

Process of Mon Ethnic Identity Construction: A Case Study in Ban Wangka, Thailand

Nobparat Chaichana

Faculty of Education and Development Sciences, Kasetsart University Kamphaeng Saen
Campus, Thailand

E-mail: Chimmanee2531@gmail.com

Apichart Jai-aree

Faculty of Education and Development Sciences, Kasetsart University Kamphaeng Saen
Campus, Thailand

E-mail: feduacj@ku.ac.th

Prasong Tanpichai

Faculty of Education and Development Sciences, Kasetsart University Kamphaeng Saen
Campus, Thailand

E-mail: fedupst@ku.ac.th

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the process of Mon ethnic identity construction in Ban Wangka, Nong Lu Sub-district, Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province in the present context reflecting directly the phenomena in the Mon ethnic group. Qualitative research method was employed and anthropological research method was applied. Data were collected from related literature; data from the field were collected through in-depth interviews, and participant and non-participant observations in “personal” and “public” spaces. Content analysis and triangulation were performed with the data. The study found that the “Mon” is an ethnic group in Southeast Asia, and presently dispersed in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Thailand. Their immigration to Thailand could be seen since the ancient kingdom, to Ban Wangka in 1948 mostly from Mawlamyine, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar; the reason for immigration was mainly political. The process of their identity construction resulted from economic and social interactions in the multicultural society at the Thailand-Myanmar border. As a result, the ethnic boundary has been built through selection of cultural differences as symbols and making the past serve the present. For example, they dress in the Mon style, invented the culture to serve the present so as to have cultural identity, and they have chosen to define their Mon self with Thai-ness, that is “a Mon Body with a Thai Heart” to be accepted by the Thai State.

Keywords: Identity Construction, Mon Ethnic Group, Process

Introduction

The Mon was a group of civilized people who played important roles in Southeast Asia such as in Thailand, Myanmar and Laos. They were models in politics, administration, language, culture and they brought Theravada Buddhism to this region since 600 B.C. (Foster, 1998: 5). The Mon ruled the land which is presently the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. They were the most prosperous in Suvannabhumi. Their feature characteristics are peace-loving, religious in

Buddhism and spirits, mostly living in their own Mon groups while being able to adapt to Thai society very well (Banjoon, 2007: 65).

The Mon built several kingdoms in the Irrawaddy River Basin, the Salween River Basin and the Sittoung River Basin. In the past, there were wars between the Mon and Myanmar in which they alternately won and lost until 1767 when Myanmar occupied and destroyed Handawaddy, the last Mon's kingdom. From then, the Mon have been under Myanmar rule for over around one hundred years until Myanmar became a British colony and became independent in 1948 (Baonert, 2006:1). The Mon have attempted to demand self-ruling independent from the central Myanmar government to gain rights similar to those of other minority groups but the Myanmar military government rejected the demand which has led to fights and many forms of movements until nowadays.

The Mon had immigrated to Thailand many times and without clear evidence. However, there is concrete evidence that they first moved into Thailand in 1584 when King Naresuan the Great declared independence in Khraeng (Plianrung, 2010: 3). The first groups of Mon who immigrated to Thailand could adapt to Thai social environment very well leading to assimilation and becoming part of Thai society as there were various supporting factors for the process. For example, a policy that gave Thais and Mons equal rights under the Phrai system in which commoners were registered under the master; the Mon felt they were part of Thai society as subjects of the Thai king (Wongpolganon, 2006: 3). Another reason for Mon assimilation into Thai society well was that they were similar to the Thai in their way of life and social and religious backgrounds.

Diphadung and Damsa-at (2002) and Premsirat and others (2001) noted that there are two groups of ethnic Mon in Kanchanaburi Province. First, is the group that came in for settlement since Ayutthaya Period and in the early Rattanakosin Period with other Mon people who had settled in Bangkok and other provinces in the suburbs of Bangkok. Presently, the Mon in Thailand are Thais who are Mon descendants. Some Mon communities have preserved their language and cultural identities while others have changed along globalization. Second is the group that came in from 1952 until the present; they are considered minorities and classified into five groups: (1) Burmese diasporas, (2) Burmese fugitives, (3) Burmese workers, (4) Burmese refugees, and (5) Burmese students who escape Burmese government's suppression. The first four groups can be found in Kanchanaburi while the fifth group can be found outside Kanchanaburi.

