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**CONSTRUCTION OF MOKEN IDENTITY IN THAILAND**  
**A CASE STUDY IN KURABURI**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis is to explore Moken identity in Thailand and to expand the knowledge about them. Many Moken live on Surin Island and other islands, but some of them managed to settle down on the mainland after the tsunami in 2004. This is a case study of the Moken living in a village in Kuraburi. Therefore the result of this study cannot be generalised. Both the Moken and non-Moken were subject to unstructured interviews, which consisted of open-ended questions, participatory and non-participatory observations and a survey. This thesis not only gives a general presentation of Moken culture and their changed living conditions after the tsunami, but also discusses the definition of the Moken by themselves through the presentation and by non-Moken and how Moken identity is negotiated or fluid in different contexts.

**Keywords:** “sea gypsies”, Moken, Thailand, ethnic identity, internal/external definition, negotiating identity.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Research Problem

The Moken in Burma was publicly known by the British in 1826 (Ivanoff 1997: 3) whereas the Moken in Thailand has been spotlighted by media as the survivors from the tsunami in 2004. The Moken are a group of “sea gypsies” that has partially kept their sea nomadic lifestyle. This is a different lifestyle compared to the other “sea gypsy” groups, the Moklen and the Urak Lawoi, which have settled down on the mainland (Arunotai 2006: 140-141; Granbom 2005: 9, 38-39). However, recently some Moken have settled down on the mainland because their dwelling areas were demolished by the tsunami (Arunotai 2006: 143). This change of context made the Moken exposed to Thai society through the consequent cultural encounters between Moken and Thai. Hence, Moken identity might have been modified compared to before the tsunami.

In addition, the Moken are a minority group in Thailand in terms of demography and religion. In terms of demography, the population of Thailand in July 2006 was approximately 64,632 thousand while the Moken in Thailand that same year were merely 842 (Library of Congress 2007; Arunotai 2006: 141). For religion, 94 per cent of Thai believe in Buddhism, and Islam is the second major religion at 4.6 per cent (Library of Congress 2007). However 80 per cent of the people in some parts of Southern Thailand are Muslim (Lowy Institute for International Policy 2006: 4). The Moken are traditionally animists (Ivanoff 1997: 54).

In contrast to the media spotlight, the author can find only a few studies in English about the Moken as an ethnic minority.<sup>1</sup> This might reflect the little attention given to the group in academics. Moreover, most of these studies lean on the Moken in Burma and Malaysia while little research about the Moken in Thailand has been done. Additionally, to the author’s knowledge, academic research about the Moken on the mainland has not been done. The following section discusses the research the author has been able to find on the subject.

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<sup>1</sup> Arunotai also mentions that very few researches about the Moken have been conducted (Arunotai 2006: 140).

## **1.2. Background: Previous Research**

Pierre Ivanoff and Jacques Ivanoff, father and son, and F. N. Chomeley describe Moken's nomadic life and their myths in *Moken: Sea-Gypsies of the Andaman Sea Post-war Chronicles*. In this book, some information about the Moken on the Andaman Sea is introduced: being known of the Moken and their daily life such as gathering seafood without modern fishing equipment, shamanistic rituals and a myth related to rice (Ivanoff 1997). In the *Rings of Coral Moken Folktales*, the ethnographer, Jacques Ivanoff presents Moken epic poems, tales, myths and songs. Since he was not able to enter Burma, he did the research on Surin Island in Thailand from 1982 to 1984. He also provides some general information about the situation on Surin Island: the youngest Moken children speak Thai; the Thai government does not offer citizenship to the Moken except for one man who got married to a Moken woman; and the creation of Surin Island as a national park, which made the Moken a tourist attraction (Ivanoff 2001).

Before the tsunami occurred, UNESCO began the "Surin Island Project" in 1998 and published a paper about the situation of the Moken on Surin Island in 2001 (UNESCO 2001: 61). In the paper, traditional culture such as semi-nomadic life, hunting or gathering seafood and animistic belief is discussed. Moken's poor situation is also introduced; first, the Moken do not hold Thai citizenship since they are not recognised as Thai by the Thai government. Therefore the Moken are not able to earn land or send their children to school. Second, regulations of the national park hinder the Moken from moving their dwelling place, as well as preventing travellers or middlemen from purchasing seafood from the Moken. Finally, middlemen tend to exploit the Moken. As a result Moken traditional culture has been threatened and UNESCO has endeavoured to preserve their traditional heritage and culture. They also encouraged the Moken community on Surin Island to get involved in the project which is aimed at improving their status including being granted Thai citizenship (UNESCO 2001). After the tsunami, Lay Cheng Tan and Riikka Vuorela wrote an article where they discussed Moken traditional knowledge and culture through the UNESCO Bangkok Newsletter in 2006. In addition, they emphasised the importance of preserving Moken traditions (Tan & Vuorela 2006: 1-4). Soimart Rungmanee and Irwin Cruz studied Moken's difficulties in Burma and Thailand in the article *The knowledge that saved the "sea gypsies"* (Rungmanee & Cruz 2005: 20-23).

Dr Narumon Arunotai, a partner of UNESCO for the “Surin Island Project”, studied Moken indigenous knowledge and culture in her article *Moken traditional knowledge: an unrecognised form of natural resources management and conservation*. She introduces Moken traditional fishing and botanical knowledge and the change of livelihood. They have sometimes been referred to as “backward” because of their traditional way of hunting and gathering seafood, but according to Arunotai, the traditional knowledge is eco-friendly and thus conserves natural resources (Arunotai 2006). Biologists, Anna Gislèn et al. studied underwater vision of Moken children in *Superior Underwater Vision in a Human Population of Sea Gypsies* (Gislèn et al. 2003: 833-836).<sup>2</sup> In a later research she proved that underwater vision of non-Moken children can be developed by training (Gislèn et al. 2006: 3443-3450).

Meanwhile, information about a thesis in Thai related to the Moken and the Moklen, *The Case Study about Learning Process and Participation in Fishing Boat Building of Survivor Community from Phrathong Island in Kuraburi, PhangNga Province after the tsunami catastrophe* was obtained during this fieldwork. The author, a monk called Phrakhru Suwatthithammarat, wrote the thesis for his master’s degree in political science in 2006. It is based on information from the Moken and the Moklen who stayed at the temporary shelter at the temple and academic texts in Thai.<sup>3</sup> According to his explanation, his study includes observations of how the treatment of the temple with the Buddhist development philosophy influenced the recovery process of the Moken and the Moklen groups and how their lives have been changed since the tsunami. It also compares their “learning process” and participation in making fishing boats with how boats were built before the tsunami (Kosonlakan et al. 2006).

In sum, previous research about the Moken are mostly about their culture, the

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<sup>2</sup> These researches are conducted by a team of the “Department of Cell and Organism Biology” in Lund University. Gislèn is the corresponding author of the research.

<sup>3</sup> Phrakhru Suwatthithammarat has served as the abbot of the Samakkhitham Temple for over twenty years. After the tsunami in 2004, many people including the Moken and the Moklen stayed at the temple for ten months to two years. The author met him when he came to Lund to give a presentation and during the author’s fieldwork.



importance of their indigenous knowledge and their poor living conditions.<sup>4</sup> The two Ivanoffs, and Rungmanee and Cruz described Moken's everyday life and their difficulties while most concentration is on the Moken in Burma and Malaysia. Despite of the fact that Ivanoff conducted his research in Thailand, the main focus is Moken folktales. However, Ivanoff's study is more than one decade old. UNESCO has been concerned with Moken culture and citizenship issues, however, it is limited to the Moken on Surin Island. Tan and Vuorela, Arunotai and Gislèn studied the Moken in Thailand, but the studies did not focus on Moken identity on the mainland. The thesis of the abbot concentrates on the change of Moken and Moklen's living conditions and the way of producing fishing boats. This thesis, however, aims at providing a case study of Moken identity construction on the Thai mainland.

### **1.3. Theoretical Concepts**

To study Moken identity, books by the anthropologists Richard P. Jenkins and Thomas Hylland Eriksen are utilised. In *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*, Jenkins understands ethnicity as "internal definition" and "external definition" (Jenkins 2008: 55). He explains:

"[T]here are processes of internal definition: members of a group signal to fellow group members or others a self-definition of who they are, their identity. This can be an individual process or a collective, group process (although when we are talking about an individual, it only makes sense to talk of ethnicity when the identification in question and its expressions refer to a recognized collectivity and draw upon an appropriate repertoire of shared practices). /---/ There are processes of external definition. These are other-directed processes, during which one person or set of persons defines the other(s) as 'X', 'Y', or whatever. This may, at its most consensual, be a validation of the others' internal definitions(s) of themselves" (Jenkins 2008: 55).

The two definitions are useful to understand ethnic identity since ethnic groups

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<sup>4</sup> T.H. Eriksen argues that the meaning of "indigenous" is not always indicating a "first-comer". Rather an indigenous group is people who have no or less political power, who are "partly integrated into the dominant nation-state" and who keep traditional way to make products (Eriksen 2002: 14, 125).

interact with each other. Thus to lean on only one definition means to lose another definition. Both definitions will be assessed in the following in order to fully grasp Moken identity.

The “external definition” further needs to be assessed by using the “two social reality” approach of anthropologist Amri Baharuddin Shamsul. In his article *Debating about Identity in Malaysia*, identity is formed in the contexts of “authority-defined” and “everyday-defined” social realities. The two social realities coexist, but on different levels. The “authority-defined” social reality is created by people in power structures such as the academic area or government. According to Shamsul, this social reality is normally textualised or recorded as academic journals, books, films and photographs, but it can also be found in official policies. The “everyday-defined” social reality is expressed by people in the society. This social reality tends to be orally conducted by experience and it can be found in “popular culture” such as cartoons, songs, short-stories, rumours and gossips (Shamsul 1996: 477-478). In this latter group, we find examples from common Thai and non-Thai people.

In *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Eriksen mentions that “ethnicity is an aspect of relationship”. “Interethnic relationship” exists between an ethnic group and other ethnic groups by “acknowledgement of differences”. Identity can be “situational”, “fluid” or “negotiated” through the “interethnic relationship” of power relations (Eriksen 2002: 19-35). Eriksen’s “negotiating” identity is relevant for this study. Through exploring definitions of Moken identity by the Moken and non-Moken, an “interethnic relationship” can be found. Then, it can be studied how the “interethnic relationship” influences Moken identity.

