

# ONLINE COMMENTS ON THE PROCESS OF GRANTING THAI NATIONALITY TO STATELESS THAM LUANG CAVE SURVIVORS

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## ABSTRACT:

Nationality is the basic human right for everyone, but nowadays at least 10 million people around the world are stateless. They are lacked of human security. Thailand is one of homes for about 480,000 stateless people who are waiting for their legal status to be granted. This research, firstly, studied and analysed online comments regarding the government's action on granting Thai nationality to stateless *Moo Pa* (Wild Boars) football players. Secondly, it explored reasons given in the comments. Finally, it discussed political implication concerning these comments. This research employed quantitative research method of online comments on five sources from two online platforms; Facebook and YouTube, to investigate the opinions posted between August 2018 and January 2019.

Research result showed that about 56% of comments posted between August 2018-January 2019 were relevant to the stateless football players. These online comments were categorised into three different groups. The first group congratulated four stateless cave survivors for being granted Thai nationality. The second group requested the same standard for the rest of stateless people. The third group questioned the government on such action. This research also discussed the political implication on the granting Thai nationality *rapidly* to these four special stateless cases. Lastly, this research made three main contributions to the knowledge.

## Keywords:

Tham Luang Cave, *Moo Pa* Academy, Wild Boars Academy, Thai nationality, *Tham Luang* Cave rescue, stateless people  
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## Introduction: Tham Luang Cave Rescue

Before the monsoon season in 2018, the world became anxious when 13 Thai local junior football members, named *Moo Pa* (Wild Boars) Academy was reported missing on 23 June in *Tham Luang Khun Nam Nang Non* (*Tham Luang* Cave). The Cave was located beneath *Doi Nang Non*, a mountain range on the border between Thailand and Myanmar. After several days of heavy rain, the Cave could possibly flood up to 5 metres. Cave rescue teams from around the world came to Chiang Rai Province to facilitate the rescue operation promptly (BBC News, 2018).

*Tham Luang* Cave rescue had caught international attention. Let by the head of the rescue mission and governor of Chiang Rai province, Narongsak Osatanakorn, this two-week rescue operation

involved 100 international expert divers and rescue workers, representatives from about 100 governmental agencies, approximately 1000 personnel from the Royal Thai Army's special operations unit and Navy Seals. In total, more than 10,000 volunteers were involved in the rescue effort (Department of Home Affairs, 2018). Furthermore, the rescue teams had to work in the most challenging environment. The monsoon season was approaching Thailand. The temperature was dropping to 18-20 degrees Celsius. The rain kept pouring, making the Cave flooding (Preeda-anantasuk, 2019; Woracharoensri, 2019, pp. 745-749). During the rescue effort, a 37-year-old former Thai Navy SEAL, Saman Kunan, died of asphyxiation on 6 July whilst returning to a staging base in the Cave after delivering supplies of air (Safi & Goldberg, 2018; Garcia & Esquivel,

2019; Peng et al., 2019; Hadi et al., 2019). If the boys were not found before the monsoon, the mission would be postponed to November for safety reason.

This event captured the public's attention around the world. On 23 June, journalists and foreign media around the world such as BBC, ABC, and Channel News Asia had set up base camps in a small remote district of Mae Sai, China Rai Province (Chanthapan, Davis, Numdokmai, & Sutabutr, 2018, pp. 120–121; Promchertchoo, 2018). On 2 July, after nine day of searching, all 12 boys and their football coach were found by the British divers, John Volanthen and Richard Stanton. Other challenges were Cave flooding, strong currents and zero visibility. For a journey through the Cave, experienced divers team took about six hours against the current and five hours to exit the Cave. So that, it would take more than eleven hours to rescuer each batch of the boys. Importantly, the oxygen level in the Cave would dropped to lower at 15 percent by 8 July (Ries, McKirdy, Whiteman, & Wagner, 2018). Limited time of rescue was approaching as the boys may develop hypoxia in the Cave. Finally, between 8 and 10 July, all of the boys and their coach were rescued by an international rescue team and all of the rescue divers had also exited the Cave safely (Clarke et al., 2018).

