

CHAPTER IV

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this research is to explore the factors effecting the perception of individuals related to prejudice against the Chinese in Thailand. Following theories of prejudice as stated in the literature, the author is looking for possible factors which effect prejudice against the Chinese. Three of these factors were studied by this research.

1. Individual potentials for prejudice (authoritarianism) which lead the person to discriminate against the Chinese.
2. The acceptance of the standards of Thai society regarding discrimination against the Chinese.
3. The influence of the standards of the individual's peer group regarding discrimination against the Chinese.

From the results presented in the last chapter, the following conclusions can be stated:

- a. A negative feeling among the ethnic Thai students towards the Chinese exists. There are no significant differences between the sexes or between individuals at different levels of education.
- b. Personality factors leading to a negative attitude towards the Chinese seems to exist among certain students; this has been called "authoritarianism."

The accuracy of the authoritarian personality measure (F. Scale) seems to be strongly supported by the finding that people who are high F will show a greater resistance to change in their first impressions than people who are low F. (Table XIII). This follows quite strongly the nature of the authoritarian personality syndrome which has been said to show a high intolerance of ambiguity (1). The fact that there is no significant difference between high F and middle F or middle F and low F, on the tendency to change first impressions does not seem to change the effectiveness of the scale. Tyler (5) has reported that such a finding is common and in no way effects the usefulness of talking about high F and low F people.

c. Authoritarianism is significantly correlated (by Chi-square) with a negative attitude toward the Chinese.

d. Another factor which shows a significant correlation (by Chi-square) with a negative attitude towards the Chinese is conformity to a peer group which itself is negative towards the Chinese.

This last finding is extremely important in that distinguishes the kind of prejudice against the Chinese in Thailand from the kind of prejudice that exists against the Negroes in The Union of South Africa and the Southern United States. In these two places, Pettigrew (13) administered the same conformity scale which was administered here and found a significant correlation between an individual's tendency to conform to societal group standards in general and his negative image of the Negroes. However, in this study, we did not find a significant correlation between the subject's tendency to conform to societal group standards in general and his negative image of the Chinese. On the other hand, we did find that if we asked an individual what his friends' attitudes towards the

Chinese are, and then combined this with general conformity, we could then find a significant correlation (using Chi-square) between the individual's negative image of the Chinese and his general conformity plus his membership in a peer group which has negative feelings toward the Chinese.

As a result, it can be said that in Thailand the negative attitude towards the Chinese seems not to be the result of the general conformity or acceptance of societal standards, but is rather a result of conformity to a peer group which holds a negative image of the Chinese.

This leads us to question the origin of prejudice against the Chinese in Thailand as well as its continuation in society at large.

As was mentioned in the first chapter, in public life the Thai and the Chinese mingle freely and easily with each other. One of the crucial reasons for this is that there are only slight differences in physical appearance between the Thai and the Chinese, especially regarding skin color. Also, because there has been a great deal of intermarriage, it is often very hard to distinguish a Thai with a Chinese background from a Thai without a Chinese background.

One of the important intervening factors which should be considered is the historical relations between the Thai people and the Chinese people in Thailand. The Chinese and the Thai have had a very good relationship on the basis of equal rights in social status, education, religious worship, etc. for a long time. From the Ayudhaya period (1350-1767) until the early part of the Ratanakosin period (the present Bangkok period), the Thai were closer to the Chinese than to any other group of foreign people in Thailand. Intermarriage was quite common even among members of the royal family. Thai and Chinese people treated each other like kin. Of course, there were differences in language, family and kinship systems, and certain behavioral characteristics which could have led to conflict,

but these socio-cultural differences were, for the most part, not emphasized. The Thai respected and admired the Chinese for their skill in trading and enlisted their services to trade with other nations. Many Chinese persons served the King's household and were given noble titles. The number of immigrants was not limited and a result, during the latter part of the 19th to the early part of the 20th century the Chinese immigrants increased year by year. For the most part, they were pushed by intolerable living conditions in China (starvation caused by poor crop yields due to bad climatic conditions) and they were pulled by the attraction of better opportunities in Thailand (demand for labor for canal and railroad construction and processing mills) (14, pp 64-67). Thai and Chinese people lived together side by side and the problem of prejudice was not often overtly revealed.

