

Mon Diaspora and the Relationships with their Homeland

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Abstract

This article aims to explain the relations of Mon diaspora at Baan Wang Ka, Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand with their homeland. It argues that such relationships are diverse and reflect the complexity of notion of "Bifocality" explaining that homeland is the place of spiritual and cultural roots while host countries are more associated with economic and livelihoods. Mon diaspora has been living in Baan Wang Ka since AD.1948. The ethnic suppression policies in Myanmar are the major cause of transnational mobility of these people, although, in the later periods, some of them left their homeland to go to Thailand for trading and eventually resettled at the village. Currently, Mon people in the village include four generations who were from Myanmar and heirs of those from Myanmar, however these people associate with their homeland differently. Some relate to their homeland as the place of spiritual and identity of Mon origin. For others, their connections to homeland have to do more with economic than cultural and spiritual dimensions. Such diverse relationships related to not solely generation differences and causes of migration, but also individual's experience, economic opportunity, legal status, social status in Thailand as well as religious belief. On another score, the diversity of relationships has also associated with their homeland and host country contexts.

Key words (3-5 words): Homeland, Mon ethnic group, diaspora

Introduction

"Je Toy Top Serp: homeland"¹ is Mon's expression reflecting the importance of "homeland" which is considered as the place of spiritual roots. It is also the place of life's learning which contributes to the understanding of the world and the society. Although Mon diasporas at Baan Wang Ka have immigrated and resettled in Thailand for more than 60 years, these Mon people still remain their relationships with their homeland in terms of family, kinship, politics, economy, society, culture and language.

The homeland for the diasporas is defined as a sacred space where the diasporas have to return to their roots and the goodness of the past (Aomsin, 2008). This explanation is consistent with the concept of "Bifocality"(Vertovec, 2004) . It suggests that the relationships between the homeland

¹ Thai language was used by the author to spell and pronounce Mon language according to the interviews from the Mon people in the area. So, the pronunciation of Mon language may be different from those of the Mon people in Myanmar, but the meaning remains the same.

and the host country do not dissociate from each other. The homeland is considered the place of the culture, spirit and identity while the host country is the area of the economic opportunity and it is crucial to the living. However, Mon diasporas at Baan Wang Ka have diverse relationships with their homeland apart from the definitions given by the concept of "Bifocality". Therefore, this article focuses on describing the relationships of the homeland and Mon at Baan Wang Ka² who have immigrated from Mon State, Myanmar³-- including heirs of those from Myanmar – and resettled at the area of Samprasop,⁴ Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province since the year 1948. The ethnic suppression policy in Myanmar is the major cause of the immigration. For some, an economic reason is the cause of the immigration from the homeland and resettlement at Baan Wang Ka as well. It is believed that living in Thailand is better than living in the poor homeland due to the economic downturn. Although Mon at Baan Wang Ka immigrated from their homeland with different reasons, these people are defined by Thailand as "Diaspora, Burmese Nationality"⁵.

Mon at Baan Wang Ka immigrated into Thailand three times in the year 1949, 1950 and 1951, respectively. The causes of immigration were the hostilities between the government and the ethnic armed forces. Additionally, Sangkhlaburi is the area near the Myanmar border and it is far from the inspection of Thai authority. The resources are also abundance and there are the opportunities for trading with Thai people. These factors are one of the reasons making Mon diasporas immigrated to Thailand. At present, Mon people at Baan Wang Ka consist of four generations. The first generation includes those who immigrated to Thailand because of the ethnic suppression policy in Myanmar as well as those who looked for better economic opportunities. Moving out of the homeland with the state of being oppressed and lost reflects the feelings of nostalgia of the diasporas because a home does not refer to only a place of living, but it also includes spiritual roots and the learning resource of life experience. Therefore, moving out of the home with a sense of loss and resting in other regions create a sense of alienation and mutual imagination of returning to their homeland.

² The official name of Baan Wang Ka is Pandin Tham Pandin Thong Village, Moo 2, Nonglu, Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province. The words "Wang Ka" is the mixture of Thai language: "Wang" which means the underwater area with the depth that is suitable for the living of various fish species, and Mon language: "Ka" which refers to fish. So, Wang Ka means the area with rich in fish species. The name reflects the selection of a suitable place for the settlement of the Mon diaspora.

