese illegal migrants. However, the majority hold the pink cards of displaced Burmese.

Thai-born people who missed the population census and house registration, are not identified as Thai citizens. Even though they hold pink cards, the Thai state cannot escape from the reality that those people have their origins in Thai territory. Moreover, the Thai state has no right to identify Thai-born people as displaced

[13] Civil registration constitutes fifteen categories of registration and identification cards which are issued by the Department of Local Administration. District and Subdistrict Registration Offices provide civil registration services such as house registration, birth and death notification, change of residence, copying and authentication of personal records, adding and removing names on house registrations, revision of registration information. They also issue identification cards, copy and authenticate identification card documents. Moreover, they register marriage and divorce certificates, name and family registration. Quoted in Opas Kaewkao, "Thailand Civil Registration in Thailand", 17-20 November 1999.

Burmese. Marginal people in this study means people who have long been living in Thailand but are not yet considered as Thai because they missed the population census and house registration. They are not accepted as Thai citizens, neither are they Burmese because the Burmese state does not recognize these people as its citizen. Stateless Rom Thai villagers lack basic civic rights which are important for their livelihood. They do not have the right to vote, having little chance of education, the right to health care insurance and the right to restricted occupations. The majority of the undocumented people are elderly whose first identification card was one for non-Thai citizens. For more than 20 years, they hold colored cards as their identity cards. For more than 20 years, they have earned their living as non-Thai citizens. For more than 20 years, they have been marginalized.

The Marginalization of Undocumented Rom Thai Villagers

1. The legal dimension.

Civil registration is a process of recognition of the existence of people. Data on citizens is recorded such as house registration or birth and death notification. Birth registration, in the form of a birth certificate is the first process by which the state recognizes that there is a new baby born on its territory, regardless of the nationality of the parents. A person who is registered with a birth certificate and with their name on a house registration certificate has an existence in legal terms. That person can show these documents to access basic civic rights and government services as a citizen. The existence of a person who has no birth certificate and whose name is not on any house registration certificate cannot be recognized. It is difficult to verify such a person's real name or origin. It is hard to be recognized as "human" with "human rights".[14] Thailand has the experience of mistakes in the civil registration system. Nowadays, there are still many people born on Thai soil who missed civil registration. As a result, they earn their living as non-Thais and cannot access civic rights as an ordinary citizen. Most failures of civil registration occur in remote areas where the governmental services or state power cannot reach or are difficult to access.

Legal marginalization, in this study, means that the villagers are marginalized as "the other" of society through a legal process which is expressed by such powerful tools as nationality law, identification cards and house registration certificates. The dominant group creates the discourse and myth through Thai nationality law by using identity cards and house registration certificates to classify a subordinate group as non-Thais. Often, the hill people or the indigenous people are viewed as non-Thais, thus they cannot be granted Thai nationality.[15]

2. Geo-political dimension.

The undocumented stateless people become marginal and are denied basic rights which are necessary to their livelihood. Undocumented people are not accepted as Thai citizen even though they insist that they are Thai-born. It is true that the Thai state believes the legal evidence or legal documents more than community evidence.

[14] Chutimas Suksai, "Why we have to register birth", Plan Organization, 2006, pp.14-15.
[15] Somchai Preechasilpakul, Nitisart Chaikhob, 2005, pp. 30-33.

In this study, at least, the undocumented people are marginal in a geographical perspective. The main factor for Mae Ai villagers being undocumented was their remoteness from central state power.

The marginalization may occur on a geographical dimension. The term marginalization itself refers to the existence of something or someone in an area on the edge/border of a political or geographic entity. In political geography, the concept of border combines two phenomena: boundary and borderland. In "Refugees and the border", Hazel J. Lang explains that boundaries are political territorial lines dividing two contiguous states.[16] In Ladis K. D. Kristof's definition, "the boundary indicates certain well established limits (the bounds) of the given political unit and as such functions to exert an arbitrary limit separating two jurisdictions."[17] In addition, in "Coexistence: Borderlands and Intra-state Conflicts in Mainland Southeast Asia", Carl Grundy-Warr denotes borderlands as "zones or territories flanking and straddling international land boundaries, are a more fluid ecumene, encompassing a confluence of political, military, cultural, and economic interactions."[18]

A map of Siam appeared for the first time after the Paknam crisis of 1893 with the cooperation of Britain, France, and Siam. Thongchai Winichakul shows how Siam escaped colonization by accepting European mapping practices and the colonial alignment of boundaries.[19] The idea of people (chat), and territory (prathet) were created and linked to the people when the boundary of a nation was defined. Thus, map-making was not only a process which demarcated the area of country, but also identified who are its citizen or nationals and who are not. Moreover, maps also classified distinctions of culture, language, or religion between contiguous countries. \

Therefore, it can be said that the Siamese or Thai identity was created when our country was demarcated on a map. Also promoted among all people in the country was a sense of citizenship. This sense of Thai-ness was instilled in the people through the idea of nationalism. However, in some border areas, the boundary of Thai nation was clearly demarcated on the map, but the sense of Thai-ness had still not pervaded there. Thongchai states that "the discursive domain of Thai-ness remains homogenous and unified. In turn, moreover, in the terminology of the geographical discourse, terms such as border become ambiguous. The border of Thai-ness is more limited than its geo-body. The Thai geo-body is not necessarily equal to Thai nationhood."[20]

The Rom Thai villagers have resided near the border of Thailand and Burma. They are at the geographical margin of the country: in other words, they are the marginal in terms of geography. As mentioned above, Thai-ness or the citizenship which was expressed through the registration process and an identification card did not reach Rom Thai village while Thai geo-body was already drawn on the map. The

[16] Hazel J. Lang, "Refugees and the border", Fear and Sanctuary: Burmese Refugees in Thailand, 2002, p.127.
[17] Ladis K. D. Kristof, "The Nature of Frontiers and Boundaries", Annals of the Association of American Geographers49,3, 1959, pp.270-273. Quoted in Hazel J. Lang, "Refugees and the border", Fear and Sanctuary: Burmese Refugees in Thailand, 2002, p.127.
[18] Carl Grundy-Warr, "Coexistence: Borderlands and Intra-state Conflicts in Mainland Southeast Asia", Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography 14,1, 1993, p.45. Quoted in Hazel J. Lang, "Refugees and the border", Fear and Sanctuary: Burmese Refugees in Thailand, 2002, p.127.
[19] Thongchai Winichakul, Siam mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation, 1994, p.128.
[20] Thongchai Winichakul, Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation, 1994, p.170.

villagers did not know of the boundary on the map. They were not aware of the agreement setting the boundary between Thailand and Burma. They crossed the frontier to earn their living in Sobyawn, an abundant area which is an overlapping area of Thailand and Burma. To be at the margin means to be far from the central state power. Often, the government services reach marginal villages slower than core villages.

Marginalization and Implications for Access to Government Social Services

1. Health care

In B.E.2545, the health insurance project issued gold cards (30 Baht cards) to persons without Thai nationality but permitted to reside temporarily, such as persons holding blue card (highland people) because such persons have their names in house registration certificates for persons without Thai nationality (Tor Ror 13). In B.E.2549, the government cancelled this right for persons registered in Tor Ror 13 documents and determined that the right to health insurance must be restricted to persons with Thai nationality.[21] The National Health Security Office (NHSO) announced that those with the right to health insurance must be Thai nationals, so do not include aliens. 'Aliens' in this case refers to 1.a person who is permitted to reside temporarily in Thailand and 2.a person who is not permitted to reside. For this reason, stateless people or undocumented people are not eligible for the governmental health insurance service. As a result, they have to pay all medical treatment fees. Sometimes, to obtain treatment and medicinal drugs, they have no other choice then to go into debt to the hospital.

