Language and Ethnic Relations - a Case Study on Reverse Situations: Thais a Minority in Kedah, Malaysia and Malays a Minority in Pathumthani, Thailand

By:

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Introduction

In undertaking my research on the classification of Thai–Kedah dialects, Umaiyah (2003) under a study leave grant from the University of Malaya, I came across Thai Buddhists who regard themselves as Malaysians, a minority group living in small communities in Kedah, Malaysia. These small communities are scattered in the state of Kedah, centred on Buddhist temples living peacefully with the predominantly majority Malay community. Of interest in this paper is the community living in Naka, Kedah.

In the course of conducting my study on the assimilation of Bangkok-Melayu communities in the Bangkok metropolis and surrounding areas under a grant from the Asian Fellows Scholarship, Umaiyah (2003), I came across Melayu people who regard themselves as Thais, a minority group living peacefully in small communities scattered in and around Bangkok metropolis. Of interest in this paper is the community living in Khlong Bang Pho, Pathumthani.

This brought new challenges to my study, opportunity to extend the scope into language and ethnic relations; a study on reverse situations in line with the focus of the Asian Fellows Scholarship for cohorts to conduct multidisciplinary research.

For a better understanding on ethnic relations between majority and minority communities, an appreciation on the background of the two communities to be studied would be useful.

Thais in Malaysia

In my research, Umaiyah (2003) on speakers of Thai dialects in Kedah, Malaysia, I came across many small communities of Malaysians who speak a Thai dialect as their first language. The communities can be Muslims or Buddhist. The Buddhist community can be easily identified as it is centred on Buddhist temples. The Muslims are sometimes referred to as Samsam.

Kobkua (1996) focussed on the origin and ethnicity of the Samsam. There is scant explanation of the people's ancestry or why these Thai-speaking Malaysians are in Malaysia. Kobkua, herself, believes that the Samsam were originally Siamese who converted to Islam in their original settlements in Siam by the tenth and eleventh centuries. They migrated to Kedah due to socio-religious, other socio-economic and political factors. In note number 3 of her paper, she admits of a continuous flow of Muslims and Buddhist labour migration which could be due to floods and scarcity of foodstuff.

Findings from the classification of Thai-Kedah dialect, Umaiyah (2003) suggest that Buddhist Thai dialect speakers in Kedah belong to the Sukhothai people. Specifically, the people of Baling (in South-East Kedah) and Naka (in Central-East Kedah) could be migrants from Satun area as Kobkua says; or they could be descendants of Sukhothai families, at par with the people of Satun, who moved to the interior of Kedah hundreds of years ago. Those in Kubang Cenok (North Kedah) appear to be recent migrants from Songkhla.

Malays in Bangkok
Existence of Malays in Bangkok was reported by Tadmor (1992, 1995), Jitmoud (1988), Damrilert (2002) and Umaiyah (2003). The first group of Malays were brought to Bangkok as prisoners in 1786 after Pattani was defeated by forces from Bangkok, Jitmoud (1988:108). The Thais took some 4,000 Pattani Malays in ships to Bangkok as slave and other prisoners were marched 1,200 kilometres to Bangkok.

Raids took place in 1791, 1808 and 1832 to crush efforts for self rule in Pattani. Kedah was raided in 1838 after declaring self rule. The objective of these exercises was to weaken Pattani and Kedah; and to provide slave labour used for the building of Bangkok that was rising to replace the devastated Ayuthaya.

The Pattani prisoners upon arrival to Bangkok were 'processed' and sent for resettlement in different locations in and around Bangkok. They were provided with land to develop and settle. It is observed that the Malay Muslims were settled along the Khlong (canals), probably for ease of transportation and abundance of land (forest at the time). Today, descendants of the communities can be detected starting from Khlong Banglampoo (within the greater compound of the old palace), travelling to the east until some 74 kilometres away at Bang Pakong River. The areas are dotted with mosques, Islamic schools and Muslim graveyards.

Malay Muslims from Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Penang were placed at Thanon Tok. Later they were moved to Khlong Saen Saep near Sai Kong Din in Minburi. The descendants were moved to new khlong such as Khlong 17, 20, 21 and 22. Some were also moved to Tha-It and from Tha-It moved to Bang Bua Thong, Umaiyah (2003: 21 – 22).

