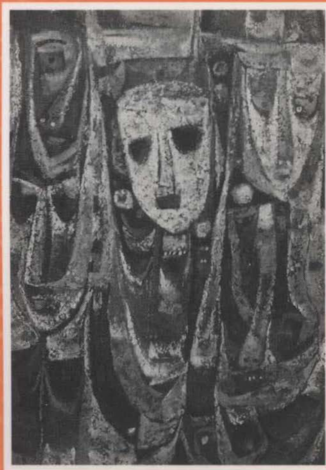
Asian Social Science Series

Alternate Identities



The Chinese of Contemporary Thailand

Academic Publishers

Times Academic Press

Tong Chee Kiong & Chan Kwok Bun (eds.)

Asian Social Science Series Vol. 1

Editors: Chan Kwok Bun, Syed Farid Alatas & Vineeta Sinha

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CONTENTS

Contributors *v*
Submissions to the Asian Social Science Series *vi*

INTRODUCTION **Positionality and Alternation: Identity of the Chinese of Contemporary Thailand**
Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong 1

CHAPTER 1 **Rethinking Assimilation and Ethnicity: The Chinese of Thailand**
Tong Chee Kiong and Chan Kwok Bun 9

CHAPTER 2 **Pigtail: A PreHistory of Chineseness in Siam**
Kasian Tejapira 41

CHAPTER 3 **Chinese Identity in Thailand**
Walwipha Burusratanaphand 67

CHAPTER 4 **Chinese Settlers and their Role in Modern Thailand**
Amara Pongsapich 85

CHAPTER 5 **Ethnicity and World View in Bangkok**
Richard Basham 107

CHAPTER 6 **Left Behind by the Boom: Chinese Merchants in Provincial Thailand in the Era of Rapid Economic Growth**
Michael J. Montesano 137

CHAPTER 7 **Sino-Thai Entrepreneurs and the Provincial Economies in Thailand**
Yoko Ueda 169

CHAPTER 8 **Preservation of Ethnic Identity and Acculturation**
Supang Chantavanich and Somkiat Sikharaksakul 189

CHAPTER 9 **Chinese Literacy in a Bangkok Chinese Family**
Pranee Chokkajitsumpun 203

CHAPTER 10 **Wang Thong: Civic Identity and Ethnicity in a Thai Market Town**
P. Tarkulwaranont, Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong 227

CHAPTER 11 **Sino-Thai Ethnic Identity: Married Daughters of China and Daughters-in-law of Thailand**
Jiemin Bao 271

CHAPTER 12 **Tradition, Identity and Religious Eclecticism among Chinese in Thailand**
Ann Maxwell Hill 299

Index 319

Introduction

Positionality and Alternation: Identity of the Chinese of Contemporary Thailand

Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong

Who and what are the Chinese in Thailand? The essays collected in this volume focus on the problems faced by the Chinese immigrants on their coming into Thailand since the tail end of the last century. All our contributors implicitly and explicitly engage in a definitional – and thus conceptual – exercise that further develops the now-known complexity of the identity of Chinese overseas. Following the essay by Tong and Chan[1] on rethinking assimilation and ethnicity of the Chinese of Thailand, the rest of the volume has taken a shared view that ethnicity, ethnic identity and ethnic relations are far more dynamic than mere poles of self-maintenance of ethnic purity and complete assimilation between which the ethnic actors or groups oscillate. Rather, ethnicity and ethnic identity straddle, boundary-cross, alternate and perhaps mutate in the face of a multitude of influences. This volume of essays seeks to identify and characterize such influences while linking them to the multiple processes and consequences of Chinese identity formation in the Thailand context.

Of course, at the core of the problem of Chinese identity in Thailand is the lack of homogeneity of both the Chinese and Thais

as ethnic groups. As Pornchai, Chan and Tong's essay shows, analyses of Chinese ethnicity must first grapple with the fact that there are many dialect groupings of Chinese in Thailand, while the Thais are themselves a diverse collection of different peoples. The Thai language does not have a common word to describe ethnicity. Walwipha questions all monolithic labels that suggest the Chinese and Thais are homogenous groups. Amara advocates a more dynamic, nuanced look at the Chinese as a varied group who have responded to various extenuating circumstances brought forth by state policies. Bao examines the Sino-Thai identity as one based on traditional orderings but also not least one that synthesizes Thai Buddhist and Chinese Confucian ethics. Hill's characterization of the syncratic and eclectic nature of Chinese popular religions in Chiangmai has deep implications for understanding the geography and anthropology of Chinese identity in Northern Thailand. Walwipha highlights this geographical aspect in that Chinese in Bangkok and those in the provinces are differentially shaped by their respective interactions with the local social, economic and political environments. Montesano's discussion of the market society of the 1918–31 Chinese cadres who made up the market society of provincial Thailand calls into question the assumed linking of Chinese-Thai's economic miracle today with those who have remained and are economically left behind in the provinces. Ueda also highlights the apparent disparities in the allocation of economic resources between Bangkok and provincial Chinese.

In an attempt to look for ways of conceptualizing the Chinese in alternative, non-ethnic terms, Montesano, Amara and, in some way, Hill put forth the notion of Chinese as an economic class. As Walwipha suggests, Chinese and Thais are mutually defining each other in ethnic, political, and economic terms – not unlike the traditional in-group/out-group thesis in social psychology. In Pornchai, Chan and Tong's essay on the market town of Wang Thong, this is further influenced by conditions such as the re-telling of Chinese origins in the local community that has accorded the Chinese rights to community membership and identity. All of this is demonstrated in the ability of the Chinese to localize and integrate their version of ritual practices in the face of local Thai practices that are increasingly intruded upon by central Siamese ways.

Ethnicity is no simple primordiality. It alternates. Oftentimes, it is positionality pure and simple. Kasian's brilliant socio-historical study corrects an error Skinner (1997a) might have made in according

the pigtail wearer an automatic, assumed symbol of being Chinese. It is known to the Thai historian that the pigtail has come to mean different things to different peoples at different times and places – there is no automatic or assumed symbol or outward manifestation of ethnicity. Pigtail as ethnicity is an invention, a historical artefact. Kasian's insightful account shows that the Chinese were considered Thai so long as they subordinated themselves to the *moon nai* and *phrai* system of Thai social order. For only a Chinese could smoke opium, there were many non-Chinese who actually "renounced" their ethnicity (e.g., of being Thai) in pursuit of a vice.

Thai state policies have an enduring impact on Chinese-Thai interactions and the social treatment of the Chinese in the Thai state. More importantly, these policies affect considerably the nature of Chinese responses to their social condition. In Walwipha's essay, the social and economic position of the Chinese is seen in terms of "seeming assimilation" where the Chinese have adopted Thai ways out of sheer economic necessity. Amara's discussion of the strategies adopted by the Chinese in changing periods of Thai economic and political imperatives show the Chinese having to be highly adaptable in order to survive economically as well as socially as a minority group. This collective adaptability is also discussed in the essay by Supang and Somkiat: Chinese schools in Bangkok cope with restrictive pedagogic demands of the state by resorting to a "hidden curriculum" that pretends. Minority culture is transmitted "behind the scene", itself a strategy of considerable ingenuity. The observed cooperation between the Thai political elite and Chinese business presents another intriguing sociological face. Amara's essay sets the scenario up in terms of a distinctive partnership between Thai politicians and Chinese bankers, which invokes a larger picture of the reliance of the Thai state on Chinese capital and technology. This theme is also examined by Tong and Chan who note the mutuality and complementarity of an exchange relationship between the two groups. Similarly, Bao's discussion of the co-presence of Thai political figures and prominent Chinese businessmen in wedding arrangements typifies such socio-political ties.

The prominence of the economic role of the Chinese in Thailand is undisputed, as Basham observes. Outside Bangkok, provincial economies continue to be benefited by the strong Chinese entrepreneurial spirit. Essays by Montesano and Ueda note the willingness of the Chinese to move into new grounds for their economic pursuits, making their contribution to the local economies

of the provinces. Specifically, Ueda's discussion of how the provincial Chinese have managed to overcome their economic handicaps by resorting to close personal contacts demonstrates the persistence and utility of ethnicity and cultural tradition in a business setting – this Chinese propensity of using connections in business is also reported in Basham's essay. As cultural capital, a coherent sense of community and ethnic solidarity is good for business. Supang and Somkiat's essay meticulously reports efforts of the Chinese schools to transmit implicitly Chinese culture because of heavy state restrictions on the curriculum. This tenacity of Chinese ethnicity is also observed by Pranee when she describes how family members of two generations helped each other access the Chinese heritage and keep literacy in Chinese practices alive.

Bao's paper sensitizes our attention to the continued use of pre-1949 Confucian practices in Chinese wedding rituals as an indication of how poignant and enduring these practices have become. Ethnicity fuses with class to celebrate the social position of the two families involved. And in the context of emerging wealth among the Chinese in Thailand today, a Chinese temple was built in Chiangmai by a Chinese businessman within the ground of a Thai wat. Hill's case study here illustrates a range of new ethnic preservation activities engaged in by the Sino-Thai. Far from the assumed straight-line assimilation route put forth by Skinner (1957a, 1957b, 1963, 1973), Chinese are variously restating their ethnic and economic position within the fabric of Thai society.

Ethnicity then is subjected to transformation, mediation and negotiation. Embedded within a web of interlocking forces and influences, ethnic actors constantly adjust their postures, strategies and identities which not only impact on their own lives, but also on the ethnicity of others. In the context of contemporary Thailand, ethnicity has in fact transcended the traditional Chinese-Thai divide. In addition to the majority/minority and, in-group/out-group, conceptions in social psychology, there is a third element, that of western-styled consumerism and materialism observable in Sino-Thai weddings. To Pornchai, Chan and Tong, this moderating external influence could make the Thai and Chinese more alike each other than assimilation alone. In this sense, both Thai and Chinese could be evolving in tandem to form a new collective identity and consciousness, not unlike the Chaw Wang Thong described in Pornchai, Chan and Tong's essay, but perhaps more shaped by the forces of capitalism.

All our contributors agree on the assimilation of the Chinese in Thailand. Skinner asserts that a successful assimilation of the Chinese would be complete by the fourth generation and the character of assimilation will take the form of prolific use of the Thai language in almost every social context private or public. All contributors to this volume take issue with this total assimilation thesis. For example, Supang and Somkiat put forth an intriguing idea that because the Chinese by now have been effectively integrated, Chinese language and culture is not as frowned upon as it was in the pro-assimilation years – thus the plausibility of a resurgence of Chinese ethnicity. In fact, the Thai state has to some extent liberalized the image of Chinese in view of attendant economic opportunities in China. Pranee notes the utility value of Chinese literacy within a changing economic and political landscape where the use of Mandarin confers one with a distinct economic advantage. Both essays point to a re-assertion of the Chinese identity although the more important point here pertains to the influence it has on the Thais. More and more Thais now attend Chinese schools and learn the Chinese language for economic reasons.

Even the state and the Chinese community are seen to be mutually engaging each other to realize their respective aspirations. Amara and Walwipha highlight the Thai state's cultivation of the Chinese in business and politics. This interdependence is further highlighted in Bao's essay on wedding celebration sites where the Sino-Thai elite and the Thai political elite cement each other's mutual need for continued political and economic ties. Ueda offers the possibility of the Chinese gaining even more prominence with their burgeoning third generation being poised to exploit economic opportunities in China. In Hill's paper, that economic context is pushed even further as the Chinese in Chiangmai begin to counter-influence local Thai customs, traditions and fundamental religious constructions. For example, their infusion of merit-making practices with familiar Chinese patronage of temples, monks and Buddhist institutions has begun to shape the phenomenology of a Thai wat. The building of a Chinese temple within the ground of a Thai wat has deep economic and political implications for understanding the recent resurgence of Chinese ethnicity in Thailand.

In an essay tracing the history and sociology of knowledge as far as the study of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia is concerned, Qiu (1990) identifies three waves of theoretical ideas. The first wave was that of "ethnic persistence theory" right after the war – which sees the ethnicity of Chinese in Southeast Asia as unchanging, ever-

persistent. Victor Purcell (1965) was the theory's chief proponent. The dominant image of the overseas Chinese then was that of a sojourner who always looked homeward – China. Overseas Chinese were studied as a window to a larger agenda of understanding China. To loosely paraphrase two Chinese sayings: "Change was coped with by no change"; and "All changes in the periphery were finally traceable to the origin, the centre" – China. The intellectual spirit here was rather akin to what critics in the field of cultural studies now call essentialism. At the crest of the second wave was of course the extremely influential idea of assimilation advocated by Skinner (1957a, 1957b, 1963, 1973) in the late fifties in his famous works on the Chinese in Java and Thailand. His prediction that the Chinese in Thailand would have completed their assimilation by the fourth generation is a well-known one within the academic as well as the policy-making communities. As an idea, assimilation can perhaps be seen as a counter-reaction, an antithesis, to the earlier thesis of ethnic persistence. The two ideas represented two contrasting orientations on the part of the theorist as well as the Chinese themselves. According to the former, one looks toward, or, some say, backward to, China. According to the latter, one orients oneself toward Thailand – to solve "the Chinese problem", assimilation is the only way out.

If the ideas of ethnic persistence and assimilation represented two polarities – logically and theoretically speaking – the Chinese as individuals and groups/communities on the one hand, and the theorist on the other, were faced with a dilemma of choice. As it happened, the dilemma turned out to be more apparent than real upon a discovery of the richness but also the complexity of "the Chinese problem" – and perhaps of most instances of ethnic group relations. What has emerged is a third idea, a third image of the Chinese, a third ethnicity which is a product of structural and cultural integration. Borne out of an intellectual heritage that speaks vehemently of pluralism and a variety of multiculturalisms, this third wave stresses the multiple faces of ethnicity while interacting with the social structures of class, politics, gender, generation, and so on. In Thailand, there are many ways of being Chinese and, for that matter, of being Thai or Sino-Thai.

Several core concepts inform this third wave, this third ethnicity. First is the discovery of one's multiple rootedness; it conjures up an image of plurality, not singularity, of a succession of sinking roots as process, and of multi-stranded roots as outcome (Chan 1997:207).

Every Chinese is at the tension point of a multiplicity of forces intersecting with each other, be they nationalism, transnationalism, localism, capitalistic consumerism, traditionalism, modernism, and so on. A related concept is that of hybridity borne out of multiple rootedness and consciousness. The ethnic actor is forever mixing and mixed, forever crossing, traversing, translating linguistically and culturally. He is not either/or, but both. Thainess interacts with Chineseness in the context of an "impact collision resulting in mutual entanglement" (Postiglione, 1983) and a hybrid identity, a new transformed, shared "third ethnicity". The third concept is "enabled" or "made possible" by the first two : that of positionality. Because of his plural consciousness and hybridity, to the ethnic actor, identity is mere positioning. The Goffmanian actor invokes his identity in context; his ethnic competence is in "staging", "passing", self-presentation, or what Berger (1986:68) calls alternation, which is "the possibility to choose between varying and sometimes contradictory systems of meaning". In alternating his identities, the Chinese of Thailand develops "the perception of oneself in front of an infinite series of mirrors, each one transforming one's image in a different conversion" (Berger 1986:77). A Chinese thus has as many selves or faces as the number of mirrors he cares to hold up for himself or herself. This metaphor stresses the agency of the ethnic actor though the real sociological drama is not all romance because the validity of a face presented is in part determined by the extent to which it is socially recognized. Without being too sociologically pessimistic, identity alternation has its own limits and is often a matter of social and political permission by others.

Of course, hybridization of the Chinese, and the Thais, is a convoluted process. The Chinese identity, and for that matter, the Thai identity, in Thailand is made even more elusive and slippery by the emergence of global Chinese capitalism; a plausible onset of re-sinification as a result of rapid socio-economic development in China; and recent gestures of the Thai state in engaging Chinese businessmen in Thailand on the one hand, and China on the other hand. A Chinese problem is a Thai problem. It may be necessary for scholars and laymen alike to stop viewing Chinese as outsiders looking in Thai society from without. Perhaps it is now more appropriate to speak of Chinese of Thailand, as a salient part of a larger whole, rather than in Thailand, a kind of come and go, pick and choose. The preposition "of" connotes belongingness, connection, inclusion. To know and speak of the Thai, one must also know and speak of the

Chinese, and vice versa. Scholarly discourse in the future will then be on Thai studies and Thai society in which the Chinese are deeply embedded – not on overseas Chinese studies and Chinese society/ community any more (Chan and Tong, 1995:10).

Notes

1 Unless indicated otherwise, authors cited in this introduction are contributors to this edited volume.

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1

Rethinking Assimilation and Ethnicity: The Chinese of Thailand*

Tong Chee Kiong and Chan Kwok Bun

This chapter critically re-examines some of the major hypotheses on the assimilation process in general and the assimilation of the Chinese in Thailand in particular. We argue that assimilation cannot be seen as a straight line, one-way, lineal process of the Chinese becoming Thai. At the very least, assimilation is a two-way process which, in the long run, will leave the Chinese with something Thai and the Thai with something Chinese. The important theoretical question is no longer whether the Chinese in Thailand have been assimilated or not, but rather how they, as individuals and as a group, go about presenting themselves in their transactions with the Thai and other Chinese, and why. The analytical focus will thus be on the dynamics of social transactions within and between ethnic boundaries. What typically happens when an ethnic actor stays within his or her own ethnic boundary? What motivates him or her to cross it?

The primordialists on the one hand and the situationists on the other answer these questions in seemingly contrasting ways. This need not be so. Some fundamental, classical dichotomies in sociology, such as instrumental and expressive functions, public and private

place, and secondary and primary status, can be retrieved and used creatively as strategic conceptual building blocks in the overall task of theory-building in the field of ethnic studies.

It Takes Two

The assimilation process has two important issues: its directionality and its influence differential in terms of the relationship between the assimilator and the to-be-assimilated (Teske and Nelson, 1974:363–64). Much of the classical American literature on the subject either implicitly or explicitly treats assimilation as a one-way process, suggesting "an essentially unilateral approximation of one culture in the direction of the other" (Siegel *et al.*, 1953:988), typically in the context of unequal status and power between the two parties involved. Accordingly, it is alleged that when assimilation happens, it always typically operates in the direction of the dominant group exerting influence on the less dominant group — a unilineal process of social change. Such a view, elegantly articulated in Park's (1950) influential theory of race relations cycle, embodies in it a sense of inevitability and irreversibility. The eventual absorption of minorities into the dominant culture and the gradual disappearance of ethnicity are to be understood and accepted not only in terms of what they are and what they will be, but also in terms of what they should be. A theory of ethnic relations and social change becomes an ideology in disguise which, in spirit and in practice, prescribes rather than describes. What is prescribed here is the vision of one country, one culture, one ideology, one way of feeling, thinking and doing — a loopback into a tribal existence of oneness and homogeneity.

This dominant view of assimilation in the social science literature evokes images of an eager majority group intent on moulding, shaping, influencing and, if necessary, coercing minority groups "to become alike" and "to come in line", so to speak. This view is based on one assumption: the assimilator and the to-be assimilated are both willing game players, the former to affirm their sense of cultural superiority as well as the ideology of racial homogeneity, the latter to gain cultural acceptance and structural integration. As in van den Berghe's (1981:217) words, "...it takes two to assimilate. Assimilation is sought by members of the subordinate group — granted by members of the dominant group.... For assimilation to take place,

therefore, it takes a convergence of desire for it from the subordinates and acceptance by the dominants." This willingness to be assimilated on the part of the subordinates is thus not to be taken for granted on both theoretical and empirical grounds. As van den Berghe argues, a desire for assimilation must be motivated, oftentimes in a context of initial unequal relative positions such that assimilation through change in group membership would confer advantages on the individual while looking after his or her need for self-maximization.

While hypothesizing that "the more unequal their relative position is, the more of an incentive members of the subordinate group have to be accepted into the dominant group", van den Berghe (1981:216) is cognizant of a contending hypothesis which points to the persistence of ethnicity and ethnic sentiments, as well as the natural propensity of humans to prefer and behave favourably towards those presumed to be kindred. Contrary to the American model of assimilation, this contending hypothesis thus makes it theoretically imperative not to take assimilation and the demise of ethnicity for granted. Understood in this sense, assimilation is problematic and demands explanation when it happens; so is the disappearance of ethnicity, not its persistence.

In striving towards a realistic model of assimilation — realistic in the sense that it takes care of theoretical queries as well as enables itself to accommodate observed empirical variations — the theorist needs to develop a good grasp of the concept of ethnicity and its role in model-building. What then is ethnicity? van den Berghe (1978:403) advocates a sociobiological view:

> My central thesis is that both ethnicity and "race" (in the social sense) are, in fact, extension of the idiom of kinship, and that, therefore, ethnic and race sentiments are to be understood as an extended and attenuated form of kin selection.

This view is based on his interpretation of the sociobiological concept of "inclusive fitness" (Hamilton, 1964), a phenomenon associated with the natural propensity to "prefer kin over non-kin, and close kin over distant kin" (van den Berghe, 1978:402). Van den Berghe's view of ethnicity in terms of maximization of individual fitness by behaving nepotistically and, therefore, ethnocentrically is essentially in consonance with that of the primordialists who see ethnicity as "deeply rooted, given at birth,

and largely unchangeable" (van den Berghe, 1978:401). The primordialists, accentuating the "subjective" feelings of the ethnic experience, argue for the irreducibility of ethnic membership to class membership. As van den Berghe (1978:404) argues,

> [e]thnic groups, for nearly all of human history, were what geneticists call breeding populations, in-breeding superfamilies, in fact, which not only were much more closely related to each other than to even their closest neighbours, but which, almost without exception, explicitly recognised that fact, and maintained clear territorial and social boundaries with other such ethnic groups.

This conclusion and intentional preference for members of the same ethnic group as well as the deliberate attempt to maintain clear spatial and social distance with other ethnic groups is at the root of one anthropological school which sees ethnicity as a phenomenon deepening as one moves from the boundaries towards the centre (Rosaldo, 1988). It is at the centre, in the middle, not the boundaries or edges, where ethnic events "concentrate", "gather together", "thicken", and "pile up" — some strong concepts used by the Ilongots of northern Luzon in the Philippines in describing and explaining ethnicity (Rosaldo, 1988). In this view, ethnicity is cumulative over time, maintaining and preserving the condition prior to the point of cultural contact as well as resisting and defending attempts at cultural penetration, dilution or absorption on the part of the dominant. Collectively, members of ethnic groups enjoy the experience of gathering together and concentrating. In so doing, in "a state of healthy vitality and well-being", using Rosaldo's phrase, the group becomes "strong and thick".

In contrast to the primordialist and sociobiologist views of ethnicity, the other dominant view in anthropology suggests that ethnicity be best seen as a phenomenon emerging from "a constantly evoking interaction between the nature of the local community, the available economic opportunities and the national or religious heritage of a particular group" (Yancey *et al.*, 1976:397). The theoretical focus here is on how members of a particular ethnic group go about manifesting themselves while in full view of the opportunity structures in the wider society. In due process, ethnicity emerges, unfolds and takes shape. The human being is now seen as an active agent selectively and strategically presenting and displaying his ethnic emblems in ways he sees fit. Ethnic identity is merely "a thing"

subjected to manipulation and differential presentation; it is not a reflection of the true self. As Rosaldo (1988:164) puts it, "Ethnic identity, a thing that groups put on and take off to signify their difference from other such groups, comes to resemble clothes, masks, emblems or badges." These situationists view ethnicity more as form and process than as content, and that it is most empirically expressive and visible along the ethnic boundaries, not in the "centres" (Barth 1969:15). Thus Nagata (1974) would argue for the plausibility of a model of "ethnic oscillation" whereby individuals, with no single or fixed reference group, interpret situational requirements, adjust and display themselves for, among other reasons, social affinity, expediency and concern with social status and mobility. Foster (1977:114) completes this line of thinking:

> An ethnic identity is not necessarily an all-or-nothing, permanent thing. One may claim one identity in one situation and a different identity in another situation, depending on the relative payoffs.

Nagata, like Foster, argues that some individuals, in coping with particular exigencies of survival, would be developing a double identity and leading a double life.

Crossing Ethnic Boundaries

Nevertheless, Rosaldo (1988:161) is disinclined to see the two dominant anthropological views in studies of ethnicity as necessarily contradictory to each other, nor does he think the two conceptions have exhausted all possibilities of explaining the empirical phenomenon of ethnicity. To him, ethnicity is neither completely expressive (and primordial) nor completely instrumental (and situational); rather it "usually is both instrumental and expressive, and theories that oppose the two perspectives have posed a false dichotomy". On occasions of cultural "get-together", ethnic identity "thickens" while the past tradition is being selectively re-enacted upon, not simply repeated.

Rosaldo's attempt to "reconceive" ethnicity by criticizing the distinction traditionally drawn by the primordialists on the one hand and by the situationists on the other as being "more analytical than empirical" was anticipated by De Vos and Romanucci-Ross's (1982:378–89) analysis of the instrumental and expressive uses of

ethnicity. The vectors of expressiveness and instrumentality of ethnicity interpret, define and regulate interpersonal relationships both within and between ethnic groups. Instrumental behaviour is essentially goal-oriented, a means to an end, while expressive behaviour is an end in itself, "a result of a prior need or emotional state" (De Vos and Romanucci-Ross, 1982:379).

It is not clear from De Vos and Romanucci-Ross's formulation if instrumental ethnicity in terms of the five thematic concerns of achievement, competence, responsibility, control-power and mutuality applies to interpersonal relations both within and between different groups. Nevertheless, their "expressive ethnicity" dimension in terms of harmony, affiliation, nurturance, appreciation, pleasure and fortune clearly and explicitly denotes social relationships within a particular ethnic group. In combining and synthesizing the formulations of Rosaldo and De Vos and Romanucci-Ross, as well as those of the primordialists and the situationists, one may suggest that interpersonal relationships "in the centre" are typically characterized by an excess of "expressive" over "instrumental" ethnicity. Within the centre of an ethnic group, in such private places as home, community halls, clan associations, social get-togethers or on such ethnic ritualistic occasions as celebrations of festivals, religious worships and ethnic holidays, ethnicity is manifested mainly expressively to meet a personal emotional need for appreciation, affiliation, harmony and pleasure. The person loses and is engulfed willingly in a larger whole (which is invariably more than the sum total of its parts), finds and expresses his subjective sense of belonging and continuity with a past, a heritage, a tradition. Yet, at the same time, as De Vos and Romanucci-Ross (1982) and Rosaldo (1988:169) are quick to point out, the persons and the group are also conscious of pleasure turning into suffering or even death when the gatherings are penetrated by outsiders, threatening loss of their own identities and possibly, eventually, group survival.

Yet, in such private places, on such ethnic ritualistic occasions, there is no shortage of manifestations of instrumental ethnicity either. Rituals not only explain but also affirm group and, therefore, personal origin. As De Vos (1982) puts it, they solve the perennial human problems of where we are from, what we must do, and how we are different. In the centre, ethnicity is undoubtedly primarily primordial and expressive at the personal level. Yet, it is also constructed, used and utilized at the group level, noticeably towards group cohesion.

In answering the questions of why humans are social and why they co-operate, van den Berghe (1978:409) has identified three main principles of human sociality: kin selection, reciprocity and coercion. By kin selection, humans are expected to co-operate within the same kin group and, by extension, the same ethnic group. Ethnic groups appeal to individual loyalty because they are "supra-families". While relations within ethnic groups are essentially co-operative, intergroup relations are typically characterized by competition and conflict, visibly observable along the fringes, in common public places, where boundaries intersect and overlap. Sometimes, competition and conflict are muted. As van den Berghe (1978:409) puts it, "ethnic groups may enter a symbiotic, mutually beneficial relationship based, for instance, on the exploitation of two specialized and non-competitive niches in the same market". Reciprocity can operate between non-kin and between ethnic groups. It is co-operation for mutual benefit, for exploitation of opportunities and maximization of interests with expectation of exchange and return. Relations within and between classes, and between non-ethnically-based trades, occupations, associations, organizations, institutions and communities, are thus typically in the realm of reciprocity.

At the fringes of ethnic boundaries, in common public places, where materialistic transactions are negotiated and completed, one witnesses the visible emergence of the instrumental use of ethnicity. It is also in these places where the situationist view of man begins to gain plausibility. Ethnicity becomes changeable, culturally and ecologically defined, and situationally sensitive. The classical view holds that it is at the boundaries where ethnic action happens, more dramatically so when either co-operative or conflicting relationships between ethnic groups need to be strategized and enacted with obvious political and economic consequences.

It is at these moments of boundary-crossing when Hoadley (1988:504) insists that inquiry be focused "on those aspects of cultural and public life most likely to reveal ethnic boundaries and evidence of individuals having crossed them". What then is the motivation for crossing boundaries? Hoadley (1988:604) argues that, "[a]ll things being equal, the authority and status enjoyed by the majority group within a society exerts a natural attraction for minorities". The situationist view of man is once again invoked here: he is strategizing realities, constructing and reconstructing them, with the overall aim of self-maximization, both psychologically and materialistically, as van den Berghe would insist.

Nevertheless, other than the questions of motives and motivation, the next order of important questions, for both the ethnic actors and the students of ethnic relations, concerns behaviour, comportment, outward manifestations and appearances. Or simply, how do the ethnic actors conduct themselves in their public lives? Among other things, it depends on the balance of power and available strategic resources between the ethnic groups on the one hand, and the fluidity and ease of flow between these ethnic boundaries on the other.

In majority-minority relations, members of the minorities may be tempted to engage in "passing", a form of denial of the authentic self. As De Vos (1982:28) suggests, passing requires maintaining a façade and a variety of intrapsychic and external behavioural manoeuvres. Conversely, in relations of balanced power and relatively equitable distribution of resources, ethnic actors would cross boundaries for instrumental ends. Under these circumstances, entry into class-, interest-, and opportunity-based relations does not typically demand a complete abdication of one's ethnic identity. Instead, ethnicity is being worked on. At one moment, the person may want to temporarily submerge it in favour of a façade closer to and, therefore, more readily identifiable with his interactant. At another moment, he may even decide to be deliberately expressive of his ethnicity when emblematic usage of language, clothing, culture and customs of his own ethnic group is judged to favour him in the transaction.

So, in the fringes as well as in the centre, ethnicity is instrumental and expressive in usage. The ethnic actor is fully aware and alert. He does not assimilate. Neither does he engage in "passing" into or among the other dominant group; nor does he have a "double identity", leading a "double life". He is not a marginal man either. He has a primary, core ethnic identity, best expressed and nurtured in private. This is his master identity. He also has a secondary ethnic identity, the acquisition of which is sociologically and psychologically problematic and, therefore, demands a more vigorous explanation. Just like the primary ethnic identity, this secondary ethnic identity needs to be acquired, internalized, nurtured, presented and validated. As Foster (1977:114) maintains, "[v]alidation is accomplished by showing that the individual in question has certain critical behavioural attributes that define the ethnic category." He does not just present it, superficially, for situational gains. He must have it "down pat", yet in such a way it will reconcile with his primary ethnic identity in

the sense that he is fully capable of enacting the many critical and necessary emblems of the other ethnic groups — such as language, cultural practices, behavioural comportment, values. On top of all this, he is most natural and spontaneous in one language (Sapir, 1968), one ethnic group, one centre and one place.

Conceived as diametrically contrasting with assimilation are two conceptually and ideologically related theories of ethnicity and ethnic relations: first, cultural pluralism and multi-culturalism; and second, integration. Borrowing John Dewey's concept of democratic pluralism, Horace Kallen (1924:122–23) stresses, "[c]ultural pluralism is possible only in a democratic society whose institutions encourage individuality in groups, in persons, in temperaments, whose programme liberates those individuals and guides them into a fellowship of freedom and co-operation". Pluralism articulates a pattern of ethnic relations whereby diverse groups that are different from each other in many fundamental ways come to share a common culture and a common structure of institutions within the confines of a "plural society", while allowing for the preservation and perpetuation of ethnic distinctiveness in businesses, religions, voluntary associations, clubs and media, as well as amongst families, kin networks, friendship cliques and intergroup marriages.

As an ideal and an ideology, pluralism promotes cultural and social heterogeneity and, therefore, self-awareness and self-direction in the private spheres, as well as unification and co-operation in the public domains — without necessarily creating ethnic division and social conflicts. Louis Adamic (1938), in further extending the idea of cultural pluralism, borrows from the poet Walt Whitman's phrase "a nation of nations" to highlight the multi-cultural character of America as an immigrant country.

In the process of integration, what emerges is a synthesis of two or more ethnic cultures — such a process unites but does not homogenize the two groups. Following Glazer and Moynihan (1970), who first stressed the processual quality of integration in their analysis of ethnic groups, Femminella (1961) coins the concept of "impact" to articulate "a booming collision (of two cultures) resulting in a forced entanglement". Postiglione (1983:23) suggests that "out of the process of impacting and integration evolves a new synthesis which gives meaning and importance to the developing nation" — the complex forces of this "culture collision" yield a creative aftermath (Postiglione, 1983:22).

The Chinese in Thailand: Skinner's Views

It is generally believed that the Chinese in Southeast Asia exhibit a strong sense of cultural persistence and continuity. Mallory (1956:258) points to the "amazing loyalty of the Chinese to their own culture century after century...so that they perpetuate their language and social customs and hold firmly to them". More recently, Ohki (1967:5) suggests that "the Chinese culture is highly resistant to being worn down by other cultures during the acculturation process". Though there may be some truth to this observation, it is fallacious to assume that the Chinese migrants would react in the same way in the vastly different physical and social environments of Southeast Asia. In Thailand, for example, existing research literature seems to suggest that the Chinese bear more attributes of social integration and assimilation into Thai society than of conflict. Skinner (1963:1) has found that a majority of the descendants of Chinese immigrants in each generation merge with the Thai society and become indistinguishable from the indigenous population to the extent that fourth-generation Chinese are practically non-existent. He feels that the reason that many Western and Chinese observers have grossly overestimated the number of Chinese in Thailand was due in part to their failure to see the extent of complete assimilation as "they note the large migration of Chinese, but fail to see that a large proportion of the Chinese migrants in each generation merge with Thai society" (Skinner, 1963:2). Furthermore, Skinner (1963:4) suggests that the cultural persistence of the Chinese community in Bangkok is witness not to a peculiar unchangeableness on the part of the Chinese, but rather to a continual reinforcement of Chinese society through immigration. Scholars working on the Chinese in Thailand have continued to use the Skinnerian paradigm. Both Amyot (1972) and Ossapan (1979), for example, argue that the combination of Thai government policies and the lack of formal Chinese education has led to the assimilation of the Chinese in Thailand. Both authors have made a much-generalized statement.

If Skinner is right and assimilation is taking place with regularity, then the Chinese cannot survive as "Chinese" in Thailand. The gates of immigration have been closed since 1949. It follows that the Chinese minority will be absorbed and, in two to three generations, there should be no ethnic Chinese community in Thailand. Yet, in present-day Thailand, there is still a substantial number of ethnic

Chinese. Boonsanong (1976:57) suggests that ethnic Chinese form one-tenth of the Thai population or close to 4 million persons, and China-born residents of Thailand who are aliens number nearly half a million. Similarly, Szanton (1983), based on ethnographic data collected in Sri Racha in 1983, has found that many Chinese still maintain themselves as sociologically distinct segments, and intermarriage between the Chinese and Thai is not as strong as previously suggested. Furthermore, in present-day Thailand, especially around the Bangkok area, there are still many Chinese associations, economic and religious, that continue to look after the interests of the ethnic Chinese. It is further noted that there are still many private Chinese schools in Bangkok.

What are some of Skinner's major ideas and hypotheses on the assimilation of the Chinese in Thailand?[1] First, he (1963:5) asserts that, other things being equal, there has been a fairly constant rate of Chinese assimilation in Thailand over a period of a century and a half. Second, the assimilation rate of the Chinese in Thailand is at least of the same order of magnitude as that of the Europeans in the United States (1963:5). He notes that one may cite similarities between Thai and Chinese cultures as important pro-assimilation factors:

> The Thai cultural inventory has always had many points in common with that of the Southeast Chinese. The preferred food staples for both peoples, for example, are rice, fish and pork. The Thai commitment to Theravada Buddhism was no barrier to social intercourse or cultural rapprochement in view of the familiarity of the Chinese to another form of Buddhism. In addition, the differences in the physical appearance between Chinese and Thai are relatively slight.

In his comparison with the assimilation patterns of the Chinese in Java, Skinner (1973:399) singles out certain factors as having primary effect on the assimilation rate of the Chinese in Thailand. First, he suggests that the historical experience of the Thai, with no direct subjugation by any colonial power, has resulted in the Thai's sense of pride and security in the excellence of their tradition. Thus, Thai culture, by virtue of its vigour and continuity, was attractive to the Chinese, which in turn accelerated the assimilation process.

Skinner also points to the fact that the Chinese in Thailand were free to reside and travel throughout Thailand. He observes that

"throughout the new residential suburbs in Bangkok, Chinese are found residing among the Thai in a random arrangement [and] show no sign of neighbourhood segregation. Even families headed by Chinese immigrants have moved to such suburbs. This changing pattern facilitates the development of social intercourse between the Chinese and the Thai" (1973:311). If the hypothesis that assimilation rate is related to the size and composition of the ethnic community is indeed true, then this greater access and contact of the Chinese with the Thai will result in a faster rate of assimilation. Moreover, the Chinese in Thailand were free, on reaching maturity, to identify as either Chinese or Thai. One of the reasons for the acceleration of assimilation in Thailand is the availability of "structural avenues" which were conducive to and, in fact, encouraged the absorption of the Chinese into the dominant indigenous culture.

Except for certain periods, the Thai government reacted favourably towards the Chinese and adopted a pro-assimilationist policy. This can be seen in its educational and economic policies. Skinner (1957:365–72) notes that as early as 1898, the Thai government had adopted a national education scheme which actively sought to integrate Chinese schools into the national educational system. Bearing in mind that education represents a major source of socialization, and at an age when the individual is most susceptible to behavioural and character moulding, the acceptance of Thai language and education by the Chinese will greatly accelerate the assimilation of the Chinese into Thai society. As one Thai author (in Skinner, 1957a:250) puts it, "without a doubt, compulsory education in Bangkok, where most Chinese congregate, is one means of assimilation. In compulsory education lies an instrument which is infinitely useful for our purposes. It would ensure that the second generation of Chinese will, to all intents and purposes, be Siamese". Economically, the Chinese play a vital role in Thailand. The Chinese migrants were needed to provide manpower for agriculture, shipping and for the expansion of trade. Skinner notes that in Thailand, unlike the Javanese case, mass migration has meant that the Chinese were spread out in all strata of Thai society. This promoted, or at least did not pose a barrier to, the assimilation of the Chinese. Moreover, the ruling and administrative elites in Thailand were dominated by Thai, as such the Chinese businessmen identified with this group. Thai leaders also advocated a policy of giving citizenship to the migrant Chinese. The Nationality Act was amended "in conformity with the government's liberal policy toward the Chinese so that all persons

born in Thailand were automatically Thai citizens" (Skinner, 1973:378).

These measures, Skinner notes, assured the Chinese in Thailand that they were wanted and thus gave the Chinese a sense of security. Thus, Chinese culture in Thailand underwent changes in the direction of Thai culture, gradually closing the gap between the two ways of life and rendering the "Chinese way" less sharply distinguishable from the larger Thai society. By the 1950s, the basic administrative distinction between the Chinese and the Thai was wiped out. The children of mixed marriages grew up as Thai, and the social visibility of the Chinese decreased vis-à-vis the Thai. Skinner thus concludes that first- and second-generation Chinese might be more Chinese-oriented, but by the third and the fourth generations, the Chinese in Thailand are, in all practical considerations, Thai.

Bilingualism and Bicultural Education

Skinner has overemphasized the powers of the forces of assimilation which, in a sense, has coloured his perception of the Chinese in Thailand. This is evident in the anomalies that we noted during our fieldwork in regard to the situation of the Chinese in Thailand today.[2] For example, it has been suggested that the adoption of the language of the dominant group and the extent of its use is often indicative of cultural assimilation, since language acquisition is often accompanied by the adoption of cultural values as well as by entry into the social institutions of the society. Undoubtedly, and Skinner is correct in pointing this out, that many Chinese in Thailand indeed have acquired the use of the Thai language. Exigencies of social and economic survival in Thailand have necessitated this. But most Chinese in Thailand are not monolingual. In fact, Boonsanong (1971:13) found that although every Chinese person he interviewed speaks Thai, nearly all of them also speak Chinese. Moreover, a large number of his respondents also speak one or more additional Chinese dialects besides their parents' mother tongue, though the majority of them learned to speak their parents' dialects first and later acquired the rest. This is important as it suggests that for this group of people, Chinese cultural values are internalized first and Thai cultural values come later. This fact furnishes significant proof of the cultural influence of parental language on the respondents' early socialization (Boonsanong, 1971:13). When the respondents were asked why

Chinese was used, some of the common reasons given were, "It is more natural for me to speak Chinese in my family because we are Chinese," "Chinese is the business language — if you don't speak Chinese, how can you do business?" or "I try to speak to my children only in Chinese so that they can learn from me."

There were many instances of bilingualism. In one family (middle-aged parents and two children, one aged 9 and the other 6), the couple were speaking to each other and to their children in Cantonese but, when the children answered the parents, it was in a mix of Cantonese and Thai. This was also true when the siblings spoke to each other, although in this instance there was a greater usage of Thai than dialect. In another interview conducted in a mix of Mandarin and Teochew with a shopkeeper, the latter spoke to his customers in Thai; but to the shopkeeper next door, he spoke in Teochew. These fieldwork observations corroborated the following statement of one of our informants:

> There are many families who still speak Chinese dialects at home. Of course, this is more so among the older generations, but I know many third-generation Chinese who still know Teochew and speak Teochew to their parents and grandparents. There are, in fact, shopping centres in Bangkok where most of the shopkeepers speak Teochew and Cantonese to one another.

Thus, in Thailand different languages are used as codes in the different environments to signify and maintain ethnic identity:

> Teochew is used between Chinese and among young people you know. When Chinese businessmen do business with one another, it is in the Teochew dialect or Cantonese. Because of necessity, I allow my children to attend Thai school. This is the fate of an overseas Chinese. It is better if they know the language [Thai]. To get ahead in Thailand, you have to do this. My wife is Thai. My children speak to her in Thai. However, I taught my children to speak Chinese [Mandarin] from when they were very young. So now, I can speak to them in Chinese.

Hence although the Chinese in Thailand use Thai language in public social discourse, the learning of Thai has not led to the demise of the Chinese language. Instead, bilingualism is common and different languages are used in different social situations.

In the domestic environment, Chinese is used, especially when speaking to parents and older relatives. This is also true when one Chinese talks to another. Outside the home, however, especially when dealing with Thai bureaucrats and Thai in general, there is a greater necessity to use Thai. Boonsanong's data indicated that for the "Group One" Chinese, over 76 percent of the respondents said they used Chinese more than Thai at home.[3] Though there was a reduction in the usage of Chinese at home for the "Group Three" respondents, that is, those who were supposed to be the "most assimilated" group, a significant 20 percent still claimed that in the domestic environment, they spoke Chinese more often than Thai.

Closely related to the problems of language acquisition is the role of education in the assimilation process. Skinner's argument is that the integration of Chinese schools into the national education system, and the influx of Chinese into Thai schools where Chinese students are strongly persuaded to speak Thai and pledge allegiance to Thai symbols, have facilitated the assimilation of the ethnic Chinese into Thai society. In a later study, Guskin (1968:67) arrives at the same conclusion:

> [Given] the results of the law of Thailand, the cultural values related to education, the norms and values related to respect for teachers and the school regulations which must be followed if the student desires to succeed, [Chinese children] are committed to attending Thai schools and, it would seem, are normatively integrated into them.

While many Chinese parents acknowledge the practical values to be accrued from a knowledge of Thai, this view is not held by all Chinese in Thailand. In fact, according to our informants, there are still some Chinese parents who deliberately avoid sending their children to Thai schools, preferring Chinese schools instead. Some even keep their children from attending schools in order to have extra labour for business and commercial activities. Contrary to Skinner's position, Coughlin (1960:144–68) argues that Chinese education was in a stronger position in the 1960s than in the 1930s and 1940s. He noted that although there was a marked decline in the number of Chinese schools, there were, however, more children attending Chinese schools: 17,000 in 1938 and 63,000 in 1960. There was also no evidence that the Chinese community had given up its

desire for separate Chinese schools. The existence of Chinese schools helped perpetuate Chinese culture and nationalism. This has been the basis of the government's opposition to these schools from the beginning, and also one of the reasons for the Chinese community's desire to maintain them. Chinese schools provided virtually the only means by which spoken and written Chinese can be learned (Coughlin, 1960:158), though the home would serve the function of reinforcing the use of the spoken language.

Significant is the fact that, today, there are still many Chinese schools in Bangkok and even in the regional provinces. In 1989, there were 102 Chinese language schools in Bangkok alone. For the whole of Thailand, they numbered 213. Due to government policies, they are no longer called *huaxiao* (Chinese schools), but are known as *minxiao* (people's schools) or *kongxiao* (public schools). These schools, according to one informant (a school teacher), follow the regular curriculum of Thai schools. The significant difference is that classes are conducted in both Chinese and Thai. The continued existence of so many Chinese schools in present-day Thailand attests to the importance parents in Thailand place on a Chinese education and their desire to retain the Chinese identity in their children. Moreover, other than these public schools, many parents, especially the richer Chinese, send their children to private schools where Chinese is the medium of instruction. Also, according to one informant, Chinese parents who send their children to Thai schools would engage private tutors to teach their children Chinese. Another popular alternative is for the children to attend Thai schools during the day and take Chinese classes in the evening. Said one informant:

> There are fewer Chinese schools today compared to the past. This is due to government policy. They do not encourage Chinese education. The Chinese are a very practical people. If they see that it is better to have their children in Thai schools, they will send them there. But they will find ways to maintain the Chinese language and Chinese education.

As Chinese education in Thailand is only available for the first six years of school (it is possible for an optional three more years), parents who want their children to have higher education in Chinese will send their children overseas. Said one Chinese:

> In the past, many Chinese sent their children back to China or, if they are pro-Guomindang, they will send the children to Taiwan. Many Chinese parents today, I don't know exactly how many, but I think many, still send their children to Taiwan for higher schooling. Recently, they also send them to Malaysia and Singapore. It is not because of nationalism that they want to maintain Chinese education. Chinese is an economic language, a language of survival. Chinese language is very useful for doing business in Thailand.

On deeper analysis, there are really two issues here: affordability and desire. Parents who can afford to will send their children overseas for higher education, often to Taiwan or to Malaysia where it is not very expensive. Destination aside, these Chinese parents desire their children to have a Chinese education, or at least some of it.

It is also important to remember that Chinese schools in Thailand today do not teach the type of nationalistic Chinese education prevalent in the 1940s and early 1950s. Due to a growing recognition that education cannot be entirely Chinese if it is to be of any use in Thailand, the curricula in these schools are adjusted to meet the needs of the Chinese in modern Thai society, incorporating the teaching of Thai language and history with that of Chinese language and culture. Based on the belief that a Thai education would lead to an administrative post in the Thai bureaucracy while children in Chinese schools would acquire Chinese values that can help in the business enterprise of the family, many Chinese parents send some of their children to Thai schools and the rest to Chinese schools. It is often said that nothing can be more advantageous than for a Chinese businessman to have a brother who holds a high position in the Thai administration or is a member of the political elite.

Of Cliques, Clans and Prejudices

If Skinner is correct in his analysis of Chinese assimilation in Thailand, the Chinese would have undergone "structural assimilation". According to Gordon (1964), there is a large-scale entry of Chinese into cliques, clubs and institutions of Thai society. Coughlin (1960:32–66) argues that the very commercial success of the Chinese in Thailand was due in large part to the development of tight social and economic organizations which served to encourage co-operation

among the overseas Chinese and provide protection for them in a hostile environment. These Chinese associations, which brought together individuals with similar interests (familial, economic or religious), were the very backbone of the Chinese community in Thailand. He further notes that "these overseas associations in their totality are influential in perpetuating social distinctions between the Thai and Chinese population groups that their continued vitality as growing institutions beyond the immigrant generation can only be the indefinite postponement of any major move towards a more thorough assimilation of the Chinese minority in Thailand".

In Bangkok today, there are over 80 Chinese associations (based on clan, region or dialect) that continue to serve important social and community functions for the Chinese. The most important of these are the economic organizations, such as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and occupational guilds, to which Chinese businessmen still make substantial financial contributions. In a sense, this is an indication of their usefulness, as the Chinese seldom put money into any organization that has lost its usefulness. For one, these associations still offer social prestige for the Chinese community. For example, the top offices in the Chinese Chamber of Commerce are still highly valued by Chinese businessmen as they carry with them prestige and power within the Chinese community.

Although the continued existence of these associations is significant because they indicate a failure of complete "structural assimilation", this point should not be overemphasized. Most of the Chinese businessmen who join Chinese associations are also members in Thai associations, such as the Thai Chamber of Commerce. Undoubtedly, this is because of an awareness among Chinese businessmen that in order to succeed in Thailand they have to co-operate with the Thai elites, who control the political, military and administrative arenas, but lack the economic base to bolster their political and military powers. Thus, alliances are made between the Thai elites and Chinese businessmen, a complementary relationship which serves the interests of both groups. Chinese businessmen reorganized their commercial corporations to include Thai elites with "good connections". Many Chinese-Thai ventures are set up, utilizing the capital and entrepreneurial skills of the Chinese, with the Thai officials providing "protection" and giving official privileges and government contracts.

So, not only do many Chinese join Thai associations for pragmatic and economic reasons, some in fact sit on the board of directors for both Thai and Chinese associations. As an example of this cross-representation strategy, we note that Vichien Tejapaibul (from a wealthy Chinese banking family), in 1989, was the Deputy Honorary Treasurer of the Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce. At the same time, he was Vice-President of the Thai Chamber of Commerce and Treasurer of the Board of Trade of Thailand. Similarly, Boansong Srifeungfung sits on the Board of the Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce as well as the Board of Trade of Thailand. Even when the person is not represented on both boards, there is often representation through other members of the family. For example, one member of the Lamsam family (Thai Farmers Bank) sits on the Thai Chamber of Commerce while a relative sits on the Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

Furthermore, a strong sense of occupational division of labour persists between the Chinese and the Thai even in Thailand today. There seems to be a high degree of consensus among our informants that Thais tend to enter the bureaucracy and the army, while the Chinese are in the business world. "The Thais become soldiers, policemen and teachers," said one informant, who continued, "In fact, most civil service jobs are taken by Thais. The Chinese are businessmen and merchants. They tend to engage in freelance activities." Another informant said, "80 percent of all doctors in Thailand are Chinese. They also control the restaurant business." One Chinese said, "The value of being a soldier is not highly regarded by the Chinese."

Boonsanong (1971:26) notes that "it is clearly evident in the interview responses which point in a matter-of-fact way to an *a priori* state of affairs in which some occupations are Chinese occupations and others are Thai occupations. Furthermore, it seems largely taken for granted that Thai should do certain kinds of work and Chinese other kinds." Close to three-fourths of the respondents in Groups One and Two in Boonsanong's survey said that the Chinese mastered greater skill in trade and commerce than the Thai. Perhaps more significantly, 58.3 percent of those in Group Three, that is, Chinese government employees, agreed with their statement. Similarly, in Sri Racha, the Chinese tended to define their Chineseness in terms of degree of commercial orientation and business success (Szanton, 1983:109).

Both the Chinese and Thai seem to accept the ethnic stereotypes that the Chinese are better businessmen and the Thai are better governmental administrators. Reasons given by the respondents include: "Trade and commerce fit well with the character of the Chinese people", or "Chinese are gifted merchants". On the Thai side, it is believed that "government work is the work of the Thai people", or "Thai have contact (*phuak*) and relatives (*yaat*) in the government". Ethnic prejudice remains a strong undercurrent in Thai society today. The existence of these prejudices indicates a lack of cultural assimilation. An editorial in the *Bangkok Post*, a major English language newspaper in Thailand, as recently as 1983, clearly illustrates this prejudice. Under the headline, "Chinese Connection and Money", it read:

> The true Thai as a race form a typical warrior society with typical conservative values. They prefer to accumulate position and prestige. They hate to touch and discuss money. Even Thai farmers with their earthly wisdom would still want their sons to be civil servants, rather than have anything to do with money... The Chinese take over money matters. Thai people of Chinese descent continue to have a stranglehold on business and money. Chinese-Thai pour money into acceptable charitable organizations to get recognition and royal decorations. All of them search sophisticated dictionaries to find lengthy Thai names and surnames in order to appear more Thai, with the result that now one can recognize really the true Thais only by their short surnames.

One Chinese businessman said:

> The Chinese are the masters of the business world. When the Thais feel that they cannot get into business, they say that the Chinese are crude, only interested in making money.

One Thai person remarked:

> People realize that there are differences between the Chinese and the Thais. The Chinese are the rich people.[4]

Another Thai informant said:

> The Thai government likes to give rank and position to the Chinese. If you are chairman of a bank, or give money to charity,

> you will be awarded titles. But this does not make them Thai... They are simply ornaments. The Thais feel that they have to work 30–40 years before they get an award, but when the Chinese give money, they get titles. Do you know half of those with the title *kunying* (ladies of the Court) are Chinese women from rich families?

The continued existence of ethnic stereotypes can be taken as an indication that ethnic differences still persist in Thailand today.

Coughlin has taken a stronger position and argues that the occupational segregation of the Thai and Chinese is a major source of friction between the two peoples. He (1960:116) reasons that "this occupational separation has given the Chinese minority immense economic power, but at the same time has incited fear, resentment and a growing measure of intolerance on the part of many leading Thai. Their present economic position, related as it is to so many fundamental institutions and values, is the major obstacle to the further integration of the Chinese minority." There is certainly some degree of truth to this statement, especially during the 1930s and 1950s, where strong Thai nationalistic fervour led to criticisms of the economic control of Thailand by the Chinese. The Chinese were perceived as subtly undermining the livelihood of the Thai people.

Occupational segregation, to a large degree, still exists in Thailand today, but the availability of Thai education for the Chinese has meant that more and more Chinese are finding jobs in the Thai administrative service. Many Thais are beginning to feel that "Thai can be businessman too" and are increasingly engaging in commercial activities.

But, it can be argued that, at the elite level, this occupational differentiation is maintained. The situation is not one of tension, but of complementary functions. As pointed out earlier, the Chinese businessmen, in order to protect their financial interests, have formed alliances with leading Thai politicians and military men, who in turn retain high remuneration by serving as directors in such companies. Thus, a case can be made that there is no desire or necessity for the Chinese elites to be assimilated into Thai society as this will disturb the finely balanced relationship between the two groups. On the Thai side, the assimilation of the Chinese elites could be seen as an intrusion and would threaten their interests. A large proportion of the ethnic Chinese in Bangkok today are the wealthier people who,

in a sense, have more to gain by maintaining the status quo. "Becoming Thai" would lead to a conflict of interests with the Thai elites. In this sense, the Chinese and Thai elites can be seen as subgroupings of different ethnic categories which assume complementary economic roles in the local environment. By occupying exclusive economic niches, these groups maintain their separate cultural identities (Golomb, 1978:162).

At one level, the wealthier Chinese in Bangkok thus would have more to gain by remaining Chinese. However, at another level, the fact that they interact more with the Thai elite will have many subtle, though largely unclear, influences on their abilities to remain Chinese. In reality, the poor Chinese are more likely not to change because they have little to gain by becoming Thai.

Among the Chinese outside Bangkok, in the provinces, such as the farmers and small businessmen in the northern and northeastern regions and in the highlands, many of them maintain contacts with lowland urban Chinese relatives or friends to retain their Chineseness. These more marginal Chinese are even less assimilated than the well-off Chinese in Bangkok.

Religion, Tradition and Ethnic Identification

Skinner also suggests that the basic similarities between Chinese and Thai religious life are conducive to assimilation. "The Chinese popular religion, with Mahayana elements, is similar to Theravada Buddhism. Chinese religious sentiment is eclectic and syncretic rather than exclusivistic. Thus, religion is no barrier to Chinese assimilation in Thailand" (Skinner, 1973:408). To say that because both the Thai and the Chinese practise Buddhism and, therefore, religion is no barrier to assimilation is like saying that since both Protestants and Catholics are Christians, they should get along very well. Significant differences exist between Thai Theravada Buddhism and Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. The Thai, for example, worship at the Buddhist *wat*, while the Chinese worship at deity temples. The Thai cremate their dead in the *wat*, while the Chinese prefer to bury their dead. More significantly, the Thai have no ancestral duties while the Chinese are duty-bound to carry out such rituals. There are other differences as well. For example, compared to Thai Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism is less strict with members of the monastic order. As such, Chinese

Buddhist teachings put less emphasis on asceticism and combine many more Chinese folk beliefs and rituals with Buddhist ones. Thai Buddhism, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on the purity of the religion.

Differences between Thai and Chinese religious beliefs are not irreconcilable, but their similarities should not be exaggerated. In Thailand today, a large number of Chinese continue to carry out ancestral rituals. This observation receives support from Boonsanong's survey, which indicated that nine out of ten Chinese respondents were engaged in ancestor worship. This figure is for Group One respondents, but even among Group Three respondents, supposedly the most assimilated, 63.3 percent claimed to be ancestor worshippers (Boonsanong, 1971:34). The observance of ancestral rituals is central to Chinese religious life and contributes substantially to the integration and perpetuation of the family as a basic unit of Chinese social life. Moreover, ancestor worship is linked to the idea of *xiao* or filial piety, according to which children owe their parents obedience and are committed to the perpetuation of the family name and lineage. For example, a majority of the Chinese in Thailand still practise the rituals of burying the dead. Our own informants said that many Chinese in Thailand still practise ancestor worship; many continue to go to the temples for worship. There are numerous Chinese temples in Bangkok, particularly in the Savatburi area.

In addition, the Chinese in Thailand also maintain the celebration of Chinese festivals. The Chinese New Year continues to be celebrated on a grand scale in Bangkok, Phuket and the southern provinces. Other important festivals which are celebrated include the Qing Ming, Chun Yuan and Mid-Autumn festivals. One Thai informant noted:

> The Thai people know that Qing Ming is around, because at that time, there will be bad traffic jams as the Chinese make their way to the graveyards to pray to the ancestors. This is especially true in the Saraburi and Chonburi areas, where there are many Chinese cemeteries. The Chinese festival of "praying to the moon" is also popular. We Thai know about this festival because we eat the mooncakes too. Almost everywhere you see mooncakes. In fact, I think the biggest mooncake in the world was made in Bangkok. I think it is in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

Another informant asked a rhetorical question:

> If there are no Chinese in Thailand today, who are those people celebrating Chinese New Year and praying to the ancestors?

The continued practice of ancestor worship and the widespread celebrations of festivals point to the persistence of Chinese cultural values in present-day Thailand. Chinese religion and rituals have emerged as important markers of ethnic identification in Thailand. One of our Thai informants said that he could easily tell whether a person is Chinese or Thai simply by observing the way the person carries out certain customs or rituals. Many Chinese continue to hold on to the tradition of having reunion dinners and handing out *hongpao* — red packets which contain money. The giving of *hongpao* is a traditional Chinese custom to signify a gift of good luck. However, the very same Chinese who continue to practise these Chinese customs also observe Thai rituals at the *wat*. Many Chinese claim that they make donations to the Thai *wat* regularly. The Chinese in Thailand celebrate both the Chinese New Year and the Thai New Year. At funerals, some Chinese may perform rituals which are distinctly Chinese in origin and content, but they do so in the Thai *wat* as well. Undoubtedly, Chinese ritualistic behaviours observed in a Thai setting testify to an overt mixture of Chinese and Thai customs. Yet this mixture does not mean the demise of Chinese rituals nor its replacement by Thai ones, but a modification and adaptation of both customs to become "part Chinese and part Thai".

Turning to the matter of ethnic language, we note five major Chinese daily newspapers in Bangkok today, with an estimated readership (not circulation) of over 500,000 people daily. The oldest, and probably the most influential, is *Sing Sian Ye Pao*. It was originally founded by Aw Boon Haw, who was a leading Chinese merchant with business connections in Hong Kong, Singapore and Myanmar. The second largest is *Universal Press*. According to one informant, this paper is funded by the Republic of China and its editorials are slanted towards Taiwan. The other major dailies are the *Zhonghua Press*, the *Qing Lua Zhong Yuan*, and the *Xin Zhong Yuan*. Newspapers in Thailand can be divided into two groups, those that are pro-PRC (People's Republic of China) and those that are pro-Taiwan. Most of their subscribers belong to the older generation. However, many young people continue to read them.

Finally, let us look at intermarriages and family life. Here, some discrepancies in empirical observations are evident. On the one hand, Skinner notes a high degree of intermarriage between the Chinese and the Thai, especially before 1893, when there was a dearth of Chinese women immigrants to Thailand. Likewise, Boonsanong (1971:57–58) has found that between 30.3 percent (Group One) and 63.7 percent (Group Three) stated that they had Thai members in their households. However, Coughlin (1960:75–83) argues that intermarriage between the Chinese and Thai, especially in the Bangkok area, was not as prevalent as many had been led to believe. In his random survey of 145 marriages, representing a full range of socioeconomic levels, he found no instance in which a Chinese girl had married a non-Chinese and only two men who had married Thai girls. He suggested that the reason for this was partly due to the trend towards numerical equality of the sexes and the cultural differences between the two. "The Thai consider the Chinese uncouth and raucous in public ... and are grasping, excessively materialistic, interested only in making money" (Coughlin, 1960:75–83). Conversely, the Thai are characterized by the Chinese as indolent, untrustworthy and slippery in business dealings. More specially, there are cultural differences between the two ethnic groups regarding marriage rules. For example, the Chinese are generally patrilineal and patrilocal, whereas the Thais are matrilineal and neolocal. Marriage rituals are also very different, with different values and expectations between the two groups. Such cultural differences underpin and intensify feelings of ethnic prejudice. The Chinese consider Thai girls marrying into Chinese families as a form of upward mobility, giving the Thai better economic conditions as well as business linkages. But, Chinese girls marrying into Thai families, except for royal and military connections, are often considered as economic and social retrograde. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that a large percentage of the Chinese in Thailand today claim that they would prefer to marry another Chinese instead of a Thai. Boonsanong noted that over 60 percent (Group One) said that they preferred Chinese spouses. Some reasons given for this attitude were: "My parents would approve of it and would be happy with a Chinese-in-law," or "As Chinese, we would understand our customs better."

One Chinese informant, aged 65, almost defiantly asserted his ethnicity in this way:

> Many Chinese have acquired Thai citizenship (he also estimated that about 200,000 have retained PRC citizenship). In legal terms, they are Thai. Even in public, most of these people will say that they are Thai. But, in cultural terms, from their way of life, they are still Chinese because they retain many elements of Chinese culture. It is like milk and coffee. When you pour milk into coffee and stir it, they mix. It is very difficult to distinguish the milk from the coffee. But, they are still two different things. I can speak Thai like any other Thai, but I am Chinese. To be Thai is not to deny my Chineseness. To stress Chineseness is not to deny my Thainess.

Conclusion

Contrary to Skinner's assertions, as far as the Chinese in Thailand are concerned, assimilation as defined and prescribed in the American sociological and anthropological literature has not taken place. Neither does it seem to be a useful and sufficiently dynamic concept to delineate and make sense of the complexity of relationships between the Chinese and the Thai in Thailand. American theories of assimilation often over-exaggerate the absorptive powers of the majority group and its culture; oversimplify the process of social change in terms of its directionality and dimensionality; and often tend to view minority groups in terms of the simplistic dichotomy of either having been assimilated or not. Conceptualizing assimilation as a one-way, unilineal, unidimensional process, the theorist fails to come to grips with the tenacity of ethnicity and is, therefore, often at a loss as to how to account for its persistence.

Any theoretical attempt to disentangle majority-minority relations would thus need to incorporate a vigorous treatment of the dynamics of ethnicity and ethnic identity. In the same vein, ethnicity is both primordial and situational, not either or. Ethnicity is intrinsically self-maintaining, cumulative, deepening, self-affirming, and most vividly to be expressively used in the centre of one's own ethnic group, in the private place. It resists outside attempts at dilution or penetration, that is, assimilation (or, using a more graphic term, ethnocide, following van den Berghe's [1981:217] analysis). In this sense, ethnicity is understood primarily in its primordial terms. It resists efforts at assimilation and holds its own. It derives its nourishment and vital energy

from its primary ethnic identity, a psychosocial core formulated since birth in the family, nurtured and maintained before, during and after contact with a foreign culture. A person thus usually and typically has one primary ethnic identity, one reference group, one heritage.

Ethnicity is also amenable to construction and presentation on the part of both the ethnic actor himself or herself and his or her observers. In the "fringes" where ethnic boundaries intersect and overlap, ethnic actors enter into co-operative (or, conflicting) relationships. In such a public place, members of minorities strategize and manage their ethnicity; situations and exigencies of survival would need to be defined, reconstructed and acted upon with caution. Ethnicity is instrumentally used: either it feeds on one's secondary ethnic identity, "an identification with the other", which is more likely, thus minimizing differences and social distance between the majority and minority groups, or it will not.

Most Chinese in Thailand today adopt Thai values, speak Thai, go to Thai schools, join Thai associations and celebrate Thai festivals. They would consider themselves as Thai, not citizens of China. They would pledge allegiance to the Thai flag and monarchy. All these attempts at integration into the Thai society facilitate everyday life interactions as well as administrative, political and economic transactions in the public place. Their secondary ethnic identity is not just momentarily conjured up and then displayed for the occasion; it has been acquired, internalized and integrated as an integral part of one's definition of one's own ethnicity.

Two other markers of expressive and instrumental ethnicity are the use of language and ancestor worship. The Chinese, and this is most clearly seen in the behaviour of the shopkeepers, talk with one another in Chinese, often Teochew. However, in their dealings with the Thais, they would use Thai. Similarly, Chinese is most often used in the home, as opposed to Thai in the public area. Unlike the Thais, the Chinese worship their ancestors. This is used by many Chinese to maintain their identity as it differentiates them from the Thais. It also reinforces their historical linkage with China.

Most Chinese businessmen in Bangkok enter into symbiotic relationships with the Thai political and administrative elites. These relationships are typically class- or interest-based, mutually beneficial

to both parties, and are intrinsically precarious in terms of power balance maintenance. The prevailing stereotype of the Chinese is, as one Thai succinctly put it, "All the Chinese in Bangkok are rich." The Thai elites have political and administrative control while the Chinese have and are also perceived to have financial and economic resources. These ethnic stereotypes separate the Chinese from the Thai and retard assimilation. In fact, wholesale assimilation of the Chinese upper economic echelon into the Thai political and administrative elites would lead to an imbalance in a potentially precarious, though at present, finely-tuned, relationship. Assimilation would result in an overlap in roles and, therefore, subsequently threaten the interests of both groups. It has been suggested that the Thai economy is dominated by a handful of large commercial banks owned by leading Chinese families. One of the biggest banks in Thailand is owned by a Chinese. Many seats on its Board of Directors, however, are occupied by Thai political and military elites (Gray, 1986).

While the Chinese elite in Bangkok continue to nurture and manage their relationships with the Thai in the form of alliances, agreements and contracts, most Chinese in Thailand speak both Thai and Chinese, worship in both Thai *wat* and Chinese temples, and join Chinese as well as Thai associations. Yet, one also witnesses the tenacity and survival of a primary Chinese identity: Chinese schools and associations persist, and Chinese customs and religious rituals are still being practised daily. Coughlin (1960) calls this "double identity", an essentially static concept that fails to view the person as an active being who understands and respects his group allegiances; uses his ethnicity expressively and instrumentally; conducts himself in ways he sees most appropriate and advantageous in private and public places; knows the distinction between primary and secondary identification, and uses the distinction strategically. Logically, such a view of an ethnic actor must consider assimilation as problematic and, certainly, not taken-for-granted. It is a view that focuses its theoretical and empirical attention on the human actors relentlessly meeting their own needs while adopting and trying out strategies in daily social transactions (Whitten and Whitten, 1972). It is a proactive view in the sense that the theoretical interest lies in acknowledging the individuals and the group making the best of the situation, not as mere victims of social forces. Yet this same person recognizes and nurtures his sense of belonging to his ethnic group. As Rosaldo

(1988) points out, while members of an ethnic group enjoy "piling up" and "concentrating", they are also conscious of the possibility of these gatherings being penetrated. The essence of ethnicity is thus one of maintenance and resistance, as much as one of construction and presentation.

The key question is no longer whether the Chinese in Thailand or, for that matter, most overseas Chinese everywhere, are assimilated or not. The concept of assimilation has little explanatory utility beyond what has already been used or prescribed in the social science literature. The more relevant question is: How do the Chinese go about conducting themselves as a group and as persons in their daily social transactions with those of their own and with "the others", and why? Such a question subsumes under it a constellation of experiential and phenomenological questions best answered at the level of everyday life. Concepts suggested in this article, retrieved from classical sociological imagination and utilized by contemporary students of ethnic and race relations, are some of the useful theoretical building blocks.