Sometimes they are sick but they try to recover from illness without treatment. Or they try to think that they do not have symptoms of illness, or that their illness is not so severe and do not need to see a doctor in order to put a burden on their family to pay medical fees. The majority of the undocumented people in Rom Thai village are elderly and face the health problems. Most of them are poor. If they are still strong enough to work, they work as laborers in chili and garlic plantations. They earn little money per day, and it is not enough for medical fees.

Sukkaew Somwandee, an undocumented person was shot near the right eye. As a result, the lens of the right eye was damaged and he became blind. He cannot hear clearly because of a sound like wind blowing in the ears. Sukkaew was once jailed for eleven years. After leaving prison, he married an illegal alien woman. He has no house. His present residence is an area which was once a pigsty. Sukkaew earns his living as a laborer in chili plantation. He gets only 100-120 baht per day. His damaged eye and ear have never been treated in hospital but by the traditional healer. He gives the following reason for this:

> "I want to see if a doctor can cure me. But I don't have enough money. I have to pay all the medical fees if my eye and ear are treated by a doctor in the

[21] Surapol Kongchantuek, "The right to get public health service of non-Thai people", Available from www.statelessperson.com

hospital. My neighbors told me that it is not necessary to go to hospital. They told me that just the community doctor can cure me."[22]

Sukkaew hopes that his eye and ear will recover. Even though he wants to see a doctor, money is the main problem preventing him from going to hospital. In reality, Sukkaew was born in Thaton. His father got a Thai identification card in 1964 when he came back from Sobyawn. In 1969, both Sukkaew and his father came back to Thaton. Sukkaew was granted a pink card by the district office. In 1971, his father's identification card expired, and he asked the district office for a new one but was given a pink card. However, Sukkaew still has the Thai identification card of his father as crucial evidence to prove his status in the future. It is clear that Sukkaew is a Thai citizen by birth. But he was unlucky enough to miss the population census and house registration. Instead he was given a card for displaced Burmese, which classified him as 'the other' in Thai society. Though he is Thai by birth, he is not Thai citizen by law. He cannot access free health care service like other Thai citizens. Furthermore, Sukkaew has no knowledge of his rights. He does not realize his rights and the significance of good health. However, money is the main reason that forces him to forego health care.

Two other undocumented people face health problems. Nae Somwandee and Sangprom Noytha are elderly people who once lived at Sobyawn. Both of them faced the same problem as Sukkaew; they missed the population census and house registration, and got the cards for displaced Burmese which they still hold as their identity cards. Nae Somwandee and Sangprom Noytha complain of muscle or knee pains due to old age.

Nae Somwandee tries to treat herself. She buys drugs at a pharmacy in Mae Ai district and will not go to hospital unless her pain is extremely severe.

"I have pains in my knee but I do not go to see a doctor because I have to pay all of the medical fees."[23]

Sangprom Noytha is 85 years old and cannot work. He depends on money from his children and grandchildren. He has the same symptoms as Nae but more severely. However, unless it is necessary, Sangprom will not see a doctor because of concerns about the treatment fees. Sangprom

"If the pain in my knee is not severe, I will not go to hospital. My grandchild, Phra Mahanikom, pays my medical fees for me."[24]

Responsibility for their medical fees falls on their children or grandchildren. Therefore, both may forego health care because of a desire not to be a burden to their families.

[22] Interview with Sukkaew Somwandee on Wednesday 20 June, 2007 at 15.30, Rom Thai village.
[23] Interview with Nae Somwandee on Thursday 21 June, 2007 at 15.15, Rom Thai village.
[24] Interview with Sangprom Noytha on Thursday 21 June, 2007 at 14.40, Rom Thai village.

2. Education

A cabinet resolution of July 5, 2005, stated that persons with no civil registration and persons without Thai nationality also have the right to education. Previously, Thailand limited educational opportunity to Thais or allowed stateless people access to a limited level of education. Non-Thai children now have the chance to study regardless of level or location of education. (with the exception of the children of illegal migrants resident in temporary shelters, who can study only in the camps). Non-Thai children also have the same right to scholarships as Thais. Stateless children whose right to travel is controlled are given permission to leave their designated area to study as long as the period of study is specified. After stateless children finish their studies, their educational institutions have to issue them with transcripts, which will be marked in red ink to show that they are undocumented. Educational institution cannot therefore refuse an education to stateless children for the reason that the children do not have Thai nationality or civil registration.

However, in practice, the regulation of the Ministry of Education in 2003 concerning the educational scholarship stipulates that the qualified grantee must be a Thai national. Thus, the non-Thai children or the undocumented children cannot be a qualified grantee to educational scholarship.

Even though undocumented young people have a right to study, they still face a marginalized condition, with respect to the right to a scholarship. Neng Naiyod, for example, was born on Thai territory while her mother held the green card with red edges. When Neng was born, her mother did not notify Neng's name on the birth registration. Her mother, Keng Naiyod, was born on Thai territory, but missed the population census and as a result she was given a colored card as her identity card. In 1999, Keng Naiyod was granted Thai nationality and a Thai identification card and, in 2002, she was among the 1,243 Mae Ai villagers who were deprived of Thai nationality. Though her Thai nationality was reinstated in 2005, her daughter's name could not be put into the civil registration system. The Mae Ai official gave as a reason that Keng's Thai status is incredible. Keng's status must be proven again by the Department of Provincial Administration.

Neng Naiyod is marginalized because she cannot get a scholarship for free education. The qualification for a scholarship is not only being poor and good grades, but also Thai nationality.

> "I asked for a scholarship for a poor student and have good grades but I could not get it because I'm not legally Thai. I am poor so I want to help my mother by getting this scholarship. I have the right to study just to Mathayom 6. I have never thought of a university education."[25]

The qualifications for scholarships appear to be another instrument to identify nationality and classify who is 'the other' and to be unqualified to have access to free education. Nevertheless, Neng wishes to study to a high level and get a good job.

[25] Interview with Neng Naiyod on Wednesday 20 June, 2007, at 17.00, Rom Thai village.

> "In the future, I want to be a doctor. My mother is always sick. I want to take care and cure my mother."

However, Neng's dream will not come true if she does not gain Thai nationality. Even if she has the chance of higher education in medical science, she cannot work as a doctor because she does not have Thai nationality. In reality, she was born to a Thai mother so she should have Thai nationality. In practice, state officials still do not accept her status though Neng's mother holds a Thai identification card. Undocumented people believe that they cannot study at a high level. And, even if they study at a high level, they cannot get a good job. Moreover, parents tell their undocumented or stateless children that they should not study much because it is useless and is a burden to the family. Keng Naiyod gave her opinion on her daughter's education.

> "Neng does not have to study much. It is useless to study to a high level as long as she still does not have Thai nationality. No Thai identification card means no right to get a good job. Even if she graduates from school or university, she will have to work as laborer."[26]

Nevertheless, Neng Naiyod still hopes to get Thai nationality. And she believes that Thai nationality will help her study at a higher educational level and get a good job. She also believes that Thai nationality will help her escape from poverty. All her hopes depend on the district officials' decision and practice.

> "I wish to have Thai nationality. I hope the district office will help the poor stateless people."

