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**The Struggle in Memory Space of
Diverse Ethnic Groups in Thailand**

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“Communities don't have trust in government or businesses as they believe the only thing businesses are interested in is to make profits in disregard of the environment, society or community health,.

Entrepreneurs also distrust the community. They tend to think of people in the community as uneducated and only wanting to rally the street.

Government still perceives people through the patronage system and does not see them as fellow humans.

Such attitudes must be changed. We have to start by building trust and understanding by listening to one another,”

Anand Panyarachun, Former Prime Minister:

“Change attitudes to break impasse”,

The Bangkok Post 14/04/2010

Introduction

The collective memory of people in society is of great importance because collective memory is the foundation of imaginings which connect the past with present conditions and a future expectation. That is to say historical memory causes its owners to share a joint understanding of what historical conditions gave rise to their existence in present conditions and of what must be done, how it must be done and by whom it must be done, if they want to live correctly in the present and to have a future which is good according to their ideals.

Since the era of King Rama V the Thai elite and Thai state have constantly attempted to construct memories of the “Thai Nation” and “Thai-ness” and to cause these memories to influence people of all “classes”, from all localities, and of all ethnicities. Although they have succeeded in making such memories the mainstream memories which now inform Thai identity, including national Thai culture, they have not been able to completely dominate all groups in Thai society. Meanwhile many groups have constructed memories inside the framework of mainstream memories, some groups have constructed memories outside the frame work of mainstream memories.

This trend is particularly evident in the present where greatly increased political conflict and struggle, resulting from rapid changes to the structure of Thai society, caused by expansion of capitalism and class differentiations, which are now affecting even remote rural areas and have caused competition for resources within and between groups to increase in intensity and relationships of power to become more complex, has resulted in memory space becoming one of the spaces used for political struggle by groups who want to alter their identity and relationships of power in order to have increased rights and bargaining power. These groups include many ethnic groups who have for a long time been marginalised within the Thai state and Thai society.

The Importance of Studying Ethnic Groups’ “Struggle in Memory Space”

The memory which has informed Thai identity since the period of the absolute monarchy (end of the 19th century- start of the 20th century) remains highly influential today. Although people of diverse ethnic groups are visible in social space the Thai state permits marginalised ethnic people to keep their ethnic identity only in the form of material culture and cultural capital that can be sold as a commodity. It can be seen that there is continuance of the strategy to make people of all ethnicities possess “Thai hearts,” that is to accept “Thai ideal of truth, goodness and beauty,” which means accepting the system of social relationships in which people are divided into “classes” and which is the foundation of the political structure that keeps power in the hands of the elite group. Until nowadays the elite tend to think of people in the community as uneducated who have been in the circle of “*stupid, poor and ill*”, and the government still perceives people through the patronage system.¹

An important problem that has led to conflict and violence in Thai society is therefore the meaning of the “Thai nation” and “Thai-ness” which is insufficiently broad to incorporate people of all ethnicities within the Thai state leading to ethnic groups being forced to “become Thai.” This problem is among the political problems which have been gradually increasing in acuteness since the 1960s. In the 1960s capitalist expansion linked people of all

¹ See: Saichol Satayanurak, “**Khukrit kap Pradittakam “Khvam Pen Thai” [Kukrit and the Construction of Thai-ness]**. Vols 1 and 2. Bangkok: Matichon, 2007.

ethnicities within a single unified political economy. However, there were advantages and disadvantages within the structure of that political economy which centralised power in resource management. Decentralisation of power, or implementation of local administration, over the past decades has not yet increased power of villagers to the extent that it should have. This has created conflicts between people of various “classes” and conflicts between ethnicities and “Thai people” (including conflict among those ethnic groups and Chinese people who have “become Thai” to maintain their status and interests as local elite and middle class) in many regions.

Although most conflict is conflict between “classes,” which is directly related to competition for resources, the issue of ethnicity has been joined to class consciousness and used to build legitimacy for struggles. “Memory space” has therefore been used by people of each ethnicity in their struggle, both with the state and with ethnic groups privileged by the structure of the Thai economy and politics, to change their identity.

It is interesting that the struggle of some ethnic groups does not take the form of competing with or struggling against mainstream memory. Because the influence of mainstream memory is so great, people of many ethnic groups must try to attach their history to it by using monuments, ceremonies, pictures, historical writings or other forms of narrative to make their past link as much as possible to the past of the “Thai nation” and “Thainess.” This is because changes in the economy and natural and social environments have made people have unavoidably to depend on various resources and policies administered by the administrative state, with the consequence that in the present the lifestyle of people of almost all ethnic groups must necessarily involve the Thai state.

Nevertheless, people of some ethnic groups have constructed memories that are not related to mainstream memory. They have done so for different purposes. For example to build unity within the ethnic group which will help them survive in changing contexts, to oppose other ethnic groups in the locality that have greater economic and cultural power, to fight in the national political sphere etc. The construction of memory in all forms has the objective of changing relationships of power in a social unit to which that ethnic group belongs. This may be the village community, the locality, the nation...

Understanding the struggle in “memory space” of ethnic groups will therefore help one to more clearly understand the cultural political dimensions of the problems of tension and conflict in Thai society. This will be beneficial in searching for alternative ways to resolve political problems, including adapting national culture to become “multicultural,” which do not neglect the cultural dimension.

Although this article aims to analyse the struggle of various ethnic groups and does not include the struggle of social groups based on other characteristics such as class, gender, age etc. it is hoped that it will help create understanding of the intensity of the struggle in “memory space” and lead to realization that solving political problems is a complex matter which requires correction at all levels including that of political culture.

The Development of Mainstream Memory and its Impact

Most ethnic groups are presently waging their struggles under the influence of mainstream memory which informs Thai identity and national culture. It is therefore appropriate to briefly analyse the development and the strength of mainstream memory.

In the period from the reign of King Rama V to the reign of King Rama VII when the traditional Thai state changed to an absolute monarchy and in the context that the King was expanding his power to directly govern people throughout the country and had to face the threat of Western Imperialism, the elite wrote a new type of history in order to construct a meaning of the “Thai nation” and “Thai-ness” which would help manage relationships of power between classes, ethnic groups and people of different gender and help create legitimacy for the occupation of territories that previously had been vassal states.

The history written by the elite created an identity for the “Thai nation” as a nation that had prospered since antiquity with prosperity, peace and sovereignty of the nation all originating from the King and Buddhism which are the heart of “Thai-ness.” Thai style governance in which Buddhism causes the Thai King to have the highest wisdom and greatest benevolence made the “Thai Nation” independent and prosperous. Although in some eras severe problems arose, for example the loss of sovereignty to Burma, a Thai King had always helped restore sovereignty and progress the art and culture of the “Thai Nation.”²

In constructing this memory of the “Thai Nation” there was an effort to emphasize the importance and the progressiveness of people of Thai ethnicity when compared to people of other ethnicities in Thai state. Various ethnicities, for example the Lao, the Khmer, the Malay, the Shan etc. were seen as still being uncivilized, backward, lazy and/or untrustworthy. However in order to bring the territory of people of those ethnicities under the King’s power and to protect against the great powers entering and wresting them away there was also an effort to construct history in order to show that some vassal states had belonged to Thai people since antiquity. Examples of this include “**Phraratchaparop Rueang Phra Phutta Chinnarat**” (**The Royal Statement on the Matter of Phra Buddha Chinnarat**) and “**Phongsaodan Yonok**” (**The Yonok Chronicle**) which state that the ancient state in the upper North had the name “*Lanna Thai*” even though this name does not appear in any sources and the elite in that time generally perceived that the people in that territory were “*Lao*”.

² See: Saichol Satayanurak, “Prawatisat Withi Khit Kiao Kap Sangkhom lae Wattanatam Thai khong Panyachon Phor. Sor. 2435-2535 Rai Ngan Phon Kan Wichai Chabap Sombun” [History of Ways of Thinking about Thai Society and Culture of Intellectuals 1892-1992. Full Report of Research Results]. Thailand Research Fund, 2007.

Towards the end of the period of the absolute monarchy there began to emerge historical writings that focused on the history of the “**Thai race.**” These histories built a plot that the Thai race was an ancient race which once had great power and prosperity but became disunited and so were defeated by the Chinese. Despite this defeat people of the Thai race have the virtue or disposition of being “*devoted to the freedom of the nation*” and therefore were not willing to remain under the power of the Chinese. Thus they migrated on mass to the territory of modern day Thailand and built artistic and cultural prosperity anew. Although sometimes people of the Thai race have broken unity again causing the “Thai Nation” to lose its sovereignty to Burma twice and to lose territory to the great powers of England and France on many occasions, but the Thai nation has had great kings, and heroes and heroines that have fought wisely and courageously to protect the nation’s sovereignty and to build prosperity making “*this Thailand good*” up until the present.

After the revolution changed the system of governance to a constitutional system in 1932 many more histories focusing on the Thai race under the above plot were written. These histories constructed memory of the Thai nation through the principles of racism. This led public servants and the people to support the leader within the new system who was implementing a policy to “*build the Thai nation to make it a great power in the Golden Peninsula.*” They also enabled the leader in the new system, by building hope that a “Thai nation” in which the Thai people were unified under a strong leader would become a big nation that had greater security and prosperity, to be able to use dictatorial power. Throughout the period of WWII histories based on the principles of racism were presented to society in high concentration with the government using various types of media, for example plays, songs, radio discussions, ceremonies, textbooks etc. to do so.

Although World War II ended with Thailand on the losing side the collective memory and national identity from the period of the world war is still reproduced. This is because it helps dictatorial rulers be able to easily demand that people within the nation make sacrifices and remain unified. At the same time the People’s Party’s complete loss of power in the 1950s opened up an opportunity for royalists to revive the ideology of **royal nationalism**.³ The intellectual who has been most influential in making the ideology of royal nationalism stronger in Thai society since the 1950s is M.R. Kukrit Pramoj. His work, when accompanied by the social actions of many factions, including the revival of art and culture from the era of the absolute monarchy, for example architecture, music, literature, plays and various royal ceremonies, have caused collective memory and national identity under the ideology of royal nationalism to remain highly influential into the present.

³ Thongchai Winichakul is the person who invented the word “royal nationalism” and this word has been widely used in intellectual circles. It refers to the nationalist ideology in which the King is most important for the independence, security and progress of the nation.

Consequently Thai history and identity influenced by the ideology of royal nationalism are highly powerful alongside memory and national identity originating in the ideology of racism. Nevertheless, since the period of the government of Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat (1957-1963), history and Thai identity that originate in the ideology of royal nationalism have been increasingly reproduced whilst emphasis on the “Thai race” has in turn reduced in importance.

Growth in the influence of history and Thai identity based on the ideology of royal nationalism over the past four decades is consistent with the context of people of Chinese lineage having increasingly “become Thai” and rapidly gained economic, political and cultural influence such that they have become the majority within Thai society’s elite and middle classes. Because of this the construction of mainstream history and Thai identity consequently no longer emphasises the issue of race but has changed to emphasis being “Thai” in the sense of being loyal to the King and following Buddhism which are at the heart of “Thai-ness.”

Despite this change, some ethnic groups who are unwilling to “become Thai” or are able to “become Thai” only to a limited extent, for example Malay Muslims and some hill tribe peoples, are still frequently regarded as “others” in contexts where the state emphasises national security. It is only hill tribe people who generate income from tourism that the state gives any importance to and even then it is importance as a good more than as people or members of the “Thai nation.”