NOTES

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1 Skinner's contribution to the study of the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia is indisputable. His use of historical analysis, particularly in his works on the Chinese in Thailand, still remains the standard methodological tool for interested scholars. Skinner was among the first to attempt a comparative analysis of the overseas Chinese. He advocates the need for a cultural analysis, adopting a more holistic approach rather than reducing everything to economic and political factors. He denies a social mythology – the general belief that the Chinese in Southeast Asia can be seen as a general category of people. More than anyone else, Skinner has rekindled interest and discussion in the study of the Chinese in Southeast Asia.

2 This study was conducted using qualitative fieldwork methods. Three field trips to Thailand in 1984, 1989 and 1991 were made to collect the data. Two major interview methods were used: (1) focused, open-ended, semi-structured interviews guided by an interview schedule; and, (2) casual, interview-like, "everyday life" conversations during the fieldwork. The interview schedule

consisted of questions pertaining to, among other things, children's Chinese/ Thai education and schooling, acquisition and use of Thai and Chinese languages, personal and family life histories, meaning of being "Chinese", ethnic prejudice and social contacts between Chinese and Thais. Generally conducted in Mandarin or Teochew, some during visits to families to allow for observations of parent-child, between-generations interactions, these interviews lasted between half-an-hour to one-and-a-half hours. The interviewers made notes during and after these interviews.

A total of 40 informants and respondents were interviewed: 18 businessmen, 4 journalists of Chinese dailies, and the rest comprising clan leaders, taxi-drivers, civil servants and students. The "snowballing" sampling process was based on recommendations and referrals made by informants and respondents during different stages of the fieldwork. When interviewing the 10 (out of the total sample of 40) non-Chinese speaking Thai respondents, an interpreter was used, who also assisted in translating Thai archival materials at the library of Chulalongkorn University — a site housing many valuable and rich materials on the subject of our inquiry. We also went through old issues of English newspapers and archival records at Chinese schools and clan associations; we managed to deepen, check and counter-check our analyses through discussions with Thai scholars. We would like to thank, especially, Professors Charnwit Kasetsiri, Suvanna Kriengkraipetch and Walwipha Burusratanaphand.

3 Boonsanong divides his respondents into three groups:
Group One — less educated non-government employees;
Group Two — more educated non-government employees;
Group Three — government employees.
He suggests that there are differential rates of assimilation for the three groups. Though his findings are significant, it must be pointed out that his selection of respondents falls into a tautological trap. He purports to indicate that government employees show the greatest assimilation. But the very fact that they are government employees could be taken to mean that they have already been assimilated into Thai society.

4 It is important to make a distinction between perception and reality. There is a stereotypical perception that the Chinese in Thailand are rich and have achieved this status through exploitation of the Thai people. Statistics available in the 1960s showed that, in reality, the average income of the Chinese was significantly lower than that of the Thai. This data, however, has not altered ethnic perceptions.

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2

Pigtail: A PreHistory of Chineseness in Siam*

Kasian Tejapira

> *Hangpia* is the hair on a *Jek*'s head which is shaven off except at the occiput into a round shape like a cake of brown sugar cane, and is then plaited into a long tail. (Bradley 1873:757)

Challenging the reification of ethnic categories, this chapter examines the genealogy of Chineseness in Siam before the early 20th century by focusing on the pigtail as an alleged sign of Chineseness. A critical scrutiny of G. William Skinner's arguments in his *Chinese Society in Thailand* and the political and cultural history of the pigtail in both the Middle Kingdom and the Kingdom of Siam reveals the variable, situational and pluralistic meanings of the pigtail. With the pigtail as signifier being thus deconstructed, Chineseness turns out to be a recent invention in Thai racialized discourse that had little to do with the pigtail as such.

Prologue

Growing up in a Teochew community in Bangkok during the 1960s, I came to learn about my non-Thai ethnic identity primarily through the Teochew dialect. It is a dialect in which claims of the

following kind were heard: "We are *Tung Nang* who came from *Tung Sua* to *Hsien Lo* or *Mang Kok*." On almost every occasion when cordial family conversations took place, my father, who emigrated to Thailand from Kwangtung (Guangdong) province in the 1930s and, till this day, still speaks only a few mostly abusive Thai words, never tired of urging me and my brothers to recite after him the name of the exact locale of his and hence our homeland: *Tung Sua*, *Kwangtung*, *Lo Ti Huay*. In our Teochew dialect, we never call ourselves *Jin* or *Jek* as the Thai call us, nor do we ever call them "Thai". In fact, the words *Jin*, *Jek*, and "Thai" simply do not exist in the Teochew dialect. For us, the Thai are all "*Huan Nang*".

The discourse in Teochew of ethnic identity seemed transparent and unproblematic enough to me at that time. In modern English translation, *Tung Nang* refers to the Chinese, *Tung Sua* to China, *Hsien Lo* or *Mang Kok* to Thailand, and *Huan Nang* to the Thai, that is, there was a clear case of "us" versus "them". As for those more formal, written terms such as *Tong Kok* (China), *Tong Kok Nang* (Chinese), and *Khai Kok* (Thailand), they, of course, existed but not as a part of everyday speech. This Teochew-mediated Chinese imagined community was my ethnic identity and national reality. It was clear to me. I took it for granted. It was mine.

My subsequent discovery of the dynastic roots of these all too familiar Teochew-Chinese ethnic and national categories was a cognitive shock indeed. It turns out that *Tung Nang* actually means "people of the Tang dynasty (618–907)" while *Tung Sua* signifies "the mountains of the Tang dynasty", a term initially used by Korean sea travellers. As for *Hsien Lo* and *Mang Kok*, the former is derived from a combination of the names of the kingdoms of Sukhothai and Lavo, whereas the latter is a transliteration of Bangkok. Both are quite distinct from the nation-state of Thailand today in time and place. *Huan Nang* is a generic term used by ancient dynasties to refer to those tribes to the south and west of their Middle Kingdoms, not only the Thais. In fact, "China", "Chinese", and the like are non-Chinese terms invented by foreigners, the use of which has imposed a continuity on the discontinuous history of dynastic kingdoms in China. Even *Tong Kok*, or the Middle Kingdom, was only a self-styled honourable

title rather than a genuine name of any kingdom. The real political identity of ancient Chinese kingdoms was a ruling dynasty, hence the name of the kingdom constantly changed with every change of dynasty. Therefore, strictly speaking, there was no single continuous Chinese kingdom, only a discontinuous succession of *Tai Shang*, *Tai Chou*, *Tai Chin*, *Tai Han*, and so forth (Liang, 1986:31–32, 83, 162, 206–7).[1]

What then is the relevance of this metamorphosis of dynastic terms into categories of the nation in terms of a prehistory of Chineseness in Siam? The relevance is twofold. First, it is a reminder that in order to imagine a modern national community, to give life, substance, reality, and history to it as an imagined collective entity of pilgrims who have travelled continuously and heroically in epic and immemorial ways through homogeneous and empty time to the destiny of the nation-state of the present, people have to select and re-interpret, remember and forget dynastic words and things of the past. If this is granted, then it is expedient to look at these terms with sceptical eyes for their meanings almost always readily lend themselves to (mis)appropriation by our modern national imagination and conceptual apparatus. For the dynastic past now lies shrouded as it never was by the modern myths of nation.

Second, the demystification of the myths of nation and our awakening from the nationalist slumber lie essentially in the study of the prehistory of a nation. The task here is to rediscover and salvage dynastic words and things of the past in all their ambiguities and indeterminacy, to deconstruct the monolith of national meaning through a plurality of dynastic meanings.[2]

This paper focuses on one single dynastic object of the Chinese past, namely, the *pigtail* or *queue* as a guiding thread through a prehistory of Chineseness in Siam during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The main hypothesis is that the problem of the Chinese minority within the Thai nation was constructed or created politically by the joint efforts of the nationalist regime in China on the one hand, and the racialized, absolutist regime under King Rama VI in Siam on the other (Anderson, 1983:94–95; 1979:211–23; Skinner, 1957: [5]). This point, of course, is not new. It has already been raised by Anderson and Skinner. However, the issue here is approached from a different angle by proving the non-existence of Chineseness in Siam before the reign of King Rama VI, that is, during

the reigns of King Rama IV and King Rama V. The evidence will be drawn from the pigtail.[3]

The Pigtail in the Qing Dynasty

The first question to investigate is what a pigtail originally meant in the Middle Kingdom under Qing rule (1644–1911). The wearing of the pigtail had its origin among certain Han and Mongol tribes. It was later adopted and coupled with a shaven forehead by the Manchus. After the latter overthrew the Ming dynasty and founded the Qing dynasty during the 1640s, they imposed their pigtail hairstyle upon the male population all over the realm in place of the traditional Ming mode of gathering long hair in a topknot. The clear political aim of this arbitrary imperial decree was to exact a manifest, symbolic submission to the new dynastic rule from every male subject. Those who defied the pigtail edict had to pay with their lives as the Qing army declared everywhere it went: "Keep your hair and lose your head, or keep your head and cut your hair." Many people were killed as hairstyle became a fatal political issue. The only safe way for men to avoid wearing the humiliating Manchu pigtail was to become a Buddhist monk, with a completely shaven head, or a Taoist priest, wearing a topknot (Hookham, 1972:265; Liang, 1986:246).

So, at its origin, the pigtail signified Qingness, not Chineseness. For the native people who maintained a residual loyalty to the Ming dynasty, it symbolized a shameful submission to an alien, barbarian dynastic rule, not national pride (Hookham, 1972:265; Spence, 1983:97).[4] Since then, the cutting off of the pigtails is a distinct act of rebellion among those native people who rose up intermittently against the Qing. The Taiping Rebellion, perhaps the biggest millenarian uprising in the world in the 19th century, which involved Nanjing, much of Central and South China, and threatened the Qing court in Peking (Beijing) from 1850 until it was brutally crushed in 1864, had all its male followers cut off their pigtails and re-adopt the Ming hairstyle to release them from "the tail-wearing shaven-headed badge of former slavery". No wonder that in the Qing imperial documents, the Taiping rebels were called the "Long-Hair Rebels" (Hookham, 1972:277–87; Liang, 1986:230–31; Franke, 1967:182). Although the pigtail prevailed temporarily over the "Long Hairs", the latter still lingered on in popular imagination and later assumed a broader

nationalist singificance in the National Revolution of 1911 (Spence, 1983:120–24, 162).

Naturalization of the Pigtail

Under the threat of death, men grudgingly wore a pigtail. Nonetheless, in the course of over two centuries of Qing rule, force of circumstances turned gradually into force of habit, and a remembered grudge gave way to forgetful, natural acceptance. Ridiculous and ugly though it looked in European eyes, the Qing subjects came to adapt themselves and value the pigtail as part of their way of life (Hookham, 1972:279; Kiernan, 1986:162; Spence, 1983:97). In the hot summer, people usually coiled their pigtails on their heads or tied them in knots (Lu Xun, 1977:101). In battles, Qing soldiers fiercely wound their pigtails round their cleanly shaven caputs in a display of belligerence (Hookham, 1972:281). And there might be such historically derived reverberations in the stereotypical act of Qing characters in modern Chinese films when they wrapped their pigtails around their necks while engaging in boxing and strenuous manual work. Apart from this, without a pigtail, one lost all chances of becoming a mandarin and improving one's status in the Qing social hierarchy (Lu Xun, 1977:77).

Hence, the pigtail as a sign of alien, barbarian Qingness was unwittingly transformed into a sign of cultural nativism, highly honoured and jealously guarded by ordinary folks. Lu Xun (1977), one of the greatest modern Chinese writers, superbly captured this transformed cultural meaning and value of the pigtail in his most celebrated novella, *The True Story of Ah Q*. In this story, the pigtail of one character, the son of a gentry family, "disappeared" when he came home from studies in Japan. Due to the disappearance of his pigtail, "his mother cried bitterly a dozen times, and his wife tried three times to jump into the well". Ah Q and the village folk called him an "Imitation Foreign Devil" and "Traitor in Foreign Pay". His attempt to wear a false pigtail only brought him further scorn and hatred. According to the story, in folk opinion, the pigtail no longer stood for a shameful submission to Qingness. On the contrary, its loss was considered an embarrassing, dishonourable, traitorous imitation of foreignness, and a betrayal of proud native culture (Lu Xun, 1977:77).

Even upon the coming of the 1911 Revolution when some opportunist villagers decided to join in the looting, they could not bring themselves to cut off their own pigtails and chose to coil them on their heads instead. Nor could Ah Q, the anti-hero of Lu Xun's story, think of a more suitable term to address the "Imitation Foreign Devil" — now the village head of the Revolution — than "Mr Foreigner" (Lu Xun, 1977:100–3). The villagers were afraid of going to town during the Revolution for fear of some "bad revolutionaries" who "made trouble by cutting off people's pigtails". And when a member of the gentry, a character in Lu Xun's story, suffered that shameful misfortune, all his family lamented bitterly (Lu Xun, 1977:101, 112).[5]

Of course, those "bad revolutionaries" who cut off the poor villagers' beloved pigtails thought otherwise. They were a new unfamiliar breed of people, namely Chinese nationalists, who regarded the pigtail as a symbol of shame (Spence, 1983:97). They were the products of modern Western-style education, telegraph wires, and newspapers in reaction to the paralytic Qing rule on the one hand, and European colonial aggression on the other (Kiernan, 1986:166). They included people like Lu Xun, who, during his study in Japan, had his pigtail cut off and then at once had a photograph of his shorn new look taken, on the back of which he later inscribed a fiery patriotic poem for one of his closest friends. He mocked the Chinese students in Japan who did not have the courage to cut off their pigtails and kept them coiled up on their heads instead "so that their hats stood up like Mount Fuji". The martial young Chiang Kai-shek also cut off his pigtail in military school. So did Zhang Binglin, a brilliant radical polemicist and editorial writer, in a Shanghai public rally (Spence, 1983:97). It followed naturally that when the nationalists overthrew the Qing dynasty in 1911, some revolutionaries would cut off other people's pigtails, no matter how "bad" such an action might appear. There was simply no place for the shameful Qing pigtail in their imagined community of modern China.

The political significance of the cutting off of the pigtail might not have been understood by ordinary people. In their pre-nationalist imagination, the nationalist revolutionaries perhaps represented restorers of the Ming, appearing in white helmets and military garb in mourning for the late Ming emperor, or the Long-Hair Rebels of

Taiping in bygone times (Lu Xun, 1977:96; Spence, 1983:120–24, 162). And yet they did recognize the disappearance of the pigtail and a bare nape as a sure sign of the revolutionary (Lu Xun, 1977:101; Spence, 1983:162). As for those who opposed the Revolution such as General Zhang Xun and his army, who had fought the nationalists tenaciously at Nanjing in 1911, they persisted in keeping their own pigtails (Spence, 1983:136). The nationalist campaign against the pigtail raged on until the early 1920s when it finally became a dead issue (Spence, 1983:184).

The long detour into the history, politics and culture of the pigtail could be of use in finding out what the pigtail meant under the Qing. The answer is elusive and uncertain. The pigtail could and did signify Qingness, cultural nativism and anti-nationalism, depending on historical context. Its meanings were thus pluralistic and situated, even inconsistent and contradictory over time. The act of wearing a pigtail, refusing to wear it, winding it on one's head, wearing a false one, cutting it off, and keeping it meant different things to different people in different times and places. To attempt to find and fix a single, immovable, consistent and transparent meaning would be an effort in vain.

It was amidst this flux of meanings of the pigtail that the "pigtrade" began (Kiernan, 1986:163). Hundreds of thousands of Chinese were shipped by European firms to European colonies and other destinations, such as Siam, greedy for cheap coolie labour throughout the globe during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Many of them boarded the steamers of the Bangkok Passenger Steamer Company, the Nord-Deutscher Lloyd Company, the Nippon Yusen Company, and the Chino-Siam Steam Navigation Company, and ended up in Bangkok, bringing with them the pigtails and all their ambiguous meanings (Skinner, 1957:43, 45, 62, 65–67).

The Pigtail under the Chakri Dynasty

In the canon of academic works on Thailand is an excellent study of the Chinese in Thailand that so far has stood the test of time, namely, G. William Skinner's *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (1957). In the directory of things that Skinner deemed important in his book, an entry reads: "Queue, as Sign of

Chineseness" (p. 454). There is thus an authoritative statement in unequivocal terms by Skinner that in Siam, a pigtail meant Chineseness.

In the light of the earlier discussion of the pigtail, this statement sounds strange. Among the many meanings of the pigtail in the Qing realm that have been traced, none is directly identical with "Chineseness". The cultural-nativist meaning seems the closest to this, but is still distinct from it while the others clearly contradict it, especially the anti-nationalist connotations. However, since it has also been part of the findings that the meaning of the pigtail was always pluralistic and contextual, let it be assumed at this point that the pigtail could possibly mean Chineseness in the new context of Siam, and there might be some transformation of its meaning *in that direction* once the pigtailed immigrants arrived in the Chakri kingdom.

The next logical step is to specify the various contexts in which Skinner identified the pigtail as a sign of Chineseness in Siam. A reading of the text on a number of related topics yields the following: the Chakri state's taxation of the Chinese before 1910 (1957:71, 121), the Chakri state's censuses of 1904 and 1909 (ibid:73), the Chakri state's ennoblement of Chinese leaders (ibid:151), cultural assimilation of the Chinese into Thai society (ibid:128, 132–34), and the aftermath of the abandonment of the pigtail in 1910 (ibid:254). It can then be concluded that there were two major settings in which Skinner found the pigtail to be a sign of Chineseness, that is (1) Chakri state-Chinese relationships and (2) the spontaneous process of cultural assimilation. Apparently, Skinner's main concern when he discussed the pigtail in the first kind of setting was to determine what was the most accurate number of Chinese in Siam (ibid:71, 73). Hence Skinner the demographer had to adopt, inevitably, the viewpoint of the Chakri state, albeit with an admirable degree of scepticism in the reliability of available statistics. In the second setting, he was mainly concerned with the cultural reasons for which the Chinese chose to keep or discard their pigtails in Thai society (ibid:128, 132–34). Here, Skinner the anthropologist had to try to see the pigtail through the pigtail wearer's eyes. The problems here are whether the pigtail wearers' subjective perception of the pigtail was the same as that of the Chakri state, and how Skinner mediated between the two.

Skinner came up with a clear-cut answer to the first question: the viewpoint of the Chakri state concerning the pigtail was the same as the subjective perception of the pigtail wearers in this matter. The former was said to be unproblematically based on and derived from the latter. Both concurrently saw the pigtail as a sign of Chineseness (ibid:71, 73, 128, 132–34).

A scrutiny of Skinner's text on this issue (ibid:71, 73) reveals a structure of arguments by which he attempted to mediate the two points of view. First, the Chakri state as tax collector and census-taker considered all males who wore a pigtail as Chinese. Second, all males who wore a pigtail showed by outward appearance that they considered themselves Chinese. Third, the Chakri state therefore actually considered as Chinese all males who considered themselves Chinese. And fourth, all male Chinese who continued to wear a pigtail did so because they were still culturally unassimilated into Thai society.

The crucial linking arguments — or should we say sleight of hand — appear as follows. On the first occasion, Skinner wrote:

> The Chinese head tax was paid by all males over 20 years of age who wore the queue *i.e.* who still considered themselves Chinese. (ibid:70–71, emphasis added)

The two groups of people were identified with each other simply by the *i.e.* without any further explanation.

On the second occasion, Skinner first wrote:

> The census takers, then, attempted to *record as Chinese all who showed by outward appearance that they considered themselves Chinese*. (ibid:73, emphasis added)

And then, one paragraph later, he restates the same argument with a minor but significant difference:

> The 1904 results, assuming that the aim was *to record as Chinese all those who considered themselves Chinese*, was certainly an undercount for several reasons. (ibid:73, emphasis added)

Thus, by an almost unnoticeable omission of the middle term — *the outward appearance of pigtail*, the viewpoint of the Chakri state's

official census-takers was identified with the subjective perception of the pigtail wearers, asserting the concurrence of opinion between the two on the meaning of the pigtail as Chineseness.

On the last two occasions, Skinner sought to establish a clear-cut dichotomy of cultural and political choices facing the *luuk jin* or male descendants of Chinese immigrants in Siam before 1910, the year when the Chakri state abolished the triennial head tax on the Chinese and made them liable to the higher regular capitation tax paid by the rest of the population (ibid:162). As there was in Siam no racial barrier to complete assimilation and the Chakri state's policy made it necessary for the *luuk jin* to identify themselves clearly as Chinese or Thai, Skinner claimed:

> They [the *luuk jin*] could *either* identify with the Chinese *or* achieve complete acceptance by the Thai, and they were not constrained by convention to take either course. ...Sons and grandsons of Chinese immigrants *either* wore a queue *or* did not... The Chinese descendant *either* paid the Chinese poll tax *or* sought out a Thai patron; it was virtually impossible to do neither. (ibid:128, emphasis added)

> He either wore a queue, acknowledged the jurisdiction of the Chinese headman, paid the triennial tax, and was marked on the wrist, or he clipped his hair, paid an annual capitation tax, and established client relations with a Thai patron. (ibid:298)

Thus, as far as the pigtail is concerned, the choices facing the *luuk jin* were absolutely clear-cut. *Either* wear a pigtail, identify with the Chinese, and pay the Chinese poll tax, *or* cut it off, be completely accepted by the Thai, and seek out a Thai patron. "There was no middle ground in the matter of identification ... a marginal role midway between the two societies was unusual", according to Skinner. It follows naturally that those who opted for the first alternative must have been culturally unassimilated into Thai society.

In summary, it was through a series of arbitrarily connected arguments, leading from state categorization, outward appearance of the pigtail and self-identification to cultural non-assimilation, that Skinner claimed the pigtail to be a sign of Chineseness in Siam. Needless to say, this structure of his arguments is logically flawed, and its resultant claims equally unwarranted. To begin with, it treats

the outward appearance of the pigtail as primarily an intransitive reality which was passively recorded by the Chakri state, thus underestimating the possibility that this outward appearance might equally be, if not more so, a transitive reality actively enforced by the Chakri state itself. Second, it took for granted that the outward appearance of the pigtail showed a voluntary self-consideration of being Chinese on the part of the pigtail wearers, thus disregarding a possibility that some of them might do so only to appear outwardly as Chinese for certain reasons while actually considering themselves to be something other than Chinese. And finally, Skinner considers cultural non-assimilation to be the prime reason for wearing a pigtail, thus reducing the significance of motivations connected with tax evasion and opium addiction in this regard.

We may conclude that the basic inadequacy of Skinner's reasoning about the pigtail lies in his failure to give sufficient regard to political and economic factors involved in the contexts under consideration as against cultural ones, and in his tendency to reduce the relationship between the Chakri state and the pigtail wearers to a problem of cultural non-assimilation. This results in an interpretation of the pigtail as a mark of Chineseness and the exclusion of the element of power from the power-ridden contexts of the pigtail in Siam.

However, pure logical refutation is no substitute for empirical disproof. If Skinner's claim was that whenever you saw a pigtail in Siam, you found a Chinese, the next task must be to search for a Chinese with a pigtail who was not considered Chinese and a non-Chinese with a pigtail in Siam. It is these trans-coiffured that are next considered.

A State Categorization and Pigtail

On the basis of the earlier challenge to Skinner's reasoning, the points of empirical entry will be the logical breaches in his structure of arguments. Accordingly, the first step is to find a case where the Chakri state neither considered nor treated some males who wore a pigtail as Chinese. The pertinent case is *the Chinese within the* phrai *system*.

The *phrai* system was the fundamental structure of the Chakri state during the early Bangkok period until it was eventually abolished

by the administrative reform of King Rama V in 1905 (Chatthip and Suthy, 1981:40, 498–501). Originally established in the period of the Ayutthaya kingdom, the system functioned to determine the rights and obligations of different strata of people in the kingdom according to their *sakdina* or ranks. Essentially a corvée labour system, it divided people into two basic strata: the *moon nai* (masters) in the upper stratum who controlled manpower; and the *phrai* (serfs) in the lower stratum who had to register with and work for a particular *moon nai*. At the top of this hierarchical state structure was the king, the Supreme Master and Lord of Life, so to speak. Thus, by gaining a status of either *moon nai* or *phrai*, a person had all the differential rights and obligations under the laws and norms of the *phrai* system, and was considered fully assimilated into the Siamese state structure, regardless of his or her ethnicity, culture and language (Sonsak, 1981:43).

It is important at this point to bear in mind the essential conceptual difference between the traditional Siamese kingdom and a modern nation-state, and its far-reaching practical consequences. Whereas the latter is defined by its boundaries and population, the former was defined by its centre and ruler, that is the king (Anderson, 1979:213).[6] Likewise, while membership of the latter is based on nationality, that of the former was through the *phrai* system. In fact, the traditional Siamese kingdom was a multi-ethnic state. There were a large number of Lao, Khmer, Malays, Mon, Thawai, Yuan, Persians, Portuguese and Chinese mingling with the numerically dominant Thai population as common subjects alike of the Siamese king since the Ayutthaya period. The *phrai* among them had to have their wrists tattooed, register with a *moon nai*, and perform corvée labour while the degree of access to the king on the part of the *moon nai* among them was not determined simply by their ethnic identity (Anderson, 1979:213; Sonsak, 1981:44). Therefore, traditionally, the degree of a certain ethnic group's integration into the Siamese kingdom was not determined by their cultural assimilation into Thai society, but by their political assimilation into the phrai-based *kingly state*. What really counted in the king-cum-state's eyes was not whether you were a Chinese or a Thai, but whether you were a *moon nai* or a *phrai*.

Thus, during the Ayutthaya period, the Chinese were never considered foreigners by the Thai (Skinner, 1957:11). They had served the Siamese kings in their capacity as either an ennobled *moon nai* or a common *phrai* since the 15th century. When the Burmese laid

siege to Ayutthaya in the 1760s, the Chinese valiantly joined the Thai in defence of the capital. On their part, the Siamese monarchs had a taste for Chineseness. They admired Chinese medicine, opera and literature, and also married fair-skinned Chinese women. Apart from the mixing of genes, the early Chakri monarchs also adopted Chinese names to use in their diplomatic contacts with the Qing empire. King Rama I was known as *Tae Hua*, King Rama II as *Tae Hok*, King Rama III as *Tae Hud*, King Rama IV as *Tae Meng*, and King Rama V as *Tae Chia* (Skinner, 1957:4, 11, 14–15, 19–20, 26, 118–25, 128, 143–54, 245; Phonlakul, 1972:14).

During the early Bangkok period, the need for a directly exploitable labour force outside the declining *phrai* system, greatly increased after the signing of the Bowring Treaty with Great Britain in 1855. This led the Chakri state to adopt a policy of not forcing the Chinese to become *phrai*. Thus the majority of Chinese subjects in Siam were allowed to stay outside the *phrai* system, even though they remained under the control of the Chakri state. The Chinese in this category, who were officially called *Jin phuk pi* (wrist-tag wearing Chinese), had to wear an official wrist tag and pay a triennial head tax of 4.25 baht to the state. However, the Chakri state also continued to give the Chinese an opportunity to enter the *phrai* system and become *phrai* if they voluntarily chose so. In such instances, they would receive the same treatment as any other *phrai* of whatever ethnicity, that is, having their wrist tattooed, registering with a *moon nai*, and performing corvée labour. The Chinese in this latter category were thus considered as remaining within the *phrai* system in contrast to their kin who stayed outside (Anderson, 1979:221–22; Skinner, 1957:133, 162; Sonsak, 1981:44–48, 80–86).

The most striking thing about these Chinese *phrai* was that they were allowed by the Chakri authorities to continue to wear pigtails and Qing dress despite their *phrai* status. This distinctive outward appearance from that of other *phrai* signified their cultural non-assimilation and earned them the special official name of *Jin phrai* (Sonsak, 1981:47). And yet, in so far as they had their wrist tattooed and registered with a *moon nai* in addition to their pigtails and Qing dress, the Chakri state neither considered nor treated them as Chinese, as the following royal decree of King Rama IV issued in 1867–68 made clear:

> The word *jin* (that is, Chinese) means a person with a pigtail. If sons or grandsons of the Chinese wear a pigtail but are tattooed

> on their wrist and registered in a list, then they are Thais. (Quoted in Sonsak, 1981:46)

This means that the Chakri state regarded the *Jin phrai*'s tattooed wrist as overriding their pigtail, and their *phrai*-ness as overriding their Chineseness. The *Jin phrai* wore pigtails, yet they achieved complete acceptance by the Thai and sought out a Thai patron because, as far as the Chakri state was concerned, the *Jin phrai* were Thai despite their pigtails. In this power-ridden context of the pigtail and its meanings in Siam, political assimilation into the *phrai* system took precedence over cultural non-assimilation into Thai society.

The case of *Jin phrai*, a category of Chinese in Siam largely overlooked by Skinner, thus stands in direct contradiction to many of Skinner's arguments about the pigtail. The *Jin phrai* did not pay a triennial head tax, were not considered Chinese by the Chakri state, and were not subjected to a false dichotomy of cultural and political choices asserted by Skinner (1957:70–71, 73, 128).[7] The situation was the same with the Chinese leaders who were ennobled by the Chakri state. These *Jek sua*, *Jin khun nang*, or *kromkan Jin* still kept their pigtails despite their *moon nai* status (Sonsak, 1981:47–8).[8] Together with their *Jin phrai* counterpart, they constituted the non-Chinese pigtail in official recognition, so to speak. The pigtails were not a sign of Chineseness for the Chakri state.

Pigtail and Self-Identification

The next move against Skinner's interpretation of the pigtail is to find those males in Siam who wore a pigtail, and yet did not consider themselves in any way Chinese, so as to sever the second link in his chain of arguments between the pigtail and self-identification. These pigtailed non-Chinese can be found in the figures of the so-called *Jin plaeng*, that is, transformed or "fake" Chinese (Sonsak, 1981:78).

The creation of this official category of pigtail wearers had nothing to do with cultural assimilation. It was purely based on opium addiction, administrative control and tax gathering. To begin with, opium-smoking was by no means an alien vice carried into Siam by Chinese immigrants only some time before the 19th century, as Skinner implied (Skinner, 1957:120). In fact, natives of this land had

learnt and loved to smoke opium continually since the beginning of the Ayutthaya period. Due to a host of serious social, moral and economic problems caused by opium-smoking, especially the loss of working and fighting capacity among *phrai* addicts, the Siamese monarchs prohibited opium from 1360 during the reign of King Ramathibodhi of Ayutthaya. A criminal law issued by the king contained a provision which stated:

> Those who smoke, consume, or sell opium shall be subjected to severe punishment, confiscation of all their property, three days of public parade on land, three days of public parade by boat, and imprisonment until they can give up opium. If they can give it up, they shall then be released on parole guaranteed by their kin. (Quoted in Sanguan, 1959:vol. 3)

Despite the official ban, opium continued to plague Siam up to the Bangkok period because of the practical ineffectiveness of monarchical power in the outer areas of the kingdom. The problem became even more widespread and severe at that time, and threatened to get out of the Chakri state's hands with the immigration of an increasing number of Chinese opium addicts into the kingdom. More and more natives, including those of the *moon nai* status, turned to opium in total disregard of the law. The successive attempts by King Rama I, King Rama II and King Rama III to suppress it with stricter measures all ended in vain. Moreover, the Chakri state's ban and suppression of opium even backfired since opium smuggling led to a spread of *ang yi* (secret society or triad) activities, thus creating a further security problem for the authorities (ibid:[vol. 3]254–63).[9]

It was King Rama IV who came up with a novel and lucrative solution, that is, suppressing opium by selling it (and likewise suppressing *ang yi* by patronizing it). Therefore, in 1851, the first year of his reign, the new king decided to legalize, monopolize and tax opium for the first time in Siamese history. However, the new state regulations specifically allowed only the Chinese to smoke opium freely but still forbade the subjects of other ethnic groups to do so. The rationale and explanation of this policy were contained in an order issued by Chaophraya Chakri to governors all over the kingdom as follows:

> Opium is an evil thing. Whoever smoke, consume and become addicted to opium, will be morally corrupted and commit crimes.

> Although the former great kings have proclaimed the laws forbidding opium for many reigns, it appears that the number of those who buy, sell, and smoke opium has not decreased. Thai and Chinese subjects who smoke and consume opium have greatly increased with every reign until opium spreads everywhere throughout the country. Thai and Chinese who buy and sell opium have smuggled money out of the country to buy opium to such an extent that money in the country has decreased every year... And those who clandestinely buy, sell and smoke opium are among the Chinese more than any other language groups... Hence it is deemed appropriate that the following officials... will join together to farm opium tax and trade opium only among the Chinese without selling it to hitherto Thai, Mon, Lao, Khmer, Malays, Yuan, Burmans, Thawai, Brahmins, and Portuguese who, being subjects in the kingdom, will be soldiers fighting against the enemy. Also, now that there is an opium tax and tax farmers will barter goods for opium, the money that Thai and Chinese smuggle out of the country in great amount to buy opium each year will remain inside the country.
>
> If any hitherto Thai, Mon, Lao, Khmer, Malays, Yuan, Burmans, Thawai, Brahmins and Portuguese, being subjects and prohibited from smoking and consuming opium, hire a Chinese to buy opium from opium tax houses for their own smoking and consuming, and if they are proven thus guilty, they will be severely punished according to the law. (Quoted in ibid:vol. 3)

A number of important points can be drawn from the quotation above:

1. The previous ban on opium had been based on moral considerations;
2. Up till then, opium addicts in Siam included both Thai and Chinese alike, though the majority of them were Chinese;
3. The ban on opium was lifted for administrative and financial reasons;
4. The non-Chinese subjects were forbidden to join the Chinese in opium-smoking for security reasons;
5. Note the word "hitherto" or *doem* in Thai, which always accompanied the names of non-Chinese ethnic groups each time their exclusion from the freedom to smoke opium was reiterated.

What can be made out of these observations? Two conclusions can perhaps be drawn, and both of them directly contradict Skinner's

opinions on this issue (Skinner, 1957:120–21). First, Skinner put it as if the main reason for King Rama IV's decision to bar the non-Chinese subjects from opium-smoking had been based on moral considerations. Points 1, 3 and 4 make it clear that moral considerations gave way to administrative, financial and security concerns in the state's conception of this policy (Sonsak, 1981:199–200).

Second, Skinner tended to underestimate the number of Thai opium addicts at that time, arguing that, normally, the Thai did not engage in heavy labour and so had no need for opium. Point 2 and especially the often-repeated "Thai and Chinese who smoke opium" which crops up in the document show otherwise. We should not forget that opium is, after all, a strongly addictive drug. It needs no heavy labour to supplement its inherent addictiveness. And since there is some evidence that a large number of Thai had already been addicted to opium despite the official ban, it can be reasonably inferred that the partial lifting of the ban and the consequently greater availability of opium throughout the country — there were about 1,200 licensed opium retail shops in Bangkok alone, according to Skinner — must have resulted in an even greater number of Thai opium addicts thereafter. The opium tax farmers and retailers might have felt rather reluctant to sell opium illicitly to the Thai, but they had to pay for the costs, including the taxes from a system of tax farming to the state. More opium addicts meant more customers and more profits, regardless of their ethnicity. So, it might well have been worth the risk of doing so. All things considered, Skinner's dismissal of the importance of Thai opium addicts after 1851 appears to be unwarranted since it must have been practically impossible to bar the Thai from smoking opium completely, and their number was thus likely to rise (Sanguan, 1959:[vol. 3]273–74; Skinner, 1957:121).

Why did a usually cautious, scrupulous and critical scholar like Skinner make such a rash judgement? The reason seems to be that he could not afford to take the Thai opium addicts too seriously for doing so would undermine his case for the interpretation of the pigtail as a manifestation of Chineseness in Siam.

It is here that the *Jin plaeng* enter the scene as those Thai and other non-Chinese opium addicts who could not give up opium-smoking. As part of the new state policy of suppressing-by-selling opium, King Rama IV with remarkable leniency, forbearance and

humanity made provisions for those non-rehabilitable non-Chinese opium addicts. They could continue their evil habit of opium-smoking on the condition that they transformed their outward appearance into Chinese by changing their hairstyle from a bun or a *krathum*-flowered shape into a pigtail, registered with a local official, wore an official wrist tag, and paid a special, higher rate of tax. If their hair was still too short to be plaited into a pigtail, they could for the time being tie a false pigtail to their hair. And even if their hair was too short for this to be done, a false pigtail could be coiled on their head. But in no instance were they allowed to cut off the real or false pigtail from their head and sport a Thai hairstyle. If they were caught doing so, they would be sent to Bangkok, punished, tattooed on their face, and compelled to cut grass to feed elephants for the rest of their lives. All these meticulous regulations on the fake and false pigtails were aimed at making the *Jin plaeng* readily recognizable "so that they can be summoned to wear a wrist tag and pay money easily" (Sonsak, 1981:79, 86, 198, 202).[10]

The *Jin plaeng* were further divided into two subgroups, the *Jin plaeng* who had already been assimilated into the *phrai* system, and those who had not. The two were treated differently by the state. In the case of the former, if they had hitherto been ennobled *moon nai*, they would be dismissed; but if they had already been registered and tattooed on their wrist as *phrai*, they would have to remain under the control of their respective *moon nai*, perform corvée labour, and in addition, pay a triennial head tax of 60.75 baht. In the case of the latter, they were considered to be unreliable persons who had despicably forfeited their own tradition and language for the sake of opium-smoking. Regarded as irreversibly transformed into Chinese, they were not subjected to the control of a *moon nai* and corvée labour, but were instead deprived of all legal rights. Furthermore, they had to pay an unusually high triennial head tax of 60.75 baht. These moral, legal, and financial forms of discrimination were aimed at discouraging any untattooed non-Chinese from feigning Chineseness to avoid the *phrai* system (Sonsak, 1981:80–90, 198–210).[11]

To conclude, "the *Jin plaeng* meant people who changed their own original hairstyle into a pigtail for the sake of opium-smoking" (ibid:79). They were the pigtail wearers in Siam who did not consider themselves Chinese in any imaginable way. They had to make themselves appear outwardly as Chinese because the pigtails, whether

feigned or false — at least initially until they could grow their own — were literally imposed on their heads by the Chakri state, for otherwise they would have been sent to cut grass for elephants until their death. And the state forced them to adopt pigtails essentially for reasons of administrative control and tax collection under the veneer of moral and cultural concerns. These fake Chinese or pigtailed non-Chinese constitute another piece of pigtail evidence of the non-Chineseness of the pigtail in Siam.

Pigtail and Cultural Non-Assimilation

Given the foregoing findings on the various kinds of pigtail wearers in Siam so far, there is not much else left to do in refuting Skinner's final linking argument except to bury it: those males who identified themselves as Chinese by continuing to wear a pigtail did so because they were still culturally not assimilated into Thai society. The *Jin phrai* and *Jin khun nang* pigtail wearers were fully assimilated into the *phrai* system and were considered Thai by the Chakri state despite their pigtails. The *Jin plaeng* pigtail wearers were indeed Thai and non-Chinese people who belonged culturally to their Thai and non-Chinese communities despite their pigtails. That all of them wore a pigtail in common with the *Jin phuk pi* had little or nothing to do with cultural non-assimilation but had everything to do with state control, taxation and opium addiction. Their pigtails were not primarily a sign of Chineseness, but one of administrative categorization, tax value and opium addictiveness.

But does not this conclusion go a little bit too far? Is this denying any possibility that a pigtail might indeed be commonly held as a sign of Chineseness in Siam at that time, that there might have been a number of Chinese people who wore a pigtail and Qing dress because they considered themselves, and were considered, Chinese culturally? In attempting to counter Skinner's cultural positivist interpretation of the pigtail, has the interpretation of the pigtail been excessively politicized? After all, the *Dictionary of the Siamese Language*, the first standard Thai dictionary originally compiled by Dan Beach Bradley in consultation with Ajaan Tad in 1873, had defined *Jek* and *Jin* as "the name of people wearing a pigtail, shirt and pair of trousers who came from China" (Bradley, 1971:141). And when the

Chinese in Siam discarded their pigtails following the Nationalist Revolution of 1911 in China, Nai Busya, a well-known Thai poet in the reign of King Rama VI, complained in his *Niras Sampheng*, a travelogue in verse about a well-known Chinese commercial district in Bangkok:

> Small road is crowded by Jek and Thai,
> Unavoidably mingling, clashing with one another.
> Jek mix with Thai beyond recognition,
> Who is who, one can't help but wonder.
> Modern times deviantly mess up the place.
> Jin cut off their pigtails and become Thai undetectably.
> What an unconventional abnormality,
> People surprisingly reverse their ethnicity.
>
> (Nai Busya, 1985:32; my translation)

Is not all this evidence enough to demonstrate that culturally a pigtail did mean Chineseness in Siam?

Perhaps it does. The inquiry may have veered too emphatically in a politicist direction in reaction to Skinner's cultural positivism, but for good reasons. The probable existence of the cultural meaning of the pigtail as Chineseness in Siam is not denied. That layer of cultural consensus on the meaning of the pigtail might indeed exist among the vast majority of people in both Thai and Chinese communities alike. However, the main contention is that this cultural layer of the meaning of the pigtail had been penetrated, meddled with, overidden, abused and deflected by the Chakri state for its own political and economic interests to the extent that the pigtail lost its clear-cut original cultural meaning as Chineseness in the process. The *Jin phrai*, who considered themselves Chinese, were categorized as Thai by the state while the *Jin plaeng*, who considered themselves non-Chinese, were categorized as Chinese by the state. The tightly plaited meaning of the pigtail was thus loosened, unravelled, and spun off in many different centrifugal directions until it became ambiguous, pluralistic and situational. The pigtail in Siam was thence made to mean different things (Chineseness, administrative category, tax value, opium addictiveness) to different peoples (Thai, *Jin phuk pi*, *Jin phrai*, *Jin khun nang*, *Jin plaeng* and the Chakri rulers) in different times and places. And all this chaos was due to the inherently political nature of the context of the pigtail. Of course, it would have been much easier to find and fix the single

meaning of the pigtail in Siam but this is possible only if politics had left culture alone.

Conclusion

Having reached the end of an engagement with Skinner's arguments is it therefore the conclusion that the notion of Chineseness existed before the reign of King Rama VI? Granted that there had been both the cultural meaning of the pigtail as Chineseness and that the Chinese wore pigtails long before King Rama VI ascended the throne, this by no means implies that the racialized overtones to the meaning of Chineseness in the time of King Rama VI had also previously existed.

First, consider the following facts. King Rama IV and King Rama V were completely willing to accept *Jin phrai* and *Jin khun nang* as Thai despite their pigtails, while King Rama VI insisted on regarding the Chinese as Chinese despite the disappearance of their pigtails. The two former kings looked at a Chinese *phrai* with a pigtail and they saw Thai *phrai*-ness while the latter king looked at a Chinese man without a pigtail and yet he saw Chineseness. King Rama V stated, both publicly and privately, that he regarded the Chinese not as foreigners but as "our men" and one of the components of his kingdom, and that his government should rule them well so that they would feel "we are the Chinese rulers" (quoted in Skinner, 1957:162–63; Phonlakul, 1972:213). On the other hand, King Rama VI branded the Chinese as inassimilable, opportunistic, two-faced, devoid of civic virtues, treacherous, secretive, rebellious, Mammon worshippers, economic parasites and "the Jews of the Orient". He warned that the Chinese constituted a grave potential threat for which the Thai rulers should be on the watch (Skinner, 1957:164–65). Why the difference? Why such a drastic change?

What had drastically changed was not so much the Chinese as the way the three monarchs looked at them. For King Rama IV and King Rama V, the Chinese were just one ethnic group among the multi-ethnic subjects of their kingdom. Their Chinese culture made no difference in terms of their access to *phra barom phothisomparn* (royal protection). However, for King Rama VI, the Chinese were an alien minority within the recently conceived Thai nation. The perception that they were of the Chinese "race" now automatically disqualified them of a share in the state as it were. The Chinese

found themselves ineligible for membership in the Thai-monopolized imagined community. It was essentially this change from, shall we say, a Chakri dynastic conception of Chineseness to a discriminatory one in which Thai notions of a Chinese "race" were integral that totally transformed the whole meaning of Chineseness in Siam. Some kind of cultural Chineseness might have existed before the reign of King Rama VI, but certainly not the Thai version of Chineseness with its racialized overtones. The two were non-identical and discontinuous. The latter was newly invented. It had never existed in Siam before.

So, much to the dismay of the Chinese and to Skinner's surprise, Chineseness stuck to the Chinese even after they had cut off their pigtails for a long time. With "the pigtail as a sign of Chineseness" already removed, Skinner was left wondering why a culturally intermediate Sino-Thai community failed to develop in Thailand (Skinner, 1957:128, 254, 298–300). What he forgot was that after 1910 the thing that made one remain a Chinese in Thailand was no longer his or her outward appearance, but his or her politically-defined "race". And in the thinking of King Rama VI, Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram and Nai Kimliang Watthanaprida (Luang Wichitwathakan), the traits that were despicable in the Chinese race stuck to the Chinese and their descendants regardless of their cultural adaptation (Anderson, 1979:212–13, 220). Thus, following the logic of this racialized discourse, the universe of the Thai nation must be racially divided into two, the Thai race and the non-Thai or Chinese race, between which no intermediary middle ground was possible. Given this dominant ideological dichotomy of the Thai and Chinese, no matter how many Chinese individuals learnt the Thai language in addition to Chinese, adopted Buddhism as their religion, combined and interacted among themselves, it would still remain literally unthinkable that they constituted an intermediate Sino-Thai community. In the Thai racialized discourse, that was simply an outrageous discursive impossibility.

Did Skinner fall unknowingly into the trap of this Thai racialized discursive universe? The evidence seems to suggest so since much of the information he himself gave indicates the possible existence of such a Sino-Thai culture and community, yet he persistently interpreted it and concluded otherwise (Skinner, 1957:305–6, 310–15). But, alas, as Ah Q could well testify, those without pigtails were actually neither Chinese nor foreigners but

jia yang gui zi (bogus foreign devils) or *li tong wa guo de ren* (traitors in foreign pay).[12]

NOTES

*This paper was originally written for Professor Benedict Anderson's course on "Plural Society Revisited" at Cornell University in the winter of 1988, and has since been revised. Thanks is owed to Khun Khruu Ben for reminding me of my absent pigtail and forgotten Chineseness.
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1 The account in this part of the text is based on Liang Sathiansut's *Prawat Watthanatham Jin* [A History of Chinese Culture] (1986). Held in high regard by Thai aristocrats, this octogenarian Sino-Thai scholar was the chairman of the Committee for Research on Sino-Thai Affairs in Chinese Documents in the Office of the Prime Minister in the 1980s. Filled with cultural anecdotes, his *Prawat Watthanatham Jin* is far from being a formal academic treatise. However, Liang often displays an admirable critical and historical sensitivity in this work. It is also worth noting how Thai-fied my generation of *luuk jin* (male descendants of the Chinese) has become; we now have to trace our Chinese cultural roots *via* books in the Thai language.

2 The conception of these two points is derived from various writings of Benedict Anderson, Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida.

3 Within the context of the problem posed, there are, of course, other choices of topic, for instance, a prehistory of Chineseness in China, or of Thainess in Siam. The choice of a prehistory of Chineseness in Siam is simply because I am a *luuk jin* and never had a chance to wear a pigtail.

4 At this point, one is reminded of one of the more brutal scenes frequently seen in modern Chinese historical or martial arts films in which a Qing subject, kneeling down with his hands tied behind the back, was pulled by his pigtail so as to expose his stretched neck to the hovering sword of a Qing public executioner. Though not necessarily true, this scene does forcefully express how the pigtail could serve not only as a symbol but also as an instrument of Qing dynastic domination.

5 There remains one disturbing question to be addressed at this point concerning the thesis of the pigtail as a sign of cultural nativism: whether villagers really thought about the pigtail in that way, or that it was only a caricature of rural idiocy purely invented by Lu Xun. Knowing too little about authoritative works on Chinese culture, a more credible confirmation of this thesis is not possible. But some circumstantial evidence seems to point in its direction. For example, it is known for a fact that Chinese immigrants in Siam still kept their pigtails, and their male descendants continued to do so even when they could no longer speak contemporary Chinese. Their motives for keeping a

pigtail, according to contemporary observers, were based on both special socio-economic benefits and a sense of cultural identity which it induced (Phonlakul, 1972:26; Skinner, 1957:132–34).

6 It is worth mentioning in passing that the Chakri state began to set up the Division of Map Making only in 1875, and took the first incomplete official census only in 1904 (Sanguan, 1959:[vol. 2]484; Skinner, 1957:73). This rather late awareness of the importance of clear boundaries and accurate population statistics on the part of the Chakri state testifies to its essentially traditional kingdom-like nature in the period under consideration.

7 An objection against my criticism of Skinner may be raised at this point, based on the temporal differences between my evidence and that of Skinner's. As I cite the royal decree of 1867–68, while Skinner used an official memorandum on the 1904 census, could it not be the case that the Chakri rulers changed their definition of Chinese over time from the reign of King Rama IV to King Rama V? Without discounting that possibility, my criticism would still hold for the following reasons: (1) the *phrai* system in general, and hence the *Jin phrai* in particular, were not abolished until 1905, one year after the census was taken; (2) the two official documents dealt with different matters, the royal decree with providing guidelines for local administration, the memorandum with census-taking; and therefore (3) it might be possible that the Chakri authorities held two different definitions of Chinese simultaneously as they were intended for different purposes.

8 Again, this conclusion runs counter to an instance cited by Skinner in which an ennobled Chinese had his pigtail cut off in a public ceremony to change his nationality (Skinner, 1957:151). This symbolic act need not be interpreted as a change of nationality. After all, the Thai Nationality Act was proclaimed only in 1913, 12 years after the ceremony had taken place. This cutting off of the pigtail could also be interpreted differently as a change of political allegiance from the Qing emperor to the Chakri king, or a sign of cultural assimilation.

9 Two anecdotes may be added about the so-called *ang yi* or Chinese secret societies which became common in Siam during the 18th and early 19th centuries. First, concerning the etymological origin of the term *ang yi*, Liang claims that the word *ang* came from the family name of *Ang Kuang*, the last Ming army commander to die in continued resistance against Qing rule after the Ming dynasty had fallen. So as to honour their former leader, his followers agreed to adopt *ang* as their common clan name and called their secret society *ang yi* which literally meant the "ang" letter (Liang, 1986:222–23). Second, although the *ang yi* organizations were initially introduced into Siam by Chinese immigrants, they were by no means limited merely to the Chinese communities, and later diffused into other ethnic groups as well. According to a report to Queen Saowabha, the then acting regent to King Rama V, in 1897, several *ang yi*-type organizations were set up by some Thai and Indians, and some of them even had a *farang* (a European) as chief. These non-Chinese *ang yi* included the *Samakkhi Sujarit Jaroensuk* gang led by Luang Phakdi (a retired noble), Nai Tuam (a Thai), and Nai Chom (a British subject); the *Katanyu* gang led by Nai Rit; an Indian gang led by Nai Fa (a French subject); and another Indian gang led by Bang Sen (a British subject) (Phonlakul,

1972:53–54).

10 At this stage, the significance of point 5 in earlier observations on the order issued by Chaophraya Chakri becomes clearer. The almost unnoticeable suffix *doem* or "hitherto" consistently attached to the names of the non-Chinese subjects in that order might anticipate the fact that some non-Chinese opium addicts would thereafter feign being Chinese, to whom the ban on opium-smoking did not apply.

11 As to the situation of the *Jin phrai* opium addicts, they appeared to be a little better off than the *Jin plaeng phrai*. While they were still subjected to all usual *phrai* obligations, they could smoke opium freely without being compelled to wear a wrist tag and pay any special tax (Sonsak, 1981:202).

12 There was indeed such a Sino-Thai community in Siam and there was a Thai word for it, *Jin Siam*. The *Jin Siam* were deeply committed to the Siamese country, had their own associations and came out in support of the People's Party openly during the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy. However, the community became inactive and the word fell into disuse with the rise of "Thailand" in the late 1930s (Nakarin, 1985:112, 132).

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3

Chinese Identity in Thailand

Walwipha Burusratanaphand

This chapter argues that the Thai-Chinese relationship has still not received adequate academic attention, especially in the failure to take into account the rapidly changing social conditions and environment in Thailand. Most studies on the Chinese community in Thailand have relied on Skinner's works (1957, 1958) as a standard reference instead of examining the problem critically or developing new perspectives in the face of changing social conditions. Based on these studies, it seems that the changes in Thai society over the past 30 years have not had any influence on the life of the Chinese and their relationship with other ethnic groups. We must move beyond Skinner's thesis.

This chapter seeks an answer to the question: Does an absence of serious conflict between the Thai and the Chinese necessarily mean that the Chinese people are assimilated and are not "aliens" in Thailand? The answer is only possible by considering the trend of the Chinese in Thailand and their ethnohistorical background, the historical developments in Thailand, particularly the impact of national policies on the various ethnic groups, and the cultural changes within each ethnic group, whether Thai, Chinese, Lao or others. Instead of merely saying that the Chinese are assimilated, we should ask, and in the process, deconstruct "What is a Chinese?" or

"What is a Thai?" Moreover, an understanding of Thai society is only possible if we examine the alliance between Thai political leaders and Chinese businessmen. Here, instead of using the assimilation model, ideas such as interest-group alliances and multinational networks are examined.

A Historical Perspective

Well over 95 percent of the Chinese in Thailand are drawn from Cha'o-Zhan. Among the different waves of Chinese immigration are two major influxes. The first large-scale arrival took place in 1782 under the reign of King Taksin, a half Teochew, half Thai monarch. The second great influx of Chinese, who came as common labourers, dated from 1918 to 1955, a period of massive construction of the railroad and other infrastructures of a modernizing Thailand.

There are several interesting features of Chinese migration. Prior to 1917, there was a continuous flow of migrants between Bangkok and Swatow. Immigration was temporary and primarily a response to the increasing demand for labour and commercial opportunities in Thailand. For the immigrants, their aim was to fulfil their desire for economic improvement and then return to China. We can observe that there was a sudden and spectacular period of "arrivals" to and "departures" from Thailand after the Chinese government repealed an edict prohibiting emigration in 1893 (Skinner, 1957).

After 1918, Chinese arrivals exceeded departures (see Table 1). It is estimated that the rate of the Chinese immigrants who remained during this period was about 50 percent of the number of the Chinese residents in Thailand in 1957 (Skinner, 1957:176). Some of the factors discouraging the return to China may have been several restrictive measures, such as the Thai Immigration Act (1950) which limited the quota of immigrants to no more than 200 persons per nationality. From 1950 onwards, the Chinese immigrants to Thailand were those who had already been to Thailand and had in their possession re-entry permits (Purcell, 1965:197). These immigrants form the generations of grandparents and/or parents of the younger Chinese descendants. Thus, the Chinese living in Thailand today can be classified into several generational cohorts:

First generation	overseas Chinese
Second generation	local-born Chinese of overseas Chinese parents
Third generation	local-born Chinese of local-born Chinese parents
Fourth generation	local-born Chinese of local-born Chinese parents

Table 1

Estimated Total Arrivals and Departures of Ethnic Chinese 1882–1955 (in thousands)

Year of Arrival	Total Arrivals	Total Departures	Total Surplus
1882–1892	177.5	99.4	78.1
1893–1905	455.1	261.9	193.2
1906–1917	815.7	635.5	180.2
1918–1931	1,327.6	827.9	499.7
1932–1945	473.7	381.3	92.4
1946–1955	267.8	107.8	160.0

Source: Skinner (1957:Chapter 2)

Trends on the Study of the Chinese in Thailand

Based on Skinner's works, it has generally been accepted that Thailand has no problem with the Chinese minority. Skinner will be mentioned frequently in this article because his work, especially *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (1957) has been widely cited as a reference by Thai scholars, more so than other important scholars such as Landon (1941) and Coughlin (1960). The attraction of Skinner's work lies in his assimilation theory which argues that third- and fourth-generation Chinese in Thailand will be culturally assimilated because Thai society and government policies facilitated the assimilation process.

Skinner predicts that the Chinese community in Thailand will finally disappear and be assimilated into Thai culture and society for two reasons. First, in the near future, the number of Chinese migrants will decrease due to the ageing of the China-born generation. Second, the Thai government's policy to reduce the number of Chinese immigrants has been effective.[1] There are, however, several major problems in the Skinnerean model. For example, the definition of "Chinese" in the assimilation model assumes that descendants from

immigrant Chinese who do not fully follow their own traditional culture are not fully "Chinese". There are two fundamental issues here. First, which "Chinese" culture is to be used as a standard? The Chinese culture of mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, or that of Singapore, San Francisco, Hawaii, and so forth? Second, which group of Chinese among the overseas Chinese should we consider as having "Chinese" qualifications? If the way of life and social behaviour of the overseas Chinese descendants have changed from their Chinese ancestry in mainland China, do we still call them "Chinese"? The scholar who does his or her research by binding himself or herself to a culture which is taken to be the standard for assessing "Chineseness" may conclude that these changes have resulted from assimilation. Thus, any immigrant Chinese or their descendants who do not follow "Chinese" culture are viewed as having been assimilated, or at least, being less Chinese. If we follow this line of analysis, then within three generations there will be no "Chinese" in Thailand. However, if we take the view that identity and perception of an ethnic group is not necessarily bound to any fixed culture and they can exist and adapt to social and cultural changes, then the Chinese migrants and their descendants will remain Chinese as long as they still believe in their "Chineseness", even if parts of their culture may be different from those of their ancestors. This does not mean that the development of ethnic consciousness and various overseas cultural changes will all proceed in the same way.

Differences in the cultural developments of these communities depend on economic, social and political conditions of the different host countries. Moreover, various groups of overseas Chinese living in the same country (such as Thailand) do not necessarily share the same culture. The Chinese in Bangkok are different from Chinese communities in other provinces, partly due to the size of various communities, as well as variations in local economic, social and political conditions. On one level, these communities are influenced and pressured by the same politics of the central government (e.g. the National Economic and Social Development Plan), but because of the distance from the centre of authority, the degree of influence may be different. Thus, it may be concluded that the identity of a Chinese community in a given province is a function of cultural development, ethnic consciousness and the pattern of relationship to the Thai community in that locality. Although all Chinese communities are the same in some ways, the lack of a Chinese

organization at the national level reduces these similarities.

This is important because previous studies have tended to view the "Chinese" in Thailand as a homogeneous group. While it is true that most of the Chinese in Thailand are Teochew, internal conflicts among the Chinese have not been sufficiently studied. While Skinner acknowledges the differences among the Chinese, he still concludes that there is strong co-operation amongst themselves: "Within a few years after its establishment, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce had assumed stronger powers and more functions than organizations of the same name in Western countries. As the most important Chinese organization in Bangkok, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce *soon became the organization representing the Chinese community as a whole*" (Skinner, 1957:171, emphasis added). This belief, which is still prevalent, is problematic. First, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce was the gathering of the Chinese for short-term pragmatic considerations of protecting themselves and to be able to deal better with Thai government policies at that time (such as during the Sino-Japanese War and the Nationalism Policy by Pibun). Most of the time, however, the Chinese community was divided and they occasionally fought among themselves for economic reasons. When they had problems with the authorities, the leaders of each group would separately negotiate and ask for help from Thai officers instead of working together. Because of the diversities of lineage principles and localities, they are still not unified today. There is no one overall Chinese organization which acts as the representative for all Chinese in Thailand.

Second, each Chinese group and generation has different experiences (and history) about living in Thai society, with different points of view concerning ancestral China. The Chinese who migrated after the Second World War have not enjoyed the same benevolence from the Thai government as those who migrated from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. The former did not think about their homeland and the Chinese republican government in the same way as the latter thought about China during the Qing (Manchu) dynasty.

These differences illustrate the point that scholars should be more careful in defining the label "Chinese". It is obsolete to use the stereotyped definitions of Chinese, e.g. having small eyes, being frugal and commercial in character. Researchers have to be very specific in identifying the differences among the members of this

ethnic group before studying the relationship between the Chinese and other ethnic groups. National character can be determined by both outsiders and members of that society. Even in one single area, the definition of "Chinese" may have different meanings. Even the numbers of the Chinese living in the same district are different, depending on which set of figures and statistics are used. Moreover, among the Thais, there is no consensus in their views of the Chinese in Thailand. For some, the Chinese are seen as pioneers, bringing in new technology to rural areas, as "a gap-filling and input-completing function man" (Harris, 1981). For many others, they are the economic elite trying to monopolize the trade market.

Skinner reports that the Chinese have accepted Thai culture and traditions through the process of assimilation. But, Skinner's views were influenced by Thai nationalism and social norm of the 1960s. The political, social and historical discourse of that particular point in Thai history warranted a unified Thai system of social and cultural values. This phenomenon does not mean that all of the Thai population who are descended from the Mon, Lao, Khmer or other ethnic groups have been totally assimilated into Thai social norms. Many differences still exist between the groups.

Chinese Culture in Thailand

The modern Chinese population in Thailand descended from migrants originating in southern and southeastern China. These migrant ancestors were of rural background and had little access to education. Their lifestyle was that of the peasants or the Han culture, which was a blend of Mahayana Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, ancestor and deity worship.

This Han culture of the Chinese immigrants may be seen as comprising two parts. On the one hand it is the peasant's culture: a minor culture that struggles against supernatural elements through the ritual *Chi Tien* (deity worship or ancestor worship). These religious activities are strictly home-based. On the other hand it is both ethnocentric and superior, strongly influenced by Confucianism, Taoism and Mahayana Buddhism. It responds to the community need for mutual assistance (Anuman, 1932:2–3). The belief system of the mainland Chinese ancestors of the overseas Chinese in Thailand is a religious syncretism where a considerable degree of integration occurs

between beliefs and practices of different sources, contributing to a pattern which is distinctively Chinese.

The Chinese immigrants brought with them their religious observances which helped them preserve their social behaviour. As a social mechanism, religion and rituals created unity and cohesion in the group, and reinforced mutual aid among the Chinese residents in the land of strangers. More specifically, they underline the belief in their cultural superiority. The Chinese, therefore, see the necessity for maintaining the Chinese culture as a distinct segment.

State Policies

It is impossible to make sense of the Chinese in Thailand without recourse to the role of the state, particularly the different and changing policies towards the Chinese. To a large extent, these policies are driven by economic and pragmatic considerations, with cultural ideas being of secondary importance. Thus, whether the Chinese were an alien community in Thailand depended, to a large degree, on national policy. If one compares this to a play or a drama, the plot of the story is that the state needs capitalists (a.k.a. Chinese) in order to maintain the prosperity of the state; at the same time, the growth of capitalism in Thailand needs political support from the state (i.e. Thai elites).

To understand this, we have to return to the period when ancient Ayutthaya was defeated by Burma. The traditional Thai "state" was organized such that all Thais were enlisted in the corvée system. Labour was at the disposal of the state. Thais paid taxes in the form of expensive materials from each village and these materials could be turned into goods and products for export by the state. This corvée system later became obsolete because many commoners were taken to Burma as prisoners-of-war, died in the battlefield, or were exiled from the country. Hence, the state could not rely on the corvée system as a catalyst for economic growth. The state, therefore, needed the support of the Chinese traders in the kingdom, especially for trading with China and Southeast Asian countries. The Chinese brought in capital and technology to transform raw materials into finished products which were in great demand, such as producing sugar from sugarcane. The Chinese-operated export of goods and services

inadvertently expanded the Thai economy substantially prior to the signing of the Bowring Treaty.

With the introduction of the tax-farming system, the role of the Chinese traders was to stimulate and transform a "self-sufficient economic system" into an "exchange-based economic system" in which the state played a supportive role by creating an attractive environment for the overseas Chinese to do business in Thailand. These Chinese traders, in return, acted as agents of the government, performing an operative function of improving and developing the economic system of Thailand. However, the status of the Chinese trader at that time was still that of an "outcast". This was chiefly because the government used the idea of corvée labour to identify those who were inside or outside the system, that is, those within the corvée system could be considered as "Thai" citizens.

The tax-farming system opened up opportunities for the government to be involved in business, from manufacturing to the sale of goods and services. It also enabled the government to have greater control over the utilization of national resources. Chinese tax farmers created many new forms of income for the government, including the exploitation of natural resources and taxation. This was evident during the reign of King Rama V when there was a reorganization of the whole public administration system throughout the country: new and modern equipment was introduced for the army, infrastructures such as the railway system, as well as state and capitol buildings were built, public servants were paid salaries, and so forth. In one sense, the Chinese were behind the growth of the absolute monarchy after the reign of King Rama V because without the Chinese traders, who played a significant role in the Thai economy, the absolute monarchy would not have been firmly established in Thailand at that time.

Since the Chinese were engaged in almost all kinds of business activities and had become wealthy, why, then, could they not try to control the Thai state themselves? Anderson (1978) argues that it was because the Chinese were not Thai, they looked different and they were treated as foreigners — hence, they were politically handicapped. This is not quite true when we look at the situation after the signing of the Bowring Treaty.

It is not simply Thai government policies that affected the Chinese, but the international relationship between China and

Thailand as well. For example, in 1909, the Manchu government passed a bill stating that all overseas Chinese were under the Qing dynasty. This caused a threat to Thailand and led to tension between the Thai and the Chinese. The idea of creating a Thai nation-state also created antagonistic feelings between the Thai and the Chinese. However, after 1932, with the abolition of the absolute monarchy, the attitude towards the Chinese changed significantly. Policies to allow the Chinese to acquire Thai nationality were intensified.

This was partly because the government needed the support of the Chinese capitalists. At that time, Thailand had three dominant sources of capital: European agency houses; King's Property Bureau and a group of royalists; and Chinese rice-mill owners and rice-exporters. The European agency houses were being forced to wind up so that the government could take over all the economic activities and build its own economic base. The royalist capital group was totally disregarded because the government wanted, for political reasons, to destroy it. So, the government worked with the most viable group, the Chinese capitalists.

But, after the Second World War, during the Pibun period, the government, wanting to promote "Thai Economy for Thai", adapted the policy of nationalism.[2] Strict rules were introduced to check the activities of foreigners, especially the Chinese capitalists. For example, although Chinese capitalists were not expelled from Thailand, they were forced to choose whether they wanted to be Thai or not. The government's policy was to give economic freedom but not political freedom to the Chinese capitalists. The Chinese in Thailand chose to forsake the former identity and became Thais for the sake of their own economic well-being. This is a basic difference between the Chinese in Thailand and overseas Chinese elsewhere.

Thailand, during this period, pursued other anti-Chinese policies.[3] Many Chinese businessmen, especially those who were brought up during the Second World War and who did not have as much power as the old tycoon families, such as Lumsum or Wanglee, had to try to establish links with the authorities by paying large sums of money. The economic policy of that period was to oppress the Chinese and to help the Thais. However, it should be noted that, covertly, one wing of the government had secret business deals with the Chinese; "the relationship between General Phao and Chin Sophonphanich and many other overseas Chinese" is one example (Somjai, 1987:38). Thus, the government encouraged the Chinese

capitalists to expand from commercial business (the rice business) to the financial sector (banks). Banking provided capital for the government, such as the Bangkok Bank (Chin Sophonphanich) and the Agricultural Bank (Suriyon Riwa). Both banks gave contributions to General Pibun's political party (Seri Manungkasila Party). In return, Chin and Suriyon were offered concessions in the insurance business and the export of agricultural products. They also invested in agriculture which has been the important source of capital from that period until now. Both businesses are still dominant in the Thai economy today.

Many methods, such as increasing the alien fee, restricting the Chinese to certain residential areas, and enacting laws to reserve land and buildings in the vicinity of railway stations for Thais only, were used to force the Chinese to change their nationality.[4] These policies greatly affected the Chinese in their business transactions, especially those engaged as middlemen. Furthermore, an anti-communist policy affected the Chinese indirectly. However, these policies were enforced on the basis of nationality, not race, and so did not affect the great majority of the local-born Chinese. Indeed, "the whole anti-Sinitic movement in Thailand appeared to have had an artificial origin ..." (Chang, 1940:154).

The alliance of Chinese business leaders (who became Thais for the sake of economic well-being) with Thai political leaders ensured that there was no serious Chinese opposition to government policies. Despite the 14 October 1973 event in which students, demanding participation of all Thais in ruling the country, destroyed the social contract between the Thai military and political leaders and the Chinese capitalists, it turned out to be a period of rapid growth for the capitalists. At present, there is a movement of capitalists to gain more power by participating in political activities.

