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CULTURE AND FERTILITY

The Case of Thailand

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FOREWORD

It is generally recognized that ethnic diversity is characteristic of Southeast Asian countries. However, very little is known about the relationships between this diversity and other social and behavioural dimensions. In most countries in the region, such relationships have yet to be fully explored, partly because of the sensitivity of the issue and partly because of the dearth of essential data on ethnic behaviour and differentials.

In the case of population behaviour, although several aspects, such as fertility, mortality and a variety of attitudinal dimensions, have been measured successfully in most Southeast Asian countries, they are normally presented as national aggregates, and are often only broken down by rural-urban residence, education, income, household size and ethnic group. Thus, while there is some information available on the relationship between ethnic identity and fertility, the relationship has not been systematically examined in most of the Southeast Asian countries. The lack of this kind of basic data on ethnic differentials in population behaviour in Southeast Asia has definite implications for national population policies and programmes. These policies and programmes are usually implemented or launched on a national level with very little consideration for the ethnic diversity of the country, and are therefore often perceived, on an ethnic group or community level, as being ethnically based, unacceptable or even biased. Perceptions like these certainly have a direct effect on the manner in which such policies and programmes are implemented and received.

With conditions as the foregoing in mind, and in view of the importance of, and the lack of information on, the relationship between dimensions of ethnic identity and population, the Institute in 1975 got together with a group of interested research scholars from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand and began an investigation of such relationships and their implications for population policies and progress. Entitled "Culture and Fertility in Southeast Asia", this investigation consisted of two separate but linked activities, divided into Phase I and Phase II of the project, with the former focused largely on the analysis of secondary data and the latter on material generated by planned fieldwork and the administration of a questionnaire.

The work that follows forms part of the "country monographs" growing out of Phase I of the project. These monographs, like the project itself, have

been made possible through the co-operation and support of a number of individuals and organizations, particularly the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, the various country team leaders and their colleagues, and the two co-ordinators of Phase I, Dr. Rodolfo Bulatao and Dr. Ong Jin Hui. To all of them we say, thank you.

We are also particularly grateful to Dr. Ong Jin Hui who, in addition to general co-ordinative responsibilities, helped to edit the manuscripts on which the country monographs are based.

Whilst thanking all contributors to, and participants in, the project, and wishing the monographs all the best, we hope it is clearly understood that the responsibility for facts and opinions expressed in this publication rests exclusively with the authors and their interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Institute or its supporters.

5 September 1980

Kemial S. Sandhu
Director

Institute of Southeast Asian Studies

Variations and shortcomings of the type above notwithstanding, the five monographs on the whole do provide a useful background to the identification of relevant ethnic variables. Moreover, the lack of comparability of data is currently being corrected in the second phase of the project. A standardized core questionnaire with additional peripheral and specific queries has been designed, based on the findings of the country studies of Phase I. Ultimately, it is expected that the analysis of data collected in Phase II will culminate in an in-depth examination of the relationship between ethnicity and fertility.

1 September 1980

Ong Jin Hui
Editor, Country Monographs
Culture and Fertility in
Southeast Asia, Phase I

PREFACE

This volume is part of a series of monographs on culture and fertility in Southeast Asia. They arose out of a regional research project, "Culture and Fertility in Southeast Asia", initiated by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, and involving researchers from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The first phase of the Culture and Fertility project concentrated on demographic variables and issues in relation to ethnic and other cultural variables.

Each monograph, focusing on a particular country, is developed essentially on the following lines. First, the historical background and the development of the present social structure are detailed. Following this, the patterns of interaction among the various ethnic groups are considered, with particular attention paid to the identification of variables which may influence fertility patterns of the various groups. Against this backdrop, the population policies and family planning programmes are explained. The demographic structure and its changes in tandem with these policies and programmes are then analysed. In order to determine the impact of key variables on fertility patterns, a secondary analysis of available data was carried out, utilizing multiple classification analysis.

There are differences in the substance of the individual country monographs, largely on account of the nature and availability of materials and documentation. All the same, there has been quite an adequate coverage of the areas deemed important in all the volumes. Indeed, the chapters on national population policies and family planning and the ones on demographic structure are almost complete in detail; in addition, they are comparable with one another. On the other hand, the chapters based on secondary analysis have problems of comparability because secondary data were used. Since these data sets were not originally designed to answer to the project's research model, there were difficulties in comparing variable definitions and operationalization. Even more problematic was the fact that some variables were not available in the data sets. Furthermore, the data sets were not comparable in population coverage and time-frame (the target year was 1970). For all these reasons, this chapter in each of the monographs should not be treated as anything more than a preview or pretest of the research model. Seen in this perspective, it not only provides a useful means of identifying relevant explanatory variables but also shows that variations do indeed exist in a number of areas between ethnic groups and between countries.

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I: CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The population of Thailand is approximately 43 million. Most of this population comprise the Thai people, but there are, in the main, two distinct minority groups characterized by district: the Thai-Moslems and the Chinese. A number of other minorities -- the Vietnamese, Kampuchean refugees, hilltribes and such -- also exist. The latter, however, will be ignored in the present discussion.

