Who are the Moken and Moklen on the Islands and Coasts of the Andaman Sea?

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0. Introduction. This paper distinguishes between two closely related groups of people, who speak Austronesian languages in Southern Thailand and Burma (Myanmar): the MOken and the MokLen. The MOken are semi-nomadic sea people, but the MokLen are land-based. To help the reader distinguish between MOken and MokLen, I will use capital 'O' and 'L' in MOken and MokLen throughout this paper. If you keep in mind the dichotomy between Ocean (MOken) and Land (MokLen), you will get less confused by these two similar names. Both groups share many linguistic and cultural characteristics, but enough linguistic and cultural differentiation has occurred to support the conclusion that they not only speak separate languages, but should be considered culturally distinct as well. In sections 1 and 2, we will try to answer the question posed in the title of this paper by looking at present-day linguistic and cultural similarities and differences. Section 3 deals with historical considerations.

Previous Research. The early 1980's saw a great advance in MOken and MokLen linguistics through the efforts of four Master's degree students at Mahidol University. Veena (1980) described the Southern Jadiak dialect spoken at Rawai, Phuket. Pensiri (1982) described one dialect of MokLen at Lampi. Sorat (1981) surveyed ten MOken, MokLen, and Urak Lawoi' speech communities, and Sudarat (1984) used the historical-comparative method to reconstruct a proto-language for MOken, MokLen, and Urak Lawoi'. In addition to these sources, the three most important works on MOken are Lewis (1960), Sopher (1965), and Say Bay (1989).

Lewis (1960) collected a number of old published and unpublished texts in Dung MOken that were recorded between 1844 and 1936, and then compiled a word list from these texts. Sopher (1965) made a comparative study of sea nomadism across island Southeast Asia from an anthropological perspective. Say Bay (1989) is the

only recent linguistic study that we have on Burmese MOken (Dung). There are no descriptions available on the Jait, Lebi, and Niawi dialects of MOken. Court (1971) provides a word list comparing MOken and MokLen with grammatical notes. Hogan (1972) still stands as one of the most comprehensive comparisons of MOken, MokLen, and Urak Lawoi'. Pattemore and Hogan (1989) present convincing sociological, historical, and linguistic arguments to establish that the origins of the Urak Lawoi' are independent of the MOken and MokLen. The Urak Lawoi' live between Phuket and the Malaysian border; they speak a dialect of Malay, which has been heavily influenced by Thai. For a longer literature review on these languages see Hogan (1972:207-10). My forthcoming dissertation will first provide linguistic descriptions of MOken and MokLen followed by a historical-comparative study of the place of MOken and MokLen within the Austronesian language family. I hope to expand the scope of Sudarat's (1984) study to look for other Western Austronesian languages that may subgroup with MOken and MokLen.

1. Present-Day Situation.

1.1. Demographics.

1.1.1. Location of MOken and MokLen Speech Communities.

The area in which MOken and MokLen are spoken extends approximately 650 kilometers from Phi Phi Island (Krabi Province) in Thailand to Tavoy Island in Burma (Myanmar). In Burma, MOken speakers live throughout the Mergui Archipelago in the Andaman Sea. Their distribution is interrupted in Thailand, however, by the juxtaposition of MokLen speakers between the northern and southern groups of Jadiak MOken. The MokLen live along the west coast of Peninsular Thailand. The northernmost MokLen-speaking villages are found on Phra Thong Island, off the mouth of the Takuapa River. Most MokLen villages are centered in two districts of Phang-nga Province in Thailand--Amphur Takuapa and Amphur Thai Muang. The southernmost MokLen-speaking villages are located near the north end of Phuket Island. At their southernmost limit, the MOken live in the Urak Lawoi' villages of Rawai on Phuket Island and at Phi Phi Island near Phuket. Pattemore and Hogan (1989:76) note that these MOken have 'come since the time of World War 2, fleeing the Japanese at first and subsequently being joined by relatives, mainly from Burma.' The MOken also live at several locations just south of Thailand's border with Burma--in Ranong and on Sin Hai, Luuk Plaaj and Surin Islands (Hogan 1972:210).