"Thainess" vs. "Chineseness"

In order to study the relationship between the Thais and the Chinese in Thailand, let us re-examine the words "Thai" and "Thai national". The word "Thai" originally evolved from the word "Siam". The meaning of the word, in a way, expresses a unique characteristic of the country, i.e. having the Thai language as a means of communication among the people of Thailand. However, besides

the Siamese-Thai, there are also those who are of mixed-blood, e.g. Mon-Thai, Malay-Thai, Cambodian-Thai and so forth. Even those who originally descended from the Tai or Thai ethnic groups still possess different characteristics of their own subgroups such as Laotian, Vietnamese and Chan. Differences in tradition and lifestyles among these subgroups, to some extent, have some influence on the pattern of the relationship, attitudes and reaction towards the Chinese in Thailand, especially those born in Thailand. The three major geographical regions of Thailand (the north, northeastern, and central areas) are distinctive in that they have different traditional attitudes, ways of life and languages — some obvious, others more subtle — which, in turn, affect the relationship between the Thai and the Chinese. In the past 40 years, even though there has been an attempt to create a unified Thai identity, it would be misleading to conclude that the relationship between the Thai and the Chinese, say in Ayutthaya, Khonkhaen and Lampang, are similar. In some provinces such as Pisanulok, Sukhotai or Phetchaburai, the relationship between the Thai and the Chinese is much more complex. If this is the case, one may ask "What exactly is Thai culture?"

Yet the absence of such a definition does not render "Thainess" less real. The interpretation and definition of its meaning is meant to be an aggressive measure of standardization — like the way one legitimizes power. The most standardized person is the individual who is made a part of the collectivity from where the definition comes into being. Instead of asking the question — what "Thainess" means, one can proceed the other way round by trying to define what "otherness" is; or what is non-Thainess or the enemy of "Thainess".

Thais have many words to categorize "otherness", often using ethnic characteristics as a mode of differentiation. For example, Thais are accustomed to identifying themselves as distinct from *farang* (foreigner), a word which refers to all outsiders, whether American, English, French, Italian or others. The word *farang* determines the state of "otherness" in contrast with the "Thainess". By this reverse procedure of definition, the meaning of "Thainess" becomes relevant.

Another example is the appellation *Kaek*. The word *Kaek* can be used in many senses, all of which signify "non-Thainess". Thai people use the word *Kaek* to describe members of several ethnic groups such as the Malays, Javanese, Indians and Ceylonese. *Kaek* also includes Arabs and Persians in the Middle East. It is also an appellation for adherents of certain religious communities such as

the Hindis, Sikhs and Muslims. *Kaek*, which has undergone a long historical process, delimits both the perception and mental state of its interlocutor. It undeniably conveys the feeling of religious and ethnic differences of the "other". The awareness of "otherness" is indispensable in retaining the sense of Thai identity.

It is said that "Chinese and Thai are not strangers but brothers." Yet, in historical perspective, the most important "other" for the Thai has been the Chinese. This is because the Chinese occupied a dominant position in the economic life of the country at the beginning of the 20th century. The power of the Chinese was demonstrated in a Chinese general strike as a result of the development of Chinese nationalism (*San-Min-Chu-i*). The nationalist feelings among the Chinese were quickly felt throughout Southeast Asia. At the same historical moment, the Bangkok government tried to instil a spirit of Thai nationalism. The ensuing reaction against the Chinese, who would not accept "Thainess", could be seen in titles of press articles ("The Jews of the East" or "Thailand, Wake up!"); in the promulgation of the Nationality Act of 1913; as well as in the Private Schools Act of 1918 extending government control over all Chinese schools and requiring the instruction of the Thai language and civics.

Early 20th-century Thai nationalism is characterized by a push to build a "nation-state" under the monarchy and the conservation of the Thai identity. This is unlike the more aggressive nationalism of 1938–55 when the emphasis was on territorial aggrandizement and the racial superiority of the Thai, exemplified in the creation of a national "Culture Assembly" and programmes such as Thai-ification of the economy, calls on Thai patriots to buy goods manufactured by Thais only and to abandon the Thai policy of assimilation by intermarriage. All these measures were meant to arouse the sense of the Thai ethnic identity. As one commentator noted, "the government tried to rebuild the national cultural identity on an individual and community level from public life right to the kitchen life" (Thongchai, 1989:71). The Thai state's attempts to determine what should be the "cultural standard" enabled it to impose Thai citizenship on the Chinese through different measures. According to Rattaniyom (1939), the Thais were held by civil obligations to protect and fight for the nation and not to act or speak in favour of foreign countries. Apparently these impositions were very effective. In 1955 when the "Thai nationalism" period came to an end, more than 6,000 Chinese expressed their desire for naturalization, yet only 2,000 petitions were granted (Tawee,

1973:123). The government was also pleased that the new policy towards the Chinese was well received by the diplomatic circle and was considered to be just and in the interest of maintaining administrative order (F.O. 436/7 Sir Josiah Crosby. Enclosure in No.148).

This attempt at Thai-ification stirred up reactions among the minority groups, particularly the Chinese. The Chinese community responded with attempts to unite and define who was "truly Chinese". Thus, the Chinese who gave their support to Chinese nationalism, whether they were Sino-Thais of the second generation or local-born Chinese who had become Thai citizens, would be classified as "truly Chinese".

This period also saw the rise of a rivalry between Chinese nationalist and the Sino-Thai, seen in the assassination of a Chinese leader by the secret societies.[5] This strengthening of ties with the homeland and activities of the Chinese underground organizations created an undefined sense of Chineseness, in other words, the awareness of the otherness or of its enemy — which is "Thainess".

In more recent years, with the rise of communism in China and its influence in Thailand, the Thai government saw communism and Communist China as a dangerous enemy of "Thainess". However, the return of Thai student leaders who had fled the city to join the clandestine Communist Party of Thailand in the jungle during the Democratic Revolution (1973), who were disillusioned with the politics of Chinese-backed PCT, led to political changes. The Thai government adopted a more liberal attitude. Chinese studies came out into the open, and communism was taught openly. Moreover, people began to recognize the weak points of Thai society: social and economic inequalities, economic monopoly, corrupt bureaucracy, and a general lack of political democracy (non-participation of the citizens in politics), all of which are now accepted as being an internal part of "Thainess" along with Buddhism, tradition, political sovereignty and monarchical institutions, and are no more considered as inappropriate qualifications. In the perspective of contemporary international politics, China does not constitute an important "other". For example, several returned overseas Chinese in Cha'o-Zhan were interviewed on the People's Republic of China (PRC) policy towards them. Their response was unanimous. According to them, the Peking government discouraged any strengthening of ties between the overseas Chinese and their homeland and wished to see their complete assimilation into the host country.

The returned overseas Chinese are treated as second-class citizens and their disenchantment could not be concealed. When there was trouble in the motherland, these Chinese were ready to leave the place where they could make money, return home and become the Red Guards or even fight in the Sino-Japanese War. It is evident that because of international political reasons, the Chinese government refused to make any cultural claim in the host country where the overseas Chinese were residing, but in domestic affairs, it regards the Chinese cultural standard as the most quintessential. As a Thai specialist of Chinese affairs stated, "China is not a great power — or at least not a super power and will never want to be a great power because China clings to ancient traditions" (Kien Teeravit, 1976).

Conclusion

Most previous studies have tended to overemphasize the degree and powers of assimilation and viewed both the Chinese and Thai as homogeneous, monolithic groups. The foregoing discussion attempts to deconstruct the meaning of Chineseness and Thainess, and demonstrate that the relationship between the two groups is a complex one. Factors such as local conditions, different historical experiences and different subgroups have to be considered. More thinking is needed on the question of "Chineseness" and "Thainess" in Thailand.

One cannot derive an understanding of the position of the Chinese in Thailand and their construction of identity simply by looking at cultural or socio-ethical factors. Rather, one must focus on a historical understanding, especially the impact and reactions of the Chinese to government policies at different historical moments. In some periods, the policies towards the Chinese were conciliatory and positive, at other times, they were very discriminatory — and conflicting. These policies only make sense within the political and socio-economic context of Thai society. The Chinese were commercially important, but were always regarded as outsiders. While there was an alliance between the Thai elites and Chinese businessmen, the relationship was primarily pragmatic, not a product of long-term cultural assimilation.

Notes

1 See Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (1957), Ithaca: Cornell University Press; and *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand* (1958), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, for a discussion of assimilation in Thailand.

2 For example, in 1938, the leader of the militaristic right wing and exponent of hypernationalism, Pibun, became Premier (up to 1955). He promised radical changes in areas of national life which affected the Chinese. He compared the Chinese problem in Thailand to the Jewish problem in Germany and implied that the Nazi solution might be applicable.

3 If we look at economics in Thailand from the point of view of the nationalist government's role, economic nationalism stands out as one of the major themes of the administration in nationalist era. The campaigns were for: 1) Economic assistance to and vocational education for ethnic Thais; 2) Economic restrictions on aliens; 3) An expansion of the state's role in industry; and 4) Encouragement of semi-governmental "Thai enterprises" in commerce and finance. These campaigns were accompanied by a much more thorough set of restrictions on alien economic activities, thus reinforcing the secure atmosphere surrounding the livelihood of Chinese aliens. None of them could be sure that their means of livelihood would not be threatened. The restrictions on economic activities are as follows:

- An Occupational Restriction Act of 1938 barred aliens from 20 occupations, including hairdressing, salt manufacture, metal inlaying, driving of buses, pedicabs and motor tricycles for hire, taxi driving, manufacture of charcoal, umbrellas, the accoutrement of monastic service, operating private wharves, and commercial fishing, women's haircutting, hairdressing and dressmaking.
- The Act of Alien's Resident Area Restriction of 1941, 1942, 1943, forbade aliens to live in 14 *Changwat* (cities), from all 71 *Changwat*, where they accumulated their capital, and made them move out within 90 days.
- The Salt Act of 1938
- The Liquid Fuel of 1938
- The Vehicles Act of 1938
- The Act for the Slaughter of Animals for Food of 1938
- The Thai Vessels Act of 1938
- The New Revenue Code of 1938 (Label)
- The Act for the Preserving Bird's Nests of 1939
- To permit only Thai food hawkers in all government schools and offices of 1939.

These acts and activities concerned the Chinese aliens' occupations from the worker to the capitalist. The only answer for the alien is to transfer title and surname to Thai citizen.

4 Moreover, the loss of Thai nationality was proclaimed in the law on nationality as follows.

Section 17: A person of Thai nationality by reason of birth within the Kingdom whose father is an alien may have his Thai nationality revoked when it appears that:

(1) he has lived in the country of his father's nationality or former nationality

continuously for more than five years from the date of becoming *sui juris*.
(2) there is evidence to show that he uses the nationality of his father or mother or is a partisan of the nationality of his father or other nationality.
(3) he does any act which affects the security or conflicts with the interests of the State or is in contempt of the nation.
(4) he does any at which conflicts with the peace, order or good morals of the public ... and

Section 18: In appropriate circumstances, for the security or benefit of the State, the Minister is empowered to revoke the Thai nationality of any person who has Thai nationality by reason of birth in the Kingdom whose father is an alien or whose mother is an alien if it does not appear there is a legal father, when it appears that:
(1) the father or mother of such person had been allowed to reside in Thailand by virtue of a special and individual dispensation.
(2) the father or mother of such person was authorized to enter the Kingdom only temporarily, or
(3) the father or mother of such person entered Thailand without authorization under the law on immigration.

(From Law Directory, 365–366)

5 This was a serious blow to Chinese-Thai community relations since the Chinese leader had a significant role in bridging gaps between the Chinese community and its outside world.

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4

Chinese Settlers and their Role in Modern Thailand

Amara Pongsapich

This chapter attempts to analyse the status of the Chinese in Thailand, from sojourners or temporary migrants to middlemen or marginal Sino-Thai settlers, and finally, to participants in the present multinational capitalistic system. The relationship between the Chinese and the Thais hence gradually shifted from exclusion of the Chinese from the Thai social structure in the early Bangkok period to inclusion via the process of intermarriage and incorporation of the Chinese in the Thai school system and government offices which were traditionally dominated by Thais only. When mainland China was closed off from the rest of the world after the Second World War, the Chinese in Thailand were suspected of adhering to the communist ideology. But when China opened up the country to welcome the capitalistic economic system, the Thai government became confident that the Chinese in Thailand had abandoned the communist ideology and that there was no reason to doubt their loyalty to their host country.

Traditional Thai Buddhist Values and Ideology

The study of values is made difficult because of the lack of agreement on an appropriate methodology to study value systems, and the

ambiguity of the concept itself. The concept of "values" is related to other concepts such as "world view" and "ideology". World view is the cognition and perception of the world surrounding a person, while values constitute the evaluative aspect, concerned with judging situational elements in terms of some value standard of the society. "Ideology" is the value standard of society which has been accepted at the superstructural level as the guiding principle to be adopted and followed.

In a collection of papers entitled *Traditional and Changing Thai World View* issued by CUSRI in 1985, Buddhist beliefs and traditions are identified as being the basis for many Thai beliefs and practices (Pongsapih, et al., 1985). The collection discusses the impact of doctrinal Buddhist teaching, and of popular Buddhist beliefs and practices, on certain aspects of the Thai social order. Manifestations of the Thai world view are seen in areas such as social hierarchy, *bun* and *bap* (merit and demerit), and *bun khun* (favour rendered hence establishing an obligation of gratitude).

Other papers of a more contemporary nature describe the contemporary world view and value system reflected in folk songs, games, movies, and short stories. These, as well as papers reporting on more formal research, show that while the more traditional values, essential for maintaining the social order, are still stable, changes are occurring, more noticeably among the urban Thai. The man-to-man world view seems to be one of harmonious co-existence. It is combined with the pragmatism of adaptability and flexibility.

Traditionally, Buddhism has been treated as the national religion or ideology of Thailand. In his article "Civic Religion and National Community in Thailand", Frank Reynolds (1997) draws on the concept of "civil religion" coined by Jean Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century and taken up again by Robert Bellah in his analysis of civil religion in the United States. Coleman defined civil religion as "a special case of the religious symbol system designed to perform a differentiated function which is the unique province of neither church nor state. It is a set of symbolic forms and acts which relate man as citizen and his society in world history to the ultimate conditions of his existence" (Reynolds, 1977). Based on Coleman's definition, Reynolds describes how Buddhist religious beliefs and symbols have been used by the state either to provide legitimacy for itself, or as a mechanism to deliver certain messages. Specific forms of religion associated with the life of the national community were in evidence both during the monarchic period — during King Taksin's reign in

the early Bangkok period, up until the reign of King Rama VI — and after 1932, when Thailand adopted the democratic political system with the king as head of state (Reynolds, 1977:275–76).

Reynolds further states that in the past, the established form of Thai civic religion had proved to be a deeply rooted and highly resilient tradition that had both influenced and adapted to the various crises in the life of the national community. Today, the resources and vitality of this tradition are being integrated into the life of the national community and are being tested in a variety of ways. The nation's success in these areas will depend on the dedication and creativity of those who are responsible for nurturing and adapting the symbols, activities, and institutions that constitute the specifically religious dimension of Thai national life.

Many scholars who studied the function of Buddhism in Thailand have proposed that Thai society and the Thai social order should be seen as having a religious base. Hanks (1962, 1975), for example, believes that "the essence of Thai world view is a cosmic hierarchy whose levels are defined in terms of 'merit' (*bun*) and 'demerit' (*bap*)". He sees patron-clientage as the main relationship in Thai society manifested in many traditional relations. Akin Rabibhadana's work (1969, 1975) brought the patron-client concept to full discussion. The concept was further reviewed by Jeremy Kemp (1980, 1982), and by Akin Rabibhadana himself (1982). The patron-client relationship as a principle of social structure might have had Buddhist support in the past, but with the introduction of a new national development concept, although the relationship remained operational, it was without the implications of a Buddhist religious base.

What one sees emerging at the superstructural state level is another national ideology which would function as a factor unifying people of the country. The role of the national development plan introduced by the government has been to present new developmental concepts, mostly capitalistic in nature. While the poor farmers still have difficulty interpreting and accepting the new ideology, the upper- and middle-class people have been able to make adjustments reasonably well. The hypothesis proposed here is that in Thailand today, the new capitalistic development ideology is replacing the traditional Buddhist ideology still adhered to by most villagers.

Another ideology introduced and being promoted is that of "democracy". Available reports show democratic ideology operating

neither at the superstructural level (as evidenced by the February 1991 *coup d'état* and the May 1992 incident), nor at the infrastructural level (as evidenced by the vote-buying incidents). More needs to be known about the operation of democratic ideology in Thailand.

Thai Development Ideology and Changing Social Values

Development strategies in Thailand had shifted from an emphasis on agricultural rural development to that of greater industrialization. The earlier development plans emphasized economic growth, with little concern shown for its impact on social conditions and ways of life. The social aspects were recognized only a decade later. Strategies were based on Western models and technology transfer, with diffusion being seen as the process by which development was to take place.

The diffusion model based on Western experience tended to introduce new development concepts in a top-down manner. Eager to achieve success, implementing agencies were anxious to introduce development projects and get them to work. This brought out two undesirable attitudes. One was the attitude of the Thai implementing agents towards the villagers, whom they considered to be stupid and slow if they did not immediately accept what was being proposed. There was no attempt to try to understand why certain items or ideas were difficult to accept or were rejected. Since most projects were introduced from the top, implementing officers felt that the projects should be accepted without question. They were also frustrated if the projects did not gain acceptance for their promotions depended on the successful implementation of these projects.

The second undesirable attitude was the tendency of villagers to take the new benefits for granted and without obligations on their part. They became used to receiving free goods and benefiting from free development projects and were unwilling to contribute labour or money in exchange for them.

During the 1960s, the diffusion model of development, in effect, presupposed that for economic development to take place, one had to "change the people". Many studies on attitudes of people towards innovation and/or technology transfer were made, but the results were usually negative. Thailand was still backward and undeveloped. Max Weber's "Protestant ethic", or a Buddhist version thereof, was not in

evidence. Consequently, there was no "spirit of capitalism". Although one may say that this had nothing to do with Weber, some would retort that this proved that Weber was right. Buddhist values, they claimed, were not conducive to capitalistic development.

It is undeniable that Thailand has been subjected to "directed" change following the capitalistic model of development, at least since the introduction of the First National Development Plan. The Thai government did not question the capitalistic development model advocated and practised by the United States. The role of the United States and the World Bank in the development of Thailand is an irrefutable fact. If Thailand were to develop following Weber's thesis, the religious institution which strongly influenced the world view and value system of the country had to change.

In 1963, in his article comparing Japan and Thailand, Eliezer Ayal made the point that if we attempt to relate these values to the economic propensities essential for economic development — to accumulate capital, to co-operate, and to apply oneself to systematic hard work — we have to conclude that these were hardly present. As for the propensity to innovate, there was little to suggest that the Thai value system opposes absorption of new ideas. The primacy of personal values over political values reinforced Thai non-activism since the Thai were deprived thereby of a compelling goal requiring co-operative action (Ayal, 1963:50–51).

The National Cultural Commission must have thought along the same line. To celebrate the Bicentennial of Bangkok in 1982, the Commission launched a spiritual development programme called "Five Basic Values" to attempt to change the value systems of the Thai people to promote development (Chulalongkorn University, 1982). The Commission identified 12 Thai values to be changed. They were 1) immorality; 2) materialism; 3) weak work ethics; 4) lack of national sacrifice; 5) lack of Thai nationalism; 6) preference for individual gain to group benefit; 7) spending beyond one's economic status [*fum fuey*]; 8) consumerism; 9) "acting big or tough" (*nak leng*); 10) living beyond one's economic status (soft life — *kin di yoo di*); 11) fatalism and belief in magic; and 12) abandoning and looking down upon the rural way of life.

The Subcommittee on Research and Cultural Development identified nine desirable values but felt these were too many to advocate and propagate. So they selected five for the campaign; these five were similar to the Japanese values identified by Ayal as having helped make

Japan more advanced than Thailand. They were: 1) self-reliance, diligence, and responsibility; 2) frugal spending and saving; 3) discipline and abiding by the law; 4) a religious ethic; and 5) adhering to "Nation, Religion and Monarchy".

It was clear to the public that there was a need to develop and change the values. People had become materialistic, selfish and lacked spiritual norms. Ayal claimed that these values retarded economic development and were the reasons that Thailand could not follow Japan in her development path.

Thailand was implementing the Fifth National Development Plan when the Five Basic Values Programme was launched in 1982; it was the same period during which the world was experiencing an economic recession. The Fifth National Development Plan focused on poverty eradication. The nation's economic growth rates of the country were between 2–5 percent annually. In 1990, only eight years after the Five Basic Values campaign was launched, Thailand's annual growth rates hovered around 10 percent. Is this due to the new ethics and the spirit of capitalism? What took place during the last two decades which led to such development?

Although attempts to advocate national social values had been made, it was widely agreed that the increasing economic growth had nothing to do with them. There was no proof or claim that the Five Basic Values had been recognized and adopted by the populace. At the same time, the government continued to operate using extension workers as agents to disseminate the national development ideology. There was no doubt that "development" had become the national ideology in tandem with the Buddhist ideology. Many even felt that capitalistic development had replaced Buddhist ideology. The question remained whether "democracy" had become another Thai ideology.

Thai Nationalistic Ideology and the Chinese

Up to the Second World War, Thai government had viewed Thailand as an ethnically homogeneous country consisting of Thai people only. Those who were non-Thai ethnically were outside the Thai social structure. They lived as separate groups but mixed with Thais by means of free cultural and economic exchanges. After King Rama VI (1910–25), the Thai government adopted a democratic form of government. The constitutional government was formed after the

1932 *coup d'état* and political activities became its preoccupation. The ethnicity/nationality issue did not come up until after the Second World War. During the Phibun regimes (1938–44 and 1948–60), a nationalistic stance was adopted, endorsing segregation and discrimination policies with regard to non-Thais. Phibun introduced the policy of nationalism or *rathaniyom* and changed the name of the country from Siam to Thailand.

The nationalistic movement that took place after the two world wars brought about conflict and distrust among the people of different ethnic origins, including the Chinese. The Chinese reaction to the Depression and the government's economic "Thai-ification" policies resulted in two important developments within the social structure. First, hard times led shopkeepers and merchants in almost every trade to organize among themselves. Business associations became the most widespread form of Chinese formal organizations. Through them, members of trade associations could exchange information, formulate concerted action in the face of government regulations, operate to avoid excessive competition and restrict the entry of new entrepreneurs into the trade. The other Chinese response took the form of secret societies, which were organized along dialect-group lines with the primary aim of preserving each group's share of the rapidly diminishing economic pie. The legitimate trade associations were established almost exclusively in Bangkok, while secret society activity was, up to 1937, largely restricted to the provinces (Skinner, 1962:245–55).

In Southeast Asia, secret societies became powerful during the early 19th century, robbing and demanding protection money from villagers. To some, they were considered "outlaws" to be eliminated by the government. To others, the activities of "secret societies" may be viewed as philanthropic since they provided assistance and protection to certain groups of people. These are desirable Buddhist values and reactions of local Thais towards the Chinese secret societies were mixed: some felt antagonistic while others did not.

Skinner elaborated that Chinese dialect-groups and clan associations were set up to meet many needs. They protected the special occupational interests of members; helped new immigrants from the home districts or migrant areas to find jobs and get established; built and maintained temples for the gods of the home district and cemeteries for the use of those who could not afford the cost of sending their deceased to China for burial; provided the locale

and occasions for social gatherings of those from the same district or migrant area, and so on.

One of the most notable developments in Chinese formal organization during the early 1900s was the rapid increase in the number and scope of mutual help and welfare associations. Since the Thai government was slow in extending public social welfare facilities, the local Chinese society fostered intracommunity self-help. Poor Chinese still counted on raising their occupational status and becoming upwardly mobile. The social values of the average labourer were radically oriented towards the struggle to get ahead. Nevertheless, Skinner felt that the poor were still poor and inadequately provided for. The elite therefore provided assistance through generous, morally motivated philanthropy. This paternalism and highly sanctioned philanthropy became the foundation of most of the Chinese associations formed or expanded during the 1920s and 1930s.

Another type of welfare organization that became prominent in Bangkok at that time was the benevolent society. Several small benevolent societies were founded in the 19th century on strict dialect-group lines, but by the early 1920s, one of them, the Pao-te Shan-t'ang, was recognized as the most important benevolent society in Bangkok. Founded on highly eclectic (Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist) religious sanctions, its major activities were the collection and burial of corpses from the streets and those unclaimed from the T'ien-hua Hospital, the provision of free coffins and burials to destitute families and the organization of relief to victims of fires and floods. It maintained a free cemetery on the outskirts of town.

Another type of essentially mutual-aid organization was the Buddhist society. The most important of these, Chung-hua, Lung-hua and Yi-ho, were founded in 1930, 1932 and 1935 respectively. Aside from contributions from wealthy members, the societies relied on regular monthly or annual membership dues. On the death of a member, a Buddhist society contributed substantially towards his funeral expenses and held religious services designed to secure the early release of his soul from limbo (Skinner, 1962:257).

Among dialect-group associations, the Cantonese Association was the most advanced in this regard. It had founded a cemetery in 1884 and a clinic in 1903. Another significant trend in Chinese formal organizations was evident between 1927 and 1938 — the strengthening

and reorganization of the major community associations, for example, the Chamber of Commerce and the dialect-group associations. The intense reorganizational activity which characterized this period was a response to the increased pressure put on the Chinese by the Thai government. The Hakka Association was the first to reorganize. A new constitution was drawn up in 1927, membership was regularized, and the Association was registered. It was not until 1936 that the first steps were taken to organize the Teochew Association in Bangkok.

The Chinese Chamber of Commerce also underwent significant changes during this period. In the year 1932–33, it organized relief for the Shanghai war refugees, arranged for an exhibition of Chinese products in Bangkok, mediated the rickshaw-pullers' strike, arranged for the return to China of girls abducted to Bangkok for immoral purposes, assumed full responsibility to the Thai government for several hundred Chinese immigrants detained for failure to meet immigration requirements (eventually securing their legal entry), and founded and operated the biggest and best Chinese middle school in the country.

Historical studies indicate that the status of the Chinese in Thailand and the interethnic relations changed from period to period depending on the government policies and the ways in which they adjusted to or coped with them. During the Phibun regime, when the government adopted nationalist and anti-foreigner policies, ethnic conflicts were obvious. After the Phibun regime, Thai-Chinese relations gradually improved.

Hence the benevolent deeds of the Chinese associations had helped produce a positive image of the Chinese among local Thais. At the local level, the Thais learned to accept Chinese welfare activities because they fitted in well with the local Buddhist values of ***bun*** and ***bap***, merit and demerit. Both the Chinese and the Thai values have their bases in both the Mahayana and Hinayana sects of Buddhism.

The Role of the Chinese in the Economic Sphere

The introduction of export activities after the Bowring Treaty in 1855 did not bring about change in production technology. The Thais practised broadcasting and transplanting as the two methods of production up until after the Second World War when new varieties, double cropping and mechanization, were introduced.

Changes which took place after the Bowring Treaty and before the Second World War were the commercialization processes. Rice traders set up rice mills with simple machines, invested in the rice trade, and were the first group of entrepreneurs who became millionaires. They comprised mostly Chinese immigrants who were wage labourers or entrepreneurs and formed an entrepreneurial class of Chinese traders. During this period Chinese merchants could enter the noble class of the Thai social system by bidding to become tax-farmers. As tax-farmers they had ranks and titles similar to noblemen who were ethnically Thai, comprising *chao nai* (members of the royal families) and/or *khunnang* (government officials).

Before 1932, rice trading involved the investment of rice merchants who accumulated, expanded and became very influential traders. Additional activities of these merchants included investment in rice mills, saw mills, and import-export trades. Rice exporters with multiple economic activities were the Chinese ancestors of many leading merchant families in Thailand.

After 1932, Chinese merchants established trade associations including the Rice Mills Association, Ricc Traders Association and Chinese Traders Association. A new rice traders group of Chinese immigrants came into the rice trade sphere at this time. This group did not have any ties with the nobles and princes but established a new relationship with civil government officials who came into power after 1932. A form of patron-client relationship was established.

At any rate, when the civil government adopted "nationalistic capitalism" as the economic policy, the intention was to do away with foreign investors and set up "Thai" government enterprises. But in practice, groups of Chinese merchants, i.e. those who had immigrated earlier and had become tax-farmers and nobles, and those who immigrated later and had no titles, established close connections with Thai government officials. Joint investments were then considered "Thai" investments. Other activities carried out by the rice merchant groups included the establishment of other government enterprises as well as companies. These were, for example, the Thai Insurance Company, the Thai Agricultural Products Company, Bank of Asia, and the Metropolitan Bank of Thailand.

After the Second World War, a shift in economic policy was made by the 1947 *coup* leaders. "Government capitalism" was announced as the policy though, in practice, this did not differ very

much from "nationalistic capitalism". The "government capitalism" policy, however, enabled government officials to be members of the Board of Trustees of two government enterprises. As Board members they were entitled to monthly salaries as well as annual bonuses. As a result, most of the high-ranking officials (both military and civilian) and the business investors were incorporated into the politico-economic system, which express again, another form of patron-client relations.

The rice farmers in the Central Region were the main rice producers in the country. Rice mills established throughout the central provinces belonged to rice merchants who had close connections with government military and civilian officials in Bangkok. There were Chinese rice merchants who were locals and had their residences in the provinces or influential rice merchants living in Bangkok who had their clientele supplying paddy to them. These strong links between Bangkok and the Central communities helped make the Central Region an extension of Bangkok. The patron-client relations established through the process of exporting rice were multilevel and therefore somewhat different from the former two-tiered "patron-client" relations.

To survive in this fierce competition and to maintain control of the national economy, holding companies and related firms were established. Monetary institutions in the forms of banks and finance companies were instituted and expanded. The fact that the Ministry of Finance became a shareholder in some banks certainly helped strengthen the bank tremendously, both economically and politically.

The national development plan introduced the construction of many infrastructural facilities including dams and roads which greatly benefited the farmers in the Central Plain. The export policy was also included in the first national development plan. Some rice traders moved into construction work and rice exporters diversified into exporting other products, such as cassava, maize and jute. Other rice export activities took the form of the Bangkok International Rice Trade which was the joint investment of two Thai political elites and one Chinese company, each holding approximately one-third of the total shares. This company was given a higher quota and allowed to export inferior quality paddy without being punished.

During this period, it was also reported that rice exporters had the upper hand vis-à-vis the government. The Rice Trade Union was established in 1959 and comprised paddy and steamed paddy

exporters. A request was also made to establish a rice subcommittee to guard the rice trade; its members were from the rice inspection committee, the rice price committee and the rice quota committee. As a result, the rice trade was mostly controlled by merchants with representatives from the Ministry of Commerce performing advisory roles.

In effect, rice trade activities reached their peak during this period. Rice exporters had been able to control the market in the country and had concentrated their efforts in identifying international markets for export. Simultaneously they expanded their activities to include the export of other crops. Another group of rice exporters explored new economic investments and shifted to banking and other types of non-agricultural investment.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the Chinese in Thailand had been making rational choices. According to Hechter (1986), rational choice theory is an alternative to normative explanations and structural explanations. Rational choice considers individual behaviour to be a function of the interaction of structural constraints and the sovereign preferences of individuals. Within these constraints, individuals face various feasible courses of action. The course of action ultimately chosen is selected rationally (Hechter, 1986:268).

The question asked here is whether the Chinese in Thailand made rational choices individually or as groups. Certainly when Thai-Chinese relations were poor, the Chinese formed clan associations and started to create groups through the process of inclusion and exclusion. But when Thai-Chinese relations improved, decisions were made not as ethnic groups but as individuals, each wanting to become involved in the profit-making market economy. Rational choices were then made individually.

The Chinese had been able to cope with structural constraints and work within the situation to their own benefit. They co-operated with the Thai elites to compete in the economic sphere between themselves and with others in the world market. One coping strategy of Chinese rice merchants at the middle level was to establish and expand holding companies with branch offices in provinces in the Central Region. Another coping strategy was to increase capital investment with no change in structure or technological practice. This group of merchants had connections and worked with local merchants quite closely.

It is undeniable that rice farmers in the central plain area and

elsewhere had been supporting the Chinese merchants. As the local Chinese merchants shifted their economic activities, they encouraged rice farmers to shift their activities as well. Some villagers willingly changed their occupation while others, mainly the older people, resisted. Instead of producing food for consumption, people now produced manufactured goods in return for a cash income. This change was a shift from the agricultural way of life which valued land as an important commodity; hardships in farming and a higher demand for land, which resulted in increasing land prices, caused people to change their perceptions regarding land, making them eager to sell their land for cash even if they had no definite plans for the future.

While one observes that social values are definitely changing, manifested in diverse behavioural changes in the way of life, changes in world view are not seen so clearly. Perceptions regarding the self in the relationship between oneself and others, and between oneself and nature and the supernatural have been viewed differently by people. Reciprocal obligations and relationships are being replaced by an emphasis on monetary exchange. Cash compensation is used to fulfil many of the traditional values, such as *kreng cai* (to have respectful fear; to fear to approach) and *bun khun* (favour rendered establishing an obligation of gratitude). Meanwhile, the role of the supernatural in everyday life is still observed, although perhaps to a lesser degree. However, it is clear that belief in the supernatural has not been abandoned. The world view of people may be changing on the man-man relations level, but not as clearly on the man-nature and man-supernature levels.

Role of the Chinese in Local and National Political Spheres

In Thailand the interrelationship between the political and economic spheres has been very close. Before the Second World War, the political sphere may seem dominated by the royal Thai elites, and the economic sphere by the Chinese entrepreneurial class. However, the analysis presented earlier here provides evidence of a close relationship between the ruling elite of the 1932 *coup* and both first- and second-generation immigrant Chinese.

Following Gramsci, Chai-anan (1987) described the state (with

the government as a concrete structure) as an institution which serves the ruling class but presents itself as if it is serving the people of the nation. In effect, class distinctions become blurred and the state appears to be operating for the people. The state becomes a sacred symbol created by a certain ideology and political legitimization process. He felt that the capitalist ideology together with some political factors had enabled different classes of people to form alliances (Chai-anan, 1987).

It is undeniable that capitalist ideology in one form or another had been used by the government as the development concept for the country. "Nationalist capitalism" ideology adopted by the government during 1945–1960 encouraged the establishment of government and private enterprises. During this period, rice mills, sugar mills, saw mills and liquor factories dominated. Because of close proximity and access to transport routes, about half of the government-operated industries and enterprises were located in the Central Region. Distilleries located in many provinces in the country were operated by Chinese immigrants whose skills in the trade were indispensable. Thus even though the government controlled the enterprises, the operations in fact remained in the hands of local Chinese operators.

In another incident in the 1950s, the then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior established the Economic Promotion Company. Using their established network, the new company obtained loans with a government guarantee. The funds were used to set up Suphanburi Sugar Mill, Saraburi Marble, Bangphra Paper Mill, Chonburi Sugar Mill, and the Northeast Gunny Sack Factory (Piriyarangsan, 1983). The operators of these factories were Chinese and/or Sino-Thais.

As a result of government policy to control economic activities in the country, many entrepreneurs and the economic elite invited the political elite to be on the Board of Directors and established close ties with them. This practice was evident and may be viewed as a form of government intervention. In fact, benefits from economic activities were given to the political elite and may also be viewed as "protection" awards.

The Investment Promotion Act constituted in 1960 brought about many multinational investment schemes in the country. Joint-ventures between Sino-Thai and Japanese or US firms have been recorded, most of which were located in the Central region. To obtain

government support, government employees both at the local and national levels were used as contact points to promote investment. Trade associations and other non-profit organizations were formed to help establish networks among merchants and between merchants and government officers. In the Sixth and Seventh National Development Plans, the private sector became more involved in the planning process. By this time, the business or private sector consisted of people who no longer considered themselves "Chinese" even though they were descendants of Chinese ancestors.

One way to accumulate wealth was through land ownership. Local merchants and government officials as well as Bangkok residents became land speculators, intentionally or unintentionally. Subdistrict headmen and village headmen soon followed suit and took the opportunity to buy up land from fellow villagers when they heard about future construction projects or new highways to be built. In provincial towns, many Chinese descendants were construction contractors who gradually enter local politics; some are now involved in national politics. Some establish themselves as *cao pho*, i.e. very influential mafia-type leaders who are powerful both economically and politically.

Christina Szanton (1980) observed that at the local level the Chinese descendants have adopted a Sino-Thai mode of operation which still preserved many features of their Chineseness, and which allowed them to operate successfully in the urban middle-class settings where they were in large numbers. At the same time, there were recurring rifts between segments of this middle class, mostly between the Sino-Thai, as well as between the Thai and Sino-Thai within the petty bourgeoisie segment (Szanton, 1980). Although Szanton found signs of intra-ethnic differentiation at the town level, she also stated that the Sino-Thai had certainly become the new bourgeoisie which might lead to ethnic stratification.

The case studies carried out in 1992 indicated a lesser degree of overt Chineseness. Almost 20 years after the observation made by Szanton, the urban middle class in provincial towns is not differentiated ethnically. The third- and/or fourth-generation Chinese have adopted a Sino-Thai cultural pattern. Some still practise ancestor worship and visit the graveyards of the ancestors while others have abandoned the practice. They are now in business or government offices and are part of the Thai social structure.

The issue in Thailand at present is the national economic

development policy which favours the Sino-Thai population over the poor rural Thai. The Chinese or Sino-Thai have been able to fulfil the demand for industrial development proposed by the government. In the 1950s, when nationalistic capitalism was designed for the Thais, the Chinese offered their services to make the policy operational. In that process, the Chinese made rational choices and made themselves indispensable to the Thais. Later, when the government looked to the private sector to contribute to national development, again the Sino-Thai, who are located in private firms, banks, import-export businesses and real estate, complied quite willingly to the request made by the government. When the government invited the private sector to become involved in the national development plans as experts and consultants, they were the group who made themselves available. Referring to the past, Skinner (1973:406) made the following comments:

> The Chinese were simply too useful to the Thai ruling class to be hindered, while at the same time the rulers perceived nothing to fear.
>
> Confident in the vitality and invulnerability of their own civilization, the Thai elite did not hesitate to use the Chinese even though they knew the Chinese thought they were using the Thai.

At the local level, there has been a shift and change of social values. Traditionally, a respected person was a patron who assumed the role of protector for his client. He appeared to be passive and received income in the form of goods and services without having to do the actual work. His status was maintained because of his merits and his good deeds. One did not need to be greedy and ask for more than what one received. Buddhist ideology predominated in everyday life. When the mode of production changed, it was not sufficient to maintain the status quo. In the capitalistic mode of production, there are possibilities for investments and further advancements, especially when connections are established with government personnel. To advance economically and socially, one now has to invest to earn more. A successful person now accumulates wealth through investment, taking opportunities to utilize the available resources to generate more wealth.

The New Social Structure: The Chinese Case

Since the Thai government adopted the capitalistic development ideology, the Chinese or Thais with Chinese ancestors have become a prominent and influential mechanism in the country's economic development. Their status as an "ethnic minority" is no longer appropriate. They are an "influential ethnic group" dominating many aspects of the socioeconomic and political spheres of decision-making in the development of Thailand.

By contrast, the local Thais were not able to cope with the new capitalistic development policy or ideology, and so resorted to working with the Chinese. They were, and many still are, adhering to the Buddhist values and world view which uphold that one should not work for one's own benefit entirely and that the accumulation of wealth should not be practised overtly. Those who could not accept the new capitalistic ideology rejected it and either moved further into the forest areas to continue their subsistence way of life or remained poor and helpless. The Chinese or Sino-Thai generally accepted the new ideology and responded readily to the policies — such as in the cultivation of cash crops, tourist and rural industries, and new "captured" fisheries (e.g. deep sea fishing or "cultured" fisheries in the forms of fish and shrimp farms using technology and modern management techniques) (Amara, 1993).

It is undeniable that the Chinese have social values which are more compatible with capitalistic values. Some theorists call these "immigrant values". The rational choice theory seems to help explain quite well the behaviour of the Chinese in different contexts. The question remaining to be asked is whether the more advantageous status and role of the Sino-Thai at present will create antagonistic feelings among the Thai and cause class differentiation as well as ethnic differentiation to become more distinct. Different models of ethnic relations such as the class and plural society models need to be re-examined and juxtaposed with the assimilation and acculturation models.

Perhaps the pattern differs between the elite class and the middle class. Among the elite groups, the industrialization and globalization process taking place all over the world push the Chinese investors into the international sphere. Their investment activities become multinational and their Chineseness becomes more useful. The Chinese connections could be maintained or newly established for the sake of business benefits. In a way, this group of Sino-Thai stop

their assimilation process and maintain their Chinese identity together with the Sino-Thai identity. The shift in the globalization process makes the assimilation model less useful than it was in the past. Now they make rational choices to emphasize their ethnic identity accordingly.

The urban middle-class group, on the other hand, consists mostly of second- or third-generation Chinese who have moved up the social strata and constitute a large majority of the middle strata of the Thai social structure. The question is what will happen to them in the future. Two possibilities are envisioned here. The first possibility is that assimilation will continue and be completed to the point where the terms "Chinese" or "Sino-Thai" will become meaningless. The second possibility is for the group to become more conscious of their Chineseness and prefer to maintain a dual identity. This process is likely to happen for the same reason that the elite group prefers to maintain their Chineseness for global connections.

One other factor which will help strengthen this possibility is the ethnic situation in Thailand where there are other ethnic minorities. The degree to which the Chinese have become assimilated into the Thai social structure is phenomenal or even exceptional. It is not possible for other ethnic minorities to assimilate into the Thai society to the same degree. Therefore maintaining ethnic identity will be the trend followed by most ethnic minority groups. The Chinese descendants will then follow other groups and maintain their ethnic identity while living in Thailand and holding Thai citizenship. When this pattern takes place, Thailand will become a plural society with different gradations of ethnic identity depending on the degree of assimilation taking place. The Chinese will be the group most assimilated into Thai society, while the Muslim Malays will be the group least assimilated. At the macro-societal level, cultural pluralism is the trend for the future of Thailand. But at the intra-ethnic relations levels, the Chinese will assimilate and maintain their cultural identity if and when appropriate.

Conclusion

Up until the early part of the 20th century, the Chinese left China in search of a better life and wealth. At first, as sojourners, the search for wealth was for survival and the extra income was sent back to China. Later when it was not desirable to return to China, the overseas

Chinese remained marginalized, served as middlemen and faced the dilemma of either returning to the homeland or staying on in the host country. As middlemen, the Chinese followed the capitalistic mode of production and adjusted themselves to the national development ideology of the Thai government. In fact, they adjusted to the capitalistic development ideology better than the Thais. While the Thais are still coping with the government's ideology, the Chinese have advanced to become world leaders in multinational investment schemes. For Thailand to join in the globalization process, it will have to allow for cultural diversity and, at the same time, identify an integrative mechanism which will unite the people. National ideology which is acceptable to all or most people regardless of ethnic background is one solution.

Capitalistic ideology supported by the government in the previous national development plans appeals to the elite and the middle class but does not serve the needs of the poor. Though the basic needs of the rural people are not fulfilled, they seek spiritual support. Even the elite and the middle class follow some spiritual practices. National ideology will have to be composed of a mixture of economic, political and spiritual components which allow for individual freedom. The argument presented here is that Buddhist ideology has been replaced by capitalistic development ideology. In the past, Buddhism had the function of being an integrating factor. At the moment when political, economic and religious freedom is being demanded, national development ideology may function as an element for national integration. The role of religion is no longer seen at the ideology level. However, Buddhist values and world views are still being observed in many instances.

The social values of the Chinese and the Thais have been compared in this chapter. The Chinese immigrant values helped make the Chinese or Sino-Thai more responsive to the government's development ideology. The rural traditional Thai farmers, however, are slow to change and many still adhere to Buddhist values and world views. Some accepted and adopted the materialistic values more readily, others rejected the new values at first but are slowly changing. In this process, one still sees the role of religion in the Thai way of life. Many of the customs and rituals are still being practised. The rural poor as well as the urban rich, both Thai and Sino-Thai, still follow ritualistic practices to ensure success when uncertainty in new daily ventures prevails.

What has been observed is that the earlier ethnic conflicts and hostile feelings between the Chinese immigrants and the Thai hosts were due partly to the intrusion of a new ethnic group in traditional Thai social structure. As society evolved, both the Thais and the Chinese made adjustments. The Thais were forced into the capitalistic development ideology while the Chinese willingly adopted this ideology, first, for survival and then for economic and social advancement. Now the globalization process of the postmodern era makes it possible for descendants of Chinese settlers in Thailand to form their own identity, while having a Thai nationality and Sino-Thai culture. They belong to modern Thailand and are loyal to the country. At the same time, they maintain part of their Chinese heritage because their ancestors and they themselves have been involved in the development of Thailand. The Sino-Thai have a sense of belonging to Thailand, while Chineseness is seen as a cultural identity.

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5

Ethnicity and World View in Bangkok*

Richard Basham

The genius of the Thai in incorporating the varied peoples with whom they have come into contact has long been noted by scholars of Thai society. In remarking on the Thai conquest of lands ruled by Angkor, a well-known French scholar of Indochina (Louis Finot, writing in 1908) suggested that rather than speaking of a Thai invasion of Southeast Asia, "(the) word inundation would perhaps better describe the march of this singular race which, fluid as water, insinuating itself with the same force, taking the colour of all the skies and the form of all the banks, but guarding under its various aspects the essential identity of its character and language, had spread itself like an immense tablecloth over Southern China, Tonkin, Laos, Siam, even to Burma and Assam" (Briggs, 1951:260).

Although Finot's prose might seem florid, his analogy points to the subtle, yet forceful, nature of the spread of Thai culture and its ability to assimilate peoples of widely varying phenotype. Indeed, the concept of "Thainess" has little racial utility in the sense of the notion that a Thai people migrated to present-day Thailand from their ancient homeland in southwestern China. A more useful image might be of a migrating language and culture, both undergoing change in their long southerly march, but remaining very much Thai in their patterns and outlook at the end of their journey.

Most interesting of all has been Thailand's success in incorporating its substantial Chinese population which Amara (Chapter 4, this volume) quite aptly refers to as "phenomenal or even exceptional". Scholars have long noted that the Thai imposed "no racial barrier to complete assimilation of the Chinese" and that intermarriage between the Thai and Chinese was quite common (Skinner, 1957:128). However, the increase in both Thai and Chinese nationalism in the early decades of the 20th century, and the increased immigration of Chinese women into Thailand, led to increased ethnic tensions and helped retard assimilation (Purcell, 1965:118–23; Coughlin, 1960:30; Supang, 1997).

Today, however, the processes of acculturation and assimilation have proceeded to the point where in most instances it no longer makes sense to speak of even full-blooded people of Chinese ancestry living in Thailand as "Chinese". Indeed, so many Chinese today speak Thai as native speakers — and most of them have full linguistic competence only in Thai — that it is best to think of them as "Sino-Thai", or "Thai", rather than "Chinese". It is important to note as well that, in general, the more successful an individual of Chinese ancestry is, the more likely he or she is to identify publicly as Thai and to be seen as Thai by others (Skinner, 1958; Boonsanong, 1971).

The flexibility and frequent ambiguity of Chinese and Thai ethnicity is reflected in the vast numbers of Sino-Thai who speak Thai as native-speakers. Usually, the Sino-Thai find no conflict in regarding themselves as both Thai and Chinese, although such ethnic-based celebrations as Chinese New Year, or personal and occupational networks, may lead them at times to emphasize their Chinese ancestry. Indeed, expressions of identity for Sino-Thai are, in general, more situational than perduring (Bao, Chapter 11, this volume; Chan and Tong, 1995). Similarly, the Sino-Thai often present themselves solely as Thai, sometimes unknowingly confusing Chinese customs and aspects of the Chinese world view with those of the Thai.

An important, unresolved issue concerning Chinese acculturation to Thai life is the degree to which the Sino-Thai have really become Thai. Do most Sino-Thai today partake fully in the same world view(s) held by the Thai or, since the acculturation of many Sino-Thai into Thai world view has occurred through secondary, non-family contact, have they at most acculturated into a Sino-Thai version of Thai culture? Or, as Chan and Tong (1993) have suggested, will powerful instrumental and expressive aspects

of Chinese culture and tradition continue to differentiate them from the "real" Thai? Certainly, Tobias's (1977) work in Ayutthaya supports the view that a distinct Chinese or Sino-Thai culture and community is likely to persist alongside the "real" Thai community for the foreseeable future (Keyes, 1978:33).

The Bangkok Research

The research in Bangkok[1] covered in this chapter (which is focused on research conducted in 1987, with later follow-ups), investigated the degree to which the Sino-Thai share the same world views as the Thai. Additionally, the research sought to investigate Thai and Sino-Thai knowledge about — and attitudes towards — each other and the ways in which the world views of urban Thai compare with the so-called "traditional" Thai world view (Amara *et al.*, 1985; Mulder, 1985). Here, it is important to note that the issue is not, as Keyes (1978:33) would have it, one of contrasting the world views of the urban Sino-Thai with the vast majority of the Thai who live in rural or small towns, but of comparing the world views of the urban Sino-Thai with the urban Thai.

Questions in the research were phrased in as non-directive a fashion as possible, many following the Sentence Completion Test (SCT) format (Phillips, 1965); informants were asked as well to respond to three cards from the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). Questions were also worded and arranged to minimize cross-questioning and response "contamination". Various issues of importance, such as religious knowledge and belief, were also broached in different ways during the interviews.

Sino-Thai are defined as those of Chinese appearance, who spoke Thai without an accent and who acknowledged their Chinese ancestry. Conversely, Thai people are those of Thai appearance who spoke Thai as their native language and those of mixed ancestry who considered themselves, and would be considered by others, as Thai. Ambiguity of ethnic background inevitably exists among some of the informants. In part, this was due to centuries of intermarriages resulting in a great deal of phenotypic blending. There was some reluctance among informants as well to admit Chinese ancestry, even in instances where the individual's appearance was obviously Chinese.

These few ambiguous cases were resolved by our assessment of

how the individual would be classified by the wider population. Thus, we placed a very high-status individual — a *khunying* — of predominantly Chinese appearance in the Thai category by virtue of our assessment that nearly all Thai would accept her primarily as Thai. Similarly, our problem as to where to place a woman whom we were certain was Sino-Thai was resolved when we accidentally encountered a Thai woman whom we had interviewed earlier. During our conversation, the Thai woman remarked that she had seen us the day before interviewing a "Chinese woman". When we told her the woman (whom she had correctly described) had denied having Chinese ancestry, she laughed and said: "her face looked Chinese and she held herself like a Chinese (she sat with her feet on her chair seat during the interview)...she is definitely Chinese!"

Ethnic Knowledge and Attitudes

Both the Thai and Sino-Thai informants had a high degree of knowledge of each other's customs, especially those concerned with marriage, merit-making and funerals. Most informants were able to comment as well on differences in patterns of divorce, child-rearing, and family life between the two groups.

The Bangkok informants were able to distinguish rather clearly between "Chinese" (*khon ciin*) and "Sino-Thai" (*khon thay thii mii chyachaat ciin tae may phuut phaasaa ciin*). However, some Bangkok informants who were well aware of cultural differences between Thai (*khon thay thua pay*) and Chinese felt that certain customs of the Thai and Sino-Thai in Bangkok were too similar to distinguish adequately. After all, the Bangkok Thai and Sino-Thai have experienced a lengthy process of acculturation in which the Sino-Thai have become culturally more Thai and the Thai themselves have become more "Chinese" than their upcountry counterparts. Although most of this acculturative movement has occurred among people of Chinese ethnic background — who have long been involved in a process of becoming more Thai as well as more "modern" (Somboon 2530 B.E. [1987]) — it must not be forgotten that the acculturation process has been a mutual one (Chan and Tong, 1995:6).

Not surprisingly, the Bangkok Thai and Sino-Thai interviewees were most likely to remark on differences in funeral customs between

the two groups. Most informants in both groups noted that the Thai cremate the corpse, while the Chinese bury it in a cemetery for which, as one Thai informant remarked, "they must buy a plot in a cemetery for between 50,000 to 100,000 or (even) 200,000 baht". Sino-Thai funeral ceremonies were also seen to be more elaborate, with more money expended in the Chinese ceremony (*kongtek*), something which many Thai informants characterized as "extravagance" or a "waste" of money. In contrast, a number of Thai remarked on the quiet and relatively inexpensive nature of Thai funerals in which "Thai chant (*suat*) and then cremate (*phaw*)".

The Sino-Thai acknowledged the greater ceremony and costs associated with their funerals. Indeed, some suggested rising costs were making traditional, Chinese-style funerals so expensive that modern Sino-Thai were being forced to adopt cremation. However, several informants remarked on the need to perpetuate at least the rudiments of so-called "ancestor worship". As one Sino-Thai university student explained, traditional values lead them "to give importance to their parent's corpse, rather than cremate it or throw it into the ocean". And a retired Sino-Thai professional man-of-influence suggested:

> Because of the belief that the soul is going to heaven, the Chinese have more ceremony. Their beliefs are similar to the Egyptians. (In contrast) the Thai believe in merit (*bun-baap*).

After funerals, marriage customs were seen as the most obvious cultural markers distinguishing Thai from Sino-Thai. Most informants remarked on actual differences in ceremony between Thai and Sino-Thai marriages:

> The Thai pour lustral water. The Chinese do not have to have monks (come to chant and receive food before the ceremony), but they show respect to their elders. (28-year-old Sino-Thai businessman)

Many also elaborated on greater parental involvement among Sino-Thai in arranging their offspring's marriage including the choice of a marital partner. Sino-Thai marriages tended "to be arranged by adults and not coming from love", and involved more elaborate financial arrangements than Thai marriages. Post-marital residence expectations also differ; Thai couples were deemed more likely to

reside with the bride's parents after marriage whereas Sino-Thai couples would be more likely to reside with the groom's family.

Interestingly, however, responses to our query concerning preference for post-marital residence — "Whom should a couple live with after marriage? Please explain." (*Langjaak taengngaan laew khuubaawsaaw khuan ca assayyuu kap khray...phrawheetday*) — produced almost identical responses from Thai and Sino-Thai. Eighty-two percent of Thai informants (81 percent of males and 83 percent of females) and 81 percent of Sino-Thai informants (80 percent of males and 82 percent of females) said that newly-married couples should "separate out to live on their own". Only 9 percent of Sino-Thai informants (13 percent of the males and 6 percent of the females) said that newlyweds should live with the groom's family, while 6 percent of Thai (men and women, equally) said couples should live with the husband's family and 6 percent (no men and 11 percent of women) said they should live with the bride's family. Most informants, Thai and Sino-Thai, argued that neolocal residence was necessary "to avoid family problems". However, a number of informants acknowledged that financial difficulty, or the need to take care of aged parents, might require a newly-married couple to postpone setting up an independent household.

Sino-Thai and Thai noted convergence in the merit-making customs of Thai and Sino-Thai, although many Sino-Thai were seen not to worship at the Thai temple. A typical Thai response:

> The Chinese don't worship at the Thai temple, but they worship their ancestors and can eat their offering later. The Thai don't eat their offering. (28-year-old Thai female labourer)

Similarly, Sino-Thai women tended to contrast Chinese and Sino-Thai "ancestor worship" with Thai merit-making focused on the temples and monks, although they often remarked on the increasing tendency to abandon ceremonies directed towards ancestors in favour of Thai patterns of merit-making. One high-status 48-year-old Sino-Thai female distinguished Thai and Sino-Thai along instrumental and expressive lines:

> When Chinese make merit, they are hoping for something in return. Thai make merit to feel better. Thai, in the old days, hoped for the next life.

Sino-Thai men, especially younger informants, on the other hand, argued that Thai and Sino-Thai patterns of merit-making were not really very different, although Sino-Thai were said to be more likely to give to charity than to monks.

In matters of child rearing, most Thai informants stressed that Chinese and Sino-Thai parents place greater emphasis on strict child-rearing and on developing self-discipline, while the Thai tend both to indulge their children and to permit them more autonomy:

> The Chinese teach their children to work since they are little. Thai worry that their children will suffer. (55-year-old Thai male, Police Colonel)

> (Sino-Thai parents) don't give their children any free time, especially when they are attending university. Thai parents let their children raise themselves. (56-year-old Thai male, high-ranking government officer, retired)

Other Thai male informants noted the tendency for those of Chinese ethnic background to emphasize business training:

> The Chinese will be interested in teaching their children business, while the Thai want to give their children a higher education so they can become a government official. (28-year-old Thai female hawker)

or to favour sons:

> Thai raise their children equally, but the Chinese love their son more. (35-year-old high-status Thai male, company officer)

Most Sino-Thai males confirmed the responses of their Thai counterparts, contrasting the Thai tendency to indulge their children (*thay taam cay luuk*) with the Chinese disposition for strictness (*ciin liang luuk may plawy khreng*), and the Thai emphasis on preparing their children for government service, rather than for careers in business. Sino-Thai male informants noted as well that ethnic Chinese children are taught to show more respect to their parents and to "work hard and be thrifty". Greater Chinese emphasis on accumulating wealth was noted in such remarks:

> The Chinese worry that their children might starve, so they accumulate wealth for their children. For the Thai, it does not matter — they're not afraid of being poor. (44-year-old male Sino-Thai hawker)

Some Sino-Thai women contrasted their tendency to teach their children to work hard, persevere (or, endure; *mii khwaam otthon*), understand hardship (*ruucak khwaam lambaak*), and to be enthusiastic (*kratyyryyron*), with the Thai emphasis on teaching good manners:

> The Sino-Thai teach their children to work hard and to take care of themselves like adults. The Thai teach their children to be polite. (25-year-old female Sino-Thai advertising executive)

In considering the stability of marriages among the Thai and Sino-Thai, informants remarked overwhelmingly on the greater frequency of divorce among the Thai. Both Thai and Sino-Thai informants commented as well on the greater strictness of ethnic Chinese in matters of marriage, pointing out that the Thai took marriage less seriously and were more likely "to have affairs with others". As one 28-year-old Thai female labourer complained,

> The Chinese are more responsible (in family matters). Thai don't have any sense of responsibility. I, myself, am facing the problem of a husband having a minor wife.

Of all sub-groups, however, Sino-Thai women were most likely to suggest that Sino-Thai marriages were more unstable than Thai unions. This perception seemed to arise from female resentment of greater male dominance among Sino-Thai and of subordination of the daughter-in-law to her husband's family. Additionally, while Sino-Thai men might maintain that marriage is "for life", they do take a minor wife (or wives). Sino-Thai women today often regard the taking of a minor wife as tantamount to divorce (as do many of today's Thai women).

The issue of minor wives (*mia nawy*) proved to be a sensitive one, especially for women. Perhaps not surprisingly, male informants tended to be somewhat sympathetic towards minor wives:

> (Minor wives) are cute, lovable. (33-year-old male Thai steward)

(Minor wives) look at the world from a good point of view. (31-year-old Thai male mechanic)

I sympathize with them. (The reason they became a minor wife) might have been caused by coming from families which broke up when they were young, or it might have been caused by poverty. (Or, perhaps, she) likes to be extravagant. (30-year-old Sino-Thai company manager)

A minority of Thai male informants, however, condemned minor wives for "causing problems" and for their tendency to seek to supplant their "husband's" principal wife. Several male informants found it difficult to generalize from their extensive personal experience with minor wives. As one wealthy Thai businessman admitted laughingly, "I cannot answer correctly, because I have many wives".

Although a small minority of Thai and Sino-Thai women sympathized with minor wives on grounds that they might have been forced into becoming a minor wife because of family poverty or that they might have been deceived by the man into thinking he was single, most of the female informants spoke of minor wives as "short-sighted" (lit., think short-term, *khit san*), "selfish," "people with jealous hearts" or "bad karma" who "feel they are pretty and will be above the major wife (*mia luang*)". And, in contrast to the "traditional pattern" in which minor wives joined the family under the control of the major wife, informants complained that minor wives, today, usually entered into direct competition with the major wife and attempted to supplant her. Some of the informants were (or had been) minor wives themselves and tended to offer less judgemental responses, while a number of women had had personal experience with their husband's minor wives. One informant — who at first asserted that minor wives had "demerit" (*baap*), before joking sardonically that either she or her husband's minor wife had *baap*, but she was not sure which one it was — complained that:

(Minor wives) really persevere. The major wife has little perseverance. Therefore, she has to give up her husband to the minor wife. (28-year-old Thai female labourer).

Another stated simply:

It's good for the man, just like another helping of food. (But) if

you are the first wife, it isn't good. It hurts. (33-year-old female Sino-Thai company employee)

In another instance, we were interviewing a Sino-Thai female civil servant at home while she nursed her baby in the presence of another woman whom we had assumed to be a friend. Then, her husband entered the house drunk and went upstairs to watch a favourite television show. As he scaled the stairs, he shouted to the other woman to go to a store and fetch him some whisky and ice. Later, when on the subject of minor wives, she told us the other woman was her husband's minor wife. Although somewhat philosophical about her situation, she complained that "some women want (to become a man's wife) even if they know he is already married".

In comparing Bangkok Thai and Sino-Thai family life, most informants emphasized differences between the two groups. Although a few Thai and Sino-Thai informants spoke of Thai families as characterized by "love in the family" and by "kindness", or noted that "rich and poor families are very different", the great majority of informants portrayed Thai families as "poorer than Sino-Thai", "easy-going", "unenthusiastic", "lazy", and "living from hand to mouth" (*haa chaaw kin kham*). A number of informants commented on the predilection of Bangkok Thai families for living extravagantly: "We (Thai) make 20 baht and spend 25" (*day 20 kin 25*). In general, there was the tendency of Thai informants to portray Bangkok Thai as "living like it is everyone for himself" (*Yuu baep tua khray tua man*) and not socializing with neighbours:

(Bangkok Thai) don't often socialize with their neighbours, because one has to earn a living and think about oneself (in Bangkok). I walk in and walk out of the *soi* and I never look at anyone. (55-year-old male Thai Police Colonel)

Several Bangkok Thai informants blamed the Chinese for the financial problems of many Thai families:

If we didn't have other nationalities coming in and stirring up problems, the Thai would be able to make it. The Chinese are sending money back to their country. (39-year-old Thai male, high-ranking civil servant)

It is hard to find a real Thai in Bangkok. The majority are Chinese and Chinese mixed with Thai. Chinese continually come

into Thailand, because they have relatives in Thailand who will help bring them in. And they will only stay in Bangkok. For example, I have clients who are recent migrants from Hong Kong who are continuing to bring out their relatives. The real Thai are forced to live outside Bangkok, because of their poor financial situation. Those who refuse to leave Bangkok have to live in a slum. (25-year-old male Thai insurance agent).

> Notice that there are two types of Thai-Chinese: those who don't have any loyalty in helping out Thai society — they send all of their money to Red China — and those who will not see themselves as being Chinese and who believe in Thai customs and traditions. (60-year-old female Thai lecturer)

In general, Sino-Thai assessments of Bangkok Thai families were similar to those offered by Thai, although Sino-Thai tended to portray Thai families as more chaotic and prone to dissolution, and as disinclined to help out needy relatives. The Thai were said to prefer government service as well and to lack the seriousness of purpose required for success in business:

> (The Thai) are not serious in their work. They don't persevere. If they invest their money and only receive a small return, then they will think of closing the business and going into something else. (61-year-old Sino-Thai housewife)

Several informants remarked that the Thai were more meticulous than the Sino-Thai (*phithiiphithan khwaa*) and, in the words of one high-ranking Sino-Thai female, are "sweet and polite, clean, neat, and slow". Several Sino-Thai commented on the higher status of women in Thai families. As one low-status Sino-Thai male said with disdain:

> Most Thai husbands tend to be afraid of their wives and are dominated by them. Some wives don't have respect for their husbands.

The majority of Thai males characterized Sino-Thai families as hardworking, frugal, and having a better financial status. The Sino-Thai were said to be better educated than their Thai counterparts and "to control the man (son) more than the woman (daughter)". Thai women were almost equally likely to describe Sino-Thai families as "sticking together" to "help each other out" or as being

characterized by "selfishness in the family". Several informants noted the "hustle and bustle" and absence of manners in Sino-Thai family life as well.

Sino-Thai men described Sino-Thai families as hardworking in business, thrifty, and not "finicky" about their standard of living. As one informant put it, "(we) Sino-Thai have lower tastes and higher incomes than the Thai". A young Sino-Thai architect remarked as well that:

> Sino-Thai families are warm and comfortable with each other. When they have children, they can visit each other. They don't divide into classes like the Thai.

Sino-Thai women remarked overwhelmingly on the tendency of Sino-Thai families to stick together as a family, "even after the children have grown up". Additionally, they noted positively on the Sino-Thai predilection for hard work, frugality, and gradual accumulation of resources and expansion of their businesses, although there was some censure on patterns of cleanliness ("[Sino-Thai] are vigorous, but not really clean"), as well as resentment of the androcentric nature of Thai-Chinese society ("The son comes first"). One middle-aged Sino-Thai female remarked that while "the Thai are becoming much more like westerners" (*thay pay thaang farang maak*), the Thai-Chinese were "tending to become more Thai (than Chinese)". This awareness of contrast between their own behaviour and that of "real" Chinese seemed particularly acute among Sino-Thai women who had lived or travelled in neighbouring countries with large, relatively unacculturated Chinese populations, such as Malaysia and Hong Kong. They noted that, while they might frequently identify themselves as Chinese in Thailand, they almost always referred to themselves as "Thai" when abroad.

Although inquiries concerning attitudes towards Thai and Sino-Thai males and females were worded in the neutral and terse manner dictated by the Sentence Completion Technique (e.g., "Thai males..." [with the informant to elaborate at will]), the responses received were, on the whole, far from neutral. The Thai female sample displayed great ambivalence in describing Thai men. Most of their responses were negative, characterizing Thai men as "selfish", "liking to drink", "financially irresponsible", and tending to "take advantage of women", although a significant minority described them as "polite

and gentle" and "better than Sino-Thai men". The following are typical descriptions of Thai men given by the Thai female respondents:

> They are well-behaved (but) greedy (*makmaak*). They are never realistic about their financial situation... They are irresponsible (*may mii khwaam rapphitchawp*). (28-year-old labourer)

> They take advantage of women (*awpriap phuuying*)... (but) the majority are gentle. (28-year-old psychologist)

> Even if he already has a wife, he is still a playboy and is extravagant. (38-year-old owner of dressmaking shop)

In describing themselves as a group, Thai men tended to concur with the assessment offered by Thai women, although no Thai man described Thai males as "polite" or "gentle". In order of frequency, they described Thai men as liking "to have fun", "to drink", and "to socialize"; as being "irresponsible", and as "spending more than they earn" and as "liking their freedom."

Both male and female Sino-Thai informants offered almost uniformly negative comments about Thai men. Sino-Thai men characterized them as "playboys", who are "temperamental" (*cawaarom*) and "anger easily", and who "brag", are "selfish", "unenthusiastic" and "want to show off their wealth, but they don't really have it". Other comments included the following:

> They prefer drinking and, and after they complete their education, they like to be government officials. (28-year-old Sino-Thai businessman)

> The majority still want to have a good time with friends. They don't accept their family and work responsibilities. (30-year-old Sino-Thai company manager)

By far, Sino-Thai women offered the most negative assessments of Thai men. Almost all the female Sino-Thai informants characterized Thai men as "selfish", "irresponsible", and/or "lazy", as can be seen from the following representative sample of their comments:

> They are selfish (*henkatua*). They don't often have "spirit" (used English word). They don't like to see other people be better than

> them. (25-year-old female Sino-Thai government hospital employee)

> They are lazy and like a good time. They're selfish and are not the head of the family. They are not responsible. (26-year-old female Sino-Thai lecturer)

> They are sneaky and are playboys who don't take things seriously. Most don't really work hard. They like the easy life and like to make money easily. (32-year-old female Sino-Thai bookstore owner)

> They are lazy. They like to be government officials and don't like to work in business. They are not enthusiastic. (48-year-old female Sino-Thai principal of private school)

Stereotypes held by the Thai male informants towards Thai women were quite divided: some saw Thai women as "followers" of their husbands, others as "heads" of their families; some characterized them as "working hard" and "maintaining their customs", while others complained that they were "extravagant" and "following the European way-of-life" (*paj thaang yurop*). The following comment by a 56-year-old retired senior government officer (whose father held a royal title) is representative of those made by several Thai male informants:

> When they don't have a choice, they have to accept jobs that they don't want to do; for example, work in a bar or be a waitress. They are extravagant... They dress well, but their house is a mess.

In describing their own group, Thai females focused on their "sweet and well-mannered" nature, their desire for autonomy, and the pleasure they derived from "looking pretty". Thai female informants also described Thai women as "disadvantaged" *vis-à-vis* men, as "liking to gossip", "selfish", and "competent... these days, they are able to earn their living better than some men". The ambivalent nature of Thai female descriptions of Thai women is perhaps best captured in the response of a 28-year-old Thai psychologist:

> Thai women are very reluctant to impose on others. They usually lack self-confidence and don't often express themselves. They

> are not open about themselves, as if they were wearing a mask (*myan say naakaak*).