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar has over 132 ethnic groups living in it and is one of the countries with most problems relating to minority groups. The problems began when Myanmar became independent from Britain in 1947 and wanted to annex territories of races as part of Myanmar by abolishing Panglong Agreement which was made between Myanmar and other ethnic races that after 10 years of independence from Britain, any ethnic race could have autonomy if they so wished. However, Myanmar violated the agreement and sent the military to seize the territories and declared that no ethnic races were given autonomy and no ethnic races were allowed to be separated from Myanmar (Santiwutthimethi, 2002: 2). The Myanmar government has operated a nation building process to gain unity by implementing the policy "Myanmarization" targeting at assimilating minorities and making them feel that they are "Myanmar" with loyalties to "The Republic of the Union of Myanmar". Nevertheless, the policy could not resist the ethnic races desire to be autonomous because they all have their own cultural identities and have more awareness of being their own races than being part of Myanmar.

The population of the Mon ethnic group in Ban Wangka, Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province is now over 10,000, most of whom emigrated from various villages in the Mon State of

the Republic of the Union of Myanmar such as Ye, Songpuek, Mudoeng, Mawlamyine, Sathoem, etc. In addition to political reasons, according to Diphadung and Damsa-at (2007: 61-62), Wongpolgan (2006) and some surveys on Mon immigrations, other reasons for the Mon ethnic group to immigrate to Thailand include the following. (1) The two lands are adjoining and the Mon used to go back and forth as well as to work without having to worry about the boundary. (2) The Thai are kind and generous. (3) Thailand has better social conditions and the Mon can make a living without being forced to work like slaves as they are in Myanmar. (4) Thailand is economically better and the Mon can make a good living even though they probably cannot get rich. Moreover, when compared with other neighboring countries, Thailand are better than most of them. Making a living in Thailand is better than in almost every country in the region. (5) Both the Mon and the Thai are Buddhists; and (6) The Thai government has never strictly used containment policy or pushback policy against minorities entering Thailand.

The abovementioned phenomena are interesting and should be studied as they provide us with understanding of the identity construction process of the ethnic Mon in Ban Wangka, a minority group in Thailand under a changing situation economically, socially and politically. In addition to this, Ban Wangka community is very interesting in many ways as follows. (1) The ethnic Mon of Ban Wangka is a “New Mon” group immigrating to Thailand in 1947 because of political reasons and Thailand officially classified them in the Myanmar diaspora group and granted them Thai citizenship in 2002. (2) Since their immigration in 1949 the Mon established a Mon community by building houses in the Sam Prasop area where three streams: Bikli, Chongkalia and Ranti meet. When Khao Laem Dam was built during 1981 and 1984, they had to move up to an allocated area and the community was developed and became a large community that is recognized as part of the local society where there were various ethnic races living together. This reflects the fact that community development requires a leader with potential high enough to gather the Mon ethnic race under such limitations. (3) Ban Wangka had Phra Udommongkhon or Luang Pho Uttama as their important leader who was a community leader with diverse leadership as he was a worldly leader, a wisdom leader, a spiritual leader, and a cultural leader (Thabsakul, 2001: 65-66). He was a Buddhist monk who consolidated and empowered the Mon in Ban Wangka and he has become a legendary figure for the local community. (4) The Wangka ethnic Mon community has become commoditized as it has been expanded by “a large influx of tourists” especially during festivals. It is noteworthy that this community which is 240 kilometers from Kanchanaburi City has become a tourist attraction overnight with the “Wooden Mon Bridge” as a cultural selling point.

These reasons led to the research question, “Amidst situations that had changed with social, environmental, economic and political contexts during the past 70 years on the Thailand-Myanmar border, how has the Mon ethnic identity construction process occurred in the present Thai society context?”

Research Objectives

The objective of this research was to investigate the identity construction process of the Mon ethnic group of Ban Wangka, Nong Lu Sub-district, Sangkhla Buri District, Kanchanaburi Province in the present social context.