The extent of Bangkok-Melayu assimilation and subsequent dilution of language and cultural practices was found to be relatively high in all sites visited, Umaiyah (2003). Malay is still spoken, albeit mostly by people aged 50 and above in Bang Bua Thong, Nonthaburi and in the villages of Khlong Bang Pho and Khlong Neng in Pathumthani. The Malay dialect spoken in Bang Bua Thong has a distinct dialect and has been a subject of further research, Umaiyah (2005).

Related Literature

According to Bealey (1999: 123) ethnicity can be defined as 'the characteristic of belonging to an ethnic group,' involving identification 'with people one sees as similar to one's self.' Eriksen (1993) examined a number of approaches to ethnicity and said that, 'All of the approaches agree that ethnicity has something to do with the *classification of people* and *group relations*'. The word ethnicity still has a ring of 'minority issues' and 'race relations', but in anthropology it refers to aspects of relationships between group which consider themselves and regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive.

Macionis (1998:327) defines a racial or ethnic minority is a category of people, distinguished by physical or cultural traits, who are socially disadvantaged. Distinct from the dominant 'majority', in other words minority are set apart and subordinated. The breath of the term 'minority' has expanded in recent years beyond people with particular racial and ethnic traits.

Eriksen (1993) argues that in the contemporary world, virtually everybody is forced to take on an identity as a citizen. Since some form of cultural and ethnic variation must be 'matter out of place' to nationalists, ethnic variation is frequently defined by dominant groups as a problem, as something one has to 'cope with'. Downright genocide and enforced displacement are the most brutal methods employed by states in their dealings with minorities. There were instances of genocide in the Americas and Australia after colonisation by Europeans; and more recently attempts at 'ethnic cleansing' in Serbian-Bosnia conflict.

Ethnic boundary mechanisms function differently, depending on the social networks in the areas, Sandra Wallman (1986). In her paper, Wallman found interesting differences in majority-minority relationships between two poly-ethnic areas in London with similar background. She reported that in Bow, there is strong polarisation and dichotomisation between traditional residents and immigrants and describing it as a closed homogeneous system. In Battersea, the relationships were much relaxed and socially less important, an open heterogeneous system.

Some interesting local research conducted on anthropology and minority studies includes: Sanitwong Na Ayuthaya Kusuma edited a Conference proceeding entitled 'The crack in Thai society? Integration and National Security Problems' (Sanitwong Na Ayuthaya, 1988), where questions on re-evaluation of national policy on minorities was posed. Jitmoud Sawvanee book on 'Ethnic Group: Thai Muslim' (Jitmoud, 1998) covered the history on Thai Muslims and her perspective on Bangkok Malays. Phongsaphit Amara's study on 'Culture, Religion and Ethnic Group: Anthropological Approach to the Analysis of Thai Society' (Phongsapit, 1990) is another useful reference as the title suggests.

Satha Anand Chaiwat's in the article 'Muslim Studies: Radical Social Science and Otherness' (Satha Anand, 1998) advanced the idea of a 'radical social science' which chooses to reposit human as the centre of the study as a critical methodology appropriate for Muslim Studies. Suthawat Arong in the article 'Theory Solving Minority Problem' provides a different dimension in the approach for the study of minority problems – study the majority instead. It provides a comprehensive understanding of the issues facing Malay minority.

Satsaguan Ngampit's several publications are handy reference materials too: textbooks such as 'Principles of Cultural Anthropology' (Satsaguan, 2000) and 'Anthropology Research' (Satsaguan, 1999); and research findings such as 'The Family Institution of Ethnic Group in Bangkok Metropolis: A Case Study of Vietnamese Families' (Satsaguan, 2002), 'The Family Institution of Ethnic Group in Bangkok Metropolis and its vicinity: Case Study on Thai Songdam Families' (Satsaguan, 2001) provides insight on impact of Thai government policies on other minority groups too.

Louis Golomb book on 'Broker of Morality: Thai Ethnic Adaptation in a rural Malaysia Setting' is an interesting account on the Thai minority, Golomb (1978). The articles, 'The Patterns of Social Interaction in Malaysian Society', Abdullah Taib, (1981); and 'Some patterns of Ethnic Relations in Malaysia', Fatimah Daud (1985) provides some insight into this Malaysian plural society.

