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CHAPTER 2

Ethnic Categories in Burma and the Theory of Social Systems

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POLITICAL BACKGROUND: THE FEDERALIST MOVEMENT

In this chapter I shall first give some of the recent background for Burma's current minority problems, and then put it in the general context of an appropriate theory.

Burma's minority problems are at least as vexing and complex as those of any country in mainland Southeast Asia. Mr. Maran (in this volume) has summarized in a general way the analyses of the problem which are available to us and has shown that they take us very little distance toward any understanding. He has told us further that Burma's independence in the form of a *Union* was achieved in 1948, in part as a result of decisions reached at the Panglong Conference, following activities of the Frontier Areas Enquiry Commission. Deliberations of that Commission helped to persuade the spokesmen for various minority groups within the colonial territorial boundaries of Burma to opt for union with the Burman majority.[1]

Since independence in 1948 Burma has been beset with various degrees and kinds of insurgency, and among the insurgent groups have been, for example, the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), the Mon National Defense Organization, and other groups whose labels show them to be connected with Kachin, Shan, and even Arakanese aspirations for some sort of recognition as "nationalities."

The Constitution of the Union of Burma is such that certain

[1] In this paper, and the one by Mr. Maran which follows, the term "Burman" refers to a native speaker of the Burmese language, who is a member of the dominant national majority group in "Burma." "Burma" means the territory of the Union of Burma. "Burma proper" means the region of Burma, principally the major river-valley region, which is occupied primarily by Burmans.

blocks of minority peoples (Kayah, Karen, Shan, Kachin), along with Burma proper (the heartland of the majority Burman population), have the status of states within the Union. One block, the Chin, constitutes a "special division," which is not quite a state. On the eve of the assumption of political power by the Burma Army Revolutionary Council in March 1962, there was even fairly substantial talk of the possibilities, pro and con, of some sort of similar recognition for the Mon and the Arakanese.

Prominent among the ostensible precipitating causes of this assumption of power by the military was the activity of a consortium of minority blocks. This consortium was holding the so-called Federalist Seminars in Rangoon the very week of the Revolution. This was well reported in the Rangoon press though not in foreign papers. As nearly as I can judge, the consortium did not claim to represent the governments of the minority-block states, but they did represent interests in and of the minority states and the Chin Special Division. As its steering committee was headquartered in the Kayah State Guest House where I was also staying,[2] I can say that a very diverse set of sentiments on minority issues was represented.

The consortium seems to have concentrated very much on Shan nationalist aspirations, and was perhaps led by proponents of Shan nationalism. In fact, much of the force of the argument behind the organization was the not-too-veiled threat of Shan secession from the Union. Documentation for a description of the issues and actors is lacking because the organization's records were quickly impounded by the Revolutionary government. Thus we can only presume that this particularly strong and well-articulated Shan nationalism was associated with the renewed Shan insurgency of the time. Shan nationalist sentiment had been provoked with the abolition of the political status and prerogatives of the traditional Shan sawbwas (princes) in the Shan State during the military Caretaker regime of 1958–1961.

The "representativeness" of the personnel from the various minority blocks differed considerably from group to group. One inference from the location of the steering committee headquarters (in the Kayah State Guest House) is that the Kayah State apparatus was itself involved. Sao Wunna, who was then Kayah State Minister (in the Union government), was subsequently

[2] I was in no way involved in the proceedings of the meeting.

implicated in a rather serious anti-government conspiracy, and this fact tends to confirm the inference that the state government was involved. In any case, Kayah representation, overt or covert, was by persons at the center of ongoing Kayah State politics. I suspect this was true for the Shans as well, but cannot prove it.

In the case of the Kachin, about whom Mr. Maran writes, the Sama Duwa (who was then President-elect of the Union of Burma) was occasionally seen with members of the steering committee at the Kayah State Guest House. But he walked out on them in anger, and perhaps this move explains why he was not arrested when he returned to Rangoon some days after the Revolution.

The Chin were far less involved, being represented at Kayah Guest House by two Northern (Tiddim) Chin politicians, one of whom was a retired army captain, at that time a member of Parliament. Apparently neither of them was more than an observer and neither was a major political figure in the more vocally nationalist parties (e.g. CNO, or Chin National Organization) of the Chin Special Division. Likewise, neither was arrested on the night of the take-over, as were six of the other participants in the Guest House.

I can say nothing about the other groups.

Leaving aside the Shan secessionist threat as unassessable, the Federalist movement brought diverse people together on the common ground of a proposed *federal* constitution for the Union. In this system more autonomy would be given to the minority constituent blocks. Also, in essence, the Union would not be run so much by Burma proper. Up to this time the Burmans had dominated the Union by means of the parliamentary system of government. Among other things, the Union (central) government was also the government of Burma proper (one of the Union's constituents). What the minorities wanted, as a minimum common denominator, was more power to distribute central government revenue to and within the non-Burman states. There was also talk in the Federalist circles (mainly Shan?) of asking for the right of the states to negotiate independently with foreign governments—ostensibly for foreign economic aid—and this must have appeared a very serious threat to the Union.

So much for the Federalist movement and the attendant Shan

insurgency as background to Burma's present internal problems. It was certainly a complicated minority-oriented situation.

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND: THE STATE RELIGION ACT

During the final couple of years of the civilian government, under U Nu, the religious question was also a complicating factor in the politics of majority-minority relations. Buddhism is, of course, the religion of most of the Burmans, the national majority people of Burma. It is, in fact, a central part of their sense of national-cultural identity, quite apart from technical questions about individual religious beliefs. On the basis of the somewhat vague promises U Nu made during his successful campaign after the first military regime, he was under pressure to make Buddhism, in some way or other, the national religion.

The State Religion Act was passed about three months before the Revolution which removed U Nu from power. What this act might have meant, of course, cannot be known. U Nu insisted that it would not infringe upon the freedom of religion for adherents of other religions. But it did involve official Union government recognition of the preeminent place of Buddhism as the religion of the majority, and it meant the continuation of the financial and organizational support already given to Buddhist missionary activity, Buddhist monastic-hierarchical reform, Buddhist scholarship, and so on.

The "state religion" question affected majority-minority relations adversely in two very different ways. First, let us take the case of the Shan, who are generally Buddhists of the same doctrinal variety as the Burmans. The Shan Buddhist organization has traditionally been formally distinct from that of Burma proper; under the Burmese kings the Shan monasteries appear not to have been subject to the jurisdiction of the Burmese Buddhist primate (Mendelson 1964). The Shan had felt for some time that the central government was trying to impose Burman monks and Burman monastic traditions in the Shan State, and the State Religion policy only exacerbated this fear.

