

Ethnic Identity and Language: Can Languages Be “Culture Bearing Units” for Ethnic Identification? Through the Study of the Northern Thailand’s Hmong Case

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Abstract: Since the mid-1960s, the issue of "ethnic identification" had been debated among scholars, in particular between Raul Naroll (1964) and Micheal Moerman (1965), that "culture-bearing units," such as language and cultural practice, are not appropriated for identifying the distinction between ethnic groups. "Is language such a critical element of demarcation for ethnic identification?" "Why does language is so important for identifying and maintaining the Hmong ethnic identity in your field sites?"

Language is one of the most significant markers of ethnicity, rather than being an inevitable 'culture-bearing-unit' for ethnic identification. In other words, language alone cannot be the demarcating unit for ethnic identification, not even with some of the other factors which Naroll (1964) introduces. The ideal way to demarcate ethnic identification and delimit ethnic boundaries is with those crucial culture-bearing-units and the ethnic people themselves, but the demarcation of ethnic units (or ethnic identification) is complex and nowadays it is quite political. I will discuss this point of view further and will introduce Hansen’s comparative analysis (1999) on the ethnic groups of the Naxi and Tai cases in the southwest China as pieces of evidence for this discussion. This case is especially applicable because one of the compared ethnic groups is of the Tai tribe. Thai Lue originated from the examined region of southwest China, and the tribe is a focus of the debate between Naroll and Moerman about the 'culture-bearing-unit;' whether language and six other culture-bearing-units can be demarcating units for ethnic identification or not. Especially, a mother tongue for an ethnic group is the most influential principle and element for ethnic identification because it entails shared histories and as cultural repository containing emotions, not just phonological or other linguistic traits. One of the most important roles of language is delivering information from a person to a person, and generation to generation. But mother tongue has another important function that is transmitting ethnic identity to the next generations. In this sense, mother tongue is the core element of delimitation of ethnic identification even though it is not the only and absolute element for the process.

Through this study, we will find that while culture-bearing-units are crucial ethnic demarcating units, the ideal type of the ethnic demarcation is by the ethnic people themselves rather than by scholars and outsiders. As we scrutinize the dynamics and process of ethnic identification and demarcation, we will find how complex and political the process is. And based on this discussion, we will practically study language and ethnic identity related issues in the Hmong villages in Chiang Rai, Thailand. And furthermore, we will address script-related issues and power relations between the state policy and the community, as well as the Hmong villages’ negotiations on language and education while they cope with hidden oppression and conflict on mother tongue-based multilingual education.

Keywords: ethnic identification, mother tongue-based multilingual education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The range of ethnic identification is quite extensive, and even its analysis can be seen as a political act because of its sensitivity and lack of agreement among the stakeholders about the ethnic demarcating process (Moerman, 1965). Thus, it requires a thoughtful and prudent approach. Raoul Naroll states that the six criteria for demarcating ethnic entities are "trait distributions, territorial contiguity, political organization, language, ecological adjustment, and local community structure" (1964: 284, 296; Moerman, 1965: 1215). For these delimiting criteria, Moerman raises issues about three main shortcomings of "culture-bearing units." First, "criteria such as language, political organization, and culture do not correlate completely; the units delimited by one criterion do not coincide with the units delimited by another" (1965: 1215). Second, if 'culture' is defined as "a pattern, a set of plans, a blueprint for living (Naroll, 1964: 288), then units delimited by combinations of these criteria, including the combination which Naroll suggests, are only occasionally and accidentally culture-bearing units" (Ibid.). Third, "it is difficult to discern discontinuities of language, culture, polity, society, or economy with sufficient clarity to draw boundaries" (Ibid.). In this reasoning, Moerman challenges that "the delimitation of ethnic entities is problematic, especially, where continuously inhabited but not divided into either sharp ecological zones or strong and durable states" (Ibid.).

Moerman introduces Garvin's statement to propose that language and cultural practice are not appropriate for demarcating ethnic identification. "It becomes quite difficult to use objective characteristics of language and cultural practice for determining where one entity stops and another, its neighbor, begins" (Garvin, 1958: 125 cited in Moerman, 1965: 1216). On the difficulty of using political organizations to delimit an entity, Nadal's opinion is that the demarcation of ethnic identification by culture-bearing units (Naroll, 1964) ignores the common phenomenon of "intermediate zones" (1974: 158 cited in Moerman, 1965: 1216), even though, in modern society, its physical boundaries may not be essential. In addition to cultural dissimilarities, especially for dialects and cultural traits, Moerman gives (1965: 1216) the following discussion list: Ember (1963: 235-6), Capell (1952: 111), Fortes (1945: 14), Goody (1962: 3), Hogbin & Wedgwood (1953: 242), Nadel (1947:4), Read (1954: 7), and Tajfel that 'social identity' is based on group (ethnic) membership (1974, 1981).