3. Occupation

Without a chance of higher education, undocumented people cannot get a good job to improve their livelihood. In Rom Thai village, the people without Thai nationality work as laborers in chili and garlic plantations. Although the undocumented people insist that they were born on Thai territory and have Thai relatives, their status is equal to that of aliens with the permission to reside in the Kingdom on special grounds having the status of legal immigrant according to the Immigration Act B.E.2522 (1979 C.E.).

In Rom Thai village, most villagers work as laborers in chili and garlic plantations. Sukkaew Somwandee who is still physically fit for work, talks about his occupation.

> "I am an employee in chili plantations. I am hired at 100-120 baht per day. If I can pick chilies a lot, I will get around 200 baht per day. Someday no one hires me, I stay at home. My wife is an alien who migrated from Burma. She works as laborer in chili plantations as well."[27]

Though Sukkaew was born on Thai territory and has a Thai nationality father, he is permitted to work as an illegal migrant because he missed the census and holds

[26] Interview with Keng Naiyod on Wednesday 2o June, 2007, at 17.00, Rom Thai village.
[27] Interview with Sukkaew Somwandee on Wednesday 20 June, 2007 at 15.30, Rom Thai village.

the pink card. He does not have many alternatives for work. Laboring seems to be the best choice for him because he does not to leave the restricted areas and use a lot of knowledge.

Reasons for Marginalization of Stateless People in Rom Thai Village

The marginalization which happens to stateless people in Rom Thai village can be the result of the followings:

1. Civil registration may not occur as a result of the inefficiency of the civil registration system. Though the Civil Registration Act was promulgated in 1956 and there was the population census and house registration throughout the country, Mae Ai District Office was established only in 1973. Villagers born before 1973 had to register their birth with the village head. The village head then had to travel to Fang District to register the births in the village. Therefore, Thaton villagers born before 1973 had been delayed in notifying their birth or had no identification cards at that time. Moreover, Mae Ai District Office was destroyed by fire in 1976 and legal documents were destroyed. The villagers thus lack legal evidence to prove their personal status. Because of the fire, villagers who had their names in the civil registration system before 1976 became undocumented people after 1976. As a result, some villagers were forced to take pink identification cards for displaced Burmese which were issued under the Immigration Act B.E.2493. These pink cards were given to the immigrants who left Burma and illegally entered Thailand before the ninth of March 1976.

2. Villagers in remote areas may be left out of the civil registration system . People at the geographical margins of country have difficulty accessing central government services. Mae Ai villagers have long stayed on Thai territory far from the core of the country, near the border. The location is distant from the dominant culture in terms of geography, ethnicity, culture, and language. In the past, many illiterate villagers had no concern for Thai citizenship. The villagers did not recognize the agreed boundary of Thai territory. The map-making accessed the villager's area but central state power still did not reach there. The border on the map was not meaningful to the Mae Ai villagers. There is no difference between people on two sides of a river or mountain which divides the two states. It is not the mistake of the villagers to have shifted their livelihood across the boundary of the two states.

3. The indeterminate area between Thailand and Burma is another factor causing the Rom Thai villagers to become stateless. Many Thaton villagers went to work and earned their living in Sobyawn. At that time, Sobyawn was in an indeterminate area where both Thailand and Burma claimed sovereignty beyond that area. Burma understood that the people who were born in that area were Burmese while Thailand understood that they were Thai. The villagers believe that Sobyawn at that time belonged to Thailand. They referred to the historical consciousness that they had never seen Burmese or British soldiers there. But they found a Chiang Saen style Buddha image in Sobyawn.[28]The Burmese-Siam Demarcation Survey may have been

[28] Phra Maha Boonlerd Theerananto, Thaton: The community of Kok river basin, 2001, p.22.

unclear. It is possible that there were too few boundary posts.[29] Similarly, both Thailand and Burma claimed the right to govern Doi Lang and sovereignty power beyond that area. In the past, Mae Ai villagers were often been in trouble with Burmese soldiers. Burmese soldiers would garrison in Doi Lang and impose a tax on Mae Ai villagers. Today on Doi Lang mountain, there are both the Thai and Burma military camps. The problem of unclear borders may result in ethnic minorities along the Thai-Burmese border becoming stateless.

4. Many villagers, particularly the elderly, are not concerned with citizenship. Many undocumented people in Rom Thai village still do not know what nationality means and cannot give a definition. They simply realize that they are Thai because they were born on Thai soil. They know that Thai nationality and Thai identification cards are necessary for their lives. However, they could not reply why Thai nationality and identification cards are indispensable for them. They do not understand how the civil registration and birth registration is essential for their lives. In the past, many children's births were not registered, resulting in these children becoming undocumented even though they have Thai national parents. Some people and the village head mistakenly understand that birth certificates are not necessary because they think that they have a community witness to confirm the birth of their children.[30] However, a witness statement is still weak evidence because it cannot prove how the child is related to the Thai state. Consequently, it may be argued that the child was not born on Thai territory and they cannot prove themselves as Thai if the witness dies.

5. District officials who deal directly with stateless people should have a positive attitude to them. It is true that prejudice can lead officials to make mistakes in their work. Discrimination based on prejudice is a factor marginalizing undocumented people to being in the marginal condition. In this case, discrimination is not expressed in physical abuse, but in terms of negligence, for example, accepting a villager's documents but not processing them. The dominant group, in this case the district officials, applies negative prejudice to discrimination against the subordinate group, in this case the undocumented people, that creates disadvantages for them in many aspects of social, economic, and political life. Discrimination marginalizes the minority, subordinate, or powerless group, who then face denial of access to jobs, housing, health, education, justice, and political participation. Therefore, district officials should not assume that undocumented people are non-Thais as long as their personal status is still not proven.

Harmonization towards the stateless problem: A challenging problem in Thai society.

Although the statelessness lead the people to being marginalized and being excluded to have access the rights, the government sector, non-governmental organization, academia society and the stateless people themselves can find the way to escape or reduce the hardships of the stateless condition, at least by the following processes.

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[29] Sompong Chumak, "Frontier Issues, Disputes Avoidance and Settlement", National Seminar Proceedings on "Thailand's Frontiers and Beyond: Conflict or Confluence?, 1987, p.94.

[30] Pinkaew Ounkaew, "The fact of birth registration of ethnic groups in Northern areas", Plan Organization, 2006, p.40.

1. The basic rights to education, employment, and health care are indispensable for every human being. The stateless people in Thailand should have the same human rights as Thai citizens. It is not necessary that all the rights of Thai citizens should be granted to aliens. But the stateless people are likely to be given at least the opportunity to obtain health care services regardless of ethnicity or nationality and without any distinction between 'us' and 'them'. The government sector should separate between the human rights and the national security reason.

2. Thai state officials should find a solution for the people with no civil registration and faced the problem of statelessness. The first process is prevention. District Offices should record birth registrations for every newborn baby to prevent statelessness. Birth registration is a separate issue from nationality. The Thai state may issue a birth certificate without Thai nationality. The argument that birth certificates give nationality is a misunderstanding. The second process is post-protection or rectification. When villagers have no civil registration, the District Office can help them by delayed birth registration. To add the names of stateless villagers to house registration certificate also helps prevent statelessness.

3. Prejudice and bias may lead officials to discriminate against villagers. The relevant officials should be informed about the community history, and not hold rigid beliefs that villagers holding pink cards are Burmese. If possible, the relevant officials should eliminate prejudicial or negative attitudes and consider the villagers' arguments before determining their status. Official work will then be more reliable and accurate. The advantages are not only to the villagers, but to the officials as well. , the Officials should be more understanding toward history of undocumented Thai people holding colored cards and the reasons why they missed the census and hold cards designating them as aliens. The process of confirming nationality will then be feasible. Officials should make distinction between other aliens holding colored cards and immigrants and solve the problem of true aliens holding Thai identity cards. When prejudice is neutralized, official discrimination will disappear; as a result, villagers' fear of contacting relevant officials may be reduced to some degree.