The reaction of other groups had a different basis. Among some of the tribes, notably Chin, Kachin, and Karen, there are large numbers of Christians. Furthermore, much of their nationalistic political leadership comes from the Christian, mission-influ-

enced sections of the population. Mr. Maran has written of this in the case of the Kachin.

Among the Chin, the only group of which I can speak from fairly direct knowledge on this point, the religious issue seriously agitated a large segment of politicians, particularly those not in the government party. It did not precipitate insurgency, but it created a very real, if quiet, panic. Roughly 70 percent of the Chin are non-Christians; most are animists, but some, especially on the Arakan (Kaladan River) side, are at least nominally Buddhists. Only about 22 percent are Baptists, real or nominal, and a few percent more are Protestants of other denominations, or Roman Catholics.

Despite the small proportion of Christians involved, the State Religion Act resulted in a feeling among the Chin that the central government wished to threaten important symbols of Chin *political* identity. This feeling tended to persist even after the State Religion policy ceased to be in effect under the new military Revolutionary government.

One of the important political functions of Christianity for the Chin has been to serve as a symbol of their being a part of a larger world of civilization via the churches and their missions. That world was, necessarily, the Western world. Thus, to the extent that the Revolutionary government has pursued socialist economic policies and neutralist or non-aligned foreign policies, the Chin have felt increasingly cut off from this part of their identification with the rest of the world. As a consequence, the panic among the Chin nationalist political leaders has not dissipated. The secular policies of the Revolutionary government have been seen as a threat to just those things that, to the Chin, are symbolized in the issue of religion.

It should be pointed out that Chin identification with a religious institutional link to the outside world of civilization carried little desire for political separation from the Burmans. For the most part it was quite the reverse. Many Chin, and not just the Christians, felt that their age-old claim to be an integral part of the civilized political economy of Burma proper could be expressed only after the education and all sorts of cultural teachings of Christian missions had made it possible for the Chin to appear to the Burmans as something more than mere tribes-

men. The missions gave them cultural leverage for asserting themselves as partners equal with the Burmans in the Burmese economic and political network. It is therefore unfortunate that during the past year or so a serious feeling, perhaps even an active movement, for political separation from Burma has begun in the Chin Hills. From my quite fragmentary current information, this seems to be a very different attitude from that of the past. Although there has always been a small and rather passive sentiment favoring Chin independence, the Chin for the most part have been intensely loyal to the Union. Chin troops were largely responsible for keeping Rangoon out of Karen and other insurgent hands during the battle of Insein in 1949. Chin troops were thought so reliable that late in the summer of 1958, when the first military regime was quietly being planned, Chin troops replaced most others in the strategic Motor Pool and in some other key service depots in and around Rangoon.

MINORITY PROBLEMS AND POLICIES

From all the foregoing we can derive general support for Mr. Maran's contention that Burma has not one but many minority problems, and also that there are *intra*-minority problems. We can conclude that the minorities have felt that Burma's policy toward them has been financially niggardly and administratively subordinating, and that it has not allowed adequately for economic development, educational improvement, or self-expression for the minorities in the Union councils. Until the present Revolutionary Council Government, in fact, there seems to have been no overall "minority policy" other than the very general guarantees of the now defunct Union Constitution.

The present government has propagandized widely for the development of the cultures and economies of the tribal and hill areas of the country. For example, the government has established projects for the development of terrace cultivation in the Chin Hills, and has also established an Academy for the Development of National Groups at Sagaing, which seems to have as its major activity the bringing together of groups of about ten people from each of the various minority areas, who will live together and be trained for about two years. It is expected that they will thereby learn to understand each other's customs and also get

a feeling for their joint membership in the Burmese nation. In connection with this the Academy will encourage the practice and performance of the folk customs of the various minority groups, in the hope that the separate minority identities will be seen to complement one another. We do not yet know how different this will be from the former annual custom at Union Day, when hill men were brought to Rangoon to sight-see and to perform tribal dances. At the moment it is unclear whether the present policy will continue to reflect the view that minority customs are just collections of oddities useful mainly for arousing Burman curiosity about the remote peoples of the Union.

AN EXAMPLE OF INTRA-MINORITY PROBLEMS: KAYAH, KAREN, AND SHAN

I should like now to give a previously unpublished example from my fieldnotes of intra-minority problems. The example shows how some aspects of a minority's relationship to the majority population can be seriously affected by relations with other minorities.

Kayah State is one of the constituent parts of the Union of Burma. Formerly it was called the Karen-ni (Red Karen) State, though the ruling people of it call themselves Kayah (or, more exactly, Kaya-li = Karen-ni = Red Karen). It is usually stated as a fact that the change of official name, which took place in 1951, was insisted upon by the Kayah, simply because they did not wish to be identified as a kind of Karen, nor with the very serious Karen rebellion in 1949 and the years following. It is further usually stated as a fact that the Kayah insisted on the change because they had no connection with the rebellion and did *not* consider themselves to be any kind of Karen. But the situation is really much more complex.

The Kayah actually define themselves as a very special kind of Karen. In the villages men will discuss differences and similarities between their Kayah customs and the customs of their various Karen neighbors. One central part of Kayah identity in Burma is that they traditionally have had sawbwas (princes). The sawbwa system is a Shan political system, which derived its jural authority mainly from the old Burmese kingdoms.

There are three statelets of Karenni (Kantarawadi, Kyèbogyi,

and Bawlahkè), each of which was formerly under a Shan-style sawbwa (prince). The second, which is in the center of Karenni State, was much involved in the beginning in the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), the Karen rebel organization. Its young prince, Saw Shwe, himself led his men as a part of the KNDO in the jungle, and in some of the villages of Kyèbogyi virtually all the able-bodied men were at one time with the insurgents.

Because they were under the leadership of their own prince, the Kayah claimed to be a separate force in the Karen insurgency. For one reason or another this antagonized the central body of the KNDO and led to general disaffection of the Kyèbogyi Kayah and their sawbwa. They withdrew from the insurgency, but it appears that Saw Shwe was detained by KNDO leaders somewhere in the jungle, where he subsequently died or was killed.