#### **1.4. Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore Moken identity in Thailand and provide additional knowledge about the Moken in general. To achieve this purpose the main research question is, how is Moken identity in Thailand defined by themselves and by “others”? In addition, the following sub questions are explored: How do the Moken practice their culture? How does the Thai government include or exclude the Moken by their definition? How do other authorities and non-authorities define the Moken? Finally, how the interaction between the Moken and “others” influences Moken

identity will be scrutinised. Three theoretical concepts are selected in order to analyse the research findings: The first is “internal” and “external definition” from Jenkins, the second is “two social reality approach” from Shamsul, and the third is “negotiating/fluidity of identity” from Eriksen.

## **1.5. Methodology**

### **1.5.1. Design of the Study**

A qualitative research methodology is chosen for this thesis. A qualitative research is conducted to examine objects in natural settings through understanding or interpreting materials obtained from various methods (Denzin & Lincoln, cited in Creswell 2007: 36). A mixture of a case study and ethnographic research among the various qualitative approaches was selected and not only secondary materials but also materials from natural settings are required in order to study Moken identity in reality. Punch says that the goal of a case study is to understand the case or to develop the understanding of the case with whatever appropriate method and Creswell states that a case study is selected when an issue is assessed. Moreover, Creswell stresses that the purpose of ethnographic research is to ascertain the influence of culture (Punch, cited in Silverman 2005: 126; Creswell 2007: 73). Hence, a combination of case study and ethnographic research is the selected methodology for this study.

Considering the small Moken population and the limited time given for fieldwork, Kuraburi<sup>5</sup> was selected since there is a village inhabited by 32 Moken, Moklen and local Thai families. This village is from here on called village B. The author came to know about it from the abbot of the temple during his presentation at “Focus Asia” open lectures, organised by the “Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies” in Lund. The method to make such a limited selection is often called “convenience sampling” and cases of “convenience sampling” can “represent sites or individuals from which the researcher can access and easily collect data” (Miles & Huberman, cited in Creswell 2007: 126). In this situation, “convenience sampling” would be appropriate.

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<sup>5</sup> Kuraburi is one of districts in Thailand.

### 1.5.2. Methods of Selection and Respondents

As a background to this research, the author visited Surin Island for two days and paid a short visit to the Moken village on Surin Island before starting fieldwork. Fieldwork was conducted in Kuraburi, PhangNga province in Thailand for seven weeks, from the 7<sup>th</sup> of February to the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2009. Particularly village B, cared by the temple, was selected to understand Moken identity.

Various research methods were utilised, including non-participatory and participatory observation, interviews and a survey in order to obtain primary materials. Non-participatory observation was conducted on Surin Island while participatory observation was carried out at the Samakkitham Temple, a primary school (here after primary school R), village B and a Moklen funeral ceremony. In addition, various kinds of interviews were carried out: one-to-one interview, group interview, “indirect narrative interview”<sup>6</sup>, and e-mail interview. Unstructured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions in order for the interviewees to feel comfortable and various data to be provided from their individualistic situations. Finally, a survey was utilised to understand views of teachers at primary school R. In addition, secondary text materials such as laws and literatures were assessed. Although a tape-recorder was utilised, taking interview notes was preferable rather than recorded tapes due to noise in the background.

During the fieldwork there were 16 interviewees: seven Moken, eight Moklen, a local Thai, a NGO staff member, a government officer, and a foreigner. Among the interviewees four Moken constitute a family and live in a royal project village sponsored by Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn (from here on village T). For the group interview, many inhabitants of village B participated at the beginning, but most of them naturally left after a while. As a result, there were five persons who provided useful information for this study: three Moklen, one local Thai, and one Moken who joined temporarily at the beginning of the interview. Also, one older Moken and three

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<sup>6</sup> The author indicates “indirect narrative interview” as the contents heard from the abbot after interviews conducted by him because of trust matters and the time consumed. The author saw two of the interviewees only that time during this fieldwork since they keep going to sea. Moreover, the author conducted the group interview while the abbot conducted the interviews.

older Moklen were involved in the “indirect narrative interview”. All Moken and Moklen interviewees represented in this study settled down on the mainland after the tsunami disaster. The staff of the NGO, ActionAid, has worked for the NGO for three months as a regular, but he has also done research about the Moken for the NGO in 2006. The government officer came to Kuraburi as the assistant district chief officer two years ago. One of his responsibilities is to take care of the Moken on Surin Island. He surveys and documents Moken personal information as the first step of granting them Thai citizenship. The foreigner, who experienced the tsunami with the Moken is interviewed by e-mail correspondence. Meanwhile, six teachers who each takes care of different levels of primary school R answered the survey.

The key informant of this study is the abbot of the temple, Phrakhru Suwatthithammarat. The staff at the temple has actively helped tsunami survivors from the beginning and there is trustful relationship between them. Additionally, he is knowledgeable about the Moken and the Moklen academically due to his thesis mentioned above. The abbot was, therefore, not only the informant but also functioned as a kind of supervisor during the fieldwork. The temple staff also connected the author to the NGO staff and the government officer.

### 1.5.3. Validity and Reliability

Although a majority of the Moken live on Surin Island, some of them settled down on the mainland after the tsunami, such as in PhangNga province (Ivanoff 1997: 109; Arunotai 2006: 141), where the fieldwork was carried out. Moreover, living with Moklen and local Thai in the same village after the tsunami has made the Moken exposed to a new environment. There is also primary school R near the village. Hence, this environment is suitable to explore Moken identity on the Thai mainland. Participatory observation and interviews seem valid because ethnicity and identity are created by their “collectivities” and “performances”, to borrow Østergård’s and Goffman’ words. “Collectivities” means persons’ living and acting together, and “performances” means individuals doing something to present themselves in the way they want to do or they want to be seen (Østergård, cited in Jenkins 2008: 10; Goffman, cited in Jenkins 2008: 61; Jenkins 2008: 61). Moken “collectivities” were found by observation. Their everyday life and their explanations reflect their ideas, thoughts and a world view, therefore unstructured interviews with open-ended

questions were the most appropriate. Since the boundary of ethnic identity is partially made by “others”, interviewing “others” additionally contribute to the validity of this study.

The reliability of this study will be about generalisation, trust-building and the language barrier. As mentioned, this thesis is a qualitative case study, thus it cannot be generalised but Moken identity in a specific area can be deeply explored. The trust between the village inhabitants and the author has been built by picking children up to school, participation in villagers’ activities and programmes by the Samakkhitham temple and visiting the village with temple staff. To conduct interviews with the Moken in village T, the author accompanied the Moklen whom the Moken already know. Also the author’s nationality, Korean, might be helpful on the trust issue since Korean culture is quite popular in Thailand. The villagers’ stories or explanations during interviews are thus based on the trust the author managed to build.

Because of the language barrier a Thai-English translator was needed. However, it was difficult to find someone who spoke English well and was also recognised as a trustworthy person. Three Thai-English translators were used: the abbot, a staff of the temple and one introduced by a staff of the temple. Additionally, help from a Moklen of village B for the translation of Moken-Thai was obtained. In that case, two translators were used at the same time. It was an advantage in terms of trust while it was a disadvantage in terms of the professionalism of the translators. Because of this barrier quotations from interviews and Thai texts are based on translation by the various translators, except for the interviews with the staff of the NGO and the government officer and discussions with the abbot.

#### 1.5.4. Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations of this study are closely connected to the measures of trust-building discussed above, not least due to the fact that many foreigners have used the situation after the tsunami for their own benefits. The author introduced herself as a student in the master’s programme of “the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies” in Sweden to build trust and introduced the research. Permission from interviewees and teachers were obtained to interview or observe them and permission

from parents was also obtained for the children. Confidential treatment of their information was promised when interviews were conducted.

This research might be a sensitive issue in Thailand since the Moken are an ethnic minority group and UNESCO reported on Moken's poor situation. However, this research focuses on exploring Moken identity in Thailand and aims to contribute to knowledge, not judge the Moken situation. For this reason, this research would not bring any peril to the interviewees. Rather, the research enabled the interviewees to tell their own story through this research as one inhabitant said: "We want people to know more about us" (meeting, February 26, 2009, village B). However, fictional names will be utilised to adhere to the principle of confidentiality for the interviewees, the villages and the primary school.

### **1.6. Disposition of the Thesis**

The rest of this study consists of four chapters. Chapter 2 explores how the Moken define themselves. Chapter 3 discusses various definitions of the Moken by "others". The "others" are divided into eight categories in this research: academics, the Thai government, teachers of primary school R, members of the temple, staff of the NGO, the Moklen, local Thai and a foreigner. Chapter 4 describes circumstances under which the Moken negotiate their identity or make their identity fluid. Chapter 5 elaborates research findings and provides an analytical discussion and a conclusion.

## **2. WE ARE MOKEN**

To find out how the Moken define themselves, some people who believe that they are Moken were interviewed and the story of one man who believes he is Moken was considered through the "indirect narrative interview". The obtained information shows what the Moken do and who the Moken are. The eight interviewees in this chapter will be introduced concerning ethnicity<sup>7</sup>, sex, age, the way of interview or position during an interview as well as their fictional name. These persons are: Yai (Moken, female in her 60s, interview), Taley (Moken, male in his 70s-80s, "indirect narrative interview"), Da (Moken, male in his 60s, interview), Nokyai (Moken, female in her 60s, interview), Reang (Moklen, male, 52, group interview/the Moken-

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<sup>7</sup> Their ethnicity is defined by themselves.

Thai interpreter), Pa (Moken, female in her 60s, interview), Wan (Moklen, female in her 30s, group interview/interview) and Narak (Moken, male, 8, interview). Da and Nokyai are a couple, and they are Narak's grandparents living in village T. Reang and Wan are a couple. Except Da, Nokyai and Narak, the rest of them live in village B.

## 2.1. Moken or Moklen?

Common “cultural stuff” such as language, lifestyle or ritual can make people close in one ethnic group (Ruane & Todd, cited in Jenkins 2008: 10-11). Therefore, these “collectivities” constitute the identity of an ethnic group. The contents of interviews show how the “cultural stuff” impacts on Moken self-defined identity.

