Subgroup ‘names’ of the Sakai (Thailand) and the Semang (Malaysia): a literature survey

SHUICHI NAGATA1,2*

1Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto, 100 St. George Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 3G3
2School of Social Welfare, Tokyo University of Social Welfare, Iseaki, Japan

Received 2 July 2003; accepted 1 August 2005

Abstract After a long interruption due to the Pacific War and Malayan Emergency, anthropological research on the foraging populations of southern Thailand and northern Malaysia was resumed with renewed vigor by Thai, Malaysian, and international scholars. However, the link between recent findings and those reported by earlier workers in the region is often not made explicit. One difficulty in constructing a clear linkage is the lack of unambiguous identities or ‘names’ of the foraging groups under investigation. The present paper addresses this problem, examining the ‘names’ of the Sakai and Semang subgroups reported in the literature, evaluating the status of their referents, and discussing the reasons why subgroup names have been obscure.

Key words: Sakai, Semang, tribe, identify, foragers

Introduction

One of the difficulties a field researcher encounters in the study of Orang Asli, the aboriginal peoples of Malaysia, is the name of the people under study. Who are these people one is studying? What is the name of the tribe? Do the people form one tribe or are they ‘mixed’? Is it a tribe or a segment of some tribe? These problems are crucial not only in anchoring one’s study but also in learning the extent of geographical spread of the people. Any distributional study of cultural groups must begin with some identification mark of the people in question. This, however, is by no means simple.

The problem of ‘naming’ was taken up by almost all early researchers, including Vaughan Stevens and Miklukho-Maclay (von Miklukho-Maclay, 1878), Skeat and Blagden (1966: p. 24, first published in 1906), and others (de Morgan 1849: p. 321) as “the Samang, the Bila otherwise hill Bila and Ryots.” While the terms Bla, Bila, or wila ceased to be in use as a designation of a people, the Semang became predominantly a term to refer to foraging populations in the peninsula. But its etymology was a matter of much debate. Skeat said “The term ‘Semang’ has never been satisfactorily explained” (Skeat and Blagden, 1966: p. 22), but Schebesta (1952: p. 75) went on to speculate that it originated from a Lanoh word, sma’, meaning a human in which the last glottal stop had been changed, according to Schebesta, to velar nasal, ng, by the Perak Malays. However, it is unclear if this interpretation is correct.

The Semang do not call themselves Semang, which some of them understood to mean a legendary people other than...
themselves (Schebesta, 1952: p. 73). Wilkinson even says: “(t) (Semang) has come to be regarded as contemptuous, so that no wild tribesman will answer it. ‘We are not Semang,’ say the negritos of Ijok, ‘we are Sakai of the Swamps; if you want Semang you will find them in the hills behind us’ ” (Wilkinson, 1910: p. 9, quoted in Evans, 1968: p. 20, first published in 1937; see also Annandale and Robinson, 1903: p. 20).

My experience is the same as Schebesta’s (1952: p. 73), who wrote that he seldom heard the word from the Malays, let alone the ‘Negritos’ themselves. This is one reason, Schebesta (1952: p. 73) says, that Evans avoided using it and adopted instead ‘Negrito’. Another reason for Evans’ rejection of Semang is the fact that other terms are used to refer to Negritos of the other parts of the peninsula, e.g. Batek of northwestern Pahang (or the much quoted term, Pangan) on the east coast (Evans, 1968: p. 20). More recently Nicholas (2000: p. 3, note 3) expressed his preference for the term ‘Nigrito’ since Semang carries “a negative connotation when used by some of the Senoi groups” (see also Benjamin, 2002).

Schebesta (1952: p. 76), however, found in Semang an Austroasiatic root meaning ‘human’. On this ground, he opposed Evans’ rejection of Semang to refer to all the wooly-haired people of the peninsula (“‘alle’ Schattierungen der ‘Ulotrichen’ Malayas” (Schebesta, 1952: p. 78)) and adopted it instead. In other words, Schebesta’s Semang is an etic, not emic, term to refer to Malayan Negritos. To use his own expression, it is a scientific term [‘ein wissenschaftlichen Terminus’ (Schebesta, 1952: p. 72)] and not ‘Lokalbenennung’ (Schebesta, 1952: pp. 75, 81, 83) or a parochial term used by certain peoples in certain places.

In what follows, I use Semang in Schebesta’s sense, i.e. wooly-, ‘fuzzy’- (Evans, 1925: p. 44), or ‘fuzzy’- (Hamilton, 2002: p. 82) haired nomadic hunter-gatherers, who form one of the three categories of the Orang Asli, the two others being Senoi and Aboriginal Malay. Linguistically they belong to Diffloth’s (1975: p. 2) and Benjamin’s (1976: p. 43) ‘Northern Aslian’, which includes Chewong but excludes the people like Lanoh and Semaq Beri. The last two are also hunters-gatherers but whose languages do not belong to Northern Aslian.

It is important to note that although Sakai is no longer used to refer to the aborigines of Malaysia, it is the term for the aboriginal populations in southern Thailand provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala, Satun, Phatthalung, and Trang. In addition to Sakai, Sakae, Semang, Senoi, Ka-nung, Orang Asli, Aukae Asli, Negreto, and Ngoh are also presently used by the Thais to refer to the foragers of Trang, Phatthalung, and Satun (see also Hamilton, 2002: p. 82). Thonghom (1995: p. 6) and The Institute of Southern Thai Studies (2001: p. 2245) also mention Semang and Negritos as referring to the Thai Sakai but their use in this sense appears to be limited to academic writings.

In recent writings on the Thai Negritos, terms such as Meniq (Porath, 2002: p. 100), Mani (Albrecht and Moser, 1998), or Maniq (Bishop, 1996; Hamilton, 2002: p. 82) are used to refer to this group, but these terms have yet to achieve the status of general acceptance. Their meaning and the inappropriateness of using them as a term to replace Sakai is discussed below.

**Tribal Names**

How then is a ‘tribe’ to be found? Rudolf Martin (1905: p. 193) proposed that only those names used by the people to refer to themselves should be adopted as the tribal name of the people in question (see also Schebesta, 1952: p. 80). In other words, he proposed an emic designation, according to which, for example, he used ‘Mendi’ or ‘Menik’ to refer to the Semang of Perak (Martin, 1905: p. 194). But this, as he himself pointed out earlier, goes back to the Mon–Khmer root, meaning ‘man (Mensch)’ (Martin, 1905: p. 193). Schebesta (1952: pp. 80–81) points out that this word, in its various forms, cannot be taken as tribal names since they are not proper nouns but common nouns meaning ‘human being’ or ‘man’. In fact, however, such a word is still used for ‘tribal’ names as in the case of Batek, meaning ‘human’, and Maniq (Bishop, 1996), the group in Ban Rea, Than To district of the province of Yala (Duangchand, 1984: p. 5, maps L and M). On the other hand, ‘Jahai’, according to van der Sluys (1999: p. 307), means “we who walk the trail of our ancestors”, *ja* meaning “time before” and *hai* “to walk in single file along the forest trails”.