For a variety of reasons, the internal, and partly inter-dynastic, politics of Kayah State determined that whatever Kyèbogyi did, Kantarawadi and (perhaps with less zeal) Bawlahkè would do the opposite. Kantarawadi had long been recognized, first by the British and later by the Burmans, as the nominal paramount statelet in Kayah. Kyèbogyi, unquestionably the oldest Kayah statelet, had long disputed this position. When Kyèbogyi joined the KNDO, the Kantarawadi and Bawlahkè leaders were persuaded or constrained not to join. With the attendant destruction of the Kyèbogyi royal house and of elements friendly to it in that of Kantarawadi,[3] Kantarawadi was able to secure control of the Kayah State Ministry of the Union government for members and allies of its own royal house.

Thus what we have in Kayah State is a kind of Karen minority whose special position is defined by its identification with the Shan political system. This identification was used by the Kayah *not* to make themselves appear to be Shan, but rather to set themselves apart as a special entity vis-à-vis other Karen. The Shan are Buddhists; the Kayah, generally, are not. But the special affirmation of Kayah loyalty to the Union of Burma was a typical

[3] Traditionally, the Mahadewi, or chief wife, of the Kantarawadi sawbwa was a daughter of the sawbwa of Kyèbogyi. The story of how and why her son was kept from possible succession to the Kantarawadi sawbwaship in the mid-1940's must be written elsewhere.

product of Shan-style (intra-Kayah) politics among princes, as well as a product of inter-Karen relations.

It is not surprising, with this background, that by 1962 the previously loyal Kayah State government was particularly closely identified with the Shan-dominated extreme wing of the Federalist movement. As Mr. Maran says, it is impossible to view a minority as an isolate and to understand its relations with the majority on that basis. The Kayah State loyalty to Burma in the late 1940's and 1950's was loyalty *as against* other Karen (this is also true of Kyèbogyi separatism within the KNDO). It depended on identification *with* the sawbwa system of the Shan, and as the Shan position vis-à-vis the central government changed, so did that of the Kayah. The Kayah do not relate to the Burmans in a vacuum.

PAST AND CURRENT VIEWS OF THE MINORITY PROBLEM

I have no idea what the future role of the tribal people will be in the nation of Burma. I know what it is now and what, given present policy, it must continue to be for some time to come. Discontent characterizes almost all minority regions of Burma today, tribal and non-tribal alike. Active discontent brings government retaliation, and all this aggravates the general state of feud and insurrection in many parts of the country. The other face of insurrection is, of course, the insurrections of the political right and the political left. These are thoroughly mixed up with minority problems in several cases, but I am going to presume that these two faces of civil disorder are at least analytically distinct.

The most serious obstacle to solving Burma's problems of minority-majority relations is the official attitude toward indigenous minorities. Paradoxically, this attitude is nearly identical to many modern social-science approaches toward societies and cultures in general. I propose that this theory is in need of revision because it is unsound, especially for many parts of Southeast Asia, including Burma.

What are some of the fundamental ideas I am objecting to? First is the idea that any territorially localized group of people is *naturally*, exclusively, and definitively a portion, or a whole, of something called *a* society, and that there is in principle a

definite, countable number of societies in the world. Ideally, each of them is supposed, on this view, to be a "people" with a culture peculiar to itself. (Note that the terms "naturally" and "ideally" are very important parts of this rhetoric, albeit frequently inexplicit.)

The second idea is that labels such as Chin, Kachin, Karen, Shan, Burman, and the like, have reference to "peoples" in the sense sketched above. Each of these labels is supposed to correspond either to some empirical, real, natural group of people (i.e., a society), or to some closed set of such societies in those cases where the label is a cover term for a class or type of societies. For example, we can take the idea that the term "Kachin" encompasses such labeled categories as Maru, Lashi, Atzi, Jinghpaw, etc. If we accept this view, "Kachin" refers at most to a species of *external* relations between real societies.

Third is the idea that, except under recurrent, transitory, and problematical conditions (variously called culture contact, social change, or similar terms), local groups fall naturally into these labeled categories in a non-overlapping repartition. Any two *ethnic* categories of this sort (if neither is a cover term in the sense given above) are supposed to be mutually exclusive as to local group membership.

These ideas seem to imply that if we can only somehow sort out these labels "correctly," as in a tribal or ethnic synonymy such as appears in books like the recent HRAF ethnographic gazetteer of mainland Southeast Asia (LeBar *et al.* 1964), it must be possible to arrange them in a proper taxonomy (Conklin 1964) of actual local groups or natural societies, together with their respective cultures. As a corollary it also seems to be supposed that any hierarchical element in such taxonomies (e.g. the element according to which there are differently labeled "kinds" of Kachin) is at most only an organization of essentially *foreign* relations, probably nothing more than explicit recognition by outside observers, or by the peoples themselves, that the peoples so grouped have shared a certain amount of history and may also speak closely related languages.

These are ideas that have been central to the formal rhetoric of Western social and political philosophy from at least the time of the Enlightenment. And this very rhetoric as a formal system

of argumentation has been borrowed by many different varieties of modern Burmese nationalism, so that Burmese political life today is conducted in terms of the internationally understood language of Left versus Right, Socialism versus Liberal Democracy, and so on. The same political philosophy, of course, has deeply influenced both the notions about nationhood found in the now defunct Constitution of the Union of Burma and the proposals made for its revision, e.g. by the Shan-led Federalist movement of 1961–1962. Leach (1960) has made a convincing case for the disparity between traditional concepts of nationhood and those that European legal and constitutional considerations have imposed upon modern Southeast Asia.

What has not been pointed out with sufficient force and clarity is that many of these same notions have been inherited from the same source by modern social science. Social science has its roots not just generally in Western thought, but to a considerable degree in the social and political philosophies of the eighteenth century as well as German Romanticist thought (Lévi-Strauss 1955; Pocock 1961). Therefore I think it proper, even though this paper is a part of a symposium directed to problems of a delimited region of the world, to address myself to general social-science theory. For, in one way or another, that theory itself, or a branch of it, has played a major role in generating the problems of majority-minority relations in Burma—or at least in obscuring the conditions required for their solution.

I submit that the solution of such practical national problems is unlikely to be discovered until the exact definition of the problems becomes understood. I do not for a moment suppose that this understanding can be achieved only through the ministrations of social science, but that does not serve as an excuse for avoiding the issue. Indeed, I shall point out below that throughout the pre-colonial period of history the Burmans had a reasonably correct tacit understanding of the nature of their relations with bordering peoples, tribal and non-tribal. That Burma seems to have lost this understanding today is almost certainly directly attributable to the importation of very explicit European ideas about nations, societies, and cultures, and the kinds of phenomena that they are taken to be.

