
To Be or Not To Be *Orang Siam* among *Patani Melayu* Migrant Workers in Tom Yam Restaurants in Malaysia¹

Suttiporn Bunmak²

Abstract

Oghae Nayu (Malay Muslim people) who are Malay ethnic from the lower southern Thailand are also one of the unauthorized foreign workers in Malaysia. Tom Yam restaurants are Thai *Halal* food business which sells Thai national identity among *Oghae Nayu*. This paper seeks to explain the role of Thai national identities created and used by *Nayu* workers in Malaysia. Drawing up examples based on six months between 2008, November to 2009, April of qualitative approach fieldwork, participant observation and in-depth interviews of *Nayu* migrant workers from the lower southern provinces of Thailand employed at Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur by use of snowballing technique.

Tom Yam restaurants as a Thai *Halal* cuisine are popular among Malaysian Muslims scattered across Malaysia. However, there are no Tom Yam restaurants in lower southern Thailand similar to those in Malaysia. The first Tom yam restaurant run in Kuala Lumpur in the 1970s by *Oghae Siye Islae* who are Thai-speaking Muslim originally from Songkhla, Thailand and then the restaurants spread out through *Oghae Nayu* who are Malay-speaking Muslims from Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, Thailand. These businesses continue to employ *Nayu* migrant workers from their home who speak the same language as owners. The same ethnicity and culture are not only reason that why restaurant owners prefer to employ them and also using *Nayu* workers for Thai identity serve to sell Thai cuisine.

Introduction

*Nayu*³ migration flows to Malaysia are not a new phenomenon: there has been cross border mobility of relatives and other personal crossings throughout history both before British colonialism and after Malaysian independence. During the British period in 1940 there was an agreement that allowed traffic to cross the boundary between British Malaya and Thailand. Since Malaysian independence and the increase in economic growth in Malaysia there have been flows of low-skilled workers from lower southern Thailand to meet Malaysia's labour import demands especially in the low paid service sectors of the economy which in turn has led to an increase in *Nayu* illegal migration flows.

This study uses a qualitative approach to understand social reality on its own terms, based on the understanding of people themselves and on observations of their interactions in natural settings (Gubrium and Holstein 1997). Qualitative methods allowed me to access the inner reality of human experience because they emphasize the importance of examining social phenomena from the point of view of participants. However, Fetterman (1998) and Berg (2004) recommend using a variety of methods to gather data because it encourages rigour. Research methodologies each have their limitations, but by using a variety of methods, the

¹ This paper was presented to the international conference on international studies in Kuala Lumpur 1-2 December 2010. This draft version please do not cite without author's permission.

² A lecturer in Social Science, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Thaksin University, Thailand Email: neng_nida@hotmail.com

³ *Nayu*: this concept is defined and discussed further below

negative effects of each can be minimised. Accordingly, this study obtained primary data via in-depth interviews but I also studied documents and used direct observation. It focuses mainly on *Nayu* migrant workers but also draws on a variety of other key informants, including employers. The snowballing interview technique was important because a large majority of the *Nayu* workers were working illegally and, hence, are unauthorised. Given that there were no records on illegal migrant workers to be used as a sampling frame, snowball sampling was used. Snowballing would also help me to uncover and effectively delineate the networks of which these workers are a part. I conducted interviews with sixty migrant workers.

This paper involves an investigation of *Nayu* migrant workers from lower southern Thailand and their border crossing to Malaysia that shapes their experiences as temporary migrant workers. The paper has a dual objective to elucidate the complex social relations in Thai national identities in which *Nayu* migrant workers operate and use within Thailand and Malaysia. This paper focuses on the historical aspects and socio-economic contexts of lower southern Thailand and Malaysia and the more recent labour migration flows between the two countries.

