Relocation and Poverty of the Aboriginal Peoples along the Thailand-Malaysia Border

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Abstract

Aboriginal people living along the Thailand-Malaysia border were called Orang Asli in Malaysia and the Ngo Paa in Thailand. In Malaysia, most of these Orang Asli had been resettled into new villages under government initiative whereas in South Thailand the only established resettlement village was located in Ban Than-To, Yala Province. Having complied with Governmental directives and migrated into the resettlement villages, subsequent generations of these Aboriginal people remain economically behind the mainstream society whilst having sacrificed their traditional homeland and lifestyle. It was observed that most of them received insufficient education, had low income, and lived in poverty. There was also a decline in the use of words and expressions relating to ways of the forest. Moreover, eco-tourism and home-stay did not provide a viable business opportunity for them.

Keywords: Aboriginal people, Relocation, Thailand-Malaysia border, Poverty.

Introduction

This paper discusses issues faced by the aboriginal people who were relocated by government sponsored resettlement schemes in Northern Malaysia. This paper refers to the relocation of Orang Asli under a government policy, away from their natural forest habitat to resettlement villages where they were provided with housing and amenities. The findings are part of a broader on-going study entitled “A Genetic and Typological Study on the Mon-Khmer Languages (Indigenous Languages) in Malaysia and Thailand: An Investigation into Language Maintenance and Language Loss”.

Objective

The objective of this paper is to investigate into:

- Causes leading to the relocation of aboriginal people living along the Thai-Malaysia border to government sponsored resettlement schemes,
- Impact of the change in lifestyle on the migrants, and
- Issues faced by the migrants in adapting and coping with lifestyle change.
Significance

Findings from this study are envisaged to provide a better appreciation on the issues faced by aboriginal people in adapting to their new lifestyle and the impact of migration on language maintenance and language loss of the Northern Aslian Language.

Methodology

Site visits were conducted at resettlement schemes and temporary forest dwellings of Orang Asli along the Malaysian side of the border i.e. Kampong Lalong, near Baling in Kedah, Kampong Sungai Banum, (Belum Forest) Perak, a Kintak village along the Kedah/Perak border and Kampong Sungai Rual in Kelantan. On the Thai side of the border, site visits were conducted on the Tien-Ean people living on the Banthad mountain ridge stretching from Trang, Phattalung to Satun (Figure 1). Respondents consisted of the Tok Batin (tribal chief) and selected villagers. Data were collected through interviews and participant observation with audio and video recording. The researcher did not travel to Moo Baan Than-to, the resettlement scheme in Yala due to the unrest in Southern Thailand. Data were gathered from people in contact with these residents.

Findings by researchers on Orang Asli issues in the book edited by Ma’Rof and Gill (2008) were used as framework for this paper. Selected relevant information from this book (in Malay language) is presented in Appendix I.

Background Information

The aboriginal people living along the Thai-Malaysia border were called Orang Asli in Malaysia and Ngo Paa in Thailand. In Malay, Orang Asli means the “Original People”. In Thai, Ngo Paa literally means “forest rambutan”, ngo referring to the hair of the aboriginal people that is similar to the short curly hair of the “rambutan” fruit and paa meaning “forest”. They were also called Sakai in Thailand, though this term was no longer used in Malaysia due to the negative connotation – slaves or primitive people.

These people spoke the Northern Aslian language which was classified under the Mon-Khmer sub-branch of Austroasiatic language family. Northern Aslian languages included Kensiu, Kintak, Jahai and Tien Ean. In Malaysia, the speakers were located in the states of Kedah, Perak and Kelantan whilst in South Thailand they were located in the provinces of Satun, Trang, Pattalung, Yala and Narathiwat.

These people freely roamed the forests along the present day Thai-Malaysia border for a long time. However, a border was created by the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty or Bangkok Treaty of 1909 (US
Department, 1965). The northern Malay states were broken into two parts where Pattani, Narathiwat, Songkhla, Satun and Yala became part of Siam; and Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Terengganu went under British influence. Today, the forest is no longer free for the Aboriginal people to roam. For security reason certain sections of the border are fenced. Cross-border movements must be made through immigration checkpoints.