I think that such views of societies as I have described above

necessarily pose a serious problem for "nation-building" in countries like Burma, where many symbiotic ethnic categories have existed through much of history and where local groups in this symbiosis have been related to each other in a variety of reticulate ways. When applied toward the solution of something called a minority problem in such a country, these views set up two opposite and equally abortive responses. On the one hand, official actions try to erode minority cultural and linguistic distinctiveness by propaganda, education, and plain force, possibly reducing ethnic peculiarities to the level of harmless historical relics or folkways as a transitional sop to regional pride and prejudice. I suspect that this is implicit in the organization of the new Academy for the Development of National Groups set up by the present Revolutionary Government of Burma at Sagaing (*Forward,* III, 7, 11–17, November 1964).

On the other hand, regional "ethnic" differences can be recognized in the medium of Federalism. One can even try to carve out discrete ethnic states for peoples who have not traditionally lived unmixed in compact contiguous territories. Burma has delineated a Karen state in this way and has tried, with no apparent hope of satisfaction, to carve out a similar state for the Mon—in that vast region of southern Burma where most Mon have long ago become thoroughly Burmanized in language and culture.

The first response, as I have noted, often requires the use of force. In any event, it is almost bound to create hostility between numerically and economically unequal local groups. Adherence to a minority cultural tradition is treated as tantamount to subversion of the nation and is branded as a mark of group inferiority within the nation. The second, or federal, response, given the explicit ideological view I have already attributed to the concept of society, is very likely to create a climate of mutually exclusive, regional ethnic nationalism in the sense that federal relations tend to be fixed constitutionally as those between contractually or "voluntarily" associated cultural and social sovereignties inherently foreign to one another. The tragedy is that this climate can be created where in fact no such concept of sovereignties existed before.

I am not, of course, claiming that *modern* nations necessarily have any other choices practically open to them than the two

sorts of responses I have just spoken of. I am, however, questioning the view taken of the "peoples" of Burma and other such countries, when these "peoples" are the objects of very particular, concrete policies of nation-building.

THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS: CULTURE, SOCIETY, AND "ETHNIC GROUP"

I wish to suggest an alternative theory of the nature of ethnic categories. It is a theory that I believe is at once less mystical and romantic than the traditional one and at the same time much more in line with the facts of human social and cultural life in general and of Burma and Southeast Asia in particular. What I shall propose is by no means altogether novel. I am obviously building upon Leach's work (1954; 1960). But I must go beyond Leach somewhat, insofar as he has rather drastically and unrealistically oversimplified his definitions of ethnic categories and of majority-minority relations between such categories. Nonetheless, he has shown how people who are at one point Kachins can "become" Shan in a systematic way that is part and parcel of the social-structural rules of the Kachin social system itself. He has also shown that sub-categories within Kachin bear no clear or necessary relationship to linguistic categories.

What theoretical assumptions are required to make sense of these and a host of similar examples from the ethnographic literature on Burma and surrounding countries? How will it be possible to *generalize* about inter-group relations in Burma without so oversimplifying the picture as to render impossible the drawing of interesting connections between theory and fact?

In the first place, I assume that social and cultural systems are reference systems—that is, cognitive models at varying levels of awareness. Actual groups of people make selective use of these models, or appeal to them in order to guide their real-life actions in an actual environment that, in most cases, includes groups of peoples using other such systems. These models generate meaningful *interpretations* to situations and things, and to the range of possible sequences of behavior in these contexts. I wish to avoid implying that models of this kind must tend (even ideally) to be cognitively consistent or homogeneous. The limits of cognitive and affective dissonance within which human social

life can function is a real problem in psychology; but almost certainly these limits are not vanishingly narrow. Certainly persons have the continuous problem of maintaining their psychological integrity, and, in one sense or another, so do groups. But I can think of nothing that has been more damaging to the development of a formally adequate social anthropological theory than an unfortunate tendency to confuse persons with roles, or groups with models of organization.

We know that systems must have flexibility because we observe that people respond (often experimentally, but in cognitively intelligible and strategically assessable ways) to a variety of real-life exigencies, many of them in a measure novel and unpredictable. With Leach (1961; 1962) I wish to have a sociological theory that will account directly for this flexibility.

I am also not concerned with any *presumptive* "conflict" between so-called ideal and real culture. Culture, we assume, is in this respect rather like language. In actual discourse we often produce utterances that are not fully grammatical or well formed. Usually this does not interfere with communication, because grammatical rules allow us to *impose* an interpretation on actual utterances. (To share a language is to share a grammar in precisely this sense.) But while this involves quite massive constraints on the shape of our actual utterances, it does not constrain sharers of a common language to speak exactly alike. If, as Chomsky would have it (1957), the grammars which are in people's heads are not utterance-generating devices, but rather interpretation- or structure-generating devices, so too, one supposes, the "norms" or patterns of a culture cannot be expected to account directly for actual behavior.

THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS: "ETHNIC" CATEGORIES AS ROLE SYSTEMS

I suggest that (when people identify themselves as members of some "ethnic" category,) e.g. Jinghpaw, Kayah, Chin, Sgaw Karen, (they are taking positions in culturally defined systems of inter-group relations) (this particular formulation I owe to P. Kunstadter). These systems of inter-group relations comprise, at least in the case of Burma, complexly interdependent complementary categories. I claim in particular that, in reality, (*ethnic*

categories are formally like roles) and are, in that sense, only very indirectly descriptive of the empirical characteristics of substantive groups of people.

A role is defined, not in absolute terms, but relative to a whole system of other roles. It is perhaps the exceptional role system that consists of either just two roles or just two kinds of roles, i.e., a single kind of relation (*pace* Nadel 1957, where an attempt is made to reduce all role relations to the dimension of superordination/subordination). Again, I claim in particular that it is characteristic of Burma, as of much of the rest of Southeast Asia, that (any local or regional group, especially one that is in any sense a minority group, is inherently likely to have recourse to more than one ethnic role system and more than one "identity.") I tentatively ascribe this plurality of ethnic role systems and identities to the ecology of state-level polity in this part of the world (cf. Leach 1960), and to the fact that almost any minority group must come to terms with more than one state civilization and a variety of other minorities, themselves differently treated by different states. In any case, a minority's relations with any given civilization are predictably fluid and *ambiguous* (Leach 1954; Lehman 1963).

These claims are serious, because more is involved in them than merely the common observation that people frequently identify themselves alternatively with reference to categories of wide scope in some cases and of narrow scope in others (Burmese vs. Rangonian, American vs. New Yorker, and so on). Roles, we are often told (Goffman 1958; G. H. Mead 1935; Nadel 1957), are regularly played not simply to the person immediately addressed, but also to an implicit audience of other parties—the public which is, so to speak, shared by the immediate parties to the interaction as their common system of reference. I am in fact suggesting that ethnic categories fall into systems in this sense also.