Objective
The objective of this study is to:-
1. Investigate the relationship between Thai-Buddhist minority in Kedah and mainstream Malay majority in Malaysia; and between Malay minority in Pathumthani (Bangkok metropolis) and mainstream Thai-Buddhist majority in Thailand
2. Identify and compare key elements determining minority-majority relationships of the groups under study in the two countries.
3. Assess factors (derived from key elements, in item 2 above) affecting harmonious living of the groups under study with its mainstream society.

Significance of the study
The study of ethnic relations between minority and majority can contribute to better understanding on how societies can live together harmoniously and ultimately help develop peaceful living globally.

Statement of the Problem and Methodology
The main problem that concerns this study is the language and ethnic relations between Thai-Buddhist minority in Kedah and mainstream Malay majority in Malaysia; and

between Malay minority in Pathumthani (Bangkok metropolis) and on mainstream Thai-Buddhist majority in Thailand and the attendant issue of harmonious living of the communities under study.

The problem is approached through a comparison of three key elements impacting the two communities in the respective countries. Theses are: 1) Policy of the dominant power group (Government) towards their minorities, 2) Ethnicity and group identity and 3) Environment surrounding the community.

Site Selection and Data

The criteria for site selection at the sites in Thailand and Malaysia are: the respective minority communities exist as a group surrounded by the majority group, retained their cultural identity (relatively to a higher degree) and strong internal community network. The Thai Kedah community living in the village of Naka (located 40 kilometres east of Alor Setar, the capital of Kedah; and the Bangkok Malays community living in Khlong Bang Pho, Pathumthani (a general area made up of four thambun namely: Bang Pho Nea and Bang Teay in Sam Khok ampher; Khu Khwang and Khu Bang Luang in Lad Lum Kaew ampher some 20 kilometres from the Pathumthani Provincial Office) are selected for this study.

Data on the respective Thai Kedah and Bangkok Malay communities in the two countries were gathered by the researcher during her previous research in Kedah at Thai Kedah villages in Naka, Baling and Kubang Cenok; in Bangkok and surrounding areas (including Khlong Bang Pho, Pathumthani) at various Malay villages. Subsequently, the researcher conducted several follow-up research and site visits to these areas.

Conceptual Framework

The framework used in this paper is mainly adopted from the Eriksen's (1993) together with other relevant concepts, broadly outlined below:-

Minority

The term minority should be treated within a context; the twin concepts minority and majority are relative and relational. An ethnic minority can be defined as a group which is numerically inferior to the rest of the population in a society, which is politically non-dominant and which is being reproduced as an ethnic category (cf. Minority Rights Group, 1990). A minority exist only in relation to a majority and vice versa, and their relationship is contingent on the relevant system boundaries, Eriksen (1993). These systems boundaries are nearly always state boundaries. The majority-minority relationship therefore changes if state boundaries are redrawn. Suthasasana in his article, Nithet (2001: 50), further argues that the minority should exhibit one or more differences, in terms of language, religion, tradition, culture, ancestry, skin colour, ethnicity, or nationality.

Today, states generally use one or several of the three main strategies, Eriksen (1993), in their dealings with minorities.

First, the state may insist on the assimilation of 'entropy-resistant elements'. One example, minorities such as Bretons and Provencals become French; that they shed their parochial languages and boundary markers and gradually come to identify themselves as French people. Although such policies of assimilation are often believed to help their target groups to achieve equal rights and to improve their social standing, they often inflict suffering and loss of dignity on the part of the minorities. Successful policies of assimilation ultimately lead to the disappearance of the minority.

Second, the state may opt for domination, which implies segregation on ethnic grounds. This entails the minority being physically removed from the majority, and this is frequently justified by referring to the presumed cultural inferiority of the former. South African apartheid was a very clear case of ethnic segregation, and many North American cities are also segregated also on ethnic lines.

The third main option for the state consists in transcending ethnic nationalist ideology and adopting an ideology of multiculturalism, where citizenship and full civil rights need not imply a particular cultural identity, or a decentralised federal model providing a high degree of local autonomy.

Eriksen (1993) quoted Hirschmann (1970) that minorities may respond to state domination in three principal way; 'exit, voice or loyalty'. The first response or option is to assimilate; a common process, whether chosen or not. In some cases, it is nevertheless impossible for an ethnic minority to choose assimilation. Blacks in United States, for examples due to the skin colour ('race'). Skin colour, language and religion can become an ethnic characteristic. In minority-majority relations, therefore, we see the limitations of an analytical perspective on ethnicity which one-sidedly stresses the voluntary, strategic aspect. Many people are indeed victims of ethnic classifications which they themselves do not support.