Of all groups, Sino-Thai men were most reluctant to answer the question on Thai women. In their answers, Sino-Thai men were most likely to characterize Thai women as "well-mannered", "gentle" and "sweet". Next in order of frequency were descriptions of Thai women as "unwilling to work hard", "liking the easy life", and "lacking perseverance". Additionally, a number of informants offered explicit contrasts between the characters of Thai and Sino-Thai women:

> Thai women are a sorry sight, because, these days, they just like to have sex (*frii sek*) ... (whereas,) Sino-Thai women work at selling things. (36-year-old unemployed Sino-Thai male)

> These days, Thai women are more concerned with advancing themselves by becoming independent and earning their own living. Therefore, they don't have time to train their children properly, which creates a lack of warmth in the family and causes their children to become a burden on society... Sino-Thai women think about helping their husbands in business and helping their husbands with responsibilities and sharing problems. And they also teach their children to be thrifty and appreciate the value of money. (30-year-old male Sino-Thai company manager)

> Thai women must dress up. They like to have a wealthy boyfriend. They like wealthy Chinese men (*aasia*). Also, they like to be minor wives... Sino-Thai women are like Sino-Thai men: they work hard and fear poverty. (44-year-old Sino-Thai male hawker)

> Thai women do not mind (marrying) foreigners... (while) Sino-Thai women do not like to marry foreigners. (72-year-old male Sino-Thai retired professor and man of influence)

Characterizations of Thai women offered by Sino-Thai women were linked to the status of the respondent. Most high-status Sino-Thai women described Thai women in positive terms as "sweet and polite", "honest", "hardworking", and "enthusiastic", although a minority portrayed them as having "little sense of responsibility" and as "lacking self-confidence". In contrast, only two (of eight) mid-status Sino-Thai female informants described Thai women in positive terms (as "having better manners than Sino-Thai women"

and as "more advanced, these days, because they are more knowledgeable and able to look after themselves"). The remaining mid-status informants and all low-status Sino-Thai females interviewed characterized Thai females in such negative terms as: they "lack perseverance", "are evil and cause trouble or are never satisfied with what they have", "are petulant and paranoid" (*khiingawn khit maak*), "grow up slowly", "love the easy life...live hand-to-mouth...(are) lazy...(and) some have lovers", and "these days, they are bringing in a lot of foreign civilization...(and) are very free".

Significantly, while only one (6 percent) of the Sino-Thai females felt that Thai women were "like Sino-Thai women", five (30 percent) felt they were "like Thai women." In a seeming paradox, Sino-Thai women often described their Thai female counterparts in pejorative terms, yet many of these same women carried with them an idealized notion of Thai female behaviour to which they themselves aspired.

In contrast to the mixed assessment of Thai men and women, Sino-Thai men were described in relatively positive terms by most members of all groups. Most Thai men described them in positive (or neutral) terms as "heads of their families", who "like to sell things", and "work hard to help their family". Most Thai females characterized Sino-Thai men as "good people" who "work harder than Thai men" to "support their family well". Only two of the Bangkok Thai women characterized Sino-Thai men in negative terms as "selfish" and "spendthrift playboys".

Sino-Thai male characterizations of Sino-Thai men focused on their tendency to "work hard" in business, although several informants noted that they like to gamble and "go out". The following two replies are characteristic of their responses:

> Sino-Thai men have responsibilities towards their family and their work. They will only go out, have a good time, and socialize in connection with their job. (30-year-old male Sino-Thai company manager)

> Their behaviour is kind of mixed: some like to work hard, others like to go out. (These latter) have some Thai behaviour in them. (60-year-old male Sino-Thai owner of slum rental property)

Sino-Thai females tended to describe Sino-Thai males as "hard

workers" with a "sense of responsibility toward their families", e.g. "they work hard, love their children and their wife (and) their parents, as well". However, a significant majority characterized them also as "selfish" and "dictatorial". Thus, a 26-year-old Sino-Thai female lecturer complained that:

> They are more dictatorial than Thai men. Everything must depend on the Chinese man. (However,) they work very hard.

A 27-year-old Sino-Thai businesswoman noted that:

> They work hard and are very responsible. (But) they are very selfish.

Most of the Thai male respondents described Sino-Thai women as "following their traditions" and working to "sell things". One high-status Thai male noted as well that "they dare to express their opinions more than Thai women" and another noted that:

> They follow the man's directions, (but) they always think their ideas are right. And they are very confident that they have a higher status (*thaana*) than Thai. (56-year-old Thai male, retired high-ranking government official)

Thai women described Sino-Thai females as "hard workers" and "good people" who are "well-mannered" and "have to serve their husband's relatives". And, as one high-status Thai woman put it:

> They struggle harder than Thai in work, study, and for their family. They are much firmer than Thai. (28-year-old Thai female psychologist).

Only one of the Thai female informants described Sino-Thai females in negative terms, as "selfish" (*henkaetua*). Sino-Thai men, in general, described their female counterparts in positive terms, as "hard workers", who "like to sell things", are "frugal" (*prayat*), "persevere more than Thai women", and "help their husbands in business". Several Sino-Thai men remarked as well that Sino-Thai women are "well-mannered". Only two (of 15) of the Sino-Thai male informants described Sino-Thai women in negative terms (i.e. "They like the

easy life" [*chawp khwaam sabaay*] and "They are not being faithful to their ethnic background" [*khit phit luumchaat*]).

In describing Sino-Thai women, in general, our Sino-Thai female informants emphasized their tendency to "work hard" and their "sense of obligation" to their family and husbands, although two informants felt Sino-Thai women were "unfeminine" and "not well-mannered".

Religious Beliefs and Practices

Although most Thai and Sino-Thai are Buddhist, the Thai have traditionally subscribed to Theravada Buddhism, while those of Chinese ancestry have followed Mahayana Buddhism. Thus, theoretically at least, the Thai have relied on the *arahant* tradition, while the Chinese have focused on "saviour gods" (Boddhisattva), who deferred their own salvation in order to aid others (Spiro, 1970:60–63; Tambiah 1984). Popular Thai religion includes many non-Buddhist elements, and the Chinese have combined Buddhism with elements of Taoism, Confucianism, and "ancestor worship" to form what is often known as "Chinese folk religion" (Phya Anuman, 1961; Kirsch, 1975; Tambiah, 1970, 1984; Tobias, 1977; Weller, 1987; Wolf, 1974). Today, many Sino-Thai maintain ancestral altars and worship in Chinese temples, but it is common for Sino-Thai to participate fully in Theravada Buddhist ritual and activities (Boonsanong, 1971, Somboon 2530 B.E. [1987]).

Research on Thai popular religious belief and behaviour has tended to focus on "merit" and "merit-making" activities (Bunnag, 1973; Ingersoll, 1975; Phya Anuman, 1961; Tambiah, 1968). While somewhat analogous beliefs have been reported for China, merit has not been as central to Chinese religion as it has been to Thai religious belief (Brokaw, 1991).

A good deal of variation is found among Thai concerning Buddhist merit (Basham, 1987, 1989a; Suntaree, 1985). When asked "(d)o you believe in merit?" (*khun chya nay ryang 'bun' may*), 65 percent of the Bangkok Thai informants expressed belief, 9 percent said they did not believe, and 26 percent either were uncertain or expressed only a partial belief. The Bangkok Sino-Thai informants offered similar responses: 72 percent said they believed in merit, 9 percent did not believe and 19 percent expressed uncertainty or partial scepticism. Most informants who said they believed in merit explained

their belief in terms of "traditional" Thai culture: e.g. "if you are Thai, you have to believe in merit" and "(o)ur ancestors told us that if you do good, you will receive good; if you do bad, you will receive bad" (*tham dii day dii tham chua day chua*).

It was also found that high-status Bangkok Thai women were less likely than their Sino-Thai female counterparts to express unqualified belief in merit (50 and 80 percent respectively), and the expressed belief of the Thai females varied inversely with status (i.e. 50 percent of high-status, 60 percent of mid-status, and 78 percent of low-status Thai females expressed unqualified belief in merit), while among Sino-Thai women those of high status were most likely to assert belief in merit.

Among the Thai male informants, those of high- and mid-status were more likely than those of low-status to assert clear belief in merit; however, they were also more likely to state that they did not believe at all in Buddhist merit. In contrast, expressed belief in merit among the male Sino-Thai sample varied inversely with status (i.e. 40 percent, 80 percent, and 100 percent, for high-, middle-, and low-status individuals, respectively).

Although most Western scholars have stressed that the Thai believe those who hold political and economic power owe their position to the accumulation of Buddhist "merit" (*bun*) in this and/or in previous lives, this research suggests that there are serious flaws in this assumption (Basham, 1987, 1989a, 1992). In response to the query "(d)o you think people with authority are people with merit?" (*khun khit waa khon mii amnaat pen khon mii bun may*), only 35 percent of the Bangkok informants agreed that those holding positions of authority were, indeed, "people with merit", while 45 percent denied that this was the case. The remaining 20 percent of the informants were uncertain and offered explanations such as the following:

> One cannot always be certain. It depends on the situation and the individual. Some (people) might be able to create power for themselves. (30-year-old male Sino-Thai company manager)

The Thai female informants were least likely to agree that those with political authority "had merit", followed in order of increasing acceptance of the merit-power nexus by Sino-Thai males, Sino-Thai females and Thai males.

It is useful to note that in response to queries concerning the nature of merit (such as, "merit is..." [*bun khyy* ...] and "a person who has merit is one who..." [*khon mii bun pen khon* ...]) the informants tended to stress that merit is manifested in physical and psychological happiness, rather than in status, material goods and authority (Basham, 1989a). This view of merit was common to all groups, and was especially characteristic of the female informants.

When informants were asked "(w)hich is more important in helping a person gain authority, good fate or money?" (*rawang bunwaarsanaa kap nguntraa an nay mii khwaam samkhan taw kaan thii ca chuay hay bukkhon mii amnaat maak kwaa kan*), they responded overwhelmingly: "money". Seventeen percent of all respondents replied that good fate was more important than money in obtaining a position of authority, while 61 percent thought money more important than good fate. High-status Sino-Thai women and Thai women were most likely to nominate good fate over money as a key to obtaining authority.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the Bangkok Thai and Sino-Thai informants in matters of Buddhist merit-making lay in different assumptions as to what actions were most effective in producing merit. When asked "(w)hat is the best way to make merit?" (*tham bun withii nay thyngca dii thiisut*), the Thai were most likely to nominate the offering of food to monks, visiting a temple, offering financial support to a temple or helping to build a temple, while the Sino-Thai stressed "helping others" and "giving charity" as the best ways of earning merit. Few Thai females even mentioned charity as a way to make merit; indeed, one very high-status Thai female made a point of insisting that giving charity was not the same as making merit: "(for example), donating to a hospital is charity; it is not making merit". The emphasis on making merit by giving charity was particularly strong among Sino-Thai females, constituting 58 percent of their responses. In a typical reply, a 27-year-old female Sino-Thai businesswoman said that one can best make merit by "helping those who really need help. Once they are strong enough, they can really help themselves".

Even Sino-Thai females who emphasized making offerings to monks, acknowledged the role of charity in merit-making:

> I, myself, make merit with the monks. I would donate charity to the poor if my financial situation were good enough. (52-year-old housewife)

While a number of Sino-Thai male informants noted the merit-making efficacy of building a temple, or making offerings for a temple, none nominated making offerings directly to monks as the best way of making merit. Interestingly, Thai females were alone in stressing the importance of "good behaviour" and "sincerity" in merit-making (such responses accounted for 20 percent of the Thai female replies).

Not surprisingly, the Thai male informants were more likely to have spent time in the monkhood than the Sino-Thai men interviewed: 63 percent of the Thai men had been monks, while only 40 percent of the Sino-Thai males had ever entered the monkhood. The Thai informants were much more likely as well to have had fathers and other relatives who had been monks. Although none of the Bangkok informants had been in the monkhood for more than one Lenten season (*phansaa*), 44 percent of the Thai males had spent an entire Lenten period as a monk, compared to just 20 percent of the Sino-Thai informants. However, most Thai who had been monks had been civil servants at the time they entered the monkhood and, thus, were eligible for special leave. When those who worked for the government were omitted from consideration, there was little difference between the two groups in terms of their participation in the monkhood.

Political Authority and Democracy

The widespread perception of public officials as individuals who do not derive their authority from religious sanction begs the question: how do persons in authority acquire and legitimate their authority?[2] Connections, skill and luck were the most common explanations advanced by the Thai informants to account for an individual's acquisition of political authority (as well as for unsavoury forms of influence [*itthiphon myyt*]). Some informants pointed to the following advantages of having connections:

> These days, in Thailand, you have to have connections. You don't have to have knowledge — you can still go far. (40-year-old male Thai gambler and "fixer")

> You have to have a clique to help you in your work and help you advance. Connections give you support. (55-year-old male Thai Police Colonel)

Most, however, commented negatively on the importance placed on connections in Thai society (negative replies outnumbered positive ones by a two-to-one margin). This was true for both Thai and Sino-Thai informants, although Sino-Thai males and Thai females were slightly less likely to offer blanket condemnation of those with connections than were Thai men and Sino-Thai women.

Several informants offered detailed, and poignant, accounts of personal abuse which they experienced at the hands of well-connected individuals. Most commonly, however, informants complained that people with connections gain an unfair advantage over others, although many acknowledged that the exigencies of everyday life force people to rely on whatever connections they can muster:

> Connections, these days, are very important. If you don't have connections, then, for example, you have to pay money to have your child accepted into a good high school. I had to pay 50,000 baht to get my child into (a good school). If his grades were higher, though, I would have only had to pay 30,000 baht. (32-year-old female Sino-Thai bookstore owner)

The Bangkok informants acknowledged generally that "knowledge and ability should be better than connections", and that they are "better for society", but asserted that "one cannot compare one who has education and ability with one who has connections" as "the (one) with connections is better off". As one informant said when referring to people with education and ability who lack connections: "I like them and sympathize with them very much, but they cannot compete with those who have connections".

The subject of the capable, educated individual who is unable to find worthwhile employment due to a lack of the requisite connections was a common one; a number of the informants in fact held jobs for which they were overqualified. One Thai female informant sought to achieve upward mobility by building a network of individuals whom she met through her employment at a local hospital. She showed me with pride the large file of business and index cards that she had accumulated and which she sought to use when she needed a favour or had one to bestow.

Although there is a great deal of mention of democracy in schools and in the media, and Thailand has long had more or less regular elections, the concept of democracy seems poorly understood by most Thai. Only 21 percent of the Bangkok informants offered definitions

of democracy which suggest self-government by the citizenry, as reflected in such comments as "democracy gives citizens freedom and the right to vote", "it follows the will of the majority", and "the highest authority comes from the citizens". Definitions of democracy which were in accord with the principal Western definitions of the term were offered most frequently by Sino-Thai males (40 percent), Sino-Thai females (18 percent), Thai females (17 percent), and Thai males (13 percent), in that order. Most commonly, the Bangkok informants felt that democracy merely involved personal rights and freedom, e.g. "democracy is freedom within the law", and "democracy gives freedom to everybody; anything that we can think of doing, we can do it" (Basham, 1993). In any event, only a minority of informants felt that Thailand was a democracy and many of these had offered incorrect definitions of democracy.

Discussion

In his study, *Chinese-Thai Differential Assimilation in Bangkok*, Boonsanong Punyodyana (1971:47) argues that "the task of defining a Chinese and a Thai person is not an easy one". Although in most instances this is not the case, it is certainly true at the margins. And, of course, when one is attempting to distinguish Sino-Thai and Thai, rather than Chinese and Thai, the task is if anything more difficult. The challenge of isolating these two groups for the purposes of study is made more difficult by the permeability of all levels of Thai society, by the situational nature of many expressions of ethnicity (which often includes quite conscious "passing" of Chinese for Thai), and by the tendency of middle- and high-status members of Thai society to approximate Chinese phenotype, especially in Bangkok. Since many individuals of predominantly Chinese ancestry would consider themselves as Thai in all contexts (and would be considered by most Thai as being Thai), there is room for honest disagreement as to whether or not it is useful to consider them as Sino-Thai. By my definition such individuals as Luang Wichitwathakan, Phya Anuman, and Sulak Sivaraksa, would be considered Sino-Thai. Others might well dispute the appropriate ethnic category for all or some of these individuals.

In any event, it is readily apparent to any observer that much of Thailand's wealth and commercial activity is monopolized by people of Chinese background. Most large companies are owned and directed by the Chinese or Sino-Thai and the majority of

businesses and shops in the central business areas of Thai cities and towns are owned and managed by individuals of Chinese background. Many small shops also display Chinese ancestral altars in addition to a Thai Buddhist shrine (although, as Purcell [1965:35] noted for the Singapore Chinese, these ancestral altars serve more to "memorialize" ancestors than to join together a corporate lineage). Even at the smaller end of the commercial sector, where capital investment is low and hired employees few, Chinese are still well represented. This pattern of Chinese dominance in commercial and professional employment is, of course, scarcely unique to Thailand: it is, or has been, the norm throughout Southeast Asia. What is unusual is the relative lack of resentment which it has engendered in Thailand in comparison with neighbouring states such as Malaysia and Indonesia (Basham 1983; 1989b).

The low level of resentment towards Chinese economic dominance is not the result of an inability on the part of "real" Thai to take note of it or to perceive ethnic differences. What is lacking among most Thai, however, is a sense that there is anything inherently wrong with such differences, or that the Chinese or Sino-Thai act unacceptably as a distinct, self-interested community.

Certainly, the Thai do not generally perceive ethnic differences as sufficient cause for social factionalism. Interviews conducted in Bangkok, Ubon and Chiang Mai showed that, while both Chinese and Sino-Thai were perceived to be distinct culturally from the Thai, many of these cultural differences were admired by the Thai. Thai informants tended especially to praise those of Chinese ancestry for their perseverance and hard work, and to regret the relative absence of these character traits among the Thai. Additionally, most Thai admired Chinese tendencies "to try to improve themselves", and to "maintain relationships with each other (unlike Thai)". Even the widely acknowledged greater prosperity of the Chinese did not seem cause for ethnic friction. Indeed, the Thai almost universally attributed such differences to Chinese patterns of "hard work, enthusiasm, perseverance, and goal-orientation", in contrast to what many informants claimed was a Thai tendency to "earn 20 baht and spend 25", or to "live hand-to-mouth" in an "easy-going, unenthusiastic, and lazy" manner.

While such stereotypes may exaggerate the actual situations of the Thai and Sino-Thai, and ignore the many exceptions, they are

reflected in differing world views. Thus, the Sino-Thai informants were more likely than the Thai to argue that "in order to succeed in life" one had to persevere, struggle, and work hard to achieve their goals. Stories of successfully completed acts of achievement were more characteristic of Sino-Thai than Thai protocols on Card One (the "achievement card") of the TAT. And the Sino-Thai were more likely than the Thai to stress the importance of family solidarity and support of parents in old age.

When the Thai criticize the Chinese, their concern is almost always with social manners. Here, Thai women are most likely to monitor the social behaviour of the Chinese and find it lacking. Not surprisingly, they place the greatest value of all groups on good manners, comportment and decorum. On those relatively rare occasions when they refer to the Chinese in pejorative terms (such as "Chink" [jaek]), it is invariably because the individual has violated customs of proper manners or etiquette. And of all groups other than Thai women, the Sino-Thai women — and, especially, the middle- and high-status Sino-Thai women — are most sensitive to charges of being ill-mannered.

Thai emphasis on the importance of public display of good manners is reflected in the Thai language, with its politeness particles and levels of politeness in the choice of vocabulary. It is also evident in the tendency for the Thai to judge the movements of others according to what might be termed "motoric morality," in which one's pattern of physical movement serves as a crucial indicator of one's social status and moral state. Not only does refined comportment serve to signify that one was reared in a good family of high status, it also serves to draw a line between those who merit respect by virtue of personality and upbringing and those who may have acquired the accoutrements of relative prosperity without entitlement to the social status normally appropriate to such material wealth.

Such standards are quite rigid, as they must be in a society in which vast differences in status have not been reflected traditionally in commensurate differences in wealth. Even today, high-status Thai often gain paltry remuneration from their employment, income which can be surpassed easily by one with business prowess alone, or by one who chose to engage in illicit activity. Thus, often a prostitute will possess sufficient income to press a claim for acceptance as a middle-class individual — especially in fleeting encounters of a

commercial nature — but will find her efforts undermined by at best a partial comprehension of appropriate modes of motoric behaviour: she will literally not know how to hold herself. Additionally, many wealthy Chinese and Sino-Thai have accumulated wealth but have not sufficiently internalized the appropriate patterns of motoric behaviour to enable them to translate their wealth into genuine social acceptance by Thai.

Well-mannered Thai should move in a fluid and graceful manner; above all their movements should not produce noise. The Chinese who move noisily, and in a quick and jerky fashion, are regarded with varying degrees of distaste and amusement. Indeed, one of the easiest ways to judge at a distance whether an individual is likely to be regarded as a Chinese or a Thai is to observe their walk. Unacculturated or partially acculturated Chinese move with emphasis on the lower half of their body, as if they learned to walk on roller skates, in contrast to the Thai tendency to divert attention away from the legs to the torso.

When sitting, Thai women must take care not to draw attention to their legs or feet, which should be held in such a way as to minimize attention to them under all circumstances; they must never place their feet on a chair seat or sit with their legs apart. While moving and sitting, the Thai should avoid extending or flailing their extremities. If arms and legs need to be extended, such movement should be slow and graceful and avoid emphasizing the lower portion of the body. In general, movements should be both auditorially and visually "quiet".

Those of Chinese ancestry who learn to speak Thai as native speakers and develop a deep understanding of Thai culture, but who fail to conduct themselves according to a Thai sense of motoric morality, continue to be regarded by the Thai as Chinese. Their compatriots who develop full linguistic and cultural competence as Thai and hold themselves as Thai, however, will be accepted as if they were "real" ethnic Thai.

In adopting Thai culture the outsider is not necessarily expected to cast off wholly his own traditions but to incorporate certain aspects of Thai official culture and motoric morality. Thus, Thailand's acculturating Chinese have been able to "become Thai" while retaining much of their Confucian heritage and work ethic. Many of these individuals have "become Thai" while harbouring rather negative stereotypes of "real" Thai. Such negative attitudes towards

ordinary Thai people and their culture, however, have for the most part been tempered by a positive orientation towards an idealized, elite Thai culture to which they aspire.

At school, Thailand's ethnic Chinese are exposed to Thai official culture and to the very real sense of pride the Thai have in it. As a result, many Chinese and Sino-Thai children begin to feel vaguely ashamed of ethnic Chinese customs, and especially of Chinese manners and their parents' lack of a Thai sense of motoric morality. This seems especially true of middle- and high-status Sino-Thai women who often become deeply attached to Thai culture. At school, and in their everyday encounters with the Thai, however, the Sino-Thai find that their own efforts to comport themselves as Thai gain them acceptance as Thai. This combination of a self-confident sense of expressive cultural superiority on the part of the Thai and an eagerness to accept the Chinese who conform outwardly to Thai standards of behaviour is ultimately very difficult to resist. Ironically, it often leads not to true acculturation and assimilation, but to the preservation of largely Chinese minds within Thai bodies.

NOTES

*The transliteration of Thai words in this chapter is based on the *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association*, 1999. Minor changes of the symbols were made here, due to the limitation of the computer fonts.

1 The interview consisted of 36 topics (and a number of sub-topics) including religious beliefs and practices, family life and attitudes, ethnic knowledge of Thai and Sino-Thai behaviour, esoteric and exoteric stereotypes, issues of political organization and legitimacy, attitudes and ideas of achievement, and characteristics of male-female relations. Although the interviews were structured, they were open-ended and non-directive (in the psychological sense of the term). The interviews varied from less than an hour to more than two hours in duration, depending on the extent to which an informant wished to elaborate. In all, 66 individuals were interviewed in Bangkok: 16 Thai males, 18 Thai females, 15 Sino-Thai males, and 17 Sino-Thai females. These informants were selected to be as representative as possible of the Bangkok population according to social status (variation in sample sizes resulted from our attempt to achieve as representative a sample as possible, coupled with our commitment not to skew our results by discarding interviews).

2 A number of the topics raised with the Bangkok informants concerned issues of political authority and democracy. These included questions which asked informants to comment on "people with connections..." (*khon thii mii sen*), "democracy is..." (*prachaathippatay khyy...*), "is Thailand a democracy?" (*prathet khong raw [prathet thay] pen prachaathippatay ryy may*), "When an ordinary citizen is in the presence of a superior government official, he will

feel..." (*mua prachaachon thuapay yuu tawnaa khaaraatchakaan phuuyay khaw ca rusuk*...), "when the senior government official gave an order to his subordinate to carry out, but the subordinate knew that the order was against regulations, he..." (*mua khaaraatchakaan phuuyay awk kham sang hay luuk nawng patibat tae luuk nawng ruu waa kham sang nan may thuuktongtaam rabiap khaw*).

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6

Left Behind by the Boom: Chinese Merchants in Provincial Thailand in the Era of Rapid Economic Growth

Michael J. Montesano

The rapid growth of the Thai economy from the mid-1980s and the increasing share of manufactured goods among the kingdom's exports changed the image of business in Thailand. Unprecedented confidence in the strength of the Thai economy engendered a new respect for the businessman. And, as the vast majority of Thailand's business leaders are ethnic Chinese by one definition or another, this new respect has represented the local Thai manifestation of the Chinese triumphalism central to the concept of "Greater China" that gained currency in Asia with the onset of widespread rapid economic growth in the second half of the 1980s.

In Thailand, no less than elsewhere, this triumphalism was poorly focused. Local Chinese finance, business and industry did indeed take the leading domestic roles in the economic progress of the decade after 1985. But these interests and their path to success have been exceptional. To celebrate the role of Chinese business *per se* in Thailand's economic growth is to obscure more than one illuminates. Such celebration asserts an at least implicit continuity from the rather small-scale commercial pursuits in which the majority

of the Chinese in Thailand has earned its livelihood from, at the latest, the late 1940s to the big business and finance that dominated the booming Thai economy of the early 1990s. Nor has this assumption of continuity always remained implicit. The distinguished Thai historian and cultural critic Nithi Iawsiwong has, for example, asked rhetorically:

> ...(I)sn't it the persistence of the merchant culture of the *chek* in Thailand that has made the present Thai economic system enter into the commercial expansion that one sees in the present? (Nithi, 1994:92)

The word "*chek*," a derogatory term for Chinese, connotes cunning in commerce and uncouthness in manners. Recently, a number of writers treating the Chinese in Thailand have begun to give it an ironically positive spin. We may count Nithi among those writers. But are they justified? Is there in fact continuity from the habits and values of these *chek* — what Nithi calls their "merchant culture" (*watthanatham pho kha*) — to those that account for the boom that Thailand has enjoyed in the past decade? Or would greater clarity about the identity, habits and values of the most important bearers of such a culture over the last five decades make the picture appear somewhat different?

The Provincial Commercial Class of Post-1945 Thailand

In the analysis of the historical role of the Chinese in the Thai economy, disproportionate attention has been devoted to the tax farmers of the late 19th century and the finance capitalists of the 1950s and 1960s (Cushman 1989: 223–25 & 241–46). It is all too easy to conclude that those Chinese who have fallen either outside those groups or outside those periods merit interest only insofar as they played supporting roles for or illustrate the origins of those groups. But the large majority of the merchants of post-1945 Thailand — Nithi's *chek* — quite simply does not fit into such a rendering of the history of the Chinese in Thailand. For that rendering neglects the dramatic demographic developments of the decades immediately following the First World War, developments which have continued to shape Thai life into the present period.

In the mid-1950s, G. William Skinner wrote that, "(i)n all probability, at least half of the China-born Chinese living in Thailand today first immigrated during the 1918-1931 period" (Skinner, 1957: 172 & 174). Skinner estimated that that period saw an immigration surplus of some 500,000 Chinese; his estimates for the 1882–1917 and 1932-1955 periods were 450,000 and 250,000, respectively (*ibid.*:172). While dramatic agricultural, social, political, and military factors combined to offer a strong "push" to emigrants from south China (*ibid.*:174), Siam's "pull" resulted from much more mundane circumstances. Skinner summarizes these as "a boom in rubber and tin production in South Siam, further expansion in rice milling and sawmilling (*sic*), a rapidly expanding foreign trade, and a resumption of railroad construction" (*ibid.*).

Within a decade and a half, the first international economic depression and then world war would slow this migrant stream (*ibid.*:174 & 176). By that time, however, the 1918-1931 influx had begun to leave its mark on Siam in a number of ways. First, it slowed the rate of Chinese assimilation to Thai norms and identity (Skinner, 1960: 409). Second, it boosted the percentage of Teochews and Hakkas among the China-born residents of the kingdom (Skinner, 1957: 178-180) and thus magnified the role that members of the former speech-group in particular would play in determining the character of mid- and late 20th-century Thai Chinese life. Third, and of most immediate interest in the present context, it permitted the peopling of the provincial market centres which were assuming new importance in these same interwar decades.

In the four decades from 1910, the Thai rice economy expanded more slowly than had been the case in the five decades of extremely rapid growth after 1860. And yet it was the later period that saw the process of consolidation or "filling in" of patterns that had first emerged during the earlier one (Somphop, 1989: 47 ff. & 70 ff.). The establishment of numerous commercial rice mills in provincial Siam was among the distinguishing features of this process. From the middle of the 1910s, as provincial mills came to share the kingdom's rice crop with the large mills of Bangkok (Ingram, 1964: 104), they served, too, as the anchors of the growing market towns that dotted the rice plains not only of Siam but also of Burma and southern Vietnam by the time of the Great Depression (Owen, 1971: 115).

Specialization in the production of rice for export left Thai

farmers reliant on commercial sources for a variety of other necessities (Robertson, 1936: 246; Ingram, 1964: 117 ff.). In the decades preceding the Second World War, similar patterns of reliance also took shape in those parts of the kingdom whose residents had turned to the cultivation of Pará rubber (Andrews, 1935: 171; Skinner, 1957: 174; Stifel, 1973: 117). The resultant provincial commerce of the interwar period thus represented an expansion of that in which rice traders had earlier carried cotton goods upcountry on their trips to procure paddy (Johnston, 1975: 257–85; Ingram, 1964: 117). But the elaboration of trading patterns resulting from the new scale, scope, and velocity of this commerce brought, from the 1920s, qualitative change to Siamese economic life.

If rice mills served to anchor the provincial market centres of Siam, these centres also offered moorings to clusters of stalls and small shops. These latter functioned, in a newly articulated trading hierarchy, as intermediate points in a distribution system that linked Bangkok with export-oriented agricultural villages. Describing the Central Plains in the mid-1930s, Harvard anthropologist James Andrews wrote that

> ...The goods sold in small villages must have come from the biggest distribution point in large boats to a smaller center (*sic*); and there they must have been trans-shipped to smaller boats and taken to a still smaller center (*sic*). The process goes on... (Andrews, 1935: 174)

Nor, as will become clear below, was this course of development unique to the Central Plains. The interwar period also saw the emergence of new, highly articulated marketing systems for consumer goods in other regions of Siam.

At first, the market towns lying at the nodes of these systems were often simply markets rather than well-realized towns.[1] The complex social and institutional life implicit in the latter term was lacking. And, even in the many cases in which marketing and administrative centres shared a single toponym and general locale, commercial quarters remained spatially and physically distinct from the cantonment-like complexes of government buildings.

Whether as quarters of provincial capitals or as essentially free-standing hubs in rural districts or sub-districts, the market centres

that became such an important feature of Siam's economic — and social — landscape in the interwar period invariably shared the common Thai-language designation of *talat* ("market"). This appellation took in the variety of functions which these centres served simultaneously. Most literally and most basically, the *talat* were the complexes of stalls in which vendors sat for part of each day or week. More generally and — for present purposes — more importantly, *talat* meant the commercial quarters of a town or the clusters of shops ranged around those complexes of stalls. At the same time, the concentration of goods, operating capital and merchants which distinguished these centres was fundamental to the effective functioning of the abstract *talat* or markets that determined the prices that farmers received for their crops and paid for household necessities.

The market centres served, then, as the loci of activities that, in the aggregate, defined the swiftly evolving national economy of the interwar period. The members of the 1918–1931 Chinese immigrant cadre who spread out across provincial Siam in the months or years following disembarkation found themselves in a highly commercialized setting, a rural society made up of farmers rather than of peasants (cf. Redfield, 1956:27). And their arrival would only contribute to still greater commercialization. It was, for example, the arrival of Chinese moving out from Bangkok in the 1930s that gave to the market centre of Talat Phlu the commercial character that would define it for the next half century or more (Galaska 1969: 78-80). Chester Galaska's characterization of this process notes developments common to many such market centres in the same period:

> Areas such as Dalat Plu (*sic*) do not develop out of farming communities in a recapitulation, as it were, of primitive society to modern urban growth. All of the basic skills and occupations represented in the community were already present in other parts of the metropolitan area and were attracted in rather than developing anew in that area... (T)he basic desire to sell something must be rated an important characteristic leading to the development of settlements in a market area. It is the market frame of mind which brings people into an area and eventually has a strong influence on the skills that they pursue (*ibid.*:190–91).

Many of the aspects of the emergence of Talat Phlu as a market centre noted by Galaska typified events under way across Siam in the interwar period. The international migration from China to Siam, for example, represented but the first leg of the journeys made by the members of the 1918–31 immigrant cadre from their home villages to the provincial *talat* in which so many of them settled. And their stays in Bangkok, almost invariably their port of disembarkation (Skinner, 1957:202), might stretch to a number of years before they took the decision to try their luck in the provinces. Naturally, such prolonged stays in the commercial centre of the country, itself home to a large and economically prominent Chinese population, resulted in the formation of personal relationships strong enough to survive the immigrants' migration to other parts of the kingdom. Internal migration might, then, serve as a fundamental ingredient in the formation of commercial networks.

For, as Galaska makes evident in alluding to skills having been "attracted in" to the emergent market centre of Talat Phlu, members of the 1918-1931 immigrant cadre moved out of Bangkok — and often even out of the Central Plains — in search of opportunity. It was precisely because the newly emerging market centres were new that they were so attractive. Nevertheless, the recent immigrant from China who could establish a store or even merely operate his own market stall soon after he reached the end of his migratory trek was exceptional. More often, work for others preceded ownership of one's own undertaking, no matter how small.

It would be a mistake, however, to understand this initial, ideally brief stage in the immigrant's career in a provincial market centre as a period of anonymous labour-for-hire arrangements or to draw a sharp contrast between it and the period of self-employment which followed. Language alone made fellow Chinese his most probable employers. And, in market centres, they were more often than not his only possible employers.[2] Further, new immigrants commonly left Bangkok for locales in which they could work for blood relatives or for bearers of their surname with whom distant or fictive kinship relations had been activated. In all of these cases, and not least because the Chinese populations of even the most important provincial market centres were relatively small and densely concentrated, new arrivals who entered the employ of others began a process of assimilation both to the society and to the ethic of the talat in which they would make their careers.

By most measures that society and that ethic were highly successful. The robust domestic commerce of prewar Siam and postwar Thailand offered opportunity for the majority of the members of the 1918–31 immigrant cadre to support themselves through independent market activity by the mid-1950s (Szanton, 1982: 517). They became the *chek* traders to whose "merchant culture" Nithi assigns so much importance. As this culture, this market ethic, manifested itself among the traders of Talat Phlu, it meant, according to Galaska, that "(t)o have a home and to be self-employed, to have a family and a source of income for savings, to be part of a neighborhood, and to worship at a local temple was to be established" (Galaska, 1969: 236).

Galaska attributes this set of priorities to values brought from China (*ibid.*). The role of their Thai experience in shaping the society and the ethic of the merchants who emerged from the 1918–31 immigrant cadre is accorded little significance. To take the value attached to self-employment as a case in point, however, both history and logical parsimony suggest an explanation that does not depend on this sort of recourse to Sinology. In fact, "self-employment" is itself a misnomer. Both the strangers and kinsmen who hired new arrivals to the market towns of interwar Siam and the new arrivals themselves shared a common understanding of the objectives of the latter: to accumulate the resources to make the transition from labour to capital.[3]

For, in the economic climate of provincial Siam, those who traded on their own accounts stood to reap the greatest gains. Chinese merchants dealt above all in low-value, high-bulk, and minimally differentiated goods. While hard work certainly brought remuneration, the returns which accrued to energy in securing supplies at low cost, to skill in marketing, and to innovation in pricing and credit arrangements motivated the denizens of the *talat*. We shall return to the broader implications of the new arrivals' drive to move out of labourer status below. Here, however, two observations suffice. First, conditions in Siam fully account for that drive; culturalist musings are unnecessary. Second, the real issue is not self-employment at all; ownership of capital was what mattered. And the transition to capital did not necessarily entail the establishment of a new, independent undertaking. The new migrant could also become an equity partner in an ongoing concern. He might even become a partner in the concern for which he had worked, especially in cases in which employer and employee were kinsmen or fictive kinsmen.

The wave of Chinese immigrants who arrived in Siam during the decade and a half between the end of the First World War and the Great Depression represented an aberrational event. Not only did it differ, above all in size and composition, from earlier waves of Chinese arrivals (the blood of many of whom already coursed through the veins of the kingdom's elite by the interwar period), but it also encountered different conditions upon its disembarkation in Siam. In the main, these conditions proved favourable. The increasing complexity of the marketing systems that channelled both consumer durables and non-durables to cultivators of rice and rubber offered to the members of the 1918–31 immigration cadre the chance to emerge as the principals of a market society unprecedented in Thai history.

But, no different from the cadre of immigrants that took advantage of it, that chance was aberrational. While it was evident from the late 1940s that members of that cadre defined the merchant populations of hundreds and hundreds of *talat* across Thailand, by the mid-1950s the relative social mobility characteristic of the preceding three or three and a half decades had begun to wane (Szanton, 1982: 517–18). Just, then, as Chinese immigration to Thailand had in effect come to an end after the military victory of Communist forces on the Chinese mainland in 1949, so too did the movement of Thai Chinese into commerce slow considerably a few years later. In combination, these two developments gave those members of the 1918–31 immigration cadre who had become merchants and their commercially oriented offspring lasting importance. They dominated commercial life in the market centres of Thailand across the three or four decades from the late 1940s. Their market society and its market ethic, both shaped by and shapers of the *talat* to which these immigrants came and in which they prospered, ordered the most common form of commercial activity in Thailand.

Far more than the "itinerant peddlers" and "small shopkeepers" whose role in the provincial commerce of early 20th-century Korea Bruce Cumings has described so dismissively (Cumings, 1981: 17), members of the 1918–31 cadre of migrants from China to Siam occupied a position of real economic importance. As long as the kingdom remained first and foremost a specialized and commercialized producer of agricultural goods for export, the merchants who served as channels of basic necessities and consumer goods to farmers were fundamental to the success of the national economy. Their numbers, their direct interdependence with the

producers of the goods on which that economy was based, and their literal ubiquity worked, by 1950 at the very latest, to raise the market society of these merchants to the status of Thailand's pre-eminent market society.

The habits and inclinations produced by and productive of the market society of the 1918–31 Chinese immigrant cadre began with its members' migration experience itself. Having disembarked in Bangkok, the members of this cadre moved out to provincial market centres in search of economic-cum-commercial opportunity. They were, however, poor — often truly destitute — at the time of that move. As noted earlier, then, they most often worked as labourers for fellow Chinese in the period immediately following their arrivals at provincial market towns.

Saving, the accumulation of capital for productive purposes, was the clear prerequisite to entering trade and taking advantage of the opportunity that had drawn these migrants to the provinces. This route from labour to capital, by which those members of the 1918–31 immigrant cadre who settled in the market centres of provincial Siam "typically" became traders, had signal implications for the market society to which, by becoming traders, they both submitted and contributed. This specific pattern of accumulation also helped account for the importance of that society to the national economy.

As these traders had devoted themselves to the accumulation of capital even while they were still labourers, they were clearly disinclined to revert to petty commerce after making the transition to trader. Instead, continued capital accumulation — whether to enable them to buy partners out, to establish themselves independently of partners, to expand the scale of their undertakings, or to diversify into new undertakings — characterized their commercial strategies. Saving proved an enduring form of behaviour, the mark of these merchants' commitment to capitalism from the earliest stages of their careers in Siam/Thailand.

In another way, too, this cadre's migration experience marked its market society and the accompanying market ethic. Once established as merchants, its members looked back up the routes that they had followed to the market centres in which they settled to develop commercial connections. Their access to business networks was not in any way automatic; rather, it reflected a particular sequence of events.

No less than their migration experiences, the market towns in which the members of the 1918–31 cadre settled influenced their market society and that of their offspring. These centres owed their prosperity and the commercial opportunity that it implied to their location in regions devoted to highly commercialized export agriculture and to their functional relationship to the agricultural economies of those regions. They proved a profitable setting for even relatively small-scale traders. The merchant willing to compete energetically in the sale of basic goods to the agricultural populations of the surrounding countryside could prosper handsomely. But prosperity in trade depended on having a stake to wager, on being able to buy low and sell high on one's own account, on having personal equity. And greater equity made possible higher profits. However, as the arenas in which they pursued most of their activities were the rather circumscribed market centres in which their shophouses stood side by side with tens of others, purely individualistic capitalism was impossible. Members of a community and their children were called on to socialize and cooperate with the other Chinese merchant families of their *talat* every day. A pattern of intense social interaction and a related awareness of the modest origins of nearly everyone else in the *talat* emerged. An assumption of egalitarianism characterized the market ethic of this group of Chinese merchants.

In fact, immigrant merchants' transition from labour to capital represented as much an increase in status within the numerically small communities of Chinese that peopled provincial market centres as a transformation of their positions *vis-à-vis* established traders from employee to rival. To be sure, the merchants of the provincial market towns competed against one another. But this competition was, in some sense, delimited by relationships and ties of solidarity born of common residence in the *talat* and of a shared identity relative to the ethnic Thai farmers, lawyers and civil servants who surrounded them and who were not engaged in commerce.

The market ethic of the 1918–31 immigrant cadre proved, as Nithi notes, persistent. So did the society that was its twin. In fact, their persistence was remarkable. Across three or four long postwar decades, they ranked as Thailand's most prominent market ethic and market society, judged by the number of subscribers or members and by centrality to the national economy. And, even in the 1990s, their influence remains both strong and evident in the provincial market centres of the kingdom. But to confuse persistence with

triumph would be a mistake. The market society described above and the success of a particular group of immigrants from China were inseparable. Likewise, ethnic Chinese businessmen spearheaded the boom which brought such growth to Thailand after the mid-1980s. As the following section illustrates, however, this boom coincided with economic conditions discontinuous with those that made possible the economic importance of the members of the 1918–31 immigrant cadre. Two subsequent sections examine the experiences of several members of this cadre and their heirs. These cases suggest that their market society and its defining ethic have proved particularly poorly adapted to the new economic conditions obtaining in Thailand.

The Commercial Environment in the Era of Rapid Growth

By the late 1970s, two basic characteristics had defined the Thai economy for at least a century: comparative advantage in agriculture and overall adherence to a free-trade regime (Falkus, 1991:54; Phasuk, 1992:16; Ammar, 1990:1). For a variety of reasons, including the closing of the land frontier and poor prices for agricultural goods on the world market (Ammar, 1990: 4 & 49; Phasuk, 1992: 10 & 19), Thailand's favourable position as an agricultural producer seemed to erode with remarkable speed in the early 1980s. In fact, a number of signs had earlier pointed to the likelihood of this development. For one, as early as the 1950s rural population pressure had begun to reverse the pattern of relative scarcity of labour per unit of land that had represented one of the bases of the Thai economy for hundreds of years (Falkus, 1991:62). At the same time, domestic capital formation had begun to accelerate in the 1950s and 1960s (Somphop, 1989:204), and the 1970s saw certain segments of the industrial sector begin to look beyond their traditional domestic market and towards foreign markets. Textile and agri-business concerns served as the pioneers in this turn towards manufacturing for export (Phasuk, 1992:19–20). By 1980, while agriculture continued to occupy some three-quarters of the labour force, it accounted for a mere fourth of the gross domestic product (Narongchai *et al.*,1991:4).

In the 1980–85 period, Thailand's exports of manufactured goods grew at a rate of 40 percent a year (*ibid.*: 6). At the start of the

1990s, these goods represented close to 70 percent of total merchandise exports by value, while the contribution of agriculture to that total accounted for less than 30 percent (*ibid.*). Fundamental reform of Thailand's economic-policy environment played little role in stimulating the growth that marked the nation's economy from the mid-1980s (*ibid.*:17). Instead, the relatively passive approach embodied in a phased devaluation of the baht from November 1984 onward defined the effective role of the Thai government (Phasuk, 1992:21–24). And these devaluations only intensified the impact on Thailand of the modified structure of international exchange rates heralded most dramatically by the Plaza Agreement of September 1985 (Fallows, 1994:225; Calder, 1991:6–9). Not only the cost in US dollars but, even more, in Japanese yen of doing business in Thailand plummeted. Investors, both foreign and domestic, responded quickly (Narongchai *et. al.*, 1991:5 & 24; Warr, 1993:51 & 53).

While by no means the only source of Thailand's new comparative advantage in manufacturing for the world market, relatively low labour costs seem clearly to have been the most important one (Narongchai *et. al.*, 1991: 5 & 24). The decline in agricultural competitiveness and the rise in industrial competitiveness have had complementary effects on the Thai labour force. Each has served, whether as a push or as a pull, to hasten the movement of labour out of farming and into manufacturing (Narongchai *et. al.*, 1991: 25–26; Ammar, 1990: 34). In the Thai case, this rather common-sounding process has had a number of particular consequences.

First, given the long history of Bangkok's primacy and the extreme concentration of the nation's manufacturing capacity in the capital (Falkus, 1991:68–69), the increasingly industrial orientation of the Thai economy has, not unexpectedly, only worked to reinforce the degree to which Bangkok dwarfs other centres. Major quantitative indices underline the persistence and even suggest the deepening of Bangkok's functional dominance of Thailand (data in Falkus, 1991:68; also in Rigg, 1991: 134, 150, 157.)

Second, both the general export orientation of Thailand's manufacturing boom and the specific nature of what one prominent observer has called the "star performers in the industrial sector during the 1980s" — "textiles and garments, gems and jewellery, canned tuna fish and toys" (Ammar, 1990: 29) — have meant that linkages

between agriculture and manufacturing have been minimal. Foreign, rather than domestic, demand accounted for Thailand's industrial boom (*ibid.*: 29 & 48). These patterns have brought in their wake an end to decades of success in the alleviation of rural poverty (*ibid*: 41 & 50).

The basic outlines of the Thai economy after the mid-1980s should now be clear. Manufacturing enterprises whose sites lie in the country's single great conurbation have assumed pride of place in Thailand's latest iteration of engagement with international markets. Agriculture, by its very nature a provincial phenomenon, has ceased to define Thailand's relationship to those markets. In a Bangkok of unprecedented wealth, trends ranging from the proliferation of rival chains of all-night convenience stores to the use of mobile telephones to follow investment portfolios on the Securities Exchange of Thailand (SET) have pointed to an intensification of market activities of certain types. The new, industrial economy is doubtless giving rise to one or more new market societies, each with its own market ethic. But it is to the abilities, at times differential, of members of the market society described in the previous section to weather this transition away from the economic order both formative of and formed by that society and its own particular ethic that we now turn.

Teochew Dry Goods Stores in Trang

The fortunes of the Teochews in the southern province of Trang have been tied to the gradual expansion of the domestic transportation and communications networks of Siam/Thailand since the turn of the century. Members of the Hokkien and Cantonese communities whose origins lay in Trang's longstanding commercial links with Malaya (Skinner, 1957:51–52, 110) first encountered Teochews in significant numbers in the second decade of the century, when the latter worked as coolies on the construction of the Southern Line of the Siamese State Railway. In their poverty and ill health, these coolies contrasted markedly with and left a strong negative impression on the already well-established Hokkien and Cantonese of Trang (Thuan interview; Rat and Thipphawan interview).

Few of the Teochews who came to Trang as railway labourers seem to have chosen to stay there. Through the 1920s it remained

impossible to speak of a Trang Teochew community, and those Teochews who had settled in the Trang *talat* faced considerable hostility (Sak interview). The 1930s, however, saw immigrant and first-generation Teochew traders making short-term trips to Trang with goods for sale. Travelling from such provinces up the rail line as Phetburi in northern peninsular Siam, these merchants were scouting for commercial opportunities in an accessible but less commercialized part of the kingdom. The words of a contemporary observer, noting the impact of the growth of the rubber economy of the 1930s on South Siam, offers insight into the atmosphere that they found in Trang: "New towns have come to life, schools have been opened, stores and shops built, and medical centres have been made available" (Landon, 1939: 72). As increasing numbers of itinerant Teochews recognized Trang's commercial promise, they moved there to try to open market stalls or shops of their own (Sanong and Thong interviews).

Among the China-born Teochews that the 1930s brought to Trang were Chia Li and Tou Nguan Tiang. Their arrival launched the careers of two of the most prominent merchant families in postwar Trang. The descendants of Chia Li use the Thai surname Chitmaitricharoen; those of Tou Nguan Tiang go by Tothapthiang. The initial parallels and eventual divergence of the careers of these two families reflect a number of the realities with which the years after the onset of rapid growth confronted members of the 1918–1931 Chinese immigrant cadre to Siam and their offspring.

Chia Li was able, in the course of several years as a coolie in the Trang market, to accumulate sufficient capital to open his own dry-goods store. By the late 1930s, the Chia Meng Huat Store occupied a rented shophouse opposite the Trang municipal market (Uraisi interview). While Chia Meng Huat did offer such goods as salt and sugar on a retail basis, from the time of its establishment an important part of its custom was wholesale distribution to traders active in the markets of other districts and sub-districts of the province (*ibid*).

Within a few years the volume of Chia Meng Huat's business led Chia Li to summon a kinsman, Chia Huai Liak, to help him. The latter had, after his arrival in Siam from China, gone to Ban Don (Suratthani), a railway junction on the east coast of peninsular Siam, in search of work. Chia Huai Liak soon married a China-born Teochew whose mother had a stall in the Trang municipal market. By 1944, he began selling such dry goods as onions, garlic,

and salt from a store of his own in a shophouse behind the market (Hong and Surin Ch. interview). At the same time, he remained a partner in the Chia Meng Huat Store (CRF *Ho.So.Cho.To.Ro.* 4).

The appearance of such enterprises as the Chia Meng Huat and Chia Huai Liak stores in the quarters surrounding the Trang municipal market symbolized the more general prominence of China-born Teochew merchants in the commercial life of Trang by the late 1940s and early 1950s (Rat and Thipphawan interview; Uraisi interview). Two factors accounted for the swift success of these relative newcomers to the province, and both reflected the importance of transportation and communications in the history of the Trang Teochew and of the networks on which they could draw.

On the supply side, merchants such as Chia Li and Chia Huai Liak could rely on close contacts with regular suppliers in Bangkok, whose primacy in the life of Thailand's Teochews parallels its primacy in other dimensions of Thai life. In particular, continuing relationships with Teochew agents in Song Wat, the centre of the Thai dry-goods trade, ensured these merchants access to a source of merchandise beyond the reach of the Penang-oriented Cantonese whom they superseded (Sanong and Surin Ch. interviews).

On the demand side, the consolidation and growth of the Thai rubber economy in the first decade after the end of the Second World War gave hundreds of thousands of people on the western coast of peninsular Thailand larger, steadier money incomes than ever before (Stifel, 1973:117–27). Trang's position on the railroad and the poorly developed state of the road network of the South put it in an advantageous position to serve as a distribution centre for a newly lush market spanning a number of neighbouring provinces (Uraisi, Surin Ch., and Thong interviews; Landon, 1939: 139–40).

Success in the dry-goods trade earned for the Chia Meng Huat and the Chia Huai Liak stores both reputation and capital. Reputation figured importantly in these stores' success in securing "agencies" — really exclusive distributorships — for such processed goods as canned milk, matches, and soap. It lent credibility to their promises regarding volume of sales, made to the Bangkok-based manufacturers or importers of these goods (Surin Ch. and Uraisi interviews). Capital allowed Chia Li, Chia Huai Liak, and their sons to diversify out of the retail and wholesale trades. Ever attentive to the steady disposable incomes characteristic of the region's rubber-driven economy, they invested both in services by becoming partners in two Trang movie

houses in the late 1950s and in processing by bottling and selling their own brand of soda pop in the early 1960s (CRF *Ho.So.Cho.To.Ro.* 15; CRF *Ho.So.Cho.To.Ro.* 24).

Though he followed much the same path as Chia Li and Chia Huai Liak, Tou Nguan Tiang took longer to make his fortune in Trang. Having settled briefly with kinsmen in Ban Don after his disembarkation from China in Bangkok, he arrived in Trang in the late 1930s and became a fishmonger (Surin T. interview). By the late 1940s he entered into partnership with other Teochews who shared the Tou surname to open the Tou Nguan Thai Store, a dry-goods concern similar to Chia Meng Huat and Chia Huai Liak, in a shophouse behind the municipal market (Surin T. interview; *Krom kansonthet* 1949: section 8, p. 6).

The late 1950s and early 1960s saw Tou Nguan Tiang at the peak of his prosperity. Leaving the Tou Nguan Thai partnership to go into business on his own, he operated the Tou Nguan Ki Store. With an agent in Bangkok and a thriving trade in canned goods, cement, and metalware, this store enjoyed a high profile in the Trang market and in the commerce of the region. But an obligation to cover the losses of a friend for whose creditworthiness he had vouched brought about Tou Nguan Tiang's abrupt ruin in 1965; he died not long thereafter. In the meantime, his two oldest sons worked to redeem their family's fortunes and its good name (Suphatra, 1992:32–37; Surin T., Uraisi, and Sawat interviews; *Krom kansonthet* 1957: section 6, p. 56).[4]

It has been noted earlier that having the capital to earn more capital has been at the core of the ethic of postwar provincial merchants and of the society that they built. The activities of the Trang Teochew reflected that ethic. That Tou Nguan Tiang's eldest son, Sutham Tothapthiang, went to work for someone else in the aftermath of his father's financial ruin represented, then, a distinct setback for the family. Working first as a clerk in Yantakhao District of Trang, he spent a year in a similar position with a rice mill in the northern province of Uttaradit and then became a travelling salesman for a maker of seasoning powder.

Tou Nguan Tiang's second son chose, in those same years, to enter petty commerce in foodstuffs in the Trang market. Making and selling noodles and retailing eggs and rice, Surin Tothapthiang assumed, in essence, the life led by members of his father's generation in the years immediately following their arrival in Siam.

By 1970, however, Sutham's widening network of contacts among the rice millers of northern and northeastern Thailand, coupled with Surin's understanding of the rice trade in the rice-deficient South led the brothers into that trade. They opened a new store in Trang (CRF *Ho.So.Cho.To.Ro.* 262). Before long, they had become rice wholesalers whose market covered nearly all the provinces of the lower South, a territory far larger than that served by the Tou Nguan Ki Store at the height of their father's success.

Most of the rice handled by the Tothapthiang brothers never passed through Trang at all. And their decision, in 1975, to go into business with their oldest sister, her husband, and a number of Bangkok merchants (CRF *Bo.Cho.* 1082/2518) purchasing and marketing canned fish under their own label only confirmed their increasing orientation towards national rather than strictly local commerce.

The following two decades saw the Tothapthiang family's business empire grow very fast. Centred on "Smiling Fish" (*pla yim*) brand canned sardines, it came to include, in Trang, a fish cannery, a luxury hotel, a facility to manufacture aluminium cans, and a factory to produce imitation shellfish following the Japanese *surimi* process. In Bangkok and its environs, a maker of ready-to-eat noodles, a trucking firm, and a television production company numbered among its assets (CRF *Bo.O.Cho.To.Ro.* 11, CRF *Bo.O.Cho.To.Ngo.* 133, CRF *Bo.O.Cho.To.Ngo.* 60, CRF *Bo.O.Cho.To.Ngo.* 55, CRF *Bo.O.Cho.To.Ngo.* 85, CRF *Bo.Cho.* 7571/2531, CRF *Bo.Cho.* 1274/2523, CRF *Bo.Cho.* 250/2521, CRF *Bo.Cho.* 2090/2525, and CRF *Bo.Cho.* 60/2529). As the most visible member of the family, Surin Tothapthiang became in 1986 the founding president of the government-sponsored Trang Provincial Chamber of Commerce, organized in compliance with the Prem Tinasulanon government's policy of promoting the role of organized business in Thai public life (*Kong sathaban kankha* n.d. [a]; also, data from Thai Chamber of Commerce).

In its determination to market its "Smiling Fish" brand canned fish nationally, the Tothapthiang family began in the early 1980s to advertise extensively on Channel Seven television (Surin T. interview; Bonsai Group 1991: 279). Owned by the Thai military and managed by a firm controlled by the prominent Thai Chinese Rattanarak family, whose empire centres on the Bank of Ayuthaya, Channel Seven offered nearly blanket coverage of provincial Thailand (McCargo

1993:4; CRF *Bo.Cho.* 575/2510; *Thai rat*, 27 October 1989; Salin interview; *The Nation*, 5 and 9 August 1993). Members of its management team became important investors in Tothapthiang family businesses. And Channel Seven gave Surin Tothapthiang and his activities as chamber of commerce president wide visibility. Even as his family's commercial endeavours became increasingly national in scope, media exposure helped him cultivate a reputation as Trang's most prominent businessman.

And what, in the meantime, of the Chia Meng Huat and the Chia Huai Liak stores? Run by sons of the long deceased Chia Li and Chia Huai Liak who used the surname Chitmaitricharoen (CRF *Ho.So.Cho.To.Ro.* 15), they remained busy wholesalers of canned goods, packaged foods, and household necessities. Improvements in the highway system of southern Thailand served, from the 1970s, to deprive Trang of much of its advantage as a regional distribution point. The creation of national sales forces on the part of Bangkok-based manufacturers and distributors has meant the termination of most exclusive distributorships. Personal relationships with suppliers, so important three and four decades ago, have paled into irrelevance. And, as packaged goods with fixed prices have come to represent a greater proportion of the stores' turnover, profit margins have narrowed; the earlier trade, dominated as it was by dried foodstuffs, offered more opportunity for speculation and more scope for the exercise of commercial skill (Surin Ch. and Uraisi interviews).

Led by Chia Huai Liak's oldest son, Surin Chitmaitricharoen, the children of Chia Li and Chia Huai Liak continued to diversify into such lines of business as producing "sanitary" ice, bottling drinking water, and selling imported liquor (Surin Ch. interview; CRF *Bo.O.Cho.To.Ngo.* 34; CRF *Bo.O.Cho.To.Ngo.* 134). Their focus remained fixed on local marketing opportunities. As Surin Chitmaitricharoen has observed, drawing an implicit comparison with the first two decades after 1945, the family and its enterprises "are not growing, but they are not wanting either" [*mai to tae mai ot*] (Surin Ch. interview).

The *Chao Talat* of Singhburi

While it lies at the northern fringe of the Central Plains, Thailand's rice-bowl, Singhburi straddles both the Chao Phraya and the Noi Rivers (*Samnakngan changwat Singhburi* 1984: 2). Their floodwaters

and a basic network of canals to channel those waters and to facilitate transport integrated the riverine zones of the province into the kingdom's highly commercial, export-oriented rice economy. By the 1930s, the patterns of domestic trade characteristic of that economy had led to the emergence of a network of small, river- or canal-side market centres serving as points of accumulation and distribution for the surrounding rice-plains. In this network, the Singhburi *talat* itself enjoyed no great prominence. If at all, it was distinguished only because it was adjacent to a provincial government seat.

The location of the Singhburi *talat* near the confluence of the Chao Phraya and Lopburi Rivers (*ibid.*) made it a centre of wholesale commerce for the numerous smaller markets along that latter river, many of them across the nearby border between Singhburi and Lopburi Provinces. Traders active in those markets made regular trips to Singhburi to purchase goods that had arrived by the Chao Phraya from Bangkok (Wirat and Charat interviews).

The preparations of the government of Field Marshal Phibun for war to regain, with Japanese assistance, certain "lost" territories from French Indochina led in 1941 to the prohibition of aliens' (*tang dao*) residence in certain provinces and districts deemed strategic or sensitive. Among these latter was Lopburi Province, whose capital Phibun planned to turn into Thailand's most important army base (Skinner, 1957: 270–72).

The exodus of largely Teochew "aliens" who moved the short distance across the provincial line from the small market centres of Lopburi to the Singhburi *talat* gave the merchant community there a critical mass that would remain the core of its economy 50 years later. Their arrival spurred the physical expansion of the *talat*. Rather than resented as potentially threatening commercial rivals, the 20 or 30 families of new arrivals were warmly welcomed by sympathetic fellow Teochews, who felt that local commerce could easily accommodate all of them (Niphon, Ui-yen and Nanthana interviews). In effect, and despite the unique circumstances of these families' migration to Singhburi, the pattern or norm of competition with cooperation characteristic of this market society prevailed. Among the "aliens" whose families prospered with their move to Singhburi and with exposure to the commercial opportunities that it held, the experiences of two who came from the small *talat* of Bang Kham and Tha Khlong along the Lopburi River, Eng Sun Sia and Tang Kim Phuang, exemplify the functioning of that society in this setting.

China-born Eng Sun Sia had worked as a goldsmith in Bang Kham. He opened a new gold shop in Singhburi. The marriage of his son Huang Kua to the daughter of Tang Bou Ki, Singhburi's most prominent goldsmith, reflected the rapid assimilation of the Lopburi group into the market to which it had moved (Kriangchai [Huang Kua], Ui-yen, Niphon and Charat interviews; CRF *Ho.So.Cho.So.Ho.* 120).

By the early 1950s, Eng Huang Kua had begun to emerge as an important Singhburi merchant in his own right. He opened a store to sell cloth. He also carried on his father's craft by running a gold business (Kriangchai interview). Those trades, like the others into which he would diversify, relied for custom on the mainly rice-farming population of the province. Provincial goldsmiths doubled of course as upmarket pawn-brokers. This latter line of work dovetailed neatly with Huang Kua's emergence as a money-lender. And money-lending required many of the same sorts of contacts across the countryside and enforcement capabilities that concessions to distribute liquor demanded. For nearly three decades, starting from the 1950s, Huang Kua served as exclusive provincial agent for the popular "Mae Khong" brand of whisky (Kriangchai and Sommai interviews; CRF *Ho.So.Cho.O.Yo.* 108). He was the nearest Singhburi had to a *chao pho*, or "godfather", by the dawn of the golden age of provincial Thai *chao pho* during the 1980s.[5]

Each of the commercial pursuits of Eng Huang Kua — who in time became Kriangchai Chaiphiphakon, at least for official purposes (CRF *Ho.So.Cho.So.Ho.* 120) — served the steadily growing rice economy of Singhburi Province. The completion in 1956 of the Chao Phraya Dam in Chainat, immediately upriver from Singhburi, opened large areas in the west of the province to rice cultivation for the first time. Indeed, double cropping became feasible in much of Singhburi (Small, 1973:6 ff.; *Samnakngan phanit changwat Singhburi* 1991: 89–96). Cultivators had larger incomes than ever before, and the merchants of the Singhburi *talat* profited accordingly.

The prosperity that characterized the rice economy of postwar Singhburi, and in fact of the postwar Central Plains as a whole, opened up particularly rich and rewarding opportunities for those involved in the construction and building materials businesses. It was in the latter of those trades that Tang Kim Phuang and his most important successor engaged.

Unlike Eng Sun Sia, Tang Kim Phuang had been born in Siam.

His sojourn in China for Chinese-language education, a common practice among the sons of Chinese immigrant families who could afford it, meant, however, that he returned to Siam with the immigrant cadre under discussion here. It also meant that, like the members of that cadre, his status became that of "alien" rather than Thai national. Even before leaving Lopburi, Tang Kim Phuang had counted wood among the goods in which he traded. His arrival in Singhburi occasioned no immediate change in his business, but time and market opportunities would lead him to focus more and more on lumber. Nai Phuang's Lumber Yard (*rong mai nai Phuang*), in a prime location offering frontage not only on the Chao Phraya River but also on Singhburi's principal commercial street, soon became an unmistakable local landmark (Wirat and Charat interviews; *Samakhom chao talat Singhburi* 1985:1).

While the siblings of Tang Kim Phuang undertook a wide variety of commercial pursuits in Singhburi, his nephew by his sister and her tailor husband Ngui Khun Iam went to work at Nai Phuang's Lumber Yard (Wirat and Charat interviews). Wirat Suphawita had been born two years before his family moved from Lopburi's Tha Khlong market to Singhburi. After a decade or so as an employee of his uncle, he established his own lumber yard and construction supply business (Wirat interview; CRF *Ho.So.Cho.So.Bo.* 68; CRF *Ho.So.Cho.So.Ho.* 180; CRF *Ho.So.Cho.So.Ho.* 179). By the mid-1970s, rural Thailand's apparently permanent construction boom was well underway (Anderson, 1977:15). Wirat emerged as a leading member of a new generation of Singhburi merchants.

In the mid-1970s, Wirat joined a group of energetic young merchants in forming a club intended to preserve the communal spirit that they felt had characterized the Singhburi market in which they had grown up at a time when unprecedented prosperity seemed to threaten that spirit (*Samakhom chao talat Singhburi*, 1985: 23–26; *Samnakngan cha changwat Singhburi*, n.d.). By 1985, this club had evolved into the officially registered Association of Singhburi Market Folk, or *Samakhom chao talat Singhburi*, and built an association hall on a prominent site along the Chao Phraya River. Wirat was its chairman. The glossy album issued to commemorate the dedication of this hall opened with photographs and biographies of the leading *chao talat* — market folk — of Singhburi since the 1930s. Wirat's uncle, the deceased migrant from Lopburi Tang Kim Phuang, was given pride of place.

In 1986, when the provincial government promoted the organization of a Singhburi Provincial Chamber of Commerce, Wirat Suphawita numbered among its seven founders (*Kong sathaban kankha* n.d. [b]). In 1992, he became its second president (Singhburi Provincial Chamber of Commerce, 1992; Wirat and Chaiwat interviews). Not only the *chao talat* of Singhburi but now also the bureaucrats in its provincial hall recognized his leadership role in the market.

To Huang Kua, Wirat, and their fellow *chao talat*, however, the early 1990s hardly seemed a time to bask in new-found stature. Instead, they suddenly felt like commercial midgets. Dependent as always on participants in the agricultural economy of the province for their market, the *chao talat* of Singhburi found themselves directly confronting for the first time the resources of a major industrial investor, geared to national and international markets and financed by national and international capital, of the sort characteristic of Thailand in the years of rapid growth.

Despite its proximity to Bangkok, the Thai Board of Investment (BOI) had placed Singhburi in its investment promotion Zone 3. Projects in that zone were eligible for the maximum package of incentives. This consideration, along with the province's abundant supply of water and favourable position on the national electricity grid, led the Shin Ho Paper (Thailand) Company to select a site just north of the Singhburi market between the east bank of the Chao Phraya River and the Asia Highway to build Thailand's first newsprint factory. For raw material, the factory was designed to depend largely on imported waste-paper. A number of South Korean paper and financial concerns, the Bangkok Bank, a holding company controlled by some of Thailand's most established Chinese families, Thailand's largest selling newspaper *Thai rat*, and the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank took equity in this 3-billion *baht* or 120-million dollar project. While its initial focus was the large and growing domestic market for newsprint, Shin Ho Paper's public relations staff spoke repeatedly about the advantages Thailand offered for eventual access to the markets of Indochina, far beyond the rice-lands that surround the Singhburi *talat* (CRF *Bo.Cho.* 1195/2533; Udom Phakkasem 1993; *Krung thep thurakit*, 2 December 1992; *Phu chatkan rai wan,* 30 March 1991; *Thai rat,* 2 October 1991; *Deli niu*, 16 December 1992; *Than setthakit*, 1 April 1991).

Conclusion

In their careers in the market centres of provincial Siam/Thailand, the members of the 1918–31 Chinese immigrant cadre and their descendants both formed and were formed by a capitalist market society of astonishing success. The fortunes of the merchants from the *talat* of Trang and Singhburi discussed here bear witness both to that capitalist orientation and to that success. It is men such as these whom Nithi has in mind when associating the "merchant culture" of the *chek* of the 1945–1985 period with the capitalist boom that left no aspect of Thai life unchanged. And, in fact, members of the 1918–31 Chinese immigrant cadre and their descendants were by no means unrepresented among principals in the firms to which the years of rapid growth presented such opportunities.

Far more often, however, that wave of immigrants and their offsprings have remained small-scale merchants, both in Bangkok and in the provinces, and have not emerged as tycoons engaged in international business or in manufacturing for export. Instead of the continuity for which Nithi would argue, the experiences of Surin Tothapthiang, Surin Chitmaitricharoen, Huang Kua Chaiphiphakon and Wirat Suphawita underline the fundamental discontinuity in Thai commercial life before and after rapid economic growth. That discontinuity, understood in its several dimensions, reflects nothing less than the maladaptation of the market society of the provincial *talat* to the changed circumstances of the Thai capitalist economy.

