

TRADITIONAL MINORITIES AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THAILAND

David Bradley

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the educational problems and needs of traditional minorities in Thailand,¹ especially related to their ability in Thai, the national language. The various groups involved are quite diverse; their degree of integration into Thai society also differs, as does the strength of each group's separate identity. In Thailand, traditional monastery education has virtually been replaced by schools teaching the tightly-structured nationwide Ministry of Education curriculum. However, few of the schools in minority villages are provided by the usual central authority; rather, a large number of ad hoc arrangements have been made. None of the schools in remote minority villages even reaches the legal minimum, Pratom 6, so most minority children who want to complete primary education must do so outside their villages, at considerable expense. Of course all secondary and tertiary education is located in or near Thai towns.

The effects of this situation are unfortunate, both for the minorities and for Thailand as a whole. Starting with the handicap of curriculum entirely in another language and studying in less than ideal conditions throughout their school career (which may be very short), the level attained by minority students is generally low, though there are individual exceptions. Capability in written Thai is often very limited, though spoken Thai ability may be somewhat better - a tribute to the utility of Thai and the learning ability of the students. In this situation the minority languages remain the first languages of the minority villages, and the minorities will remain separate from the mainstream of Thai society.

A great deal of excellent research on minority languages has been done by the Tribal Research Center in Chiangmai, the Indigenous Languages of Thailand Project, and the Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development (formerly Southeast Asian Language Center). However this research has not yet been applied to solving the educational problems of helping minorities. I am certain that it soon will be.

My own recent fieldwork in Thailand provides data on an excellent example of the educational and linguistic integration of a minority, and could serve as an example for programs with other minorities; though the transition could be made more quickly and less painfully with appropriate cultural and linguistic inputs.

CHINESE, MALAYS, KHMERS AND THAIS

Firstly, I would like to outline briefly some groups I am *not* considering. As in many countries of this region, Thailand has a large Chinese population

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from various regional areas, especially Teochiu. This is mainly an urban or town group, though there are some Yunnanese (south-western Mandarin) living in villages in north-western Thailand. Their educational needs are met in part by private primary and secondary schools; many such children would be luecin, descendants of a Chinese father and a Thai mother, or second and later generation migrants, and thus bilingual.

Another very large group is the Moslems in the southern provinces of Thailand. Some, the 'Thai Malay' Moslem Thai-speakers along the west coast, speak Southern Thai. Others in the eastern provinces of the south have Malay, an Austronesian language, as their first language, and learn Thai only in school. In a sense, these Malays are a minority from the Thai point of view. However, in their area, they are the vast majority; they speak the northernmost dialect of the national language of Malaysia, in a dialect continuum with adjacent dialects. This language therefore has prestige and widespread use in the media, albeit in a neighbouring country.

The Khmers are in a similar position in Thailand, as speakers of dialects of the national language of Kampuchea, which is a Mon-Khmer language. However, they tend not to identify with that country, and are tending to assimilate into the general Lao population of the southern parts of north-eastern Thailand.

The last category of groups not considered here is the speakers of Thai dialects or languages other than 'standard' Bangkok Thai. In the north-east, the north, and the south the main 'Thai' population speaks rather different dialects: Lao, Kham Muang, and Pak Tay respectively. The differences from 'standard' Thai are mainly in the area of phonology and lexicon; for some details see Brown 1965 and Diller 1981a. Since 'standard' Thai is taught in schools in all regions, educated people in these areas learn it as a second dialect in a diglossic situation; and intermediate varieties, with 'standard' lexicon but regional phonology, or an expansion of the range of possibilities within the regional dialect encompassing the 'standard', have developed; see, for example, Diller 1981a on diglossia in Southern Thai.

In addition to these regional varieties of South-western Thai² languages with large numbers of speakers in Thailand, there are various other Thai languages with smaller numbers of speakers: Shan and Lue in the north, and Saek, Yo, Phuan, Tai Dam or Lao Song, and Phutai³ in the north-east; and also some in the western central region. These languages are somewhat less similar to 'standard' Thai; especially the various small groups of the north-east, which are Central or (Saek) Northern Thai, historically and linguistically quite distinct from South-western Thai including Shan, Lue, Kham Muang, Lao, 'standard' Bangkok Thai, and Pak Tay. However, their native ability in a closely-related language is a great help in learning the national language at school.

The difficulties of the speaker of another Thai language or dialect in learning 'standard' Thai are real and substantial. In practice they are reduced by the teacher from the region who uses the regional dialect to introduce his students to 'standard' Thai; though strictly speaking (s)he is not supposed to do so. The result, as noted above, can be a kind of diglossia.⁴ However the degree of difficulty in learning another dialect to a usable extent is considerably less than for the traditional minorities, who are culturally much more distinct, and whose languages are unrelated to Thai.