Schebesta’s (1952: p. 84) criteria for a name of a ‘tribe’...
are: (1) native statement of the Semang themselves (endonym); (2) dialectical differences; and (3) differences in cultural practices, which are often associated with differences in dialects.

Of course, these criteria had to be fine-tuned by querying the neighboring tribes and ascertaining the difference between their own name and the name their neighbors used for them. Schebesta (1952: p. 85) notes that though there is no name for the Semang as a whole, the respective Semang ‘tribes’ have their own names. On the basis of these criteria, he goes on to identify Semang ‘tribes’ and classify them into four groups (North, West, East, and South) (Schebesta, 1952: pp. 85–86; see also Benjamin, 1976: p. 41) (Table 1 and Figure 1).

While Schebesta’s criteria are reasonable enough, one is still left in limbo when it comes to applying them in practice. The first problem concerns native statements. How is one to elicit them? How should one phrase a question about an informant’s ['Gewährsmänner' (Schebesta, 1952: p. 87)] ‘tribe’, without knowing the word for ‘tribe’? Benjamin (1966: pp. 9–10) describes the continuing difficulty of identifying a ‘tribe’ as follows:

“Yet we are faced with the fact that these tribal names (essentially as 1st worked out by Schebesta in the 1920s) were obtained as Aborigines’ replies to such

Table 1. Semang ‘tribes’ according to Schebesta

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North</th>
<th>West</th>
<th>East</th>
<th>South</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tonga’ or Mos</td>
<td>Sabub’n-Lanoh</td>
<td>Jahay</td>
<td>Batek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kensiu</td>
<td>Menri’</td>
<td>Kenta Nakil</td>
<td>Kenta’ Bog’n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Historical and approximate distribution of the Semang (Malaysia) and the Sakai (Thailand).
question as, ‘What people are you here?’ Ambiguous questions posed often enough necessarily produce ambiguous replies; and this must be what happened. The tribal names obtained by this means over the years are a very mixed lot. Some are innocuous Malay terms such as Orang Darat, Orang Ulu, Orang Hutan, Orang Pangan (respectively, ‘men of the Interior, the Headwaters, the Forest, the Scrubland’). Others, still Malay, are less innocuous, such as the well-known Sakai (‘serf, dependent’ in archaic Malay). Yet others incorporate place names: Orang Selatar, ‘Men of the Selatar creeks (a group of sea nomads on the south coast of the Peninsula’). These terms all fail to delimit unambiguously Aborigines from non-aborigines, leave alone one aboriginal tribe from another.”

He adds a footnote:

“The most startlingly misreported tribal name that I know of is the “Po-Klo” of Annandale (Annandale and Robinson, 1903: p. 23). The reply to his ‘who are you?’ was obviously ‘we are all po klo’ (siblings and cousins; relatives).” [Benjamin, 1966: p. 9, note 16; also see Schebesta, 1952: p. 90, where he translates the same as “Sie sind in den Wald gegangen (They are gone to the forest)”).

Nowhere in his three-volume book, however, did Schebesta give the word for ‘tribe’ (‘Stamm’), so one is left wondering just how he went about asking the tribal names. The same question may be raised in the works of others Schebesta give the word for ‘tribe’ (‘Stamm’), so one is left wondering just how he went about asking the tribal names. The same question may be raised in the works of others Schebesta. 

Tribes” (Skeat and Blagden, 1966: p. 19). To ask, why this omission, may take us back to the debate between Schebesta and Evans mentioned above.

‘Tribe’, ‘Territory’, Bangsa

A ‘tribe’, in the sense of “a fixed and immutable group membership” (Dentan, 1975: p. 62), does not exist in South-east Asia. The identity of a ‘tribe’ emerges in opposition to what it is not, including the state. Without such an entity that stands in opposition to itself, there is no tribe. It is therefore quite possible that the Semang had no ‘tribal’ identity in the form of a name when they were unaware of ‘others’, especially when their life was outside the framework of a state. In other words, the fact that Evans, and for that matter other earlier researchers, could not agree just what constitutes a ‘tribal’ name of the Semang may be because there was no ‘tribe’ to attach a name to. Annandale and Robinson (1903: pp. 21–22) had already cautioned not to assume that a ‘tribe’ has a definite organization:

“The Semán have been referred to as a tribe, but it must not be supposed that they have in any sense a tribal organization, for they are divided into a number of camps, each consisting of about half-a-dozen families, and these camps are quite independent of one another. It is true that the headman of the camp which has its headquarters near Krunei calls himself ‘Penglima of the Sakai’, but this is purely a Malay title, bestowed on him by the ex-Raja Muda of Rahman in return for aid given in elephant hunting. The other Semán headmen do not recognize him as their superior. The headman of each camp appears to be appointed by the Malay whom the men of that camp recognize as their master.”

The fluidity of ‘tribal’ identity has been noted not only among the Semang but among other Orang Asli. Both Benjamin (1966) and Dentan (1975) pointed out that while language, territory, and kinship play a significant role in determining the identity of Temiar and Semai, these variables do not covary and as a result the ethnic identity of an individual is neither fixed nor stable, s/he choosing whichever affiliation best suits his or her interests at given moments (Dentan, 1975: p. 50). Neither the Temiar nor the Semai have a word meaning a ‘tribe’ but only the phrase meaning ‘our people (son’oi hiti)’, whose content may vary depending on who it is contrasted to. There is no ‘tribe’ as a bounded corporate group.

A similar situation was explored among the Batek Semang by Endicott (1997). The Batek use the concept of bangsa to refer to “groups of persons habitually speaking a common dialect and living together, at any given time, in specifiable places within the Batek home range” (Endicott, 1997: p. 35). A bangsa is a collection of local communities or camps, consisting of several huts for families or single adults. Such a camp is called haya by the Batek. The haya also refers to each of these huts forming a camp (Endicott, personal communication). The Batek may use another term, pawak, for a group of related people living in a camp, but Endicott says it is rarely heard used (see Endicott, 1974: p. 235). “The usual term for such a group is gunumal so-and-so, ‘so-and-so’s group,’ referring to a prominent member of the camp” (Endicott, personal communication).

