

*Collective Consciousness of Ethnic Groups in the Upper Central Region of Thailand*

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**Abstract**

This research aimed to study the memories of the past and the process of constructing collective consciousness of ethnicity in the upper central region of Thailand. The scope of the study has been included ethnic groups in 3 provinces: Lopburi, Chai-nat, and Singburi and 7 groups: Yuan, Mon, Phuan, Lao Vieng, Lao Khrang, Lao Ngaew, and Thai Beung. Qualitative methodology and ethnography approach were deployed on this study. Participant and non-participant observation and semi-structured interview for 7 leaders of each ethnic group were used to collect the data. According to the study, it has been found that these ethnic groups emigrated to Siam or Thailand currently in the late Ayutthaya period to the early Rattanakosin period. They aggregated and started to settle down along the major rivers in the upper central region of Thailand. They brought the traditional beliefs, values, and living style from the motherland; shared a sense of unified ethnicity in common, whereas they did not express to the other society, because once there was Thai-valued movement by the government. However, they continued to convey the wisdom of their ancestors to the younger generations through the stories from memory, way of life, rituals, plays and also the identity of each ethnic group's fabric. While some groups blend well with the local Thai culture and became a contemporary cultural identity that has been remodeled from the profoundly varied nations.

Keywords: collective consciousness, ethnic groups, qualitative methodology

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## Introduction

Thailand, also known as Siam, situated right at the heart of South East Asia, represents one of the most complex areas in terms of long history, variety ethnicities and rich culture. Some historical evidence suggests that Tai peoples who speakers of a common Tai-Kra-Dai language (Li, 1977; Ostapirat, 2005; Ferlus, 2009) migrated from southwestern China from the 11th to 12th century. Various Indianised kingdoms states ruled the region, competing with Thai states such as Ngoenyang, the Sukhothai Kingdom, Lan Na and the Ayutthaya Kingdom, which rivaled each other.

Thai culture has been influenced by religious tenets, largely inspired by Theravada Buddhism, but also incorporating a great deal of Indian, Chinese, Khmer and other traditions from the rest of Southeast Asia and beyond. (Tourist Authority of Thailand, 2015) Until contacting foreigners since the Ayutthaya period to the present, Thailand adapted to a new culture and still maintained the identity of Thailand. However, Thai identity occurred along with the discovery of Siam by political reform under the rule of nation-state was found, by king Chulalongkorn and king Mongkut. (Dejthvaporn, 2012; Chonlaworn, 2014) Many groups and their increase to control the state equipment, which not only but is a tool for administration but also means defining what the country. Since Thai culture was re-created again after World War II with Thai culture as the mainstream culture in the central region as a model. (Fall, 1999, as cited in Roeder, 2011) Which is nationalistic in those days, there was an inhibition of minorities to express their culture. Such as teaching in schools to live according to Buddha's teaching. There is a set of values in the dress. Teaching Thai language and accent like the central region in all regions.

During this, Thailand has preserved its unique identity and traditions over the centuries while welcoming a diverse culture to the coast while the Kingdom increases contact with the outside world. Nowadays, Thailand is the world's 50th-largest country. It is with around 69 million people. (The World Bank Group, 2019) These places are vary multi-culturalism, that had an ancient minority groups or an ethnic groups that have a historical continuity with Thai society since the past more than a hundred years. Each ethnic group have there are stories about the history of the group. They have a group speaking the language. There are different costumes that are unique, have their own traditions and culture. There are settlements scattered in various regions in 67 provinces from a total of 76 provinces in Thailand. There are as many as 50 groups. The average population is approximately 6,097,427 people (Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development, Mahidol University, 2010) or 8.84 percent of the total population of Thailand. Classify the area according to the characteristics of the settlement can be 4 types: highland settlers or hill tribes settlers, people on a flat area of along the riverside, sea people and groups who living in the forest. The ethnic groups that live in the central region of Thailand are the largest group, with a large population and have a variety of ethnic groups, most of them are Thai-Lao and Thai-Korat people.