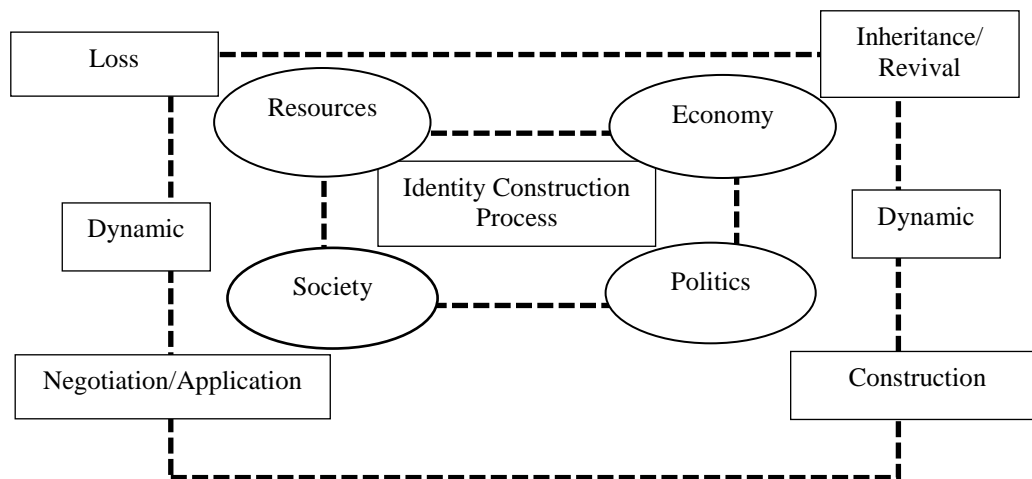
Literature Reviews

Diphadung and Damsa-at (2002), Wongpolgan (2006), and Plianrung (2010) who explored ethnic identity construction processes specified that the process can form when there are

economic, social, political, educational and communication interactions in everyday life in various contexts which have happened among diasporic groups in Thailand and Myanmar. Having been pushed to the margins has also forced ethnic races to use various methods to fight for a place to stand in society with dignity for themselves, their families and others in the multi-racial society where they compete for access to limited natural resource bases and rights. Therefore, people have to make the effort to preserve their ethnic identities in the area where assimilation by Thai political and educational mechanisms through mass media taking place in their every life in addition to their interactions with other racial groups where there are possibilities of fluidity of identities.

Studies by Ochima (1993), Sattayawatthana et al (2004), and Banjoon (2008) did not focus on the Mon ethnic identity construction process and the study areas were mostly in the central part of the country to which the Mon immigrated before 1947. Besides, these studies were only surveys on the Mon's rituals and culture in the areas; in other words, the studies were only about what showed Monness or about fixed identities that were easily seen. However, occupations and ways of life among the Mon people may have changed a great deal as they have to be in line with the present economic, political and social conditions, especially in the globalization age. Consequently, Mon's identities must have had fluidity and change; particularly as a result of the assimilation policy of the Mon into Thai society and because the Mon and Thai are not much different from each other.

From the literature reviews, a research conceptual framework could be written as shown below.



Research Methodology

The qualitative research method was used in this applied ethnographic study. Data were collected from related literature and field data were collected using in-depth interviews and participant and non-participant observations in “personal” and “public” spaces. The data were all validated at every step. A data collection plan was prepared with techniques to gather reliable data in detail as follows.

1. Selection of a research field and social situation: The survey—for a reason of convenience in traveling to the village, the researcher informally contacted the village cultural leader to set the date that the researcher could observe, interview and survey the social situations. These were about places in the community where people do activities together during traditional festivals and where they conduct practices of their everyday life. Dates were set to follow important

informants who were cultural wise men and official community leaders who were to provide information and explain characteristics and ways of life of the ethnic Mon group.

2. Entering the field: The researcher entered Ban Wangka community unofficially and explored the community, coordinated and contacted the cultural leader and interacted with the community by participating in activities held in the community.

3. Visiting the study site: The researcher sought 10 data sources related to the way of life among the ethnic Mon of Ban Wangka and Ban Chedi Sam Ong, a neighboring community, the abbot of Wat Wangwiwekaram (a mental refuge for locals) and community wise men in culture. The total 10 informants were selected using purposive sampling method. A geo-social mapping of the community was made so that the researcher could see the geo-structure, geo-characteristics, economic characteristics and social characteristics of Ban Wangka community.

4. Participant and non-participant observations: Observations were made to collect primary data related to the ethnic identity construction process of the Mon of Ban Wangka community. The cultural situations found in the community enabled the researcher to understand traditions and rituals and then the data were validated using focus group discussions and mind-maps.

5. Semi-structured in-depth interviews: Primary key informants were the abbot of Wat Wangwiwekaram, a community wise man, a Mon history expert and 8 ethnic Mon people. Secondary key informants were 3 local government officials selected using purposive sampling.