³According to the interviews with the key informants in the study area, Mon diaspora usually use the term "Myanmar" for the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. In addition, it was found that "the Republic of the Union of Myanmar" is not commonly used among the Mon people. Therefore, in this article, the author chose to use the term "Myanmar" instead of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. The name was chosen due to the differences of the perception of the people in the field, which can convey feelings and stories than those of the unfamiliar vocabulary.

⁴The area of Samprasop is the area where the three rivers: Songgaria River, Bikhli River and Ranti, are merged. . B. Buckley hit and run Confluence Mon diasporas have chosen this area as the community.

⁵When moving into Thailand, these Mon people were identified as Diaspora, Burmese Nationality according to the announcement of the Ministry of the Interior which was used to identify the Burmese who escaped from the warfare into Thailand before the year 1976. So, they had the status of Diaspora, Burmese Nationality (Orrawan, 2003).

The second to the fourth generations of Mon diasporas are the heirs of those of the first generation. Even though some obtained Thai Nationality, they still have consciousness of the diasporas which has been passed on from generation to generation through stories, the belief indicating the progenitor of the family and the community as well as the realization of ethnic identity. Scholars have argued that the links among the generations of the diasporas are formed through memories or recollections of events forcing the ancestors to leave the homeland. These memories are mostly transferred through stories by ancestors to descendants (Barh, 1996 cited in Banthid, 2006: 6)

This article aims to explain the relationships of Mon – all four generations – at Baan Wang Ka and their homeland. The data were collected by interviewing with Mon people living in Baan Wang Ka and studying from the document for the analysis of some issues. This paper is divided into two parts: 1) the observation of the relationships with homeland from the studies of the diasporas and 2) the relationships of Mon diasporas at Baan Wang Ka and their homeland.

The Relationship with the Homeland Indicated in Studies of the Diaspora

The word “diasporas” is derived from the word "diasperin", Greek language which means significantly related to sowing crops in various locations with roots seizing to the ground (Kasem, 2009). The word "diaspora" appeared firstly in the Hebrew Bible which was translated into Greek language (Septuagint) in the century 2-3 before BC (Evans, 2009: 1-3 cited in Monchai and Maneemai, 2013). Then in 1973, it was developed into social thought. The word "diasporas" appearing in the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences refers to only the exile of Jews from the Holy Land. It implies of uprooting, oppression and pain in adapting to a new environment until their own cultural center can be established and maintained constantly by refusing to abandon their identity (Monchai and Maneemai, 2013).

The diasporas have been increasingly gained the interest in the academia during the decade 1890-1990⁶. In the early stages, the meaning of the diasporas was used by the scholars to refer to the victim diaspora (Thirawut, 2007: 11) because the diasporas were forced to stray from the area or the specific place considered their homeland. Given the meaning of the diasporas this way is criticized that it is the narrow condition describing the characteristics of the diasporas because diaspora can occur with willingness and no manner of being victims. However, it sometimes is done in order to find the benefits from the new host which can be seen from the diasporas conducting commercial activities such as the network of merchants from abroad which can be found on different continents (Kanlaya, 2008: 15). This is the explanation and the characteristics of the diasporas according to the view of Robin Cohen⁷ which is said to be a comprehensive explanation of the concept of the diaspora phenomenon rather than the past studies related to the diasporas. This

⁶Phil Cohen stated that between the years 1975 to 1999, the diaspora was used as subjects or subtitles in more than 216 volumes of books. In addition to the books, there were journals that directly delivered the contents of the diaspora such as Diaspora or Global Networks. Some journals have published articles on the diaspora regularly since the year 1990s.

⁷The explanation of the concept of the diaspora according to the view of Robin Cohen will be discussed in detail about the definition, the criteria and the modern concept of the diaspora in the next topic.

article focuses on the relationships with the homeland of the diasporas according to both concepts, the traditional and modern concepts. To begin, it is important to discuss these concepts.