To Be Melayu in Thailand

The vast majority, 94.2 percent of the population of Thailand is Buddhist. Muslims are the main religious minority making up nearly five percent of the population. Muslims live mainly in two parts of Thailand, in lower Southern Thailand and in the Central Region including Bangkok. Almost all Muslims from the Central Region speak standard Thai, are urban and are involved in trade. They have originated from South Asia and the Middle East over several centuries. They differ from the *Oghae Nayu* in lower Southern Thailand who are ethnically Malay, speak Malay dialect in their home and have Islamic religion. Southern Muslims are the original locals. They live in rural areas and are involved in agriculture and mostly speak the Malay dialect. Muslims form a majority in Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun make up 82 percent of the population in Narathiwat and Pattani, 68.9 percent in Yala and 67.8 percent in Satun. But Muslims in Songkhla are still a minority in 2000 (see Table 1.1).

In Malaysia, Islam is the official religion. All Malays and some indigenous Bumiputras are Muslim (about 60 percent of the population) and follow Islamic law according to the Koran (Liew 2003). They follow the same customs and religion as the *Oghae Nayu* of lower southern Thailand. This section provides an overview of Malay-ness of *Oghae Nayu* while they are in lower southern Thailand including its history, social and cultural contexts of *Oghae Nayu* in Thailand.

(a) History

The Malaya Peninsula begins at Singapore in the south and stretches north along the Kra Isthmus to the Songkhla, Yala and Narathiwat provinces. In the north, the Malay Peninsula is currently part of the southern provinces of Thailand. A large number of Malays live in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat and in some districts of Songkhla. Although it is currently located in Thailand, a largely Buddhist country, this area is often seen as part of the Malay world (Barnard and Maier 2004). The lower southern provinces of Thailand and the northern states of Malaysia have a long historical relationship, extending well before the establishment of the British colony of Malaya.

Although *Oghae Nayu* live in the southern provinces of Thailand, they are not the original people of this area. Indigenous Pangans and Sakais were the original people of the land. Hindus from India arrived and took control of this area several hundred years before the birth of Christ (Syukri 1985, pp 4-8). Then people from Siam (present-day Thailand) moved south

and ruled over the north of the Malay Peninsula in the fourth and early fifth centuries A.D. (Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, pp2-3; Syukri 1985, p8). Later in the eighth century A.D., Malays from Sumatra arrived in this area and settled on the coast, while Siamese people settled in the interior after the power of the Siamese in Malaya began to weaken. Later the number of Malays from Sumatra increased and they become more powerful (Syukri 1985, pp8-9). Patani⁴ in its origin, was not Malay and not Islamic, but the people who came to settle in this area were Hindus and Buddhists.

In the ninth century, the Islamic religion arrived from India to the Malay Peninsula then spread through the Malay Peninsula as far north as the Kingdom of Patani. Once dominated by Hindus and Buddhists, the kingdom now shifted to Islam. Later all the kingdoms in the Malay Peninsula under the rule of Siam-Pahang, Kedah, Kelantan and Patani- became Islamic. Over more than three centuries, Islam spread among the Malays and the King of Patani converted to Islam between the middle of the fourteenth and the middle of the fifteenth centuries (Teeuw and Wyatt 1970, pp5-6; Che Man 1990, pp32-34). Soon after that, the royal family and then the people of the kingdom followed Islam which became the national religion (Syukri 1985; Leete 2007).

When the British colony of Malaya was established in 1909, the states of Patani, Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, and Perlis were the under the control of Siam. However, there were many efforts by Malays to resist Siamese governance and to gain their independence. In 1909 under the Anglo-Siamese Treaty (or Bangkok Treaty) between Siam and Britain, Siam ceded its control of Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Perlis to Britain. However, Siam did not bequeath Patani to Britain. Pattani Province, Narathiwat (Re-ngae) Province, Songkhla (Singgora) Province and Yala Province including Satun (Setul) Province were separated from Kedah and remained under the rule of Siam (Andaya and Andaya 1982; Wyatt 1984; Syukri 1985). This ended the Siamese control and it separated Patani from the north of the Malay Peninsula which now constitutes the northern states of contemporary Malaysia.

This history is the major reason that Malay-speaking Muslims in Thailand have close ties on the other side of the border, in particular with the people of Kelantan (Haemindra 1977; Yusuf 2007). Moreover, although this is illegal there are many Malay-speaking Muslims in Thailand who hold dual citizenship in both Thailand and Malaysia. People cross the border to pursue their common traditional way of life and come to visit their relatives. British Malaya and Siam signed an agreement in 1940 that gave local people the right to hold a special border passes to move freely between Thailand and Malaysia. This agreement, still in force, allows people who live in Songkhla, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and Pattani in Thailand to go without a passport twenty five kilometres into Perlis, Kedah, Perak and Kelantan in Malaysia.

