

**INTEGRATING OTHERS:
A STUDY OF A BORDER SOCIAL SYSTEM
IN THE THAILAND-BURMA BORDERLAND**

LEE SANG KOOK

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

2007

**INTEGRATING OTHERS:
A STUDY OF A BORDER SOCIAL SYSTEM
IN THE THAILAND-BURMA BORDERLAND**

LEE SANG KOOK
(M.A., Seoul National University/Korea)

**A THESIS SUBMITTED
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE**

2007

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was in deep grief at the final stage of writing this thesis due to the sudden demise of my great teacher, Ananda Rajah. With the loss of my great mentor, I struggled to overcome the emptiness of my heart and to find new sources of the inspiration and sharpness he used to provide. The final stages of my writing were filled with regret that I lost him too early before I could appreciate him both as a friend and an intellectual peer. His absence made me realize what a great teacher he was to me and how well I was taken care of by him. I dedicate this thesis to him.

Through this sorrowful period, many people stood behind me, shared my sadness and encouraged me to carry on my work. Above all, I am deeply grateful to Saroja Dorairajoo for taking over the supervisory role and wonderfully guiding my study in the remaining period. I am very thankful to Hing Ai Yun for her dedicated care throughout my years at NUS and particularly at the final stage. I also thank the other two members of my thesis committee. Carl Grundy-Warr shared my grief at losing his good friend and was a great help towards the completion of this thesis. Kyaw Yin Hlaing kindly agreed to be in my committee and provided insightful comments on the thesis. I also extend my gratitude to my former committee member, Niti Pawakapan, for his contribution at the early stages of my study before he moved from NUS to Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. I thank Oh Myung Seok, my former supervisor back in Korea, for guiding me to NUS and for introducing me the pleasure of learning about Southeast Asia. I also benefited from good friends during the editing of this thesis. Daniel Soon and Charanpal Singh Bal were willing to lend a hand in doing this job. I am also grateful to Kamaludeen for devoting his energy to the editing of this thesis. I also thank my friends in the sociology department for their friendship over the years.

During my stay in Thailand, many people assisted and facilitated my research. Supang Chatavanich, Director of Asian Research Center for Migration, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, helped me conduct fieldwork by granting me the status of a visiting fellow in the Institute. Pornpimon Trichot, as an academic advisor in the Institute was also very helpful to me. My data-collection would never have been possible without help from people in Mae Sot. First of all, I received tremendous assistance from Ekasith in settling down in the field and approaching various groups of people and organizations in Mae Sot. I am also indebted to Peter. He was willing to lend a hand by helping me interview many people. I enjoyed the companionship of Supha and Nuanphan. Being around with them made my life in Mae Sot more joyful. I am thankful to many civil servants in government sectors in Mae Sot for their generosity in providing information.

The help which the Karen people have given me in my research can never be overemphasized. Among them, my research assistant, Plalawla, was most helpful in conducting this research. He assisted me in learning Karen and Burmese and assisted me in interviewing many Burmese people. A good relationship with the Karen in Mae Sot First Church was not only conducive to my research but also conducive to my personal and social well-being throughout my stay in Mae Sot. Besides, I thank many Burmese, though I cannot name them, for their willingness in sharing their experiences. I am grateful to many NGOs in Mae Sot for welcoming me and providing me with materials for my research.

My gratitude is extended to Oh Young Cheol who has been supportive of my research since the beginning of my interest in the Thailand-Burma Borderland in 1999 and Kim Bong Kook who was willing to help me settle in Mae Sot and provide helpful information.

In Singapore, I was also indebted to many people. I thank Shin Yoon Hwan and his family for embracing my wife and me as if we were their family members. I am also thankful to Kim Jee Hun for his help and companionship. I am grateful to Park Bae Gyoon and Lee Yong Sook for their kind treatment and encouragement. Also, I thank members of Korean Church in Singapore for fellowship throughout my stay in Singapore. I am also grateful to the Karen Church in Singapore for treating me as their member.

In conducting fieldwork, I received financial support from the Asia Research Institute at NUS and the Korean Association of Southeast Asian Studies. This financial assistance was crucial in carrying out fieldwork with financial stability. Besides, I am indebted to the Korean government for granting me the Korean Government Overseas Scholarship to enroll in the PhD program at NUS. I am also thankful to NUS and particularly the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences for providing me with a scholarship and conference funding throughout my years at NUS.

Lastly I express my heartfelt gratitude to my family. I was always remembered in the prayers of my mother and father. I hope my small effort can pay back their unimaginable sacrifice and love for me. I also thank my brother and sister for their concern and timely encouragement. Above all, my wife, Kim Sun Hee, has always been with me, going through both the joyful and sorrowful periods in Thailand and Singapore. She was a great adviser and friend in every step of my research. I hope my work would be a humble appreciation for her immeasurable devotion to me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	i
Table of Contents.....	iv
Summary.....	vi
List of Tables.....	viii
List of Plates.....	ix
List of Figures.....	x
List of Maps.....	xi
Currency.....	xii
Abbreviations.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
PROBLEM.....	1
BACKGROUND.....	3
QUEST FOR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	8
<i>Plural society</i>	9
<i>State-society approaches</i>	12
<i>Globalization</i>	14
TOWARDS A “BORDER SOCIAL SYSTEM”.....	17
METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES.....	22
OUTLINE OF THE STUDY.....	27
CHAPTER 2 THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF A BORDER SOCIAL SYSTEM IN MAE SOT.....	32
THE PRE-DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIAL SYSTEM: FROM THE 13 TH CENTURY TO THE 1820S.....	33
<i>Muang Chot and commercial connections</i>	34
<i>Warfare and its consequences</i>	38
MIGRATION AND GROWING OF A SOCIAL SYSTEM: FROM THE 1820S TO 1962.....	43
<i>The British colonization of (Lower) Burma and migration of various groups</i>	43
<i>Patterns of culture and settlement</i>	46
<i>The making of a national town</i>	48
BLACK MARKETS AND COMMERCE-DRIVEN SOCIAL SYSTEM: FROM 1962 TO 1988.....	53
<i>The Burmese Way to Socialism and the flourishing black markets</i>	54
<i>The KNU and Mae Sot</i>	57
<i>Commerce-centered social system</i>	59
MASSIVE MIGRATION AND MIGRANT INSTITUTIONS: FROM 1988.....	61
<i>Political crisis in Burma and population movement</i>	62
<i>Changing policies of Thailand</i>	64
<i>Development of Mae Sot and multitude influx of others</i>	66
<i>Expansion of social system and emergence of migrant institutions</i>	70
CONCLUSION: SIAM MAPPED?.....	72
CHAPTER 3 STATE IN STATE: THE ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE OF MAE SOT.....	74
DOMINANT ALIEN POPULATION.....	75
GOVERNING REGIMES.....	80
<i>The administrative system of the state</i>	81
<i>Other regimes</i>	88
STATE PENETRATION.....	101
<i>Reasons and goals behind state engagement</i>	101
<i>Means of controlling practices</i>	103
RESPONSE TO THE STATE PENETRATION.....	107
<i>Weapons of the illegal migrants</i>	107
<i>Defiant locals</i>	113
<i>Demystifying the state agencies</i>	118
CONCLUSION: MAE SOT, ANOTHER STATE.....	124
CHAPTER 4 THE TOWN MARKET, BORDER TRADE AND OTHERS.....	127
THE CENTRAL MARKET.....	129

<i>Locational position of the market</i>	129
<i>Customers</i>	131
<i>Merchants</i>	133
<i>Marked points of the market</i>	141
AT THE BORDER: SMUGGLERS, CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT OF GOODS AND THE POLITICAL	
ECONOMY OF BORDER TRADE.....	144
<i>Smugglers or free traders: Burmese vendors of the riverbank</i>	147
<i>Border-crossing of goods</i>	157
<i>The ethnic political group, border politics and border trade</i>	164
<i>Understanding the border and border trade</i>	175
CONCLUSION: ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF OTHERS	176
CHAPTER 5 MIGRANT SCHOOLS: EMERGENCE OF EDUCATION INSTITUTION OF OTHERS	179
GENERAL FEATURES OF MIGRANT SCHOOLS.....	181
<i>Present state</i>	183
<i>Teachers</i>	186
<i>Educational levels and curriculum</i>	187
<i>Joint school activities</i>	193
<i>Challenges</i>	197
<i>Other educational programs</i>	199
CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER PARTNERS: REFUGEE CAMPS, INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS, THAI LOCALS	
AND MIGRANT SCHOOLS	201
<i>Connections with refugee camps</i>	202
<i>Connections with international partners</i>	205
<i>Relationships with Thai locals</i>	207
THE STATE AND THE MIGRANT SCHOOLS.....	209
<i>State's recent policies</i>	210
<i>Reactions of migrant education leaders and NGOs</i>	213
CONCLUSION: INSTITUTION AND INTEGRATION.....	216
CHAPTER 6 CULTURE AND OTHERS.....	218
MAINTAINING BURMESE CULTURE	220
<i>Teashops</i>	221
<i>Pastime</i>	225
<i>Ethnic culture: living as Karen in the town</i>	228
NEW CULTURAL EXPERIENCES.....	236
<i>Thai cultural influence</i>	236
<i>Influence of international cultures</i>	239
FESTIVAL FEVERS: BREAKING BOUNDARIES	242
<i>Loy krathong</i>	243
<i>Songkran</i>	247
CONCLUSION	252
CHAPTER 7 DYNAMICS OF THE BORDER SOCIAL SYSTEM.....	254
DEPARTING THE BORDER	256
<i>Bangkok Dream</i>	257
<i>Resettlement programs</i>	261
FLOWS OF CAPITAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.....	273
<i>Encroaching of Bangkok in border trade</i>	274
<i>Relocation of factories</i>	275
<i>Massive economic development projects</i>	278
CONCLUSION	285
CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION.....	288
Bibliography.....	292
Newspapers.....	304
Appendix A.....	306
Appendix B.....	307
Appendix C.....	310

SUMMARY

This study is concerned with Mae Sot and its vicinities in the Thailand-Burma borderland. This study examines how the Burmese are integrated in the social system of the town, although they lack proper legal status. This study attempts to overcome the conventional description of these people as victims and thus passive actors. Unlike earlier pathological approaches to people's ways of life, this study reveals that the Burmese, regardless of whether they are illegal residents, constitute the border society as prominent members. The society of the town is not possible without their participation and contribution.

The case of Mae Sot vindicates that the society is not just founded in the legal or formal basis. This study suggests that it is quite necessary to take into account illegality or informality as a norm in constituting the society to achieve an adequate explanation of societal formation in the border town. Furthermore, it proposes that the integration of these legal and illegal parts gives a holistic understanding of the society.

This study first traces the historical formation of the border social system. It discusses that migration of various groups, notably from Burma, engendered the formation of the society in the town throughout history. This study reveals that the multitudinous migration since the period of the late 1980s differentiates the societal formation from the previous periods. The social system was abruptly expanded and needs to incorporate even illegal others who are prominent in sustaining the town.

I then go on to explore the integration of "others" in the border social system in the sectors of administration, economy, education, and culture. My research reveals that the administrative system of the state does not monopolize governance in the town, suggesting that other regimes take part in governing the Burmese. In examining why

the town is not under the total control of the state, this study focuses on the various strategies that vulnerable people devise and the localized behaviors of state agencies.

In dealing with the town's economy and border trade, I show that the Burmese actively participate in trading activities in the central town market as merchants and customers though they lack legal status. In dealing with border trade, the study reveals that smuggling is a part of regular economic activities in the border and ethnic politics and political development are very much reflected in border trade.

I pay special attention to migrant schools because "others" have their own educational institution which distinguishes Mae Sot from other border towns. I observe that migrant schools are positively recognized by the state as regular educational organizations.

In the cultural aspects of Burmese lives, the study describes how they maintain their own culture and are influenced by other cultures. I particularly focus on the roles of festivals in breaking boundaries between the Thai locals and the Burmese.

This study reveals that the border social system is very dynamic by showing the constant flowing of people revolving around the town and the border. Particularly, the study deals with the current phase of movement amongst the Burmese to Bangkok and other countries. Also, I touch on the strengthening of state involvement in the town through the implementation of development projects. The town is situated within this dynamic challenge of people's movement and state engagement. The border social system reflects the dynamics of integrating others.

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 3.1 THE POPULATION OF THE THAI LOCALS IN MAE SOT DISTRICT	76
TABLE 3.2 REGISTERED BURMESE IN MAE SOT DISTRICT DURING THE PERIOD OF 1 – 31 JULY 2004	77
TABLE 3.3 EMPLOYMENT SECTORS OF MIGRANTS IN MAE SOT DISTRICT REGISTERED DURING THE PERIOD OF 1 JUNE 2004 TO 17 JANUARY 2005.....	78
TABLE 3.4 ESTIMATED POPULATION OF MAE SOT INCLUDING THE THAI LOCALS AND THE (ESTIMATED) BURMESE.....	79
TABLE 4.1 VOLUMES OF EXPORT AND IMPORT THROUGH THE MAE SOT CUSTOMS OFFICE (2000-2005)	162
TABLE 4.2 COMPARISON BETWEEN MAE SOT AND OTHER BORDER TOWNS IN NORTHERN THAILAND IN 2004	163
TABLE 4.3 MAJOR EXPORT ITEMS THROUGH THE MAE SOT CUSTOMS OFFICE (OCTOBER 2004 – SEPTEMBER 2005)	163
TABLE 4.4 MAJOR IMPORT ITEMS THROUGH THE MAE SOT CUSTOMS OFFICE (OCTOBER 2004 – SEPTEMBER 2005)	163
TABLE 4.5 MONTHLY EXPORT VOLUMES THROUGH THE MAE SOT CUSTOMS OFFICE FROM JANUARY 2004 TO NOVEMBER 2005	171
TABLE 4.6 MONTHLY IMPORT VOLUMES THROUGH THE MAE SOT CUSTOMS OFFICE FROM JANUARY 2004 TO NOVEMBER 2005	173
TABLE 5.1 MIGRANT SCHOOLS IN MAE SOT AND ITS VICINITY	184
TABLE 5.2 TIME TABLE OF CDC MIGRANT SCHOOL.....	190
TABLE 5.3 TEACHING HOURS OF SUBJECTS (WEEKLY).....	192

LIST OF PLATES

PLATE 3.1 A LIVING AREA OF MIGRANTS NEAR THE MAE SOT HOSPITAL	90
PLATE 3.2 A LIVING AREA OF MIGRANTS ALONG THE PRASATWITHI ROAD	91
PLATE 4.1 GEM TRADERS NEAR THE CENTRAL MARKET	143
PLATE 4.2 THE CENTRAL MARKET	143
PLATE 4.3 A BURMESE SELLER AT THE CENTRAL MARKET	144
PLATE 4.4 RIVERBANK MERCHANTS BEFORE THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WALL.....	155
PLATE 4.5 AT THE OUTSET OF BUILDING THE WALL	155
PLATE 4.6 THE WALL IN THE BUILDING PROCESS	156
PLATE 4.7 THE COMPLETE FORM OF THE WALL AND THE MERCHANTS.....	156
PLATE 4.8 THE COMPLETE FORM OF THE WALL AND THE MERCHANTS.....	157
PLATE 4.9 MOVEMENT OF GOODS AT A BOAT PIER.....	167
PLATE 4.10 MOVEMENT OF GOODS AT A BOAT PIER.....	168
PLATE 4.11 MOVEMENT OF GOODS AT A BOAT PIER.....	168
PLATE 4.12 MOVEMENT OF GOODS THROUGH A DKBA POINT.....	169
PLATE 4.13 MOVEMENT OF GOODS THROUGH A DKBA POINT.....	169
PLATE 5.1 CLASSROOM OF A MIGRANT SCHOOL.....	194
PLATE 5.2 PARENTS MEETING AT ELPIS CENTER	195
PLATE 5.3 TRANSPORTATION	195
PLATE 5.4 SPORTS ACTIVITY.....	196
PLATE 5.5 CHILDREN’S PLAY.....	196
PLATE 5.6 PERFORMANCE OF KAREN MIGRANT STUDENTS	197
PLATE 6.1 TEASHOP	222
PLATE 6.2 A NOTICE OF WARNING AGAINST SPITTING BETEL JUICE IN THAI AND BURMESE	226
PLATE 6.3 KAREN NEW YEAR CEREMONY.....	232
PLATE 6.4 KAREN NEW YEAR CEREMONY ATTENDANTS	232
PLATE 6.5 CELEBRATING <i>LOY KRATHONG</i> AT THE MOEI RIVER.....	247
PLATE 6.6 WATER SPLASHING IN CENTRAL MAE SOT DURING <i>SONGKRAN</i>	251
PLATE 6.7 THE SCENE OF THE MOEI RIVER DURING <i>SONGKRAN</i>	252
PLATE 7.1 RESETTLERS TAKING A BOARDING PROCESS AT THE MAE SOT AIRPORT.....	272
PLATE 7.2 RESETTLERS TAKING OFF THE MAE SOT AIRPORT	273

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 3.1 MAE SOT'S ADMINISTRATION STRUCTURE.....	81
FIGURE 3.2 THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE NCUB.....	94
FIGURE 3.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE CCSDPT	97
FIGURE 7.1 CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT OF BURMESE POPULATION	286

LIST OF MAPS

MAP 1.1 MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA	XVI
MAP 1.2 THAILAND-BURMA BORDERLAND	XVII
MAP 1.3 MAE SOT DISTRICT	3
MAP 2.1 MAE SOT TOWN	31
MAP 4.1 MAE SOT-MYAWADDY BORDER	146
MAP 4.2 LOCATIONS OF THIRTEEN WAREHOUSES BUILT BY THE MAE SOT CUSTOMS OFFICE	161
MAP 7.1 THE EAST-WEST ECONOMIC CORRIDOR	281

CURRENCY

Kyat is the Burmese currency. As of 2005, 1,000 kyat was equivalent to 1 US dollar at a black market or street. This street rate more accurately reflects the actual economy than the official exchange rate which has remained 6 kyat to 1 US dollar.

Baht is the Thai currency. During my stay from July 2004 to July 2005, US 1 dollar was equal to 40 baht.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAPP	Assistance Association for Political Prisoners
ABSDF	All Burma Students Democratic Front
ACMECS	Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
ALP	Arakan Liberation Party
AMI	Aide Medicale Internationale
APEBC	Assistance Program for Education of Burmese Children
BIMST-EC	Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation
BLSO	Burma Labour Solidarity Organization
BMSOH	Boarding Middle School for Orphans and Helpless Youths
BMWEC	Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee
BOT	Bank of Thailand
BRCP	Burma Refugee Care Program
BVP	Burma Volunteer Program
CCFD	Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development
CCSDPT	Coordinating Committee for Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand
CDC	Children's Development Center
COERR	Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees
CNF	Chin National Front
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
DAB	Democratic Alliance of Burma
DKBA	Democratic Buddhist Karen Army
ECS	Economic Cooperation Strategy
FSP	Further Study Program
FTUB	Federation Trade Union of Burma
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion Program
HI	Handicap International
ICS	International Child Support
IOM	International Organization for Migration

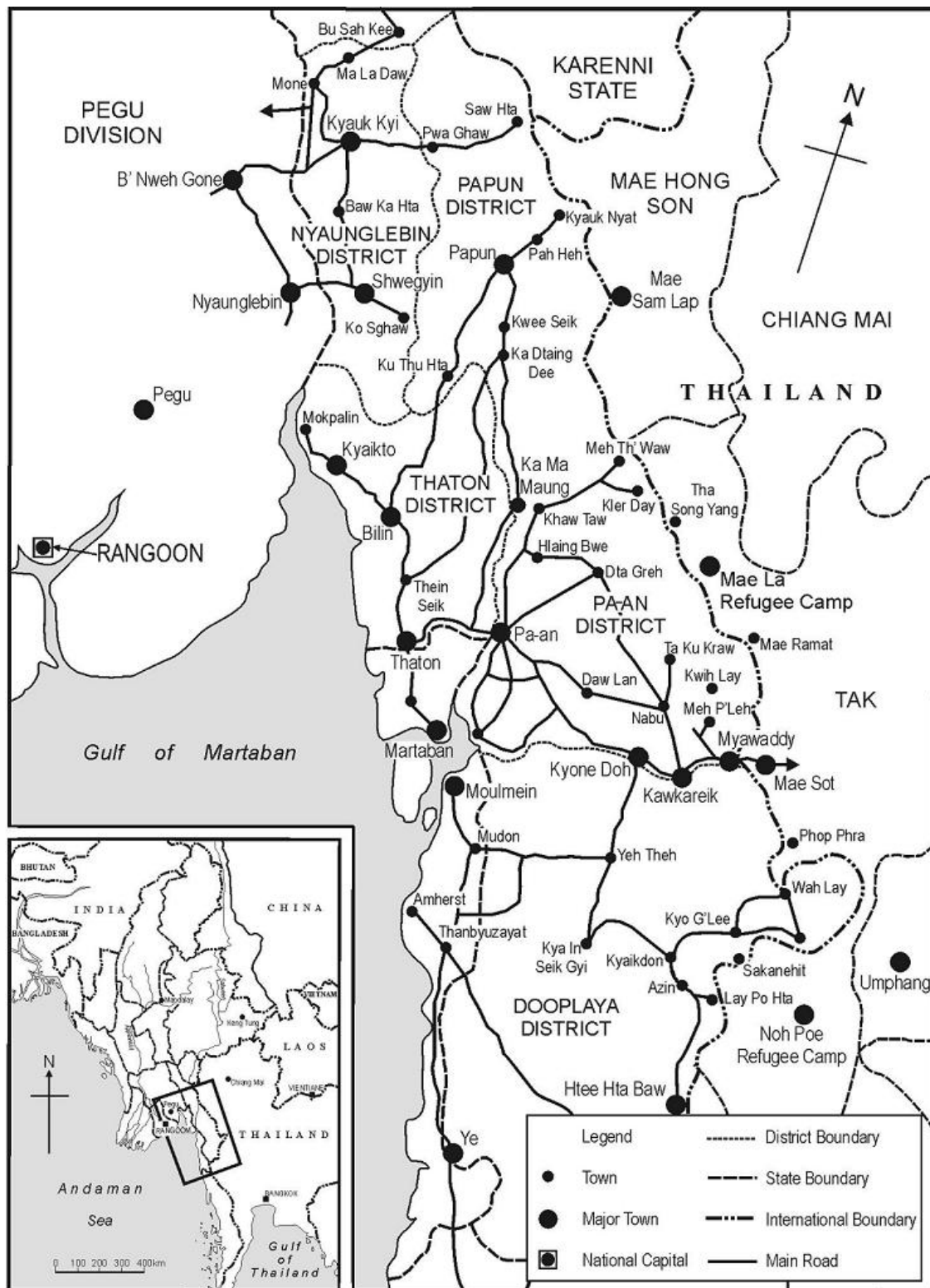
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ITM-GT	Indonesia-Thailand-Malaysia Growth Triangle
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Service
KED	Karen Education Department
KIC	Karen Information Center
KNU	Karen National Union
KRC	Karen Refugee Committee
KSNG	Karen Student Network Group
KSS	Karen Super Society
KUSG	Karen University Students Group
KYLMTC	Karen Youth Leadership and Management Training Center
KYO	Karen Youth Organization
KWO	Karen Women's Organization
LDC	Least Developed Country
MI	Malteser International
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MOU	Memorandum of Agreement
MPU	Members of Parliament Union
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontiers
NCGUB	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
NCUB	National Council of the Union of Burma
NDF	National Democratic Front
NESDB	National Economic and Social Development Board
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHEC	National Health Education Committee
NLD	National League for Democracy
NLD LA	National League for Democracy Liberated Area
OSI	Open Society Institute
PAB	Provincial Admissions Board
PAO	Provincial Administrative Organization
PEC	Peace Education Center
POC	Persons of Concern
RENGO	Japanese Trade Union Confederation
SAW	Social Action for Women

SBEZ	Special Border Economic Zone
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SMRU	Shoklo Malaria Research Unit
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SVA	Shanti Volunteer Association
TAO	Tambon Administrative Organization
TBBC	Thailand Burma Border Consortium
TOPS	Taipei Overseas Peace Service
TPC	Teacher Preparation Course
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WEAVE	Women's Education for Advancement and Empowerment
WE/C	World Education/Consortium
ZOA	Zuid Oost Azie Refugee Care

Map 1.1 Mainland Southeast Asia



Map 1.2 Thailand-Burma Borderland



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM

This study is concerned with Mae Sot, a Thai border town in the Thailand-Burma¹ borderland, and its vicinities. Many Burmese² stay in these areas without legal status. My research was induced by a deep frustration with superficial descriptions of the lives of borderlanders, which are not uncommon in the perception of the outside people, let alone journalistic and even academic works (e.g. BLSO 2002; Arnold 2004; 2006; World Vision 2004; Thornton 2006). Although I acknowledge the various precarious aspects of their lives, which have been documented in previous journalistic and scholarly works, the “normalcy” with which they carry on their daily lives have largely been ignored; in other words, how their “normal” lives are constituted is missing in these works. Although dramatic events often attract our attention, indulgence in cases such as “suffering”, “deportation”, “drugs”, and “trafficking” do not reveal the totality of the lives of borderlanders at all. Why do they insist on staying there despite alleged hardships? How can we explain the delightful environment of Burmese tea shops which are packed with illegally-staying Burmese

¹ Throughout this study, I use the name of “Burma” instead of “Myanmar.” Since the current military junta had changed the name of the country from “the Union of Burma” to “the Union of Myanmar” in 18 June 1989, the choice of the name among individuals and various groups has become a political act (those engaging in democracy movements have been persistent in using “Burma”). Scholars often use both names interchangeably. The reason behind my choice in using Burma does not necessarily reflect a political stance. The main reason of doing so is to appreciate the historical use of the name and to maintain consistency in naming the country throughout my study.

² The term referring to “people” in Burma has also not seen consensus after the official change in the name of the country. Some people refer to them as “Burmese” while others refer to them as “Myanmarese.” This study uses the term “Burmese” when referring to people in Burma; while adopting “Burman” when pointing to the majority ethnic group in the country. For details on the name change of the country, see Lang (2002: 7-8).

people? Why is the town not in disarray despite the predominant presence of “illegal aliens”? How is it possible that unauthorized Burmese merchants (often referred to as “smugglers”) are selling smuggled goods just next to a formally established border market in the midst of border-patrolling Thai soldiers?

I seek to delve into the dynamics where borderlanders’ lives are based in contradistinction to earlier works that only focus on the borderlanders’ problems and victimization. Minghi (1991: 17) points out that there is a tendency for traditional border studies to view “the boundary as an interface between two or more discrete national territories and subject to problems directly reflecting the relations between the nation-states it divides.” In the sense that states are desperate to mark “our territory” against “other’s” (Wilson and Donnan 1998: 9), it is obvious that borderlands inherently contain certain levels of conflict between neighboring states and states’ aspiration for dominance and independence.

However, borderlands are also living environments where ordinary people root their mundane everyday lives. As Donnan and Wilson mention (1999: 4), “borders are meaning-making and meaning-carrying entities, parts of cultural landscapes which often transcend the physical limits of the state and defy the power of state institutions.” Borderlanders, though they lack legal status, make the border town as a living environment with which they have deep relationships in their everyday lives. The town is a “normal” place for them unlike the conventional description of the town as the place where problems, as mentioned above, presides. Borderlanders as legitimate actors actively constitute the society of the town even in the absence of legal recognition and in precarious conditions.

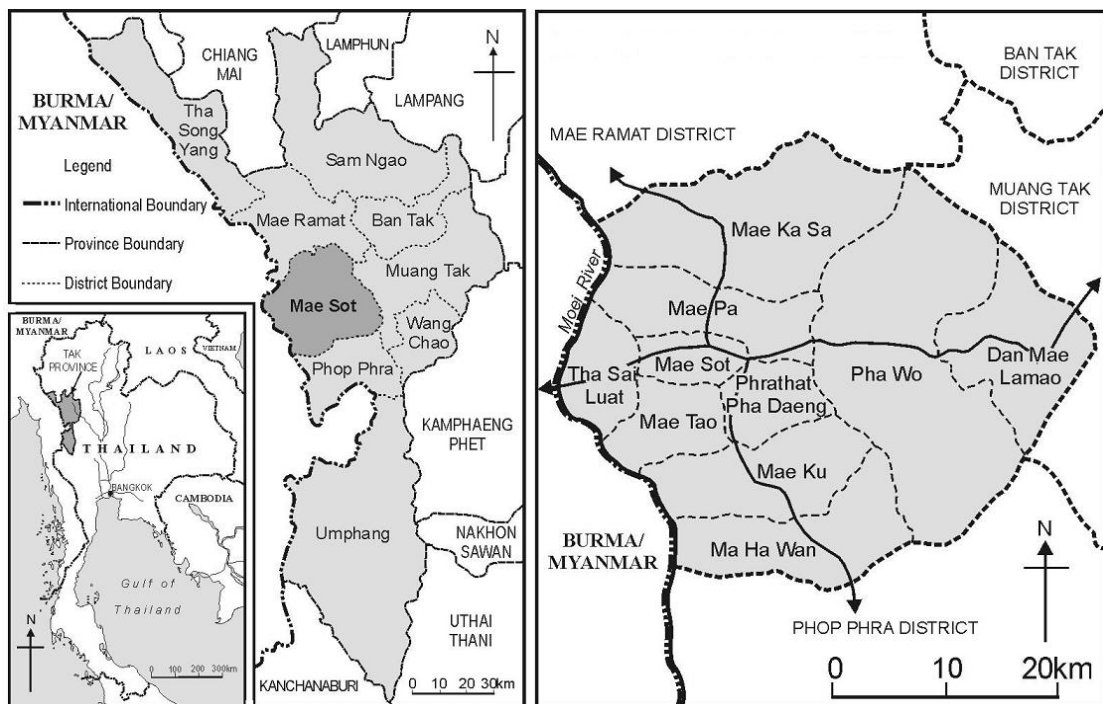
Though this study does not disregard the various imminent difficulties that they have to cope with in their everyday lives, its aim is to provide adequate recognition to

their contribution to the operation of the town in various sectors. They are not necessarily destroying the social system of the town. It is too simplistic to criminalize them as people destroying the social system. An understanding of the town with this simplified notion is totally misleading. The town which is dominated by “illegal others” has much more complexities. Although social scientists have raised it before, the question regarding how societies/communities are potentially cohesive entities despite complex social and cultural relations remains extremely relevant for the understanding of border communities/towns.

In addressing this question, I use the border town of Mae Sot and its surroundings as the empirical site for which my theoretical concerns will be formulated.

BACKGROUND

Map 1.3 Mae Sot District



Mae Sot is located in the northwestern region of Thailand, 509 km from Bangkok, 87 km from Tak, 283 km from Moulmein, and 447 km from Rangoon. It borders Mae

Ramat in the north, Phop Phra in the south, *muang* Tak in the east, and Myawaddy, Karen State of Burma in the west across the Moei River.