SUBSTANTIVE EVIDENCE OF THE THEORY

If the very general propositions I have put forward so far are correct, we must expect to find in the ethnography of Burma at least five kinds of facts more adequately accounted for by these proposals than by hypotheses more usually put forward

in these connections. I shall list these kinds of facts in a somewhat arbitrary order and try to illustrate each one with one or two substantive ethnographic examples from Burma.

(1) There should be evidence that, at least in some cases, ethnic categories were traditionally defined over a long period of Burmese history by role complementation and not absolutely.

Luce (1959) has shown on the basis of Old Burmese inscriptions that the label "Chin" (the Old Burmese word was *khyan*) as used for peoples immediately west of Burma, was originally a term meaning, as it does today, "ally," or "comrade." Under this category the early Burmans recognized peoples ancestral to present-day Chins, who then inhabited not only the western hill country but also much of the plain of the Upper Chindwin. The Burmans considered them as a useful buffer between themselves and the Sak-Kadu, with whose kingdoms the early Burman state was in fundamental competition. The terms of the system of inter-group relations here must then be taken as three: Burman, Sak-Kadu, Chin.

One may compare this usage (cf. Lehman 1963) with the current Haka-Chin pair of complementary category terms, *zo* and *vai.*[4] *Vai* denotes Burma in its aspect as the focal civilization for the Chin, and the word *zo* has the basic meaning of (relatively) "uncultivated," "backward" with reference to *vai.* This system of categories is at least partially to be contrasted with the triplet of terms, *kawl, lai,* and *zo.* In this system the same Haka-Chin set themselves off from Burma much more sharply and proudly. *Kawl* is a somewhat derogatory word for Burmans, and *lai* (its general gloss is "central") is the word that Haka speakers use for themselves, reflecting their view that they are the cultural and political culmination of the cultural tradition. *Zo,* whose general gloss is again "relatively uncultivated," is here opposed to *lai,* reflecting the way in which Haka speakers look down on people of other parts of the Chin Hills.

(2) There should be evidence that we cannot reconstruct any demonstrable discrete ancestral group for some "ethnic category"—no matter whether we define such a possible ancestral group as a discrete dialect group, or as a group with relatively

[4] There are equivalent, but not necessarily cognate, words for *vai* in other Chin languages, and cognate words for *zo* in almost every other Chin language.

sharp cultural discontinuities from its neighbors. In this case there should also be evidence that the category has never achieved the degree of cultural and/or linguistic discreteness from its neighbors that it may claim for itself or have claimed for it by observers treating it as having *a* global culture consequent upon a distinctive history. These things would amount to evidence that an "ethnic category" is not *necessarily* ethnic in any usual sense, however much genuine or spurious ethnicity may be appealed to by any group as a justification or rationalization of their "being" such and such a "people." In addition there should be well-attested cases where the membership of an "ethnic category" is not even ideally absolute. It will also be interesting to find evidence that category *terms* need be neither symmetrical with respect to pairs of terms nor unique with respect to a single term.

All the points made under section (2) can be illustrated with a single case. There is a group of Karen dialects and languages which may be properly called Central Karen. It includes groups living in the Kayah State of Burma and in the hill country just west and north of that state, namely groups speaking Karen languages commonly known as Kayah (some of whom also live in Province Mae Hongson in western Thailand), Brè, Manumanaw (or Münü), Geba, Gehku, and maybe one or two others, and also, probably, Padaung and Yeinbaw. In the first sub-set any two adjacent groups speak mutually intelligible dialects, while groups more distant from one another tend to find their dialects mutually unintelligible. This kind of set is what linguists call an L-simplex.

There is a relatively more sharp linguistic break between the first sub-set of dialects and the Padaung-Yeinbaw sub-set. The first sub-set of groups can also be called a cultural and social simplex chain. All parties agree in recognizing that some villages are both Münü and Kayah, others are both Münü and Brè, and so on. For the bulk of the relevant cultural inventory of these groups, there are no sharp distributional discontinuities, but, with few exceptions, only gradual variations from village to village.

The exceptions concern only the Kayah. In the first place, the traditional costume of Kayah women is strikingly different from anything else found in the whole range of Karen groups. The

women wear neither smock nor sewn shirt, and on their knees they wear remarkably large and heavy bundles of lacquered cotton rings. This is hard to account for, although it may very well be a fairly recent development, even a self-conscious emblem of the existence among the Kayah alone of something like a real state-level political system of Shan-style princedoms. These princedoms arose about the middle of the nineteenth century, and the peculiar religious cult that is symbolized by the presence in every Kayah village of ceremonial teak poles (*iyluw*) and other apparatus can be shown to be a direct product of the Kayah's Shan-style political system.

Indeed, this apparatus has extraordinary and detailed parallels with Shan-Burmese Buddhist religious paraphernalia. For instance, the *iyluw* is a virtual duplicate of what is called in Burmese *tagundaing*, the Buddhist flagpole of victory found in many Burmese religious precincts. Although the charismatic-political founders of the cult under discussion reinterpreted these things in syncretistic, non-Buddhist terms (Lehman, forthcoming), Kayah legend and myth typically ascribe the power of these leaders (*phre phrow*, or miracle workers) who were founders of the system of princedoms, to a direct though mystical knowledge of the civilization and institutions of kingship of the Burmans. There is also historical evidence (see Stern 1965) that this movement among the Kayah took its origins in part from the semi-Buddhist millenary cults that flourished and spread among the Sgaw and Pwo Karen immediately to the south in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. In fact, one of the earliest reported leaders of such cults disappeared into Karenni, i.e., what is now the Kayah State, at a time just preceding what I have calculated as the period of the founding of the Kayah princedoms.

These apparent exceptions to the existence of a social-cultural simplex chain as a characterization of Central Karen have all to do in one way or another with a rather recently developed political system, by means of which some Central Karen groups literally took over from the Southern Shan the organization controlling inter-tribal and tribal-Shan-Burmese trade (Lehman 1965; forthcoming).

However, in reality there is about as much difference between one dialect of Kayah and another (variation is from west to east)

as between some dialects of Kayah and some of Manumanaw or Brè. Moreover, my recent work among the Kayah of western Thailand has shown that as an ethnic label "Kayah" (it is a word for "person," common to most Central Karen dialects) has two rather different meanings. Thus usage of the term belongs to two different systems of ethnic categories and intergroup relations.

