

## Identity Adaptation of Shans' Community in Mae Hong Son Province

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**Abstract:** This dissertation has a purpose of Shan's identity reflection and adaptation culturally in Mae Hong Son Province. Firstly regarding to the research, there is a found that identity of Shans' culture has been relatively connecting to their local nature with a belief of Spiritualism and Buddhism causing specific culture and custom as well as their local handcraft. Now-a-days, Shan has been changing their culture identity socially and financially in both cases of characteristic and attitude which have been mixed of Shan's modern and traditional culture. In parallel, personal and community change impact way of thinking socially and culturally as well as ones' attitude preservation in order to harmonize with the rapid globalization constantly.

**Key words:** Adaptation, attitude, culture, shan, traditional, Mae Hong Son Province

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### INTRODUCTION

This research intention is to study social and culture development among Shan's community in Mae Hong Son Province, pointing appearance of their community adjustment in Northern Thailand which close to Burma where contains of various kind of cultures as same as elsewhere in the world. People relations were begun from groups of family and relatives in community helping each other to create their personal characteristic culturally. In case of making their characteristic was intensively based on a belief and a standard worship in the area and at the same time, there is difference sub-dividedly which according to Totemism lineage which has relationship differently from their each family in the area. Some families are liked with a belief and social activities (Kuper and Kuper, 2003). Moreover, group or society level in each places are having together characteristic and attitude in order to produce a common sense for group members in their community as well as concerning what is different from the group with possible changing and adjusting capabilities by using man-made symbols in groups' culture (Schlesinger, 1993) which is the same as group lineage in Mae Hong Son Province who has communication between groups of people in the area where is close to Burma. Those groups of people, named: Muser; Mong; Pa Gar Ger Yor (Kareang); Lee Sor; Ra Wah; Chinese U-Narn (Jeen Hor); Thai Youn and Thai Yai (Shan) have their religion, belief, worship and way of living differently.

In Mae Hong Son Province, Shan used to be Kon Tai nationality who evacuated from Northeastern Burma, especially Rat Charn, Hmork-Mai, Muang-Nai, Muang-Larn Ker and other cities around Sarawin River,

some evacuated from Southern China for agricultural opportunity, temporary living, war evacuation, logging and timber trading. In the ancient time, Shan's community had been used as Burmese way through to Ayutthaya city or Northern provinces such as Phitsanulok city, there was settlement of Shan in Prang Moo village and expanded over the areas of various important rivers. Shan differently has their attitude from others urban society in Lan Na Kingdom because they received cultural influences from aboriginal Tai which using Shan's language for speaking and writing. Furthermore, Shan is giving an importance to their custom and culture which unavoidably related to Buddhism that has been passing on strictly as well as artistic characteristic is mixed of Shan's art and Burmese's art which also received influence from a belief and faith for Buddhism, Shan community is peaceful and safe for live and asset, also people are friendly and generous.

However, presently cultural attitude adaptation is a spectacle that combined in communities and every nationalities which is openly receiving global influences as well as Shan has started their adaptation personally and grouply in order to appropriately harmonize themselves to the current way of life and live with others in community happily. Social and cultural self-adaptation is a personal evolution with culture and society in case of language, history, cuisine, custom, religion, artistic and way of living which adaptation is a more complicated life's method adjustment which exactly the same as Shan's cultural attitude shall originally be impacted and merged by other superior cultures. Various Shan's communities are facing the happened servitude; Shan's elderly people are worrying about social and cultural value is being originally changed and impacted in a negative way,