The Kensiu of Siong, though sedentary in a resettlement community for almost four decades, have a similar set of concepts referring to various groupings observed among the Temiar, Semai, and the Batek. In Kensiu usage, at the most inclusive level, there is gin, meaning ‘people’ in opposition to non-people, i.e. animals and sky spirits (cenoy). Cenoy are not gin because they are above humans. Malays, Chinese, Whites are all gin, which an informant said is the same as manusia in Malay (see Table 2).

Schebesta ignores this most inclusive level of contrast, namely human versus non-human, and begins from the level of aborigines versus non-aborigines when he states:

“Die Semang sind sich ihrer Eigenrassigkeit durchaus bewußt und bringen dies unter sich und auf Fragen Fremder dadurch zum Ausdruck, daß sie sich in dem

Table 2. Levels of articulation/segmentation (the Semang)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Batek (Endicott 1974, 1997)</th>
<th>Kensiu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People/non-people</td>
<td>gin (people)/-</td>
<td>mani?/homi?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aborigine/non-aborigine</td>
<td>batik/gob</td>
<td>pawa? (pota?) = bangsa hanyat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Tribe’</td>
<td>bança?</td>
<td>hayat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local community</td>
<td></td>
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jeweiligen Dialekt als ‘Menschen (Meni’, Menra’, Sema’, usw.)’ bezeichnen; die anderen sind die Fremden, die Gob, Hemi’, Hami’ oder Homi’ [The Semang are aware of their own ethnic identity and express it on others’ questioning, that they refer to them in their respective dialect as ‘human being (Meni’, Menra’, Sema’, etc’), while others are ‘strangers’, Gob, Hemi’, Hami’ or Homi’] (Schebesta, 1952: pp. 80–81).”

This level of opposition, aborigine/non-aborigine (Benjamin, 1966: p. 4), is, in Kensiu, a well-known pair of moni?, versus homi?. Thus Malay or Chinese are described as ‘gin homi? Melayu?’ (or jawi’) or ‘gin homi? Cina?’ . There is some ambiguity about Black Americans, one of whom visited the village in 1985 and stayed a few days there. Some said he was a moni?, others homi?, and one said he could be considered the same as either Whites, the Chinese, or the Indians. It seems clear, however, that only the moni? can become sky spirits, cenoi?.

Below the level of this contrast comes that of divisions among the moni?, which, in the case of the Batek, Endicott (1974, 1997) called ‘diaspora groups’, or bangsa?, as described above. Although bangsa is also found in Kensiu, this language has another term, pwak, to refer to these divisions. Thus pwak? Kensiw, Kensiu ‘tribe’ or pwak? ha? an to inquire about someone’s ‘tribe’ or bangsa?. What is his tribe/ bangsa?, to which an answer may be Kensiw Mos (Nagata, 1986). As mentioned below, Mos refers to their relative location vis-à-vis the Kensiu of Siong, meaning the Kensiu in the Sik area of Kadah as being at the edge of the distribution of the Kensiu. Incidentally, instead of pwak?, Malay asal is occasionally used, thus ha? bo? asal low? (what is your ‘tribe’?)

There is some ambiguity about pwak? of the children of mixed marriages. The children of a Kensiu betul man and a Jaih Tahedeh woman, the father insists, are, like him, Kensiu betul, although they have been living with the mother in the settlement in Yala, which he says is the place of the Kensiu Hetot. Another man, a Jaih, married to a Kensiu woman and raising a family in Lubuk Legong, said he doesn’t know what the children’s pwak? may be and doesn’t care what it is (“may be Orang Asli!”). To pwak? is attached pata?, which is the area that the group makes use of for living and subsistence and may be related to Malay pata, meaning a plan or a map. A pwak? has one pata?. Pata? c9mam is the territory of the Thunder God, Kaey.

Kensiu pwak? appears related to pwak. Semaq Beri, who constitute a Senoi and not Semang group, use to refer to “a group associated with an area—usually a river valley...usually contains ‘core’ siblings’ and normally has a headman” (Kuchikura, 1987: pp. 34, 35; 1996: p. 40). Dallos (2003: p. 47) cites pwak, used by one of her Lanoh informants to mean ‘clan, tribe, group, in Malay’. Pwak in Malay is defined as “tribe, a family in the widest sense, or clan” (Coope, 1991), while in Thai, phiak (พี่) means “group, troop, kind, family, companion” (Thonghom, 1995: pp. 12, 15; Tomita, 1997: p. 1040). Drawing upon the entry pwak in R.J. Wilkinson’s A Malay–English Dictionary (2 volumes, first published in 1932 and reprinted by Macmillan, London in 1959), which I was unable to consult, Dentan (personal communication, April 5, 2002) points out that the primary meanings of pwak are “pasok, troop, platoon, team,” all pointing to ‘voluntary associations’ without a ‘kinship’ connotation except in Pahang usage. Both Iskandar (1986: p. 907) and Tochigakumei (1943: p. 1190), however, give secondary meanings of suku bangsa, kaum, soekoe, showing ascriptive ‘communities’ are deeply involved in the Malay meaning of pwak.

There are similarities and differences between Kensiu pwak? and Batek pwak. Batek pwak refers to the people who form a camp, “but it can also be used for a larger group of relatives” (Endicott, n.d.). Kensiu pwak? is more like Batek bangsa? or pwak when used for a larger group. It refers to a level higher than local camps. The ‘locations’ associated with Batek bangsa?, however, does not appear to be stable at all. Endicott (1997: p. 35) says “The Batek seem to conceive of bangsa? as groups of persons habitually speaking a common dialect and living together, at any given time, in specifiable places within the Batek home range. They speak of bangsa? as having come from certain river watersheds, as moving to other areas, as splitting, converging, expanding, and contracting.”

The ‘locations’ are not blocks of land sharply demarcated by defended boundaries but more like what Schebesta calls ‘Schweifgebiet (wandering territory)’, accessible to anybody wishing to forage or live temporarily. Batek bangsa? has a “geographical referent... (and) associated with a particular river valley” (Endicott, 1974: p. 249). Kensiu pata? may, as mentioned, become a matter of contention among the people of different pwak? or ‘tribes’. Both Batek bangsa? and Kensiu pwak? consist of a plurality of camps. However, Kensiu does not have a word meaning ‘camp’. A camp or a village such as the Kensiu resettlement community of Lubuk Legong, is called hnya? (but). As mentioned, Batek hnya? (Endicott, 1974: p. 213) also refers both to a hut and a camp consisting of several huts. That Kensiu hnya? refers to a single lean-to, a camp, or a village, depending on the context, is somewhat similar to Temiar de’k (house), which also refers to the traditional village of two to three years duration (Benjamin, 1966: pp. 15–16).