Mainstream history and Thai identity based on the ideology of royal nationalism securely dominate Thai society and help sustain a societal structure that divides people into classes and the Thai state in which power is centralised in the hands of the elite. Under this system people have a role only in voting. They are not able to genuinely participate in deciding resource allocation and do not have opportunity to control or check the use of state power. The result is that the state is able to use its power to advance unbalanced national development policies. Many policies and large projects have been constructed in such a way as to bring advantage to groups that already have economic and political power while disadvantaging the majority of the population. Many groups that have been forced or induced to change their resource use to engage in commercial production have had to face losing their investment because they are without bargaining power in the market. Meanwhile large scale industry is destroying the environment both directly and indirectly. In the end people of many ethnic groups have become “marginalised” with the gap between the income and possession of assets of the rich and the poor continually growing.

In the above context there have been attempts by many groups of “marginalised people” to change relationships of power in order to give their own group more power, rights or opportunities. This struggle to change relationships of power has involved use of many techniques such as joining the Thai Communist Party, joining separatist movements or joining new social movements. Another important dimension of the struggle is

construction new memory aimed at altering identity and relationships of power. People of each group in Thai society are currently mobilising around this issue in a vigorous and highly interesting manner. Nevertheless this article will analyse only the construction of memory by some ethnic groups.

Ethnic Groups' Construction of Memory which Links with Mainstream Memory

Ethnic peoples in Thailand have not accepted their ethnic status within the “Thai nation” as “others” or as “marginalized peoples.” Rather they have tried to construct memory and alter their identity in order to improve their status and gain rights and power within the “Thai Nation.”

In the context that ethnic peoples must depend increasingly on resources administered by the state and must, as producers, retailers and consumers, have closer associations with the general Thai public, and when royal nationalist ideology is highly influential in Thai society, **construction of memory which accords with royal nationalist ideology has occurred most widely with people of many ethnic groups attempting to link their past with the plot of national history.** This is one part of the effort by people of these ethnic groups to “become Thai.”

The **Chinese ethnic group**, whom were once seen as the “*Jews of the East*,” constructed memory that they had come to Thailand to “*rely upon the royal grace*” of the Thai King, that they are loyal and grateful to the Thai King and they are good Buddhists. They also changed their names and surnames to make them Thai, studied in Thai schools and used the Thai language suppressing their “Chinese-ness.” This continued through to the 1970s when change in Thai policy led Thailand to befriend mainland China. This change caused the Chinese in Thai society to gain status and bargaining power. Consequently they were, in some dimensions, able to outwardly show their “Chinese-ness.” In 1975 M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, as prime minister of Thailand and after having returned from travelling to open ambassadorial relationships with the People’s Democratic Republic of China, in a televised address to the people announced to the more than 3,666,000 Chinese people in Thailand that they should “*Not be afraid, you can continue to be Chinese or you can be Thai.*”⁴ Even in the mobilization that led to the violent events of 6 October 1976, in which Chinese students had the greatest role and Vietnamese completely

⁴ **Prachathipatai (Democracy) Newspaper**, 28 June 1975, 1-2.

avoided involvement, the conservatives who used force to ruthlessly suppress demonstrators had to claim that the instigators who were “*a danger to the nation, religion and King*” were “*Vietnamese.*”⁵

Since the late 1970s, when electoral democracy gained in importance and the Thai economy became more connected to the world economy, people of Chinese ethnicity have been highly successful in improving their economic and political status. This improvement, combined with cultural political conditions which changed in circumstances where the “Thai Nation” developed closer friendlier relations with the “Chinese Nation,” and the context that economically and politically the Chinese nation became globally important and Thai royalty travelled many times to China demonstrating great admiration of Chinese art and culture, meant that Chinese people were able to outwardly, safely and fully demonstrate their “Chinese-ness” within the “Thai Nation.” They have done this by on one hand emphasising their “Thai-ness” in the sense of being completely loyal to the “Nation, Religion and King,” and on the other hand emphasising that they are people of Chinese lineage who love the Thai kingdom as their place of birth and greatly love the “Thai Nation.” The People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD), in their battle with Police Lieutenant Colonel Thaksin Shinawatra, the former prime minister who is supported by many people of Lao ethnicity from the North and Northeast, went so far as to announce openly that they were “*Lookjin rak chat*” (“patriotic Thai-born Chinese”) *to help save the Nation.*”⁶

People of other ethnicities who have been “marginalized” or made “the other” have not been as successful as the Chinese. Nevertheless people of many ethnicities have tried to construct memory which links to mainstream memory in order to gain rights and bargaining power.

One group of *Dara-ang*⁷ who migrated from the Burmese border region in 1982 relate memories of the armies of the various factions fighting in the border region frequently coming and exacting their produce and emphasise attachments to Thai people and “Thai-ness” which help give legitimacy to their residence in Thailand. In addition to relating that they were familiar with Thai soldiers in the WWII era when the Thai army took possession of their former abode - Shan state - they also relate memories from the era in which, with loyalty to

⁵ See: Saichol Satayanurak, “**Khukrit kap Pradittakam “Khvam Pen Thai” [Kukrit and the Invention of Thai-ness]**.” Vol 2. Bangkok: Matichon, 2007.

⁶ See: Kasian Tejapira, “The Misbehaving Jeks: The Evolving Regime of Thai-ness and Sino-Thai Challenges” , **Asian Ethnicity**, 10:3, 263-283.

⁷ Dara-ang is the name which the Palaung people use to refer to themselves. It translates as “People on the Mountain.” The group that migrated into Thailand referred to in this article is the group that once lived in the Doi Lai region in Myanmar.

“Thai-ness,” they migrated into Thailand. In particular they relate that when they heard news that the King Rama IX would travel to Doi Angkhang the Dara-ang who lived along the border waited for the day when he would come and when he came about 200 Dara-ang, alongside Lahu, Shan and Yunannese people, gathered to await his arrival. For this occasion the Dara-ang prepared offerings of a Buddha image, a traditional flower bowl offering, and a traditional Dara-ang women’s outfit. These offerings were a representation of their loyalty and asserted that they were kinsfolk who believe in the Buddhist faith in the same manner as the Thai. Speaking of their memories of this day one of the Dara-ang said:

“...The King asked who we were, whether we were Buddhist. At that time we still could not really speak. All we could say was that it was hard for us and therefore we wanted to ask to come and live, ask to live in Thailand, ask to be Thai.

The King granted permission and he also gave us 5,000 Baht to build a temple. We were very glad and we believed that we could come in and live without any problems. Therefore, we moved in to live in Thailand ...”⁸

The events that occurred in that period have become memories that the Dara-ang retells and which live on. These memories are also retold through a song which the Dara-ang sings. The song lyrics at one point state “...We are the red Dara-ang. The Queen gave us clothes. The King rules the country. He also loves the poor. He loves every tribe.”⁹

In the case of the **Lao ethnic group** in the upper North, apart from changing their identity from “Lao” who are backward, lazy and untrustworthy to “Khon Meuang” (urban people) who are advanced, they have also constructed new memories of many kinds. An example is memories of Her Highness **Princess Dara Rasmi** the daughter of the Governor of Chiang Mai who was given in 1886 during the reign of King Rama V (King Chulalongkorn) as a royal consort. In the period in which the Bangkok elite were in the process of expanding their power to rule Chiang Mai directly and up until the 1950s the memory of Princess *Dara Rasmi* constructed by the Northern nobility focused only on her being an important person within the lineage of Chiang Mai nobility who was granted honour and love by the King of Bangkok and thus was an conduit for good relations between the Chiang Mai nobility, the Thai nobility and Thai public servants. However, since the 1950s, Princess *Dara Rasmi* has been built to become a person of importance within Thai national history and local history. This has been

⁸ Sakuni Natphunsap, “Daraang Khon Chaikhop Song Phaendin [Dara-ang: Marginalised People of Two Lands],

Thammasat University Journal of Sociology and Anthropology 21, 1 (2002): 117.

⁹ Ibid, 118.

achieved by placing increased emphasis on the love between her and King Chulalongkorn. The love between them has become the “*tie of love between two Kingdoms*” which resulted in *Lanna* kingdom joining with Siam kingdom to form the secure and prosperous “Thai Nation.”

This memory constructed according to the royal nationalist plot gained even greater force with construction of the *Dara Rasmi* museum, monuments, ceremonies and celebrations. It has become a part of the local history syllabus of many schools and the subject of poetic composition and song lyrics. It has also resulted in the garden around the museum being decorated with “*Chulalongkorn roses*” which are a symbol of the love between their majesties.¹⁰ The Lao people of the upper North are glad to receive this type of memory as it helps them become wholly “Thai.” These memories, when combined with the change to call themselves “*Khon Meuang*,” have resulted in the Lao people of the upper north gradually forgetting their Lao-ness and becoming a fully integrated part of the “Thai nation.”

In **Phrae**, an old city in the upper North, there has also been construction of memory and identity which accords with a royal nationalist plot. This construction has been undertaken by the descendants of the vassal Prince of *Phrae* and has been undertaken in order to change the identity of the vassal prince from that of an “*insurgent*” to a “*person with the highest loyalty*” both to the “Thai nation” and to “The Great Beloved King” (King Rama V or King Chulalongkorn) whom is the King most responsible for protecting the sovereignty of, and modernising, the Thai Nation. When the “*Phrae Rebellion*” (1902) first subsided there were efforts at both the central and regional levels to reduce the acuteness of conflict between the centre and region by emphasizing that the tragedy that had occurred was not the doing of the “*Lao*” in *Phrae* but that rather “*Ngiew bandits had plundered Phrae*.” This was done in order to render the rebels in *Phrae* “others,” that is “*Ngiew*” (Shan), who were only “*bandits plundering the city*” not people who rebelled in order to secede from the “Thai Nation” or people in any way opposing the Great Beloved King of the Thai nation. Nevertheless later, when the administrative reforms in the reign of King Rama 5 were increasingly studied and interest emerged more widely in people’s history and local history, the issue of the rebellion in *Phrae* increasingly appeared in historical writings.

Since the 1970s the greatly increased force of royal nationalist ideology has caused memory that the vassal prince of *Phrae* rebelled against “The Great Beloved King” to have increased impact on his descendants. This has led them to reconstruct history of the “*Ngiew rebellion in Phrae*” by constructing a new plot that the vassal prince of *Phrae* joined with the Bangkok elite in planning that he would provoke the *Ngiew* (Shan), who

¹⁰ Chirachat Santayot, **Phra Racha Chaya Chao Dara Rasmi [Her Royal Highness Princess Dara Rasmi]**. Bangkok: Matichon, 2008.

were backed by the great powers, to rise up and rebel in order to provide an opportunity for the Bangkok government to send the army to subdue them. Acting according to this plan made the general public perceive that the vassal prince of *Phrae* was an insurgent. However the vassal prince was prepared to make this sacrifice in order to let “The Great Beloved King” successfully subdue the *Ngiew* (Shan) and protect the sovereignty of the “Thai nation”. Apart from this, in 1996, the year in which the current King celebrated the 50th year of his reign, the people of *Phrae* made many remembrance books which attempted to construct memory that the people of *Phrae* were very loyal to the Thai nation and the institution of the Thai monarchy. Even when writing of the construction of the city 700 years ago (when the “Thai nation” had not yet emerged) they wrote that *Phaya Phon* built the city out of loyalty to the King of the “Thai nation”. They also constructed a monument of *Phaya Phon*.¹¹ This has resulted in the legendary King of the people of *Phrae* becoming an important person in Thai national history.