Fundamental questions for demarcating and asserting ethnic identity- Inconvenient facts of ethnic identification:

- Problem: 1. Cultures change over time, which means that ethnicity can be changed. In other words, ethnicity is impermanent in that individuals, communities, and areas change the ways they are identified. Then, how can they be identified, and what are the criteria to measure and identify the items which are 'culture-bearing units' forming the ethnic identity? Is it worth identifying them if ethnicity changes?
- Problem 2. Even though ethnicity changes as cultures change, there is an endless attempt to identify themselves among various local ethnic groups in multiethnic societies. For ethnographers, ethnologists, and governments, this is an important issue.
- Problem 3. If the demarcation and labeling of ethnic groups are sensitive and political, how can it be dealt with objectively? For example, "the original Thai tribes are political" (Nadel: 1942; Schapera, 1955 cited in Moerman, 1965: 1222).
- Problem 4. Who are the researchers? Whose perspective do they use - that of the ethnic group people themselves, or of outside scholars, or of freelancer government census employers? (emic and etic views)
- Problem 5. The changes occur as a process over a long time, so how can they be observed? Sometimes the process of cultural and ethnic identity change takes several generations. And there are probably intermediate zones and people in the midst of that process, which results in in-between people. According to Cole, (1945) and Eggan (1941), it is hard to trace changes in culture and society. Historically, "within Thailand itself all such change is toward the language, culture, and identification of the politically dominant people which, for the last 50 to 100 years, has been the Siamese" (Archer 1888: 13; Kingshill, 1960: 218-220; Moerman 1964b: 43-47 cited in Moerman, 1965: 1222). The Lue have not been exempt from this transition, including other Lue groups of people (Chinese originated Tai tribes) whose backgrounds were same as the Lue in Northern Thailand but lived in the central or southern region of Thailand (Damrong 1918/19: 2 cited in Moerman, 1965: 1222).
- Problem 6. If the change of ethnic identification is conscious or its emblems intelligible, we need to explore the

principles which underlie how persons go about choosing and influencing others to choose an ethnic identity. And when they label themselves, and for others, the labels of ethnic classification are not the same as distinctive features (Moerman: 1223). So, the following question arises: "To what extent may the criteria claimed by members differ from the diagnostics by which outsiders recognize them?" (Ibid.). They have ways of folk nomenclatures, and we must know those ways.

- Problem 7. In Thailand, ethnic identification goes along with labeling. Notably, it uses the names of states and ethnic entities. However, "sociopolitical integration are given the same term: myang, a term also used for the capitals of such units" (Archer, 1888: 10; Leach 1954: 122 cited in Moerman, 1965). That's why classification of the original tribes of Thailand is political.

2. THE CASE OF THE LUE IN THAILAND (THE EXAMPLE GROUP IN THE DEBATE)

The Lue originated in China, and their migration to Southeast Asia first started during the 8th and 10th centuries according to Thai historians. The 'Lue' people are descendants of the Tai tribe of China. There are many people in Thailand with Chinese ancestry. One describes himself in the paper as 'Chinese mixed with Lao (Jek pon Lao).' In the present-day, Thai are Chinese mixed with Lao (Chaloemtiarana, 2014; Barker & Phongpaichit, 2009). This statement seems quite radical as it "insinuates that the Thai are no longer a well-defined race but an ethnicity composed of many races and cultures" (Chaloemtiarana, 2007). The biggest and most influential group are Chinese Thais. Thai Lue originates from the same ancestors - the Chinese Tai. The majority of the Chinese Tai came to the Thai region between the 8th and 10th centuries, though there have been many recent immigrants from China within the past 200 years. However, as with the other Chinese Tai, the recent immigrants also mixed with the Lao people in Thailand. They were willing to give up their ethnic history and cultural heritage to assimilate into the mainstream, and they did it. The latest Tai Chinese came around 100 years ago to avoid oppression from the communists. But they have not mixed much and have kept their ethnic identity, not as Tai Chinese but as Lue (Thai Lue in Thailand; Shan in Myanmar, etc.) and they have remained a distinctive ethnic minority group. In this context, for the mainstream Thai people and the Thai government, demarcating ethnic units and entities probably does not mean much. It is seen in the context of social, educational assimilation policy and its implementation.