Ivanoff (1985:174) divides the MOken in Burma into five groups and gives the names of their island bases: Dung (Ross Island), Jait (Owen Island), Lebi (Sullivan and Lampi Islands), Niawi (St. James Island), and Chadiak (St. Matthew's Island). Say Bay (1989:4) lists these same groups as MOken dialects, but rewrites Chadiak as Jadiak. For maps on the locations of MOken and MokLen speech communities see Hogan (1972:211), Makboon (1981:VII), Ivanoff (1985:175), and Say Bay (1989:3a).

1.1.2 Population. Ivanoff (1986:11,6) estimates the MokLen population at 3,000 people, and the MOken population at 2,000. My own estimate is based on a revision of Bishop and Peterson's (1987) figure. I estimate the MokLen population at 2,500, but have insufficient data to estimate the MOken population. Sopher (1965:171) provides estimates on Burmese MOken populations between the years 1826 to 1939.

1.2. Linguistic Situation.

1.2.1. Dialects of the Same Language or Separate Languages? Researchers disagree on whether MOken and MokLen are dialects of the same language or different languages (see Makboon 1981, Hogan 1972, and Say Bay 1989). Until further evidence is available, my working position will be that they are separate languages. This position is being adopted based on interviews that I have conducted in Thai and MokLen concerning MokLen encounters with MOken speakers. One of my MokLen informants at Kɔ? Nɔk reported that when he met a Surin Island MOken, he had to speak Thai because he could only understand a few words of MOken. A MOken informant reported that when a MokLen woman began living at Surin Island, she could only understand a little MOken speech after hearing it one year, and still had trouble understanding it after hearing it many years. These reports parallel the findings of Bishop and Peterson (1987:8):

> The MokLen definitely perceive their language as a separate language from MOken. The MokLen consistently referred to themselves as being different from the sea people (MOken) and [said] theirs was the 'true' language which the sea people have mixed with Malay.

The mutual intelligibility testing done by Bishop and Peterson (1987:4-7) also supports the position taken above.

1.2.2. Present-Day Language Contact. The present-day ethnolinguistic situation in Southern Thailand and Burma is very complicated. The MOken are in contact with Burmese, Malay, MokLen, Thai, Urak Lawoi', Chinese and possibly Karen and Mon speech communities. Ivanoff (1986:13) states that few MOken speak or understand Burmese, many speak and understand Thai, but all speak and understand Malay. Ivanoff adds that Dung and Jait dialect speakers in Burma speak more Burmese than other MOken. Therefore, some MOken speakers are quadrilingual, and many are trilingual, while MokLen speakers are usually bilingual. MokLen people over twenty-five years of age are fully bilingual in MokLen and Southern Thai. Some educated MokLen can speak Central (Bangkok) Thai in addition to Southern Thai. Many MokLen children do not speak MokLen, but have a passive understanding of it.

The MokLen are in contact with Thai, Chinese, MOken, and Urak Lawoi' speech communities. MokLen villages are frequently adjacent to Thai-Muslim communities, but these people rarely speak Malay. Interethnic marriages are fairly common between Thai and MokLen people. I have also encountered several MokLen people with Chinese family names. MokLen people can be easily identified because they have only a limited set of family names: Nawarak, Nathalee, Samutwarii, and variations of this name (e.g. Chansamutwarii or Hanwarii). MOken speakers are frequently named Klaathalee or Hanthalee, although there is overlap between MOken and MokLen family names.

1.2.3. Language Convergence. MokLen-Thai bilingualism is the primary cause of the MokLen language's convergence toward Southern Thai. I would estimate that thirty to forty percent of the MokLen vocabulary consists of Thai words already. Loan translations from Thai into MokLen are abundant. The MokLen expression for 'never mind' is [pɪn (a)nɔŋ hah], which literally means 'is what not'. This illustrates an important syntactic difference between MokLen and Thai. The Thai literal translation for mai pen rai is 'not is what'. Lewis (1960:48) notes a similar loan translation into MOken from Burmese for the same expression (Dung MOken *a-tewot-ha* from Burmese *a-twet-ma-shi-a* 'never mind'). This example also illustrates several other points: 1) Changes in vowel height are often exhibited in MokLen words borrowed from Thai. 2) Both Thai and MokLen have optional syllable dropping (indicated by parentheses), which may have originally been borrowed from Mon-Khmer (Larish 1991). 3) The study of the MokLen language is important to Thai historical studies. To some Thai

people, the expression mai pen rai is no longer analyzable into 'not is what'.