After the rescue, the public was surprised to the fact that four of them were stateless people. Adul Sam-on, a fourteen-year-old who could communicate in English, and his two peers with his coach had no nationality (Johnson, 2018). These stateless youth were from tribes in an area that extends across Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, and China. As a result, they were not recognised as citizens of any state. Their statelessness deprived them of public service such as higher education, healthcare insurance, and basic rights of mobility (Cheva-Isarakul, 2018; Khaikham, 2017). They were restricted to leave Chiang Rai Province due to Thai domestic law. The founder of the *Moo Pa*

team, Nopparat Khanthavong, said that 'to get nationality is the biggest hope for the boys' (Bacon, 2018), so that they can travel to play football matches outside Chiang Rai province.

### **Thailand: A Home of Stateless Population**

Nationality is the basic human right for everyone, according to Article 15 in the UN *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* that '(1) Everyone has the right to a nationality. (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality' (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). In fact, Thailand is a home of about 480,000 stateless people who were registered with Thai government. The government has promised to end statelessness by 2024 (Bohwongprasert, 2019; Jedsadachaiyut & Al-jasem, 2016; UNHCR, 2014). However, only Chiang Rai Province accommodates approximately 12,730 stateless people (Deetes, 2020). Mae Sai District is where Thailand, Myanmar and Laos meet in the Golden Triangle. The place is famous for its black market, smuggling, methamphetamine, human trafficking, and a sanctuary for members of various ethnic minorities from Myanmar and Laos. Therefore, the Thai state has been skeptical of this place for a long time (Chia & Kenny, 2012; Waas, Rijken, & Gramatikov, 2014).

Adul was one of thousands of refugees' children fled armed conflict from Myanmar to Thailand. When Adul was six years old, his parents took him to escape from Wa State, an unrecognised self-governing area in Myanmar to Thailand due to guerrilla warfare, opium cultivation and methamphetamine trafficking. His parents hoped that Adul would have a proper schooling which enabled him to speak English and brought him a better life in Thailand (Beech, 2018). Similar to Adul, other two football players and the coach were stateless ethnic minorities. Their daily life of crossing the border to Myanmar was normal. In contrast, their identities is questioned in the sense of Thai nationhood through their nationality,

concerning with Thailand's national security (Office of the National Security Council, 2015).

Public attention had paid to the Cave rescue in terms of their legal status of being statelessness. This was not the first time that well-educated and talented young people were left stateless in Thailand. Normally, the process of applying Thai nationality took more than years. In contrast, Thai officials and government promised to provide the stateless *Moo Pa* football players with legal assistance in obtain Thai nationality within six months. In fact, it took only three month after the rescue when they were granted Thai nationality on 26 September 2018 (Reuters, 2018). The question was asked why the government granted Thai nationality for stateless *Moo Pa* football players in advance, but neglected the rest of stateless people.

### Literature Review

A classic work discussing citizenship was proposed by T.H. Marshall in *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950). In Marshall's model, citizenship is a principle of equality. It showed that citizenship was linked to the capacity to enjoy a set of rights; civil, political and social. civil rights refers to the rights of individual freedom and political rights are 'the right to participate in the exercise of political power' (Marshall, 1987, p. 10). Lastly, social rights refers to 'the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security...' (Marshall, 1987, p. 11).

In contrast, Chang and Turner proposed that the progress of citizenship, especially in East Asia, could not be easily 'characterised as the evolutionary advancement in citizenship rights from civil to political to social citizenship as was originally formulated by T.H. Marshall (1950)' (Chang & Turner, 2012, p. 5). Moreover, McCargo (2011) agreed with Turner's idea. He suggested that citizenship in Southeast Asia was a complicated issue. It embodied both ambiguity and complexity for millions of people in Thailand. The proper identity (ID) document could be priceless for those who did not have it. Also, one

person having different types of ID card could improve their livelihood (Laungaramsri, 2014, p. 160). On the other hand, the lack of ID card would lead to be a subject of harassment, bribery and vulnerable to changing regulations or the rotation of individual officials (McCargo, 2011). Therefore, He concludes that citizenship is 'not an either/or, but a matter of degree' (McCargo, 2011, p. 846). Thai citizenship can be considered a result of the negotiation between the state and the individual.