The second response or option for minorities is in acquiescing in their subordination, or in other ways trying to co-exist peacefully with the nation state. Sometimes, they may negotiate for limited autonomy, in say, religious, linguistic or local political matters; some even reproduce their boundaries and identities informally. Some, such as North American Jews, Sino-Mauritians or Freetown Creoles (in Sierra Leone; cf. A Cohen, 1981), can even be considered elites.

The third option for minorities is to exit or secession which is always incompatible with state politics. In Handelman's sense, the group that favours secession and full independence are always ethnic communities.

These strategies are ideal types. In reality, both state tactics and minority response will combine strategies of assimilation and segregation (or ethnic incorporation), and minorities may be divided over issues of independence. 'Integration', is a term commonly used to describe combinations between assimilation and integration/incorporation. This implies the minority's simultaneous participation in the shared institution of society and its reproduction of group identity and ethnic boundaries.

Indigenous peoples
In anthropology, the term 'indigenous people' is used to describe a non-dominant group in a delineated territory, with more or less acknowledged claim to aboriginality, Paine (1992). Indigenous groups are defined as non-state people, and they are always linked with a non-industrial mode of production and may not necessarily be 'first-comers'. Whilst this does not mean indigenous people do not take part in government or work in factories, but rather they represent a way of life which renders them particularly vulnerable to modernisation and the state.

Eriksen made two general points. First, there is no necessary contradiction between modernisation and retention of ethnic identity – on the contrary, Eriksen argues that modernisation are required for identity maintenance to be successful. The chances of survival of minority ethnic minorities depends more on their ability to master changes and utilise new technology and political possibilities for their own ends; and not cultural change in itself.

Second, a minority-majority relationship may involve other agents as well as the two groups. Third party may play an important role. Minority groups, particularly indigenous people generally lack military and political power, thus to a great extent rely on international support. The networks of the minority groups are extremely important in this regard. So is the role of cultural brokers and entrepreneurs: those individual and agencies which mediate between the people and the state. In some cases, there may be doubts as to whose interests these brokers actually represent: in Roosen's (1989) and van den Berghe's (1975) view, they may be career politicians in search of power.

Boundary process and identity
Sandra Wallman (1986:243) suggested a model on ethnic boundary mechanisms:
> When all your resources are in one overlapping local system, the possibilities
> for adaptation are much more limited, and your social relationships tend to be
> multiplex, – i.e. the person you work with is also your neighbour etc. – local

relations are not linked with domains or systems outside in the same way, and ethnic groups are more likely to remain distinct.

The salience of ethnicity according to Wallman (1986) varies and that this variation can be investigated by looking at 'who does what with whom and for which purposes'.

It is commonly held that second and third generation immigrants in European cities experience identity problems because they 'live in two cultures', Liebkind (1989) and Leman (1987). Minorities too have the same problem, practicing their culture within the community and subscribing to the culture of the majority when 'outside'. Eriksen's (1989: 137-138) observation on identity process and perceptions: A clear 'acculturation' in terms of values and general orientation has taken place. The people in question may switch situationally between identities, at times resulting in tension between these individuals and their parents. The boundaries preventing full assimilation may be both internally and externally constructed.

Public controversies over culture
According to Erisen (1993), in many countries, there is a general agreement that ethnic distinctiveness is acceptable as long as it remains private – however, it is never easy to draw an unambiguous boundary between the private and pubic. Occasionally, there are public debates over the different cultural practices of minorities that do not conform to the norm of the (majority) society. It can be on religious, language or other practices of the minority.

Scope and limitation
In this paper, 'Culture consists of the values the members of a given group hold, the norms they follow, and the material goods they create.' Giddens (1991:31). Data in this study will revolve mainly around two dominant components of culture that differentiate minority and majority groups under study i.e. religion (Islam and Buddhism) and language (Malay and Thai), while other culture components such as clothing, housing will also be touched on as result of the former. Analysis will be conducted from a synchronic approach and historical data is intended to be for background information.

This paper will cover language of the communities under study as a differentiating factor for examining group identity. It is not the intent of this paper to report on the languages as a subject.

Analysis
The data will be analysed and presented within the broad outline of conceptual framework set out in this paper. It will be described, discussed and assessed along the lines of the key elements.