The Kayah of Thailand arrived in their present home territories before consolidation of the Shan-style Kayah political system. The older ethnic meaning of Kayah is preserved among them. They lump western Burma Kayah groups and dialects together with those otherwise labeled by us as Manumanaw, that is as "Münü" or "western Central Karen." Thus "Kayah" is in effect a cover term equivalent to our use of "Central Karen." For these Kayah groups, clearly, the distinctive overlay of things like the aforementioned women's dress and ritual complex, which they too possess, is not allowed to obscure the essential simplex-chain character of Central Karen social and cultural variation.

The Burma Kayah, for whom the Kayah statelet system is more significant, profess to find the degree of linguistic difference between one dialect of Kayah and another quite insignificant in comparison with the differences between any Kayah dialect and even Manumanaw. Kayah is for them a much more specific term, and in fact they recognize no category equivalent to Central Karen. The Padaung and Yeinbaw are called by these Kayah *La khi* (la chiə). The Geba, whose language is in actuality so close to western Kayah that the latter people, having no writing system of their own, write Geba in the missionary-developed Romanization, are called by these Burma Kayah, *pakü da ne*^{2}, that is a kind of Sgaw Karen (*pakü*). This is quite interesting, inasmuch as the category Central Karen, wherever recognized by the peoples under discussion, is always opposed to the category Sgaw Karen. Thus the Sgaw word "Bwe" meaning "Central Karen" includes, indifferently, Geba and Kayah.[5] This equivalence is again well illustrated in western Thailand where, in places where one finds numerous Sgaw Karen, Kayah answer to the name of Bwe, and Geba answer to the name Kayah.

There is, finally, still another set of ethnic category labels avail-

[5] The Sgaw word for "Central Karen" is "Bghwe" in the Sgaw dialects of Thailand and "Bwe" in the Sgaw dialects around Toungoo in Burma.

able to some Central Karen groups. The Padaung and Gekhu think of themselves as forming a single category. That is, the Padaung call themselves *kekhoŋ*, as do the Yeinbaw, and this word is nothing but a variation of the word Gekhu, which means in all these cases "country-top," that is, people living in the uplands. This category is opposed to Geba, the people living on the slopes on the western side of the range separating the Kayah State from the Toungoo region of Burma proper.

Clearly there is a great deal of asymmetry in these categorial systems. For similar complications in a neighboring region of Southeast Asia, one can look at the system of labels used by the various Northern Thai-speaking groups of themselves (Moerman 1965).

Another case of asymmetry is that of the Lisu (Maran, this volume). This "people" is an element in the Kachin social system when living among Kachin, but not when living elsewhere (e.g. in Thailand). It is, of course, meaningless to ask whether Lisu is or is not a "kind" of Kachin.

(3) There should be evidence that for some groups of people there is a serious *choice* as to what cultural category to adopt for themselves, and in particular that cultural distinctiveness between two groups is not necessarily a simple consequence of either distance or barriers to direct communication and interaction.

I have shown elsewhere (Lehman 1963) that an interesting problem is raised by the fact that the Central Chin, who have for some centuries lived adjacent to a part of Burma proper which is very sparsely inhabited by Burmans, do not generally insist that villagers maintain and exhibit all the traditional external symbols of "being Chin"; whereas the Southern Chin, who have for centuries lived adjacent to plains regions densely inhabited by Burmans are extremely conservative in this respect. This is a state of affairs that has been noticed for many tribes-peoples in and around Burma (cf. Leach 1960; Scott 1900). The closer these groups live with their civilized neighbors, the more conservative they become of the traditional symbols of "being" a different people. This suggests very strongly that they are reacting, more or less self-consciously, to the immediate possibility of being attracted toward trying to adopt Burman cultural stan-

dards, an attempt which, furthermore, would put most of them in the position of being at best unsuccessful Burmans as compared with people whose environment allows them reasonable chances for success at meeting Chin-defined cultural standards of living.

(4) There should be evidence that all proposed simple dichotomies based on attributes fail adequately to characterize intergroup and majority-minority relations in Burma in any reasonable way consistent with the facts. In this connection it has to be pointed out that, if indeed we are not classifying either groups or total societies with the use of ethnic category labels, and if instead these categories are parts of one type of role systems, then, if these role systems are at all complex, say in hierarchical ordering, no dichotomy could possibly characterize such systems adequately.

I will here deal one at a time with the dichotomies usually put forward as characterizing majority-minority ethnic relations in Burma and the rest of Southeast Asia.

(a) It is often supposed that minorities generally are hill dwellers and majority peoples are valley or plains dwellers. Many Karen, both Pwo and Sgaw, have for a very long time, however, dwelt in the plains of Lower Burma and western Thailand. The Plains Chin (Stern 1962) have for some centuries dwelt in a large plains region of western Burma, without ceasing to be a minority people even though living in the very midst of areas of dense Burman settlement and having become heavily Burmanized in language, culture, and religion. On the other hand, while the Shan live in river valleys, the fact that these are upland valleys rather than lowland plains can be shown to have important consequences not only for the peculiarly Shan style of economic and political inter-digitation with surrounding hill tribes, but also for such things as the Shan systems of land use and settlement organization. Certainly too, the traditional multiplicity of Shan principalities is itself largely a result of the dispersion of the Shan among often sharply separated upland valleys.

(b) A related dichotomy often put forward is that between peoples who cultivate irrigated rice and those who practice swidden or shifting cultivation. This dichotomy is imprecise in more than one way. For instance, considerable regions of Upper Burma

are so situated that there is very little wet farming done. Of the dry farming that replaces it (see Nash 1965), some at least is swidden farming (*taung ya*) and in addition a certain amount of shifting cultivation is practiced at least in the case of supplementary crop production wherever Burmans have to make use of marginal or newly opened land. The Plains Chin, mentioned above, are a tribal minority practicing for the most part wet farming. By contrast, the Yaw, who live nearby between the Ponnyadaung Range and the Chin Hills, often practice dry cultivation, but they are not customarily classed as a minority. They are Buddhists, speaking a non-standard dialect of Burmese. Lowland Karen (who are classed as a minority tribe) practice a great deal of both wet and dry farming. Their dry farming, moreover, as also in the case of the Kayah, is in some cases plough cultivation, in others hoe cultivation, depending upon the steepness or rockiness of the local terrain.