Mae Sot is located in a flat valley which is formed by two mountain ranges – the Thanon Thongchai mountain range and the Dawna mountain range. The former extends up from Chiangmai Province and ends at Kanchanabri Province, dividing Tak Province into two halves. The latter runs along the border between Thailand and Burma up from the north of Karen State down to Tenasserim Division. The rugged mountains of these ranges have always restricted communications between Mae Sot and the areas beyond the ranges. This feature, in turn, has attributed to Mae Sot's uniqueness in various sectors such as population formation, culture, economy, and so on as we will see in the following chapters. Also, it was conducive to Mae Sot's central position in the western Tak Province which also has the same geographical restrictions. Up from Tha Song Yang down to Umphang, for people in this region, Mae Sot is like a capital town, where they pursue their livelihoods and education. Even when they go to Bangkok and the inner places, there is a need to stopover in Mae Sot before continuing their journey because a big and convenient road over the mountain range is only connected from Mae Sot.³

Mae Sot historically played a linking role for traders traveling between the Indian Ocean and mainland Southeast Asia. It also paved a way for military operations for the pre-modern kingdoms of Burma and Thailand. It was a buffer area between these two archrivals throughout history. It is against this background that Mae Sot and its adjacent areas as “in-between” places accommodated various kinds of people such as traders, fugitives and ethnic traitors even before the modern period.

³ During my stay from July 2004 to July 2005, I visited a very remote village in the southern part of Umphang District and found that many residents were sending their children to attend secondary schools and a college in Mae Sot. Their commercial activities also centered on Mae Sot. I went there together with the Karen to take part in a ceremony for the establishment of a church in the village, known as Buangkher.

Up until several decades ago Mae Sot remained just a small village. When the Burmese military took power and subsequently introduced the Burmese Way of Socialism with her doors closed to the outside world from the early 1960s to the late 1980s, Mae Sot was a prominent entry point for the black markets along the Thailand-Burma borderland which was controlled by ethnic rebels, notably the Karen National Union (KNU). The prolific operation of the black markets drew enormous attention from Thai locals as well as the ethnic Burmese who were seeking to eke out a livelihood. Specifically, the black markets gave rise to big local businessmen who originated from other areas, particularly Bangkok. During the days of the operation of the black markets, in tandem with existing ethnic mixtures, Mae Sot saw the trend of domestic migration from other areas of Thailand to Mae Sot for border trade.

As the economic conditions of Burma were comparable to that of Thailand at this point,⁴ the Burmese did not pursue economic opportunities in Thailand. Although the black markets operated near Mae Sot, since they primarily engaged in trade and transportations, they rarely sought permanent residence in Mae Sot.

However, conditions changed dramatically in the latter part of the 1980s. The Burmese economy fell to awful conditions, achieving the status of “Least Developed Country (LDC),”⁵ while Thailand went through an enormous economic boom during the 1980s. A newly shaped Burmese military junta came to power and opened her long secluded doors to the outside countries. However, it kept a tight leash on domestic affairs and harshly trampled the democratic uprising and penetrated into the liberated areas held by ethnic rebels. In a series of assaults from the military regime, the black markets were rendered out of date, and the trading trend between both countries mostly took on official and formal ways.

⁴ For the economic conditions during the period of 1962-88, see Myat Thein (2004: 85-120).

⁵ I will explain further on the term “Least Developed Country” in Chapter 2.

It was at this time that a multitude of Burmese migrants came to Mae Sot in search of their livelihood, as the economic gap between Burma and Thailand widened during this period. The series of subsequent tides of migration brought about a demographic expansion in Mae Sot. It is estimated that the number of the Burmese reached over 200,000, whereas that of the Thais is around 100,000, though the population of the Burmese has not been exactly counted.⁶

Apart from economic migrants, political activists and refugees also flooded into the town and its outlying vicinities in search of refuge. Approximately 1,000 Burmese political activists are running dozens of offices representing exile interests, while around 80,000 refugees are housed in three camps in the vicinity of the town (TBBC 2005).

To make matters more complex, the influx of refugees brought quite a few international agencies into the town. In the 1990s, dozens of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) opened their offices in Mae Sot to deliver humanitarian assistance and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) opened its field office in 1998.

Demographic expansion caused by the influx of alien people changed the economic and social conditions of the town. In the industrial sector, many factories from other provinces relocated to the town to take advantage of cheap foreign labor. Around two hundred factories, mostly producing garments, are in operation with over 30,000 Burmese laborers employed. Other economic sectors saw a great deal of economic participation and contribution from them too. It is extremely common to

⁶ The information on the Thais in Mae Sot was obtained from the Mae Sot District Office whereas the number of the Burmese in Mae Sot is estimated from various interviews with people, including civil servants and Burmese political activists. I will elaborate on the population of the Burmese and the Thai in Mae Sot in Chapter 3.

find Burmese being employed in almost every shop in the town. The preponderant presence of the Burmese is also observable in the realm of domestic work.

The presence of a sizeable number of Burmese brought Burmese socio-cultural elements into the town: they can watch Burmese television programs on cable channels; they maintain their indispensable habits of chewing betel, leaving so many “red spots” on many parts of the roads in the town; and they “kill time” by chatting and drinking tea in typical Burmese teashops which are found all over the town.

In the field of education, schools for migrant children were established with the help of migrant activists and foreign volunteers. Thousands of Burmese children are educated through Burmese school textbooks and they are also taught English by the foreigners. To grow up as Burmese became possible in the town by way of education in the migrant schools.⁷

Migration also diversifies the religious composition of the town. Besides Buddhism which is the main religion among the majority of the Thais and the Burmese, other religions are also practiced. One can see the prominent presence of Muslims in the town. Whereas there already exist Thai Muslims, of recent, Burmese Muslim migrants have increased the number of mosques in the town. Christianity is also practiced among other Burmese ethnic groups such as the Chin and the Karen. For example, those who engage in the KNU’s activities are mostly Christian. Sikhs are found among businessmen who are Thai nationals. Apart from the religions mentioned above, many migrants still retain animistic belief systems.

As a result of this considerable increase in alienity and illegality, the mode of societal formation had to be changed. “Otherness” is not necessarily something to be abhorred, but something that needed to be incorporated into society. And

⁷ There are some cases of Burmese children in Mae sot who attend government schools in Myawaddy on a daily basis across the border.

encountering modes between us and them also take on different ways. The integration of formality/officiality and informality/unofficiality significantly appears in administration, economy, education and the cultural affairs of the town.

In the next section, I will seek to elaborate upon my theoretical claims in terms of understanding the town by critiquing some existing theories.

QUEST FOR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conventionally, border studies dealing with mainland Southeast Asia have focused on hill tribes or ethnic groups (e.g. Keyes *et al.* 1979; Wijeyewardene *et al.* 1990; Jonsson 2005). The main issues of those studies revolve around the ways in which the identities of those peoples living across mainland Southeast Asia were formed in the process of interacting with others and how states affect the social systems of those ethnic groups involved. These studies were conducted during a time when nation-building projects stretched to remote border areas. The focus of these studies was on the influence of state penetration and the reaction of locals.

Currently, as globalization and economic integration are becoming major issues in this region, the scrutiny of economic opportunities is mainly initiated by the Asian Development Bank and economic agencies of individual states in the borderlands of this region (ADB 2001; 2004). Some scholarly works have reviewed this border project, focusing on its impact on localities and the reaction of local governments (Maneepong 2002/2003; 2004; 2005a; 2005b). Others explore the trade regulation of borderlands with reference to local traders rather than state project (Walker 1999) and social and cultural change in the age of globalization (e.g. Evans *et al.* 2002).

The study of the Thailand-Burma borderland epitomizes similar trends. However, in this borderland, the sizeable presence of ethnic rebellion groups, conflicts between the Burmese government and those groups, and the consequences of these conflicts such as forced migration, have drawn the attention of scholars (Rajah 1990; 1994; Grundy-Warr 2004; 1993; Grundy-Warr and Wong 2002; Grundy-Warr and Rajah 1997; Grundy-Warr *et al.* 1997). In addition, the issue of refugees along this border has attracted a large body of research (Lang 2002; 2001; Lee 2001; Chiang 2002; Ng 2000; Phua 2000). Some academic and NGO reports deal with the lives of migrants in the border areas, including Mae Sot (BLSO 2002; Arnold 2004; 2006; World Vision 2004; Thornton 2006). Though these researches are very informative in making sense of the borderland region, they intrinsically confine their focuses on “ethnic groups” or hill tribes, “conflicts” and “suffering”. However, in the town where not only temporary migrants but also long-settling people are living, and where not only conflicts but also stability are observed, the pattern of existing studies is limited in providing a holistic understanding of borderlanders’ lives. How can we develop alternative perspectives in viewing the town? In the quest for one, some existing theoretical approaches deserve detailed discussion.

Plural society

The situation described in Mae Sot parallels Furnivall’s (1944; 1956) depiction of the “plural societies” of Burma and Indonesia, in which a plural society is defined as “a society, comprising two or more elements or social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit” (1944: 446). People in this type of society are divided into racial groups and each group keeps its own way of life style

separately, only meeting in the market-place (1956: 304). It has been a key concept for scholars to understand even the current post-colonial societies of the region.

The “plural society” was brought about by the migration of various ethnic groups – Chinese, Indian, Europeans – into the colonies for economic development. According to Furnivall, these ethnic groups did not share common social demands on which a mature society should be based. Therefore, people in plural societies only pursued their own economic gains, without necessarily considering the welfare of society as a whole.

Though different conditions between the colonial and the “modern” period render direct comparisons implausible, it should not prevent the concept from being critically applied. It seems that what Furnivall had looked at were revisited: diverse composition of ethnic groups – Thais, Burman, Karen, Mon, and Europeans – as a result of migration was conspicuous and each group seemed to have its own way of life, not combining with other ethnic groups. Residential areas are distinct; the types of labor are sectionalized; and clothes, food, and pastimes vary according to ethnic groups.

However, we can observe some inadequacies in applying Furnivall’s concept to the town’s situations. First, Furnivall’s idea is too static, because he assumed that the society never experiences changes. At the outset of migration, the characteristics of the plural society such as separate residence, sectional labor and bounded culture could be observed, but as time goes on, people are very likely to mix and integrate with other people in various ways.

Second, Furnivall rigidly restricts contact point and social interaction to the market-place. Wertheim (1980: 18) indicates that Furnivall denies any social and cultural contacts between the different racial groups. He notes that a creolization

process between immigrant groups was evident in the colonies (ibid). The creolization process must have happened in various everyday life fields. To assume that people only meet in the market-place is too simplistic. Social and cultural fields must be considered in understanding people's contacts, too.

Third, Furnivall dismisses the roles of the market itself in building up relationships between racial groups. Rex (1980: 98), on the other hand, argues that the market draws people together into a single social system, produces new group affiliations and gives new meaning to old ones. The market is not just a contact place but also a social field where diverse groups mingle and subsequently inter-ethnic relationships are produced.

Last, the problem in an attempt to apply Furnivall's plural society model is that we cannot have a clear understanding of the roles of states in the formation of the society. Furnivall does not delve into the role of states in the maintenance of society, apart from the role the state plays as an initial cause for the engendering of a plural society by bringing various groups of people into society. It seems that colonial states maintained *status quo* with a reluctant attitude to the positive resolution of the plural society. However, in the post-colonial period, nation-states through the nation-building process directly intervene in the affairs of society through policies and state apparatus such as the bureaucracy. Especially in border areas, this aspiration of states is evidently manifested, regardless of whether it is efficient or not, since borders are considered as the utmost markers of state sovereignty. This final point regarding the role of states hardly finds a position in Furnivall's discussion. Thus, we need a theoretical framework that positions/accounts for the influence of states in the explanation of society formation.

State-society approaches

State-society approaches provide viewpoints to explain how state and society contest to implement the interests of each other. These approaches challenge both the state-centric approaches and community-confined approaches. The state-centric approaches presuppose a center-periphery dichotomy and are preoccupied with the dominance of center over periphery. In these approaches, peripheries are predestined to be incorporated into the centers of political, economic, and cultural areas. Modernization theories (e.g. Rostow 1960; Inkeles 1969), dependency theories (e.g. Frank 1969) and world systems theories (e.g. Wallerstein 1979) are based on this assumption. Not only found in discussions of modern societies, but also in analyses of pre-colonial social formation in Southeast Asia, this center-periphery model has been prominent (Walker 1999: 6). Phrases such as “mandala” (Wolters 1999) and “galatic polity” (Tambiah 1976) presuppose the asymmetrical power relationships and radiance effects of influence from centers. Though these state/center-centric approaches are informative in understanding the nature of the centers’ power and aspects of their influence in peripheries, they oversimplify power relations, whereby power inevitably flows from the center, as if by gravity, from the “top” down (Walker 1999: 8). In addition, they show a lack of interest in the impact of periphery on the center (Migdal 1988: xv).

On the other hand, community-confined approaches tend to assume that communities have their own modes of life without much consideration of external forces that act upon them. In other words, community-centered researches regard their fields as microcosms in the absence of outside influences such as states. As Migdal mentions (1988: xvi), these studies, while occasionally referring to state policies and resources, often remain enmeshed in the intricacies of social life at the local level.

In sum, both center-periphery models and community-centered models do not shed light on understanding the complexities of the local, which state-society approaches attempt to overcome. State-society approaches depict society as a *mélange* of social organizations comprising of two facets; first, groups are heterogeneous both in their form and in the rules they apply; second, the distribution of social control in society may be diffused among numerous, fairly autonomous groups rather than concentrated largely in the state (Migdal 1988: 28). It suggests that “focusing on these struggles within society, between states and other social organizations such as clans, tribes, language groups, and the like, will give new insights into the processes of social and political change” (Migdal 1988: 31). The image coming to my mind, when dealing with the approaches, is “a strenuous tug of war” where players are persistent not to lose a rope. The two opposing teams in the game are “society” and “state”, while the “rope” represents resources. In order to gain more and not to lose an inch of resource, the games the teams play tend to be tense. The game image gives vivid understanding of each team’s relentless aspiration in securing and acquiring dominance in society.

In state-society theories, it is assumed that the boundaries between state and society are sharply drawn. Though later theoretical developments saw the various patterns of relationships between state and society paying particular attention to ensuing collaborations (Migdal 1998; 2001; Dauvergne 1998), the inherent and essential assumptions of the theories are “conflicts” and “tensions” between two extreme forces. Therefore, in this model, patterns of behaviors and relationships such as “accommodation,” “negotiation” and “unofficial/informal actions” do not draw much attention as compared to conflict-centered ones.

Besides, since the theories mainly deal with cases within national boundaries, it does not provide a clear understanding of delicate cases in border areas. This model

does not attempt to comprehend the impact of external factors such as cross-border movements and the presence of illegal society members in borderlands. Especially in the case of Mae Sot, where the number of alien people who are mostly illegally staying is enormously predominant, rigid application of the theories cannot give adequate accounts of societal formation.

Globalization

At this juncture, it seems cliché to introduce debates of globalization on whether states are in decline and whether a borderless world has arrived. Whether we agree with Ohmae (1990; 1995), who makes a bold claim about the demise of states, or whether we are inclined to hear the persistent roles of states in authorizing the movements of capital and people (Panitch 1996), we can find the debates revolving around “borders” and the degree of their openness. In other words, the issue of borders has been the dominant theme in the discourses of globalization regardless of theoretical positions. We have seen the debates where the taken-for-grantedness of borders as essential markers against neighboring states is problematized and where there is something happening in border areas that the traditional understanding of space tied to the notions of disconnectedness and boundedness cannot clearly grasp.

Traditional anthropological notions that dealt with the concept of a certain place as discrete, separate and self-reliant have been criticized by advocates of globalization theories (e.g. Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson *et al.* 1997). Conventional anthropological research assumes that the modes of natives’ lives were formed and maintained in a particular place. Relationships with and influences from outside were hardly considered in the traditional work. These approaches tended to spatially

incarcerate natives to a particular place (Appadurai 1996), taking for granted the isomorphism of peoples, places, and culture (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 34).

Scholars that interrogate the relevance of this traditional approach suggest that we now need to look at the mobile features of people's modes of life in the era of globalization. Therefore, in new approaches, "migrants" and "refugees" are considered as normal subjects, showing the very nature of their mobility. Also, scholars pay special attention to borderlands, suggesting that "the notion of borderlands is a more adequate conceptualization of the 'normal' locale of the postmodern subject, rather than dismissing them as insignificant, as marginal zones, thin slivers of land between stable places" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 48).

In the anthropological globalization approaches, borderlands also play the role of a "node" in interconnecting national boundaries (Hannerz 1996: 17). Hannerz (1996: 67) notes,

The interconnectedness typically takes the shape of a relatively continuous spectrum of interacting meanings and meaningful forms, along which the various contributing historical sources of the culture are differentially visible and active. The context of center-periphery relationships suggests both the spatial dimension and the fact that the creole continuum has a built-in political economy of culture. Social power and material resources, as well as prestige, tend to be matched with the spectrum of cultural forms. At one end of this continuum there is thus the culture of the center, with greater although not always unambiguous prestige, as in creolist linguistics the "Standard," the "superstratum." At the other end are the cultural forms of the farthest periphery, often in greater parochial variety. In between are, to put it simply, a variety of mixtures.

In this interconnectedness, borderlands are not considered to be dominated by the center as conventional center-periphery approaches argue. Rather, these are the places where "interplay" and "mixtures" or "creolization" between the center and the

periphery take place. Absolute distinctions between “We” and the distant “They” are blurred and “transnational” characteristics can be observed (Kearney 1991: 55).

Though connectedness and creolization are very informative concepts in comprehending current phases occurring in borderlands, we need to ask whether these are really “new” traits which have only occurred recently, especially when considering the Thailand-Burma borderland. Peoples have been moving and migrating for a long time. Even in the wake and development of nation-states and national boundaries, the borderland was relatively porous, such that cross-border movements were not heavily restricted. Historical factors and geographical features play enduring roles which led to the creation of mixtures and the creolization of “society” in the borderland. Theories of globalization does not seem to pay due attention to this point. Recent development may be a little exaggerated.

Another point that globalization theorists dismiss is the issue of “power.” Walker (1999: 11-12) indicates that connections and flows in borderland areas are not haphazardly taking place, but are regulated. He goes on to argue that liberalizing initiatives which encourage mobility and passage should not be assumed to be initiatives which undermine regulatory power. Rather, these create the conditions for a new “mix” of regulatory practices (1999: 15). Here, his interpretation of power in reference to borderlands is that of “regulation” which he defines as “the practices people employ to initiate and control mobility and interconnection” (1999: 12). He does not restrict the agencies that hold the legitimacy in regulating practices to states. Private interest groups (border traders in his case) too, according to him, participate in various ways to regulate actions (1999: 13).

However, though he denies the monopoly of regulating practices by the state, the concept inherently connotes disciplinary actions which make the subordinates

conform to regulations laid down by power holders. Therefore, even though he notes some collaboration between frontier communities and the state in the operation of border trades (1999: 111-112), this suggestion is not quite adequately positioned in his key arguments that borders are still controlled by the state. While his attempts to counteract triumphant proclamations of borderless worlds or liberalizing borders by ultra-globalization theorists are meaningful, these attempts, however, have led him to emphasize the notions of state-centric regulation rather than give a balance understanding of borderlands. Therefore, though the cases and realities in his book captivantly show various ranges of relationships between the state and border communities, including negotiations and collaborations as well as tensions and conflicts, we only get *ad hoc* explanations of such cases within the very strict conceptual framework of “regulation.”

The key question that should be raised is not whether the state is losing or maintaining control in borderlands and border societies. This kind of question only succeeds in giving tautological answers that validates the presence of the state in borderlands. This question is intrinsically limited in understanding the complexities of borderlands where the ebb and flow of people are continuously occurring and the informal/unofficial is deep rooted. Attempts at understanding the situations in borderlands demand a new framework where these features should be incorporated.

TOWARDS A “BORDER SOCIAL SYSTEM”

I seek to understand the border town and the formation of the society with the concept of “border social system.” Before dealing with it, it is necessary to identify

what a “social system” is. Parsons and Giddens are two prominent scholars who have sought to define the concept.⁸

Parsons (1991[1951]: 25) mentions,

Since a social system is a system of processes of interaction between actors, it is the structure of the relations between the actors as involved in the interactive process which is essentially the structure of the social system. The system is a network of such relationships.

According to Giddens (1979: 65-66),

Social systems involve regularized relations of interdependence between individuals or groups, that typically can be best analysed as *recurrent social practices*. Social systems are systems of social interaction (emphasis original).

The key words in defining the concept are “interaction” and “relations” between actors. Also, a social system is not randomly constituted, but based on recurrent practices. The concept of a social system can be applied to the study of borderlands. Unlike the assumption made in the concept of a plural society, interactions and relationships between actors are taking place on a recurrent basis in the border town. A social system is definitely observable there.

What then makes the difference between a conventional understanding of a social system and a border social system? In the former, actors are assumed to be formal actors whose behavioral attitudes are based on rational choice. In the theory, analyses on the influence and impacts of informal or unauthorized actors on society are not pursued to their satisfactory end when in fact, in borderlands, informal actors such as

⁸ For the definitions of the concept by scholars, see Bailey (1994).

undocumented migrants and refugees are actively involved in re-constituting the social system.

In addition, in a border social system, the constant ebb and flow of actors is a more obvious phenomenon. The early functionalists such as Parsons are criticized for dismissing the dynamics and changes in the society at the expense of overly focusing on “equilibrium” and “stability” (Giddens 1984; Bailey 1994; Leach (1964[1954])). Border social systems show vibrant changes that are an intrinsic part of the border society. Alvarez (1984: 121) states, “[A] social system or society is built upon organized, fluid movement of people through time and space.” He (1984: 121-122) goes on to mention,

[R]ather than viewing the frequency of movement and the volume of population movements as disturbances to a system and a departure from its rules, fluid personnel are the lifeblood of societies. Migration and mobility (flow) are an organized part of these social systems.....the flow of people through a continuing migration (legal, undocumented, temporary, permanent, circular, and so on) is build into the fabric of border society.

The patterns of interaction between actors in borderlands are different from normal social systems. The presence of unauthorized actors brings about different types of interaction that go beyond conventional understanding. Not only are there formal/regulated ways of relationships, but informal patterns of interaction are quite prominent as well.

Though a “border social system” may sound like just a literal mixture between “border” and “social system”, however, its physical base, the border, gives it a refashioned connotation because its unique geographical features produce very different societal formations in terms of the kinds of actors, the degree of mobility,

and the types of interaction that is possible. To reiterate, border social systems encompass illegal/undocumented actors, continuous flows of people, and informal relationships to a far greater degree than social systems in non-border areas.

I argue that the understanding of borderlands is not complete without paying attention to the integration between the formal and the informal. In proposing the necessity of dealing with the informal economy, Hinton (2000: 22-23) gives a dual critique of conventional ways of approaching the economy. First, in developing countries, the “informal sector” comprises a very large portion of total production. Therefore, “to omit it from calculations builds in significant distortions” (2000: 22). Second, to make a sharp distinction between the two is invalid because they are intertwined in complex ways. He states that in mainland Southeast Asia, much of the cross-border trade would fall into the informal sector. He goes on to mention that it is not only the trade in heroin and narcotics that take on informal ways, but the activities of a myriad of small traders are subsumed under the “black economy” (2000: 23).

Tannenbaum and Durrenberger (1990: 283) also make similar arguments. They mention that the “‘formal’ and ‘informal’ are not economic facts. They are categories relevant not to the working of economic systems, but to government measurement policies.” Moreover, according to them, “what is formal in one country may be informal in another; what is informal at one time may be formal at another. These are cultural categories, not economic facts” (ibid).

Abraham and Van Schendel (2005: 4) problematize the state categorization of the legal and the illegal. They suggest that though many transnational movements of people, commodities, and ideas are illegal in the state understanding, they are quite acceptable and licit/legitimate in the eyes of participants in these transactions and

flows. Thus, it is imperative to take into account these illegal aspects of cross-border movement to understand the border economy holistically.

The need for considering the informal sector is not confined to the economy. It can be raised for understanding other sectors. Especially in the case of Mae Sot, where Burmese political activists and international relief agencies take prominent residence with their political and relief structures, the administration and governance of the town take a different form. Alongside the state administrative regime, other regimes such as those headed by the political activists are also in operation in the town. Governance in the town includes these non-state regimes. Unauthorized Burmese are also accommodated in the governance of the town.

In the education sector of the town, the informal is also evidently observable. The fact that there exist more than thirty informal migrant schools encompassing several thousand migrant students in Mae Sot vividly shows the strong presence of the informal. State education authorities must deal with these informal migrant schools.

To understand the cultural fields in the town, one requires an integrating approach of the formal and informal too. In many elements of culture such as festivals, food, languages, and so on, certain levels of creolization or hybridity are found in the town. The Burmese in the town, though most of them are illegal residents, actively take part in consuming cultural stuffs and celebrating festivals. Thus, to neglect those illegal residents just because of the lack of legal status does not provide an adequate explanation to understand the cultural aspects of the border town.

This study investigates how “others”⁹ are integrated in the border social system in Mae Sot and its vicinities. In doing so, I argue that the border social system is based

⁹ I do not necessarily mean that the Burmese are the only components of “others”. Other ethnic groups such as the Chinese and the Muslims are included in “others” too. “Otherness” in my thesis means some traits or natures that non-Thai ethnic people construct. Since the Burmese are major others in Mae Sot, this thesis treats the Burmese as main others.

on interactions or relationships among actors including unauthorized people and that these interactions take place in a way in which notions of the informal/unofficial and the formal/official are integrated; the informal or the illegal is not meant to destroy societal formation but should be regarded as a sizeable part in the constitution of the society in the town.

The study seeks to vindicate this argument in the arenas of administration, economy, education and culture in Mae Sot.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The field research in Mae Sot and its adjacent areas spanned almost six years. Several visits were made and my initial encounter with these areas took place in December 1999 when I sought to conduct refugee-related research for my Masters Thesis. Then, I stayed in Mae La Camp between February and April 2000 with a view of dealing with the adaptation and identities of the Karen refugees. While I was staying there, I made several refreshing visits to Mae Sot, and catching a few glimpses of the situation in the town, though I did not conduct substantial research. I returned in December 2003 and spent a couple of weeks mainly in Mae Sot with a visit to the refugee Camp. My purpose was to re-contact former informants and make arrangements for a later full-scale research for my Doctoral Thesis. During that time, I noticed that the interval of over three years brought about many changes to the lives of my former informants and the landscape of Mae Sot. Many of them were now staying in Mae Sot where the presence of alien people has become more prominent. Therefore, I turned my research focus from “genuine” refugees inside refugee camps to the case of Mae Sot and border issues with an expanded research framework.

I conducted a full-scale year-around field research from July 2004 to July 2005 as Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University. During this time, I primarily stayed in Mae Sot. But I made frequent visits to Mae La Camp and also went to Umphang District areas, which are located south of Tak Province, to provide comparisons with Mae Sot. The final phase of gathering additional data and information took place in December 2005.

During my stay in Mae Sot, the formation of my rapport with the locals began with a group of Karen people centering on a church. As some of them are involved in both the Karen and inter-ethnic Burmese organizations, they helped me approach these organizations for interviews. At the level of grassroots research such as studying the living conditions of migrant workers, I was able to gain access to them with the assistance of some Karen church members who were also living amongst them. Though the Karen people in Mae Sot, especially the Christian Karen, seemed to have their own life styles, they were also part of a broad migrant people. Therefore, my association with them was an entry point into the lives of other migrant people living with and around them. Through them, I was also able to investigate how connections between the migrant population and camp refugees were maintained and how cross-border movements of their relatives and their goods took place.¹⁰ In other words, though the Karen people were my focal group, it did not restrict me from looking at other people's lives and border issues. Rather, they prompted me to see how migrant people live their lives with a close reference to the Karen.

In the beginning, it was a big challenge to approach government sectors such as the district office, the municipal office, the customs office, the immigration office, and labor offices because my topic might have been considered as "sensitive" or

¹⁰ See my work (2004) on the inter-connections between refugees and outside Karen living in Mae Sot.

detrimental to their administrative practices for the reason that much of my topic involves the study of illegal or unauthorized mechanisms that the state apparatuses officially do not allow to be present in the town. In this respect, I needed someone that guaranteed my status in introducing me to those offices. It was very fortuitous for me to rent a house from a landlord – a big businessman who is in very close contact with these offices and also a member of the Tak Chamber of Commerce. Throughout my one year field research, he consistently helped me contact them for interviews. Besides, I was able to acquire a lot of information on the border economy through his own experience of cross-border trade. Also, with my informant's assistance, I was able to take part in several meetings, activities and social gatherings organized by local businessmen.

As time went on, I built friendships with some young local businessmen who ran shops, operated factories and engaged in border trade in the town and its vicinities. Close socialization with them enabled me to look at the economic situations of the town not from the official statements but from real experiences on the ground. I also established close relationships with other Thai locals by participating in various social gatherings such as football competitions, festivals, funerals and wedding ceremonies. Through these social relationships I was able to witness how the lives of Thai locals were associated with others in mundane everyday lives.

One interesting point that differentiates the town from other border towns is the noticeable presence of international parties, including the UNHCR and INGOs, which are mainly concerned with refugees. Though the number of people working there was small, they deal with hundreds of thousands of people near the town and their influence on the border region was not at all negligible. Therefore, in my research, I needed to take them into consideration. In approaching these international

organizations, I received preponderant assistance from those Karen working in INGOs and the UNHCR. It is not uncommon that the Karen, whether they are from Burma or Thailand, are majority workers in these organizations due to their ability to speak Karen and English, which are necessary in dealing with refugees and foreigners. I made frequent visits to some NGOs, and sometimes I followed them to a refugee camp to observe their activities. Moreover, my wife's involvement as special education teacher in an NGO gained me a lot of favors in my research: I had easier access to a refugee camp; I was able to do an in-depth ethnography on the operations of INGOs; and I had many opportunities to take part in the social gatherings of those organizations.

Most of the information that I draw in this study derives from participant observation, informal conversations and formal interviews. For the focal groups such as a group of Karen Church members and local friends, I used the first two methods, whereas I applied the last one when interviewing personnel from government offices and ethnic or Burmese political organizations. In the initial phase, I attempted to make use of the method of survey distribution to understand the general conditions of migrant people. In fact, I employed this method a couple of times. However, I was confronted with ethical issues. Some people were very afraid that their details would be revealed and end up in the hands of Thai officials. Therefore, I decided not to use the method.

The diversity of members of the border society in the town is also reflected in my research. The list of my people I researched on ranges from an illegal migrant who was desperate for daily survival to the Head Officer of the District (*nay ampoe*); from a petty tobacco smuggler to a business tycoon; from the Mon, the Karen, the Chin, and other Burmese ethnic groups to the American, the French, and other Westerners;

and from members of ethnic rebellion groups to the UNHCR. The complex features led me to diversify the people I researched on and to be equipped with holistic approaches in understanding the town.

Though my stance tended to be impartial to whoever I approached, dealing with vulnerable people does not necessarily mean “neutral” research. It was a really tough job for me to handle their untold but recognizable expectation of material contribution. Since I was obligated to them for the gathering of information, it was hard to dismiss that expectation. Their attitudes do not necessarily come from the scarcity of resources. In fact, it developed from the situations in the town in that more and more outside people are bringing the resources in the form of relief agencies and many vulnerable people are benefiting from them. To put it differently, the less-privileged know how to deal with a naïve researcher.

Another issue that frustrated me was language. It was not because I did not speak native languages fluently, but because some native people, especially those who are “smart” at utilizing available resources, prefer not to speak their languages and favored “English.” Of course, it should not be generalized to imply the behavior of the ordinary people. Many people are not able to speak English. I endeavored to communicate with common people by using whatever means, by speaking in their languages and employing language translators at times. However, the ability of a researcher to speak a certain level of local languages does not guarantee hospitality. They welcome English speakers with no ability of their languages rather than those who can speak their languages, since English became a very practical means for them to get substantial opportunities such as overseas resettlement and jobs in INGOs. English favoritism goes hand in hand with the preference for Westerners who bring along with them more material gains than others.

