

Abstract

This is a case study of ethnicity of the Mons in a community of the Mae Klong basin in Thailand. In particular, it seeks to study about the contribution of rituals to maintaining ethnic identity of the Mons in Thailand.

Theoretically, "group", "identity" and "history" are the basic elements to define "ethnic group", and rituals have a function to form and to display these elements. Then, it can be assumed that a kind of rituals contributes to maintaining ethnic groups. Therefore this study tries to analyze rituals of the community with paying attention to "group" "identity" and "history" which displayed in the rituals to find a mechanism of Mon ethnicity maintenance.

The Mons in the community have complex double identities : Mon identity and Thai identity, that are represented by ethnic symbols such as spoken language, costume and specification of ethnic groups by themselves. Thai identity which they show does not mean Thai "ethnic" identity, but means identity or loyalty to Thai society where they were born and are living as Thai citizens, because they are still succeeding their Mon genealogy by patrilineage system that is maintained by house spirit belief and the rituals. House spirit rites such as phithii-lieng-phii (spirit worship rite) and phithii-ram-phii (spirit dance rite) play an important role as a mechanism to maintain Mon ethnic identity because these rites have succeeded and displayed symbols of genealogy and history of the Mons. On the other hand, some Buddhist rites such as merit making rituals managed by 9 Mon temples in the area have a function to get consciousness of individuals and small Mon groups together which form the Mon cultural sphere in the

Mae Klong basin that maintain Mon culture and tradition. At the same time, Some of Mon texts such as "Lokhasithi" and "Lokhasommuti" also have an important role to maintain Mon ethnic identity because these texts indicate the way of life as the Mons and have the force to maintain rituals by suggesting right of them.