The case studies of negotiation between the Thai state and non-citizens was investigated. About 40,000 displaced Thai living in Myanmar had crossed the border to Thailand in the 1980s without Thai citizenship. Their lives became difficult because of the lack of rights to access livelihood assets. As stateless people, they negotiated their status by using the political capital concept of 'father's home-mother's homeland'. Finally, they were granted Thai nationality by birth, not by naturalisation according to *Nationality Act* (No. 5) 2012 (Phongsiri & Thongyou, 2012, p. 67). Moreover, stateless Shan migrants in Chiang Mai province, who had weak social capital, could rely on their own personal connections to access healthcare services in public hospitals with the help of hospital staff (Seo, 2015). For other stateless persons, they relied on NGOs to handle their applications for Thai nationality, which is resolved only on a case by case basis.

Researches on Thai public opinion had been conducted in various aspects, mostly on political issue. Therefore, research studying the Thai perspective on stateless people is limited. Sunpuwan and Niyomsilpa's works on Thai perception towards refugees and migrants from Myanmar touch upon the issue of Thai public opinion towards non-Thai citizens (Sunpuwan & Niyomsilpa, 2012, 2014). Nonetheless their researches are based on the opinions of respondents who are more familiar with the

migrants. Moreover, in 2015, questionnaire surveys on opinions of Thai respondents towards the stateless youth was conducted in Thailand. However, the data collection was limited because it was conducted in paper (Khaikham, 2017, p. 234). As Thailand was facing human rights challenges regarding stateless, it was more important to know what Thai people in general think about granting Thai citizenship to the stateless Cave survivors.

In order to respond to the question above, this research firstly studied and analysed online comments towards the government's action on granting Thai nationality to the stateless *Moo Pa* football players. Secondly, it explored reasons given in the comments. Thirdly, the research discussed political implication concerning these online comments. Lastly, this research made three main contributions to the knowledge.

### Research Methodology

Quantitative approach was employed in this research to investigate online comments concerning granting Thai nationality to the stateless *Moo Pa* football players. The data were fetched from 713 online comments posted freely in five sources (three news agencies) on two online platforms; Facebook Fanpages and YouTube Channels, between August 2018-January

2019. These comments were in Thai. On Facebook Fanpages, a number of comments were very active under three news posts of NewsTV18 (2018), Workpoint TODAY (2018) and Thairath Online (2018). On YouTube Channels, comments were posted under news clip of Thai PBS News (2018) and Thairath (2018). In total, 401 relevant comments were analysed by descriptive statistical analysis to describe the frequency of answers (Neuman, 2011). Microsoft Excel was used to analyse and present the data in the form of pie charts. Moreover, the researcher collected and sorted the comments to be interpreted and coded. Also, content analysis such as systematic textual analysis was used to operationalise the data through Nvivo (Neuman, 2011). These data enabled the researcher to explore the diversity of online comments.

### Research Result

The research result showed that about 56% of 713 comments posted between August 2018-January 2019 were relevant to the topic. Figure 1 below showed percentage of relevant comments were posted in five different sources from two online platforms; Facebook Fanpages and YouTube channels. These comments were posted in Thai by 63% female and 37% male.

Online Sources		Percentages of Relevant Comments
Facebook Fanpages	1) NewsTV18 (2018)	55.17
	2) Workpoint TODAY (2018)	85.29
	3) Thairath Online (2018)	38.22
YouTube	4) Thai PBS News Channel (2018)	75.86
	5) Thairath (2018)	46.40
Total		56.24

Figure 1: Percentage of Relevant Comments from Five Different Online Sources

Figure 2 below showed that the online comments could be categorised into three groups. The first group (49%) congratulated the Cave survivors for

being granted Thai nationality. The second group (30%) requested the same standard to the rest of

stateless people. The third group (21%) questioned the Thai government on such decision.