(b) Social and Culture Contexts of *Oghae Nayu*

There are many ethnicities in Thailand. The main ethnic group is the Central Thai who constitute about 50 percent of the population and mainly live in the Central Region around Bangkok. *Oghae Nayu* constitute only 2.2 percent of the population but form the majority in the lower southern Provinces excluding Songkhla (see Table 1.1). However, this area also contains Thai Muslims, Thai Chinese and Thai Buddhists who are distinctly separate groups with their own ethnic identities. *Oghae Nayu* are an ethnic group who speak Malay dialect (*Bahasa Melayu*) and who have Malay identity. The cultural identity of the *Oghae Nayu* in lower southern Thailand is based on Malay culture and on Islam. In particular, *Oghae Nayu* in Thailand speak a language very similar to the main language of the Northern Malaysian States.

⁴ Patani denotes the historical Kingdom of Patani, but Pattani refers to the current Pattani province.

Table 1.1 Religion and Language in the Study Area, 2000

	Pattani	Yala	Narathiwat	Songkhla	Thailand
Thai Muslims- who speak Thai (<i>Thai Islae</i>)	4.1	2.8	1.6	18.6	2.4
Malay Muslims-who speak Malay (<i>Oghae Nayu</i>)	76.6	66.1	80.4	4.6	2.2
Total Muslims	80.7	68.9	82.0	23.2	4.6
Buddhists (<i>Siye</i>)	19.2	31.0	17.9	76.6	94.2
other	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	1.2
Total Number	595,985	415,537	662,350	1,255,662	60,916,400

Source: National Statistical Office, Population and Housing Census 2000 for Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Songkhla and Satun Provinces.

Oghae Nayu in Thailand attempt to differentiate their own identity from that of Thai Muslims and Thai Buddhists in Thai society. They face many obstacles in achieving this during World War II, the Pribun Government (1938-1945) implemented a one nation-state policy which attempted to merge all ethnicities into the Thai culture (Winichakul 1994; Laungaramsri 2003; Yusuf 2007). Thai national integration was to be achieved through education and by a process of nation-building whereby Thai-ness would be developed through language, religion and the monarchy. This construction of Thai-ness included *Oghae Nayu* and when Siam became Thailand the word for ‘Malay Muslim’ was to be replaced by ‘Thai Muslim’ within the Thai polity to promote national culture. However, *Oghae Nayu* still do not call themselves *Oghae Siye* (Siamese people) or *Oghae Thai* (Thai people) as to them the Thai identity is by definition Buddhist. *Oghae Nayu* view their ethnic and religious identity as different from Thai Buddhists. *Oghae Nayu* continue to call themselves *Oghae Nayu*⁵ (Malay people) and to call Thai people *Oghae Siye* or *Oghae Thai*.

Moreover, when *Oghae Nayu* go to Malaysia, they do not call themselves *Oghae Siye* or *Oghae Thai*. They call themselves *Orang Melayu Tani* (Patani Malay people) in standard Malay. *Oghae Nayu* from Thailand do not call Malaysians *Oghea Nayu* (*Orang Melayu* in standard Malay). They call Malaysians *Oghae Malaysian* (*Orang Malaysian*). Thus they also delineate their own identity from Malaysians in Malaysia. In addition, Malaysians also call them *Orang Melayu Tani* or *Orang Melayu Siam* (Siam Malay people). From the *Oghae Nayu* viewpoint the word “Thai” is used to refer to Buddhist Thais. The word *Nayu* in Malay dialect or *Melayu* in standard Malay means Muslim-ness and Malay-ness as all *Oghae Nayu* are Muslims.