The main aim of this research was to study the memories of the past and the process of constructing a collective consciousness of ethnicity in the upper central region of Thailand. In addition, with focus on the theoretical conceptual about collective consciousness, is the set of shared beliefs, ideas, and moral attitudes which operate as a unifying force within society. The term was introduced by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim in his 'The Division of Labour in Society' in 1893. (Wren, 2012; Trnka & Lorencova, 2016). The research questions are what are the cultural identity of each ethnic group and all of the keep together, and how do ethnic groups in the upper central region of Thailand, where is The area that is close to the center of the kingdom and is rich with the powerful influence of Thai creation and which reduced the traditional cultural identity of each ethnic group, construct a collective of each group and collective of the upper central region of Thailand until present.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative methodology and ethnography approach were deployed on this study. The data was collected by 3 techniques; firstly, non-participant observation with unobtrusive measures was based on the concept of Wolcott (1995) as follows observe everything in front, look for notable things that can be observed, looking for contradictions and problems, and look for the missing and excess parts, secondly, participant observation was based on the concept of Spradley (1979) as follows descriptive observations, focused observations, and selective observations, and thirdly, semi-structured interview for 7 leaders of each ethnic group, that was selected by purposive sampling technique, was based on the concept of Spradley (1979) as follows asking descriptive question to retrieve information about words that represents the language and the information in Folk term, asking questions to reveal and making a taxonomic analysis, making a componential analysis and discovering culture themes. Until the knowledge reached the saturation point both in terms of concepts and theories, therefore stopped collecting data.

Access to the field by visited "Lifestyle Festival Ethnic groups "(upper central province group 2) between 27 June - 1 July 2018 at Phra Narai Ratchaniwet, Mueang district, Lopburi province that was created by Tourism Authority of Thailand. In this festival, there are ethnic groups in 4 provinces such as Lopburi province, Chai-nat province, Singburi province, and Ang-thong province. The scope of this research in 7 ethnic groups as follows:

- 1) Yuan, Wat Nong Kra Bean, Ban Mi district, Lopburi province
- 2) Mon, Ban Bang Khan Mak, Muang district, Lopburi province
- 3) Phuan, Ban Mi, Ban Mi district, Lopburi province
- 4) Lao Khrang, Ban Kut Chok, Nong Mamong district, Chainat province
- 5) Laos Vieng, Ban Noen Kham, Noen Kham district, Chainat province
- 6) Laos Ngaew, Ban Thong End, In Buri district, Singburi province
- 7) Thai Beung, Ban Khok Salung, Phatthana Nikhom district, Lopburi province

Analysis of data was based on the concept of Charmaz (2006) which uses interpretation and creative constructionism combines the use of the paradigm to

understanding society and the paradigm of the revolution to explanation. The phenomenon that has been conducted with inductive research strictly starting from a holistic approach. The data were analyzed by means of the line by line coding, categorizing, and proposition. Finally, creating theoretical memo and diagrams to explain the connection between various data sets. To analyze the relationship between information verification and outline of the basic theories obtained from Grounded in the data as knowledge about collective consciousness of ethnic groups in the upper central region of Thailand. Field notes and reports with a descriptive analytical approach.

## **Findings and Results**

Based on intensive data collection and analysis, ethnic groups in the upper central region of Thailand shared the memories of the past and construct a collective consciousness through storytelling, behavior, local museum, praying, and singing. It also has a unique identity in spoke languages, traditions, beliefs, cloths, foods, arts, culture as well as utensils that are worthy of conservation and disseminate to future generations to learn. For each group, there are many different backgrounds. However, the upper central region has been settled down by them.

History of ethnic groups in the upper central region of Thailand can be divided into 4 groups as follows:

- 1) Thai ethnic groups of Yuan descent who migrated from the North of Thailand, from Yunnan Province in China, set up houses in Chiang Saen, named Yonok Nakorn, around the beginning of the era. Which is a distorted sound from the city name “Yonok”. The population was widely spread in the Lanna Kingdom. Later, the Burmese king brought the army to the north and ruled over the city for 200 years. The word Yuan may be derived from the Sanskrit word “yavana”, meaning a stranger or a foreigner. Since, British colonial ruled the Burma saw that people were the same people as Siamese Shan, Yuan people are constantly being in the position of being others.
- 2) Thai ethnic groups of Lao descent who emigrated from the North-East of Thailand or Laos in the present, there are 3 groups as follow “Lao Phuan” ethnic groups from Chiang Khong, “Lao Khrang” ethnic group from Luang Prabang and “Lao Vieng” and “Lao Ngaew” ethnic groups ethnic groups from Vientiane. There were many immigrants to Thailand from the Thonburi period to the early Rattanakosin period. Lao people had culture and language spoken by traditional culture and food similar to Thai people making it easy to adapt to blended with Thai people.
- 3) Thai ethnic groups of Mon descent who migrated from the West of Thailand or Myanmar in the present, there called themselves “Thai Raman”. There is an evidence to believe that immigrants had settled in Bang Khan Mak more than 160 years ago, began since the Late of Ayutthaya to early Rattanakosin reign. The Mon has a strong grouping style. Still maintaining the cultural identity of their ethnicity with high unity strictly adhering to Buddhism and having a philanthropy, built a temple to be a spiritual center at the temple there