**Boundaries**

Among the Kensiu, while membership, identity, or belongingness [‘Angehörigkeit’ (Schebesta, 1952: pp. 92, 94)] to bangsa? and pwak? is largely ascriptive, it may also be acquired through socialization and migration. Nonetheless the pwak? membership, once acquired, appears to remain unchanged. ‘Tribal’ identity plays an important role in the selection of sexual partners because of c9mam (sexual prohibition based on classificatory kinship, see Nagata, 1999: p. 55). bangsa? and pwak? membership gives one criterion by which to determine the relatedness of the partners such that if the two parties are of different bangsa? or pwak?, there is no danger of being related and hence attacked by c9mam. There is no hindrance for persons of different pwak? to settle in a particular hnya?. Linguistic barriers between different pwak? appear easy for Kensiu and other groups of the West Semang to overcome.

Schebesta (1954: p. 217) observes that being of the same ‘tribe’ (‘Stam’), based on language and customs, does not
automatically imply segments of it are friendly or maintain close ties. On the other hand, a particular tribe may have friendly relations with a stranger tribe or even with Senoi groups (Schebesta, 1954: p. 217). An example Schebesta (1954: p. 217) gives is the Kensiu and the Kintak, which have a tradition of the common origin in Kedah Peak and yet had, at Schebesta’s time, hardly any connection between the two, each maintaining a friendly tie with culturally distant ‘tribes’ of Lanoh and Jahai in Thailand respectively.

Two emergent phenomena, however, deserve attention regarding the open boundary of *pawɔʔ*. In 1992, in the resettlement community of Lubuk Legong, some residents expressed concern about an individual who was away from the settlement community of Lubuk Legong, some residents of the village and hence entitled to a portion of rubber estate profits (Nagata, 1991). The concern goes against the traditional understanding of an open, non-exclusionary camp or village residence.

The sedentary life in the resettlement village has been reinforcing the level of distinction between the aborigines/non-aborigines or, in the case of Kensiu, *mǎnʔiʔ/*hòmʔiʔ. For one thing, the *pawɔʔ* composition of the village population has been increasing its diversity, as people from different parts of Malaysia, as well as a woman from Indonesia, have now migrated into the village. The linguistic situation is just as complex, though daily interactions are managed mostly by Kensiu with Malay as a secondary language. At the same time, the differences in *pawɔʔ* are losing their potency or relevance in comparison to that of Orang Asli. In other words, a new boundary in the form of Orang Asli is taking over the aboriginal identity expressed by *mǎnʔiʔ*. This process in turn generalizes the Orang Asli identity over and beyond the village and relates the Kensiu and other villagers to other Orang Asli in Malaysia as a whole (Nagata and Dallos, 2001; Nicholas, 2002).

**Subdivisions ‘[Unterstämme’ (Schebesta, 1952: p. 86)] of northern Semang and Sakai of Malaysia and Thailand**

In the same way that the Batek consist of a series of *bungsa* groups (Endicott, 1997: p. 35), the Kensiu are likewise subdivided into a number of subcategories, which may also be referred to as *pawɔʔ*. The division appears to be based on locations rather than on language, as among the Batek. Endicott (1997: p. 48) writes:

“The alternative of naming the group after its location would have less enduring utility because the people move more often than they change their vocabulary. Nevertheless, naming by location seems to be common among the western Semang, with the strange result that people are often found living far from the areas for which they are named (Skeat and Blagden, 1966: volume 1, p. 26). But, within locationally-named groups of western Semang, group and language dynamics are probably similar to those among the Batek.”

Why such a difference in naming exists between the Batek on the one hand and the ‘western’ Semang that include Ken-siu-Kintak on the other is unclear.

Now that many of these divisions are present in Legong, the people do not agree just where they were originally located. The Kensiu, based in Mukim Siong, are called Ken-siu Betul, Nakil, Dalem (inside Kensiu), or Tengah (Nagata, 1986). This is in contrast to the Kensiu in Yala Province, who are called Kensiu Lue (outside Kensiu), whereas those associated with Sik are Kensiu Mos. The locality of Kensiu Hetot is unclear but are said to be the same as the Kensiu in Ban Rea (ลบันไร่), Yala province. Some say, however, those in Yala are Kensiu Battu, who Evans placed in Mukim Sok near the Thailand–Malaysia border (Evans, 1968: pp. 24, 89; Schebesta, 1952: p. 86) (Table 3).

According to Schebesta (1952: pp. 83, 86), it is not possible to analyze the word ‘Kensiu’. In spite of the rejection by Martin and Skeat, both Kensiu and Kintak are genuine ‘tribal’ names (‘Stammsnamen’) of the Kedah Semang, first identified by Vaughan Stevens (Schebesta, 1952: p. 83). Schebesta (1952: p. 79) says of the name Kintak Bong that the association of ‘Kintak’ with Kinta River of Perak is uncertain, while the word, Bong, is related to the Malay word *bélum*. Diffloth (personal communication, 2002) says this interpretation by Schebesta is not believable. The Kintak are divided into two subgroups of Nakil in Kroh (Evans, 1968: p. 24) and Bong in Ulu Selama (Evans, 1968: p. 12), and Kupang (Table 3). Kensiu and Kintak together form the core of Schebesta’s North Semang, whose area of distribu-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North Semang and Thailand</th>
<th>Former locations</th>
<th>Recent locations (1980s and 1990s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kensiu Betul (Nakil, Dalem)</strong></td>
<td>Siong (Kedah)</td>
<td>Baling (Kedah), Ban Ray (Yala), Bkt. Asu (Ulu Perak)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kensiu Mos</strong></td>
<td>Sik (Kedah)</td>
<td>Baling (Kedah), Bkt. Asu (Ulu Perak)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kintak Nakil</strong></td>
<td>Kroh (Ulu Perak)</td>
<td>Bkt. Asu (Ulu Perak), Baling (Kedah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kintak Bong</strong></td>
<td>Ulu Selama and Kupang (Perak)</td>
<td>Baling (Kedah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ten’en</strong></td>
<td>Nawong (Trang and Phaththalung border)</td>
<td>Lipang subdistrict, Palian district (Phatthalung), Thale Ban National Park (Khuon Don district, Satun)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
tion includes the provinces of Phatthalung, Trang, and Pattani (Schebesta, 1952: p. 85).

Apart from the Kensiu (กะปิ) in Yala Province, three other groups of the ‘Sakai’/Semang are reported in South Thailand (Duangchand, 1984: p. 8; Thonghom, 1995: p. 89; The Institute of Southern Thai Studies, 2001: pp. 2245–2247): (1) Ten’en (เทน-เอ่น) [Taen-aen (Pookajorn and staff, 1991: p. 222), hereafter Ten’en] speaking Ten’en, and living around Phatthalung, Trang, and Satun (total population of about 70 people); (2) Tea-de (ทะเลใต้) (hereafter Tehedeh) speaking Tea-de, and living around the Ruesah (เรือเสาะ) and Ra-ngae [รกเน่ or Rancae (Nagata, 1995: pp. 99, 107)] districts in Narathiwat (total population of about 40 people); (3) Yahay (ยายาย) (hereafter Jahai) speaking Yahay, and living in the Weang (เวิง) and Sukhirin districts in Narathiwat (total population of about 30 people).