In the case of **Meuang Long**, a small old city near *Phrae* which has both Lao and Shan residents and which was the first city in which the “*Ngiew* rebellion” broke out, the last governor of Long was, like the vassal prince of *Phrae*, once seen as “*one of the insurgents*.” However in 1998 a large idol of him was built and posters showing his family history and detailing various accomplishments that attested to his loyalty to the Thai King were displayed. Examples of these accomplishments include the story of his being appointed by King Rama IV and the stories of him having sent good quality iron from *Meuang Long* and two very large teak trees, to be used in the construction of the Giant Swing which is used in important royal ceremonies in Bangkok, as offerings to King Rama IV. Even though according to historical evidence the governor of *Meuang Long* was appointed by the governor of *Lampang* and iron and teak were offered to the King of Bangkok because the governor of *Lampang* was wresting forestry profits from *Meuang Long* and the governor of *Meuang Long* therefore wanted to be subject to Bangkok instead of *Lampang*, and there is no evidence at all that the teak from *Meuang Long* was used to build the Giant Swing. These stories are now constantly reproduced. The stories told by the heirs of the governor of *Meuang Long* tell that out of loyalty the governor of *Meuang Long* took iron to offer to the King of Bangkok every year and explain that he was killed in the “*Ngiew* rebellion” because his offerings of teak led Rama 4 to favour him to such extent that the governor of *Lampang* became jealous and sent the *Ngiew* to assassinate him. In the present day almost residents of villages in the *Meuang Long* area construct memory that their village was the

¹¹ Chaiphong Samniang, “Phonlawat Kan Sang lae Kan Rap Ru Prawatisat Meuang Phrae Pho So 2445-2549” [Dynamics of the construction and perception of the History of Phrae 1902-2006]. Master of Arts Thesis, History Department, Graduate School, Chiang Mai University, 2007.

source of the teak that was used in building the Giant Swing.¹² This occurs because they all want to attest that their village has been loyal to the King of the Thai nation for a long time.

The construction of memory which links to mainstream memory also appears among ethnic groups who are displaced. An example is the **Shan Diasporas** most of whom entered the country illegally, do not have identity cards, are at risk of being arrested and sent back to their previous place of domicile or suffering extortion at the hands of state officials, and are without opportunity to access various state resources such as healthcare and education. These Shan Diasporas have few work choices, suffer being deceived as to wages or having wages reduced, suffer sexual harassment and are looked down on. This is especially so when they are seen as being “Burmese.” This is because Thai people have memory that Burma has been an enemy nation since antiquity and in the present they identify the Burmese as a group of people that create problems, for example crime and epidemic, for Thai society. Amidst these oppressive forces the Shan Diasporas have chosen to use temples in Chiang Mai as an important site in constructing and reproducing memory and identity for themselves. They have done this because use of temple space reduces the suspicions of Thai society and the Thai state. The abbots of *Pa Pao* and *Ku Tao* temples have given good support to various activities of the Shan Diasporas. This is especially so in the case of the abbot of *Pa Pao* temple, which is of Shan lineage and suggested at an academic seminar in 2007 that the Shan and Thai are of the same blood and therefore should help each other.¹³

The Shan Diasporas have tried to link themselves to mainstream “Thai-ness.” They have for instance organised celebrations for important days concerning the Thai King, adorned their houses with the royal portrait, studied Thai, and constructed memories about the Thai nation’s greatest King, namely *King Naresuan*, which contend that he joined with the Shan prince to fight against Burma in the middle of the 16th century. The Shan Diasporas pay homage to monuments of *King Naresuan* which are placed in temples. Both Shan monks and soldiers have had an important role in reproducing memories related to *King Naresuan*. These memories are consequently widely known among the Shan Diasporas.¹⁴

¹² Phudet Saensa, “Meuang Long: Khwam Phan Prae khong Meuang Khanat Lek nai Lanna Chak Rat Charit Teung Patchuban [Mueang Long: Transformation of a Small City in Lanna from the Traditional State to the Present]. Master of Arts Thesis. History Department. Graduate School. Chiang Mai University. 2009. 179-188.

¹³ [online] 2007: http://khonthaijaidee.org/news_openhouse.html

¹⁴ Panphrae Chaoprayun, “Botbat Khong Phuttasasana tor Krabuankan Phalitsam Atalak khong Chao Thai Yai nai Amphoe MueangChangwat Chiang Mai” [The role of Buddhism in the process of reproduction of Shan identity in Chiang Mai city] Master of Arts Thesis. Regional Studies Department. Graduate School. Chiang Mai University. 2007.

As for the **Mon ethnic group**, one segment of the population migrated to and settled in Thailand many hundreds of years ago and have in various localities become members of the Thai upper class and of the Thai population and another segment are Mon Diasporas who have come in large numbers over the last 2-3 decades to sell their labour and whom have been designated “Burmese migrant workers” by the Thai state.

Among the segment of the Thai upper class who are of Mon descent there has been construction of memory of the Mon which identifies the Mon as having been highly civilized since the ancient past. This is done through relating the history of the Mon by returning to the era in which Buddhism flourished in Mon territories and the glory days when the Mon had power over the territory of Burma. Even the ancient Thai’s were influenced by Mon Buddhism and took and used the *Phra Thammasat* Laws from the Mon. This historical picture has much meaning for the Mon in the present¹⁵

Meanwhile the Mon Diasporas have reproduced stories about the relationship between the Great *Sukhothai* King, *King Ramkhamhaeng*, and *King Wareru*, also known as *Chao Fa Rua* or *Magado*, who was a great Mon monarch in the late 13th century.¹⁶ The stories relate that in addition to giving wealth and his daughter to *King Wareru*, *King Ramkhamhaeng* also helped *King Wareru* to establish his rule over the Mon territories. This is a memory which emphasises the divine grace of the Thai King upon which the Mon have relied. The Mon Diasporas hope that the Thai state will permit them to continue to “*depend upon the King’s grace*” into the future. Mon nationalist ideology has also resulted in the Mon Diasporas in Thailand hoping that the Thai people will help the Mon to have their own state once more as occurred in the case of *King Wareru* who was only a poor merchant but was able to found a Mon state because he was aided by the Thai Great King.

Apart from this, some of the Mon who have lived in Thailand for a long time have also constructed new histories. An example is *Ong Banjun* an independent Mon academic and the president of the Mon Youth community in Thailand. He was subjected to the Thai educational system intensively telling him to “become Thai” to the extent that he once felt ashamed of, and despised, his own father - “*the reason was because my father was Mon.*”¹⁷ Nevertheless, in the late 1990s and early 2000’s *Ong Banjun* has had a big part in constructing

¹⁵ <http://www.monstudies.org/config.php?nfile=T1.htm>

¹⁶ <http://www.monstudies.com/smfboard/index.php?topic=397.0>

¹⁷ Ong Banjun, “Ton Thang chak Malamaeng” [The Way from Moulmein]. referred to by Thamrongsak Petchlertanan ,“Naenam Nangseu Rangwan sarakodi “Naiin Awod” 2549 “Ton Thang Chak Malamaeng”” [Introducing the 2006 winner of the Naiin Literature Award for Non-fiction “The Way from Moulmein”] in **Mon-Khamen Seuksa [Mon-Cambodian Studies]**. The Foundation for the Promotion of Social Science and Humanities Textbooks Project. 2008. 14.

memory about the Mon. He has done so by showing that Mon civilization has influenced Thai civilization in many ways - for example ancient law, Buddhism, music and dance.¹⁸ He has also shown that the Mon are important Thai citizens - many Mon have settled in various towns; the first king of the *Chakri* dynasty and his consort (*Phra Mahesi* rank) were Mon; and between the reigns of King Rama I and King Rama V many Mon women were royal consorts, mothers of Thai kings, consorts of Thai royalty and governesses during the princes' youth. The Mon therefore are an important component of the Thai elite.¹⁹ For example *Queen Debsirindra*, a royal consort during the reign of Rama IV, apart from being the royal mother of King Rama V, also had royal sons who were important members of Thai royal lineages, namely the *Jakraphan* and *Phanuphan* lineages. Ong Banjun presents data on Mon women who were born commoners and became royal wives and, in some cases, bore royal children, in a clear and detailed manner. His data shows that in the reign of King Rama I there were 7 such women, in the reign of King Rama II there were 7, in the reign of King Rama III there were 4, in the reign of King Rama IV there were 6 and in the reign of King Rama V there were 26. Many of the Thai upper class, or the aristocratic families, therefore have Mon blood. Examples include the *Sanitwong*, *Kridakon*, *Bunnag*, *Hongthong*, *Na Bangchang*, *Chuto*, *Chatchai* and *Khotchaseni* families.

Ong Banjun also shows that there are Mon who have believed in the *Thammayut Buddhist monastic sect* that Rama 4 established and have had an important role in spreading its influence from Thailand to "Mon Land" (in Myanmar). He shows that they built 52 *Thammayut* temples there and that this has led to construction of more temples so that in the present there are 102 Mon temples dedicated to the *Thammayut*, or as the Mon prefer to call it *Maha Yen*, Buddhist sect.²⁰

It can be seen that some groups of people from within many ethnic groups have tried to construct new sets of memory that connect to mainstream memory. Through this connection some groups want to give their

¹⁸ Ong Banjun, "Phrawatisat Chat Phan Mon Nok Baep Rian Prawatisat Rat Chat" [The History of the Mon Ethnic Group outside textbooks on history of the Nation State], **Ruam Bot Khwam Wichakan Chat Niyom Kap Phahuwattanantam [Collected Academic Essays on Nationalism and Multiculturalism]**, 4-6; and Ong Banjun, **Ying Mon Amnat lae Rachasamnak: Botbat Bueang Lang Prawatisat khong Satri Mon [Mon Women, Power and the Royal Palace: The Behind the Scenes Historical Role of Mon Women]**. Bangkok: Matichon, 2007.

¹⁹ Ong Banjun, **Ying Mon Amnat lae Rachasamnak: Botbat Bueang Lang Prawatisat khong Satri Mon [Mon Women, Power and the Royal Palace: The Behind the Scenes Historical Role of Mon Women]**.

²⁰ Ong Banjun, "Phrawatisat Chat Phan Mon Nok Baep Rian Prawatisat Rat Chat" [The History of the Mon Ethnic Group outside textbooks on history of the Nation State], **Ruam Bot Khwam Wichakan Chat Niyom Kap Phahuwattanantam [Collected Academic Essays on Nationalism and Multiculturalism]**, 17.

group, or their ethnic group, a role in the history of the Thai nation and an identity as people who are loyal to the Thai King whilst some groups want to make people within their ethnic group and within Thai society as a whole aware of the importance of their ethnic group to the Thai Nation which will help them to have increased rights or bargaining power and will reduce, to the greatest extent possible, the contempt that people in Thai society have towards them.