The problems for the Chinese community, the Malays, and the speakers of other Thai dialects or languages than 'standard' Thai are thus quite different. All warrant further discussion and research. However, these problems are much less extreme than those of the traditional minorities which are the focus of this paper.

TRADITIONAL MINORITIES

There are many small groups in Thailand whose languages are either Tibeto-Burman (TB), Mon-Khmer (MK), Miao-Yao (MY) or Austronesian (AN). These groups tend to be socioeconomically less well integrated into Thai society; in many cases they live in mountainous border regions. Table 1 gives a brief summary of names, linguistic affiliations, populations and locations; for more exact information, see Bradley 1984b, Gainey and Thongkum 1977, Tribal Data Project 1972-1977, and Bhruksasri and McKinnon 1984, especially my chapter and the demographic chapter by Kunstadter.

	Own name	Thai name	Other names	Population	Location	Linguistic subgroup
TIBETO-BURMAN	Phlong*	Kariang	Pwo } Karen	300,000	W	Karenic
	Sgaw*	Yang	Sgaw		NW	Karenic
	Lahu*	Musə		35,000	NW,N	Burmic
	Akha*	Ikaw		22,000	N	Burmic
	Lisu*	Lisaw		20,000	NW,N,W	Burmic
	Mpi	Kaw		2,000	Phrae P.	Burmic
	mBisu	Lua ⁵	Bisu, Misu	200	Chiengrai P.	Burmic
	Ugong	Lawa	Kanburi Lawa	300	W	Burmic
	Jinghpaw*	-	Kachin	1,000	NW	Kachinic
Tibeto-Burman Total				380,500		
MON-KHMER	Chong	-		6,000	E	Pearic
	Mon*	=		200,000	W	Monic
	Nyahkur	Chaobon ⁶	Niakuol	10,000	w.NE	Monic
	Kui*	Suay		210,000	s.NE	Katuic
	So			30,000	e.NE	Katuic
	Bruu		Vankiêu	1,000	e.NE	Katuic
	Bräo			200	e.NE	Katuic
	Lavüa	Lua		15,000	NW	Palaungic
	Phalo	Lua	Mae Rim Lawa	100?	Chiengmai P.	Palaungic
	Khamet ⁷	Lua		100	Chiengrai P.	Palaungic
	Lua	=		100?	Lampang P.	Palaungic
	Khmu*	=	Lao Thoeng ⁸	10,000+	e.N	Khmuic
	Mal/Pray*	Thin ⁹		25,000	e.N	Khmuic
	Mrabri	Phi Tong Luang ¹⁰		100?	e.N	Khmuic
	Tonga/Mos	Ngaw ¹¹		300?	S	Aslian
Mon-Khmer Total				507,900		
MIAO-YAO	Hmong*	Maew	Miao, Meo	60,000	N,W	Miao
	Iu Mien*	Yao	Yao	35,000	e.N	Yao
Miao-Yao Total				95,000		
AN	Moken/ Moklen/ Urak Lawoi*	Chao Thale ¹²	Orang Laut; Sea Gypsies	4,000	W. coast	Western

Table 1: Traditional minorities of Thailand

The total population involved is less than a million, or about 2% of Thailand's total. A full bibliography of linguistic research would be out of place here; but the work under the aegis of the Tribal Research Center on Lahu, Akha and Lisu, of the Indigenous Languages of Thailand Project on Khmer, Kui, Bruu and Mpi; and of the former Southeast Asian Language Center on Sgaw Karen and on Lavüa should be acknowledged. Another valuable source on ten traditional minority languages is Smalley 1976, which includes chapters on nine of the above; three TB languages, both MY languages, three MK languages and the one AN minority language of Thailand.

The smallest traditional minorities - such as the TB mBisu and Ugong, the MK Phalo, Mos and others - are in most cases in the process of assimilating; for a case study, see the section below on Ugong. A few small groups, such as the TB Mpi and the MK Bruu and So, have traditions of being brought as war captives to their present locations; some, such as the Brao, are relatively recent refugees - though earlier than the massive post-1975 influx from Laos. The populations given do not include the population of refugee camps - which house large numbers of Meo, Yao and others in the north; large numbers of Lao, other Thai groups, and some MK groups in the north-east; and very numerous Khmers (and a few others) along the border with Kampuchea.

Some of the traditional minorities, especially the larger ones, are what I call 'transnational minorities' in Bradley 1984a; these are indicated by an asterisk in Table 1. Such groups live in several countries, but have a feeling of their separate identity. Until recently, there was considerable movement of individuals in such groups from village to village, without much regard for national borders which divide their territory.

EDUCATION POLICY: PAST AND PRESENT

This section is not intended to give a comprehensive survey of Thai education policies; rather, it briefly discusses the issues in traditional and modern primary and secondary education as they affect the traditional minorities. For more references and details see Sternstein 1976.