Conventional anthropological studies tend to describe the natives as innocent, pure and value holders. However, our field sites of ethnographic enquiry are changing and so are the natives themselves. It is evident in my case that they are becoming shrewder with the skills and strategies in extracting benefits from given situations. It is not about moral issues. Rather, it suggests that natives now do not remain spatially incarcerated in the absence of maneuvering skills (Appadurai 1996). Rather, they know how to adapt to precarious situations by employing various strategies. Anthropologists need to be more realistic in describing natives beyond the traditional styles of romanticizing them.

OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

The following chapter deals with the historical development of the border society. The development of societal formation in Mae Sot is divided into four periods. The first period is between the 13th century when it saw an evidence of people's existence and the 1820s when the British began to engage in (Lower) Burma. In this part, Mae Sot's linking role in commercial activities between the Indian Ocean and mainland areas is mentioned. It also deals with sporadic population movement due to warfare between the Burmese and Thai kingdoms. The second period is between the 1820s and 1962. During this period, the people of Mae Sot developed their own way of life, not much intervened by the state though the modernized Thai state attempted to influence the town. The third period is between 1962 and 1988. The military government of Burma isolated her from the outside world during this period. Mae Sot saw a great development, mainly led by the black markets which operated in the borderland. The town became the commercial center during this period. Last, this

chapter touches on the recent period starting from 1988. Due to the collapse of the Burmese economy in the late 1980s, many Burmese, mostly illegal migrants, crossed the border to seek livelihoods. Also, refugees sought sanctuary around the town in this period. This chapter deals with how the demographic expansion fundamentally transformed the conditions of the town and how the social system of the town which includes unauthorized people is different from the previous periods.

Chapter 3 examines the administrative governance of the town. First, it shows the demographical conditions of Mae Sot to explain why Mae Sot is not a typical Thai town. Then this chapter deals with the governing regime of the Thai state. In doing that, the roles of various state agencies are explained. However, this chapter demonstrates that the state regime does not monopolize governance towards “others” in the town. Many Burmese and international regimes engage in governing the Burmese. Though the Burmese lack proper legal status, they are included in those governing regimes. This chapter pays attention to the state aspiration to place the town under its control and other people’s response with respect to this. Here this chapter shows various tactics that vulnerable people employ. Also, it touches on various forms of quasi legal status whereby the Burmese can achieve a certain level of legal recognition from state authorities.

Chapter 4 investigates a town market and border trade. First, this chapter observes the operation of the central market and points out that Burmese merchants are prominent actors and issues of legality are not central in the operation of the town. With regard to border trade, first the chapter deals with unauthorized Burmese traders or smugglers along the border. In doing that, the chapter shows that smuggling is a rather regular activity unlike the pathological labeling that has been ascribed by the state. Also, it demonstrates how unauthorized border traders embody the border in the

midst of state's actions to dispel them from the border. Then, this chapter explains the nature of border trade. The chapter argues that border trade is greatly influenced by political development in Burma. This chapter suggests that it is imperative to integrate the informal/illegal and the formal/legal to understand the town's economy and border trade in the Thailand-Burma borderland by bringing forth various cases.

Chapter 5 engages in migrant schools. This chapter pays special attention to them because migrant education demonstrates that the Burmese, though they lack proper legal status, have their own institution. In explaining how this migrant institution came into being, this chapter mentions the roles of various partners such as Burmese activists, NGOs and Thai locals. This chapter investigates how these schools operate in detail by analyzing the school curriculum and by looking at efforts to cooperate with other parties. In examining how the state engages in this migrant institution, this chapter shows that the state approaches migrant schools positively, considering them as regular education. Here this chapter looks at the integration of migrant schools into the state education system.

Chapter 6 touches on the cultural aspects of Burmese lives in the town. It reveals that the Burmese can maintain their own culture by consuming Burmese cultural stuffs and associating with peer groups even in foreign soils and in the lack of legality. Besides, this chapter describes the influence of other cultures such as Thai and international cultures into Burmese lives. This chapter focuses on the roles of festivals in breaking the boundary between the Burmese and the Thais. In doing this, this chapter takes a close look at how these festivals are celebrated and how the Burmese and the Thais associate with each other during these festivals. This chapter suggests that the celebration of festivals vividly shows the cultural integration of others.

Chapter 7 investigates the dynamics of the border system. This chapter sheds light on the fluidity of the border social system in the town. Constant ebbs and flows of people across the border make the border social system very dynamic. Particularly, this chapter deals with people's further movement to other places such as Bangkok. This chapter shows that Mae Sot is like a springboard for the Burmese to advance to other places which offer more opportunities. Besides, this chapter touches on the issues of refugee resettlement programs into third countries. This chapter examines how this population drainage impacts at both the individual and organizational levels. While people depart the town, Mae Sot witnesses the advancement of capital and the implementation of development projects conducted by the state and international bodies in order to exploit the town in the name of regional economic cooperation. Population movements and various development projects make the border social system more dynamic.

Chapter 8 summarizes the discussions of each chapter and makes a suggestion that it is necessary to take into account others in understanding the border town, though they are illegal residents. This chapter points out the problems of conventional approaches where legality tends to be the prerequisite for social analyses and others are in general considered as victims. Unlike these approaches, this chapter suggests that illegal parts can constitute the regular and legitimate parts of the society. Furthermore, this chapter suggests that it is imperative to integrate legal/formal and illegal/informal parts to have a holistic understanding of particular places.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF A BORDER SOCIAL SYSTEM IN MAE SOT¹¹

This chapter deals with the historical background of Mae Sot. I attempt to account for its history in the context of broader regional, political and economic developments. Located in between the major polities of Burma and Thailand and also between the ocean and the mainland, Mae Sot, throughout history, was destined to act as a buffer and a link in terms of the changing conditions of the region. Historically, Mae Sot had a strong connection with Lower Burma, notably Martaban. Mae Sot's geographical approximation with Lower Burma structured its historical patterns. In other words, Mae Sot had "collective destinies", influenced by the political and economic development of the region. Anthony Reid's eminent attempts (1988; 1993) to uncover "collective destinies" which geography formed commonalities of people's lives in the history of Southeast Asia can be applied to the case of Mae Sot and Lower Burma. The changing situations of the Burmese region had a great impact on Mae Sot. Political developments in Lower Burma such as pre-modern Thai-Burmese warfare, the British colonization and ethnic insurgent movements affected Mae Sot enormously.

In an attempt to investigate the historical development of the border social system, this chapter reveals that although Mae Sot was linked to the outside world by trade between the ocean and the mainland, whereby refugees and fugitives sought refuge during turbulent periods of Thai-Burmese warfare, it did not see a sizeable residence until the nineteenth century. As the British began to develop Lower Burma after the

¹¹ This chapter was presented at the ASEAN Graduate Student Forum on Southeast Asian Studies, 28-29 July 2006, Singapore.

first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826), Mae Sot kept pace with the development by accommodating the migration of various types of migrant groups who pursued the expanded trading opportunities. People's migration engendered the social system. They developed particularistic local identities when they adapted to the environment of Mae Sot.

At the turn of the century from the 19th to the 20th onwards, Mae Sot experienced massive engagement from the state and became administratively a "Thai" town. However, due to its geographical remoteness and inconvenient transportation system, the people of Mae Sot still continued exclusive ways of life styles.

Mae Sot witnessed another leap of development between 1962-1988 when the Burmese government closed its doors to the outside world and in consequence the black markets operated near and in the border region of Mae Sot. During this period, Mae Sot's social system was strongly based on commerce whilst accommodating the new wave of migration.

After 1988, Mae Sot saw a dramatic development as a multitude of aliens came into the town and various economic development projects were conducted. Its social system became enormously expanded.

THE PRE-DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIAL SYSTEM: FROM THE 13TH CENTURY TO THE 1820S

This section is concerned with the beginning of Mae Sot's history. I will show that Mae Sot was connected to the outside world through commerce, from which we can assume the engendering of the town. This section is also concerned with warfare between the pre-modern kingdoms of Burma and Siam since its consequences

affected Mae Sot greatly. Above all, the migration of fugitives and refugees into Mae Sot laid the foundation of Mae Sot's future society formation.

***Muang Chot* and commercial connections**

The first historical record on the existence of Mae Sot occurred in the earlier period of Sukhothai. During the reigns of Ramkhamhaeng's father (around 1270s), a ruler of *Muang Chot* who was called Khun Samchon invaded Sukhothai's western outpost at Tak. *Muang Chot* is assumed by some scholars to be Mae Sot (Anurak 1998; Sunait 1990: 274; Wyatt 2004: 41). The forces of *Muang Chot* were defeated by Ramkhamhaeng and it was placed under the rule of Sukhothai. During Ramkhamhaeng's reign, Sukhothai experienced geographical expansion which is indicated in the inscription of Ramkhamhaeng. Here, Mae Sot is also included. I introduce the interpretation of Terwiel (2002: 12).

The places whose submission he received on the east include Sraluang, Song Khwae [Phitsanulok], Lumbacai, both banks of the Mekong up to Vientiane. To the south Khanthi, Phrabang [Nakhon Sawan], Phraek [Chainat], Suphanburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi and [Nakhon] Si Thammarat as far as the coast of the ocean. Westwards, *Chot [Mae Sot]*,...n [Pan near Martaban] and Hangsaphadi [Hamsawati, Pegu], ending at the sea. To the north, Phlae [Phrae], Man, N...[Nan], Phlua [Pua] and across the Mekong as far as Java [Luang Prabang] (emphasis added).

As shown above, the reigning areas of Sukhothai were extended to the coastal areas of the Indian Ocean such as Martaban and Pegu where the Mon settlement was predominant and with which Mae Sot had commercial connections. This fact was testified by the story of Wareru who was a Mon merchant. He was in the habit of

visiting the Siamese capital of Sukhothai for trading purposes and had settled in Sukhothai through a combination of circumstances not least with the attainment of a high position in the palace, as a captain to the guards of King Ramkhamhaeng. Here, he commenced a love affair with one of the king's daughters and persuaded her to elope with him. Settling down in Martaban, he took part in a series of intriguing incidents against the Burmese governor. Becoming a rebellion leader, he captured Martaban and Pegu. By 1287, he had gained control over the entire country south of Prome and Toungoo. Wareru placed his new kingdom under the overlordship of Sukhothai (Hall 1981: 179; Halliday 1917: 10-11; Harvey 1967: 110-111; Terwiel 2002: 14).

Though the name of Mae Sot does not appear in the story, it can be easily assumed that Mae Sot was definitely included in the journeys of Wareru between Martaban and Sukhothai. Also, the fact that Wareru was once a merchant vindicated commercial connections between Martaban and Sukhothai through the passage of Mae Sot. Terwiel (2002: 14) mentions,

The information in the Rama Khamhaeng inscription regarding westward expanse and the journey of Wareru between Martaban and Sukhothai would appear to me to be connected, if we think in politico-commercial terms, in particular long-trade connections...The corpus of Sukhothai inscriptions and later historical literature produces ample evidence of the importance and regular use of this long-distance westward connection.

This connection between Mae Sot and Lower Burma had existed long before the Sukhothai period. Hall (1981[1954]: 24) mentions that since the time of Southeast Asian proto-history, one of the overland trade routes was via the Moulmein and

Rahaeng (Tak) passes¹² where Mae Sot was included. Later on, this route, along with a route from Tavoy over the Three Pagoda Pass, was used by the Burmese in their military expeditions on Siam during the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Also, in a more recent period, it was used by the Japanese to invade Burma during the Second World War (ibid).

Apart from commerce, religion also linked Mae Sot with the mainland and the ocean. Monks in Sukhothai made long journeys traveling overland to Martaban where they embarked upon the long sea voyage to Sri Lanka (Terwiel 2002: 15; Frasch 2002: 65f).

All in all, the historical records show that during the Sukhothai period Mae Sot was once populated and played a linking role between the ocean and the mainland for commercial and religious activities.

Reid (1993: 13) mentions that Lower Burma also saw the expansion of maritime trade at the outset of the age of commerce in the mid-fifteenth century. Frasch (2002: 64) traces the expansion of maritime trade in the coastal areas of Burma. According to him, the eleventh century saw a kind of “trade revolution” regarding the increase in numbers of traders taking part in commerce as well as in terms of the importance of trade as a source of state revenue. However, in terms of commercial relations with the other parts of Southeast Asia, Lower Burma witnessed a great leap of trade in the mid-fifteenth century.¹³

¹² Tak was under the influence of the northern Thai kingdom of Chiangmai in the eighteenth century and was known as Rahaeng. When central Thai, Ayutthaya, took over in that century, they substituted the even older name, Tak, which could date from as far as the time of Ramkhamhaeng inscription (Renard 1980b: 27).

¹³ Aung-Thwin (2002) argues that in general, the application of “the age of commerce” in the case of Burma is not appropriate since the centers of the Burmese kingdoms were located in Upper Burma which had placed more importance on the production of agriculture. However, the case of Lower Burma should be dealt with differently from that of Upper Burma. Throughout its history, much of the development of Lower Burma was heavily dependent on commerce.

Lieberman also elaborated on this connection between Lower Burma and other parts of Southeast Asia. He (1980: 205) explains that the maritime centers in Lower Burma like Bassein, Pegu, Martaban, and Ye benefited from the expansion of Indian Ocean and Indonesian commerce. Lieberman (ibid) observes that “in the mid-fifteenth century not only the volume of trade passing through the Mon ports expand in absolute terms, but the relative importance of the Mon area as a link in the Asian trade network increased.”

Commerce in Lower Burma comprises of three principal components (Lieberman 1980: 206; 1984: 27). First was the trade with the rising center of Malacca and north Sumatra. The second line of commerce was with West Asia and India, particularly Gujarat, the Coromandel Coast, and Bengal. The third segment was the inland commerce line between the eastern ports of Martaban and Siam. It is obvious that Mae Sot played a linking role in the case of the third component.

To accommodate the expansion of trade volume in Lower Burma, the new port of Ye (south of Martaban) opened in 1438 (Reid 1993: 13). The shipyards of Martaban supplied many of the biggest junks for the merchants from other parts of Southeast Asia such as Malacca, Java and even south China, because Martaban was best placed for large stands of Burmese teak (Reid 1993: 42).

The Portuguese capture of Malacca in 1511 further enhanced the commercial position of Lower Burma. To escape Portuguese interference, merchants took alternative routes to Lower Burma. The ports of Lower Burma increased their transpeninsular trade with the Gulf of Siam. And the newly emergent anti-Portuguese centers of Aceh and Banten began to provide Lower Burma with Eastern commodities to draw the attraction of Indian merchants reluctant to make the long journey to the Malay/Indonesian ports (Lieberman 1984: 28).

Warfare and its consequences

The economic proliferation of Lower Burma induced confrontations between the Burmese and Siamese kingdoms. Mae Sot's route was used as a linking pass for military operations.

After the great kingdoms – Pagan and Angkor – had collapsed, there were no great states in mainland Southeast Asia until the middle of the sixteenth century. The region was fragmented into geopolitical zones. These zones ignored, brutalized, and allied with one another in a bewildering fashion. At the same time, each zone remained internally fragmented (Pamaree 2005a: 71; Lieberman 2003: 123-131). It was against this background that *Muang Chot* appeared and competed against Sukhothai. Though Sukhothai and the Mon Kingdom of Pegu influenced the Mae Sot areas and Lower Burma, they did not impose imperial rule over local lords (Sunait 2002).

However, flourishing trade in Lower Burma influenced the geographical expansion of Toungoo and Siam, which subsequently resulted in confrontations between the two kingdoms. Ayutthaya subjugated Tenasserim in the 1460s and Tavoy in 1488 to obtain direct trade opportunities via the Indian Ocean in attempts to overcome the limited access to Malacca (Wyatt 2004: 72-73; Sunait 2002: 19-20).

Tabinshwehti of Toungoo captured Pegu in 1539 and subsequently moved his palace there in the hope of engaging in maritime trade. He also conquered Martaban in 1541 and subsequently placed Lower Burma, which had been under the influence of Ayutthaya with the tributary status, under his control (Harvey 1967: 154-155; Lieberman 1984: 29-30; Wyatt 2004: 77).

Two kingdoms were on the brink of battle. In late 1548, Tabinshwehti mobilized all his armies, which included Burmese and Mon soldiers as well as Portuguese mercenaries, to commence war against Ayutthaya. During this military expedition,

Burmese armies took the Three Pagoda Pass, starting from Martaban to Taungpaboun and then to Kanburi (Kanchanaburi) on the distant periphery of Ayutthaya. However, in the later military operation of 1563, the armies passed through the route between Martaban and Tak which was called the Rahaeng route or *dan* Mae Lamao (Mae Lamao customs station). From Martaban, the route led to the village of Taphu along a river. From there the armies marched overland, crossing the Moei River at Myawaddy and Mae Sot until they reached the Mae Ping River opposite Rahaeng village where the provincial district of Tak (*muang* Tak) is situated at the present day. Damrong mentions that this was the usual route taken by the people of the northern provinces of Siam. In Siamese history it was called “the road to the outpost and duty station of Mae Lamao” which is currently one of the villages in Mae Sot District (Damrong 2001: 15-16; Pamaree 2005a: 79-81).

As shown above, it is clear that Mae Sot paved the way for the military expedition of the Toungoo kingdom against Ayutthaya. In turn, Ayutthaya also used Mae Sot as a guard post. As has been illustrated earlier, in the vicinity of Mae Sot, a military base which was called “*dan* Mae Lamao” was established to surveil the movements of Burmese armies. The village where the base was located still remains in existence till this present day.

Though Ayutthaya fell and became a vassal state of Toungoo in 1569, it did not take long for it to achieve independence. Subsequently by 1600, it claimed again Tenasserim and Tavoy for the purpose of regaining direct access to maritime trade with the Indian Ocean. However, Toungoo moved its capital from Pegu to Ava in 1636 and posted governors in Pegu and Martaban. Harvey (1967: 193) mentions that this relocation of capital was due to the failures of the attempted coalescence with the Talaings (Mon). The rebellions of the Mon in Lower Burma culminated in the fall of

Toungoo in the 1750s. Alaunghpaya quelled the Mon uprisings and turned his attention to Siam. Just like in the earlier days, full scale wars between the two kingdoms ensued.

In this warfare between Konbaung and Siam, the Martaban-Tak route where the Mae Sot route was situated was again used for military expeditions. The 1785 expedition which attacked Bangkok took this route as part of a five-pronged attack.¹⁴ The Burmese armies began their journey from Martaban to Tak most probably by passing-through Myawaddy and Mae Sot. Then they marched southward to Bangkok (Pamaree 2005b: 19).

Fugitives' fleeing to Mae Sot

Perennial battles and rebellions in Lower Burma engendered the displacement of people throughout history. In order to regain control of Ayutthaya, a large number of the Mon and Thai ethnic war-captives in Lower Burma were forced to join Toungoo's protracted military expeditions. Due to the insufferable condition, Mon and Tai war-captives repeatedly rose in rebellion and fled away from Lower Burma into adjacent areas, notably Siam (Pamaree 2005b: 12-13). Indeed, periodic migrations to Siam due to appalling conditions continued up until the British began to colonize Lower Burma in 1824 (Harvey 1967: 180). In fact, the present-day refugee incidents take on this historically recurrent pattern.

The 1660s and 1750s-1810s saw a more prominent population influx from Lower Burma into Siam. The last emperor of the Ming dynasty, Yung-li fled to Upper Burma from Yunnan with his 700 followers in 1658. At first they were disarmed and

¹⁴ Bodowphaya led the invasion of Bangkok in 1785. The five directions whereby he remarkably stormed Siam are as follows: 1) from Mergui to Chumphon and Chaiya southwardly; 2) From Tavoy to Ratburi, Phetburi to meet up with the force at Chumphon; 3) Three Pagoda Pass to Kanchanaburi, then directly against Bangkok; 4) from Martaban to Tak and Kamphaengphet; and 5) from Chiang Saen to Lampang and southeastward to Phisanulok (Pamaree 2005b: 19).

permitted to reside in Sagaing. However, the remnants of the Ming armies, hearing of their plight, tried to rescue them. A Burmese army was defeated at Wetwin, and for three years Upper Burma was in extreme turmoil, ravaged up to the walls of Ava and as far south as Pagan. The Toungoo court ordered the governor of Martaban to mobilize Mon levies for the defense of Ava. However, the Mon levies deserted and raised a revolt at Martaban. Desertion was punished by burning the absconders alive in batches. Fearing further reprisals, thousands of Mon fled into Siam (Hall 1981: 402-403; Harvey 1967: 196-198).

The later influx took place during the Konbaung dynasty. Alaunghpaya subjugated the Mon rebellions in Martaban which precipitated the collapse of the Toungoo dynasty. After that, he and his successive kings waged strenuous wars against Siam. In the series of military expeditions, the Mon were continuously summoned as levies. The Mon levies who had been mustered against Siam mutinied in 1773. The mutineers devastated Rangoon and in a fear of retaliation, migrated to Siam with their families (Harvey 1967: 259). In 1814, there was another rebellion by the Mon in Martaban, which culminated in refugee influx into Siam (Halliday 1913: 5).

Lieberman (1978; 1984: 218-219) mentions the Mon were not the sole group behind these insurgencies in Lower Burma. Rather, many other ethnic groups, notably the Karen, joined the uprisings. In fact, the leader of the 1740 uprising in Martaban, Smin Dhaw, was Karen. Along with the Mon, the Karen in Lower Burma were in prolonged turmoil between 1740s and 1820s. Most obviously, many Karen communities lay along the routes through which the various armies passed. Many amongst the Karen were forced to provide provisions, were recruited as guides and spies, and were taken as captives (Keyes 1979: 34-35; Renard 1980b: 15). Due to the series of turbulent situations, they migrated to Siam along with the Mon in search of

refuge. Since then, Siamese historical records began to deal with the Karen as a significant ethnic element (Keyes 1979: 45; Renard 1980a: 131).

There were three routes by which the fugitives traveled on their way to refuge in Siam. Martaban was their major rallying point. From there, they took the northern pass via Myawaddy, Mae Sot and Tak; the southern one via Tavoy and Kanchanaburi; and a middle one by way of the Three Pagoda Pass. For the first route, they proceeded by land through Kawkareik and Myawaddy on the Burmese side and arrived in Mae Sot which was the Siamese frontier station to Tak (Halliday 1913: 7; 1917: 15)

The immigrants were welcomed by Siam. For example, the Mon expressed that “the Lord of the golden prasada, the righteous king of Ayutthaya, was the haven of the Mon race, and on every occasion saved the lives of the Mon people” (Halliday 1913: 4; Harvey 1967: 180-181). King Mongkut also considered himself as “King of Karens” (Renard 1980b: 23). Siamese kings made use of the immigrants as useful laborers and border guards (Wyatt 2004: 113, 135-136; Renard 1980b: 21).

It is against this background that Mae Sot saw the settlement of people who fled from harsh conditions in Burma in search of refuge. As shown before, fugitives took the Mae Sot route in search of refuge in Siam. Among them, the Karen were the most prominent resettlers in Mae Sot. Keyes (1979: 35-45) notes the millennial movements and demographic expansion of the Karen as reasons for migration in addition to conflict-driven migration. Caught in the devastating turmoil of warfare between the Burman and Siamese kingdoms, their migration may have been stimulated by millennial ideas that reached a peak in the 1820s (Stern 1968: 305-306, cited in Keyes 1979: 45). Hovemyr (1989) also asserts that a main motive behind Karen Christian missionary zeal into Siam was to search for the Karen king.

In addition to these political and religious changes, the increase in Karen population rendered the traditional modes of upland cultivation in the areas where they live, difficult. Therefore, they had to move down to the lowland areas.

MIGRATION AND GROWING OF A SOCIAL SYSTEM: FROM THE 1820S TO 1962

Not long after the refugees migrated to Mae Sot, it witnessed the migration of various other groups of people as commercial activities were growing due to the introduction of British colonial rule in Lower Burma. People began to settle down and adapt to the particular local environments.

This period also saw state intervention as the state bureaucracy began to modernize. Administratively, Mae Sot was incorporated into the state system. However, the people of Mae Sot built up and maintained their own ways of life and culture in response to the central penetration.

The British colonization of (Lower) Burma and migration of various groups

British involvement in the development of parts of Lower Burma as a result of the Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-1826 resulted in the migration of various groups of merchants to Mae Sot. The British gained control of Lower Burma up to Moulmein facing the Burmese port of Martaban. Moulmein, which had been a village, was developed as a capital for the colonized areas for the purpose of military and economy (Furnivall 1991[1939]: 5-6). Under the auspices of the British, Moulmein saw great economic progress, surpassing Martaban in terms of its economic importance.

British colonizers made attempts to enhance overland trade by attracting Chinese merchants (Renard 1980a: 135-136). This was well recorded in the stories of Richard's missions to Siam. In several of his trips to Chiangmai from Moulmein via the overland route, passing through of Myawaddy and Mae Sot, he was persistent to attract Chinese merchants in Chiangmai to extend their trade activities to Moulmein (Farrington 2004). Also, the British made attempts to construct railway lines linking Moulmein and Chiangmai to enhance the speed of the journey (Renard 1980a: 170-171). Besides, they paid particular attention to teak forests along the Moei River.

Given the expanded business opportunities in the trade route between Moulmein and inland areas, and also in Mae Sot as a result of people resettlement, diverse groups of merchants used Mae Sot as a stopover at first, and then as a resident place. Following the Karen and the Shan who migrated to Mae Sot in search of refuge in the earlier periods, ethnic Chinese from various parts of Burma and Yunnan began to set up their residency there in the hope of gaining business opportunities. Also, the Burman moved to the frontiers of Mae Sot apart from their periodic back-and-forth migrations. After that, a group of northern Thais, notably from Lampang, migrated to Mae Sot. Besides, Mae Sot saw the migration of Muslims from Bangladesh through Burma and also saw the later resettlement of a group of Sikhs and Hindus (Anurak 1998).

The new settlers engaged in trade with Moulmein. The road condition between Moulmein and Mae Sot was more convenient than that between Mae Sot and Tak. Benefiting from the trade with prosperous Moulmein and due to the rich natural resources in Mae Sot, they brought their relatives to Mae Sot. Also, another group of Chinese moved into Mae Sot from Bangkok. With the encroachment of these new

settlers, the earlier residents of the Karen moved to other peripheral areas of Mae Sot (Anurak 1998: 14-15).

Bastian's journey in 1862-1863 (Bastian 2004 [1866]; 2005[1867]) gives some glimpses about Mae Sot. He was on the journey to Bangkok from Burma, and passed through Myawaddy and crossed the Moei River, staying in Mae Sot in November 1862 before continuing his journey to Tak and Bangkok.¹⁵ According to him, Mae Sot was a very lonely place with Karen villages surrounding it. He saw a Chinese caravan carrying luxury goods from Burma to Siam. During his jungle journey from Mae Sot to Tak, he encountered Siamese traders who, carrying their wares in baskets on their backs, were on their way to the border station. He also later met a train of elephants that belonged to them (2005: 8-9). From his accounts, it can be assumed that during this time, Mae Sot was a small settlement area, though various groups of people began to settle down there and it acted as stopover for merchants. In contrast, according to his accounts (2005: 11-17), Tak was a lively and bustling town. The Chinese constituted a sizeable part of the population and lived mostly in the market quarters.¹⁶ Tak was a rallying point for border trade with Moulmein, and an overland entrepot where goods from Chiangmai, Sukhothai, and Laos were gathered. Inconvenient transportation and jungle routes still prevented Mae Sot from taking over Tak as a major overland trade station, though the importance of Mae Sot continued to grow over the years.

¹⁵ In fact, the name "Mae Sot" does not appear in his story. After crossing the Moei River, he arrived in "Maiteta" which according to Anurak (personal dialogue, December 2005) is "Mae Tao" village where a border checkpoint is located at the present days. However, Bastian mentioned that he arrived there *the next day* after crossing the Burmese-Siamese border and "Maiteta" was the settlement area where the Siamese official was residing (Bastian 2005: 1-2). From that source, "Maiteta" can be assumed to be the town area of Mae Sot. He might not have had a clear understanding of geographical names.

¹⁶ The king of Thonburi, Taksin was once a governor of Tak. The Teochiu Chinese trading community contributed considerably to his success (Wyatt 2004: 123-124).

Patterns of culture and settlement

Migration transformed Mae Sot into a settlement place beyond a mere trading stopover. A kind of social system was developed as a result of the immigration of various groups of people. However, at first, newly migrating people maintained social relationships within their own groups. The features of a plural society were observed in those days. For instance, the earlier settlers, especially the Karen, did not integrate with the new immigrants. Therefore, as mentioned before, they moved to other marginal places when their initial settlement areas were encroached upon by subsequent immigrants. It seems that existing Karen life styles which were based on agriculture were not compatible with the newly emerging commercial environment which was enhanced by commerce-driven immigration.

However, one of the earlier groups of settlers, the Shan, solidly maintained their way of life. They began their settlement around the place where the District Office of Mae Sot is located at the present day. As Buddhists, they built their own temple, Wat Mae Sot Na Dan, which has been located on the way from the Mae Sot District Office to the central area of Mae Sot town, as early as 1857 (Anurak 1998: 79). The Shan maintained their settlement in the inner places of Mae Sot town between the Intharakhiri Road and the Prasatwithi Road (Anurak 1998: 15).

The Chinese congregated around the Sriphanit Road, which was the central area of Mae Sot in the old days. Their industriousness and skillfulness in doing business led to their economic prosperity. They engaged in businesses such as brewery, goldsmith, butchery and hotel industries (Anurak 1998: 15).

Unlike the non-Thai people such as the Shan, the Chinese, and the Burman who set up their residence in the central area of Mae Sot town, the northern Thai people did not necessarily venture into the inner area. They began their settlement on the

outskirts of Mae Sot such as Mae Pa, Mae Ku, Mae Tao, Mae Ka Sa, and Pha Wo with some groups settling in the central area of Mae Sot (Anurak 1998: 2, 16).

As for the Muslims, originally Bangladesh, established their dwellings around the Sriphanit Road near the Mae Sot Hospital after migrating from Burma (Anurak 1998: 20). In fact, a road named, “Thanon Islambamrung,” still remains there, showing that they were a dominant group there. They built a mosque along that road. Their main economic field was trade.

As time went on, various ethnic groups gradually molded into “*chao Mae Sot*” (The people of Mae Sot) beyond the pluralistic patterns that characterized initial settlement. The processes of adaptation to the local environments and the increase of inter-ethnic relationships in their everyday lives were seen although this did not lead to the total loss of individual ethnic identities.

Although the “*chao Mae Sot*” saw the increasing intervention of the central government since the later part of the nineteenth century, geographical remoteness made it conducive for them to maintain their own living patterns. The natural environment such as the Moei River nurtured a sense of solidarity among the people. It was the rendezvous point for the people of Mae Sot to go for picnics. They enjoyed bamboo-rafting, fishing, swimming, digging out shellfish, and so on. They also did washing and bathing. Their life styles were to a great degree attached to the river (Anurak 1998: 23). The river was not a dividing boundary but a place for breeding the identity of the particular locality.

Seasonal festivals such as *songkran*¹⁷ and New Year’s Day brought people together in collective celebration. In those cases, it saw the participation of the Burmese from Myawaddy. Especially during *songkran* festivals, the people of Mae

¹⁷ I will deal with this festival in detail in Chapter 6.