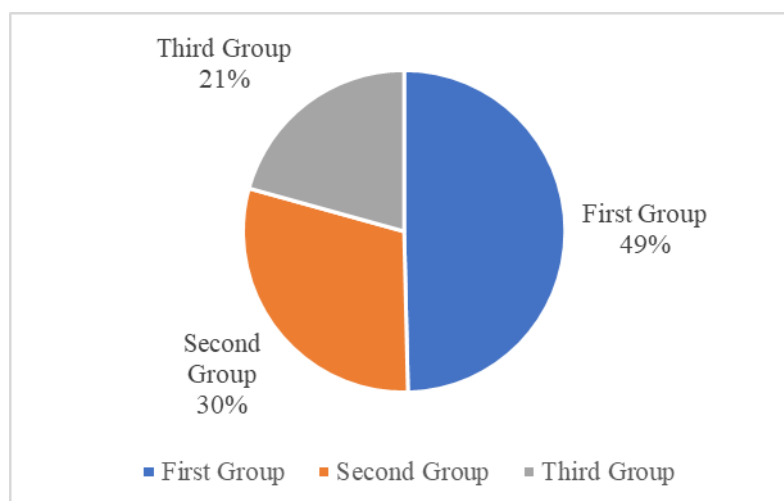


Figure 2: Categories of Online Comments posted between August 2018-April 2019.

The first group was the majority of the online comments. About 49% congratulated the four Cavesurvivors for being granted Thai nationality. Their comments mentioned morality and 'good behaviour'. The first group believed that it was a morality reason for the government to grant Thai nationality to such talented young people. Some comments wrote that 'the kids were very humble. They were good persons of Thai society as well the future of Thailand' (Thai PBS News, 2018a) and these kids 'became the citizen of Thailand. It was like a reborn. They all would be good people of society and their family' (Thai PBS News, 2018a). In addition, the first group believed that being Thai citizens, these stateless youth could have better lives in Thailand, as they commented that '[with Thai nationality,] they would have better future in Thailand' (NewsTV18, 2018) and 'congratulations to the youngsters who have become fully Thai. Best of luck in living Thai life in a proper way' (Thairath Online, 2018).

Moreover, the first group believed that the Cave rescue mission had contribution to the Thai society. Some comments wrote 'the rescue mission make the world unite again for the first time in many years' (Workpoint Today, 2018). Moreover, some comments believe that the mission brought international attention to

Chiang Rai Province and Thailand, especially, in a tourist sector. During two-week rescue in Chiang Rai Province, hotel rooms were fully booked. Rental cars were fully reserved. Restaurants were full with customers working for news agencies. Some comment said 'the youngsters of *Moo Pa* team must continue to be good people and do good things for everyone around the world. We could see that they were good people of society. I hoped you all would fight and take the Thai football to the World Cup' (Thai PBS News, 2018a).

The second group, about 30%, requested the same standard of granting Thai nationality to the rest of stateless people. One comment requested 'the local government, ministry of interior and the Thai government to consider other stateless people who were qualified to be granted Thai nationality. The process must be quick and fair as the same as four cases of the Cavesurvivors' (Thai PBS News, 2018a). In addition, some people did not understand 'why these Cavesurvivors were given privilege' (Workpoint Today, 2018). Some comments complained about their situations such as, 'my mother lived in Thailand for more than 50 years. She still did not have Thai nationality. What about others who were born in Thailand and lived here for 30-40 years?' (Thairath, 2018). A



comment was posted by a stateless person saying that ‘they had already received Thai nationality, but why hadn't I got it yet? I had filed my case for a long time, but I hadn't heard anything. I didn't have any nationality now’ (Thai PBS News, 2018a). Some comments encouraged ‘all stateless people around country [to] stand [up] for and claim [their] rights!!’ because ‘it must be the same standard!!’ (Thairath Online, 2018).