4. District officials should have enough knowledge pertaining to Thai nationality law and community history through training on nationality law and ethnic history. On the other hand, the villagers should been given basic knowledge concerning Thai nationality law and the rights of aliens. This study found that most undocumented Thai people want to have Thai nationality but cannot explain why Thai nationality is important to their lives. Also they cannot define the meaning of Thai nationality and/or Thai citizenship. A better understanding of Thai nationality law will help villagers to realize their status and rights, and plausibly increase their confidence in contacting district officials.

5. The general idea of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights without differentiation of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property ownership, birth or other status. The discrimination practice on ethnicity is equivalent to violation on human rights. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand in B.E.2540 and B.E.2550 state that human dignity, rights and freedom must be protected. However, there is still violation of human rights problem concerning ethnic differentiation. This is because those whose rights have

been violated have no lawful status in accordance with Thai law. Thus, it is important that a clear policy to solve the problem of people who do not have legal status should be established.

The National Legislative Assembly Extra-ordinary Commission on Non-legal Status and Rights of Individuals in Thailand led by Tuenjai Deetes was formed. The aims are to identify individuals with legal status problem, monitoring Thai law and related policies pertaining the legal status problems, survey existing support network, and explore possibilities to help people escaping from legal status problem. The target group is not only the hill people, but also composes of people living near the border, people who do not know their origin, people losing civil registration document, and people or refugee escaping from death. However, there are three major factors impede this working team to help the unlawful status and no legal status people in the present Nationality Act and related regulations and guidelines.

Therefore, if Nationality Act can be changed or annulled, many children born with the alien parents will not be aliens who illegally entered Thailand. The relevant officials should determine the obvious regulation or criterion of granting Thai nationality according to the strategy approved by the Cabinet Resolution on 18 January 2005. As a result, the unlawful status and non-legal status people may have more chance to get Thai nationality.

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Sangprom Noytha on Thursday 21 June, 2007. at 14.40. Rom Thai village.
Sukkaew Somwandee on Wednesday 20 June, 2007. at 15.30. Rom Thai village.

Paper 4 Historical Ethno-Symbolism and the Study of the Mon Ethnicity in Thailand[1]

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Abstract

In the world today, there has been a growing awareness that the so-called 'nation-state' is rarely a true appellation. In fact, only a few states comprise of ethnically homogeneous population, and many of them are diversely multiethnic in composition. Coincided with this evidence, there have been various forms of ethnic rivalries and conflicts as well as ethnic movements. This reveals that ethnic minority groups are active in re-creating and reinventing the meanings and practices associated with the representativeness of their ethnicities or ethnic identities. Consequently, ethnicity has reappeared as a crucial social and political force for the construction of reality. Therefore, it is important to find appropriate method(s) which helps to deal with the issue regarding ethnicity.

In an attempt to understand ethnicity or ethnic identity, historical ethno-symbolic approach was applied with a case study of the ethnic Mon in Thailand. The focus area was set in the three old Mon communities, namely Kung Phayom, Ban Muang and Nakhon Chum communities in Ban Pong, Ratchaburi, Thailand. By developing this idea, two major elements of historical ethno-symbolism were used, including the myth of ethnic nation and the invention of the national symbols (comprises of language, religion and symbolism of nationhood). The study attempts to answer the sociological questions of why, how and which types of identities are constructed, contested, transformed and institutionalised. This would further help to better understand the politics of ethnicity.

Introduction

This study aims to understand ethnicity through the empirical analysis of ethnic identity. An ethnic Mon in Thailand was chosen as a case study since it lightens the understanding of the other possible type of ethnic minority, of what Glass calls "hidden minority" who "do not wear a striking label of inferiority" (1964: 150, quoted in Marger, 1991: 47). In this context, the Mons are seen as the ethnic minorities who possess ambiguous ethnic identification. This is simply because they do not experience such overt, institutionalised forms of discrimination, and because many of them have gained access to significant occupational and political positions. However, if consider carefully, there is also the possibility for them to perform a particular kind of ethnic movement. As Glass explains, "there is still a blank patch on

[1] Extracted and adapted from Patise Chuaykunoopakan's *Historical Ethno-Symbolism and the Study of the Mon Ethnicity in Thailand*, a dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Master of Science in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, Department of Sociology (May 2007).

the collar where such a label can be pinned on; and at any time of general social stress, it may indeed be stuck on again" (1964: 150, quoted in Marger, 1991: 47).

Mon is considered a very ancient ethnic group which has been located in Southeast Asia for more than 2,000 years. As found in the Mon Historical Record[2], originally, the Mon people were located in South India in the Region called Manipura (Assam at present). While the Burmese call the Mons as "Talaing(s)", they are known by the Westerners (especially the British) as "Peguan". The other word for the Mons is "Raman", which derives from the word Rāmañňadesa, meaning "the Monland". According to Nithi (2003), there are two assumptions for the migration of the Mon people. In terms of inter-linguistic relation, namely the transferral of the Mon-Khmer language group, it was believed that the Mon people possibly migrated from the North of Southeast Asia. The other theory proposes that Mon people migrated from the South of India so that they were called "Talaing" which was from the place called Telingana.

Many scholars (for example, Foster, 1986; Sirirath, Sathian & Nipa, 1999; Guillon, 1999; Halliday, 1917/2000 & South, 2003) agree that Mon civilisation was among the most distinctive and influential in pre-colonial mainland Southeast Asia. The Mon heritages include, for example, aspects of the language, art and architecture, political and legal systems, and especially Theravada Buddhism. Nevertheless, the recognition of the "Monland" as the great prosperous country dramatically ceased to exist after the conquest of Pegu by King Alaungpaya of Burma in 1757. Hence over the centuries, many Mon people have fled or been displaced within their traditional homelands (namely, Thailand and Burma), and outside the region. This has made the Mons known by the world as "a people without a country" (Halliday, 1913, quoted in Smithies, 1986: 33). In addition, there is an attempt for the Mon activists and nationalists to fight for their own sovereignty and thus re-establish the "Monland". However, it should be noted that the majority of Mon people in Thailand seem to have little or no interest in the nationalist cause. Nevertheless, a significant minority have been committed to the revival of the Mon cultural and linguistic heritage while a small number remain actively engaged in the struggle for the "Monland" in Burma. The very important strategy the Mon nationalists have employed is to attest the authenticity of their ethnic identity – "to 'the originality, the self-generating nature, of a given culture-community" (applied from Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in Global Era*: 66ff., 146).

The study will answer the major sociological questions, "How are we to understand the politics of the Mon ethnicity?", "What accounts for its salience?", and "How is the Mon ethnicity experienced or manipulated?".

[2] Phra Maha Chuang Oucharoen (trans. & ed.). (n.d). "The Mon Historical Record", in *The 80th Anniversary of Professor Dr. Su-ed Kotchaseni, the 48th Anniversary of Thai-Raman Association* (*80 Pee Satracharn Kierttikun Naipat Su-ed Kotchaseni 48 Pee Samakom Thai Raman*). (2004). Bangkok: Thai-Raman Association, 137.

Setting Theoretical Framework: Why Historical Ethno-Symbolism?