especially Shan's new generation young people will unavoidably face a challenge of financial influence and informative society globally which in this research mention about how Shan's cultural attitude in Mae Hong Son Province is and how they are going to be impacted from globalization in the present and the future.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Cultural attitude of Shan in Mae Hong Son Province:** In the study of primary literature, to be part of social and cultural activity in Shan's community in order to gather related information such as pattern of Shan's everyday life, house condition, language, dress and relationship between among 7 Shan communities in the areas of Muang, Prai and Khun-Yhom district, Mae Hong Son province. There is a found that Shan's cultural attitude was produced from relationship, value, belief, standard rule and constant development. In the past time, Shan communities in Mae Hong Son Province voluntarily evacuated from Burma to Thailand avoiding the battles between China and Burma, Thailand and Burma to Thailand for their better settlement as well as Western colonialism, political change, financial relationship with Lan Na Kingdom, such as trading and logging. Every Shan's communities in Mae Hong Son Province situate on the fertile plot of lands where great geographical characteristic are; Shan communities always have river or brook run through which very much important for the living produces themselves way of life with knowledge, skill and though. According, to Shan's way of life with traditional belief and religious faithfulness are closely related with animatisms causing Shan to provide space for birth and dead activities publically in their villages. Shan creates attitude for their spiritual excity governors who they respect as a heaven God named; Kunsang, special food that combined with dessert and fruit without meat represents godhood as a high class spirit who had make lots of good thing for Shan and Shan's custom has characteristic traditionally related with agricultural society in case of costume dressing, entertainment and acting. Food consumption culture and local handcrafts have been passed on for a long time which considered as an expression of Shan members in community the same as Woodward (1997)'s mentions that attitude is connected or based on nature such as nationality, family relationship and also history which all these cause society a stability, in clarification, every Shan communities give an importance to merit making in Buddhist holy days by taking day off from work in order to avoid possibility of killing animal and also they like merit making with their belief of a life adaptation, Shan community has custom

which related to 12 Buddhism months that called Yha See Sib Song or in the other word is 12 sign of the zodiac. In Shan's way of life, Shan is generous and friendly with visitors they have their personal style of costume and haircut, men like to have tattoo on their bodies in order to express a manhood, strength and invulnerable living, as well Shan create their dancing by replicating animal movement for the Wan Aork Wha (End of Buddhist lent) ceremony and Jong Para parade, such as Rumto or Garto, Bird dancing or King Gar Hra and Gar Rai dancing which considered as Shan's popularity and has been passing on until now. I case of local handcrafts in Shan community, almost painting, sculpture and architecture are created relatively with Buddhism Shan painters do not like mural painting the same as Larn Na people generally because of they have their temples differently styles. In the other hand, there is a finding of tattoo painting and Tai pattern on hat call Goop Tai and generally most of Shan's sculptures are image of Buddha and they also sculpt king of beasts which crafting Tai pattern, for Shan's architectures there is construction of temples and accommodations with ideology. According to Shan geographical communities are mostly situated on high hills rather than large open space and big temples are only constructed with wooden material and provided spaces for Buddhism ceremonies with space for Buddhist monks to stay in a Buddhist monastery during the Buddhist lent at the same time where mostly called Hern Tai, first floor is raised high up from ground level using bamboo as a flooring and wall pattern and banana leaves are used for building roof, in case of permanent accommodation where constructs with hard timber or teakwood for the whole building would represent a wealthy Shan.

From the said mentioned before, historically Shan's cultural attitude has specifically been characteristic in both case of similarity and difference with others, relation and interdependence with nature is harmonizingly connected to Buddhism belief causes systematic value and majority belief sharing their attitude together through behavior in way of life and culture which causes them a feeling of strong ownership together and shall be hold forever in Shan community which conform with Boas (1940) who said behavior and personal action when they come together would create social and cultural formation in the same direction causing an ownership feeling in their mind personally and grouply which reflects intensity of Shan's cultural attitude would be survived continually. Also, Shan has been having their attitude preservation method constantly in their families' relation, community rules are culturally created and supported formally from local government sectors. In case of agricultural profession, although there is a use of advance machinery

in Shan communities but there is still a use of manpower in their profession and intends to be part of sufficient economy, especially some combined vegetable gardens in communities, Shan have applied their costume to suit condition of everyday life. They also have activities and Shan's food festival which also have an entertainment during ceremonies and festivals.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Adaptation and impact on Shan's cultural attitude:** From this informal interview by using snowball sampling, observation and focus group discussion about Shan community context which connected to Shan's cultural attitude as well as possible impacts that will happen in the soon future.