About 31.9% of the second group also mentioned a historic case of a stateless boy named Mong Thongdee. Many comments requested the government ‘[not to] forget to grant Thai nationality to other stateless cases including Mong too. He [also] brought Thailand's reputation’ (NewsTV18, 2018; Thairath, 2018). One post said...

Maung Thongdee was born in Thailand and make Thailand famous, but [he] did not gain Thai nationality. Some kids were born in Burma. They parents brought them to Thailand and left them at Mae Sai Church when he was 6. How did that Burmese boy get Thai nationality? This happened because of the ‘Cave issue’. The Thai government please be fair and double check (Thai PBS News, 2018a).

Nine years ago, a boy named Mong Thongdee was once in public attention when he won a national paper plane contest in 2009, but he was unable to go for international contest because of his statelessness. Government officials and politicians at the time promised him to be granted Thai nationality soon. Unfortunately, it never happened. As the Thai governments changed regularly, eventually Mong was quickly forgotten. Recently, Mong was a 21-year-old adult, but he was waiting for the promise to be fulfilled (Thai PBS News, 2018b). In 2018, Mong applied for Thai nationality on the basis of his good

contribution to Thai society and the country. His case had raised public concern. The question was asked why the government neglected Mong Thongdee, but granted Thai nationality for stateless *Moo Pa* football players in advance. Therefore, the second group had criticised the process of granting Thai nationality as it is unfair for those who have applied and waited for Thai nationality for a long time.

Lastly, the third group, about 21%, questioned the government on such decision. Millions of stateless people hope that this fast-track process would be applied to the other cases. Unfortunately, it did not happen due to state's attitude towards stateless people concerning with national security. Some comments wrote that ‘I could say this is double standard. Why? Some people have requested the nationality for 10 years. Compared to the *Moo Pa*, should they be under the same or different standard’ (Thairath, 2018). Some comment posted that the ‘Thai government officials just do the job because it was a hot issue’ (WorkpointToday, 2018). Some wrote that this fast-track process ‘was just another soap opera of this junta government. It just pretended to be a good government to the world’ (Thairath, 2018; WorkpointToday, 2018).

Moreover, some comments believed that fast-track of granting Thai nationality was inappropriate. Although the Cave rescue brought international attention to Thailand, many comments considered *Moo Pa* football players confined in the Cave as an accident. It did not intend to benefit Thai society directly. Therefore, Thai government could not use this ‘good behaviour’ and ‘provided benefits to Thai society’ as an excuse to grant Thai nationality as the same ground as those who demonstrated ‘good behaviour’ intentionally. Some comments wrote in Thai that ‘they were just lucky to be stuck in the Cave and survived, otherwise they wouldn't get [nationality] ... Will other kids, who weren't

stuck in the Cave, have the same opportunity as well? (Ives & Jirenuwat, 2018).

### Research Discussion

The online comments illustrated three main concerns of the process of granting Thai nationality to special cases of the Cavesurvivors under the junta government during 2014-2019. The process was considered unfairness and legal controversy. Importantly, this decision of granting Thai nationality was used as a political tool of junta government for its own political gain.

Firstly, the fast-track process was unfair, as did not apply to the other stateless cases. Apparently, the approval of Thai nationality for Mong and other stateless cases continued to take a long time. Although, Mong's champion in *origami* was well known nationally, the Ministry of Interior still requested him to provide the evidence approved from the Ministry of Science and Technology to confirm his participation and champion in the contest. On the other hand, the *Moo Pa* case only provide their qualifications, including birth certificates. Sooner, their requests were approved for Thai nationality.

