11 The Mani people of Thailand on the agricultural frontier

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■ *Mani of Klong Tong in Palian District / Marcus Colchester*

> The Mani do not have any rights, they live in the forest. (Thai settler woman[1])

Introduction

The problematic situation of the indigenous peoples, so-called 'hill tribes', of northern and western Thailand is well known.[2] For most of the second half of the 20th century, government policies deprived them of land rights and citizenship and sought to resettle them in the lowlands, as the Government viewed them as forest-destroyers,[3] potential allies of communist insurgents[4] and narco-traffickers.[5] That situation is beginning to change, in part due to more enlightened views being adopted by Government officials,[6] in part because the cultural diversity of the 'hill tribes' has become a magnet for eco-tourism[7] but, mainly perhaps, because of sustained advocacy by the peoples themselves, and their NGO supporters, who have developed strong social movements and alliances with the poor to press for their rights.[8]

By comparison, the even more precarious situation of the remnant indigenous peoples of eastern and southern Thailand is almost unknown. One such group is the Mani,

'Negrito' hunter-gatherers who live in the forested Banthad Mountains along the watershed between Satun, Patthalung and Trang Provinces in southern Thailand. Since the 1960s this area has experienced a dramatic expansion of tree crops, mainly rubber and more recently oil palm that has led to rapid forest clearance, road-building and forest colonisation.

The oil palm sector in Thailand is unusual in that about 70% of the planted area has been established as small-holdings.[9] Most of this expansion has occurred in the central and southern parts of the country with a vigorous focus around Krabi and now extends southwards down the Peninsula. Until now, industry interests and academic analysts have suggested that oil palm expansion in Thailand is not affecting indigenous peoples. But the question is: have those who make such assertions looked in the right places?

This paper results from a short diagnostic survey, undertaken jointly by the Indigenous Peoples Foundation of Thailand and the Forest Peoples Programme in January 2013.[10] The study aimed to ascertain the situation of the Mani people in relation to agricultural expansion, draw attention to their plight and consolidate links between them and the indigenous peoples of the north.

Languages and origins

According to linguists, the Mani people speak one of the several Aslian languages, which are spoken by the numerous forager groups who inhabit Peninsular Thailand and Malaysia,[11] where they are known collectively by the Malaysian Government as Orang Asli (Aboriginal Peoples).[12] In

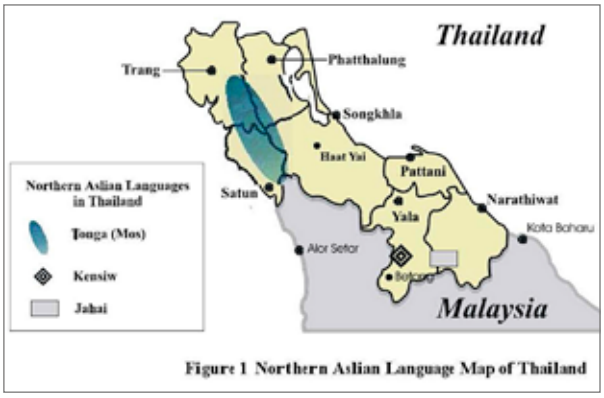
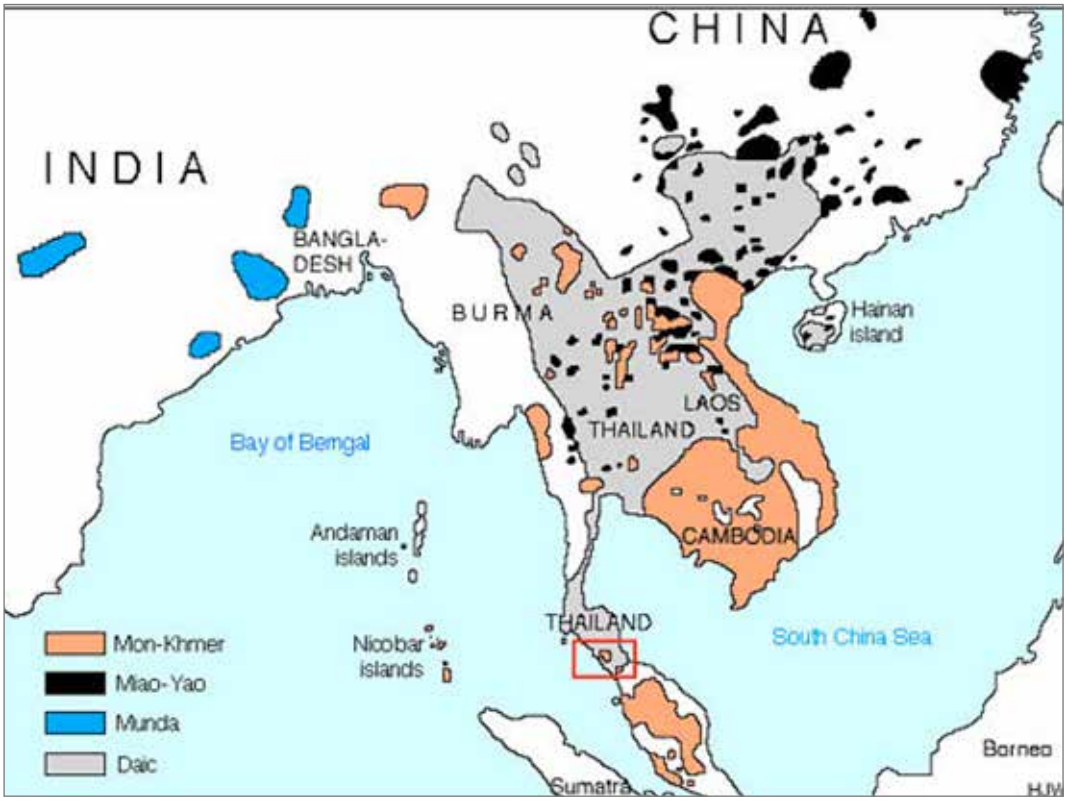


Figure 1 Northern Aslian Language Map of Thailand

■ *The Mani (shown as Tonga (Mos)) live in the forests bordering three provinces, Trang, Satun and Patthalung. Semang (Kensiw) and Jahai foragers live further south in Yala and Narathiwat. (Source: Bishop & Peterson 1999)*