Traditional concept of the diaspora

The concept emphasizes on the classification and the model analysis of the diasporas. For example, the article entitled "Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" written by William Safran (Safran: 1991 cited in Yos, 2008) discussed about the definition and the common criteria of the characteristics of the diasporas in 6 aspects: 1) the minorities who immigrate from their homeland into the marginal areas of other societies, 2) these minorities still share memories or stories about their homeland, 3) these diasporas believe that they are not acceptable or excluded from the new society they move to live in, 4) so, they deeply hope that one day they are able to return to their homeland, 5) they dedicate to restore their homeland and 6) the collective consciousness of the diasporas or the identity are based on their relationships to the homeland. This series of description is the description of the Jewish diasporas which finally has become the model used to describe the characteristics of the diasporas in other groups. It is obvious that the definition and the criteria for identifying the diasporas according to the view of Safran value the return to the "homeland".

The studies related to the relationships of the diasporas and the homeland according to the traditional concept of the diasporas often described through the creation and the restoration of the "homeland" in the host country. It is like building a mental residence for the immigrants who still long for their roots. The restoration of the original community is a part of maintaining its traditional and cultural forms in order to allow the people in the "host country" to aware of them as an existing cultural group. For example, there was collective consciousness of the diasporas among Lao refugees in the United States. They also restore Lao traditions such as making merits at the Lao Buddhist temple and participating in other social activities at the Lao temple. Therefore, the Lao temple is served as "Lao Community" instead of the originally physical area and the culture of the community presenting in Laos. "A temple" is the key resource of reproducing Lao culture, tradition and identity in the US. Meanwhile, Thai or Isaan food cooking, getting together at Thai festivals as well as making merits at temples in Japan are the cultures created or reproduced in the host country, the cultural consciousness related with the homeland of Issan women who marry Japanese men is expressed (Rattana, 2009; Yenjit and Maneemai ,2009). Like Japanese, Punjab immigrants in California, Leonard (1997) (cited in Yos, 2005), presented their new house as their homeland in terms of geography, culture, economy and agriculture. Building relationships with the new host by creating their own roots through the imagination of their homeland represents a bond to the homeland and also produces the familiarity with the new society. Moreover, maintaining ethnic identity of Theravada Buddhism and using Thai language in Malaysia also express the conservation of the relationships linked to the homeland (Suphasamet, 2013). In addition, the belief of life after death of Vietnamese refugees in Thailand is important to those who have faith in Confucian tradition, and it also expresses the relationships with the homeland. Traveling back to the homeland to pay respect to the cemetery of parents and ancestors demonstrates the importance of the homeland as a cultural sacred place which the diasporas still long for the goodness. Although they are unable to return to their homeland, the cultural reproduction in the new host or the conservation of the ethnic

identity and social beliefs has helped to build relationships between the diasporas and the homeland.

Modern concept of the diaspora when entering the era of globalization

The transnational phenomenon is more complex when contributing to the expansion of the definition of the diasporas and adding the perspective on the causes of diaspora which is different from the original one. This can be seen from the expansion of the causes of diaspora provided by Cohen (Sujitra, 2010), which stated 5 aspects of diaspora as follows: the diasporas from oppression or victimization, the labor diasporas who move out of their homeland for the reason of finding a job, the diasporas due to trading activities such as Chinese merchants in other countries and the diasporas caused by the system of imperialism or colonialism in the past or the cultural diasporas. In addition, a departure from the homeland of the diasporas need not occur in the way of being forced, but it is likely to seek for income and stability of their lives. For instance, Aiwa Ong and Donald Nonini studied Modern Chinese transnationalism. The study provided the images of the diasporas which were different from the original one. That is to say, the diasporas are not victim diasporas. It also provided a variety of actions of the Chinese immigrants who looked for the opportunities and took advantages from the conditions of social, economic and political structures in order to create the economic status and the acceptance from the society they moved to live (Ratana, 2009). The modern concept of the diasporas causes the argument about the criteria for determining the characteristics of the diasporas which is more expanded.

The studies related to the relationships between the diasporas and their homeland based on the traditional concept of the diasporas often describe the relationships with the homeland in the way of transferring money back home, getting back to homeland whenever possible or reproducing the relationships with families in the homeland by communicating via the Internet, video tapes, etc. (Snohat and Stawp, 1996: 163-166, cited in Yos ; Adisorn, 2007; Wassana, 2006; Sukanya, 2006) or trying to maintain their traditional culture because this is bond tying the diasporas to feel a part of their parents who live in the homeland (Tanwa, 2007).

