

# **Ethnoarchaeological Study On The Upland Sakai At Pa-Lian Subdistrict, Trang Province, Thailand**

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## **I. Introduction**

Archaeology is relatively a new field of study in Southeast Asia. Some basic questions on chronological patterns and cultural sequences remained unanswered. Southeast Asian archaeology, therefore may hope to find enlightenment through investigation of contemporary ethnic groups living in the area where archaeological excavations have been conducted. It is fortunate that many Southeast Asian ethnic or tribal groups retained assemblance of their old lifeways. They remained to be the living link to an ancient past.

The focus of the field research is on the systematic excavation at the Sakai cave, and is aimed at linking or comparing archaeological find and features, specifically lithic material as may be perceived in activity areas discovered, with the living tribal groups of Sakai. It is assumed that the Sakai remained to be basically a hunter-gatherer groups, and that chronological sequences of the soil and specimens found resulting from excavation may be connected with the living Sakai's remnant hunter-gatherer technology.

The purpose of ethnoarchaeology is to systematized integrated archaeological finds with ethnographic information. Ethnoarchaeology is the study, from an archaeological perspective of material culture based on verbal about

artefacts obtained from persons, or their direct descendants, who were involved with the production (Peterson, 153 : 1974). The ideas stated and implied in this definition serve as an economical means for introducing the topic further. It might be tempting to limit the scope of ethnoarchaeology to the material forms of nonliterate peoples, if only because "primitive" are the forte of antropologist (Aswalt, 3 : 1973). However, given the goals of integrating tangible forms derived from archaeological discoveries with oral reports about them, it does not seem reasonable to arbitrarily restrict the time-space context in which these data are considered. There appear to be no compelling reasons for the excavation of houses, garbage dumps, or even garbage cans, from industrial societies being any less amenable to the ethnoarchaeological approach than that of an aboriginal shelter or kitchen midden. The analysis of it might provide worthwhile information about similar but exotic deposits (Watson, 92 : 1979).

The ethnoarchaeological study of upland Sakai group of topical concept investigation covered settlement pattern, various subsistence activities, social organization, and kinship system. Data had been collected by open-ended questions, as in interviews, life history and observing their daily routine in the camps. The mapping of Sakai settlements and graphic illustration of their materials culture were made as much as possible according to the time permitted. Analysis of ethnological data through description and comparison of present day Sakai material culture to the Sakai layer excavation may be possible at this point of the study.

## **II. The Hunting-gathering Groups of Sakai**

### *2.1 Lokation*

The ethnoarchaeological site is in mountainous area where the ethnic groups, Semang or Sakai inhabited. The studied area is approximately laid on the latitude  $7^{\circ} 13' 20''$  N. and longitude  $99^{\circ} 52' 0''$  E. located near Khuan Mai Dam village, pa-lian district, Trang province in the lower Southern Thailand (Fig. 1). Topographically the site is situated on the Nakhon Si

Thammarat range, which its northern original mass is underwater in the Gulf of Siam and stretch esexactly southward towards the southwesternmost of Satun province where it comes to an end along the Malaysian border (Donner, 1982).

