

Abstract

"Identity Construction of Mon Women at the Thai-Burma Border and their Interactions with the Burmese and the Thai: The Case of a Mon Community in Kanchanaburi Province" reflects the grass-roots lived experience of Mon women. These women have been labeled as marginal people because of their lack of Thai citizenship. The main focus of this study was the construction of identity by Mon women at the Thai-Burma border. Practically, their stories have not been a crucial part in the history of the Mon mainstream, accordingly, the Mon women have been marginalized from the political scenario. Meanwhile, these women have passed on the false social consciousness from one generation to the next that politics was a male task. Actually, Mon women have created their own tactics of informal struggle outside of the formal political scenario. However, their struggles have more or less affected the politics of identity in the Mon community as a whole. From feminist ethnographical approach and participatory field investigations, the following conclusions have been drawn.

The process of identity construction involved interactions in various situations in everyday life in the different contexts of the marginalized diasporic Mon community at the Thai-Burma border, including economics, politics, education, and mass media. Being situated at the margin, led the Mon women to apply various tactics to find a proper space for themselves and their family members. This allowed them to live with dignity in a competitive multi-ethnic society and to gain access to limited resources and rights. Accordingly, those who were able to maintain their Mon-ness successfully and completely were mostly senior Mon women of the first generation who migrated to Thailand more than 50 years ago. However, their second generation who were born in Burma and accompanied their families to reside at Wangka village, Sangkhlaburi district at the Thai-Burma border were more assimilated due to Thai political mechanisms and the educational system as well as to the mass media and interactions with peoples from various ethnic backgrounds in their everyday life. Thus, their identities were loosely formed between the two poles of Mon-ness and Thai-ness. Still, they have tried their

best to maintain their Mon traditional heritage and created cultural reproduction. One reason for revitalizing ancient traditions was to promote tourism. The third generation of Mon women was expected by their families, as well as their community, to preserve their Mon-ness. However, education, careers and marriage choices have become the external factors that have caused them to distinguish themselves from the community of their origin and adapt themselves to the new environment in their daily life. Thus, their Mon-ness has been dominated by their Thai-ness until there is a saying frequently uttered in the Mon community, "Being Mon by flesh and blood, but being Thai by heart."