According to South, Mon nationalism is defined as "a movement or ideology which aims to achieve certain goals on behalf of the ethnic constituency in question" (2003: 6). Furthermore, "Mon nationalist inspirations are grounded in a conception of ethnic self-identity... To be Mon is to identify with a certain territory, with a distinct civilisation and culture nearly two thousand years old, and with the Theravada Buddhist religion" (South, 2003: 23). In this context, the aim of the Mon nationalists is seen as 'integrative', since they perceive the nation as "a primordial expression of the individuality and the creative force of nature. Like families, nations are natural solidarities; they evolve in the manner, so to speak, of organic beings and living personalities" (Smith, 1998: 178).

In this paper, I proposed historical ethno-symbolism as an alternative approach to understand the ethnic identity of the Mons in Thailand.

> "Historical ethno-symbolism emerges from the theoretical critique of modernist approaches, as well as from a different reading of the historical record. For ethno-symbolists, what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular *living past* has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias. It is from these elements of myths, memory, symbol, and tradition that modern national identities are reconstituted in each generation, as the nation becomes more inclusive and as its member cope with new challenges" (Smith, 1999: 9).

Historical ethno-symbolism is applicable for the study of the Mons and the other ethnic groups where history and culture play significant roles in the formation of nations and nationalism. As mentioned earlier, historical ethno-symbolic theory emphasises the importance of history and culture as effective sources for the acceleration of nationalist movements. For the historical ethno-symbolists, nationalism could raise its power and become more inclusive through the rediscovery and reinterpretation of the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages by the intellectual elites (Smith, 1999). Studying ethnic identity through historical ethno-symbolism would therefore allow us to tackle the ethnic continent from the angle of its own history. This helps to see how and why the conceptualisation of ethnic ideology has been constructed, contested, and progressively changed over periods of time. The following paper will carry out the study of ethnic identity of the Mons in Thailand through the application of historical ethno-symbolic approach. The study will be divided into two main sections. The first part will provide the ethnic myth of the Mon nation. The second part will present the invention of symbols of ethnic heritages, which includes language, religion, and symbolism of Mon nationhood.

Research Methodology

A case study was located in three communities (Kung Phayom, Ban Muang and Nakhorn Chum) in Ban Pong, Ratchaburi, Thailand, due to these following reasons. First of all, Ban Pong is regarded as one of the largest communities of Mon descendants in Thailand (South, 2003). Secondly, Ban Pong is claimed to be the very ancient Mon community where people still maintain a considerable degree of traditional Mon culture (compared with other Thai-Mon communities in Thailand).

Primary data was gathered directly from key informants (namely, the Thai-Mons in Ban Pong) by using different data collecting techniques. Four techniques had been applied in this study. The main tool was standardised questionnaire. Moreover, reconnaissance survey, in-dept interview, and field observation were also used for supplementary information. The fieldwork lasted for around one month, from late June to the end of July 2006. The questionnaire was conducted with the Thai-Mon people with the total amount of 103 individuals in Kung Phayom, Ban Muang, and Nakhorn Chum communities, Ban Pong, Ratchaburi, Thailand. The focus groups were divided into two major sections: the young generation (under the age of 20) in comparison with the other older generations (20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, and 70+). The findings were measured in calculating the percentage, presented in single table with the analysis of the data.

Secondary data was gathered from various sources. For instance, facts and figures about the study area were collected primarily from Ban Pong Administrative Office. An overview of the situation was given through former researches on Mons in Ban Pong and in Mae Klong River, for example, researches by Oshima (1993); Boobpha (1996); and Sirirath, Sathian & Nipa (1999). Supplementary information was collected from the Mon periodicals (*The Sound of Raman*), internet websites, the Mon language textbooks, and so on.

In terms of data processing and analysis, quantitative analysis through the application of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed. Descriptive statistics specifically for percentage were used to describe the respondents' answers in each topic. Moreover, qualitative statement technique was applied for the analytical description of the findings.

The Ethnic Myth of the Mon Nation

Narrating the ethnic myth is one of the ultimate missions of the ethnic or nationalist movements. In order to claim for the real existence of their community, the very first and important task of the nationalists is to trace their community's origin, and hence locate it in time and in relation to other relevant communities. Since the ethnic Mons are claimed to be one of the oldest indigenous groups in Southeast Asia, history is a very fundamental source that the Mon nationalists have applied to fulfil their nationalist aspirations. In this respect, the Mon history could be characterised as 'myth-history'. To some extent, its history lesson is not to be taken as an accurate account of the past but rather as an exercise of legitimation where (ethnic) identity and values are celebrated.[3]

Based on the Mon Historical Record (translated and edited by Phra Maha Chuang Oucharoen, n.d), the myth-history of the Mon ethnicity began during the occupation of the Mons in South India. The Mon glorious cities included "Sudhammavati" or "Thaton", and "Pegu" or "Hamsawati". In this respect, it should

[3] The concept of 'myth-history' has been applied from David Mc Crone. (1998). "Chapter 2: Tribe, Place and Identity: Ethnicity and Nationalism", in *The Sociology of Nationalism*. London: Routledge, 51.

be noted that the Mon myth-history always includes supernatural and heroic figures, and with the link to Buddhism as a way to romanticise its ethnic myth.

The other important element of the ethnic myth that the nationalists have applied is **the myth of decline**. The myth of decline explains "how the community lost its anchor in a living tradition, how the old values became ossified and meaningless, and how, as a result, common sentiments and beliefs faded to give way to rampant individualism and the triumph of partisan interests over collective ideals and communal solidarity" (Smith, 1999: 67). Coincided with the myth of decline is **the myth of location and migration**. The myth of location and migration helps to clarify where an ethnic group came from and the reasons why its collective people have relocated to the present place. As mentioned by Smith (1999), space gives a necessary framework of self-identification, and assumes special importance where claims to 'territory' are being pressed. The myth of migration thus gives reference to the myth of ancestry where there is "the symbolic kinship link between all members of the present generation of the community, and between this generation and all its forebears, down to the common ancestor" (Smith, 1999: 64).

The Mon nationalists highlight their myth of decline as the major reason for the stateless situation of contemporary Mon people. Moreover, the Mon nationalists strongly emphasise their constant immigrations in the past mainly as a result of the Burmese invasion. Thus, it is the task of the contemporary Mon people to reunite the fragments of their brotherhood and re-establish the "Monland". In this context, it is also important to note that these immigrations of Mons into Siamese territory coincided with the active intercourse between the two countries, namely Burma and Siam. The wartime between these two countries consequently brought large amount of Mons to flee to Siam for refuge (Halliday, 1917/1986: 8).

The other aspect of historical ethno-symbolism that the Mon nationalists have applied is **demarcating the territory of a nation**. It is among the most effective ways that a national identity is strengthened and sustained. Every single map reveals the nation's 'property space' or sovereignty in which the power order is implicit but unsurprisingly clear (Mc Crone, 1998). Thus, a map is the most concrete, and the seemingly natural and stable feature of a nation (Thongchai, 1994). It is highlighted that territorial boundary tends to shift with the political context of which among the most important features are the size and significance of the boundary that helps to shape the level of group identity that emerges as most salient (Horowitz, 1985).

In history, the "Monland" covered three regions stretching over the whole of lower Burma, namely Tenasserim, Pegu and Irrawaddy. Today the "Monland" (or the Mon State) is a figment of ambiguity. It does not exist on any official maps, but only in patches where the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and its military wing the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) are located. The present day Mon State was established in 1974. It covers an area of 12,000 square kilometres, extending from the Gulf of Martaban to the Thai border, and including many small islands along 566 kilometres of coastline.[4] It is divided into three regions: Northern, Central and

[4] Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO). (1996). *Mon.* (http://www.unpo.org/member_profile.php?id=39). [Downloaded on April 22, 2007] & Ashley South. (2003). *Mon Nationalism and Civil War in Burma.* New York: Routledge, 7.