Historically, young males in Buddhist countries entered a monastery as a novice for three months or more during their adolescence. During this time, the monks would teach them to read and write, both in the vernacular and in Pali; this education was largely of a rote nature, relevant mainly to religion. Prior to the existence of secular schools, the monasteries also provided education to the local young boys, whether novices or not, over a longer period. Thailand was no exception to this rule; some schools of this type continue to exist, and many other ex-monastery schools were taken over by the Ministry of Education.

The traditional minorities in principle had equal access to the monastery schools; since the monasteries also provide boarding, the obstacles if anything used to be less than now. There are still various monasteries which 'specialise' in teaching traditional minority novices and monks; the largest and best-known is in Chiangmai, but others are scattered through the towns near minority areas, and there is even one in Bangkok. Since many traditional minorities are nominally Buddhist, the reduction in the availability of monastery education has had a negative effect on their opportunities to learn.

Since 1852/2396, there have also been private schools established by Christian missionaries in Thailand; some of these are now among the most prestigious secondary schools in the country. From 1871/2414, when King Chulalongkorn

established the Royal Pages' School, there have also been secular government schools; and after 1905/2449, nonreligious private schools. At first all these were concentrated in Bangkok and the largest towns, so their availability to minorities was virtually nil.

In 1921/2464, seven years of education became compulsory; but it was not until the reforms of 1935-1936/2478-2479 that primary schools were rapidly expanded into the rural areas, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. At the former date, the amount of compulsory education was reduced to four years. It was almost certainly at this time that the first primary schools in the most accessible minority villages, such as the Ugong village Ban Lawa in Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province, were set up. However it still was not possible for the bulk of minority children to get any education at all.

From 1953/2496 to 1979/2522, the education system consisted of four years of lower primary (Pratom 1-4, Pratom Ton) and three years of upper secondary (Pratom 5-7, Pratom Plai); then five years of secondary (Matthayom Syksa 1-5), divided into lower (three years) and upper (two years) in the academic stream; or five to six years of vocational secondary. The Primary Education Act of 1962/2505 re-extended the minimum education required in principle to seven years, though four remained the norm; and reaffirmed the policy of extending the school network at least to every district. The compulsory minimum requirements were of course not enforced in rural areas.

In a major reform carried out in 1979/2522, the distinction between lower and upper primary was abolished, and the number of years in primary reduced to six (Pratom 1-6). This has reduced the pressure on large primary schools which formerly had seven years to teach; but increased that on former lower primary schools which were typical in minority villages (if any school existed). The new six-year primary has been made the legal minimum education, with greatly increased numbers of students in Pratom 5 and Pratom 6 as a result. At the same time, secondary education was increased to six years (Matthayom 1-6) in the more popular academic stream, or four years in the vocational stream. The secondary schools have thus been forced to add a year, often with no additional staff to teach it.

The funding of all government schools was the responsibility of the Ministry of Education until rural primary schools were transferred to the Department of Local Administration of the Ministry of Interior in 1966/2509; these funds are now controlled by the Provincial Education Officer, a Ministry of Interior official. However a very recent reform will return this control to a new National Committee for Educational Administration under the Ministry of Education, which will operate at the province level through a local educational council. The Ministry of Education has always funded and controlled the government secondary schools, though at times in the past the policy was to rely on private schools for this level.

Curriculum and assessment at all levels, primary and secondary, has remained the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. This curriculum is unified and nationwide; it assumes a background of 'standard' Thai language and culture.

EDUCATION FOR TRADITIONAL MINORITIES

In some lowland villages or villages on main routes, the Ministry of Education established schools many years ago. These are generally the villages which have best assimilated into Thai society - some to the extent that the

population no longer identifies itself as anything other than Thai. There is one such case which I discuss below, a formerly Ugong village. In other such villages, where the influx of Thais is less, or the normal school has not been established so long, the vestiges of minority identity may survive somewhat longer. There is another Ugong village in this category.

The norm in the remoter minority villages until quite recently was no school at all. It is only in the last 40 years that normal education, even at the most basic primary level, has become available in a few such villages. Others still have no school provided.

Beginning in 1960/2503, the Border Patrol Police began to establish schools, along with military posts, in a number of highland villages along the northern and north-western borders of Thailand. These Akha, Lisu, Lahu, Meo and other villages had previously had almost no contact with the Thai authorities, but they have grown accustomed to frequent STOL or helicopter visits; which sometimes transport the seriously ill to hospitals, and bring in medical teams as well as the teachers. Most such schools are built with local materials, and staffed by one or two teachers who would have very large classes of heterogeneous ages if all the potential students attended.

About 15 years ago, the Department of Public Welfare began to set up nikhoms: tribal welfare centres, providing agricultural and health services, and usually also bringing normal primary schools with them. Such centres were established first near Chiangdao, Mae Chan and Tak;¹³ others have been set up more recently in other locations, such as Kampaeng Phet and Dan Chang.¹⁴ The Department of Public Welfare also operates centres in some towns, such as Uthai Thani, serving a wider area; and has a network of officials in provinces with traditional minorities. The Tribal Research Center in Chiangmai is also under the control of this department. However, the main function of the department is welfare, not education.