Below follow some Moken voices:

Yai from Surin Island: “The Moken and the Moklen are the same people. Some people cannot pronounce Moken properly. The people say Moklen”, “I am original Moken” (interview, March 3, 2009, village B).

Taley from Pakjok village in Phrathong Island: “I am one of Island people (Chao Koh).”<sup>8</sup> “Moken and Moklen, same, same. Just some words of language are different” (interview, March 5, 2009, village B).

Da from Surin Island: “I am Moken.”, “I know Moken and Moklen. They are the same. Both languages are little bit different, but it is because the area where people live is different. It is like dialect” (interview, March 13, 2009, village T).

Yai does not see any difference between the Moken and the Moklen, while Taley and Da recognise a slight difference between Moken and Moklen languages. However, the difference does not help the Moken to distinguish them from the Moklen. Nevertheless, language seems important to create Moken identity. To the Moken, one

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<sup>8</sup> To him, the Moken are people from island. However, Phrathong Island is not an island. “Island” means far away from the mainland such as Surin Island. According to him, his ancestor came to Pakjok by *kabang* from the “Island”. *Kabang* is the Moken traditional boat with roof.



important criterion is whether a person can communicate with them in their language or not. For example, Da and Nokyai define Reang, who was the Moken-Thai interpreter, as Moken because he can speak “Moken” language even though Reang identifies himself as Moklen (interview, March 13, 2009, village T). Indeed language plays a crucial role for Moken self-defined identity.

Lifestyle also contributes to generating Moken identity. Da and Nokyai defined Mae, an inhabitant of village B who thinks she is Moklen, as Moken because of her lifestyle. Nokyai also made fun of a Thai-English interpreter, Jia, by saying: “Mae is Moken because she goes to sea and catches clams and sea cucumbers. /.../ If Jia goes to sea and catches them, she can be Moken” (interview, March 13, 2009, village T). According to their definition about Mae and the joke, their lifestyle is related to the sea and is distinctive compared to people who live on the Thai mainland. For example, many local Thai used to farm on lowlands and hill tribes are related to forest. Therefore, their lifestyle defines Moken identity as “sea nomads”. However, it does not help the Moken to make a clear distinction from the Moklen since Moklen lifestyle is also connected to the sea.

In terms of ritual, the Moken and the Moklen have similarities since they believe in the spirits of their ancestors. Both the Moken and the Moklen go to the mainland to ask “others” for clothes, food and money to serve their ancestor. During the interview with Yai and Pa, who believe that they are Moken, this ritual was mentioned. Wan, who defines herself as Moklen, also said that she goes to the mainland with her son to practice the same tradition. If they do not practice the ritual, they believe that bad things will happen (interview with Yai and Pa, March 13, 2009, village B; interview with Wan, March 16, 2009, village B).

The Moken think the Moklen belong to the same “group” on account of the “collectivities” such as language, general lifestyle and belief and ritual. Jenkins points out that “a group is a collectivity which is meaningful to its members, of which they are aware /.../, rooted in processes of internal definition /.../” (Jenkins 2008: 56). When Da and Nokyai were asked about the conditions of being Moken, they did not understand the question. It may mean that the condition of being Moken is too natural to be recognised by them, therefore, the condition is taken-for-granted. However, the

question of whether a certain local person is Moken or not, was easily answered regarding to language and lifestyle in general (interview, March 13, 2009, village T). Thus, the taken-for-granted “collectivities” are meaningful to the Moken to construct their identity and the Moken become aware of the “collectivities” when defining other people. In conclusion, for the Moken a common language, similar lifestyle and ritual blur the boundary between Moken and Moklen identity, i.e. to them Moken and Moklen identity is overlapped. Therefore this is a case of a vague ethnic identity which is not always restricted by the common “cultural stuff” factors referred to by Ruane and Todd.

## **2.2. Moken Daily Life**

According to Jenkins, a “taken-for-granted” milieu such as culture needs to be considered in order to grasp ethnic identity since ethnicity is related to cultural distinction (Jenkins 2008: 14, 79). Thus Moken culture needs to be explored to understand Moken identity. As cited, language, lifestyle and ritual represent culture (Jenkins 10-11). In addition, ethnicity is related not only to culture but also to history (Karner 2007: 17). In the informants’ story and interviews, Moken history and culture are described.

### **2.2.1. History around the Second World War Described by Taley**

Taley’s ancestors came to Pakjok, village no. 4 of Phrathong Island by *kabang*. He was born in Pakjok village. Before the Second World War there was a Moken village on so-called Chard Island. The Moken went to sea, hunted fish, gathered seafood or mined in their local area. However, the eruption of cholera and small pox killed many Moken people. Because of these diseases, people left the island and moved to other islands or to the mainland. Ra Island near Phrathong Island was another Moken dominated place. According to Taley, there were three communities, the Moken, Chinese-Thai and local Thai. “The Moken was the first group who started to live on Ra Island”. The Moken hunted fish, grew their own vegetables and mined. The first Chinese-Thai arrived, started the first commercial mine and local Thai laboured at the mine. Unlike local Thai, the Moken still continued their own work (“indirect narrative interview” with Taley and three older Moklen, March 5, 2009, village B).

### 2.2.2. Comparison of History Before the Tsunami and the Present Time

Moken interviewees in this section used to live on islands and moved to the mainland due to the demolition of their habitats by the tsunami in 2004. Interviews show how they have lived before and after they settled down on the mainland. The contents of the interviews can be divided into six parts: livelihood and lifestyle, house, children's playing, language, belief, ritual and tradition, and ID card. Their previous situation and the change that has occurred will be compared in each category.

Yai, Taley, Da and Nokyai made their living by working on the sea in the past. Both men and women fished, clammed or caught sea cucumbers in general. Taley, Da and Nokyai did not use modern fishing net when they went fishing. After Yai, Taley, Da and Nokyai came to the mainland they have to go to the sea by motorbike, which was not necessary before settling down. Yai and Taley mainly go to the sea as before (interview with Yai, March 3, 2009, village B; "indirect narrative interview" with Taley, March 5, 2009, village B; interview with Da & Nokyai, March 13, 2009, village T). Particularly Taley is rarely in the village on the mainland because of that. Indeed, he was seen only once during the fieldwork. Additionally, the media focused on Taley because he refused to utilise modern fishing equipment after the tsunami (observation, February 7 to March 27, 2009; discussion with the abbot, February 28, 2009, the temple). In contrast, working on the sea has become a part-time job to Da and Nokyai; they do not go fishing any more and only catch clams or sea cucumbers. They have a donated long-tale boat with a motor and do not row, which otherwise was the usual way to transport oneself among the Moken in the past. Their main job is as a day worker or Da makes miniature *kabangs* to sell. Even their daughter Nong works as a maid to earn money regularly. She heard about the job from her cousin and other Moken (interview with Yai, March 3, 2009, village B; "indirect narrative interview" with Taley, March 5, 2009, village B; interview with Da & Nokyai, March 13, 2009, village T). According to Eriksen, people often use their ethnic network when searching for a job (Eriksen 2002: 32).

Da and Nokyai lived in their *kabang* before the tsunami. According to them, it was equipped with everything they need including a place to live (interview, March 13, 2009, village T). On the contrary, Taley's *kabang* was changed to a boat since his family did not go far away and they lived on Phrathong Island. The place at *kabang*

where they used to live was not seen as necessary and was therefore removed (“indirect narrative interview”, March 5, 2009, village B). In addition, Yai, Taley, Da and Nokyai, each, also had another kind of house near the sea: a small hut made from bamboo on four wooden pillars (interview with Yai, March 3, 2009, village B; “indirect narrative interview” with Taley, March 5, 2009, village B; interview with Da & Nokyai, March 13, 2009, village T). After they came to the mainland none of them live in *kabang* anymore. Yai and Taley both live in their house in village B or small huts on Ra Island. Their houses on the mainland do not look like their huts on the islands since those are built with concrete and are far from the sea (observation, February 7, 2009, village B). Da and Nokyai also used to live in village B after the tsunami, but moved into their daughter’s house in village T. Although Nokyai does not recognise it, they have more stuff in their house than before such as a fan, gas stoves, a refrigerator, a TV, lights and so on. Anything related to fishing was not seen in their house but some pictures taken with foreigners or each family member were hanging on the wall (observation & interview, March 13, 2009, village T).

Children’s play was also related to the sea until they moved to the mainland. Narak from Surin Island played with a simple fishing pole given by his grandfather. Sometimes he caught squids or other fish, then he asked his grandfather to cook. Alternatively he raised clams he caught (interview, March 17, 2009, village T). However, after living on the mainland children’s play is limited as they cannot go to sea easily because of the distance. In the case of Narak, most of his playing is not related to the sea any more. He also gets into mischief with other students, mostly in the Moken or the Moklen group, at his school (observation, February 16 to March 2, 2009, school R).

In regard to language, Nokyai, Yai, Da and Narak provide different cases. The Moken on Surin Island usually speak Moken language, however, some also learnt Thai even before the tsunami. For example, Nokyai frequently interacted with Thai staff and learnt the language (interview, March 13, 2009, village T). Yai is different from Nokyai. According to Reang, she was not able to speak Thai, but started to learn after moving to the mainland (group interview, March 5, 2009, village B). However, Yai and Nokyai’s Thai is poor. While, Da and Nong can speak only Moken and barely understand Thai. In contrast to the four, some Moken are fluent in both languages.

Narak can speak and write both languages because he goes to school on the mainland (observation, February 18-19, 2009, school R).

The Moken believe in the spirits of their ancestors and their tradition and ritual are mostly based on this belief. After practicing the tradition on the mainland, the Moken offer the obtained gifts to the ancestor and then consume them. The tradition has been practiced from generation to generation and they teach their children to follow the same tradition (interview with Yai & Pa, March 3, 2009, village B). In the context of belief the Moken sometimes unintentionally break Thai customs. One such example according to observation is when inhabitants of village B, including Wan whose grandfather is Moken from Surin Island, came to the temple to clean.<sup>9</sup> They started to make hammocks from monk clothes for babies and children. It was not important to them who makes and touches the clothes. Wan was swinging a string connected to the hammock to help a baby sleep in it. This is in sharp contrast to their careful behaviour towards their spiritual house, which looks different from Thai's (observation, March 16, 2009, the temple). As Buddhists, Thai people show their respect with specific ways of bowing or sitting in front of monks. Particularly, Thai women and girls do not touch monks. When they give something to monks they have to either place the item where the monk can pick it up or give it to a man who gives it to the monk. In this culture, Thai women and girls are not allowed to touch monks' clothes either. Therefore, what Wan and other Moken women did could not happen among Thai Buddhist women.