(c) It is often said that, inasmuch as Burmans have traditionally defined their society as inherently Buddhist in character, that is, as having an explicitly Buddhistic institution of kingship (Mendelson 1961), minorities may be defined as non-Buddhist. Obviously, most of the non-tribal indigenous minorities—the Arakanese, Mon, and Shan (all of whom are definitely and inherently adjuncts of Burman civilization rather than independent civilizations on the same level as the Burmese)—are Buddhists. For the most part they have monastic communities following the same rules of ordination as those followed in Burma proper. Yet the Shan have reacted very adversely to attempts by the Burmese government to Burmanize the Sangha of the Shan State. The Palaung, an Austroasiatic-speaking tribal group of the Shan State, are also Buddhists, and have in general become Shan-ized in politics and culture. Most Plains Chin are also Buddhists now.

On the other hand, Burmese Christians do not constitute a distinct sociological minority group in the ethnic sense. Conversely, a non-indigenous minority like the Chinese remain a minority even though many of them are Buddhists—of a kind, however, different from Burman Buddhism.

(d) Leach (1960) has suggested that, whereas the civilized peoples have characteristically cognatic kinship systems, tribal peoples in this part of the world are unilineal, usually patrilineal.

He has also asserted that succession to positions of political leadership among the tribes-peoples is essentially hereditary, while among civilized Burmans and Shans it is fundamentally charismatic. These things he has ascribed tentatively to the fact that the civilizations are built on Hindu-Buddhist Indian models, while the tribal peoples preserve an old Southeast Asian traditional model of social organization that is shared with China.

But one can just as well attribute the cognatic organization of the civilized peoples to the demonstrated fact that these groups have been formed over the centuries as much by recruitment from diverse other groups, notably hill peoples (see Cady 1954), as by natural demographic increase. In any case, most Karen groups are straightforwardly cognatic, and the rest, e.g. the Sgaw and Pwo, are also basically cognatic despite relatively great emphasis upon matrifiliality for purposes of determining post-marital residence and inheritance (cf. Hamilton 1963; also personal discussion with J. W. Hamilton, T. Stern, and S. Iijima). Indeed, Indian kinship systems are not fully cognatic, while Burman and Shan kinship is nearly so.

Furthermore, many hill men have no *distinct* political offices to be succeeded to (e.g. many Sgaw and Pwo Karen). Nor are all hill men (e.g. Karen) necessarily practitioners of unilineal succession, even where, as among the Kayah, they have a kind of state and an office of "prince." Chiefly status, as with the Chin, is by no means always a matter of hereditary succession, even jurally (Lehman 1963; cf. Maran, this volume). Karen, including Kayah, quite generally recruit their leaders on a markedly charismatic basis; or, more precisely, leaders impose themselves by virtue of their claims to be possessed of unusual powers, to be of miraculous birth, or to have special knowledge of the outside world of civilization. By contrast, even though throughout Burmese history succession to the Burmese throne was uniformly erratic both in fact and in law, one of the first things a royal usurper always felt it necessary to do was to establish in the public mind the idea that he was "of the royal bone"; that is, he had to give presumptive evidence that some of his ancestors were of royal birth.

(e) Language is a poor guide to whether a group is or is not either a minority or an ethnic group in any sense. Even speak-

ers of Burmese are sometimes minorities. Of all the dialects of the Burmese language, only Arakanese is the language of a group with separate national consciousness. Arakanese is no more different from Standard Burmese than are many other dialects, such as Yaw, Taungyo, or Tavoyan. Arakan had, of course, a long history as one or more independent kingdoms which were often at war with Burma and which had particularly close relations with kingdoms in what is now East Bengal.

The Mon are descendants of speakers of an Austroasiatic language, who had an important independent kingdom in Lower Burma, long before that of the Burmans. Since the eleventh century, however, their country, the Irrawady Delta, has been subject to Burman rule much of the time. Mon nationalism still exists, and there has been from time to time an attempt to create a Mon state within the Union of Burma. Yet most people claiming to be Mon by ethnic identification are nowadays native speakers of Burmese; many in fact speak no Mon at all. The Mon are actually for the most part quite indistinguishable from the Burmans in culture and language as well as religion.

Many of the sub-categories of Kachin are identified by labels whose primary reference is to a fairly wide range of very different languages within the "Tibeto-Burman" spectrum of Sino-Tibetan (Atzi, Nung-Rawang, Jinghpaw, Gauri, Lashi, etc.). But Leach (1954) has shown that it is *not* the case that, for example, all those participating in the Lashi sub-system of political organization are speakers of Lashi, and, conversely, not all Lashi speakers participate in the Lashi sub-system.

We can, of course, say that in many instances "ethnic" category labels in Burma, if they are labels of wide scope like "Kachin," apply only (or largely) to speakers of a single language sub-family. Karen is such a label; so are Chin and Burman. But Kachin, notably, is not confined to a single language sub-family. It must follow that we cannot include even a language sub-family criterion in our theory of the definition of "ethnic" categories.

(f) Level of political development is hardly a better indicator of minority status than is language. The Shan certainly must be accounted as having a state-level political system. But this system of princedoms, with very few exceptions, explicitly

derives its legitimacy as well as its titles of royalty conceptually from the Burmese kingdom. The ideological dependence of the Shan civilization upon the civilization of Burma[6] as a focal Buddhist monarchy was in no way diminished by the fact that very often actual Shan rulers were in open conflict with individual Burman kings. This state of affairs, in fact, was probably no more true of Shan princes than of other *de facto* political leaders of many regions of Burma proper during much of Burmese history. Such conflict was in large measure a struggle for the Burmese throne itself, which, of course, was occupied by the Shan from about 1370 to 1555.

(g) There is no single pattern of economic relations between minority and majority in Burma. While the Shan system is clearly an adjunct of Burmese civilization, the Shan social and political system was itself the immediate locus of the economic symbiosis of many north Burma hill tribes with Burmese civilization. Leach (1954) has proved this for the Kachin, and in general the well-known Shan system of five-day markets was an institution for drawing upon surrounding hill peoples as sources of produce and as allies and dependents.

We can examine further this matter of economic interdependence. The Chin, for example, have always had a great deal of trouble in exercising what they felt to be their legitimate claim on the goods and markets of Burma (and of Assamese and Manipuri civilizations). For the most part they had to assert their claims by raiding and looting, because the Burmans showed little interest in trading with them, or even in claiming to rule over them (*contra* Leach 1960).

Among most of the hill tribes the situation is different. The Shan-Chinese trading complex involved tribal peoples in many ways. Wherever there are Shan in Burma, there are petty pack traders as well as periodic markets. This Shan trade draws the hill people into its orbit by means ranging from casual attraction to coercion. The trade is often less important for the tribesmen than for the Shan, as Mr. Maran has indicated for the Kachin. But in the case of the Kachin this was because they were more

[6] In a similar way the Kengtung Shan were ideologically dependent on the old Northern Thai Kingdom of Lanna Thai, and the Chinese Shan were likewise dependent on the Chinese Empire.

dependent themselves for civilized merchandise upon Chinese traders, who were in turn ultimately a part of the Shan-tribal–Chinese-caravan trade cycle.