It is not clear what period of recent history these population figures represent. The Encyclopedia of Southern Thai Culture (The Institute of Southern Thai Studies, 2001) notes the disturbance the Thai Sakai experienced during the 1975–1977 communist insurgency (Thonghom, 1995: p. 34):

“In 1977, it was found that the Sakai lived in Thung Wa district, Satun, Thanto sub-district, Bannungsata district and Betong district, Yala, Ra-ngae and Weang districts, Narathiwat. There were less Sakai people in other provinces, for it was the time when communists and terrorists were wiped out. The Sakai hid themselves in other places: those who lived in Phatthalung and Trang moved to stay with those in Thung Wa, Satun (The Institute of Southern Thai Studies, 2001: p. 2247).”

Brandt reported the locations of ‘Jahai’ in the Ra-ngae and Wang districts of Narathiwat (Brandt, 1961: p. 133, 1965: p. 34; Hamilton, 2002: p. 85) and the Betong district of Yala Province (Brandt, 1961: pp. 129, 133), but he does not differentiate them into Jahai and Jahai Tehedeh. By the 1980s, the two groups of Narathiwat Jahai had either become extinct (Nagata, 1991) or were residing with the Kensiu in Kedah or Yala or with the Kintak in Ulu Perak. A large group of the Tehedeh was near Betong (Batu 9), Yala Province, before moving to Legong in the early sixties, shortly after the Emergency and in a period of epidemics (Nagata, 1986, 1991, 1995: pp. 99–100).

Neither Schebesta nor Evans mentions Ten’en, though it appears from their writings that they had visited the Ten’en areas of Phatthalung and Trang. Instead they mention Tonga and Mos in these areas (Schebesta, 1952: pp. 81, 86; 1973: pp. 15, 269, first published in 1928; Evans, 1968). The situation is the same with Brandt (1961, 1965), who mentions Tonga and Mos but not Ten’en. Bernatzik visited a ‘Semang’ camp at the border between Trang and Phatthalung, the inhabitants of which though he does not name them, must have been Ten’en (Bernatzik, 1958: pp. 74–77).

On the other hand, the Thai sources I examined give a detailed description of the distribution of the Ten’en in the 1980s and 1990s. According to them, the Ten’en are located in the area defined by the Banthat mountain range (The Institute of Southern Thai Studies, 2001: p. 2248; Porath, 2002: p. 100). The Encyclopedia of Southern Thai Culture (The Institute of Southern Thai Studies, 2001: p. 2247) records the areas of encounter with them: Tamod district, Phatthalung (70 Sakai) in 1983, Lipang sub-district, Palian district, Trang (20 Sakai) in 1984, and Klong Chalerm sub-district, Kong-rha district, Phathalung (30 Sakai) in 1985. Thonghom (1995: pp. 37–43) mentions three ‘bands’ of Ten’en along the Tong River, close to Ton Te waterfall, surveyed in 1993. Of the three, the ‘Jarrha Band’, appears to be the same as the one Pookajorn and his team surveyed in 1990 (Pookajorn and staff, 1991: p. 221). In 1995 and 1996, Albrecht and Moser (1998: p. 162) surveyed currently inhabited as well as recently abandoned camp sites of the Ten’en that they called ‘Mani’. Their article provides a detailed map showing the sites they visited (Albrecht and Moser, 1998: p. 163). These sites, which include the Sakai cave, initially excavated by Pookajorn in 1990, are concentrated in the headwaters of Langu and Pa Bong rivers, directly south of the mountainous area called Naitra, and where the borders of the four provinces of Satun, Songkla, Trang, and Phatthalung meet. They were and are made and lived in by the Ten’en. Albrecht and Moser (1998: p. 161) estimated the number of the Mani or Ten’en as just over 140, dispersed and/or merging in numerous camps.

I shall examine later the relationship between and the Tonga and the Mos of Schebesta–Brandt and the recent information regarding Ten’en or Mani. Table 3 summarizes the former and recent geographical locations of the ‘North’ Semang and Sakai.

‘Tribes’, Legendary, or Extinct or Unidentified

The above list of ‘tribal’ names for Schebesta’s North Semang region is poor in comparison to those Schebesta or Evans presented half a century ago. Does it mean the ‘tribal’ names that they presented in their lists, but those that the people now resident in the region failed to mention, represent the ‘tribes’ that became extinct? Which ‘tribal’ names disappeared and why? There are a number of different circumstances that led to such disappearance. In what follows, I shall consider them on the basis of the cases available in the literature.

Mythical tribes

Under the section, “Traditions of Abnormal Races and Cannibals”, Skeat and Blagden (1966: pp. 281–285) give a list of what may correspond to Schebesta’s ‘mythical tribes’. Below is a summary of the ‘tribes’ that existed in the legend of the people from Schebesta’s work as well as my own field work.

Mawas

Their forearm is made of iron and is used as a bush knife (Martin, 1905: p. 205); a small group of nomadic Jahai in the upstream region of Pergau, Tadoh district, so called by the Jahai there, but the Jahai in Perak and the Kintak, who call them Meni’ Kal, consider them as legendary beings (Schebesta, 1952: pp. 91, 94).

Girgasii

In Marong Mahawangsa, man with a tail, eats meat without cooking (Martin, 1905: p. 206).
Udai


Pemsed (poms?–Kensiu)

Very problematic; Evans claims he met two of them, Bangul and Hilik, from Bukit Enggang in Jeniang, Kedah, and Benjamin places them in his linguistic map but notes they were extinct in 1920. Poms? are well known among the older Kensiu residents of Lubuk Legong who talk of a territorial dispute over a piece of land between the Kensiu of Stong and the Pemsed who were in the area around Jeniang in the mythical times (masu? pukdok). The Pemsed were defeated in this dispute and had to flee and that is said to be the reason why none can see Pemsed any more, although they are said to be descended from Bukit Enggang in Jeniang, every Thursday, the market day of Parit Panjang, Kedah (see also Schebesta, 1952: p. 74, 87; Evans, 1968: p. 25).

Kensiu Bateq or Batu (Nagata, 1986)

People with noses like elephants and who use their feet as spoons. This may be a type of slander.

In addition to those reported by the early writers, Schebesta (1973: p. 162) mentions other legendary peoples he heard about from the Jahai. Apparently the stories of imaginary peoples are common among the Orang Asli but the meaning of their existence has yet to be analyzed.