In response to the gaps in minority education, the Thai Royal Family has provided quite a number of support programs to various villages. This role has become traditional for them, and is one of the reasons for their enormous popularity throughout Thailand. Some schools are funded directly by the Queen Mother, who also supports a tribal handicrafts market; other schools are provided by the King, by the Queen, or by other members of the Royal Family. These projects are sometimes visited by the donor; and I can personally testify that everyone flocks together from a wide area on such occasions, to see the visiting Royalty.

Another mechanism for the introduction of schools to mountain villages is via religious support. Some Buddhist missionaries establish a monastery school where boys can receive a rudimentary education of the formerly-usual kind. More frequently, however, it is the Christian groups which provide teachers to practising Christian villages. This is not too surprising, as the principal groups concerned, the Karen and the Lahu, were rather successfully missionised in Burma; and as transnational minorities, they also live in Thailand. In such cases, it is a question of meeting the request from the villagers for a teacher; often, the villagers construct the school and pay a substantial proportion of the teacher's salary - so the missionaries are simply acting as middlemen between Thai teachers and minority village communities.

The local authorities, responsible for rural schools since 1966/2509, should also be praised for extending schools into more parts of the country; but there is still scope for great expansion. In general, the establishment of a school is considered when the primary-age population of an area is over a hundred;

especially if the village headman, township headman (kamnan), district officer, and provincial education officer are in favour of it. In many cases, however, the village headman of a minority village, who is nearly always a member of the minority, may have relatively little influence with the higher local officials; and in any case he and the villagers may not be favourably disposed to losing the labour (and later the respect) of their children.

The general picture, then, is that many but far from all villages have a school. Many such schools are run on an ad hoc basis, and it would probably be desirable to regularise them by taking them into the normally funded system. This would require continuing logistic support from the agencies that originally established them, at least initially; and perhaps a special allowance for remoteness to attract better teachers.

The physical environment of such schools is quite different from lowland schools. Most are built of local materials, and have limited textbook and other supplies, if any. Many have only one teacher, nearly always a Thai, some have two, and a very few have more. The students rarely have school uniforms, elsewhere universal; they almost never have parents who can help with their studies.

The attendance of the students is often irregular, as seasonal and family requirements dictate. The attendance of the teachers is also often very irregular; I have had a headman complain that the teacher in his village gives classes only a few days a month, spending most of his time away from the village. Such a situation is, sadly, far from unusual; the supervisors almost never visit, so the teacher is left to his own devices as the only Thai in the village. Of course, some teachers are dedicated and hard-working; and those teachers who are paid directly by the community will not be able to shirk their duties. Perhaps the village teachers should be paid through, or subject to approval by, the village headman - who must visit the district office regularly in any case.

The level reached in such schools is generally very low. Most teachers attribute the high-to-universal failures on standardised tests to the stupidity and primitiveness of the students, rather than to their own absences or failures. It is also true that students in very large and unruly classes with disparate age groups, little or no teaching materials, and an inappropriate curriculum in what amounts to an unknown foreign language can hardly be expected to learn very much. This is true even if there is motivation to learn, which for many children there is.

Despite these obstacles, most students learn to speak a certain amount of the national language, which they need in all official situations and in most other situations outside the village: travelling, marketing, and so on. Their ability in Thai is generally much better than that of their parents, though still recognisably non-native. Very few achieve any usable degree of reading ability, nor much writing ability other than the alphabet and their name. Speaking ability is reinforced by the radio and by contacts with visiting Thai vendors, officials and others. In some cases a few Thai people have moved into the village; when this kind of natural opportunity to speak is available, minority ability in spoken Thai can be very good indeed, even without much education.

The small number of highly-motivated students who succeed in village schools must necessarily be sent to board in a Thai town if they and their parents want them to complete primary and undertake secondary school. It is only the least-remote, most assimilated minority village which has a full six-year primary school; there are a couple of Karen villages in this category. Often, children are sent to board from the beginning of primary schools, usually because there is no village school, or because the town schools are (correctly) seen to be better.

The Christian organisations, Catholic and various Protestant, provide hostels for such children in some towns. The various Protestant missions typically provide hostels for each group - the Lahu, the Karen, and so on - separately, under the charge of a pastor. The Catholics, whose schools are mainly in the towns, accommodate Thai children from villages as well as various minority children in the same hostel. The costs of accommodation, food, texts and so on must usually be met by the parents - a very significant expense for them; some scholarships are available at higher levels. There are even some minority students at tertiary institutions in Bangkok, staying at religious hostels.

Other minority students live in monasteries in towns to pursue their education, though this is less common. Some stay at nikhoms in order to be educated with the children of the Thai officials there. The general rule, though, is that children do not pursue their education outside the village.