There are many other Chinese-background ethnic groups in Thailand, such as the Aka and Lisu. Hmong is another one of these groups. Those that have remained as ethnic minority groups in Thailand are often following their own will and choices. For them, preserving their ethnicity has been a crucial and valuable decision. The descendants of Chinese who came earlier and assimilated into the mainstream are now at the center of the mainstream society in Thailand.

3. VIEWS OF 'ETHNIC IDENTITY' IN DIFFERENT THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Naroll introduces a common thread which runs through the preceding statements, viewing the 'tribe' or 'culture' or 'society' as a basic culture-bearing unit (1964: 283-291). For example, Reichard (1938: 413) refers to the 'tribe' as the basic culture-bearing unit, which is understood as "an economically independent group of people speaking the same language and uniting to defend themselves against outsiders," and also as "a closed society, with laws and morals applying only to its members." Radcliffe-Brown (1940a: xiii-xviii) refers to Australian aboriginals as "divided into some hundreds of separate tribes; each with its own language, organization, customs, and beliefs." He also proposes that a tribe can exist in "any convenient locality of suitable size" and that it is "the structural system as it appears in and from that region, for instance, the network of relations connecting the inhabitants amongst themselves and with the peoples of other regions" (1940b: 4-5). Leach (1954) also favors the 'region,' and Driver's "regional study" is also related to territorial groups (1956: 15). Fortes (1940: 239) opines that the term 'tribe' is "a well-defined political or cultural entity differentiated from like units." Fortes especially mentions that 'the difficulty of using such a concept in discussing the precise boundary-territorial, linguistic, cultural or political' (cited in Naroll, 1964: 284). Evans-Prichard (1940: 23) as well as Fortes mention 'the concept of society' as the culture-bearing unit. Murdock (1953: 478-479; Naroll, 1964: 284) suggests defining a culture as "including all local cultural variants exhibited by communities within a particular geographical area which speak mutually intelligible languages and have essentially similar forms of economic adjustment." Ember takes "a continuously distributed population whose members speak a common language or lingua franca which is different from the dominant languages of any neighboring societies" as his sampling of a culture-bearing unit (1963; Ibid.). Whiting (1954: 526) recommends 'the local community' as the basic unit of comparative study. And Nadel (1951: 187) suggests the "political group," and Schapera (1956: 8-10) mentions "the political unit."

According to Naroll (1964), ethnic unit classifications can be figured through detecting similarities among societies that depended on their relative geographic contiguity and overall cultural connections, and political organization. In his criterion, language is considered the essential culture bearing-unit. However, none of the above-mentioned scholars think that language or the speech community alone can be relied on to define the basic culture-bearing unit. Furthermore, they don't agree on what else needs to be considered. Naroll considers and applies language as the threshold criterion for ethnic identification. Regarding difficulties with the 'culture-bearing unit,' he concludes that 'there are serious practical difficulties. First, defining and measuring intelligibility of dialects, and second, marking boundaries along linguistic continuums, and third, classifying multilingual speakers.' Above, Naroll mentioned that scholars also equally conceive of language as the basic culture-bearing unit. (Naroll, 1964: 291). As a new alternate or complementary concept of the culture-bearing unit, Naroll proposes the 'cultunit' for use in cross-cultural surveys. Here, the "cultunit" is defined as a group of territorially contiguous people who not only are domestic speakers of mutually intelligible dialects but also belong to the same state or contact group" (Ibid.).

4. CONTEXT OF THE HMONG CASE IN CHIANG RAI PROVINCE, THAILAND

Although "Thai was declared "the national language of Thailand in State Convention number 9, promulgated 24 June 1940 during the regime of Field Marshal Plaek Pibunsongkhram, most language decisions in modern Thailand are based on unwritten assumptions" (Udom 2009: 90). "Language is not mentioned in the current Thai constitution, and most Thai policymakers feel that the most important languages for the country are Thai and English" (Ibid.).

According to the Ethnologue¹, there are 72 languages in Thailand, including 3 sign languages. Among them, there are 51 indigenous languages, and 21 languages are nonindigenous languages. However, the right to mother tongue education is not recognized in Thailand.

'The 1999 Education Act guarantees the right of all children, without discrimination, to a quality education. A cabinet declaration in 2005 reaffirmed the right of all children, including non-Thai children living in Thailand, to receive an education. Furthermore, the government announced the extension of a mandatory free education from 12 years to 15 years in 2009' (www.unicef.org/thailand/education.html).