In Malaysia, migration (or resettlement) of Orang Asli was initially carried out for security reasons. They were to be removed from the forest because the communist insurgents were obtaining support from Orang Asli. Subsequently, it became part of a government policy to ‘absorb these people into the stream of national life’ (James, 1968). Nicholas (2000) however, argued that ‘development programmes and policies for Orang Asli . . . have a single ideological goal – to enable the control of the Orang Asli and to control their traditional territories and resources’ (Appendix II).

The population of Orang Asli in Malaysia was relatively small. The Department of Orang Asli Affairs or Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli (JHEOA, 2006) reported that the population of Orang Asli was 141,230. The Negrito (tribes living in areas under study) population in Kedah was 191, in Perak was 1,575 and in Kelantan 1,086.

In South Thailand, the population of Ngo Paa was also relatively small. According to Phaiboon (2006) there were some 200 speakers of Northern Aslian languages. The Kensiu were settled foragers in Thanto District; Tea-de were located in Weang and Srisakorn District in Narathiwat; Jahai were also found in Srisakorn District and Bala-Hala Forest, Betong District in Yala Province; and Tean-ean in Langu and Thungwa Districts, Satun Province, Palian District, Trang Province and Paborn District, Phatthalung Province.

The 2009 Yala Provincial Report stated that there were 52 Sakais made up of 21 families living in the Moo Baan Than-to resettlement scheme. The Sakais were allocated 300 rai (around 150 acres) of land planted with rubber. They were trained to lead a rural life – eating and wearing regular clothes. Annette Hamilton (Hamilton, 2002) reported that the Kensius were accorded a surname “Srithaanto” by Her Royal Highness the Queen of Thailand. She stated that “.. it is very difficult to put together the various accounts of the founding of the village...” and concluded that, “Almost certainly the present resettlement village was established as a direct result of the complex politics of the region” and that “the publicly presented reason . . . to improve the poor quality life of the Sakais, as part of the duties of a caring and protective state”.

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The Tien Ean people were still leading a nomadic life in the Banthad Mountains in South Thailand. They were separated from the main group living in the Yala, Narathiwat, Kedah, Perak and Kelantan (Appendix III).

**Research Findings and Discussion**

Orang Asli adults in the resettlement schemes were the second or third generation migrants. It was their parents or grandparents who were resettled from the forest. As children, these people were brought up in the schemes and attended regular school. Their knowledge of the forest was instilled by the older generation, who brought them along to ‘work’ in the jungle.

The present generation of Orang Asli and Ngo Paa were faced with challenges. Living alongside the mainstream population, the mainstream population were encroaching into the forests evacuated by the aboriginal people for economic gain. The impact on the aboriginal community had been studied and reported by several researchers (see bibliography).

In the following section, an attempt is made to outline the issues on poverty, economy, tourism, education and language.

- **Poverty**

Upon arriving to the settlements, one noticed that the homes seemed to withstand years of neglect. Outwardly, it was observed that there were hardly any improvements on the homes even broken wall planks were not replaced. Internally the homes were sparsely decorated. It prompted the observer to enquire whether these people are not house-proud or simply could not afford.

In Kampung Lalong near Baling, the Orang Asli settlement was located near a Malay village. A few homes were different from the rest with satellite TV antenna and cars (parked nearby), inside the homes being equipped with TV, washing machine, refrigerator and gas cookers. We were informed that these were homes of businessmen, who were the more successful people. Other homes might have satellite TV antennae. The antennae, however, were for show because electricity supply was cut as they could not afford to pay.

This was different from the FELDA (Malaysian government resettlement) schemes, where the migrants were from the mainstream community. FELDA settlers appeared to be wealthier as living standards of these second and third generation migrants have visibly improved. Incomes from the palm oil or rubber plantations were high. They were able to capitalise on education, employment, business and other opportunities.
In South Thailand, (according to local informants) Sakais living in the Moo Baan Than-To resettlement scheme continued to depend on forest products to supplement their income. Some of the Ngo Paa was said to have moved southwards to live with their own tribe in Malaysia, where they could expect a better life.

**Economy**

Orang Asli were economically less developed than those in the mainstream community. Income of Orang Asli families living in the resettlement schemes appeared to be lower than the mainstream population nearby. Though Orang Asli were provided with land for rubber or palm oil cultivation, they remained dependant on the forest. Allocation of land to Orang Asli was on similar basis as in other land development schemes, i.e. one-quarter acre for housing and 6 acres for rubber or oil palm. However, the lands allocated were on hilly terrain where productivity was lower. Thus, even when they eventually produce, their income would be lower.