■ *Mani forest camp near Wong Sai Tam in Satun Province / Marcus Colchester*



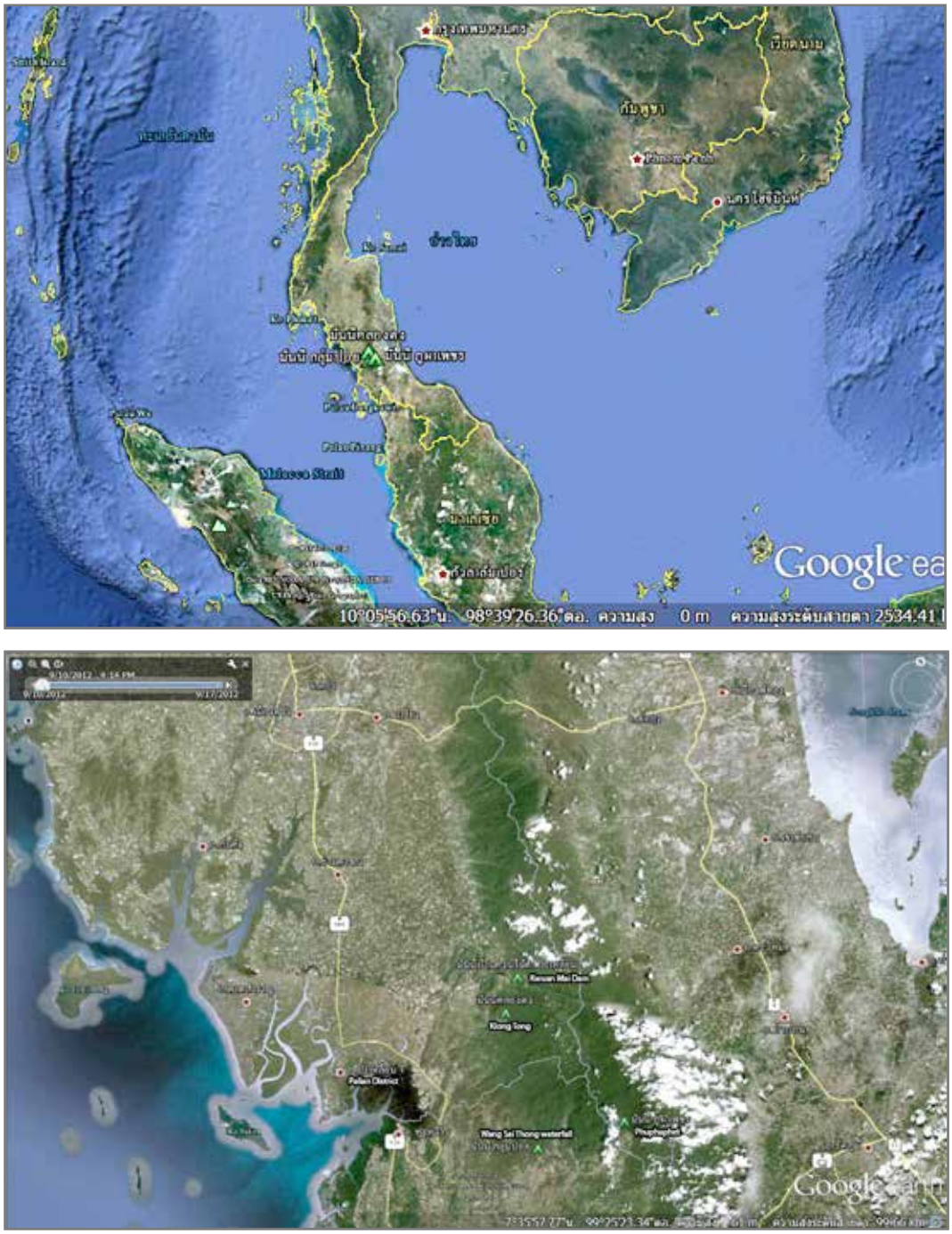
■ *Regional map showing approximate location of Mani (red box), part of the Austroasiatic (Mon-Khmer) language group.*

many ways, the Mani closely resemble the Semang peoples to the south, which include a small group in Yala Province and those just across the border in Malaysia.[13]

The Aslian languages are in turn considered to be part of the Austroasiatic family of languages which includes the better known Mon-Khmer language group, Vietnamese and the languages of other indigenous peoples of north-east Thailand, such as the Mrabri, and the various Khmuic groups of the Annamite Mountain chain between Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and south-west China.[14] It is presumed that the Austroasiatic language family stems from the south-east Asian mainland and these languages today represent the modern descendants of a linguistic substratum that has been overlaid by the Austronesian, Tai-Kadai (Daic), Tibeto-Burman and Miao-Yao language groups that came later.[15]

Physically, the Mani resemble the other so-called 'Negrito' peoples found in the Andaman Islands, Peninsula Malaysia and the Philippines: they have dark skin, broad noses and curly hair. Physical anthropologists have long suggested that such peoples are descendants of one of the early waves of human migration out of Africa and genetic studies seem to confirm this.[16] An archaeological survey of one of the cave-like cliff shelters still inhabited by Mani today suggests almost continuous occupation for 10,000 years.[17]

Whatever the truth of these conjectures, what is clear is that the Mani people both look very different to, and speak a language highly distinct from, the majority of the southern Thai. They thus hold themselves to be quite separate from the Thai and are so perceived by the Thai themselves. They refer to themselves as 'Mani', which means 'people' or 'human beings', and they refer to all outsiders as *hami*, including Europeans (*hami kalang*). Locally, the Thai refer to the Mani as 'Sakai', a Malay term with the connotation of 'slave' that is widely used in Malaya, eastern Sumatra, and the Riau and Natuna archipelagos, to refer to sub-dominant forest peoples. More colloquially, in the Southern Thai language the Mani



■ *Location of the forest camps (green triangles) visited in the field survey*

are also referred to as *caw paa*, meaning 'savage' or *chao ngawh* meaning 'rambutan people', because their curly hair is thought to resemble rambutan fruits. All such terms are pejorative and the latter two terms are strongly resented by the Mani.[18]

Geography and vegetation

Trang and Satun constitute the southernmost provinces on Thailand's Andaman sea coast. The average rainfall is around 2,008–2,700 millimetres annually.[19] Although the area experiences a strong seasonality related to the monsoon in the Indian ocean, with a dry season from January to May and a wet season for the rest of the year, the overall high rainfall has allowed the area to develop an almost continuous, mainly evergreen, forest cover. Until the spread of farming this forest only gave way to swamp forests, mangroves

and areas of sea-grass along the shoreline and to seasonal montane forests in the interior uplands.