The majority of the Hmong population in Thailand came from Laos when the Laos civil war happened. The elder generation of those over 60 years participated in the Vietnam War too. They stood on the American side and fought against the communists. When the Americans left the area, they were left behind. Many of them could immigrate to America, Canada, Australia and even to France. However, many others waited to go to those countries but were not able to, so they left Laos and came to Thailand as refugees. In a Hmong refugee camp, some people came to the area near the mountain Phu Chi Fa, including villages such as Huai Han and Huai Khu, but some of them still hoped to go abroad to those countries. For this reason, in the Huai Khu village, some people never got Thai citizenship. Some of the residents of Huai Khu fought against the Thai government as members of the communist resurgent. Due to this historical background, the majority of the Huai Khu school parents are against the local school's education policies and strategies related to mother-tongue-based bilingual education.

In contrast to Huai Khu, Huai Han villagers came from a refugee camp and settled there with the arrangement of the Thai government. That is why Huai Han Hmong people accepted the government assimilation policy and Thai script for the Hmong orthography easily. Huai Khu villagers' opposition is mostly about the script that Foundation of Applied Linguistics (FAL) and the school chose for the instructional language, and for the mixture of their language with Thai. FAL chose the Thai script for the mother tongue orthography instead of the Roman script. In the area, much of the population is Christian, and the church uses the Hmong language with the Roman script. Using the Hmong language with a Romanized script is a symbol of connection to the diaspora of Hmong people all over the world. For that reason, people prefer to use the Roman script. FAL and the schools' strategy for bilingual education is assimilation so that the Hmong people become an integrated part of the country, Thailand, while maintaining their own cultural heritage.

As we see in the case of the Hmong, the choice of orthography is very political and, therefore, ethnic demarcation is also impacted by political power (selection), not only by the ethnic people themselves. The following cases of Chinese ethnic groups also show the impact of politics on the demarcation of ethnic identification.

¹ <https://www.ethnologue.com/>

5. LITERATURE REVIEWS AND DISCUSSION FOR DEMARCATION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

In my opinion, even though language entails many aspects of ethnic groups' traits including ethnic identity, history, and culture, it cannot be the only commonly recognized culture-bearing unit. However, I would like to further examine language as a particularly significant ethnic marker.

For further discussion, we need to define 'ethnic identity.' There is a common definition that "ethnic identity is an affiliative construct, where an individual is viewed by themselves and by others as belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group" (Trimble & Dickson, 2005). According to Phinney, "ethnic identity is a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to one's identity, or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group" (2003: 63). Based on these definitions, we will discuss the issue of demarcating ethnic identification.

Starting from 1922, the philosopher and sociologist Max Weber stated that 'ethnic groups' especially emphasized a subjective element in the definition that was previously unseen. He "differentiated between racial and ethnic identity by proposing that a blood relationship was necessary for racial identification but not for ethnic identification. He defined ethnic groups as, "...those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for group formation; furthermore it does not matter whether an objective blood relationship exists" (Trimble & Dickson, 2005).

People are aware of their ethnic identity both consciously and unconsciously. Likewise, they behave and practice it consciously and unconsciously. Therefore, the psychological aspect is an essential element in defining ethnic identity (Foucault). It is closely related to language because when people think, their thoughts are formed with language, and are also expressed and understood with language.

How do the Hmong people think about their own ethnic identity? I asked them, "What is Hmong-likeness? Is it important to be aware of being Hmong, and why so?"

As a part of a survey done among the Hmong of northern Thailand in 2016, the Hmong people answered the question "what is Hmong-likeness?". Most of the Hmong people pointed out that speaking and understanding of their mother tongue is the most important element in indicating 'Hmong-likeness.' The next most common answer was engagement in Hmong cultural practices and rituals, which are performed in the mother tongue. In their opinion, a person who loses their language loses their Hmong identity. When applied to the whole ethnic group, loss of the mother tongue (language death) does not only mean a loss of ethnic identity, but also the extinction of the life of a culture. However, in the survey, most of the people were sure that language death wouldn't occur. In Huai Khu village, a leader mentioned: "it would never happen, but if it did, we would no longer be Hmong." Indeed, languages, particularly those that are ethnic minorities, are closely related to ethnic identity.

