

MINORITY GROUPS AND MINORITY CLASS: THE OPPRESSED AND OPPRESSOR IN THE THAI SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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Majority-Minority relations in some countries is typically characterized by the dominance and oppression of the majority population on a minority ethnic or racial group or groups. For example, in Japan the Japanese who consider themselves "unique" or "pure breed" discriminate against minority Koreans (Burakumin) and Ainu. In Korea, the Koreans treat the Pekchong like a caste minority. In America, whites are prejudiced and discriminate against numerically inferior blacks, American Indians, Asians and others. In Northern Ireland white Protestants have exploited minority Catholics to the extent that they have caused a civil war to break out in that country. On the other hand, in some other countries it is a minority group rather than the most numerous people which is in a dominant position, because such a minority group is better equipped and better organized in its economic and political power than the rest of the people. This is the case, for example, of white-black relations in South Africa, European-native relations in ex-European colonies and, more recently, Pakistani-Bengali relations before Bangladesh's declaration of national independence, etc.¹

In Thailand, however, the dual nature of the minority group concept, based on political consideration on the one hand and cultural or ethnic consideration on the other, presents a social situation typical of neither the types above. In Thai society it is the power-bearing, hence, distinctly privileged minority *class* which dominates and even directs the fate of minority groups without the participation and even awareness of the mass or the majority of the people of Thailand.

Whereas inequality between majority and minority people elsewhere is usually rooted in racial or ethnic cleavages, unequal relations between

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Thailand's dominant minority class and subjugated minority groups is based essentially on economic and political exploitation. It is the peculiar grouping of people termed "ruling class" or "governing elite," trans-cultural and trans-ethnic in character, which poses itself as the dominant and oppressive minority affecting all cultural and ethnic minority groups. Thailand lacks a history of direct confrontations, let alone of killings or of war, between common people of divergent ethnic or racial groups. During the Second World War when Chinese people were attacked and looted by Thais, it was the brutal act mainly of Thai soldiers and policemen whose prejudice was aroused by the nationalism of the pro-Japanese Pibul regime. The common Thai and Chinese people continued to live in relative peace and harmony.

The present paper purports to show that the historic domination and the traditional political orientation of the governing elite in the Thai social structure has tended to make all ethnic and cultural minorities splintered and marginal. At the same time, because such minority groups have continually sought to improve their status by exerting their legitimacy and by trying to gain acceptance and recognition of their identities and interests, they have created undercurrents of conflict and resistance to the status quo which the ruling elite has always tried to define and maintain. In the long run, the success or failure of the elite minority to induce ethnic and cultural minorities to conform to its traditional expectation and requirements would seem to determine the character of Thai society's future. The more restrictive and ruthless the elite's measure of control and suppression is, the stronger the resistance and the more rapid the change would tend to happen.

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Thailand with its 38 million population is set to be a unified kingdom, one and undivided.² Until 1932 it had been ruled by an absolute monarchy, but since then a succession of elitists regimes, sometimes under a civilian and sometimes under a military leadership, have been in charge, usually referring to themselves as democratic governments under the king who is the head of the state. The king must be a Buddhist.³ Thailand comprises 71 provinces with governors serving as their

administrative chiefs. Each province consists of districts ranging in number from a few to over ten. Each district is headed by a district chief. In each district and province there is a provincial court benched by a chief judge and his staff. All of these functionaries plus others, e.g., land officers, revenue officers, education officers, finance officers, conscription officers, etc., are important officials of the Kingdom of Thailand. They are all appointed officials and their appointments are made by one agency or another of the national government in Bangkok. All government officials (there are 779,832 of them in 1973) are His Majesty's servants and nearly all of them are Buddhists. Bangkok, the royal capital or the city of angels, is the single urban center of the country wherein one out of every ten people in Thailand reside. Even Chiang Mai, the second largest city, is 38 times smaller than Bangkok; ten years ago it was 30 times smaller and thirty years ago, 21 times smaller.⁴ This rapid and very uneven urbanization pattern shows clearly that all things in Thailand have centered, and have increasingly centered, on the national unity based on the primacy of the royal city. Bangkok is the centripetal force pulling all activities to the core while emanating great influences over all aspects of Thai national life. The prince patriarch of the Theravada Buddhist order (*Sangha*) serves as the religious counterpart of the king. He and his administrative staff called "Ecclesiastical Council" (*Sanghamontri* until the Sarit regime, when it was reorganized and renamed *Mahatherasamakhom*) hold near-complete power over the administration of all Buddhist monasteries and the education of all Buddhist priests in the kingdom, but the religious affairs are also under supervision and control of the Religious Affairs Department which is entrusted with the authority to appoint and remove abbots of Buddhist monasteries, approve appointments of non-Buddhist religious leaders and oversee the activities of all religious groups in Thai society.