Although the diasporas refer to the dispersion of people from their homeland (A Dictionary of sociology, 2009: 177 cited in Suphasamet, 2013), these people still maintain their relationships with both collective consciousness and materials of their homeland in order to link the relations between the host country and the homeland. Understanding the relationships between the diasporas living in the host country and the homeland are important for the understanding, the cultural expressions, well-being, or even political activities that oppose their government (Gabrial Sheffer, 1986 cited in Kasem, 2009). The network of relationships across the border of the refugees are not closely linked, tied or confined only to their homeland or their new host, but it is the network that is linked and appears in the two areas at the same time (Portes, 1997 cited in Wattana, 2005)

This explanation is consistent with the concept of "Bifocality" which is used to describe the cross-border relationships. According to this concept, the relationships between the homeland and the new host do not separate from each other. The homeland will be served as the cultural and spiritual areas and the area of identity while the new host is basically the area of the economic opportunity (Vertovec, 2004). However, the this paper indicates that Mon diasporas at Baan Wang Ka have relationships with the homeland in the ways that are both consistent with and distinct from the

concept of "Bifocality". This is because of diverse conditions apart from the periods and the causes of migrations, such as individual experiences, economic opportunities, social status, faith and belief in Buddhism, including the context of the homeland and the new host. These all result in different features of the relationships with the homeland of Mon Baan Wang ka.

Mon Diaspora and the Relationships with their Homeland

According to the historical data, Mon is an old ethnic group. It is assumed that Mon immigrants settled in Southeast Asia about 2,000 years ago (Niti, 2003; Ong, 2007). It is the civilized nation located in the east of the Irrawaddy River. However, after King Alaungpaya, the King of Burma, had conquered Mon, he completely annexed Mon under the authority of Burma. Since then, Mon thus has been under the authority of Burmese people, and had no chance to restore its position as the nation. So, there are considered "a people without a country as mentioned by Robert Halliday, a well-known Mon study scholar (Jeujan, 2006: 2). The situation in Mon State was not carried out in a normal condition due to the ethnic suppression policies of Myanmar causing the battle between the Burmese army and the ethnic armed forces. This affected Mon residents in the area of the battle. Their villages were burned and destroyed by the Burmese military and food supplies were robbed by the ethnic armed forces and the Burmese army troops. These impacts are reflected through the narratives of the third generation of Mon diasporas which they were told by their ancestors who were the first generation.

...My grandparents had to cook in the early evening, and after they finished having dinner, they had to rush off to sleep in the forest at night because the Burmese military or the Karen soldiers might rob them if they stayed at home. Even a rice cooker was robbed. The village was not safe. Finally, they had to immigrate to Thailand ... (Son Ha Le⁸, the third generation).

In addition to the immigration because of the ethnic suppression policies which is the main reason causing Mon to evacuate and resettle at Baan Wang Ka, there is that the first generation of Mon diasporas who evacuated from their homeland due to the economic reasons as in the case of . Jai Ma Rock 's mother. Jai Ma Rock 's mother who was a merchant always came cross the border to trade in Sagklaburi. So, she decided to evacuate from her homeland in Myanmar and settled in Baan Wang Ka because it is a safety area. She does not have to face with poverty and threats from the Burmese military. It is also convenient for trading across the border or traveling to Myanmar when she wants to visit relatives or go to join the festivals (Jai Ma Rock, the third generation).

The reasons mentioned above are the conditions resulting in the immigration of Mon into Thailand. Currently, Mon are living near the border of Thailand and Myanmar at Baan Wang Ka, Sangkhlaburi District, Kanchanaburi Province. Besides the different causes of the immigration, the researcher also found that the relationships with the homeland of Mon at Baan Wang Ka are consisted with the concept of "Bifocality" that Mon people still have relationships with their homeland as it is the cultural, spiritual and identity spaces whereas the new host is basically an area of the economic opportunity which is a matter of living space. Meanwhile, some Mon people still maintain their relationships with the homeland in a different manner from the concept of "Bifocality". That is to

⁸ All names motioned in this paper are alias.

say, this group of Mon people provides the meaning of the homeland as the area of the economic opportunity which is critical to their living while the new meaning of the new host is given as the area of the strong Mon culture and freedom of political activities. Therefore, for the content in this part, the researcher would like to present the diverse relationships with the homeland of Mon diaspora at Baan Wang Ka which are both consistent with and different from the concept of "Bifocality".