Sot and the Burmese from Myawaddy enjoyed swimming together in the Moei River with Thai and Burmese cultural performances on the river side. Also in sporting events, various teams such as the Muslims, the Chinese, the Shan, the hill tribes, and the civil servants participated and built up solidarity (Anurak 1998: 26-28).

Buddhist festivals contributed to the development of inter-ethnic mixtures among people such as the Chinese, the Shan, and the northern Thais. They participated in various Buddhist activities such as the Buddhist lent and merit-giving (Anurak 1998: 25). Besides, in various other activities, the people of Mae Sot, regardless of ethnicity and religion, were willing to participate.

Interestingly enough, during those days, there was a modern cultural wave that flowed from Burma to Mae Sot. Under the auspices of the British, Burma tasted the modern ways of life earlier than Mae Sot. In the eyes of the people of Mae Sot, the Burmese appeared to enjoy the privileges of modern things. The style of Burmese ladies was so charming that they gained the attraction of the people of Mae Sot. Silent films from Burma were also shown in a theater-like building in Mae Sot. The people of Mae Sot learned modern life styles such as drinking tea in the afternoon, eating cookies and cakes, and playing football. They also went to Burma to take pictures, which was not available in Mae Sot during those days. The rich and also the civil servants of Mae Sot often made trips to Burma to catch up with the development of Burma (Anurak 1998: 29-30).

The making of a national town

While Mae Sot was being populated, the Bangkok regime attempted to stretch its influence to remote areas. When territorial integrity and independence were

threatened by British and French colonialists, Siam was desperate to reform the prevailing system of government (Tej 1977: 14). From the second half of the nineteenth century, Siam launched a series of reforms in various parts of the state, notably the provincial administration. The key to the reform of the provincial administration lay in centralization (Tej 1977: 39).

In the early reforms of the provincial administration, Siam focused on strengthening the defense of the threatened areas of the kingdom. The defense demanded administrative, judicial and financial changes to the provinces. The Bangkok regime employed local noble men as government officials. It also engaged in judicial autonomy as well as financial sectors for the purpose of central control. Apart from the administrative changes, the government attempted to establish close physical contact with the entire country by posting mapping groups headed by McCarthy to all parts of Siam. There were major improvements in the field of communications during those days (Tej 1977: 61-75; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995: 397; Thongchai 1994: 119).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Bangkok effectively became an imperialist power by consolidating the previous tributary states into the direct circle of Siam, which can be called “internal territorialization” (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995: 397; Thongchai 1994: 145-148).

Bangkok’s intervention became more prominent with Prince Damrong heading the Ministry of the Interior in the last decade of the nineteenth under the support of King Chulalongkorn. Damrong transformed the Ministry of the North into the modern Ministry of the Interior. He made more radical and massive drives to reform the provincial administration. He came up with a new administrative system, termed as the “*thesaphiban*” system. Here, a number of provinces were grouped into a single

administrative unit (*monthon*, “circle”) in a similar manner to the royal commissionerships established earlier in Chiangmai and Phuket (Wyatt 2004: 194). In this system, Tak Province was included in *monthon* Nakhonsawan which was established in 1894 (Tej 1977: 101, 271). The central government also attempted to have a firm control at the district, subdistrict, and village levels. Local noblemen were transformed into district officers, while below the level of the district, the direct masters of serfs were replaced with village heads and subdistrict chiefs (*kamnan*). The Ministry of the Interior directly sent out instructions to provincial and district officials to create villages and subdistricts by having the “heads of approximately ten households” whose houses were located near each other to elect a village head. Villages were in turn clumped into subdistricts (*tambon*). The village heads were instructed to elect among themselves a *kamnan* (Tej 1977: 111; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995: 399).

Reflecting on the above occurrences, Mae Sot also saw the interventions of Bangkok and the subsequent administrative developments at that time. Initially, the Karen were assigned to be in charge of border control in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1845 Bangkok extended its rule beyond Mae Sot to Tha Song Yang, the northern-most district of Tak Province (Renard 1980b: 21).¹⁸

The administrative change of Mae Sot started from rearranging the guard post. During the reign of Rama V, the border post (*dan* Mae Lamao) which had been located in Mae Lamao village was moved to adjacent places of Mae Sot near the Moei River with the expansion to four posts: *dan* Intharakhiri, *dan* Chai, *dan* Phon, and *dan* Chiangthong. While the first border post was in Mae Ramat district north of Mae Sot,

¹⁸ Before that, Chiangmai had governed Tha Song Yang. Mae Hong Son province had initially included Tha Song Yang but when boundaries were redrawn, the district was shifted to Tak Province (Renard 1980b: 27). Even Tak throughout its history, had changed allegiance on several occasions from Sukhothai to Chiangmai and to Ayutthaya at the end of the eighteenth century (Renard 1980a: 114).

the others were located inside the district area of Mae Sot. Administratively, all of them were initially under *muang* Tak of *monthon* Nakhon Sawan. However, in 1898, they were dissolved and incorporated into a newly created *amphoe* Mae Sot, and separated from the previous administrative position. And *phra* Intharakhiri¹⁹ who had been in charge of *dan* Mae Ramat and was Karen, became the first *nay amphoe* (Head of District) of Mae Sot (Anurak 1998: 83).

The state conducted several modern projects in Mae Sot. In 1881 the telegraph line was connected from Tak to Moulmein, passing through Mae Sot and Myawaddy (Anurak 1998: 3; Thongchai 1994: 118). Mapping and topographical surveys were conducted for the purpose of drawing boundaries between Siam and British Burma and between provinces. During 1882-1883, a map of the boundary between Tak and Chiangmai was created to settle their dispute over woodcutting tax (Thongchai 1994: 118). During 1890-1891, a mapping of the boundary on the frontier between Siam and Burma was conducted (Thongchai 1994: 124). In 1896, a team of Anglo-Thai boundary expedition marched to Mae Sot after conducting investigations in the Three Pagoda Pass and Umphang areas (Renard 1980a: 191). Mae Sot seemed to gradually become a part of the “geo-body” through Siam’s attempts at the turn of the century.

Throughout the early part of the twentieth century, Mae Sot was on its way to becoming a full-fledged administrative district, equipped with state agencies and other organizations as seen in the following (Anurak 1998): the first public school was opened in 1915; the police station came into existence in 1920; the border checkpoint

¹⁹ In fact, the name of Intharakhiri traces back to 1661 when the Siamese force under King Narai invaded northern Thailand, capturing many principalities of Karen and Lawa that were under the suzerainty of Chiangmai, including *muang* Intharakhiri (Damrong 2001: 222). Intharakhiri is Mae Ramat today where one of the guard posts was located as mentioned above. Renard mentioned that the Karen were in charge of Intharakhiri throughout history. The title of the chief person was awarded and passed down in recognition of the place of authority. Therefore, there were a lot of *phra* Intharakhiri in the history. However, most of them were assumed to be Karen (Renard 1980a: 57). Anurak mentions that the first *nay amphoe*, *phra* Intharakhiri, was also Karen (personal communication).

was established in 1927; the prison was built in 1938; the *thesaban* (municipal office) was erected in 1939; the customs office was introduced in 1940; the border patrol police began to be stationed in 1954; and the Mae Sot Hospital was established in 1958.

Also, the field of communications saw some important developments: the Mae Sot airport, which was built after the First World War, commenced passenger service in 1932 though it was interrupted during the Second World War;²⁰ and in 1954, the condition of the Mae Sot-Tak road was improved in order to accommodate vehicles though it was one-lane without pavement (Anurak 1998).

The penetration of Bangkok and Mae Sot's subsequent incorporation into the administrative system as laid down by the central government did not necessarily take place without resistance from the locals and without witnessing discrepancies between state aspiration and actual implementation. A retired governor of Tak encouraged the officials who were his relations to resist the new governor who had been sent from outside the province, according to Prince Damrong's report to King Rama V in 1899 (Tej 1977: 174). And Mae Sot district officials posted by the central government from the outside were not able to communicate properly with the local people because their languages were different. The officials spoke central Thai, while people in Mae Sot spoke northern Thai, mixed with some other ethnic languages in accordance with their ethnic groups. Therefore, they had to hire interpreters when approaching the locals. Demographically speaking, the population amongst the central Thai was exclusively small. Mae Sot's culture rarely contained elements of central Thai culture. Rather, northern Thai or Lanna lifestyles were becoming an integrating model for various groups in Mae Sot without the total loss of the elements of each ethnic group. Given

²⁰ During the Second World War, Japanese armies marched to Burma through Mae Sot (Anurak 1998: 33).

that situation, the introduction of the central elements through official channels was very alien to the people of Mae Sot.

Even so, the people of Mae Sot retained their contact with Burma more than with modernized Thailand. Burma continued to be their source of business activities and modern ways of life until the 1960s.

BLACK MARKETS AND COMMERCE-DRIVEN SOCIAL SYSTEM: FROM 1962 TO 1988

During the 1960s, Mae Sot saw ongoing development. Road conditions between Mae Sot and Tak were again rehabilitated. After then Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn visited Mae Sot along that route, he realized the importance of the road as a means of connection with Burma, and sought for financial aid from the Australian government during his visit to the country. In 1970, with the technological and financial assistance of Australia, the road was made convenient and safe, though it still is a one-lane path (Anurak 1998: 12-13).

At that time, the people of Mae Sot witnessed the physical presence of the monarch. In 1964, King Bhumibol Adulyadej and the Queen made a visit to Mae Sot for the first time. They made another visit to Mae Sot in 1978. Afterwards, several projects, such as those on agriculture, were initiated by the palace (Anurak 1998). The tangible appearance of the monarch even in the remote town of Mae Sot might have precipitated the town into a “national” town by imbuing the core idea of Thai nationalism in the minds of the people of Mae Sot.

Throughout the period, in general, the government attempted to enhance the its ability in the affairs of remote areas and in the long run it wanted to increase the integration of remote villages into the national economy (Wyatt 2004: 286).

Though Mae Sot continued to be influenced by the center during those days, such influence was very minimal, compared to the impact of the political development of Burma and the Thailand-Burma borderland on the fashioning of Mae Sot. In other words, the town was more susceptible and indebted to the other side of the border, particularly in its economic development.

The Burmese Way to Socialism and the flourishing black markets

Burmese democracy, which was full of detrimental disputes and the mutinies of communists and ethnic insurgent groups from the time of her independence, collapsed in 1962, allowing the military to seize power through a coup.²¹ Subsequently, the military government projected “the Burmese Way to Socialism” which was hermetic and self-isolating. Private sectors and properties were nationalized and confiscated. The country’s doors were closed to its neighboring countries and the rest of the world.

Simultaneously, the KNU lost its territorial occupation in the adjacent areas of Rangoon, Toungoo, and Delta region towards 1960 (Lintner 1999: 297). Consequently, they moved their military bases to the eastern border areas. However, they rehabilitated their military and administrative capacities and maintained a firm control in those areas.

The closed door policy of the military regime resulted in a scarcity of consumer goods in the country. The situation gave rise to the engenderment of the black markets in the borderland, especially in the adjacent areas near Mae Sot. From 1963, the black markets saw a dramatic development, though in the early 1950s customs gates had been opened at a number of KNU posts along the border. The first new Karen

²¹ For details, see Taylor (1987) and Smith (1999a).

customs gate was opened at Phalu, south of Myawaddy, in the 6th brigade area in 1964. The following year Bo Mya²² opened another gate at Wangkha in his 7th brigade area to the north (Smith 1999a: 283).

Martin Smith (1999a: 283) documents the proliferation of the black markets as follows,

By the 1970s Bo Mya's main base at Kawmoorah was sometimes producing as much as one *lakh* kyat in a single day's trading when up to 1,000 cattle would splash across the Moei River into Thailand at the end of the long journey across the Dawna Range from central Burma. Transported in the other direction were radios, watches, high-quality sarongs and other manufactured goods now unavailable in Burma. Added to this income was revenue from timber mills and tin and antimony mines run jointly with local Thai businessmen. Vast profits were generated though opium, which was an important source of income for insurgent groups in the Shan State, has always been strictly prohibited. In the peak year of 1983 KNU Finance Minister, Pu Ler Wah, estimated incomes at 500 million kyat (£50m at the official exchange rate), an astonishing figure for an otherwise impoverished backwater).

The above paragraph was testified by local informants involved in the operation of the black markets. Cattle were voluminously transported from the Burmese side, while consumer goods and machineries such as sewing machines came from the Thai side.²³ Jewelry made up a great portion in that trade too. Whereas gold was very often used as a means of payment for Burmese buyers, jade and ruby attracted even overseas merchants mostly from Hong Kong. Merchants from Hong Kong used to visit and stay in Mae Sot to acquire jade from the Burmese traders. According to

²² He passed away at the age of 79 as recently as 24 December 2006 in Mae Sot. See the reports of Bangkok Post (25 December 2006) and the Irrawaddy (24 December 2006; 26 December 2006) on his death.

²³ For details of items traded between Thailand and Burma in the black markets, see Mya Than (1992: 57-58).

Chang (2003; 2004), Yunnanese merchants were very active in this jade trade and Mae Sot took over from Mae Sai as a central trading place for jade by the 1980s.

The impact of the black markets on the national economy of Burma during those days was enormous. Though exact figures were not attainable, estimates of the illegal trade vary from between 50 to 85 per cent of the total official trade in the mid-1980s (Myat Thein 2004: 80). According to Khin (1988: 94), about two-thirds of goods in the black markets were smuggled in from Thailand, and the total illegal trade was thought to have a turnover of up to 50 per cent of official trading.

The effect of the black markets on Mae Sot was dramatic and tremendous. The sleepy outpost of Mae Sot rapidly turned into a bustling new market town and the pivotal center of much of this new trade (Smith 1999a: 283). The abundant black market operations induced another phase of migration comprising of businessmen from Bangkok who were mostly Chinese but occasionally included some Indian Sikhs. New immigrants had relatively more capital and resources than the people of Mae Sot. They soon dominated the central area of the town and transformed the landscapes of that area into a highly commercialized place by establishing their shops and welcoming new customers. In consequence, the Shan who had been staying there sold their land and moved out of the place (Anurak 1998: 17).

The lives of the people of Mae Sot were intimately related to the operation of the black markets. The number of people involved in the trade was very large; for instance, the number of porters engaged in transportation from Mae Sot to Wangkha was more than 1,000. Many shopkeepers expanded their businesses in connection with Bangkok from which goods were delivered to Mae Sot before entering into the black markets. Traditional commercial relationships with northern Thailand were

replaced by connections with Bangkok as the capital city experienced rapid industrialization and subsequently provided the necessary goods for the black markets.

The black markets equally attracted the massive participation of the Burmese. Besides merchants, many Burmese porters took over delivery in Wangkha. Then they passed through jungle routes protected by the KNU soldiers all the way up to Moulmein. From there, they took the train to Rangoon where the open black market, popularly known as St John's Shopping Center, was in operation for the Burmese to consume the goods (Aung Kin 1983, cited in Myat Thein 2004: 81). In this commodity moving chain, an incredible number of Burmese as well as Thais were involved. Mae Sot became the central position in the circulation of black market goods.

The prolific development of the black markets strengthened the capacity of the KNU. Though the military bases became confined to the borderland, the profit generated by tax (roughly 7 per cent) on trade enabled the KNU to be equipped with weaponry. Significantly, it increased the political clout of Bo Mya who was in charge of the areas in the black markets. Based on successful economic and military operations, he eventually became president of the KNU in 1976 (Smith 1999a: 284-285).

The KNU and Mae Sot

In general, the relationships between Mae Sot and the KNU were friendly. However, there was a woeful exception. In 15 May 1960, a military band of the KNU inflicted horrible damage on Mae Sot. The group burnt down the District Office of Mae Sot, which had been previously located in the current location of Mae Sot police

station, and destroyed communication systems. The people of Mae Sot and district officials fled to Mae Pa village. Shortly, the band retreated to the Burmese side. This was a big national issue, and thus then Prime Minister Sarit and government officials visited Mae Sot to ensure the increase of security. The reasons behind this incident were not mentioned in Anurak's book (1998: 33-34). However, according to Bo Mya in his biography (n.d.: 83-88), this was because the leaders of the military band were deceived by Thai merchants. The Karen group delivered 300 heads of cattle to the Thai merchants who promised to pay for them soon. But the merchants never turned up, which provoked the Karen band to retaliate. Bo Mya, who at that time was a branch leader in the 7th brigade, came over to Mae Sot to settle the case with Thai authorities. He assured them that the KNU would never cause trouble in the future. This meeting portrayed Bo Mya as a diplomatic figure to the Thai authorities.

Despite such an awful incident, the KNU and the Thai authorities maintained amicable relationships throughout the years. It was mainly because of the KNU's security roles in the border. Under Bo Mya's staunchly nationalist leadership, the KNU undoubtedly gave the Thai government crucial help in blocking the spread of communist insurgency in the region and frustrated the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT)'s attempts to link up with the Communist Party of Burma (CPB). Without the solid presence of the KNU in the form of "liberated areas" along the border, the CPB in Tavoy-Mergui would have been able to forge a link with the CPT in the forests of Mae Sariang and Umphang, and the connection would have been further extended to the communist parties of China and Malaysia. The KNU's assistance was not confined to the Kawthoolei²⁴ side of the border. They were requested by Thai officers

²⁴ It is the Karen name for the state that the KNU was trying to establish. It roughly covers Karen State that the Burmese government designated. Kawthoolei means "the land without evil."

to cross into Thailand to disarm Karen villagers who had been organized by the CPT (Smith 1999a: 299).

The cordial relationships were reflected in Bo Mya's statement where the KNU was likened to a "Foreign Legion" for Thailand, guarding their borders and preventing links between the Burmese communists and the Thai communists (Smith 1999a: 299). In return for the KNU's positive roles for Thailand, the Thai authorities allowed them to stay on Thai soil and to buy arms, ammunition and other supplies in Thailand. Also, the Thais attached special agents who served as observers and advisers to the Karen units (Lintner 1999: 299). It is against this background that the families of KNU leaders began to settle in Mae Sot in addition to their residence in the liberated zones of the border. For example, the 6th brigade commander of the KNU, Shwe Hser and his family members sometimes came and stayed in their house in Mae Sot.²⁵ The Thai authorities also issued travel permits and provided amenities for rebel leaders who wanted to go to Chiangmai or Bangkok under the auspices of Thai intelligence agencies. Often the journeys were rallied from Mae Sot.

Commerce-centered social system

I have mentioned that the flourishing black markets induced a new wave of migration to Mae Sot. This period witnessed the settlement of many Bangkok businessmen in Mae Sot. Though they had business relationships with Bangkok, their hectic business dealings forced them to stay in Mae Sot on a permanent basis. Moreover, the relatively inconvenient transportation system discouraged them from retaining their close relationships with Bangkok. In the beginning, male migration

²⁵ I met his descendants in Mae Sot.

was the main pattern. However, entire families followed them to Mae Sot in the hope that family labor could be used in their expanded business fields, as well as keeping their families in close proximity in their new settlements. Throughout the period of 1962-1988, this group of new domestic migrants became crucial figures in the town's economy and constituted the main components of the Tak Chamber of Commerce till the present day. Their identities were also transformed to that of the people of Mae Sot as their settlements persisted on a permanent basis. They were not only involved in business activities but also in social and cultural arenas.

In fact, during this period, more aliens flowed into Mae Sot. However, they did not pursue permanent residence in Mae Sot unlike domestic migrants. The Burmese merchants were staying in Mae Sot for short periods of time during their trade with the Mae Sot businessmen. Also, the Burmese porters were mainly involved in transportation between Wangkha and Moulmein. As Wangkha and Phalu provided tremendous business opportunities for the Burmese regardless of ethnic groups such as in the business of running food stalls in addition to delivering jobs, they did not feel compelled to seek for jobs in Mae Sot. Though they often made visits to Mae Sot, it was temporary.

The KNU also did not place their military bases in the Thai side despite their periodical appearance in Mae Sot. Though they received favorable treatment and had a settlement as shown before, they were more desperate to strengthen their liberated zones in Kawthoolei. In fact, their military and economic capacity enabled them to run those areas as a *de facto* nation-state with firm administrative apparatuses.

However, it does not deny the localization of alien people. Inter-ethnic marriages across the border continued. Some new Burmese migrants and pre-existing Burmese

people experienced the transformation of their identity to that of the people of Mae Sot throughout the years.

Given that others were not permanently residing in the town, the establishment of institutions for alien people in the areas of education and health did not come into existence. The tide of alien migration was solely generated by commercial interests, not by education or health. The social system of the town was mainly based on commerce where interactions between alien people and the people of Mae Sot are centered. The division between the illegal and legal or between the informal and formal did not contain any meaningful connotation since almost every cross-border trade was in the shape of the illegal and informal. Comparisons would only be possible under the condition that the formal constitutes a sizeable portion of the whole.

It was only after the late 1980s that the town witnessed an enormous number of alien people in institutional bases within the town's social system. Also it was after the late 1980s that comparisons between the illegal/informal and the legal/formal appeared to have increased relevance as the state attempted to engage in the affairs of the town.

MASSIVE MIGRATION AND MIGRANT INSTITUTIONS: FROM 1988

The year 1988 witnessed great changes in terms of societal development. Whereas Mae Sot expanded gradually in the past, this period saw an abrupt and unexpected population increase. This movement was mainly induced by the political development in Burma. Also, this period saw the end of the Cold War in the region and a subsequent adjustment of geo-political and geo-economical policies in Thailand. Mae Sot appeared to be in a great geographical position, and thus the state strengthened its

penetration into the town. Paradoxically, the enormous presence of unauthorized migrants and the state's increased involvement were observed side by side in the town. Moreover, the state has to deal with the sizeable existence of migrant institutions deeply entrenched within society.

This section reveals what caused an increase in the migration, how the state became more involved in the town, how the society was transformed due to massive migration and how the state engaged with the migrants.

Political crisis in Burma and population movement

The Thailand-Burma borderland saw significant geo-political and geo-economical changes in the late 1980s, which had a deep impact on Mae Sot. The military regime drove the economy of Burma into an abysmal situation. The export volume decreased to 2 per cent of GDP in 1987/1988 from 16 per cent of GDP in 1961/1962. The country was almost bankrupt as the external public debt rolled into huge amounts; the debt/GDP rose from 20 to 40 per cent in 1986 when debt-service obligations equaled 58.24 per cent of export earnings. Burma was on the brink of bankruptcy. The situation compelled the government to seek "Least Developed Country"²⁶ status in the United Nations in 1987 in order to reduce interest rates, and to receive new financial grants from international organizations like the IMF (Mya Thein 2004: 77-80). The Burmese Way to Socialism, which was an idiosyncratic blend of Marxist, Buddhist and nationalist ideology, had witnessed Burma's decline from a country once

²⁶ The status of the "Least Developed Country" has some requirements: the per capita income should be below US\$200; industry should be less than 10 per cent of GNP; and literacy is also less than 20 per cent. Burma was said to have adjusted its state of literacy downwards to qualify for that status (Myat Thein 2004: 84).

considered among the most resource-rich in Asia to one of the world's ten poorest nations (Smith 1999a: 24).

Burmese lives suffered from the harsh conditions. They had to go through a shortage of essential everyday goods and financial insecurity caused by the government's chronic demonetization practices in attempts to normalize the black market economy. People ceased to contain their tolerance against the regime. Outrageous anti-government demonstrations took place in March 1988 and soon rampantly spread to the whole country. People in every sector including students, workers, monks, farmers, teachers and government employers took part in the uprisings. On the one hand, the government suppressed the demonstrations, while on the other hand, it tried to introduce a multi-party political system with the abdication of Ne Win who had been the head of the government, and with the introduction of a civilian leader, Dr. Maung Maung. However, people's disgruntlement was not mollified in the face of governmental subjugation and *ad hoc* democratization.

The political crisis eventually led to the promotion of new faces from the military into the government through a coup. They took power in 18 September 1988 and subsequently formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).²⁷ The new military regime relentlessly trampled democratic uprisings. They operated massive suppressions over the whole country. These dreadful oppressions triggered a mass exodus to Burma's border areas, mostly along the Thailand-Burma border. Thousands of students and political activists boarded cars and buses, bound for Moulmein and Kawkaik and from there trekked through the jungles and over the hills to the Thai border near Mae Sot, while others went to the nearby Three Pagoda Pass or headed for Victoria Point in the far southeast (Lintner 1999: 353). This exodus

²⁷ The SLORC was officially dissolved and replaced with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in November 1997. However, key members of the SLORC retained their positions in the newly reconstituted junta (Lang 2002: 8)

took similar routes to that the fugitives or refugees had taken in the old days as shown earlier in this chapter. It was an atavistic recurrence.

The SLORC discarded the defunct closed-door economic policy in place of massive open-door policies, especially towards neighboring countries. It attempted to formalize trading and political relations with neighboring countries by nullifying the operations of the black markets. Therefore, it was imperative for the government to have firm control in border areas where natural resources were abundant but ethnic insurgent groups were prominently present. To achieve this, it sought cease-fire agreements with many ethnic militant groups such as the United Wa State Party and the Shan State Army (Smith 1999b: 50). However, on the other hand, it operated strenuous and massive military expeditions towards non-ceasefire groups, notably the KNU. Alongside military operations, the notorious “Four Cuts” campaign²⁸ devastated the border areas by the late 1980 (Smith 1999a: 397). Consequently, the campaign pushed many people into the other side of the border, while others remained internally displaced people till today.

Changing policies of Thailand

While Burma saw a woeful economic decline and social devastation by 1988, Thailand enjoyed rapid economic growth, which was 9.5 per cent in 1987 and 13.2 per cent in 1988. The profile of Thailand’s economy witnessed rapid change; the proportion of agriculture in GDP decreased, while the industrial sector’s share increased with the demand for trade and markets (Buszynski 1994: 723). In terms of

²⁸ The strategy was officially endorsed in 1968 and was known as *pya ley pay* in Burmese. Fundamentally, the campaign aims to cut the insurgents off from their support system which includes food supplies, funding, intelligence and recruits (Lang 2002: 38). It was substantially introduced from the mid-80s in southeast Burma (Smith 1999a: 397)

the geo-political situation, Thailand was released from her obsession with national security as the Indochina conflicts came to an end with the demise of the CPT. Thus, Thailand's foreign policy needed adjustments to reflect the changing economic and political situations in the region.

Given the situation, Thailand's border areas no longer served as buffer zones; instead, in the new political and economic context of regional relations, they served as gateways for trade and investment (Battersby 1998/1999: 487). Thailand aspired to turn "battle fields into trading markets" and opened up economic ties with Thailand's former foes, including Burma playing a central role (Grundy-Warr *et al.* 1997: 99).

General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's visit to Burma in 1988 symbolically heralded a new era in relations between Bangkok and Rangoon. He and a hundred of his delegates were the first foreign diplomatic group to recognize the newly formed military regime. Among the projects in their discussion were an increase in the official trade in teak and, to the alarm of Karen villagers, the construction of hydro-electric dams along the Moei and Salween rivers in the heart of Kawthoolei to provide electricity to both countries, were included. As a result, by early 1989, twenty concession areas had been granted along the Thailand-Burma border with a total export of 16,000 tons of teak logs and 500,000 tons of other hardwood logs authorized. Besides, Thai fishery companies received permission to catch 250,000 tons of fish in Burmese waters (Battersby 1998/1999: 477; Lintner 1999: 357-358; Smith 1999a: 397; Hirsh 1995: 244).

Now the roles of ethnic insurgent groups which had acted as border guards against the threat of communists lost their relevance in the new geo-political and geo-economical strategy of Thailand. The Thai government wanted to have more formalized relationships with the Burmese government at the expense of the insurgent

groups. Formal economic relations with the military government would evidently bring more profits. This attitude was reflected in a “constructive engagement” policy where economic reasons come before anything else in engagements with Burma (Grundy-Warr *et al.* 1997: 98-99).

Development of Mae Sot and multitude influx of others

As Burma and Thailand began to formalize their political and economic relations marked by the increased encroachment of the Burmese troops towards the border, the black markets that formerly operated near Mae Sot witnessed a heavy decline by the late 1980s. In 1988 the KNU’s income plummeted by 60 per cent (Smith 1999a: 396). The Burmese government developed Myawaddy as the official trading outpost in the late 1980s. Businessmen from Mae Sot began to send their export goods to Myawaddy posts, not to the black markets. By 1992, those black markets in Wangkha and Phalu had disappeared.

The disappearance of the black markets, which had a great impact on the economic development of Mae Sot, never caused a decline in the economic importance of Mae Sot. A large number of the Burmese who had suffered the social and economic devastation in Burma now flew into the town in pursuit of economic opportunities. Also, those people whose livelihoods had previously relied on the black markets went to Mae Sot to sustain their survival.

Mae Sot saw an enormous influx of “economic migrants” from 1988 onwards. In contrast to the gradual increase of alien people in the previous periods, this new wave of migration took place suddenly and the size of migration was so enormous that they outnumbered the Thai locals.

As there was cheap labor available in Mae Sot, factories began to relocate in Mae Sot. The relocation of factories was backed by the decentralization policies of the Thai government in its attempts to rectify the extreme economic disparity between Bangkok and the peripheral areas of the country. In those policies, Mae Sot received special attention from the government due to its promising location. And in the broader regional perspective, the roles of Mae Sot were regarded as incredibly important in promoting regional cooperation through programs such as the Greater Mekong Subregion Program (GMS)²⁹ (Maneepong 2002/2003; 2004; 2005a; 2005b; ADB 2001).

Mae Sot also gained from other economic opportunities due to Thailand's economic boom in the 1990s. It has become a tourist destination, a shopping attraction as well as the preferred destination for relocated garment industries and other labor-intensive industries. Recently, under the GMS program, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) also designated the East-West Corridor,³⁰ which supported various infrastructure projects in Mae Sot, acknowledging Mae Sot's role as part of a strategic network (Maneepong 2005a: 266).

Under the auspices of the government and regional entities such as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the ADB, Mae Sot witnessed considerable infrastructural development. In 1997, the Thai-Burma Friendship Bridge, which connects Mae Sot and Myawaddy across the Moei River, was completed. Also, the road between Mae Sot and Tak saw massive developments with asphalt pavements being built and there was also a substantial

²⁹ It was formed in 1992 under the agreement of six countries including China, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

³⁰ The Economic Corridor approach was first discussed in late 1998 as a key means of developing further cooperation of the GMS. The East-West Economic Corridor stretches across four GMS countries from Moulmein in Burma, through Mae Sot in Thailand and Laos, to Da Nang in Vietnam (ADB 2001: xi).

increase in road safety due to the financial endowment of the government and other regional organizations. The road constituted a part of the Asian Highways.³¹ The series of developments eventually enabled Mae Sot to surpass the provincial district of Tak as the economic center in the province.

From outside sponsorships, more and more factories were built in Mae Sot. The number of factories increased from 118 in 1993 to 218 in 2000 (Maneepong 2002/2003: 91). Garment factories constituted dominant figures in employment and investment (Maneepong 2005a: 280-281). These factories were built in cooperation with overseas partners, notably from Hong Kong and Taiwan (BLSO 2002; Maneepong 2005a: 282).

The economic expansion of Mae Sot attracted more alien people throughout the 1990s, who were not necessarily confined to the factories. It became very common for most shops to hire illegal or undocumented Burmese workers. They were mostly hired in the form of illegal or undocumented employment. Many of them were even employed as domestic workers. Though the government introduced the registration scheme in the late 1990s, it was only effective in factories. Other sectors such as shops and the domestic arena still continued to engage in plenty of illegal employment.

