

Beliefs and Rituals among the Urak Lawoi Sea Gypsies in the Bulon Archipelago, Satun Province

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Abstract : This study aims to reflect changes in beliefs and rituals among the Urak Lawoi sea gypsies on the Bulon archipelago of Satun Province that are related to changes of society according to each dimension of time. The historical study was conducted using an oral history approach. The study found that the traditional way of life as itinerants who moved seasonally resulted in their dependence on nature and beliefs in supernatural power, and mysterious powers and superstitions in the belief of ghosts, ancestors, guardian spirits, large banyan trees, life and living, treatment of diseases, king of nagas, and other beliefs. They displayed their respect to supernatural powers through rituals by worshiping, making offerings to spirits and performing Rongeng dance for spirits in return for fulfilling their vows. After World War II (1945), the Urak Lawoi sea gypsies on Bulon archipelago changed their itinerant way of life to permanent settlements. However, their beliefs in supernatural powers and ritual performances remained in existence. Until 1987, when tourism began to spread to the archipelago, some of them gradually turned to make a living with tourism. Moreover, during the last 20 years (from around 1994), Islam has spread among the people. With this social context, the traditional beliefs in supernatural powers have changed to beliefs according to the religion and the way of life that has changed. Thus, when the traditional beliefs and rituals can no longer fulfil the new way of life, they slowly disappear, such as the floating the boat ceremony that has been replaced with new beliefs and rituals according to Islam. Nevertheless, some beliefs and rituals still exist, such as beliefs about treatment of diseases and Rongeng dance for spirits in return for vow fulfilling. In conclusion, the traditional beliefs and rituals of the Urak Lawoi sea gypsies on the Bulon archipelago cannot fulfil the new way of life, and have, thus, brought about changes in beliefs and rituals that are congruent with the current society.

Keywords : belief, ritual, Urak Lawoi, sea gypsy, Bulon Archipelago

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