In the majority of cases, however, MokLen syntax is isomorphic with Thai syntax. MokLen has borrowed many words like 'then' and 'but' from Thai--words with purely syntactic function. Again, the convergence of MokLen syntactic structure toward Thai is thought to be the result of bilingualism. It is much easier to speak two languages if they have the same structure.

Many of the more recent phonological changes in MokLen can be attributed to Thai influence as well. MokLen has a Southeast-Asian-mainland-type-vowel system. The introduction of new phonological distinctions like /o/ vs. /ɔ/, /e/ vs. /ɛ/, and /ə/ vs. /ʉ/ (high-central unrounded vowel) is probably the result of Thai influence.

Part of my present research involves trying to determine whether MokLen can be called a tonal language or not. MokLen appears to be devèloping a tonal system quite similar to Southern Thai. Most tones in MokLen are predictable, but tonal minimal pairs seem to be developing through the merger of initial consonants. Older speakers tend to retain the consonant contrasts, but some younger speakers have only a tonal contrast. Further data checking and analyses are required before a more definite determination can be made on this question.

1.2.4. Language Maintenance. White (1922:304-11) predicted that the MOken would be absorbed by the more dominant Burmese, Chinese, and Malay surrounding them. Fortunately, we still find healthy MOken speech communities in Burma and Thailand. White neglected to consider the value of relative isolation that is afforded by their semi-nomadic lifestyle. Based on offshore islands and living on their boats, they are able to maintain their traditional way of life to a large extent (Hogan 1972:206). They have little pressure exerted on them to conform to the norms of the Southeast Asian linguistic and cultural area. This is the primary factor in their ability to maintain their language. The MOken's tendency to borrow new words from Malay also contributes to the language's ability to maintain its Austronesian structure.

Two indicators of the general health of the MOken language are: 1) the ability of their children to speak MOken, and 2) their ability to adapt Malay cultural

influences to their own language and culture. At Surın Island, for example, I was able to record a large number of (Malay-like) contemporary MOken songs. In contrast to this, very few MokLen children can speak the MokLen language; they speak mostly Thai. And, only a few traditional MokLen songs remain, ones associated with shamanistic ceremonies. Thus, the MOken are maintaining their language better than the MokLen, but the MOken are heavily influenced by Malay language and culture.

1.2.5. Ethnic Shift. MokLen parents encourage their children to speak Thai. When these parents are questioned about this, they say that they speak Thai to their children because they want their children to do well in school. They see education as their primary means of social and economic advancement. At one particular MokLen village, even the adults reported that they no longer speak MokLen, although they could speak it with me. I confirmed this surprising fact at another MokLen village; some MokLen speak only Thai with other MokLèn people. I would argue that the MokLen are undergoing a shift in ethnic identification. Some of them no longer want to identify themselves as MokLen, but as Thai. This is confirmed by the fact that many of them would rather be called Thai Mai 'New Thai' than Chaaw (Tha)lee 'Sea People'.

2. Cultural Differentiation.

2.1 Exonyms and Self Identification. The complicated ethnolinguistic situation in Southern Thailand and Burma is highlighted by the large number of names that are used to refer to the MOken and MokLen. These are summarized in Tables 1 and 2 below. There are over twenty names used to refer to the MOken and MokLen, not counting variant spellings.

Tables 1 and 2 exemplify the problem of determining whether the MOken and MokLen should be considered one ethnolinguistic group or two. Moerman (1965:1219) states that in 'situations of ethnolinguistic mosaics (Nadel 1942:14-17), interpenetration, or continuous variation, it must be emphasized that self-identification and ethnic labels are frequently the least ambiguous, and sometimes the only way of determining where one entity ends and another begins.' Clearly, the names MOken and MokLen are cognate forms, but this suggests a historical unity more than a present-day one. The proto-form for these two names will probably be reconstructed as *mo'kle:n or *mə-bo'kle:n. The fact that the MOken and MokLen have additional names to set each other apart suggests that

they think of themselves as separate ethnolinguistic groups. This is also suggested by the discussion on ethnological traits to follow. As we shall see below, the geographical distinction between land and island is arguably the most descriptively accurate.