On the other hand, Buddhist Thais, in particular in the South of Thailand, call *Nayu* people *Khaek* or *Khaek Malay*. *Khaek* is an adjective and pronoun referring to Muslim people in general, including Muslim immigrants from Iran, Iraq, India, Cambodia and other countries. *Oghae Nayu* view *Khaek* as a derogatory term but Thai Buddhist people use this word to indicate that an individual is not Thai. According to Winichakul (1994, p5):

Khaek also denotes Muslim, but by no means exclusively so. That is to say, a reference is sometimes made regardless of whether or not a certain characteristic really belongs to any particular nation or ethnic group, because the aim of discourse is to identify the un-Thainess rather than to define the characteristic of any particular people.

Table 1.2 below summarise the various terms which Malay-speaking Muslims, Thai-speaking Muslims, Buddhist Thais and Malaysians uses to refer to themselves and to each other. In this

⁵ *Nayu* is the word that Malay speaking Muslims in lower Southern Thailand use to refer to themselves. Accordingly, it is the word that I use in this thesis to refer to them, also.

thesis, which concerns *Oghae Nayu*, I have used their terminology and their linguistic form of reference.

Table 1.2 the Name of People between Malay, Thai Muslim and Thai

<i>The subject person</i>	<i>The object person</i>			
	Malay Muslims who speak Malay	Thai Muslims who speak Thai	Thai Buddhists	Malaysians
Malay Muslims who speak Malay	<i>Nayu</i> ¹	<i>Islae</i> ¹ / <i>Thai Islae</i> / <i>Siye</i> ¹ <i>Islae</i>	<i>Siye/Thai</i>	<i>Malaysian</i>
Thai Muslims who speak Thai	<i>Kheak</i> ²	<i>Thai Islam</i> / <i>Islam</i>	<i>Thai</i>	<i>Malay</i>
Thai Buddhists	<i>Kheak</i>	<i>Kheak</i>	<i>Thai</i>	<i>Malay</i>
Malaysians	<i>Melayu</i> ³ <i>Tani</i> / <i>Melayu Siam</i>	<i>Thai Islam</i> / <i>Siam Islam</i>	<i>Thai/Siam</i>	<i>Melayu</i>

1 in Patani Malay dialect

2 in Thai standard language

3 in Malay standard language

The Thai government policy of nation-building attempted to integrate *Oghae Nayu* people in southern Thailand into Thai society by teaching their children Thai language and culture in government schools (Haemindra 1977). Islamic private schools reserve religious studies to integrate academic and vocational subjects into their curriculum. The curriculum of Islamic private schools accords to the structure of Thai government national schools which teach the standard Thai language. The Thai government school curriculum emphasizes speaking standard Thai (the official national language which is based on the Central Thai dialect), Buddhism (to be Thai is to be Buddhist) and devotion to the monarchy (to be Thai is to be loyal to the King). However, the government allowed Islamic private schools to teach the Thai government curricula as well as Arabic and Malay languages and Islam. Southern Thailand has both a government and Islamic private schools.

And at the same time, many *Oghae Nayu* often feel that they are unfairly treated by the Thai government, and by Thai Buddhists in general (Haemindra 1977; Yusuf 2007) and *Nayu* parents are likely to send their children to *Pondok* schools (traditional Islamic boarding schools) or to Islamic private schools to avoid assimilation into Thai Buddhist culture. In addition, many Muslim students move to study in Malaysia to seek their religious and education from Muslim country. *Oghae Nayu* view Thai public schools, where Thai language is used as the medium of instruction and learning, as a threat to their Islamic culture and identity (Haemindra 1977; Yusuf 2007). In the *Pondok* schools children are taught by *tok guru*, the traditional religious teacher. They operate as boarding schools and students live in accommodation within the school compound which they either build on their own or inherit from graduating seniors. The curriculum of *Pondok* schools teaches only religious studies, Islamic history, local history and Arabic language without any other academic and vocational subjects. There are around 321 *Pondok* schools which teach Islamic Studies in the Malay dialect, and there are around 327 Islamic private schools in southern Thailand. An estimated 85 percent of *Nayu* students attend Islamic private schools and *Pondok* in Yala, Narathiwat, Pattani, Songkhla and Satun provinces (Liow 2009).