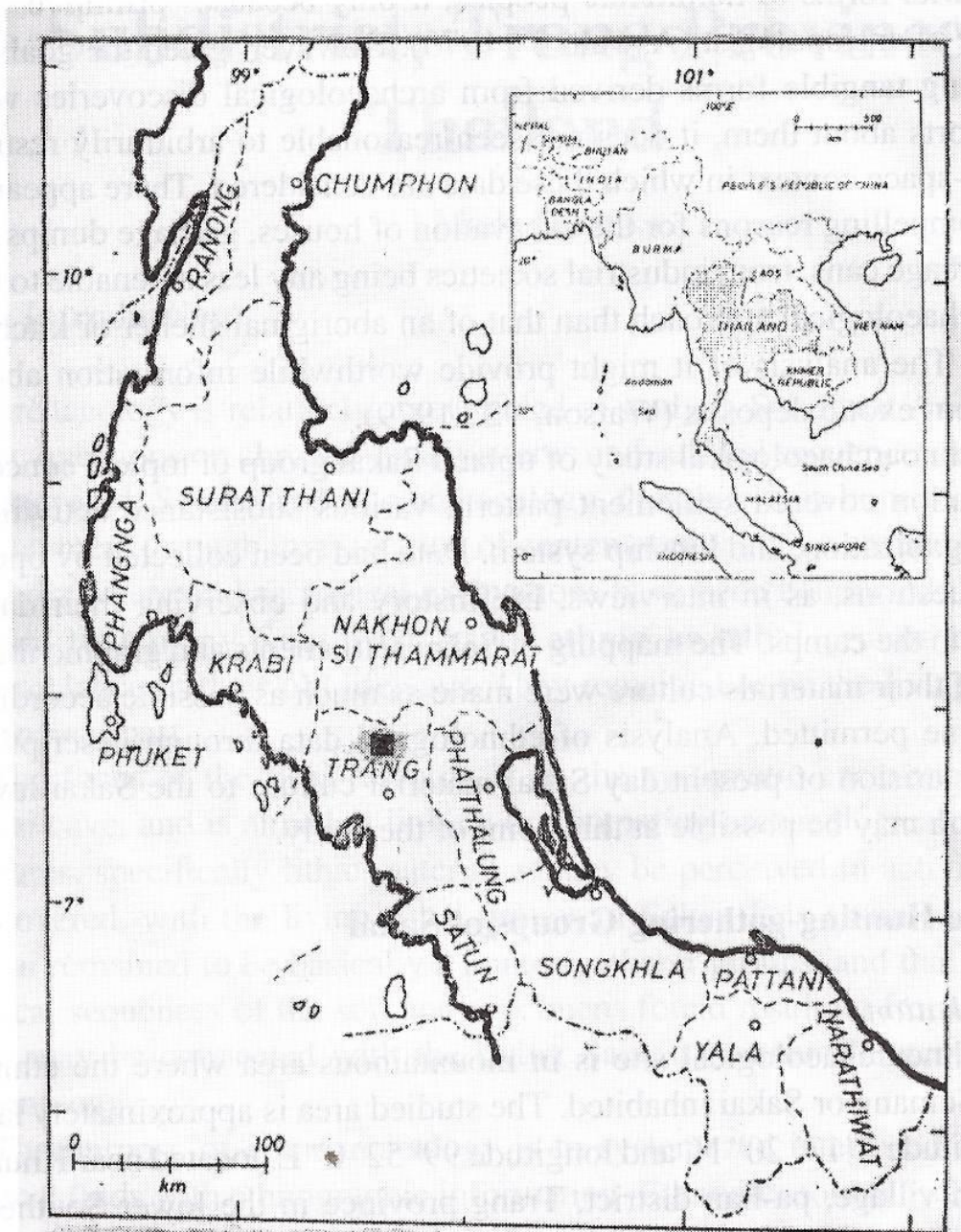


Fig 1. ■ Location map of the Sakai tribes

The easiest access is by using land transportation on the route No. 404 and No. 4125 from Trang province passing through Yan Ta Khao District, pa-lian subdistrict and the last village at Ban Chao Bha before entering Khao Bantat Reservation park. The camp is settled in a small valley surrounding by numerous limestone mountains in the areas of Ban Klong Tong where a small stream, Klong Tong, emerge and flows north westward 2 Kms. Away to the lowland joining with other stream near Bon cock woor where is the landmark for further 2 hours trekking.

Among the minority groups in southern Thailand, the hill tribes Sakai is the smallest in terms of population. The Sakai band usually is composed of about 15 to 20 persons. They can be found, living in dispensed manner in the jungle of Trang. A Sakai band usually composed of an extended family of three generation. Because of their hunting and gathering existence, they live in a very simple way. Moreover, they are clever, are able to learn anything fast, especially the ways of life such as how to hunt far and gather, and how to communicate with other people.

Their settlements are located in the valley near the stream that is the source of palian river wich is called "Klong Tong" group. The villagers called the stream "Klong Tong" because many bamboo plants along the stream in the past and foremost variety of the bamboo is called "Pkai Tong" or "Tong".

## *2.2 The Settlement*

Site study on the living of the Sakai has bound that they has two types of settlement namely the permanent and temporary camp. The permanent camp mosf of the time even during summer and rainy season when heave blood-ing accurs. However, if the climate is very hot, they transfer to the temporary camp in the forest. The Sakai build only very simple permanent shelters because their constant migration to other site which after more abundant food sources. Their shelter are usully constructed of bamboo and plants that easily found in the area (pl. 1).



*Pl. 1. The permanent camp of Sakai*

The Sakai shelters is the same with the shelters of Mlabri people in northern Thailand (Pookayorn, 20 :1983 ). The size of the shelter is small, just enough serve 2-5 family members, or people. In addition, their camp is always adjasent to a water source. The Sakai avoid dwelling in limestone caves although these are abundant and are quite suitable as shelters. The temporary camp is located 200 meters from the permanent camp. It is built among bushes and big trees near a stream (pl. 2).