6. Focus group discussion: The discussion between the researcher and the informants was conducted to confirm the data and return the data to the community and network partners. The study results were presented to the community, and suggestions from the community and related organizations were welcomed to validate the content.

Triangulation techniques were used to test the validity and reliability of the data and findings. Triangulation of sources was used to cross verify data from different sources and methods triangulation to verify the validity and reliability of the methods employed along with reflections from key informants after primary findings were concluded. Informants were encoded in order to keep their identities confidential and to be in line with research ethics.

Research Results

The population is 11,680 of which only 6,771 have Thai nationality (Tambon Wangka Municipality, 2018). Ninety percent (90%) immigrated from various villages in the Mon State of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar such as Ye, Songpuek, Mudoeng, Mawlamyine, Sathoem, etc. The Mon immigrated into Thailand for the first time in 1947, the second group came in 1950 and the third group in 1951 through Chedi Sam Ong checkpoint and Bikhli. They settled in Ban Nithe of Sangkhlaburi District (Diphadung and Damsa-at, 2002: 49). In 1953, Phraraja Udommongkhon or Luangpho Uttama took the Mon from Ban Nithe to resettle in Ban Wangka Lang after negotiated with Palat Charoen, the then Acting Chief of Sangkhlaburi Minor District Officer, and each family of the Mon were allocated with 400 square wa of land (Sattayawattana, 2004: 324). Later the Mon community of Ban Wangka was moved to the present location as a result of the construction project of Vajiralongkorn Dam in 1981 and each family was allocated with 50 square wa of land. The community has gradually been developed until now.

The Mon community of Ban Wangka has been developed continuously and it has adapted to economic and social changes, tourism, and the main development mechanisms. Nevertheless, due to limitations in terms of land, the Mon ethnic group has to struggle for survival by taking up different occupations inside and outside the community. On the other hand, the geo-

characteristics of the community make it interesting as it is an outstanding “Border Ethnic Group” in its way of life leading to more income, jobs, occupations, services and trade for the community.

The Past-Present Phenomena: Changes in the Wangka Mon Community

The general living conditions of the ethnic Mon of Ban Wangka can be divided into two major parts: before and after the construction of Vajiralongkorn Dam. Before construction of the dam, most of the Mon made a living doing subsistent agriculture and other occupations as follows. (1) Agriculture in which most of them grew peanuts and corn, and (2) they also grew upland rice by digging rows of holes and dropping grains of rice in them. Most people grew rice for their family consumption. (3) Cross-border trading and local trading: For local trading, there were shops in the village mostly groceries selling shrimp paste, fish source, salt, vegetables, fruits, products of the forest and native food. For cross-border trading, most is exchange of goods from Myanmar such as products of the forest, wood, and food. (4) Odd employment: Most Mon people who were poor with no land for agricultural activities and no money to invest in trading were hired to do odd jobs such as working as drivers to transport goods to Myanmar for Thai merchants, as coolies and farm workers, etc. After the construction of the dam in 1984, they had to move to a new place where they had less land as they lived in the compound of Wat Wangwiwekaram and they were not allocated any land yet as most of them did not have Thai citizenship. As a result, their way of life had to change even though they were still engaged in agricultural occupations as they previously were. For example, they had to do fishing in the river using local wisdom. Trading could be classified into three categories. (1) Trading in the village with the center at Wat Wangwiwekaram market. (2) Selling souvenirs at the area around the end of the Uttama Wooden Bridge and beside Phutthakaya Chedi because these two areas are the symbols of Ban Wangka Mon village. (3) Cross-border trading: During that time, a local agreement was made to open the Thailand-Myanmar checkpoint at Chedi Sam Ong checkpoint for trading.

The Wangka Mon community has changed rapidly and with strong intentions in maintaining Mon ethnic identities while adapting to economic change from self-reliant agriculture to agriculture that relies on market economy system. Because the community has limitations concerning land resources, the Mon have to struggle for survival by means of trading as they have advantages in the location that is on the Thailand-Myanmar border. Moreover, the construction of Vajiralongkorn Dam has resulted in recreational places responding to “Unseen Thailand” tourism with the outstanding way of life of the Thai-Raman cultural community as a selling point to attract tourists to the community.