My thesis analysis is influenced by Barth's notion of the persistence of ethnic groups in complex situations such as a nation-wide movement of assimilation via boundary maintenance and issues of individual and political power (1969). Barth especially emphasizes ethnic boundaries in defining ethnic groups, as they contain units of shared history that the members of the ethnic group have as a common past. Barth (1984, 1989) uses the term of 'social organization' as another idea in the importance of boundaries of ethnic groups. Despite fluid memberships and different geographical locations and citizenships, they know who are Hmong because they use the same language or dialect, and have many shared cultural traits. For example, the Hmong funeral ritual is a unique cultural ritual in which they sing their regrets about life, unrealistic and emotional wishes, ancestral philosophies and worldviews, and so on. For the Hmong, cultural practices such as the new year festival are also necessary for forming Hmong-likeness. This fits the view of cultural ecology that, as Barth recognizes, ecology can change over time, changing the group's culture without destroying the integrity of the group. As Stephen Cornell states (1988), the cultural elements of ethnic expression are also closely related to the clarification of ethnic boundaries and formation of ethnic identity. They are a historically shared manner of expression. Among the Hmong, for example, 'Hmoob' identifies the Hmong people themselves, 'Suav' identifies the mainstream Chinese, and 'Map' is used for other ethnic people in China (at the Hmong Conference 2017). Cornell mentions that "identity is both a prism and tool through which people interpret and conceptually construct the world" (1996: 267). In other words, ethnic identity is used to analyze and interpret the data and phenomena of neighboring groups making

boundaries, which is essential to the maintenance of their ethnic identity among other ethnic groups (1998).

An important phenomenon is that these rituals and gatherings are all connected to the use of the mother tongue. When I checked whether the funeral ritual could be performed in another language or not, all of the Hmong people said that it would not be possible because indescribable emotions permeate their mother tongue.² In this sense, without the mother tongue, defining and forming an ethnic identity is impossible.

As for ethnic boundaries, Barth (1969: 9) defines ethnic units as "aggregates of people who essentially share a common culture, and interconnected differences that distinguish each such discrete culture from all others." However, Barth's critical focus, his approach to ethnicity, is on "the ethnic boundary that defines the group rather than the cultural stuff that it encloses" (Ibid.:15). It implies that these ethnic boundaries are neither concrete nor absolute, yet people persist. And people, ideas, and customs flow between groups that are able to maintain separate identities (Wagner: 13). Barth's concept of 'ethnic boundaries' is useful for demonstrating how ethnic identity works in a globalized post-modern society. For Barth, 'the culture within the group is irrelevant to the status of ethnicity as an entity': "the sharing of a common culture is generally given central importance.... culture in the definition of an ethnic group requires all members of one such group to exhibit the definitional culture traits, which is usually not the case (1969: 11-13). Barth (1969) views cultural institutions as being ecologically based. "Ecology" here includes all of the external circumstances with which group members must contend. "This means the boundary itself, by defining who is in the group and who is not, is part of the ecology... and he sees the boundary as primary to the group and the only option for group definition. Language is recognized as a means of ethnic identification, or boundary maintenance." (Ibid.: 14).

Barth (1969: 10-11) defines ethnic groups as "categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves..." and gives four identifying features of an ethnic group: biologically self-perpetuating, sharing fundamental values, comprising a field of communication, and having a self-identifying membership recognized by others as distinguishable from similar groups. In the case of the Hmong, the transnational location of groups fit these criteria well, and Barth's definition allows for the characteristic membership flexibility of the Hmong diasporas (Wagner: 15).

In this sense, learning and speaking Hmong is being used as an ethnic boundary marker in transnational locations. Thus, in Hmong mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), students perceive that the language and the process of learning it are a part of their valuable heritage in one way or another in their region of Chiang Rai province or wherever else they may be. For a more distinct definition, Barth focuses on the concept of shared history as an ethnic boundary unit. According to this idea, members need to have a common past. This is especially important for the boundaries of ethnic groups as units of social or political organizations. This fits in with Barth's original concept of culture as a response to ecology, recognizing that ecology can change over time, changing a group's culture without destroying the integrity of the group (1984, 1989). Based on these criteria, people in transnational living locations, despite having fluid membership, still share many cultural traits and are quite sure they know who has what ethnic identity.

As for Cornell's definition of identity, he states that 'identity is both a prism and tool through which people interpret and conceptually construct the world' (1996: 267). This explains how cultural elements of ethnic groups are part and parcel of ethnic maintenance and express ethnic boundaries. He also emphasizes 'putative kinship' (shared descent) or common provenance as an important part of membership in an ethnic group (Cornell 1966: 268-269). "This element of the definition is especially applicable to the Hmong with the constant tracing of blood and renegotiation of blood quantum" (Wagner: 22).