Tribes mentioned but no longer present (Schebesta, 1952: p. 92)

Some are indeed extinct.

Semang Paya of Ijok

Mentioned in Anderson (1965: p. xxxviii); so called by Malays because of the association of these Semang with the swamp land, but Meni’-Gul by the Kajen, Meni’-Biangog (‘nicht selhhaft (non-sedentary)’, Schebesta, 1952: p. 81) by the Kinta (Schebesta, 1952: pp. 92, 93); extinct by 1921 (Evans, 1968: p. 93).

Blagden described the Semang Paya and the related small groups of dialects, “now probably extinct, but spoken in the extreme south of Kedah and in the upper part of the valley of the Krian, the boundary river between the States of Kedah and Perak,” as “low-country Semang” (Skeat and Blagden, 1966: volume 2, p. 390; Benjamin, 1976: p. 50). They included all the groups listed in this section, who were mostly in Kedah, southern Perak, and Province Wellesley, now extinct or migrated elsewhere. To these groups Dentan (1997: p. 113; personal communication, April 6, 2002) adds the Bila, mentioned below, and call them “lowland Semang . . . (whose) basic ecological orientation seems to have been coastal, like that of Btisi.” The current distribution of the North Semang in the interior of Kedah and Ulu Perak may thus represent the retreat from the lowland and coastal plains of Kedah and Province Wellesley.

Semang of Ulu Selama

Same as Kintak Bong who moved from Selama to Kedah by 1931; molested and suffered from influenza epidemic (Evans, 1968: p. 13).

Meni Kaien

Kaien is the name of Sungei Krian in local Semang speech (Schebesta, 1952: p. 88)—same as Semang of Ijob? (Evans, 1968: p. 13)—range from Larut to Dindings, Selangor?; listed in Benjamin’s (1983) map.

Semang Juru of Province Wellesley

Mentioned in Evans (1968: p. 12) quoting Anderson, 1965; Schebesta (1952: pp. 19, 93). Dentan (1997: p. 113), referring to Thompson (1943: p. 23) and others, notes at the time of the 1891 census “only one Negro . . . was to be found in Province Wellesley” but became extinct by 1901.

Semang in Yan, near Kedah Peak

Mentioned in Crawford (1848: p. 205) as the “Sáman of the Járai” (Schebesta, 1952: p. 93; Anderson, 1965: p. 166; Evans, 1968: p. 12 quoting Anderson, 1965: p. xxxviii). Kedah Peak is known locally as Gunung Jerai (1217 feet above sea level), and by the Kensiu as Batu Telain (forbidden rock), which, according to their tradition, has a fruit orchard guarded by a tiger and where only a shaman can enter (Nagata, 1991).

Semang Bakow


Tribes mentioned but unidentified so far or identified by other names

There are those that cannot be located, or have been recorded under different names.

Semang Bila

Crawfurd (1848: p. 187) writes of “a negro race” the Malays call Sáman or Bila, while Anderson (1965: p. xxxviii) reports that “(t)he Semangs are designated by the Malays Semang Paya, Bukit, Bakow and Bila.... The Semang Bila are those who have been somewhat reclaimed from their savage habits and have had intercourse with the Malays.” Low (1849: pp. 20, 321, 327–328), whose interpretation Martin (1905: p. 206) follows, considers Bila as distinct from Semang, noting that ‘Samang and Bila’ were each under their own chief in Marong Mahawangs. Both Iskandar (1986: p. 1351) and Tohchigakumei (1943: p. 1767) explain wila as Orang Asli or a pygmy race in Kedah. Finally, Schebesta follows Anderson, considering Bila or properly Bila as a Malay word meaning ‘tame’ (‘zahn’), and the designation, Semang Bila, as similar to the way of specifying a characteristic of the Semang in the Semang Paya of Ijok (Evans, 1913; Schebesta, 1952: p. 81; Anderson, 1965: p. xxxviii), whereas Skeat and Blagden (1966: volume 1, p. 20) interpret Orang B’la as ‘kept’ or ‘domesticated men’, used especially of slaves and dependants (Dentan, 1997: p. 113).

Mabek Hamik

Mentioned in Annandale and Robinson (1903: pp. 3, 7–8,
Mabek, according to Annandale and Robinson (1902), is the name of a place near Jalor, i.e. Yala. They called the Semang they encountered there Hami, which both Evans and Schebesta rightly say means non-aborigines; on the basis of the place, Manik, being close to Sungai Reh (Schebesta, 1952: p. 86; Evans, 1968: p. 24) in Yala (see Figure 1 in Annandale and Robinson, 1902: p. 408), Schebesta thinks they are the same as Kensiu Batu; incidentally mabo? means ‘woman, wife’ in Kensiu.

Jarium Semang


Sakai Jeram

Mentioned in Annandale and Robinson (1902: p. 413, 1903: p. 9), Schebesta (1952: pp. 79, 81, 88 Jahai near Kampung Kerunei); de Morgan (1993) changed the correct tribal name of Lanoh to the Malay name of Orang Jeram.

Sabub’n

Evans (1968: p. 26, note 3) says he never heard of Sabub’n as a name of Semang and that a Lenggong Negrito told him sabubn means ‘black’. Schebesta (1973: pp. 16, 94, 259) does not use the name of Lanoh. In Schebesta (1952: pp. 74, 85, 88, 89), Negrito in Grik are called Sabub’n-Semnam or Lanoh-Semnam. ‘Semnam’, according to Annandale and Robinson (1902: p. 413; 1973: p. 258)—the Jahai near Lenggong, who live in a village/mixed with Temiar in a village called Bukit Sapi. There is a possibility that some of these people are Benjamin’s ‘Sabum’.

In his post to Orang Asli List Service of 30 November, 1997, Geoffrey Benjamin writes:

“(...)the Sabüm (u-diaeresis or u-slashed-through: a high central vowel) and Semnam, these are sub-groups of the linguistic cluster currently called ‘Lanoh’ overall. Lanohs themselves distinguish between the different kinds of ‘Lanoh’ (open-O) from both the Sabüm and Semnams, but it is probably too late in the day to reconstruct fully the geography of this. As linguistic categories, Sabüm and Semnam appear in my own ‘Austroasiatic subgroupings’ paper (Benjamin, 1976), as well as in Gérard Diffloth’s (1975) ‘Les langues mon–khmer de Malaisie: classification historique et innovations.’ The linguistic differences seem to be quite authentic, even if the speech varieties are all closely related to each other, and slightly more remotely to Temiar. Schebesta’s paper on ‘Ple-Temer’ grammar is not Temiar as we know it now, and may well be yet another of these dialects/languages, probably since disappeared.”