will be a swan pillar to be seen because the Mon people believe that they are descended from Hongsawadee.

- 4) Indigenous Thai ethnic groups who living in the original area from the birth of the Siamese state, “Thai Beung” ethnic groups from Nakhon Ratchasima Province or Korat in present, Thai Beung people have the cultural identities that are different from Thai mainstream cultures such as accents in spoken languages which the government had determined since the time of Thai national reform, Thai Beung had adapted many times until now there is the perfect match with Thai identity. Until group identity can attract the attention of the current government in providing funding to establish community museums, create learning resources for the next generation of wisdom.

Settlements of ethnic groups in the upper central region of Thailand Can be divided into 3 groups as follows:

- 1) The group that settled in the “Chao Phraya River Basin” are 3 groups; Lao Khrang Ban Kut Chok, Laos Vieng Ban Noen Kham Chainat province, and Laos Ngaew, Ban Thong End Singburi province
- 2) The group that settled in the “Lopburi River Basin” are 3 groups; Yuan Ban Nong Kra Bean, Mon Ban Bang Khan Mak, and Phuan, Ban Mi Lopburi province
- 3) The group that settled in the “Pa Sak River Basin” is Thai Beung Ban Khok Salung Lopburi province.

The traditions and cultures that are the identity of each ethnic group are both distinguished and different with the origin and meaning but similar things are the foundation of beliefs about Buddhism, way of life and supernatural. Can be divided into 3 groups as follows:

- 1) Traditional cultural identities that have been modified for contemporary details such as, spoken language, accent and specific vocabulary of ethnic groups, ancestral and supernatural worship, morale and spiritual respect, important Buddhist traditions, and New Year Festival.
- 2) Cultural identity that has been revived for ethnicity and cultural tourism such as, style of costume and color tone, design and development of woven fabric patterns, techniques for dyeing and weaving, and handicraft and paper cutting for event.
- 3) The cultural identity that was created by combining with Thai identity such as, local food, Folk play, event and festival, singing about religion or ethnicity, and performances of each ethnic group.

Example:

Yuan Wat Nong Kra Bean, there are split into groups from Sao Hai in Saraburi provinces, spoke with Lanna language. There is a tradition of Ton dancing for their belief, dancing for Ancestral spirits and Songkran festival.

Mon Ban Bang Khan Mak, there had a tradition of dancing for pray the ghost and wearing the coconut oil in hair popup, creating swan pillars - the royal centipede flag and playing the Biceps tayang, and Saba in the Songkran festivals.

Phuan Ban Mi, there had an idiom about gender that “Men must be weaving & Women must be sawing”, have their own spoken language; RAK which is HUK mean love and PAI NAI LOR which is PAI KA LOR mean Where are you going? There is a wisdom to preserve food from fish and sticky rice with coconut milk. Believe in ghost of grandfather, dancing for pray the ghost and Songkran Festival Make merit.

Thai Beung Ban Khok Salung, has spoken and written language, a unique accent, similar to Suphanburi. Every surname will end with Salung is the name of location. They have the tradition to encourage the farmer to harvest, New Year festival, making dessert, creating sand pagoda, and dancing. They are the model for cultural tourism community and for socializing younger generation through local museum.

Lao Khrang Ban Kut Chok, word ‘krang’ is natural color from the tree use dye, 5 colors loincloth, Mudmee fabric and connect the paw. There had own spoken language. Tradition raised the flag to the court. Food are the Pork Chili, Nam Prik Ong.

Laos Vieng Ban Noen Kham, there are closer to Buddhism tradition. Love to singing about buddha’s history, worshipping a thousand rice parade, weaving sarong with ancient machine. There is a unique pattern of fabric, such as hade of Nakha, saompao boat, chipmunk stag, swan stump, and embroidered fabric pattern by hand.