The evidential case of the Chinese Tai (The Lue's ethnic root group in China):

Hansen (1999) in 'Lessons in Being Chinese' discusses the Chinese government's state education policy which they have applied to all minority groups and regions for their aim for education: 'assimilation.' They have intended to apply it

² However, according to Dr. Prasit at Chiang Mai University, shamans' incantations of the Hmong traditional funeral rituals are performed with many ancient Chinese words.

The Hmong traditional religionis, "an assemblage of many belief systems, based mostly on ancestor worship, Confucianism and animism.

Paying respect to ancestors and honoring them on important occasions are traditions that are likely borrowed from the Chinese, while beliefs in the existence of nature spirits are local influences that exist among rural inhabitants of China and Southeast Asia." (<https://wenku.baidu.com/view/461c8c19227916888486d7c3.html?re=view>)

uniformly to let the minority people assimilate into the mainstream. Just as the Thai government only acknowledges 62 out of over 75 ethnic groups, the Chinese government recognizes only 55 out of 275 indigenous ethnic (language) groups (Ethnologue³). Likewise, in current global situations, ethnic identification is controlled by government and policy rather than by the ethnic people and the groups themselves. The culture-bearing-units such as language, cultural traits, etc. are not as influential as Naroll suggests (1964) either.

According to Hansen's research, assimilation policy is much more successful in some cases than in others. For example, in Lijiang area of Yunnan province, elite members of the 'Naxi' ethnic group have a centuries-old relationship with the Chinese state educational systems as a way to social mobility and have continued this tradition through Confucius education and under the Communist rule in the modern era. They even enthusiastically participate in the present system, using education to gain official and professional positions. In contrast to the Naxi's case, the Tai ethnic group in the Sipsong Panna area of the same province have made different choices in many ways as a separate kingdom until 1950. For example, the Tai have preserved their own script for their ethnic language and have instituted a separate educational system which is run by Theravada Buddhist monasteries. This schooling system is still the preferred school system for many of the Tai people. Here, what I see in a comparison of Thailand and PRC's education policy for ethnic minorities, is that standardized and homogenized state education aims to produce loyalty to the state and the central government, and national cultural integration through a "one language and one country" policy.

The state government's belief is that education in itself is capable of instilling identification with the state in students. However, in the case of China, the ethnic minority education policy, which aims at assimilation, ironically often stimulates ethnic minority people's interest in strengthening their ethnic identity. In these cases, the government's political process and decisions are the primary demarcating sources.

According to Hansen's study, the case of Chinese minorities is more explicit than the cases seen in Thailand, though the issues of education policy are sensitive matters in both situations. This was seen in the case of the Chinese Tai in the southwest autonomous prefecture bordered by Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar and Laos. So, there is an obvious conflict between the government and minority groups relating to the development of minority languages and education, especially bilingual education.

There are different views on the purpose of education, for example, 'in the three counties in Sipsong Panna, teachers, school administrators, and members of the Bureau of Education were roughly divided between a majority who saw the teaching of Tai as a temporary necessity and a minority who wanted expansion and improvement of Tai-language instruction in primary schools, in examinations, and in secondary education' (Hansen, 1999: 129).

Because of the Chinese's government's policy on ethnic minority groups, the Naxi assimilated into the mainstream cultural system and adopted the Confucian education that the government provided. In contrast, the communist Chinese government accepted and cooperated with the Tai group's strategy, thereby avoiding large-scale revolts against the final abolition of royal titles and the traditional Tai government and political system in Sipsong Panna. The Tai name of the kingdom was adopted by the Chinese government as the name of the new autonomous prefecture in 1953, showing that the government sought to avoid major conflicts with the Tai in the early stages of the PRC. On the other hand, the Tai's adoption of standard Chinese and the bilingual school system through bilingual education aided their chances of furthering their education, getting jobs, and receiving economic benefits. For the Tai, keeping their orthography and mother tongue by using bilingual education was a successful negotiation strategy.