Clearly, from the legal and administrative point of view, the state of Thailand is unitary and *de facto*, especially since 1932 when the concept of nation-state replaced the notion of absolute kingdom. While the principle of democracy, as written in the constitution and as frequently boasted of by the bourgeois in power, has been torn apart a number of times by military coups which resulted in military dictatorial rule, no Thai government has deviated from the strict adherence to the centralized

rule of Thai statehood. The single nation, Buddhism and the king are firmly held official symbols of Thai unity.

As such, the Thai nation is a sacred monarchic state. The dominance of Theravada Buddhism, syncretized with court Brahmanism and the commoners' cult of spirit worship, is manifest not only in the traditional and constitutional requirement that the king must be a Buddhist, but also in the lack of constitutional guarantee for representation of citizens of minority faiths or minority groups either in the national assembly or the cabinet. The unitary character of the Thai nation based on sacredness of the dominant religion is stressed further by the statistical fact that 94% of the Thai population is officially Buddhist.

The Thai national government and bureaucracy imposes its centralized control over the population not merely through legal means and administrative machinery, but also by making central Thai the official language to be used in all schools and government offices. In process, the use of regional and ethnic dialects and languages, most notably written languages, has been barred or discouraged. As a consequence, for example, the Northern and Northeastern Thai written languages have been virtually destroyed and it is next to impossible for the Chinese to retain their written language over generations.

The centralized control of educational content and educational administration is another important attempt of the Thai government to build and maintain national unity. The Ministry of Education fields its officers in all provinces and districts to carry out the policies aimed at fostering conformity in knowledge, attitude and way of thinking among Thai youths, regardless of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The notable difficulty confronting the Ministry of Education is the Muslims in the provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun who have adamantly refused to have their children educated in any way other than the Islamic way. In this case, special permission has to be given to the Thai Muslims to operate their religious schools (*pondok*). However, the Thai Government has also demanded that *pondok* school pupils learn Thai as well as Arabic.

The orientation toward "unity in conformity" as sketched above has created some degree of national unity. In the process of inculcating it on the people, the boundary of the Thai nation-state (as opposed to

the loosely defined ancient kingdom) has become firmly established. The Thai government and its attendant bureaucracy has come into existence and been modernized under the leadership of the governing elite. Thai national culture and the national language have gradually developed. Finally, the diverse ethnic groups in Thailand have become at least partially integrated into the mainstream of Thai social life imposed from the top by the national leadership.

Yet, unity by conformity is that type of unity whose success necessarily depends on oppressing and even suppressing the interest and identity of those who do not or cannot conform. By coercing people of different origins and cultural backgrounds to conform to the rules of Thai society as narrowly defined in terms of the central national interest, the Thai ruling class has inadvertently or unwisely produced fertile grounds for great conflicts and dissensions. The chaotic state of affairs experienced by the present regime, which has assumed power as a result of the great students' and people's uprising against military dictatorship in October 1973, is, among other things, a product of the long history of oppression and suppression of minority status and interest by the ruling class. This state of affairs expresses itself, for instance, in killings of officials and kidnapping of people by the Muslim secessionist movement in the South, guerrilla attacks of hill tribesmen on government personnel in the North and antagonisms of the Vietnamese in the North-east toward local authorities, and similar unrests.

On the facade of it, the people of Thailand seem highly uniform and content. It would seem that common cultural and occupational factors such as Buddhist religion and peasant agriculture have historically served to blend and bind people securely together under one roof, namely, the kingdom or the nation-state. In reality, however, this is not the case. Even among people generally or officially called the Thai "race," there exist great differences in characteristics, dresses, customs, aspirations and behavior. The people of North Thailand are supposedly Northern Thai, but are often lumped together and stereotyped by Bangkok Thais as "Lao." Among them, however, are Lao, Khon Muang (the largest majority), Shan, Lue, Haw, Khown, Yawng, Lawa Karen, Kha, Khmu and a host of other ethnic groups most of whom are dwellers of lowlying lands and are typically engaged in rice cultivation. They speak

different languages or dialects. Some have had their own written languages. In addition, there are mountain dwellers numbering over thirty groups or tribes. Although they constitute less than one per cent of the total population of Thailand or approximately 300,000 people and are not traditionally considered Thai citizens in the strict legal sense of the term, of late they have captured great attention not only from the Thai Government, but also from the US Government. Hundreds of persons from the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia have been hired or instigated by the US Government to do research on them. Most research on hill tribes and other ethnic groups supported by the US Government is geared primarily to counter-insurgency purposes, that is, for countervailing the forces of change mobilized by minority people against the ruling elite of Thailand.⁵