The Wa were to a remarkable extent a part of the complex economic and political system through which the northern Shan states subsisted upon trade with the Chinese caravaneers from Kweichou and Yunnan. The "Wild Wa" headhunters and their chiefs seem to have been, among other things, bandits and toll collectors along the caravan routes. Quite possibly by informal agreement, they insured that caravan trade belonging to one prince was not encroached upon by other princes while it passed through the remote Wa areas, far from the direct administration of Shan rulers. (The late G. E. Harvey has suggested evidence for this hypothesis in personal communication, but the case is in no way proven yet).

Obviously, some tribal minorities had to force their claims of symbiosis upon their civilized neighbors, while others were in varying degrees forced into formal dependence. It can be shown that the definition of many of the different kinds of Karen, or of the equally many different kinds of Chin, is in part a function of the different positions of relatively restricted localities in the webs of economic and political intercourse with Shan, Burmans, and Chinese (Lehman 1963; forthcoming). There are over forty Chin languages with numerous dialects in each, but these overlap in unpredictable ways with regional Chin political and economic networks. None of these economic or political or linguistic entities, of course, is *a* "tribe" in any exclusive sense we might wish to impose upon that altogether vague word.

It seems that tribesmen were often buffers or pawns in the incessant rivalry between various Shan princes. The latter consistently played tribesmen and Burmans off against one another. Clearly this had a great deal to do with the organization of intergroup relations among those tribes that happened to be in the orbit of the Shan-Chinese-Burma network.

Nevertheless, there is no simple distinction to be drawn between tribes-people whose connection with civilization is mediated by the Shan and those, such as the Chin, for whom this was not the case. Many sorts of Karen, for instance, traditionally had direct relations with both Shan and Burmans.

(5) Finally, there should be evidence that in at least some cases these ethnic categories had claimed for them by their occupants less sovereignty, closure, and exclusiveness, vis-à-vis one another and vis-à-vis Burma proper, than is commonly supposed by anthropologists or by internal-policy-makers in contemporary Burmese governments. In short, there should be evidence leading us to suspect in at least some cases that in trying to Burmanize minorities for the purpose of nation-building, one may sometimes endanger just the means that local groups have traditionally developed for living as parts of a system of social relations encompassing Burmans together with many of these other "peoples." Illustrations of this kind of evidence will tend to show also that, in the case of Burma in particular, the ultimate dependence of some tribal categories on a system of inter-group relations whose major focus is Burma proper and its civilization has been obscured by the fact that the connection with Burma proper was systematically mediated by some third category, usually Shan. This is, in its way, of course, further evidence of a non-dichotomous and reticulate structuring of these systems of ethnic categories. In effect one can probably show that a Shan-focused inter-ethnic system was itself a part of a larger system focused upon Burma proper.

The Kayah category can in part be understood, as we have seen, as a kind of Karen system which incorporated a Shan-style political order, while retaining animism. The Kayah did this not so much to make themselves independent of civilization, as to give themselves means for asserting a more direct dependency upon Burma. Thus the Kayah "princes" were always most eager to acquire Burmese titles directly and to have it appear that they ruled in their own territories by appointment of the King of Burma.

The traditional Kachin system was, as we know, Shan-oriented. It also had a complementary Chinese orientation. Many Kachin material symbols of political and ritual status and leadership are clearly modeled on, and often directly borrowed from, both Shan and Chinese. The Jinghpaw language has an extremely large vocabulary of Shan loanwords, but relatively few from Burmese. In the 1870's and 1880's (see Maran, this volume) the Kachin in Burma became in some degree cut off from their access to

China. At the same time, the increasingly strong presence of the British in Burma began to replace the Burmese kingdom as a political center of gravity; for the Shan were engaged in attempting to weaken what had increasingly become Burma's direct hold upon administration in the Shan states. This combination of circumstances, which also for the first time brought Burman administrators into the Kachin area (e.g. to Bhamo), opened up for the Kachin a broader vista of their place in the sphere of civilization. They began to define their distinctiveness with more direct reference to Burma itself, where previously it had been defined with reference to the Shan. The Kachin attempt to take Mandalay in the 1890's has precise parallels in what the Shan had tried repeatedly and sometimes successfully to do earlier in history. As Maran tells us (in this volume), the Burmanization of the Kachin continues to become more important. The fact that the Burmans have ignored this reorientation of the Kachin has led to recent unrest among them.

I have shown elsewhere (Lehman 1963) that traditional chiefs among the Central and Northern Chin were always eager to claim that they were allies of the King of Burma, even though, as a matter of fact, their Burman "allies" were nothing but rebels and bandits fleeing Burmese justice or retribution. This does not appear to be a case where the traditional tribal political institutions were inherently obstacles to the creation among the Chin of a sense of belonging in some way or other to the Burman scene—granted of course that a sense of "belonging" of this kind never meant willingness to acknowledge any possible claims by the Burmans to outright rule of the Chin Hills.

I have also pointed out above that in many ways the Chin employed their political identification with mission Christianity as a means of asserting their claims to be a civilized people able to hold their own *within* a Burmese nation. In many respects the current unrest and disaffection in the Chin Hills has its immediate origin in the Chin reaction to the abortive State Religion Act, one of Burma's explicit nation-building schemes.

CONCLUSION

I can conclude this paper with two sets of propositions. First, clearly Burma has quite complex traditional relations of various

kinds with her minority groups. She has even had, traditionally, varying models of relations with individual groups, depending upon what such a group presented itself as "being" on any given occasion—that is, what ethnic label it chose to use for itself. Facts like these constitute inherent aspects of "who" minorities are. If this is so, then there is assuredly no single minority problem, just as there is no single kind of relationship to minorities. Therefore no single, blanket minority policy is likely to be capable of solving these minority problems.

Second, it is obviously necessary to find out in each case just what a minority's traditional relation to Burman civilization has been, before one goes about trying to change that relation. Just noticing that a minority's traditional culture is in large measure different from that of the Burmans in no way precludes that culture's having served as a symbol or surrogate for that minority's claim to be included somewhere in the general sphere of Burman civilization (Lehman 1963). Leach, in his "Frontiers" of Burma article (1960), unfortunately either misses this point altogether or seriously underemphasizes it.

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