A medium is vital in Moken society because he can communicate with spirits. For example, when somebody dies the funeral is conducted by a medium without monks.<sup>10</sup> The Moken keep the dead body for one to two days and offer seafood to people attending the funeral. The next day they bury the body in the ground and the medium builds a small house with four wooden legs in front of the grave. When people go back, the medium follows the group and spreads holy water on them in order to avoid bringing ghosts from the place. The bereaved family can ask the

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<sup>9</sup> Wan thinks that she is Moklen. She believes in spirit and asks for clothes, food or money to serve the spirits of her ancestor regularly as the Moken and other Moklen do.

<sup>10</sup> In the case of the Moklen, monks and a medium participate in their funeral (observation, March 16, 2009, Kuraburi).

medium the cause of death seven days after the death since he becomes able to communicate with the spirit. The strong trust towards a medium was observed during the interview. As the Moken think, Da and Nokyai talked about their disfavour for cremation, saying that “If the dead body is burnt, the dead person would be naked and squat with curled hands under lemon grass.” Reang commented that “Do not believe it. It is just children’s saying.” However, Nokyai insisted on that and said, “No, no, no. It is true. My father was a medium and he knew everything. It is true” (interview, March 17, 2009, village T). This quotation shows that she believes not only in the story about cremation but also in their medium. Even though more than four years have passed since they moved to the mainland, their belief, tradition and their world view seem not to have been changed drastically.

In the context of healing, the process of mixture between Thai and Moken culture was seen from interviews.<sup>11</sup> In Surin Island, when the Moken are sick they ask a sorcerer for curing. Only when they are not cured they go to a hospital, according to Da and Nokyai (interview, March 17, 2009, village T). However, both change and preservation can be observed after Yai, Da and Nokyai move to the mainland. Yai went to the hospital for the first time in her life when she fell down recently, whereas Nokyai wants to go to a sorcerer on Surin Island if she is sick because she once witnessed someone healed by the sorcerer. Da says that he would go to a hospital if he gets ill on the mainland, but he would go to the sorcerer if he is on Surin Island (interview with Yai, March 3, 2009, village B; interview with Da & Nokyai, March 17, 2009, village T).<sup>12</sup> The three interviewees show different thoughts, which seem to represent the process of change in the context of healing. Nokyai keeps traditional mind, Yai adapts to Thai way and Da seems pragmatic placing himself between the two.

Before Yai, Da and Nokyai settled down on the mainland none of them had an ID card. After the tsunami, many Moken including Yai and Da were issued on ID card. However, their ID card differs from Thai’s. The ID card of locals is sky-blue and contains a 13-digit personal identification number, birth date and an address. Yai and

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<sup>11</sup> Healing is one context of ethnic categorisation (Jenkins 2008: 68).

<sup>12</sup> According to Nokyai and Da, they have never got sick so far (interview, March 17, 2009, village T).

Da's ID cards are white and have no personal identification number. Instead, it is written "Identity personal card has no register position" in place of the personal identification number.<sup>13</sup> The birth date category on Da's ID card, granted in 2008, shows only the assumed birth year since the Moken do not count birth date.<sup>14</sup> The address written on his ID card does not indicate exact address either because his house number is "0", which means non-existent. They are categorised as "Thai Mai" on the ID card (interview with Yai, March 3, 2009, village B; interview with Da & Nokyai, March 13, 2009, village T). They are issued an ID card by the Thai government after settling down on the mainland, but it is still differentiated from local Thai's card.

In conclusion, Moken's livelihood and lifestyle, house, children's playing, language, belief, tradition, ritual and ID card before and after they moved to the mainland were presented during interviews with them and observation. Some of their daily life have been kept. However their everyday life even before the tsunami was not exactly the same as the Moken traditional way. The Moken have already got contact with Thai or adopted Thai lifestyle to some extent before coming to the mainland. The Moken on the mainland call themselves Moken although they have experienced some changes compared to before. Therefore, factors that define ethnic boundary can be changed (Wallman, cited in Jenkins 2008:20).

### **2.3. Moken Individualism**

Even though ethnicity is formed by "collectivities", individual performance must also be recognised (Brubaker, cited in Jenkins 2008: 25). Moken individualism was detected through an interview with Da. As Moken, Da and Nokyai lived with other Moken on Surin Island. It is possible that they are an important family since Nokyai's father was a medium. However neither they nor the family of his younger brother have practiced the tradition on the mainland after their parents died. They decided not to believe in spirits unlike their parents. Da's family is afraid that if they forget practicing the tradition of believing in spirits, bad things will happen. According to them, it was not a problem not to follow the tradition. No one on Surin Island blamed

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<sup>13</sup> Jia helped the author by writing the sentence down and the abbot translated it.

<sup>14</sup> For example, -/-/2505. Thailand utilises solar calendar, but counts year based on Buddhist calendar too. For example, year 2009 is year 2552 in Thai way.

them for it and they continued to live as Moken in their society (interview, March 13, 2009, village T). Considering these two cases, one's individual ethnic belonging does not end by not doing some "collectivities".

### **3. THEY ARE MOKEN**

How the Moken define their identity was examined in the previous chapter. Then how do "others" define the Moken? To explore the definitions of Moken identity by "others", "others" are divided into two groups based on Shamsul's "two social reality" approach. The first group, representatives of "authority-defined" social reality, includes academics, government officials, teachers of primary school R, members of the temple and the staff of the NGO. While the second group, representatives of "everyday-defined" social reality, includes the Moklen, local Thai and a foreigner. In this section there are three new interviewees with fictional names: Pee (Moklen, female, 30, group interview), Chame (local Thai, male, 44, group interview) and Farang (American, male in his 50s, e-mail correspondence). Before studying Moken identity as it is regarded by "others", the following section will discuss how the Moken recognise their identity defined by "others".

#### **3.1. Moken's Recognition of the Definitions by "Others"**

The Moken are aware that they are defined by "others" in different labels from their contact with Thai people, for example when they come to the mainland to practice their tradition.<sup>15</sup> When non-Moken define the Moken, there are several labels that are used: "Moken", "Thai Mai", "Chao Lay" and "Chao Nam". "Thai Mai" means "new Thai" in Thai. According to Taley and three older Moklen, the label "Thai Mai" has been created by Kun Satian an authorised Thai in PhangNga province to label the Moklen. ("indirect narrative interviews", March 5, 2009, village B). "Chao Lay" means "people from sea" in Thai and "Chao Nam" means "people from water" ("indirect narrative interview" with Taley, March 5, 2009; Wan in group interview, March 5, 2009; interview with Wan & Reang, March 16, 2009, village B). "Chao Lay" and "Chao Nam" are perhaps the same to Thai. As commonly as "Chao Lay" is used to label the Moken, "Chao Nam" is also utilised by Thai people. Therefore, Thai

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<sup>15</sup> Yai said that some people call her "Oh, Moken comes. Moken comes.", another call her "Oh, Chao Lay, Chao Lay, Chao Lay.", and the others call her "Oh, Thai Mai." when she goes to the mainland (interview, March 3, 2009, village B).



define the Moken as people from sea or water. However, the definitions of the two labels are quite different to the Moken. The Moken feel “Chao Nam” as a kind of insult since “water” reminds them of men. In that sense the definition evokes having sex to the Moken.<sup>16</sup> From the author’s point of view, some interactions between the Moken and “others” are seen from these definitions. The term “Moken” might show equal interaction between them, because the Moken label themselves Moken and “others” use the label.<sup>17</sup> However, “Chao Nam” seems to show unequal interaction. Thai keep using the label, which the Moken do not like, without considering Moken’s feelings. In contrast, Da has not heard about “Chao Lay” or “Thai Mai” (interview, March 13, 2009, village T). It is perhaps because he does not practice Moken tradition on the mainland and he cannot speak Thai. It means that Da has had no or little interaction with Thai compared to other Moken. Therefore, Moken’s recognition of definitions by “others” would be dependant on the interactions.

### **3.2. Representatives of “Authority-Defined” Social Reality**

This section will explore Moken identity in authority structures: academic area, the Thai government, primary school R and the NGO.

#### **3.2.1. Academics**

Chao Lay or “sea gypsies” consists of the Moken, the Moklen and the Urak Lawoi in academic works, thus the scholars define the Moken as one of Chao Lay or “sea gypsy” group (Arunotai 2006; Hogan, cited in Granbom 2005: 9). They are classified by their language, dwelling place and citizenship and the Moklen and the Urak Lawoi are the groups that have settled down and hold Thai citizenship (Arunotai 2006: 140; Ivanoff 1997: 25, 109; UNESCO 2001: 21). According to this definition, the Moken and the Moklen cannot be the same. While, in terms of culture the Moken still maintain a nomadic life with their eco-friendly knowledge and have plentiful knowledge about the forest as well (Arunotai 2006:140-146). Unlike the Moklen who believe in Buddhism and their ancestors, the Moken only believe in their ancestors.

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<sup>16</sup> Not only the Moken but also the Moklen dislike that definition of the label (group interview, March 5, 2009, village B).

<sup>17</sup> Ivanoff mentioned: “The members of this wandering ethnic group call themselves the Moken.” (Ivanoff 1997: 52).

Since they are animists, their world view is spiritual (Arunotai 2006: 146; UNESCO 2001: 21). They are not close to an industrial livelihood, their lifestyle is traditional and they do not have political power since UNESCO and Ivanoff mentioned the Moken do not have Thai citizenship (UNESCO 2001:31; Ivanoff 2001:31). Hence, the Moken can be defined as an “indigenous” group too.