Family and relatives across the border

...My parents have to return to Myanmar during the dry season every year. They stay there until they spend all of money. They go to visit relatives, make merits and watch Mon plays. They live in Thailand just for working and when they have enough money, they go back to Myanmar... (Namphueng Suksawat, the second generation).

Although Mon diaspora at Baan Wang Ka have immigrated and resettled in Thailand for more than 60 years, the relationships between Mon diasporas at Baan Wang Ka and families and relatives living in the homeland remain strong. Every summer, they go to visit their relatives at Mok Ka Niang Village and Jao Ka Le Village in Ye City, Mawlamyine Province, Mon State, Myanmar which are their homelands before immigrating to Thailand. The reasons why Mon go to visit relatives and family during the summer are that the condition of roads are better than those of in the rainy season, and it is the period that Buddhists in Myanmar are free from doing agricultural activities, so they spend the summer traveling as pilgrims to worship the holy places in Myanmar. Mon at Baan Wang Ka also not only travel to visit their relatives, but they also pay respect to the sacred Buddhist pagodas such as Kyaikhtiyo or Shwedagon. Also, they often go to their homeland to join visit religious ceremonies such as ordination.

..When my cousin ordained, we went there to help organize the ceremony because when I got married, they also came to Thailand to help me with the wedding. Now, it is more convenient to go there. We can go there any time. We leave the village in the morning and arrive at Ye City around three o'clock. The trip takes around 6-8 hours... (Ming Bu, the second generation).

After talking with Mon in the village, it was found that at present, the journey back to their homeland occurs more frequently than in the past. This is because the roads are convenient and better and the battle between the Burmese troops and the ethnic forces in Mon State seems to be calm. After the ceasefire negotiations between the Government of Myanmar and the leader of the New Mon State Party in the year 1995, the researcher has noticed that maintaining strong relationships with the homeland through family and relatives does not happen with all Mon diasporas because for some Mon, they do not have family or relatives in Myanmar. However, they still return to Mon State or other cities in Myanmar in order to attend religious ceremonies and also make merits at temples.

...Last month, we went to raise the Tiered-umbrella of a pagoda at the temple in Ye City. Almost all the villagers went there. All of the drivers in the village were hired. We stayed at the temple. We did not visit relatives because we may not recognize each other.... (Mi Yee, the second generation).

It is obvious that maintaining the relationships with their family and relatives at their homeland has also linked with the religious belief, faith and practices.

Cross-border economy

According to the causes of the immigration of Mon at Baan Wang ka, it was found that most of them traveled into Thailand because of the unrest in Myanmar. As a result of the ethnic suppression policies, Mon people had to evacuate and escape from the battle. They needed land to build houses and make a living. Nevertheless, the second generation to the fourth generation of Mon wanted to seek a breakthrough in the area and Thailand also offers a variety of occupations.

... I have been running the coffee shop for several years because my partner has opened a coffee before. So, after getting married, I help him running the business. Recently, there are a lot of **customers**, so we have to open the shop from six a.m. to 8 p.m. At the present, boats are available for tourists to rent for sightseeing at Underwater Temple. I have never thought of going back to Myanmar because I do not know what to do there. I used to have a rubber garden, but I sold it already. I feel like home here because my family is here and we have our business here too... (The owner of the coffee shop, the third generation).

Now, Baan Wang Ka is even more important as a tourist destination of Kanchanaburi Province. There are attractions such as Underwater Temple and Wangwiegaram Temple, which is the place where Uttamarambho Bhikkhu stayed during the rainy season (it is the place of heart and soul of Mon diasporas in all over Thailand), Phuthakaya Pagoda and Auttamanusorn Wooden Bridge. These attractions are like the landmarks that travelers must visit. As the village is a tourist attraction, it allows Mon people in the village to have more occupations such as selling food sets for the tourists who want to make a merit by offering food to monks. Some of them also open the restaurants selling Mon food or open their own houses as homestays or provide tents and bedding for tourists. These are new careers for Mon people in the village.

However, some Mon diasporas think that their homeland is a space to create economic opportunities and important for their living such as those who are the drivers transporting people and goods across the border, or those who sell jewelry, souvenirs and food from Myanmar, tour guides and those who sell betel nut which other ingredients like betel leaves are imported from Myanmar. These Mon people who have occupations as mentioned above have relationships with their homeland differently from the explanation of the concept of Bifocality.