In tandem with economic migrants, Mae Sot was greatly influenced by the flow of refugees. The Burmese government gained more territory with its expanded military offensives in the 1990s. A large number of refugees fled to refugee camps near Mae Sot. Before the camp consolidation policy³² of the Thai government, many of them pursued an economic engagement with Mae Sot with relative ease.

³¹ For the detailed routes, see the website (<http://www.unescap.org/TTDW/common/TIS/AH/maps/AHMapApr04.gif>).

³² The Thai government implemented the policy for security and administrative efficiency. At the beginning of 1994, the number of camps was thirty; by mid 1998, it reduced to be nineteen; and as of

The number of refugees grew throughout the 1990s. When the first sizeable influx of refugees took place, their number was 10,000. However, it increased rapidly to 55,000 in 1993, 80,000 in 1994, 115,000 in 1997, and 158,000 in 2005 (Bowles 1998; TBBC 2005). Most dramatically, the KNU lost Manerplaw which had served as a head-quarter for long periods in 1995 after the split with the Democratic Buddhist Karen Army (DKBA)³³ (Lintner 1999: 413-414; 1995). Now, ethnic insurgent groups as well as political activists who had retained their physical presence in the KNU-controlled areas lost almost all of their territorial bases inside Burma.

Consequently, ethnic insurgent groups such as the KNU and other National Democratic Front (NDF)³⁴ member groups searched for refuge in Mae Sot and restructured their military strategy to guerilla warfare. Also, Burmese political organizations such as the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF) sought sanctuary in the town. Furthermore, sub-KNU organizations including the Karen Youth Organization (KYO) and the Karen Women's Organization (KWO) came over to Mae Sot and began to be involved in activities for Karen refugees.

The refugee crisis drew the attention of humanitarian relief agencies. The dominant presence of refugees in the adjacent areas of Mae Sot led them to open branch offices in the town for the convenience of rendering assistance to the needy. Throughout the 1990s, dozens of INGOs began to run their branches in Mae Sot. Eventually, in 1998, the UNHCR also commenced its missions and opened its regional branch in Mae Sot.

2005, it further decreased to be ten (Bowles 1998; TBBC 2005).

³³ The DKBA was said to be formed by Buddhist Karen soldiers who were disillusioned with their lack of influence within the Christian-dominated KNU leadership. It was also said that this split was instigated by the Burmese government. Soon after the split, the DKBA allied itself with the Burmese government (Smith: 1999a: 446-450; Lintner 1999: 413-414).

³⁴ It was organized as an umbrella organization for ethnic insurgent groups in 1976 under the leadership of the KNU (Smith 1999a: 280).

Now, Mae Sot seemed to become a town with a preponderant presence of aliens, though it saw small numbers of domestic migration of businessmen and factory owners from other areas such as Bangkok. While Mae Sot witnessed an enormous attention from the government and was endowed with various developmental projects in the hope that the government could make use of the town for state purposes, paradoxically, the town became increasingly a very different town with a heavy reliance on aliens in almost every sector. Furthermore, despite the attempts of the government in legalizing or officializing the patterns of aliens' residence, such as the Work Permit scheme, illegal and unofficial parts of the town never disappeared. Rather, it saw the increase of an institutionalized presence of the unofficial, for example in the areas of education (migrant schools) and health (a migrant clinic).

Expansion of social system and emergence of migrant institutions

The abrupt increase of alien people changed the landscape of Mae Sot. The town sprawled with the expansion of migrant ghettos and clusters. Some buildings in the town were transformed into dormitories to house factory workers.

Burmese cultural products were also preponderant: it was not rare to see them chew betel and recognize its red spots on the streets; Burmese teashops were served at Burmese social gatherings; and there was an increase in the sales of Burmese books and songs in the markets.

Though in the beginning, migrant lives seemed to be constituted haphazardly, as time went on, they came to live a relatively normal life, relying on the Burmese communities and cultural stuffs. Moreover, some of them built up intimate relationships with the Thai locals, which gave them opportunities for a livelihood.

Through these relationships, despite their illegal presence, they were able to avoid the authorities.

It was remarkable in this period to see the development of migrant institutions. It made the social system of the town totally different from previous periods. Also, it made the town quite different from other border towns. It was prompted by the participation of many Burmese, Thai and foreign activists. While these institutions helped aliens to cultivate their roots in the town, they also attracted more people from the Burmese side. The Cynthia Clinic, known locally as “the migrant hospital,” treated over 200-250 migrant patients for around 10 baht for almost every ailment as of 2005. One third of the patients among them came from the Burmese side such as Myawaddy (Interview with Dr. Cynthia 8 December 2004). Since its establishment in 1989, it continued to witness the active participation of overseas partners with the cooperation of local health authorities.³⁵

Migrant schools also saw a massive existence throughout the period. They were also initiated by the Burmese activists in the beginning. Many political groups such as the NLD and the ABSDF began to run migrant schools with overseas aid. The Karen in the town operated the school system using the resources and manpower available to them from the refugee camps and overseas partners. As of 2005, there were more than 30 migrant schools with over 3,000 migrant students.

Whereas the social system of the past was driven by commerce and saw the gradual integration of the Burmese in the absence of institutional bases, the social system of this time was based on not only commerce but also other economic sectors such as factories and strong social and cultural institutions. The expanded capacity of the social system increased cross-border flows. Thousands of people made border-

³⁵ Dr. Cynthia originally came from Rangoon. She fled from Burma after the 1988 crackdown and played a crucial role in establishing the Clinic with the help from other Burmese activists. She was awarded Ramon Magsaysay Prize in 2002.

crossings on a daily basis to pursue their economic, medical and other practical opportunities. Also, it has become trendy for people in the town to venture to other Thai cities such as Bangkok in search of better opportunities.

Though there are no organizations representing Burmese migrants, the roles of political activists were notable in the affairs of migrants. While they still continued small-scale mobile political movements, they became increasingly involved in the welfare of Burmese migrants with the increasing aid from the outside world.

State agencies did not dismiss the presence of others. They needed to engage with the institutions and political activists. Local authorities noted how deeply entrenched others were in the town. Therefore, their governance covered those unauthorized people and institutions, not necessarily relying on forceful methods. In that sense, local authorities' unofficial ways of dealing with them gained more relevance in the current phase of governance styles.

CONCLUSION: SIAM MAPPED?

This chapter has dealt with Mae Sot's history from as early as the 13th century. From its beginning, Mae Sot has always had relationships with other areas, notably from the Burmese sides. Mae Sot's history can be described as the history of otherness. The first settlers of the town were the Karen, and other groups such as the Shan, the Chinese, the Muslims, and so on filled the town afterwards.

Although the state began to engage with the town since the late 19th century, its otherness never disappeared. Thongchai's ground-making work (1994) deals with the victory of mapping practices at the turn of the 19th century to the 20th century and the subsequent empowering of geography in modern periods. Though at the level of

rhetoric Mae Sot was mapped and became a part of the geo-body, at the level of people's everyday lives Mae Sot was never mapped and never became a "Thai" town. Mae Sot's historical development vindicates this point. During the British colonial period of Burma, Mae Sot had more intimate relationships with Burmese sides. Also during the period of the Burmese Way to Socialism, Mae Sot had closer connections with Burma. Even after 1988, the otherness of the town increased dramatically. Focusing on the victory of mapping obfuscates the actual realities of ordinary people in the particular locality of the border.

The development of the town's social system is strongly based on this otherness. The expansion of the town kept pace with the increase of the otherness. The engendering of the town was induced by the migration of other people. Also, during the period between 1962 and 1988, it witnessed a leap in forging strong commercial ties with others. The current period sees the enormous pervasiveness of others too. Without those others who sustain the town's economy, the town's system would be impossible.

I do not necessarily dismiss the impact of the Thai state on the town. The state strengthened its influence throughout history by positioning the state agencies and enforcing regulations. However, these practices were never implemented without discrepancies. The state cannot dismiss the reality that otherness is essential in sustaining the system of the town. In that sense, the governing styles of the state needed to be modified to accommodate alien people though illegal or unauthorized means. Particularly, the state needs to deal with migrant institutions, not necessarily by the use of physical threats. Going beyond a focus on state unilateral influence, scholarly attention on the dynamics revolving around the presence of others provides much more relevance for understanding the town.

CHAPTER 3

STATE IN STATE: THE ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE OF MAE SOT

This chapter investigates the particular governance of Mae Sot. Unlike other inner places in Thailand, the enormous presence of others, particularly unauthorized others, makes the town very unique in matters of governance. In addition, the existence of ethnic political groups, democratic movement groups and international relief agencies makes the town more distinct from other towns in Thailand. Mae Sot, as a national or Thai town, is subjected to the state governing system while the town, as a town of others, accommodates other governing regimes at the same time. This chapter deals with the interactions of those governing systems and demonstrates how the Burmese are integrated in the governance even though they do not have a proper legal status.

With regard to the governing styles of Mae Sot, I attempt to rethink the notion of modern states that are constituted by the isomorphism of territory, sovereignty, and citizenship. This common notion is totally incomplete in understanding places such as Mae Sot where others, as quasi citizens in the town, constitute an important part of the governance of the town. The conventional understanding of the state serves to view Mae Sot as a deviant town. But, the town has its own ways of governance which mixes and matches the state's governance. It seems that Mae Sot is itself a small *state* on its own, of which principles and styles of governance are very different from other conventional states.

First, the chapter shows the demographical features of the town. Here, the dominant component of others in constituting the population of the town is addressed. Second, the chapter deals with various regimes running the town, including the state

regime, the migrant regime, the ethnic or democratic political regime and the international relief regime. Third, from the point of view of the state, the chapter pays attention to the aspiration of the state to place the town under its firm control. Fourth, in explaining why non-state regimes continue to exist in Mae Sot, the chapter focuses on the strategies of the aliens, the defiant locals, and the localization of the state agencies.

DOMINANT ALIEN POPULATION

The land size of Mae Sot District is 1,986.116 km² or 1,242,322.5 rai with 346,116 rai of cultivated land, 741,807 rai of forest and 39,692 rai of settlement areas.³⁶ It constituted 12.11 per cent of the whole land of Tak Province which is of a size of 16,406.650 km². The size of the central area of Mae Sot (*tambon* Mae Sot) itself is 1,325,625 rai or 27.2 km² (Mae Sot District Office 2004; Mae Sot Municipality 2005).

Mae Sot District (*amphoe* Mae Sot) is divided into ten sub-districts (*tambon*). *Tambon* Mae Sot is the center for the District in various sectors such as commerce, administration, and education. *Tambon* Mae Sot is also called *muang*³⁷ Mae Sot. The neighboring four sub-districts of *tambon* Mae Sot have factories and commercial links with it. The other sub-districts are mainly agricultural areas. In Mae Ka Sa, the picturesque corn field is stretched, while in Ma Ha Wan near Phop Phra District, rose farming takes up a big portion of the landscape. The beautiful scenery of the outskirts of Mae Sot was so attractive that it propelled me to visit those areas on my motorbike as often as possible.

³⁶ 1 rai is equivalent to 0.0016 km² or 1600 m².

³⁷ According to Thongchai (1994: 49), the word *muang* refers broadly to a community, a town, a city, even a country – that is, an occupied area under the exercise of a governing power but without specification of size, degree or kind of power, or administrative structure. For a detailed discussion on *muang*, see Wijeyewardene (2002: 126-154).

As of 2003, the population of Thai locals in Mae Sot District by sub-districts is as follows:

Table 3.1 The Population of the Thai Locals in Mae Sot District

Sub-district	No. of Village	Male	Female	Total	No. of Household
Mae Sot	18	14,232	14,322	28,554*	10,799
Mae Ku	14	4,763	4,763	9,526	2,892
Tha Sai Luat	10	4,473	4,134	8,607	3,028
Pha Wo	9	3,196	3,124	6,320	2,007
Mae Tao	6	3,296	3,122	6,418	20,81
Mae Ka Sa	15	5,346	5,328	10,674	3,336
Mae Pa	10	5,532	5,248	10,780	4,004
Ma Ha Wan	12	6,329	6,537	12,866	3,222
Dan Mae Lamao	10	3,864	3,723	7,587	1,908
Phrathat Pha Daeng	6	2,724	2,768	5,492	1,777
Total	110	53,755	53,069	106,824	33,074

* According to the information of Mae Sot Municipality, the population of *tambon* Mae Sot is 35,449 as of 30 November 2004 (Mae Sot Municipality 2005: 20).

(Source: Adapted from Mae Sot District Office 2004: 15-16)

Among them, three sub-districts of Mae Sot, Mae Ku and Tha Sai Luat have a municipal office (*thesaban*) where an elected mayor (*nayok thesamontri*) is in charge of the administrative matters of the sub-district.³⁸

It is evident that Mae Sot has a sizeable existence of others. The table below gives us a glimpse at figuring out the number of alien people. It indicates the number of registered migrants.

³⁸ I will explain in detail local administration in the following section.

Table 3.2 Registered Burmese in Mae Sot District during the Period of 1 – 31 July 2004

Sub-district	No. of Registered Burmese
Mae Sot	28,521
Mae Ku	7,254
Tha Sai Luat	14,635
Pha Wo	589
Mae Tao	6,379
Mae Ka Sa	4,074
Mae Pa	10,309
Ma Ha Wan	6,224
Dan Mae Lamao	245
Phrathat Pha Daeng	6,042
Total	84,272

(Source: Mae Sot District Office 2004: 8)

Registration occurred in the Mae Sot District Office. This registration was initiated by the government in its attempts to obtain the overall figure of alien migrants all over the country. The registration was meant to grant a kind of amnesty to migrant workers for one year. As a result, over the entire country, 1,269,074 people, among whom 905,881 was Burmese, were registered. In Tak Province, including Mae Sot, 120,636 people were registered.³⁹ Mae Sot accounted for almost 70 per cent of alien migrants in the whole Tak Province which composes of nine districts.⁴⁰

However, the registration scheme was different from the Work Permit application. Those who wanted to work were required to apply for Work Permits after the registration. In Thailand, roughly 500,000 workers registered for Work Permits as of late 2004 (Arnold 2004). In Mae Sot, only 41,095 workers were enrolled for Work

³⁹ For detailed information of the registration, see the website (http://www.iom-seasia.org/index.php?page=stat_th). Also see the website of the Ministry of Labor (<http://www.mol.go.th>).

⁴⁰ The nine districts are *muang* Tak, Wang Chao, Ban Tak, Sam Ngao, Mae Ramat, Tha Song Yang, Mae Sot, Phop Phra and Umphang. The first four districts are located in the eastern side of the mountain range, while the other five districts are located in the western side of the mountain range.

Permits. It showed that less than half of those registered in Mae Sot were legal workers.

Table 3.3 Employment Sectors of Migrants in Mae Sot District Registered during the Period of 1 June 2004 to 17 January 2005

Sector	No. of Workers		Total
	Male	Female	
Factory	9,252	21,944	31,196
Agriculture	2,446	797	3,243
Sales in Shops	1,752	1,061	2,813
Construction	1,948	205	2,153
Domestic Worker	144	1,298	1,442
Rice Milling	86	13	99
Brick Making	41	11	52
Fishery	33	9	42
Commerce	30	2	32
Ice Making	19	4	23
Total	15,751	25,344	41,095

(Source: Mae Sot Labour Office 2005)

However, it can be easily assumed that all Burmese migrants did not register. In fact, a great number of people did not even turn up for the registration. Among the migrants I interviewed throughout my fieldwork, it was rare to find those holding Work Permits or even registration cards, except factory workers and those who work in big agricultural farms. Though an exact figure of the total number of migrants was never attainable, it was generally accepted that roughly 200,000 migrants were staying in Mae Sot District. Some people like the headman of Mae Sot Municipality even made a bold assumption that *tambon* Mae Sot itself contained 200,000 Burmese. However, the general consensus on the estimation of the Burmese in the area of Mae Sot Municipality is around 100,000.

Based on the estimations, we can compare the populations between Thai locals and the Burmese in both the Mae Sot town area (*tambon* Mae Sot) and in Mae Sot District regardless of legality. This is evident in the table below.

Table 3.4 Estimated Population of Mae Sot Including the Thai Locals and the (Estimated) Burmese

Location	Thais	Burmese	Total
<i>tambon</i> Mae Sot	28,554	100,000	128,554
Other <i>tambons</i>	78,270	100,000	178,270
Mae Sot District	106,824	200,000	306,824

Though this rough figure gives a general picture of people staying in Mae Sot, we also need to take into consideration the constant flows of cross-border movements of the Burmese. From an interview with the Superintendent of the Tak Immigration Office on 2 December 2004, it was revealed that on a daily basis, the arrival figure of the Burmese who made official cross-border movements through the Thai-Burma Friendship Bridge and the Immigration checkpoint was on average around 2,000. However, interestingly enough, the departure figure was 1,600. Four hundred people did not turn up on the departure list of the office. We can easily assume that they either remained in Mae Sot or crossed back to Burma by bypassing the Immigration checkpoint. In fact, even on arrival to the Thai side, many Burmese do not pass through the checkpoint; during the rainy season, they board a boat and during the dry season, they just walk through the River. All unaccounted and unauthorized movement over time would tremendously expand the potential population of Mae Sot. Hence, an exact number of the Burmese crossing the border was never possible.

Nonetheless, the crude projection in the table above is enough to show that alien people are preponderant in Mae Sot. This feature fundamentally questions the

authenticity of the town as a “Thai” place given that others constitute the majority of the population. Also, it raises the problem of governance since the authorities do not simply dismiss the dominant presence of others. Here, governance does not necessarily connote the practices that dispel others. Given that the town is to a great degree dependent on others, accommodating practices are included in the governing styles too. The governing styles cross over the dividing domains of the legal and the illegal. Since much of the patterns of existence of others take on the unofficial or the illegal, it is rather natural to deal with the unofficial domains as well as the official domains. In addition, the governing of aliens is not solely in the hands of the Thai authorities. Various alien organizations such as ethnic groups, political groups and international organizations are also participating, though restricted to a certain degree.

GOVERNING REGIMES

For many years since Fred Riggs’s pioneering study in the mid-1960s, the Thai polity was characterized as a “bureaucratic polity,” where the state was dominated by a bureaucracy (Riggs 1966). However, as business interests became a great factor in the political arenas from the late 1980s, critics such as Anek Laothamatas (1992) suggest that the model has lost its relevance in Thai politics because local businessmen and their associations began to influence local as well as national politics to a great degree. In this new political economy, money began to play a decisive role in gaining political power (McVey *et al.* 2000).

A massive drive for decentralization throughout the 1990s drew more attention from scholars. Scholars attempted to analyze its impact at the local level (e.g. Nelson 2002; 2005; Arghiros 2001; McCargo *et al.* 2002). However, their focus only revolves

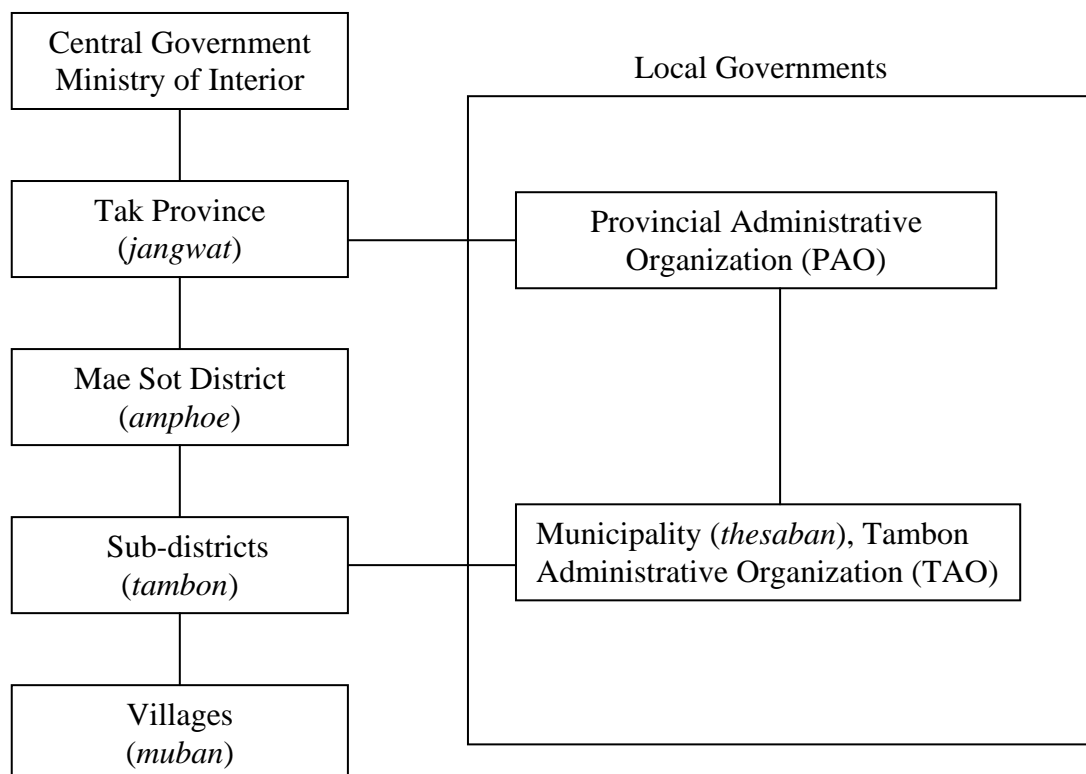
around elections. Though ethnographic observations of election campaigns provide us with a deep understanding of local politics (e.g. Arghiros 2001), they are limited in understanding local politics on an everyday basis. Moreover, focusing on elections dismisses the presence of the non-electorate (migrants), though they are pre-dominant components of local politics in places such as Mae Sot. In the end, an election-driven study is only about the official and formal aspects of local politics.

The administrative system of the state

Mae Sot's administrative structure is illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 3.1 Mae Sot's Administration Structure

Administration Hierarchy



(Source: Adapted from Arghiros 2001: 26)

As shown above, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) takes charge of administration at the provincial level and below. The Governor of Tak (*phuwarachakan*) is posted by the MOI, and so is the Chief Officer of Mae Sot District (*nay amphoe*). The Governor supervises the field officials of central ministries that have provincial level branches. He also oversees districts which are directly accountable to the provincial administration.

The Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO, or *onkan borihan suan jangwat*) plays the role of a local government at the provincial level. Provincial councils were established in 1933, soon after the abolishment of absolute monarchy in 1932. The Provincial Administrative Act of 1955, which has been superseded by the Act of 1997, gave autonomy and control over budgets by creating the Provincial Administrative Organization. Prior to changes in 1997, the PAO was chaired by the provincial governor. However, now it is chaired by *nayok* PAO. The executive body of the PAO is the provincial council. It is made up of members elected from each district. Elections are held every five years. The PAO is in charge of policy formulation, supervision of the general administration of the province, passing legislation and approving the provincial budget. It is also involved in district level administration (Arghiros 2001: 22-23). The general trend of local businessmen being dominant figures in PAOs in Thailand (e.g. McVey *et al.* 2000; Arghiros 2001) is also observed in the Tak PAO. *Nayok* PAO of Tak Province is a businessman running a garment factory, using Burmese laborers in Mae Sot.⁴¹

Governance at the district level and below is currently a mixture of bureaucratic rule and local democracy. At the moment, there is no local government at the district

⁴¹ I had several chances to socialize with him and his family. During the process of data collection at the factories, I came to know his wife who was mainly in charge of the garment factory. I was then invited to dinner by her and her friends who were members of the Tak Chamber of Commerce. I also attended a Buddhist initiation ceremony for his son. There, I saw an MP and other big businessmen of Mae Sot.

level. Mirroring the organization of provincial administration, the district chief (*nay amphoe*) looks after the activities of field representatives of various central ministerial departments (Arghiros 2001: 25). As of December 2005, *nay amphoe* of Mae Sot was transferred from Nakhonsawan in January 2005 by the MOI. The term of office is normally two to three years. He is the 41st *nay amphoe* since *amphoe* Mae Sot was established in 1898.

As mentioned before, Mae Sot has three municipalities (*thesaban*). *Thesaban* Mae Sot was established in 1937 (Mae Sot Municipality 2005: 17), while the other two (Mae Ku and Tha Sai Luat) were upgraded from *sukhaphiban* (sanitary district) to the status of *thesaban* in 1999.⁴² At the outset of the foundation of *thesaban* Mae Sot, it covered 480 km² with 27 *mubans* (villages). However, for administrative efficiency, it was reduced to administer only 27.2 km² in 1949 (Mae Sot Municipality 2005: 18). As mentioned before, those three municipalities are administered by a mayor elected from amongst the locals.

Sub-districts are administered by *kamnans* who are elected by villagers among the sub-district's incumbent village heads. Residents of a village elect village heads (*phu yai ban*). The position of *kamnans* and village heads is ambiguous located somewhere between that of civil servants and villagers' representatives. Before the promulgation of the TAO Act in 1994, with its actual implementation in 1995, the sub-district council was headed by a *kamnan*. However, the *kamnans*' political importance and official recognition are lessening because many duties and rights have been replaced by the TAO. *Kamnans* are no longer the members of sub-district councils.⁴³ The TAO is composed of two elected representatives from each village in a *tambon*. It forms an executive committee and the council in its own right. The duties of the TAO include

⁴² Overall in Thailand, the former 984 sanitary districts were upgraded to municipalities in 1999 during the process of decentralization (Nelson 2002).

⁴³ Until 1999, *kamnan* was allowed to hold membership in the TAO (Arghiros 2001: 248).

the construction and maintenance of water and land transport infrastructure; the management of public cleansing and the disposal of waste; the prevention and the eradication of epidemic diseases; the surveillance of public safety; the promotion of education, religion and culture; the promotion of the development of women, children, youth, the elderly and people with disabilities; the protection and preservation of the environment and natural resources; and assignments from government agencies (Chaiyan 2002: 38; Arghiros 2001: 27).

Apart from the local administrative organizations, there are several state agencies which are not under the auspices of the Mae Sot District Office. The Immigration Office near the Moei River is under the charge of the Immigration Bureau, a branch of the Royal Thai Police which was separate from the MOI and became an independent agency under the Prime Minister in 1996. This Office is in charge of the cross-border movements of vehicles and people and legal issues pertaining to alien people's residence in Thailand. Therefore, when we talk about "illegally staying people," it means that they break the regulations as laid down by the Office. As of December 2004, there are thirty one officials attached to the Mae Sot Immigration Office. There are three official crossing points along the Moei River. One is on the Thai-Burma Friendship Bridge, another is located in the upstream area, and the other in the downstream. Whereas all three points are controlled by this Office from the Thai side, the counter points on the Burmese side are not necessarily in the hands of the Burmese authority. Among them, only the Bridge point and nearby areas are controlled by the Burmese authority with the DKBA in control of the upstream point and the KNU in charge of the downstream point. It means that the Office needs to deal with ethnic political organizations in the matters of cross-border movements of people and vehicles.

The duty of border surveillance, however, is not in the hands of the Immigration Office, but in the hands of the army, especially the Third Army among the four regional commands.⁴⁴ The presence of soldiers is most salient around the Immigration checkpoint and a border market called “Talat Rim Moei”. Armed soldiers check the Burmese who are coming and going through this checkpoint, while others patrol the bank of the River and sometimes inside Talat Rim Moei. In addition, some groups of soldiers are positioned at a checkpoint located at the eastern entrance of Mae Sot.

Whereas the Immigration Office controls the cross-border movements of people and vehicles, the Mae Sot Customs Office is in charge of the movement of goods. The Customs Office is a branch of the Ministry of Finance, not under the control of the Mae Sot District Office. The Mae Sot Customs Office covers three Provinces including Tak, Kamphengphet and Sukhothai. As of June 2005, thirty five officials were working in the Office. This number was still quite short to keep a close vigil on the movement of goods. This was vindicated by the statement of the Chief Officer that he never knew the amount of unauthorized export and import goods though his main goal was to trample down smuggling. The Customs Office is in charge of several crossing points. The movement of goods across the Bridge does not provide a complete picture of the crossing of goods. Only half of the volume is traded through this Bridge. The other half is moved by boat, controlled by the DKBA from the Burmese side. The Office also needs to cooperate with the DKBA in matters of exporting and importing goods, which will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Though in general, the Royal Thai Police are not under the control of the MOI any longer, district level police are accountable to the provincial administration which is directed by the MOI. The policies related to the Police are then passed down to the

⁴⁴ The First Army is in charge of Bangkok; the Second Army is in charge of the northeastern areas of Thailand; the Third Army takes care of the northern and the northwestern parts of the country; and the Fourth Army is based in southern Thailand (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Thai_Army).

Mae Sot Police from the provincial administration. Also, the implementation performance of the policies is checked by the provincial administration. Besides, Mae Sot sees the presence of the Tourist Police which was set up to meet the needs of tourists. Whereas the Army is mainly in charge of security issues along the border, the Mae Sot Police is appropriated to implement a whole range of laws and regulation laid down by the state in every nook and cranny of Mae Sot District; for instance, ensuring that motorcyclists wear a helmet; checking Burmese migrants for legal documents and arresting illegal residents; and raiding factories hiring illegal workers.

Besides, Mae Sot accommodates several provincial branch offices. These branch offices are located here due to the relatively long distance to Tak. Above all, Mae Sot's expansion and central position in the western Tak Province which comprises five districts require much of the provincial administrative matters to be conducted in Mae Sot rather than in the provincial Tak District. This recently gave rise to the movement of upgrading of the western Tak province to the level of an independent province, with Mae Sot playing a role as a provincial district. It was initiated by *nayok thesamontri* of Mae Sot Municipality.⁴⁵

The Mae Sot Labor Office takes the form of a "One-Stop Service" where four different departments (employment, labor protection, welfare, and skill development) are positioned simultaneously to serve the needs of Burmese migrants as well as Thai locals in relation to labor matters. Among the departments, the employment department issues Work Permits for migrants. Also, this department introduces

⁴⁵ This information was obtained from the interview with him on 8 July 2005. The size of five *amphoes*, which is equivalent to 10,714 km², can be entitled to the status of the Province. This size is similar to that of Phitsanulik. The size is ranked among the top 20 from 76 provinces. However, in terms of population, the current number of 290,000 in those *amphoes* is not considered enough to constitute a province. This number is ranked 68th among all provinces. However, the geographical distance between the eastern areas and the western areas of Tak Province, different social, economic, and cultural conditions between two regions and the expansion of border economy provide convincing reasons for the movement. See a report of Mae Sot Municipality (2003).

Burmese employees to Thai employers. The labor protection department is involved in settling disputes between Burmese employees and Thai employers, while the welfare and skill development unit provides the social security and enhance the capacity of laborers respectively, although this is mostly for the benefit of Thai locals at the moment.⁴⁶

In addition, the Provincial Court, the Provincial Prosecutor's Office, and the Provincial Education Office are based in Mae Sot, demonstrating the importance of Mae Sot beyond the district level capacity.

In the case of refugee camps, the MOI has direct control through the provincial and district administrative apparatus. Administratively *amphoe* Mae Sot is not involved in refugee camps. *Amphoe* Tha Song Yang engages in Mae La Camp, while *amphoe* Umphang is involved in Um Phiem Mai Camp and Noh Poe Camp. The Assistant Chief of the District Office (*palat*) is positioned as Camp Commander to the Camps.⁴⁷ However, the existence of many international relief agencies into Mae Sot and the flowing of refugees into Mae Sot led Mae Sot-based state agencies to be involved in refugee issues too.