Nevertheless people of different ethnic groups have achieved unequal success in constructing history, or memory, through linking their ethnic group's history with mainstream memory in order to become Thai, or to become a dignified part of the Thai nation. Successfulness has depended on conditions internal to the ethnic group as well as economic and political context. For example people of some ethnic groups exist in contexts that cause them to have a need to cling to their old culture which in turn causes them to be able to "become Thai" only to a small extent and some groups may become Thai in some contexts but preserve their ethnic identity in others. Consequently the linking of ethnic history to mainstream memory is varied as detailed above. In addition, there are also people of many ethnic groups that construct history, or memory, outside the framework of mainstream memory without trying to associate themselves with "Thai-ness." This occurs because they do not want to "become Thai" but rather construct memory for other purposes.

Ethnic Groups' Construction of Memory outside the Framework of Mainstream History

In the context that the state and capital groups have power over local level resource management which causes distress for people of many ethnic groups, people of those ethnic groups have fought to combat the influence of the state and capital groups in many ways. Part of their struggle occurs in the space of memory. For example there are efforts to construct new sets of collective memory for their group to be used as a platform for coming together and bargaining or fighting with the Thai bureaucratic state.

The struggle of the **Malay Muslim** ethnic group in the space of memory consists of both struggle between Malay Muslims and the state and between Malay Muslims and the local Chinese population. There is construction of many histories and memories which shows that the struggle in memory space of Malay Muslims has been very intense over the past two decades. This is because conflict over resources has increased greatly.

The foundations of economic problems arose in the 1950s when the mobilization of some segments of the Malay Muslim intelligentsia who wished to secede from the Thai state and of the Chinese Communist movement led the government of *Field Marshal Sarit* to implement a policy of establishing "Southern development self-help settlements" by moving Thai Buddhists, most of whom were war veterans, to live in villages in the five southern

border provinces and established schools that taught according to the central curriculum and forced students to wear school uniform without permitting female students to cover their faces. This conflicted with the Islamic educational system which emphasised teaching of religion and following of custom. It consequently resulted in resistance in the form of frequent burning of schools and public places. When the government of *Field Marshal Thanom* developed a project to build *Bang Lang Dam* in *Yala Province*, which according to the *Pattani* watershed development plan would take more than 30 years to construct with construction commencing in 1968, problems increased in severity. Many people lost their homes and fields and water management was ineffective because there was no plan to distribute water in a manner consistent with the features of the peoples' cultivation activities.²¹ As for industrial and commercial development this widened the gap between Chinese and Buddhist Thais and the Malay Muslims both in economic and cultural terms. A lot of Chinese from outside and inside the area became capitalists and part of a middle class, most public servants were Thai Buddhists and the Malay Muslims remained farmers, traditional fishermen and labourers within the industrial and service sectors. As such they, like unskilled labourers throughout Thailand, are taken advantage of when it comes to pay and lack of welfare. Traditional fishermen have also been severely affected by the arrival of big fishing boats owned by large capitalists from outside which have caused decline in sea conditions and rapid depletion of fish stocks. Income from traditional fishing is consequently no longer sufficient to support a family and many villagers have had to go and search for work in Malaysia.²²

Malay Muslim villagers do not see the Thai state as their protector. Members of parliament are an interest group and get votes mainly by using money and influence. Even the provincial Islamic Committees have been criticised by villagers as being only a group of people that enter power for their own benefit and do not do anything for the community at large.²³

²¹ Piya Kittaworn, "Chao Malayu Pai Tai Nayobai Phattana" [Malays under development policy] in Nithi Jeosiwong (editor) "Malayu Seuksa Khwam Ru Pheun Than Kiao Kap Prachachon Malayu Muslim Phak Tai" [Malay Studies Foundational Knowledge about the Malay Muslim People of the South], Bangkok: Amarin, 2007. 135-136.

²² Lertchai Sirichai, "Chao Pramong Pheun Ban Changwat Chai Daen Phak Tai Nai Sathanakan Khwam Run Raeng Mum Mong nai Miti Chat Phan Samphan" [Traditional Fishermen of the Southern Border Provinces in the situation of Violence: Viewpoints from the Ethnic Relations Dimension] in "Ruam Bot Khwam Wichakan Prachum Wichakan Chat Niyom Kap Pahuwattanatham Na Sun Prachum Nanachat Rong Raem Di Empret Chiang Mai 22-23 Thanwakom 2551" [Collection of Academic Essays, Academic Conference on Nationalism and Multiculturalism, Empress Hotel International Conference Centre, Chiang Mai, 22-23 December 2008]. 3.

²³ Ibid, 4.

In these circumstances there exists a movement which encourages villagers to detest the Thai state by using two main interrelated reasons. Those reasons are that the Thai state is ruthless and oppresses Muslim people and that in the past the Muslim people once had the great *Pattani* sultanate but that it was seized by the Thai state leading Muslims to be oppressed.²⁴ This type of agitation occurs amid problems of resource competition because when the sea deteriorated, state officials did not enforce the law to protect the villagers but instead have tended to support fishery enterprise who come in and fish along the coast even though these activities are illegal.²⁵

In the present the state resistance movement is attempting to use ethnicity as a tool by making villagers see that their true essence is Malay Muslim-ness and that the Thai state is trying to destroy this. The actions taken have many forms including distorting Islamic teachings, distorting history and establishing practices to show results according to the twisted teachings - for instance using violence against leaders of the traditional fishermen who have collaborated with the state in order to show that “bad Muslims” must be punished²⁶

As for the relationship between villagers of different ethnicities, when resource competition problems did not yet exist and the sea was still rich people of different ethnic groups could live together in the community peacefully. Malay Muslim fishermen would sell sea products to Chinese traders in the village. Each ethnic group depended on the other and each preserved their own ethnic identity whilst accepting the ethnic identity of their neighbours. Chinese people could erect shrines to the Gods, hang talismans with Chinese letters, and build Chinese style graves within the village.²⁷ In **Ban Chueng Kao** which is deep in the mountains and distant from the centre of *Narathiwat* province the Malays and Buddhist Thais whom have migrated to the village are equally poor. This has led them to live together like friends or like relatives who must support each other especially when there is sickness or a catastrophe. *Ban Chueng Kao* still has the new rice ceremony (*prapheni bun khao mai*). This demonstrates the family like relationship between the Thai Buddhists and Malays²⁸

²⁴ Ibid, 3.

²⁵ Ibid, 4.

²⁶ Ibid, 17-18.

²⁷ Ibid, 5.

²⁸ <http://www.geocities.com/banchengkao/03.html> cited in Phrae Sirisakthamrong, “Adit-Patchuban lae Khwam Lak Lai Tang Watanatham nai 3 Changwat Chai Daen Phak Tai” [Past-Present and Cultural Diversity in the Three Southern Border Provinces] in “Ruam Bot Khwam Wichakan Prachum Wichakan Chat Niyom Kap Pahuwattanatham Na Sun Prachum Nanachat Rong Raem Di Empret Chiang Mai 22-23 Thanwakom 2551” [Collection of Academic Essays,

As for the areas where there is strong competition over resources, whether because of seizure of land or depletion of sea resources, history, or memory, plays a large role in the struggles of the various sides.

Some very important works are the books on the **History of Pattani** which have been written by the Malay Muslim elite to build pride in their own area by showing that it had been an advanced independent kingdom since ancient times. These books tend to begin by stating that in the past *Pattani* flourished, it had its own monarchs who ruled for many dynasties and whom built prosperity for the country enabling *Pattani* to hold power for two centuries, have a wide network of relationships with other countries, and be a large seaport to which merchants of many nationalities came to trade and where some took up residence to trade permanently. *Pattani* is therefore a state of great importance to the history of the Malay world.²⁹ This history of *Pattani* is the retort of Malay Muslim people who have been seen by Thai government authorities as possessing a culture which is inferior to that of the Buddhist Thais. In addition to emphasising that *Pattani* has been an advanced independent state for a long time there are also attempts to emphasise that *Pattani* has been an important Islamic educational centre since ancient times. It is even claimed that the educational establishments known as *pondok* emerged in *Pattani* before emerging in other cities of the Malay peninsula.³⁰

History written to construct memory specifically about *Haji Sulong Abdul Kadir* who was killed by state officials has many forms. This reflects that even among the Malay Muslim elite individuals have different objectives in their ideological and political struggles.

Ibrahim Shukri in the book “**Prawatisat Ratcha Anachak Malayu Patani**” (**History of the Malay Patani Kingdom**) states that *Haji Sulong Abdul Kadir* wanted to secede because of mistreatment by Siamese public officials and because it was right and just that the “Malay ethnic group” have rights and independence, that they “*not be another country’s colony.*” *Ibrahim Shukri’s* analysis constructs memory of the “*insurgent Haji Sulong Abdul Kadir*” that actually he was not an insurgent but rather was a hero of the Malay people that “*demande rights to which they were entitled and acted to protect their territory*” by attempting to fight for

Academic Conference on Nationalism and Multiculturalism, Empress Hotel International Conference Centre, Chiang Mai, 22-23 December 2008]. 16.

²⁹ Phrae Sirisakthamrong, “Adit-Patchuban lae Khwam Lak Lai Tang Watanatham nai 3 Changwat Chai Daen Phak Tai” [Past-Present and Cultural Diversity in the Three Southern Border Provinces] in “Ruam Bot Khwam Wichakan Prachum Wichakan Chat Niyom Kap Pahuwattanatham” [Collection of Academic Essays, Academic Conference on Nationalism and Multiculturalism], 3-5.

³⁰ Nidhi Ieosiwong, Lecture for the Course ‘Malay Studies for Reconciliation’ on the topic of ‘History of Langkasuka and Pattani’ at College of Islamic Studies, Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani 11-12 May 2006.

independence and that these efforts led him, along with his eldest son and two friends, to be killed in an inhumane manner.³¹

Another person who uses the pseudonym “*Saeng Phet*” has analysed that *Haji Sulong Abdul Kadir* did not want to secede. Rather he tried to lead people with separatist thoughts to accept living under the power of the Thai state. *Saeng Phet* points out that even though *Haji Sulong Abdul Kadir*’s actions were undertaken in order to “*protect the culture of Malay people and create autonomous administrative units for the Muslim province that would be under the administration of the Thai government*” his demands did not receive interest from the government.³² This work of *Saeng Phet*’s reflects the author’s desire to see this territory remain part of the Thai state but suggests the Thai state must protect the culture of the Malay Muslims or allow the Malay’s to protect their Malay ethnic identity.

Arifin Binji, in the book “**Patani Prawatisat lae Kan Mueang nai Lok Malayu**” (**Patani: History and Politics in the Malay World**) states that *Haji Suolong Abdul Kadir* did not want to violate the constitution or to secede, rather he wanted only to “*solve the problems of post World War II economic hardship and the unlawful behaviour of state officials at that time.*”³³ It can be clearly seen that *Arifin Binji* wants the state to solve economic problems and to make state officials stop oppressing Malay Muslims.