The market society of the 1918–31 immigrant cadre was both constituted by and constitutive of the locales in which the members of that cadre settled. Provincial market centres like Trang and Singhburi and the merchants active in them played vital roles in the functioning of the national economy, based as it was on the production and export of agricultural commodities. More recently, however, these two market centres and hundreds of others have lost their previous importance in the increasingly industrialized Thai economy. Trang, previously a regional hub, has become a rather remote backwater. Merchants, like Surin Chitmaitricharoen, who basically behave as if Trang has continued to serve as a hub, face relative stagnation, at best. Singhburi, on the other hand, appears to have become the northern fringe of Bangkok's industrial hinterland. While none of its merchants has moved into national or international markets, production for those markets has moved to Singhburi. Wirat Suphawita, Huang Kua Chaiphiphakon, and others in the *talat* may

ultimately benefit from the custom of large numbers of locally employed factory workers. While such a position would resemble that which they have traditionally enjoyed *vis-à-vis* the rice farmers of the province, it would at the same time reflect the end of Singhburi's role as a node of any economic importance in its own right.

In addition, a Singhburi in which local merchants served the employees of large factories would illustrate dramatically the insignificance of those merchants' capital accumulation relative to that of the concerns to which those factories belong. For all the importance of capital accumulation in the market ethic of the 1918–31 immigrant cadre, the profits earned by members of that cadre have proved of little or no importance in the emergence of concerns like Shin Ho Paper, symbolic as it is of Thailand's new, increasingly industrial economy. The scales of the resources involved in each of the two cases are incomparable.

If by counter-example, the case of Surin Tothapthiang only reinforces this point. It was, after all, the failure of his father to protect his accumulated equity that first drove Surin and his brother Sutham onto the course that led to their great success. But, while Surin has chaired the boards of the firms in the Tothapthiang family group and while Sutham only had to forego self-employment briefly, the scale at which those firms have operated reflects the decision to offer considerable percentages of their equity to outside shareholders.

The Tothapthiang family's contacts with outside shareholders has been, in turn, reflective of the kinds of connections that it forged. The market society of the 1918–31 immigrant cadre and its accompanying ethic stressed two sorts of connections, those with other merchants in the same *talat* and those with suppliers in Bangkok. As noted above, those latter connections often dated ultimately to immigrants' sojourns in the primate city before their relocation to provincial market centres. Surin Chitmaitricharoen's case illustrates the gradual attenuation of those ties to Bangkok merchants. As for ties within the *talat*, what is salient is not their strength or their weakness but rather their usefulness. Relative to the sorts of connections forged by the Tothapthiangs, that usefulness in the changed national economic context is clearly limited.

In building his connections to Bangkok, Surin Tothapthiang departed from the usages of the market society that his father had known in two fundamental ways. First, he sought connections not as part of an effort to improve his business in Trang or even in the

region that Trang formerly served as hub. Instead, access to national markets was his objective. Second, as embodied by Surin Tothapthiang's extensive links with Channel Seven, he forged ties, albeit indirectly, to the Thai state. The Tothapthiangs became, in a way that was impossible for their father and for the vast majority of the members of the market society of the 1918–31 immigrant cadre, rentiers. The manner of capital accumulation characteristic of their group of firms has been marked by access to a share of the economic rent flowing from the long-term concession to run Channel Seven. As noted earlier, the Tothapthiangs developed close ties to the firm holding that concession, ties that have, in turn, required some *quid pro quo*.

Surin Tothapthiang's own connections within the Trang market came to seem so weak as to draw comment. Wirat Suphawita, Huang Kua Chaiphiphakon and Surin Chitmaitricharoen have exemplified the basic egalitarianism of the market society in which they grew up. They have enjoyed, as a result, goodwill and respect in their respective *talat*. In the open-air coffee shops for which Trang is famous, however, market folk have exchanged criticism of Surin Tothapthiang with notable keenness. Even if partly or largely motivated by jealousy, this criticism has reflected a market ethic that Surin Tothapthiang so clearly cast aside. Local wags have noted, for example, that his success has been due to his having a financial "*baek ap*" (back-up) in Bangkok rather than to his own business acumen or to co-operation with others in the *talat*. More gravely, however, Surin Tothapthiang has been seen as the sort of man whom, though an acquaintance since boyhood, one must acknowledge first (*tong thak khao kon*) when one runs into him in the *talat*. Having forsaken a shophouse in the market for an air-conditioned executive suite, Surin turned his back, too, on one of the fundamental premises of the ethic of that market. Just as that ethic emerged in response to particular socio-economic conditions, so too will it — albeit with a lag — cease to exist when new social and economic realities have replaced those conditions. For now, however, many of its usages or emphases hold lasting appeal in the *talat* that shaped this society and its ethic and that they simultaneously shaped. Among these usages, as commentary on the activities of Surin Tothapthiang makes clear, is the fundamental linkage between co-operation or egalitarianism, on the one hand, and social solidarity and the way in which it shapes business connections on the other.

That the usages of Thailand's once dominant, capitalist market society can serve as the basis for such criticism of a figure who would seem to have succeeded so spectacularly in the era of rapid growth reveals much about the bout of capitalist expansion recently so evident across East and Southeast Asia.[6] Of Thailand, it is impossible to write, as Cumings has written of Korea, of "the simultaneity of the coming of the market and the rise of industry" and the importance of that simultaneity in determining the form that capitalism assumed as a result (Cumings ,1981:48). Clearly, both Siam's tight integration into the international trade in a number of primary commodities and the structures of production of those commodities ensured that the market reached Siam before industry did. Korea and Thailand represent, then, polar opposites as cases of the relationship between the emergence, on the one hand, of markets and market society and, on the other, of modern industrial and financial capitalism and the social and cultural changes associated with it.

What the Thai and Korean cases share with one another and, one assumes, with most if not all the other cases in East and Southeast Asia are the radical discontinuities marking the passage from earlier economic ethics to those appropriate to new realities. In contrast to that of the market society of provincial Thailand, the economic ethic of many East and Southeast Asians remained well into the last quarter of the 20th century distinctly non-capitalist and non-market-oriented. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, their regions' centrality to international industrial and financial capitalism required that these East and Southeast Asians faced a difficult question. Where might the constitution of a new, market-oriented, capitalistic economic ethic appropriate to the 1990s and to subsequent decades begin?

Next to such challenges, those facing the descendants of the members of the 1918-1931 Chinese immigrant cadre who settled in the market towns of provincial Thailand looked easy. After all, their economic ethic was already market-oriented and capitalistic. And the error of observers like Nithi in judging that there was in fact no challenging passage for this group to make is also far from extraordinary, for reasons considered above. Yet, as the cases of the merchants of Trang and Singhburi illustrate, this passage has indeed proved harrowing, and it will most likely be negotiated only through generational change. For Surin Chitmaitricharoen chose to send his daughter to Bangkok's English-medium Assumption Business Administration College (ABAC). One of Eng Huang Kua's grand-

daughters holds an American master's degree in business administration. After her graduation, she took a job at one of Thailand's hottest securities firms. And, having worked in banking and with computers in Bangkok, Wirat Suphawita's son left for Ypsilanti, Michigan, also to pursue an MBA. Successful individual adaptation to rapid growth seems certain for all three of these talented young people. Like Sutham Tothapthiang in the immediate aftermath of Tou Nguan Tiang's business failure, however, none of them appears likely to be self-employed. Unlike Sutham, however, they may not work for others only temporarily. Indeed, in aspiring to hold equity in the Thai economy by buying shares on the SET rather than by having their own business, young people like these three demonstrate the manner in which they are both forging and being forged by a new market society, one with its own ethic and without any but the weakest ties to that of their grandfathers.

Notes

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1 Unless otherwise noted, the points developed in this section are drawn from the author's Cornell doctoral dissertation on "The Commerce of Trang, 1930s-1990s: Thailand's National Integration in Social-Historial Perspective." The work of Szanton and Galaska, cited in the bibliography, has also been of paramount importance in shaping the conclusions offered here. And Skinner (1957: 198 ff.) offers invaluable background material on the migration of Chinese from Bangkok into provincial Siam in the interwar period.

2 Accumulation-oriented merchants of, for example, South Asian, Malay and, to some degree, Mon and Shan extraction have also been found in the market centres of provincial Thailand in the 20th century. Their distribution has varied from region to region. And, taken as a whole, their numbers and their apparent fortunes have been dwarfed by those of the Chinese. Ethnic Thai participation in small-scale but non-subsistence-oriented commerce has, perhaps until very recently, been most noteworthy for its tentativeness.

3 In the Central Thai that now dominates market life in provincial Thailand, this process is described with the phrase *sang thana*, "to build up one's condition, means, or status."

4 Unless otherwise noted, the account of the early history of the Tothapthiang family presented in the following pages is drawn from these same sources.

5 *Cf.* Ockey 1992, Chapter IV, for a superb introduction to *chao pho*.

6 It must be noted that, even as most of the provincial merchants among the

descendants of the immigrant generation of 1918–31 have suffered relative commercial marginalization, a number of them have come to enjoy great political prominence. By the late 1980s, these latter figures set the tone for Thai public life at both the national and local levels. Space does not allow discussion of this paradox here; *cf.* Ockey 1992, esp. Chapters III–V, and Montesano, 2000. Consider, too, the case of Banhan Sinlapa-acha, who — as member of parliament for his native province of Suphanburi, Singhburi's neighbour on the Central Plains — assumed the Thai premiership after the general elections of 2 July 1995. This course of events contrasts markedly with that in Malaysia. The parallel commercial and political marginalization of Malaysian Chinese shopkeepers who bear and have been borne by a market ethic similar to that of the Thai Chinese examined here is a *leitmotif* in the work of Heng Pek Koon; *cf.* Heng 1988 and Heng 1991.

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7

Sino-Thai Entrepreneurs and the Provincial Economies in Thailand

Yoko Ueda

In provincial Thailand today, the vast majority of entrepreneurs consist of Sino-Thai individuals,[1] although their consciousness of being Chinese has been declining sharply in recent years. As is the case in many Southeast Asian countries, Chinese immigrants and their descendants have played a crucial role in the economic development of Thailand. Here, the contribution of Sino-Thai individuals to the provincial economies in Thailand will be discussed on the basis of surveys which were carried out in Nakhon Pathom, Ratchaburi, and Nakhon Ratchasima.[2] This will be done by first discussing the present situation of Sino-Thai entrepreneurs in the province, followed by the argument that the continuous internal migration of Chinese people within Thailand has stimulated the growth of the provincial economies. Then it will be shown how provincial Chinese entrepreneurs have tried to increase business efficiency through the use of a large, informal network of personal relationships within the Chinese ethnic community. Trustworthiness or creditworthiness in the Chinese community has been effective in reducing transaction costs and has performed a similar role to price signals in the market in adjusting demand and supply. This point will also be further analysed, where the example of financial businesses will be discussed.

Sino-Thai Entrepreneurs in the Provinces Today: Generation Change and Identity

The Teochew Chinese form the dominant dialect group among today's Sino-Thai entrepreneurs in provincial Thailand. This finding is consistent with those of several other works on Chinese speech groups in Thailand as a whole.[3] According to the research I did in three provinces of Thailand, between 60 percent and 80 percent of provincial business leaders are Teochew Chinese.[4] The second largest group are the Hakka, who comprise from less than 10 percent to about 30 percent of business leaders.

Another interesting feature is that the second-generation Chinese are the largest group among these provincial business leaders, most of whom were born in Thailand, not China.[5] It is noteworthy that a generation change is presently taking place in the provincial business world, however. Power is gradually shifting away from the second generation to the younger third generation. The Nakhon Ratchasima Branch of the Chamber of Commerce, for instance, which is the most influential business association in that province, has been headed and managed mostly by third-generation Chinese descendants since it was established in 1980. This generation change reflects the fact that Thailand has received few Chinese immigrants for decades. Due to the menace of overwhelming communism in China, the Thai government introduced a restrictive policy on Chinese immigration in 1949 which reduced the annual quota for Chinese immigration from 10,000 to 200 (Phuwadol, 1976:181; Skinner, 1957:177–78). As second-generation Chinese continue to age, the shift from the second to the third generation in the business world (and elsewhere) will be further accelerated. In other words, the number of second-generation Chinese who entrust the management of their businesses to their children will increase.

There are explicit differences between second- and third-generation Chinese in Thailand. First, a clear line can be drawn between the second and third generations as regards ability and knowledge of the Chinese language. The number of Chinese entrepreneurs whose first language is Chinese is very small in provincial Thailand today. Entrepreneurs whose first language is Chinese are either first- or second-generation Chinese born in China. In addition, those comfortable in both Chinese and Thai form a minority among second-generation Chinese. Among the interviewees, none of the third-generation Chinese have been eager to study Chinese

as their second language. Instead, they give priority to English, probably for the sake of business.[6]

Most third-generation Chinese thus have very little knowledge of Chinese, even if they have been given Chinese as well as Thai names. It is fair to say that third-generation Chinese in Thailand today have almost totally lost the language of their ancestors.

However, a considerable number of second-generation Chinese have studied Chinese in one way or another. Some have attended a Chinese school for several years in their childhood, and others have studied Chinese through tutorial lessons. Therefore, many of the second-generation Chinese still retain their Chinese sense of values to a much higher degree than is the case with the third generation. This is true even if their first language is Thai and their Chinese language ability poor.

As a result of rigid regulations on Chinese schools by the second Phibun government (1948–57), which feared the expansion of communism in Thailand, the number of both Chinese schools and students of such schools has declined sharply, and all Chinese secondary schools are prohibited, except for two foreign language schools in Bangkok. The Thai government tried to restrict the number of Chinese lessons through a policy of subsidizing only those schools which taught Chinese lessons for not more than six hours per week. It also strengthened control over the Chinese teachers, who were usually sent by the Chinese government in order to educate the Chinese in Thailand (Phuwadol, 1976:167, 175–80; Skinner, 1957:370; Thavi, 1974:128; Watson, 1980:127–28). These discriminative policies made it virtually impossible for Chinese children to master the Chinese language through formal education. Those who were born in and after the 1950s had only very limited opportunities to enter Chinese schools. This explains the negligible number of younger third-generation Chinese who have attended Chinese schools in Thailand.

Besides, the Chinese lacked a strong economic incentive to study the Chinese language because the costs involved in learning Chinese exceeded the benefits derived from doing so. The costs would include the school fees, tutorial fees, and the costs for overseas studies if parents sent their children to foreign countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan for a Chinese education.[7] Hence, after the 1950s, those whose first language was Thai increased in number, and linguistic ability in Chinese probably

yielded less benefits for the Chinese in Thailand than had been the case previously. This was because the wave of new immigrants from China stopped and because the number of Chinese who were born in Thailand increased. The relative importance of Chinese in the international world has also been smaller in the 1950s than after the phenomenal growth in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and later China itself.[8] Furthermore, the Thai culture and religion were acceptable to the Chinese.

In Thailand, most Chinese did not offer a vigorous resistance to government discrimination policies as they had come to appreciate the advantages of learning Thai. As the Chinese people were absorbed further into the Thai population, the values of the parents would have shifted more towards a Thaification. Second-generation Chinese have first-generation fathers who have very solid Chinese cultural backgrounds and who would be more zealous in bringing up their children with Chinese culture, even if they were residing in a foreign country. Second-generation Chinese, however, were Thai-bred and most were born in Thailand. Here, Chinese people in general have been accepted as members of society far more smoothly than has been the case in other Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia. If Chinese people have been subject to little discrimination,[9] it is perhaps natural that those who were born in Thailand and never resided in China start to lose their Chinese identity. Therefore, second-generation Chinese are less enthusiastic about bringing up their children as Chinese, even though they were brought up with Chinese values by their fathers.

Today, the number of third-generation Chinese in Thailand who have received a Chinese education in foreign countries, such as Taiwan, is very small.[10] They prefer an English education for overseas studies. This also indicates that the successful assimilation of the Chinese into Thai society has given them little incentive for studying Chinese, which leads to an eventual loss of their Chinese identity.[11] The mere fact of being Chinese is no longer of as much benefit in local business circles as once may have been the case.[12]

Another substantial difference between second-generation and third-generation Chinese can be observed in their school careers. Many second-generation Chinese received only four years of primary education, or less. Born in poor families of first-generation fathers who had nearly nothing to fall back on when they started to work in Thailand, the second-generation Chinese had no choice but to work

at a young age to help support the family. Therefore, second-generation entrepreneurs achieved success mainly through hard work and personal effort. This is true even in cases where they received financial support from their parents to start their business careers.

This contrasts remarkably with the third-generation Chinese, more than half of whom have received tertiary education according to the survey. Most of the third generation, who are successful in today's provincial business world, were born to comparatively well-to-do families. There was, therefore, no need for them to work when young; some of them in fact were sent abroad to study. A number of the interviewees who are third-generation Chinese had received master degrees in the arts or business administration from universities in the United States, indicating a great upward shift in educational attainment between the second- and the third-generation Chinese. A good education provides better opportunities for new and even joint ventures with foreign companies. Higher education has, indeed, opened new horizons to the younger generation Chinese, even in the provinces.

For provincial businessmen who had received little education, it is evidently hard to communicate with foreigners. Their chances only improve if they can get help from their children who have completed tertiary education. A second-generation Chinese businessman, who started a joint venture with a German company with the help of his children, said he recognized the importance of foreign languages in business. This was why he put his children through post-graduate education.

Another difference between second- and third-generation Chinese can be observed in the methods used to raise capital and expand their businesses. As mentioned, most second-generation Chinese had to work since their childhood because they were born of poor Chinese immigrant fathers. Some started to work by helping their parents' or siblings' businesses, such as the operation of general shops, or by selling miscellaneous goods such as lottery tickets and newspapers. Others left their hometowns to work in Chinese-run shops soon after they finished four years of schooling. With some business experience, they set up their own small-scale businesses with what small amount of money that they had saved, or in cooperation with their parents and siblings. Many successful Chinese entrepreneurs in provincial economies today started their business careers in this way, and have expanded their businesses through hard

work, even if the economic conditions of these second-generation Chinese were better than those of their fathers. However, the situation dramatically altered in the third generation.

Many third-generation Chinese who are outstanding figures in today's provincial economies are not self-made. They have lived in affluence since their childhood and their higher education, such as MBA degrees from universities in the United States, show that the living conditions of Chinese families have improved considerably with time. Some started by taking over businesses that their fathers had already established. Others were granted newly-built factories or branches when they finished their education. Still others operated hotels or factories which their fathers had bought after they graduated from university. These individuals owe their success to a large extent to their families.

If the generation change from the second to the third becomes increasingly apparent, the provincial economies will possibly take on a different look. Signs of change are already showing in Nakhon Ratchasima. The third generation, most of whom have received far more education than their parents' generation, have extended networks in Thailand and beyond, with a majority of these acquaintances made and relationships established during schooldays.

Holding high positions in local business associations also help members of this generation to become acquainted with those who hold responsible posts not only in Thailand but overseas.[13] This is because these organizations, which are now virtually entirely run by third-generation Chinese descendants, usually have main offices in Bangkok and subsidiaries throughout the country.

In Thailand, those who have higher degrees, such as an MBA from an overseas university, are highly respected and valued. In Nakhon Ratchasima, where the number of businessmen who have received tertiary education in foreign countries is limited, it is not unusual for these individuals to be asked to hold important posts in local business organizations. Therefore, the power of provincial business communities will inevitably continue to shift to the highly educated Chinese descendants. This can lead to an expansion of business networks within the provinces and beyond national boundaries.

Migration and its Contribution to Economic Development in the Provinces

In provincial Thailand, Chinese communities were formed through a continuous influx of Chinese people, mainly from Bangkok. In those provinces bordering Bangkok, where waterways from Bangkok were readily available, an influx of Chinese people probably began before the construction of the railway. The Chinese were dispersed widely in Thailand along waterways which extended from Bangkok to the remote provinces. However, the opening of railway lines from Bangkok, which eliminated transportation difficulties, caused a massive migration of Chinese people from Bangkok to rural Thailand.

In the case of Nakhon Ratchasima, which is located 256 kilometres from Bangkok, the number of Chinese immigrants swelled after the railway from Bangkok reached Nakhon Ratchasima in 1900. This railway, which was extended from Ayutthaya, was the first line to reach into the interior of Thailand. Therefore, it is fair to say that Nakhon Ratchasima was an upcountry town which attracted a considerable number of Chinese migrants from Bangkok, and did so earlier than the other remote provincial towns.[14] Shipments of rice to Bangkok increased after the railway reached this provincial town, and this increase in economic activities attracted Chinese migrants.[15]

Frequent migration of Chinese people has constituted a very important factor in the development of provincial economies in Thailand. Research in several provinces suggests that the Chinese have been a highly mobile (and upwardly mobile) people, and their mobility has contributed greatly to the expansion and commercialization of provincial economies.

Research in Ratchaburi Province (Ueda, 1990:63–65), which is located to the west of Bangkok, found that the local textile industry had its origin in small-scale factories which were established by Hakkas who had moved from Bangkok by the latter half of the 1930s. Though small in number, some of these textile companies have developed into a local exporting industry. These Hakka Chinese first learned how to weave textiles by working in Chinese-run textile factories in Bangkok before they moved to Ratchaburi. Another Hakka man had worked as a handweaver in China. This suggests that manufacturing in the provinces was started by Chinese immigrants and the Chinese who had initially gained technical know-how in Bangkok.

The example of the textile industry in Ratchaburi shows that, in provincial Thailand, the production of goods such as fabrics which, in the past, were woven at home was commercialized by Chinese immigrants. The reason that a high proportion of Hakka Chinese were in the textile industry in Ratchaburi might be attributed to the fact that the Hakka Chinese are a minority in the Chinese community of Bangkok. In Bangkok, the textile industry was probably controlled by the Teochew, who were dominant among the Chinese in Thailand. The Hakka Chinese who were eager to be successful in the textile sector would have had little choice but to move to the provinces. Once several Hakka Chinese started textile production in a provincial town, a migration of Hakka Chinese would inevitably follow, expanding the textile industry there.

Another example which shows how provincial economies have been commercialized and diversified by immigrant Chinese is water-jar production in Ratchaburi Province. The production of water jars, which are used for collecting rainwater, has developed into a notable local industry in Ratchaburi.

One of the interviewees mentioned that the first pottery in this province, which produced water jars for sale, was opened by a Teochew immigrant who had been a porcelain-painter in China. After immigrating to Bangkok, he moved to Ratchaburi because of its renown for good clay to make pottery. A number of potters who were employed at his pottery later set up independent potteries on their own. In this way, Ratchaburi has become a centre for water-jar production in Thailand. This case shows that the entrepreneurship of the Chinese immigrants has resulted in industries to produce traditional goods which had been scarcely commercialized before. In addition, judging from the dialect grouping that is evident — the Teochew Chinese in the pottery industry, and the Hakka Chinese in the textile factories in Ratchaburi — the Chinese tended to expand their businesses and recruit employees through ethnic networks. The results of the research in Ratchaburi therefore tell us that local industries in the provinces originated with talented Chinese immigrants well ahead of the 1960s, when the industrialization policy was introduced into Thailand.

The Chinese community in Bangkok has played a key role in dispersing business know-how and techniques to the provinces. Bangkok has been the centre for Chinese immigrants, where they

have exchanged information concerning business opportunities and accumulated experience before their migration to the remote provinces, particularly after the construction of the railways.

In addition, the survey in Nakhon Ratchasima found that the Chinese have also moved rather frequently from one provincial town to another in search of opportunities. This suggests that Chinese people did not hesitate to move in quick response to market requirements, if they were not satisfied with their existing situation, or if they judged the new location to be one that had high potential.

In today's Nakhon Ratchasima, many of the outstanding businessmen were not born locally. They came from Bangkok and various local provinces. In provincial towns such as Nakhon Ratchasima, where army bases are located, one reason for the high mobility of the Chinese was the restrictive policy enforced during the Second World War, where those who were not of Thai nationality had to leave such towns. As a result of these movements, local economies were plunged into confusion and budding industries were, at times, paralyzed.

At the same time, however, this prohibited-areas policy offered a large opening for those who were of Thai nationality, such as the second-generation Chinese born in Thailand, who were prompted to move into these prohibited areas. New migrants replaced the Chinese who had to abandon their businesses in the prohibited areas.

Among the top 10 entrepreneurs in Nakhon Ratchasima (Ueda, 1995:129–39), there are two second-generation Chinese born in Thailand who left their hometowns and moved to Nakhon Ratchasima during the war. One of them came to Nakhon Ratchasima from another provincial town in Central Thailand. He had followed his elder brother who had moved there during the period of the prohibited-areas policy. His family is typical of the newcomers who have taken full advantage of business opportunities newly-created under this policy.

Although the Chinese respond quickly to better economic opportunities and possibilities, it is too early to conclude that the Chinese are the most mobile people in Thailand.[16] However, the survey suggests that the successive Chinese migration, not only from Bangkok to the provinces, but also between the provinces, constitutes an important factor of economic development in provincial Thailand.

Entrepreneurship of Sino-Thai Businessmen in the Provinces

A concentration of economic activities in Bangkok has constituted the most significant feature of the Thai economy. Bangkok has increasingly become the most important economic centre of Thailand since Thailand first joined the world economy in 1855. This is because the Thai economy has grown through expanding exports of primary products, such as rice, since that time, and because the port of Bangkok has been the pre-eminent international port of Thailand.

Bangkok, which is located near the mouth of the Chaophraya River, satisfied the geographical conditions necessary for a good port and was the best access point to Thailand from the sea. This geographical advantage determined the economic concentration in Bangkok, and strongly influenced the direction of economic development in Thailand. Soon Bangkok developed into the transport node of the country. Transportation facilities and networks, which have extended from Bangkok throughout the country, attracted people and business activities to this city. Because the economies of scale generate higher returns on investments in Bangkok, which has larger markets than the provinces, the Bangkok-concentrated economy evolved.

The concentration of political power in Bangkok has been another important factor which strengthened the economic competitiveness of Bangkok. Since the end of the 19th century, when the basis of the contemporary political system was laid, Thailand has had a highly-centralized administrative system. Important decision- and policy-making have been mostly carried out in Bangkok by central government agencies. This centralization of political power in Bangkok has given Bangkok-based entrepreneurs an advantage over their provincial counterparts in seeking political patronage.

One of the most explicit examples is the intimate relationship that developed between army officers and Sino-Thai bankers in Bangkok during the period 1958 to 1973, when Thailand was governed by a military-dominated authoritarian government. Military officials, in exchange for rewards offered by commercial bankers, provided these bankers with protection from competition during this period. Since 1965, when the Asia Trust Bank was established, no new banks were approved for about three decades.[17, 18, 19] Besides commercial banks, some big business groups grabbed the opportunity

to expand their businesses by establishing close relationships with influential political figures. It would be wrong to attribute the success of today's big business groups solely, or even in a large part, to their political connections. However, at least until 1973, when Thailand saw the development of electoral politics which enabled provincial wealthy businessmen to seek political connections by launching into politics, Bangkok-based businessmen were far better positioned to acquire large returns ("rents") through close relationships with politically influential figures.

Although provincial entrepreneurs faced many disadvantages in the Bangkok-concentrated economy and politics, the survey in Nakhon Ratchasima showed that they made the best possible use of the advantages which the small local community enjoys. Networks based on reputation and creditworthiness among local Chinese businessmen constituted one such advantage. Trustworthiness and reputation can be established through the close and concrete relationships that are easier to maintain in small circles than in large cities. In Bangkok, where the market is large, the impersonal and anonymous extended order of market mechanism became the dominant force.

The principle of community, that is relationships based on mutual trust, plays an important role which neither market nor government can fill. It supports instead both market and government, and overcomes the limitations of their mechanisms. In small communities, intense person-to-person informal networks function as a means of transmitting information necessary for trading between individuals, just as the price mechanism does in the market. Members in small communities, for instance, are able to acquire information, at a very low cost or virtually no cost, about the creditworthiness of other members who may be potential trading partners. Close person-to-person relationships in provincial Chinese communities also reduce transaction costs in business undertakings, such as the cost of collecting information and decision-making costs. Such relationships are often established in local Chinese associations, which had been formed on the basis of birthplaces, dialect groups or family names. These organizations have provided a means through which members exchange information and establish acquaintances, thereby playing an important role in the business world.

Credibility established through close and personal relationships within local business circles would be greater in some sectors than in

others. One typical case in point is the financial sector. The following is an example of financial businesses in a provincial city, where local businessmen managed to exploit their entrepreneurship in enhancing their competitiveness. The discounting of post-dated cheques in Nakhon Ratchasima developed into local financial businesses among Chinese merchants several decades ago. This financial arrangement was the short-term money lending for provincial Chinese businessmen whose demand for credit was not met because of the Bangkok-dominated resource allocation system.

In developing countries, it is not uncommon for commercial banks to serve rural areas and small borrowers inadequately. In general, businesses in rural areas (or in the provinces of Thailand) are so small that the potential default risk is high and information on their trustworthiness is costly to obtain. When the authorities artificially set the real interest rate at a level below the market-clearing rate (in Thailand's case through a legal interest rate ceiling on bank loans),[20] an excess demand for bank loans resulted. It became necessary for commercial banks to ration their loans, and bank loans were allocated among favoured borrowers, such as big-business operators (in Bangkok, in the case of Thailand) and those who have political connections. Small borrowers could obtain only limited loans from commercial banks because the artificial interest rate did not pay enough to cover the potential risks to banks. Therefore, government control of interest rates caused a distorted allocation of bank loans.

The discounting business of post-dated cheques addressed this distorted allocation of credit by provincial Chinese businessmen. After 1954, when a new act which criminalized the use of bad cheques was passed, the issuing of post-dated cheques became a widespread practice among businessmen in Thailand. Post-dated cheques have been discounted both in the formal financial market, such as commercial banks, and in the informal market. The latter is a financial arrangement which provides Chinese businessmen with short-term loans. This informal cheque-discounting business was generated by demands brought about by government regulations. Because the monetary authorities imposed an interest rate ceiling on loans, the low interest rate generated an excess of demands for credit which could not be satisfied by formal financial institutions. Therefore, less favoured, or less creditworthy, post-dated cheques were put into the hands of financial entrepreneurs who may well not have proper licenses to operate. Commercial banks which were restricted by a

legal interest rate ceiling were unwilling to accept these risky post-dated cheques.

The research in Nakhon Ratchasima revealed that there were many local Chinese merchants who had been engaged in the discounting of post-dated cheques as a side business. According to one of the interviewees, local merchants in Nakhon Ratchasima had come to use post-dated cheques widely by about 1960 when there was an increase in trade between Bangkok and this city. Most cheques were drawn on merchants of Nakhon Ratchasima, who sold agricultural products to Bangkok.

In this informal credit market, credit was allocated very rationally on the basis of the trustworthiness of clients. Chinese merchants usually determined the discount rate by the past records of clients, as well as the market interest-rate level. Informal financial merchants who were free from legal regulations could adjust interest rates to match the borrower's trustworthiness. Longstanding clients were highly trustworthy, and their cheques were discounted at a lower interest rate than those of new clients. Chinese merchants who were involved in the cheque-discounting business had strong incentives to maintain relationships with the same customers in order to reduce both transaction costs and the risk of default. In addition, they could reduce information costs and risks by limiting the number of customers to a small circle of acquaintances or mutual friends.

The market needs practical enforcement methods to operate well. In the informal market, enforcement methods also had to be informal. The sanctions which Chinese entrepreneurs relied on in this informal credit market were utilized by appealing to a person's reputation. In extreme cases, social ostracism, which means a total loss of creditworthiness in local business society, was the sanction used against defaulters. Once defaulters lost the creditworthiness which had been fostered through business and social activities, they faced great difficulties in regaining it: sometimes they even had to leave the area altogether. In a small provincial community, information about the trustworthiness of members was easy to diffuse because information costs are low. Therefore, the desire to maintain one's reputation and the threat of social ostracism were effective methods in discouraging payment defaults, which in turn means that lending arrangements on the basis of personal relationships, such as the informal discounting business, gave a strong incentive to borrowers to invest in promising and safe ventures. Close

relationships in small communities thus reduced the risk of the 'moral hazard'[21] of borrowers. Relationships based on trustworthiness, which are a form of non-market control, can be a method to approach optimal resource allocation in a market.

Thus Chinese merchants were successful in cutting down the transaction costs associated with processing loan contracts by utilizing person-to-person relationships. Ultimately, these financial businesses have helped to increase the efficiency of business transactions in the provinces and to rectify, to some extent, a resource allocation distorted by government intervention.

In 1972, the government began to control the activities of non-bank financial institutions, and informal financial businesses were required to obtain permission from the Ministry of Finance. Since then, formal financial businesses began to emerge from informal cheque-discounting arrangements in Nakhon Ratchasima.

The example of a finance company which was established in Nakhon Ratchasima in 1972 by a local Chinese merchant shows the disadvantage of provincial financial businesses. The founder and his son, who had been involved in the discounting of post-dated cheques and hotel management, decided to apply for permission from the Ministry of Finance in 1972, and they were accorded permission to manage a finance company. This finance company was the only one in the Northeast at that time. Later they decided to develop the company into a local bank. However, since the monetary authorities had refused permission for the establishment of any new commercial banks since the mid-1960s, they gave up applying for permission. Government regulations on the establishment of commercial banks can be attributed partly to the political patronage of Bangkok-based bankers, which deprived provincial financial businessmen of opportunities to grow in the commercial banking sector.

Although a run involving finance companies of Thailand in 1983 threatened the solvency of this finance company, and it was eventually taken over by a Bangkok-based finance company,[22] we should note the possibility that a Bangkok-oriented policy acted to blight the budding financial businesses of the provinces.

It can be argued that relationships based on creditworthiness have been instrumental in realizing an optimal resource allocation in the provinces. In the provincial financial markets, government regulation on interest rates prevented the market mechanism from functioning properly, distorting resource allocation. Transactions

based on trustworthiness have corrected the distorted resource allocation to some extent, and increased business efficiency for local entrepreneurs. Although government regulations and the Bangkok-dominated policies put provincial businessmen at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* their counterparts in Bangkok, the rise of local financial businesses revealed the entrepreneurship of provincial Chinese businessmen who have contributed to economic development in the provinces by making full use of their strongest asset — intimate relationships.

Conclusion

This brief profile of entrepreneurs in provincial Thailand attempted to illustrate how Sino-Thai entrepreneurs have participated in and contributed to the economic development of provincial Thailand. The high mobility of local entrepreneurs and the rise of informal financial dealings are the focus of this analysis.

Since the early stage of economic development, Chinese people have coped with the restraints placed on them. Frequent migration was one way, and this stimulated economic growth in the provinces. In the financial sector, although provincial entrepreneurs were circumscribed more or less by government policies favourable to entrepreneurs in Bangkok, they have overcome difficulties through arranging financial dealings on the basis of trustworthiness among local Chinese business people. These financial businesses were organized and they functioned well enough to show the talent and entrepreneurship of Sino-Thai businessmen in the provinces. Trustworthiness based on close person-to-person relationships could provide an edge or competitive advantage over their counterparts in Bangkok, and the Chinese were successful in diversifying and expanding provincial economies through utilizing this advantage. This illustrates a crucial aspect of the economic development in provincial Thailand, where the contribution of Sino-Thai entrepreneurs has been great.

Notes

1 'Sino-Thai' and 'Chinese' are defined as Chinese immigrants and their descendants. However, in Thailand today, the number of Chinese who

immigrated from China is relatively small, reflecting the fact that the wave of Chinese immigration ended in about 1950 as a result of the Thai government's restrictive policy on immigration (Skinner, 1957: 177–78). As a result of this policy, the majority of 'Sino-Thai' or 'Chinese' in Thailand now consists of the descendants of these immigrants.

2 Surveys in these three provinces were conducted intermittently between 1988 and 1992. For details of the research in Nakhon Pathom and Ratchaburi, see Ueda (1990), and for the survey in Nakhon Ratchasima, see Ueda (1995).

3 According to recent data (Australia, East Asia Analytical Unit 1995: 25), Teochew Chinese form a majority of ethnic Chinese in Thailand, accounting for 56 percent of the total. Hakka Chinese make up 15 percent, and are the second largest group.

4 Since my research attempted to establish a profile of those who dominated provincial economies, I mainly surveyed those who were considered to be business leaders and successful entrepreneurs in the local economy. My research in the three local provinces was thus not a comprehensive survey of provincial entrepreneurs, but of leading provincial entrepreneurs.

5 A first-generation Chinese is defined as an individual born in China of a China-born father who never resided in Thailand. This paper defines a second-generation Chinese as an individual born in China or in Thailand of a China-born father who immigrated to and resided in Thailand. A third-generation Chinese is an individual born in Thailand of a second-generation father.

6 There is a strong possibility that the number of third-generation Chinese who begin to learn the Chinese language for business reasons will increase as Thailand expands direct investment in China. Such individuals may recognize anew, through studying Chinese, that they are Chinese descendants. However, it must be stressed that it is for business reasons, not because of Chinese identity, that Chinese is studied as a foreign language in Thailand today.

7 There were cases in which well-to-do Chinese people circumvented the restrictions imposed on them by the Phibun government by sending their children to these Chinese-speaking countries for an education (Watson, 1980: 125, 129).

8 The incentives to master Chinese have thus become much greater today than was the case several decades ago. The rapid economic growth and the huge inflow of foreign direct investment in China, particularly during the 1990s, might increase the economic incentives for younger generation Sino-Thai to learn Chinese. This is because overseas Chinese in Asia have been the largest foreign investor in China, and the C.P. Group, a Thai big business group, is said to have made the heaviest investment among foreign investors in China. In many cases, personal relationships between overseas Chinese and leading officials in China are essential for foreigners to successfully launch into China. It would be natural in Thailand today if younger Chinese descendants were to show an increased interest in studying the Chinese language because it is indispensable to gain access to the Chinese network.

9 Thailand has been the most successful country in Southeast Asia in assimilating Chinese people into local society. This point is often discussed from the viewpoints of religion and government policy. It has been argued that it has been far easier for the Thai people, most of whom are Buddhist, to accept the

Chinese than for Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia. The earlier adoption of the *jus soli* principle was another factor which accelerated the assimilation of Chinese people in Thailand. Thai authorities have maintained the principle of *jus soli* since 1913, when a nationality law came into force. Therefore, those who were born in Thailand have been granted Thai nationality since the early period of the 20th century (Amyot, 1972:88; Thavi, 1974:42–54). This situation differs greatly from that of Malaysia, where more than half of the Chinese residents did not have Malayan citizenship as of 1954. It was not until 1957, when the new constitution of an independent Malaya established the *jus soli* principle, that a large number of Chinese people acquired Malayan citizenship (Amyot, 1972:12–13). In Indonesia, the citizenship problem of ethnic Chinese has still not been resolved. Many Chinese people have not acquired Indonesian citizenship, even though they have resided in Indonesia for generations (Australia, East Asia Analytical Unit, 1995:40).

10 The situation of Malaysia today provides a clear contrast to that of Thailand. In Malaysia, thousands of Chinese who were educated in Chinese went to Taiwan for tertiary education because of the difficulties in receiving a tertiary education in Chinese in Malaysia (Australia, East Asia Analytical Unit, 1995:184).

11 Supang and Somkiat (Chapter 8, this volume) note that the third generation Chinese in Thailand today have a unique identity which is different not only from that of the first- and second-generation Chinese, but also that of Thai people. According to their argument, third-generation Chinese recognize that they are Thai, but still preserve their Chinese identity to some extent, in terms of culture and class. However, their Chinese identity is not a national one. Supang and Somkiat explain that Chinese identity is being stirred up through a recognition that the emerging middle-class is dominated by Chinese descendants. Amara (Chapter 4, this volume) assumes the same stance on this issue, and suggests that the second- and third-generation Chinese who constitute the majority of the urban middle class will become increasingly conscious of being Chinese from now on. This is because 'Chineseness' offers access to the global and international Chinese connections.

12 However, it should be pointed out again that there is a possibility that an increase in direct investment in China by Sino-Thai entrepreneurs may awaken in them a consciousness of being Chinese.

13 For instance, one third-generation Chinese descendant who held an important position in the national Thai Chamber of Commerce as well as the post of the president in the Nakhon Ratchasima Chamber of Commerce took the lead in the construction project of a first-class hotel in Nakhon Ratchasima, in cooperation with one of the most prominent hotel franchises in Thailand. His positions facilitated his connection with the Bangkok-based hotel owner in this project. In addition, he was the only individual who has begun foreign direct investment among my interviewees in Nakhon Ratchasima.

14 The huge influx of Chinese from Bangkok probably began earlier in Nakhon Ratchasima than in Northern Thailand, at least. The Northern line reached Lopburi in 1901 when the Northeastern line to Nakhon Ratchasima was already in operation. Since the construction work on the Northern line was

suspended for several years (Ramaer, 1994:57), it took another two decades to reach Chiang Mai in 1921.

15 Plaio (1987:33) illustrates how Chiang Mai deepened the economic relationship with Bangkok after the railway reached Chiang Mai. Since then, this northern Thai city has experienced an influx of Chinese merchants from Bangkok.

16 According to a survey in Chiang Mai (Endo, 1996:56–60), there are several outstanding Chinese families which have long histories in the local business world of Chiang Mai. They resided and started their businesses in Chiang Mai well before the railway from Bangkok reached the town in the early 1920s. Endo explains that these Chinese became successful at first through being involved in river trading between Bangkok and Chiang Mai, which expanded after the last quarter of the 19th century. This result from Chiang Mai forms a striking contrast with those results found in Nakhon Ratchasima, where business circles are controlled by relatively new Chinese migrants.

17 Excluding the Krung Thai Bank, which was set up in 1966 by merging two banks.

18 The *Asian Wall Street Journal* (18 September 1997) reports that 15 Thai commercial banks which had permission to operate in Thailand 'became some of the world's most profitable in the early to mid-1990s under the government's protection.'

19 As one of a series of deregulation measures, the monetary authorities, in January of 1997, awarded licenses to three new banks to operate. In accordance with the decentralization policy of the government, their headquarters will be located in the provinces. All existing Thai banks have their headquarters in Bangkok.

20 In developing countries, the government regularly intervenes in the financial sector in order to channel cheap credit into those sectors in which the government has given high priority. A credit ceiling for commercial banks is the most common form of intervention.

21 Moral hazard is defined as 'actions of economic agents in maximizing their own utility to the detriment of others, in situations where they do not bear the full consequences or, equivalently, do not enjoy the full benefits of their actions due to uncertainty and incomplete or restricted contracts which prevent the assignment of full damages (benefits) to the agent responsible' (Kotowitz, 1989:207). In this case, it means investing in a risky but highly-profitable project and shifting the responsibility on the lender's shoulder if that project fails. Because the punishment for defaults is heavy in the case of personal relationships, the borrower makes a solid and careful investment and the number of defaults should therefore decline.

22 Before this run, the operator of this finance company decided to make a clean break from the financial sector. He sold the majority of his shares in his company to a friend who operated a finance company in Bangkok. At present, he is deeply involved in real estate businesses.

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8

Preservation of Ethnic Identity and Acculturation

Supang Chantavanich and Somkiat Sikharaksakul

The massive exodus of overseas Chinese to Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries during the 18th and 19th centuries is a phenomenon that has always attracted the attention of both academics and policy makers. The Chinese emperors of the Ming dynasty were not in favour of this migration at first. Emigrants were considered uprooted people by the court.[1] Later, Emperor Chianlung permitted his citizens to leave because the prosperous junk trade brought in a sizeable state income from trade and taxation.

Migration across the Nan Yang (South Seas) reached its peak at the beginning of the 18th century. Among the Chinese migrants were the Hainanese from Hainan island who had been migrating to Thailand since the Qing Dynasty. Most of these Hainanese were fishermen and peasants who were of low socio-economic status, and could not compete with the Teochew and the Hokkien who were able to find good jobs in the big cities.

Consequently, the Hainanese settled in remote areas and worked as timber traders, collectors of forest products, or owners of small food shops. In the 19th century, when steamboats replaced junks for the journey across the Nan Yang, more Hainanese came to Thailand. It is estimated that between 1882 and 1917, about 183,319 Hainanese (see Table 1) left Haikhou for Thailand.[2] Most of them were from

two *hsien*, namely Wen-ch'ng and Chiung-shan. The Hainanese resettled in the north of Thailand in the valley of Yom and Nan rivers, in the provinces of Sukhothai, Pichit, Prae, Nan and Nakhon Sawan.[3] Of the five dialect groups, namely Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien and Hainanese, the Hainanese was the second smallest group, after the Hakka.[4] In Thailand, before the Second World War, the Hainanese established three associations to provide social security for their compatriots. These were Ch'iung-chou Kung-so, Ch'iung-tao Hui-so and Ch'iung-tao Lien-ho-hui. Hainanese from all occupations were members of these associations, which later developed into a single Hainanese Association of Thailand.

TABLE 1:

Migration from Haikhou to Thailand

Year	No./Year	Total No.
1882–1892	1,186	13,047
1893–1905	4,979	64,724
1906–1917	8,796	105,548
Total		183,319

Source: China Trade Returns 1882–1917; Chinese Customs Decennial Reports, 1892–1901, 1901–1911, 1912–1921, quoted from Skinner *1957.*

The Hainanese Association of Thailand

It is well known that Chinese immigrants organized themselves into secret societies in the 19th century. Conflicts of interest among various dialect groups led to antagonism and occasional fighting. In 1897, the Thai government issued a decree to formalize and control the secret societies. Though many societies did not comply with the law, by 1910, the secret societies began losing their influence as associations were established formally by each dialect group to offer Chinese education to Chinese descendents. The Canton Association which belonged to the Cantonese dialect group, for instance, was the first to be established, followed by the Hainan Association (in approximately 1900) and finally the Teochew Association of Thailand after the First World War.[5]

Originally, the Hainanese Association of Thailand was informally set up by Hainanese traders. It was based on two

Hainanese clubs, i.e. Wu-muan-tie Club which was a club for the Hainanese in the hotel business and trade, and Ch'iung-tao Club which was for workers and labourers. After the Second World War, the two clubs were merged into the Hainanese Association.[6] The Hainanese School was set up within the premises of the informally established Association.

The History of Chinese Schools in Thailand

The first Chinese school in Bangkok was founded in 1852 by missionaries. A Chinese missionary named Sinsaa Kieng Qua Saen ran the school and taught in Chinese until he died in 1860 after which teaching was conducted in Thai.[7] It was not until 1908 that the Chung Hua Association founded another Chinese school named Hua Eia with support from the Tung Meng Hui in Thailand.[8] The Hua Eia School adopted the curriculum, syllabus and textbooks from schools in China.[9] Three teachers from China were invited to teach in Thailand. One of them was Cantonese, one Sichuan, and one Hainanese. However, the school was not successful because teachers were heavily involved in the political activities of the Tung Meng Hui. When the revolution in China was over, the teachers returned to resume positions in the new government.

It was evident that the Hua Eia School aimed to educate children of the overseas Chinese to arouse nationalistic sentiments in them. The overseas Chinese in Thailand during that time became conscious of their ethnic identity and the role of the school in preserving this identity. When the Hua Eia school was closed after the revolution in 1911, five more Chinese schools were established, each by a different dialect group: Hsin-min School, founded by the Teochew in 1912; Chin-te School, founded by the Hakka in 1913; Ming-te School, founded by the Cantonese in 1914; P'ei-yuen School, founded by the Hokkien in 1915; and Yu-min Kung-hsuo School, founded by the Hainanese in 1921.

Thai Policy towards Chinese Immigrants and Chinese Schools

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Chinese migration to Thailand was welcomed by the royal Thai court because there was a great need

for imported labour to develop the nation; for example, the junk trade and fisheries which required skilful seamen; the expansion of agricultural production for exports; and the construction of new communication and transportation links like canals, railways and roads. All these works were undertaken by the overseas Chinese labourers.[10] Although there were occasional fears that the huge number of Chinese immigrants might be a threat to the Thai economy, no strong measures were implemented to prevent the Chinese from immigrating until the mid-20th century. In 1947, when the revolution in China drove some Chinese to Southeast Asian countries, the Thai government announced a quota on the number of Chinese immigrants to Thailand: no more than 10,000 persons per year. Later in 1949, this number was reduced to 200 persons per year.

This occurred after the implementation of Phibul Songkhram's nationalistic policy during 1939–44 and after the anti-Japanese movement during the Second World War. The real reason for the need to control Chinese immigration in 1947–49 was the fear of communist infiltration. This put the Chinese schools in a difficult position as they were considered by the Thai government as instrumental in encouraging nationalist or communist ideologies among young ethnic Chinese.

The Thai repressive policy did not only have its roots in the Thai nationalistic and anti-communist mood. The Chinese schools themselves had aroused among the students a strong sense of solidarity and allegiance to their homeland and this was unacceptable to the Thai government. Before 1948, there were 276 Chinese schools in Thailand. Many schools had been established in Bangkok and upcountry without proper authorization from the Ministry of Education. After the Second World War, overseas Chinese in Thailand could legitimately impart their education, language and culture, and a liberal political ideology to their children. It should be noticed that the Hua Eia School which was founded by the Chung Hua Association in 1908 received full support from the Tung Meng Hui which mobilized Chinese nationalistic ideology among overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia under the leadership of Dr Sun Yat Sen. There were also Chinese schools which supported an ideology opposed to the liberal one, although they also considered themselves nationalistic. The nationalistic expression of the Chinese schools took the form of singing the Chinese national anthem and flying the Chinese national

flag at school which were seen as flouting Thai authority. Consequently, in 1948, the Thai Ministry of Education took control of all Chinese schools. No new schools were permitted and schools with political activities were closed. School headmasters had to be of Thai nationality. The number of Chinese schools decreased from 276 in 1948 to 168 in 1965.

The Thai government also controlled the language of instruction. Chinese language could be taught for only seven hours per week as a foreign language.[11] The schools had to use syllabi and textbooks approved by the ministry. Many children of ethnic Chinese shifted to Thai schools because there was no significant difference between the Chinese and Thai schools in terms of teaching and learning. Parents who would like their children to learn Chinese had to hire private teachers at home. Middle-class Chinese children were assimilated into the Thai social fabric and Thai culture while the upper and lower classes maintained their ethnic identity by not attending Thai schools. The well-to-do Chinese traders sent their children to Hong Kong or Singapore to receive Chinese education while the poor could not afford to send their children to formal Thai schools.[12]

The Hainanese Yu Min (YM) School was founded within this socio-political context of the Thai government policy. It was one of the services the Hainanese Association of Thailand offered to its members. Other services included an old age home, a cemetry, a hospital, Chinese temples, cultural and educational promotion, and social welfare.

It should be noted that although the Ministry of Education allowed the teaching of Chinese in the Chinese schools, it did not give pupils credit for achievement in the subject. Scores from Chinese language courses do not count in scholastic assessment. This discouraged pupils from learning the language.

The Hainanese School: Its Background[13]

The YM Primary School was established in Thailand in 1921 by a group of Hanainese merchants in Bangkok. In the beginning there were only 19 boys in the YM School. Within three years, the enrolment increased to 70 pupils. A new building was constructed; textbooks and learning kits were imported from Shanghai and the

school library was expanded. As in all Chinese schools, a Thai headmaster and a Chinese headmaster were in charge of the administration and the teaching in Thai and Chinese respectively.

Later, Hainanese girls were accepted for enrolment. By the time King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) returned from his visit to Europe, the school brass band had been formed and performed before the king on his return. Soon after, in 1928, the king visited the school and praised it. In 1932, the school expanded to offer secondary education because of its competence and popularity. In 1941, the school taught in the Hainanese language.

Before and during the Second World War, the school was closed for eight years. In 1948, the YM School was reopened and its name was changed to Yu Min Kong Suay, meaning a school founded by people for people's education. The YM School had to revise its curriculum and timetable in accordance with the restrictions of the new Thai government policy. Only 7–10 hours were allocated for Chinese teaching while 20 hours were for the Thai language and other subjects. Still, 880 pupils attended the school that year. The Thai policy concerning Chinese schools, however, ultimately made them less popular, and the enrolment decreased gradually. In 1993, only 168 pupils attended the school.

Ethnography of the School

The YM School is located on Suriwong Road, in the compound of the Hainanese Association of Thailand. It offers primary (Grades 1 to 6) and pre-school education. The small enrolment at the school means a small number of pupils in each classroom (12–23 pupils per class). The three-storey building comprises six rooms on each floor. In all classrooms, paper boards are placed on both sides of the black board. Posters and window displays show Thai national holidays (e.g. the King's and the Queen's birthdays), Buddhist religious days (e.g. the beginning of the Buddhist Retreat, Visakha Day), and various aspects of the Thai culture. The Thai flag is also displayed on the boards. Outside the classrooms, a plaque with both Thai and Chinese characters indicates the grade of each class. The main plaque in front of the school is also written in both Thai and Chinese.

Most students are ethnic Chinese of various dialect groups, i.e. Hainanese, Teochew, or Cantonese, with a few Thais. During break,

pupils often chat and play together without any ethnic or dialect segregation. However, they seem to prefer grouping together with the same gender. Pupils can bring their own lunch packs or buy their own lunches, or they can ask the school to prepare lunch for them. School lunch comprises both Thai and Chinese dishes (for example, Thai curry and Chinese noodles). The preschool children are not skilful at using chopsticks while bigger kids are.

School teachers comprise six ethnic Chinese and seven ethnic Thai. The ethnic Chinese teachers speak different dialects (Cantonese, Hainanese and Teochew). Two of them are Chinese language teachers, of whom one is the headmaster for Chinese language teaching. He obtained his secondary education in Thailand and finished two years at a university in Taiwan. At the time of this research he had been a teacher of Chinese language for 26 years. The second was a female teacher who graduated from Chong Hua School in the south of Thailand (Yala Province). Later, she attended adult education and had private tutorials for Chinese language. She was then 42 years old. The other four ethnic Chinese teachers do not have any knowledge of Chinese language. They all attend Thai schools and some are married to Thai nationals.

Teaching Learning Process and Chinese language

School hours and timetable at the YM School are similar to Thai schools in general. School begins at 8.30 a.m. Pupils stand in rows in front of the flagpole to sing the national anthem while the national flag is hoisted. Then they pray in accordance with Buddhist teachings and break into their classes. Courses continue until 10.10 a.m. Students will have a break, then return to class again until noon. After lunch, students continue their classes until 3.30 p.m., have a snack, and sing the national anthem again before returning home.

Subjects taught include mathematics, Thai and foreign languages (Chinese and English), Life Experience, Habit Formation and Working Experience. At this school, Chinese is taught from Grades 1 to 6 as an elective and English is taught from Grades 5 to 6. Within each classroom, teachers know their pupils well because there are few students. The maximum number of students is 23 in Grade 6 and the minimum is 12 in Grade 5. Classroom atmosphere appears to be cheerful, warm and friendly. Pupils are expressive.

In pre-school classes, pupils are taught some Chinese songs, alphabet and counting. They learn about Chinese culture and Chinese traditional days like the Chinese New Year. In Grades 1 to 4, pupils are taught PinYin, and the texts *Hua-wen Tu-pen* and *Hua-wen Ke-pen* are used for Grades 5 to 6. A note of observation of a Grade 5 Chinese language class reads:

> The Chinese language text *Hua-wen Ke-pen* which is authorized by the Thai Ministry of Education is used in this class. This text emphasizes the morality of virtue and honesty. One chapter is about the story of President George Washington (Hua-Shen-Tun) of the United States of America. The teacher tells pupils the story about Washington's childhood when, one day, wishing to try the sharpness of his axe, George Washington cut a cherry tree which his father loved very much. When his father came home he was angry. George Washington was very brave. He faced his father, explained what he did and apologized to him. Finally his father's anger subsided and he was proud of his son who had been honest and brave. After the story, the teacher emphasizes the morality of honesty and virtue which are important according to Confucianism.[14]

In all Chinese language classes, individual ethnic Chinese pupils are given Chinese names by the teacher. The Chinese given names make the pupils proud of their family and ancestors. The given name will be used by the pupil all through his or her life if the family has not yet given him or her one. In this class, all conversations are in Chinese. However, pupils speak Thai in other classes and out of class. Thai students who do not choose Chinese as their foreign language sit idly and are not active in the classroom. Pupils also learn calligraphy using Chinese painting brushes. Chinese philosophy, especially Confucianism, is also taught and the principles of *Li, Yi, Lien* and *Lih* are emphasized.

The Chinese culture is also taught through extra-curricular activities. For example, on the school's sports day, various kinds of tournaments, matches and competitions are organized. Among these are Chinese-Thai singing contest, Chinese-Thai dance contest, Chinese calligraphy contest and Chinese poetry composition contest. Inter-Chinese school activities also occur. Each year, on 28 September, all dialect group associations will celebrate Confucius's birthday. On this occasion, the Chinese choir sings and Chinese dances and songs

are performed by ethnic Chinese pupils in many Chinese schools in Bangkok.

To Be or Not To Be... That is the Question

Although the Chinese in Thailand are recognized as aliens best to be assimilated into the Thai society, there are some implicit conflicts in this process of integration. On the one hand, the Chinese wish to keep their traditions, customs, and language which constitute their identity, although they will never return to China. On the other hand, they want to be accepted into the resettled land, especially when they are no longer sojourners who sailed to trade with other countries.

As Bonacich (1973) said, middleman minorities who controlled economic activities in the land to which they had migrated were often hated by the native people because of conflicts of interest. The antagonistic feeling between the overseas Chinese and the native Thai had two consequences. The Chinese themselves would struggle very hard to keep their ethnic identity and that of their children. Consolidation by dialect groups, provision of social securities to compatriots especially in the form of schooling, and keeping strong ties with their homeland, including sending remittances, were examples of such attempts. On the Thai side, the national policy was to assimilate the overseas Chinese into the Thai society. Control of the number of immigrants and intensive supervision of Chinese schools and remittances were measures implemented.

The YM School is an example of the two forces which continue to exercise their power. Chinese parents expect the school to help preserve ethnic Chinese identity for their children. The school understands this expectation and tries to reproduce Chinese culture through the school's hidden curriculum, i.e. through the school's social norms observed by students without having them actually written into the curriculum. These normative social patterns are the school's standard (Dreeben, 1968). Although students have only 10 hours of Chinese language a week, they have plenty of time to learn about Chinese culture, songs, dances, alphabets, paintings and morality. The Chinese given names at school symbolize another world to which students also belong. In addition, the Chinese culture is internalized through the various contests at school fairs, table manners and conversations in Chinese.

In a Thai school, a different hidden curriculum is used to reproduce Thai culture and ideology. An example from some Thai rural schools reads:

> The morning assembly is usually taken by the headmaster or the teacher on duty. After the national flag is hoisted, the students pray. This is followed by the pledge of loyalty, which reads: "I swear to be good, to respect and uphold the nation, the religion and the King. I'll respect and obey my parents and my teachers." This pledge of loyalty is not dictated by any Ministry of Education rule. It was first initiated by the provinces. The school's pledging has now become part of the flag hoisting ritual and is itself a ritual to the students and teachers alike.[15]

It is noted that Thai schools play a vital role in ideology reproduction. In rural northern Thailand, schools function as a cultural and ideological productive force on the pupils.[16]

In the YM School, the attempt to acculturate ethnic Chinese pupils into Thai traditions and ideology is equally evident. We can see the usage of ministerial texts and syllabus, the adherence to school rituals of flag hoisting and praying, and other administrative practices which are in accordance with the Private School Act 1982. Teachers try to decorate classrooms in a typical Thai style. Posters and story boards concerning the Thai royal institution, elements of Buddhist teachings and Buddhism as well as displays of national flags, substantiate such attempts. The school seems to prove that it emphasizes the three significant institutions which constitute the Thai society, i.e. the nation, the religion and the King. The programme of Life Experience in the curriculum also encourages pupils to learn about the Thai society and culture. It includes lessons on respect for elderly people, religious days, Thai government and politics, and Thai lives. The programme of Habit Formation includes civic education (good Thai citizenship), Thai traditional songs, and Thai cultural heritage.

The effect of these two intermingling cultural forces on the children seems to be positive. Ethnic Chinese pupils finally adopt a new identity of their own. This new integrated ethnic identity is similar neither to the one their ancestors of first and second generation possessed nor to the one to which native Thai people are attached. Revitalization of some Chinese traditions has new rationales, for

example, learning the Chinese language for the purpose of succeeding in the Chinese trade circle. Telling people that one is an ethnic Chinese means that one is a member of the new middle class and can easily find business alliances among those of the same origin. The new generation Chinese descendants speak Thai, understand and practise Thai culture, and consider Thai to be their reference group but still keep some traits of the Chinese identity, not as national identity but as cultural and class identities. As Wang Gungwu (1991) explained, the Chinese in Southeast Asia possess four identities, namely national, cultural, class and ethnic. Each of the four identities has been used as a new way of representing Chinese identity. Most Chinese probably are a bit of each and thus possess a mixture of multiple identities.[17] The YM School plays an efficient role in harmonizing cultural heritage with the utilitarian demands of the contemporary world.[18]

To conclude, the YM Hainanese school may represent many more Chinese schools in Thailand in their dualistic roles of acculturation and maintenance of ethnic identity. The school familiarizes children with Thai culture and knowledge through the teaching of Thai national primary school curriculum. It also internalizes the Thai political values of the king as the royal institution, the nation, and Buddhism as the religious institution. At the same time, the YM School encourages pupils to be aware of Chinese culture. Children learn Chinese language, sing Chinese songs, perform Chinese dances, write Chinese calligraphy and poetry, and have Chinese names. School extra-curricula activities and school norms enhance the preservation of ethnic Chinese identity about which children have already known from home. The dualistic roles of the YM School have created in the children an integrated mix of multiple identities that focus on the cultural and economic (class) aspects of life in their Chinese identity. As regards the Thai identity, the children are orientated into the cultural as well as political aspects. This reflects the Thai national policy of assimilation and national security which has been advocated since the 1930s.

NOTES

1 Xu Saolin, "Chinese Policy towards the Overseas Chinese". In *The Chaozhou in Thailand and in Their Home Village in Chaozan*. Supang Chantavanich et al. (eds), Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1991:36.
2 William G. Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, 1957:50.
3 ibid., pp. 83–84.
4 ibid., p. 83.

5 ibid., pp. 169–70.
6 ibid., p. 295.
7 Pichai Ratanapol, *Development of the Controls of the Chinese Schools in Thailand*, 1969.
8 William G. Skinner, op. cit., p. 161.
9 Pichai Ratanapol, op. cit.
10 Viyada Tongmit, *The Chinese Labour in Thai Society, (AD. 1782–1910)*, 1981.
11 William G. Skinner, op. cit., p. 371.
12 Boonsanong Punyodyana, *Chinese-Thai Differential Assimilation in Bangkok: An Exploratory Study*, 1971.
13 Data about the YM School are from fieldwork conducted in 1993.
14 Same as note 13.
15 Supang Chantavanich, "Relevance of Rural Primary Education". (Chapter 11). In Amrung Chantavanich, Supang Chantavanich & Gerald W. Fry, *Evaluating Primary Education*, 1990: 165.
16 Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, "Cultural and Ideological Reproduction in Rural Northern Thai Society". Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1984:58–91.
17 Wang Gungwu, "The Study of Chinese Identities in Southeast Asia," in his *China and the Chinese Overseas*, 1991:207–16.
18 Ibid., "Education in External", op. cit., p. 284.

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9

Chinese Literacy in a Bangkok Chinese Family

Pranee Chokkajitsumpun

Many in overseas Chinese studies regard the ethnic Chinese in Thailand as a model of a high degree of assimilation (Kachadpai and Porntipa, 1988; Cui, 1978; Skinner, 1957 and 1973; Suryadinata, 1995). Chiang (1991) cites the decreasing number of people who speak native Chinese dialects as one of four factors leading to the absence of a Chinese element in Thai society. Deeyoo, Boonruang, Laddawan, Wilaiwan and Sirinee (1994) have conducted a survey of language use among the Chinese in Bangkok. They find that descendants of Chaozhou (Teochew) speakers speak more Thai than Chaozhou in daily life. Thai-born Chinese do not expect their children to speak Chinese since they themselves do not speak it with their children. Despite the continuing decline of other Chinese dialects, spoken Mandarin and Chinese literacy have been flourishing in Bangkok. Signs of this phenomenon include a growing demand for Mandarin fluency at work, the government's promotion of Mandarin education from kindergarten to graduate school, and an increasing enrolment in Mandarin classes in formal and non-formal education.

The Chinese family in this study included China-born parents, and Thai-born children and grandchildren.[1] The latter two generations were typical Sino-Thais. They possessed Thai citizenship

and Thai names. They received mainstream education in Thai and knew little about Chinese rituals or their parents' native Chinese dialect. Still, some tried to maintain the ability to read and write Chinese. This study investigates the roles, functions, value of and attitudes toward Chinese literacy in a Chinese family. It is an attempt to understand the interrelationships between Chinese literacy and other aspects of the family: belief, culture, economy, education, politics, tradition, and social organization. These interrelationships are a significant dimension of a Chinese family in the complex, modern and cosmopolitan society of Bangkok.

This work combines two approaches: the ideological model of literacy (Street, 1984; 1993; 1995), and the ethnography of literacy (Szwed, 1981). The ideological model of literacy propounds the concept of literacy practices as aspects of culture and power structures, and is concerned with analyzing these practices in relation to their contexts and social interactions. The ethnography of literacy provides the notion for analyzing, interpreting, and describing the patterned uses of language, reading, and writing in literacy events.[2] The latter was used for this study and data was collected by spending twice a week with a family from April 1995 to March 1996. These methods included participant observation, interviews, investigation of printed materials in the home, and life history studies based on journals and photographs of family members. Two research questions were addressed: How important are the practices of Chinese literacy to each family member and to the entire family? What is the possible future of Chinese literacy in this family over time? This work will increase understanding of the status of Mandarin in Bangkok in this decade, and it will also serve as a resource for larger-scale investigations of Chinese literacy in Sino-Thai families.

The two Chinese languages relevant here are Mandarin and Chaozhou. Mandarin is the official language in China, and the basis for written Chinese — it can be regarded as a northern "dialect". Chaozhou is one of the three Southern Min dialects spoken widely in the Chaozhou region in Guangdong Province in China. China-born Chaozhou speakers began migrating to Thailand toward the end of the Southern Song Dynasty (A.D. 1127–1279). According to Chen (1987), Chaozhou speakers of Thai nationality and their offsprings number 4 million, who constitute 70 percent of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand. The pronunciation of Chaozhou and Mandarin

differs greatly and much of their colloquial vocabularies is different too. Norman (1988:187) states impressionistically that "To take an extreme example, there is probably as much difference between the dialects of Peking and Chaozhou as there is between Italian and French". Young Sino-Thais acquire Mandarin and are trained to read and write in Mandarin. In contrast, many middle-aged and elderly Chinese whose native tongue is a non-Mandarin dialect may speak Mandarin, but they read and write in a kind of Mandarin that is heavily influenced by their native dialect. For this study, the term "Chinese literacy" is taken to denote Mandarin Chinese literacy as practised by young Sino-Thais. It also refers to the reading and writing of Mandarin by people fluent in Chaozhou or any other dialect.

Ethnography of the Family

This study is based on one family selected on the following criterion: at least two family members of different generations needed to read and write Chinese at home. This criterion helped examine the transmission of Chinese literacy from the literate members to others and allowed the investigation of the generational maintenance of this literacy. The family of a 20-year-old sophomore from a Mandarin class in a university was finally selected for this study.[3] The author spent two days a week with the family from April 1995 to March 1996. During this period, there were eight family members living in the house: the parents, three daughters, one son, one grandson and one granddaughter (both of whom were the eldest daughter's children). Two older daughters had moved out after they got married. (See Table 1)

Like many immigrant Chinese families in urban Bangkok (Supang, 1989), this family lived and ran a small business in a house behind a market. At one end of the market stood a Chinese shrine. Approximately 40 out of 60 (66 percent) market vendors were ethnic Chinese. Thai was the language used by the majority in this market although Chaozhou was heard mostly from the elder Chinese vendors and customers. One Thai-born Chinese vendor played Mandarin popular songs everyday. Several tour groups from Taiwan who stopped by the market spoke in Mandarin among themselves but most of the time they spoke in English or used gestures when communicating with the vendors.

Table 1:

Family members						
China-born parents	Father	Mother				
Age	67	60				
Thai-born children	* 1st	* 2nd	3rd	Brother	4th	5th
Sex	F	F	F	M	F	F
Age	36	34	31	30	28	20
Thai-born grandchildren	Pong	Duan				
Sex	M	F				
Age	13	10				

* Married and not living with the family.