Thus it is clear that *Oghae Nayu* have maintained their own identity of Malay-ness and Muslim-ness through their language, customs, tradition and religion like Malay ethnic in the northern states of Malaysia. They have a long history links to the northern part of the Malaya peninsular. Religion, language and ethnic traditions create attitudes and behaviours that differ between *Oghae Nayu*, *Siye* and *Islae* (Knodel, Gray et al. 1999). The Malay culture shapes the identity of *Oghae Nayu* as their ethnicity relates to the Malay way of life, beliefs and

behaviour. *Oghae Nayu* have lifestyles and beliefs different from *Oghae Siye* and *Oghae Islae* which they maintain through their practice of traditional culture. They also visit relatives and friends in Malaysia but maintain fewer social contacts with *Oghae Siye* in Thailand. *Oghae Nayu* live a culture similar to that in the Kelantan State and Terengganu State of Northern Malaysia. There are close relationships between *Oghae Nayu* in Thailand and *Oghae Malaysian* in these Northern States. However, *Islae* who are Thai Muslims speaking Thai have attitudes and behaviours similar to *Siye*, despite their religious differences, they have always maintained close social relations with each other.

To Be Thai in Tom Yam Restaurants Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur has many Tom Yam restaurants. The first Tom Yam restaurant was established in Kuala Lumpur in the 1970s by Armad⁶, who was a Thai-speaking Muslim originally from Songkhla, Thailand. He decided to open a small family restaurant in Malaysia which sold Thai dishes, including Tom Yam soup made by his wife. At this time, there were no restaurants which sold Thai food in Kuala Lumpur. *Nayu* people did not know Thai food, including Tom Yam soup. Tom Yam is popular with Malaysian Muslims and Tom Yam soup is the main Thai dish served, so Armad's restaurant was well patronised.

This led to the restaurant being called a Tom Yam restaurant, rather than a Thai restaurant to attract Muslim customers for whom the word "Thai" means "Buddhist". They are known as "Tom Yam restaurants" also because they are operated by Muslims from the lower southern provinces of Thailand who are not called "Thai" by Buddhist Thais but "*Khaek*", a derogatory term meaning alien. Muslim people from these areas do not usually call themselves "Thai" either but they call themselves *Melayu* (Malay).

In the lower southern provinces of Thailand, there are no Tom Yam restaurants similar to those in Malaysia. Almost all Muslim people from these areas do not know how to prepare traditional Thai dishes. The restaurants for Muslim people in the lower southern provinces of Thailand are called *Raan Ahaan Islam* (Islam restaurant) or *Raan Ahaan Khaek* (alien restaurant), which means Muslim food restaurants or Halal food restaurants. They are quite different from Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia as Muslim restaurants in Thailand sell only Muslim dishes, which differ from Thai dishes.

Armad's business became increasingly successful. Within a year, he brought his young brother and two relatives from his home town to work in his restaurant. All of them followed his lead and set up their own Tom Yam restaurants. They also were Thai-speaking Muslims from Songkhla, Thailand. After a few years, two of Armad's friends in Malaysia, Malaysian nationals with *Nayu* mothers and Malaysian Muslim fathers, followed his success and set up Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur. However, unlike Armad and his relatives, these friends were *Nayu* from Pattani province, Thailand. Thus, although the first Tom Yam restaurant was developed in Kuala Lumpur by Thai-speaking Muslims, the business then spread through Armad's social ties into two types of Tom Yam restaurants, those run by Thai-speaking Muslims from Songkhla, Thailand and those run by *Oghae Nayu* who were Malay-speaking Muslims from Pattani, Thailand.

As the Tom Yam restaurants extended, restaurant owners continued to employ workers from their home towns who spoke the same language as them. In turn several migrant workers who were employed in these restaurants, set up their own restaurants with both Thai-speaking and Malay-speaking Muslims when they had more experience and enough funding. Although

⁶ This name is a pseudonym. The relation of Armand told me the social history of Tom Yam restaurants in Kuala Lumpur. Many first generation Thai Muslim restaurant owners told me the same story.

Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia started with Thai-speaking Muslims, *Oghae Nayu* ownership increased, as ex-employees who had the advantage of speaking the Malay dialect, which is quite similar to the official standard Malay opened their own restaurants. Nowadays there are many Tom Yam restaurants scattered across Malaysia. Currently, Muslim owners from Thailand and several Malaysian Muslims run Tom Yam restaurants and employ *Nayu* workers.