*Pl. 2. The temporary camp of Sakai*

In this particular camp the four shelters are made in the traditional Sakai style. Many kinds of big leaves may be used except palm for roofing as well as sitting or sleeping ground cover. The camp is cool and shady and truly used during hot weather. As in the permanent camp, here the headman shelter is surrounded by his children and their families.

Until recently the Sakai stayed in rockshelter or caves not far from the permanent-camp during the rainy season to avoid heavy rain and flood. The rockshelters that they used as habitation were "La Khon Kae". At the rockshelters they may make a slightly horizontal platform, or use many kinds of leaves placed on the ground for sleeping. During that time, the rockshelters become a habitation site where food preparation, eating, throwing away of garbage and sleeping activities were conducted. In the present time it is not necessary for Nai Sang group to stay in the rockshelters and caves because they were often disturbed by other people.

In the past, the Sakai would place his head towards the mouth of the cave or outside while sleeping, lie on his side so he can be awakened easily if there is a need to escape from enemies, especially tiger. Nowadays, they sleep with the head oriented to the north because no more danger from attacks of big animals (tiger, elephant, bear, etc) in the jungle during the night.

### *2.3 Material Culture*

Generally house compositions of the Sakai shelters is both the permanent and temporary camps including the cave is composed of the sleeping and cooking areas. The firepit is a very important feature. A nuclear family usually has two or three firepits, one used for cooking and the others for warming. A single adult if he sleeps alone, has only one firepit which is only used for warming because he eats with the parents. In making shelter, the joints are tied very well with rattan, and although they now use nails in putting up permanent huts, they still do not know how to put and use nails properly.

Creating fire is done through function of a rattan stick held vertically on

another rattan horizontally laid on thin wood fibers nearby to catch the spark erected. Since making fire is difficult, the Sakai do not put out embers in the camp even when the firepit is momentarily unused. When transferring to another settlement site they carry a burning wood from former camp to a new camp to start a new firepit. Nowadays, a plastic fuel lighter is conventionally used. The Sakai knows several methods of building firepits for cooking, and there are as follows :

1. Three pebble stones may be used as tripod (pl. 3)
2. Three big rattan stems may be used as tripod
3. Combination of the same height of a stone and two rattan sticks may be used as tripod



*Pl. 3. The firepit with tripod stones for cooking at the temporary camp*



The three techniques of building firepit for warning are as follows :

1. Putting woods on the ground is used to start fire. This method is often used in the temporary camps and caves, and in the firepit of single adult.
2. A low raised firepit on a platform is constructed on the same level and adjoining a raised sleeping or lying platform in the permanent hut. The wide open box-like firepit is created by putting mud on banana leaves, laid on the firepit platform. When the mud is slightly dried, wood is put to make fire. This method is useful during rainy season because the fire cannot be put out by moisture.
3. Four to six pieces of big hard wood are placed on the ground and covered with clay to prevent the humidity in the camp.

The roofs of permanent huts are made from many kinds of palm leaves such as "Nao" (*arenga pinuata mere*), "Rakam" (*salacca rumphii mall*), etc. The roof wall of temporary hut or lean may be made from any leaves, however "Rud" (*Zingiberaceae*) and banana leaves are abundant in the area and most commonly used.

In the permanent hut, the periphery may have a configuration of wood where banana leaves may be added to complete it as a roof adjoining the main roof to prevent them from rain. To the Sakai, there is a natural need for wind and light inside the shelter hut. There is also a need to regulate these atmosphere, not too much and not too little, just enough.

The permanent house has one or two wall which may be made by using a combination of bamboo slats and palm leaves. In temporary camp the dwelling has no wall because there is no strong wind to bother them in the front of cave.

Each married couple has a firepit for cooking their own hut. Sometime a shelf is built on one side high above the firepit. This high raised shelf is used to keep cooking utensils and food.

Most of the tools and utensils used by the Sakai are made from plant materials which can easily be obtained from the jungle. The best tool for

hunting is the blow pipe which is made from bamboo tube. The body a blow pipe is composed at two bamboo tubes join by resin from "han" tree (*canarium sp*). The dart used in this tool is made from "thao" (*pinanga limosa ride*) and "rakam" the pointed end contained poison extracted from another plant. The tool is used by inserting a dart into the blow pipe, then fix it with cotton from "Tao Rang" (*Cayota mitis lour*) and blow to the target.

Two kinds of utensil used by the Sakai in their dwelling are Basketry and Kitchen utensils. There are various kinds of baskets that the Sakai made and use, and these are as follws : "Chong" basket with a single handle and small in size used for keeping betel nut and piper leaf for the betel chew. "Yard" or "Cher" basket for keeping cloth, food plates, bowe, plastic water container, etc. "Yard" basket for stone hunting equipment and is usually large in size and has two handles on each side.