...In the past, I used to be a driver driving to transfer rice, charcoal and the stuff that UN volunteers brought to the refugee camp. But after the contract was terminated, I started driving to deliver stuff and people to Mon State. When traveling to and fro, I will pass the military outpost of Karen, Mon and Burmese and I have to pay them with Thai baht depending on the amount goods. I can negotiate with them because I can communicate with them with Mon language and Burmese language whether they speak to me with Mon language or Burmese language. When I return to Thailand, I take onions and garlic back with me to sell to the sellers here. I earn good income... (Mong Min, the second generation).

...Since Uttamarambho Bhikkhu established the market at Phuthakaya Pagoda, Mon people have sold souvenirs to tourists. Their products include jewelry, Tanaka and Myanmar

textiles, etc. These products are brought from Myanmar. Sometimes, I go to Myanmar to buy the products myself because I can choose them myself. But if I am not free, the sellers from Myanmar will deliver the products to me. It is convenient. The products just arrive in one day. We have known each other for long... (Bob Dode, the third generation).

These Mon people seek for economic opportunities in their homeland based on the individual experiences such as a former driver transporting UN volunteers' stuff. He had often traveled to Mon State, so he knew well about the routes, which later is beneficial for his job. He also has the ability to communicate by using Mon language and Burmese language. Therefore, he can negotiate with the middlemen, both Mon and Burmese, and Burmese military at the checkpoints at the border. There are about five checkpoints from the border to Phaya Tong Su town where the truck drivers have to negotiate and pay a fee. In addition, Mon at Baan Wang Ka also travel to trade consumer goods at Phaya Tong Su Market, locating 28 kilometers from the border. Mon people living in Phaya Tong Su city like to purchase products from Thailand such as clothes and food because of the quality of the products. Moreover, the products can be transported faster than ordering from Yangon. It is obvious that for Mon living in Baan Wang ka, both host country and homeland have provided them with economic opportunities where they can earn their living. Whether the homeland or host country is a better place an economic earning depends not only on context, but also individual experiences, in this case.

Cross-border Politics

The effects of the ethnic suppression policies of the government of Myanmar create the imagination of Mon nationalism to happen under the context of the ethnic pluralist society. However, this policy is rarely materialized in Myanmar. Mon at Baan Wang Ka who emigrated to Thailand — because they had been affected by the battle in Myanmar and because of economic reasons -- still maintain their relationships with and cherish for their homeland as the owners, and continue to have political relations with the homeland, especially those who had involved in politics and served as staff of the governments.

...I used to be a soldier. During that time, Shwe Kyin, the leader of New Mon State Party visited Baan Wang Ka and talked about saving the nation. I was really resentful and wanted to save the nation. So, I decided to apply for a Mon soldier. I was the first female soldier of the village too. But as a woman, I did not join the battle. I just helped find news. I also provided aid for Mon soldiers if they were injured. Now, I am old. I still have a lot of friends living there. Some years, I attended Mon National Day and watched the military parade. Now, Mon people there have more freedom. But we have soldiers taking care of Mon State that we are not allowed to go outside... (Namphueng Suksawat, the second generation).

In the past, Baan Wang Ka was the core area for the movement on the nation ideology of the New Mon State Party. Currently, there are a lot of former Mon soldiers living in the village. These people are the leaders of Mon cultural conservation.

...I noticed that the young generation of Mon people can speak Mon language, but cannot read and write. Their accents were also strange. So, the elderly cannot understand what the young generation says. So, my friends living in the US and I corporately produce the Mon

language lessons for children both who live in the village and those living in different countries to practice the language. I study both Mon language and music. I want the new generation to conserve our culture. Although we still have not got Mon nation back, if we still have our culture, our nation will not collapse... (a former Mon soldier, the second generation).

Therefore, Mon's saving the nation movement today is not fighting with such weapons as in the past. The leader of New Mon State Party, former soldiers or Mon diasporas at Baan Wang Ka focuses on the conservation movement which aims to achieve political policies for the well-being of Mon people in Myanmar or for building international relationships in order to narrate the existence of Mon people who own the lower Burma in the past. Baan Wang Ka is an area for political activities. At present, Baan Wang Ka is the Mon culture center which has been established for more than two years. The joint meeting is organized at the Mon culture center once a year. There are Mon people from Mon State, Thailand and the US attending the meeting to determine the direction of movement of the cultural policies. This cultural center is corporately working with the Mon cultural center in Saterm Province and Mawlamyine Province. The cultural center is located in the temple. As the temple is a religious area, the Burmese military will not check it.