Although there are some Malay and Indonesian chefs who were previously co-workers with *Nayu* migrant workers in Tom Yam restaurants, the food they prepare has a different taste to the food cooked by *Nayu* chefs. As a result, this position is usually reserved only for *Nayu* migrant workers and a few migrant workers from the other parts of Thailand because Tom Yam is considered Thai cuisine, and both customers and *Nayu* migrant workers firmly believe that a non-Thai chef can never produce the delicious taste of Thai dishes which only Thai people can cook, so the chefs have to be Thais. Several *Nayu* workers employed in these restaurants consider that these restaurants embody the concept of Thai-ness. Surprisingly, most *Nayu* workers have never tasted or cooked this spicy soup in their homes. However, the term “Tom Yam people,” which refers to the *Nayu* workers employed in Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia, is well-known, wide-spread and accepted by *Nayu* workers themselves. Normally, young *Nayu* workers become the foreign migrant workforce in the Tom Yam restaurants in Malaysia.

In addition, Tom Yam food in Malaysia is Halal (cooked according to Muslim food law) and supplied to Malaysian Muslims in an Islamic society, so the chefs should be Muslims. Thus the cuisine of Tom Yam in Malaysia is considered a unique speciality of Muslims from Thailand. Many *Nayu* people are able to find work in Malaysia in Tom Yam restaurants due to the idea that only Thais can prepare Tom Yam, and only Muslims can cook Halal food. Some reports by Chidchanok Rahimmula (2008) suggest that there are 100,000-150,000 migrants working in Tom Yam restaurants all over Malaysia, while there are approximately 5,000 Tom Yam restaurants owned by *Nayu* entrepreneurs. Although this study does not indicate the scale of Tom Yam restaurants and *Nayu* migrant workers, from the interviews with key informants it can be roughly estimated that there are about 4,000 Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs and 80,000 migrant workers in this business.

Nayu workers are preferred to work in Tom Yam restaurants because Thai food at Tom Yam restaurants is considered so unique that only Thais can cook such exotic dishes. Because of this notion of Thai-ness in Thai food preparation, restaurant entrepreneurs employ only *Nayu* migrant workers. The skills required for Thai cuisine are highly valued by *Nayu* workers in the Tom Yam restaurants as such knowledge of Thai-ness and the requisite culinary skill is considered to be specific to *Nayu*. Thus, *Nayu* people take advantages of this, using their national identity culinary skills and knowledge of Thai dishes, to be employed in the Tom Yam restaurants. Moreover, customers in Malaysia expect that the Thai dishes they consume in Tom Yam restaurants have been prepared and cooked by Thai people. This is based on the notion of Thai-ness which means that an exotic Thai dish can only be known and cooked by Thai people.

Hafizzuddin: I hire *Nayu* workers because these are Thai dishes which only “*Khon Thai*” (Thai people) know how to cook well. Malaysians do not know how to cook a Tom Yam soup. Although another person may know how to cook it, it isn’t a good dish unless it’s cooked by “*Khon Thai*”. [*Nayu* Female Owner]

The notion of Thai-ness only can product an exotic Thai dish by Thai people. Similarly, the sense of Thai studies among many Thai scholars thing that a study of Thai studies by Thai scholars can product profoundly know better than non-Thai scholars in particular Western scholars who are not a part of Thai-ness. As Thongchai Winichakul (1994, pp7-8) point out

that: Thai people, scholars or not, have always been warned not to *tamkon farang* (“tag along behind the Westerners). For them Thai-ness, Thailand, Thai people, Thai studies, or whatever Thai, is something the *farang* can approach but never reach with the utmost intimacy that Thai people can . . . studies of Thai by Thai people have been located deep within the paradigmatic discourse of We-self.

In contrast in an ethnic restaurant, the customers might expect co ethnic staff as linking between co ethnic personnel and ethnic product through the notion of culture specific skills than non co ethnic staff in the ethnic restaurant (Butter, Masurel et al. 2007). The notion of culture specific skills is behind the employment of co ethnics in ethnic businesses. It is seen that not only employees and employers preferred co ethnic workers in the ethnic restaurant the customers also expected co ethnic personnel.