Minority

One should be mindful that groups which constitute majority in one area or country may be minorities elsewhere. Thais, for example, form a strong majority in Thailand, but the groups of people who consider themselves as Thais living in Malaysia, are considered by others as Thais living in Malaysia where they are minorities.

The same applies to Malays living in Bangkok, who are minority in face of the majority Thais in Thailand. Malays in Malaysia on one hand form the majority in Kedah and hold political influence in Malaysia. Eriksen (1993) state; a majority group can also become a minority through the inclusion of its territory in a larger system. Had the state boundary be redrawn and say Kedah is included into Thailand, and then Thais in Kedah will become the majority and the Malays in Kedah a minority.

Language and ethnicity of minority groups is dependent on Government policy. For example, in 1916, King Rama VI (1910 – 1925) decreed that all Thais must have a surname. For Muslims, this meant abandoning their patronymic naming, and in addition they were encouraged to add Thai words onto the name, Jitmoud, (1988:115). Subsequent to the adoption of constitutional monarchy in 1932, the Government continued with nationalist policies; banning all Muslim first names and requirement to use names resembling Thai names; and new policies determined that schools were not allowed to teach Malay language (referred as Jawi). Umaiyah (2003) concluded that these policies contributed to the dilution of language and cultural practices of the Bangkok-Melayu.

The federal constitution of Malaysia provided for all 'residents' at the point of independence from Britain, in 1957, be given citizenship; irrespective of race, religion and origin. No restrictions were imposed on names, religion and education on the multi ethnic groups. It is permissible to establish schools to teach mother tongue language. Chinese and Indians continued with schools where Mandarin and Tamil are the medium of education, different to the national schools where Malay is the medium of education; all within the national education system. Malaysia takes a pluralistic approach towards ethnic relations. Thais in Kedah can choose to attend state sponsored schools or in some cases at Chinese medium schools. Within the community they speak their own Thai-Kedah dialect (Umaiyah, 2003 – A classification of Thai-Kedah dialects) and learn to speak and write Standard Thai from monks (posted to the temples from Bangkok) at the local temples.

Indigenous people, such as the Malays, Dayaks, Kadazans and Thais including and for their concurrence to accept migrants as citizens were given special rights, enshrined in the constitution; implemented under the new economic policy. In the context of the Siamese people practicing Buddhism, or Thais in Kedah, Malaysia, see themselves as Malaysians and do not attempt to be classified as a minority. Politically, these are small communities,

insufficient to form a majority from within, such as, to dominate in a particular state or even parliamentary (made up of several state constituencies) constituency. For their support to the ruling party, the Thais are given political representation (one seat) in the unelected Senate of Malaysia.

For Malays in Bangkok, they are practicing Muslims and they too see themselves as part of the mainstream Thai society. Politically, Bangkok Malays are significant in number, sufficient to gain representation at the local council level and parliamentary seats. An interesting point to note is that representation of Bangkok Malays, though based on communal support, is within the framework of existing Thai political structure as part of mainstream political parties.

Indigenous people
One can argue that Thais in Kedah and generally in Malaysia can be classified as indigenous people in so far as anthropology definition, though there is no history of slaughter, forceful assimilation or neglect of the community despite centuries of warring between Malay states and Thailand. Within the Malaysian context, Thais has been accorded 'bumiputra status' (son of the soil – a redefinition of the term 'indigenous people') same as Malays and all other 'bumiputra or indigenous people' in Malaysia. They are entitled to the same 'special rights' accorded to 'bumiputra'.

In the case or the Bangkok Malays, it can also be argued that they too can be classified as indigenous people. In an earlier study, Umaiyah (2003), it is found that they are a non-dominant group, lives within a delineated territory (as provided to them by the Thai Government) and linked to agricultural way of life vulnerable to modernisation and the state.

Ereksen argues that indigenous peoples stand in potentially conflictual relationship with to the nation-state as an institution. In the case of the two communities, they do not express themselves as 'activists in the context of indigenous people' thus do not have a 'main political project' which is often presented as an attempt to survive as a culture bearing group' as envisioned by Ereksen.

In the context of Thais in Kedah there are no reported territorial conflicts, the land they own are with valid legal titles. There may have been incidences of compulsory acquisition of such land by the state, undertaken within existing legal processes including avenues for appeal. The communities are located in the rural parts, so land acquisition is mainly for rural development such as road building. As a minority, they do represent a voting bloc and thus becomes an added attraction for political parties and politicians seeking power base.