The hill tribes have become the center of attraction for three reasons. First, their shifting cultivation or slash-and-burn highland farming has caused rapid destruction of the forest, which is the source of rivers in the northern and central part of Thailand. Secondly, their traditional poppy growing culture has become the chief source of supply of drugs for the US market. Thirdly, their free movement across the borders of Thailand, Burma and Laos and their contact with the Communists and communism have turned some of them against both Thai government authorities and US imperialism.⁶ Both the Thai Government and the US Government, therefore, have decided to take the hill tribes into serious consideration primarily to make them abandon their hostile pursuits. The long neglected hill tribes have actually made it known that at least in Northern Thailand some parts of the population are not altogether in conformity with the rules and expectations of the governing class in Bangkok; indeed, they do not appear simply to exist securely with everybody "under one roof," the top of which is monopolized by others.

In the Northeast, similar to the North, the people are officially considered "Northeastern Thais" or simply Northeasterners, but are often called "Lao." The fact is, as a whole, they are more closely akin to Laotian people across the Mekong river in their speech, diet and custom than to the Thai people in the Central Plains area or in the capital. Yet, in the Northeast itself there is great variation of culture and ethnicity. For example, there are people who call themselves Phu Thai,

Kaleu, Khmer, Kui and others. Of particular importance are some 50,000 Vietnamese who are classified by the Thai government as *persona non grata* or just as "special persons." They are refugees who have fled to Thailand from Indochina during the Independence War with the French. They are confined mainly to the provinces of Nongkai and Nakorn Panom on the Lao-Thai frontier. Although they have lived in Thailand for decades and many of them were in Thailand, and have never left the country and have even attended Thai schools, none of them is accorded Thai citizenship by the Thai government. On the contrary, the Thai government has held the firm policy of deporting all refugees and their descendants, but has found no country to which to deport them *en masse*. They are undoubtedly a special minority group in contemporary Thai society.

In the South, the largest minority group is the more than one million Malays or Muslims (officially called "Thai Muslims"), but there are also uncounted Chao Le scattered over the peninsula on both the East and West coasts. Even in the central part of Thailand surrounding Bangkok, there are, besides people of *real Thai* origin, ethnic groups that are present, such as Mon, Puan, Song, Pung Khao and Pung Dam.

Of course, the largest ethnic group in Thailand is the Chinese. There are about three million ethnic Chinese who are mainly concentrated in Bangkok. The remainder are scattered in market towns all over the country. Although Chinese settlement in Thailand dates back to the beginnings of the Thai kingdom in the 13th century and mass migration of Chinese to Thailand was discontinued following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 or twenty five years ago, the Thai government still has not permitted nearly 400,000 Chinese people to become Thai citizens, although many are willing to be naturalized. As non-citizens or second class citizens, the mass of Chinese people in the streets are barred from many rights and privileges and are usually taken advantage of in various manners by the Thai government bureaucracy. In spite of the widely held notion that the Chinese in Thailand are the most successfully assimilated Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, they remain, in the view of Thai ruling authorities, "problematic." Nonetheless, they are anything but homogenous in the patterns of their relations with Thai people and even in their own social characteristics

and behavior.

Chinese emigration from Kwangtung and Kwangsi provinces was forced primarily by economic and population pressures. Until the 20th century, when the Thai nation-state began to take shape, immigrants to the Thai kingdom were almost all males who through intermarriage with Thai women became assimilated in Thai society. They made their livelihood mainly by working as hard laborers and retail shop keepers, but the more successful of them were appointed servants of the royal government or were granted monopolies in revenue collection for the king, thus emerging as a capitalist class that shares material interest in common with the top power elite. Thus, some Chinese "passed into" Thai politics and governmental affairs and were ennobled by the Thai king, thereby diversifying the ethnic composition of the Thai governing elite. It seems ironic that the minority ruling class should interact unequally with the minority group from which it drew (and continues to draw) part of its members. The emergence of Chinese nationalism in early 20th century and the sharp rise in the number of female immigrants from South China temporarily retarded the rate of social assimilation, especially of the proletariat. It strengthened the foundation of the Chinese business and workers community in Thailand and increasingly separated non-assimilated Chinese from those who were assimilated, particularly those who became members of the ruling class.