In Trang, the forest cover has been decreasing. In 1985, the forest cover was 20.8% (639,375 rai), but by 1997 the total forest cover in the province was already down to 18.86% (579,719 rai). The main causes of this loss are illegal logging, development of infrastructure, drought and wild fires, expansion of agricultural areas and expansion of shrimp farms. As noted below, this process of deforestation has since accelerated alarmingly.

In southern Trang and northern Satun, where the study was focused, the gently undulating coastal plain gives way abruptly to sandstone and limestone massifs which rise on sheer cliffs above their surroundings. In places the vigorous rivers, bursting over the edges of these cliffs in the form of spectacular waterfalls and then wriggling their way down narrow valleys to the sea, provide a popular draw for the more adventurous kind of tourist.

History

The forest peoples of the Thai-Malay Peninsula played a central role in the area's history. From at least two thousand years ago, trading links developed through Southeast Asia to connect the rising powers of China and India. The trade route between West and East in turn promoted the development of coastal principalities in Southeast Asia that offered secure ports at which exchanges could be made. Also traded was the produce of the region itself, in particular the precious resins, dyes, woods, rattans, medicines and animal products, that came from the forest peoples and which were traded far to both East and West. The coastal trade entrepots thus relied on the vigour of the forest peoples to whom the traders related in ambivalent ways, on the one hand, valuing them as vital trade partners while, on the other hand, seeing them as backward, 'slave' peoples subservient to their coastal rulers.[20]

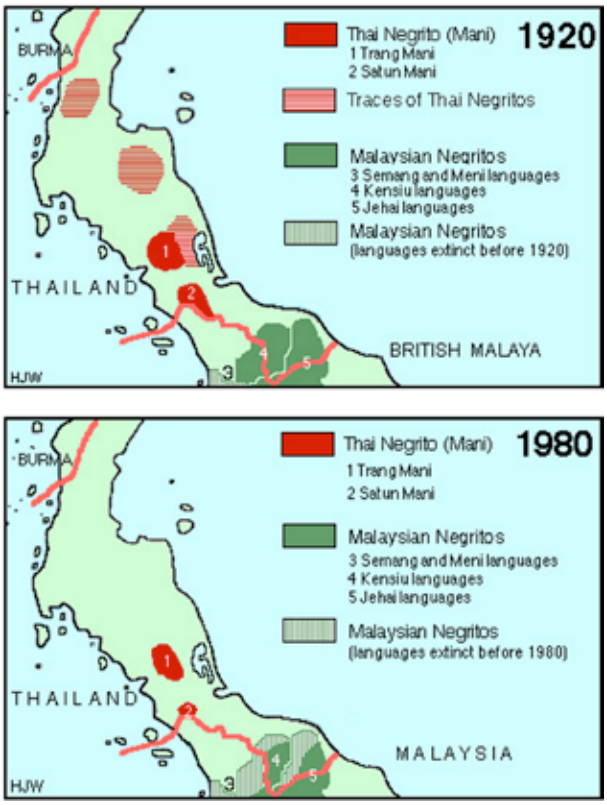
Politically, on a regional scale, control of the area and the extraction of tribute from the local rulers of these trade-based principalities was contested between the Mon kingdoms of Dvaravati in what is today's Thailand, the early Malay Empire of Srivijaya based on the east coast of Sumatra, the Champa of south Cambodia and Vietnam, the Khmer empires of Angkor Wat, the later Malay sultanates and the Thai principalities that became Siam, as well as China itself. Although much of this trade was connected by sea through the Malacca Straits, there was also a vigorous land route across the Peninsula, which had a western end at Trang from at least the 3rd century AD.[21] Evidence of this close relationship between the Mani and the trading kingdoms comes also from their language, which includes both Khmer and Malay borrowings, as well as more recent Thai elements.[22]

Although Siam became the dominant power in the region from the 15th century onwards, with the decline of the Khmer Empire based around Angkor Wat, it did not directly control the Mon principalities and later Muslim-Malay sultanates that developed on the Peninsula, instead being content to force them to accept Thai suzerainty and exact tribute. It was only with the intrusion of European colonial powers that the Thai Kingdom of Siam felt obliged to consolidate its power and assert direct control over the region.[23] In 1909, a boundary was agreed between the British-protected Malay States and Siam and this remains the border between Thailand and Malaysia to this day. Copying the example of the colonial powers, the Thai State then formalised law and administration in this newly annexed southern part of its domain and subjugated customary laws to the laws of the modernised Thai State.[24] It was from this time that a conscious policy to develop agriculture in the region began to receive State support, including the promotion of lowland rice and rubber.

It was in 1905 that the Mani first came to the attention of the Thai King (Rama V). The King is said to have adopted one

Mani boy named 'Kanang', who died in the royal palace when he was around 20 years old during the reign of Rama VI.[25] A local legend has it that Thai courtiers tried to persuade the Mani to visit the King in Bangkok but the Mani were very mistrustful and so it was only while they slept that the courtiers were able to take away the sleeping Mani child. The child was sent to Bangkok and was adopted by the King. The child however would not stop crying and only desisted when given some red clothes to wear, from which time the Mani are believed to like red clothing, although in fact, as the authors were told by the Mani, they don't!

Corresponding to the gradual expansion of the Thai State and commercial farming, the forested areas of the Negrito peoples of the Peninsula became diminished. Successive field studies by anthropologists[6] show the gradual contraction of the extent of the Mani and neighbouring Aslian groups (see maps on right).



■ *Maps showing gradual extinction of Mani as farming expands*

The institution of slavery has been an intrinsic part of Southeast Asian society for thousands of years and rulers had always sort to expand their cities by capturing slaves from highland groups and from other areas and bringing these people to work in the lowlands.[27] However, as part of its programme of modernisation, from 1874 the Kingdom of Siam progressively restricted and then prohibited slavery and these laws were later applied in southern Thailand, following its formal annexation in 1909. How long before these laws came into effect in Trang remains unclear: the enslaving of Aslian groups in Malaysia was recorded as late as the 1930s.[28]

During the 1960s and 1970s the forested areas of southern Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia became refuges for communist insurgents.[29] The insurgents relied on shifting cultivators and forest peoples for supplies and to act as their guides. The army would also press the locals to provide support. Caught between these two forces, most chose to avoid involvement. Interviewees recall one occasion in Kwan Mae Dam when a fire-fight broke out between the army and insurgents and all the villagers fled far away for nearly two months to wait for things to calm down. Not surprisingly, people were somewhat reluctant to provide us details of their roles in these situations.[30]

The more recent Muslim extremism which has begun to affect southern Thailand is largely limited to the Provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat but the Mani say it has discouraged them from making contact with other Sakai groups said to live in those regions.