Village education could be made more effective using materials appropriate for TSL (Thai as a Second Language) aimed at minorities. It might also be desirable to provide more government hostels specifically for minority children in Thai towns, to allow the most able to pursue their education. It would be useful if there were some remedial help available in such hostels. These hostels need not be free; there should certainly be many more of them - especially non-Christian ones, though of course the Christian hostels also accommodate some non-Christian students.

A CASE STUDY OF ASSIMILATION VIA EDUCATION: THE UGONG

The Ugong, whose language was first described in Kerr 1927, may have been the prototypical Lawa for the central Thai. Early in the current dynasty, two traditional minorities, the Karen and the 'Lawa', marched in processions of subjects. At that time, few of the more northerly MK minorities now called Lawa were under the effective control of Bangkok; but the Ugong lived along the main invasion route from Burma, which was of strategic importance at the time.¹⁵ The Karen also (Pwo Karen) lived in this area then, but even the Karen acknowledged that the Lawa, i.e. Ugong, had been there before them.

During a brief survey in 1977, and for a three-month period during 1980-81, I carried out fieldwork on the Ugong in the four main areas of current settlement. These are Ban Lawa, Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province; Na Suan, Sisawat District of the same province; Kok Chiang, in Huai Khamin Township, Dan Chang Subdistrict, Suphanburi Province; and Khog Khway, in Ban Ray District of Uthai Thani Province. The educational situation is different in each case; the degree of assimilation to Thai society and knowledge of Thai appears to be a direct concomitant of education and other contacts with Thai people.

The internal differences between the various dialects of Ugong are surprisingly large; however, they are no barrier to communication. Having learned to use the Kok Chiang dialect, I was very well understood in all other centres, even though Ugong has not been spoken regularly in some of them for decades. These differences are the subject of a separate study which I am doing; preliminary results were reported in Bradley 1978 and Bradley 1981. The main dialect differences are fairly radical sound changes; there are also some lexical differences. I will give one example: the name of the group.

Ban Lawa	[ʔlɯɣǎɿ]
Na Suan	[wɔŋ]
Kok Chiang	[ʔɯɰgɔŋ]
Khog Khway	

The first syllable (in all but Na Suan) is the word for *person/man*; the second syllable has no independent meaning.¹⁶ Notable differences include the loss of final nasals, vowel nasalisation and diphthongisation in Ban Lawa; replacement of /g/, which is not present in Thai, with /ɣ/ in Ban Lawa (also not in Thai) and with /w/ in Na Suan; replacement of the highly marked preglottalised lateral /ʔl/ with /ʔ/ in Kok Chiang and Khog Khway; tone differences; and many others not found in this one example.

Local tradition suggests that Khog Khway is an offshoot from Ban Lawa, and that Kok Chiang is the last in a chain of offshoots from Na Suan. It is perhaps not surprising that it is the remotest offshoots which have preserved the linguistic identity best. In addition to the four villages where I have found willing speakers, there is another village near Kok Chiang with a few speakers; and other villages in the surrounding area which are said to have been Ugong, but are no longer - partly due to total assimilation, partly due to an influx of Thai and Lao into the area.

It can be assumed that many Thai and even some Karen people in the upper Khwae Noy and Khwae Yay valleys are the descendants of Ugong; in this part of the world, assimilation is the rule. Just as the Mons of Dvāravatī and Haripuñjaya have become Thai, many Ugong have done so too. It can be embarrassing and frustrating finding such people; individuals reported to speak the language often deny it, but refer back to the source as a speaker instead.

The area of Na Suan, formerly also known as Hin Hak, has recently been submerged by a hydroelectric project on the Khwae Yay, but when I visited it in 1977 prior to resettlement there were no people in the village or its immediate vicinity who would admit to being 'Lawa'. After much searching¹⁷ I found two speakers in a Khmu village,¹⁸ one of whom was too old to be much use as an informant, and the other of whom was actually Khmu, but had been married to an Ugong recently deceased. The descendants of the former were solidly 'Thai', and of the latter, Khmu. In another small Thai village I found two old ladies who remembered a few words; hardly even semi-speakers. They had had the opportunity to speak to each other in Ugong, but hardly ever did so, as everyone else in the village was monolingual in Thai.

The Sisawat area where Na Suan is located has been administered by the Thais, at first through a Karen local authority, for several centuries. The Ugong villages were in an area suitable for irrigated rice fields, along a navigable river; so a large influx of Thais has also been a factor in this acculturation. About 50 years ago the Ugong communities, at least two of them, were much less assimilated; but primary schooling became available, and the decline since then has been rapid. One Ugong speaker from Ban Lawa was actually born in Na Suan 64 years ago, but left to marry in Ban Lawa; he was surprised to learn of the demise of his group's separate identity in the Na Suan area. With the resettlements necessitated by the dam construction, the demographic situation has become even more scrambled; within a few years, I suspect, there will be no memory of Ugong in this area.

