

The Ethnic Manni Sakai: Guidelines for Social and Cultural Revival for Living Together in Southern Thailand

¹Anong Chaowanakit and ²Songkoon Chanthachon

¹Phatthalung Educational Service Area Office 1,
Muang District, Phatthalung 93000, Thailand

²Institute of Northeastern Arts and Culture, Mahasarakham University,
Muang District, Mahasarakham 44000, Thailand

Abstract: Local villagers in Southern Thailand refer to them as Ngoh or Chao Pah. Southern provinces of Yala, Pattanee and Narathiwat refer to them as Sakae. Malaysian's refer them as the Sakai, Semang or Orang Asli. The ethnic people themselves prefer to be called Manni. Latest estimates that there are currently only 300 Manni Sakai living in Southern Thailand and they believe in the spirits of their ancestors, believe in deities residing in large trees, forest spirits, water spirits, earth spirits and mountain spirits. They are a nomadic tribe that has a unique cultural heritage that conserves and protects the environment. They do not build permanent structures and are experts at indigenous knowledge in herbal medicine. Currently, Thailand's government and local administrations have ignored the Manni Sakai and have done very little for them. The central government must exercise its authority and put forth measures and activities to create equality and unity among minority and majority groups. The successful conservation and revival of the social and cultural identities of the Manni Sakai depends on defining, which government branch and agency are responsible for the development. To accomplish this, a center for the Manni Sakai needs to be created by following 5 strategies that are strategy to create security, strategy to recognize and acknowledge the Manni Sakai, strategy to promote good health care, strategy to promote education and strategy to promote the conservation and revitalization of social and cultural identities of the Manni Sakai.

Key words: Manni, Sakai, Orang Asli, ethnic, society, cultural, revival, Southern Thailand

INTRODUCTION

Thailand society was developed from a background of ethnic, religious, belief, values and livelihood of many groups of people. The majorities are Thai's and the remaining populations are at least 50 groups of minorities living throughout the country. Usually, the minority groups are at a disadvantage and are usually overwhelmed by the majority Thais or left neglected and not recognized creating inequality in society. The central government must exercise its authority and put forth measures and activities to create equality and unity among minority and majority groups. These minority groups usually live in distant rural areas and in deep jungles and mountain areas throughout Thailand such as the Malaburi (Tong Luang), Chao Kao or ChaoBon or Chaokao (Prasert *et al.*, 2009) and the Manni Sakai, which live in the Jungle Mountains of Southern Thailand and Northern Malaysia (Carey, 1976).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research on the ethnic Manni Sakai: Guidelines for socio-cultural revival for living together in the Southern society is for the study of history and socio-culture of the Manni Sakai from the past to the present and to find guidelines for their conservation and revival, by employing the qualitative research procedure, collection data from documents and field study.

The researching tools are interviews, observation, group discussion and action-meeting. It's a participatory action research. The data collection conducted with the Manni Sakai ethnic groups in Phatthalung, Trang and Satun, including a field study at Mlabri conservatory Center in Nan Province and a study on the conservatory revival of the Manni Sakai ethnic of Perak, Malaysia. The study took 2 years from 2006-2008.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History, social and culture background of the Manni Sakai

History: The Manni Sakai are a wavy haired dolichocephalic people, whom are wrongly placed racially with the Vedda of Ceylon or the aborigines of Australia (Evans, 1968).

The ethnic group is referred to by many names. Local villagers in Southern Thailand refer to them as Ngoh or Chao Pah. Southern provinces of Yala, Pattanee and Narathiwat refer to them as Sakae. Malaysian's refer them as the Sakai, Semang or Orang Asli, which is a modern Malaya language term adopted post-independence to replace the colonial English ethnic term 'aborigine' (Kruspe, 2004). The ethnic people themselves prefer to be called Manni (human). The Manni Sakai have lived in Southern Thailand and in North Malaysia since the middle stone age about 1,500-10,000 years ago. In Southern Thailand, the Manni Sakai lives in the forest mountains of the Bantad mountain range in the provinces of Phatthalung, Trang and Satun. The area in the region is a tropical rain forest, which is fertile environment with lush vegetation, large trees, vines, herbal plants and abundant wildlife such as monkeys, langurs, flying lemurs, gibbons and wild boars. The biodiversity of the region is currently in danger from illegal logging and land encroachment from humans. These developments are decreasing the amount of forest coverage and reducing food resources disrupting the natural food chain of the region.