Ban Wangka Mon: The Lost Identity and the Challenging Invented Traditions in the Age of Globalization

Ban Wangka ethnic Mon are proud of their Hanthawaddy Kingdom and the long history. While collecting data in the field, the researchers found from interviews that Mon people aged over 70 feel attached to the Mon State. The Mon-Myanmar assimilation policy has forced Mon culture to become cultural symbol of Myanmar. Consequently, the ethnic Mon had to recreate their ethnic identities to make the past serve the present. Some of the outstanding invented traditions of the ethnic Mon are the Mon national flag, the Mon National Day, and Mon national costumes. These inventions are recognized by the Mon in Thailand-Myanmar and other lands that the Mon live in as symbols that indicate their unity in the imaginary Mon community.

The Mon National Day is celebrated annually on the first day of the waning moon in the third lunar month at Chedi Sam Ong Checkpoint which is on the Thailand-Myanmar border. They adhere to the Mon national flag as their oneness of being Mon. The Mon flag is red and consists

of a yellow swan flying towards a blue star. Red means bravery; yellow symbolizes victory and honor; blue symbolizes honesty/truth; the blue star represents the guiding star at the pole indicating the intention of the Mon as a race. Regarding the Mon national costumes, men wear a red sarong with a pattern of a rice field and a long sleeve white and red checkered shirt, and women wear a red Pha Thung with another piece of cloth sewed to the bottom part and they wear a white blouse. They do not wear the national costumes in their everyday life even though the style of clothing is the same but not the colors. Among elderly women, a dark brown blouse is popular except for during religious festivals.

It can be said that the inventions of different traditions of the ethnic Mon correspond with the concept of Hobsbawm & Ranger, (1984:6) which states that an ancient type of woven cloth is improved to be used as a national costume to demonstrate unity or oneness of the ethnic group in nationalism movement. The colors and patterns of the material of the costumes are also the Mon identity that makes Ban Wangka Mon look different from Myanmar people and other ethnic groups.

The Ethnic Identity Construction Process of Mon People in Ban Wangka

The ethnic Mon identity construction process depends on internal and external factors. The process occurred as a result of economic, social, and educational interactions as well as everyday life communication in many different contexts of the community. This has resulted in construction of ethnic borders by selecting and taking cultural differences as symbols to preserve ethnic identities. Therefore, people who could preserve Mon ethnic identities are as follows.

The first group is the group of the oldest people in the community who immigrated to Thailand 70 years ago and are still alive totaling about 60 people. They are considered as people who apparently maintain their “Monness” and show it with the way they dress, their hair style, their betel nut chewing, and their preservation of traditional Mon culture. The purpose of showing their selves and maintain them in “the space” of the marginal people in Thai society is to negotiate with the mainstream culture and tourism that come with mainstream people in Thai society. One informant said “We, Mon people must live, dress and do the same as our ancestors did; we must follow them, no change.”

The second group is the group that carries the economic burden of their families. They have to take care of their families, work and look after their parents and their children which is rather a heavy load after the community’s mode of production has changed. Even though they were born in Myanmar and immigrated with their families, the mainstream development and Thai social mechanisms, influence of the media in their everyday life, and their interaction with different ethnic groups have resulted in fluidity between their “Monness” and “Thai-ness”. However, they try to preserve as much of their Mon culture as possible though they also have to invent some new culture for touristic purposes. This is reflected in a statement of one informant who said “When I’m home, I use the Mon language. In the community, I also use it with other locals. But when I go to the district office or contact with Thai people or officers, I speak Thai. Like yesterday when I went to the hospital, I spoke Thai even though that officer is a Mon person just like me.”

The third group is the group that is expected by the community to maintain their Mon identities. However, as a result of development by the Thai government, tourism, economic, social and occupational changes, and their selection of spouses, they have to move from the community and adapt themselves to new environments. Consequently, their “Monness” is suppressed by “Thai-ness”. They show the multi-identities of ethnic Mon by the statement “The body is Mon but the heart is Thai”. This corresponds with the statement “I have Thai tourists stay at home because

my house has been made for homestay. My parents speak Thai, so I speak Thai, too. Some Mon words, I don't even know what they mean. I'm married with a Thai and we speak Thai to each other."

Construction of the Ethnic "Wangka Mon"

If interpreted in semiotic meaning, it could be found that the ethnic Wangka Mon employ an ethnic border to show their selves with different forms of culture. These are the way they dress in their Mon clothing in accordance with their Mon tradition while in spouse selection, the ethnic border can be flexible and fluid and adjustable to economic and social situations. This is in line with what was said in the focus group discussion, "For clothing, our community still maintains our tradition for men to wear "Sarong" and women to wear "Pha Thung". When going to the temple, we must dress the Mon way but children of the new generation dress in the Mon style only on Buddhist holidays."