To deal with the linguistic and ‘tribal’ situation of the ‘Lanoh complex’ (Noone, 1936: p. 52; Benjamin, 1976: p. 50), Schebesta (1952: pp. 88–89) set up a separate group, ‘West Semang’. According to Diffloth (1975) in the article quoted by Benjamin above, however, Lanoh does not belong to the North Aslian, to which the majority of Semang languages belong, but to the Central Aslian that comprise Semai, Temiar, Sabum, Semnam, and Jah Hut. Linguistically, therefore, it is moot to consider the Lanoh as Semang. Benjamin (1976: p. 48) gives four subgroups of Lanoh, which Dallos correlated to her findings on the basis of her field work in Tawai and Air Bah, Ulu Perak, in 1998. Table 4 shows this correlation (Dallos, personal communication, 2005). Dallos notes that the Lanoh other than jarium are said to “use Temiar language a lot;” and “now they have become mixed (kacokan, in Malay).” Alternatively, people say that these divisions are not really Lanoh, but Temiar who, although speak Lanoh, speak it with a “funny accent” or dialect (Dallos, personal communication, 2002).

Table 4. ‘Lanoh Complex’ by Benjamin and Dallos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benjamin</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Dallos Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semnam</td>
<td>Kuala Kenering, Auer Bal</td>
<td>Lanoh ‘jeram’. Lanoh jorang are also known as Lanoh somnam, or Lanoh saka?, which, according to the people in Air Bah, means ‘original (asal in Malay)’, or ‘true Lanoh (sejati)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabum</td>
<td>Lenggong</td>
<td>(The Lanoh of Air Bah did not know who ‘Sabum’, or sabum, might be. However, there are Lanoh near Lenggong, who live in a village/mixed with Temiar in a village called Bukit Sapi. There is a possibility that some of these people are Benjamin’s ‘Sabum’.) Also, some people in Bukit Sapi are said to be Lanoh lapes (also known as Lanoh kiyen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanoh Yir</td>
<td>Kg. Sarah</td>
<td>Lanoh menderay - mondray (they are called ‘yir’ because they pronounce the word ‘yay’, ‘two of us’ as ‘yir’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanoh Jengjeng</td>
<td>Upper Perak (Sg. Ringat)</td>
<td>Lanoh jinjeng/jenjeng (jinjeng)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ambiguous tribal names whose location changed

Chong, Mos, and Tonga

In both Evans’ and Schebesta’s writings, the three ‘names’ of Chong, Mos, and Tonga appear in a confusing
manner. In his original article, Evans (1925: p. 43) calls the Negritos encountered in Trang and Patthalung simply ‘Chong Negritos’, but not Tonga or Mos, meaning the Negritos in the area of the present Kachong Nature Reserve between Patthalung town of Nawong and Trang town of Kachong (Evans, 1925: pp. 40, 42–43). Although Burenhult (1999: p. 135) says the word list in Evans (1927: pp. 8–12) is that of Tonga, nowhere in the referred text, which is a straight copy from his 1925 article, does Evans state that the list is that of the Tonga. In his book, Evans (1968: p. 23, 30) again writes of Chong Negritos meaning those “at Chong in the Trang-Patalung hills.” Schebesta (1952: p. 86) too says Chong is the center of the northern-most distribution of the Semang, i.e. Tonga. Brandt (1961: pp. 129–131) does not mention Chong but Ga-Chong Fall, mentioned on the online map of Trang (http://www.trangonline.com/trangmap.jpg), and certainly not as a name of a people. So it seems Chong is not a name of a Sakai group but that of a place. ‘Chong’ in Thai also means a Mon–Khmer ethnic group living in the areas of north Chantaburi and Trat provinces and Cambodia and one wonders if this was confused with the Sakai by Evans and others.

While Evans does not mention Mos in his 1925 article, in his 1937 book he writes of “Tonga or Tenga and Mos... living near Chong, on the Trang side of the range” (Evans, 1968: p. 23), without explaining if Tonga or Tenga and Mos refer to two (or three?) different groups or ‘tribes’ of Sakai. Schebesta (1954: pp. 240, 259, 272, 289) is more specific, though only slightly so, with references to Mos or Phatthalung-Mos, but not to Tonga, whereas his 1957 volume speaks of Tonga-Mos (Schebesta, 1957: p. 157). Only in his book published in 1928 does Schebesta (1973: pp. 15, 269) mention Mos specifically, numbering about 100, and distinct from Tonga. Brandt (1961: p. 129; 1965: p. 35), on the other hand, writes of Tonga, Mos, and Chong Negritos in Banthat mountains and says that “The Patthalung-Trang Negritos... I will arbitrarily call Tonga” (Brandt, 1961: p. 130; see also Hamilton, 2002: p. 85). Finally neither Benjamin’s nor Bradley’s (1983) maps on peninsular Malaysia and south Thailand list Mos.

Mos, according to Blagden, appears to mean “‘without’ in the sense opposite to ‘within,’ as the Malay luar” (Skeat and Blagden, 1966: volume 1, p. 483), while Diffloth says (Diffloth, 1975: p. 4, note 4) it is a Kensiu word meaning “le bout, l’extrémité” and that the Mos could very well be a northern extension of the Kensiu, although Schebesta places them in the region of Patthalung-Trang. I have previously described how the Legong people claim Kensiu Mos had been centered in Sik, Kedah, but is now practically merged with the people in Lubuk Leong (Nagata, 1986). If this interpretation of mos is correct, it means there was no people called simply Mos in Thailand or Malaysia. ‘Mos’ is a modifier, not a noun, and this is reflected in the absence and ambiguity of Mos in the writings of Evans, Schebesta, and others. What about Tonga then?

As mentioned, Evans (1968: p. 23) gives the name Tonga or Tenga along with Mos. Schebesta states that the Tonga are the most northerly located Semang, whose foraging area is on both sides of the road connecting Patthalung and Trang, centering in Cong, now Kachong (Schebesta, 1952: p. 81, 86; 1973: p. 15). However, Schebesta (1973: p. 15) is not clear about the difference between Tonga and Mos, writing “The most northerly group are the Tonga, or Mos.” On the map opposite page 182 of Schebesta (1952), he gives ‘Tenga (Mos)’. The only hint that the Tonga may be distinct from the Mos appears when he reports that a Negrito girl, Isan, said her people are called Tonga and ‘their neighbours’ (which means not her own group) the Mos (Schebesta, 1973: p. 269).