It is difficult to know exactly how many ethnic Manni Sakai are left in the area because the group frequently relocate their communities. The Manni Sakai travel between Southern Thailand and Malaysia. It is estimated that there are at least 300 Manni Sakai living in the Bantad mountain ranges in the provinces of Phatthalung, Trang and Satun. In the past the Manni Sakai used to live in the forest in the provinces of Yala and Narathiwat but currently, they have all migrated into Northern Malaysia.

The Manni Sakai have their own spoken language and no writing. They are speakers of Austroasiatic, Mon-Khmer languages (Roseman, 1993). The Manni Sakai in Southern Thailand share the same dialect but may differ in tone and syllables. There is a misconception that the Manni Sakai speak Malaysian, but that is because of the cultural combination and exchange of customs and traditions through cultural contacts with ethnic Malaysians. Currently, the Manni Sakai can speak Southern Thailand's dialect, which is spoken and understood by all the tribal leaders of the Manni Sakai. Members of the group can understand most Southern Thai words, but usually speak their own ethnic tongue.

Society and culture

Family: The Manni Sakai build their village and houses near water sources where there are an abundance of wildlife and vegetation that are utilized as food resources. Manni Sakai families are single families and are monogamy. The family's band together in tight communities and will consists of at least three generations; Grandparents, father and mother and children. The Manni Sakai hunt and farm together in groups of 10-40 people and will relocate their village when the food source is depleted. They will return to the same location again once the environment returns to fertility. The Manni Sakai are located at communities North of Klong Tong in the province of Trang. In the Klong Tong area, the Manni Sakai there, have their own territory marked out and relocate their settlements within their territory to hunt and gather food. But the Manni Sakai in the area of Hua Chang in the province of Phatthalung and in the area of Wang Sai Tong in the province of Satun, migrate throughout the forest jungle without a designated territory. The latter groups of Manni Sakai move to a new location when the food source has run out and when there is a death or deaths within the community or the death of someone outside their tribe that had died within their current location.

Beliefs: The Manni Sakai belief in the spirits of their ancestors, believe in deities residing in large trees, forest spirits, water spirits, earth spirits and mountain spirits. For the Sakai, some spirits are associated with the natural topographies of the land, which are alleged to have effected or still have the power to affect the unconscious and conscious experience of people (Abramson and Theodossopoulos, 2000). The Manni Sakai believes that spirits truly exist and believe that every living animal has a Toh Pa Wung (spirit) that protects the animals. The Manni Sakai believes in magic and incantations in healing. Magic spells and rituals such as incantations to bury the dead and incantations for planting. They believe in the magic of dreams and premonitions. The Manni Sakai also have rituals to receive new-born called Pitee Xima, which is a ritual to celebrate the coming of a new member of the tribe when the child is 15 days old. The ritual of Pitee Chan Nung Liang is performed when girls reach the age of child bearing or adult hood. Marriage rituals of the Manni Sakai are similar to local traditions where there are marriage proposals, engagements, celebrations and honeymoon. The Manni Sakai's version of honeymoon means that the newly wed couples will venture into the forest for 7 nights after their marriage celebrations.

The Manni Sakai's beliefs are important cultural identity's and have changed very little in modern times. Currently, there are small numbers of ethnic Manni Sakai who can be hired to log large trees. Marriage engagements in the past used to be made in amounts of langur heads or leaf monkey heads, but currently have changed to engagements of foods such as meat, fish and vegetables that are available and can be used to provide meals to guests and members within the tribe.