In addition to struggling through creation of memory concerning the history of the *Pattani* Kingdom and *Haji Sulong Abdul Kadir* there is also **construction among the general population of memory related to important events and village history**. This reflects the feelings of dissension and distrust existing in relations among people. Generally Malay Muslims, Thai Buddhists and Chinese in each area have different painful memories. For instance the Malay’s may remember stories in which state leaders discriminated against Malay people, including discrimination, intentional or unintentional, that results from state policies which cause hardship

³¹ Ibrahim Shukri, **Prawatisat Racha Anachak Malayu Patani [History of the Kingdom of Patani]** cited in Phrae Sirisakthamrong, “Adit-Patchuban lae Khwam Lak Lai Tang Watanatham nai 3 Changwat Chai Daen Phak Tai” [Past-Present and Cultural Diversity in the Three Southern Border Provinces] in “Ruam Bot Khwam Wichakan Prachum Wichakan Chat Niyom Kap Pahuwattanatham Na Sun Prachum Nanachat Rong Raem Di Empret Chiang Mai 22-23 Thanwakom 2551” [Collection of Academic Essays, Academic Conference on Nationalism and Multiculturalism, Empress Hotel International Conference Centre, Chiang Mai, 22-23 December 2008]. 5.

³² Saeng Phet (pseudonym), “**Pom Prawat “Rat Pattani” Fai Tai Mai Khoi Dap**” [**The Knot of History “Pattani State” The Southern Fire that has Never Been Extinguished**] Bangkok: Wanchana printers, 2003.

³³ Arifin Binji, Abdulla La Omen, Suhaimi Ismail, **Patani Prawatisat lae Kan Mueang nai Lok Malayu [Patani: History and Politics in the Malay World]**, Songkhla: Southern Islamic Culture Foundation. 2007. 261.

for the people; Thai Buddhists, or to put it another way the state's people, for example teachers, may remember stories of teachers in the area being harmed or kidnapped; and Chinese may remember stories of some separatist movements making demands for protection money.³⁴

As for stories in the Malay Muslim community of the era of *Field Marshal Phiboonlsongkram's* government during World War II, these stories tend to emphasise the issue of the government destroying Malay Muslim culture for instance by not allowing Malay or Arab languages to be taught; requiring Thai to be used in communications with government officials; requiring Malay Muslims to change their names to Thai names; forbidding study of the Koran; forcing adoption of modern laws and the modern justice system in place of Islamic Law and the office of the *Datoh Yutitham* (Qadi) who decided cases concerning family law and inheritance according to Islamic Law;³⁵ forcing Malay Muslims to dress according to state edicts including forbidding Malay men to wear *sarongs* or *taqiyah* (Muslim prayer caps), forbidding women to wear the *Hijab* and requiring all Muslims to dress in western style. It related that in this era Malay people could not enter district offices to communicate with the public officials wearing a *sarong*. In front of the district office there would be a shop for them to rent trousers. In some areas there are stories that Malay Muslims were forced to pay respect to images of Buddha.³⁶ In some areas it is also told that officials kicked people who wore *sarongs* in the street, pulled off young women's *hijab*, used men's *taqiyah* as *takraw* balls, and hit women market vendors with their gunstocks because they were wearing *kebaya* (traditional blouses) and had covered their heads.³⁷

These stories and memories reflect that deep down Malay Muslims want the state to accept their Malay Muslim identity which means accepting their right to life according to their religion, use their language, and maintain other aspects of their culture. These stories and memories are also a part of the struggle to remind descendants, relatives and neighbours not to trust state power. In the same way as **stories and memory of the Ko**

³⁴ Phrae Sirisakthamrong, "Adit-Patchuban lae Khwam Lak Lai Tang Watanatham nai 3 Changwat Chai Daen Phak Tai" [Past-Present and Cultural Diversity in the Three Southern Border Provinces] in 'Ruam Bot Khwam Wichakan Prachum Wichakan Chat Niyom Kap Pahuwattanatham' [Collection of Academic Essays, Academic Conference on Nationalism and Multiculturalism], 6.

³⁵ Ibid, 7.

³⁶ Piya Kittaworn, "Chao Malayu Pai Tai Nayobai Phattana" [Malays under development policy] in **Malayu Seuksa Khwam Ru Pheun Than Kiao Kap Prachachon Malayu Muslim Phak Tai [Malay Studies Foundational Knowledge about the Malay Muslim People of the South]**, 127.

³⁷ Supalak Ganjanakhundee, Don Pathan, **Santiphap nai Pao Ploeng [Peace in Flames]**. Bangkok: Nation Books, 2003. 137.

To Bridge incident of 29 November 1975 they reflect that villagers in the three Southern Border provinces want justice which is to be achieved by officials ceasing to oppress them and an end being put to discrimination against Muslims.

The **Ko To Bridge incident** is the story of a Malay boy called *Sue-mae*, his older brother and four of his older brother's friends. All were Muslim. They travelled together past a post of the royal Thai marines and were attacked there by "people in green uniforms." Five of the men were killed. The corpses were taken to be disposed of at *Ko To Bridge*. *Sue-mae*, who pretended that he was dead, was able to rise from the water and recount what had happened to the villagers. This led to large protest meetings in front of the town hall on the 11th of December 1975. On the 13th someone threw a bomb into the group of protestors killing 13 and injuring 40. The next day religious leaders announced that everyone who had died was a *shahid* (religious martyr) and the protestors moved to in front of the central mosque. The number of protestors increased to a hundred thousand. Eventually a government representative came to negotiate. The protests therefore ended on the 24th of January 1976.³⁸

Memories of **the Ko To Bridge incident**, in addition to reinforcing feelings that state officials, whom are Buddhist, harm villagers, also gives rise to stories which increase dissension between Muslims and Buddhists in the local area. For instance it is recounted that when relatives took people injured by the bomb to *Pattani Hospital* some Thai Buddhist doctors and nurses showed loathing towards, and spoke harshly to them because they were displeased with the Malay Muslims protests; that the headmaster of one school reprimanded students who joined the protest; and that when there were protests over Buddhist teachers being held for ransom Muslim teachers joined in but that when the Muslims protested in front of the central mosque no Buddhists came to support them.³⁹

The struggle of the Malay Muslims in the South also appears in the form of the "**Kampong.**" *Kampong* are stories of village history which demonstrate the competition for memory space caused by desire to claim rights to ownership of the village and gain power in managing village resources. In relating their village history most Malay Muslims will state that the village founders were Malay Muslims in order to emphasise their legitimate rights as owners. People in many villages will also emphasise their village's connection to *Kelantan* state in

³⁸ Arifin Binji, Abdulla La Omen, Suhaimi Ismail, **Patani Prawatisat lae Kan Mueang nai Lok Malayu [Patani: History and Politics in the Malay World]**, Songkhla: Southern Islamic Culture Foundation. 2007. 383-387.

³⁹ Phrae Sirisakthamrong, "Adit-Patchuban lae Khwam Lak Lai Tang Watanatham nai 3 Changwat Chai Daen Phak Tai" [Past-Present and Cultural Diversity in the Three Southern Border Provinces] in 'Ruam Bot Khwam Wichakan Prachum Wichakan Chat Niyom Kap Pahuwattanatham' [Collection of Academic Essays, Academic Conference on Nationalism and Multiculturalism], 8.

Malaysia where the population are also Malay Muslim, for example by relating that Malay Muslims from *Kelantan* were the founders of the village. This type of narrative remains powerful in the present.

Ban Kuemeng in *Raman* District, *Yala* province, has a record of having had good relations with the ruler of *Kota Baru* (in Malaysia) in the past. Although in this village there are narratives of cooperation with the state and of local development in which the state has taken part there is also a narrative concerning the history of struggle between a community hero, *Khru Posu Mawaedisa*, and the Thai state. The state sees *Kru Posu* as a separatist. However the local villagers see him as a developer and a village champion. Villagers in this village were dissatisfied when the state named the village “*Kameng*” (village with many goats). The villagers wanted to use the name “*Kuemeng*” which comes from the name “*Tokuemeng*” instead. *Tokuemeng* is the name of a woman who was revered by the community in former times and whom was perceived as having been virtuous, had a bright mind, been beautiful, had long wavy hair, spoken gently and been an expert in every field of weaponry and magic.⁴⁰

These memories of village history of Malay Muslims do not only reflect that the villagers feel bound to Malay Muslims in Malaysia. Memories that Malay Muslims’ built the villages also gives the villagers greater legitimacy as village owners than Chinese or Thai Buddhist residents. Memories concerning the village name in *Ban Kuemeng* also reflect Malay Muslims’ desire to fight back against identity given to them by the Thai state. These memories challenge both the identity of Malays who are seen by the state and society as inferior to Buddhists and the identity of Malay Muslim Woman who are seen as being powerless, unintelligent and not beautiful according to Thai or Chinese standards.

The Chinese in the lower South also have memories about their villages that build legitimacy for them as village owners. For instance villagers in *Satingphra* and *Ranot* districts in *Songkhla* province tell of a community that emerged in the process of clearing virgin forest and the role of Chinese traders in building the community. In some villages where the Chinese are very influential they accept that Malay Muslims founded their village but speak of the role of the Chinese in building prosperity. An example is *Ban Ku Nu Chanong*, in *Betong*

⁴⁰ Elissa Hasamo, “Kan Wikro Phap Ruam Khrongkan Wichai Kan Phattana Chum Chon Doi Chum Chon nai Satanakan Khwam Khat Yaeng Nai Pheun Thi 3 Changwat Chai Daen Phak Tai [Analysis of the Overall Picture of Research on Community-led Community Development Programs in Circumstances of Conflict in the 3 Southern Border Provinces] in “Ruam Bot Khwam Wichakan Prachum Wichakan Chat Niyom Kap Pahuwattanatham Na Sun Prachum Nanachat Rong Raem Di Empret Chiang Mai 22-23 Thanwakom 2551” [Collection of Academic Essays, Academic Conference on Nationalism and Multiculturalism Empress Hotel International Conference Centre, Chiang Mai, 22-23 December 2008], 20-26.

district, *Yala* where it is said that at first there were only Malay's but that in 1800 young men and women from China travelled by ferry to Malaysia and journeyed to *Betong* in order to reside and to trade. At that time it is said *Betong* was still jungle and still full of wild animals. Business progressed steadily and soon more Chinese people came to settle.⁴¹ Another example is *Tambon Koyo*, *Songkhla* province. There is a narrative that two Chinese people from *Shianghai* came to this village and taught the villagers how to use the flying shuttle handloom to weave cloth causing the weaving handiwork of *Koyo* to become famous and to become an important part of the areas cultural heritage.⁴²

As for tension and conflict between the Malay Muslims and the Chinese, whom have unequal economic and political power, this can be clearly seen in the construction of memory about the **Goddess Lim Ko Niao** and **Krue Se Mosque**. There are many subplots to these memories. This reflects that there is struggle between many factions each of whom has a different political purpose – some construct memory to contend with other ethnic groups in the local area, some to contend with the Thai state.

The story of the *Goddess Lim Ko Niao* and *Krue Se Mosque* which is most prevalent in the present tells the story of the *Goddess Lim Ko Niao* cursing her older brother, *Lim To Khiam*, to prevent him successfully building *Krue Se Mosque*. However this kind of narrative was constructed only recently. The stories in the past did not mention cursing at all. For instance the **Phong Sao Dan Meuang Pattani (Pattani Chronicle)**, which was written by a local Chinese leader who was appointed to a position as a public official of Siam and was printed in 1902, relates that *Lim To Khiam*, who was *Hokkien* Chinese, migrated from China to *Ban Krue Se*. In *Ban Krue Se* he married a Malay wife and he consequently converted to Islam. His younger sister, *Lim Ko Niao*, followed him to *Ban Krue Se* in order to plead with him to abandon being Malay and to return to see his mother in China. *Lim To Khiam* refused to return. *Lim Ko Niao* was so upset that she hung herself. *Lim To Khiam* buried her at *Krue Se*. The Chinese believe that she was an innocent girl who loved her country and family. They make offerings to her every year without fail. In this version from the **Phong Sao Dan Meuang Pattani (Pattani Chronicle)** there is no statement or passage that refers to *Lim Ko Niao*'s curse. It is mentioned that *Krue Se mosque* is in a state of disrepair but there is not mentioned why this is. In the same manner the book **Sejarah Kerajaan Melayu Patani (History of the Malay Patani Kingdom)**, which was printed in 1985 and written by *Ibrahim Syukri*, also speaks of the death of *Lim Ko Niao* without any story about a curse. Likewise the book

⁴¹ Ibid, 20.