More recently assimilated is Ban Lawa;¹⁹ the Sangkhlaburi District, despite being on the main invasion route via the Three Pagodas Pass, was ruled until

early this century through a Karen local 'nobleman', recognised by the Thai government. Ban Lawa has considerably less flat land nearby, so there was also less incentive for a Thai influx on economic grounds. It is also much further up the Khwae Noy than Na Suan was up the Khwae Yay, and above several rapids passable only with difficulty in the drier parts of the year.

The government first established a school with one teacher some 45 years ago; the teacher prohibited the use of Ugong in school. Moreover, Ban Lawa even then had become ethnically very mixed as a result of the teak industry, with Khmu, Khmer, various kinds of Karen, and others moving in via marriage. I am assured that the last marriage between two Ugong took place over 50 years ago; no one under 50 speaks the language. It is tempting to attribute the imminent death of the Ugong language here to the school and the ethnic mixture; though the latter need not eliminate a separate group identity, as will be seen in Kok Chiang. In Ban Lawa, the two youngest speakers are both blind; the most fluent speaker is the previously-mentioned one born at Na Suan, who now speaks Ugong of the same dialect as the Ban Lawa locals. He was the last Ugong village and township headman; the headman is now Thai, albeit married to one of the two blind Ugong.

The Thailand-Burma railway passed near Ban Lawa; but apart from several years of contact with the Japanese and their prisoners,²⁰ this had little permanent effect on communications as the railway was dismantled by the British shortly after the war. The school survived; in fact an Ugong eventually became one of the teachers by the 1960s. It is now a large wooden building with a number of teachers, and reaches Pratom 4. The children start school with considerable knowledge of Thai, which is generally spoken (along with Pwo Karen) by most of the villagers including all the surviving Ugong speakers. Students wear uniforms, have sufficient textbooks, and each Pratom is taught in a separate class by a Thai teacher; the Ugong teacher died some years back. If students wish to complete their primary and pursue secondary education, it is available about half an hour's walk away in the district town.

Also in the district town, especially near the long-established Christian hospital and mission, there are a few Ugong individuals, mostly older people who married non-Ugong; in this case, mostly Mons from Burma. Some of the Ugong in this area speak some Burmese or Mon, in addition to Thai and Karen; but few outside Ban Lawa are better than semi-speakers of Ugong. There are probably other Ugong individuals in the area who reject this identity, preferring to be thought of as Thai.

Another hydroelectric project, under construction by an Australian firm and funded by Australian aid, will soon be flooding the upper Khwae Noy. When this happens, Ban Lawa will be resettled; if they are settled together, the last few speakers may still be able to use their language for a few more years. If not, the language will be lost, as it has been on the other branch of the river. Thus, within less than two generations of the opening of a one-teacher school, this group will have become Thai or Karen.

The third area of Ugong settlement that I will discuss is Khog Khway, in western Uthai Thani Province. It is now easily reached by a road built a few years ago, which connects it more closely with the provincial capital than with its township or district towns to its south-west. Until recently it was the township (tambon), but it is no longer. The current headman is an energetic Thai, Luay, who is very helpful and hospitable. Thai headmen have been the rule for the last decade or so; the last Ugong headman retired many years ago, and finally died in 1980/2523.

The Ugong in this village are not as numerous as the Thai, who have moved in and bought land on which they grow various non-irrigated crops. Many Ugong now work as day labourers for the Thais, and live near the Thais; another, more self-sufficient group lives at the old village site a couple of kilometres away. The total number of Ugong speakers here would be about 100; there are about 600 people within the area of the village, of whom a small number are Pwo Karen and the rest are Thai or Lao. The Karen actually live somewhat apart; and the Thais live along the new road.

This village does not have its own school; but the next village has a very large and well-equipped school which reaches Pratom 6, until recently to Pratom 7; and another town slightly farther away (out of walking distance) also has a secondary school. Several small trucks carry the children to and from school daily, while some children walk. These schools have been established for more than a decade, and have produced a number of Ugong literate in Thai with a Pratom 7 education. The Thai children in the village have Ugong friends; in fact, the headman's 18-year-old eldest son speaks quite a bit of Ugong and has an Ugong wife.

The Ugong at the old village site do not all send their children to school; the cost of uniforms and supplies would be burdensome for them. However, they mostly speak reasonably good Thai nevertheless, because of the extensive contacts with the Thai majority in the village. On the other hand they are not about to assimilate, as they continue to marry other Ugong. In fact, they even travel to Kok Chiang, the other viable Ugong community, in search of spouses. This continuing contact may be responsible for the maintenance of mutual intelligibility between the two rather different dialects.