Respondents during my fieldwork, aware of their position and political 'influence' are guarded in responding, portraying the community as fully supportive of the ruling political party. At the same time, they are also quick to point that the community is receiving the deserved allocations from the state in terms of funding for local development.

Similarly Malays in Bangkok, did not report territorial conflicts but were more concerned on opportunities sell their land, in light with the accelerated urbanisation of areas surrounding Bangkok coupled with sudden increase in land prices In the earlier study, Umaiyah (2003), the same was reported especially in urbanised areas, leading to Malay communities living in urban slums on the remaining pieces of Bangkok Malay owned land surrounding mosques.

From the above discussion, in terms of indigenous status and language, the Thai Kedah community appear to secure more benefit from national (Malaysian Government) policy than the Bangkok Malay – Is this true and if so, is it relevant to the attendant issue that is defining harmony?

Has the Thai Government policy on language, i.e. the imposition of compulsory use of Thai language on names and for education on minorities, affected harmonious living of Bangkok Malays and the Thai mainstream society?

Can one assume that for Khong Bang Pho community, oppression would be when they are required to use Thai language for practicing Islamic? Thus, the Malay minority in Khlong Bang Pho are prepared to comply with the assimilation policy with respect to language imposed by the Thai Government.

The retention of ethnic identity by the minority is dependent upon, in addition to government policy, the ability of the community to adapt and positively response to changes in the environment (within the country and globally). The present people of Khlong Bang Pho, having settled in the area for some seven generations (over 200 years), consider the place as their homeland; they feel they are as indigenous as the mainstream society, equally entitled to the same benefits as any other Thai citizen; able to retain their ethnicity for example their cultural practices even though assimilated.

There is an active social life within the Thai Kedah community, centred on and around Buddhist temples encouraging social contact within the community. They freely receive television and radio transmission from Thailand and are therefore exposed to mainstream Thai culture. Other findings during site visits as part of my research, Umaiyah (2003) showed that Thais in Kedah retained their ethnicity over the generations living along the Malay community.

Way of life of the Malay community in Bangkok has been going through major changes since 1930s, when their lifestyle was encroached upon. They began to interact with the mainstream Thai society and 'forced' to assimilate, Umaiyah (2003). Ereksen (1991) argued that 'the form of cultural reflexivity engendered by literacy may be a decisive variable in ethnic revitalisation of indigenous people' and in the case of Bangkok Malays this appeared in the form of Islamic revival, or the makings of Thai Muslims, Umaiyah (2004). The Bangkok Malays reaction to the 'forces' of assimilation by strengthening their commitment to retain their culture; this, coupled with a worldwide revival of Islamic fundamentalism made the society easier to accept.

To the Thai communities in Kedah including Naka, the challenge is the changing employment landscape as industrialisation sets in. This minority population, especially the youth, is less insulated from the mainstream society, bringing new challenges. The community and the village is still detached from these development.

Rapid development of Bangkok and surrounding areas resulted in communities of Bangkok Malays, almost overnight finding their neighbourhood changed from padi land into modern society, factories, housing estates, shopping complexes and the like. Suddenly, there are modern highways connecting to Bangkok city and quality roads in the villages, when less than 30 years ago, the transportation to Bangkok was only by boat.

The sudden encroachment of modern society to the previously isolated Bangkok Malay society instantly brought changes. Youths are able to secure work at the new businesses. Many parents lament to me of the sudden change and the inability of the community to cope. They are suddenly closely surrounded by Thai Buddhists who are totally integrated within the capitalist system of business and production; which is to be the new way of life for the Malays in Bangkok, having sold their padi farms.

Encroachment through land purchase, subsequent development and urbanisation of Malay peasantry areas has been a continuing phenomenon since Malays first settled in Bangkok over 200 hundred years ago. Parts of Bangkok such as areas along the Khlong Saen Saab such as the Bo Bae market, Phra Thu Nam, Ramkhamhaeng (Khlong Tan – originally called Khlong Kelantan and Kelantan is the name of the state in Malaysia bordering Narathiwat Province, were previously Malay owned padi land.

The area under study, Khlong Bang Pho is still relatively rural in nature and beginning to witness encroachment from urbanisation as it is slightly away from major roads and highways. From the researchers' own interviews, the people are reasonably aware of the looming challenge of urbanisation their community would face, as a minority, Malays and Muslims.