The Thai

Historical Background

There is much ongoing debate as to the origin of the Thais. One commonly accepted thesis is that the Thais existed in tribes in various parts of China. From about 69 B.C. there was a steady migration of these groups to the Indochinese Peninsula. Consequently, various kingdoms came to be established at Sukhothai, Ayuthaya, Thonburi and Bangkok.¹ Except for a brief spell of Burmese domination in 1767, these kingdoms underwent indigenous changes to develop into present-day Thailand.

Thai Culture

The focus of Thai culture can be said to be Theravada Buddhism. This religion of the Thais incorporates two influential notions -- karma and merit-accumulation for happiness in present and future reincarnations. "Karma" emphasizes individual responsibility for fate and perhaps this explains the Thai's tendency to prize individualism very highly. Consequently, family ties amongst the Thais are not very strong. The matrilocal family system -- prevalent in rural Thailand -- has quite easily given way to nuclear family households in urban Thailand. Most of the Thais, however, live in rural areas where they are chiefly occupied with rice-growing. However, there are also Thais who hold important positions in government and other institutions.

¹ Rong Syamauda, *A History of Thailand* (Bangkok: Thai Watana Panich Co. Ltd., 1973), pp. 6-8.

The Chinese

Historical Background

Chinese immigration to Thailand can be traced back to as early as the fifteenth century.² The largest influx occurred around the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mainly as a result of the famine and civil disorders which characterized these periods. This flow of migrants was mainly from Guangdong province and it has given Thailand four of its main Chinese dialect groups, viz., the Teochius, the Hakka, the Cantonese and the Hainanese. The other distinct Chinese dialect group found here is that of the Hokkiens from Fujian province. Of these five groups, the Teochius, comprising 56% of the total Chinese population in Thailand, dominate numerically and they are followed by the Hakkas and Hainanese with 16% and 12% of the total Chinese population respectively. The Hokkiens and Cantonese make up only 7% of the total.

Chinese Culture

Dialect differences notwithstanding, the culture of the Chinese can be said to be based on Confucianism. This is easily observable in the emphasis given to ritualistic ancestor-worship and the highly stressed "code of ethics" of five relationships -- ruler and ruled; parents and children; older brother and younger brother; husband and wife; and friends. It will be noted that of these five, three are pertinent to familial relationships. Taking all this into consideration, it may be seen that family is an important fact of Chinese culture. The Chinese have a patrilocal family system based on a system of seniority and gerontocracy. Whilst individuals may seek self-progress, it is family fortunes that are given real concern. Ancestor-worship further underlines a preference for male children; in fact, according to Confucian tradition, the more sons one begets, the greater one is blessed.

However, though these elements persist strongly, they have simultaneously allowed Chinese adoption of Mahayana Buddhism as a major religion. In addition, many second generation Chinese have quite easily assimilated significant aspects of Thai culture.

² See, for instance, William G. Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957).

Occupationally, however, the Chinese remain a distinct group. The majority are engaged in wholesale and retail businesses -- ranging from street stalls and small retail shops to large industries.

The Thai-Moslem

Historical Background

The Thai-Moslems -- as their title denotes -- are Thai, but they should be distinguished from the majority by their adherence to Islam. Their adoption of this religion has given rise to a "new" Thai minority because of Islam's very distinct characteristics.

Thai-Moslem Culture

Thai-Moslem culture is significantly dominated by the Islamic faith. The strength of this domination is best seen by the existence of separate schools and laws for Thai Moslems. Unlike the Chinese case, assimilation into Thai culture, not surprisingly, is nonexistent. Most of the Thai Moslems do not even speak Thai.

The patrilocal family structure allows a man to take four wives, provided he can support all of them. Family ties are sufficiently strong, but the stress is on Islamic brotherhood that goes beyond mere narrow limits.

Thai-Moslems are concentrated in four border provinces in South Thailand, where they are engaged on rubber plantations, rice fields and in orchards.

II: INTERGROUP BEHAVIOUR

Sino-Thai Relations

Till recently, Sino-Thai relations have been smooth and conflict-free. As

mentioned, the Chinese began migrating to Thailand from about the fifteenth century. During this early period of migration, the Chinese dealt mainly with Thai Kings and were mostly involved with them over trading. Chinese migrants were mainly males. They tended, therefore, to settle down with Thai women. The children -- known as "lukjir" -- were quickly and effortlessly assimilated into Thai society. This easy assimilation was allowed by the fact that Chinese culture -- dominated as it was by Confucianism -- had ample room for the adoption of Thai culture. Social mingling was also without barriers.

Most important, perhaps, was an absence of conflict of economic interests. Trading was not highly valued in Thai culture. Additionally, the corvée system, patronage bond and slavery engaged the majority of Thai males -- leaving a social vacuum which the Chinese easily filled. Then again the abolishment of the corvée system and store emancipation in the reign of Rama V greatly increased the demand for Chinese labour. This happily coincided with the period of massive migration of the Chinese to Thailand.