Family Background

Both parents had migrated from villages in Shantou (Swatow), Guangdong Province, China, in 1947: the mother (hereafter called Mother) was then 12 years old and the father (Father), a 19-year-old orphan. Several years after arriving in Thailand, Father had completed fourth grade in a Thai continuing education school. They got married in the late 1950s. All their children received mainstream education in which classroom instruction was in Thai; English was learned as a foreign language. Their educational achievements ranged from seventh grade to bachelor's degree. The first three daughters completed seventh grade. The only son (Brother) obtained a Bachelor of General Administration. The fourth daughter (Fourth) completed ninth grade and the fifth daughter (Fifth) was in her second and third year of university at the time of the study. She was majoring in English literature with a minor in Mandarin. All the children, while attending school, assisted their parents in running the family's business at home. The home served as a place to live, to conduct business, and to train the children in basic business management.

The linguistic abilities of individuals in the family were varied. The parents were native speakers of Chaozhou who were fluent in Thai. They spoke Chaozhou to each other, to friends, and to relatives. With their children, however, they often spoke Thai. As a result the children became passive bilinguals (Penalosa, 1981): they spoke Thai

while they understood Chaozhou far better than they spoke it. Mother could read Chinese numerals but could not write at all. Father read recurring short strings of Chinese characters — names of places, stores and people — with Chaozhou pronunciation. He could write a few words, such as his Chinese name. All the children except Brother studied Mandarin. In 1985, Father hired a private Chinese tutor from the neighbourhood to teach his children Mandarin. His daughters, Second, Third and Fifth, studied for one year. Only Third continued her studies, at an evening school for several years. At the time of the study, Third's competence in Mandarin was between a beginner's and that of an intermediate. She could read more than she could speak or write. Fourth was a beginner who had been studying Mandarin for six months. She could respond to simple everyday questions in Mandarin and could read better than she could write. Fifth, an intermediate student, had been taking Mandarin as a minor subject for two and a half years at the university. She could handle daily conversations and simple discussions conducted in Mandarin. She also read vernacular Chinese writing and studied writing 600-word essays for five months.

Another person who must be mentioned is 42-year-old Chen, whose literacy practices greatly contributed to Chinese literacy in the family. He came from a peasant family in a village near Father's hometown. He spoke Chaozhou as his native tongue and acquired Mandarin in school. He had completed sixth grade. Father and Mother first met him in 1993 when they were visiting their respective hometowns. At that time Mother had a serious pain in the leg and Chen had recommended a traditional healer in his village.

The siblings of Chen's wife had come to Thailand first. Chen followed and began making visits to Bangkok in the beginning of 1994. One afternoon in mid-1994, Father asked him to speak Mandarin to Fifth, who had been taking Mandarin for almost a year at the university. He began by asking, *Zhongwu chi hao le ma*? (Did you have lunch?)" Fifth could not answer him in Mandarin. He asked her a few more questions to which she could not answer either. Father then had Chen tutor her in Mandarin for several hours in the afternoons in the living area of the home. However, Fifth did not have much time to study Mandarin as she was working in the market everyday. Father would come to the stall to remind her of the tuition lessons.

Chen and Fifth used no textbooks. In the beginning, Father

served as an interpreter, translating her Thai questions into Chaozhou for Chen. Chen answered in Mandarin and Chaozhou. He also wrote down the answers in Chinese script and transcribed them into Hanyu Pinyin, the official Chinese romanization. Father then translated Chen's answers into Thai for Fifth. Third, within earshot from her work table, would sometimes polish Father's translation. This complex tuition class went on for 10 days until Fifth understood Chen's Mandarin better. He tutored her for over a month, during which Father paid him tuition fees.

House Visits

The family lived in a four-storey house. The first floor was extremely functional. Its front part contained bookshelves full of novels, Japanese comics, and Western fiction for rent. All were in Thai. Next to the bookshelves was the living area with a Chinese calendar above a Chinese-style chair. Father kept a Chinese geomancy measuring tape, letters from relatives in China and fortune-telling tickets printed in Chinese in a filing cabinet next to the chair. Third's two dressmaking tables faced the Chinese-style chair. On one of them was a Chinese-Thai dictionary. A compact disc and cassette player was on the other table. Next to it were a television, one small house altar on the floor, and another on a shelf. A sign bearing the family store's name in Chinese hung above the shelf.

One end of the second floor contained rows of Buddha images and Chinese dolls. A tape recorder and a box of cassettes of Thai and Chinese Buddhist sermons were nearby. At the other end was Father's cupboard, which contained things from China such as vases, dolls, and sets of tea cups. The third and fourth floors housed four bedrooms, the largest of which was shared by the three daughters and the two grandchildren. In this room was a table with Chinese textbooks and workbooks for Fourth and Fifth.

Father had retired for 10 years. He liked watching *Judge Pao*, a Hongkong television series broadcast in Thailand since 1994. He sometimes played audio and video cassettes of Chaozhou operas or chatted with elderly relatives who stopped by to visit the family. Father practised geomancy and led others in performing Chinese rituals. Mother still worked seven days a week. She made and sold Thai desserts at a stall near the market entrance.

Following her elder sister's marriage five years ago, Third had taken over the family responsibilities. She was a dressmaker and ran a book-rental business. Since her dressmaking table faced Father's chair, she often chatted or watched television with him while working. She also sang along with Mandarin songs she played on cassettes or compact discs. Third was addicted to two soap operas from Taiwan.

During the first three months of my fieldwork, Brother worked for Mother by selling food in the market. Then there was a time during which he stopped work and drank heavily. Later he found a cashier's job in a drugstore owned by a Thai-German company. Most of his customers were English-speaking Caucasians.

Like Mother, Fourth made and sold desserts at the stall every day, and also during the Chinese festivals. Sometimes she watched a small television while working. Some of the programmes she watched regularly were films and soap operas from Taiwan and Hong Kong. After visiting Kunming, a city in Yunnan Province in China and a popular destination for Thai tourists, she enrolled in a beginner's Mandarin class at a private language centre. Later she enrolled in another evening Mandarin course at the university where Fifth was attending daytime courses. Her two-hour class was held on three weekday evenings for five months.

Fifth finished her sophomore year at university and returned to live with the family from March to June 1995. She sold desserts at the stall during the day. Some nights she reviewed Mandarin lessons from previous semesters or translated Mandarin songs for Third. When school began in June, Fifth moved to a dormitory in the vicinity of the campus. Traffic in Bangkok was very congested, which prompted Father and Third to let her stay near the campus on weekdays. In the first semester of her junior year, she took 12 courses, four of which were Mandarin courses. Usually she did her Chinese homework on weekend nights at home.

Pong and Duan, the family's grandchildren, went to a Thai school near the home. The whole family gathered for the funeral of their maternal grandmother. On Tomb Sweeping Day, an annual event in April, they would go to their paternal grandmother's tomb as well, which was located in a province 150 kilometres from Bangkok. They performed Chinese rituals to worship the ancestors' spirits.

Chen visited Bangkok twice in 1995. On the second trip, he could not stay at his regular hotel as it had been sold. Father invited him to stay with them. Chen moved in and continued selling things in the market while helping the family as much as he could. He assisted Mother and Fourth in setting up the stall in the morning. He also shared his knowledge of Mandarin with the family's daughters. The parents visited Chen's village in August, during the celebration of the village's new pavilion which had been built with the help of Father's fund-raising campaign.

Functions and Values of Chinese Literacy in the Family

Individuals in the family engaged in reading and writing Chinese in various degrees. Their practice of Chinese literacy can be classified as reading and writing: (1) names, (2) ritual/festival-related materials, (3) entertainment/recreation-related materials, (4) school-related materials, (5) fortune-telling-related materials, and (6) Chen's writings for the family. The materials read or written by many family members are discussed first, followed by those read or written by fewer of them.

Names

Store Names. All members of the family, with or without Mandarin education, could identify the Chinese script on the red sign in the living area. It was the name of Father's old store. He had created it from three Chinese characters which read from right to left. The first character was the family name and the other two characters had the water radical compatible with his fire element.[4] Fourth first learned how to write her surname by copying the first character on the sign.

Among the family members who could read Chinese, Father was the one who liked reading signs with store names written in Chinese characters and with the transcription of the sounds of these characters — as pronounced in the Chaozhou dialect — in Thai letters. Father read the signs to educate himself in written Chinese. He did so by matching the Thai transcriptions with the Chinese script in the actual names. At the same time, his knowledge of Chaozhou helped him understand the meaning of the script.

At the seventh gathering after the funeral of the family's maternal grandmother, Mother's siblings gave each child in the family a gold ring. As soon as the children showed their rings to Father when they arrived home, he held a magnifying glass to look for the name of the store engraved on the inside of the rings as that would give a clue to the quality of the rings.

Personal Names. Father gave each of the children a Chinese name. When Brother was born, he was the only maternal grandson. Thus, Father named him in Chaozhou, Chek L ("one-L" is the initial of Mother's maiden name) and later taught him to write it. Father signed cheques using this name as well. Although he could sign in Thai, Father chose to sign in Chinese for two reasons. According to Third, cheques with a Chinese signature had more credibility than those with a Thai one. The other reason was, Father felt comfortable expressing his ethnic identity through the use of a Chinese signature on his cheques. Many people who received his cheques were also Chinese and some could read and write Chinese.

Once in 1995, Father was invited to Chen's village to attend the opening of a new pavilion that had been built with funds raised by Father. Father brought home pictures taken on that visit; many of them displayed a sign with his Chinese name located above the pavilion. He read and reread his name in the pictures. Obviously he was proud of the recognition accorded to him and of his success as a Chinese immigrant in Thailand, despite being orphaned since childhood.

After a trip to Kunming with Father and Fourth, Third showed me a Chinese guide's business card written in simplified form. She read his name to me to check her pronunciation. She also noticed that his address began with the country and the province rather than the house number and the street name.

When Third began attending Mandarin class, she enjoyed practising writing her siblings' Chinese names. Third had also taught Fourth to write her Chinese name a long time ago. When she began studying Mandarin, Fourth asked Fifth to teach her how to write her Chinese name. Fifth pretended not to know how to do it and suggested that Fourth asked Third. Her pretense was intended to allow the two elder sisters, who shared different interests and rarely talked to each other, to have a common topic to talk about —

Mandarin and Chinese script. She was successful. When she saw Third writing Fourth's name, she pointed out that Third did not follow the characters' proper order of strokes. Third argued that writing a character with or without the proper stroke order resulted in the same character. Fifth's diplomatic use of Fourth's problem in writing her Chinese name promoted good relations within the family.

When she travelled with Father and Third in Kunming, Fourth hired someone to carve Fifth's name on a stone to make a name stamp. Fifth was fascinated by the artistic look of her name on the stamp which was different from normal writing. She used the stamp excessively, even on her English textbooks.

Ritual/Festival-related Materials

Tombstone. In the past, Father took Mother, Brother and the grandson, Pong, to his mother's tomb on Tomb Sweeping Day while the daughters stayed home. One day, Brother was assigned to paint all the Chinese characters carved on the grandmother's tombstone though he had never studied Chinese script. He and Pong learned from Father that personal names painted in green were for the dead whereas the ones in red belonged to those who were still living. In recent years, when Father permitted the entire family to visit the tomb, Fifth did most of the painting. Fourth only painted simple characters such as the ones denoting a date. The parents were happy to see their children involved in the Tomb Sweeping rituals.

Three years ago Father talked to Third about purchasing a piece of land for his and Mother's tombs. Third paid for the land and left the receipt with Brother. The receipt was written in Chinese. It included Father's name, the amount paid, and the cashier's signature. Although Brother did not know any written Chinese except Father's name, Third felt that he should be the one to keep the document as he would be the one to carry on the family name.
Calendar. Father used the calendar above his seat in the living area most. Arabic numerals on the calendar show the date according to the Western calendar, Chinese numerals designated the date as arranged in the Chinese lunar calendar, and recommendations for the user's personal life followed in Chinese and Thai. Father usually updated the calendar by tearing off the page of the previous day. Other family members such as Duan, his 10-year-old granddaughter, would remind him if he forgot this routine. Father used the calendar

to check or confirm upcoming events. It reminded him of goddess Guanyin's holy days when he would play sermon tapes to worship her.[5] The calendar also reminded him of Chen's coming visit to Bangkok and Guanyin's birthday, which would be celebrated at her shrine in Chen's village.

Mother read the Chinese dates in the calendar for the Chinese festivals so that she could prepare food to sell during the festivals. She also consulted the calendar for the children's Chinese birthdays each year and reminded them in advance so that they could plan to do good deeds on these important days. Mother also read the Chinese numerals printed on the lanterns at funerals. Once she complained that it was a pity that she did not buy a lottery ticket with numbers matching the ones seen on a lantern of her dead relative. If she had, she would have won.[6]

Chinese New Year Banner. A few weeks before Chinese New Year's Day, Father covered the glass door with Chinese New Year banners which he had bought from Bangkok's Chinatown. They had blessings printed in Chinese. Although many did not understand the script on the banners, Father still displayed them in public to express his pride in his Chinese ethnicity and culture.

Yellow Sign of the Vegetarian Festival. During the Vegetarian Festival, the family decorated their foodstall with a string of yellow paper with the character *zhai* (vegetarian food) printed in red. The yellow paper together with the script indicated that the stall was selling a wide variety of vegetarian food during the festival.

Entertainment/Recreation-related Materials

Chinese Videotapes and Television Programmes. Although he understood literary Chaozhou well, Father still read the Chinese subtitles in videotapes of Chaozhou operas. He read them with Chaozhou pronunciation in a low voice to savour the poetic flavour of the lyrics. He also read the palace names in a videotape of the Forbidden City narrated in Mandarin. Since he did not understand Mandarin, this reading was to help him follow the scenes. In addition to these videotapes, Father viewed every episode of *Judge Pao,* a television series from Hong Kong, which portrayed Pao Qing Tian, an upright magistrate during the Song Dynasty. Father felt he shared one characteristic with Judge Pao — the desire to uphold justice. His

love of the series encouraged the other family members to watch too. Those who were literate in Chinese learned the judge's name. One of its theme songs, with good music, motivated Pong to get its lyrics in Thai transcription so that he can learn to sing it. During her first visit to the family, the author was impressed by his singing of the theme song as she was aware that he had never studied Chinese.

Third was addicted to two soap operas from Taiwan, which were dubbed into Thai with Chinese subtitles. Although she understood the Thai soundtrack, she read the Chinese subtitles. Often she could not complete reading the subtitle. She read and translated aloud the theme song of the soap operas, and Father praised her for managing a proper translation. Further, she encouraged Fifth to watch the soap operas so that she too could practise reading the subtitles. Fifth, however, rarely watched them because she spent most of her weekdays preparing for classes. During summer vacation, Fifth lived with the family. She and Duan shared a television while working together at the stall. When the theme songs of the soap operas flashed on the screen, she read them out loud, which motivated Duan to ask about their meanings.

After Fourth had studied Mandarin for three months, she began reading the Chinese subtitles. She found that she could read only two words, *women* (we) and *nimen* (plural you). She paid so much attention to the subtitles that she ended up not understanding the stories. Some characters in the subtitles were the ones she had studied in class. They reminded her of their meanings and usage as explained by her teacher. Watching the soap operas with Third and Fifth, she sometimes initiated talk about different ways of writing the characters such as *zhi* (only) and *cai* (then), which they often read in the subtitles. To my surprise, Fourth concentrated better at the stall watching the Chinese television series and learned more about Chinese script than when she watched them at home. This was because conversations with other family members and the ice-grinding noise from the shop next door distracted her. Also, at home she tended to lie down and then fall asleep.

Family members literate in Chinese read the Chinese subtitles in order to increase their knowledge of Chinese. For Third and Fifth, reading the subtitles enhanced their understanding of the stories. Fourth traded off her enjoyment of the Chinese television series for the ability to read Chinese. She was capable of integrating what she learned inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, what they

read in the subtitles became an integral part of their talks about the Chinese script. Not only did these conversations allow them to share their knowledge of the Chinese script among themselves and with others illiterate in the script, but they also helped create a lively atmosphere in the family.

Songs. Third enjoyed singing Mandarin songs once she started on her Mandarin. One of her teachers impressed her with a translation of *Meihua* (the plum blossom), a song about the plum blossom, Taiwan's national flower. The song made her feel good to be a Chinese who worked hard and survived difficulties. She bought several cassettes of popular songs while visiting Kunming in China and actively practised singing after the trip. While working at her table, she played the cassettes and sang along. Sometimes she sang while Father talked to relatives in the living area opposite her table. She also sang at bedtime, which disturbed Fourth, who read in bed and did not understand Mandarin. When Fourth began taking Mandarin, she found herself more tolerant of her elder sister's singing. She was amused by the interaction between Third and Fifth when they were watching a videotape of a concert by Deng Lijun, a popular Taiwanese singer. Third looked at the lyrics flashed on the screen and sang along as Fifth translated them into Thai and acted out their meaning. As a result Fourth stopped reading a Thai novel and turned to watch the videotape. Knowing that Third enjoyed Mandarin songs, Chen brought her compact discs of Mandarin songs from China.

"I sing to relax," Third told me once. She said that to sing Mandarin songs well she needed to understand their meaning and to capture the feeling expressed in the songs. However, she did not know Chinese script well enough to understand the entire song. Accordingly, she asked Fifth for help. As Third was the most powerful family member in terms of finance and decision-making, Fifth would always oblige. During her stay with the family in summer, Fifth sacrificed some of her study hours at night to copy, transcribe and translate Mandarin songs. Some nights she worked on them until one the next morning.

By singing Mandarin songs, Third's reading and understanding of Chinese improved. She read the lyrics during leisure, at bedtime, and at work and even committed them to memory. Her interest in Mandarin songs also caused Fifth to read and write Chinese and their discussion of the songs in turn interested Fourth.

Chinese Chess. Father and Fifth were the only family members who could play Chinese chess. One evening Third had a client over for some discussion, while Father and Fifth were at their game of Chinese chess. They read the script on each piece before each move. The client was fascinated and started to ask Father for the meaning of the script. He read them out in Chaozhou for him but continued playing the game. He was so engrossed in the game that he forgot the client's question. So Chinese is read too during the family's recreation activities.

School-related Materials. As part of their course requirements, both Fourth and Fifth read and wrote Chinese in school. Their reading and writing were also social-interactional since they involved others in helping them with Chinese. Fifth's ability to write in Chinese in turn influenced Pol's and Thep's acquisition of the Chinese script. Pol, Second's 5-year-old son, and Thep, her 4-year-old son, stayed with the family during weekends.

Fourth practised reading and writing Chinese whenever she could. After work at the stall, she spent the evening reading and writing words learned in class. She read their transcriptions both in Taiwan's and China's official romanized forms. She needed to know both systems although she had studied Mandarin for only two weeks. Her instructor, who came from China, preferred to teach the mainland system, whereas the textbook, since it was published in Hong Kong, used the Taiwanese system. Further, Fourth's instructor could not communicate in Thai nor in simple Mandarin so Fourth could not understand his instructions and was frustrated. She had to read parts of the lessons to Fifth to ask for explanation.

Later Fourth enrolled in another Mandarin course at the university where Fifth was studying in the daytime. The instruction was satisfying as it encouraged her to study hard. She read and wrote some characters at the stall and at home. At the stall, after packing desserts, she would write any characters that come to mind onto the pad that she used for taking customers' food orders. She would repeat writing several characters to confirm how they should be written. Some characters, such as *shi* (teacher), would be incomplete because she wanted to practise only part of them. At home she sometimes sat at Third's table in front of the television. Rather than watching television, however, she used her fingers to write simple Chinese characters on the table, for example, *bu* (not), *ta* (she), and *ta* (he).

Fourth preferred doing homework in the house. It had a clean table, whereas the desk at the stall was greasy and her hands were often sticky. During her normal workday, she could allocate some time for study. She would write one Chinese character per page and submit it to her teacher, even though it was not assigned homework. During Chinese festivals, however, she would be too busy to attend class and so would study on her own. Fourth could identify Chinese script better than write it. She also remembered characters with many strokes better than the ones with few strokes. She felt the more complex characters, such as *xue* (to study), were beautiful. On weekdays when Fifth stayed at her dormitory, Fourth sometimes consulted Chen on the meanings of words in her textbook.

During summer vacation, in the evenings, Fifth reviewed her lecture notes taken in Mandarin classes. She expanded them by adding words and their usage from a dictionary. When her junior year began in June 1995, she did her Mandarin homework during weekend nights. She would copy a lesson, translate it into Thai, and do an exercise. Her nephews, Pol and Thep, often watched her write Chinese when they spent weekends with the family. The two boys could identify the Chinese handwriting of Fourth and Fifth. Once, Pol, who had little Chinese instruction, asked Third and Fifth to dictate some English words to him. After that he drew a tree and wrote *mu* ('tree') near it.

Fortune Telling-related Materials

Calendar. Apart from reading the Chinese calendar to confirm upcoming festivals, Father read it to obtain spiritual security in his daily scheduling. For instance, he read the description of each day before confirming his appointments. He selected dates which, according to their description, were lucky days to practise geomancy. Once he heard Mother talking on the phone about attending a funeral of one of her relatives. Immediately he checked the calendar on the wall and read the description that anyone born in the year of the monkey or the tiger should not go to the funeral.

Father also read the Chinese calendar for information about the fortune of newborn children. Once he handed Third a page from the calendar displaying the date on which her helper delivered a child. "Today is a good day. Pass this to her", he said to Third.

Geomancy and Fortune-telling Tickets. Father was the only one in the family who practised geomancy. His geomancy measuring tape had Arabic numerals, some Chinese script printed in red, and some in black. Father read the tape, for instance, when measuring the location and size of Third's working tables and the desk at the family's stall. He also read the scale to determine their ideal size and location before positioning the items. If something that was measured coincided with a character in red, such as *fu* ('abundant') or *cai* ('wealth'), it meant a good location which would bring fortune to its owner. However, if it were a character in black, such as *qiong* (poor), the location would bring bad luck. After measuring the location of his mother-in-law's tomb, he recommended that his wife find another location.

Father was also the only one in the family who practised fortune-telling by reading faces. People who knew his fortune-telling ability would approach him and request him to read their fortune. When he drew fortune-telling tickets printed in Chinese, however, he needed someone to read them for him. Once, much worried about Brother's drinking, he went to a Guanyin shrine, and asked her about his only son. Then he drew a ticket and asked an attendant at the shrine to read it in Chaozhou. When he arrived home, he showed the ticket to Brother and recited the moral instruction that was printed on the ticket.

Chen's Written Chinese for the Family

Teaching Materials. Chen's writings were valuable teaching materials for Fifth. Her reading of these materials achieved several objectives. Once he wrote an obituary poem about her maternal grandmother who had passed away several days earlier. After listening to his explanation of the poem, Fifth asked for a copy of the poem which she greatly valued as a contribution to the family's history and for its aesthetic value. She kept the poem for future use in her Chinese writing homework.

Chen's writings also reinforced Fifth's understanding of his verbal messages. This was especially helpful when she could not follow his oral explanation. Once he asked her what she was looking for in the living room. She did not know 'cotton wool' in Mandarin. Later when she found the cotton wool, she showed it to him, and asked for the word in Mandarin. "*Yaomian*," he said and accordingly wrote the word and its transcription in Hanyu Pinyin, *yaomian*, for her.

Letters. When Father needed to correspond with his relatives in China, he sought help from his neighbours, friends, or Chen. Fifth had been taking Mandarin as a foreign language for two and a half years at university. She could read vernacular writing and write essays in Chinese. Despite this, it was difficult for her to read Chinese characters found in letters written by native speakers of Chinese. Their handwriting was illegible to Fifth. Also, she was unfamiliar with some of the lexical items and sentence structures used, as they were much influenced by the Chaozhou dialect.

Chen read and wrote letters for Father not only to maintain good relations with him but also to return the favour for the latter's hospitality. During his stay in Bangkok in 1995, Chen wrote three letters for Father. Two of them were addressed to a relative in China. Another was to invite the Chinese traditional healer, who had treated Mother's leg during her trip to China, to visit relatives in Thailand. Father intended this letter to be a supporting document when the man applied for a visa to enter Thailand.

Discussion and Conclusion

All the individuals in this study lived in a home infused with Chinese culture. Nonetheless, each of them experienced Chinese literacy differently. The functions and values of their Chinese literacy practices were also diverse. Father read Chinese when practising geomancy, telling fortune, and using the Chinese calendar. Although he had lived in Thailand for almost 50 years, he still remembered many Chinese tales as well as a statement of Sun Yat-sen's about the glorious future of China. Father often spoke with pride about the country's abundance of natural resources and its economic growth in the last decade. His love for China, combined with the feeling that Mandarin education is important, led him to encourage his children to learn the language. He thought that China would rule the world in the future. His children, therefore, would have a difficult life if they had no knowledge of Mandarin. He also believed that Mandarin education would inculcate in them the core values in Chinese culture, such as filial piety and respect for the elders. His practices of Chinese literacy and encouragement of Mandarin education for the children were due to sentimental reasons.

Third's use of written Chinese was largely associated with relaxation and entertainment. She sang Mandarin songs and read

the Chinese subtitles in television soap operas from Taiwan. Since she worked from home, she saw Father a lot and that provoked her often, especially when he became tipsy from a few drinks and started to indulge in senseless talk. Furthermore, being responsible for the family's finances and the others' behaviour, such as Brother's drinking, brought her anxiety, worry, and pressure. She needed an outlet and she found this by singing Mandarin songs and watching Chinese soap operas.

Fourth wanted to learn Mandarin so that she could travel independently in China. However, other members of the family disapproved of her spending three hours commuting between home and school to attend Mandarin class for two hours in the evening. They also felt that her study forced Mother to look after the stall on her behalf. Brother thought her study was impractical, as opportunities for her to make use of her study outside the classroom were very slim. She should have studied English or received vocational training. No one knows her motive for wanting to devote herself to the study of Mandarin. Indeed, she wanted to make up for the parents' lack of support for her education. While Brother and Fifth attended college, she had to quit school after the ninth grade to work full-time for the family. At times Fifth's high school classmates stopped by the house, and she would listen to their conversations which she felt were interesting and decided that education did indeed widen one's thoughts. While the other siblings could attend Mandarin classes conducted at home by a Chinese neighbour hired by Father, she had to sell desserts at the stall. "While I was walking into the house to get things for work, I heard the sound of the class, '*yi, er, san, si...* ('one, two, three, four'...)' I asked why I had to sell desserts. Why couldn't I study Mandarin like the others?" It was not surprising then that, as soon as she was economically independent, she decided to study Mandarin despite the family's objections.

Fifth's reading and writing in Chinese greatly involved school-related materials. She divided her time between Mandarin and her English literature studies, a very difficult major.

The practices of Chinese literacy of all the daughters had practical value. They enabled the girls to go beyond their house and broaden their outlook. Third read Chinese when singing in Mandarin and watching Chinese dramas. These activities allowed her to escape from the reality of the home and enter an alien world where she heard and spoke Mandarin and read Chinese

script. Fourth and Fifth practised Chinese literacy to fulfil school requirements. Beyond these practical values, there was a symbolic value attached to their practices: Third's ability to read and write Chinese enhanced her ethnic consciousness. After Fourth and Fifth started studying Mandarin, they felt more intimate with some family members than before. Fourth had much to share with Third, as did Fifth with the parents, in talking about their knowledge of Mandarin and Chinese culture gained in studying the language. Once Fifth solicited input from Father about Chinese funerals. She wanted to write a report on this topic, one of her class assignments. The practices of Chinese literacy among the daughters brought them back to the inner world of their home.

Chinese literacy in this family had some impact among the individuals with knowledge of Chinese script. It also created mutual impact between these members (Father and the daughters) and others who could not read and write Chinese (Mother, Brother and the grandchildren). Father's authoritative leadership in the family and his pro-China attitude often caused Brother to argue with him. Moreover, Brother had no interest in Mandarin. Nevertheless, he could write his Chinese name given and taught by Father. He could also identify Father's store name from seeing it every day in the home. His heavy drinking caused Father to worry so much that Father sought advice from fortune-telling. Father memorized what was written in a fortune-telling ticket in order to explain it to Brother.

Since all the children had no knowledge about the Chinese calendar, Mother, who never studied Mandarin, read the calendar for them when their birth dates approached. Pol and Thep, Second's sons, became familiar with the Chinese script they saw in the house as they had been staying with the family during weekends for several years. Watching Fourth and Fifth do Mandarin homework, Pol later could copy simple Chinese characters. Pong and Duan, First's children by a Thai father, spoke little Chaozhou, and never studied Mandarin. However, because they lived in the family where written Chinese is used, it has introduced them to the Chinese world (e.g. Father's use of the Chinese calendar and Fifth's retelling of Chinese fables) and has reminded them of their ethnicity. Several claims concerning the relationship between Chinese education and Sino-Thai identity are not applicable to cases like Duan, Pong, Thep and Pol. Skinner claims that:

> The Thai-ification of Chinese schools together with the reduction in their number has greatly restricted the opportunity to learn written Chinese and become better acquainted with the rudiments of Chinese history and traditions. The importance of a Chinese education in this regard is brought out by two conclusions reached by the writer after several years of working among the Chinese in Thailand: The only third-generation Chinese who identify in most social situations as Chinese are those educated in Chinese schools, in Thailand or abroad. The only fourth-generation Chinese who ever identify as Chinese are likewise Chinese-educated. The implication is clear that without a Chinese education grandchildren of Chinese immigrants at the present time become Thai. (Skinner, 1957:38)

Purcell supports the above view and says that "The only third-generation Chinese who still looked upon themselves as Chinese were those educated in Chinese schools" (1966:165). Such a claim is insensitive to other forms of Chinese education outside school, such as family upbringing and private tutoring. As in the case of Third, knowledge obtained from attending private tutoring in Mandarin strengthened her Chinese identity.

In the family studied, the flourishing of Chinese literacy occurred concurrently with the decline of the parents' native Chinese dialect. Both phenomena increased from one generation to another, that is, the Thai-born children acquired a higher level of Chinese literacy through school or tutorial-based studies of Mandarin when compared to the China-born father who was literate in Chinese but only on a limited scale. On the other hand, the children spoke Chaozhou much less than the parents. Although mastery of Chinese literacy requires greater effort than literacy in other languages (Bendor-Samuel, 1992), many groups of overseas Chinese — for example, some family members in this study — strove to maintain literacy. This study investigates roles, functions, values, and attitudes with regards to the practices of Chinese literacy in the everyday context of the family. The practices took on multiple functions. They functioned in activities associated with study, recreation, and ritual. Some members read and wrote Chinese to accomplish the practical goals of daily life, to make plans, to maintain social relationships, to enjoy recreational activities, to meet school requirements, to increase knowledge of Mandarin and Chinese script. The practices of Chinese literacy

in the family also functioned symbolically in preserving and reinforcing Chinese culture and identity among family members, with or without Mandarin education.

The author ascribes the flourishing of Chinese literacy practices in the family to two factors: the growing number of Chinese literates and the resulting increase in the use of materials with Chinese print in the home. The children studied Mandarin at a time when its status had been improving for a decade due to changes in the international economy and international politics. Several decades ago the Thai government regarded written Chinese as a medium used to spread the communist ideology and Chinese nationalism. Consequently, Mandarin education and the use of Chinese script in public were suppressed. This, in turn, discouraged many Chinese from passing on or emphasizing knowledge of Chinese to their offspring. The Chinese language, still spoken in its varieties by the elderly, gradually lost importance. Fewer and fewer acquired literacy skills in Chinese. Subsequently, due to the normalisation of relations between Thailand and China, the end of the Cold War, and the collapse of the communist system in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, China's economic liberalisation, the influx of Taiwanese investment into Thailand, trade relations with China and Taiwan have become substantial in recent years. The Sino-Thais' knowledge of Mandarin is now an advantage (Vatikiotis, 1996), thereby causing the Thai government to promote Mandarin education. Many Chinese, like the children in the family researched here, have begun or resumed their study of the language.

The improvement in political and economic relations between Thailand and China also allowed much travel between the two countries. The family's parents had met Chen in China and later he stayed with the family in Bangkok. Chen supported the family members' efforts to learn Chinese so his presence in the home, therefore, was certainly an asset to Chinese literacy in the family.

Chinese literacy in the family will be maintained as long as subsequent generations continue studying Mandarin and take jobs which require them to read and write Chinese. If the political situation between China and Thailand remains stable and economic cooperation between them increases, Chinese literacy will become more and more important to the people of Thailand. Sonthi (1994) and Likhit (1996) encourage them to acquire

Mandarin for future use. Under such conditions, the practices of Chinese literacy by the second generation of the family studied will be beneficial to the third generation who acquire Chinese literacy by formal training or other forms of education. An interesting question to explore further is the functions, values and attitudes concerning the practices of Chinese literacy by the third and subsequent generations.

Notes

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2 Such an event – "any activity which involves one or more of the following: reading, writing, manipulation of written materials or books with the intent to use them for some purpose, or any observed behaviour or discussion that makes references to reading, writing, or other activities in the material culture of literacy (Wagner, Messick, and Spratt, 1986: 240)" – is made up of participants, setting, purpose, channels, codes, message form and content, genres, key, rules of interaction, and norms of interpretation (Salzmann, 1993).
3 The author would like to express the deepest gratitude to all individuals in the family for their cooperation throughout her field research. To protect their anonymity their names and the place names have been changed.
4 Many Chinese believe that individuals possess an element: gold, wood, soil, water, or fire. When making a name, one should select Chinese characters made up of radicals conveying a meaning which harmonizes one's element.
5 Guanyin, or Avalokitesvara, a Bodhisattva who sought salvation in Buddhism for others before enlightenment.
6 Many Chinese in Thailand believe that the Chinese numerals printed on a dead person's lantern would later appear in lotteries. Thus it is common to see a lottery seller at a Chinese funeral surrounded by people who are busy selecting tickets.

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10

Wang Thong: Civic Identity and Ethnicity in a Thai Market Town*

P. Tarkulwaranont, Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong

Introduction

The position of the Chinese in Thailand has long been integral to Thai social studies, given the history and extent of their immigration and the role they have played in Thai society. Nevertheless, many aspects of the Chinese and their place within the wider Thai society have not been adequately investigated. Added to these gaps is the sheer speed and extent of social and cultural change that have affected Thailand, especially after the Second World War. Many of the older studies (Landon, 1941; Skinner, 1957a, 1957b, 1958, 1963, 1973; Coughlin, 1952, 1955, 1960) present an image of the Chinese that is simplistic and dated.

This study is an ethnographic contribution to the understanding of the Chinese in Thailand based on the authors' experience of the market town of Wang Thong.[1] It examines the changes in ethnic identity, its capacity to adapt and how the pattern of ethnic relations is dominated by the "past" and at the same time, by a local civic identity. The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, it is to discover the present state of ethnic identity and ethnic relations in Wang

Thong. The common view concerning the Chinese in Thailand is that they have, to a great extent, been assimilated into Thai culture and society. Many second- and third-generation descendants are said to have become "Thai" in terms of their cultural practices and association with the Thai. Skinner's works which uphold this view have up to now dominated the analysis of the Chinese in Thailand. However, despite Skinner's findings, there remain today descendants of Chinese immigrants who, in varying circumstances, still identify themselves as "Chinese". It is thus a major research problem to find out whether they have become "Thai" or remain "Chinese". Second, this paper analyzes the significance of the "past" (local history, myth and ritual) in the context of ethnicity and ethnic relations.

In Wang Thong, a small rural market town where, in theory, the Chinese are thought to have been assimilated more easily and rapidly into Thai society, the authors found that Chinese ethnicity co-existing alongside the so-called Thai identity. The Chinese form an astonishingly integrated community with the local people. Investigations of the history of multiethnic associations of the area and different versions of local oral traditions and rituals suggest that the present pattern of ethnic identification and relations in Wang Thong is largely determined by the issue of the "past". By reconstructing local history, myth and ritual displays, the Chinese have come to possess, when compared to the Thai, a greater claim to local community. This is an essential resource which legitimizes their local political and economic rights associated with their identity. Furthermore, due to the lack of a predominant historical identity and the need for local economic and social cooperation, the Chinese and the Thai have adopted a new form of common identity associated with Wang Thong localism which binds them together within one economic and social boundary.

For more than 30 years, the dominant explanation for the pattern of ethnic relations between the Thai and the Chinese is "assimilation". This idea of assimilation was first developed from experiences in the United States, where various ethnic groups participated in the creation of a new nation and new identity. Immigrants from various parts of the world, after a period of residence, have assimilated this new identity of "being an American". In Thailand, the same idea was applied to Thai-Chinese ethnic relations, suggesting a cultural transformation of the Chinese and their social integration into Thai culture and society. However, this idea was developed during the period of unique political and social

conditions and was supported only by data from the Chinese population in Bangkok.

The period before and during which Skinner carried out his research was indeed a difficult time for the Chinese in Thailand. Under the two Phibun governments, 1938–1944 and 1948–1957, the Chinese were placed under severe restrictions. It is thus simple enough to suggest that such pressures, along with inadequate support from the Chinese government, had forced the Chinese immigrants and their local-born descendants to assimilate Thai culture in order to enjoy the privileges of full Thai citizenship. In addition, Skinner also suggested factors that encouraged voluntary assimilation among local-born Chinese in Thailand in contrast to those in other Southeast Asian countries. Unlike other Southeast Asian countries which had experienced colonialism, the elite class in Thailand had always been Thai. It was this group of Thai who possessed power, privilege, prestige and wealth. If the Chinese in Thailand aspired to upward mobility, they would have to become Thai. Since there were no distinct cultural or physical differences between the Thai and the Chinese, full assimilation of the Chinese into Thai society was possible (Skinner, 1957a: 299–300). Although he did not provide a clear definition, Skinner proposed that assimilation here involved two processes of socio-cultural transformation. First, the Chinese must be "desocialized" (Parsons, 1975: 53–83) from their Chinese groups and identity. Skinner offered the closing of Chinese schools as one example. This was to be followed by resocialization, in which the Chinese became familiar with the Thai way of life, beliefs, and symbolic identity, and adopted them in practice. This second process, according to Skinner, can be the result of intermarriage, schooling and other forms of close inter-group association.

There are three major problems in the application of Skinner's idea of assimilation. First, one cannot simply say that the Chinese are absorbed into Thai culture or Thai society. Many aspects of the Thai culture and social structure have been influenced by Chinese elements as well. Second, especially in recent years, both the Thai and the Chinese have been exposed to external Western elements during the country's modernization and industrialization processes. It is not that the Chinese and Thai have become more alike because the Chinese are assimilated into Thai culture, but because both are (to a certain extent) assimilated into a common new cultural and social environment. Finally, it must be remembered that the Thai

and the Chinese are not homogeneous ethnic groups. There is no single set of Thai cultural practices into which one can say the Chinese have assimilated. Neither can one say all Chinese share the same pattern of relationships with the Thai.

This chapter, however, does not intend to extend the debate on theoretical issues concerning the "assimilation theory", but rather to propose an alternative approach to the studies of the Chinese in present-day Thailand. This is needed to understand the changes and adaptation of ethnicity and ethnic relations in this particular case of Chinese-Thai relations, and perhaps elsewhere. The authors' experiences in Wang Thong suggest a strong relationship between issues of the "past" and ethnic relations — a "past" that includes not just the history of the community but also local myths and rituals. In recent years, the idea that the "past" plays a significant role in the conduct of present social phenomena and that it could largely be the product of certain current interests are widespread in anthropological circles. This chapter addresses the current debate on the relations between the past and present. In addition, the authors will show that such relations between the past and the present can be applied to the study of ethnic relations.

Unlike evolutionists and diffusionists of the late 19th and early 20th century, there is an increasing realization among anthropologists that history is not merely the reflection of human evolutionary process or the means for cultural comparison between societies. Rather it is an important issue on its own which needs equal attention as do other aspects in anthropology. Their approach to history, therefore, treats the past more seriously. An increasing number of anthropologists working on the less orthodox materials of the past (such as oral traditions and local myth) have gradually developed anthropological techniques in handling and interpreting such historical materials. Oral traditions such as popular versions of local history, once restricted or even considered conjectural, have gained in status in anthropological studies. Following the works of Malinowski (1926) and Levi-Strauss (1963; 1967) on the studies of myth (in the context of history), more anthropological investigations on this issue have proven that there are significant connections between the past and many aspects of present social phenomena, particularly in the areas of social organization and politics among different social groups (Leach, 1954; Geertz, 1966; Robertson, 1973; Willis, 1980; Appadurai, 1981; Peel, 1984).

This chapter is based on the general theory that in a society composed of several social groups, the pattern of inter-group relations as well as domination of the society is determined by the relevant historical resources (power of the "past") possessed by each group, and vice versa. In the case of ethnic relations, the pattern of relationship between (and among) the groups is determined by the claim to their right over the history of the community. Conversely, the power to manipulate the "past" is determined by the present social standing of each group in the given community. The resources of the "past" include conventional forms of history and oral traditions of narrative history, legends, and local myth. Particular rituals concerned with elements in the "past" are also considered such resources of the "past".

In the particular case of the Chinese, they have moved into the area for over a century and had their own versions of local history and myth which differed from the Thai's. Despite being ruled by the Thai, they shared considerable space in the reconstruction of local history and myth. Moreover, in local ritual display, the Chinese managed to dominate the local community while the other groups' original ritual practices are fading away. Although the Chinese have integrated into the local community (both socially and economically) and shared the local civic identity (*Chaw Wang Thong*), their dominant roles in local economy and politics reflected their greater possession of the "past" and the power to manipulate the "past". Unlike other parts of the country where economic domination and differences in Thai-Chinese ethnicity are the major obstacles in ethnic relations, the Chinese of Wang Thong (through their claim to local history and the dominant ritual display of their mythical goddess) have integrated with the local community and share the local civic identity while maintaining their economic domination and distinct ethnic identity.

The authors' study, therefore, investigates the resources of the "past" possessed by each major group in Wang Thong, namely the Thai, Chinese and Lao. This includes their roles in the reconstruction and manipulation of local history, myth and ritual. To understand the domination of the Chinese in this particular aspect of power, let us also look into the role of local government officials concerning the inclusion of (central Siamese-oriented) national ritual practices which, to a great extent, affect the Thai in their claims to the "past".

Wang Thong: Setting, History and Demography

There are various definitions of Wang Thong. Formally, it refers to the administrative boundary of the district (*amphoe*) of Wang Thong. The trading community in Phitsanulok and the nearby region refer to Wang Thong as the market centre of the district in which they conduct business. For villagers in remote parts of the district, Wang Thong is the district office where they have occasional contacts with government officials. Other villagers view Wang Thong as the *Talaad*, the market where they can purchase most of their necessities. In this chapter, the term Wang Thong refers to both the administrative area and the market town. This study covers the whole district of Wang Thong. By the market town of Wang Thong, the authors mean the *Sukhaaphibaan* Wang Thong (the sanitary district, roughly coinciding with the original boundary of Wang Thong Village) plus its six surrounding satellite villages which have close social and economic ties with the *Sukhaaphibaan*. The term Wang Thong is also used to refer to local civic identity. However, the development of identity being dynamic, it is impossible to establish a geographical boundary where the people identify themselves as *Chaw Wang Thong*, the people of Wang Thong.

Wang Thong is, by Thai standards, a sizeable market town. It serves the district of the same name as the central place for economic, social, and governmental administrative activities. Having relatively good transportation facilities, Wang Thong has become one of the biggest market centres outside Phitsanulok, the provincial city. As market transactions are mostly handled by the Chinese traders, Wang Thong also has the second biggest Chinese community in the province. The district of Wang Thong is 17 km from Phitsanulok and covers an area of 1,574.6 sq km or about one-sixth of the province. About 55 percent of its area in the north and central part of the district is mountainous. The lower central and southern part of the district consist of highland-valleys and lowland. In terms of transportation, the district has directly benefited from two major regional highways. The Phitsanulok-Lomsak Highway (built in 1956) runs through the district from west to east linking the district with Phitsanulok, Nakorn Thai district and the provinces in the Northeastern Region. The southbound Wang Thong-Khao Sai Highway connects the district to the provinces in the Central Region. Within the district, communication between each *tambon* (commune) is served either by asphalted roads or well-maintained dirt roads. Some villages in

the hinterland, however, can be difficult to reach during the heavy rainy season. Regular transportation to the provincial city and other provinces is provided by 42 bus services daily. Another 50 mini-buses ply between Wang Thong Market and Phitsanulok. Most of the villages have at least one or two mini-bus services to the district market and provincial city.

Water transportation in the district is of little significance. In the past, traders transported paddy down the Wang Thong River to Phijit and Nakorn Sawan. Today the river has become so shallow that it is used mainly in the rainy season by some farmers to transport their daily garden products to the market.

The ethno-demographic structure of present-day Wang Thong is very complex. The division of sub-ethnic groups and the different periods of the arrival of both the so-called Thai and the Chinese make it impossible to discuss ethnic relations in the simple terms of Thai versus Chinese. By the mid-1980s, the ethno-demographic composition of Wang Thong can be described in two ways. Using the sub-ethnic divisions and the period in which each group arrived, there are at least 10 distinct groups. These include the descendants of the Siamese Thai from the upper central region, the Lao Song from Phetburi province, and the Chinese from nearby areas who came during the second half of the 19th century. From the early 20th century inflows include the descendants of the Khon Muang from the northern region, the Lao Isan from the northeastern region, and the Chinese from Ban Sam Ruan and Phitsanulok. The latest inflow during the last 30 years include the Lao Isan, the Chinese of three different dialect groups, and their descendants. If we, however, divide Wang Thong into three socio-geographical parts, the picture of ethno-demographic composition assumes the following pattern. The market town of Wang Thong comprises descendants of the Siamese Thai who came during the second half of the 19th century; descendants of the Hainanese Chinese of the early 20th century; and the Chinese immigrants (Hainanese, Teochew, and Hakka) of the last 30 years who came with their children. In the surrounding lowland villages, are descendants of the Siamese Thai, the Khon Muang, some Lao Isan, and some early Chinese farmers all of whom arrived during the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century. Up in the highland villages, the population consists mainly of the descendants of the Lao Song, who arrived during the second half of the 19th century, and the recent Lao Isan immigrants.

Multiethnic Association

It is clear that Wang Thong has experienced two major developments in multiethnic association and the reconstruction of its local history. First, the history of the area is marked by social and cultural intercourse among various groups of people. Due to Wang Thong's geographical location, different ethnic and cultural elements, the Siamese Thai of the central region, the Lao from the northeast and the Khon Muang from the north, have migrated into the area, including the Chinese of the later period. Thus, its inhabitants are composed of various groups of people who have migrated as a result of political and economic forces throughout history. Second, since various groups arrived almost contemporaneously during the most recent period of resettlement, it is difficult for an observer to establish the historical primacy of any single group. Unlike other parts of the country where local history is dominated by that of a single majority group, the people in Wang Thong do not accept that any single group has the monopoly in the reconstruction of the local history.

The ethno-demographic complexity is exacerbated by the fact that these different ethnic groups are by no means separate from each other. The increasing scale of economic interdependence and social involvement link them together. To a great extent, the majority of the people share the common identity of Chaw Wang Thong. This is important in explaining much of the social relations in Wang Thong. Even in times of great economic and political conflicts, for example, between the Lao farmers and the Chinese traders, an emphasis on Chaw Wang Thong identity has helped ease the situation. This, however, does not suggest that each group has abandoned its ethnic or sub-ethnic identity but that they have jointly developed a common communal identity which they can all share without sacrificing their original identities. To become Chaw Wang Thong, they are not forced to adopt the unfamiliar culture of any predominant group since there is no such group in Wang Thong. They can therefore preserve their cultural practices and original identities, and yet also maintain local recognition as members of the community.

Among the younger generation, though the consciousness of ethnic and sub-ethnic identities is still very much alive, there is no fixed cultural pattern to which one must conform. There is evidence suggesting that cultural patterns of each ethnic and sub-ethnic group

are no longer seen by the present inhabitants to be as categorically distinctive as in the past. Moreover, it is common to find that many of the younger generation of these different ethnic origins are free to adopt from other groups the way of life, beliefs and other forms of cultural practices. This is, however, not the result of assimilation since they adopt them on a selective basis and do not necessarily attach ethnic identification to these practices. The society as a whole has become a more or less multi-stranded society where there is more than one pattern of beliefs, values, religion, and so on. Unlike in a "plural society", each of these different cultural patterns does not belong exclusively to the respective ethnic group but can be adopted occasionally and selectively by members of other ethnic groups.

The recent changes in the economic and social structure of Wang Thong have an effect on the pattern of identity and relations among the various ethnic groups in the community. The most significant is the expansion of local civic identity and the emergence of the residential identity of Wang Thong which brings together the different ethnic and sub-ethnic groups as well as the market and village communities. The conception of such an identity has helped the Chinese acquire local recognition and establish good relations with the Thai. Thus, Chinese ethnicity in this study can only be understood together with the other aspects of identity which have been developed in the community. The development and changes within Chinese ethnicity, in this case, appear to be the result of a renegotiation process between Chinese and the local identity. It is thus essential to discuss the pattern of ethnic relations based not merely on the issue of ethnicity, but also on the changes in ethnicity and local identity. Let us now focus on three major areas in the development of identity and ethnic relations: the local Chinese ethnicity, the formation of localism and local identity, and the pattern of relations between different groups in the community.

Local Chinese Ethnicity

Like the Chinese in Singapore who as a group see themselves as racially or primordially Chinese though individually using a multiplicity of indicators such as language, religion, education or culture, or none at all (Tong and Chan, n.d.), there are many Chinese

in Wang Thong who identify themselves as Chinese, and yet differ in many aspects of their religious beliefs and cultural practices. During the past 100 years of settlement in the area, some of their cultural practices have remained unchanged, while others have been adapted to the local situation. For example, many of the younger generation local-born descendants no longer use Chinese dialects. Those who married Thai wives and raised their children as any ordinary Thai family would seem even more vulnerable to losing touch with their ethnic identity. Yet the majority of these Chinese and their descendants still identify themselves as "Chinese" or "having Chinese blood". The question is what binds them together, or what is their concept of Chinese ethnicity?

Based on the authors' fieldwork, there seems to be at least three definitions of Chinese ethnicity. The first group of Chinese, who came to Thailand before and after the Second World War, emphasize the ability to speak one of the Chinese dialects and knowledge of Chinese ritual practices, especially ancestor worship and praying to deities. Other aspects of cultural practices, however, are more negotiable. For instance, most do not hesitate to participate in the Thai merit-making rites or private Thai household rituals. Many of them have one of their children ordained as Buddhist monk for a short period.[2] Many also adopt Thai food habits and many Thai animistic beliefs. However, this does not mean that they have absorbed Thai culture. Rather, they see these beliefs and practices as differing little from Chinese ones.

The second notion of Chinese ethnicity is articulated by local-born Chinese (not necessarily born in Wang Thong) whose parents are both Chinese (immigrants or local born). Although most in this group could speak a Chinese dialect, they do not consider language to be an essential element of Chinese ethnicity. Instead, they emphasize the knowledge of ancestral history and the consciousness of the Chinese blood ties. They encourage their children to marry other Chinese and have "pure" Chinese grandchildren. Nevertheless, they do not stop their children from marrying Thais if that is their decision. This group also holds a strong belief in ancestral worship, Chinese gods and deities, but their belief is not as strong as that of the first group.

The third concept of Chinese ethnicity belongs to the local-born Sino-Thai who have been raised in Sino-Thai families. For them, the central indicator of Chineseness is having Chinese ancestors. Many

claim that the children of a Chinese are automatically Chinese, regardless of whether they speak Chinese or know Chinese rituals. Equally, the children of a Thai are naturally Thai. When asked which of their parents, if one is a Chinese and the other is Thai, has a stronger influence on their identity, most appeared indecisive. For example, over half of the Sino-Thai claimed: "We (people in Thailand) all have Chinese blood, only more or less." It seems then that ethnic identity does not depend on one single set of cultural traits and it can be kept alive by in-group cultural transformations. Thus, Chinese immigrants and their descendants, as long as they identify themselves as "Chinese", can be considered as Chinese even though their cultural practices and way of life differ from those of their origins and of their immigrant ancestors.

For most ordinary Thai of Wang Thong, the concept of ethnicity seems very abstract; the majority do not feel able to talk about it. There is, in fact, no equivalent Thai term for "ethnicity". The closest term used by Thai anthropologists is *Chaad Phan* (birth race) which only makes sense to those in the academic circle. Among everyday Thai, the whole concept of ethnicity can only be described in separate terms, such as *chya chaad* (race), *phaa saa* (language) and *caariid thamniam* (tradition and/or custom). In general, the Thai do not seem to have an integrated, complete concept of ethnicity.

Only when pressed will the Thai define Chinese and Chinese ethnicity in terms of immigrant Chinese and the national and cultural identities of mainland China. Consequently, according to local Thai people in the market and the villagers, there seem to be only 20 or so Chinese in the whole of Wang Thong. When asked about the ethnic identity of local-born traders (both of whose parents are immigrant Chinese), most Thai villagers become indecisive, but finally put them into the category of *luuk ciin Wang Thong* (Chinese children of Wang Thong). With regard to visible Chinese ritual practices in the town, for example, the worship of *Caw Mae Thong Kham*,[3] while the Thai do recognize its Chinese origin they see the procession as part of *praphenii thong thin*, the local tradition.[4]

The villagers in Wang Thong in particular prefer to identify individuals according to their occupation, socio-economic status, their relationship with others, and most of all, their relations with the community. Thus, when referring to one Chinese trader of the market (as a respondent), most of the Thai villagers identify him as trader (*phoo kha*), rich man (*khon ruaj*), well-known person (*khon miinaa*

miitaa), market people (*chaw talaad*). Only a few villagers have actually used the term "Chinese trader" (*phoo kha ciin*) as an identification.[5]

Localism, Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations

Folk concepts of Chinese ethnicity among the Chinese and Thai in Wang Thong seem to suggest that there has been a process of re-negotiation of ethnic identities among different generations of these two major ethnic groups. Members of both groups clearly recognize their distinct ethnic identity, but are not overly concerned by the differences which exist and instead choose to emphasize their common residence. Throughout the authors' fieldwork in Wang Thong, the term *Chaw Wang Thong* (people of Wang Thong) was used repeatedly by the local people whenever the question of ethnic identity is raised. Apart from a few cases, there seem to be no hostile feelings between the two groups although the Chinese clearly dominate the wealth and economy of the community.

Kuwinpant did not report the use of the term *Chaw Wang Thong* during his fieldwork between 1974–76. There were, however, two common terms used for local identity, *chaw talaad* (the market people) and *khon baan nok* (people of the outer villages) [Kuwinpant 1980:12, 14]. Like *Chaw Wang Thong*, the two latter terms seemed, at that time, to identify people according to residence and not ethnic identity. It is then possible to suggest that the emphasis of local identity (and not ethnic identity) has already been developing for some time before another identity began to claim a larger geographical ground, namely, the *Chaw Wang Thong*, which includes both the people in the market and the surrounding villages. The recent shift of such an identity from *chaw talaad* (covering only the market centre) to *Chaw Wang Thong* (including both the market and the surrounding villages) is likely to be supported by the development of local transportation, changes in village economy, and the emergence of Wang Thong as a district urban centre.

The development of village roads and other communication networks between villages and the market have, in recent years, brought the "market" (*talaad*) and the "outer villages" (*bann nok*) closer, forming an integrated community. In addition, the changes in village economy, especially the expansion of the market network

and changes in occupational patterns, have made the two parts of the community more economically interdependent. A large number of villagers developed extensive personal and business relationships with traders in the market and have come to consider themselves as part of the same community. Such a consciousness of belonging to the same community seems to overcome the problem of ethnic or class divisions. During fieldwork, the authors did not witness any major signs of ethnic antagonism between the Chinese and the local Thai people, nor any serious conflicts between traders and villagers. Although the Chinese traders are much wealthier than the local Thai, most Thai do not perceive them as alien traders who exploit the local economy. Rather, they are viewed as friends and relatives who are successful because they work very hard at their business. Most Thai petty traders and villagers have at least one or two traders in the market whom they can turn to in times of need. The patron-client relationship is common among the traders and villages. Traders, especially in the agricultural products, provide low- or zero-interest credit to their regular customers in order to maintain their businesses. Occasionally, farmers can arrange for advance payment from the traders, before the sale of their farm products, to meet urgent expenses.[6]

In general, inter-ethnic relations in Wang Thong are largely restricted to two types of interaction: between the Chinese and the Thai traders in the market town, and between the Chinese and the Thai petty traders and villagers in the surrounding villages. Between the Chinese and local Thai traders, it is found that a number of Siamese Thai and Lao families who own stores or shops in the market have close personal and business connections with the Chinese traders. Social visits and the loan of goods when one is short of stock are common practices. Outside of business, these Chinese and Thai (and Lao) families usually know each other well since they live in the same neighbourhood and most of their children go to the same school. In fact, almost everyone knows each other well within the market. On the occasion of any household ritual ceremony (for example, birth, marriage, Buddhist monk ordination) the neighbourhood would join in without a need for formal invitations. Similarly, at events such as the communal Buddhist merit-making rites (*ngaan bun* or *phitii tham bun*), the neighbourhood gets together to organize the ritual. Apart from the functional division of the market and the neighbourhood, there is hardly any sense of division in the community. Intermarriage between ethnic groups also helps establish good relationships between

families. With or without actual kinship relations, most people in the community address each other by the Thai kinship terms of *phii* (older brother or sister), *paa* (aunt: father's or mother's older sister), or *lung* (uncle: father's or mother's older brother) as a way of showing respect.[7]

Ethnic relations between the market Chinese and the villagers seem to be based more heavily on their economic interdependence. Only four Chinese families actually have kinship relations with Thai families in these villages. The rest established their relations with villagers through the marketing network. However, unlike the outer villages, most Chinese know and have direct relations with a large number of villagers in the six surrounding villages. Although such relations are based mainly on business, Thai villagers regard the Chinese as *khon ruu cak kan* (people who know each other) or *khon kan eng* (people of the same group), and invite or expect them to join in village social events or household ritual ceremonies. During village communal merit-making rites or festivals (like the boat-race festival), most Chinese traders are approached by villagers to support the events. However, at market merit-making ceremonies or other market festivals, only the more affluent villagers feel it appropriate for them to participate.

Contrary to Skinner and most writers on ethnic relations in Thailand, it was found that the Wang Thong community (the market and the six villages) has developed into an economically and socially integrated social unit. Both the Thai and Chinese conceive of ethnicity not based on differences, but rather as the identification based on common locality. These two major phenomena seem to lead to the development of *Chaw Wang Thong*, the new identity which is shared by both the Chinese and the Thai, and which helps establish the unique patterns of ethnic relations between them. How did such a form of local identity develop in Wang Thong? Why has residential identity become so significant in their lives? How can the lack of ethnic antagonism in Wang Thong be accounted for? The authors' study suggests that this distinct pattern of ethnic identity, the emphasis on the Wang Thong locality, and ethnic relations within the community have, in part, to do with the construction, negotiation, and appropriation of the local history and perception of the past. Each group, whether Thai, Chinese, or Lao, manipulate the past — myth, oral traditions, and rituals — to claim dominance and/or legitimacy for their present social standing. The "past" can be seen as a mode of human communication. They reveal the underlying structure of relations and the significant unconscious structure of

belief (Kirk 1970:42). Thus, let us see how the Chinese have been able to reconstruct local rituals, particularly the worship of the goddess, *Caw Mae Thong Kham*, to justify existing social arrangements in Wang Thong.

The authors suggest that the symbolic content of myth and ritual acts (the dramatic recapitulation of myth) serve to justify existing social arrangements by validating the rights of particular members or groups and, at the same time, enforcing social sanctions within that particular social system. But, even within a stable social system, and particularly in a multiethnic setting, there may be more than one set of myths generated by different rival groups, or factions, to validate and balance the rights and powers of each group. As Leach (1954:278) suggests, "Myth and ritual is a language of signs in terms of which claims to rights and status are expressed, but it is a language of argument, not a chorus of harmony."

The distinct patterns of ethnic identity, the emphasis on the Wang Thong locality and ethnic relations within the community have arisen from the unique historical background of the area. The history of the area, and the development of the market and its adjacent villages in recent years have been discussed. Let's now explore another aspect of history which is based on the perception of the "past" as reconstructed by the local people in Wang Thong.

Local History, Myth and Ritual

As in any other society, the people of Wang Thong are both the writers and the readers of their local history. The past indeed has many benefits, among which are validation of the present and enhancement of communal identity: "If they don't talk about their past, they will have no future.... Their history is their identity." (Lowenthal, 1985:46). Local history, as seen through local oral traditions, reflects both the perception of the past based on present social conditions and the perception of the present based on conditions in the past. Oral traditions in the form of history, legends and myth are in fact the living dialogue between past and present conducted by the living members of the community. Claims over the past are used to justify social standing in the present, and present social conditions are used to manipulate and reconstruct the past. In the case of Wang Thong, the Thai, the Chinese, and the Lao have

their own version of Wang Thong's local history and myth. These different versions of local history co-exist in the market town and its satellite villages. Although the Thai (Siamese of Central Region) are the majority group, there is no sign that their version of local history is dominant.

The existence of these various versions of local history and myth suggests that each group shares a considerable space in the reconstruction of their local history. In other words, the Thai, the Chinese and the Lao each possess certain claims to the resources of the "past". This, however, does not suggest that the resource of the "past" as a whole is proportionally allocated to each group. In the context of re-telling and dramatizing their claim to the "past" (ritual display of certain mythic elements related to the "past"), the Chinese seem to be the dominant group. Each year, the Chinese traders in the market organize the festival and ritual procession of their goddess, *Caw Mae Thong Kham*, who is the major element in their version of local myth. This festival is recognized by the Chinese and by the other groups as one of the major annual events of the community. On the other hand, the original local Thai and Lao ritual traditions have declined in importance and new forms of national Thai rituals have been introduced into the community. The survival of local Chinese rituals has strengthened their version of local history and myth about their goddess who is believed to be the guardian of Chinese economic well-being. Although the goddess today has become less exclusive, the festival and ritual procession, to a certain extent, still symbolize the Chinese (Hainanese) economic and social leadership in the Wang Thong market as well as its surrounding villages which have become more and more integrated into the market economy. The three major ethnic groups of the community have developed, over time, different versions of the Wang Thong local history and myth.

The Thai Story

The Thai who told the following version of the story of Wang Thong are the Siamese Thai of the central region who form the biggest sub-ethnic groups. Unlike in other areas, the local history of Wang Thong (according to this group) does not appear to have any certain form as a narrative story, at least in the context of Thai oral traditions. There is no formal locally instituted body which has kept the story alive to pass on to the next generation. Occasionally, however, the

story is told by the older members of the neighbourhood to a young audience. The story of the local history told on such occasions varies according to the storytellers and their audience.

The following version of the Wang Thong local history is compiled from the stories told at three different occasions of local merit-making events by different storytellers and from the accounts given to us in interviews with six informants:

> A long long time ago, there were two brothers who lived in a small village far away in the north. At that time, the village was suffering from famine. One night the two brothers had a strange dream of an old man in white clothes. In the dream, the old man told them that there was a very prosperous piece of land waiting for them in the south where the river runs through a large valley. There they would find themselves a comfortable home and fertile farmland. The following day the brothers told the other villagers about the dream and tried to persuade them to move to the new land, but no one believed them. The two brothers, however, headed southwards by themselves. After a few days' journey, they finally found the piece of land where the river (Wang Thong River) runs through the valley. They settled down and built a small hut under the shelter of betel nut trees on the west bank of the river. Since the land was quite fertile, more and more families settled there and a village grew. The farmland expanded along the west bank of the river as more families moved in. The village became bigger and when it was time to divide the village, the younger brother moved southwards following the river and set up a new village. Each brother built a temple as the centre of their village, Wad Paamaak for Baan Paamaak and Wad Baangsaphaan for Baan Baangsaphaan the new village. The two villages together formed Nakhon Paamaak Commune (Betel Nut Forest City Commune). The name commemorates the betel nut forest where the two brothers first settled down in this valley. As time went by, villagers from Nakhon Paamaak set up more and more new villages along the river until it became a big cluster. There were 20 villages in 1892 when the local government recognized the importance of the community and set up the district office; Amphoe Nakhon Paamaak then emerged. By that time, the farmland had expanded as far as Sup Priwan (about 20 kilometres to the northwest), but Nakhon Paamaak remained the centre of the area; agricultural products were gathered here before sending to Phitsanulok. Villagers from surrounding areas came occasionally exchanging goods and food on the playground

> next to the river bank halfway from Baan Paamaak to Baan Baangsaphaan. This became a market place later on. At that time, it was said that some villagers discovered gold in the river near the market place. Villagers rushed out to the river but no gold was found. However, the event was big enough to have the river named Wang Thong River (river of the golden loop). Baan Paamaak, Wad Paamaak and Nakhon Paamaak Commune were also renamed Baan Wang Thong, Wad Wang Thong and Wang Thong Commune after the river. The expansion of farmland and the development of new roads encouraged the traders and the market to move northwards to set up a new site near Wad Wang Thong known as Talaad Chum (Chum market) which later expanded into the present Wang Thong market. Wang Thong kept growing, more people came and since the land in the valley was already occupied, they headed for the forest on the highland in the northeast. Wang Thong became the gateway to the whole remote area in the north and northeastern part of the province. It grew to be the centre of at least two other districts: Nakhornthai and Noen Mapraang.

The Chinese Story

The Chinese version of local history is chiefly dominated by the genealogical background of a Hainanese family whose ancestors are said to be the founders of Wang Thong market (Kuwinpant, 1980:58–59). According to the Hainanese Chinese in Wang Thong, the local history is based heavily on the commercial history of the market and the significant role of the Hainanese traders in the development of community:

> About 120 years ago, the area was only a small village of a few families surrounded by forest. A Laotian family from Vientiane came. On the way, the only daughter of the family married a Hainanese trader who was on his way from Phitsanulok to the north. After they were married, the husband decided to settle down since he was told by the Laotian family that up north there are only mountains and forest. It seemed to him that Wang Thong was the marginal river basin village and the gateway to the remote area up on the north and northeast highland. He was confident that Wang Thong would one day become an important market centre. He and his wife Jaaj Myang started a small shop, the first in the village and the surrounding area, selling household groceries to villagers. The husband spent most of the time travelling to and from Phitsanulok bringing new stocks for the shop. Jaaj

> Myang ran the daily business and dealt with the villagers at her shop. Years after, more Hainanese traders from Phitsanulok and nearby cities came, more shops were set up and the place soon became a market. It was then named "Talaad Jaaj Myang" (Jaaj Myang Market). It was the Hainanese who foresaw the changes in the agricultural market. Instead of waiting for villagers in Phitsanulok, some of them came and started their agricultural product business in Jaaj Myang market. Talaad Jaaj Myang grew as its scale of marketing activities increased. It provided villagers from the nearby area with their everyday necessities as well as served as a market place for them to sell their agricultural products. Not long after, Wang Thong had the largest Hainanese community in Phitsanulok province, second only to the provincial city. When the Phitsanulok-Lomasak Highway was completed in 1956, Ko Thang, a Thai-born Hainanese, one of Jaaj Myang's great great grandsons-in-law, was the first trader who moved to the new site close to the new highway. With permission from the district governor, he built the new market place next to the district office at the corner where Wang Thong was to become a bigger market for agricultural products.

This version of Wang Thong history, however, is not shared by all the Chinese traders in the present-day Wang Thong market. In recent years, there has been an ever-increasing number of non-Hainanese traders present in Wang Thong market, particularly the Teochews. These non-Hainanese Chinese view the history of Wang Thong differently. According to them, the present-day Wang Thong is not the result of market development, but rather a geographical shift of a single major market site. Therefore, the present significant role of Wang Thong as a leading market centre should be viewed as part of a wider and longer history of markets in the area. Their story is that, long before Wang Thong played the role of a market place and the former Nakhon Paamaak and Bang Krathum was still one district, the major market place was situated at Baan Saam Ruan in the present-day Bang Krathum district.[8] In 1898, when the district office was moved to present-day Baan Wang Thong, the market and most of its traders shifted to Talaat Chum (or Talaak Jaaj Myang in the Hainanese version) to take advantage of better communication facilities brought about by the new district office. Finally in 1956, the market was moved to the present site after the Phitsanulok-Lomsak Highway was completed.