Laos Ngaew Ban Thong En, there are strict Buddhists too. There is an idiom about gender that “Men must be weaving blanket hat and woman must be sewing pillows, nets, loincloths, stirring rice”. They have their own language, vocabulary like Goeb which means Shoes and belief in ghosts of fields, grandfather and grandmother ghost. They make chili sauce with fish, make a drum, and they danc for prediction the future of chicken bones.

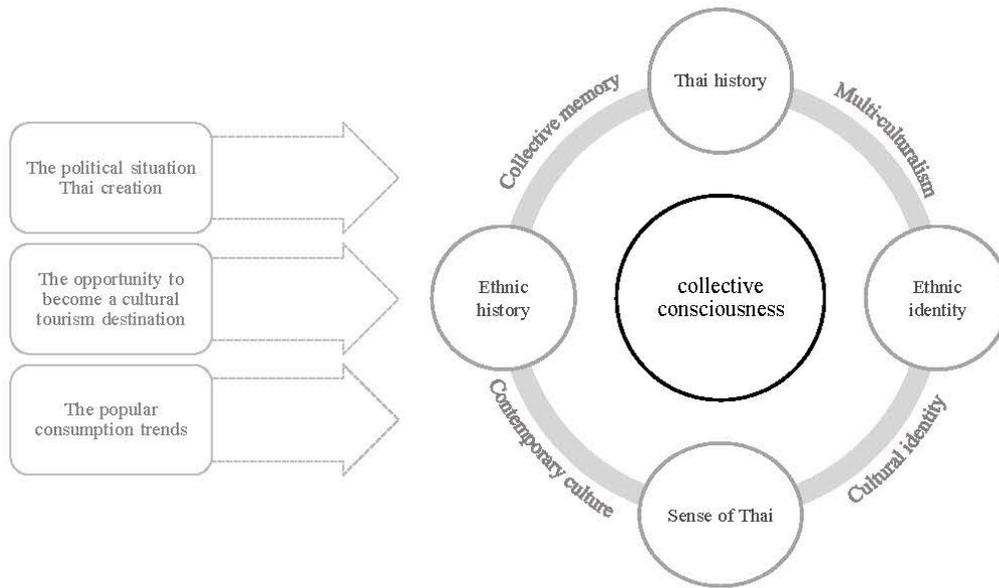


Figure 1: Conceptual model of proposition in this study.

As shown in figure 1, the collective consciousness of ethnic groups in the upper central region of Thailand were constructing by 4 sessions, one collective memory was blended with Thai history and ethnic history, two multi-culturalism was blended with Thai history and ethnic identity, three cultural identities were blended with ethnic identity and senses of Thai, and four contemporary culture was blended with senses of Thai and ethnic history. Meanwhile, the political situation Thai creation, the opportunity to become a cultural tourism destination and the popular consumption trends that are interested in different cultures and experiences, were an external influence that encourages the creation of collective consciousness too.

## Conclusions and Discussion

According to the study, it has been found that these ethnic groups emigrated to Siam in the late Ayutthaya period to the early Rattanakosin period. They aggregated and started to settle down along the major rivers in the upper central region of Thailand; 3 rivers: Lopburi, Chao Phraya, and Pa Sak Rivers. They brought the traditional beliefs, values, and living style from motherland; shared sense of unified ethnicity in common, whereas they did not express to the other outside their society, because once there was Thai-valued movement by the government.

Key success factor in order to adapt and modulate to Thai culture and maintain culture identity of ethnic groups simultaneously are living as a large family group, having a connection between relatives through traditions, using surname that indicate their ethnicity and their living places, having the strong community leaders that get the government and villagers participation. There are a home, a temple, and a school taking part in constructing cultural identity of some ethnic groups through local museums.

The collective consciousness of ethnic groups was contested, merged and shared. Each ethnic group has its unique identity and cultural identity according to the era. Capitalism and the state stimulate the cultural recovery process of ethnic groups in some aspects but reduced some old the beliefs, traditions, rituals and language. Therefore, the cultural tourism trend made them to adapt to modernity and construct the contemporary culture to promote their own identity again.

However, they continued to convey the wisdom of their ancestors to the younger generations: through the stories from memory, way of life, rituals, plays and costumes included the identity of fabric each ethnic group. While some groups blend well with the local Thai culture and became a contemporary cultural identity that has been remodeled from the profoundly varied nations.

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