Their beliefs in spirits and natural deities have created a society that is friendly to the environment. Their cultural tradition conserves natural resources and is in equilibrium with nature and the spirits that they respect. Many traditions and customs of the Manni Sakai conserves natural resources such as; they only hunt and gather enough food for regular consumption. They do not destroy forests or slash and burn fields. They only cut trees with diameters of only 3-4" to make posts for their Tub (shelters). The Manni Sakai do not dump their refuse and garbage into water sources. They hunt and share among family and friends. When hunting, they do not kill female animals because they believe that the animal may be bearing offspring or will bare in the future that they can hunt later.

Administration: The Manni Sakai society is a peaceful community. There are no discontent to seize the possessions of others. Sharing is the bond that keeps their society intact. The Manni Sakai's administration is divided into family leaders, group leaders and lineage leaders. The leaders of the three administrations will give their judgment and help each other in decision making within the community. When relocating to another settlement because of natural reasons or intimidation from outsiders, the leaders will decide on the best way out, whether to move or let the outsiders make housing in their territory. The leader of the lineage has primary responsibilities to taking care of the members of their lineage. Such as the Manni Sakai communities living in the Bantad Mountain range in the provinces of Phatthalung, Trang and Satun are under the care of one leader. The lineage leader will help clear problems between groups and communities under their lineage. Currently, the administration of the Manni Sakai in the Bantad Mountain range is made up of Nai Piew (Mr. Piew) as the lineage leader, Nai Sahng is the leader of the Manni Sakai group in Klong Tong in the province of Trang, Nai Kai (Mr. Kai) is the group leader in Wang Sai Tong in the province of Satun and Nai Daeng (Mr. Daeng) is the group leader in Kao Hua Chang in the province of Phatthalung.

Economy: The Manni Sakai are hunters and gatherers and a nomadic tribe. Their livelihood depends on hunting game and digging cassavas and edible vegetation such as plants and herbs. Plants and herbs are the ethnic groups economic products such as; Rieng (*Parkia timoriana* Merr.), Satoh (*Parkia speciosa*), Wai (Rattan), Kluay Mai Pah (wild orchids) and Mai Klisana (*Aquilaria crassna* Pierre). Game is their primary sources of protein and cassavas their main staple for carbohydrate. Hunting tools consists of Boh Laoh, Krabok Toot, Karn Duk Raew and wooden spears used for hunting game and spearing fish, which is also caught by hand. Plants and herbs would be hand picked without using tools, leaves and plants would be plucked from trees and vines, trees would be climbed or reached by using long branches or sticks. Branches and sticks used to dig for cassavas. Bamboo, Wai (Rattan), Bai Krapoh leaf (*Licuala paludosa* Griff), Bai Taey leaf (Pandanus Palm) utilized into useful tools such as; Wai utilized as thongs for collecting charcoal and fire wood, Bai Krapoh used as a Krabua (ladder). Bamboo trunks used for cooking rice, boiling meals and to retain water. Bai Taey plants are weaved into mats and baskets. Coconut shells used as bowls and Banana leaves used as plates.

Modern influences from globalization and reduced territory have altered traditional economic customs of the Manni Sakai. Changes in modern society have influenced the Manni Sakai to adapt to use utensils, pots and pans made from plastic and metal. The Manni Sakai also trade for rice, meat and vegetables from local stores in nearby rural communities. Manni Sakai groups in Klong Tong in the province of Trang and groups in Wang Sai Tong in the province of Satun consume candy, soap, flour and use modern utensils together with their natural utilities. Currently, the economy of Manni Sakai is slowly changing to a system that uses currency brought upon them by modernization.

Education: The Manni Sakai receives their education from nature, tutoring and teachings from the knowledge handed down through their lineage. Learning is limited to the essentials of their livelihood such as; how to dig for cassavas, hunting, how to collect honey, surviving the jungle, how to take care of yourself and your family and preventing dangers. Knowledge in herbal medical treatment and curing known diseases such as; how to take care of babies and young children, pregnancies and child bearing mothers. The education system of the Manni Sakai relies on grandparents and adults in the family and group. There is a dedicated individual or group healer

who will teach the use of herbal medicine, cures and nursing. The leaders of the Manni Sakai are the individuals that possess the most knowledge in survival skills. The leaders are also skilled in cures and incantations.