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1. MokLen [mɔ'klɛ:n]; (ɔ)la:ŋ data: 'people on (land)'; (ɔ)la:ŋ plus any specific village name
2. Təmap 'meaning unknown';
3. Thai Mai 'New Thai'; Cha:w (Tha)le: 'Sea People'; Phi: Nɔ:ŋ 'elder and younger sibling'; Bɔklɛ:n; Cha:w Bok 'Land/Coastal People'; 'Cha:w Na:m 'Water People'
4. no data
5. Phuak Sing 'Lion Group' (Sudarat 1984:4)
6. ora:ŋ laut 'Sea People' (Hogan 1972:206)
7. MokLen (Hogan 1972:206 first recorded use of this name in the literature)

Table 1. Names used to refer to the MokLen by 1. themselves; 2. MOken; 3. Thai; 4. Burmese; 5. Urak Lawoi'; 6. Malays; and 7. Westerners. When more than one name is found, they are ordered by frequency of use or preferability to the MOken or MokLen.

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1. MOken [mo'ke:n];
2. (ɔ)la:ŋ pɔla:w 'Island People'; (ɔ)la:ŋ t/kaʔaw 'Sea People';
3. Cha:w Kɔʔ 'Island People'; Cha:w (Tha)le: 'Sea People'; 'Cha:w Na:m 'Water People'
4. Selung(s), Selong(s), Salon(s), Selone, Silong (White 1922:55,6); Chalome and Pase (Sopher 1965:66)
5. MOken, Bəsing (Hogan and Pattemore 1988:185); Phuak Sing 'Lion Group' (Sudarat 1984:4)
6. ora:ŋ laut 'Sea People' (Hogan 1972:206)
7. MOken, Sea Nomads, Mawken, Sea Gypsies

Table 2. Names used to refer to the MOken by 1. themselves; 2. MokLen; 3-7 same as above.

2.2. Ethnology. To help answer the question posed in the title of the paper, we need to look at the MOken and MokLen from an anthropological perspective in addition to a linguistic one.

2.2.1. Physical Characteristics. Sopher (1965:163-9) reviews earlier reports by various researchers; the

debate on whether the MOken have negrito characteristics or not is especially relevant to the main question posed in the title of Larish (1991). That is, do MOken, MokLen, Acehnese and Chamic look similar to Mon-Khmer due to a genetic affinity or areal influence? A comparative study of MOken and MokLen physical characteristics by an anthropologist trained in this area is clearly needed. Such a study would help in answering the question posed in the title of this paper.

2.2.2. Ecological Adjustment. The MOken are often referred to as Sea Gypsies or Sea Nomads because they live a nomadic sea-faring life on house-boats called kabang. The MOken live on these boats in the dry season, but in the rainy season they build thatch houses on stilts just above the high-tide line, and beach their boats. The kabang is represented in Figure 1. This is what they formerly looked like. Today the palm-stem bulwark has been replaced by planking, and engines are used instead of sails. The unique 'crocodile mouth' hull is still hewn from a single tree. White (1922) and Sopher (1977) give detailed descriptions of the kabang.

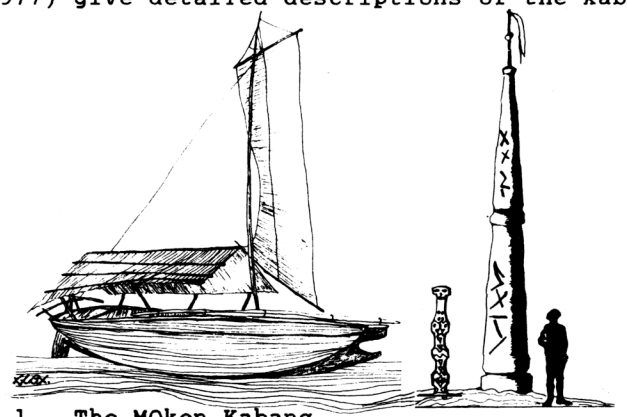

Figure 1. The MOken Kabang.
Source: Sopher (1965:185)
Figure 2. Examples of the MOken Spirit Post.
Sources: Sopher (1965:283) for the large lobong.
Picture taken at Surin Island (1991) for the small lobong.