This “indigenous” minority group is defined as an ethnic group losing their own traditions because of outsiders surrounding them, particularly Thai. Ivanoff calls Surin Island a “cultural zoo” because it has become a national park and the island has been influenced by “Burmese, Thai, Malay and Moken social territories” (Ivanoff 2001: 34). Arunotai expounds that Moken culture is waning by the influence of capitalism, the regulation for nature preservation in Surin Island as a national park and the contact by Thai and foreign tourists. Capitalism leads the Moken to go fishing instead of hunting or gathering seafood for self-sufficiency, something which changes their livelihood as employees of the national park. The nature preservation regulation limits Moken’s possibility to logging trees for making their traditional boat, *kabang*, and doing their daily life on the sea. Finally, Thai and tourists expose the Moken to a modernised or globalised environment (Arunotai 2006: 146-147).

### 3.2.2. Thai Government

#### 3.2.2.1. *Nationalism*

Thai nationalism was launched in 1939 and it was particularly inspired by Japan (Terwiel 1991: 134). Winichakul says that Thai nationalism was created as a reaction against colonialism and in order for the country (Winichakul 2008: 584). While, Terwiel suggests that Thai nationalism needs to be seen as a continuing phenomenon and Winichakul shows its flow in his article *Nationalism and Radical Intelligentsia in Thailand* (Terwiel 1991: 145; Winichakul 2008). Their studies about Thai nationalism shows the impact of Siamese nationalism by King Rama VI. In the view of King Rama VI, Siamese need to speak Thai language, believe in Buddhism and respect their king (Vaddhanaphuti 2005: 161). According to Winichakul, Thai nationalism has contained monarchy even when the absolute monarchy was unstable in early twentieth century. When less stress was put on the monarchy around the 1940s, another factor was highlighted: “Thai race”, which indicates “Tai-speaking peoples” (Winichakul 2008: 584). In the 1980s a religious part, specifically Buddhism, was

added to Thai nationalism influenced by a “self-proclaimed radical conservatism” against capitalism and Westernisation of Thailand (Winichakul 585).

As mentioned above, Thai language, Buddhism and monarchy are crucial factors to Thai nationalism. These factors seem to have also influenced the Moken, particularly the monarchy. The Moken would feel gratefulness towards the monarchy since a princess offered some projects such as free hospital treatment after the tsunami (interview with the assistant district chief officer, March 24, 2009, the interviewee’s office) and the mother of the King gave the Moken family names such as Klatalay and Hantalay<sup>18</sup> more than ten years ago. The family name is used on Moken’s ID card and utilised when they introduced themselves in the group interview. However, other factors may exclude the Moken. Many Moken cannot speak Thai at all or properly since their mother tongue is Moken. They believe in the spirits of their ancestors and many still practice tradition to serve the spirits. Therefore, the Moken would have been easily defined as “others” to Thai in terms of Thai nationalism.

#### 3.2.2.2. *Laws*

Persons in Thailand are affected by Thai laws; however, the persons are defined differently by the laws. To see how the Moken are defined under Thai laws, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand (2007)<sup>19</sup>, the National Education Act (1999), the Nationality Act (1992), and the Immigration Act (1979) in English version were studied.<sup>20</sup>

Nationality Act allows a baby who has a mother or father with Thai nationality to have Thai citizenship (the Nationality Act, Section 7). Therefore many Moken who do not hold Thai citizenship are excluded from these sections. Then what is the definition of the Moken by Thai law? According to the Nationality Act and the Immigration Act, non-Thai is defined as “alien” and if an “alien” enters Thailand, he or she is defined as “immigrant” (the Nationality Act, Section 4; the Immigration Act,

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<sup>18</sup> The meaning of Klatalay and Hantalay is people who are brave or strong at sea in Thai (group interview, March 5, 2009, village B).

<sup>19</sup> From now on, the Consitution of the Kingdom of Thailand will be called the “Constitution”.

<sup>20</sup> Thai laws are translated in English on the website, <http://www.thailaws.com> (accessed January 31, 2009).

Section 4). Therefore, the Moken in Thailand, who do not have Thai citizenship, are defined as “alien”. Moreover, the “alien” Moken, who frequently cross the border between Thailand and Burma, will be defined as “immigrant”. In terms of religion, the Moken might be neglected. According to the “Constitution”, “The King is a Buddhist and Upholder of religions”. This shows Buddhism’s supremacy over “other religions” although Buddhism is not mentioned explicitly in the “Constitution” as the national religion and the Thai state aims for harmony of religions (the “Constitution”, Section 9 & 49). It seems vague to classify “other religions” in detail. Only Buddhism is distinctive, hence it is not clear if Moken’s traditional belief is officially considered as a religion. Moreover even if it belongs to religion, it is generalised as “other religions”. The National Education Act also excludes Moken identity. This law emphasises learning Thai identity such as Thai language and “Thai wisdom”. Buddhism in this act is distinctive as it is in the “Constitution”. In addition, the consciousness of monarchy is mentioned. Therefore the National Education Act is intended to educate Thai nationalism to the students. Under these circumstances, there seems to be no place for Moken identity to stand. There is a case which shows Moken’s exclusion by laws. The Moken cannot insist on their legal rights about the land where they have lived for a long time, since they do not have any registered information. This is not changed even if they hold in ID card later (discussion with the abbot, February 28, 2009, the temple). Hence, the exclusion strongly affects Moken’s life and threatens the maintenance of Moken identity.

### 3.2.2.3. *Kuraburi*

The view towards Moken identity by the governmental office in Kuraburi needs to be studied since it takes care of the Moken on Surin Island. The contents of the interview consisted of definitions and stereotypes about the Moken by the government, Thai citizenship and a comparison with hill tribes.<sup>21</sup> For definitions and stereotypes about the Moken by the government, the assistant district chief officer defined the Moken as a sea nomad group on islands, not on the mainland, without any registered record. He mentioned that the Moken live on the islands of Southern Thailand, however, there is only one Moken village in Kuraburi, the one on Surin Island (interview, March 24,

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<sup>21</sup> Eriksen sees stereotype towards an ethnic group as vital since it identifies ethnic boundary (Eriksen 2002: 25).

2009, the interviewee's office). Therefore, the Thai government has a limited definition of the Moken compared to the Moken whom the author interviewed. In contrast to the Moken interviewees, the Thai government identifies the Moken only based on their dwelling place, whether they live on islands or on the mainland. In addition, the officer described the Moken as "uncivilised" and "undeveloped". "Polite people" and "people do not destroy" were also mentioned when he explained about Moken's crossing border between Thailand and Burma (interview, March 24, 2009, the interviewee's office). These seem to be stereotypes about the Moken. The first two stereotypes would be based on the definition of Moken identity by the Thai government.

In terms of Thai citizenship, the assistant district chief officer defined "Thai Mai" as the ex-Moken living on the mainland with their own ID card. According to him, the identity card of "Thai Mai" is the same as Thai's, thus they are treated as Thai citizens. Furthermore, the process of granting Thai citizenship to the Moken is "the same" as in the case of hill tribes, only the time when they are recognised by the Thai government is different. There are several steps: first, survey about name, family members' name and the length of stay on Surin Island with taking one's picture; second, documentation, third, submission to upper government, fourth, permissions from immigration office and Thai army. The survey is done regularly since they need to prove that the Moken registered by the survey have lived in Thailand for around ten years. If a Moken frequently goes out of the border of Thailand, the ID card is not granted. (interview, March 24, 2009, the interviewee's office).

The survey seems to have two functions: it is the first step to grant Thai citizenship; and the Moken are recognised and administered by the Thai government. Every baby who is born on Surin Island is recorded by the government, however being granted Thai nationality is dependant on the baby's parents' nationality (interview, March 24, 2009, the interviewee's office). Therefore there would be two concerns to get Thai citizenship: first, settling down is ultimately crucial for Moken adults. However, it is not clear whether Moken who naturally settled down in Thailand get their own ID card or Moken who decide to abandon their nomadic life to be Thai citizens get their ID card, or both. Second, parents' nationality is vital to get Thai citizenship for Moken babies. Meanwhile, their status is different from legal immigrants from other

countries who are offered pink card (interview, March 24, 2009, the interviewee's office). In sum, Thai government seems to define the Moken as semi-“others”.

The government officer briefly mentioned the religion category on the ID card. According to the government officer, the only religions recognised by the government are Buddhism, Islam, Hindu and Christianity (interview, March 24, 2009, the interviewee's office).<sup>22</sup> Since the Moken believe in their ancestors, their belief is not regarded as a religion. In that case, “no religion” is written on the ID card (interview, March 24, 2009 at the interviewee's office). Then, Moken belief is excluded or neglected by the Thai government, i.e. their belief has no place in a religious category under the “authority-defined” social reality.

During the interview the government officer described what services the Thai government has offered to the Moken on Surin Island. The services are healthcare, education and so on. There is an informal school on Surin Island with two volunteer Thai teachers. The teachers do not know the Moken language and education is conducted in Thai. According to him, Thai language ability is important since it connects Moken children to upper level education on the mainland (interview, March 24, 2009, the interviewee's office). His explanation would be right in actuality, however, Moken children would lose their culture and identity gradually and become homogenised in a Thai way.

#### 3.2.2.4. *Kuraburi Pier*

To go to other islands by boat from Kuraburi passengers have to pass Kuraburi pier. In front of the pier there is a ticket office run by the Thai government. In the ticket office many tourist attraction notices are put up on the wall. One of them is about the Moken village on Surin Island. The notice presents the Moken in two languages. The English version says:

“**Sea Gypsies** “Chao Nam” or “Moken” are th[e] name[s] of “Sea Gypsies” who lives [on] Surin Island. Do you know where they [are] from and how

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<sup>22</sup> It seems that whether there is a religion category or not on the ID card is dependant on whether the ID card is an old or new version.

[they could] get there? Moken still have traditional li[f]e style. Their house, boats are traditional and they beli[e]ve in spirit. Moken live [i]n the south island. You can visit them also shopping there (observation, January 26, 2009, Kuraburi pier ticket office)”.