Following the closure of Thailand to Mainland China in 1949, the Chinese in Thailand have gradually been forced to abandon the hope of returning to their homeland and therefore have had to settle permanently in Thailand. The process of their social assimilation has taken many routes, i.e., intermarriage, education, religion, occupation, etc. However, since Chinese with different social and personal characteristics differ widely in their ability to adapt to the Thai milieu, the patterns and rates of Chinese-Thai social integration or assimilation vary greatly according to social categories or groups to which they belong.⁷ Unquestionably, the difference in assimilation or non-assimilation patterns also depends on inconsistencies of Thai government's policies and practices. It seems that some Chinese people in Thailand would always remain essentially Chinese and that if the present social structure remain-

ed unchanged, common Chinese people would continue to be regarded as a troublesome minority people who control and exploit the Thai economy. But at the top of the political hierarchy Chinese business and finance tycoons would continue to mingle their interests with those of the top bourgeois political figures of Thailand.

The presence of splinter minority groups has caused constant concern to the domineering class of Thai government and bureaucratic elites. In the name of national unity and national security, the ruling minority has invented a complex of political and legal devices and applied them with the hope to keep in check dissident or potentially dissident minority groups and make them conform to the rules and expectations of the central national authority. In the lines that follow, accounts will be given about such repressive devices and the manners in which they have been inflicted on various minority groups. Also, an attempt at evaluating their effects both on the status of the oppressed minorities and the Thai social structure as a whole will be made.

Suppression and Control of Chinese Schools

The assertion made earlier in this paper about the trans-ethnic character of the minority ruling class and its repressive role vis-a-vis the ethnic minorities finds its significant support in this section. In 1912 Phraya Rasada Nupradit, Governor of Phuket and noble man of Chinese origin whose Chinese name was Ko Sim-bi, wrote a letter to Prince Damrong Rachanuphab, Minister of the Interior, to ask for the latter's advice on how to control or suppress the first formal Chinese school in Thailand that had been built on the island of Phuket.⁸ The initiative taken by this ennobled Chinese Thai governor marked the beginning of systematic control by the Thai governing class of Chinese schooling in Thailand which continues to be exercised until the present.

According to the Private School Act A.D. 1918, all private schools including those run by Chinese were to observe the following regulations of the Ministry of Education:

1. All private schools were to be under control and supervision of the Ministry of Education.
2. All private schools were to educate pupils to be loyal to Thailand.

3. Foreign teachers must hold certificates of Thai proficiency.
4. All private schools must teach a required amount of Thai.
5. Textbooks used in private schools must be approved by the Minister of Education.

By the power of this law, therefore, there could exist no Chinese schools, because all schools run by foreigners were officially considered private, not foreign schools.

In 1933, the government under the new limited monarchy imposed even stricter measures of control of Chinese schools. It limited the instruction period in the Chinese language to no more than six hours per week and banned fifty books in Chinese for fear they would be used as texts in Chinese schools. In 1948 the government announced that only 16 primary and secondary Chinese schools were allowed in Thailand, that is, eight in Bangkok, three each in Ubon and Korat and another two in the rest of the country.⁹

The control of Chinese education has been motivated essentially by two things: (1) the desire to assimilate the Chinese through language and education and (2) the anti-communist sentiment. The first aim of the ruling elite can be said to have been accomplished to a considerable degree. At present, the Chinese who have been educated in the Thai system are among the most socially assimilated with the Thais. However, even now there are many more Chinese schools in existence than the Thai government authorities seem to desire. Table I indicates that the Ministry of Education has found it difficult to close down all or most Chinese schools at once. It has had to take time reducing the number of Chinese schools which sprang up in large number at the close of World War II.

Table I

Year	Number of Chinese Schools
1948	276
1951	272
1952	264
1960	185
1964	174
1967	172

Each year a number of Chinese schools (mostly primary and lower secondary schools) have been converted to Thai schools. If they are not converted, they are made to hire Thai headmasters and more Thai teachers than Chinese ones. Besides being required to pass examinations in the Thai language, each Chinese teacher has also been checked closely on his political outlook and political connection. Such activities are handled by the Police Department.¹⁰

It has often been alleged that Communist China has penetrated into the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia for its political gains. This allegation has been proved groundless by an extensive study of the People's Republic of China's policies and actions regarding Overseas Chinese by an eminent Australian Sinologist.¹¹ Fitzgerald has also shown that Nationalist China rather than the People's Republic of China has interfered blatantly with the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. In Thailand, due to an open anti-communist policy of the Thai government since the Pibul Songgram regime in early 1950's, it would have been quite difficult if not impossible for the Communist Party of China to pursue an effective program among local Chinese. On the contrary, since the end of the Second World War, all Thai regimes have cooperated closely with Taiwan and have let it maintain troops (the 93rd Division) on Thai soil with the aid of the United States. The local Chinese have been urged to display the Nationalist flag and portraits of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. Many have been imprisoned without court trials and evidences on charges of communism or acting as communists inspired by Red China.