The rise of Chinese nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century interrupted this conflict-free history. Hostility began to develop and precautionary measures against the threat of Chinese influence were taken. The communist threat led to the adoption of containment policies. However, despite this setback, the lack of physical, cultural and religious differences among the Thais and Chinese prevailed and continued to boost Sino-Thai co-operation and assimilation. An interesting feature of this is that despite some important prejudice about "the uncouth Chinaman", the Thais are never inclined to reject anyone of Chinese ancestry who speaks and behaves like a Thai.³ The Chinese, for their part -- even whilst having stereotyped notions of the "husu" (barbarian), lazy, loose and not very intelligent Thai -- continue to adopt Thai patterns of culture. For instance, of the approximately 10,000 cases of registration for changes of names annually, 90% are Chinese wanting to change their last names to Thai names.⁴

Thai and Thai-Moslem Intergroup Relations

Geographic location (that is, concentration of Thai-Moslems in southern border provinces), language (viz., Malay) and Islam as a chosen religion are

³ William G. Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957), p. 381.

⁴ Boorootpat, Khajatpai, *Panha Chonkloomnoi Nai Pratesthai* [Minority problems in Thailand]. (Bangkok: Prae Pittaya, 1972), p. 97.

major barriers to the interaction and communication between the Thai majority and the Thai-Moslem minority. These factors also create crucial barriers to assimilation.

History has also left its negative mark; those border provinces that the Thai-Moslems have traditionally concentrated in were once tributary states of Siam. Conflict as a predominant facet of Thai and Thai-Moslem relations throughout history has been well summed up by the fact that "the heroes for the Thai majority are invaders for the Muslim minority, and heroes of the Moslem minority are rebels of the Thai majority." The hostile feelings that exist till today probably form the chief reasons behind the contemporary existence of various Muslim movements in Southern Thailand -- for example, the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO), the Posu group, Wamaeduesa, Poyae group, Nai Seng group, and so on.⁵

To the Thai Government and people, the Thai-Moslems appear to lack a Thai national identity. Hence, their loyalty to Thailand is suspect; it is believed that Thai-Moslems consider themselves Malays for they prefer to speak in Malay, study the Malay language and preserve a culture that is similar to the Malays. The average Malay is well aware that Thai-Moslems refuse to further their studies in Thai schools beyond that which is compulsory. The Thai-Moslems, on the other hand, perceive the majority, especially the government, as being hypocritical and contemptuous of them. To make matters worse, they believe that the Thai Government is trying to destroy their religion and identity -- a serious contention, for religion is a highly emotional matter.

Aware of the latter's suspicions, Thai authorities have taken a guarded, pluralistic approach towards the Thai-Moslems. For instance, the government has legalized polygamy among the Thai-Moslems and granted the right of leave of absence for religious activities in Mecca.⁶ Also, in October 1963, a programme of Malay language training was launched for officials assigned to posts in the southern provinces.

5 Among Sutthasart, *The Problem of Conflicts in the Four Southern Provinces* (Bangkok: Phitak Pracha Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 129-130.

6 "Decree on leave with pay of the civil and judicial officials," *Government Gazette*, Book 82, Part 6 (August 1965), Article II, Subsection.

Simultaneously, attempts to integrate Thai-Moslems and create national consciousness amongst them have also been made. One such example is the introduction of admission quotas for Thai-Moslem students to universities in Bangkok without their having to take entrance examinations.

Even so, the most salient feature of Thai and Thai-Moslem relationship is the constant political unrest in Southern Thailand. This includes many separatist movements since 1932. Significantly, at least one of these movements -- the National Liberation Army of Pattani, founded in 1960/61 -- defines itself as having a religious mission.

Intergroup Perceptions and Fertility

There has not been any single study on intergroup perceptions among the Thai Chinese and Thai-Moslems in relation to one another's fertility-patterns. However, impressionistic evidence and personal experiences allow for the following hypothesis. First, the Thais feel that the Chinese Confucian beliefs explain their desire for large families and many sons and their unwillingness to practise family planning. Whilst this belief is not groundless, it is not entirely true either. Secondly, the Thais deem themselves to be sexually superior to the Thai-Moslems for it is believed that they have comparatively superior reproductive organs.

These attitudes towards the Chinese and Thai-Moslems, however, have no influential bearing on Thai fertility. Family planning is adopted on an individual basis and it has never become conscious behaviour on an ethnic level. The fear of becoming outnumbered is quite nonexistent except among some members of the ruling élite. The latter's fears relate to Chinese fertility among the Chinese in Thailand as well as in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Some consider a large population desirable on a military power rationale.⁷ However, such arguments are comparatively rare. On the whole, there is consensus that this fear is baseless whilst family planning is necessary.

⁷ See Tawee Rangkum, "*Pratesthai Tongkarn Nayobai Prachakom Nai Puchubun Rue Mai Yangrai*" [Does Thailand need a population policy at present?], Paper presented at the First National Seminar on Population, 1963.