It was observed that Orang Asli ended up on the lowest end of the value chain – selling at the lowest price and buying at the highest cost. This could be illustrated from an observation in the forest during a site visit to a Kintak community in North Perak. Forest products were sold to local traders in the forest as they did not own vehicles to transport forest products out from deep inside the forest and needed to remain there to continue with harvesting. The researcher was informed that the trader bought, for example, a certain type of forest fruit (popular in Thailand) from Kintak gatherers in the forest at RM2.50 a kilogram. The fruits were eventually bought by traders on the Malaysia-Thailand border at between RM4.00 to RM4.50 a kilogram.

Local traders who exchanged forest products with food and groceries also priced their goods at higher prices to include transportation and profit. On the other hand, Orang Asli paid a high price when buying goods at shops located some distance away in towns. There were other costs associated with travelling to the towns such as transport and meals which was a burden to these low income people. In northern Perak, for example, to shop in Gerik could take the whole day.

Prices of goods, materials and food in Gerik were observed to be higher than in the city.

There was little or no employment opportunity for the Orang Asli and Ngo Paa living along the border. These settlements were in remote areas and away from economic activity. Residents in Kampong Lalang which was close to the town of Baling (an economic hub) were able to find employment such as labourer, lorry driver and equipment (backhoe) operator. Otherwise these Aboriginal people were self employed – continue to work in their smallholdings or harvest from the forest.
• Tourism

Eco-tourism and home-stay were fast becoming tourism products. Malaysian villagers including those living in Baling were beginning to find these as viable business proposition that generate additional income. However, exploiting this potential may be beyond the ability of Orang Asli living in the resettlement villages. At the time when the fieldwork was conducted, participation in the tourism industry seemed to be limited to the occasional tourist bus passing through the resettlement villages for a quick photo taking session which hardly contributed to their economy.

Meaningful participation of the Orang Asli in the tourism industry requires an integrated approach, involving the relevant government departments and agencies working together with the tourism industry to identify, develop market and enable Orang Asli to manage the business. Otherwise, such initiative may fizzle out or be taken over and exploited by others.

The Thai government developed the resettlement scheme at Moo Baan Than-To with a view of making it into a tourist destination. However, its location in the deep south (Yala) coupled with the current turmoil were not too attractive. Kensui people living in the settlement were asked to showcase their culture and handicraft. Some resented the way they were treated and being dressed-up in red and paraded like caged animals at Bangkok shopping malls to promote the settlement. To supplement their income, people living in the resettlement schemes still continue to harvest forest products, including travelling to forests in Malaysia.

• Education

On the whole, academic achievement of the North Aslians was lowest compared to all other Orang Asli tribes. According to a JHEOA official, not a single North Aslian has gained entry into any Institution of higher learning. It was observed that all children of Orang Asli in the resettlement villages were attending compulsory education in government schools.

Realisation on importance of education was highest at Kampung Lalang in Baling. Some parents discussed their children’s education with the researcher. They spoke about achievements of their old Malay school friends who completed higher education and were employed as teachers and government officials. However, to the Orang Asli living in remote areas, they were more concerned with training the children on the ways of the forest. They did not foresee their children being able to enter into institutions of higher learning or use education to gain employment. These children would continue seeking livelihood from the forest but
formal education at schools, on the other hand, kept the children in classrooms. Could these children re-adapt themselves to work in the forest or would they become misfits?

The Orang Asli community in the remote settlements seemed to lack role model and people to mentor them, in particular rural life. Their horizon requires broadening to appreciate fundamentals of the modern world, such as coping with capitalism and transformation. Some respondents did indicate consciousness on rights of the Orang Asli through activities organised by Non Governmental Organisations.

- **Language**

At the resettlement schemes, North Aslian languages remained as the lingua franca. North Aslian language was not used in formal education. The teachers were from the mainstream society and teaching was in the Malay language. In the forest they had their own worldview. When they lived in modern housing away from nature, their lifestyles changed. They became less communal and more individualistic. Malay words were borrowed and used in their daily conversation. Their elders acknowledged that many words and expressions relating to the old ways of the forest in their mother tongue were fast fading and forgotten.