Obviously, the case of Cavesurvivors was more privilege than other cases. Some comments said 'I will go to stuck the Cave too. Some people have been waiting for a long time. This was not fair at all' (Thairath Online, 2018), 'next day, I will take my children to the Cave to get these privileges' (WorkpointToday, 2018), 'anyone who wants to get Thai nationality as fast as a rocket, hurry and go to the Cave. You will skip the queue quickly' (Thairath, 2018). In addition, some people wrote 'hundreds of future Thais were skip the queue. Because money and politics that made the *Moo Pa* become Thai persons' (Thairath Online, 2018) and 'some people have to wait for over a year and there's little update on their cases ... It's so difficult to get through each stage of the process' (Thairath Online, 2018). Some stateless persons also commented that ...

It is not fair. I have been submitting my documents for citizenship for 2 years now and spend almost 50,000 baht. It had been exhausted. It was difficult for me because I was poor. I believed that if these kids were not in the Cave they would have been struggle as me. Could the ministry of interior and the government be mercy to me? (Thai PBS News, 2018a).

In addition, one comment wrote...

I'm not envious of *Moo Pa* kids, but I am a real Thai people who don't have ID card. My parents, my brothers and sisters all have the cards. Yet it is very difficult for me to apply for Thai nationality. My parents had requested it since I was 6 years old. Now I am 26, but still stateless. Or do I have to get stuck in a Cave first? (Thairath Online, 2018).

Finally, it took Mong Thongdee more than nine years to gain Thai nationality and Thai ID card in October, 2018 (Khaosod, 2018). Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of people live in Thailand without nationality.

The second concern was legal controversy. The Cavesurvivors and Mong was samples of stateless people who had been granted Thai nationality successfully. However, they were granted Thai nationality in different procedures. The comments focused on what ground the stateless *Moo Pa* football players would be granted Thai nationality for. According to the *Nationality Act B.E. 2508*, amended in 2008, in order to gain nationality, applicants were required to provide the evidence of their birth, their immigration status, their permanent residency in Thailand and be able to demonstrate 'good behaviour' and proved that they had provided benefits to Thai

society or the country. The implementation of the *Nationality Act* (2008) faced many challenges, especially a controversial statement of ability to demonstrate 'good behaviour' and 'provide benefits to Thai society'. According to paragraph two of Chapter 1 Section 7 which states the following:

In case the Minister deems it appropriate, he may consider and give an order for each particular case granting Thai nationality to any person under paragraph one, in conformity with the rules prescribed by the Cabinet (Nationality Act (No. 4), B.E. 2551, 2008, p. 2).

This required statutory interpretation. The decision of granting Thai nationality, therefore, depended solely on a consideration of the officials to decide case by case without legal consistency. Compared to the case of Mong Thongdee, who had contributed benefits to Thai society by his talent, as people argued, stateless *Moo Pa* football players had done nothing or put any effort to bring benefits to Thailand. They were simply trapped in the flooding Cave. The international effort of rescue was request inevitably. Some comments were posted online in Thai that ...

The image of Thailand was recognised internationally because of the operating and rescue team. If you got stuck in the cave without anyone knowing, you would die in the Cave. So Thailand's reputation was from the [rescue] team, not because of the kids (Thairath Online, 2018).

The government's action of granting Thai nationality to the Cave survivors with other 30 stateless cases in August 2018 was considered as three political implications. Firstly, international pressure and domestic criticism had been put on the junta government. Thai people and the world