As well as being unique in their culinary skills, *Nayu* workers are also cheap to employ. The Tom Yam restaurants provide only limited and poor working conditions. Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs cannot afford to employ local workers. Consequently, they rely heavily on *Nayu* migrants who are cheap so as to earn high profits and make a success of their business. So, it is not surprising that almost all Tom Yam restaurant entrepreneurs prefer recruiting *Nayu* workers from Thailand. They need cheap labour and they employed *Nayu* workers although they are illegal.

In addition, Lakoan Thai (Thai soap operas) have become important to the Thai national identity of *Nayu* workers. The Thai soap operas use Thai national language and some Thai *Isan* dialect. Thai standard language is not spoken at home by *Nayu* migrant workers, and usually their parents have only a limited understanding of Thai standard language and are not proficient at speaking it because the older generation has not received the government education which teaches Thai standard language. Thai soap operas affirm the identity and ideology of Thai Buddhist people in Thai society, but they are nonetheless popular among *Nayu* women in Malaysia. A few Thai soap operas are shown on Malaysian Television and while I was in the field, one was shown twice a week from 3.00 a.m. to 4.00 a.m. on Channel Three. This soap opera is in Thai national language including some *Isan* Thai dialect and uses subtitles in the Malay national language. There were many episodes broadcast in three months, and although it was three years old, the *Nayu* workers enjoyed watching it. Its theme is romantic love among young people and it deals with family problems among young urban Thais. This soap opera shows Thai Buddhist culture in Bangkok which is quite different to the *Nayu* culture.

Nayu in particular women like to watch these soap operas with their colleagues. However, some workers' accommodations have no television so they go to watch soap operas at their friends' places nearby after they finish work. A few owners have set up satellite dishes without licences for their employees. These workers can watch Thai television channels when they have free time. However, they sometimes have to work while Thai soap operas are on air. But the Thai soap operas also are reproduced on DVDs and VCDs. Although these soap operas on VCD are quite out of date, the *Nayu* workers still enjoy watching them and they bring VCDs from Thailand when they return to Malaysia.

During my fieldwork, I watched Thai soap opera with *Nayu* migrant workers in their accommodation and their restaurants. In many accommodations, there are Thai soap opera magazines and in other Thai magazines in the corner of the room or on a shelf under the television. *Nayu* women like to read Thai soap opera magazines and Thai star gossip magazines in Malaysia. They do not read Thai magazines much when they are at home because they can not afford to buy them and some women are not able to read. When they and their friends return to Thailand, they bring these magazines to their friends in Malaysia. I was always asked to bring Thai magazines for them when I returned from Thailand. They like to

read the Thai magazines and then they share them with their women friends after they have finished reading them. Reading Thai magazines and watching Thai soap opera gives *Nayu* workers a sense of home and Thai-ness when they are in Malaysia. Even though they are discriminated against in Thailand, it appears that when they are living in Malaysia, *Nayu* workers identify more with Thai culture and the Thai national identity than they identify with Malay culture despite its linguistic and religious affinities with *Nayu* culture.

Moreover, Thai popular music is the most popular form of entertainment among the *Nayu* workers in Malaysia, original music from Thailand flows through transnational networks crossing the border and linking the migrant networks themselves. The Thai music is sent by Bluetooth through their friends in Malaysia, from one friend's cell phone to another friend's. The Thai popular music in music folder of cell phone goes through one friend's cell phone to another friend's cell phone. The music files are exchanged and spread out among their networks in Malaysia.

While *Nayu* workers who are waiters are without customers, they use tiny mobile phones with ear buds to listen to Thai popular music. In the kitchen, there is the sound of Thai popular music which is turned on by *Nayu* workers who are working. Listening to Thai popular music on a cell phone often plays a key role in their lifestyle as they are Thai nationals even though they are *Nayu* in Thailand. Young *Nayu* workers in Malaysia enjoy Thai popular music because it provides a sense of Thai identity as selected in Thai urban Buddhist culture. However, only young people listen to Thai popular music. Older *Nayu* workers do not pay attention to Thai or Malay music.