**Concluding Remarks**

In the forest, Orang Asli led a communal lifestyle whereas the resettlement schemes were designed to be similar to those for the mainstream population, a capitalist society i.e. life revolves around cash – almost everything is money; money to buy food, clothing and consumer goods. People become less inclined to share wealth or money, as opposed to sharing food in the old way of life.

The mainstream society made their transformation to the present lifestyle progressively, over several generations. Orang Asli have not made this transformation, neither adapting nor coping with the new lifestyle. The challenges are more than the community can cope. Having complied with Governmental directives and migrated into the resettlement villages, subsequent generations remain economically behind the mainstream society whilst sacrificing their traditional homeland and lifestyle. Economic disparity between Orang Asli and the mainstream society is widening. Orang Asli have a long way to catch-up with the mainstream society which is already on the fast lane.

This transformation is an evolutionary process that needs to be inculcated into the community. To ease their acceptance to change, their culture and language should be retained. Government policy for the
development of Orang Asli should be re-conceptualised incorporating Orang Asli-friendly initiatives including mentoring activities, to facilitate the transformation process.

**Figure I: Locations of Aboriginal People under Study**
Appendix I

Issues of Transformation

A team of academics at University Putra Malaysia, in their book *Orang Asli: Isu, Transformasi dan Cabaran*, in English “Orang Asli: Issues, Transformation and Challenges” (Zainal Abidin 2008) discussed Orang Asli issues and submitted recommendations for the Ninth Malaysia Development Plan (2005 to 2010). Issues related to this paper are discussed below:

- **Poverty**
  
  There is a need for poverty eradication program to address on requirements of Orang Asli living in the interior. Close to 76% of the Orang Asli living below poverty are found in the 323 villages located in the interior of Pahang and Kelantan. Factors attributed to this included dependence on forest products as economic source; poor infrastructure, communication and difficulty to market forest products from the interior; without land titles; and (the attitude of) dependence on government aid. The recommendation is for centralised resettlement schemes bringing together the many smaller villages.

- **Land ownership and developing the land**

  JHEOA records showed that Orang Asli are living and working on a land area of 138,861 hectares, comprising of:
  
  - 14% (19,303 hectares) of land gazetted as Orang Asli reserve;
  - 21% (28,933 hectares) of land approved but pending gazette as Orang Asli reserve; 58% (79,715) of land applied by JHEOA to be classified as Orang Asli reserve;
  - 7% (9,873 hectares) occupied by Orang Asli that are already classified such as forest reserve, National Park and for game reserve; and
  - 644 hectares of land with Orang Asli holding titles (housing and agriculture).

  The requirement for 138,861 hectares land area utilised by Orang Asli relative to their population of 141,865 persons (2006) appears large; and comes to the attention of various quarters. Land is a state matter whilst JHEOA is an agency of the federal government. JHEOA has to negotiate land matters with the respective states; conflicting views on the concept of native land and the national land code, a matter that has been brought to court; acreage of land ownership by individuals is low; state is empowered to gazette and de-gazette Orang Asli land reserve; and encourage land ownership by individuals, a move requiring consent of the state government.
Initiatives to approve land for development such as practiced by the Pahang state government would accelerate efforts to provide planned and organised economic activity via the resettlement schemes. Each family is provided with 6 acres for agriculture activities and a quarter acre for housing. However, such a move entails uprooting people living in the interior and discarding the ‘old way of life’ for a rural life with modern amenities.

- **Education**

The high rate of school drop-out is a major concern. In a 1995 study, drop-out is attributed to attitude of parents (Fadzil Mahamud, 2005). In 2005, the drop-out rate for primary school reduced to below 1% compared to over 9% in 2003. Number of students continuing their education at secondary school increased to 58% in 2007 compared to 43% in 2003.

In 2004, 436 Orang Asli were attending institutions of higher learning and another 150 persons graduated during the year (JHEOA, 2007).

- **Living in the interior and basic amenities**

In the interior, the Orang Asli settlements are small and interspersed. The school drop-out rate could be higher especially as small children were forced to wake up early to attend school.

- **Healthcare**

The rate of occurrence of diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and filarial infection is higher among Orang Asli compared to the mainstream population. Efforts to provide effective healthcare, promote heath awareness and prevent the spread of serious diseases has to be increased.