Southern regions. With regards to the contemporary Thai-Mons in Thailand, they are descendants of political refugees and others who entered Thailand from their homeland in the South of Burma. According to the study of Bauer, the size of the Mon populations in both Burma and Thailand seems to be a debatable figure. The estimated number of the contemporary Mon population in Thailand ranges between 60,000-200,000 people, depending partly on whether language use is considered a key criterion. Bauer calculates that the number of Mon speakers is unlikely to exceed 60-80,000 people (Christian Bauer, quoted in South, 2003: 20). In fact, no one knows exactly how many Mons live in Thailand today, because the Mon descendents are all Thai citizens and are not distinguished legally from the Thais in any possible way. Moreover, since much assimilation has occurred, it would be difficult to decide who is Mon and who is not (Foster, 1986). As commented by Seidenfaden, "It seems therefore sure that one day the Mon will be completely absorbed by the Thai" (1958: 116-7, quoted in Smithies, 1986: 34).

The Findings of the Study Area: As proposed by the ethno-symbolists, one of the major elements that gives nationalism its power are the myths and memories of ethnic origins which can be rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias and presented to the participants (Smith, 1999). The assumption for this study is that a sense of ethnic identity tends to increase when members of the ethnic groups have significant shares of their *ethno-history*. On the contrary, the sense of ethic identity tends to decrease when *ethno-history* is seen as less important. In this context, *ethno-history* refers to "the ethnic members' memories and understanding of their communal past or pasts, rather than any more *objective* and dispassionate analysis by professional historians" (Smith, 1998: 16).

According to the study, the Thai-Mon people tended to have no clue about the number of their population, and have superficial knowledge about their *ethno-history*. The historical evidences they provided varied, but were generally of what has been written by both the Thai and Mon sides. This implies that the myth-history of an ethnic group is not to be taken as a history lesson in the sense that it is an accurate story of the past, but is rather the way to celebrate ethnic identity and values, and therefore integrate members of the group (applied from Mc Crone's theory, 1998). Similarly, territoriality plays a significant role in integrating people of the nation. In this context, territoriality seems to be weakened when it lacks a clear picture of its own territory (or an official map). This proves that the myth-history and the territoriality of the nation are always multi-stranded and contested, which requires the continuous process of reinterpretation of national identities (applied from Smith's theory, 1998). With this reason, there is the possibility for changes in perceptions of ethnic identity of the group members in certain places and in different periods of time.[5]

[5] Please refer to the table presentation of the questionnaire results in Patise Chuaykunoopakan's *Historical Ethno-Symbolism and the Study of the Mon Ethnicity in Thailand*, a dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Master of Science in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, Department of Sociology (May 2007).

The Invention of the Mon National Symbols

Mon Language: Even though language use is not the sole criterion of ethnic identification, it is one of the important cultural aspects which help to construct and sustain an ethnic community. Bash (1979) suggests that language is of great importance for the maintenance, the coherence, and especially the integrity of any given social construction of reality.

Language is very fundamental to the definition of the Mon ethnic identity. As proposed by Guillion (1999: 3), the term "Mon" itself represents the "Mon culture". Guillion (1999) further explains that in spoken Mon, the elegant expression in writing and literature for "the Mon language" is *bhāsā man*. This expression, derived in part from the Pali *bhāsaka*, "speech," also means "Mon culture". The Mon language itself asserts that Mon culture and Mon language are inseparable. With this reason, when speaking of Mons, one of the primary key identifications is the Mon language.

All dialects of Mon, whether in Thailand or Burma, are mutually intelligible. Nonetheless, some vocabularies and the expressions of the Mon language used in Thailand are distinct from those used by the Mon language in Burma. Since the Thai-Mon people have had extensive interactions with the Thai, Chinese, Lao and Khmer people, they have adopted some words and expressions from these ethnic groups. On the contrary, the Mon language in Burma might possibly be influenced by Burmese, Indian, English and other ethnic groups in Burma. However, the Mons from both sides of the countries can communicate and understand each other (Boobpha, 1996: 98). The other issue concerning the language use of the Mon people is bilingualism, which has been widespread in both Thailand and Burma for a long time. In Thailand during Halliday's research time (1922: 78, quoted in Foster, 1982), the Mon language had already absorbed significant Thai vocabulary through a process that possibly required a long period of bilingualism. According to Foster (1982), in the modern times, the restricted use of the ancient Mon tongue has had an important effect on the amount of people identifying themselves as 'Mon'. This includes an estimate number of one-and-a-half million people, of which around five percent are in Thailand. The figure corresponds approximately with the number of Mon descendants who do not speak the language. The lack of the promotion of a written language could affect the spoken language, since people generally seem to think a language that is not written as a second-class language. In Thailand, the Mon written language is scarcely taught, and seemingly in the effort to teach the alphabet which makes Mon as a written language virtually dead (Foster, 1982).

Buddhism as the Major and Only Religion: According to the historical ethno-symbolic approach, religion has provided the most intense energy for many pre-modern ethnic communities or *ethnies*. This is particularly significant in those *ethnies* which have evolved a myth of ethnic election (Hutchinson & Smith (eds.), 1996: 187). As suggested by Smith (1996), "To be chosen is to be placed under moral obligations. One is chosen on condition that one observes certain moral, ritual and legal codes, and for only as long as one continues to do so. The privilege of election is accorded only to those who are sanctified, whose life-style is an expression of sacred values" (190). In this respect, religion strengthens the sense of ethnic identity by making ethnicity seen as a primordial phenomenon which is ineffable and obligatory.

The link between religion and ethnic myth of election is applicable to the case of ethnic Mons. The Mon myth-history tends to make close connection between Buddhism and the Mon people. As mentioned in the Mon myth-history, the ancient Mon city of Pegu was believed to be built due to the Buddha's prediction. There are also the records of the important Mon Buddhists in history. For example, the Mon merchants, Sumala and Wimala, brought eight hairs of the Buddha to keep in Mutao Stupa in Burma. There was also a narrative of the Mon monks, Sona Thera and Uttara Thera, who were the disciples of the Buddha. Moreover, Shwedagon Stupa (in Rangoon) has been claimed to be built by the Mons. In Thailand, the Mons have long gained a reputation for their religious ritual purity. This could possibly be since the Buddhist reforms in Siam in the 1820s and 1830s by the future King Monkut (King Rama IV) later became the basis of Thammayutnikai which has been praised for its strict monastic discipline and ordination procedure (Prince Dhani, 1965: 30-32, quoted in Foster, 1982). Moreover, the migration of the Mon people also brought a large number of Mon monks and novices. The Mon migrants built many Mon temples which are not only the places to teach Buddhism and perform religious rituals, but also the great place for the Mon Studies. There are various resources such as the Mon scripts, paintings on the walls, and so on. These are regarded as valuable heritages, especially for the Mon activists and nationalists, to search for the national resources.

The Symbolism of the Mon Nationhood: According to Thongchai (1994), the symbolism of nationhood has its own power. It is generally the conjugation of several discourses, each of which is effective in itself, and hence "makes the symbol of nationhood a rich and potent icon" (Thongchai, 1994: 171). However, "A code or a symbol, like the word "border" or the map of a nation, does not necessarily signify the original signified. It can be generative, producing many more related meanings" (Thongchai, 1994: 170-171). This argument is supported by the findings of Anthony Cohen (1996, quoted in Mc Crone, 1998). According to his theory, flags and other national symbols have the power to provide the members of the nation with the means by which to perceive. The assumption that under normal circumstances they can make people think in specifiable ways is nevertheless flawed. Despite its potential to guide misleading perception, the hegemony of the symbolism of nationhood considerably strengthens and unites the people of the nation.