The main argument here realizes that the Han and the government of China have ideals about minority groups found within the framework of the Chinese state and constitution, notably that all minzu (minority people) have equal rights to develop their language, maintain their cultural traditions, and believe in their own religions. This is the foundation of communist ideology and hegemony. However, in reality, the Chinese education fosters in many students a perception of themselves as members of a "backward" people simply because it denies the usefulness of the minorities' own languages, histories, religions, forms of education, customs, marriage practices, values, ethics, and so forth. (Hansen, 1999: 106)

Identity and multilinguality as a distinct of negotiation with the government:

While discrimination and stereotyping exist for minorities in China, some of the minorities in the northeastern China still

³ <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/CN>

produce better academic performance and enrollment rates into universities. This is because of effective multilingual education. For example, Korean Chinese minority students learn through Korean, Chinese and English instruction, and their academic status is much higher than other groups including the majority Han students.

In Thailand, there are also bilingual education cases using two languages such as Thai and English. However, this is a case of using two prestigious languages among middle or higher-class Thai, similar to the previously mentioned Chinese and Korean, and Chinese and English bilingual schooling in private sectors. This cannot serve as a good model of bilingual education for ethnic minority people because a minority language has no prestige for practice and few practical benefits to its preservation in comparison with prestigious languages. Rather, these situations and comparisons reinforce the minorities' feelings and social positions of inferiority and 'backwardness'. In this context, the Thai language means 'superior' and 'unifying,' though the government does allow one level of adaptation by permitting the Hmong and some other minority language groups to use their mother tongue as an instructional language in the process of assimilation.

Why is language so important for maintaining ethnic identity?

Berger and Luckmann describe the function of language in a social construction in the following way: "Language is capable of becoming the objective repository of vast accumulations of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations. To take the most important item of socialization, language appears to the child as inherent in the nature of things... Language also typifies experiences, allowing me to subsume them under broad categories in terms of which they have meaning not only to myself but also to my fellowmen" (1967: 35-39)

As Berger and Luckmann state above, language has a key role in maintaining and identifying ethnic identity. In the case of the Hmong in Chiang Rai Province, one of the critical causes of their ethnic identity crisis is the government's policy of assimilation. The Hmong language has been forbidden in educational institutions. The following questions give answers to the question "Why is language so important for identifying and maintaining Hmong ethnic identity in your field sites?"

"Why does the government still hesitate to give ethnic minority groups the right to use their mother tongue as an instructional language at school?" "Why does the government let them remain in a backward state?" "How do the Hmong, as an ethnic minority language group, cope with the government's education and language policy?" "What are the main issues to consider in this matter?" And "How do they negotiate this matter with the government?"

As a subdominant ethnic minority group, the Hmong have tried to preserve and practice their unique cultural rituals with external differences from the mainstream culture in the language used and clothing worn. This is a kind of underground or hidden form of increasing negotiation power against the mainstream and the government's oppression. If participating in those cultural practices and rituals becomes an effective learning process, it also becomes a process of making 'cultural power' which is an influential type of underground resistance in the power relations. Participating in cultural practices and rituals can also have an influence on children or learners through the effect of the ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development). Thus, resistance occurs not only by maintaining the ethnic identity and mother tongue, but also by preserving and participating in cultural practices and rituals. These social and cultural activities and social and individual interactions occur using the mother tongue. Therefore, the language (mother tongue) is essential; it is the key tool of resistance and negotiation in preserving the ethnic identity. In the history of the Hmong, since leaving China they have been through various instances of war and immigration. But they have kept most of their cultural knowledge and language intact. This means that they have fought and struggled with many internal and external factors that have attempted to change their ethnic identity and cultural heritage.

6. CONCLUSION

Ethnic identity refers to a collectively possessed ethnic consciousness. It is constructed in relationships among people of the same ethnicity who claim that they have shared histories, culture, and a common background language, even if they cannot speak it. A substantial foundation for ethnic identity is that of individual identity. Individual identity is implicitly both psychological and political in nature because people construct their identity according to their preference. They choose where they want to belong and how they want to be recognized. Due to this intention, their ethnic identity can be constructed, and languages can be selected. In this way, the process of ethnic identification or demarcation is complex.

There are certainly culture-bearing-units such as language, cultural practice, etc., but the ultimate decision makers are the people themselves. The process of forming ethnicity or ethnic identity normally takes generations; however, currently,

governments intervene in ethnic delimiting processes with political motivations as we previously discussed as a micro level's evidence, such as Naxi and Tai tribes in Yunnan Province, China. And as macro level's evidence, the government of China and Thailand control ethnic delimitation directly and indirectly, for instance, according to the Ethnologue⁴, there are 72 languages in Thailand. Among them, there are 51 indigenous languages, and 21 languages that are nonindigenous languages. However, the right to mother tongue education is not recognized in Thailand. They have intended to apply it uniformly to let the minority people assimilate into the mainstream; have only acknowledged 62 out of over 75 ethnic groups. In the case of China, the government recognizes only 55 out of 275 indigenous ethnic (language) groups (Ethnologue⁵).