There is a finding that Shan currently has more connection with their relatives or others from the different ethnic, having said that Shan also has more depend on community or government sectors causing community members a group working reduction. The local and public sectors have supported in the area of knowledge training according to the received budget makes community members an integration that based on the specified local government conditions. Relation between person and community used to be natural and informal in contract, now there has been a change in connection between communities and government sectors is positively adapted according to the provided programs or activities. There is also an employment of manpower by using budgets from government and private sectors, public works in communities as it used to help each other working and now things have been changed by using auction system for qualified Shan's contractors from government sectors. In addition, Shan especially new generation give less importance to Buddhism faith and worship as well as spirit believing when compare to the previous generation. Buddhism worships are mixed of a spirit veneration and faithfulness in Buddhism and Brahmanism, passing on Buddhism and culture adaptation knowledge through temple, family and school would need formal leader such as abbot monk, village headman, head of a group of villages and informal leader, such as local wisdom has an important role in giving direction in adapting worship formation, restrictiveness in religion.

Presently, many things have been adapted such as putting on shoe in temple as it used to believe that taking off shoe before entering temple restrictively represents respectfulness for religion but now in contrast shoes would be lost because of its' value, etc., this reflects an negative social change in Shan communities.

Now-a-days, Shan community members do not admire weaving, traditional Shan costume, dress from outer community and ready-made dress are getting more popular among Shan new generation. Traditional Shan dress is still used occasionally in some events or required by the formal government ceremony, in case of food consumption culture, Shan presently admire rice and sticky rice which they consume both of local food and outer resources. At the same time, various Shan communities have used food ,such as nuts, sesame seed and spice mixture in the communities to sell in market and OTO center as community products according to the government policy (OTOP) which supports by the local government sectors. Shan openly receive various kinds of food from where else such as Larb, Num Prik Pla Rah, center region foods and also food for the South of Thailand. Sharing foods with neighbors or relatives is reduced cause mostly they prefer to prepare food just for their own families.

In case of entertainment, some Shan communities has brought an outer source of dancing and acting into community for traditional ceremonies, such as international music which impacts Shan's traditional entertainment missing or less popular, such as Shan's music folk drama (Jard Tai) and Hed Kwam have changed from Shan's entertainer to a hire entertainer from outer community. Furthermore, modern performances are getting more popular among group of teenagers generally as well as there is a reward for each performing commercially which reduces the religious image significantly in case of forming adaptation which emphasizing on the colorful costume and make-up, dancing has been more applied publically with the specific requirement from local community and government sector which causes Shan a more mixture.

Adaptation of Shan's local handcrafting skill presently, small amount of Shan who have ability in basket making and needle crafting which mixed of modern pattern, to build temple and sculpt image of Buddha are unlikely happening, even thought if there was a renovation for building Shan would select iron or concrete as a building material rather than timber as it used be. There is no worship before sculpting statue of a lion for religious place as its element; to construct or renovate religious places would only be considered by monks and community members through procedure of the Office of National Buddhism and Department of Fine Arts. Traditional body Tattoo is no longer popular among Shan's new generation but modern pattern is fashionably introduced instead as well as traditional building construction has been changed from traditional Shan's

timber architecture to be more modern built with concrete or brick because of material shortage and also traditional *Hern Tai* is now hardly to find.

According to the discussed before, factors that impact on Shan's cultural attitude adaptation have an important role on the method of globalization growth when we look at the side of benefits to Shan, especially the roles of commercial development and tourism that giving Shan an opportunity in producing new culture activities in case of replacement or application based on knowledge and understanding would helps the evanescent Shan traditional way of life and culture to be restored, making Shan to feel proud of their culture which is a part of Shan's cultural attitude existence comes with opportunities of work, construction and tourism employment in order to get an income for spending in daily life and developing public utilities and facilities. On the other hand, Shan communities in Mae Hong Son province as they used to be peaceful and having traditional attitude according to the ideal of sufficient economy is now interfered from capitalism economy and dominated from the various foreign cultures (Cultural diversity) increasingly.

Communities' adaptation in general receive an impact from situations of the coming Western culture or modern culture as well as the advancement of technology and communication that are the outer factors cause Shan communities receive an impact in the levels of personal behavior, relation among family members and community members including possibility to adapt traditional way of life for oneself and family to survive in the current globalization and government financial and social strategy, especially provincial development on tourism makes some Shan community members short of reciprocity and desperately wait for supports from government sectors. Development that emphasize on unnecessarily facilities would cause Shan communities' cultural scenery a lost, for example to install advertisement board in the areas of tourist district.