Making a living

In common with most of the other Aslian peoples of the Peninsula, the Mani way of life is profoundly shaped by their foraging mode of living, which includes hunting, fishing, gathering and the use of a very

wide range of forest products for their own welfare, for subsistence and also for trade.[31] As noted, the Mani have been deeply involved in the regional trade in forest products for millennia, they continued into the 1950s to supply the local markets with forest products such as rattan which they would exchange for shop-bought goods, tobacco and rice. Even today, Mani bring herbs, medicines and aphrodisiacs from the forests to trade with villagers and tourists.

'Since they must carry themselves all the comforts that they possess' the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins famously remarked of mobile foraging peoples, 'they only possess that which they can comfortably carry themselves.'[32] Accordingly, Mani material culture is quite simple. Apart from clothing and traded metal implements – digging tools, axes, knives and cooking pots – most of the rest of their needs are made from immediately available forest products. Their single roofed huts, most of which don't have walls, are only large enough to cover their sleeping platforms which they construct in a low-V shape, so they sleep with their feet and heads up. These shelters can be constructed in a matter of minutes from local vegetation.

The origins of the Sakai : a local Thai legend

In the old days, during the time when all the animals were created, there was a chief of a small kingdom where there were some Sakai. The chief felt sorry for them as they seemed so poor. So he gave them some goats and some sheep and hoped they would prosper. Later when he came back to them to see how they were faring, they offered him a very poor meal. The king was disappointed and offended, and he cursed them. Later a crow flew over with fire in its beak. The crow threw the fire down on the Sakai. The whole area caught fire and the Sakai were badly burned. That is why the Sakai are black, have frizzy hair and wear no clothes.[33]

More sophisticated are their baskets made from vines and palm leaves, which are made in a variety of forms, and their blowpipes (*balaw*) made from canes. Every hunter also equips himself with an internally chambered quiver for safely holding poisoned palm wood darts, the points of which are weakened so they break off in their prey, should the animal attempt to pull the dart out.

■ *Typical hut for a single family in a forest camp / Marcus Colchester*

While monkeys and apes provide the main game animals hunted with blowpipes, a number of ground dwelling species are also hunted by being dug from their burrows, including forest rats, bamboo rats (*Rhizomys spp*) and a species known locally in Southern Thai as *mudin* ('soil pig'), which is probably a variety of ferret-badger (*Melochale spp*) and, the authors were told, a particular favourite.[34] Rivers and streams also provide many sources of protein such as freshwater shrimps, frogs, snails and small species of fish.[35]

The majority of the carbohydrates in the traditional Mani diet come from a variety of species of wild yams (Dioscorea spp),[36] which grow widely dispersed through the forest. It is the availability of these yams which above all dictates the movement of people. As people explained to us, when the yams in one area get used up, they move to another area where yams had been reported by other hunters. The decision to move is made by the headman having checked the suggestions of the hunters and canvassed the community.

Camp sites are carefully selected for a variety of factors including available water, building materials, security from falling trees as well as the fruiting cycles of various favoured species. According to interviewees, the tendency is for the Mani to move camp five to six times each year, taking account of the seasons and the flux in the size of their groups, which split up and rejoin frequently.

The authors' interviews suggest that the Mani are also highly mistrustful of outsiders, which may be a legacy from the era of slavery, still dimly remembered by those the authors interviewed as something they heard about 'from before our time' of which they said 'but we are still afraid of that'. This caution also reflects the persistent discrimination they face from lowland Thai, who will scornfully refer to them as 'savages' even within their hearing. In Kwan Mae Dam, the Mani told us they were reluctant to settle down as they feared

■ *Blowpipes and quivers against the wall of a rock shelter camp / Marcus Colchester*

■ *Yams are dug up using a metal-ended digging stick / Marcus Colchester*

being captured and cut up and their internal organs traded.[37]

As noted below, the forests that the Mani depend on are now being rapidly cleared by lowland Thai farmers. At the same time the value of their traditional forest products in the local and regional trade has also markedly declined. Many groups have been displaced from their favoured foraging areas by these encroachments. The Mani have thus adopted a variety of other survival strategies to cope with these changes. A small minority have begun to farm crops such as bananas and sweet potatoes. In at least two villages, Kwan Mae Dam and Klong Tong, Mani have also established their own small rubber gardens.

■ *Mani blowpipe darts in their quivers, showing the chambered holders / Marcus Colchester*

Klong Tong is an interesting case. In this settlement, the Mani have settled permanently, they have accepted identity cards and in the last five years have built permanent dwellings. Three factors seem to have precipitated this change. First, the settlement was established at the initiative of a local Thai farmer who married two Mani girls and now has a large Mani family. Secondly, the headman of the Mani group (who has since died) thought that the Mani needed to have land security and agreed to the idea to plant rubber. Thirdly, the local government and forestry officials agreed to the plan (the whole village is in a forest reserve) and so the officials provided roofing materials and allowed the use of local trees to make planks for housing.[38] Although the area is only accessible through a steep portage between the mountains, which has now been opened to motorbike, five or six lowland Thai families have now also settled in the vicinity and opened up extensive rubber gardens.

The other more widely adopted survival strategy is to carry out occasional wage labouring for local farmers. When forests are depleted or they feel the need for cash, both men and women will labour in the rubber and palm oil estates. A few have also begun working with tourist resorts, where their 'exotic' appearance is an added attraction.