In addition to the history of Wang Thong, there is the Hainanese

legend of their goddess which is related to River Wang Thong and the early market place. The Hainanese traders of Wang Thong believe that *Caw Mae Thong Kham*, their guardian goddess, is of local origin despite her Chinese godly appearance. According to the older generation of the Hainanese, the story of *Caw Mae Thong Kham* is as follows:[9]

> A long time ago when the Chinese traders first came to Wang Thong, most of the trade was done along the river bank. Chinese traders from Wang Thong travelling by boats followed the river to Thalo, Phijit, Taphanhin, Bang Munnak, and as far as Paknampho.[10] They carried paddy and other agricultural products down the river to major market centres like Paknampho and took back manufactured goods to Wang Thong. Because the river flow was strong, travelling upstream took almost twice the time and labour compared with the journey from Wang Thong. One day, a Hainanese trader travelled upstream back to Wang Thong after his business trip to Phijit. Just before Wang Thong, he and his crew had to stop the boat to spend the night half way between Wang Thong and Thalo. However, none of them could sleep in peace as they were disturbed by a knocking sound from the rear of the boat. Each time the trader sent his men to find out what was making the noise, the knocking stopped. Once the men returned to bed, the knocking started again. Fear of being attacked by forest bandits or by a ghost kept the men alert all night. The next morning, they continued the journey. Soon after they moved the boat, they discovered what had kept them awake the previous night. It was a piece of wood floating at the rear. But what was strange was that no matter how they tried to push it away, the piece of wood kept following the boat against the river current all the way to Wang Thong. The trader, having other business to attend, left the piece of wood at the river bank and almost forgot about it. The following nights, many other traders in Wang Thong shared a strange dream. In the dream was a young and very pretty lady in a bright golden dress asking them to build her a house. She would reward them with a fortune. After a long discussion, the Hainanese traders agreed that what they saw in the dream was a goddess asking for a shrine to be built for her. Since it was at the river bank where they saw the golden goddess in their dream, they decided to have a look at the spot. Meanwhile, the first trader, after unloading the goods, heard about the dream and suspected that it might have something to do with the piece of wood he left at the river bank. Most of them agreed that the goddess they saw

in the dream must be related to the piece of wood. They had it carved into a goddess image and placed in the shrine built for the goddess. The shrine is located at the spot where she (the goddess spirit in that piece of wood) first landed at Wang Thong. From that time on, all the Hainanese business prospered under the protection of the goddess, *Caw Mae Thong Kham* (The Golden Goddess). The market (Talaad Jaaj Myang or Talaad Chum) developed into a bigger market centre. The market was finally moved to the Caw Mae Thong Kham at the southern end of the town, about 500 metres from the present market place.

The Lao Story

The word "Lao" that is employed here is the general term for three culturally different groups of the Thai-Lao people in Wang Thong. However, of particular concern are the Lao who immigrated from the provinces of the northeastern region. In recent years, their numbers have increased rapidly, playing a more significant role than the other two Lao groups. The following version of their story is compiled from accounts by informants in the villages of Baan Nam Duan and Baan Din Thong. These accounts were related to the authors on three different occasions when the villagers were asked about the history of their ancestors who immigrated to the area:

> Hundreds of years ago, there was a great Naaj Hoj from the northeast plateau who led the buffalo trains from the northeastern region into the upper central region. On his last trip, at the age of 50, he was on his way back after his sale of cattle when he saw a huge curtain of rain hanging across the sky. Since the rain was heavy, he and his men decided to make camp and stay the night at the foot of the Khaw Kayaang mountain (present-day Kaeng Sophaa area). When they awoke the next morning to a clear sky, the Naaj Hoj ordered his men to prepare for the journey. Just after they finished packing and were about to set out on the journey, the heavy rain started again. This went on for many days even though it was the dry season. Finally, he decided to brave the heavy rain, which kept on for three days. Before he and his men could go very far, the Naaj Hoj was down with forest fever. That night, he saw the god of the forest (as the Lao described it) in his dream. The god threatened to take his life unless he stopped sending the animals to be killed and took up farming as his new occupation instead. In the dream, the Naaj Hoj made the excuse that his homeland was dry and infertile

and there was nothing he could grow. In response, the god allowed them to settle in this area. The next morning he told his men the dream and said that he had made a pact with the forest god to give up leading buffalo trains and to settle down in the area. The men, after experiencing all these off-season rains, and all the trouble, agreed with him. From then on, more and more Lao villages were settled.

The distinctive elements in these stories clearly reflect the identities of these people and their ethnic origin. Morphologically speaking, like other aspects of culture, oral tradition of one culture may appear in different versions of stories differing in details of time and space. But they share the identical structure of value and belief. No matter how strange the Thai, the Chinese, and the Lao stories might be, they were all constructed according to their respective culture and identity. It is possible to identify the ethnic and cultural elements presented in their stories. There are obviously three major sets of distinct ethno-cultural and mythic elements, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1:

Ethno-Cultural and Mythic Elements in Oral History and Myth

Thai	Chinese	Lao
The dream	The river trader	The Naaj Hoj
Old man in white clothes	The sacred wood	The off-season rainstorm
Hanuman	The dream	The dream
Rama of Ayothaya	The goddess	The forest god
The magic horse	The blessing of the goddess	Buddhist concept of karma
Giant fish	The forest god granting land	Buddhist concept of karma

Although the stories as told by the three ethnic groups share several common elements, there are also elements that belong exclusively to each group. For the Thai, the old man in white garb is

generally believed by many villagers to be the ancestral spirit. The story of Ramayana, from which are drawn the characters of Hanuman and Rama, has long been syncretized into Thai legends and folktales. For the Chinese, the story of the golden goddess is identical to the Hainanese deity, Shui Wei Niang, worshipped in Hainanese communities in the northern part of the country. In the case of the Lao, the term Naaj Hoj and the cattle trading tradition are obviously of northeastern region Lao origin.

In terms of similarities, these stories share a common emphasis on the description of local geographical elements, such as the mountain, the lake, the river and the hill route. Each group used these elements as a setting that points to the specific locality. The stories also have the same basic function: they describe why and how each group came to settle in this area. By using supernatural figures and their mystical powers, each story also establishes the right of each ethnic group over the community. The Thai were inspired by their ancestral spirit (old man in the dream) to come to Wang Thong, and were promised this fertile valley. The Chinese, who came here to trade, have the blessing of their "local" goddess to stay and prosper in Wang Thong. The Lao, on the other hand, have their right over their land because their ancestors (the Naaj Hoj and his team) were granted this land by the forest god.

The fact that these ethno-culturally distinct stories co-exist within the socially and economically harmonious community of Wang Thong suggests an interesting pattern of social formation: the crystallization of community where distinct ethnic groups share the same space in the reconstruction of local history and myth, and the right of each group over the community. However, in the context of recapitulating the "past" (in terms of re-telling and dramatizing the elements of the past in certain versions of history or myth), only the Chinese have played a significant role. Unlike the Thai and Lao, the Chinese manage to keep and display their ritual traditions which are directly related to the major elements in their version of local history and myth, and thereby surpass the others in enhancing their claim to the "past".

Ritual Display of the Goddess

In Wang Thong market town (including some immediate adjacent

villages), the ritual calender comprises three major events: The Buddha's Footprint Festival at Khaw Samokhlaeng, the annual procession of the goddess Caw Mae Thong Kham, and the boat race of Wang Thong River.[11] Among these, the procession of the goddess is the largest celebration. Despite its obvious Chinese appearance, this festival has drawn the attention of not just the Chinese but also of the Thai people both in the town and nearby villages. The festival can be interpreted as a local institution which links different groups of the community. The social significance of the festival is, first, the transformation of the goddess from a foreign deity into a local goddess and, second, the function of the festival in bringing together different groups of Chinese as well as the local Thai people in one common cultural function.

It cannot be ascertained when and by whom the shrine was built. The older generation of Hainanese Chinese, however, claims that the worship of the goddess Caw Mae Thong Kham has been a part of the local community since the early days of Wang Thong market. Among Hainanese traditional deities, is a goddess called Shui Wei Niang who has been worshipped by most Hainanese boatmen, river traders, and boat builders.[12] Shui Wei Niang's festivals and shrines dedicated to her can be found in almost every Hainanese settlement in the northern part of Thailand. Many of these shrines can be dated back to the early 19th century and the goddess has somehow adopted the Thai name of Caw Mae Thab Thim.[13] Although the younger generation of Hainanese descendants might not know the name Shui Wei Niang, it is cross-generational knowledge that Caw Mae Thab Thim is of Hainanese origin.

Since the Chinese community of Wang Thong had been dominated by the Hainanese from the beginning, it is possible that the early Hainanese pioneers brought with them this particular deity. As they were mainly river traders and boat builders, the worship of Shui Wei Niang must have been an important part of their ritual life in the early days. In addition, many of the Chinese inscriptions in the shrine were dedicated to Shui Wei Niang. However, instead of adopting the Thai name Caw Mae Thab Thim for this deity as do other Hainanese communities, the Hainanese of Wang Thong chose the name Caw Mae Thong Kham for their goddess. This may be because in the process of re-negotiating their ethnic identity, the Hainanese of Wang Thong also transformed the features of their deity, converting her from a foreign deity to a local goddess who thereby became a *genius loci*. The myth of the goddess and the emphasis on her local name play an important part in validating their identification with the local

community and the consequent rights entailed in such an identification. Thus, here lies the emphasis and incorporation of specific local geographical elements with the Chinese mythic elements of this particular deity. The original name of the goddess, Shui Wei Niang, which literally means "the goddess of the lower stream", was localized and became Caw Mae Thong Kham, the "golden" goddess (Wang Thong means "golden loop"). By doing so, the Hainanese gain both the claim to the community and the protection of a "local" goddess.

Another significant aspect of the festival is that it reflects the changing pattern in intra-ethnic relations among the Chinese. In recent years, the market town of Wang Thong has seen an increase in the number of non-Hainanese Chinese. Although they are still the major sub-ethnic Chinese group, the changing sub-ethnic composition in the market place has affected the long trading tradition of Hainanese dominance. As a result, the goddess has also become appropriated by her non-Hainanese "clients". Thus, seen here is the representation of non-Hainanese in the shrine committee and the inclusion of non-Hainanese ritual practices in the goddess's procession. For example, according to traders, the procession of the goddess has, in recent years, incorporated the Eng Ko dance. The term Eng Ko itself is Teochew and the dance is a form of traditional Teochew folk dance imitating the "108 Bandits of Liang Shan" in the Chinese classic *Shui Hu Chuan*.[14] Many Hainanese recognize this Teochew tradition but did not object to its inclusion in the festival.

These modifications in the Caw Mae Thong Kham ritual reflect a degree of change in ethnic identity and relations among the Chinese, particularly in the Hainanese dialect group. They reveal that the two dialect group identities are merging into a more compromising pattern of Chinese identity based on their local business and social interdependence. The goddess who was once responsible for the well-being of the Hainanese has now extended her protection to the Teochew as well as the Hakka.

But this does not suggest a decline in Hainanese dominance. Although the goddess has, in recent years, become less exclusive, she is still seen as the symbol of business interests and communal leadership of the Hainanese. Thus, the preparation of reception tables and the act of ritual submission to the goddess by non-Hainanese traders are, more or less, the signs of local acceptance of Hainanese authority. In 1984, among 36 non-Hainanese stores and service shops on the procession route, 31 had prepared their reception tables to

honour the procession.

The final aspect of the festival is its role in the relationship between the Chinese and the Thai. The Thai view the festival as either inclusive or exclusive, depending on how close the individual is to the market community. Thai villagers are divided by their social and economic connection with the traders in the market; those who consider themselves part of the market see the festival as a local event. Although they do not participate fully in the ritual or the feast, many come to the festival to enjoy the fringe activities, like the operas or film shows usually organized in conjunction with the festival. The festival, therefore, provides opportunities for the Chinese and Thai to interact, enabling the Thai to become more familiar with the Chinese ritual.

The Thai who do not have close business connection with the market and those who reside in the outer villages view the festival as exclusive for the market people. They refer to the festival as *ngaan Caw Mae Wang Thong*, the festival of the goddess of Wang Thong. The main reasons they find themselves excluded from the festival are that they are not the people of Wang Thong nor the market people and neither are they rich nor well known. Only a very small number say they do not join the festival because it is Chinese. The differences between these two groups of Thai demonstrate quite clearly that despite her Chinese origin, the goddess Caw Mae Thong Kham has become an integral part of the Wang Thong locality. The Thai who consider themselves as *Chaw Wang Thong*, therefore, see the festival as part of their local social events; implicitly, there is some recognition that the Chinese are an integral part of the community.

Ritual Display of the Buddha's Footprint

Each year commencing on the 12th day of the third month in the Thai lunar calendar, a major event is organized at the temple Wad Khaw Samokhlaeng.[16] This is referred to by the locals as well as those in Phitsanulok as *Ngann Phraphudthabaad Khaw Samokhlaeng*, the festival of the Buddha's Footprint at Khaw Samokhlaeng.[17] In recent years, the festival lasts at least three days and has drawn crowds of approximately 7,000 to 8,000 pilgrims. Most come from Phitsanulok city or nearby provinces. According to the abbot of Wad Khaw Samokhlaeng, only one in twenty pilgrims

is from Wang Thong and there are less than a hundred from Wang Thong town itself. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to discuss the pattern of ritual activities in this festival in order to understand the changes in local ritual practices. Such changes demonstrate the decline of original local Thai ritual practices and the introduction of central, national Siamese Thai ritual practices which have, in the long term, weakened a sense of local *vis-à-vis* national identity.

Unlike most other local Buddhist festivals, the preparation of Ngann Phraphudthabaad Khaw Samokhlaeng is largely done by the *wad* in cooperation with the provincial and local authorities rather than by the local lay community. The festival comprises four sessions daily. The first is the *Phithii Tukbaad Ruam*, the collective offering of food to the monks. The second, *Thambun Liang Peen*, requires the offering of food, and other necessities (sometimes money) to the monks. The third and most important ritual is the *Wian Thian* (circling) and *Pidthongphra* (gliding) the *Mondob* and the Buddha Footprint in the evening. *Wian Thian* is a ritual practice common in most Buddhist festivals. Literally, the words *Wian Thian* mean circling with candles. In practice, Buddhist monks and laymen, holding candles, incense and flowers, proceed around a certain sacred building or place of worship, where the procession moves around in a clockwise direction.[18] *Pidthongphra*, on the other hand, is a practice of Thai origin involving the craft of gliding.[19] Judging from the number of participants in these rituals, the *Wian Thian* and *Pidthong* session is considered to be the focus of the whole festival. It is only in this ritual that the *Phuuwarachakarn Cangwad* (the Provincial Governor) and other leading figures of Phitsanulok come to participate in the festival. However, since the pattern of these ritual sessions is repeated everyday, the *Phuuwarachakarn Cangwad* only appears on the first day.

Entertainment is provided after the completion of the formal procession. In 1987, during each festival night, films were shown until 3 a.m. Like many other Buddhist festivals, entertainment of this kind is provided partly by the lay community and partly by the *wad*. Apart from the films, there are many more forms of activities, like those generally found in a local fun-fair, on the *wad* ground. Throughout the festival, this four-session ritual is repeated daily. The difference is that the formality of the ritual declines after the first day, as does the number of participants from the lay community.

As far as the local people could determine, the Khaw

Samokhlaeng festival started about 20 years ago. It was not until 1953 that the present monastery was re-established. Before then, Wad Khaw Samokhlaeng and six other monastery sites on the mountain had been ruins for more than a century. It was some years later when the second abbot of Wad Khaw Samokhlaeng, with support from Phitsanulok and local authorities, restored some of the more accessible Footprints and built a *Mondob* over the biggest one near the monastery.

The authors' investigations suggest that before the initiation of rituals in their present form, there might have been a locally instituted pattern of ritual activities at the Khaw Samokhlaeng. At the foothills of Khaw Samokhlaeng, right beside the highway, where once stood the old village of Baan Khaw Samokhlaeng, there is an ancient well called Bo Chang Luang. Elderly villagers in the nearby villages said there used to be an annual ritual of *Ram Chaang* at the well, although the authors could not find any villager who knew how the ritual was performed. These local rituals have disappeared and have been replaced by the new form of the central region Siamese-oriented ritual activities. As with most rural communities throughout the history of centralization, regional rural communities have had to sacrifice their local identities under the premise of nation unification. In the case of Wang Thong, though the introduction of the new state-sponsored ritual is not directly responsible for the decline of locally-instituted ritual practices, such additions make it harder for a local community to revive rituals that are closely associated with local history, identity, and affiliation with the community.

The festival, as presently celebrated, can be seen as a provincial event rather than a local one. The provincial administration in Phitsanulok has promoted it as one of the major tourist attractions of the province (especially in 1987 when the central Thai government had just started its tourist promotion campaign in the "Visit Thailand Year"). The extensive involvement of the government officials, both on the provincial and district levels, can be explained in two ways. First, it is their official duty to participate in this ritual activity, since each local office represents the political power of the central government. As Buddhism is the state-sponsored religion, it is the task of the government and its local agents to ensure that the best facilities are provided. Unlike other non-Buddhist rites (for example, the Chinese goddess procession), the heads of government departments have to appear alongside the Buddhist hierarchy. This may be because, in the traditional Thai political ideology derived

from the *Phra Thammasaad,* the *Anaacak* (the state) and *Saadsanacak* (the Sangha) are described as the two allied powers of the land. The *Phuuwarachakarn Cangwad* and the Buddhist hierarchy of Phitsanulok are therefore presenting themselves to the local people as symbols of the dominant political and religious power. Second, personal involvement in this kind of major event is believed by many officials to improve their popularity with the public. Since most of the senior officials do not originally belong to the local community, it is appropriate for them to gain local popularity through major religious merit-making events. Although these senior officials are more concerned with their superiors in Bangkok who decide the future of their careers, they also have to establish good public relations with the local community. It is said that the central government sometimes takes this aspect of public relations as an indicator of successful and industrious officials, especially among the local governors.

Unlike the procession of the goddess, the festival at Wad Khaw Samokhlaeng has very different effects in terms of local identity. The Chinese managed to transform their traditional deity into the most dominant local goddess who provides them not only business protection, but also a claim to local identity (*Chaw Wang Thong*). Paradoxically, local history, myth and the original local identity of the "Thai" population find no space in this modern form of imported Buddhist rites. Earlier forms of ritual activities which reinforce their identity and legitimize their claim to the community have given way to state-sponsored rites. Although the rituals of the Buddha Footprint festival do not directly dramatize the entire myth concerned with the story of Buddha's Footprint, the authors see it as the mythic recapitulation dramatizing a two-fold story. In the first part, they dramatize the triumph of Buddhism over the indigenous gods; in the second, they dramatize the domination of the central Siamese-oriented identity over local identity.

Ritual Display in the Boat-race

In traditional Thai rural society, villagers participate in an annual ceremonial boat-race at the end of the rainy season. Similar boat-race traditions are also found in other parts of mainland Southeast Asia — Burma (now Myanmar), Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. However, there are differences in ritual patterns and in the degree of significance among these Southeast Asian boat-race customs.

In Wang Thong, the boat-race had its own unique origin. According to the older generations, the original boat-race was exclusively between the villages of Baan Wang Thong and Baan Baang Saphaan. Although the race took place in November after the rainy season, members of the older generation of both villages insisted that the boat-race was a festival on its own and not part of the Buddhist Kathin Offering Festival that comes after the end of the *Khaw Phansaa* period (the Buddhist Lent). This original boat-race rite, however, ceased to exist by the 1940s.

It should be noted that the early Wang Thong-Baan Saphaan communities relied heavily on the Wang Thong river. Before the construction of the highways, most of the southbound traffic to Phijit and Nakhorn Sawan were by boat. Even before the arrival of the Chinese traders, villagers must already have had some network of economic exchange among the villages along the river. The so-called "Brotherly Villages Boat-race" could possibly be the symbolism of such a relationship. If this was the case, then the decline of their original boat-race tradition could be the direct result of the development of the overall regional transportation. The construction of highways and roads changed the mode of transportation and, in some cases, even changed the physical arrangement of villages and market centres. Most houses in the villages now had been moved away from the river bank to new sites near village roads. The market centre had also been moved twice due to the construction of new roads and highways.[20]

The present form of the boat-race festival in Wang Thong was introduced only a few years ago. In 1982, a plan to introduce the annual boat-race in Wang Thong River was discussed by the senior local officials, traders of Wang Thong market, farmer organizations and the abbot of Wad Baang Saphaan. According to some senior officials who attended the meeting, the main objective of the boat-race was to promote *Khwaam Saamakkhii Naj Chum Chon*, the unity of the community. The plan, however, does not seem to be based on the original tradition of the community, since those who were asked to form the racing teams represented not the Wang Thong-Baang Saphaan community, but farmer and village organizations set up by the government's rural policy. The racing boats were sent in by five major teams representing Wang Thong, the Wang Thong Trader Community (mostly Chinese traders), the Farmer Organization of Baan Nam Duan, the Farmer Co-operative of Baan Wang Phrom, the Khloong Ped Farmer Group, and the villagers of Baan Baang Saphaan.

The race was officially opened by the District Officer, *Naaj Amphoe*. Winning team members, their sponsors and their friends may hold a feast to celebrate at the close of the event. Unlike the festival of the Buddha Footprint at Khaw Samokhlaeng, this present form of the boat-race tradition of Wang Thong involved less ritual practices. Apart from the involvement of local officials, the boat-race reflected a different pattern of development in local ritual activities than those of Khaw Samokhlaeng. In the case of Wang Thong, the syncretized form of pre-Indianized and Buddhist boat-racing tradition (involving both totemic dualism and Buddhist Kathin festival symbolism), seemed to have been replaced by one in which the myth about the origin of the community and the relationship between the two brotherly villages (Baan Wang Thong and Baan Baang Saphaan) had been dramatized and reinforced. This latter tradition had in turn declined (due to the development in local transportation) and been replaced by the modern form of the Siamese oriented boat-race tradition. The development of this particular boat-race tradition demonstrated the process of decline in original local rituals and the use of outside elements through cultural and political forces dominated mainly by the central Siamese-oriented cultural identities. Such a development in ritual activities reflected the decline of local Thai myth and history (of the two brotherly villages). This contrasts strongly with the vigour of the Chinese historical tradition expressed as if it is a thriving ritual.

Conclusion

This chapter concerns itself with three closely interrelated issues: changes in ethnicity; the pattern of ethnic relations in Wang Thong; and, finally, the role of local history, myth, and rituals in the conduct of ethnic relations and the formation of local civic identity. On the issue of ethnicity, this study suggests three theoretical points in considering the boundary of ethnic identity. First, ethnic identity is not necessarily based on a universal set of cultural or sentimental attachments. Chinese ethnicity, in this study, derives from various historical backgrounds, different dialect groups, and many forms of cultural practices, though all identify themselves as "Chinese". Second, even among the Chinese of the same dialect group, there are changes in cultural practices due to different cultural interpretations between different generations bringing forth diversity of practices,

lifestyles and beliefs among people who call themselves "Chinese". Third, in any open society exposed to a wide range of cosmopolitan practices and ideas because of modernization and development, there is a tendency for members of different ethnic groups to share many mutual practices and beliefs, thus becoming increasingly more like each other.

These three theoretical points are best borne in mind when defining who is Chinese and the pattern of ethnic relations. This chapter suggests a broader definition of the Chinese in Thailand than is to be found in earlier studies. Taking into account the changes in ethnicity, Chinese immigrants and their descendants by and large still possess their distinct ethnic "Chinese" identity. Regardless of the practices which might appear to differ from their ancestors', one is considered Chinese as long as he so identifies himself (Tong and Chan, n.d.; Bao, Chapter 11, this volume). In the case of Chinese descendants whose lifestyles appear to be no different from that of the Thai, this study suggests that such a phenomenon is not necessarily the result of assimilation. The apparent similarities between the Thai and Chinese descendants can be the result of both groups adopting the wider cosmopolitan practices and beliefs, chief among which include those related to consumption of Western symbols and material culture (Bao, this volume).

In the smaller Chinese community of upcountry Thailand, particularly in Wang Thong, the pattern of changes in Chinese ethnicity observed in the authors' fieldwork seems to confirm their hypothesis. Although it has been suggested in earlier studies that the Chinese in rural areas are more easily assimilated into local Thai culture and society, the authors found that the majority of the Chinese and their descendants still preserve their identity as Chinese. Like Chinese communities elsewhere, conceptions of Chinese ethnicity in Wang Thong vary according to different dialect groups and different generations, spawning a host of mutual sub-ethnic, inter-generational stereotypes (Bao, this volume). In other words, the idea of Chinese identity itself is dynamic. Adoption of some Thai cultural practices is common among many Chinese families, but it does not have much effect on their identity as "Chinese".

The definition of Chinese ethnicity among the local-born Chinese is also changing. The majority see their Chinese identity as related more to ancestral origins and less to original Chinese cultural practices. They see the changes in Chinese cultural practices as just adaptive

responses to changes in time and place of their settlement — a core argument of the "emergent ethnicity" hypothesis (Yancey et al., 1976; Chan, 1997; Chan and Tong, 1993), namely, that an immigrant group's ethnicity has more to do with "where one is at" than with "where one is from" (Ang, 1993). Nevertheless, for the time being, a number of basic original Chinese practices, especially those concerned with the worship of ancestors' spirits and Chinese deities, have changed very little.

The effects of cosmopolitan ideas and practices can also be seen in a small community like Wang Thong. Almost every aspect of life in the most remote villages of Wang Thong district has changed rapidly in the last 20 years. Economic development and new communication facilities have exposed the local population to new forms of "modern culture" and a "new way of life". Many Thai and Chinese have now become, in many ways, similar to each other as the result of such changes. On the relations between the Thai and the Chinese, this chapter offers two significant finds. First, the Chinese have not been assimilated into the "Thai culture", but into a wider modern form of materialist cultural practice which has been adopted and accepted by both the Thai and Chinese. Second, the present cooperative relations between the Thai and the Chinese of Wang Thong are not based on the assimilation of their cultural practices but on their dialectically developed as well as mutually shared civic identity.

One major problem in any discourse on assimilation is how "Thai culture" is to be defined. This paper suggests a pattern of non-universal Thai cultural identity, that is, the Thai people are not culturally homogeneous. In present-day Thailand, apart from the southern region, there are three major sub-ethnic Thai groups: the Siamese in the central region, the Lao in the northeastern region, and the Khon Muang in the northern region (which are further sub-divided into many more smaller cultural groupings). Each of these sub-ethnic groups has its own distinct historical and cultural identity. Nevertheless, the geographical movement of these sub-ethnic groups, as a result of wars or economic conditions, has reshaped the boundary of these cultural regions and transformed many parts of the country into a multicultural society of different sub-ethnic groups with different sets of cultural standards. In Wang Thong, the area at the junction of three cultural regions, the history of multicultural and multiethnic association can be traced back to the Sukhothai period.

Apart from the Chinese, the area is composed of various sub-ethnic Thai groups. In recent years many of their original cultural practices have become less distinct but, at the same time, many others manage to maintain themselves, thus the continuity of their sub-ethnic identities. The adoption of different practices and beliefs across sub-ethnic lines is common among Thai villagers, but it appears to be selective and circumstantial. A person is free to adopt any practice, belief, or value standard to suit himself or herself without altering one's sub-ethnic identity. In addition to these sub-cultural norms among the Thai, other forms of "modern practices" introduced from Bangkok or Western culture are also casually adopted. This pattern of eclectic cultural adoption is also true of the local-born Chinese.

The pattern of ethnic relations between the Thai and the Chinese is based on mutual identity shared by both the Thai and the Chinese. In Wang Thong, the issue of local civic identity is more salient than the ethnic identity of the individual members. The term *Chaw Wang Thong*, the people of Wang Thong, unites members of the local community regardless of their original ethnic identity. The Chinese are able to become an integrated part of the community, or even dominate the community, because the local Thai people acknowledge their Chaw Wang Thong identity. To acquire this local civic identity, the Chinese have demonstrated to the Thai people that (despite their ethnic identity) they and their ancestors were part of the history, prosperity, and identity of the local community. Consequently, they too have rights in the community.

The final issue of the chapter is concerned with local history, myth, and ritual, in an attempt to explain how and why the Chinese have succeeded in their claim to local history and the community. The authors propose three explanations. First, since the Thai, Chinese and Lao moved into Wang Thong (the present market town and the adjacent villages) at about the same time during the period of resettlement in the early 19th century, each group has been able to establish its own version of local history and myth without challenge from the Thai as majority group. Second, at present, only the Chinese manage to preserve a ritual that was directly related to their version of local history and myth. Finally, most of the original local Thai and Lao rituals related to their local history and myth have disappeared or been transformed by the stronger central Siamese cultural force.

The last resettlement of the area in the middle of the 19th century

saw a number of culturally distinct ethnic and sub-ethnic groups moving here. Although some of the Siamese villagers might have migrated back to their ancestral homeland, the majority were newcomers to the area. Each of these groups brought with them their original culture in interaction with (or, in adaptation to) their experiences during migration which formed their local history and myth. The Chinese, though fewer in number, gradually established a small trading centre in Wang Thong and reconstructed their own version of the local history and myth based on their trading experiences on the river. The diversity of the Thai versions of local history and myth, due to differences in their sub-ethnic groups, makes their story less uniform. Unlike Thai local history elsewhere in the country, the Thai versions of Wang Thong local history and myth have not been dominant enough to supplant the Chinese version or monopolize the reconstruction of local history and myth. Thus, side by side with the Thai, the Chinese have preserved their version of local history and myth and passed them on to their local-born descendants.

The major institution which keeps their stories alive is in the ritual display of their local history and myth. Apart from other Chinese annual rituals, the Chinese of Wang Thong have organized the ritual display of their local myth in their annual worship of the goddess Caw Mae Thong Kham. Although many features of the ritual display are distinctly Chinese in origin, the majority of the local Thai people acknowledge that the festival is, as a whole, a local tradition. The ritual display in the festival thus performs a dual-functional task. First, it re-tells or recapitulates the Chinese version of local history and myth and keeps the stories alive. Second, it enhances the Chinese account of the origin of the community and, hence, also enhances their rights to membership in the community.

On the other hand, many of the local Thai ritual practices related to their story of local history and myth have declined in recent years. The authors' study cites two major Thai annual events which demonstrate the pattern of changes in local Thai ritual practices. In the festival of the Buddha's Footprint at Khaw Samokhlaeng, this study highlights the introduction of centralized Siamese Thai ritual practice into the area. In the boat-race of Wang Thong River, this study shows how the local ritual had declined as a result of changes in the economic and geographical structure of the community, and how a new tradition of the boat-race has been introduced by central, tradition-oriented government officials. In both cases, changes in

local Thai ritual practices have resulted in the decline of the Thai local history and myth which ultimately weaken their claim to local history and myth.

Returning to the theoretical aspects of the authors' discourse, whereas other scholars have chosen to analyze Thai-Chinese relations in terms of assimilation, this chapter suggests a new analytical approach focusing on three issues: changing concepts of ethnicity of different groups; the inter-ethnic relationship between the Chinese and the Thai; and the use of the "past" in attempts to establish rights in the local community. The value of this approach has been demonstrated with respect to the situation in Wang Thong.

The authors' analysis is based on two main hypotheses. The first is that the ethnic identity of the Chinese in Wang Thong has been re-negotiated from their original Chinese identity to a more dynamic and localized identity. Although many aspects of their cultural practices have changed (as a result of adopted local Thai practices or "modern" cultural practices), they remain Chinese. The second hypothesis is that the pattern of ethnic relations between the Thai and the Chinese population of Wang Thong has been determined by the Chinese claim to membership in the community and Thai attitude to that claim. This second hypothesis is closely linked with the use of the "past" by each group (in the reconstruction and recapitulation of the "past").

The analysis begins with the resource of the "past" (history, myth and ritual). In Wang Thong, although the Chinese have more or less an equal share in the reconstruction of local history and myth, they surpass the Thai in the area of recapitulating their version of the "past". Compared with others, they are the only group which manages to maintain ritual practices that keep alive the essential elements in their version of local history and myth. Through their overall greater resources of the "past", they have acquired a claim to membership in the local community *Chaw Wang Thong* despite the fact that their ethnic identity differed from others. This claim to the local community is the key factor that provides the Chinese with many privileges in their relations with the Thai.

There are five direct consequences arising from the Chinese claim to local community and local civic identity. The first two consequences are the right to exploit the local economy and the right to compete for leadership in the local community. In Wang Thong, the Chinese have been quite successful in both areas. They have achieved greater control over the local economy than the Thai, and many Chinese

traders have been acknowledged by local people as leaders of the community (within the boundary of the market town and its adjacent villages). The Thai accept Chinese control because they see the Chinese as legitimate members of the community. Chinese domination over local economy and leadership in return enhance their power to manipulate the "past" and to maintain their version of local history and myth. For the Chinese, the past, the present and the future feed each other.

The other three consequences are concerned with the persistence and change in other aspects of their identity. One consequence is that the Chinese are able to keep their Chinese identity and many of their cultural practices (although both their identity and cultural practices are firmly embodied in their version of local history, myth and ritual). Moreover, because their civic identity is based on the resources of the "past", the Chinese are not committed to any form of assimilation in order to gain local recognition of their civic identity. However, because the Chinese version of local history and myth is reconstructed in such a way that it can be identified with the local community and geographical location, some aspects of their cultural practices and beliefs have been renegotiated. This process of renegotiation in their identity, however, does not fall into the assimilation category. The process can be better described as a merger or fusion of Chinese ethnic identity and local identity. Examples of such processes are the construction of the local goddess whose name coincides with the name of the river and the community (*Thong Kham* and Wang Thong) but preserves all other characteristics of the Chinese deity of Shui Wei Niang; and the adoption of the term *luuk laan ciin Wang Thong* (Chinese children and grandchildren of Wang Thong) to indicate both the identity of the Chinese and Wang Thong. The final consequence of the Chinese claim over the local community and civic identity is in their identification on the national level. Once the Chinese acquire the civic identity of Chaw Wang Thong, they are automatically recognized as rightful citizens of Thailand regardless of their persistent Chinese ethnic identity, especially among the local-born descendants. This greater political national identity as citizens of Thailand, in return, legitimizes their economic and political right.

This study has shown a unique pattern of development in Chinese ethnicity and ethnic relations between the Thai and the Chinese. Although the Chinese of Wang Thong at present may not

appear as a distinct ethnic group because of the ethnic renegotiation process, their identity, to a certain extent, remains Chinese. Also, the study has suggested that the present state of ethnic relations between the Thai and the Chinese has been determined by the issue of the "past". The new approach employed in this study and the new explanation of Thai-Chinese ethnic relations might help us increase an understanding of situations in other parts of the country. However, until more studies on other communities are carried out, it would be premature to suggest any generalized pattern of Thai-Chinese ethnic relations for Thailand as a whole. The authors' experience in Wang Thong suggests that developments in ethnic relations in each community operate within a set of variables which set it apart and which has to be considered seriously.

For anthropology as a whole, the authors believe this study has shed light on three particular areas. The first relates to the studies of ethnicity and ethnic relations. This chapter has discussed various aspects of changes in ethnicity and ethnic relations and suggests a distinct approach to considering the structure of ethnicity. Ethnic characteristics of any ethnic group have never been a rigid set of static physical or cultural qualities since such qualities are inherently dynamic. Despite wearing the same ethnic label, each generation has developed its own concept of ethnic identity — based on what has been passed on to them and their new experiences. Changes in the identity of any ethnic group, therefore, could be the result of its internal development as well as interaction with other ethnic groups. Given this inherent dynamism and indeterminacy of ethnicity, social scientists seem to be confronted with a new ethnicity each time a new case has been discovered. The traditional approach of ethnic classification by, for example, culture, language and education, seems to provide us with a picture of ethnic groups that no longer exist. Conceptions of ethnicity and ethnic group themselves thus become the core of one's research problem rather than merely the means of research. Second, in the study of history, myth and ritual, this chapter confirms the functionalist view on the power of the "past". History, myth and ritual have been used by different groups of people in society as a powerful resource to secure and legitimize their present interests. Moreover, the authors suggest that, unless it is re-told or recapitulated, the possession of the "past" itself is powerless. By re-telling or dramatizing the story of the "past" (history and myth), the possessor has enlivened particular elements of the "past" which can

determine the "present". Finally, in the studies of Thai society, apart from Thai-Chinese ethnic relations, this chapter has presented an original account of local Thai history, myth and ritual which may contribute to an anthropological understanding of other aspects of the area.

NOTES

* A brief note on the transliteration of non-English words is in order here. The transliteration of Thai words in this chapter is based on the *Marry Hass Thai - English Dictionary* transliteration system. The system provides a set of pronunciation symbols which represent the actual Thai pronunciation and not the spelling of the words. A few particular symbols are, however, omitted and replaced with the more familiar ones. Specific Thai names (of cities, people, historical period, for example) are transliterated according to the more familiar system based on "Notification of the Royal Institute concerning the transcription of Thai characters into Roman" (*Journal of the Thailand Society*, vol.33, part 1, pp. 49–65, 1941). The reason for the variation is that such names have long been transliterated in the latter system and have become familiar among Western and Thai readers as the specific names.

Words originating from Pali and Sanskrit which have been adopted by the Thai language are transliterated in the same manner as Thai words. Words and names originating from Chinese dialects are also transliterated in the same way. Chinese words in Mandarin are, however, transliterated according to the official Chinese Pinyin system.

1 The major part of the fieldwork in Wang Thong was carried out by the first author of this chapter during July 1984 – January 1985, while living with a Chinese (Hainanese) family in the market town. The first month in the town was spent observing the general daily activities in the market and making personal contact with Chinese and Thai families introduced by the landlord. Through these initial introductions, he was subsequently introduced to other traders and villagers in the nearby areas. Although he frequently accompanied some traders to the villages in the more remote parts of the district, most of the time was spent talking to people in the market town and its satellite villages. During this period, he attended most of the local festivals and ritual events. It was from these conversations and close observations that most of the information was gathered. In January 1987, he returned to Wang Thong again for one month to record the event of a major festival, the Buddha's Footprint Festival at Khaw Samokhlaeng. He also stayed in Wang Thong and carried out more interviews, particularly on the issues of local history and myth. A considerable amount of information used in this chapter is derived from Kuwinpant's (1980) previous study of Wang Thong.
This chapter was revised by the second author when he was a Visiting Professor at the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan, May–August 1994. The authors of this paper would like to acknowledge the research assistance

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2 Unlike what has been published in some earlier studies on the Chinese, most of these Chinese were Taoist, not Mahayana Buddhist, before they came to Thailand.

3 This is the Thai term for the local Chinese goddess. There is no Chinese name for the goddess, and the written Chinese characters above the front door of the goddess's shrine coincide with the pronunciation of this Thai name.

4 This attitude towards Chinese festivals differs greatly from the Thai in other regions. In the studies of the Chinese community of Bangkok, it was found that most Thai people identify similar kinds of festivals as belonging to Chinese traditions.

5 In some parts of the country, the Thai villagers seem to have a stronger ethnic consciousness and ethnic stereotype of the Chinese. For example, in the central and northeastern region, the term *phoo kha ciin* or *pho kha cek* (Chinese trader) are common among Thai and Lao villagers. In addition, Kuwinpant (1980:72) reports that the Chinese are known as *cek* among the Thai. However, during the authors' fieldwork, such a term was rarely mentioned by the Thai.

6 For more details on patron-client relationship, see Kuwinpant (1980:16–17, 216–19).

7 The Chinese also use these Thai kinship terms to address their Thai fellows and sometimes members of their families in the case of inter-marriage families. However, among themselves in private conversation, the Hainanese kinship term of *koo* (older brother), and the Teochew term of *hia* (older brother) are more commonly used.

8 It cannot be determined whether the Hainanese were the dominant group in Ban Saam Ryan market at that time. In the authors' visit to the place in 1984, however, there was no sign of Hainanese domination in any sphere.

9 Kuwinpant (1980:83) mentioned that nobody knows the exact original story of the Caw Mae. However, in the authors' fieldwork, it was found that most of the older-generation Hainanese agree on the story which is presented here.

10 The river Wang Thong adjoins Nan River in the Bang Krathum district. All the towns mentioned here are on the Nan River.

11 There are many other smaller events, for example, several Buddhist festivals, the Thai New Year and the Chinese New Year. However, none of these has ever drawn much of the attention of the whole community. Even the Chinese New Year, the biggest event of any Chinese community, does not have much significance here.

12 Shui Wei Niang means the goddess of the lower stream; the goddess is said to protect those who earn their living on the boats and along the rivers.

13 There seems to be little agreement regarding when the goddess was re-named and why this name was chosen. Some older-generation Hainanese outside Wang Thong say that the name was adopted when the first shrine of the goddess was built in Bangkok. Because the image of the goddess was made of red stone, local people then gave her a Thai name, Caw Mae Thab Thim, the Ruby Goddess. However, since *Thab Thim* can also mean pomegranate tree, the other versions of the story claim that the name *Caw Mae Thab Thim* was chosen because the pomegranate is the goddess's favourite tree. It is also

regarded as a sacred plant in general Chinese belief.

14 The story is translated into English as *All Men are Brothers* by Pearl S. Buck in 1933, and as *The Water Margin* by J.H. Jackson in 1937. The story is said to be compiled by Shih Nai-an in the 13th century from an earlier popular legend. It recounts the exploits of the hero Sung Chiang and his fellow outlaws who fled to the Liang Shan region and mounted a campaign against the central government which was dominated by corrupt ministers during the reign of Hui-tsung of the Northern Sung Dynasty (1101–25). Already seen are similar forms of Teochew folk dance in the religious festivals of many other Chinese communities in the central region of Thailand.

15 As the procession leaves the shrine and makes its way to the market place, the market people and those whose houses are on the route prepare to receive the goddess and the procession. At the front of their stores and houses, they place food, flowers and burning incense on small tables. The procession stops a few seconds at each of these stores and houses for the owners to worship the goddess. This ritual is said to bring good luck to the households and stores. During the procession in 1984, it was observed that virtually every household that had anything to do with the business in the market took part and had its reception table awaiting the procession. Even Thai petty traders in the morning market place collectively prepared their reception table in front of the market place.

16 The term *Wad* in Thai means temple or a Buddhist monastery. The terms *Wad*, temple, and monastery were used interchangeably.

17 The Buddha's Footprint, as known in Thailand, is an enshrined block of natural or man-made stone bearing a footprint. Legend has it that the Gotama Buddha himself had travelled in this region which was then known as Buuraphaa Thawiib (the eastern continent) in the classical Indian world. Native people did not welcome his preaching on Buddhist doctrine and challenged him with their gods. In order to convert the natives to Buddhism, the Buddha performed a miracle leaving his divine footprints on the ground at several sites.

18 The ritual is said to derive from the ancient Buddhist practice of meditation. It is also believed that the Buddha himself recommended this practice to his followers as a basic method for meditation and a strategy for solving meditation problems. When it was passed on to later generations, the *Thaksinawadtara* was transformed into a ritual symbolizing paying respect to Buddha, and to sacred places and objects.

19 An assembly is divided into several groups which will take turns to perform the Phithong ritual. The monks who have just finished their daily *Tham Watara Yen* form a procession and head for the *Mondob* housing the Buddha's Footprint. The *Phuuwarachakan Cangwad*, senior officials and leading traders invited as honoured guests join in the procession. When the procession reaches the *Mondob*, they individually enter the *Mondob*, place the flowers, candle and incense sticks in the holders in front of the Footprint, then use the gold leaves to gild the Footprint.

20 Although the market is presently still located next to the river, it is clear that most of the transportation has shifted to the highways, not the river.

21 During the authors' fieldwork in 1984, conversations with local Chinese in

the market and the surrounding villages on the topic of Chinese ethnicity were recorded. Three groups of Chinese were interviewed: 26 immigrant Chinese, 52 local-born Chinese, and 54 Sino-Thai. The first group are immigrant Chinese who came to Thailand during the years 1923–49 and are now aged from 49 to 81 years. The second group are local-born Chinese of both Chinese parents and are from 21 to 53 years of age. The third group are local born Sino-Thai (one Chinese parent, usually the father) aged between 18 and 61 years. These respondents were taken as samples from different occupational and residential groups.

22 The point here is that changing social conditions in Thailand have given the Chinese a viable alternative to being completely assimilated into Thai culture and society, yet peacefully integrated as a part of modern Thailand society. After the second Phibun government in 1957, the Chinese have not seen any serious threat from the succeeding governments. The end of significant Chinese immigration and the success in minimizing communist activities in the countryside have made the governments less concerned with the Chinese. Moreover, the growing economic development and industrialization inspired by western countries gave birth to a new elite class of wealthy businessmen who have been increasingly recognized by the public and, more or less, share equivalent weight in power, prestige and privilege with the traditional Thai elite. Social mobility for Chinese descendants is more likely to be inside their own family business and may not be necessarily acquired by being (culturally) a Thai.

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11

Sino-Thai Ethnic Identity: Married Daughters of China and Daughters-in-law of Thailand

Jiemin Bao

What comprises the contemporary Sino-Thai ethnic identity? Are they "assimilated Thai", or are they "Chinese" living in Thailand? Anthropologists have debated these issues for decades. This chapter explores the Sino-Thai ethnic identity: how their choices of wedding symbols adapted from Thai Buddhism, Chinese Confucianism, and Western consumerism reveal subtleties of identification that resist static ethnic categorization, and how asymmetric gender and class relations intersect in the process.[1] From the wedding symbols of the Sino-Thai, we begin to understand how they perceive who they are, and how they reconstruct their ethnic identity within the web of cultural, economic and historical forces.

The purpose of this chapter is to show that an intricate structure of Sino-Thai ethnic identification underlies the eclectic juxtaposition of apparently unrelated symbols.[2] This structure is informed by three key features of Sino-Thai life: Sino-Thai Confucian patrilineal practice, hierarchical order founded on gender differences and interdependence between class and ethnicity. The various symbols

embraced by these key features help us to understand the transformation of Sino-Thai ethnic identity from their Chinese origins to their present state as Sino-Thai — which is neither completely Chinese nor completely Thai. The Sino-Thai identify themselves as "married daughters" which relate both to their natal home, China, and to Thailand, their husbands' home.

The complex structure of Sino-Thai ethnic identity is explored through an analysis of Sino-Thai morality as seen, for example, in their wedding symbols. One cannot understand the centrality of Sino-Thai ethnic identity without understanding their sense of morality. Sino-Thai ethics are derived from Thai Buddhism and Chinese Confucianism. The choice of ritual symbols expresses Sino-Thai morality; for example, the desire for sons is signified by the symbol of a pomegranate stem the bride wears in her hair.

Hence the wedding ritual provides a backdrop for observing how the Sino-Thai construct their own identity through carefully selected ritual configurations which contain fundamental elements of Thai Buddhism and Chinese Confucianism. Middle- and upper-class Sino-Thai regard the wedding ceremony as the most important ritual in a person's life, involving at times the transfer rights to the family business (Cherlin and Apitchat, 1987:34). Sino-Thai have the "highest levels of ceremonial marriage" and more "parental involvement" than Thai. The wedding creates opportunities for interaction between two families, and for displaying the interests, status and identity of the family members. A wedding is far more than just the future happiness of the couple getting married.

The data for this study is drawn mainly from several middle-class and upper-class Sino-Thai weddings attended during my fieldwork in Bangkok in 1991 and 1992. Wedding ritual configurations in Bangkok are not uniform because the Chinese customs the Sino-Thai inherited differ from hometown to hometown and depend upon an individual's socio-economic status and the degree to which each person adopts Thai and Western symbols.

This chapter has two parts. In the first, we look at different Sino-Thai ethnic categories used by Western scholars, the Thai government and the Sino-Thai themselves. Such ethnic categories must incorporate the points of view of the people being described and the values which inform their ethnic identities. This sets up the theoretical background for the second part: an analysis of the construction of Sino-Thai ethnic identity as demonstrated in the

wedding rituals. By focusing on Sino-Thai ethnic identity from two perspectives — Sino-Thai self-identification and the Sino-Thai wedding performance, we then consider the overall importance of a new understanding of Sino-Thai ethnicity in the larger Thai social and economic context.

Theoretical Setting: The Construction of Sino-Thai Ethnicity

In the last 30 years, Western scholars have played an extremely important role in defining Sino-Thai ethnic identity. By re-examining the prevailing theories and investigating the Sino-Thai's self-identity, the author challenges the concept of homogeneous ethnic categories and proposes a new notion for understanding transformed Sino-Thai ethnic identity. A review of three influential scholars' work (Skinner, 1958, 1964, 1973a, 1973b; Coughlin, 1960; Szanton, 1983, 1988, 1989) provides the background.

William Skinner challenges a persistent myth which characterized overseas Chinese as unchangeable, maintaining their loyalty to their own culture century after century (Bowring, 1857; Mallory, 1956; Fitzgerald, 1965; Purcell, 1964). Skinner argues that the Chinese in Thailand would be completely assimilated by the fifth generation (1964:89). He defines assimilation as "when the immigrant's descendant identifies himself in almost all social situations as a Thai, speaks the Thai language habitually and with native fluency, and interacts by choice with Thai more often than with Chinese" (Skinner, 1973a:383). This original notion of assimilation is not grounded in Thailand but shaped by the melting-pot model of adaptation ascribed to immigrants who settled in the United States. This model assumes that there is some dominant or ethnically "neutral" area of culture by whose standards all ethnics can be judged and that ethnic identity normally changes in only one direction.

This approach fails to comprehend the reproduction of Sino-Thai ethnic identity in the Thai social context. Also, the assimilation theory plays down how Chinese philosophy, art, literature, architecture, language, cuisine and agricultural skills have been integrated into Thai culture. Finally, the theory reflects the efforts of the Thai state in enforcing various laws regarding Sino-Thai

education, citizenship, available vocations and landownership rights to foster Sino-Thai acquiescence to a Thai nationalist ideology.

In contrast to Skinner's assimilation theory, Richard Coughlin proposes that the Chinese in Thailand are characterized by double identities and that they act as a Chinese or a Thai depending on the circumstances and their own self-interest (1960:193–94). In Coughlin's view, the value systems of the "Chinese" and the "Thai" are not merely easily distinguishable but "direct opposites". He claims Chinese morality is "concerned principally with the acquisition of wealth" and that "family is the keystone of society", while Thai values emphasize "spiritual development" rather than material gain, and that the Thai family is "loosely-structured" (1960:197). According to him, Chinese double identity is associated with the different value systems and the different occupations held by the Chinese and Thai. The conception of these opposing value systems is strongly influenced by the theory of the Thai social system as a loosely structured one (Embree, 1950).

Coughlin overlooks the ambiguity of a Sino-Thai morality built on an uneasy reworking of Thai culture and Confucian ethics. Furthermore, in examining the differences between Chinese men and women, he repeats the same analytic method. He concludes "In general women seem to be a full generation behind their husbands so far as changes in their behaviour and attitudes are concerned ... " (1960:74). He does not seem to realize that the "background" behaviour of these women is constructed by Confucian morality: "proper" wives obey their husbands. In addition to the problem of defining criteria for rigid categories between Chinese and Thai, as well as between men and women, Coughlin doesn't tell us how the Chinese switch back and forth between the two identities, nor how Chinese men and women describe their own ethnic identity. His conclusion about Chinese dual identity is more usefully seen as an impressionistic sketch (Cushman, 1989:237).

Cristina Szanton, a representative of a more recent generation of scholars (Tobias, 1973, 1977; Juree Namsirichai, 1979; Hewison, 1981, 1988; Hill, 1983; 1985; 1988), examines the dynamic process of forming ethnic identities, especially the interrelationship between class status and ethnic identity (1983; 1988). Szanton argues that "the degree of commercial orientation and business success" is a major criterion of "Chineseness" for both Thai and Sino-Thai (1983:109). She also points out that intermarriage among Sino-Thai themselves is the major strategy for the "consolidation" of Sino-

Thai socio-economic status. Her data demonstrates that both Thai and Sino-Thai marry disproportionately among themselves and that the intra-ethnic marriage rates of Sino-Thai up to the fourth generation appear very high. Szanton's work challenges Skinner's assimilation theory model in which intermarriage between Chinese and Thai serves as one of the cornerstones.

However, by concentrating on a socio-economic approach, Szanton fails to address the influence of Buddhist and Confucian morality on the construction of Sino-Thai ethnic identity. This is essential for us to understand gender differences in Sino-Thai economic and marital behaviour (i.e. why is it socially acceptable for Sino-Thai women to marry Sino-Thai men or marry up to Thai, but not the reverse?). We also need to understand why some of these women who have income and social status equal to their husbands are still treated as and expected to act as subordinates and why the inequality of economic resources, educational opportunities and household responsibilities that Sino-Thai women face in Thailand persists (Szanton, 1989). Asymmetric gender expectations are deeply embedded in Sino-Thai economic and social life.

When referring to ethnic categories, Szanton takes one step forward by rejecting the term "Chinese" as previous scholars have employed it. Szanton uses the expression "China-born" when referring to Chinese immigrants, and "Sino-Thai" when she means "all descendants of Chinese migrants at various generational levels" (1983:106–07). The expressions "China-born" and "Sino-Thai" highlight the different birthplaces and distinguish the ethnic group from the homogeneous term "Chinese". However, Szanton does not go far enough. She uses the terms merely as descriptive labels.

Ethnic categories tell us how these scholars conceptualize the nature of the Sino-Thai. In the Thai language there is no generally agreed upon term used to address Sino-Thai as a group. This is correlated with the Thai state policy towards minorities. According to the law, the first generation who retain their Chinese nationality are identified as "Chinese" (*khun chin*[3]) or "Chinese Nationality" (*san chat chin*); those in the first generation who changed their nationality, and the local born second generation are identified as "Thai with Thai Nationality and Chinese common origin" (*khon thai san chat thai, chua chat chin*). Legally, by the third generation, the law treats them as Thai. The legal system sanctions these ethnic categories for the purpose of political control (Moerman, 1965:1219). However, Sino-Thai self-identity and their daily practices, which have

been unfolding for generations in Bangkok, cannot be eradicated simply by passing a law.

Sino-Thai employ vivid terms of self-identification which fall into three basic categories: identification by blood, by either dialect or birthplace, and by metaphorical notions of kinship. The first category is based on the concept of blood lineage (*xue tong* [C] or *chua*). Some say, "I am real Chinese" (*zhenzhen de zhongguo ren* [C] or *Chin luanluan*), or "I have one hundred percent Chinese blood" (*mi luat chin roi poe sen*); some say, "I am Chinese but mixed with Thai" (*chin pon thai*) or "I have Chinese blood" (*mi luat chin*); and some say, "I am a child of the Chinese" (*luk chin*), or "I have 'mixed ancestry'" (*luk khroeng*). One woman described herself as "75 percent Chinese" because her grandfather was a Chinese immigrant who married a Thai, then her father married her China-born mother.

Why does blood mean so much to them? Blood lineage (*xue tong* [C]) is a Confucian norm for unifying Chinese. When one has Chinese blood, one always remains Chinese. A popular Chinese saying used by my interviewees sheds light on the impact of this blood norm among Sino-Thai: "*Long sheng long, feng sheng feng, laoshu sheng er da didong* [C]." Loosely translated this means, "a dragon gives birth to a dragon, a phoenix gives birth to a phoenix, but the son of a mouse can do nothing but dig a hole in the earth". Noble persons are born into noble families: the dragon and phoenix are symbols of the emperor and empress; ordinary persons are born into ordinary families: the mouse is a symbol of a non-entity. Blood determines whether one will be common or exceptional. The relationship between bloodlines and self-formation is moulded by the ethics of the ruling class.

The blood norm has also played a significant role in the establishment of many Sino-Thai communities in Thailand. Sino-Thai surname communities are based on norm of the blood *yuan* [C], which refers to people with the same surname and who are descended from the same patrilineal ancestor. *Yuan* (predestined relationship), *pratityasamutpada* in Sanskrit, means that everything exists because of a cause and effect relationship (*Fu Jiao ci dain* [C] 1981:1065). Other types of communities — hometown and dialect communities (*di yuan* [C]), religious communities (*shan yuan* [C]), business communities (*yie yuan* [C]), even literary communities (*wen yuan* [C]) — are all established based on the notion of *yuan*.

The second category further distinguishes between those who

share the same blood, but speak different dialects. They identify themselves as "Chinese Teochew" or "Chinese Hainan". Each dialect group believes in stereotypes about each other. According to my interviewees, intermarriage between Teochew and Hakka, or between Hakka and Hainan, was rare until the 1960s. Within the same dialect group, they draw a distinction between Thai-born or China-born. "Chinese inside" (*chin nai*) refers to those who are born in Thailand of China-born parents; and "Chinese from outside" (*chin nok*) refers to the China-born themselves. Moreover, within this China-born group, people distinguish themselves by the amount of time lived in Thailand (i.e. Chinese immigrants who have lived in Thailand for a long time are "*lao tang* [C]" meaning "old Chinese", and new immigrants are "*xin tang*" [C] meaning "new Chinese".)

The third category emphasizes symbolic kinship. Sino-Thai identify Thailand either as their "*nai ma* [C]", wet nurse, who brings them up and nurtures them, or their "*po jia* [C]", home of parents-in-law, with whom they identify and live. A first-generation Sino-Thai man explicitly made this point: "I am a Thai. China is my natal home (*niang jia* [C]). I am a 'married daughter' (*jia chu qu de nu er* [C]). I have my own family (*zi ji de ja* [C]). I visit my parents' home, but it is not my home." Thailand is the Sino-Thai's own home; China is his/her parents' home.

Many Sino-Thai used the term "married daughter" (Phat, 1988:9; Qiu, Pingyuan, 18 February 1992 *World Daily News* [C]) to describe the point of transition from "Chinese" to "Thai". In the Confucian patrilineal kinship system, the "married daughter" is "never fully incorporated into her husband's lineage; she bears her own surname for life; she becomes the mother of members of the lineage into which she moves and therefore, in time, becomes an ancestress in it, but her position is, as it were, between the lineage of her birth and that of her marriage" (Freedman, 1957:18). The "married daughter" metaphor provides us with a key for understanding the ambiguous and flexible nature of Sino-Thai ethnic identity. In spite of the fact that "the married daughters" inherit the "unchangeable" blood lineage from China, they are "daughters-in-law" of Thailand. In everyday marital life, the Sino-Thai "daughter-in-law" more often identifies with her husband's family rather than her natal family.

In sum, these diverse self-identifications reflect the local characteristics of Sino-Thai ethnic identity. All the terms are very

specific; none of them can encompass the group. This challenges the homogeneous label that has been attached to Sino-Thai. The term "Chinese", as it is widely used, is not only problematic but misleading (Tan, 1988:157). The term stagnates and masks the complex ethnicity because the meaning of "Chinese" and the context of being "Chinese" have been transformed since the Sino-Thai immigrated to Thailand.

The Sino-Thai thus are neither "Chinese" living outside of China (Hirschman, 1988:30), nor "Chinese" in Thailand (Mallory, 1956:265). Sino-Thai morality has been constructed by a combination of Chinese Confucianism and Thai Buddhism which influence their ethnic identity. Sino-Thai are a special group of people who have been shaped by their Chinese past and by the Thai society where they have lived and put down roots. These two aspects are deeply intertwined and virtually inseparable.

Although Skinner, Coughlin and Szanton each teaches us something new about Sino-Thai ethnic identity, none of them carefully examines Sino-Thai morality, a primary ingredient in the formation of ethnic identity. While economic status, education, occupation, language, as well as social interaction in a specific context and moment are crucial, Sino-Thai ethics are the overriding factor in the construction of Sino-Thai ethnic identity. By ethics or morality I mean the rules and actions of moral conduct derived from Thai Buddhism and Chinese Confucianism. First and older second-generation Sino-Thai, who are primarily influenced by Confucian ethics, more often identify themselves as "Chinese" rather than as "Thai." Younger second- and third-generation Sino-Thai, who are primarily influenced by Thai Buddhist morality, more often identify themselves as "Thai" than as "Chinese." Furthermore, there are divisions and overlapping affiliations within generations and within certain domains. For example, in family or business norms, the Sino-Thai tend to stress Confucian beliefs such as filial piety, diligence and thriftiness. But when it comes to politics or proper social demeanour, the Sino-Thai emphasize their loyalty to the Thai monarchy, the belief in accumulating merit and emulating the polite Thai manner in posture and speech. These different aspects of Thai Buddhism and Confucian norms both complement and compete with each other. It can be argued that the Sino-Thai reconstruct themselves by reworking Thai Buddhist and Confucian ethics.

In an effort to disprove Skinner's assimilation theory, Coughlin argues that "[t]he values emphasized by Chinese society in Thailand

are in many instances the direct opposites of those stressed by the Thai people, and these must be regarded as a fundamental barrier to assimilation" (1960:197). However, Coughlin ignores the connections between the Thai and Chinese value systems. The two systems are typified by their hierarchical social order and asymmetric gender relations. In Thai culture, women are regarded as subordinate to men, while in Chinese culture only men continue the family line. Coughlin's "double identity" approach oversimplifies the complex and ambiguous nature of Sino-Thai ethnic identity.

As such, the term "Sino-Thai" must be re-defined as Chinese immigrants with their descendants embodying a synthesis of both Thai Buddhist and Chinese Confucian ethics. The term Sino-Thai itself (either *chin-thai* in Thai or *tai-hua* in Chinese) — as it appears to the eyes on the page — both separated and joined by a hyphen, is a visual reminder of the simultaneous interdependence and division between the cultures.

Within the Sino-Thai category, the first-generation China-born immigrants are differentiated from the second-generation and their Thailand-born children. At the individual level whenever possible, we can apply the rich self-identifications used by the Sino-Thai themselves. These distinctions will be crucial to our understanding of the dynamic and ambiguous nature of Sino-Thai ethnic identity, as well as their transformed ethics through different generations.

The rest of the chapter will now focus on how the Sino-Thai construct their ethnic identity through different wedding symbols in both traditional religious ceremonies as well as non-traditional ceremonies which have become increasingly popular in highly secularized Bangkok.

Sino-Thai Wedding Rituals in Bangkok

The Sino-Thai wedding configurations, which include bride wealth, dowry, religious worship, wedding reception and newspaper congratulations — contain complex symbols. The ritual symbols are diverse varying from a belt to an apron-top, from a religious seating arrangement to a pomegranate stem, from a powerful Thai political figure to a Western wedding gown. These symbols explicitly signal who the participants are, and what their social and economic status is. The Sino-Thai do not simply select symbols at random from Thai

Buddhist, Chinese Confucianist, and Western consumerist representations but rework these symbols and combine them to legitimize their beliefs and self-interests. This process will be illustrated by the following three features of Sino-Thai life.

Transformed Confucian Patrilineal Practices in the Wedding

Bangkok was the chief port of Chinese immigration from the time it was first founded. For every decade from the 1780s to the 1940s there was a sizeable number of Chinese immigrants at the port. From 1949, however, the stream of Chinese immigrants subsided to a negligible trickle. The Chinese majority of 1949 became a minority by 1954. Today it would be stretching the point to claim that more than a third of the population of Bangkok are Chinese (Skinner, 1964:83).

This sketch of Sino-Thai demographics in Bangkok provides the historical background of the Sino-Thai population in Bangkok. The total population of "Chinese" or Sino-Thai in Bangkok today is unknown, and even some of the available numbers are problematic because of different definitions of "Chinese". Here I only focus on one aspect of the impact of the large Sino-Thai population on Bangkok: patrilineal practice.

The Sino-Thai patrilocal residence and patrilineal inheritance, which Sino-Thai have transplanted to Bangkok, provide an environment in which there is a significant advantage to having sons over daughters. A son is the symbol of the continuation of the family line. "Continuity of incense and fire" (*jie xiang huo* [C]) is the fundamental Confucian norm, and it requires a continuation of patrilineal ancestry (Fei, 1939:30; Yang, 1945:45). Having only daughters, not producing a son, is unfilial (*bu xiao* [C]); symbolically it cuts off the continuity of a family's ancestors. As a recent survey conducted by Thai scholars points out, patrilocal residence still "prevails" in Bangkok, which "reflects the large Chinese proportion in the area" (Bhassorn et al., 1991:3).

However, the Confucian patrilineal practices have been transformed in the Thai context, in which Thai — especially those in northern and northeastern Thailand — prefer matrilocal residence (Potter, 1977). Sino-Thai patrilineal family structure is not the same as that in China because it is affected by the available economic resources of the new couple and the resistance to patrilineal practice

by the younger generation. Nevertheless, the patrilineal family structure is emphasized as a principle norm in the Sino-Thai wedding ritual despite its declining popularity among younger Sino-Thai.

The Sino-Thai do not just use pre-1949 Confucian cultural tokens that early Chinese immigrants brought with them from China to stress the patrilineal family structure, they also incorporate Thai cultural symbols and assign them their own meanings. Let us first see how Sino-Thai invest patrilineal ideas into the Thai form of bride wealth.

A silver or a gold belt is one of the traditional forms of Thai bride wealth.[4] The expensive handmade belt represents beauty and high socio-economic status. For women of lower and middle class, the belt is a "good investment", or a kind of insurance policy that can always be sold for cash in an emergency. For the upper-class women, the belt contributes to their status as a "walking jewellery box" (*tu phet khluan thi*). However, a first-generation Sino-Thai woman told me that she would never allow the belt to be included as part of her daughter's bride wealth or dowry.[5] This is because of the Chinese pronunciation of the word for belt, "*ku dai* [C]". The pronunciation of "*ku*" resembles the word for "storage" which implies property, and "*dai*" means to "bring over". Thus, a bride who brought a silver belt to the groom's family would be symbolically giving all of her family's property to her husband's family. But in other circumstances, this same woman might be happy to give a silver belt to her Thai daughter-in-law as bride wealth. The belt would meet the expectations of the Thai family, and she would symbolically capture wealth from the bride's family. The decision to use or not use the belt is a strategic calculation based on the notion of patrilineal inheritance.

The association of the Thai belt with kinship reflects characteristic Confucian ethics with its emphasis on patriliny over matriliny. The importance of men compared to women in the maintenance of the patriarchal system is clear. Along with the socio-economic change in recent times, the younger generation of Sino-Thai women are much better educated and have better jobs than their mothers. Some have received even higher educational qualifications than their brothers and have distinguished themselves by their career accomplishments. Nevertheless, few Sino-Thai women are allowed to inherit an equal share of family property or the family business. The reason is simple: "the daughter will marry out" while "the son will continue the family line". Sino-Thai parents often only

give dowry — not inheritance — to their daughters, although daughters are more likely to take care of elderly parents than sons. What a daughter inherits actually weakens her natal family since she will take this property away when she joins her husband's family.

Thus, the desire to have a son is an essential theme in Sino-Thai wedding configurations. The Sino-Thai continue to use various traditional Chinese cultural symbols which are no longer used in mainland China. A handkerchief-sized red apron-top (*du dou* [C]), which I never saw in China but knew of only from Chinese literature, is required dowry by some Sino-Thai because it signifies the bride's fertility. On the apron-top is sewn a pair of mandarin ducks — one holding a lotus blossom in its beak, the other holding a lotus fruit — each expressing the wish to be blessed with sons.[6] The mandarin ducks symbolically refer to the new couple. *Lian zi* [C], the lotus fruit, represents "having one child after another". The character "*zi*" has two meanings: son and child. However, the cultural connotation of "*zi*" here is unmistakably for sons, not daughters. The pocket of the apron contains even more concrete fertility tokens: red beans, green beans, dried logan, millet, and rice dyed red. One of my Sino-Thai informants included the apron-top as bride wealth for her future daughter-in-law. It is important to the mother-in-law that the daughter-in-law should have the apron-top; whether she understands the apron-top symbolizes fertility is irrelevant.[7]

A bride is valued for her ability to produce sons; structurally she is treated as a dangerous outsider by her husband's family. At a wedding for a second-generation Sino-Thai couple, the groom's entire family left the house before the bride arrived.[8] This contrasted with the moment when the groom went to pick up the bride. A large crowd of the bride's relatives and friends, holding gold necklaces and silver belts (metaphors for gold and silver gates), blocked the groom's entry both into the bride's house as well as her room.[9] The groom had to bribe and bargain his way past these well-wishers into her house enduring friendly laughter and good-natured teasing.

The groom's family avoids the bride because of a norm called "*chong*" [C] which can be loosely translated as taboo. The year in which a person is born is symbolized by one of twelve animals. It is believed that people born in certain animal years naturally conflict with those born in certain other animal years, and that there are six taboo pairs: the rat and horse, cow and goat, tiger and monkey, rabbit and chicken, dragon and dog, and snake and pig (*zi wu chong*,

chou wei chong, yin shen chong, mao you chong, chen wu chong, ji hai chong [C]). Usually close relatives who have a horoscope sign which conflicts with the bride or groom have to avoid them on their wedding day.

Why did the groom's entire family avoid the bride? The answer was that they thought the bride brought evil spirits (*sha qi* [C]) with her. In the past it was even tougher on a bride: she had to "cross fire," by literally stepping over a burning fire, so that the purifying flames would drive away the evil spirits she carried, before entering the groom's home. The "evil spirits" brought by the bride are associated with her sexual parts. She is viewed as a dangerous agent who might threaten the order of the family, disturb or even divide the family. Avoiding or isolating the bride becomes a symbolic strategy of controlling the bride's "evil spirits".

However, the symbolic meaning of the groom's family avoiding the bride and the apron-top practice in Thailand have been detached from their original context. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the massive Chinese immigration to Thailand ended, the mainland Chinese have gone through political reforms to eliminate pre-1949 "feudalist superstitious thought" (*fengjian mixin sixiang* [C]). However the Sino-Thai in Bangkok continue to draw on the pre-1949 customs or even attach patrilineal meaning to a Thai symbol. By reworking and regenerating these symbols which are neither practised by Thai nor by urban mainland Chinese, the Sino-Thai maintain some of the most fundamental elements of Confucian values in Bangkok.