The Thai version has a similar meaning, but they use different labels. It can be translated:

“**Chao Lay** Chao Lay or Moken on Surin Island? Where are they from, and why? They come to stay at the bay. Moken is a group of people who protect most of their culture and tradition. For example, place for village, a kind of house, the way of life and transportation. You can buy hand-made souvenir by Moken. If you want to know them, welcome to prove at the bay on Surin Island (observation, January 26, 2009, Kuraburi pier ticket office)”.<sup>23</sup>

A comparison between the two notices show both sides of the Thai government. The first comparison is about labels utilised in the notice of each version. The English version has three labels: “Sea Gypsies”, “Chao Nam” and “Moken” while the Thai version has only two labels, “Chao Lay” and “Moken”. It is interesting that each version does not contain the same label except “Moken”; “Chao Lay” is utilised in the Thai version, but “Chao Nam” is used in the English version. As mentioned earlier, the definition of “Chao Nam” is inappropriate to the Moken. On account of the utilisation of “Chao Nam” in the English version, foreigners would particularly get unsuitable information. The Thai government seems to introduce the Moken to “others” whereas they do not officially check or care about how the definitions mean to the Moken. The Thai government seems to try to show their concern about the Moken with the introduction while their concerns mainly focus on the Moken only as a tourist attraction. The next comparison is about similarities between them; both present Moken traditional way of life, belief and living on islands. All three are different from Thai life. Thai are modernised, most of them live on the mainland and most of them believe in Buddhism. It might be related to one of stereotypes about the

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<sup>23</sup> The abbot translated the Thai version and mentioned that the office utilised the term “prove” in the notice.

Moken as “backward” because their traditions are seen as primordial one among local Thai.<sup>24</sup> In conclusion, they introduce the Moken as different to Thai culture, hence the Moken are defined as “others”.

#### 3.2.2.5. *Thai Government towards Other Ethnic Groups*

Moken identity from the view of the Thai government would be grasped in comparison to their views on other ethnic minorities. They officially divide non-Thai ethnic groups into five categories: Chinese (Chao Chin), hill tribes (Chao Khao), Vietnamese migrants (Chao Yuan Opphayop), Thai Muslims (Chao Thai Muslim) and others, which are refugee groups from China, Burma and Indochina (Laungaramsri 2003: 162).

Chinese group used to be recognised as people who are necessary to fill in the business area in Thailand when they immigrated and they began to influence the Thai economy (Vaddhanaphuti 2005: 153). However, the emphasis on Thai nationality defined them as a threat to “Thai-ness” since they did not speak Thai even though they adopted Buddhism. They had to be educated in Thai schools and tried not to be excluded from Thai nationalism by defining themselves as Thai and adopting Thai name (Vaddhanaphuti 154). Chinese’ efforts to assimilate into Thai culture and King Vajiravudh’s effort to detach Chinese children from Chinese nationalism helped the Chinese to hold Thai citizenship (Laungaramsri 2003: 160-161). Although the Chinese group lived under anti-Chinese circumstances and Chinese became integrated into Thai society, Chinese still maintained their tradition. Finally, they are accepted as Thai as long as they speak Thai, believe in Buddhism and respect the King (Vaddhanaphuti 2005: 154-155).

The situation of Thai Muslims is different from the Chinese group since Thai Muslims’ religion and language are different from the Thai’s. However it does not mean that they have been excluded from the concerns of the Thai government. Rather, they want to be excluded to keep their own religion and language, but the Thai government has continually worked to assimilate them. Speaking Malay had been banned by regulation in the past and they have to speak Thai (Steinmetz 2004: 140;

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<sup>24</sup> The stereotype “backward” people is introduced in Arunotai’s work (Arunotai 2006: 148).



Laungaramsri 2003: 168). Nowadays the Thai government accepts their identity but Thai nationalism still affects their life. For instance, the Thai government forces them to use the Thai language as an official language even though utilising Malay or Arabic is allowed in private Islamic schools (Knodel et al. 1999: 150-151). Even government officials defined the Malay Muslim as “Thai Islam” to attach Thai identity to them (Steinmetz 2004: 133). They have Thai citizenship although Muslims have thought that the Thai government treats them as second-class citizens (Jeon 2008). As reactions to the repression of homogenisation under Thai nationalism, many conflicts and separatist movements have occurred (Steinmetz 2004: 156; Laungaramsri 2003: 168).

Hill tribes are not exceptional under the emphasis of Thai nationalism. They have their own language and some of the hill tribes are animists, therefore their identity is also excluded from Thai identity. Because of that they had to be educated in Thai by the Ministry of Education’s charter or Sangha Act of 1902 (Vaddhanaphuti 2005: 154, 158; Vail 2007: 123-125). Furthermore, hill tribes were not able to be conferred a complete Thai identity card, instead they hold a blue card, which means “incomplete Thai identity”. Some of the blue card holders, who prove their long stay in Thailand and Thai language ability, can apply for a complete Thai ID card (Vaddhanaphuti 2005: 161-162). As reactions, some rebellions such as the Hmong’s movement for political independence occurred (Laungaramsri 2003: 165). However they can be seen as a silent subordinated group compared to Thai Muslims.

Similarities and differences exist in how the government perceives each ethnic identity. First, the Moken and the above other ethnic groups were defined as “others” by Thai nationalism which technically and continually discourages the use of their own language. Second, the official division of ethnic minorities by Thai government excludes “sea gypsies” (Chao Lay). The first two other ethnic groups are defined as Thai with Thai ID cards while hill tribes with blue cards and the Moken with white cards are defined as people who have “incomplete Thai identity”.

### 3.2.3. Primary School

The public primary school R is selected to observe its environment, teachers and students since this school received Moken and Moklen children after the tsunami. The

observation was conducted in each class from 16 February to 2 March. A survey was conducted among the teachers of the school on 6 March and answers were returned on 11 March.

#### 3.2.3.1. *The Background of school R and Its Environment*

Primary school R was built in 1950 and has a director, nine teachers, one cook, one school caretaker, two volunteers and 162 students. Even though it is a primary school, there is also a kindergarten. After the tsunami, 50 Moken and Moklen children came to the school in 2005. They are divided into each level including kindergarten, however some of them are older than their local Thai classmates because of their different educational background. Normally the school starts at 08:30 and finishes at 15:30 (meeting, 13 February, 2009, school R). Every morning at 08:30 students gather in front of the Thai national flag on the ground. One boy and three girls come in front of the gathered students. The boy hoists the Thai national flag and one girl helps him, while students sing the Thai anthem. After that, the other two girls start to pray and the other students follow them (observation, February 16 to March 2, 2009, school R).

Near the front door of the school, there is a shrine where a Buddha statue is. There are four buildings including one canteen and 12 classrooms, two playgrounds for the primary school students and kindergarten children, one computer cluster and one library in the school. Every classroom has three pictures, the Thai national flag, a Buddha image and the King, over the blackboard (observation, February 16 to March 2, 2009, school R). In one classroom, there was an exhibition of paintings which students drew images of Buddha (observation, February 24, 2009, school R). All textbooks are in Thai and teach how to bow and how to behave towards the elderly or monks. According to their textbook for level one, nationalism is introduced in a chapter. Children waved the Thai national flag, learnt a poem about “loving Thailand” and the Thai anthem. They practiced many times in groups and Narak was not exceptional. They also practiced how they should bow to the King (observation, February 18-19, 2009, school R). The book for reading class of level three is the story of Buddha and Buddhism (observation, March 2, 2009, school R). In other textbooks, the main religions are introduced, but nothing about animism (observation, February 23, 2009, school R). Outside the classrooms, there are pictures of Thai culture,

Buddhism and the King or Queen on the wall. Only in one place, some pictures of Moken and Moklen children after the tsunami are seen (observation, February 16 to March 2, 2009, school R). Buddhism, the monarchy and Thai language are observed in the environment of the school R. Thus, the school environment is connected to Thai nationalism and the National Education Act. Furthermore, it shows that all of the students are treated and educated as Thai.

### 3.2.3.2. *Teacher*

Students are identified by particular authorities in schools (Cicourel and Kitsuse, and Rist, cited in Jenkins 2008: 62). The particular authorities at a school will be teachers and in school R all teachers are Thai. Then, how did the teachers define Moken students? First, teachers did not know much about the Moken and the Moklen. Second, the director of the school and some teachers thought that they might receive “new students” or “children from islands” on the day the tsunami hit the islands.<sup>25</sup> In other words, Moken and Moklen students were defined as students from the outside due to the tsunami. Third, teachers seemed to define the “new students” as the victims of a disaster. According to the teachers’ answers, after they received the students many of them tried to give comfort and pay more attention to the students. Fourth, now, four years have passed since Moken and Moklen students joined, teachers have a special label for the “new students” by the above definitions.

The label by four of six teachers are about the tsunami: “Dek tsunami” which means “tsunami child” in Thai, “tsunami students” or “tsunami group”. The definition of the labels is that “the children followed the tsunami.” Two teachers used the additional terms such as “Moken Students”, “Chao Lay” and “Thai Mai”, but interestingly none of them uses Moklen students. In other words, they do not or cannot distinguish Moken and Moklen students among the “new students”. Actually, none of them knows the Moklen according to the survey. It seems that they have no knowledge about the Moklen. Thus their knowledge makes them define Moken and Moklen students as “Moken students”. In terms of stereotypes, there were some distinctive

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<sup>25</sup> The author indicated the Moken and the Moklen students as “new students” in the questionnaire to see if teachers indicate them Moken, Moklen or others. Teachers mostly used “new students” as the author mentioned, but one teacher indicates them “children from the island”.

impressions towards the “new students”. Two of them see that the students are “diligent” and “patient” whereas three of them mentioned negative impressions such as “not active”, “not joyful”, “lonely”, “slow learners”, “going out during a class” and “not supported by their parents” (survey, March 11, 2009, school R).

In short, teachers at school R used to have little knowledge about “sea gypsies” prior to the tsunami, but have become to define them since they received the “new students”. As a result, specific labels for the “new students” are created with the definition related to the disaster. Also some teachers have positive and negative stereotypes about them. Nevertheless, their labels and definitions do not distinguish the Moken and the Moklen because of the lack of knowledge.

#### 3.2.4. Temple

The temple had been a shelter for the victims of the tsunami in 2004 for a period of some months to two years. There were many Moken and Moklen people among the victims. Since the temple has helped them by cooperating with organisations and donors in many ways, there seems to be a close relationship between the members of the temple and the victims. The Moken and the Moklen victims are divided into two villages and one of the villages is village B. Staff from the temple was not sure about the ethnic identity of the village inhabitants. According to the staff, some of the inhabitants are confused of their ethnic identity. For instance, an inhabitant said he/she is Moken on one day, but the inhabitant said he/she is Moklen on another day (oral conversation, February 26, 2009, village B).