If the policy concerning Chinese schools remains, it would seem that soon there would be no more Chinese schools left in Thailand. However, it cannot be taken for granted that Chinese schooling would altogether come to an end for many Chinese language schools, operated on a non-formal basis, have come to replace them. Moreover, on the side of the government it has been often suggested a few years ago, for instance, by the mayor of Bangkok who is of Chinese background, that Chinese lessons be given in regular Thai schools. Whatever the case may be, it is likely that interest in the Chinese language and China is increasing rather than decreasing. In Thai universities many foreign languages such as English, Japanese, German, Italian and Spanish are

taught, but Chinese is not offered. This, too, may change.

On the matter of anti-communism, it is interesting that despite the historic ban on Chinese schools and the presence and merciless, even unlawful, enforcement of anti-communist laws on Thai as well as minority members, the communist movement in Thailand is officially reported to have "reared its head among the Chinese." The Chinese are said to have spread communist ideology by means of Chinese language publications and subsequently extended their movement to the Thais.¹² It can perhaps be concluded, then, that the control and suppression of Chinese schools has not resulted in the halt of communist movement in Thailand.

Legal Restrictions

If the general understanding that Thai society has provided favorable conditions for assimilating foreign immigrants can be substantiated, it certainly can be substantiated with such objective evidences as the absence of real cultural barriers (e.g. religion, food habits, norms of interpersonal association and the like) and the lack of prejudices or strong prejudices among common Thai people against alien people. It can be supported by the high rate of assimilation of common Chinese men through intermarriages with ordinary Thai women. (The reverse is less true due probably to traditional constraints of Chinese parents on their daughters, as well as Chinese prejudice against Thai men). The same understanding (or assumption) cannot be strengthened by the behavior of the ruling class of Thailand as manifested in the many legal restrictions on aliens as well as Thai-born members of minorities which it has invented.

In the Law Code of the First Reign, A.D. 1761,¹³ marriage between a Thai and an alien person was prohibited, a violation of which was a crime punishable with six counts. This 18th century law was distinctly reminiscent of the difficulties faced by Thai nationals wishing to marry Vietnamese persons at present. The same law also forbade aliens to buy or sell certain items, a violation of which was punishable with death. It seems that this law code was not completely effective as shortly after its promulgation many Chinese became quite prosperous traders and even ennobled by the king to serve his interest in various capacities.

Prior to 1911 there was no citizenship law. Therefore, the real source of differentiation in rights and privileges between native Thais and immigrants was an ethnic and cultural, not a legal factor. However, since the Law on Nationality, A.D. 1911, was enforced, resident aliens have been affected by very elaborate legal restrictions. The many amendments of this law have resulted, for instance, in the collection of an annual fee, fee for changing residences, deportation of both aliens and citizens born of alien parents, restrictions on employment, property ownership, etc., none of which is applicable to citizens of native Thai background. Considering the fact that most non-citizens in Thailand are permanent residents who have lived on Thai soil longer than anywhere else, these restrictions would appear to deal severe injustice to the minority people.

Although the most recent Nationality Act which has been enforced since 1955 is based on both the *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* principles and makes it legally possible for aliens to become naturalized, among the eligibility requirements are (a) good conduct, (b) command of knowledge as specified by law. Such objective or partially subjective eligibility criteria would seem to entail a lot of inconsistencies in actual practice. No wonder, there still remain nearly 400,000 alien Chinese and a host of aliens of different national or ethnic origins. Most aliens have resided in Thailand for the greater part of their lives and seem to prefer to become citizens of the country of their permanent residence, but the law on naturalization and the many difficulties associated with the legal and bureaucratic procedures, formal and informal, apparently make it impossible for them to live and die as citizens of Thailand.

Discrimination in bureaucratic practices

In a democratic country, all citizens are supposed to be entitled to the same treatment by their government. In Thailand, not only aliens, but even citizens of alien parentage are discriminated against *de jure* and *de facto*. Such second class citizens have been expelled by power of the Expulsion Law created specifically to deal with dissident minorities.¹⁴ They are unable to enter the police and armed forces academies or to buy land. A person of alien parents who acquires his

citizenship by virtue of his birth on Thai soil is expected to adopt a Thai name and surname which must be registered with the government. However, far from automatically becoming Thai by acquiring a Thai citizenship and surname, the government authorities frequently make his surname sound "typically" alien. It usually includes a Chinese syllable in it or is five or more syllables long. Such a surname is readily identifies as a Chinese or Chinese Thai surname.