"Sorb" envelop the open side of which is covered with another envelop of slightly layer size. It is made by women from pandan leaves and is used to keep valuable objects like money, medicine plants, tobacco, etc., and "matig women" from pandan leaves and is used for sleeping or lying on. Bamboo tube container for water, pincer or tong made from a piece of rattan cut length wise and folded at the middle. It is used for picking up food or wood and charcoae or ember from the fire. Spatula made of finely carried rattan is used for stiring food in a usual during cooling. Bowl made from polished half of coconut. Mortar and pestle made from a hard wood plant is used for pounding in husked rice, this way be apted from the vil-lager. Gerinding stone made of pobble stone to keep bladed tools sharp. Pick made from monkey bone is used to pull out the cove from "Han" seed, and may also be used to pick anything from Sakai skin. Nowadays the Sakai already use in their daily life glass, plastic and alluminium utensils.

#### 2.4 Subsistence Activities

How food is obtained and eating habits. The staple food of the Sakai are

wild yams but animals, medicine plants, fruits and vegetables are also eaten as supplementary food, however the availability of the later groups of food depends on its seasonality. The Sakai know more than ten varieties of edible wild yam and twenty kinds of edible medicinal plants. Edible animals include the following terrestrial animals such as monkeys, ant, catu, pangolin, hogbadger (earth pig), wild pig, other, porcupine and squirrel; reptiles such as turtle, lizards, snake, etc. Fresh water animals like crabs, freshwater fish and shells. However, the most referenced animals food is monkey. The three ways of getting food are as follows :

1. Hunting wild animals with the use of blow pipe, traps and catching with the use of hands.
2. Gathering wild product by their own method honey and others.
3. Cultivation of rice which they learned from the villagers. Methods of cooking raw or fresh food are as follows; learn anything regarding survival very fast.

### *2.5 Recreation and Hobbies*

The "Noi Sang" groups were influenced by the villagers in their recreation and hobbies such as smoking tobacco, chewing betel nut and piper leaf, playing "takraw" (a ball of woven rattan strips), watching night movies at the lowland village and listening to the radio acquired through barter of honey. Nevertheless, even with the change of their environment, their beliefs and social way remained unchanged.

### *2.6 Social Organization*

The kinship system of Sakai is that of an extended family. There are three generations of members staying as a family : the grandparents, the second the generation of ego and the ego's children. The oldest man becomes the leader of groups. Everyone helps the member who has a problem, and in the jungle problem are solved peacefully. Sometimes, some members of this hunter-gatherer group may move to seek food since everybody has duty to produce food. However, a member will only hunt or gather the food that

he likes and share this with the other.

The Sakai marriage system is exogamy and monogami. Usually the men will go to visit various groups and look for prospective wives. The prospective partner decides if they want to live as husband and wife, and if their parents approved that they are considered married and is totally accepted by the groups as husband and wife. They get married at age 16-30 years old. The married couples is expected to be diligent and they are good in hunting and gathering which they have learned in all of their lives.

About divorce, there are a few in the Sakai society. They have a very close relationship and each one cares for each other, but if a divorce occurs the sons or daughters can still marry until such time usually they stay with mother.

The Sakai do not physically punish their children, they give advise in order to train them. They are nonliterate, so the method of transferring of information from the past is through verbal communication. Most of their stories teach lesson and told of the rules of taboo of society. The way of life is taught to the children such as training the boy in hunting and gathering by the father and the girl is trained on making basketry and utensils by the women of the kin or mother.

### III. Conclusion

Evidence of firepits was found in the sector of excavation, and associated finds, apart from charcoal, were animal bones, shells and seeds. The fires could have served for two main purposes, firstly, for cooking and secondly, for warm at night. The cooking fires could be distinguished with the presence of wooden tripods or hearth stones. Fires for warming did not have these features. These firing techniques have been observed to be still practised by the Sakai who presently live in the vicinity of the cave. They were reported to make fire by rubbing a rattan rod against a picca of bamboo (Jirawadee, 1992). The Sakai also straighten their blowpipes by heating them over fires.



From the observation and interviews on the present Sakai group in the area the identified plants from the excavation are still being used for food, for making tools and utensils, for making toys, for use on cooking tripod just like in the past. Most of the plants utilized for food bear fruit during the rainy season which could mean that the Sakai in the past stays in the vace probably in this time of the year, living in the cave was therefore seasonal.

Evidence from the excavation showed the Sakai preferred to cook their food before eating. Most of the plants retrieved from the excavation are still thriving in the jungle in this present time. Some have become difficult to find but can still be found in the dense forest.

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