In Kwan Mae Dam, for example, one small Mani group has established a camp on the edge of the forest at the end of a tourist elephant trail. The tourists mount the elephant, are led through the rubber gardens and then the forest and are brought into the camp where they are able to see Mani going about their daily lives. The Mani then demonstrate their skills with blowpipe and digging stick and allow themselves to be photographed. In exchange they get modest cash payments with which they are able to buy food from local stores.[39]

In Wong Sai Tong, Manang District in Satun Province, the Mani have also developed a relationship with a local tourist operator who set up alongside the river some ten years ago.[40]

Originally, the Mani did not like tourism as they did not trust the tourists, but now, the authors were told, 'we are getting used to it'.[41] 'They like to look at us because we look different and have a different lifestyle. The civilised people come and they look down on us: we don't like that... I don't know why. Maybe they think we are poor and that we don't have anything to eat.'[42]

> We can do any kind of work – we don't demand any pay, we take whatever they will give. We do good to people but sometimes they don't give good in return. Sometimes we will just get a bag of rice instead of fair payment. With those who treat us well, we will work well for them, but with others we will refuse. Sometimes the villagers come and chase us away as they do not want us living near them... We were living in a cave under the cliff by the waterfall, which is now a tourist site and they chased us away. They fired guns to scare us off.[43]

The authors were informed that in Patthalung the majority of the Mani have now settled and make a living from small rubber gardens and wage labour.

Locations

Given their highly mobile way of life, it proved quite difficult during a short visit to get even an approximate idea of the Mani's whereabouts and numbers. Even in the settlement of Klong Tong which has been a 'permanent' village for 15 years, the authors found that about half the community were away foraging when they visited. Moreover, since all the groups are quite closely related, there appears to be a constant flux of family members changing their residence between one group and another. The table gives some approximations of numbers based on estimates given by various interviewees including Mani, local Thai tourist guides and the local administration. It seems reasonable to suggest that there may be about 250 Mani in the three provinces of Trang, Satun and Patthalung.

According to those Mani whom the authors interviewed in Satun and Trang, their links with their relatives in Patthalung are gradually being lost, as the forest trails linking the areas are lost and much of the intervening area has been cleared for farming. The Mani also informed us that there are other Mani groups in the forest who are avoiding contact: sometimes they come to the camps but find the people have fled. The authors did not have time to investigate this further.

Mani groups identified by this study[44]		
	Name of group or location	Approximate numbers
	Trang Province	
1	Khao Wa Sum*	25-30
2	Klong Tong*	40-50
3	Kwan Mae Dam*	8
4	Khao Ting Cave	30-35
	Satun Province	
5	Wang Sai Tong	30
6	Wang Sai Tong splinter group*	20
7	Phu Pha Pet*	40-50
	Patthalung Province	
8	Pha Bon	20-30
9	Name not recalled	20-30
	Approximate total numbers	230 - 290

■ *Tourist poster showing Mani hunters with their blowpipes and wearing red cloth / Marcus Colchester*

Land

In discussions about their lands and forests, the Mani made clear that although they resent the forest clearance they have not taken actions to prevent it. The Mani note that forest loss through logging and now the expansion of rubber, palm oil and tourism is limiting the extent of the forests from which they can make a living.

> Yes, the rubber farmers took the land but we don't have a sense of ownership of the forests: we don't say this is mine and this is yours, like they do. As long as there is forest, we can make a living. We don't claim the land and we don't say this is my forest. We just want the forest to be kept, so we can go on living as we do. As for the outsiders' world, no matter how developed and however much money they have, we don't want that. We want the forest to remain so we can go on living here.... No, we don't object [when they take the land], we just keep moving: we don't have the power to stop them. The forest encroachers and illegal loggers can't even be stopped by the forestry officials. So what could we do? They are powerful people and they might even shoot us.[45]

The Mani spokesperson, Poi, who has travelled twice to the Indigenous Peoples' Day events organised by the national indigenous peoples' organisations, has been exposed to the idea of land rights. But he was sceptical that such an approach had relevance to the Mani. As he explained:

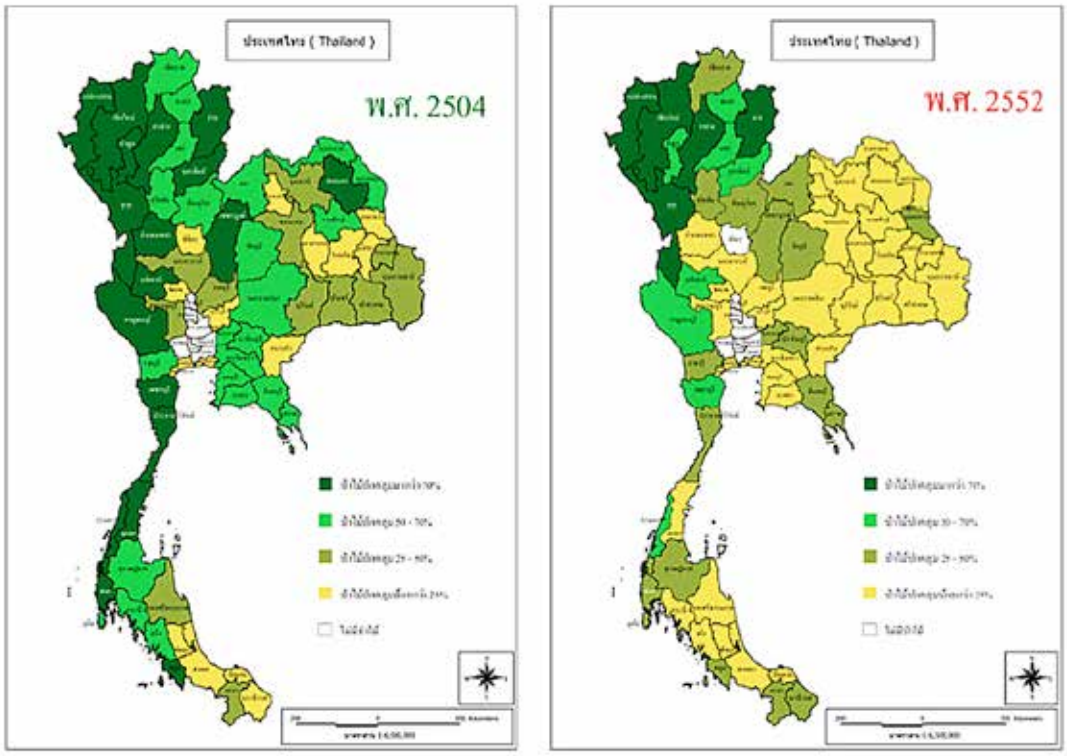
> We have not asked for rights to land. We are concerned that if we are given rights to land, then we will be restricted to small areas. So if we claimed land rights we would lose our freedom.[46]

According to local Thai farmers and shop keepers who the authors chatted to in northern Satun and southern Trang, most of the resident Thai farmers and shop keepers have come into the area as pioneers in the past five decades, with the majority arriving within the past 20 years.