In contrast to the semi-nomadic MOken, the MokLen are sedentary, land-based people, which is implied by one name for themselves--(ɔ)la:ŋ data: 'people on (the land)'. They show a preference for living close to the sea, especially near river mouths and estuaries. Population expansion, tin-mining, and the development of

rubber and coconut plantations, however, have played a role in pushing some of their villages further inland. Many MokLen men are employed by these industries, but some are fishermen, and others work clearing grass along the main highway.

Both the MOken and MokLen are hunter-gatherers. They primarily gather and eat various kinds of shellfish, but they also collect other sea products such as sea-cucumbers and jelly-fish to sell to others. Fish is a staple for both groups as well. While MokLen men make use of gill-nets, fish-traps, and fishing lines, MOken men hunt fish primarily with a spear. Given the above information, I disagree with Ivanoff's (1986:15) statement that the 'The MokLen no longer have much rapport with the sea and many cultivate rice.' In actuality, the MokLen still have many links with the sea and only some MokLen cultivate rice, most do not. The main difference between the MOken and MokLen is their degree of dependence on the sea. Strand collecting is the primary means of subsistence for the MOken. As mentioned above, most MokLen men have employment. This is their primary means of subsistence. Shellfish collecting and rice cultivation provide supplemental subsistence. In addition to strand collecting, both groups obtain numerous materials (rattan, pandanus leaves, bamboo, herbal medicines, etc.) from the jungle as well.

Although some MokLen villages do have Thai-style plank boats, no MokLen have kabang like the MOken. I have asked numerous elderly MokLen people if their grandfathers or great-grandfathers had kabang and they always say, 'No, we have always lived on the land.'

2.2.3. Animism and Shamanism. Animistic beliefs are held by both the MOken and MokLen. Ancestor respect is practiced by each group, but variations occur in ceremonial performances. The MOken ceremony centers around wooden spirit poles with carved human faces called lobong (see Figure 2). These spirit poles are thought to be inhabited by spirits, which need to be propitiated with food, whiskey, and chanting. The MokLen, however, do not have lobong, and cannot remember ever having them. Instead, they build a platform out of sticks and leaves upon which they place rice, roasted chicken and turtle legs, whiskey, and candles. Each family has its own platform, and they consume what is on it after chanting the names of their ancestors.

Shamanism is another important aspect of their animistic beliefs. The MOken call their shamans mɔ: katɔj 'spirit doctor' while the MokLen say mɔ: katɔj. I have observed and recorded several ceremonies where a shaman chants, goes into a trance, locates the spirit causing a person's sickness, then pulls or sucks out (lʉpap) the spirit and throws it away. White (1922) observed similar practices in Burma.

3. Historical Considerations.

A puzzling question can be derived from the above discussion: why do the MOken have two objects of material culture (lobong and kabang) that the MokLen lack? This leads two other important questions--were the MokLen ever sea-nomads or were the MOken once land-based like the present-day MokLen?

Sopher (1965:453 [Plate V]) concludes that the Riouw-Lingga Archipelago, south of Singapore, is the homeland or center of dispersal for all maritime nomadic groups throughout Southeast Asia, including the MOken, Bajaus, and others. He supports this conclusion with the following evidence:

> The Mawken spirit posts are most plausibly regarded as having southern affinities, while the complexion of Mawken animism is definitely Indonesian...the bifurcate ends of the kabang are also of southern origin, but may be properly regarded as having been introduced to the Mawken by others (Sopher 1965:346).

Pallesen (1985:273) followed up on this lead, but concluded that the MOken have cultural ties with the Sama-Bajaw of the Sulu Archipelago, but their languages will not subgroup together. Further evidence may show that the MokLen were once sea nomads like the MOken, but the fact that they lack kabang and lobong makes Sopher's diffusional hypothesis more likely.

Areal Influence or Genetic Affinity? The most difficult task in doing MOken and MokLen historical-comparative linguistics is sorting out the widespread similarities due to the language contact that was described above. To complicate this task of sorting out diffusional resemblances, one must consider whether the influence was recent or remote. And, are the similarities in fact due to borrowing or is there a possible genetic affinity? This question is beyond the scope of this

paper, but the study of MOken and MokLen may have a lot to offer in terms of establishing or disconfirming the Austro-Thai hypothesis.