The major styles of Thai popular music are *Pleng Lukgrung* (country music), *Pleng Lukthung* (urban music), *Pleng String* (young urban music), and *Pleng Puea Chiwit* (song of life music). However, the *Nayu* migrant workers prefer *Pleng String* and *Pleng Puea Chiwit*. *Pleng String* is quite popular among young men and women. It deals with the lifestyles of and romantic love between young Thai Buddhist men and women. *Pleng Puea Chiwit* is quite popular among *Nayu* male workers. Some men like it because it concerns social problems and has political content in opposition to conservative tradition.

Similarly, another study on Thai *Isan* migrant workers in Singapore found that the three genres of Thai popular music are quite popular among Thai *Isan* migrant workers in Singapore. These music genres represent their Thai *Isan* ethnic and Thai national identities overseas (Kitiarsa 2006). However, these migrant workers differ from *Nayu* workers in Malaysia as *Nayu* workers are mostly young migrant and Malay ethnic speaking only Malay dialect and national standard Thai language.

Listening to Thai popular music helps *Nayu* workers feel closer to home while they are working in Malaysia. Although this music is in Thai language, they enjoy listening to it even though they are able to listen to Malay popular music. There are few persons who listen to Malay popular music while they are in Malaysia. Listening to Thai popular music is a part of their cross-border activities which involve renewing a sense of Thai identity among *Nayu* workers. Thai popular music links them and the Thai nation closer in their hearts while they are outside Thailand.

It can be seen that *Nayu* workers create their new Thai identity when they cross border to work in Tom Yam restaurants, Malaysia. Their identity differs from Malay Malaysians to show themselves as Patani Malay from Thailand. As literature suggests, the notion of identity is instead perceived as being fluid, so that it may be change and more influenced by outside forces between the self and others (Heide 2002: Hall 1992). Identity is not therefore more fixed notion. *Oghae Nayu* still maintain their own Malay identity when they are in Thailand to differentiate their identity from that of Thai Buddhist identity as person who speaks the

Malay language, professes Islam and habitually follows Malay customs in Thailand. I argue that *Oghae Nayu* show their own social boundaries in contrast to the surrounding Thai Buddhist people to seeing themselves as Malay ethnic identity. However, *Oghae Nayu* create and use their own new identity after migrated to work in Malaysia. Their new identities are created to sell Thai national identity for selling Thai *Halal* food in Tom Yam restaurants. It can be seen that *Oghae Nayu* have much one identities both Malay ethnic identity and Thai national identity as ethnic minority on the Thai national margin.

Conclusion

Tom Yam restaurants as Thai *Halal* cuisines are popular among Malaysian Muslims scattering across Malaysia. However, there are no such Tom Yam restaurants in lower southern Thailand as in Malaysia. The first Tom Yam restaurant was run in Kuala Lumpur in the 1970s by *Oghae Siye Islae*, a Thai-speaking Muslim originally from Thailand, and, after that, such restaurants were spread out by *Oghae Nayu*, Malay-speaking Muslims from Thailand. The owners of these businesses continue to employ *Nayu* illegal migrant workers from their home who speak the same language as they. In addition, *Nayu* migrant workers are likely to be involved in Tom Yam restaurants more than in other businesses.

Many *Oghae Nayu*, in particular young men, migrate for Malaysia to work in Tom Yam restaurants. A number of *Nayu* migrant workers keep going to work in these restaurants because there are migrant networks supporting them to get a job and cross the border. In addition, they like to work in Tom Yam restaurants because they can use both their Thai-ness and Muslim identity to serve in Thai *Halal* cuisine for Malaysian Muslim customers: they use the notion of Thai-ness to work in Tom Yam restaurants because only Thais can cook authentic Thai food in Malaysia, while at the same time they represent their Malay Muslim ethnical identity through their connection with customers and also refuse Thai identity while they are in Thailand. The notion of Thai-ness among *Nayu* migrant workers is their advantages in getting employed without a work permit as it is assumed that only native Thais can produce real, quality Thai cuisine. This assumed cultural skills lead to limited opportunities for other foreign workers to work in Tom Yam restaurants.

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