The Mon national flag, national anthem, and national day are relatively new inventions. They are invented as to support the Mon Nationalist Movement which is based mainly in Burma yet influences a certain amount of Thai-Mons in Thailand. Even though these aspects seem not to be relevant for the case of Thai-Mons in Thailand, it shows how the Mon people apply the uses of symbols to create the sense of ethnic identity which not only unites the people of the same ethnic origin but also strengthens their ethnic identity by differentiating themselves from other ethnic groups.

It is notable that religion and history play significant roles in the creation of the Mon national symbols. For instance, the present day Mon national flag can trace its origin since 1958 when the New Mon State Party (NMSP) was established by Nai Shwe Kyin. The flag has a red colour, with the picture of a yellow sacred Sheldrake (this relates to the legend of the Mon Kingdom, symbolising the two swans that the Buddha saw when he reached the Pegu or Hamsawati) flying towards a light-blue star. The red colour refers to courage and bravery; the yellow colour refers to glory and

nobility; and the blue colour refers to truth. The light-blue star signifies the guiding Pole Star or the symbol of the Mon conviction. The Mon national anthem was created by the Mons in Burma in 1948, which marks the beginning of the rebellion against the Burmese government. Several years later, the Mon national anthem was recorded in Thailand by the Thai-Raman Association who lived near Bangkok. The last aspect of the Mon national symbol – The Mon National Day – is celebrated once every year during the period of the waning moon of the third lunar month (or in February). This was in commemoration of King Samala and King Wimala, the founders of "Hamsawati" or "Pegu". The Mon national Day was first adopted by the United Mon Association (UMA) founded by U Po Cho. It was celebrated in Moulmein in 1948, after Burma gained independence. The Mon National Day was first performed in Thailand at Ramkhamhang University in 1993. Nowadays, it has been celebrated by the Mon descendants from all over the world, such as Britain, Canada, Norway, Sri Lanka, Australia and Malaysia.[6]

The Findings of the Study Area: According to the historical ethno-symbolic approach, the survival and destiny of collective identities of an ethnic group depends largely on history and culture. There is a relationship between history and culture which "forms integral parts of the fabric of popular visions, and of the social structures and processes in which the designated populations are embedded and through which their elites must forge their strategies" (Kedourie, 1971: Introduction; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983: Introduction & ch. 7, quoted in Smith, 1998: 9). Throughout the times, historical and cultural heritages have been rediscovered, recreated and presented as symbols of nationhood, which not only help to integrate people of its community but also differentiate themselves from the outsiders. Here, the effectiveness of symbolism signifies the power and durability of ethnic or nationalist movements.

The questionnaire attempted to investigate the cultural aspects in which the activists and nationalists have applied for the invention of the national symbols. The major stereotypes of ethnic symbols (language, religion, and the symbolism of nationhood) are used as a key to measure ethnic identity of the Thai-Mon people. According the findings, my study seems to indicate that the sense of ethnic belonging of the Thai-Mon people in the three communities has declined. This can be seen clearly by the seemingly ineffectiveness of the symbolic uses of ethnic identity (such as shared language and history) among the Thai-Mon people, particularly the young generation (under 20 years of age). The changes in the people's perception of ethnic identity are tragically compatible with the danger of loss of some cultural heritages (such as the Mon language). This supports the historical ethno-symbolic theory that culture is among the most important aspects for the defence and maintenance of ethnicity.[7]

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[6] Juajan Wongpolganan. (3-6 April 2005). "The Impact of Thai-Burma Border Politics on Indigenous People: The Case of a Mon Sanctuary in Thailand's Westernmost District of Sangkhlaburi", in *9th International Conference on Thai Studies (Vol. 2)*. Illinois: Northern Illinois University, 3-4 & Sukanya Baonerd. (3 May-June 2007). "The Mon National Day: In the Conception of Nation and Nationalism", in *The Sound of Raman (Sieng Raman)*.
http://www.monstudies.com/show_content.php?topic_id=131&main_menu_id=11 [downloaded on May, 20 2007].

[7] Please refer to the table presentation of the questionnaire results in Patise Chuaykunoopakan's *Historical Ethno-Symbolism and the Study of the Mon Ethnicity in Thailand*, a dissertation submitted to

Final Analysis

According to the findings, it seems that manner in which Thai-Mon people have responded to the nationalist agenda is unclear. In this context, the meaning and the level of ethnic belonging of people varies individually. For example, the persons claiming to be Mon may have some knowledge about the Mon history, or superficial awareness of the Mon culture and traditions. Moreover, many people claiming to be Mons either know a few words of Mon, or could understand but could neither speak nor write Mon. However, it is obvious that the Thai-Mon people tend to view ethnicity as of primordialism which is 'given' and 'unaccountable'. The study of ethnic Mons through the application of historical ethno-symbolism provides the overall understanding of ethnicity as follows.

As suggested by the historical ethno-symbolists, the survival and destiny of collective identities of an ethnic group depend largely on history and culture. In order to strengthen and maintain a group's ethnic identity, the transformation and reconstruction of the constitutive myths as well as the symbols of nationhood are fundamentally required. These elements, however, have changed over time, which make the borders between ethnic and national identities move" (Tønnesson & Antlöv, 1996 & Smith, 1999). What is interesting here is of how the members of the ethnic group perceive themselves as belonging to the group which can help to sustain the ethnic community. Thus, "for nationalism to do its work, ordinary people need to see themselves as the bearers of an identity centred elsewhere, imagine themselves as an abstract community (Eley & Suny, 1996:22, quoted in Mc Crone, 1998: 41). This means the nationalists have to adopt the primordial views of ethnicity for to fulfil its nationalist inspiration. Furthermore, it is also important to consider the relational concept of ethnicity. Ethnicity, or at least the awareness of it, is seen as situational and reciprocal, because it is likely to figure in various ways, with different social costs and benefits attached, and in a certain place and time (Jenkins, 1997 & Stephan, 2000). Hence, what it means to be a group member is continuously contested and transformed through collective debates about group culture and identity. To some extent, the perception of individual agency towards the assertion of the ethnic identity is constrained and influenced by the politics of recognition and authenticity practiced within minority group. (Song, 2003a). Also, ethnic identity is produced and reproduced through social interactions with the other ethnic groups, and interaction is always situated in context (Jenkins, 1997). These could help to explain why ethnicity, as of the political and social construction, has always been contested, reproduced, and transformed over the periods of time under certain circumstances.

Ultimately, this study reminds the hegemony or the 'hidden power' of ethnicity. Ethnicity, in itself, is powerful. To some extent, people tend to assume that it is already there. Historical ethno-symbolism is a sound theory to deal with the problems regarding ethnicity. Even thought historical ethno-symbolism does not deny the possibility of pre-existing ethnic community, it helps to trace the root of ethnic origin, to see how and why the ethnic and national elements have been reinterpreted and reconstructed by the nationalist intelligentsias. I would therefore like to conclude by applying Hall's perception of ethnicity (1990, quoted in Mc Crone, 1998).

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the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Master of Science in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, Department of Sociology (May 2007).

Ethnicity is genuinely a contestable phenomenon. It has never been an "already accomplished fact", but rather a "production" that is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within representation.