Assuming the similarities between MokLen and Thai are due to borrowing, MokLen does show the effects of prolonged contact with Thai, but how long? The fact that the MokLen people have their own place names in addition to Thai ones, along with the geographical concentration of MokLen villages (twenty-five to thirty), suggest that the MokLen have been in present-day Thailand for a long time. Kanokrat (1989:2) states that the Phuket area became a part of Thailand in the thirteenth century A.D. The MokLen and the Thai may have been in contact since then, but further evidence is required.

The large number of Thai loans in the Dung MOken word list compiled by Lewis (1960) suggests that MOken moved from south to north. These words were collected in Burma between 1844 and 1936 in the northernmost dialect of MOken--the dialect farthest away from Thailand. In support of this, Sopher (1965:346) connects the Burmese name for the MOken, Selung, with Chalong Bay in Phuket. Both the Thai loans in Dung MOken and the Burmese name for the MOken indicate that the present-day home of the MokLen may be the recent homeland of the MOken people. White's (1922:57) record of MOken oral history supports this conclusion:

> Many generations ago the forefathers [of the MOken] lived upon the mainland of Burma-Malaya. They had settlements, with houses and cultivated lands. They were a quiet, peace-loving people. They were happy and contented. Then came the downward sweep of hordes of warlike men, the T'now (Burmese), burning and plundering. They drove these defenceless people before them. The Batuk (Malays) troubled them from the south also (White 1922:57).

This oral history points to a land-based origin for the MOken. It suggests they fled north while the MokLen stayed where they were. Kanokrat (1989:3,4) records that Takuapa was destroyed by the Burmese in 1785 and 1809. The MOken and MokLen may have separated then. This separation would account for the linguistic and cultural differentiation described above.

Oral History. There are numerous stories about former MOken and MokLen kings named Saam Phan 'three thousand

in Thai' and Sumii. Both the MOken at Surin Island and all of the MokLen pay respect to these former kings. Some people associate Saam Phan with 3,000 boats and others with 3,000 people. Saam Phan has two younger brothers, Tamɔɔ and Khuhɔɔ. Some stories place Saam Phan and his brothers at Baang Sak, while others place them at Nakhon Si Thammarat. These stories suggest the MOken and MokLen had a former kingdom on the peninsula. Chapter three of Hall (1985) associates small kingdoms on the peninsula with Funan (see map on page 66). Could the MOken and MokLen be the remnant population of a former kingdom?

New Evidence for Old Lines of Communication. The most important oral history that I have recorded involves consistent reports that the MokLen and MOken come from Nakhon Si Thammarat on the east coast of the peninsula. I have confirmed this report at least ten times in many different MokLen villages and at one MOken village (Surin Island). This new evidence established an east-west connection across the peninsula, which is supported by archaeology (O'Connor 1986:1-4) and history (Hall 1985:65). All of this evidence points to a link between Champa (present-day Vietnam) and India with the MOken and MokLen right on the connecting line between the two. The Takuapa River was used as part of a trans-peninsular trade route, and the MOken and MokLen may have been involved in this. All of this evidence supports the hypothesis that MOken, MokLen, and Chamic (perhaps Acehnese) may subgroup together.

Larish (1991) asks whether the special relationship between MOken, MokLen, Acehnese, Chamic and Mon-Khmer are due to areal influence or genetic affinity. The structural parallels between these four Austronesian languages and Mon-Khmer may stem from their borrowing of word final stress from Mon-Khmer, which resulted in a whole series of phonological changes. These parallels may also be due to genetic affinity. Further research should provide an answer.

Conclusion. The cognicity of the names MOken and MokLen and similar ethnological traits indicate that the MOken and MokLen share a common ancestry. Cultural and linguistic differentiation have occurred to a large enough degree, however, to suggest that the MOken and MokLen not only speak different languages, but must also be considered culturally distinct today. This cultural and linguistic differentiation suggests that the MOken and MokLen may have been separated and have been converging toward different norms.

Evidence is given that suggests that the MOken came from the place in present-day Thailand where the MokLen now live. Further evidence suggests a connection between the Chamic of Vietnam and the MOken and MokLen.

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