Granting citizenship haphazardly and registering Thai names and surnames to new citizens in a manner which serves to retain their alien identity are only very visible signs of non-formal but prejudicial practices of the ruling authorities. The most detrimental discriminatory practice by the government bureaucrats appears to be in their exploitation of the Chinese business. Petty merchants who are descendants of immigrant Chinese are treated as if they were non-citizens, despite their birth in Thailand. They must pay "taxes" beyond those required by the law, e.g., in the form of required donation or tea money, in order to be able to operate their petty business. At the level of big capitalist entrepreneurs, however, their built-in connection with top government leaders establishes a *quid pro quo* relationship in the name of aid in exchange for protection, thus mutually exploiting the Thai economy and the mass of Thai and minority people.

Imperialism Over Muslims in South Thailand

The Malay-Muslim Kingdom of Patani (Thai-ized as Pattani) has been subject to Siamese Kingdoms of Sukhuthai, Ayutthaya and Ratanakosin (Bangkok) throughout history. In periods, Pattani was independent or semi-independent. When it was under Thai suzerainty it was only loosely controlled and incorporated. Its chieftain or sultan (entitled *Chao Phraya Mahanakorn* by the Thai ruler) had autonomous power over local affairs, but had to send tributes to the Thai king. In the early Bangkok period, the people of Pattani staged uprisings against the central Thai kingdom. Consequently, the first and second kings of Bangkok ruthlessly suppressed and relocated a large number of them to Bangkok and other areas closer to Pattani. The forced migration continued until the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910),¹⁵ thus

causing Muslims to be scattered in many areas of Thailand until now. (Some Muslims have immigrated to Thailand from Yunan in South China and other countries).

The fear that the four predominantly Muslim provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun would successfully be broken away from the Thai nation-state by the recently formed "National Liberation Front of Pattani" and its "Patani Revolutionary Army" has underlain strict administrative and armed control and suppression of the Muslims by the Thai ruling authority. Muslims in the four southern provinces are treated as a subject people. Due to their lack of Thai education and language facilities, they have little opportunity to join the Thai civil service and military and police forces. All top government positions in the South such as governors, district officers and police and army commanders are filled by Buddhist Thais. The Southern Muslims exist as subjugated people in their own country. Their freedom of speech, of press, of association, or of assembly is restrained. Por Su, a well-known teacher in Yala, was transferred from school to school nearly ten times because the authorities resented his popularity. At the wedding of his daughter, nearly ten thousand people visited him. He was arrested for holding an assembly illegally and also accused of being a separatist after he refused to pay 100,000 bahts as demanded by the authorities. He has escaped to the jungle and is now regarded by the authorities as a criminal. In recent years thousands of Southern Muslims have been jailed on charges of secessionism, communism, or simply banditry or hooliganism. Out of over 400 prisoners whom the Sanya Government has inherited from the Thanom-Prapas regime, 168 have recently been released from the Sikiew jail. It is known that about 3,000 Muslims are now operating in the jungle as dissidents to the Thai Government, be they communists, secessionists or merely bandits. Murder and brutal handlings of Muslims seem to be common practice. The drowning of Haji Surong, accused secessionist, in August 1952 in Songkhla is among the best known cases. Recent reports are available about people who have been killed and beheaded or have had their fingers or hands cut off. In one case, a woman in Narathiwat was arrested in 1972 while nursing her three-month old baby. She was dragged to a jeep, forced to undress and taken away while her child was left crying.

Under the administration of a minority ruling class of Thailand, the Muslims are never given equitable share in the country's resources. In the municipality of Narathiwat, out of the population of 14,000 persons, only two thousand are Buddhists, the rest are Muslims. The municipal authorities, mostly Buddhists, have allocated 800,000 bahts for the construction of a Buddhist style crematory while only 50,000 bahts was allocated to the Muslims for buildings their graveyard. In 1968 a huge Buddha image was constructed at Khao Kong village, Tambon Manang Tayoh, Amphur Muang, Narathiwat province at the cost of 11 million bahts. This sum of money came from the taxes collected from the Muslims. It is said that the provincial governor was instructed to erect this costly religious object by the then Minister of Interior, General Prapas, because a soothsayer had advised him to build big Buddhas in four corners of Thailand, otherwise he would go blind.

For the Southern Muslims, travelling is restrained, especially along areas close to the Thai-Malaysian border where Thai Muslims have their relatives. Likewise, the Malaysians are discouraged from visiting their brethren in South Thailand. When Thai Muslims go for a *haj* or Pilgrimage to Mecca their voyages are constantly watched by the police. Thai police agents are also posted in the Thai missions in Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, but particularly Malaysia, to track the activity of Thai Muslims who visit or study there.