Gender-embedded Hierarchical Order

Buddhist, Confucian and Catholic ritual symbols converge at a Sino-Thai wedding as a complementary fusion of different belief systems. The symbols are manipulated to expand their identity and protect their interests.[10] At a second-generation Sino-Thai couple's wedding, the Buddhist groom, the Catholic bride and their families switched from Confucian rituals (i.e. homage to the gods of Heaven and Earth,[11] ancestor worship,[12] and the tea service ceremony) to Thai Buddhist ones; they later moved from an outdoor Thai spirit house to an indoor Chinese shrine, and finally held a Catholic wedding mass.[13] Yet, despite the abrupt shifts, the underlying structure of each ritual is based on a corresponding hierarchical ranking. The ritual's structure is characterized by asymmetric relations between

the holy men and lay people, between men and women, and between the older and younger generation. Let's look at two rituals performed by this couple and their families: a Thai Buddhist ritual and a Confucian tea service ceremony.

Nine monks were invited into the groom's home to hold a Buddhist ritual on the wedding morning. The altar, facing east, was at the centre of the ritual. The monks sat in a row, in order of seniority, each in his "proper" place, inferior to the statue of the Buddha on the altar, but superior to the lay people. The groom sat to the right of the bride because the right seat was considered superior to the left. Moving in descending order the seating arrangement began with monks, then laymen, and finally women. The bride was in the lowest position of the group.[14]

Thai Buddhism organizes a hierarchy guided by its key moral principle: the law of karma and the associated concept of merit accumulation. A person's karma — the sum of physical, verbal and cognitive actions of past lives — determines their present social status, wealth and power. Karma is also believed to determine gender, and in the Thai interpretation of Buddhism, being born a woman indicates an insufficient store of merit. The inequalities between men and women are pre-ordained by each individual's karma. The Thai interpretation of the law of karma explicitly endorses the moral inferiority of women and the superiority of men.

After listening to the chanting of the holy texts, the new couple accumulates merit by serving food as alms to the monks. The bride tries to grab hold of the serving ladle before her husband does. If she is successful, symbolically it means that her husband will have to listen to her in the future. The Sino-Thai bride adopts the Thai symbolic action of empowering herself, but she can only gain this power informally.

Monkhood is one of the most important social signifiers for men. Thai scholars state that, "The ideal man is found in the monk, who either devotes his life to Buddhist precepts as a permanent member of monkhood or, on a practical level, serves in the monastery for several months as a temporary member of the monkhood. In addition, the ideal man can be a good farmer and a good provider for his family. He can serve his community as a local leader" (Chaleo and Suttinee, 1988:11). Becoming a monk is morally correct behaviour. A Thai man who serves his customary term of monkhood is characterized as a "*khon suk*", which means a ripe or mature man

(Phya, 1973:57). Becoming a mature man with spiritual wisdom, he is qualified to assume leadership roles and be recognized as a family breadwinner. Buddhist morality assures status and a means of social mobility for Thai men.

Women are prohibited from entering the monkhood. Marriage becomes the symbol for a woman becoming a complete person (ibid., 57–58). A married woman is called *pen yao, pen ruan* which means that she is the house and home. Or she is *pen phang, pen pha*, the safe harbour, the secure wall, implying the protection derived from her marriage. A woman's identity is defined by her family; first with her own, and later that of her husband's.

Becoming a mother is the real step that turns a woman into a full adult. Childbearing is a moral action because it improves a woman's karma by assuring a woman's merit through the acts of her children (Muecke, 1984:462). Since women as "polluting agents" are not allowed to enter the monkhood, only means by which women accumulate merit are through the actions of a man (i.e. son) she is connected with, or through providing alms (i.e. material contributions) to monks. Thus, a woman's moral obligation in the context of Buddhist society is to bear children and to contribute economically to her family.

In the Buddhist hierarchical structure, women are regarded as tied to the material, illusory world and only men are capable of cutting through illusion to transcend the physical to attain the spiritual realm. Thai cultural symbols highlighted in the ritual are the most familiar and therefore the most powerful modes in constructing Sino-Thai public life.

The tea ceremony at the wedding is much more secular, compared to the Buddhist ritual, but no less hierarchical. The tea service ceremony serves as a ritual of filial piety — the central expression of familial relations which support a hierarchical order — the young towards their seniors. The new couple kneels and serves tea to their seniors, and they, in return, receive a "*hong bao* [C]", or gift of money sealed in a red envelope, signifying the seniors' authority. Kneeling and receiving gifts from the juniors reinforce filial sentiments, obedience and obligation within the family order.

Simultaneously, the seniors offer the new couple goodwill which typically stress two main themes. The first theme emphasizes the marital bonds: "You just love each other a little bit, but love forever" (*rak noi noi, rak nan nan*) or "May you be together until you walk

with a walking stick decorated with gold and diamonds" (*hai yu duai kan chon thao kae, chon thoe mai thao yot tong kra bong yot phet*) or "May you be together for a hundred years" (*bainian dao lao* [C]). The marital bonds are expected to be permanent and stable; the quality of love is not a necessary first priority for the marriage. Although the first Thai phrase uses the word "love", its real emphasis is on "*nan nan*" or a long period of time.

In everyday life many Sino-Thai couples may put on a happy face for outsiders, but privately they care little for each other. According to the Thailand Asian Marriage Survey, about 41 percent of married "Chinese" couples live apart (Aphichat, 1986:18). The concept of a "happy marriage" is expressed by the wish for wealth and a long marital life.

The second theme underscores children: "May you have a dozen children" (*hai mi luk pen lo*); or "May you have a son as soon as possible" (*zao sheng gui zi*[15] [C]). The possession of a son is both for the sake of accumulating merit and to continue the family line. Thus, family stability, prosperity and having sons are repeatedly emphasized in the ritual.

In addition to giving her blessing, the Sino-Thai mother-in-law gives the bride a gold necklace implying prosperity and a pomegranate stem indicating fertility. A ripe pomegranate means one hundred seeds, one hundred sons. The first character (i.e. *shi* [C]) of the word pomegranate (*shi liu* [C]), is a homonym for the word generation. The symbol represents continued fertility in the family from generation to generation. Thus, the different power relations between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are woven into the tea ceremony. The pomegranate stem highlights the mother-in-law's power over the bride implying the request to the bride to bear male children to perpetuate her husband's line of descent. The mother-in-law is shaped by the patrilineal experience. Thus she attempts to reshape her daughter-in-law according to her mould.

The public social hierarchy in the Buddhist ritual and private family hierarchy in the tea ceremony are matched in terms of constructing different male and female categories and the social meanings attached to these categories. Each ritual stresses different aspects of hierarchy but reveals a similar theme: the ways in which rights, privileges, and honour are assigned differentially to men and women. These rituals legitimize the special characteristics that reinforce Sino-Thai perceptions of particular social and family

hierarchical order. By performing these rituals, the Sino-Thai assert both their individual and their families' positions in the social hierarchy and thereby confirm the hierarchy itself.

Interdependence between Class and Ethnicity

The ethnic identity of Sino-Thai in Bangkok is intertwined with their commercial activities. Bangkok is "home to approximately 50 percent of the overseas Chinese, who seem to predominate in the city's thronged streets and shops" (Hill, 1985:145). In the middle of the 19th century, Sino-Thai merchants served the Sakdina ruling class during the formation of Thailand's original capitalist class (Hewison, 1981:396). Since Sino-Thai merchants could accumulate more money than Thai corvée labour, Chinese immigrants became more important than Thais during the reign of King Rama II (1809–23) (Akin, 1975:117). Chinese immigrants were also exempted from corvée labour and from the obligation to register under a patron or government master (Skinner, 1957:96–97). The merchants joined the royal trading monopoly, served as tax collectors, and some even became a part of the elite class (Akin, 1975:116; Skinner, 1957: 148–54). With the increasing production of rice, tin, teak and rubber, many Sino-Thai merchants invested their wealth in productive enterprises such as rice and teak mills. At the same time, they acted as go-betweens for Westerners and Thai (Hewison, 1981:396). Sino-Thai ethnic identity is deeply rooted in the economic and commercial development of Bangkok.

The interrelations between Sino-Thai ethnic identity and economic and political power are explicitly displayed in wedding rituals. Two types of reciprocal relationships are subtly involved. The first is between the Sino-Thai and Thai government officials, and the second is between the Sino-Thai themselves. The following description of an elite Sino-Thai wedding provides a context for understanding the relationship between class and ethnicity.

The bride, daughter of the president of Thailand's largest bank, married the son of an upper-class Sino-Thai family. Before the wedding service, police used walkie-talkies to monitor the crowd and block traffic so guests could get to the church on time. Since this church could accommodate only 500 guests, Bangkok's Channel Three TV broadcast the ceremony live on monitors set up in a field outside the church. The seats outside were under canopies, beautifully decorated with floral archways. The wedding service was attended

by Thai and Western priests, nuns, and a bishop who performed the wedding service. The Western Catholic priests adopted the Thai "*wai*" salute by placing their hands palm against palm and raising them to their face when they entered the church. The bride entered the church with her father to the music "Here Comes the Bride". The groom and his party wore formal matching white tuxedos and black ties.

The evening reception was held at a five-star hotel. A large number of important and prestigious guests included the former prime minister and current privy counsellor to the Thai King, a second former prime minister, a previous vice-prime minister, several past and present cabinet officers, the Chinese Ambassador to Thailand, powerful Sino-Thai business leaders and Sino-Thai association representatives. Before the privy counsellor made a toast, he led everyone in saluting the King, then he congratulated the couple and their families. The state's power was solemnly woven into the wedding rite. As Pierre Bourdieu points out, "It is practical kin who make marriages; it is official kin who celebrate them" (1977:34). After cutting an enormous 14-layer Western-style wedding cake, complete with a plastic miniature bride and groom on top, the bride and groom knelt and presented the first few pieces of cake to the most honoured guests to thank them for their participation.

Besides these high-ranking officials, the bank's clients and employees came from all over Thailand to attend the reception. Their presence was based on their relation and obligation between them and the bank's president. One branch manager travelled all the way from southern Thailand just to attend the reception. He was so pressed for time that he asked his brother, a university professor, to attend the reception as well so that they could see each other. One newspaper publisher came solely to sign the guest book; he knew a list of important guests who had signed the book would appear in the newspaper the next day. He told me: "I have to come to the reception because I need a loan from the big boss (*da lao ban* [C])".

The media was also out in full force to cover the wedding. Several dozen photographers and video crews jostled for position and filmed everything that took place. Over 6,000 guests attended. Giant video screens were set up so that even those seated at the back of the hotel ballroom could watch the festivities. As guests mingled and strolled among the carved ice sculptures, sampling Japanese and Chinese food, Western desserts and tropical Thai fruit, a chamber orchestra played Western classical music.

The presence of high-ranking Thai officials, the police, and the television crews confirms the political power and prestige which upper-class Sino-Thai can mobilize in Thailand. Not surprisingly, Hewison suggests that an analysis of the Sino-Thai upper class should focus on their class positions rather than on their ethnic origins (1988:293). However, the relations between upper-class Thai and Sino-Thai reflect class interests which cut across ethnic boundaries but without necessarily diminishing an evolving ethnic identity. As Riggs points out:

> ... insofar as a major goal of the [Thai] elite is to acquire wealth, it must exact tribute from the Chinese. Since the ruling elite is not politically responsible to the business community, there is no reason to think that it would want to adopt or enforce any general rules protecting the property interests of the businessman. It prefers an unrestricted hunting licence to squeeze the entrepreneur, subject to the condition that he must not be destroyed, lest this rich source of wealth be lost (1966:252).

The heart of the alliance rests on the need of Sino-Thai business people for social prestige and political protection, and of Thai officials for legitimate sources of wealth and economic control. Upper-class Sino-Thai have built up an extensive network with the Thai elite, precisely because of their "Chinese origin". As Gray points out, this Sino-Thai bank is allowed to use the *garuda* bird, symbol of the Thai royalty, in their business transactions (1992:458).

Ethnicity can be the subject of "being squeezed" (Riggs, 1966:252), or be instrumental in establishing and developing businesses. To understand how ethnicity can be manipulated for class interests, it is crucial for us to understand the special nature of class issues in Thailand. For instance, the participation of the Chinese Ambassador and Sino-Thai business and association members in the wedding is inseparable from the couple's families' economic status and ethnic origin. The Chinese Ambassador might feel the need to cultivate the relations with powerful *hua shang* [C] "overseas Chinese business people" to help the modernization of China. The banking family might use this connection to expand bank branches into China in the name of *hua shang*. In fact, the bank's first branch in China recently opened in the bank president's hometown province (19 February 1993. *People's Daily* [C]). Many Sino-Thai participating in the wedding have various business relations with the bank, and

especially with the "Chinese Relation Centre", an in-house banking service directly aimed at attracting Sino-Thai business people.

Ethnicity is used to reinforce class interests. Even the choice of a wedding site can reflect this linkage.[16] Another Sino-Thai entrepreneur had the honour of holding his son's wedding at the Sirikit National Convention Centre, which had never been used for a wedding before. Hosting the wedding at Sirikit was more prestigious than holding it at a five-star hotel. Gaining permission to use the centre was public acknowledgement of his high social status. In exchange, after the wedding, he donated 3,840,000 baht (US$152,199),[17] two-thirds of which went to projects for the King and the Queen, and the rest for "Chinese temples, Chinese associations, and to the Chinese Newspaper Foundation" (*World Daily News,* 7 December 1991; 18 January 1992).

Similar to the banking family, this Sino-Thai also cultivates relations with the Thai elite and with Sino-Thai institutions. Through his Thai connections, he gains public recognition as a devoted Sino-Thai philanthropist.[17]

Money is used to achieve various goals. Upper-class Sino-Thai use Chinese newspapers to convert their economic power into social prestige in the wedding configurations. The engagement and wedding of the banker's daughter received great publicity for days in several newspapers (10, 13 January; 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13 March 1992, *World Daily News* [C]). Wedding wishes advertised in the newspapers is considered an appropriate wedding gift. A full page of newspaper coverage costs 10,000 baht (US$396), half a page is US$198, and a quarter page goes for US$99. The political and economic connections between the families of the intended couple and those who contributed are often explicit in the advertisements congratulating the couple publicly.

The purpose of the congratulations is to emphasize and celebrate, not the new couple, but the high status of the bride and groom's parents. The names and social positions of the parents are printed in boldface two sizes larger than the names of the bride and groom. For instance, "*men dang hu dui* [C])", literally translated means, "the door matches the door and the window matches the window", implying a well-matched matrimonial alliance in terms of social and economic status. Or "*long chuan long* [C]" which literally means "dragons pass on dragons" indicating that a noble family will be continued. Through the commercialized media, the high social prestige of the seniors is redistributed to the new couple.

Western-style consumer culture also reinforces the Thai hierarchical structure. Western-style clothing and the wedding cake are accepted symbols of higher social status and "modernity". The number of layers of a wedding cake is also indicative of wealth and high status. The traditional Sino-Thai wedding cake (*xi bin* [C]) meaning "happy cake" is going out of fashion. A traditional Thai wedding dress or a red Sino-Thai wedding dress is being replaced by white or pink Western wedding gowns. The consumer culture helps reconstruct Bangkok fashion.

The lower or middle class also empowers themselves by manipulating consumer symbols. Nilamun,[18] a lower-class Thai bride, married a middle-class Sino-Thai husband, and her family spent money ostentatiously to show off their status. Nilamun's mother, a widow who works as a cook, spent more than a month's salary, 3,500 baht (US$138), making herself an outfit to wear at the wedding. She and her unmarried elder daughter borrowed the fanciest and most expensive jewellery they could find to match their two wedding outfits. They were in Thai dress for the morning Buddhist ritual; they changed into Western dress for the evening reception. The bride rented a fashionable 10,000-baht (US$396) Western-style white wedding gown for her big day. Judging solely from the expense of the wedding, an outsider would think the family was financially secure. However, in their everyday life, they had to make every penny count; this family of five would ordinarily spend less than 100 baht (US$3.90) for their dinner.

Western influences cross class and ethnic boundaries. Nevertheless, the upper class has much greater access to sources of political and economic power than the lower or middle class. During Thailand's rapid economic development, Western-style consumerism has influenced the social order. Hence, the reciprocal relationships between the Sino-Thai and the Thai upper class, between Sino-Thai and their institutions, between Western consumer culture and class status are all embedded in the Thai social structure. This process started at the time of the original formation of the Thai capitalist class in the middle of the 19th century. Western bourgeoisie, especially Sino-Thai merchants equipped with ethnic co-operative networks, have collaborated with the Thai ruling class to develop the Thai capitalist system. Today, if we only examine class or ethnicity, our understanding will be incomplete. Without a clear understanding of Sino-Thai ethnicity, we will not be able to understand class issue in the Thai social and cultural context.

Conclusion

Sino-Thai wedding rituals offer an understanding of how different symbols relate to Sino-Thai ethnic identity and the public image they wish to project. As a consequence, ritual tokens and everyday Sino-Thai practices are structured by the same conceptual categories, each flows into the other because they are informed by the same meanings. The perpetuation of three key features — the patrilineal practice, the superiority of men over women in the hierarchical structure, as well as the interdependence of class and ethnicity — is the ethical source of continuity between the Sino-Thai past and present. Class and ethnicity intersect most clearly, perhaps, with regards to Sino-Thai socio-economic status; whereas gender and ethnicity intersect most clearly with regards to the relationship between Sino-Thai men and women. The relations among ethnicity, class, and gender are indeed complex and heavily intertwined.

Contrary to Skinner's assimilation model, the Sino-Thai have transplanted pre-1949 Confucian culture to Bangkok. Although many Sino-Thai do not necessarily know or even care about the original meaning of these symbols (e.g., the apron-top), they are fully aware these symbols are related to their Chinese origin, with which they identify. The origins of rituals are to be found not just in the belief in these symbols, but also in the social action, in a ceremony that symbolically binds the individual to one's ethnic group. The wedding rituals of the Sino-Thai have made Confucian practices (e.g. tea ceremony) intelligible to the Thai, even as it signals differences between the Sino-Thai and Thai. Thus, the Confucian symbols Sino-Thai apply represent a social force rather than an individual practice. Confucian symbols and values persist in Thailand as a social force whether or not a fifth-generation "Chinese" actually exists.

In addition, the wedding ritual reveals that Coughlin's "double identity" theory falls short in explaining ethnic identity. When Sino-Thai switch from a Thai Buddhist ritual to a Confucian tea ceremony, the two seemingly unrelated rituals are not opposing value systems but rather both typified by their similar hierarchical structure. The Thai male-dominated social structure is complementary rather than opposed to the patrilineal family structure that the Sino-Thai have transplanted from China. Thai Buddhist morality provides men with social prestige not available to women whereas Confucian morality endows men with authority not available to women; both treat women as inferiors or as polluting agents in the society.

The wedding rituals exhibit the complex ways in which gender, ethnicity and class intersect each other, as well as the ways in which all three intersect with Sino-Thai ethics. All these aspects are woven into the fabric of Sino-Thai life, and each must be considered, especially where they converge.

Sino-Thai are a distinct minority group in Thailand. They are the "daughters-in-law" of Thailand and the "married daughters" of China. Sino-Thai have not abandoned their "tradition" inherited from their natal home (China), nor have they refused to integrate themselves into their husband's families (Thailand). Instead, by reworking Chinese Confucianism and Thai Buddhism, the daughters-in-law reconstruct their own images in their husband's families and attempt to cultivate a new generation according to their understanding of themselves and the world around them.

NOTES

1 I would like to thank the Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University, Khien Theeravit, and Juree Namsirichai Vichit-Vadakan for their help and support. Special thanks to my Sino-Thai and Thai respondents for allowing me to participate in their rituals, especially their wedding ceremonies. The field research was supported by grants from the Social Science Research Council, a UC Berkeley Humanities Graduate Research Grant, and from the Institute for Intercultural Studies. My dissertation, including part of this paper, has been supported by the Mabelle McLeod Lewis Memorial Fellowship Fund. Special thanks also to Aihwa Ong, Herbert Phillips, Sulamith Potter, Emily Zhao, and many others for their comments and encouragement. Needless to say, any errors are my own.

2 In my fieldwork I focused on first- and second-generation middle- and upper-class Sino-Thai. My data on lower-class Sino-Thai comes from a 102-household survey I conducted. Wedding data encompasses first- to third-generation Sino-Thai.

3 Chinese terms and expressions are identified with a bracketed [C]; unidentified foreign phrases are Thai. I have used the system of *Romanization Guide for Thai Script* (1968).

4 In Thailand the groom is required by item 1437 of the revised Family Law of 1990 to give bride wealth (*sin sot thong man*). The law further proscribes that *thong man* shall be given as a gift to the bride to "serve as evidence that he would marry her", and *sin sot* as a gift to the bride's parents, or whoever it was who raised the bride in order to "thank the persons who raised the girl" (Vali, 1990:4–5). In practice, *thong man* usually consists of jewellery, often a gold necklace, a pair of bracelets, a pair of gold earrings and a ring for the bride. *Sin sot* is usually a cash gift for the bride's family.

5 The families of the bride and groom negotiate the amount and content of the bride wealth.

6 Paired mandarin ducks and a dragon coupled with a phoenix are typical wedding symbols; they are also used on wedding invitation cards.

7 It is unlikely that the Thai daughter-in-law will continue this practice when her child marries.

8 Sino-Thai believe that weddings should occur at auspicious times on certain lucky days to increase the chances of a successful marriage. Weddings in Thailand are usually held in even months based on the lunar calendar. August and September are exceptions to this rule. August, although an even month, is not a good month for marriage because it is the first month of Buddhist Lent. September, an odd month, is considered lucky because it is the ninth month and the number nine is associated with long-lasting.

Sino-Thai usually consult an astrologer, either monk or layman, to schedule the most favourable time for each part of the wedding ritual. The timing of events for the wedding day is based on the couple's horoscopes, or Eight Characters "*ba zi* "[C]. The Eight Characters consist of four pairs of characters, indicating the year, month, day and hour of a person's birth, and each pair is made up of one Heavenly Stem and one Earthly Branch. In Bangkok the wedding ritual starts at dawn to avoid morning traffic and thus ensure that the schedule can be met.

9 This is widely practised in Bangkok as well as in rural Thailand. According to Watson, the Hongkong Chinese also have this custom (1985:121). In Hongkong the entrance is blocked by a group of unmarried girls; but no jewellery is involved. In Thailand the groom is blocked by both married and unmarried men and women, boys and girls.

10 I was told that gods and spirits are different, and they have the power to bestow favours or afflictions on human beings.

11 Paying homage to the gods of Heaven and Earth assures that their marriage has been sanctioned by the gods and not just by fellow human beings.

12 Ancestor worship is a fundamental ingredient of Sino-Thai life so it is taken seriously in the wedding rite. It is believed that all living persons owe their fortune or misfortune to their ancestors who continue, after death as they did during life, to assist their relatives in this world. Deceased ancestors are also thought to have needs such as for food (Hsu, 1970:235–36). Thus, since ancestral spirits provide a link with a person's past, and can influence their present and future, the descendant must worship them, care for them, and keep them well informed.

13 The following is a wedding day schedule I recorded.

4:00 a.m. Leave the groom's home to greet the bride in four carloads of people.

4:45 a.m. Arrive at the bride's home but wait at her gate until 5:15 a.m.

5:15 a.m. At the exact appointed auspicious time, the groom enters the bride's home.

5:55 a.m. Leave the bride's home for the groom's home. The traffic has started to become heavy; one of the groom's relatives is worried that the couple might miss the auspicious time for entering the groom's house.

6:53 a.m. Arrive at the groom's home ahead of time. The couple stays in the car until 7:05 a.m., the auspicious time for entering the groom's home.

7:15 a.m. Worship Buddha.

8:10 a.m. Confucian rituals: worship heaven and earth; ancestor worship; tea service ceremony.

8:35 a.m. Spirit Worship: Chinese Shrine (Home shrines "*tu di ye*" [C], or "*san chao*", always sit facing the door); Thai spirit house (A Thai spirit house is for a land deity called "*san phra phum*". It normally sits out in the yard.)

11:00 a.m. Nine Thai monks arrive to hold a Buddhist ritual in the groom's home; they leave at 11:45 a.m. after having lunch.

12:30 p.m. Lunch for the lay people is interrupted by a group of Thai youth. They get into the yard, without permission from the host, and perform a dragon dance, beat on drums and gongs, and perform acrobatics to offer their "congratulations" for the wedding. The groom's family feels obligated to pay them. These Thai dancers take advantage of Sino-Thai wedding parties, and manipulate the custom to make money.

2:15 p.m. A make-up specialist arrives to prepare the bride for the ceremony.

4:00 p.m. Catholic Church service. The groom's family members take many pictures in the church. Many of them have never been in a church before.

7:00 p.m. The wedding reception is attended by more than 300 guests and ends at 10 p.m. Many relatives come to visit the bridal room, or "new room" (*xin fang* [C]).

14 Seating arrangement:

Altar	monks
1	senior monk
2	junior monk
3	junior monk
4	junior monk
5	junior monk
6	junior monk
7	junior monk
8	junior monk
9	junior monk, groom and bride, and lay people

15 The phrase literally means "having treasure children as soon as possible". However, what it really means is having a son because a daughter is not in the treasure category.

16 The major dialect associations, such as Teochew, Hakka, Hainan, Guangdong and Hokkien, all have big reception halls with kitchens. During the wedding season, these halls are fully booked months ahead. In addition to a sense of community, many middle-class Sino-Thai like to have their hometown food provided by the association. At a typical wedding banquet held in the Teochew Association Hall, the food served would consist of either traditional Chinese dishes, like a whole roasted pig, or southern Chinese dishes served with Thai condiments and sauces. A Sino-Thai cook said the dishes are "*zhong tai he bi* [C]" (a good combination of Chinese and Thai elements). Another attraction is that the associations provide a discount rate for their members so these sites are a bargain. Fifty tables with service for ten guests each, I was told, are commonly rented for a wedding, and one table usually costs about 3,000 baht (US$118).

17 The conversion here, as elsewhere in the essay, is into American dollars.
18 "Nilamun" is a pseudonym.

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12

Tradition, Identity and Religious Eclecticism among Chinese in Thailand

Ann Maxwell Hill

This study of religious eclecticism in Chinese popular religion is based on observations made over several years in the provincial capital of Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand. Most of my informants, whose prosperity is derived from family-run shops, restaurants and other small-scale enterprises, would be considered middle class. The majority are men and women with at least one China-born parent; a few Yunnanese Chinese are themselves China-born. Although all have some degree of fluency in Central Thai and familiarity with Thai social conventions, they recognize one another as Chinese, and largely because of their family businesses and where they live, they are known to other city residents as Chinese.

Religious eclecticism among Chinese descendants in Thailand is an important phenomenon because it figures prominently in much of the conventional thinking about how the Chinese historically have adapted to Thai society, with all the paradoxes and indeterminacy accompanying that process (Skinner, 1957:126–42; 1958: 37–38, 82–83; Boonsanong, 1971; Tobias, 1977; Bao, 1995). The interpretation here is mostly ethnographic and, to a lesser degree, theoretical. First, religious eclecticism can be understood as reflecting syncretic tendencies inherent in the traditions of Chinese popular

religion brought by Chinese immigrants to Thailand. Dimensions of syncretism in the ethnography of religion in China and its implications for localization, or local revisions of immigrant traditions, are explored in the context of Chiang Mai. In this regard, the chapter looks specifically at the nexus between Chinese popular religion and Buddhism. Second, this discussion demonstrates that the eclectic religion of Chinese-identified populations in Chiang Mai also reflects the impact of state-sanctioned national culture in Thailand. Reference is made to some of the history of popular religion in late imperial China, where local religion was in constant tension with homogenizing tendencies emanating from the state. Third, religious eclecticism is interpreted as reflecting an identity-building process that continually reformulates "tradition" for Chinese-identified communities in Chiang Mai.

Since this interpretation relies on insights drawn from studies of popular religion in China, a review of ethnography and analysis from these studies will best enlighten religious eclecticism among Chinese in Chiang Mai. This overview will be followed by two striking illustrations of religious eclecticism from the author's fieldwork in Chiang Mai, from which she draws her conclusions.[1]

Popular Religion in China and Its Relevance to the Thai Case

In spite of lack of unanimity on exactly how to define Chinese popular religion, as noted in a recent state-of-the-field article by Teiser, there seems to be growing consensus at least that Chinese popular religion is neither a fixed entity nor a static system (Teiser, 1995). Building on Teiser's insights, the emphasis on the fluidity and mutability of Chinese popular religion reflects contemporary ethnographic and historical studies that view it as in an active, dialectical relationship with society and social change (Sangren, 1987; Naquin, 1988).

Earlier scholars, too, implicitly recognized the variability of Chinese popular religion, for they all grappled, in one way or another, with its syncretic tendencies (DeGroot, 1912: 211–12; Yang, 1961: 298; Welch, 1967:401–03; Freedman, 1974). Welch, a formidable scholar of Buddhism in China, remarked of Buddhist sects that they were "closely interlocked" with Confucianism and Daoism (1967:400). His observation captures one conventional sense of

Chinese popular religion's trademark syncretism: its combination of elements from what, for Westerners and some Chinese elites, are three discrete religions. In his description of the gods of "folk" religion in China, Thompson gives us the second sense of syncretism (1989:66–67). Chinese popular religion absorbs deities from many sources, including the "canonization" of historical persons, personifications of natural phenomena, figures in Buddhist and Daoist narratives and so forth. "... it is an unheard-of swarm of gods and spirits of every kind, an innumerable rabble," said Maspero, quoted by Thompson to convey the flavour of Westerners' disparagement of such bewildering diversity (1989:55 [Maspero, no date: 263]).

Is it any wonder, then, that one of the dominant themes of recent Western discourse on Chinese religion has been about uniformities and variation? Much of the debate has crystallized around two positions, one arguing that uniformities arise from ideological orthodoxy in late traditional China primarily promoted by the state, its officials and local elites (see Rawski 1988 for the clearest statement of this position). The second interpretation of uniformities, whose main proponent is Watson, makes the case for uniformities in the practice of Chinese religion, for orthopraxy manifest in rituals (Watson, 1988; 1993). In reality, however, there are few contemporary students of Chinese popular religion who do not find in it thematic or conceptual uniformities. This includes Watson, whose chief argument was with those who would construe the Chinese relationship to their religious traditions in terms of Western notions of "belief" (Watson, 1988:9–11).

Watson's work on orthopraxy resonates with much of the author's experience as a participant observer in the religious life of middle-class Chinese in Chiang Mai (Hill, 1992). The importance of getting the rituals "right" according to the instructions of ritual specialists and the way that rituals project the Chinese identity, in this case to a multiethnic community, might just as well have come from Watson's Cantonese ethnography. Based on the author's fieldwork, she shares, too, his reservations about the notion of "belief" as appropriate for describing how the Chinese relate to their religious traditions. The Western notion of religious belief as manifest in confessions of faith, adherence to dogma and doctrinal details, not to mention the apotheosis of conversion — crossing into the bounded territory of a proscriptive, exclusivist religion — have little relevance to understanding immigrant Chinese religious traditions in Thailand.

If Chinese popular religion is not driven by the concern that everyone must "believe" and believe the same, then its syncretic tendencies, which in Thailand more often verge on the eclectic, are to be expected. In fact, syncretism, with its connotations of harmonious co-existence, if not blending, of disparate elements, seems inadequate to describe the degree of local diversity found in Chinese popular religion in Northern Thailand. Even Skinner, who characterized his informants in *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand* (1958) as "... nominally Buddhist, and tolerantly syncretic ..."(p. 37), remarked of Chinese funerals that "... One can scarcely imagine a combination of Chinese and Thai death practices that has not been followed by some local-born Chinese in Thailand" (1957:314). Forty years later, in one of the few recent studies on religion among Sino-Thai, Bao refers to the "eclectic juxtaposition of apparently unrelated symbols" in wedding rituals of first- and second-generation Sino-Thai (Bao, Chapter 11; Basham, Chapter 5; both in this volume; Hill, 1992). Taking their cues, and recalling her own observations, the author describes Chinese religion in the Thai context as "eclectic," to draw attention to the selective borrowing from local Thai traditions that contributes to the variety and innovations of religious observances of a people who identify themselves as Chinese.

Theravada Buddhism, the most pervasive of Thai religious traditions at all levels of society, has a complex relationship with Chinese popular religion. This is to some extent predictable from the historical engagements of Buddhism with popular religion in China. In Chinese tradition, death provided the major nexus between popular religion and Mahayana Buddhism and occasioned ritual dramatizations of filial piety. "... many Chinese seem to regard the whole gamut of Buddhist services as simply one form of filial piety", noted Welch (1967:185). Mahayana Buddhism, too, has contributed its share of dieties to Chinese popular religion, so many that most practitioners of Chinese popular religion were implicated in one way or another in Buddhist practices, even if they did not regard themselves as Buddhist. To a great extent, the Chinese interactions with Thai Buddhism and its institutions are the same as those with Mahayana Buddhism in pre-1949 China. My informants' engagements with Theravada Buddhism are strongly marked by practices that make merit (*gong de* [C][2]) for the dead, particularly during funeral rituals (Hill, 1992). Thai

Buddhist images in Chinese temples, although austere and unnamed in contrast to their more flamboyant Mahayana counterparts, are venerated when they are associated with someone's good fortune or with powerful donors.

Buddhism in Thailand also bears close examination in its role as the prevailing religious orthodoxy, inextricable from the Thai nation-state. Although not strictly speaking a state religion, Theravada Buddhism at the national level has come to define important dimensions of Thai national culture in a polity represented as an unbroken succession of Buddhist kingships dating back to the Ayutthayan monarchs of the 13th to 18th centuries (F. Reynolds, 1977:268–69). In the contemporary Thai state, Buddhist practices are a badge of citizenship and loyalty to state and king. In this connection, some Thai Buddhist practices enter into the realm of Chinese religious culture in Chiang Mai as practitioners seek accommodation and a measure of status within the Thai society. But as something quintessentially Thai, linked to a Thai identity, it is not wholly embraced by the Chinese middle class in Chiang Mai.

Indeed, scholars of Thai national identity caution against simplistic views of the hegemony of nationalist constructions that overlook the oppositions, and are based on local identity and engendered by state ideologies (C. Reynolds, 1991:31). Recognition of the complexity of the relationship between a state-sanctioned orthodoxy and the sometimes more heterodox cultural constructions at the local level resonates with the analytical work on local religion in latter-day traditional China. Even without recourse to the more extreme instances of anti-state religious dissent, namely the millenarian movements in late imperial China, we have clear evidence that the Chinese state's capacity to "write over" local religious traditions, to circumscribe and sometimes subvert their meanings, was limited by both the practical means at its disposal and the mutable and varied nature of religious symbols. So, too, with the impulse towards religious orthodoxy emanating from the Thai state, its national elites and Buddhist monastic orders. Although Theravada Buddhist traditions are assuredly represented in the religious observances of the Chinese in Chiang Mai, the depth of "superscription," Duara's term for the inscribing of hegemonic religious interpretations over local ones, is relatively shallow (Duara, 1988: 779–80; Szonyi, 1997: 130).

To substantiate this point, as well as to illustrate the kinds of

conventions in the traditions of Chinese popular religion that affect its local manifestations among the Chinese-identified population in Chiang Mai, the author describes below two striking cases of religious eclecticism. The first is of a funeral of a China-born man who died at 67, leaving eight sons, two daughters and a wife. As with most of the city's Chinese, his funeral was held at a Thai *wat*, or temple, in this instance one with a history of contributions from prominent Chinese businessmen. The second case is about the consecration of a Chinese temple, *Milofo dian*, within the compound of another Thai *wat* situated in the foothills north of the city.

A Teochew Funeral

The Chinese in Chiang Mai have been a commercially significant group since the latter half of the 19th century (Plai-Auw, 1985: 42–49). While some branches of these earliest Chinese families are no longer regarded as Chinese because of repeated intermarriage with Thai, the city's Chinese population continued to grow throughout this century, especially after a rail line from Bangkok to Chiang Mai was completed in 1921. As in Thailand's other urban centres in the north, Chinese shophouses remain conspicuous along the city's commercial streets, and new concrete malls follow dusty roads into the countryside, abutting village rice fields. And as in other cities, Chinese residents have organized temples and benevolent associations, the latter based on surname and native place. The largest group of Chinese in Chiang Mai are the Teochews, so-called because they and their ancestors come from a prefecture in the Guangdong province of the same name (in Mandarin, *chao zhou*). Other groups of Chinese and their descendants coming from the southeastern coastal region in China are the Hainanese, Cantonese, Hakka and Fujianese (Hokkien). In this city of more than 170,000, there are no official statistics enumerating the Chinese population, let alone taking into account intra-ethnic claims to native place. Nonetheless, on the basis of cemetery surveys and long-term contact with the Chinese population in Chiang Mai, the author estimated that the second largest group, after the Teochews, from a single native place are the Yunnanese Chinese, coming predominantly from several counties in western Yunnan on the Myanmar border. The Yunnanese are the city's fastest growing Chinese ethnic group as they enter the city in a

small but constant stream from rural villages on the Thai-Burma border (Vatikiotis, 1984:158).

Chinese funeral rituals held at the city's busiest Thai *wat* are conducted in one of its four halls virtually open to the public to accommodate large celebrations, such as life crisis events and secular gatherings that include feeding the temple's resident community of monks and novices — a merit-making convention in Thai Buddhism. While the city's Chinese routinely celebrate marriages in hotels and Chinese association halls, such sites, including residences, are seen as inappropriate for mortuary rites. During the funeral proceedings, the corpse, sealed in a coffin virtually out of sight of mourners and guests, is a potential source of pollution and always capable of becoming a wandering ghost if disturbed during the funeral. It is the duty of the eldest son, assisted by other lineal descendants of the deceased, to ensure that the proper rituals are done to transform the malevolent soul into a benign ancestor, suitable for reverence and filial care in the afterworld.

This four-day funeral attended by a large number of guests who were fed daily reflected the family's prosperity in the clock-and-watch business. Most Chinese funerals are shorter but all entail considerable expense. The Thai temple's Buddhist monks and novices must be fed everyday and given gifts on the last day of the funeral. Guests are served three meals a day; the coffin, mourning clothes and objects for use in the afterlife must be bought, a truck hired to take the corpse to the cemetery, the hall rented and so forth. Some of these costs are defrayed by the city's Chinese associations. They sponsor chanting of the Lotus Sutra by groups of elderly people from Chinese temples and of Pali funeral texts by Thai Buddhist monks. Associations also provide an orchestra which plays vigorously between rituals. Association officers collect small donations from guests at the door of the hall and may enlist a member to act as official host, literally orchestrating the daily round of meals, chanting and rituals. Associations, including the city's Chinese temples, also contribute banners, which are resplendent embroidered silk cloths painted with felicitous quotations from Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist texts.

With the exception of the spouse who has no role in Chinese funerary rites, mourners closely related to the deceased dress in hempen mourning clothes which encode their particular lineal or affinal tie to the dead person, as well as their native place. For

example, the Teochew at this ritual wore distinctive mourning costumes that differentiated them from the Chinese from other native places. Older Chinese men in the city can tell at a glance the native place of the deceased and his or her relationship to the mourners. In this particular case, the eight sons and two lineal grandsons (the eldest boys of the eldest son) made an impressive group; barefooted, sombre, they performed their ritual roles under the direction of a Chinese religious specialist, or sat quietly in a row as monks and lay people chanted. They led the rest of the mourners during the "crossing the bridge" ceremony (*guo qiao* in Mandarin, *kham saphaan pay* in Thai) the night before the burial. Through this ritual, the soul is conducted through a seven-level hell and then released for travel to *tian tang* (heaven), or for rebirth. Also called *po di* (literally, "to break the earth") in Mandarin, this ritual of escorting the soul through hell was included in every Chinese funeral the author observed. The mourners then go outside to burn paper replicas of VCRs, TVs, cars, beds, houses and other objects to send to their ancestor for use in the afterlife.

The day before the burial, the same day as the "crossing the bridge" ritual, four of the deceased's youngest sons and two of his lineal grandsons were ordained as Buddhist novices. Although the author did not witness the ordination vows, the sons and grandsons appeared tonsured and robed in the afternoon. By nightfall all six were back in Chinese mourning garb. The next morning, the day of the burial, the six appeared again in novices' robes and were fed before noon, along with the temple's other monks and novices. They also received gifts of money and items for personal use from the mourning family, including their mother. Before the monks retired, a child from the mourning family poured a bowl of water onto the ground outside the temple.

On the last day of the funeral, after the guests were served lunch, the coffin was nailed shut by a Chinese ritual specialist (a corpse handler) using red nails and a hammer covered in red cloth. Then the coffin was moved to a stand at the end of the hall and trays of candles and flowers were set out at its four corners by a Teochew-speaking layman called *acaan* in Thai, or teacher. As soon as the offerings were put down, four monks came to stand at the four corners of the coffin to chant. Then the wife of the deceased grasped a cord attached to the coffin and stood with all of the Chinese mourners behind her, each holding onto the shirt of the person in

front. After the wife burned incense in front of the hall's single Buddha image, the coffin was lifted onto a truck which would take it to the cemetery.

Mr Li's Temple

The second case brings the reader to Mr Li, an illiterate man, born poor and, the author suspects, recruited at a young age into the ranks of one of the many nationalist Shan and Chinese paramilitary groups that occupy the no-man's land in the Golden Triangle (roughly the border area of China, Burma [Myanmar], Laos, and Thailand).[3] His manner is bluff, but jovial, and he is a good story-teller. He is a patriarch of a large compound, well-deserving of the Chinese approbation, *renao*, a term describing a place or scene that is full of people and is pleasantly noisy. He has a large family and many clients who live on the premises or show up when needed for one of his projects. In fact, he is renowned for not only his wealth, but also his generosity to followers.

When he first came to the city, Mr Li made lavish contributions to several Chinese temples, as befitting a man of his means, and proposed building a wing on an already-existing temple to be consecrated to new gods. For a number of reasons, his proposal was rejected so he turned to other outlets. At the same time, as he was contributing to Chinese associations, he developed a relationship of patronage with a Thai Buddhist *wat*, one also patronized by members of the Thai royal family. Li was proud of the fact that members of the royal family had presented him personally with Buddhist images in recognition of his donations to the temple. Because of his close ties as a donor to the Thai *wat*, Li decided to put his proposal for a Chinese temple before the temple's abbot. Li's idea was to build his Chinese temple inside the compound of the *wat*. After some hesitation, the abbot agreed to Li's proposal.

Li built his temple in the "traditional Chinese style". His view was that men have obligations to country, society, family, and religion, and although there are "many rich people, some don't use their money to do good things." And why this site? He chose to build inside the existing temple compound because the temple was patronized by members of the royal family and so it was very special. Furthermore, the resident monks could maintain it. As somewhat of an afterthought, he added that it was on a scenic spot.

Dedicated to the Maitreya Buddha (*milofo*, in Mandarin), a representation of the Buddha found in many Chinese Buddhist temples in Chiang Mai, the building is strikingly Chinese. Beneath the front porch roofed with yellow tiles, dragons coil around plaster pillars. To one side on the front wall is a bronze plaque listing the names in Chinese of those who contributed to the building fund. Underneath the Thai script ("Sanctuary in support of the Buddhist religion") over the porch is the temple's name in Chinese characters. Inside are large images, one of the Maitreya Buddha and two of the Sakayamuni Buddha, surrounded by bright murals depicting Chinese landscapes and gods from Chinese popular religion. In an adjacent sideroom is an ancestor altar to Li's parents, whose names appear on the wall behind.

Four years after the start of its construction, the new building was consecrated in front of a large audience of Yunnanese, other representatives of the city's diverse Chinese population, Shan (a Tai-speaking people in Northern Thailand),[4] Northern Thai, and over 300 Buddhist novices studying at the Thai temple. Thai Buddhist abbots came from seven other monasteries to chant on behalf of the temple's opening. A few limousines also arrived with wealthy Thai passengers. The occasion was reported in the social pages of one of the local Chinese newspapers.

From an interview with a monk at the Thai temple several days before the consecration, I learned that the abbot initially had reservations about the proposal from "the Chinese man", but then decided that such a building would attract more people to the temple, a desirable outcome as far as the abbot is concerned. And as the monk said, "Buddhism is Buddhism", whether Chinese or Thai. The Chinese newspaper article devoted to the event concluded with this observation: "A Chinese building — a Chinese Buddhist temple inside a Thai Buddhist temple is not only an important and significant contribution, but also symbolizes the blending of the two countries' religions and their cultural exchange." These comments, from a Thai monk and a Chinese reporter, convey some of the flavour of the discourse on the event. Both express an ecumenical spirit, but also, both clearly view Li's project as a Chinese undertaking. Li's public persona is that of a wealthy Chinese businessman who, having made his fortune, generously contributes to the country, society, and religion, a familiar convention among Chinese in Thailand. Through connections with Thai government patrons and via public religious

activities, Li was claiming a respectable niche in local Chiang Mai society, an identity as religious benefactor recognizable and acceptable to both Chinese and Thai audiences.

Commentary

At the outset of this chapter, the author noted the syncretic tendencies of Chinese popular religion, its tendency to take on local colouring, and its "openness," in a word, to local traditions. Chinese popular religion is not, as Watson noted, an exclusivist religion, circumscribed by absolute boundaries and confessions of faith. Chinese funerals in Chiang Mai, and the author observed seven of them in the city, characteristically include Thai Buddhist monks and some local Northern Thai death practices, rituals which also show impressive variation (Swearer, 1981:28).

Buddhist monks, of course, were no strangers to funeral rites in late traditional China. They, or Daoist counterparts, were *de rigueur* at Chinese funerals to chant on behalf of the dead. From the viewpoint of Chinese religious practitioners, chanting Buddhist or Daoist scriptures is a "good thing;" it earns virtue for the chanter and for others whom you want to help. Chanting at funerals is a good thing to do for the dead, and monks know the right way to do this at funerals. However, temporary ordination of Buddhist novices from among the lineal descendants of the deceased at a Chinese funeral is unusual.

The short-term ordination of sons of the deceased or village boys as Buddhist novices, sometimes for only a few hours during funeral rituals, is a Northern Thai practice. The purpose is to dedicate merit to the deceased, according to the long tradition in Thai Buddhism of ordination as a merit-making occasion (Keyes, 1980: 10–11). There are no reports of this practice at funerals in China. Indeed, the monks' celibacy is at odds with Chinese notions of filiality, epitomized in the injunction that sons produce progeny to honour the father and to carry on the family line.

Although temporary ordination stands as the most striking of Thai religious conventions introduced into the death rituals of the Chinese in Chiang Mai, merit-making (*tham bun*, in Thai) of one form or another is suffused into all funerals of the city's Chinese-identified population. Feeding and donating to monks, their chanting

of Pali funeral texts, water pouring, and the use of the sacred thread or string are all practices that transfer merit to the dead and may be found in Chinese funerals. Furthermore, interviews with Chinese *luuk laan* (descendants, in Thai) and with monks at Thai temples historically frequented by local Chinese families make clear that concern for ancestors represents a significant dimension of Chinese engagement with Thai Buddhism. People often went to Thai temples on ancestral death anniversaries or at Qing Ming, the annual spring rite for "sweeping the graves", to ask monks to perform *bangsukun* (merit-making ceremonies, in Thai) for the dead. Thai monks, familiar with the Chinese holiday of Qing Ming, confirmed this and added that *luuk laan* also came for *bangsukun* during traditional Thai holidays, such as Songkhran, the Buddhist New Year, and Loy Krathong, the Thai Festival of Lights. Before the city's first Chinese cemetery was opened in the 1950s, some local Chinese buried the remains of their dead on the grounds of these temples, indicating the long-standing link between Thai Buddhist mortuary rites and Chinese ones.

While some might see in these practices evidence for conceptual or ideological compatibility between Theravada Buddhism and Chinese popular religion, there are vast differences in the cosmological and ontological premises of the two traditions (Tobias, 1977). Even the apparent resemblance in notions of rebirth, more or less explicit in both Chinese and Thai mortuary rituals, is illusory. The Chinese soul may be reborn in the Western Paradise, or for the less fortunate, here on earth. For descendants, the soul is also manifest in the ancestral tablet and in the grave. This triple soul, the object of filial rituals for ancestors, is a far cry from the Thai Buddhist notion of *winyan*, or consciousness, central to constructs of *karma*, but, of course, never commemorated after death (Keyes, 1980:10). Perhaps it is sufficient to reiterate, taking our cue from Welch, that mortuary rituals are the nexus between Chinese popular religion and Thai Buddhism, to the extent that Buddhist merit-making can be put in the service of filial piety (Welch, 1967:185).

The evidence from religious ideology also points to another practice often noted in discussions of the syncretic tendencies of Chinese religion: the lack of concern among its practitioners for ideological consistency. There is considerable consensus among scholars that Chinese popular religion, as revealed in the rhetoric and activities of the people who practise it, is certainly tolerant, always

flexible and sometimes internally inconsistent (Harrell, 1974:204; Cohen, 1988:180). Even Sangren, who sees Chinese religion as a totalizing system of thought and practice, acknowledges its "seemingly endless complexity" and the diverse range of individual variation in the beliefs that peasants articulate (1987:4, 187). Returning to the Chinese funerals in Chiang Mai, we can at least say that the adoption of Thai rituals into Chinese ones is unlikely to be impeded by ideological concerns. Moreover, if, as Watson suggests, getting the ritual right is of paramount importance, then as long as the rituals of whatever amalgam of Chinese and Thai practices contain the sequence of acts perceived as traditional, they are considered successful and efficacious. In fact, given the eclectic variety of Thai religious rites in Chinese funerals, the sequence of "traditional" Chinese rituals are remarkably consistent among all groups of Chinese in Chiang Mai (Hill, 1992). Not surprisingly, participants in Chinese funerals show little interest in distinguishing Chinese funerary practices from Thai ones. They are simply "what our father wanted done", or, as another informant put it, "this is what we do".

Assuredly, Chinese rituals in Northern Thailand are not the same as those in China; they are, as cultural constructs, reflective of long familiarity with local Thai environments, as well as the varied traditions of different groups of Chinese immigrants. However, whether funerary rituals or simple offerings to Thai *fo xiang* (images of Buddha) in Chinese temples, they have become highly conventionalized acts; in effect they have become traditions of Chinese popular religion localized in Chiang Mai. As "what we do", Chinese religious practices in Thailand presume a community to whom these rituals are meaningful, taken-for-granted traditions. But the community in mind is clearly not Thai, for whom the symbolism of the mourning costumes, "crossing the bridge" and other Chinese rites are unfamiliar. In agreement with Bell, the author sees these rituals as leading participants to assume that there is some consensus among them that would characterize a community, whether or not each individual "believes" in the ritual traditions (Bell, 1992:210). Such participation not only leaves matters of individual belief unspoken but also allows for the reformulation of tradition, indeed of community, as people "show" their consent to these ideas through their actions.

The religious practices of the Chinese and their descendants in Thailand are conducted in familiar sequences as supervised by older

Chinese men who are experts in these traditions. At the same time, new elements, such as Thai merit-making, are introduced and become part of the traditions unique to Chinese popular religion in Chiang Mai. In the process, these public performances continually represent to their participants reformulated traditions, and new ways of thinking about being Chinese in Thailand.

We may draw a similar lesson from the construction of the Chinese temple inside the compound of a Thai *wat*, where Mr Li was able to capitalize on the felicitous conjunction of wealth and local cultural constructions of social status through religious patronage. His Chinese identity and status were validated not only within the Chinese-identified community through donations to Chinese associations and temples, but also within Thai society through the familiar conventions of temple-building and his patronage of Buddhist institutions, including the monkhood (Gray, 1991). The identification of the Thai temple with members of the royal family only enhanced the public prestige of Mr Li's acts of generosity.

Buddhism has been regarded as Thailand's "civic" religion, a term highlighting the way in which Buddhism has been assimilated into a national culture which idealizes loyalty to king and country and service to community (F. Reynolds, 1977: 279). Anyone seeking legitimate status and authority in Thai society must associate to some degree with the symbols and institutions of Buddhism (Pranee, Chapter 9, this volume). However, despite the Thai state's interest in promoting national integration through national culture, the hegemonic potential of Buddhism is continually fractured by the complexity of Thai society. As any other contemporary nation state, Thai society segments along class, ethnic, and religious lines, creating differential and changeable relations among citizens and the symbols of national culture. Recent studies have ably demonstrated that the globalization of the Thai economy, which began in the 1980s, introduced a plethora of new images and institutions that have profoundly affected identity "projects" of the state and particularly its Chinese-descended population (Ong, 1997). Blanc speaks of a "new modernity" in Thailand, one with "Chinese features", connected to consumerism, high levels of education, interest in advanced technology and the emergence of a distinct Sino-Thai urban middle class (Blanc, 1997:268–69).

Mr Li's building project, to some extent, reflects the connection

between these new global forces and the culture of the nation-state. This is evident in the unambiguous, public expression of Chinese identity represented by the Chinese temple and by Mr Li himself, an identity more secure in Thai society than ever before, thanks to globalization and the reformulation of Chinese identities in the culture and economy of modern Southeast Asia. At the same time, the accessibility of Thai Buddhist institutions and symbols to the local, wealthy elite allows them to legitimize their status in terms meaningful to the society beyond the city's Chinese associations.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on conveying some basic understandings of the Chinese-identified population in Chiang Mai, for the simple reason that religion, whether in the context of China or Thailand, is inextricably linked to questions of identity. Religious rituals represent communities to themselves and sometimes to others. To participants in the rituals described, these rituals are the taken-for-granted conventions of a Chinese community rooted in Thailand. As such, they are perceived as "traditional", as simply "what we do".

The case at hand calls to mind many contemporary studies of the "re-invention of tradition", where minority populations, like the Chinese immigrants and their descendants in Thailand, engage in identity-building projects that re-fashion cultural traditions in response to new cultural and political realities (Friedman, 1992). In this light, the inclusion of Thai Buddhist practices in the rituals of a minority is no surprise. But this general model must be contextualized within the specific traditions of Chinese popular religion that have made it so "transplantable", with its conventions well suited for local diversification.

Finally, there is a need to reiterate an understanding of ritual that connects it to representations of community, but without recourse to "belief," a Western trope inimical to the inclusivist traditions of Chinese religion. Whatever their states of mind, people through their participation in rituals act as if there is a community and afterwards talk as if there is one, evidence that they perceive their rituals as the conventions of such a community. Chinese funerals, as we have seen, reproduce familiar sequences of rituals "authenticated" by the participation of elderly, male religious specialists, but also include

Thai merit-making practices that have also become part of their community funerary traditions.

At what point, we might ask, do reformulations of Chinese popular religion in Chiang Mai become the basis for new Sino-Thai identities, rather than merely new versions of Chinese identities, as this study is meant to suggest? First, an identity, by definition, must be claimed by someone or some group and then validated by others. So far, the Chinese the author knows in Chiang Mai do not identify themselves as Sino-Thai, nor is the term, outside of academics, used by their friends and neighbours to describe them. This is not to say that the people do not sometimes identify themselves as Thai; they do, at school, at government offices, sometimes at Thai temples. But this is not evidence for a creolized Sino-Thai identity.

Second, the author has demonstrated in effect that Chinese "traditions" are extremely malleable, that religious rituals can be highly eclectic but still be claimed as the traditions of a Chinese-identified community. The critical question is not how many Thai rituals can be introduced into Chinese rituals before they cease to be Chinese. Rather, the question is what are the factors in the local, national and transnational environment at any given time that contribute to, work against or simply change Chinese identities. In this connection, we may ask to what extent Chinese identities have been revitalized as a consequence of the globalization of the Thai economy and outlook since the 1980s. Blanc and others have suggested that "Chineseness" in the Southeast Asia of the 1990s is associated with consumer goods, economic success, international education and a host of other features of a new transnational modernity (Blanc, 1997; Ong, 1997). As a result, the Chinese in Thailand are under less pressure than before to assimilate into Thai society. In the global or regional context, Thailand's national culture and economy may seem less compelling and a Sino-Thai identity less attractive than a transnational Chinese identity that confers prestige and, for some, concrete economic benefits.

Notes

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2 Chinese terms and expressions are identified with a bracketed [C]; unidentified foreign phrases are Thai.

3 Some details in this story have been changed or omitted to ensure the anonymity of Mr Li.

4 "Shan" is the English name for some groups of Tai-speaking peoples in northern Burma and Northern Thailand. In conventional usage, the Shan are distinguished from the Northern Thai people (in Thai, *khon muang*).

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Index

A

acculturation 101, 108, 110
agriculture industry 147
Ah Q 45, 46
alternation 2, 7
ancestor worship 31, 32, 35, 72, 112, 212
ang yi 55
Asia Trust Bank 178
assimilation 1, 5, 6, 9, 10-11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, 36, 37, 67, 70, 72, 80, 101, 102, 107, 108, 129, 139, 142, 172, 197, 199, 228, 230, 235, 258, 259, 262, 263, 271, 273, 274, 279, 292, 314
associations, Chinese 26, 27, 36, 91, 93, 94, 179, 307
Ayutthaya period 52, 55, 73

B

Bangkok 2, 18, 30, 35, 36, 70, 178, 203, 280
benevolent society 92
Bicentennial of Bangkok 89
bilingualism 21, 22
blood lineage 276, 277
Board of Investment (BOI), Thailand 158
boat race festival (Wang Thong River) 240, 250, 255-57
Bowring Treaty 74, 93, 94
Buddha's Footprint festival 250, 252-55
Buddhism 19, 30, 72, 86, 90, 93, 124, 198, 199, 252-55, 272, 283, 302-3, 310, 312
Buddhist society 92
Bun and bap 86, 93, 97, 112, 124, 239, 309

C

Cantonese Association 92, 190
Cantonese community 149
capital accumulation 145, 173

capital ownership 143
Catholicism 283
Caw Mae Thong Kham (goddess) 242, 250
cawaarom 119
Chakri Dynasty 47, 49
Chaozhou *see* Teochew dialect
chek 138, 143
cheque-discounting business 180, 181, 182
chess 216
Chi Tien 72
Chia Huai Liak 151, 154
Chia Li (Chitmaitricharoen) 150, 154
Chia Meng Huat Store 150, 154
child upbringing 113
Chinese
- associations 26, 27, 36, 91, 93, 94, 179, 307
- bankers 3
- businessmen 7, 26, 68, 75, 76, 80, 179, 180, 304
- calendar 213, 217-18
- connections 28, 127-28, 146, 161, 182
- culture 4, 5, 18, 21, 24, 32, 70, 72, 73, 109, 196, 197
- customs 110-33, 212, 239, 249-57
- dialects 22
- economic role of 3, 20, 137, 138, 169
- education 20, 23, 24, 25, 163, 171, 172, 190, 222
- entertainment 213-16
- entrepreneurs 169, 173, 181
- ethnicity 5, 6, 228, 235, 236, 237, 238, 258, 263
- festivals 14, 31
- identity 2, 5, 7, 24, 36, 102, 172, 199, 258, 262, 301, 314
- immigrants 1, 18, 20, 50, 68, 69, 70, 72, 73, 93, 94, 97, 103, 104, 144, 157, 169, 170, 173, 175,176, 192, 205, 228, 229, 237, 258, 275, 276, 277, 278, 280, 281, 300
- in Bangkok 2, 18, 30, 35, 36, 70, 203
- in provinces 2, 4, 30, 70
- in Thailand 7, 9, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37,

47, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 75, 96, 138, 169, 172, 197, 203, 222, 227, 228, 229, 258, 273, 274, 278, 313, 314
language 23, 25, 170, 193
literacy 203-24
migrants 18, 20, 68, 85, 144, 175, 189, 275
names 210-12
newspapers 32, 308
overseas C. 1, 5, 6, 22, 26, 37, 70, 72, 74, 80, 102-103, 189,191, 192, 197, 287, 289
religions 2, 19, 30, 31, 73, 124, 299, 300, 301, 302, 304, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314
schools 3, 4, 5, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 36, 191,192, 193, 194, 196, 199, 222, 229
settlers 85, 104
songs 215-16
symbol 3
temples 4, 5, 31, 305, 307, 308, 313
Chinese Chamber of Commerce 26, 27, 71, 93
Chinese New Year 32, 108
banners 213
Chinese Traders Association 94
Chineseness 41, 43, 44, 48, 53, 54, 59, 60, 61, 62, 70, 76, 80, 101, 104, 236, 314
Chin-te School 191
Chu Yuan 31
clan associations 91, 96
coercion 15
Communism 79, 144, 170, 192, 223
Confucianism 72, 124, 272, 283
connections 28, 127-28, 146, 161, 182
corvée system 52, 73, 74, 287
credit market 181
creditworthiness 169, 179, 181, 182
culture 4, 5, 18, 21, 24, 32, 70, 72, 73, 109, 196, 197
cultural persistence 18
cultural puralism 6, 7, 17

customs 110-33, 212, 239, 249-57

D

democracy 87, 128-29
Democratic Revolution 79
dialects, Chinese 22
dialect group association 91, 92
division of labour, occupational see ethnic stereotypes
divorces 114
double identity 16, 36, 274

E

economic role of Chinese 3, 20, 137, 138, 169
education 20, 23, 24, 25, 163, 171, 172, 190, 222
Eng Huang Kua 156
Eng Sun Sia 156
entertainment, Chinese 213-16
entrepreneurship 169, 173, 181
essentialism 6
ethnic boundaries 15, 16, 35
ethnic Chinese 18-19, 133, 193, 194, 195, 198, 199, 203
ethnic groups 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 33, 36, 37, 67, 70, 72, 102, 234, 238, 239, 242, 248, 249, 258, 261, 264
ethnic homogeneity 1, 90, 230
ethnic identity 1, 12, 13, 16, 22, 32, 35, 41, 42, 52, 102, 193, 227, 231, 234, 237, 238, 240,241, 250, 257, 260, 262, 263, 264, 272, 273, 274, 293
ethnic language 32
ethnic oscillation 13
ethnic persistence theory 6
ethnic relations 1, 10,17
ethnic stereotype 27, 28, 29, 33, 36, 71, 117, 120, 131, 277
ethnicity 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 33, 34, 35, 37, 52, 60, 108, 228, 230, 236, 237, 238, 240, 257, 258, 263, 264, 271, 290, 292, 293
expressive ethnicity 9, 13, 14, 35, 36

F

family life 33, 116
farang 77
festivals 14, 31, 240, 250-51, 310
First World War 139
Five Basic Values Programme 89, 90
fortune telling 217-18
free trade 147
funeral rituals 110-11, 304-7, 311

G

geomancy 218
government capitalism 94, 95, 101, 103

H

Hainan dialect group 189, 244, 245, 246, 251, 277
Hainanese Association 190, 191, 194
Hakka Association 93
Hakka dialect group 175, 176
hangpia 41
henkaetua 119, 123
Hill 2, 4, 5, 302, 303
Hokkien dialect group 149, 189
hongpao 32, 285
Hsien Lo 42
Hsin-min School 191
Hua Eia School 191, 192
Huan Nang 42
huaxiao 24
hybridization 7

I

ideology 86, 88
immigration 1, 18, 20, 50, 68, 69, 70, 72, 73, 93, 94, 97, 103, 104, 144, 157, 169, 170, 173, 175,176, 192, 205, 228, 229, 237, 258, 275, 276, 277, 278, 280, 281, 300

instrumental ethnicity 9, 13, 14, 35, 36
integration 17
intermarriages 33, 85, 108, 239
Investment Promotion Act 98

J

jek 41, 42
Jek sua 54
jin 42, 53
Jin khun nang 54, 59, 60, 61
Jin phrai 53, 54, 58, 60, 61
Jin phuk pi 53, 59, 60
Jin plaeng 54, 57, 58, 59, 60

K

Kaek 77, 78
Khaw Samokhlaeng festival see Buddha's Footprint Festival
khit san 115
khon ciin 110
King Rama V 74
King Rama VI 87, 90
kinship 11, 12, 92, 179, 277, 281
kongtek 111
kongxiao 24
kromkan Jin 54
kunying 29, 110
Kwangtung 42

L

land ownership 99
language
    Chinese 23, 25, 170, 193
    Thai 21, 25, 108, 132
Lao community 247, 248
letters 219
literacy 203-24

Lo Ti Huay 42
Loy Krathong 310
Lu Xun 45, 46
luuk jin 50

M
male dominance 114
Mandarin see language, Chinese
Mang Kok 42
market centres see talats
marriage customs 111-12
master identity 16
merit-making customs 112, 124; also see bun and bap
Mia luang 115
Mia nawy see minor wife
Mid-Autumn festival 31
Middle Kingdom 42, 44
migration, mass exodus 68, 139, 189
Ming-te School 191
minor wife 114, 115, 116
minxiao 24
monkhood 127, 284-85, 312
moon nai 3, 52, 53, 55, 58
multi-culturalism 17
multiple rootedness 6,7
mutual trust 179

N
National Cultural Commission 89
National Economic and Social Development Plan 70, 87, 89, 95, 99, 100
nationalist capitalism *see* government capitalism
Nationality Act 20, 78
networks *see* connections
New Year 32, 108; *also see* Chinese New Year

O

occupational segregation 28, 29; *also see* ethnic segregation
opium addiction 54-58
ordination 309
overseas Chinese *see* Chinese, overseas
overseas studies 171, 172

P

P'ei-yuen School 191
patrilineal practices 280-83
phaw 111
Phibun regime 91, 15
philanthropy 92
phrai 3, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 58, 59
phuak 28
pigtail 3, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62
pigtrade 47
Private School Act 198
pluralism 6, 7, 17
positionality 7
prayat 123
provincial Chinese *see* Chinese in provinces
provincial economy 169, 173, 174, 175, 183

Q

queue see pigtail
Qing Lua Zhong Yuan 32
Qing Ming 31, 212, 310
Qing rule 44, 53, 71, 75, 189

R

race 11
reciprocity 15
relationships, person-to-person 179, 182, 183; *also see* connections
religions 2, 19, 30, 31, 73, 124, 299, 300, 301, 302, 304, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314

reputation 151, 179, 181
Rice Mills Association 94
Rice Traders Association 94
rice trading 94, 95, 96, 139-40
rituals, Chinese *see* Chinese customs

S

schools 3, 4, 5, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 36, 191,192, 193, 194, 196, 199, 222, 229
Second World War 91, 94, 97, 140, 177, 194
secret societies 91, 190
Securities Exchange of Thailand (SET) 149, 163
self-employment 143
Sentence Completion Test 109, 118
settlers 85, 104
Sing Sian Ye Pao 32
Singhburi 155
Sino-Thai identity 2, 4, 6, 102, 271, 272, 273, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 283, 287, 289, 292
Skinner 2, 4, 5, 6, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 30, 34, 41, 43, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 60, 61, 62, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72, 91, 108, 139, 140, 149, 155, 170, 171, 228, 229, 240, 273, 274, 275, 278, 279, 280, 287, 292, 299, 302
"Smiling Fish" 153
soap operas 214
social hierarchy 86
social manners 131
social ostracism 181
state policies 2, 3, 20, 73, 78, 94, 191-92, 275
    anti-Chinese 75, 76, 78, 79, 91
suat 111
Subcommittee on Research and Cultural Development 89
Surin Chitmaitricharoen 154
Surin Tothapthiang 159, 161

T

Tai Chin 43
Tai Chou 43
Tai Han 43
Tai Shou 43
Taiping Rebellion 44
Talat 141, 142, 143, 144, 146, 150, 155, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 232, 238
Talat Phlu 141, 142
Tang Kim Phuang 157
Taoism 72, 124
tax-farming system 74, 94, 138
tea ceremony 285
temples 4, 5, 31, 305, 307, 308, 313
Teochew Association 190
Teochew community 41, 149, 150, 151, 152, 155, 170, 175, 176, 189, 190, 191, 194, 251, 306
Teochew dialect 22, 35, 41, 42, 204–5
textile industry 175, 176
Thai Chamber of Commerce 26
Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce 27
Thai Immigration Act 68
Thai language 2, 21, 22, 23, 25, 35, 62, 273
Thai New Year 32
Thai values 85, 86, 93
Thai wat 4, 5, 30, 32, 304, 305, 307, 312
Thainess 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 107
Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) 109, 131
Tong Kok 42
Tou Nguan Thai Store 152
Tou Nguan Tiang (Tothapthiang) 150, 152
Trang 151
Trang Provincial Chamber of Commerce 153
trustworthiness 169, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183
tuition, private 24
Tung Nang 42
Tung Sua 42

U

Universal Press 32

V

values 86, 100, 103
values, Five Basic Values 89
Vegetarian Festival 213

W

Wang Thong 2 , 227-64
wat 30, 32, 36, 305, 307, 312
water jar industry 176
wealth accumulation 99, 113, 145
wedding rituals 272, 277, 279-93
Wirat Suphawita 157, 158, 160
world view 86, 109

X

xiao 31
Xin Zhong Yuan 32

Y

yaat 28
Yu Min School 191, 193-98

Z

Zhonghua Press 32

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