**Representation for Orang Asli**

At the national level, Orang Asli is provided with an avenue to voice out their opinion. In the Senate of Malaysia, one person is appointed to represent Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia. The Senate is the upper house of the Parliament of Malaysia comprising of 70 members of which 26 are indirectly elected by the states and the remaining by the King. It reviews legislation passed by the lower house.

On the political front and as a minority, interest of Orang Asli is hardly represented. Malaysian politics is dominated by racially based political parties. The aboriginal people of Sabah and Sarawak are represented by their own political parties. The ruling party draws support from the Orang Asli – on the premise that Orang Asli is benefitting from policies of the government.
The Persatuan Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia (www.poasm.org), in English “Peninsular Malaysia Orang Asli Association” was formed in 1977 with the objective of protecting and enhancing interest and welfare of Orang Asli. It is actively pursuing the resolution of the ‘land rights issue’ and concurrently assisting Orang Asli seeking legal redress on land issues. On education, POASM expressed concern on the use of merit system for entry into institutions of higher learning (previously entry is also based on quota to respective community); and views the education system as alien and unfriendly to Orang Asli (high drop-out rate) (Zainal Abidin, 2005).

Another non-governmental organisation ‘committed to information and commentary on the Orang Asli’ is The Centre for Orang Asli Concern (www.coac.org.my).

**Appendix II**

**Orang Asli in Malaysia**

Interest on the Orang Asli during the colonial period came about for security reasons. The British authorities and later the Malayan government were fighting communist insurgency or the “Emergency” which lasted from 1948 to 1960. During the Second World War, both the communists and British forces fought the Japanese occupation forces with the support of Orang Asli. When the returning British colonial rulers attempted to exclude the communist from the proposed post independence government of Malaya, the communists returned to the forest to wage an armed insurgency. Since the communists based themselves in the forest, it is natural for them to enlist their old Orang Asli friends in the interior (Jones, 1968; Carey, 1976; Leary, 1995 and Endicott, 2008).

To separate the Orang Asli from communist insurgents, the British attempted to resettle Orang Asli in “new villages”. The resettlement strategy was successfully implemented on Chinese people living along fringes of the forest and the British decided to apply the same to the Orang Asli. Initially, forced resettlement was a disaster, and large numbers of Orang Asli died from disease, malnutrition, and demoralisation. They were unable to adapt to living behind barbed wires without proper shelter, sanitation and nutritionally adequate food. It is reported that ‘by 1953 virtually all the Orang Asli of the central highlands, Temiar and Semai, had turned to the communists for protection against the government’ (Jones, 1968; Carey, 1976 and Endicott 2008).
The colonial government until after the Second World War treated “Orang Asli with benign neglect, attending to them only when they broke the game or forestry laws. The state of Perak was the exception.” An Italian adventurer, Captain G. B. Cerruti was appointed to a post of “Superintendent of Sakais” in 1901. His memoir, *My Friends the Savages* (Cerruti, 1908) summarises Europeans’ views on Orang Asli at the time. The Perak Museum became the center of research on Orang Asli with some administrators taking special interest on Orang Asli (Dentan, 1997). The first formal government policy on Orang Asli, the Aboriginal Tribes Enactment – Perak: no 3 was drafted by H. D. Noone in 1939 (Holman, 1958). His recommendations included the establishment of aboriginal reserves and the post Protector of Aborigines.

The Aboriginal Act of 1954 (Federation of Malaya 1954) formalises the establishment of the Department of Aborigines and giving it control over all matters concerning Orang Asli. The Department was enlarged in order to make it an effective force to fight the insurgency. Orang Asli were made to be less inclined and denied opportunity (by providing food, labour or intelligence) to support the insurgents. The security forces formed an anti-guerrilla unit the Senoi Praak (“Fighting Aborigines”) composed mainly of Orang Asli in the late 1950’s, (Jones, 1968), a part of the Police Field Force (paramilitary unit). As the strategy to alienate Orang Asli support towards the guerrillas worked and support waned, the insurgents are said to have massacred Orang Asli communities who were thought to be supporting the government.

In recognising the contribution of the Orang Asli during the Emergency, the Yang di Pertuan Agong (the King) declared that the government was creating a “long-term policy for the administration and advancement of the Orang Asli” in order “to absorb these people into the stream of national life in a way, at a pace, which will adopt and not destroy their traditional way of living and culture” (James 1968). In every Five Year Malaysia Development Plan, there is specific allocation for the Orang Asli (Zainal Abidin 2005).