The third generation of ethnic Wangka Mon people who cannot keep the ethnic border and are married with people from different ethnic groups are criticized by the first and the second groups saying that people of this generation distance themselves from "Monness". There is a Thai proverb about borderless love which says, "Build a house as the dwellers like it, place a cradle as the baby wants it. This proverb is in congruence with this statement, "My son works in Kanchanaburi City and has built a family there. He comes home to me only once in a while. When they were not yet married, he brought her to see me. Well, I don't blame him because the world has changed."

The data from the field revealed that ethnic Mon people have their "Mon" self. Regarding the ethnic Mon identity construction process, apparently, it can be seen that all the ethnic Mon identities occurred in the first generation of the Mon and some in the second generation while in the third generation is expected by the first and second generations to be able to maintain their ethnic identities. However, among the second and third generations, there is identity fluidity between their "Monness" and "Thai-ness". According to Butler (1999: 3), identity is only performed and there is no gender behind gender performativity; identity is an act of performativity, and thus, a result of identity.

Interactions on the Thailand-Myanmar Border

Ban Wangka is a border area adjacent to Myanmar and is known by all as "Wangka Mon Cultural Village" for it is one of the 10 communities listed by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand. Considering its location and its overall ethnic Mon identity construction in this border area, it can be described in three generations as follows.

The first generation of ethnic Mon in Thailand or the first group are now more than 70 years old, most of whom have no education and some cannot communicate in the Thai language. They are strictly Mon in the way they dress, wear their hair, use the Mon language, strongly believe in and practice Buddhism. They are considered the major pillar of the community in preserving "Monness" that is an identity without putting on an act. They have almost no interactions with other ethnic groups because they live with their own families and in Mon networks through whom they can communicate. This was reflected in the statement, "To tell that we are Mon, people can just look at the way we dress with Pha Thung and Sarong; we speak Mon, respect our ancestral spirits, and obey our parents."

The second group is the group of Mon people who were born in Myanmar and came with their families into Thailand since they were very young and some of them are those who were born in Thailand after their families had moved to Thailand. Some of them can read and write the Thai language and their highest education is Prathom Sueksa 4. They speak Thai with Mon accent and

understand more Thai culture than the first group does. This is reflected by a statement of one informant, “When we lived in Wangka Lang before the construction of Khao Laem Dam, Buddhist monks at Wat Wang taught us and we got to practice the Thai language, too. We did not learn in school but some of my uncle’s friends went to school but finished only Prathom Sueksa 4.”

The second group of ethnic Mon is the group that has inherited Monness from the first group and they are well-adapted to the environment of the community which is in the environment of development by the Thai State. As for their interactions, they still contact and visit their relatives in Myanmar and call themselves Mon while trying to preserve their Monness. An important component that makes their ethnic Mon identity a mixed one as there is a discourse, “The body is Mon but the heart is Thai.” which means that they spend their lives surrounded with Thai people. A statement made by one informant is, “We came to live in Thailand since we were young but we obey our parents and adhere to Buddhism and worship our ancestral spirits. We have Thai nationality and live in Thailand, contact with Thais, speak Thai and we dress the Thai way when we go to Kanchanaburi City (wearing a T-shirt and jeans).” (A7, interviewed March 15, 2018).

The third group is the group under the age of 30 and is a new generation of the Mon. They were born in Thailand and are committed more to Thailand than to the motherland of their ancestors. There is cultural assimilation among this group through their everyday life communication, being educated in the Thai education system and the cultural tourism in the community. More than 50 people of this group have attained higher education. Such educational opportunities, interactions with Thai people and other ethnic groups who visit the community contribute to the cultural assimilation as reflected in this statement. “I go to school in Kanchanaburi City at Kanchanaburi Rajabhat University. I come home in Wangka only during semester the break to help my mother sell souvenirs under the Mon Bridge. I hardly speak Mon because there are no Mon people in Kanchanaburi City so I have to use the Thai language for communication. When I come back home I also speak Thai with my mother and tourists.”

The self-definition of the third group of ethnic Mon is given through their Mon blood, culture and tradition but their identities will not stand still as it is with flexibility. Self-identity of either the Mon or Thai is selected to suit the situation. For example, they speak Thai when they are outside the community and Mon when inside the community, as reflected in this statement. “Actually, I want to speak Mon but my friends don’t. They speak Thai. I speak Mon only when at home. So, I speak Thai with my Mon friends but speak Mon to my family. If they speak Thai with me, I will speak Thai with them; if they speak Mon, I will speak Mon, too.”