On the contrary, the abbot of the temple was sure about who is Moken or Moklen. His knowledge was based on his academic research for a master degree. Particularly he had factors to distinguish the Moken and the Moklen from academic texts, his interviews and observation. The factors are: hometown, job, fishing equipments, existence of a medium and their boats. Their hometown seemed to be the most decisive factor. According to the abbot, he found this factor in a Thai book *The Wave of Difficulty on Phrathong Island* written by Olivia Ferary, Narumon Hinchiranan, Kulasab Udpuly and Jacque Ivanoff. Here a person is defined as Moken if the person is from Ra Island or Surin Island (discussion with the abbot, February 27, 28, 2009, the temple). According to this definition, half of the village B inhabitants are Moken.

However, it is different from the inhabitants' thinking. When some village inhabitants were asked about the ethnic identity of all village inhabitants most inhabitants were Moklen. There were only two Moken people from Surin Island at the village according to them (meeting, February 26, 2009, village B). The academic authority-defined social reality has influenced the monk's authority-defined social reality. However, he has changed his definition since he heard the story of the Moklen from Ra Island during the author's fieldwork (discussion with the abbot, March 7, 2009, the temple). Additionally, the abbot of the temple has been interested in the culture of "sea gypsies" since he defines the Moken as an ethnic group losing their culture by being separated from their traditional lifestyle (E-Mail correspondence, November 25, 2008).

### 3.2.5. NGO

The NGO, ActionAid was selected to explore their definition of the Moken since the organisation previously had a programme for the Moken. It was known that how the NGO has defined the Moken through an interview with a staff of the NGO and through its website. Since the interviewee has been in Lao Island of Ranong province with the Moken, his information is about the Moken in that area. According to the staff, the Moken in Ranong province had not been recognised by the Thai government and NGOs until the tsunami. After the tsunami, this NGO had been involved in human rights issues of the Moken since they have no Thai citizenship and they are poor. Their focus was citizenship issues and they offered a programme on the subject of getting an ID card. One reason for ending the programme is that ActionAid thinks the situation for the Moken has improved. Other reasons are: the source of funding has been changed, the place where the Moken live is too poor to live for staff or volunteers and there was violence against women volunteers by soldiers (interview, March 18, 2009 at ActionAid office). These describe the Moken as people who were marginalised before the programme and are still in need in terms of their living condition. In its website, the Moken or "sea gypsy" in PhangNga province are mentioned in two articles: one says that "sea gypsies" joined in an activity of ActionAid with other organisations which is aimed at "Education for All" and it is mentioned that many Moken are illiterate (ActionAid 2007). Another is about the identity of one "Moken" girl, but mostly focusing on discrimination against the girl at her school (Chappanapong 2006). It seems that the Moken are presented as a people

who are subordinated in the two articles of this NGO. Considering the interview and the website ActionAid defines the Moken as an ethnic minority.

### **3.3. Representatives of “Everyday-defined” Social Reality**

Since there is a non-authority group within “others” it is necessary to examine the definitions of Moken identity by “others” outside power structures such as the Moklen, local Thai and a foreigner.

#### **3.3.1. The Moklen**

It was observed during interviews how the Moklen define the Moken and themselves by pointing to differences between them. According to Reang, the Moklen live near the mainland whereas the Moken live in *kabang* and on islands far from the mainland. There are some differences between Moklen and Moken languages. Also, the Moklen cannot go abroad without passport while the Moken can. For instance, if the Moken cross the border to Malaysia or Burma they would be given Malay or Burmese national flag by Malay or Burmese patrols. The Moken put the national flag on their *kabang*, then they would have no problem. In addition, the Moklen use modern fishing equipments but the Moken do not. Moreover, when Reang was a Thai-Moken translator during one of the interviews he mentioned another difference between the two groups: the Moklen think they can do what Thai can do while many Moken think their social status is below Thai’s (Reang in group interview, March 5, 2009, village B; interview, March 13, 2009, village T). Wan also emphasises a difference: the Moklen need goggles and an oxygen supply while the Moken on Surin Island do not need them for diving (interview, March 16, 2009, village B). Pee, another Moklen, pointed to similarities between Moklen and Moken in their languages and cultures. For instance, they have the same belief and terms for female and male spirits, *iboom* and *ibab*, are the same in both languages. Despite of the similarities, she thinks that Moklen and Moken are different due to some dissimilarities between the two languages and Moklen’s own distinctive tradition (Pee in group interview, March 5, 2009, village B). The above views show that the Moken see similarities between them whereas the Moklen define the Moken as a different “group” from the Moklen by focusing on dissimilarities from the Moken.

### 3.3.2. Local Thai

One local Thai, Chame, who lives with other Moken and Moklen in village B defines Moken and Moklen distinctively. To him, the Moken are people who live on the sea and sometimes come to the mainland to buy something. In contrast, the Moklen can have their house and they stay on the mainland for a long time. Also only the Moken can go everywhere without regulation. He points out that the Moken cannot speak Thai whereas the Moklen can. While the Moken do not have ID card, the Moklen have. He also said that Moklen is less different from Thai than Moken. However, he cannot distinguish who belongs to which family since the Moken and the Moklen have the same family names such as Klatalay (Group interview, March 5, 2009, village B). His points are similar to the ones made by the Moklen but he clearly distinguishes himself from both the Moken and the Moklen.

According to local Thai teachers, some of them got information about Chao Lay or the Moken by people's sayings and observations of Moken tradition on the mainland before the tsunami, i.e. they recognise the Moken through Moken's tradition performing.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the local Thai teachers have a stereotype about the Moken related to working on the sea such as "diligent" and "strong". However, they do not have knowledge about the Moklen due to lack of information (Survey, returned March 11, 2009, school R). Thus, local Thai teachers define the Moken based on their lifestyle, but their definition about the Moken includes the Moklen.

### 3.3.3. Who is Yai?

Since the definition of the Moken and the Moklen by the Moken and the Moklen seem different, the ethnicity of Yai, who believes that she is original Moken, was questioned during the group interview. Two Moklen and a Thai answered as follows:

Reang: "Yai used to be Moken but she is Moklen, because now she can speak Moklen and Thai a little bit" (group interview, March 5, 2009, village B).

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<sup>26</sup> Identity is related to "performance" and it is important when "others" also perceive the "performance" (Goffman, cited in Jenkins 2008: 61).

Wan: “Yai is Moklen, because she has lived with people on the mainland for a long time” (group interview, March 5, 2009, village B).

Chame: “Yai is Moklen because now she can speak Moklen and Thai a little bit” (group interview, March 5, 2009, village B).

On the contrary Pee, another Moklen, answered: “Yai is Moken because she can speak Moken and Moklen” (group interview, March 5, 2009, village B). One’s ethnic identity can be defined by “others” differently, although the definitions are based on the same factor, in this case language.

#### 3.3.4. A Foreigner

A foreigner, Farang has experienced the tsunami with the Moken and he has become interested in them (oral conversation, January 25, 2009, Kuraburi). Because of his interest, he started a relief project to help them and he started writing a book about the tsunami to publish. Through reading an academic work, Farang has knowledge about that the Moken have been known by the Thai government since oil was discovered near Surin Island and the Island has been proclaimed a national park. Farang also mentions Moken’s situation on the island: the construction project manager offers a cabin to the Moken and the rental fee is subtracted from their wage, the Moken cannot be involved in commercial activities with visitors and the admission fee goes to the national park, not to the Moken village. Through Farang’s observation, he sees that Moken culture has been destroyed because of the above situation. For example, they are watching TV and the consumption of “junk food” is wide. Farang describes Surin Island as a “concentration camp” and the Moken village on Surin Island as a “zoo” (E-Mail correspondence, February 23, 2009).

It can be seen that Farang is also influenced by academic work from the above. He defines the Moken as a subordinated group. His view contrasts to the view of the assistant district chief officer of the governmental office in Kuraburi and the tourist attraction notice at the ticket office of the Kuraburi pier. The governmental officer and office mention or emphasise Moken’s traditional life whereas Farang focuses on the encroachment of modernisation on Moken’s life. These different opinions may be due to the difference between the Thai government as an authorised structure and a



foreigner as an outsider of authorised structures. Hence, representatives of both social reality groups define the same Moken identity differently even among non-Moken.

#### **4. “NEGOTIATING” MOKEN IDENTITY**

From the above study, we see that the Moken and non-Moken coexist in Thailand and learn that each has similar or different definitions towards Moken identity. We also learn that interactions prevail between the Moken and other ethnic groups such as Thai and the Moklen. How then do the interactions affect Moken identity? Two cases shed light to this question.

##### **4.1. Case 1. People Call Me Moklen, so I Am Moklen**

Taley introduced himself as one of “Island people” during the group interview (Taley in group interview, March 5, 2009, village B). To him it means Moken (“indirect narrative interview”, March 5, 2009, village B). However, the negotiating of his identity was founded through the “indirect narrative interview”. According to the abbot, Taley told: “People call me Moklen. So I am Moklen /.../ It is okay to be called like that because Moken and Moklen are the same” (“indirect narrative interview”, March 5, 2009, village B). This case shows that interactions between the Moken and “others” surrounded him. Taley chooses and accepts a label by “others” as his, thus his identity is fluid from Moken to Moklen. A joke shows this “negotiating” of identity. Taley said to the abbot: “You are an old Thai and I am a new Thai.” (“indirect narrative interview”, March 5, 2009, village B) Again, Taley chooses another identity, Thai Mai, to try to be assimilated to the abbot. So, once again he negotiated his Moken identity even though it was a joke.