Indeed the original settlers in Kwan Mae Dam village in Palian District, the village nearest to the Mani groups that the authors focused on, moved to the village from the Batra valley, about eight kilometres away up in the mountains. In the 1940s the majority of the villagers of this thinly populated district were avoiding the coastal plain as it was both malarial and vulnerable to bandits. Most of them preferred to live from the shifting cultivation of dry rice in the hill forests. In the early 1950s the current village of Kwan Mae Dam was established with an original population at that time of only six families.[47]

The development of the land for rubber began and soon drew further settlers into the region. Rubber is suited to areas where transport is difficult as the cured latex can be stored and taken to market on motorbikes if roads are not available.[48] Oil palm however is much more demanding of good infrastructure but in the last decade, as prices for Fresh Fruit Bunches (FFB) have risen and since the roads are now well maintained, conversion of forests and old rubber gardens to oil palm has become more common. Prices for FFB peaked at near six baht per kilo in 2011, but locally prices have now declined to 2.4 baht per kilo, making some farmers rueful about their investments, which no longer seem competitive with rubber.[49]

■ *Poi, Mani spokesperson from Wang Sai Tong, works in a tourist resort / Marcus Colchester*



■ *Maps comparing forest cover, 1961 on left, 2009 on right. Dark green = > 70%, light green =50-70%, yellow-green = 25-50%, yellow = < 25 %.*[50]

In Palian District, the characteristics of the two crops have also led to different relations between land owners and labourers. In rubber gardens, those who are contracted to harvest and process the latex need to be highly skilled workers and so enter into a long term agreement with the land owner. They get 40% of the sale price while the other 60% is taken by the land owner, a proportion that becomes 50/50 where the terrain and transport make harvest more difficult. Harvesting oil palm however requires brute strength more than skill and so casual labour is used with workers paid as little as one baht per kilo harvested. Workers can expect to earn the minimum wage of Bt 300 per day that way (about US$10.40 at current exchange rates).

According to the local government, while rubber began to be planted in Palian District in the 1950s, it was only about 10 to 15 years ago that oil palm was introduced, although it had begun to be planted much earlier in Trang and around Krabi further north. Today these two tree crops, rubber and oil palm, have been planted on most of the available lands between the coast and the mountains and indeed the crops lap up like a sea to the very foot of the cliffs of the limestone massifs.

As in many other parts of Thailand this rapid expansion of monocrops has been largely driven by smallholders and local capitalists rather than by large companies.[51] In fact, as interviews showed and the local government confirmed, most settlers have come into the region through family connections from other more densely settled parts of southern Thailand, notably Patthalung. Muslims still make up some 95% of the population although Buddhist Central Thais are also beginning to make a presence.

The authors' field surveys showed that there has also been massive encroachment of forestry reserves and other protected areas by migrant farmers, mostly for rubber but also for oil palm.

As noted above, the loss of forests is a major problem for the Mani. Some lowlanders concur. One of the founding Thai elders in Kwan Mae Dam told us:

> The future of the Sakai [Mani] is quite difficult. Forest is getting less and less and there is no

> more food in the forest for them. More and more forest is being destroyed both in Patthalung and here in Trang. Almost all the forests have been converted. In 20 years there will be no more forest land. Even now the water is decreasing as a result and I expect it to be much worse in 20 years' time. It may also get worse for us – not just the Sakai – as land is in short supply.[52]

The Mani headman of Klong Tong, the most settled village the authors visited, also remains sceptical of the value of abandoning their traditional way of life.

> If we could choose, we would prefer to live in the forest, there used to be plenty for us there. But now we cannot move and we have to live here permanently.[53]

In interviews with local government representatives they expressed ambivalent views about the problem of land clearance in forest reserves. On the one hand, they admit, the problem of encroachment is serious but, on the other hand, they also feel such encroachment should be allowed and even encouraged as poor Thai need land. Besides, they noted, even the forestry officials seem to be unable to control encroachment as the population is increasing and is hard to control. Even where Forestry Officers have expelled encroachers, they told us, new settlers have replaced them. Other villagers informed the authors that forestry officials actually connive in allowing encroachment into the Forest Reserves and have taken bribes to allow the clearance. However, the land department will not issue land titles to encroachers. This problem of encroachment has been severely exacerbated by the fact that the local government has built a large number of roads into the Forest Reserves.

■ *Tau Chai headman of Klong Tong / Marcus Colchester*

Contradictorily, in Satun Province, the authors were told that Forestry officials have prohibited the Mani from cutting trees to make houses, as they want the Mani to stay as they are and not disturb the forests.[54] In Trang, the Mani told the authors they were scared of the Forestry Officers as they carry guns. In Satun, the Mani said that the Forestry Officers restrict the Mani from selling forest products and game in the markets.

> They should say the same to the settlers. They hunt with modern weapons and then sell the meat: and when they miss the game flees far way.[55]

The local government believes that the Mani need to settle down and adopt cash cropping if they are to find a place in the regional economy. However they also noted that they cannot provide land to the Mani unless they have ID cards which they will only issue once the Mani are settled – a Catch 22 as the only reason they might settle is if they did have secure lands. Pressed on this matter the government also admits that land in the area is already scarce: 'it is true, there is no land for them'.[56]

Actual conflicts between the settlers and the Mani are quite uncommon according to those the authors interviewed. Interviewees recalled only one incident of violence in which a settler shot a Mani who was pilfering bananas from his farm. In line with their survival strategy, the Mani's response to local depletion is simply to move elsewhere. As one Mani noted in Kwan Mae Dam:

> We would like to have more forest rather than all this rubber so we could stay further down,

■ *Mani in Klong Tong / Marcus Colchester*

> where the villagers are now. We need more big trees for our way of living, but, because of the encroachment on land and the rubber trees, we have to move further into the forest and can no longer live under our cliffs like we used to.

In his opinion:

> If the rubber takes over all the forest, then we will have no option, we will have to adapt as we will have no choice. We hope there will be no further encroachment because the Forestry Department will stop them, although we are not sure.... they [farmers] are cutting trees every day. They are still encroaching, so we will have to change our lifestyle. But for now we are OK, there is still some forest, although the future is not clear.[57]

Health and education

The authors gained only a very basic idea of the belief system of the Mani. Traditionally they buried their dead and then abandon the settlement 'to avoid ghosts'. In Kwan Mae Dam the authors were told that they believe when they die they 'go to the rainbow', which is why rainbows are made up of so many different colours.