After 1895, when China was defeated by Japan, there was an increase in nationalistic feeling among the overseas Chinese towards their motherland. At the same time, the Thai elite who had studied abroad were influenced by the ethnocentric feelings of certain Western Europeans toward the Chinese and other races. Europeans in Thailand and European-educated Thais worked together closely and one of the results seems to be that members of the Thai Government were exposed to negative attitudes towards the Chinese. Also, the interaction between the Thai and the Chinese nationalists became more and more serious. Prejudice and discrimination became involved with political machinations and economic inferiority feelings. Negative stereotypes of the Chinese were developed. As can be seen in the anti-Chinese items in this study, economic factors became very important in this stereotype. The economic situation in Thailand at the present time shows clearly that the Chinese have a great deal of control over the economy of the country. Thai people were made very much aware

of this problem by the general strike of 1910 when the economic facilities of the country were paralyzed. (14, pp 155-165).

On a much smaller scale, this can still be seen at the present time during the Chinese New Year, when almost all kinds of trading, marketing, and banking are stopped.

However, one must realize that the above comments are very speculative. One may question the underlying assumption of the above discussion; i.e., that there is a relationship between the government's reaction towards the Chinese and the attitudes of the Thai people in general. A study should be undertaken to see if this is true or not.

The stereotype or image of the Chinese as presented by the subjects in this study is not completely negative. Some of the characteristics attributed to the Chinese, according to the subjects' perception of the image their friends have of the Chinese, are quite positive. For example, the Chinese were said to be diligent, patient, hard-working, and to love their family. This later finding may be an indication of an important aspect of the Thai people's feelings about the Chinese; the total negative feelings are only a part of their feelings towards the Chinese and many people may not have these negative feelings. In other words, unlike Pettigrew's study which seemed to assume as well as indicate a general societal attitude which is negative towards the Negroes in the Union of South Africa and in the Southern part of the United States, our study seems to lead us to conclude that such an assumption is unwarranted in Thailand. The feelings of the Thai people towards the Chinese are not uniform and in dealing with an analysis of discrimination in Thailand, this must be taken into consideration.

This finding points to an important aspect in the lives of the subjects in this study. The subjects are students in pre-university schools and at a university. From observation it seems that they have a great tendency to form small groups of friends with whom they work, study, talk, etc. There is a great deal of cohesiveness among the peers in these groups. While individuals are always greatly influenced by the groups of which they are a member and to which they look for their values, it would seem that they would be especially influenced by the individuals of a group in which there is a great deal of cohesion. Thus, if an individual's friends in his or her group hold negative feelings towards the Chinese, this would seriously effect his or her own feelings. Of course, it may be that the individuals under study did not have these feelings before entering the group. However, if other members of the group held these feelings then he would have to reconcile his own feelings with theirs. It may be that he would reject the feelings of the others, but, in general, there would seem to be a tendency to accept them.

This study seems to have fairly important implications for future studies of prejudice both in countries like the United States and Thailand. Pettigrew, in his analysis, assumed a homogeneity in a particular society's feelings towards a minority group. To some extent, this may hold among the white minority population of the Union of South Africa. However, such findings may have less validity in societies where great homogeneity is not necessarily the case. While Thailand may seem homogenous to some foreigners, it is a very complex society made of many subgroups. As a result, when one refers to the cultural values or standards relating to prejudice in Thai society, one must be careful to specify the group to

which he is referring. Certain groups in Thai society may have quite negative feelings towards the Chinese, while other groups may not. The findings of this study indicate that mere conformity to the general standards of society is not a good predictor of negative feelings towards the Chinese in Thailand. However, when general conformity and the feelings of one's peer group are both taken into consideration, one may be able to make relatively good predictions as to whether or not the individuals under study would have negative feelings towards the Chinese or not. One would expect to find a similar finding among people in the United States as well as people in other countries. Further research should also be done to inquire into the affect that peer groups have on an individual's attitude toward minority groups.