These various local, provincial and national agencies I have dealt with so far constitute the governing regime of the state. They have a regular coordinating meeting held every month and irregular ones which are held from time to time in the Mae Sot District Office. They moderate various administrative and governing actions through these meetings. Their main job is to implement the regulations and policies from the center in the absence of policy-making rights at the local government level. Though certain degrees of decentralization have been conducted since the mid-1990s at the provincial and sub-district levels, meaningful autonomous governance at the local

⁴⁶ Interviews with labor officials (17 June 2005 and 14 December 2005).

⁴⁷ Interview with Camp Commander of Mae La Camp (23 June 2005).

level is limited because the governor and the district chief are appointed by the central government rather than elected by the people. In that sense, policy-making at the national-level without the true representation of the locals through the local autonomous apparatus of administration does not reflect the particularities of the local.

State agencies in Mae Sot cannot dismiss the alien people in their governing activities just because they are not Thai citizens. Given the fact that various sectors of the town are heavily dependent on them, the duty of the agencies has to include largely the affairs of alien people. This does not necessarily imply the use of coercive means. The statement of *nayok* of Mae Sot Municipality that “We need to deal with hidden people because they are also residents of Mae Sot” is derived from this context.⁴⁸ Simply speaking, the Thai governing regime engages in the matters of non-Thai people. It seems to evoke the colonial polity that a small number of people rule the majority of the population. However, unlike classical cases of colonial powers coming from the outside to rule the indigenous people, the case of Mae Sot proposes that a small number of *indigenous* people control the majority of *alien* people. It raises doubts over the authenticity of Mae Sot as “our national town” in the sense that others are a central component of the governing regime in the town.

Other regimes

It needs to be stressed that the state agencies do not totally monopolize the ruling of the town, especially the alien people. Many Burmese, Thais and international organizations, to a certain extent, take part in governance.

⁴⁸ Interview (8 July 2005).

Though an administrative system for the migrants does not explicitly exist, there is an implicit administrative system for them. The migrants do not haphazardly stay in the town. They usually live in migrant residential compounds where many households get together within a particular area. These compounds are observed all over Mae Sot District, even in the nearby downtown area and rural parts. The size of these compounds varies from a small one holding ten households to a big one holding forty households.

Some compounds are exposed so blatantly that one can easily recognize them, while some compounds are masqueraded and thus it is hard to locate its entrance. It is interesting to see that Muslim migrants live among themselves within their own residential compounds. These phenomena are most conspicuous around the places of the UNHCR building. Some of the Karen also live in their own residential compounds. However, this case only applies to those Karen who are involved in political and social activities for the Karen. In other words, people in Karen organizations get together in certain areas of Mae Sot. For example, several Karen groups such as the KYO and the Karen Education Department (KED) of the KNU are based in Mae Pa. However, other Karen who migrated from Burma for economic reasons live in integrated settlements in Mae Sot with other Burmese regardless of ethnicity.

Some compounds constituted of people who migrated from the same districts in Burma. For instance, I found out that migrants from Thaton in Mon State lived together and those from Kawkaik in Karen State also formed a compound.

Migrant residential compounds nurture social ties among people in particular compounds. They can at least retain the village-like life styles even in unstable and insufficient conditions. They co-celebrate seasonal festivals and play sports. Above all,

the experiences of escaping from police raids from time to time strengthened their solidarity in times of hardship.

These compounds do not only provide physical bases for the migrant residents. They are also forms of quasi-administrative units. The developing of the compounds into a system of administration was mainly initiated by migrant schools which are usually based in these compounds. The children of the compounds have basic Burmese style education. Also, the schools as an administrative center play a role in organizing people and in disseminating information. My entry point to investigate the migrants was through these schools. I was able to visit their houses and interview them with the help of school headmasters and teachers.

Plate 3.1 A Living Area of Migrants near the Mae Sot Hospital



Plate 3.2 A Living Area of Migrants along the Prasatwithi Road



These migrant compounds are organized under the umbrella organization of the Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee (BMWEC). The committee was initially headed by Dr. Cynthia but as of 2005, the headmaster of a Karen migrant school, Hsa Thoo Lei, took over the job.⁴⁹ The organization oversees the administration of over thirty migrant schools, though financial support comes from different sources.

The leadership of each school in a particular compound is mostly in the hands of political activists who were involved in political movements inside Burma or along the border before moving to Mae Sot. Most of all, the roles of the members of the ABSDF and the NLD are prominent in running some of the schools. These activists operate the migrant schools in connection with international partners, most notably

⁴⁹ The information was gained from the frequent visits and meetings I had with the headmaster at the school.

with INGOs, as I will deal with this in detail in Chapter 5. The roles of political activists are not confined to education matters. In general, they are involved in promoting the welfare of the migrants in the compounds as the political activists too live together with the migrants. As almost twenty years have passed since its establishment in 1988, their roles now as middle-aged leaders have expanded from political movements to general social welfare activities which include education, health and labor issues in Mae Sot.

In fact, some Burmese NGOs in Mae Sot which are concerned with labor issues such as the Burma Labour Solidarity Organization (BLSO) and the Yaung Chi Oo Workers Association are led by ex-student activists. These groups, in cooperation with Thai and international NGOs, are actively engaged in promoting the welfare of the Burmese laborers in particular and the migrants in general.

I do not necessarily mean that Burmese migrants are firmly organized under the schools and its leaders. Though many of them are living in migrant compounds, there are still quite a number of people who take up different forms of residence in Mae Sot. Domestic workers and shop workers usually stay in the houses of their owners. Some people rent rooms with their own money, while factory workers stay in dormitories provided for by the factory owners. And some Burmese seem to really live in unknown and undetected places nobody knows. However, I was surprised to see that even though they live in “hidden” places, they can be instantly mobilized. My Korean friend was preparing to move to Chiangmai from Mae Sot and needed a group of people who could help him. He managed to contact a moving agency which instantly brought a group of Burmese in the moving work from elsewhere in Mae Sot. It seemed that a network for information dissemination and mobilization existed among the Burmese migrants. My Thai informant even told me that he could mobilize one

hundred people as daily workers in a short while. He went on to say that even people from Myawaddy could be summoned shortly at a call from Mae Sot. This shows that regardless of whether they are “regulated” within the compounds, an implicit structure that “regulates” their patterns of social interaction, without a formal hierarchy or bureaucratic apparatus, exists within the town and across the border.

We have seen that the migrants come under a quasi administrative system formed by the migrant schools and a network of migrant people. Now I will explain how ethnic political groups and democratic movement groups retain their structure in Mae Sot.

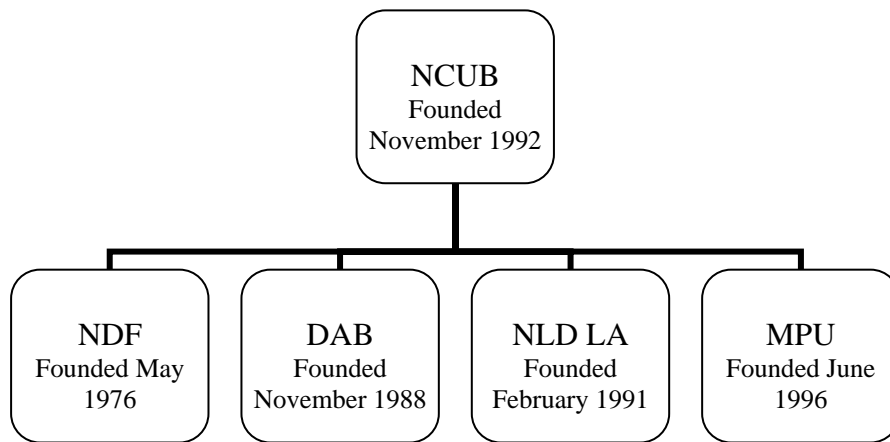
After the fall of the strongholds of Manerplaw and Kawmoora to the Burmese military in the mid-1990s, the KNU and other political groups did not continue to retain tangible territorial bases inside Burma, though mobile and guerilla military operations still went on. Subsequently those political groups sought sanctuary in Mae Sot and its vicinity. Many great political figures, including the president of the KNU and the chairman other members of the NDF, began to stay in Mae Sot. In the town, these groups reestablished contact points and offices which ran as headquarters in exile.

Initially, the umbrella organizations of ethnic or general opposition groups encompassing both non-Burman and Burman groups had been formed in the Thailand-Burma borderland before they moved to Mae Sot. For example, as shown in Chapter 2, the NDF which included non-Burman ethnic opposition groups under the leadership of the KNU was founded in May 1976. The Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) was established on 18 November 1988 to incorporate Burman political groups such as the ABSDF which was formed on 5 November 1988 in the borderlands too. In the end, the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB) came into being on 22

September 1992 as the highest umbrella organization which includes the NLD LA (Liberated Area) founded on 14 February 1991, and the MPU (Members of Parliament Union)⁵⁰ formed on 15 June 1996 as well as the NDF and the DAB.⁵¹

The organization structure of the NCUB is illustrated in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 The Organizational Structure of the NCUB



(Source: Adapted from the website of the NCUB: <http://www.ncub.net>)

The above structure is maintained without much fracture in Mae Sot. Though they do not explicitly engage in political missions in Mae Sot, Mae Sot provides them with the necessary bases for communication and strategy-making. The KNU leaderships in these united fronts continue to be prominent. As of December 2005, the Chairman of the NCUB was Tamla Baw who was also chairing the DAB on top of being the chief military commander of the KNU. The NDF was also headed by the KNU President,

⁵⁰ It comprises representatives elected in the 1990 election who have not been recognized by the Burmese government. MPU Congress is the Parliament of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) which was also formed in the borderland in 18 December 1990 by those MPs who fled to the borderland (see <http://www.ncgub.net>).

⁵¹ For details on their united fronts and their member groups, see Smith (1999a: 420-453; 1999b: 25-37) and Khaing (2000). Also refer to the website (<http://www.ncub.org>).

Ba Thin. By 2004, Bo Mya, who had been a great figure in both the KNU and these umbrella organizations, retired from his official positions due to health problems.⁵²

Both Tamla Baw and Ba Thin are staying in Mae Sot and they sometimes go into Burma for political missions such as attending congress meetings.⁵³

Apart from providing leadership in those united fronts, the KNU is still playing a role of government in exile in Mae Sot. It is vindicated by the fact that many KNU-related organizations are based there. The General Secretary of the KNU, Pado Mahn Sha told me that they are playing a leading role in the borderland though the NLD is conspicuous within Burma. He went on to mention that the KNU, therefore, receives special attention and treatment from local authorities.⁵⁴

Many Karen groups, which had been formed before coming to Mae Sot, maintain their activities, while the Karen Student Network Group (KSNG) was formed in 1996 and the Karen University Students Group (KUSG) in 2003. Though the KNU is not responsible for overseeing the refugee population in refugee camps, being the domain of the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC), it was revealed that the KRC asks for advice from the senior groups of the KNU.⁵⁵ Especially in terms of education, the KED, a department of the KNU which is involved in the educational matters of the refugee camps, shows an overlapping of roles of the KNU in dealing with the refugees.

Among other ethnic opposition groups, the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) and the Chin National Front (CNF) have their bases in Mae Sot. A representative of the ALP in Mae Sot is actively involved in the umbrella organizations. Khaing Soe Naing Aung, who has been staying in the Thailand-Burma borderland since 1973 as a

⁵² He continued to turn up at official functions after his retirement until he passed away.

⁵³ I met Ba thin at some religious ceremonies at a refugee camp and a Thai-Karen village.

⁵⁴ Interview with Pado Mahn Sha (24 June 2005). I contacted him through a Karen church member who is his nephew.

⁵⁵ Interview with the Vice Chairman of the KRC (20 June 2005). The General Secretary of the KNU also said that the KNU sometimes gave some advices to the KRC in dealing with the refugees though the KNU was not directly involved in the activities.

representative of the ALP, is playing the roles of the Vice Chairman for both the NDF and the NCUB in Mae Sot.⁵⁶

The ABSDF and the NLD have been mentioned with regard to their promotion of social welfare for the migrants above. However, their main mission is to develop democracy in Burma. This mission is retained in Mae Sot. Around fifty members of the NLD are based in Mae Sot itself, while another 200 members are in the borderland. In this region, they seek to promote national reconciliation, the restoration of democracy and Human Rights, and the promulgation of a new constitution. For this reason, they cooperate with other political groups such as the ABSDF and other ethnic groups. The NLD opened a branch in Mae Sot in 1999 after moving to the jungles in 1995 and then to Mae Hong Son in 1997 due to the fall of Manerplaw in 1995. Though recently, this organization was shattered due to the resettlement of many members into other countries such as the USA and Sweden, they still continued to engage in political movements by tapping into the strategic and geographical advantages that Mae Sot offers.⁵⁷ The ABSDF also retains 800 members in the border area, including Mae Sot.⁵⁸ Like many political groups, recent resettlement programs lessened the capacity and size of the organization, even though their influences on political engagement in the border areas are still effective.

I have mentioned that there are many relief agencies for refugees in Mae Sot. What is important is that they take the form of a relief regime, by which I mean that their activities are coordinated under an umbrella entity, the Coordinating Committee for Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT). Almost every relief agency is a member of the CCSDPT. This organization is divided into three main sectors in

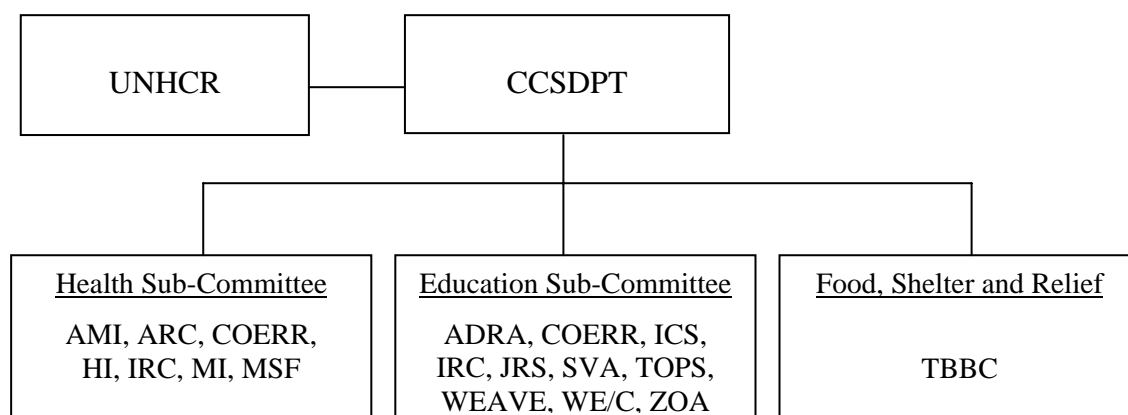
⁵⁶ Interview with him (19 April 2005). He had been the General Secretary of the NDF from 1987 to 2002 before becoming Vice Chairman.

⁵⁷ Interview with a person in charge of Foreign Relations and Youth of the NLD (21 June 2005).

⁵⁸ February 2005 edition of the Irrawaddy (<http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=4425&z=104>).

accordance with the kinds of activities they have for refugees: health sub-committee, education sub-committee and a sector of food, shelter and relief. Its structure is illustrated in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 The Structure of the CCSDPT



- ADRA – Adventist Development and Relief Agency
- AMI – Aide Medicale Internationale
- COERR – Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees
- HI – Handicap International
- ICS – International Child Support
- IRC – International Rescue Committee
- JRS – Jesuit Refugee Service
- MI – Malteser International
- MSF – Medecins Sans Frontiers
- SVA – Shanti Volunteer Association
- TBBC – Thailand Burma Border Consortium
- TOPS – Taipei Overseas Peace Service
- WEAVE – Women’s Education for Advancement and Empowerment
- WE/C – World Education/Consortium
- ZOA – Zuid Oost Azie Refugee Care

(Source: Adapted from TBBC 2005: 52)

In fact, this committee was established to serve Cambodian refugees during the Vietnam War in the 1970s. To engage with Karen refugees, it formed a sub-committee, the CCSDPT Karen Subcommittee in April 1984. With the influx of

refugees from other Burmese ethnic groups as well as the Karen, the CCSDPT Karen Subcommittee was changed to the CCSDPT Burma Subcommittee in November 1990. In the absence of the Indochinese refugees from the eastern border of Thailand, the CCSDPT was restructured in 1997. The CCSDPT is now principally engaged with Burmese refugees, while the Burma Subcommittee has become redundant and obsolete (TBBC 2005: 50-51).

The UNHCR maintains close relationships with the CCSDPT. Representatives of the UNHCR participated in the monthly meetings of the Committee.⁵⁹ From the meetings, NGOs and the UNHCR share information about refugee situations and evaluate their previous activities, and draw up future plans. Whereas the UNHCR is responsible for administrative matters such as registration and camp relocation, NGOs are in charge of practical assistances such as food, education and health as shown above.

Though the CCSDPPT is based in Bangkok, actual cooperation among its members took place mostly in Mae Sot since most NGOs have branches there. They deal with over 80,000 refugees out of a total of 158,000 refugees along the Thailand-Burma borderland in cooperation with the UNHCR Mae Sot Field Office.⁶⁰ For NGOs and the UNHCR, Mae Sot is considered as the center in the implementation of their missions. The fact that some NGOs like ZOA locate their headquarters in Mae

⁵⁹ I participated in the meetings in May and June of 2005. The meetings were held in the British Club in Bangkok. They were usually held on Tuesday and Wednesday of the second week of each month. On Tuesday, directors of the NGOs conducted their own meeting at 2:00 pm. A meeting that was open to everyone was held on Wednesday, 9:00am. From 1:00pm to 3:30pm on the same day, the Health Subcommittee and Education Sub-Committee meetings were also held. As I was familiar to the participants of the NGOs from Mae Sot, I was welcomed to these open sessions and even the Education Sub-Committee meeting.

⁶⁰ The Head of the UNHCR Mae Sot Field Office also expressed cordial relationships between the UNHCR and NGOs (Interview with the Head of the UNHCR Mae Sot Field Office 12 April 2005). The relationships go beyond their official works for refugees. It has developed into social relationships where frequent social gathering like parties were held. There were so many parties taking place among them while I was there. Some cynical people said that Mae Sot was a party town.

Sot and not in Bangkok shows the importance that Mae Sot plays in leading an international refugee regime.

So far, in this section, I have mentioned that there are other regimes apart from the Thai national regime in Mae Sot. Besides, Mae Sot has many other organizations in various sectors too. There is a town-based local NGO known as the Mae Sot Civil Society.⁶¹ It was formed in 1998 to enhance social welfare in the town. Membership is open to the people of Mae Sot, although its active members comprise local Chinese businessmen who have been staying there for a long time.⁶² Recently, it raised different opinions to the government's plan of developing Mae Sot as a Special Economic Zone⁶³ where Mae Sot would be a center for commerce, industry, and tourism. It did not want Mae Sot to be an industrial center due to the environmental problems that would be incurred such as water and air pollutions. Mae Sot Civil Society is a main actor in initiating cross-border cooperation with partners from Myawaddy. Its main activity is an annual "Thai-Myanmar Bicycle Project"⁶⁴ which began in 2000 in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce in Myawaddy.

Its stance towards Burmese migrants is ambiguous in that on the one hand, it feels that they are an important component of Mae Sot deserving of fair treatment on a humanitarian basis, while on the other hand, the organization accused them of degrading the environmental and sanitary situation in Mae Sot. Towards INGOs, its stance is very critical. It claims that INGOs describe Mae Sot as a horrible place where only bad things happen. It went on to claim that INGOs did not ask the

⁶¹ Interview with Ajarn Ploenjai (26 January 2005).

⁶² It shares an office with the Tak Chamber of Commerce.

⁶³ I will deal with Special Economic Zone in detail in Chapter 7.

⁶⁴ I took part in the project held on 13 February 2005. Approximately 1,000 people participated in the project from Mae Sot. I rode my bicycle with them at 7:30am from a playground near Mae Sot Municipality. At approximately 9:00am, I arrived at the Immigration checkpoint near the Moei River. From there I crossed the Bridge and arrived in Myawaddy. From Myawaddy, around 100 people joined the Thai group. I cycled around Myawaddy until 2:00pm. Bangkok Post also reported this occasion (14 February 2005).

opinions of the locals, much less consult the Mae Sot Civil Society, in dealing with the issue of the Burmese. Instead, INGOs only appeal to so-called international law and regulations. From this criticism, it can be assumed that the Mae Sot Civil Society attempted to have a responsible stake in local affairs through its position as a local NGO, though its organizing capacity was still weak and without strong memberships.

Mae Sot attracts NGOs from both the national and regional levels such as the Law Society of Thailand and Forum-Asia. These groups in cooperation with Burmese NGOs in Mae Sot are mainly involved in humanitarian issues with regard to migrants including factory laborers. National and regional NGOs cooperate with them more substantially, providing both legal and financial assistance and making numerous visits to Mae Sot from Bangkok.

Many guest visitors from various international groups such as labor organizations, Christian groups, journalists, and so on flocked to Mae Sot. It witnessed a huge number of individual volunteers too. Some of them make their contacts with Mae Sot regularly, while some visits are temporary. Vulnerable people in Mae Sot can make use of these contacts to survive. While I was there, I noticed many cases of individuals making connections with foreigners and overseas organizations. But these connections were so arbitrary and uncoordinated that benefits were not evenly distributed to the innocent migrants with a small number of “smart” Burmese appropriating the resources. At any rate, these connections made between individual Burmese and these foreign partners are important factors in constituting governance for migrant people.

In this section, I have dealt with various regimes apart from the Thai state system. Those regimes or governing systems engage in the everyday lives of the alien people to a certain degree. Here I do not necessarily mean that there is a peaceful

juxtaposition of these regimes onto the state system. It is apparent that tensions and conflicts between them are inherent, especially given that the border is the symbol of state territorial integrity. However, I attempt to show that the state does not monopolize the governance of the town despite its aspirations. The next section touches on the state's attempts to subsume the town under its control.

STATE PENETRATION⁶⁵

The state is not a nonchalant actor at all. Especially given that the border is a mark of state sovereignty that must be defended, whether it is rhetorical or otherwise, the engagement of the state in the town in attempts to place Mae Sot under its control is obviously recognized. This section investigates why the state attempts to engage in controlling the town and what means the state uses in doing so.

Reasons and goals behind state engagement

Why does the Thai state attempt to control the border town? What does it want to achieve? Here, my argument is very much inspired by Barry Buzan (1991). According to him (1991: 65-66), the state has three components: idea, institution, and physical base. The Thai state judges that the considerable presence of alien people endangers its ontological foundations. The issue of security is the very reason it attempts to control the town. If the idea of the state establishing its legitimacy is shaken in the minds of its people, it may be viewed by its citizens as incapable of controlling the situation in the town. Nationalism, the ideological base of the state,

⁶⁵ Some parts of this section were drawn from my own work (2005).

which exclusively differentiates its citizens from alien people, became problematic due to the outnumbering presence of the Burmese migrants. In terms of the security of state institutions, the Thai state could be in administrative disarray if it fails to control the immigrants, or, on the other extreme, its institutions could be overturned and controlled by these people. Meanwhile, the physical bases of the Thai state, which are population and territory, was encroached upon by the Burmese. The porous borderline between Thailand and Burma stimulated this encroachment. In the eyes of the state, the sovereignty-less alien state with the physical bases of its own population (Burmese migrants) and its residential areas (migrant compounds) might compete with and overwhelm the “authentic” state in Mae Sot. These problematic situations led the state to want to exert full control over the town in order to protect and secure the *raison d’etre* of the state.

The threats faced by the state are divided into five types, according to Buzan (1991: 112-145): military, political, societal, economic, and ecological. Though the Thai state does not experience any tangible threat from the migrants militarily, it is legitimate concern that the existence of the “army” of Burmese political exiles and ethnic minorities might pose a threat for internal security. Therefore, in the political arena of the town, institutions implementing regulations and policies could be in jeopardy with the possible military activities of those Burmese political exiles and ethnic groups. With regard to the societal sector, more often than not the Thai government mentions that the Burmese bring incurable diseases into Thailand, causing sanitary problems. Also it claims that the migrants are involved in criminal activities such as drug dealings and human trafficking. All in all, the state accuses the migrants of hurting the integrity of Thai society. The economic problem is, according to the state, that the Burmese deprive Thai locals off economic opportunities. It was

an excuse to expel the migrants, especially during the economic crisis in 1997. However, nowadays the attitude of the government in dealing with the threat in the economic sector is ambivalent, because in reality, they contribute to the economy of the town rather than pose economic threats. In terms of ecology, it is claimed that overpopulation caused a scarcity in water supply; the air is being polluted by the migrant-hiring factories; and mountains are deforested by the migrants.

While the issue of security is a passive reason for the state's engagement in the town, geo-political issues are positive factors that explain the aspiration of the state in wanting to control the area. Since the late 1980s, the Thai state has tried to transform the border areas from "battle fields" into "trading markets" by building up cordial relationships with Burma unlike its previous approaches of disengagement that left the border areas as a buffer as shown in Chapter 2. In doing so, it was imperative for the state to establish a firm control in the areas for the purpose of economic development. Since the state considers Mae Sot to be a strategic point in achieving this goal, it seeks to regulate the town economically under the auspices of the central government.

Means of controlling practices

How and by what means does the state control the area? At the ideological and psychological levels, the state produces and disseminates specific discourses in problematizing the alien people. Here we can use Foucault's theory (1979) to understand the state: how the practices of power divide and label what is "normal" and "abnormal", and what is deemed "true" and "false". The state has the means of rendering the migrants as "problematic" through its control of the media. Through

these means, it amplifies and circulates the negative images of the aliens. Furthermore, their state-defined criminal activities along the border region such as drugs and human trafficking have cast a spotlight on them throughout the whole country. Sometimes the aliens are scapegoated by the state to escape the consequences of its mismanagement as seen in the deportation of migrant workers by the state during the economic crisis in 1997.

The state has many agencies to control alien activities in a particular place. In Mae Sot and its vicinity, for example, the military, the police, the Immigration Office, and the District Office carry out the orders from the central government. As local governments are not empowered yet in terms of immigration and labor issues, they are under the directives of the central government when it comes to these matters. Among those government agencies, the military and the police are the most prominent organizations in shouldering the burden of the state in conducting its mission. To the extent that the two agencies can use physical force, they will force the people to follow the principles of the state.

In legal aspects, the Thai government has tried to register the migrants since the early 1990s. In 1992, the government made its first attempt to register the migrant labor force. This policy was implemented in Tak as well as other Thailand-Burma border provinces such as Ranong and Kanchanaburi. However, this was unsuccessful because the registration fee was set at what was seen as a high five thousand baht and hence the employers did not find it necessary to register their workers (Pim 2001: 161). In 1996, the government proposed more tangible policies in an attempt not only to resolve the labor shortage problem, but also to enforce controls on the illegal migrant workers, including the prevention of news arrival. Registration was conducted through provincial authorities. The Ministry of Labor, through the Center

for the Control of Foreign Workers, acted as a central authority, with immigration officers facilitating the processes of “self-support.” However, many employers and migrant workers did not take part in the process as they saw no significance in it and they believed that the work permit offered no benefits to them (Pim 2001: 162). The policies of registering or regulating the migrant workers have been changed nearly every year to keep them in tune with the real situations and in an effort to garner a higher rate of migrant turn-up. For example, the processes were divided into the issuing a residence permit and the applying for a work permit which has three kinds of duration – three months, six months, and one year, while the registration fee has also been decreased.⁶⁶

Migrants encounter physical threats from the state in their everyday lives. The police often raid the residential compounds of the migrants. Whenever that happens, the migrants flee to other places and hide themselves until the police leave. If they encounter the police without time to hide, they were often physically abused and extorted. Their livelihoods were so fragile and vulnerable due to devastating actions of the state.

A news report shows an example of how migrants were treated by the state agencies,

Security forces stormed a temple in Mae Sot district yesterday and arrested 320 Burmese workers at a garment factory who had been on strike since last Thursday. All lost their work permits, became illegal immigrants and were deported to Burma. About 50 labor officials, border patrol and local police were involved in the raid. (Bangkok Post 18 December 2003)

⁶⁶ In the process of registration, the initial check up costs 600 baht and the health insurance costs 1,300 baht. The total paid is 2,450 baht for a three month work permit, 2,900 baht for a six month one, and 3,800 baht for a one year permit. Under the old registration scheme the yearly fee was 4,450 baht (Arnold 2004: 17).

Another statement describes the adverse circumstance that the migrants face,⁶⁷

Murders, rapes, abductions, torture and other abuses of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand have occurred with alarming regularity for many years, particularly in the Mae Sot district of Tak Province, but for a long time only cases of extreme brutality were ever made public. In January 2002, for instance, the bodies of at least 21 persons were found in the Mae Lamao stream. No one has ever been brought to account for that atrocity...In the past year, abuses have increased, as impunity has spread in Thailand with new government policies favoring extra-judicial killing [in the war on drugs..], and because migrant worker's rights have been further curtailed.

The first full-scale deportation of the Burmese migrants occurred during the economic crisis in an attempt to resolve rising unemployment among Thai workers. This provided the legitimacy for the arrest and repatriation of migrant workers (Pim 2001: 163). Since then, regularly or intermittently, massive as well as small-scale deportations have taken place. In June 2003, Thailand and Burma signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) a term of which stipulates that every month, Thailand is required to deport 400 Burmese nationals to a holding center in Myawaddy, through the Thai-Burma Friendship Bridge. The Thai government formally sends back 400 Burmese every month through the Immigration checkpoint. However, informally, approximately 10,000 Burmese who are arrested in other parts of Thailand, mostly from Bangkok are deported monthly by boat through unofficial border-crossing points along the Moei River.⁶⁸

The everyday lives of individual migrants are heavily influenced by the government's deportation practices. Most of my interviewees have been checked by

⁶⁷ This was a statement written by the Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) which was sent to the United Nations Secretary-General on 29 January 2004 (Arnold 2004: 29).

⁶⁸ Interview with the Superintendent of the Tak Immigration Office (2 December 2004).

the police and deported to Burma. One of them sarcastically called the police “the migrant-haunting ghost”. In their day-to-day lives, the migrants have to survive the chasing of this ghost.

Given the fragile and vulnerable conditions elaborated above, a question still remains to be answered. Why is it that even though the state practices migrant-expelling policies, other regimes are still operating and have not been dismantled by the state? Why can the state not exercise full power over the town?

RESPONSE TO THE STATE PENETRATION

The previous section has dealt with the state’s aspiration to control the town. In this section, first, I delve into the concrete ways in which others confront or evade state forces. Second, I deal with the Thai locals’ defiance against the state. Last, I pay a close attention to the ethnographic behaviors of local state agencies. The objective of this section is to understand the persistence of the unofficial or the illegal despite the state’s practices to impose legality in the town.

Weapons of the illegal migrants⁶⁹

The registration scheme and Work Permit issuance enforced by the state do not monopolize legitimate forms which allow aliens to stay in Mae Sot. In other words, there are other kinds of quasi legal identity (ID) cards whereby they are able to acquire a certain kind of legality and recognition from the local authorities. Also,

⁶⁹ This title was inspired by Scott (1985).

migrants come up with various kinds of methods to avoid the intimidation of state forces in their everyday lives.