⁴² Sommai Phongphruek, "Hattakam Pha To Phuen Ban Koyo" [Local Weaving Handicraft of Koyo] Patum Thani University, Koyo Women's Weaving Group, 2005. 8.

Prawat Chao Mae Lim Ko Niao (History of the Goddess Lim Ko Niao), in the versions printed by the Sacred Place Foundation in 1991, 1999 and 2001, also does not include any statement or passage about *Chao Mae Lim Ko Niao*'s curse. They state only that her older brother volunteered to help the ruler of *Pattani* build a mosque. Towards the end they also say that *Lim Ko Niao* helped the descendants of the ruler of *Pattani* fight against insurgents.⁴³ This reflects that this Chinese foundation does not want to relate stories that show the conflict and tension in relations between Chinese diasporas and Malay Muslims in the area.

The first written work to mention *Lim Ko Niao*'s curse was written by a local Chinese person called *Suwit Khananurak* who claims to have received the story from *Khunphotsaraban*, the second son of *Phra Chin Khananurak* who was once an important leader of *Pattani*. In the present this version of the history of the *Goddess Lim Ko Niao* is disseminated widely both through retelling and in written form. A state department, the Tourism Authority of Thailand, has played a particularly strong role in this dissemination as in recommending tourist attractions it uses expressions that emphasise the emotions felt by *Lim Ko Niao* before she killed herself. This has led tourists and the general population to become aware of the story of *Krue Se mosque* through the legend of *Chao Mae Lim Ko Niao*.⁴⁴ The narrative that a Chinese person built *Krue Se mosque* and the reason for its construction was not successful stem from the discontent of the Chinese. This narrative therefore occupies the memory space of people in Thai society in general. It implies that success or failure in building prosperity for a locality depends mainly on the Chinese.

Malay Muslims tell the story of the construction of *Krue Se mosque* very differently to the Chinese. An example is the book **Sayarah Pattani (Religious History of Pattani)** which relates that this mosque was built by Muslims with the *Sultan Long Yunus* being the person who ordered its construction in approximately 1722. The reason construction was unsuccessful was because it was interrupted by a war over the right to the throne between *Sultan Long Yunus* and *Ratu Pakalan*. As for the **Hikayat Patani (Patani Saga)** this book relates that *Sultan Muzaffar Shah* was the person who ordered the construction of *Krue Se mosque* and that it was razed when the Siamese army came to make war with *Pattani*.⁴⁵ It can be seen that the **Hikayat Patani** explains the problems of

⁴³ Phrae Sirisakdamkoeng, "Patisamphan Rawang Chao Malayu Muslim lae Chao Chin nai Yan Sai Klang Changwat Yala [Interaction between Malay Muslims and Chinese in Neutral Areas in Yala Province] Master of Arts Thesis. Department of Anthropology. Silpakorn University, 2003.

⁴⁴ www.bloggang.com

⁴⁵ Phrae Sirisakthamrong, "Adit-Patchuban lae Khwam Lak Lai Tang Watanatham nai 3 Changwat Chai Daen Phak Tai" [Past-Present and Cultural Diversity in the Three Southern Border Provinces] in "Ruam Bot Khwam Wichakan

Malay Muslim people as coming from the Siamese states expansion of power. This type of narrative arises in order to build legitimacy for mobilization to oppose the Thai government and to support secession.

Regarding the casting of the **Pattani cannons**, Malay Muslims also have different legends to the Chinese who relate that *Lim To Khiam* was the person who cast the cannons and that he sacrificed his life in order to assure that the casting was successful. For example the **Hikayat Patani** relates that *Sultan Muzaffar Shah* ordered the casting of the cannons, the craftsmen was from *Muang Room* (Rome) and was called *Abdul Sorbad*, and although there were problems at first, eventually, due to the virtue of the *Sultan*, the casting was successful.⁴⁶ This reflects that the Malay's do not accept that the Chinese brought technology or prosperity to *Pattani* or had any part at all in fighting for *Pattani*.

A phenomenon which can be seen clearly in the present is the increase in importance of worshipping Goddess *Lim Ko Niao* among the Chinese community. They have built a large shrine to *Goddess Lim Ko Niao* and have moved it to stand close to *Krue Se mosque*. This has occurred at the same time Malay Muslims have made *Krue Se mosque*, which the Fine Arts Department long ago declared to be a historic site, return once more to being an active mosque which is used for religious observances. The Malay Muslims consider this mosque to be an important symbol and historical memorial of *Pattani*.⁴⁷ Memories of *Krue Se mosque* and *Goddess Lim Ko Niao* therefore continue to form part of the tension and conflict between Chinese and Malay Muslims in the present.⁴⁸

The fight in memory space between the Chinese and Malay Muslims has arisen in the context that the free capitalist economy has come to have greater influence giving the Chinese, who have trading businesses heavily involved in export and international trade, better economic opportunities leading them to take advantage of resources in almost all possible ways. This use of resources has caused Malay Muslims to be unable to adapt quickly enough and to become disadvantaged. This has occurred even though the Malays consider themselves the owners of the land and resources. In this context the Malays see the building of a new tomb for *Goddess Lim Ko Niao* close to *Krue Se mosque* has the characteristic of an encroachment on the Muslim peoples' sacred site.

Prachum Wichakan Chat Niyom Kap Pahuwattanatham" [Collection of Academic Essays, Academic Conference on Nationalism and Multiculturalism], 12-13.

⁴⁶ Srisak Wanlaliphodom, Pol.Maj.Gen. Chamroon Denudom, Abdulla La Omen, Udom Patonwong et al **"Lao Khan Tamnan Tai"** [Narrating Legends of the South]. Research Centre for Peace Building, Mahidol University, 2003, 52.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 41.

⁴⁸ Srisak Wanlaliphodom, **Fai Tai Rue Ja Dap?** [Southern Fire: What will extinguish it?] 2003,165-167.

Mobilization by the new generation of Muslims to restore *Krue Se mosque* to being an important religious site can be considered an effort to expunge the curse and the Chinese peoples' new *Pattani* legend.⁴⁹

In the **Northeast of Thailand** the struggle between people of different ethnic groups in the space of memory is clearly visible in the construction of memory related to **“Pho Phaya Si Khiao” in Sikhui district**, Nakhon Ratchasima province.⁵⁰ *Pho Phaya Si Khiao* is a sacred entity that people of all ethnicities in *Sikhui* district worship. However, *Pho Phaya Si Khiao* does not have the same meaning for people of each ethnic group. The *Tai-Yuan* people - who migrated from the upper North, the *Lao-Isan* people, the *Tai-Khorat* people, the public servants and the Chinese in the *Sikhui* market have all constructed memories related to *Pho Phaya Si Khiao* in order to contend for memory space which will create bargaining power for their ethnic group.

At first *Pho Phaya Si Khiao* was the guardian spirit of the *Tai-Yuan* people in *Sikhui* district. As this group of *Yuan* migrated from *Lanna* (in Northern Thailand), in order to make themselves the most important group within *Sikhui*, they constructed memory that *Pho Phaya Si Khiao* was a Prince from *Chiang Saen* who founded *Sikhui*. Meanwhile the “regular rice eating Lao”, (*Lao-Isan*) who lived in *Sung Noen* district, and the *Tai-Khorat* people, who lived nearby, saw *Pho Phaya Si Khiao* as having been merely an evil giant who had a change of heart. He was not as great as the *Tai-Yuan* in *Sikhui* believed and did not have any role in establishing the settlement. This is a rejection of the claim that the *Tai-Yuan* people founded *Sikhui*.

Later public servants in *Sikhui* district asked a local expert to record the legend of *Pho Phaya Si Khiao* in writing. The legend recorded tells the story according to the beliefs of the *Thai-Yuan*. It states that after receiving a sign from *Indra* the Prince of *Chiang Saen* moved his residence southwards and built *Sikhui*. However he later acted immorally by having a soldier kill people for him to eat. This caused him to become a Green Giant. When the giant was killed the prince returned to human form and then became a sacred entity worshipped by the people of *Sikhui*.⁵¹ The narrative constructed by government officials probably adheres to the *Tai-Yuan* legend because this legend is consistent with mainstream history which relates that the Thai king who built and ruled the

⁴⁹ Srisak Wanlaliphodom, Pol.Maj.Gen. Chamroon Denudom, Abdulla La Omen, Udom Patonwong et al **“Lao Khan Tamnan Tai” [Narrating Legends of the South]**. 53-54.

⁵⁰ See: Siriya Samutkhup and Pattana Kitiarsa, **“Yuan Sikhio” nai Chum Chon Chat Phan: Rueang Lao, Khwam Songcham lae Atalak Khong Klum Chat Phan Thai Yuan nai Changwat Nakhon Ratchasima” [Yuan Sikhiew in the Ethnic Junctions: Narratives, Memories, and Identities of the Tai Yuan in Sikhiew District, Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand]**; Sombun Printing Press, 2001.

⁵¹ Ibid, 123-126.

Kingdom of Ayutthaya descended from the royal family that ruled Chiang Saen. Moreover, the government offices in *Sikhiu* district have built a monument to *Pho Phaya Si Khiao* and have called it the “*Phraya Sikhiu of Siam Monument*.” This monument is built as an image of a man with short hair worn in the *Mahat Thai* style and wearing a stiff collared *Raja* pattern blazer as public servants did during the period of the absolute monarchy. He is standing with his face turned towards the entry to *Sikhiu* hospital. The characteristics of the monument, and the name “*Phraya Sikhiu of Siam Monument*,” cause “*Phraya Sikhiu*” to become a representative of the power of the Thai state over the local people and its ideology. On the base of the monument there is an image of a crouching tiger instead of the giant who appears in the legend. This is because an image of a giant would present a negative image of the ideology of “*nation, religion and King*.” On the other hand the tiger is king of the forests and mountains its image thus implies that the government protects the lands, and relieves the sufferings and enriches the happiness of the people. Therefore, this monument is a symbol that communicates to people that the hospital and public servants perform the function of relieving their sufferings and enriching the happiness in the same manner as *Pho Phaya Si Khiao*.⁵²

At the same time as the government was constructing the monument the Chinese in the market in *Sikhiu* district built their own shrine to *Pho Phaya Si Khiao* and constructed memory that an old Chinese man who went to pay respect to the shrine of *Pho Phaya Si Khiao* won first prize in the government lottery and therefore built a new Chinese style shrine and invited *Pho Phaya Si Khiao*'s spirit to come and dwell in it.⁵³ The Chinese have also added to this story that *Pho Phaya Si Khiao* did not want to reside in the old shrine of the Tai-Yuan people and showed this through miraculously breaking a path through the water hyacinth that grew densely in the public marsh, brushing the plants to its edge and communicating his purpose, namely his desire to move to a new shrine, through a medium. The construction of a Chinese shrine and this narrative reflect that the Chinese have come and seized the economic, political and religious ideological power of the Tai-Yuan of *Sikhiu*.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Sudaphon Hongnakhon, “Prapheni Phithikam Khao Song Pho Phaya Si Khiao Khong Chao Thai Yuan Ban Sikhio Tambon Sikhio Amphoe Sikhio Changwat Nakhon Ratchasima” [Thai Yuan Traditions And Rituals Based On Shamanism Of Po-Pya-Si-Kiaw At Ban Sikhiu, Amphoe Sikhiu, Nakorn Ratchasima]. Master of Arts Thesis. Department of Thai Studies. Mahasarakham University, 1996.