The Mani also expressed considerable mistrust of modern medicine, saying they preferred their own herbal remedies from the forest. Interviewees repeatedly expressed particular concern about the taking of blood samples and injections. Apart from the Mani of Klong Tong, the Mani lack ID cards and so have limited access to the State medical service in any case. However, when the local public health officer visited the Mani at Kwan Mae Dam and told them to come down to the school for health checks, they declined, being concerned that blood samples might be taken: 'so we ran away back to the forest'. In Manang District in Satun some Mani do have ID cards and have accepted health

care but they are still concerned about blood sampling. In Klong Tong, where the people have ID cards, they make use of the lowland medical centre if they are seriously ill, for example with malaria, but for less serious conditions prefer using medicines from the forest.

Some of the younger Mani have had experience of schooling and a few are now literate, but parents expressed a reluctance for their children to attend the village schools in the valleys, as they will be exposed to discrimination 'and we are afraid they will get hit by a car as we are not used to cars.' In Klong Tong, the Mani are now provided with a teacher by the Department of Non-Formal Education who comes three times a week to provide schooling. There is also a Border Patrol Police school nearby which takes in some pupils.[58]

All the education in these schools is in the Thai language and none make any provision to teach in Mani (unlike in northern Thailand where bilingual education in indigenous peoples' village schools has begun to be accepted by the Ministry of Education).

The Mani in Klong Tong admit that many of them are beginning to lose their own language. While the elders are still fluent, those in their 30s and younger use the language less and less - they can understand it but don't really speak it. They nevertheless still consider themselves to be Mani. Some of the elders interviewed said they felt sad that their grandchildren could not speak their own language.[59]

Social organisation and representation

From what the authors were told and could observe, Mani social organisation is non-hierarchical and relatively egalitarian. Most settlements are made up of a few intermarried clans or families but in each place – the authors were told – there is a headman who is considered the leader of the community and who makes decisions on behalf of the group.[60] However, marriages are chosen by the couple concerned, though they will seek the agreement of their parents, and there is no ritual or formal wedding. The couple merely announce their intentions and set up house together.

The headmen whom the authors interviewed seemed quite modest and unassertive individuals, and in the few community meetings that the authors observed or precipitated were attentive and listened to others rather than insist on being heard first. From the authors' observations it seems their authority as community representative is quite limited. As one headman observed 'we have a simple life and we don't fight each other.'[61]

The Mani have no formal organisation above the community level through which to represent themselves or be taken into account by State agencies. In the past two years, the Mani have been invited by the indigenous peoples' organisations of northern Thailand to send representatives to the national Indigenous Peoples' Day events held in Chiang Mai in 2011 and Bangkok in 2012. On both occasions those who attended were recruited through the same lowland Thai contact, who facilitated the authors' own survey.

Government policy

The indigenous peoples of Thailand live in three geographical regions of the country. These include: indigenous fisher communities and a small population of hunter-gatherers in the south of Thailand including Mokan, Koken, U-rak-la-woy and Mani; the many different highland peoples living in the north and north-west of the country including Hmong, Mien, Lisu, Lahu, Akha, Karen, Lua and Mrabli; and a few groups in the north-east, including Kuy, Saek and Yattkru. According to the official survey of 2002, there are 923,257 "hill tribe people" living in 20 provinces in the north and west of the country. There are no figures available for the indigenous groups in the south and north-east.

In Thailand, there is as yet no law or policy recognising and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples, although the new Constitution passed in 2007 (Part 12 on Community Rights) refers to "traditional communities" but not specifically to indigenous peoples.

The existing policies and laws of the Thai government have been largely based on the misconception that indigenous peoples pose a threat to national security as drug producers and destroyers of the environment. Policies and laws therefore aim to control and assimilate them into mainstream society. For example, they are encouraged to stop practising shifting cultivation, and instead adopt alternative livelihoods in order to reduce pressure on forest resources. The provision of a modern education aimed at making them into 'normal' Thai citizens is part of this same programme. Many of these plans and programmes are in fact not responding to the problems of indigenous peoples and, on the contrary cause a negative impact on them. The Mani people are not an exception.

The local Government has a conscious policy of encouraging the Mani people to form permanent settlements and abandon their foraging way of life. According to local government officials the main barrier to their resettlement programme comes from the Mani themselves who are unfamiliar with the market and remain dependant on wild yams. Whenever wild yam supplies are exhausted in the local forests within a five kilometre radius, the Mani will move off.

In line with its policy of encouraging the Mani to settle down, the local government in Kwan Mae Dam has a policy of offering Thai identity cards only to those who have agreed to settle. To date, in Trang Province, the only group which has acceded to this policy is the group at Klong Tong. For those with ID cards the government then has a policy to provide them with health care in local health centres and provide teachers to the community through the Non-Formal Education programme. The local government may also provide limited food supplies on an ad hoc basis when appealed to but not as a regular programme. Funds for these initiatives come from the normal local administration's budgets and not from any specific central government programme.[62]

According to the Mani in Kwan Mae Dam, they were offered Thai ID cards by the local administration but they refused them.

> If we accepted Thai citizenship, we would have to be subject to Thai rules [laws] and then we might be prevented from hunting. So we refused that offer. Khun Chaliew says that there might be a special arrangement for us and we would not be prevented from hunting, but we are not sure about that and are afraid the rules might be imposed on us.[63]

The other role for the Mani being promoted by the local government is tourism. Palian district was officially opened as a New Tourist Area on 28th December 2012 with a visit by 40 tourism agencies. The local government asserts that this is good for the Mani as they will gain money from the industry which will improve their life and 'they will be able to learn to stay with other people, learn to trade and deal with the market'.[64] The fact that they assimilate into Thai society is considered more important than maintaining their cultural distinctiveness as a tourist attraction.

Conclusions

Rapid expansion of plantation crops such as rubber and oil palm in southern Thailand is contributing to an equally rapid loss of forests. Much of this forest clearance is illegal, as the forest areas are classed as forest reserves and watershed forests. The plantations are being opened up by both local Thai and ethnic Thai settlers coming from other parts of the country. Local forestry officials appear to be turning a blind eye to this forest loss, while local government officials and politicians encourage this expansion as it

increases revenue for administration and builds supportive electorates among their constituencies.

This forest clearance and encroachment is having a major impact on the Mani, as they depend on wild animals and forest products for hunting and foraging. Forest loss undermines their food security, their way of life and threatens their survival as a distinct people.

