



INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

Ethnicity and Fertility in Thailand

Suchart Prasithrathsint

Ethnicity and Fertility in Southeast Asia Series
General Editors: Aline K. Wong and Ng Shui Meng

ETHNICITY AND FERTILITY IN THAILAND

by

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Research Notes and Discussions Paper No. 51
INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES
1985

Published by
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Pasir Panjang
Singapore 0511

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ISSN 0129-8828
ISBN 9971-988-13-5

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The study of ethnicity and fertility in Thailand is part of the five ASEAN countries' project on ethnicity and fertility. The Thai study covers 4 major ethnic groups living in all major regions of the country. The total sample consists of 858 Thai, 837 Chinese, 838 Thai Muslim and 587 Southern Thai Muslim couples. The study is the first of its kind dealing empirically with a wide range of social, economic, and demographic characteristics of the major ethnic groups and their ethnic relations. The findings of the research project are not only very informative but also full of policy implications. The Thai study has contributed a great deal to the understanding of the ways of life of the four ethnic groups and their fertility and family planning behaviour.

The research project would have been impossible without a substantial amount of financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation. We duly wish to express our gratitude to the Rockefeller Foundation, and in particular to Dr Mary Kritz. We also wish to thank the National Institute of Development Administration for providing supplementary financial support for the project. I personally wish to thank my co-investigators in various regions of the country: Assistant Professor Luechai Chulasai, Chiangmai University; Assistant Professor Thawatchai Arthorn-thurasook, Mahidol University; Archan Laddawan Rodmanee, Mahidol University; Assistant Professor Saranya Bunnag, Prince of Songkla University; and Associate Professor Suwanlee Piampiti, the National Institute of Development Administration, for their participation in field data collection and international workshops on the project.

My thanks are also due to Miss Laurie Rosenthal of the Nation Review, who helped edit the research report.

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PREFACE

The Ethnicity and Fertility in Southeast Asia Project that commenced in 1980, was an outgrowth of an earlier project, Culture and Fertility in Southeast Asia, which was completed in 1979. Building upon the results of the earlier study, which established that ethnicity was a significant factor underlying the fertility differentials among the various ethnic groups in Southeast Asia, the present project aimed to explore in greater detail the extent to which ethnicity and ethnic factors like ethnic attitudes, ethnic identification and cultural practices influenced reproductive behaviour. Instead of utilizing secondary sources, the project relied on primary data collected through the survey technique. In all, twenty ethnic groups from the five ASEAN countries were surveyed in this study which spanned a total of three years.

A study involving five different countries and so many ethnic groups of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds would invariably pose problems of comparability. To maximize comparability across countries, the study relied on the use of a common core questionnaire as well as a common analytical framework and data analysis procedures. While comparability was important, the incorporation of country-specific factors salient and relevant to the explanation of fertility behaviour was also encouraged. The final research design therefore attempted to be as comprehensive as possible in the exploration of the ethnic dimension in fertility differentials among the various ethnic groups studied.

Three workshops were held during the period of the project to enable the researchers to come together to discuss and resolve problems related to the project. The first workshop was held in May 1980. At this workshop the conceptual framework and the core questionnaire were finalized. In the second workshop held in June 1981, the methods of data analysis were decided. At the

final workshop in September 1982, the country teams presented their preliminary findings. The final reports were completed by December 1983.

A study of this scale obviously also involved many researchers. The researchers were all Southeast Asian social scientists drawn from various disciplines and backgrounds. Some were attached to universities of the region while others were from research institutes or government agencies.

Dr Rodolfo A. Bulatao from the East-West Population Institute provided the initial intellectual impetus to the project by formulating the conceptual framework and research design for the study as well as the drafting of the preliminary questionnaire. In addition Dr Bulatao together with Dr Aline K. Wong from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Dr Ng Shui Meng from ISEAS served as co-ordinators of the project. The country teams consisted of:

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Funding for the project was provided by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Rockefeller Foundation and the Human Reproduction Programme, Task Force on Psychosocial Research in Family Planning of the World Health Organization (WHO).

The results of the study are being published in six monographs in this series:

Ethnicity and Fertility in Southeast Asia: A Comparative Analysis

Ethnicity and Fertility in Indonesia

Ethnicity and Fertility in Malaysia

Ethnicity and Fertility in the Philippines

Ethnicity and Fertility in Singapore

Ethnicity and Fertility in Thailand

ALINE WONG and NG SHUI MENG
Project Co-ordinators
and
General Editors of the Series

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