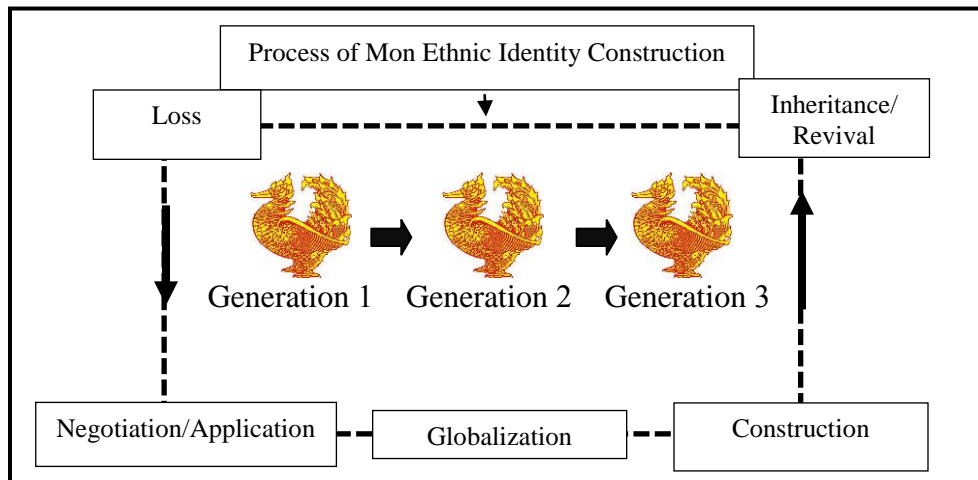


Figure 1 Process of Mon Ethnic Identity Construction: Ban Wangka, Nong Lu Sub-district, Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand

Figure 1 shows the formation process of Ban Wangka Mon identity construction process. The identities were formed by defining self and the value system such as religious value seen through the fact that the first generation of ethnic Mon adhered to Buddha's teachings along with practices that have been passed down to the second generation in the context where changes took place in the community and they chose to define themselves in a way that preserves their ethnic identities. Then, they have been passed down to the third generation in which the identities have had the most fluidity and cultural assimilation has taken place amidst globalization.

Conclusion: Influences Affecting the Process of Mon Ethnic Identity Construction

The process of Mon ethnic identity construction has fluidity according to their ethnicity in the history of Ban Wangka Mon. It can be seen that ethnic identities have been adapted in line with conditions of the community and with both internal and external factors. Some identities remain the same while others have been lost. Presently, the ethnic Mon has three processes of ethnic identity construction as follows. (1) The efforts of creating the past to serve the present; (2) Playing the roles of challenging, negotiating, and compromising with Myanmar culture; and (3) Searching for new meanings and references of being Mon. As can be seen, creating the past to serve the present by designing the costumes imitating ancient Mon costumes with beautiful colors is an effort to show continuity with the past. Besides, nationalism also affects the identity construction process. They invented traditions based on political ideology such as celebration of the Mon National Day when they use the Mon national flag as a symbol to show their Mon selves. While seeking for new meanings and references of the ethnic Mon, the Ban Wangka Mon have identity discourses of three generations that have fluidity, are not fixed, and are manifestations of their saying "The body is Thai but the heart is Mon".

Therefore, the process of the ethnic Mon identity construction of Ban Wangka Mon depends on both internal and external factors resulted from cultural interactions with peoples of different ethnicities in the multicultural area of the Thailand-Myanmar border which has created ethnic borders by selecting cultural differences. As symbols to maintain their identities, the ethnic groups participating in interactions with the ethnic Mon are Myanmar, Thai and Karen peoples. Even though they all are Buddhists and have similar ways of life, the Mon feel they are more religious and are proud that their ancestors were the first group to adopt Buddhism to Southeast

Asia.

It can be said that the construction of “Monness” originated from internal and external factors that are the effects of interactions with people from outside on the Thailand-Myanmar border, the mainstream development, tourism, and economic and social changes. Therefore, people who have strongly preserved the ethnic Mon identities without having to depend on “acting” are the elderly in the community who are around 70 years old and over. Even though some of them have received Thai citizenship, their Monness has penetrated deeply into their heart. It is impossible to change them. They are willing to spend their lives as they like it and wholeheartedly take refuge in Buddhism in their routines from morning till bedtime and throughout their lives.