Typically, governments intervene in the process of the ethnic delimitation with the aim of political integration, for example, with the assimilation policy of 'one country and one language.' In other words, the governments' hidden, invisible policy and agenda influence the process. Another issue is that assimilation-one language, one country- attempts to construct another identity and force it on ethnically powerless groups. Then, the powerless ethnic groups become 'in-between people' who become new type of people neither like the previous group nor like the mainstream people. Here we can find power relations and negotiation related to language and education policy on ethnic minority groups between the government and the ethnic minority groups.

According to Gramsci's view, this is hegemony reflecting the particular values and ideologies of their exponents (cf. Woolard, 1998⁶; Blommaert, 1999). It is simply a matter of ideology. Through this ideology, dominant ethnic groups reinforce the hegemony of the languages they speak within modern nation-states (May, 2001: preface). However, as May mentions, 'ideology is not the sole preserve of minority language proponents, although it is often painted as such' (Ibid.)

As for the relations between language and ethnic identity, Bourdieu introduces 'pedagogic authority' which ultimately needs to be seen as a form of 'symbolic violence.' This is especially true when it is expressed through the language of the classroom, which imposes a certain way of viewing the world. This is contained in the instructional language; it inculcates a person or culture's "arbitrary instruments of knowledge and expression of society" (1982/1991b: 168). Hmong ethnic and local knowledge exists mostly in the form of the vernacular; for example, ethnic rituals, practices, and festivals are all performed in Hmong. Therefore, validating the mother tongue is the way of elevating their ethnic identity and a way of preserving their ethnic knowledge. In contrast, making them feel inferior because of their language is the most effective way of discouraging ethnic pride. However, just being allowed to use the mother tongue and preserve cultural knowledge and ethnic identity without a struggle does not result in the production of power. Strong ethnic identity is produced through the friction that occurs when there is a struggle against oppression (Foucault, 1980: 92). Furthermore, as a part of the revitalization process, Hmong mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) is a means of exercising power and marking ethnic identity. This is the main purpose of doing MTB-MLE, rather than the good national exam scores that are used to prove the program's effectiveness. In another sense, MTB-MLE fosters ethnic identity through preserving and using mother tongue as the context of cooperation among the stakeholders, and relations among different ethnic factional and social backgrounds among the Hmong.

Fong and Chuang (2004) state in "Communicating Ethnic and Cultural Identity" that ethnic identity is "created in daily interactions and rituals that demonstrate common understanding and shared experiences." The language, use of time, and communication styles may be unique to each community, but the reflection and maintenance of ethnic identity through communication is an important process for all ethnic groups. That's why Naroll puts an emphasis on language.

Language should not be analyzed and sorted out alone as the only culture-bearing-unit or with a purely sociolinguistic approach that looks at dialect divisions, varieties, and mutual intelligibility tests with neighboring tribal groups (Moerman, 1965). Phonological analysis, in an applied linguistics approach, is also not enough to classify the ethnicity and ethnologic demarcation. Language, with the previously mentioned peculiarities, entails shared experiences and histories as well, such as cultural stories, rituals, and proverbs shared by the group. This means that language is not just a communicative tool, or a tool for designating sound and meaning, but also a culture-bearing repository. Moreover, it

⁴ <https://www.ethnologue.com/>

⁵ <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/CN>

⁶ Woolard points out, "in liberal democratic societies, the misrecognition, or revalorization of the indexical character of language may make discrimination on linguistic grounds publicly acceptable where the corresponding ethnic or racial discrimination is not" (1998).

entails cultural traits, for instance, rituals, traditional practices, and festivals which are performed with the vernacular. For the Lue and the Hmong, these languages and cultures have been passed on without written forms or records. This means that the languages entail their morality and even emotions. In this reasoning, language is a significant ethnic marker rather than the most important culture-bearing unit.

Here, what I propose is that language is a significant and influential ethnic marker for ethnic people themselves in discerning their ethnic identity, but it cannot be the only delimiting and demarcating unit for ethnic identification and its boundaries. This paper is intended not just for the minorities and their language situations but also for the states and governments involved. However, without the government's help, minorities and their mother tongues are vulnerable. Even though language policies reflect complex social identities and political situations, minorities must seek to foster governmental arrangements that are equally varied and fair, both for the minorities and for the government or states involved.

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