Of course, in general, migrant people are eager to acquire Work Permits for the purpose of stability and security devoid of state intimidation. In principle, with this Permit, they are allowed to secure equal health rights as Thai nationals under the thirty baht scheme where almost every kind of treatment is covered. However, despite the coercive attempts of the state, they are very reluctant to turn up and apply for the Work Permits because the cost is beyond their financial capacity. Single-staying individuals could afford to bear the cost of a Work Permit for one-year, which amounts to 3,800 baht, with their monthly earnings of between 2,500 and 3,000 baht. However, if there are more than two family members with children to look after, the cost exceeds the levels that they could manage. The cost of Work Permits for both husband and wife is doubled. And if they have grown-up sons and daughters who want to work, financial burden increases. Moreover, many of their jobs, especially those working in small-scale construction, are temporary with an inconsistent income level. Hence, it is very risky to spend large sums of money on acquiring Work Permits. When I visited migrant compounds, I found that few migrant residents held Work Permits, with many citing the financial burden as the main reason.

Those who do not possess Work Permits are susceptible to police arrest. In fact, as shown before, the scenes whereby these unregistered people are arrested and deported take place frequently in the town. I often saw arrested people in a police car, the back of which was covered with iron bars. They were subsequently deported to the Burmese side, and interrogated by Burmese authorities once they got there. However, from what they said, I felt that they were not treated seriously by the authorities as a national threat as long as they are not involved in political activities, and they were

then released without much delay. But again, they crossed back into Mae Sot. There is a joke often heard in Mae Sot, “The deported Burmese will come back to Mae Sot earlier than the police deporting them.” Some Thai authorities that I knew of also confessed that deportation was useless given the fact that the deported can cross back into the border easily. As many of them have already rooted much of their livelihoods in Mae Sot, the town came to be a meaningful part of their lives. In other words, Mae Sot is to them their own town even if their residence took an illegal form. Therefore, coming back to Mae Sot is like coming back to their home, family members, friends, workplaces and schools. As Flynn (1997: 312) mentions in the case of the Benin-Nigeria Border, Burmese people in the border town too have “a local sense of *deep placement* instead of displacement, *deep territorialization* instead of deterritorialization, which forges strong feelings of rootedness in the borderland itself and creates a border identity” despite their illegal status in the town.

Migrants’ persistent attempts to live in Mae Sot engender various tactics of evading state forces rather than just falling to arrest and deportation. They are aware of the checkups of the police. They know the salient places of the police and do not pass these places. One of my Burmese informants never rode his bicycle along the Intharakhiri Road which passes through the central areas of Mae Sot for the reason that police checkups took place very often on the Road. He usually took unnoticeable paths when going around Mae Sot. In the case that he noticed the police from a distance, he stopped proceeding forward, and instead, turned back as naturally and as shrewdly as possible so as not to be detected. When he unexpectedly encountered them, he did not show an intimidated posture but acted like an innocent person. Likewise, though not explicitly recognizable, unauthorized people always play “hide-and-peek games” with the policemen.

When migrant people face police checkups, some of them are not arrested and put into jail or detention centers. If they have money, they will bribe the police. The amount of money individuals give to the police officers varies between 500 and 1,000 baht. Even if they have this amount of money, they are hesitant in giving away this money to the police. It is because this amount of money is considerable for them and they subsequently encounter financial problems with the loss of this money. But in the instance that they do not want to be arrested and deported, which is very troublesome and contains more possible harassments in the process from both the Thai and Burmese authorities, they are willing to pay this money as bribe. Here, we need to reconsider the moral issues of bribes and corruption (cf. Scott 1972). From the point of view of people who are vulnerable to physical threats, it is a way in which they can avoid more possible dangers in the future. Also, corruption needs to be treated with comparative approaches. I heard some migrants state, “The Thai police are at least better and more humane than the Burmese police. They take a part of what we have, but the Burmese police take everything we have and even kill us.” And a political activist mentioned, “If there is no corruption and bribery, only with transparent and legal enforcement, we cannot stay here. We would be deported to Burma with subsequently more harsh sufferings from the Burmese authorities.” I do not claim that corruption should be justified. What I mean is that a moralistic approach to this issue is incomplete in understanding the ways in which corruption is somehow conducive to the endurance of Burmese migrants’ lives in Mae Sot. Otherwise they would face more horrible treatment from the Burmese side.

In Mae Sot, there are various kinds of quasi “passports” which are accepted as quasi legal documents by local state agencies apart from the Work Permit and the one-day Border Pass. These are issued by ethnic and political organizations. It is

related to the governing regimes dealt with before. These regimes issue their own identity cards for their subjects. For example, the KNU card is acknowledged by the local Thai authorities. If people hold this card, they do not easily fall to arrest and deportation. Those Karen working in Karen organizations such as the KYO and the KWO resorted to the card whenever they face interrogations on legality by the local authorities. Some Karen who are not involved in Karen organizations even tried to have this card for themselves so that they could go around town without the fear of possible arrest.

The Cynthia Clinic also issues the Clinic card for medics and people involved in Clinic's activities. At first, Dr. Cynthia made them acquire Work Permits. But the cost was tremendous and non-renewable. After some years the Clinic stopped acquiring Work Permits, and instead, issued the Clinic card which is recognized by the local authorities as a kind of passport whereby people of the Clinic can go around Mae Sot without heavy restrictions.

There were some cases whereby people in these groups were arrested by the police even if they held the cards. In fact, some Karen informants in Karen organizations told me about their arrests. In these cases, the responsible people of their organizations will contact the police directly and bring them back after paying bribes.

Interestingly enough, some people attempted to make use of the UNHCR in their survival strategies. When I was in Mae Sot, it was a huge trend for the Burmese to apply for a UNHCR interview in the hope of attaining entry into the foreign resettlement program. According to the head of Mae Sot Field Office of the UNHCR, as of April 2005, there were 2,600 applications since early 2004. She mentioned that most of them misunderstood that this application was for resettlement. The application, according to her, was to decide whether the applicants would be entitled

for the status of the Persons of Concern (POC).⁷⁰ After recognition as a POC, the process of resettlement ensues. Regardless of whether they misunderstood, many Burmese attempted to exploit the UNHCR for survival. I observed many cases where the Burmese came to Mae Sot from Rangoon and other parts of Burma just to apply regardless of whether they were actually involved in political activities. Even innocent Karen and Burmese migrants in Mae Sot applied for the interview. Once they applied for this interview, they were given a registration form issued by the UNHCR. Many applicants considered this form as a document that can be shown to the police during inspections. Though the police did not recognize the legitimacy of this form, the applicants tended to rely on it. One of my informants had no other forms except for this and always kept it with him in case of police checkups.

Reliance on the UNHCR was also observable in the case of refugees who engaged in economic activities in Mae Sot outside of their refugee camps. Whenever they were arrested by the police for illegal work, they relied on the UNHCR to be released. In fact, on a daily basis, the UNHCR went to the police station to bring back refugees. Even though the UNHCR strongly warned refugees that it would never be involved in those cases and that the police would treat them in their own right, arrests of refugees and the resultant recourse to the UNHCR continued to take place. It means that for refugees in general, not only for those in refugee camps, but also for those in Mae Sot, the UNHCR is considered as a governing organization.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Since the Thai government is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and 1967 Protocol, asylum seekers in Thailand are technically regarded as “illegal immigrants” under the national law. However, the government often referred to the Burmese refugees as “displaced persons” (*phu opphayop*) (Lang 2002: 92-93). In particular, those who fled into Thailand for political reasons and stay in the urban areas are designated as “the Persons of Concern.”

⁷¹ The cases of Karen refugees, however, are different from that of the Shan refugees in Mae Hong Son areas who can adapt to the Thai society relatively easily due to their cultural and language similarities with the Thai. Refugee camps for the Shan are absent and thus the involvement of international organizations, including the UNHCR is very rare.

Though quasi legal documents such as the KNU card and the Cynthia Clinic card are accepted in Mae Sot and reliance on organizations such as the UNHCR guarantees their presence in Mae Sot to a certain degree, the ultimate goal in their perennial confrontation with state forces is to gain complete legal recognition from the authorities. Thus, some of them attempt to acquire Thai citizenship. This case is prominently observed among the Burmese Karen more than the people of other ethnic groups because they make use of ethnic connections with the Thai Karen who are living along the border. The prominent method of applying for citizenship cards is through “adoption.” The Burmese Karen enter into the family trees of the Thai Karen after being adopted by the Thai Karen. In this process, there must be cooperation with the local officials and village heads or brokers. For this reason, the Burmese Karen need to have between 30,000 baht to 50,000 baht as a payment or bribe for these citizenship cards.

As we have seen so far, alien people in Mae Sot employ various kinds of methods to evade state forces. Beyond common discourses of suffering, it is observed that they, as positive actors, come up with strategies even in precarious situations, though some conform to state legal regulations. In addition, it is shown that non-state governing regimes are employed as protectors in their survival strategies.

Defiant locals

The roles of the Thai locals should not be neglected in understanding the endurance of aliens’ lives in Mae Sot. I do not necessarily mean that the attitudes of the Thai locals towards the Burmese are cordial. While I was in Mae Sot, I noticed that the Thai locals were contemptuous of Burmese people. In their gossips with their

peers, “*khon pama*” (Burmese) often connotes a pejorative meaning. Some simple Burmese expressions such as “*nekaungla*” (How are you?) and “*tamin sabibila*” (Have you eaten?) were mocked at. Sometimes those who are non-Burmese of Asian origin were misunderstood as Burmese and received unpleasant treatment from the Thai locals. One day my Korean friend who has a dark complexion went to a bus station to buy a ticket and spoke in Thai. During the conversation, my friend was mumbling, not understanding what the seller said. Instantly, the seller looked down on her and said fiercely, “Why did you come to Thailand from Burma, not speaking Thai fluently? Better go back home now!” In the end the seller apologized after knowing she was not Burmese. This kind of treatment and perception was prevalent in Mae Sot. Though I did not look typically Burmese, but when I did not speak and understand some Thai expressions very well, I often heard the phrase, “*khon pama ru plaaw*” (Are you Burmese or not?). One day after eating lunch with my wife, I scratched the back of a parked car belonging to a Thai local with my motorbike when I reversed it unconsciously. Instantly a driver and his wife came out of the car and inspected the scratched spot. He stared at me and asked furiously, “*khon arai na*” (What national/race are you?), assuming that I was Burmese. Then he threatened to call the police and wanted to send me to the police station. After realizing my nationality, and after my Thai friend mediated compensation (2,000 baht), his attitude was more amicable. Of course, I was not taken to the police station.

As shown above, Thai locals tend to despise the Burmese. Nonetheless, it does not prohibit them from mixing with the Burmese. This is because without the Burmese, they cannot make a living. At the practical level, they rely on the Burmese to a great degree. On the other hand, affectionate expressions such as “The Burmese are our neighbors,” “We cannot divide the border forcefully” and “We must live with them in

harmony” are often heard too. Therefore, with regard to the state’s treatment of the Burmese, more sympathy was shown to the Burmese than to the state, since state engagement disrupted their livelihoods which are intimately linked to the contribution of the Burmese. This amicable attitude was markedly observed among local market merchants. Thai merchants in the central market saw a dramatic plummeting of sales whenever police checkups took place, since the Burmese stayed away from the market. Therefore, they protested against these inspections and requested that the checkups not be done inside and around the market place. The request was accepted and in fact, I hardly saw any inspections taking place there. Given the fact that the contributions of the Burmese as customers are much higher than that of Thai locals, the presence of the police in the market is never welcomed by the Thai merchants, let alone the Burmese themselves.

The defiant attitude of the locals against the state was noticed in matters of Work Permit application. In principle, they are required to help the Burmese acquire Work Permits by bringing them to the registration place and filling out the stipulated form in Thai and English (few Burmese applicants have readable access to it).⁷² In general, factory owners seemed to conform to this regulation since the state paid special attention to them due to the relatively large number of Burmese workers employed there. However, apart from them, normal shopkeepers did not feel it obligatory. Rather, they criticized that this scheme as only benefiting the government, in a way that the government *kin* (eats) the money from the registration fee. There are several other reasons why they dislike this regulation. First, they have to pay the cost for having their employees acquire the Work Permit since the Burmese employees do not have enough money. Even though they could deduct the cost incurred from the salary

⁷² See Appendix B for the Work Permit Application Form.

of their employees, it definitely decreases the motivation of the employees' work ethic. Second, as there are many cases of the employees' sudden return to Burma or movement to other places of Thailand such as Bangkok, it is risky to spend money on these "unpredictable" employees. If such cases are to happen, they will have lost the opportunity to deduct the cost they have incurred from the salary of their employees. In fact, many factory owners and shopkeepers that I knew experienced these cases and as a result, they never encouraged their new employees to acquire Work Permits. Third, for people who are "well-acquainted" with the local authorities, they could bring their employees who were caught by the police back to their shops without much difficulty. Whenever these employees are arrested by the police, the names of their hirers warrant easy release.

Throughout my stay in Mae Sot I felt the anti-government sentiments of the locals. During the campaign period of the general election in February 2005, I went to my local friend's house where a group of football regulars got together to watch a "big" match, Manchester United versus Liverpool. They asked me which team I supported. When I replied that I was a fan of Manchester United, they were divided into two groups; one group of people hugged me and offered me a beverage while the other group jeered at me. During the halftime break, their conversation topics changed from football matters to election affairs. They asked me again, "Sang Kook, do you like the Thai Rak Thai Party?" No sooner had I said, "I don't like the Thai Rak Thai," than almost all of the locals shouted loudly and hugged me. Suddenly I became very emotionally close to them and also felt a certain kind of bond with them. I sensed these anti-government sentiments among other people in Mae Sot too. It was vindicated by the result of the election. Thaksin visited Mae Sot on 29 January 2005 for the purpose of election campaigning and the campaign song of the Thai Rak Thai

Party was dominantly heard all over the town with the Party's canvassers draped in the white color uniform marching along the roads of the town throughout the campaign period. But the locals' choice was not the Thai Rak Thai candidate. The incumbent MP of the Democrat Party retained the seat in a constituency where Mae Sot was included, even though the Thai Rak Thai swept most of the seats in Thailand.⁷³

When I revisited Mae Sot in December 2005 for my follow-up research, I was invited to a welcoming and early Christmas party by a group of local friends most of whom were businessmen. The chill of the December night filled the house. A particular lady came to the party late, wearing the white jumper of the Thai Rak Thai. Others made fun of her, saying "You are a member of the Party." She denied her connections with the party by saying that this was just a piece of cloth. But she took off the jumper and put it into her bag. She might have decided to endure the chilly weather rather than to be shamed in the warmth of the white jumper.

The locals' anti-government sentiment was not only confined to personal levels. The sentiment developed into a collective social action. I have mentioned before that local businessmen, including factory owners and shopkeepers, were very critical towards the government labor policy. They lost Burmese workers not only because the workers left for other places without notice, but because the labor office of Tak Province sent them to other provinces where cheap labor is in demand. Factory owners assumed that the governor of Tak Province must have received a brokerage fee for the transference of the workers. Moreover, this transfer propelled innocent workers to go to Bangkok in search of higher wages, which caused Mae Sot's

⁷³ Tak Province is composed of three constituencies: constituency 1 consists of the areas of the eastern Tak Province; constituency 2 is made up of Mae Sot, Phop Phra, and Umphang; and constituency 3 comprises of Mae Ramat and Tha Song Yang. The Democrat Party won the seats of constituency 2 and constituency 3 whereas the seats for constituency 1 went to the Thai Rak Thai Party in the general election of February 2005.

factories to lose a growing number of workers. In the end, on 29 August 2005, five hundred locals who were mostly factory owners, assembled at the District office, protesting against the policy of labor transference. Although on the surface, it was a demonstration against the policy, however, the complaints had piled up for a long time, induced by various government regulations. These accumulated disgruntlements finally erupted at that point. As a result of the protest, labor transference ceased.

All in all, as shown above, the critical stance of the Thai locals against the state partly explains why Mae Sot is not a town controlled by the state's aspirations.

Demystifying the state agencies

The state does not directly engage in establishing its regulations in any particular area. It needs the agencies through which it carries out its vision. In the process of implementing its policies from the central to the local, a certain degree of deflection from its original intention inevitably takes place. As long as the political system of the state is centralized and regulations are devised and ordered by the central, the difference between the initial aspirations of the state and its actual performance in the local setting will continue to exist.

The state agencies, including the local government sectors, are located between the central and the local. While on the one hand, they have duties to fulfill as the representatives of the state, on the other hand, their everyday lives are rooted in the conditions of the particular place, and therefore, they cannot help but mingle with the local people. The agencies cannot transparently complete the policies of the state because it might cause relationship problems with the local people who they have already established relationships with. And the state agencies themselves as local

residents might engage in illegal but locally acceptable practices such as the employment of illegal migrants. Therefore, they might be negatively influenced by the rigid implementation of state policies. It is here that the tentacles of the state become blunt.

Obviously, they shoulder the missions of the state and use coercive means often, especially in dealing with unauthorized residents. However, when they are not on their official duties, they are no longer serious deliverers of state projects.

In terms of social relationships, some local agencies are under the influence of local big men. As the agencies are engaged in social activities apart from their job-related ones, they are involved in many informal social organizations such as those representing the Chinese community as well as sports clubs. It is not rare that local tycoons are in charge of the expenses in organizing these social activities and tend to promote the well-being of their members by means of their financial power. In doing so, local agencies are obligated to the big men and are trapped in so-called “patron-client” relationships. I happened to join a jogging club. Members of the club got together everyday to exercise. Though its membership was opened to anyone, local big businessmen and members of the upper-class such as lawyers and doctors were the main members of the club. Interestingly enough, I encountered some policemen with whom I was acquainted and some immigration officials as well taking part in the club’s activities on a regular basis. I paid close attention to the micro power relationships among the members as well as scrutinize the expenses that were used in running the club. It was observed that in the social group, people in state organizations were under the influence of local big businessmen, since money spent in running the club and special activities such as dinner meetings was mostly from them. People in state agencies kept very low profile with little to say. Some

businessmen was joking with an immigration official, “This guy, though working in the Immigration Office, does not know about immigration matters at all.” The official just grinned at him. This low profile disposition affects their job performance. It was likely that among the members of the club, some of them were hiring unregistered Burmese workers. But it would be very difficult for the policemen and immigration officials in the club to engage in preventing those unauthorized employment. To do that would damage their social network and cause relationship problems.

Unlike their low profile in comparison to the local big men, local state agencies are enormously powerful when faced with alien people. The asymmetrical relationships between them and the alien people, however, do not necessarily signify that they implement the policies of the state without discrepancy through the use of force. Rather, they tended to use their power not for the state but for their personal well-being. In the eyes of state agencies, Mae Sot is full of resources that could be extracted from dealings with unauthorized people. State agencies could manipulate the missions that the state assigns them, such as inspection on illegal people and raiding migrant compounds, as opportunities to advance their personal interests. As shown before, migrants usually give a bribe of 500 to 1,000 baht to be released from inspecting policemen. I often heard cases from my informants that some policemen blatantly asked for “tea money” from the migrants. It seems that the corruption in Mae Sot signifies a marked equilibrium between migrants who pay to avoid potential dangers, and the policemen who consider it as rent-seeking and maintaining the status-quo.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ According to a report in Bangkok Post (12 May 2005), all over the country, the amount of extra money earned by the police was estimated to be 31 billion baht. They earned 19-27 billion baht from gambling dens, 1.5-1.8 billion baht from alien workers, 500 million baht from massage parlours, 1.8 billion baht from motorcycle queues and 50 million baht from passenger van queues. For general discussion on corruption, see Pasuk and Sungsidh (1994).

Beyond the relatively small cases, some people in local agencies were said to be involved in bigger-scale affairs such as human trafficking. In fact, it was reported that the deputy chairwoman of *tambon* Tha Sai Luat and her husband were arrested and charged with smuggling and sheltering illegal immigrants.⁷⁵ While I was in Mae Sot, there was a rumor that the police were involved in transferring migrants from Mae Sot to the inner places. The migrants are able to pass the checkpoints by paying out bribes to the police.

The local authorities extorted not only from the migrants but also from ethnic political groups and democratic movement groups, including migrant institutions. A migrant school paid 3,000 baht for “security” reasons; otherwise, according to the headmaster of the school, “The police will tease her and disrupt the running of the school.” Karen organizations also, for the same reason, paid some money to the authorities. Besides, these organizations had to placate the police by giving money in return for their continued stay in Mae Sot. Corruption was not necessarily considered as negative for some people in these organizations. An NLD member said, “Because of corruption, we can stay here. Otherwise we will face much more difficulties.” In fact, local state authorities allow political activists to stay in Mae Sot not just for the material gain. But they gather intelligent information from these political activists on the political situations of the border areas. At any rate, just as the case of the vulnerable migrants, the discourse on corruption among these groups is related to security-securing strategies in precarious situations rather than centering around moral issues.

Though corruption comprises a sizeable part of the interaction patterns between the local agencies and those groups, there exist intimate patterns of relationships between

⁷⁵ Bangkok Post (25 August 2004) and the Irrawaddy (24 August 2004).

them that have developed throughout history. The reason the KNU receives special attention from the local agencies is not least because the KNU has had a long history of relationships with them. We have seen in the previous chapter that as early as the 1960s, dialogue had been established between the local agencies and the KNU. The role of Bo Mya in these relationships was tremendous. Although now the role of the KNU as a guardian of buffer zones against the spread of the communists is non-existent and the Thai government is more interested in developing relationships with the Burmese government, the legacy of cordial relationships between Thai authorities and the KNU remains to a certain degree. For instance, the intelligent service and local authorities provide transportation for important KNU members to Chiangmai or Bangkok. In this light, the identity card that the KNU issues is acknowledged as a kind of passport by the local authorities. Also, the KNU was able to organize its own activities within Mae Sot through the relationships they have established. On 10 January 2005, the KNU organized a Karen New Year Day celebration, which is an annual occasion. I was fascinated that the celebration involved many people dressed in the Karen costume. The participants (estimated to be five hundred people) were singing Karen traditional songs, including the Karen anthem, and politicians were delivering speeches which harshly criticized the Burmese government. It was like a liberated area. Without the positive cooperation of local authorities, whether they were bribed or not, it would have been impossible to have such a political occasion in foreign soils. The NLD also organized an occasion to celebrate Aung San Suu Kyi's 60th birthday with three hundred participants in a Buddhist monastery in Mae Sot on 19 June 2005, most probably with the permission of the local authorities.

In these cordial relationships between the local authorities and those groups, especially the Karen organizations, ethnic affinity should be considered as an

important factor. Many Thai Karen are working in the state agencies, including in the local administrative apparatus. Some of these Karen officials have close relatives in both the Karen organizations and the refugee camps. There were some cases whereby the Burmese Karen from Karen State sent their children to the Thai side even before they became refugees. These children grew up receiving a Thai education and were bestowed Thai citizenships and took up positions in the government sectors. Some of them played mediating roles between the Karen organizations and the Thai authorities. Especially when it comes to refugee matters, Thai Karen are in demand due to their language abilities and cross-cultural understanding. Sometimes they do not implement what the central government commands, so as to favor the well-being of the refugees. For example, refugees are not allowed to get out of the camp, which is a regulation laid down by the state. But when I was with a Thai Karen official of the MOI in a refugee camp, and upon seeing some refugees leave the camp and go up to a mountain with a sickle, I asked him, “Why you let them go?” He answered, “They are also human. The provision they get inside the camp is not enough. I just let them go on a humanitarian basis.” They favor refugees more than the ordinary Thais do.

There are instances of marriage between the state officials and the migrants or the refugees. I heard from my informant about love affairs between the Thai policemen and the Burmese women. I also heard marriage cases between the security soldiers of a refugee camp and refugee women. It would be misleading to assume that the two groups – Thai authorities and the vulnerable groups – are always antagonistic to each other, only on a formal basis, without taking into account the emotional interactions between them. For those Thai authorities who are married to unauthorized people, it might be considered as inhumane to exercise harsh practices towards the family members and relatives of the unauthorized people to whom they are related. In that

sense, the marriage can be a factor that explains the low performance level of local agencies in accomplishing the state project.

I have attempted to show in this section that state agencies are not always loyal to the center. The issue that I want to point out is not about their work ethic or deviance. Rather, I seek to understand their ethnographic behavior which takes the informal and unofficial beyond the official and formal discussion on their performance. It explains the particularities of Mae Sot in terms of the patterns of relationships between the state agencies and other groups and the ways in which other regimes are maintained. It could be argued that the disloyal behaviors of state agencies are found not just in Mae Sot but in many parts of Thailand and even many other countries. However, in other places, those behaviors are not connected to the operation of other regimes of which their presence is rare. But in Mae Sot where non-state regimes and the sizeable presence of unauthorized people that I have dealt in this Chapter are accommodated, the endurance of those regimes and unauthorized people's lives is very much related to the behaviors of state agencies which are not always loyal to the state. It very much differentiates Mae Sot from even other border towns in Thailand which do not have such kinds of enormous presence of others.⁷⁶

CONCLUSION: MAE SOT, ANOTHER STATE

In this chapter, I have dealt with how the state system and other non-state systems operate and how these interact in Mae Sot. It is revealed that the presence of "others" is not haphazardly constituted, but based on certain governing regimes in their own

⁷⁶ Previously during the Vietnam War and in the 1980s, the Thailand-Laos border and the Thailand-Cambodia border witnessed the presence of political activists, refugees and international relief agencies like the present times in Mae Sot. However, their presence in those places became either obsolete or rare in the 1990s. Thus, the CCSDPT now exclusively engage in the Thailand-Burma border.

right. It is also shown that the state strives to control the town in accordance with certain regulations and through physical force. But state engagement in the town does not bring about outcomes that the state initially anticipates. Despite illegal forms of residence, alien people have their own ways of survival, though not explicit, to avoid the regulating practices of the state. Also the defiant or evasive stance of the locals towards the state makes it difficult for Mae Sot to be placed under the total control of the state. More over, the chapter pays close attention to the ethnographic behaviors of the local state agencies that are deviant in the eyes of the state, but adaptive in the eyes of the local.

The case of Mae Sot problematizes the conventional notion of the state. Weber's notion that a state is "a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory" (Weber 1991: 78, emphasis original) has been used as a canon in understanding the modern state for most scholars. Power is very much laden in Weber's understanding of the state. Thus, the state as a power holder has legitimacy for using physical force and politics means striving to share power or to engage in the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state. However, this view is very center-oriented. The aspiration of the state or the center is not transplanted in the local without discrepancy. The local does not conform to the regulating practices of the state because the way in which the local society is constituted conflicts with the regulations that do not reflect the particularities of the local. Ultimately, in Weberian understanding, what the state accomplishes through the monopoly of the use of physical force seems to be the monopoly of governance as the single and utmost representing organization within a given territory. However, the case of Mae Sot shows that the governing of the town is shared by other non-state regimes, not totally monopolized by the state.

The fundamental reason why the ideal Weberian understanding of the state is not applicable to Mae Sot, I claim, is that it presupposed that a nation-state has a single “type” of citizen in an exclusively confined territory. However, when it comes to a town in the borderland, the very component of the Weberian concept, the phrase “within a given territory,” is problematized because a territory is easily encroached upon by others that constitute the border society as legitimate members and quasi citizens though they are illegal and non-citizens in the state’s right. In the Mae Sot borderland region, as other non-state regimes participate in governing others, the state does not have a monopoly over governance. We must integrate others to achieve a full understanding of the border society beyond the state-centered approaches.

CHAPTER 4

THE TOWN MARKET, BORDER TRADE AND OTHERS

I have shown through the history of Mae Sot that the development of the town was greatly attributed to trade. This is still pervasive in the current development of Mae Sot today. It might be assumed that the hectic black markets which once operated in the borderland were totally obsolete, and only “transparent” economic actions are now the contributory factors to the current development of Mae Sot’s economy. In other words, it could be presumed that official and formal ways are firmly established as the *modus operandi* in the border economy in the wake of weakening ethnic political groups and rising state powers in regulating the economic activities of borderlanders.

However, my findings suggest that the obsolescence of the black markets does not necessarily mean the introduction of the “white” market. Rather, the black markets once located outside the town in the borderland is explicitly observed in the very central area of the town with so many alien participants there. Town markets, which are not necessarily in the form of “white” markets, have replaced the roles of the black markets in exchanging goods between the Thai locals, the Burmese and the ethnic people. Informality or illegality is markedly observed in the operational patterns of the markets. It is ironic that the place where goods had been exchanged in the form of the black markets outside the town in the past has encroached into the physical space of the town center with much more participation of others.

Cross-border movement of goods also reflects the informal trading patterns beyond the formal contract between the two states across the border. The Thai-Burma Friendship Bridge just plays a symbolic role in trading and only shows a partial

movement of goods. A great deal of trade is performed at other crossing-points along the border, escaping the gaze of the state.

As informality is an intrinsic component of Mae Sot's economy, the overlooking of this point leads to an incomplete understanding of the town's economy. The common assumption of modernization paradigms is that modern economic operations based on rationality and formality will prevail even in remote areas. This notion is linked to the discourse of marginalization of traditional patterns of economic pursuits. In the Southeast Asian context, Boeke (1953) and Geertz (1963) dealt with the marginalization and impoverishment of traditional sectors of economy in the wake of modern industrial capitalism in Indonesia. Though traditional sectors refer to agriculture in their cases, the connotation of tradition in the economic sphere may not be confined to the agricultural sector but extended to the ways in which people retain long-existing habits in their economic actions. And traditional ways are very much associated with informal and unofficial practices of people, because people in the past did not experience much state intervention in their local economies. All in all, the scholars observed that traditional economic patterns were not integrated into the newly emerging political economy of Indonesia. The case of Mae Sot provides a contrast in understanding traditional aspects of the economy. In Mae Sot, informal ways of economic pursuits have been resiliently alive even in the face of the state's attempts to formalize economic operations in the town and across the border.

This chapter seeks to excavate how the economy of the town is based on components of informality or illegality and how others, regardless of legal status, contribute to the economy of the town through the central market and border trade.

THE CENTRAL MARKET

Locational position of the market

No other places in Mae Sot have more intense economic activities than central market place and its vicinities. From around 8 am till 6 pm the place is packed with people. The market is composed of two areas. The first area is called “Talat Simoei (Simoei Market),” while the other area is named “Talat Phajaroen (Phajaroen Market).” The former is located near a central road, the Prasatwithi Road, whereas the latter is situated near the Chitlom Road. Two sub-areas are connected and roughly called “Talat Mae Sot (Mae Sot Market).”⁷⁷ Some people simply call it “the Burmese market” because they are the dominant participants and the aroma of Burmese products is prominent.

Around the market, especially along the Prasatwithi Road, one can sense the significance of commerce by the presence of banks, jewelry shops, a big shopping mart, mobile phone shops, Siam Hotel, and so on. A jewelry shopkeeper told me that a hundred jewelry shops are located in this area. It is common to see many Burmese jewelry merchants wear *longyi* and chew betel, anxiously observing Thai jewelry appraisers valuing gems that they brought from Burma, especially from Kachin State. In front of Automated Teller Machines (ATM) just outside the banks, people, including those in *longyi*, are stretched out in a long queue. Noodles and chicken rice stall-holders serve Burmese customers with dishes worth twenty baht. It was a big joy for me to hang around the place. I felt as if I were in Burma. The signboard indicating “Siam Hotel” sounds sarcastic and ironical. It is like a solitary indication to make an

⁷⁷ See Map 2.1.

unrealistic claim that the place is the territory of Thailand against the preponderant presence of the Burmese. The signifier does not match the signified.