Discussion and Conclusion

The ethnic Mon of Ban Wangka has a variety of identities that are dynamic and never stand still. Some identities are selected to negotiate, to compromise or when they interact in different social conditions, especially in Ban Wangka community amidst globalization. Ethnic identities that have been inherited and used as ethnic borders of the ethnic Mon can be classified into four aspects: (1) Awareness of “Monness”; (2) Having Mon blood; (3) Knowledge of Mon history; and (4) Strict practice of Buddhism. Some of these findings partially correspond with a study by Santiwutthimethi (2002) conducted in Ban Piangluang, Chiang Mai Province; it was found that the ethnic group could maintain its existence through its historical awareness that caused changes after Panglong Agreement was breached by Myanmar and through a selection process to create their ethnic borders in negotiating with the Thai state. These identities are associated with other ethnic groups that are in challenging, negotiating and compromising environments. Other findings of this present research are different from those found by Santiwutthimethi (2002), particularly the four indicators of Monness which are inherited Mon blood from the male in respect for ancestral spirits; clothing, language, and rituals related to annual practices. Santiwutthimethi (2002) found that these identities were not as important as awareness of Monness which was to be the most important and by which Monness could be preserved and inherited. It was in agreement with a study by Wongpolganon (2006) on construction of identities among Mon females in Kanchanaburi Province. The study found that the Mon ethnic identities that Mon females used as ethnic borders were having Mon blood, knowing the history of the Mon kingdom, the use of the Mon language, culture and traditions of dress, rituals concerning life from birth to death, and respect of spirits and for Buddhism.

However, when exploring the ethnic Mon identity construction process, it was found that the ethnic Mon of Ban Wangka invented the past to serve the present. That is among the first group who immigrated into Thailand, only a few can maintain the most Monness attributes; they wear Mon dress every day. To seek new meanings and new reference sources, the second group of ethnic Mon has its own ethnic identity, “The body is Mon, but the heart is Thai.” This is in agreement with the statement saying that identity is fluidity, not fixed, and only performativity. The third group of ethnic Mon chooses to define itself to be most similar to Thai people in terms of clothing and the ability to use the Thai language. Some even feel that they are Thais. Regarding interactions in the changing environment, it was found that the ethnic Mon attach importance to culture in respect for ancestral spirits. This aspect is inherited from their ancestors and if they do not follow the tradition, they will be punished. This issue is in congruence with Phunsuwan (2001) who stated that the ethnic identity construction process consists of three major processes: (1) Efforts in creating the past to serve the present; (2) Playing the role of challenging, negotiating and compromising; and (3) Seeking for new meanings and new

reference sources. This is in agreement with Jermisitthiprasert & Sawasdee (2012)'s nationalism under the process and content based on the root concept of nationalism that makes Thai-ness. Additionally, the objective of making children of these foreign workers love Thailand abruptly or immediately would cause conflict of their awareness of being other ethnic races as Myanmar, Mon and others. Moreover, they still have the feeling of royalty to their fatherland and nationalism they acquired through socialization by their families.

In addition to this, economic and social characteristics can affect the ethnic Mon identity construction process. In their interactions with Thai people, the Mon in Ban Wangka community are influenced by everyday communication in Thai society. This has influence on the identity construction of youth in the third generation. Thus, the third group is expected by the first and the second groups of ethnic Mon to maintain Monness. However, they cannot resist the mainstream development and tourism that make the identity construction process to adapt to the new environment and the third group, thus, defines themselves as "Monness" that is suppressed by "Thai-ness". This is in line with Santisombat (2007) who specifies that ethnicity or ethnic awareness does not arise from cultural differences but rather from the situation where confrontation or conflict takes place in allocation and use of power in the social system that the ethnic groups live, particularly in the modern social context where ethnic groups have interactions through marketing mechanisms and a capitalist system. As a result, the ethnic groups reconstruct and apply them through cultural symbols under the changing conditions of interactions between different groups.

Recommendations

Regarding recommendations from the findings, there should be promotion for preservation of the ethnic Mon culture that is apparent in the community to strengthen the ethnic Mon's identities that are their selves.

For further studies, it is recommended that the body of knowledge from the findings should be expanded and extended to the Mon State in Myanmar to compare the processes of Mon cultural identity construction.

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