On the other hand the Ugong living near the Thai have intermarried somewhat, and send their children to school if at all possible. The older generation still speaks Ugong, but they are shy about it and prefer to speak Thai in the presence of outsiders. Their children, with the potential for a full primary education, will have the opportunity to assimilate and 'become' Thai if they choose to.

The fourth and last area, in which Ugong is still most vigorous, is Kok Chiang and a few surrounding villages, in the north-westernmost corner of Suphanburi Province. Kok Chiang changed enormously between my first visit in 1977/2520 and my second in 1980-1981/2523-2524. A new road was built in 1979/2522, connecting it with the district town; a bus service from the province capital was extended to pass a new nikhom a few kilometres away; and two Thai fruit-buyers with trucks have moved in, establishing a cash-crop economy which has also attracted a Thai storekeeper and a Lao rice mill, and also providing regular transport to and from the village. While I was there recently, a logging company came and started to clear much of the forest, employing villagers as day-labour.

Kok Chiang was an offshoot from Wang Khway, to its west, some 60 years ago. Wang Khway in turn was an offshoot from a group of villages to its south-west in Nong Pleu District of Kanchanaburi Province; these latter villages have now 'become' completely Thai. According to folk history, the Nong Pleu villages were originally derived from the villages such as Hin Hak (Na Suan) in Sisawat District further west. Wang Khway, which I have not visited, is said still to have a few Ugong speakers, of the same dialect as in Kok Chiang.

The village is mainly populated by Ugong, with some Lao of the local variety, Lao Dan, having married Ugong girls. Outside the village cluster, but within its administrative boundaries, there are many more Lao and Thai; the surrounding villages are mostly Lao or Thai. In the last five years, as noted above, quite

a few Thai families have moved into the village itself. In the presence of these outsiders, the Ugong are reticent and prefer to speak Lao; but among themselves they all speak Ugong.

There is not, and never has been, a school in this village. All those with any education at all obtained it outside the village. Some non-Ugong had been educated before they came; a very few Ugong had gone to live in monasteries to learn in the traditional way. For example, the headman's nephew went to Dan Chang to a monastery for a year; and another village boy has gone to Chiangmai for the same purpose; in both cases they went to monasteries which specialise in minority education. There is a large school at the nikhom, and another has been set up even closer - though not within daily walking distance - for the Thais near the new bus terminus.

It seems that the people in Kok Chiang are not too anxious to have a school established, despite the fact that the number of people in the village as a whole might justify a one-teacher school. At present the extra work done by children in picking tomatoes, eggplants, and other cash crops can provide a substantial income. Perhaps they are also reluctant for their children to be Thai-ised.

The history of the village may provide some clues to its resistance to assimilation. As noted above, it was an offshoot from another Ugong village. Like no other Ugong village, it remained virtually 100% Ugong until ten or so years ago. The only exceptions were a Lao man who married the then headman's daughter over 40 years ago, and now speaks Ugong; his children were perhaps the first Lao-Ugong bilinguals in the village; and two other Lao men who (20 or so years ago) married the daughters of the last Ugong headman, who died five years ago. Both these men have also learned Ugong; one of them, Amkhaa, became the first non-Ugong headman just five years ago, immediately before I first arrived. He is a very intelligent and helpful man, and by far the best non-Ugong speaker of the language. My studies of the language were immeasurably assisted by his cooperation, hospitality and help.

More recently this separateness has been breaking down. Even prior to the commercial influx of the last two years, quite a few Lao men came to marry Ugong girls within the last ten years; not many of them have bothered to learn the language. Moreover, people of mixed Lao-Ugong background from Wang Khway have moved to Kok Chiang; while they are mostly bilingual, they still identify themselves as Ugong. Thus the number of bilinguals and monolingual Lao or Thai in the village has grown.

An interesting example of the effects of this change on the Ugong is the decision of one couple, both pure Ugong native speakers of Ugong, not to speak Ugong with their children; they want the children to grow up speaking Lao. In this case, I doubt whether they will succeed, as the grandmother lives next door and speaks mainly Ugong - though her Lao is fairly good too. But at least it is indicative of a major change in attitude.

For the outsider visiting Kok Chiang, it might be difficult to know that he is in a minority village. In the presence of Lao or Thai speakers, Ugong prefer to speak Lao; there are no 'militant' speakers who insist on speaking Ugong regardless. Moreover, all people in the village have a relatively good control of Lao; there are no monolingual Ugong speakers left. However, in the absence of a school, this village will probably persist in its minority identity for quite some time.

CONCLUSION

The general conclusion is that some flexibility in the provision of education to minorities has already been achieved; but what is available has severe limitations. The main problem is the use of the general curriculum, which assumes native ability in Thai and familiarity with majority Thai culture. Conversely, another problem is the very variable quality of the education available in minority villages, if any is available at all. Thirdly, able minority children often lack suitable opportunities to complete primary education, let alone attempting secondary courses.