Cross-border Society and Culture

...Mon culture can be expressed more living here. The activities of conservation are usually held. It is also convenient to learn or transfer Mon culture here. In Myanmar, Mon people are almost assimilated as a part of Burmese people ... (Aranya Chareonhongsa, the second generation).

Baan Wang Ka is a community that expresses very strong Mon culture. Although these Mon people have moved into Thailand for a long time and Mon people, Thai people and Karen people are assimilated through cross-cultural marriages, Mon identity is still preserved. For example, the shape of house is the same as those of the Mon house which the space of a house is organized in descending steps. The kitchen is lower than the house because it is believed that the area of the kitchen is dirty and must be lower than the residential area. In addition, Mon people living in the village continue to maintain the space relating to the beliefs of Buddhism and spiritualism. For instant, some spaces in the house must be reserved for the Buddhist altar and also the determination of the pole for the ancestral spirits, which is the highlight of the Mon house. Mon language is also more used to communicate in the village than Thai language.

...If you want to see genuine Mon, you have to visit our village. Other Mon people in Thailand have become Thai people. But we still preserve Mon language, Mon food and Mon costumes..." (Nirandorn Sandee, the second generation).

Having freedom of cultural expressions in Thailand allows Mon at Baan Wang Ka have strong identity. Moreover, in the year 2003, Baan Wang Ka was promoted as the official tourist area under Unseen in Thailand project organized by the Tourism Authority of Thailand. The strong Mon culture at Baan Wang Ka is strengthened in the context of tourism in order to meet the needs of tourists demands who prefer to learn and admire the culture. This condition supports the preservation of Mon culture. There are a lot of Mon cultural experts in the village and these people are often invited

as guest speakers to educate about lifestyle and Mon culture in Thailand as well as in Myanmar. Thus, Baan Wang Ka becomes a source of Mon culture where Mon people from Myanmar has to learn from.

...In October, 2013, New Mon State Party held a meeting to find ways to revitalize Mon language and culture. I was invited to the meeting. They knew that I have been working in the cultural field, so they may think that I have the ability to help them. In Myanmar, Burmese people rarely use Mon language. They rarely show that they are Mon people. And, when Mon people marry Burmese people, they are assimilated and become Burmese people. The teenagers also do not dress conservatively like the Mon teenager from our village... (Aranya Chareonhongsa, the second generation).

At certain times, Mon people have no rights to teach their language in schools in Myanmar. Everyone must be forced to learn Burmese language from kindergarten to university. At the same time, Mon books, including numerous books about the history of Mon that used to be in the libraries in Yangon when Myanmar was not independent from Britain have also been lost (Chon, 2006). Therefore, Baan Wang Ka has stronger Mon culture than those in Mon State, Myanmar.

Apart from economic aspect discussed earlier, the cultural relationships between Mon at Baan Wang Ka and their homeland are also more complex than the explanation of the concept of Bifocality—the homeland as a purified area with cultural roots where as a host country is a place for economic opportunities. Such differences have to do with both the conditions of social and political contexts of the homeland which are different from the new host and individual experiences. Thus, these complicate the relationships between the diasporas and their homeland.

Conclusion

This paper shows that the relationships of Mon diaspora with their homeland reflect rather diverse and complex relations than the explanation according to the concept of Bifocality which explains that the homeland is served as a spiritual, cultural and identity areas while the new host is an area of the economic opportunity and it is considered important for living. However, the relationships of Mon at Baan Wang Ka are beyond such the explanation. That is, these Mon people provide the meaning of both the host country and the homeland as the area creating economic opportunities and chances of survival. Baan Wang Ka which is the new host is considered the area having stronger Mon culture than those in the homeland. Apart from the diverse and complex relationships with the homeland, this paper also points out the conditions that affect the relationships with the homeland in several ways. It is also not limited to the immigration and the different ages of the informants, but it is also associated with other conditions, including individual experiences, economic opportunities, legal status, social status and belief and faith in Buddhism. These conditions contribute to the relationships between Mon diasporas and their homeland.

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