The encroachment of outside contact has influenced the Manni Sakai to learn new ideas and knowledge in survival skills and health care. The Sakai people began to use money to purchase manufactured items. However, their naïveté about the workings of a modern money economy made them vulnerable to unscrupulous people selling them things (Cunningham *et al.*, 2006). The influences from modernization have forced the Manni Sakai to purchase goods from rural markets such as meats, fish and other products. In turn, they sell their wild goods, herbs, vegetables and orchids for currency. The Manni Sakai group in the Klong Tong community hire themselves out as labor in rubber plantations and some have understandings in the basics of math.

Health care: The Manni Sakai's have local indigenous healers called Toh Dun or Toh Bee Dun. Female healers have the responsibility to providing care for babies and their pregnant mothers, before and after birth. Male healers have the responsibility of the general health care of the group. Simple cures and various rituals such as shouting away illnesses, chanting incantations, magic spells and herbal medicine make the health care system. The herbal medicine of the Manni Sakai are renowned locally for their effectiveness and is the current type of treatment that they use. Herbal remedies would mostly be applied by blowing the mix of herbal medicine and water on the patient where the illness is. This method is the most popular form of applying herbal medicine and is called Sah Ohs.

The current medical practices of the Manni Sakai are mostly through indigenous knowledge in herbal medicine. The system of their health care is if a person falls ill, the local healer of the group will contemplate the illness and make judgment of the best practice to apply. Next step will be shouting and chanting for the evil illness to leave the patient's body, then the Sah Ohs will be performed. Then herbal medication will be given to the patient. If the initial cures are unsuccessful, then the healer will re-perform the medical treatment again. If the patient's condition continues to be more severe, then the leaders will make the decision and take the patient to the rural clinic. Few Manni Sakai use medical services of the rural clinics in the area. Going to the clinic is the last resort of medical treatment that the Manni Sakai will do and is only done by the group in the area of Klong Tong in the

province of Trang. The other two groups in the province of Phatthalung and Satun have never been to a clinic or hospital before.

Social and cultural conservation and revival guideline:

The successful conservation and revival of the social and cultural identities of the Manni Sakai depends on defining, which government branch and agency are directly responsible for the development. Currently, government organizations and local administrations have ignored the Manni Sakai and have done very little for them. The Manni Sakai must be recognized for their cultural heritage and their livelihood and way of life understood and accepted by the modern communities. To accomplish this, a center for the Manni Sakai needs to be created. The rural administration office should be the host for this center and the center operated by members from the government sector, private organizations, community group and have a proper council to manage the center. The governor of the province should be chairman and the leaders of provincial, municipality and rural administration should work together with the leaders of the Manni Sakai to operate the center. The center's responsibility is to conserve and revitalize the cultural heritage of the Manni Sakai by the exchange of knowledge between ethnic Manni Sakai and the general public. The center is to be a source of knowledge and education for both the Manni Sakai and the general public. Services provided by the center should be a one stop service center and focus on providing external educational services to the Manni Sakai, National census registration for the Manni Sakai, development of survival skills, health care services and education, occupation development and legal council. The exchange of cultural knowledge will help both sides to understand more of each other and encourage trust and friendship. The success of the center to conserve and revitalize the cultural and social identities of the Manni Sakai requires five strategies:

- Strategy to create security to protect and provide the fundamentals of livelihood for the Manni Sakai. Local community organization should be established to conserve forests and develop awareness of community members in forest conservation
- Strategy to recognize and acknowledge the Manni Sakai as a fellow citizen. The center must provide registration and include the Manni Sakai in the national census and provide a citizen's ID
- Strategy to promote good health care of both traditional and modern medical treatments for the babies, children, pregnant mothers and the community of Manni Sakai