Brandt (1961: pp. 130–131, 136; 1965: pp. 35–36) gives a detailed description of the Tonga widely spread from Phatthalung to Trang and Satun, but without showing their difference either from the Mos or what he calls Chong. Finally ‘Tonga’ are the only Semang/Sakai group recorded in Benjamin’s (1983) and Bradley’s (1983) linguistic maps of peninsular Malaysia and south Thailand.

From all the above, one may infer that the Tonga, and neither Mos nor Chong, are the only Semang/Sakai ‘tribe’ or ethno-linguistic group in Thailand, distinct from Kensiu or two groups of Jahai. Then the question is why ‘Tonga’ is not mentioned by Thai scholars. The Encyclopedia of Southern Thai Culture (The Institute of Southern Thai Studies, 2001) does not mention either Tonga or Mos. Thonghom (1995: p. 9) quotes from an obscure ‘Ethnology (sic)’ book that “Semang in Thailand are also called Tongkas (ตองก้า), or Mos (ไม่), with their domiciliary areas on the mountains of the Pattani and the Nakhornseethamara Provinces,” but does not refer to these names elsewhere in his book. Pookajorn and staff (1991: p. 222; 1994) call the Sakai in Palian district, Trang, Taen-aen but not Tongka or Mos, whereas Albrecht and Moser call the same group ‘Mani’ (Albrecht and Moser, 1998). But the people of Legong confirmed that Pookajorn’s group near the Sakai Cave were Tene’en, when they heard the tape I made at the Sakai Cave camp (Nagata, 1991). The Tonga on Benjamin’s (1983) map, referred to above, are around Ban Du Son and Khun Ka Long, near Thale Ban National Park, Satun, and he footnotes that “[the language] Tonga” is probably closely related to Kensiu” (see also Benjamin, 1976: p. 50), but this speculation is not based on any actual encounter with the people so called. Close to Du Son, Brandt (1961: p. 131) recorded a group of Negritos in the subdistrict of Tung Nui, on the road to Rattapuri, Songkla. Brandt speculates that they might have been related to the now-extinct Negritos in Perlis, Malaysia, the area covered by the Tonga on Benjamin’s (1983) map. But, according to the The Encyclopedia of Southern Thai Culture (The Institute of Southern Thai Studies, 2001) and Thonghom, these Satun Negritos are Tene’en as well. Just what Tongka means is not clear, though Warrington Smyth (1898: volume 1, p. 318) writes that “the town of Puket is known to the Chinese as Tongka.”

These fragments of data lead me to conclude that the area allotted to Tonga in the English sources are where the groups of Ten’en have been reported since the 1970s by Thai researchers and they are called neither Tonga nor Mos. In short, Tonga is Ten’en, whose distribution ranges from Trang and Patthalung to Satun and Songkla, and in the past the Malaysian state of Perlis.

Evans (1925: pp. 40, 44; 1968: p. 9) tried to determine the northern limit of the Negrito distribution and visited Surat-
Sebesta (1952: p. 86, 1973: p. 15) considers the Tonga, or Mos, to be the most northerly group but confirms the Negrito absence in Chaiya (Sebesta, 1952: p. 86). Following Sebesta and the above discussion, I conclude that the Tene’en in Phatthalung and Trang are now the most northerly located Semang/Sakai and that their current distribution shows the historical drift from further north, as far as Suratthani and Krabi, to the narrow confines they may have gone from the south as well, from Perlis and Satun to the northwestern part of the Satun province.

Conclusions

The names of Semang or Sakai ‘tribes’ show a wide range of differences in the factors chosen as ‘names’. This has long been a cause of confusion. As the Semang and the Sakai undergo further migration, individually or by group, and combine with each other, the identity of the ‘tribes’ will change further, with some disappearing and new ones, based on new localities or linguistic and cultural peculiarities, being born. As already noted by Endicott (1997), the internal segments of the Semang do not form stable, well-bounded, corporate groups that continue to maintain their identities by means of, say, descent or belief systems. The relationship between these segments is based on pragmatic interests of those who make up the segments. Hence it is indeterminate in terms of pre-existing factors of, say, kinship and marriage.

Benjamin (1976) characterized the process of differentiation of Northern Aslian languages as following Morris Swadesh’s (1959) ‘mesh principle’ (Benjamin, 1976: p. 69). In contrast to the speakers of Central and Southern Aslian languages, Northern Aslian language speakers (excepting Che’ Wong) have until very recently all been nomadic hunter-gatherers, living in small bands, practicing band exogamy, and with individual families constantly changing their domicile. These circumstances led to the “many intra-group loans and a high modal cognacy rates” of lexical items (Benjamin, 1976: p. 74). Endicott (1997) sees the same process operating in Batek subgroup relations. Much like a system of polythetic classification (Needham, 1975), Semang subgroups or ‘tribes’ are interconnected by sharing a few elements of culture, including vocabulary, among themselves and thus forming a vast network. Nomadism, trade, and exogamy will promote to expand this network, while external threats like epidemics and wars may shrink it. Regarding epidemics, however, Dallos comments that such phenomena, instead of shrinking the network of subgroups, fragment and expand it among “individualistic foragers with an immediate return system of production” (Dallos, personal communication, 2002). Her comments are based on the case of epidemics among the Lanoh in the early 1960s and her own observation of the epidemic scare in the Lanoh village of Air Bah in 1998.

In a draft version of the 1997 article, Endicott wrote: “(s)ubgroups of Semang existing at any one time, whether named by linguistic peculiarities or locations, are best viewed as transitory phenomena, not as enduring and sharply bounded social groups.” While it captures the essence of Semang ‘tribes’ well, one may ask how effective this process may be in the event of sedentarization, which many Semang groups have been forced to undergo for the past several decades. The case of Lubuk Legong appears to indicate a certain loss of flexible identity and a search for an overriding one that may lessen the significance of subgroup or tribal differences. Such an identity is found in that of ‘Orang Asli’. An important question arising from this is that of ‘marriage’ and family formation, which is subject to the rule of consanguineal exogamy and hence subgroup exogamy. If subgroups or ‘tribes’ disappear into an overriding category of Orang Asli and everyone is the same as Orang Asli, how could the principle of exogamy operate? One solution is not to go so high a step in the oppositional hierarchy but come up with a category that may oppose, say, Temir or Semai, namely Semang. At the moment, however, there is no sign that such identity is developing among the people of Lubuk Legong.

Acknowledgments

Many people helped in the preparation of the present paper. I would like to express my special thanks to Professors Phaiboon Duangchan, R.K. Dentan, Gerald Diffloth, Takafumi Ishida, Dr. Csilla Dallos, Khun Kruen Maneechote of the Institute of South Thailand Studies, Songkhla, and two anonymous reviewers. The transcription of the Orang Asli terms was made possible by use of the Times New Austric fonts created by Dr. Geoffrey Benjamin, who made them freely available for research.

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