The development program for Orang Asli is carried out in two phases (Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, 2005).

- **Phase I**, from 1954 to 1978 where the concentration was on security aspect that is to protect the Orang Asli from the threat and influence of the communists.

- **Phase II**, from 1978 onwards, the thrust is on socio-economic development of the Orang Asli

Throughout the nine Development Plans (1966 to 2010) embarked by the Malayan and later the Malaysian government, a total of RM992 million had been allocated for Orang Asli. In the First Plan (1966 to 1970) the allocation was RM4.9 million and by the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006 to 2010) allocations increased to RM358
million (Exchange Rate 2010: USD1.00 at RM3.30). The Department of Orang Asli (renamed “Jabatan Hal Ewal Orang Asli, JHEOA, webpage www.jheoa.gov.my) in line with the National Development Policy (1991-2000) established four (4) objectives: to eradicate poverty by the year 2020; reduce disparity (income, education, health and access to essential amenities) between Orang Asli and the mainstream community; upgrading the Orang Asli to be competitive; and eradicating communicable diseases (Zainal Abidin 2008).

The development program planned by JHEOA for the Orang Asli addresses on the various aspects towards a balanced development, physical and mental; provision of essential amenities through the resettlement schemes; collaborating with state governments on land ownership for land development schemes; education and skills development; planned resettlement; economic development programs; and social development programs. The effectiveness of programs to alleviate hardship of Orang Asli had been discussed in various forums.

In 2006, JHEOA reported that the population of Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia is 141,230 living in 869 villages. There were 323 (or 37%) villages located in the interior (residents without regular income); 534 (or 61%) villages located close to Malay settlements (with road infrastructure, piped water and electricity supply and is part of development projects); and 12 (or 2%) villages located in urban areas (with all amenities and excluded from development projects). Development status of the villages is summarised as: 45 villages considered developed, 425 villages partially developed and the remaining 398 (or 46%) classified as under developed (Zainal Abidin 2008).

Incidence of poverty within the Orang Asli community is highest in the country. There are 13,784 Head of Households (HoH) or 49.5% of the total 27,841 HoH in the country living below the national classification for poverty (income below RM590 per month). Of this, 8,899 (or 32%) HoH are classified as hardcore poor. (Zainal Abidin 2008).

In the Eighth Malaysia Plan, a nationwide Poverty Eradication Program was introduced. The JHEOA was tasked to build 10,895 homes under the Eighth Plan and another 12,072 under the Ninth Plan. Bumiputra Unit Trusts (Amanah Saham Bumiputra) were distributed to 15,820 eligible households. The recipients may earn from the dividends and not allowed to withdraw the principal, worth RM5,000. Another initiative is via direct intervention, the HoH would be allocated with government developed palm oil and rubber plantation (Ministry 2005).
Appendix III

Tien Ean People

The Tien-Ean people living on the Banthad mountain range are cut-off from other aboriginal tribes located in Kedah, Perak and Yala. The forest on the lowlands between Banthad mountain range and the Main range had been cleared and cultivated. Informants estimate that the tribe consist of 100 to 120 people, living in small groups of between 15 to 30 people (similar to the report by Thonghom, 1984). They shun away from visitors and were quick to hide thus evade detection. Contact with the Tien Ean was established with the help of locals who gained their trust (our informants). These people are still leading a nomadic lifestyle though they have become accustomed to eating and wearing clothing from the outside world.

According to our informants, they have little to trade with the outside world, thus are very dependent on donations. An interesting feature is the annual mating ritual that had been said to take place around the same time (in 2010 on the same day) as the Valentine’s Day. On this chosen day, the various groups of the tribe gather at a location for males and females from the tribe choose their partners – with males wooing the women by showing off their hunt to demonstrate ability to provide for the family. Local Thais come to the Tien-Ean to seek treatment on women with difficulties to conceive.

It appears that the Thai government have not seriously implemented any plan to develop the Tien-Ean people. They were left to continue with their traditional lifestyle. According to researchers based in Mahidol University, discussions are under way to ensure these people are given the national identity cards (ID). The group of Tien-Ean respondents did inform this research team that they did manage to obtain ID for members of their group.
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