Taking the Wallman model, I will attempt to classify the Kedah Thais. Generally the community can be described as a closed homogeneous system. They are located within confined areas, the residents are limited to and where only old Kedah Thai Buddhist are considered full members; the social network is dense and close, centred around Buddhist temples; the people are mostly farmers, some, in particular, the younger generation working in factories, enterprises and with Government offices nearby, alongside other races; their homes are typical Kedah conventional and modern finishes.

Kedah Thais speak a distinct dialect, referred to as Naka dialect, Umaiyah (2003) within the community. There is a strong tendency for people to dress in the 'typical local' Thai way within the community; changing to a more 'decent' dressing (acceptable to the majority Malay community) outside.

There is little or otherwise no interface with the rest of the society i.e. communication and interaction with other peoples in Kedah; except where required such as when dealing with government matters, education, conducting business or shopping. When interacting with others, they communicate in Malay language and to a very limited extent in Mandarin and other localised Chinese dialects. There is a tendency for the younger generation to find work elsewhere and move out.

In the context of the Malays in Bangkok, and specifically the Khlong Bang Pho Malay community, they too can be described as a closed homogeneous system. The community is located in a confined area (comprising of many padi farmland), whereas urbanised communities are located within a small area (sometimes referred to as slums); the social network is dense and close, centred on mosques; the people are mostly farmers, with some, in particular the younger generation working in factories, enterprises and Government offices, alongside other Thai Buddhists; their homes, externally looking like other houses in the area whilst internally resembling Muslim homes.

The Khlong Bang Pho Malay community, the subject of this paper, communicate within the community in Malay language as opposed to the remainder of this minority group who have abandoned the use of Malay language, Umaiyah (2003). This is reinforced thorough the use of Malay language for delivering Friday sermons in mosques. Sermons in other Bangkok Malay areas have for many years been delivered in Thai language.

People living in Khlong Bang Pho, I observe when within the community, dress in a typical South Thailand Malay style (sarong, males with headgear resembling turbans and females with hijab - headscarf). Outside, and when in contact with the mainstream Thai society, there is a strong tendency to change into the more typical Thai modern dress except for females who prefer to continue using the hijab.

During my field work in the two areas, I did come across tension and even conflicts between individuals and parents. Parents refuse to accept request for inter-marriage with the majority group. Bangkok Malays can accept marriages with Muslims from other ethnic groups; and Kedah Thais accept inter-marriage with Chinese.

One finds these observations on identity pattern to be similar to those exhibited by second and third generation immigrants, Eriksen (1993);

1. It is clear that there is 'acculturation' in the two communities: Kedah Thais residing in Naka and Bangkok Malays residing in Khlong Bang Pho.
2. The two communities under study situationally switch their identity, for example switching languages.
3. There is tension between parents and siblings' arising from the latter's possible non adherence to religious practices.
4. The boundary preventing full assimilation, in both cases, is religion.

There is almost no public controversy over the cultural practices of the Kedah Thais and Buddhists, in general. They can be considered as amongst the least controversial group in the mainstream society (bearing in mind Malaysia is a multi ethnic society). They have successfully kept their presence rather low profile and least imposing.

Malays in Bangkok are not visible too, despite actively participation at local and national level politics. Initially in 1980's when Muslims started to put on the hijab, there was resistance from the mainstream society in Thailand, Umaiyah (2003). There were reported cases of woman being asked to remove the hijab, such as to be photographed for issuance of identity card. Today this type of dressing is quite common in public including worn by tourists from the Muslim contries. Malays in Khlong Bang Pho are low profile and generally 'unseen' by the majority community.

In this situation, the lack of pubic controversy can be used as a positive indicator on relationship between the majority-minority as being harmonious.

Conclusion
The two minority groups live in harmony with the majority despite diverging Government policy on minorities in the two countries; retain their ethnicity and continue with their respective cultural practices living alongside the majority host community.

The boundary preventing full assimilation is religion. The endangered Malay identity amongst the Bangkok Malays has been revitalised through the global wave of Islamic revival, without conflict with the Thai Government. In Malaysia, the Thai Buddhist community partners with Malays to be accorded the 'bumiputra status' and benefit from 'special rights' for 'bumiputra'.

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- All translations from Thai and Malay are the author's own, unless otherwise indicated.

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