The Muslims are left without any education. They generally refuse to send their children to Thai schools, while their religious *pondok* schools are given little support by the Thai government. The assignment of teachers to *pondok* schools is primarily for the purpose of suppressing or forcing social assimilation rather than educating Muslim children. The work of Thai teachers in *pondok* schools is geared to foster values alien to Muslim culture rather than to prepare children for livelihood. Even in the recently established university in Pattani no special effort is made to teach Islamic laws and religion. The Thai Government gives very few scholarships to Muslim students from each of the four provinces each year.

Attempts at assimilation have been made in utterly unwise and inhuman manners. Besides sending illiterate peasants with generally bad records of conduct to "mix" with local Muslims, criminals and hooli-

gans have also been sent to irritate the people with the false hope that such threatening technique would keep dissident Muslims in line. Clearly, the Muslims in Southern Thailand are another minority group structurally oppressed by the minority ruling class of Thai society.

The Hardship of Vietnamese Refugees

When Ho Chi Minh was fighting the war to liberate Vietnam from the French colonialists, in the 1930's he used to seek refuge in Thailand and was even ordained in a Thai Buddhist monastery in Bangkok. The Thai Government before World War II under Dr. Pridi Banomyong used to assist Ho Chi Minh by supplying arms to the Viet Minh in Dien Bien Phu. In 1946 when the French were driving hard on the Vietnamese people, thousands of Vietnamese had to flee their homeland. They crossed the Mekong to Northeast Thailand. Hundreds of them were bombarded and strafed by French war planes while being in their escape boats, even while swimming across the river.

Dr. Pridi opened Thailand to welcome the Vietnamese refugees and let them travel and choose their place of residence freely. They formed a supporting front to assist in the war for the independence of their country and were supported by many people of Thailand.

Later, when Field Marshal Pibul Songgram was prime minister for the second time (1952-1956), also by forcing himself into the office, he led Thailand to ally with the United States under the Eisenhower administration and cooperate fully with its anti-communist policy in Southeast Asia. This policy has been continued faithfully by subsequent governments until today, undoubtedly to the great detriment of the people of Indochina and those of Thailand, too. It has made Thailand an enemy of all revolutionary people of Indochina.

The military ruling clique has caused unspeakable hardship to Vietnamese refugees. In 1953 Pibul sent about one thousand Vietnamese males to be imprisoned in Patthalung and Surat Thani in the South. In 1956 Sarit Thanarat put 270 Vietnamese in jail in Bangkok. In 1965 Thanom Kittikhachorn signed an agreement with South Vietnam without the consent of the refugees and deported 99 of them to Saigon. None of the refugees arrested were given court trials before being im-

prisoned. Those who repatriated to Saigon were also put in a concentration camps by the South Vietnamese government. As a consequence, no Vietnamese refugees in Thailand agreed to be sent to South Vietnam any more.

As mentioned elsewhere, the Vietnamese refugees are considered *persona non grata* by all anti-communist regimes of Thailand. All military governments since Pibul's have accused the Vietnamese of interfering in the domestic affairs of Thailand. They have issued a decree restricting the Vietnamese (about 50,000 of them) to only six provinces, namely, Nakorn Panom, Nongkai, Udorn Thani, Prachin Buri, Sakol Nakorn and Ubol Racha Thani. If any Vietnamese wishes to travel out of his province he must have a special permit issued by the Director General of the Police Department or the Minister of Interior, both stationed in Bangkok. In spite of the fact that Vietnamese refugees have now lived in Thailand for nearly three decades, and many of their offspring have been born in Thailand and have attained education in Thai schools, all eventually must leave Thailand even against their choice. Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that points of contact between the oppressing and oppressed minorities often assume political colorations and become explosive. One such encounter occurred when the Vietnamese community congregated 12,000 strong to conduct memorial services for the recently deceased Ho Chi Minh. Participants were attacked unprovoked by police who confiscated and destroyed pictures of Ho Chi Minh in the most degrading manner. In protest to what bore the appearance of a pogrom, the entire Vietnamese community shaved their heads. A similar protest was staged by the Vietnamese when the Thai government undertook to repatriate the community en masse to South Vietnam. The protesters lay down in the streets, effectively blocking the traffic until the Thai government was compelled to stop action.

Hill Tribes and Counter-Insurgency Program

Consequences to members of minority groups suspected of politically subversive activities are enormously magnified. In the late sixties a group of Meo Hill Tribesmen were arrested, without evidence, of having provided arms to communist insurgents. When they refused to

confess guilt, many Meos were buried in the earth up to the neck, and guns trained at their heads. To avert a slaughter, three men confessed to the charge, but the validity of the confession is at best open to question.