Moreover, ex-governments used to persuade the local or provincial government sectors in Mae Hong Son Province to meet the demand of their policies which causing an economic expansion for provincial tourism which impulses Shan community members to be satisfied with their incomes, in case of economic perspective the OTOP policy was introduced to Shan communities in order to support and enforce their production but in case of social and cultural perspective Shan's locality value has been reduced because of capitalism and also benefits always be handed to group of investors or company's owners. At the same time, they give Shan community members more interaction with foreigners causing a

reduced importance for traditional popularity, to adapt Shan's cultural attitude is an intention of changing from things that they have been doing for such a long time to new way of life as well as activities and interactions of Shan new generation who now more like computer gaming, communication via mobile phone rather than real a time interaction between people which these cultures are constantly coming into Shan's communities and causing a reduction of deviated behavior and culture awareness.

Apart from government's economic enforcement policy which gives Shan communities an expansion financially, government's education development causes competitive condition in order to have a great job in the future. Shan like to send their children to school or work in the large city which makes them meet more opportunity of interaction with other nationalities causing a mixture of culture, tradition and attitude in the aspect of costume, food, language or behavior in way of life are changed which destroys Shan's specific characteristic and value. Some amount of Shan understand that keeping themselves up to date as their children would get appreciation from others and at the same time causing competition and interaction among relatives or family would be reduced that defined as cultural domination directly and indirectly. Many Shan families' incomes are from their profession or the provided loan from government and private sectors making them to actively find facilities that could give them a better happiness by forgetting that the value of their traditional attitude and the importance of Buddhism ceremonies would be reduced or perhaps there will be no longer an action in Shan community at all which is certainly be effecting Shan's traditional society and culture finally.

However, Shan community is trying to adapt themselves to suit with the current economic and social condition as Parsons (1956) mentioned that society or community would adjust itself accordingly with the thing that already have then systems would change and target goals of achievement as well as to restore an individual motivation and to keep a social schematic.

## **CONCLUSION**

Shan's cultural attitude in Mae Hong Son Province is one of methods that community has been collecting and passing on specific characteristic way of life, belief, worship and culture constantly, at the same time when social development according to globalization in the aspect of technological advancement, economic expansion and advance communication giving Shan opportunity to adapt their cultural attitude and have more

alternative chances in their life style and at the same time the various modern cultures are trying to replace the traditional culture all the them causing an impact to Shan's individual behavior generally. Shan is concerned and ready to face with culture mixed substance through the current communicative advancement if Shan has chances to participate in sharing opinions and creating a social and cultural activity which based on reliable knowledge and well understanding of Shan's traditional fundamental as well as giving an importance to oneself interdependence and among community which helps in adapting paradigm in their lifestyle powerfully and Shan's cultural attitude will survive in the current condition of global advancement sustainably.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

According to the discussion before, researcher can say that Shan community is facing the flow of change in the various perspectives if Shan has a shared method a instrument between Shan community members, it would create forces keeping back or filtering an unwanted cultures in any ways by giving the appropriate suggestion for Shan communities as follow:

Shan should set up Shan's headquarter in every communities in order to gather information of Shan's cultural attitude and to be Shan's center where derived from members' shared opinion and thinking and also to coordinate information and communicate to Shan and others constantly.

There should be a pass on the extant knowledge in Shan communities in order to practice experience, wisdom and provide activities that could restore Shan's culture attitude and applies in their traditional way of life with the present time.

To informally support in creating culture networks in Shan communities between groups of children, adult, elderly, monk and Shan's wisdom would cause forces in exchanging knowledge, good relationship in order to reduce gaps between ages which affects on gathering forces for the survival of cultural attitude sustainably.

To support institutions of family, temple and school to be a backbone in preserving culture attitude because this is the fundamental of Shan's identity including to support family activities such as Shan's families create and intent to preserve traditional culture project or to insert in the study programme at school or monks pray with Shan language very days or festival, etc.

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