For the first problem, the solution could be the devising, testing and adopting of suitable TSL (Thai as a Second Language) courses, the training and motivation of teachers to conduct them, and the provision of supplementary materials on Thai culture to integrate the traditional minorities more smoothly into Thai society. This is a problem for the Ministry of Education to solve.

The second problem would be solved by regularising all schools in minority villages; subsuming them into the normal system while keeping the curriculum partially separate at first as suggested above; and also ensuring adequate standards of teaching through better-coordinated supervision. Such schools should be established wherever possible, even if the potential number of students is smaller than the normal cut-off point. In villages too small to justify a school, consideration could be given to employing less than fully-qualified teachers who are members of the minority as para-teachers, and to extra opportunities for children from these villages to stay in hostels suggested as the solution to the third problem. Some extra financial support to the ministry which operates normal schools would be necessary.

The solution to the third problem could be the provision of subsidised hostels for minority students in towns with suitable primary and secondary schools. These hostels could be supervised in part by members of the relevant minorities. The costs involved would not be that large, as the total minority population of all ages is less than a million, so the likely numbers involved would be in the tens of thousands, concentrated in underdeveloped regions of Thailand along the western border and in the north-east. The provision of these hostels could be a Department of Public Welfare project, as this department probably has more experience in dealing with minorities than any other.

The gains to Thailand from these three measures would be the gratitude and increased loyalty of the traditional minorities; a better-informed and more easily administered population in various border regions; and greater unity in the country as a whole. Some minorities, such as the Ugong, are showing the way; in effect, they are integrating themselves into the general population, having been given the educational and social opportunity to do so.

NOTES

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for the permission and assistance of the National Research Council of Thailand, and the assistance of the former Southeast Asian Language Center. Of course, all the errors herein are my own responsibility.

2. South-western Thai, Central Thai and Northern Thai are three branches of the Thai language family; the fourth, spoken only in China, is Kam-Sui-Mak. See Li 1975 for more details.
3. Phutai or Phu Tai is a general name for the Central Thai minorities of southern Laos. This category includes some Red Tai, Tai Neua, White Tai, and probably also some White Tai, Phuan and Tai Dam or Lao Song.
4. Diglossia: use of two distinct languages or dialects in different situations, the 'high' in school, official and literary contexts; the 'low' in the home and informal situations. For a fuller discussion see Ferguson 1959.
5. Lua is the Kham Muang word for a traditional minority; it is used to refer to various MK groups, including the Mal/Pray; and also to the TB mBisu. Lawa is the standard Thai word corresponding to Lua; it is used in the same way, and may also refer to the TB Ugong.
6. Chaobon means *people above* in Thai; the term Lawa is also used to refer to this group.
7. The Khamet of Thailand speak a dialect of Lamet; this language is also spoken in north-western Laos.
8. Lao Thoeng means *jungle Lao*. There are many more Khmu in Thailand who have assimilated into the general northern Thai population.
9. The name 'Thin' (Htin, T'in, etc.) is not used by this group nor by local northern Thais in referring to them. There are two main named subgroups, Mal and Pray, speaking very similar dialects.
10. Phi Tong Luang means *spirits of yellow leaves*. This is a nomadic group with only intermittent contacts with outsiders.
11. Ngaw means *rambutan*, and is a pejorative name. These people are the Negritoes, who until recently were largely hunter-gatherers.
12. Chao Thale means *sea people*, as does Orang Laut in Malay.
13. Nikhom Chiengdao is in a tea plantation south of Chiengdao district town, Chiangmai Province; Nikhom Mae Chan is in the foothills to the north-west of Mae Chan district town, Chiangrai Province; and Nikhom Tak is about half way between Tak and Mae Sod district town, near a highway built with Australian foreign aid.
14. The resettlement area in the hills of the western edge of Kampaeng Phet Province was established to lessen population pressures further north, at Tak and elsewhere; and to remove the resettled people from the areas allegedly influenced by Meo Communist guerillas. The newer nikhom north-west of Dan Chang subdistrict town, Suphanburi Province, serves a mixed population including mainly non-'standard' Thai speaking Thai groups: Laos of various kinds and so on - as well as an Ugong village and several more remote villages.
15. The Burmese invasion which destroyed Ayudhya in 1767 was fresh in the minds of the founders of Thonburi-Bangkok.

16. /gǝŋ/ could be cognate with the early name for the Burmese, ဂွံၤ , still used in literary Burmese.
17. I am very grateful for the assistance of two families from the New Tribes Mission in finding these speakers: George and Gwen Pierce, and Robin and Rosemary Griffiths.
18. There are various Khmu villages in Kanchanaburi Province; the Thai teak concessionaires brought them from northern Thailand and Laos in the 19th century.
19. I would like to thank Emilee Ballard of the American Baptist Mission at Sangkhlaburi, for her hospitality and help in locating speakers of Ugong.
20. My main informant at Ban Lawa was still able to count in Japanese, 35 years after their departure.

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