Each year a vast amount of money is spent by the Thai Government with the aid of the US Government to suppress the Hill Tribes of North Thailand suspected of subversive (communist) activities. But it is now clear that the longer the government's counter-insurgency program runs, the stronger the Meo armed resistance becomes. The fact is in 1963 there were only 200 armed tribesmen fighting against the government personnel, but in 1969 the number rose to 1,400. The Thai Government does indeed try to deal with the "hill tribe problem" not only by force, but by approaching it in "a Thai way" as well. It has sent officials to train tribesmen in the technique of cultivating new crops so that they would stop growing opium and be able to settle on the plain. It has assigned soldiers and border police to run schools for tribal children, teach them Thai and inculcate Thai national values in them. Buddhist monks have gone out of missions to preach the Buddhist philosophy and ordain the faithfuls. The Public Welfare Department has set up relocation communities and established the Tribal Research Center.

Despite all other efforts, some of which being quite civilian-oriented and probably successful, the power elite of Thailand, namely, the military, has consistently applied the arm-struggle concept. In Chiang Rai, Nan, Petchabun and Lomsak, the Army has joined force with the Navy in the "kill-and-burn" campaign. The power holders, nonetheless, have also applied the same concept in their persistent campaign against ethnic Thai villagers in Ban Nasai, Ban Na Hin Kong, Ban Na San, Ban Na Bon, and also at Amphur Pua, Amphur Thung Chang, Amphur June, Amphur Chiang Kong, Amphur Chiang Kham and others. The effect of counter-insurgency activities in all these places is probably best reported by an army major who said: "The communist insurgents (in the North) can now be said to comprise more ethnic Thais than hill tribes people."

As far as the tribes are concerned, one observer has pointed out: "The policy of bringing them down to the plain so that they can be

easily watched is also a flop." The main reason is that the Government is not genuinely interested in their welfare. It is only interested in getting rid of the "hill tribe subversion problem." One thing all experts can agree on is that if the Government, particularly the Army, continues to suppress the tribespeople by force, the whole of North Thailand would very soon become a shoot-at-sight area."¹⁶

What has been discussed in this paper should be the proof that the plight of minority groups in Thai society is due not to the prejudice and discrimination of the majority people as in some other social contexts. It is the privileged ruling class with its permeating and subversive bureaucratic mechanisms that lie at the root of the problem. In this light, it must be concluded that unless the class structure, that is, the relations between the privileged ruling elites and the unprivileged people including minority people is fundamentally changed or destroyed, no amount of effort within the existing system of control and exploitation by the ruling class to suppress dissident minorities would result in a long lasting resolution of intergroup cleavages. What appears to be a hint of success — successful suppression, that is — would only yield the ruling minority a temporary rest. In process, Thai society and economy would continue to be at a loss of its opportunity to become a more humane society.

FOOTNOTES

1. For theoretical perspectives on intergroup relations these works may be suggested: R.A. Schermerhorn, **Comparative Ethnic Relations: A Framework for Theory and Research** (New York: Random House, 1970); M.M. Tumin, **Comparative Perspectives on Race Relations** (Boston: Little Brown, 1970); H.M. Blalock, **Toward A Theory of Minority-Group Relations** (New York: Wiley, 1967) and Pierre van den Berghe, **Intergroup Relations** (London: Basic Books, 1972).
2. Article 1 of all Constitutions of Thailand since 1932.
3. Article 2 or 3 of all Constitution of Thailand since 1932.
4. Sidney Goldstein, **The Demography of Bangkok: A Case Study of Differentials between Big City and Rural Population**, Research Report No. 7 (Bangkok: Institute of Population Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1972), p. 8.

5. Harry Cleaver, **Counter-insurgency Research in Thailand** (Palo Alto, Calif.: Pacific Studies Center).
6. See William R. Geddes, **The Hill Tribes of Thailand** [in Thai] (Bangkok: Dept. of Public Welfare, 1967).
7. Boonsanong Punjodyana, "Later-Life Socialization and Differential Social Assimilation of the Chinese in Urban Thailand," **Social Forces**, 50, 2 (December, 1971), 232-238.
8. H.R.H. Prince Damron Rachanuphab, **Sarn Somdei**, Vol. 3, pp. 28-33.
9. Pichai Ratanapol, "Development of the Controls of the Chinese Schools in Thailand," unpublished M.A. thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1969, p. 46.
10. Thawee Wirawongseri, "Legal Status of the Chinese in Thailand," unpublished M.A. Thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1973, p. 65.
11. Stephen Fitzgerald, **China and the Overseas Chinese** (Cambridge: The University Press, 1972), *passim*.
12. **Communist Insurgency in Thailand** (Bangkok: Prime Minister's Office).
13. **Law of Three Seals**.
14. **Expulsion Act, A.D. 1955**.
15. Udis Chiwanond, "The Four Provinces," **Soon**, 1, 5 (16-31 March, 1974), 16-21.
16. **Anonymous**.