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Paper 4 Historical Ethno-Symbolism and the Study of the Mon Ethnicity in Thailand[1]

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Abstract

In the world today, there has been a growing awareness that the so-called 'nation-state' is rarely a true appellation. In fact, only a few states comprise of ethnically homogeneous population, and many of them are diversely multiethnic in composition. Coincided with this evidence, there have been various forms of ethnic rivalries and conflicts as well as ethnic movements. This reveals that ethnic minority groups are active in re-creating and reinventing the meanings and practices associated with the representativeness of their ethnicities or ethnic identities. Consequently, ethnicity has reappeared as a crucial social and political force for the construction of reality. Therefore, it is important to find appropriate method(s) which helps to deal with the issue regarding ethnicity.

In an attempt to understand ethnicity or ethnic identity, historical ethno-symbolic approach was applied with a case study of the ethnic Mon in Thailand. The focus area was set in the three old Mon communities, namely Kung Phayom, Ban Muang and Nakhon Chum communities in Ban Pong, Ratchaburi, Thailand. By developing this idea, two major elements of historical ethno-symbolism were used, including the myth of ethnic nation and the invention of the national symbols (comprises of language, religion and symbolism of nationhood). The study attempts to answer the sociological questions of why, how and which types of identities are constructed, contested, transformed and institutionalised. This would further help to better understand the politics of ethnicity.

Introduction

This study aims to understand ethnicity through the empirical analysis of ethnic identity. An ethnic Mon in Thailand was chosen as a case study since it lightens the understanding of the other possible type of ethnic minority, of what Glass calls "hidden minority" who "do not wear a striking label of inferiority" (1964: 150, quoted in Marger, 1991: 47). In this context, the Mons are seen as the ethnic minorities who possess ambiguous ethnic identification. This is simply because they do not experience such overt, institutionalised forms of discrimination, and because many of them have gained access to significant occupational and political positions. However, if consider carefully, there is also the possibility for them to perform a particular kind of ethnic movement. As Glass explains, "there is still a blank patch on

[1] Extracted and adapted from Patise Chuaykunoopakan's *Historical Ethno-Symbolism and the Study of the Mon Ethnicity in Thailand*, a dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Master of Science in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, Department of Sociology (May 2007).

the collar where such a label can be pinned on; and at any time of general social stress, it may indeed be stuck on again" (1964: 150, quoted in Marger, 1991: 47).

Mon is considered a very ancient ethnic group which has been located in Southeast Asia for more than 2,000 years. As found in the Mon Historical Record[2], originally, the Mon people were located in South India in the Region called Manipura (Assam at present). While the Burmese call the Mons as "Talaing(s)", they are known by the Westerners (especially the British) as "Peguan". The other word for the Mons is "Raman", which derives from the word Rāmañña-desa, meaning "the Monland". According to Nithi (2003), there are two assumptions for the migration of the Mon people. In terms of inter-linguistic relation, namely the transferral of the Mon-Khmer language group, it was believed that the Mon people possibly migrated from the North of Southeast Asia. The other theory proposes that Mon people migrated from the South of India so that they were called "Talaing" which was from the place called Telingana.

Many scholars (for example, Foster, 1986; Sirirath, Sathian & Nipa, 1999; Guillon, 1999; Halliday, 1917/2000 & South, 2003) agree that Mon civilisation was among the most distinctive and influential in pre-colonial mainland Southeast Asia. The Mon heritages include, for example, aspects of the language, art and architecture, political and legal systems, and especially Theravada Buddhism. Nevertheless, the recognition of the "Monland" as the great prosperous country dramatically ceased to exist after the conquest of Pegu by King Alaungpaya of Burma in 1757. Hence over the centuries, many Mon people have fled or been displaced within their traditional homelands (namely, Thailand and Burma), and outside the region. This has made the Mons known by the world as "a people without a country" (Halliday, 1913, quoted in Smithies, 1986: 33). In addition, there is an attempt for the Mon activists and nationalists to fight for their own sovereignty and thus re-establish the "Monland". However, it should be noted that the majority of Mon people in Thailand seem to have little or no interest in the nationalist cause. Nevertheless, a significant minority have been committed to the revival of the Mon cultural and linguistic heritage while a small number remain actively engaged in the struggle for the "Monland" in Burma. The very important strategy the Mon nationalists have employed is to attest the authenticity of their ethnic identity – "to 'the originality, the self-generating nature, of a given culture-community" (applied from Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in Global Era*: 66ff., 146).

The study will answer the major sociological questions, "How are we to understand the politics of the Mon ethnicity?", "What accounts for its salience?", and "How is the Mon ethnicity experienced or manipulated?".

[2] Phra Maha Chuang Oucharoen (trans. & ed.). (n.d). "The Mon Historical Record", in *The 80th Anniversary of Professor Dr. Su-ed Kotchaseni, the 48th Anniversary of Thai-Raman Association* (*80 Pee Satracharn Kierttikun Naipat Su-ed Kotchaseni 48 Pee Samakom Thai Raman*). (2004). Bangkok: Thai-Raman Association, 137.

Setting Theoretical Framework: Why Historical Ethno-Symbolism?

According to South, Mon nationalism is defined as "a movement or ideology which aims to achieve certain goals on behalf of the ethnic constituency in question" (2003: 6). Furthermore, "Mon nationalist inspirations are grounded in a conception of ethnic self-identity... To be Mon is to identify with a certain territory, with a distinct civilisation and culture nearly two thousand years old, and with the Theravada Buddhist religion" (South, 2003: 23). In this context, the aim of the Mon nationalists is seen as 'integrative', since they perceive the nation as "a primordial expression of the individuality and the creative force of nature. Like families, nations are natural solidarities; they evolve in the manner, so to speak, of organic beings and living personalities" (Smith, 1998: 178).

In this paper, I proposed historical ethno-symbolism as an alternative approach to understand the ethnic identity of the Mons in Thailand.

> "Historical ethno-symbolism emerges from the theoretical critique of modernist approaches, as well as from a different reading of the historical record. For ethno-symbolists, what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular *living past* has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias. It is from these elements of myths, memory, symbol, and tradition that modern national identities are reconstituted in each generation, as the nation becomes more inclusive and as its member cope with new challenges" (Smith, 1999: 9).

Historical ethno-symbolism is applicable for the study of the Mons and the other ethnic groups where history and culture play significant roles in the formation of nations and nationalism. As mentioned earlier, historical ethno-symbolic theory emphasises the importance of history and culture as effective sources for the acceleration of nationalist movements. For the historical ethno-symbolists, nationalism could raise its power and become more inclusive through the rediscovery and reinterpretation of the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages by the intellectual elites (Smith, 1999). Studying ethnic identity through historical ethno-symbolism would therefore allow us to tackle the ethnic continent from the angle of its own history. This helps to see how and why the conceptualisation of ethnic ideology has been constructed, contested, and progressively changed over periods of time. The following paper will carry out the study of ethnic identity of the Mons in Thailand through the application of historical ethno-symbolic approach. The study will be divided into two main sections. The first part will provide the ethnic myth of the Mon nation. The second part will present the invention of symbols of ethnic heritages, which includes language, religion, and symbolism of Mon nationhood.

Research Methodology

A case study was located in three communities (Kung Phayom, Ban Muang and Nakhorn Chum) in Ban Pong, Ratchaburi, Thailand, due to these following reasons. First of all, Ban Pong is regarded as one of the largest communities of Mon descendants in Thailand (South, 2003). Secondly, Ban Pong is claimed to be the very ancient Mon community where people still maintain a considerable degree of traditional Mon culture (compared with other Thai-Mon communities in Thailand).