were surprised that *Moo Pa* football players were stateless youths. Question had raised why these educated and talented young people were not recognised by the Thai government. The junta government was very sensitive for international criticism and afraid to lose its legitimacy to govern, so that it had to take immediate action to solve this humiliation. As the result, the government accelerated the Ministry of Interior to grant Thai nationality to the stateless *Moo Pa* members quickly. Therefore, international pressure and domestic criticism had quickened the process. Secondly, the military government were legitimising its political power through generosity of granting nationality. It took five days for Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-O-cha to travel to Chiang Rai Province and visit the football players' parents at the Cave. When the rescue was successful, the Thai government hosted a reception entitled 'United as One' to thank all persons, Thais and foreigners, in the rescue mission on 6 September 2018 at the Royal Plaza in Bangkok (Public Relations Department, 2018). This event including the decision to grant Thai nationality to the Cave survivors. This news could add creditability to junta government's portfolio during its four years in powers. Importantly, General Chan-o-cha's speech in the 34<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit (2019) mentioned that the Cave rescue represented the national and international expression of compassion, humanity, prudence, feeling of love and unity in helping the youth team in Chiang Rai Province (BBC News, 2019). He emphasized that he truly worked for the country, Thailand under *his* military government had impressed the world and the country was not a failure state because of the coup. Therefore, his military government had creditability and legitimacy to govern even though it was not an elected government.

Lastly, this decision was used as a political tool of junta government for its own political gain. Granting Thai nationality to the Cave survivors



was one of Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP)'s political campaigns in 2019 national election, the first election since the Thai coup d'état in 2014. It was to ensure that General Chan-c-cha would continue his Prime Minister position. On February 2019, the military government released a 421-page report of Prayuth's government performance during his four years in office, claiming that he worked hard to 'return happiness to Thai people' for the country's stability, prosperity and sustainability (The Secretariat of The Cabinet, 2018). His founding of 3,292 *Damrongtham* Centres, under Ministry of the Interior, received complaints as well as offered solutions for more than 3,233 million cases from local people nationwide within 4 years. His works also included the Cave rescues incident and granting Thai nationality to *Moo Pa* football players. Thai citizens, who adored *Moo Pa* football players, would agree with the government's decision and vote in favour of the PPRP. Finally, Thailand held the national elections in March 2019 to prolong and legitimise the military's dominant role in the country because General Chan-o-cha continued to be a Prime Minister.

This research had made three main contributions to the knowledge. Firstly, the research investigates the situation of stateless cave survivors in Thailand. The classic work of T.H. Marshall explains citizenship as a principle to enjoy civil, political and social rights. In fact, this research was one of evidences to support McCargo's idea that Thai citizenship is a result of the negotiation between the state and the individual.

Secondly, the research is designed to study the public opinions in order to hear from Thai community whether it welcomes the stateless Cave survivors. The research result showed that the majority of Thai online comments congratulated and welcomed the stateless Cave survivors to Thai community. Some comments questioned the government on such decision, and some believed that fast-track of granting Thai

nationality was inappropriate. Their opinions help sharpen the government's policy concerning the situation of stateless youth in accordance with UN's global action plan to end statelessness by 2024 (UNHCR, 2014). Recently on 2020, Thai Cabinet approved over 3,000 students with ID number to be eligible for 'the National Healthcare Fund for Persons with Legal Status Problems' (Bangkok Post, 2019; UNHCR, 2020).

Thirdly, the discussion considered that granting Thai citizenship to the Cave survivors was politicised by military government for its own political gain, as the number of stateless people being granted Thai citizenship had been increasing between 2014-2019 under the military government. Thus, this research encourages the Thai government to grant Thai citizenship to the rest of stateless people nationwide with the same standard to ensure their security and allow public services to be accessible by all.

### Conclusion

The situation of statelessness in Thailand has been slightly improved since 2014. The Thai government let by General Chan-O-cha made the special case of granting Thai nationality to the *Moo Pa* Cave survivors within three months due to international pressure and political interest of the military regime. Public online comments were categorised into three groups. The first group congratulated the Cave survivors for being granted Thai nationality. The second group requested the same standard of granting Thai nationality to other stateless people. The third group questioned the government on such decision. As a result, the majority of Thai online comments congratulated and welcomed the stateless Cave survivors to Thai community. On the other hand, a number of online comments had criticised the process of granting Thai nationality as unfairness and legal controversy. Importantly, the junta government used this case for its own political gain. Finally, this research has made three main contributions to knowledge. It also recommends that Thai

government must grant Thai nationality to stateless people nationwide to comply with UN's global action plan to end statelessness by 2014.

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