##### **4.2. Case 2. I Want to Introduce Me as Thai to People**

Da thinks other people see him as a non-Thai because he cannot speak Thai. However he hopes to be seen as Thai since he has white coloured ID card, particularly when he seeks opportunities to get a job (interview, March 13, 2009, village T). According to Jenkins, which job someone has is crucial for the social identity as it is related to “social status” (Jenkins 2008: 61). Currently Da and his wife cannot have a “writing

job”<sup>27</sup>, they can choose from manual jobs only. Indeed, he and his wife believe that Thai have better and easier jobs and life than the Moken. Because of their view, they feel that they are inferior to Thai in the context of social class. The couple hope that their grandchildren continually go to school, can find a job and live like other Thai. However, Da cannot be recognised as Thai by “others” because of language. He says: “If I was able to speak Thai, I would have introduced myself as Thai to others” (Interview, March 13, 2009, village T). Da’s case seems different from Taley’s. His case occurred by ethnic interaction, the Moken and Thai, and power relations are observed from his saying. He has experienced weaker social identity of the Moken compared to Thai. He has not tried to negotiate his identity yet because of language, nonetheless he has a will to negotiate his identity as Thai to get a better position in Thailand. From two cases, negotiating/fluidity of identity are found in the “interethnic relationship”. One has already happened while the another is a potential case.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study is inspired by the little research on Moken in Thailand in English. In addition, from the author’s knowledge Moken identity on the Thai mainland has not been studied yet. Therefore this thesis has the purpose to explore and to extend knowledge about the Moken in general. The findings of the main research question: How is Moken identity in Thailand defined by themselves and by “others”? is elaborated on by the help of three theoretical concepts: Jenkins’ “internal/external definition”; Sharmul’s “two social reality” approach; and Eriksen’s “negotiating/fluidity of identity”. To fully understand Moken identity, not only Moken’s “internal definition” but also “external definition” towards the Moken by non-Moken were studied. Non-Moken are categorised by “two social reality” approach: “authority-defined” social reality (academics, Thai government, the temple, the school and the NGO) and “everyday-defined” social reality (the Moken, local Thai and the foreigner). In addition, interactions between the Moken and non-Moken where Moken identity is negotiated/fluid is examined. To carry out this study village B was mainly selected but primary school R, the temple, the local government and the

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<sup>27</sup> By “writing job” means office job, Da and his wife used the term, “writing job” since they do not know what kind of jobs are in Thailand. However, they have seen Thai people working in offices and to them it looks easier than their original job, hunting fish and gathering clams (interview, March 13, 2009, village T).

NGO in Kuraburi were also chosen. Unstructured interviews with open-ended questions, participatory and non-participatory observation and a survey were utilised as methods. This study is a limited case study and as such the research finding cannot be generalised.

In terms of “internal definition”, the Moken have already become assimilated to Thai culture compared to their traditional life before the tsunami. At the same time, the Moken define themselves with their “collectivities” such as language, lifestyle, traditions and religion on the mainland. Change and maintenance were observed from their “internal definition” on the mainland compared to before. Moken language is still used among them, while the Thai language is utilised when they talk with “others” in daily life. The Moken still maintain their work related to the sea but to some Moken it is a part-time job. They still believe in spirits of their ancestors and show their respect to the spirits in their distinctive spiritual house by offering items, which they obtained from local Thai on the mainland. Moreover, their burial tradition has been preserved. However, some “collectivities” can be changed or skipped by Moken individuals without a problem and they are still regarded as Moken. Meanwhile, to the Moken the Moklen are the same “group” since they have many similarities in the “collectivities” and as a result the boundary of their ethnic identity is blurred.

Turning to how the Moken recognise “external definitions” towards them by “others”: Moken, Thai Mai, Chao Lay and “Chao Nam”, all definitions can be the same or similar to “others”, whereas Moken’s understanding of “Chao Nam” is regarded an insult. Academics define the Moken as a group who speak Moken language, believe in spirits, live on islands, have no Thai citizenship, partially maintain their traditional nomadic life with their eco-friendly knowledge and are losing their traditions due to the influence of “others”. While the Thai government defines people as the Moken only if they live on islands with their traditional lifestyle and are without Thai citizenship. They do not define the Moken as Thai Mai, but as “sea gypsy”, as “Chao Nam” in the English version of the tourist attraction notice of Kuraburi pier ticket office and as “Chao Lay” in the Thai version. Therefore, the Thai government defines the Moken as “others” with differentiation. Their differentiation is also seen from the point of Thai nationalism and laws. The Moken were offered their family names such

as Klatalay or Hantalay by the mother of the King, but the Moken's inability to speak Thai, their different religious beliefs and in addition to not having Thai citizenship make the Moken defined as "alien" and "immigrant". Furthermore, even if the Moken defined as Thai Mai by the Thai government have their own ID card, their white ID card does not have a personal number of 13 figures. In terms of citizenship card, Moken's status is similar to hill tribes' as "incomplete Thai identity". Additionally, the Moken are defined as "undeveloped" but not dangerous people by the governmental officer. Meanwhile, teachers of the primary school R connect the Moken and Moklen students to the tsunami since the children came to the school after the disaster. Under the school curriculum, all students are Thai since it stresses Thai nationality and they learn about the Thai national flag, anthem, royal family and Buddhism. The abbot of the temple distinguished the Moken according to their dwelling place before the tsunami, the shape of boats, modern fishing equipment and a medium. Particularly their previous dwelling place was important according to an academic book he used for his own research. However, he revised that idea after hearing the stories of older Moken and Moklen. The NGO has defined the Moken as an ethnic group in need, and used to be involved in their citizenship issues. The Moklen tend to focus on differences between the Moken and the Moklen and define the Moken as a different "group". They define the Moken as people who neither speak Thai nor have Thai citizenship and live on islands. However, they believe that the Moken become the Moklen after settling down on the mainland and learn how to speak Thai. Local Thai think either that both the Moken and the Moklen are the Moken since they have no knowledge about the Moklen, or that the Moklen are more similar to Thai than the Moken. Lastly, the foreigner who was with the Moken when the tsunami occurred regards them as a vulnerable group that loses their tradition gradually.

Identity can be negotiated or fluid through "interethnic relationship". One man who defines himself as Moken can become Moklen by accepting the label because his "internal definition" includes the Moklen. Another self-defined Moken man, who cannot speak Thai but lives on the mainland, stated that he would introduce himself as Thai if he was able to speak Thai. He thinks he could have more and better chances to work if he is Thai. In this case, the Moken think that they have lower social status

than Thai through interactions between the Moken and Thai. Hence, there are power relations between the Moken and Thai.

Some conclusions can be drawn from the analysis above. First, there are differences between “internal definition” and “external definition” in reality in terms of Moken identity. “Internal definition” is broader than “external definition” and focuses on “collectivities”, while “external definition” by “others” focuses only on distinctions between the Moken and “others” such as dwelling place, language, belief, tradition and nationality. Second, there are unbalanced “interethnic relationship” between the Moken and non-Moken under two definitions. “Chao Nam”, which makes the Moken feel degraded, has been introduced to other non-Moken by the Thai government and is used by local Thai. Moreover, Moken identity is defined as having a lower social status in Thailand by “internal definition”. Regarding to this, unequal power relations between the Moken and the Thai government are observed. The Moken have limited legal rights due to their different ID card, which does not have a personal number of 13 figures. Lastly, an ethnic identity can normally not be removed, but Moken identity can be removed from the Moken and be exchanged as Thai Mai or the Moklen by the “external definitions” of the Thai government, academics and the Moklen. In that sense, Moken identity seems fragile and in need to be protected.

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### **E-Mail**

Phrakhru Suwatthithammarat (The abbot of the Samakkhitham temple). E-MAIL to the author dated November 26, 2008.

Farang (a foreigner who experienced the tsunami in 2004 with Moken). E-Mail to the author dated February 23, 2009.

### **Interviews**

Wan (inhabitant of village B), recorded interview and notes taken during the interview, March 5 & 16, 2009.

Da and Nokyai (inhabitant of village T), recorded interview and notes taken during the interview, March 13 & 17, 2009.

Chame (inhabitant of village B), recorded interview and notes taken during the interview, March 5, 2009.

Narak (inhabitant of village T), recorded interview and notes taken during the interview, March 17, 2009 and notes taken during the interview, March 22, 2009.

Pa and Yai (inhabitant of village B), recorded interview and notes taken during the interview, March 3, 2009.



Pee (inhabitant of village B), recorded interview and notes taken during the interview, March 5, 2009.

Reang (inhabitant of village B), recorded interview and notes taken during the interview, March 5, 16, & 17, 2009.

Taley (inhabitant of village B), notes taken during hearing the interview from the abbot, March 5, 2009.

The governmental officer (the assistant district chief officer), notes taken during the interview, March 24, 2009.

The NGO staff (the staff of ActionAid), recorded interview and notes taken during the interview, March 18, 2009.

### **Surveys**

Six teachers of school R, returned the questionnaires filled with answers, March 11, 2009.

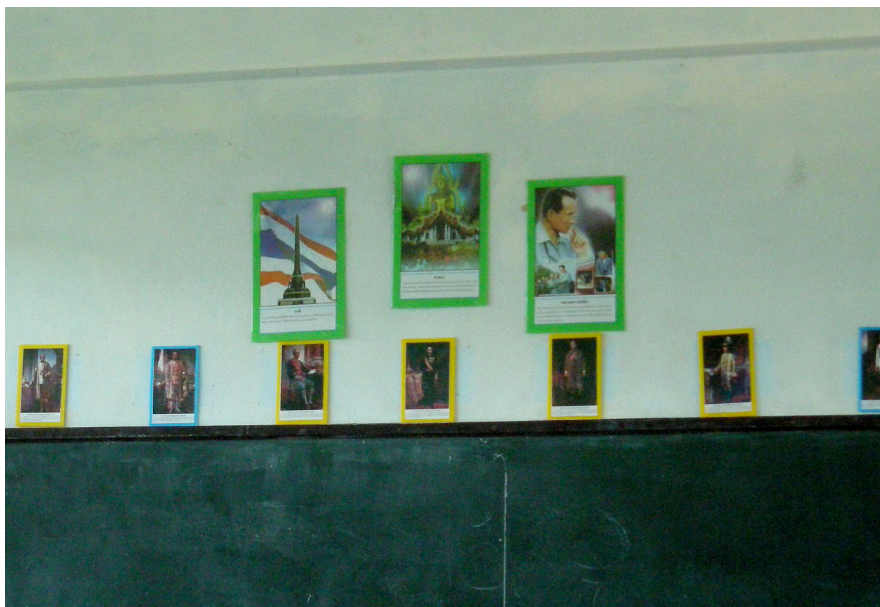
## **APPENDIX**



<Picture 1. Huts in Moken village on Surin Island>



<Picture 2. School R>



<Picture 3. A classroom of school R>



<Picture 4. Moken spiritual houses>



<Picture 5. Thai spiritual house>