- Strategy to promote education. The center is to provide a source of modern education to the Manni Sakai on subjects that are needed such as basic mathematics, currency, language skills and teach them how to use the necessary modern services such as medical and communication. The center should also be a place where the Manni Sakai can use to demonstrate their indigenous knowledge in hunting, making tools, forest trek and their way of life
- Strategy to promote the conservation and revitalization of social and cultural identities. With the four strategies mentioned before; promotional activities such as cultural fairs, exhibitions, celebrations and a local market where the Manni Sakai can sell their goods at a fair price must be provided

CONCLUSION

The ways of socio-cultural revival of the Manni Sakai's conservation should be clear guidelines of five strategies: the stability of basic needs food, habitation, clothing, medicine, by providing specific living areas for them and improving forest protection law. The right of the Manni Sakai people to be recognized and to be granted a Thai citizenship card of 13 digits ID card of the ethnic Manni Sakai race; preparing group-family register for them. Provide them health care promotion according to old local wisdom and promoting health care for children, pregnant and elderly people. Provide them education by ways of non-formal education and informal education, conserving their natural ways of ethnic-race inherited learning. Promoting their socio-cultural conservation to maintain their characteristics and good ethnic culture by providing them cultural market, socio-cultural revival conservation center; pushing forward it by provincial committee comprising of provincial governor, relating ministry's representatives, such as from, the ministry of interior, the ministry of natural resources and environment, the ministry of education, the ministry of culture, the minister of social development and human security. The provincial governor selects some persons who learn and understand the ethnic group's culture as committee members and a secretary. The local sub-district administration/municipality is the local host; officials are designated to take responsibility for the center's activity of one stop service center, employing all sector-participation approach; the way of work performance is based on the ethnic-race culture.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Extended research should be promoted on the subject of the Manni Sakai's indigenous knowledge in herbal

medicine and the customs and traditions that contribute to forest and environmental conservation. Subjects such as the health care practices of the Manni Sakai should be researched in more detail because the Manni Sakai have very strong health and have survived in the deep jungle for generations and have immunities that are healthier than the general urban population.

Other strategies to conserve and revitalize the social and cultural identities of the Manni Sakai should be researched and explored to a greater dept. Follow through programs should be conducted to assess the success and effectiveness of the initial strategies mentioned in this research. Case studies of successful methods in Conservation and revitalization of ethnic cultures such as the success of the ethnic Kula's at Ban Non Yai (Chonpairot *et al.*, 2009) should be studied and the effective measures applied in the preservation of the valuable ethnic heritage of minorities tribes.

REFERENCES

- Abramson, A. and D. Theodossopoulos, 2000. Land, law and environment: Mythical land, legal boundaries, Pluto Press, pp: 184. ISBN: 0745315704, 9780745315706.
- Cunningham, D., D.E. Ingram and K. Sumbuk, 2006. Language diversity in the Pacific: Endangerment and survival, Multilingual Matters, pp: 47. ISBN: 1853598674, 9781853598678.
- Carey, I., 1976. Orang Asli. The Aboriginal Tribes of Peninsular Malaysia, Oxford University Press, pp: 14. ISBN: 10-0195802705/0-19-580270-5. ISBN: 13: 9780195802-702.
- Chonpairot, M., S. Phothisane, P. Sudhisansophon, 2009. Guideline for conservation, revitalization and development of the identity and customs of the Kula ethnic group in Northeast Thailand. *The Soc. Sci.*, 4 (2): 167-173.
- Evans, I.H.N., 1968. The Negritos of Malaya, Routledge, pp: 87. ISBN: 0714620068, 9780714620060.
- Kruspe, N., 2004. A grammar of Semelai, Cambridge University Press, pp: 29. ISBN: 0521814979, 9780521814973.
- Prasert, S., V. Pansila, O.U. Lasunon, 2009. Guidelines and methods for conservation, revitalization and development of the traditions and customs of Nyah Kur ethnic group for tourism in the Province of Chaiyapum in Northeast Thailand. *The Soc. Sci.*, 4 (2): 174-179.
- Roseman, M., 1993. Healing sounds from the Malaysian rainforest: Temiar Music and Medicine, University of California Press, pp: 17. ISBN: 0520082818, 9780520082816.