⁵⁴ Siriya Samutkhup and Pattana Kitiarsa, “**Yuan Sikhio**” **nai Chum Chon Chat Phan: Rueang Lao, Khwam Songcham lae Atalak Khong Klum Chat Phan Thai Yuan nai Changwat Nakhon Ratchasima**” [Yuan Sikhiew in the Ethnic Junctions: Narratives, Memories, and Identities of the Tai Yuan in Sikhiew District, Nakhon Ratchasima].

The struggle in memory space of ethnic groups who live in the highlands or mountain forests is also intense with people of many ethnic groups, for different purposes, constructing memory outside the framework of mainstream memory.

The *Khamu* ethnic group in Nan province, who farm in remote border areas and are faced with problems of expropriation of their land for construction of reservoirs, have struggled against outside competition for resources and faced being looked down on, including being identified as having the status of being other peoples' slaves. It is difficult for them to look for a way to "become Thai" because they are too poor. These *Khamu* have tried to build unity within their community and to fight feelings of inferiority by reviving an ethnic social consciousness in order to emphasise their identity as *Khamu* who have faced hardship together. This has included reviving ceremonies, building museums, and resurrecting the legend that shows that people of all ethnic groups are related. These actions render the *Khamu* able to take pride in being *Khamu* and reduce their feelings of inferiority.⁵⁵

The *Lawa* ethnic group have been native to the *Lanna* region since antiquity. However they were defeated by the *Tai-Lao* ethnic group and so had to go and settle in the forested mountain areas. They remain poor into the present day and in the eyes of Thai people and the "*Khon Meuang*" (whom in the past were "*Tai-Lao* people") the *Lawa* are still seen as a backward, uncivilized ethnic group. Therefore, the *Lawa* battle hard in memory space to attain equality and to have power to bargain with other people in Thai society.

The memory constructed by the *Lawa* places *Lawa* at the centre by tying their story to "*Khun Luang Wilangkha*" who appears in contemporary legends alongside *Princess Cham Thewi* of the Kingdom of *Haripunchai (Lumphoon)*. The *Lawa* have passed on the memory that "*In our country the Lawa were once in charge*" and they have *Khun Luang Wilangkha* as their spiritual centre and a symbol of sacred forces that the *Lawa* respect and fear.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Chusak Withayaphak, "Khamu Het Hai Khamu Het Na Phum Atalak Lae Prawatisat Chat Phan nai Phak Neua Khong Prathet Thai" [Khamu Tend the Crops, Khamu Tend the Rice: The Geogrpahy of Identity and History of Ethnic Groups in the North of Thailand]. **Chiang Mai University Journal of Social Science**. Year 17, Issue 1/2003. 140-172.

⁵⁶ Phaisan Thaimai et al. "Rai Ngan Wichai Chabap Sombun "Khronkan Prawatisat Khun Luang Wilangkha kap Kan Soem Sang Khwam Khem Khaeng Khong Chum Chon Meuang Ka Tambon Saluang Amphoe Mae Rim Changwat Chiang Mai"" [Complete Research Report: Project on the History of Khun Luang Wilangkha and reinforcing the

One thing the *Lawa* regard as cultural heritage worth being proud of is the *Lawa* language. The *Lawa* language is an ancient language and the *Lawa* have gone so far as to construct memory that every language in the world was derived from it. The *Lawa* language, in addition to having sounds that are hard to imitate, is not passed on through letters. In order to protect themselves from being seen as a backward, uncivilised people the *Lawa* explain their lack of an alphabet by saying that in the past the *Lawa* had an alphabet but it was stolen, the *Lawa* therefore no longer write letters because they are afraid they will be stolen again. It is noteworthy that the context that ethnic groups in Thai society are trying to revive their ethnic identities has caused the *Lawa* to also have to explain why they tend to abandon their language so as not to be seen as people who do not love their own traditions. Specifically, when *Lawa* marry people of other ethnic groups they change to use the language of that ethnic group in place of their own. The *Lawa* explain that this is because the sounds in the *Lawa* language are hard to imitate and the *Lawa* language is hard to pass on.⁵⁷ In truth, the *Lawa* in the present day are still identified as backward and uncivilized causing them to want to change their identity or suppress and cover-over their *Lawa-ness*.

Nevertheless the *Lawa* are trying to construct a new identity. In addition to constructing memory about the *Lawa* language, as described above, they have also tried to prove that the *Lawa* have been an advanced group since ancient times, are an indigenous group who settled down and established a "state" before the emergence of the *Lanna* kingdom in Northern Thailand and have had an important political role - for example *Ai Fa* was sent by *King Mangrai* of *Chiang Mai* to be a spy in *Haripunchai* kingdom and subsequently became the ruler of *Haripunchai* in 1281 A.D.,⁵⁸

The Akha ethnic group are another group who feel that the value of people of the various ethnic groups has been reduced to that of a commodity and who have tried to fight back and negate the discourse that "*hilltribe people are dirty, hilltribe people prostitute themselves*" by demanding that "*we tribes people should help each other out, make them know that we are not like that, as they make accusations, let them know that tribes people also have good aspects.*" Apart from building *Akha* museums in order to show that their lifestyle is good and

strength of the Meuang Ka Community, Tambon Saluang, Mae Rim district, Chiang Mai Province] Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2006, 1-6.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 6.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 28.

they are not backward they have also called on *Akha* people to “*join in correcting Akha history to create fairness and to reduce ethnic bias*”⁵⁹

In writing this *Akha* history *Akha* people have emphasised their long history commencing from when the *Akha* lived in “*free lands*” and had “*a ruler who was Akha.*” They recount that even when, fleeing danger of invasion, the *Akha* migrated and became separated *Akha* worldwide continued to feel the ties of brotherhood. After telling of how they have fought against various problems and obstacles, always without becoming discouraged, they then state that in the present *Akha* have adapted to the age of globalization and are involved, at all levels from community to national, in pushing forward various policies and call on *Akha* people to join together to fight in order to solve the problem that *Akha* culture is wrongly perceived by people of other cultures. An important narrative that the group of people writing *Akha* history have tried to respond to is the narrative of the “**hugging field**” which was constructed in 1950 by *Bunchuai Srisawat* in the book **30 Chat nai Chiang Rai (30 Nationalities in Chiang Rai)** and has been continually reproduced in novels, films and songs. This memory causes young *Akha* girls to be looked down upon and to suffer sexual harassment. The *Akha* have therefore tried to prove that in *Akha* society there is no “*hugging field*” of any sort.⁶⁰

As for the struggle in memory space of the **Red Lahu ethnic group** this struggle has occurred amidst the impact of capitalism which has brought unknown things into the *Red Lahu* community both through people from outside, for example tourists, and through the children and grandchildren of the *Red Lahu* who go to cities to study or work.⁶¹ The *Red Lahu* have “*prepared to face the flow of invasion from outside*” by depending on various devices, for example old knowledge and traditional culture. At the same time they have also constructed a *Red Lahu* history.⁶²

⁵⁹ <http://www.hilltribe.org/thai/webboard/main.php?board=001236&topboard=3>

⁶⁰ Ayi (P. Ayi) on Saturday 9 December 2006 at 13:06, IP :

203.150.133.30 <http://www.hilltribe.org/thai/webboard/main.php?board=001236&topboard=3>

⁶¹ Yapho Jatikoi et al. “Khongkan Wichai Kan Seuksa Phumpanya Musoe Daeng ban Hua Pai, Tambon Wiang Nuea, Amphoe Pai, Changwat Mae Hong Son” [Research Project Study of Traditional Knowledge of the Red Lahu, Ban Hua Pai, Tambon Wiang Nuea, Pai District, Mae Hong Son Province] (Pathum Thani University: Thailand Research Fund), 1.

⁶² Ibid, 2.

The *Lahu Nyi* or *Lahu-ya* (*Mussuh Daeng*) have written history to demonstrate their origins and long past. In their history they relate their struggle against various problems and obstacles and detail the past way of life of the *Lahu Nyi* including traditions which helped control social relationships. They emphasise that the *Lahu Nyi* have not abandoned the way of life of their ancestors but have integrated it with outside culture in an appropriate manner in order to improve their quality of life.⁶³ Memory about the past of this kind not only helps build strength for responding to and resisting change that the state and capitalism bring in but also reinforces ability to revive the art and culture of the *Lahu Nyi* for example folk music, items used in everyday life, methods for treating disease, methods for collecting and caring for seeds, organization of traditional celebrations etc. Some *Lahu Nyi* are so enthusiastic about doing this that they have travelled to see traditional celebrations and ceremonies in other *Lahu Nyi* communities in order to revive them in their own village⁶⁴

The Karen ethnic group who are identified as being hilltribe people who are underdeveloped have inferior status to the Lanna people (Laos) who call themselves “Khon Meuang” and are treated as if they had recently migrated into Thailand. This has caused the *Karen* to reproduce memory that their ancestors have lived in the region for at least 700 years.⁶⁵ This type of memory helps affirm that the *Karen* are as much owners of Thai territory as any other group of people and are not displaced people who have migrated in order to depend on or compete for the resources of Thai people in any way.

The *Karen* people also have tried to focus their memory on being possessors of traditional knowledge concerning forest conservation in order to change society’s memory that they are people who destroy the forest for shifting cultivation and to instead become forest conservers. The *Karen* have done this by attempting to make society acknowledge that since the ancient past they have had knowledge about rotational shifting cultivation which is a form of agriculture that helps sustainably preserve the forests’ richness. The *Karen* are therefore not people who destroy the “Thai Nation” but are good Thai citizens. As a result of this one *Karen* leader has received a “*Good Member of Society*” award from the Thai government.

⁶³ Ibid, 106.

⁶⁴ See details in: Yapho Jatikoi et al.

⁶⁵ Chuphinit Kesamani “Kan Seuksa kap Khon Chai Khop: Korani Seuksa Khong Klum Chon Phao Pheun Mueang Nai Prathet Thai” [Education and Marginalised Peoples: Case Study of Indigenous Tribes in Thailand] in “Ruam Bot Khwam Wichakan Prachum Wichakan Chat Niyom Kap Pahuwattanatham Na Sun Prachum Nanachat Rong Raem Di Empret Chiang Mai 22-23 Thanwakom 2551” [Collection of Academic Essays, Academic Conference on Nationalism and Multiculturalism, Empress Hotel International Conference Centre, Chiang Mai, 22-23 December 2008]. 3.

It should be noted that some ethnic groups construct dual memories or identities, such as the Shan diasporas and the Lawa ethnic group in Northern Thailand.