Under the pressure of this rapid takeover of the lands and forests that they have traditionally occupied and used, the Mani are adjusting by adopting limited subsistence farming and producing rubber. They are also working in neighbouring plantations and for local tourism concerns. Those Mani the authors talked to obviously regret this loss of forests and the threat this poses to their traditional livelihoods, culture and identity. Their future is uncertain in the absence of a policy or law that specifically recognises their rights and protects them from such vulnerable conditions

Recommendations

There are many matters that this short study was not able examine in detail. As a preliminary study about the situation of the Mani people, it only provides a glimpse into their vulnerable situation. Hence, the recommendations provided below are based only on these limited observations and are far from exhaustive.

The authors believe that to be able to survive in this changing situation, the Mani people have to get themselves organised and be empowered.

An in-depth study on the Mani people should be undertaken in the three provinces to understand more about the situation they are facing. This should be carried out in close collaboration with Mani people and their leaders and with concerned local authorities. The outcomes of the study should be used for planning and strengthening the Mani people themselves. Actions also need to be taken to strengthen the capacity of young Mani and provide them with the necessary skills that could help them voice their concerns and strengthen alliances and coordination with concerned agencies, including with the Network of Indigenous Peoples in Thailand (NIPT) to resolve their problems. All such interventions need to be planned and discussed with Mani people themselves.
Appropriate support should be provided to Mani people to help organise themselves in order to find ways to solve their problems. For this, there should be an appropriate forum(s) or platform organised for them to discuss among themselves internally on their issues and concerns and on how they want to resolve them.

In the meantime, the national forum which is promoting sustainable palm oil in Thailand should take steps to curb the illegal expansion of oil palm and rubber plantations in the forests in southern Thailand.

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Endnotes

1. Interviewee in Satun Province, 15th January 2013.
2. McKinnon and Bhruksasri 1986; McKinnon and Vienne 1989
3. Haberkorn 2011; Pye 2005.
4. McCoy 1984; Tapp 1986.
5. Sturgeon 2005.
6. Forsyth and Walker 2008.
7. Gray and Ridout 2012.
8. Missingham 2003.
9. Dallinger 2011.
10. The authors would like to thank in particular Khun Chaliew Inpang, who acted as their local guide and translator and whose detailed knowledge of the Mani was key to this study, and Tau Poy, who showed the authors around the communities in Satun. The authors would also like to thank Khun Sanit Tongsem, the headman of Kwan Mai Dam village and his adviser Khun Danang Chuon, as well as Khun Madiah Phetpring of Kwan Mai Dam and Khun Kening Kandai of Wong Sai Tong tourist resort.
11. Bishop and Peterson (2003) spell their name 'Maniq'.
12. Carey 1976.
13. Endicott 1979; Howell 1989.
14. Ibid.
15. Ricklefs et alii 2010
16. Nicholas 2000; Oppenheimer 2000.
17. Albrecht & Moser 1998. While suggestive, the archaeological material does not prove that it was direct ancestors of the Mani that were the occupants of these caves.
18. The term 'Semang', which is used to refer to the closely related Orang Asli groups of Malaysia and Yala Province in Thailand, is likewise thought to derive from the Khmer term for 'debt slave' (Ghani 2010), suggesting that both the Khmer and Malay kingdoms used to have similar relations with the forest peoples of the interior.
19. http://www.lib.ru.ac.th/trang/tranginfo/forest.html
20. Reid 1993 (two vols), Andaya 2008.
21. Gray and Ridout 2012.
22. Bishop and Peterson 1999.
23. Winichakul 1997.
24. Loos 2002.
25. www.vcharkarn.com/vcafe/36920
26. Bernartzik and Ivanoff 2005; Evans 1937; Schebesta 1928.
27. Chandler 2000; Reid 1993 (two vols); Scott 2009.
28. Carey 1976.
29. Carey 1976; Chapman 1957; Taber 1970..
30. Interviews in Kwan Mai Dam Mani camp 14 January 2013; interview with Khun Madiah, 17th January 2013.
31. Duangchan 1990.
32. Sahlins 1976.
33. Interview with Khun Madiah, 17th January 2013.
34. If true this would extend the known range of this genus.
35. The authors' brief survey only identified a few aspects of Mani livelihoods which in many respects seem like that of the Batek across the border in Malaysia (Endicott and Endicott 2007).
36. Maneenoon *et al*. 2008.
37. Interviews Kwan Mai Dam, 14th January 2013.
38. This account is built up from three separate interviews, with Klong Tong residents, with the local government and with the nephew of a Thai who married into the Mani community of Klong Tong.
39. Interviews Kwan Mai Dam, 14th January 2013.
40. Interview Kening Kandai, 15th January 2013.
41. Interview with Poi in Wong Sai Tong, 15th January 2013.
42. Boi's younger brother, 15th January 2013.
43. Interview with Poi in Wong Sai Tong, 15th January 2013.
44. Groups marked with an asterisk (*) were those actually visited in the authors' survey. The numbers for Patthalung, which the authors did not visit are particularly approximate.
45. Interview with Poi at Wong Sai Tong forest camp, 15th January 2013.
46. Ibid.
47. Interview with Khun Madiah, 17th January 2013.
48. Dove 2011.
49. The local farmers in Kwan Mai Dam seem to be getting a low price for their FFB from the middlemen who take them in bulk to the mills. The current national prices are between Bt 4 and Bt 4.35 (*The Nation,* 19th January 2013 '100,000 tonnes palm oil set for release').
50. Source: http://www.seub.or.th/index.php
51. Lohmann 1993
52. Interview with Khun Madiah, 17th January 2013.
53. Interview with Tau Chai, 16th January 2013.
54. Interview with Mani elder in Phu Pha Pet, 15th January 2013.
55. Interview with Poi, 15th January 2013.
56. Interview with Sanit Tongsem and Danang Chuon, 17th January 2013.
57. Interview in Kwan Mai Dam, 14th January 2013.
58. Interviews with Tau Yaa and Tau Chai in Klong Tong, 16th January 2013.
59. Interviews in Klong Tong, 16th January 2013.

60. Bishop and Peterson, 1999, note that the role of headman is inherited patrilineally.
61. Interviews Kwan Mai Dam, 14th January 2013.
62. Interview with Sanit Tongsem and Danang Chuon, 17th January 2013.
63. Interviews Kwan Mai Dam, 14th January 2013.
64. Interview with Sanit Tongsem and Danang Chuon, 17th January 2013.