Whilst linking themselves to mainstream “Thai-ness” the **Shan diasporas** have also emphasised “Shan-ness.” For instance by constructing memory through adorning the walls of temples with pictures of many princes who once governed the Shan principalities and pictures of the Sawbwa Palace in Kengtung which was destroyed by Burmese soldiers, by organizing traditional Shan celebrations, conducting various Shan ceremonies and by selling Shan historical and literary books. These memories about the Shan’s past are important for constructing unity of mind among the Shan diasporas which provides a foundation for building a Shan network inside and outside Burma and building Shan volunteer organisations that work to help other Shan. Apart from this, “Shan-ness” has also been used as cultural capital to generate income from tourism both for the Shan diasporas and the wider Thai community. This has led the Tourism Authority of Thailand to enter and promote the organization of traditional Shan celebrations in many provinces in the upper North.⁶⁶

The **Lawa ethnic group** also link their past with Buddhism, a heart of Thai-ness. The Lawa at Muang Kha assert that they are connected with *Wat Phrabat Si Roi* because a villager was the person who found Buddha’s footprint. In 1992 a village monk asked a craftsman to mould an image of *Pho Khun Luang Wilangkha*, their spiritual centre and a symbol of sacred forces, and placed it in front of *Pho Khun Luang*’s shrine. Subsequently, a stupa was built to cover the image of *Pho Khun Luang Wilangkha* and a small park was made in the area. The next year there was a large celebration. These events caused the image that had once been an ancestral spirit of the *Lawa* to become a Buddhist style relic. Memories of the ancestral ghosts of the *Lawa* thus faded and were replaced by memories of cultural heroes which led the *Lawa*, because they changed to worship Buddhism and no longer worshipped ghosts, to be identified as being a culturally advanced group.⁶⁷

Ethnic and “Class” Problems and the struggle in memory space

Previously when ethnic problems arising from nationalist ideology have been analysed they have tended to be seen as an independently important problem. Connection has not been made between ethnic and class problems. However, as the construction and reproduction of the meaning of the “Thai nation” and “Thai-ness” by

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 61-67.

intellectuals of the mainstream aims to maintain a social structure in which people are separated into “classes” and a political structure that centralises power in the hands of the elite, ethnic problems under mainstream nationalist ideology are inseparably linked to “class” problems with the **real problem being that of “class”**. Ethnic problems are just one aspect of “class” problems. This can be seen clearly from the words of *Joni Odochao*, a Karen leader in the *Mae Wang* watershed, who has stated:

“Poor people in the city are also rejected, are also mistreated. I therefore dare to come out and to fight. The truth is that it is because we are poor that we are mistreated. I went to see the situation in Bangkok. Poor people there are burnt, evicted from their homes just like that. Their places are taken to construct buildings and roads. Like our Muslim brothers and sisters in *Ban Krua* who have lived there for a very long time. In *Isan* there are also many people who live in slums. In the South they also exist. It is a problem of poor people and rich people more than anything else. People without power will be evicted, demolished, burnt. Now I know that it is not because of what I am, not because I am a hilltribe person.”⁶⁸

Consequently the struggle of people of some ethnic groups is shown through joining social movements that identify as being “**poor people**” without emphasising the issue of ethnics. An example is “*Assembly of the Poor*” whose mobilization centred round the issue of *Pak Mun* dam in *Ubon Ratchathani* province. Academics and development workers who joined the Assembly of the Poor’s campaign have written a history of “**Sen Tang Chao Na Thai: Ramluek 25 Pee Sahaphan Chao Na Chao Rai Haeng Prathet Thai**” (**The Thai Farmer’s Path: Recalling 25 years of the Thai Farmer’s Union**).⁶⁹ This history constructs memory of villagers’ struggle by linking the struggle of “poor people” in the present with important struggles of the past. It returns to the “*Phi Bun Revolt*” that occurred in *Isan* in the era of Rama 5, the struggle of the “Farmers Division of the *Seri Thai*

⁶⁸ Interview with Joni Odochao in Sarakhodi, 2539, 77, cited in Wirapha Angkuntasanirat, “Khwaam Plian Plaeng Tang Manothat “Chat Thai” lae Kan Meuang Watanatham Reuang “Khwaam Pen Thai” Khong “Khon Jon” Phu Tok Pen “Yeua” Kan Pattana Doi Rat Thai: Korani Seuksa Samatcha Khon Jon” [Conceptual Change to the “Thai Nation” and the Cultural Politics of “Thai-ness” of the “Poor” who became the “Victims” of the Thai State’s Development: Case Study of the Assembly of the Poor], Report for the Subject 004 773 History of Thai Thought, History Department, Faculty of Humanities, Academic Year 2003. 17.

⁶⁹ Narumon Thapchumphon, Nitirat Sapsombun (editors), **Sen Tang Chao Na Thai: Ramluek 25 Pee Sahaphan Chao Na Chao Rai Haeng Prathet Thai [The Thai Farmer’s Path: Recalling 25 years of the Thai Farmer’s Union]**. Bangkok: Foundation for Children Printing Press, 1999.

(Free Thai) movement” in the World War II era, the struggle of the “Thai Farmer’s Union” and the struggle of the “Northeastern Small Farmer’s Union” and shows that the struggle of the “poor people” which continues in the present is still part of the Assembly of the Poor movement. This history is history written with a plot in which farmers have an important role. This type of history helps change the identity of farmers from “victims of development” to people acting to change the Thai nation to make it fairer. This is the first time that there has been construction of a “memory community” by connecting the role of farmers throughout the country.⁷⁰

Although the assembly of the poor continue to use the symbols of “*nation, religion and the King*” in their struggle, for example by displaying the national flag, the Thai Buddhist flag and the royal portrait when parading, in order to show unity with the general population, including the middle class,⁷¹ they also emphasise symbols that belong to the villagers themselves such as the red flag of the assembly of the poor, the “*pha khao ma*” cloth tied around the waist and traditional *Mo Lam* music. They also reject the meaning of the Thai nation which is based on racist principles and instead focus on “poor people” joining forces without distinction being made as to race or ethnicity. Every person is a member of the community that share collective memory as “poor people” “oppressed people” “people facing adversity” and “protestors.”⁷²

Conclusion

Amidst the competition for resources and increased conflict in Thai society, and in the context that relationships of power are unequal and unfair, ethnic groups in Thailand, for example the Mon, Khmer, Shan, Karen, Malay and many other highland ethnic groups have constructed histories or memories with plots of many kinds. Some, for example the Mon and Shan, have constructed memories which connect them to “Thai-ness” and emphasising a historical image of having joined with the “Thai Nation” in some aspects including fighting for independence. Some, for example the Karen and Mon, have constructed memories which attempt to show that their ethnic group have lived in Thai territory for a long time in order to assert that their ethnic group are also owners of Thai territory. Some, for example the Mon and Malay Muslims, have constructed memories that focus

⁷⁰ Wirapha Angkuntasanirat, “Khwam Plian Plaeng Tang Manothat “Chat Thai” lae Kan Meuang Watanatham Reuang “Khwam Pen Thai” Khong “Khon Jon” Phu Tok Pen “Yeua” Kan Pattana Doi Rat Thai: Korani Seuksa Samatcha Khon Jon”” [Conceptual Change to the “Thai Nation” and the Cultural Politics of “Thai-ness” of the “Poor” who became the “Victims” of the Thai State’s Development: Case Study of the Assembly of the Poor], 22-23.

⁷¹ Ibid, 32.

⁷² Ibid, 32-33.

on their past glory and emphasise having an ethnic identity in the sense of having their own culture in order to build pride in one ethnicity which will lead to unity within the ethnic group and give them strength to struggle against problems that arise. Some, for example the Malay Muslims, have constructed memory that emphasises that their ethnic group has throughout history been consistently oppressed by the Thai state in order to reinforce their ability to struggle against the Thai state in the present and into the future etc.

Although it is not yet apparent that the struggle in memory space of people of various ethnic groups has clearly caused change to the mainstream meaning of the “Thai nation” and “Thai-ness,” and although the memories that people of the various ethnic groups have constructed are not yet widely known, nevertheless the struggle in memory space is like an underwater wave which will break in the near future. This is because in this era of information technology the memory that has been constructed is able to flow quickly to wider society. The state is not able to monopolise power over construction of memory and identity as it did in the past.

Allowing people of various groups to have the liberty to construct and disseminate memory is something that should be fully supported. However it is also necessary to ensure every person in society has sufficient judgement, or a sufficiently critical attitude, to understand the deep meaning of each narrative and each type of history and memory so that they do not become confused and understand incorrectly that “history” is nonsense with no factual basis causing historical knowledge to lose all force in constructing symbolic meaning.

Additionally, state and capitalist expansion have caused differences between, and conflict among; “classes” to increase and the past is now increasingly used in political struggles. If Thai society wants to resolve conflict and tension it must understand the significance of the “memory” of each side well so that it can know what each side wants and whether, and to what extent, there is tension or conflict within and between ethnic groups. It is of no use to pretend to believe that people of different ethnic groups once lived together peacefully and therefore are able to live together peacefully, or harmoniously, in the present and the future, and to think only of finding a way to revive the desirable past without thinking to resolve structural problems of Thai economics, politics and culture which are the real foundation of conflict and violence.

If we want to reduce conflict or tension in relationships of power, the construction of history or memory of various ethnic groups must proceed in a way that reduces distortion of history and there must be construction of national history with a new plot which is able to accommodate groups who once “the other” or who have “otherness.” Regardless of “class”, ethnicity and gender all should be given a role and importance in the area of memory and there should be opportunity for people of all ethnic groups to link their “true history” with national history so as to correctly understand the nation and themselves, and so as they can stand in the space of national history with both dignity and bargaining power. If the meaning of the past is interpreted differently the struggle over it must be waged with reason and facts. The struggle must not be determined by using power to exclude the

history of less powerful people causing it to disappear from memory space. There is a need to be aware that “truth about the past” may be reached from many angles. If we can understand a person’s life, or a social phenomenon, from many angles it may be that we will see the complexity of the “truth” concerning life and society better than if we always stick to the one standpoint.

Furthermore, the meaning of the struggle in the space of memory presented here demonstrates clearly that the more important dimension of politics is not voting, but the constant struggle to define meaning. This is because the power that penetrates deepest is the power to define “truth, good, and beauty”. In the present “truth about the past,” “goodness or virtue of people in the past,” and “beauty of national art and culture that is heritage handed down from the past” of the kind that most Thai people know of and believe in, although it has already given greater space to the “local” and to “minority ethnic groups,” does not yet give enough space to help the power relationships in Thai political society become genuinely democratic. Into the present, mainstream thinking that rests on complex and close connections between histories with royal nationalist plots remains fully dominant in Thai society and supports relationships of power of the type that is centralized and unequal. This enables those relationships to continue and remain secure resulting in relationships of power in Thai political society remaining far from democratic.

Nevertheless, studying till one understands the political meaning hidden deep in national history, ethnic history, histories of individuals, local history etc, which is expressed in various forms and understands that it gives social space or rights and power to people of different groups in different ways will at the very least help strengthen Thai people’s judgement and help free them from dominant paradigms so that they have greater freedom of thought and greater freedom in searching for knowledge and wisdom. This will open up a pathway enabling rapid creation of democracy in Thai political society in the future.