“Hong Long Mini Mart,” located just next to the entrance of the market, is the biggest and most modernized shopping mall in the town. The two-story shop boasts various kinds of items and fancy displays. The main customers of the shop are Burmese. Burmese clerks are in charge of payment and attending to Thai and Burmese customers. For Burmese newcomers to Mae Sot from Myawaddy and refugee camps, the shop allows them to at least get a sense of modern ways of consumerism.

The opposite side of the Mart is filled with shops dealing with computers and Internet services, mobile shops, DVD shops, and a big book store. These shops reflect the rapidly changing landscape of the central area with the introduction of shops carrying modern technologies. It is common for the Burmese to be the main customers of these shops. They have access to Thai mobile phone networks and can watch newly-released movies. Some of them are very familiar with the use of the Internet and keep pace with the changing world.

The central market is positioned around the most advanced landscape in Mae Sot as shown above. When one turns into the market, one can see petty street Thai merchants selling a range of vegetables, foods and lottery. When one goes down farther, one encounters clothing and fishery stores. Up to this point, in general, the majority of merchants seem to be Thai locals. But from this point, the Burmese merchants appear more prevalent and the aroma of Burmese products is becoming thicker: Burmese songs are heard from music shops; Burmese book shops attract customers with giant-sized pictures of Burmese pop stars and football magazines; and cosmetics attract Burmese women. When one eventually gets to Talat Phajaroen, the

Burmese merchants become the dominant figure. The main items of Talat Phajaroen include fish, fruits, vegetables, electronics and fabrics.

Customers

The types of customers in the market are divided into three prominent categories, according to a Thai shop owner who has been running a clothing shop for more than seven years. Though there are other minor customer groups, his categorization of substantial customers is noteworthy. The first group consists of the Burmese laborers residing in Mae Sot and its vicinities. They buy goods from this market after receiving their monthly wages. It is interesting to notice a trend whereby from the end of a month till the first week of next month sales are at its peak because after being paid their wages around the 25th of every month they spend their money in the market. But as time draws nearer to the 20th of each month, the sales go down since their available money is running out.

The second group comprises Thai locals, mostly farmers living in the vicinity of the town. During the harvest seasons they engage in agricultural production and save money. At the end of the season, they come over to the market to spend their hard-earned money.

The third group comprises Burmese sojourners who arrive in Mae Sot on a daily basis. The group is sub-divided into the common Burmese and Burmese wholesalers or retailers who bring out goods from Mae Sot to Burmese sides to sell them in their own shops in Burma.⁷⁸ In the previous chapter, I mentioned that on a daily basis,

⁷⁸ Some Burmese merchants even bring goods to Rangoon by themselves. But in this case, most merchants do not come to Mae Sot themselves. They use delivery services. Many of the merchants who brought their goods from Mae Sot to Burma have shops in Karen State such as Pa-an and Kawkareik.

around 2,000 Burmese cross the Bridge, and many of them head for Mae Sot. In front of the Immigration checkpoint, dozens of *songthaew* (pickup truck) stand in a row to provide transportation for them. These trucks send them into the central area of the town near the market for twenty baht. In the late afternoon, these trucks bring them back to the border side, although some cars head for other border-crossing points where the Burmese cross the Moei River by boat to evade the immigration officers.

Other than these groups, some minor groups such as refugees are consumers too. Burmese such as political activists and people from ethnic political groups who do not work in economic sectors also patronize these shops. However, in terms of conspicuous consumption, those three groups are the most discernable actors.

Above all, a comparison of the number of consumers between the Thais and the Burmese shows that the Burmese are the predominant customers. According to the assumption of many shopkeepers and my investigation, the Burmese customers make up more than ninety per cent of the total number of customers in the market. Given that the market is sustained by the contribution of the Burmese customers, the issue of legality is hardly important to the Thai merchants. As mentioned in the last chapter, the police inspection disturbs the operation of the market and inflicts them with a loss of income, which prompts protests against the authorities.

The attitude of Thai merchants towards Burmese customers is rather amicable, though it is probably due to the practical reasons of money making. Ethnic discrimination hardly takes place, at least in the market place. Some merchants develop intimate relationships with certain Burmese customers as a result of frequent encounters. Most Thai shopkeepers are able to speak some basic Burmese expressions. They call Burmese customers *akaw* (elder brother or sister) or *nyi* (younger brother or sister). A Thai shopkeeper running a clothing shop told me: “We don’t look down on

the Burmese. They are human beings like us. Most of my customers are the Burmese. I benefit from them. How can I look down on them that bring me money?”

Merchants

It is misleading to assume that the merchants are only Thais because the Burmese might not be allowed to trade in Thai territory without proper legal status. On the contrary, Burmese merchants are rather dominant. Thai merchants are only visible from the entrance to the Prasatwithi Road up to the middle point of Talat Simoei; the rest of the market area is dominated by Burmese merchants. In this section I take a closer look at these two groups of merchants.

Thai merchants

Anan has been running a clothing shop since 1997. He was born and grew up in Mae Sot until he finished his secondary school education (*mathayom*). He studied in a university in Bangkok, majoring in economics and after that worked in a research institute as a researcher analyzing economic trends for two years. However, he was fed up with what he saw as superficial economic analysis as time went on and decided to do some business. At that time, his hometown, Mae Sot, witnessed massive demographic expansion due to the perennial influx of the Burmese migrants and refugees. His sister who had opened a clothing shop in the market in the mid-1990s was enjoying a dramatic increase in income as a result of the influx. She suggested that he open a textile shop beside her. Eventually Anan came back to Mae Sot and established his own shop in the market.

He recollected that when he began his business in 1997 he was extremely busy and made a lot of profit from Burmese migrants. At that time, there were not as many shops as there are today. Presently, however, many textile shops have opened in the hope of benefiting from the enormous presence of the Burmese in the town. Anan's income level has decreased, though he still manages to make a considerable profit from the business.

Once a month, he goes to Bangkok to purchase the items from wholesalers from the Bobe market which is the main provider of garments for the whole country. He pays a keen attention to the latest fashion trends. He told me that the Burmese are also sensitive to the changing fashion trends with the increasing influence of TV. He added: "We tend to think that the main criteria of the Burmese here in choosing a cloth would be a price, but they are also interested in the design and the latest trend."

To cater to the Burmese customers, he is hiring a Burmese Karen woman as a clerk. She stands in front of the shop and attends to the Burmese customers. She and potential Burmese customers negotiate a price, and once she gets the approval from Anan, she proceeds in selling the cloth. She speaks Burmese with Burmese customers and Thai with Anan. She spoke Karen to me once she knew I was learning Karen. Since the middle of the 1990s, she has been staying in Thailand, and happened to work in his shop through referrals. She does not have a Work Permit. Anan seemed to think that it was not quite necessary and to spend money in acquiring it could be useless if she were to leave for various reasons. He mentioned that most Burmese clerks in this market did not have Work Permits.

While Anan's customers are mostly Burmese individuals in Mae Sot and from Myawaddy, his sister's main customers are Burmese wholesalers and retailers from the Burmese sides such as Pa-an and Kawkareik. Her items are also from the Bobe

market in Bangkok. It seems that Mae Sot is a distribution center with a mediating role between Bangkok and the Burmese border areas.

She also mentioned that her income level was not as high as in the past because of the increase in market competition due to the number of textile shops. The population expansion of Mae Sot induced many people from other places, especially Bangkok, to make their way to Mae Sot. When I talked with other shopkeepers who recently opened their shops in the central areas of the town, I realized that many of them had stayed in Bangkok but the expansion of Mae Sot attracted them over to do business, utilizing their existing social networks with their relatives and friends who had already settled in Mae Sot. The items that they sell include such “modern” items as DVDs, mobile phones, and computers.

Her shop is bigger than Anan’s with a total of nine employees. Most of them are Karen. While they assist with selling at her shop, they also engage in domestic work at her house. Regarding how the workers ended up in the shop, she answered that an employee brought her friends and relatives to her shop from Burma. For the Burmese to have work opportunities, personal connection is probably the most salient factor. It means that the Burmese do not haphazardly engage in border-crossings but have pre-existing personal social relationships before they “migrate” over to work in the town.

When I asked why the Karen are very popular as clerks, she said: “First, they speak three languages such as Burmese, Karen and Thai – and thus they can attend to more customers than the Burman employees who speak only Burman and Thai. Second, they have a good work ethic. They do not attempt to deceive their owners. They work hard regardless of the presence of the owners.” This preference in favor of the Karen is also shared by the other locals. The Karen are preferred in the domestic sphere too. Many Karen women are hired as domestic workers for the reasons of sincerity and

hard work. In contrast, some Thai locals do not like to hire the Mon on the grounds that they are insidious and shrewd. A Thai friend of mine used to hire a Mon worker. There were several times when he suddenly left my friend's work place without notice. Finally, he decided not to come back and is thought to have found a new job related to the exchange of money somewhere in town with his friends. In a way, the Mon are more mobile than others, which at times is interpreted as being unfaithful and deceptive by employers.

Anan and his sister make more money from the first and last week of each month for the reasons mentioned above. However, the most dramatic upsurge in sales is generated during the holiday week of the *songkran* festival. During this period they never rest, attending to the Burmese who spend a large of their money at that time.

However, previously they suffered from plummeting sales when the police made inspections in search of illegal Burmese occupiers. Thus they hate the presence of the police in the market. Burmese contribution to their profit does not lead Anan and his sister to question the legality of the Burmese. They are good sources of income regardless of their legal status.

Burmese merchants

Anan's shop is in the middle of Talat Simoei. This place is filled with textile shops and dozens of Thai street merchants selling vegetables and foods. South of this location, the presence of Thai merchants becomes scarce, with Burmese merchants gaining more recognition.

Sei Kaung, a Buddhist Burman, runs a bookshop beside the main lane of Talat Simoei. He came to Mae Sot in 1997. He had worked in a garment factory for five years before he started his own business in 2002. While he was working in the factory,

he managed to save money by living a thrifty life style which led to him being able to open his current shop. He holds a Work Permit. But according to the regulations of the Work Permit Scheme, its holders are not allowed to engage in business, but are only permitted to work as an employee. However, he wants to do business under more secure conditions with a legal status, otherwise his business would be disrupted due to potential deportation. Above all, it is affordable for him to spend money in acquiring a Work Permit. Many other Burmese merchants in the market have legal status too largely due to security considerations and financial ability.

He maintains a cordial relationship with a Thai landowner who allows him to do business there and who helped him acquire a Work Permit. Officially, he is supposed to be employed under the landowner, and pays 2,500 baht as rent to him. In addition, he pays ten baht per day to tax collectors who seemingly are from tax authorities of the District or the Municipality. He also gives some tea money, of around fifty baht, to policemen when they *happen* to approach him.

His business has been going well, and recently his wife opened a new bookshop in the market. Like his shop, it seems that small scale bookshops enjoy the frequent visits of Burmese customers. The bookshop caters to the needs of various kinds of Burmese customers. The items include school textbooks, novels, magazines, and music tapes/CDs. The migrant schools acquire the Burmese textbooks from bookshops in the town, including Sei Kaung's shop. I also bought Burmese language text books from a bookshop in the town for my own study and a big map of Burma from his shop. From another shop, I even acquired a book written by a famous Burmese historian, Than Tun, on Buddhist art and architecture written in English.

Once a month, he goes to Rangoon to purchase new books. He does not cross the Bridge but crosses the border by boat, because Work Permit holders, according to him,

cannot cross the Bridge. But it seems that he makes the unofficial border-crossings because the “smuggling” of the books through the Bridge would reveal his business to the Thai authorities, which would harm his business. For his journey to Rangoon, after crossing the Moei River by boat, he gets on a bus at a bus station in Myawaddy for Pa-an. Then he changes a bus for Rangoon at Pa-an. Like him, many people going to Rangoon takes this route. He said that the total expense incurred in his round trip to Rangoon was 40,000 to 50,000 kyat. Due to this transportation cost, the price of Burmese books in Mae Sot is higher than in Rangoon.

Sei Kaung was an eloquent speaker with a concise analysis of Burmese economic and political situations. In the face of situations that “smart” Burmese in Mae Sot like him tended to approach the UNHCR in an attempt to take the chances of overseas resettlement programs as shown in Chapter 3 and 7, I asked him whether he intended to rely on the UNHCR. He answered: “I did not apply for the programs of the UNHCR. Since I often go to Burma, to do that would endanger my business and even my life. The Burmese police would arrest me if I were related to the UNHCR. I am quite satisfied to run my business in Mae Sot even though many of my friends already left for foreign countries through resettlement programs.”

Dan Dee sells seasonal mushrooms. She does not reside in Mae Sot. Instead, everyday she commutes between Myawaddy and Mae Sot. Her main selling item is mushroom. As long as she can sell mushrooms, every harvesting season, she continues to come to Mae Sot. She holds a Border Pass with which she pays each side of the immigration office ten baht to pass through the checkpoints everyday. Like her, many vegetable sellers cross the border on a daily basis, holding the Border Pass. Mostly they deal with the vegetables produced from the Burmese side. Besides mushrooms, vegetables such as garlic and onions are notable. However, in

comparison to the same vegetables produced in the Thai side, the prices of the Burmese ones are lower. It is mainly because of the quality of the agricultural products. For example, the price of Burmese onions ranges between twelve baht and fifteen baht per kg, while that of Thai onion is around eighteen baht per kg. A Burmese onion is relatively small and its surface is purplish, whereas a Thai onion is big and white-colored.

While Dan Dee carries her selling items by herself from Myawaddy, some grocery sellers that deal specifically with onions and garlic take their portion from the Burmese merchants of the riverbank of the Moei River whom I will deal with in detail later in this Chapter. The riverbank merchants are the main providers for these two items sold in the town market.

Dan Dee was able to acquire a small selling space which is located in front of a shop owned by a Thai. The Thai shop owner allows her to sell mushrooms. In return, Dan Dee gives the owner twenty baht per day as a token of her gratitude. Dan Dee makes roughly 100 baht per day.

Dan Dee is a Muslim. Muslim merchants dominate the market. Lar Lay and her two sisters are also Muslims selling various kinds of fish from Moulmein and Rangoon. They purchase their fish from a wholesaler in the market. While their mother operates other shops selling chicken and vegetables in other parts of the market, they are positioned beside the main lane of Talat Phajaroen. They used to pay 2,500 baht to rent the selling place. But they told me that recently, their mother bought the spot for 60,000 baht. I was wondering how that could be since foreigners are not allowed to purchase land. According to them, their mother obtained a Thai citizenship card. Thus, she was able to buy the spot from the landowner. It seemed that she had accumulated a great deal of money by running several shops, which

allowed her to obtain the citizenship card through various means which eventually enabled her to buy the spot. Lar Lay and her sisters hold Work Permits. As I have said, many Burmese merchants have legal documents. This is different from the cases of other Burmese such as salespersons, domestic workers and daily laborers. Financial capability is the main factor differentiating these groups.

While some merchants place themselves along market lanes, other merchants locate their shops within big market buildings. The latter stall-holders engage in selling electronic goods and *longyi*, running food stalls and sewing fabric textiles. Win Kai is a Muslim merchant who sells electronic goods and watches. It is interesting to note that he has overseas experience. He had worked for several years in Malaysia. Then he went back to Burma and ended up coming to Mae Sot to do business. I met some other Muslim men who had worked in Malaysia. Upon returning to Burma, many were not satisfied with the living conditions in Burma. But it was not easy for them to go abroad again. Therefore, as an alternative, they came over to Mae Sot and started their own businesses.

Despite Muslim dominance, there were merchants from other Burmese groups. For example, Kor Naw is Pwo Karen.⁷⁹ She sells *mohinga*, a common Burmese noodle cooked with a kind of catfish and stew stalk of banana. She has been living in the town for fifteen years and running the stall for three years. She got married to a Thai Karen man. It seemed that her husband helped her run the stall even though she did not have legal status to trade. Now, she is staying in the town with a Work Permit. When it comes to comparisons between the Pwo Karen and the Sgaw Karen in terms

⁷⁹ The Pwo Karen are one of major sub-Karen ethnic groups. Besides, the Sgaw, the Pa-O and the Kayah are dominant Karen groups. In the census of 1931, the most recent reliable source of the number of the Karen, there were 1,340,000 speakers of Karen languages. Among them, about 500,000 were Sgaw, 473,000 Pwo, 223,000 Pa-O, and 32,000 Kayah. The Pwo are largely plain dwellers and concentrated in the Irrawaddy delta and northern Tenasserim while the Sgaw are more widely and evenly distributed, throughout the Irrawaddy delta area, Tenasserim, the Pegu range between the Irrawaddy and Sittang, and the eastern hills (Lebar *et al.* 1964: 58-59).

of their participations in different sectors of the economy, the former is more conspicuous in the market and as employees in the commercial sectors than the latter. Members of a Karen Church in Mae Sot are mostly Sgaw Karen. But they seldom engage in business as employees. Most of them pursue work in non-profit organizations such as NGOs and KNU-related organizations. My Sgaw Karen informant explained that the Pwo Karen are more aggressive and outgoing compared to the Sgaw Karen, since they have to compete against the Mon or the Burman to make a living in the lowlands of Karen State while the latter tend to stay together within their communities in remote villages. According to him, these different living environments somehow developed different kinds of behaviors among the two groups, which result in differences in their livelihoods even in Mae Sot.

Marked points of the market

The various stories which I have introduced with regard to the central market lead us to some important points. First, the Burmese are largely integrated into the central market of the town. They are the dominant actors not only as customers but also as merchants. Their participation plays a great role in ensuring the operating of the market. Compared to the past, the present time sees the integration of others taking place in the very central area of the town. Previously the black markets outside Mae Sot in the border area provided places for the Thais and the Burmese to exchange goods and engage in trade. Therefore, others were not the main participants inside the markets of the town. However, nowadays the Burmese are flowing into the central market as big contributors to the overall operation of the market.

Second, the central market improves the relationships between the Burmese and the Thais. In Chapter 1, I introduced Rex's critic of Furnivall. As Rex (1980: 98) mentions, the market draws various kinds of people into a single social system and creates intimate relationships beyond the sterile contact place as Furnivall had argued. As vindicated in the cases of Sei Kaung and Kor Naw who acquired selling spots and Work Permits through the help of the Thai locals, deep relationships with the Thai locals enabled them to engage in market trading.

Third, legality is circumvented in the market. Police inspection is hampered by the local merchants. Most Burmese clerks in the market do not have Work Permits. Though the Burmese merchants appear to conform to the legal scheme and hold Work Permits, they also manipulate the system in doing their own businesses as shown in the cases of Sei Kaung, Lar Lay, and Kor Naw. These cases demonstrate the incompleteness of state penetration through regulatory practices such as Work Permits in the market, because people circumvent them in their pursuits of everyday livelihood.

Last, Mae Sot has a certain geographical significance. The town is centered along the border from which borderlanders from either side engage in their economic activities. The town is a distribution center of goods for the Burmese and the Thais in the borderland. Also goods from Bangkok and Rangoon are exchanged in the town. Anan's cloth from Bangkok and Sei Kaung's books from Rangoon cater to the needs of people. Their trade has been going on for long periods as indigenous forms of trade. This small-scale and indigenous form of trading serves mostly the needs of the borderlanders. However, state-sponsored economic sectors do not have close attachment to the particular needs of the local, which I will deal with in detail in Chapter 7. Mae Sot currently witnesses tensions between indigenous economic

trading patterns and exogenous state projects. The case of the central market shows that the Burmese comprise a large sector of this indigenous economy.

Plate 4.1 Gem Traders near the Central Market



Plate 4.2 The Central Market



Plate 4.3 A Burmese Seller at the Central Market



AT THE BORDER: SMUGGLERS, CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT OF GOODS AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF BORDER TRADE

We need to approach flows of goods and people as visible manifestations of power configurations that weave in and out of legality, in and out of states, and in and out of individual's lives, as socially embedded, sometimes long-term processes of production, exchange, consumption, and representation (Abraham and Van Schendel 2005: 9).

"Sometimes behind the scene or under the table, but other times in front of the scene or over the table, border trade operates" (Ekamon, a Thai trader).

One day, my Thai informant, Somsak, who was a committee member of the Tak Chamber of Commerce, informed me that some officials from the Bank of Thailand (BOT) coming from Bangkok would give a presentation about some significant issues regarding border trade at the Mae Sot Hill Hotel, the most luxurious hotel in Mae Sot. He suggested that I attend the talk with him, because this would be a good opportunity to collect crucial information on the cross-border movement of goods. The next

morning, I rode my motorbike to the Hotel and went into a spacious convention hall. Many local businessmen were already present. I searched for Somsak and sat beside him. The officials of the BOT in neat dresses delivered their presentation on border trade, mostly mentioning figures and statistics with colorful slides. During the presentation, Somsak turned to me and whispered, “It is very superficial. They attempt to explain the complex facets of border trade only with the numbers. It would be much nicer for local researchers to do research on that with the amount of money the BOT has spent.”

During the break, I met Ekamon who was also a businessman engaging with border trading activities since the 1970s. I enquired about his thoughts on the presentation. He said bluntly,

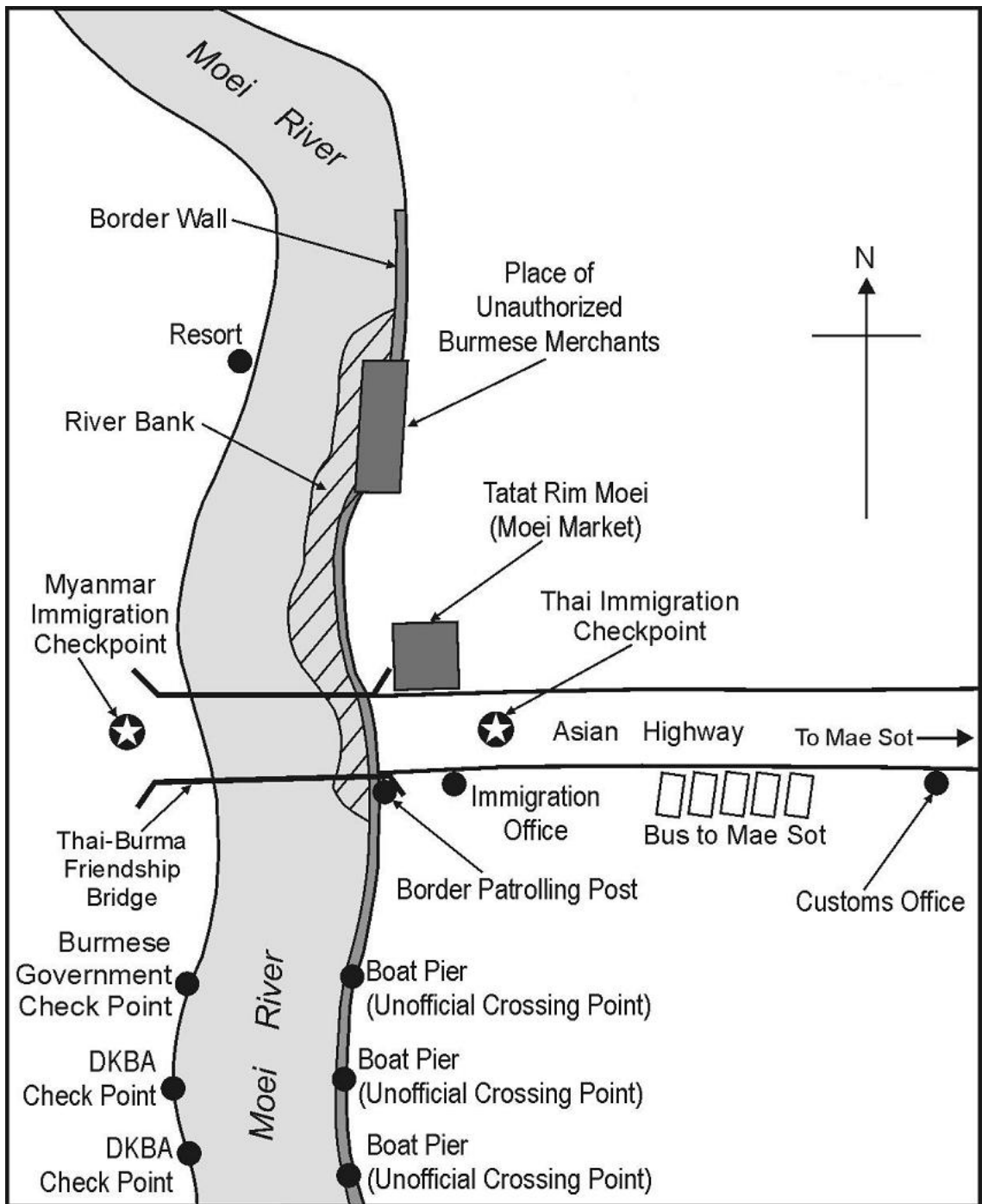
They are wasting money in useless things. They just spend this money because otherwise their next year budget will decrease. Outside people do not know the situations of border trade. This presentation only covers twenty five percent of it. Border trade is complex. Sometimes behind the scene or under the table, but other times in front of the scene or over the table, border trade operates. Outside people cannot see these complexities.

Ekamon’s critic continued, this time about state control: “What the government needs to do is to let local people trade in their own ways. When we need help, then they can assist us. But now the center tries to control us. It only disturbs us.”

Comforted in the ambience of the high-class hotel and indulging in coffee and cookies, I was present until the end of the presentation despite the seemingly cynical stance of the local participants. But their bold criticism against the BOT’s presentation impressed me and lingered in my thoughts for some time afterwards. This next section deals with what Ekamon calls, “behind the scene” and “under the

table” and its integration with “in front of the scene” and “over the table” in understanding border trade.

Map 4.1 Mae Sot-Myawaddy Border



Smugglers or free traders: Burmese vendors of the riverbank

A Snapshot of the riverbank at the border

“*Phi, supburi ao mai*” (Brother, do you want tobacco?), “*Whiskey ao mai*” (Do you want whiskey?) Whenever I went to the river bank of the Moei River, a band of Burmese vendors approached and surrounded my motorbike, enticing me to buy contraband items, especially cigarettes and liquors. It took much energy and time to get away from them. These vendors are stationed under the Thai-Burma Friendship Bridge and wait for passers-by. Interestingly and paradoxically enough, border patrol soldiers are also stationed amongst them. The soldiers do not seem to care about those unauthorized merchants selling smuggled goods at all. In that vicinity, one can see the formal border market named “Talat Rim Moei (Moei Market).” The landscape of the river bank dramatically shows the ironical but stable juxtaposition between the smugglers, the soldiers and the formal market.

If one successfully keeps away from the band of Burmese merchants and goes farther along the river bank to the north, one is overwhelmed by more unauthorized merchants. The landscape of the border is dominated by these merchants and other people such as beggars, scavengers, Thai soldiers, domestic tourists, Western tourists, and so on. Especially on weekends, this area is full of people not only from Mae Sot, but from all parts of Thailand. Items that the unauthorized merchants sell include garlic, chili, onion, crab, shrimp, dried fish, sunglasses, souvenir items, and so forth, while Talat Rim Moei displays electronic goods, confectionary, wood souvenirs, guitars, gems, and clothes.

It is not uncommon for resting soldiers to just nonchalantly observe these Burmese merchants. Some soldiers converse with them under the sun-blocking tent. Apart from

the mundane inertia of the soldiers at the riverbank, some special mission groups make sporadic visits to the place. One afternoon when I went to the riverbank, I saw a group of high-ranking military officers and civil servants in uniform get off their deluxe cars to make an on-site inspection of the riverbank. Among the hundreds of tourists and shoppers constituting the ethnoscape of the place, this group of people was an intimidating sight to the rest of the people there, especially the unauthorized Burmese traders. I observed what they would do with them. Would they arrest and expel the merchants to the Burmese side? No, they just walked along the riverbank without taking any action and left in no time.

After that, I approached some Burmese merchants and asked, “Why do you think the Thai officers came here?” “*Ma thiyaw* (an excursion)” she said. For the merchants, the inspection was considered as “an excursion,” nothing serious. They were not threatened by the appearance of those high-ranking state officers. Then I happened to talk to a Thai soldier who was positioned in Tak Provincial district. He was off duty and was spending his holiday on the border. He did not seem to regard the landscape of the border as encroached upon by the others. For him, the presence of the unauthorized traders was natural and accepted rather than problematic. He did not have a sharp idea of a territorial sovereignty which must be protected at the border.

Withi chiwit (way of life)

What does the Customs Office think of the unauthorized merchants? I was compelled to discover the reaction of the Office, whose main mission is to prohibit smuggling and arrest those selling smuggled goods. The office is on the way to the border beside the Asian Highway. The big board indicating the monthly export-import volume hung on the wall. The Chief Officer was on the second floor. I enquired about

certain general and specific issues regarding border trade. Among these, I enquired about the presence of the riverbank traders. I asked him whether he imposed taxes on them and why he did not expel them. He replied: “They do not pay any tax and even rent to us. If we take action against them, they just run away. When we leave they come back. We cannot capture them. They are free traders engaging in trade in the so-called free trade area of the river bank.”

During my follow-up research in December 2005, I went to the Customs Office again to collect some data about border trade. This time the Chief Officer was absent due to his trip to China with other important officials such as *nay amphoe* and the chairman of the Tak Chamber of Commerce.⁸⁰ I met the Vice Chief Officer instead. I raised similar questions regarding the riverbank merchants. He replied: “It is *withi chiwit* (way of life). It is also like a traditional thing. We just allow them to do that because this is minimal and crucial for their life. What we do at the moment is for the number of these merchants to not increase.”

Description of them as “free traders” and their activities as *withi chiwit* problematizes the conventional view of them as violators of state law and illegal encroachers of the state border. Rather, they are real free traders who do not pay taxes and cross the border freely without much intervention from the state, sometimes subverting state control. The state is unable to place them under control, because their mobility nullifies the state’s authoritative practices.

Withi chiwit, in other words, signifies that their activities are rather “indigenous” and are deeply embedded in the place. Smuggling is a normal and legitimate

⁸⁰ While I was in Mae Sot, delegates of Dehong city in Yunnan Province of China visited and stayed in Mae Sot on 14-15 June 2005 in order to negotiate an sister-city agreement between Mae Sot and Dehong. I was invited to the dinner reception. In December 2005, delegates of Mae Sot led by the Tak Chamber of Commerce made a return visit to Dehong.

economic activity in its own right. They do not agree with the dividing criteria between legal import and smuggling which the state imposes.

As Donnan and Wilson (1999: 88) mentions with regard to smuggling, prostitution and undocumented migration,

They ignore, contest and subvert state power. They challenge state attempts to control the behaviour of its citizens and subjects, to impose a morality, to regulate the movement of people and flow of commodities, and to define what are and what are not marketable goods. They sometimes force the state to rethink and change its policies. Though doubly peripheralised by being on the margins of the economy as well as on the edges of the state, border prostitution, undocumented migration and smuggling strike at the centre of political power, flouting state authority and even threatening to undermine it.

Donnan and Wilson (ibid) go on to mention that at the same time, they are rarely revolutionary and they do not seek to overthrow the state because “in some sense their existence depends upon it and, in particular, on the borders which the state seeks to establish and uphold.” They could not be sustained without these borders. We could say that the border and the smugglers exist in a symbiotic relationship. *Withi chiwit* is grounded in the intimate and symbiotic relationships between the unauthorized Burmese merchants and the border. An attempt to shed light on their commercial activities only with the measure of state-sanctioned legality hardly gives a deep understanding of these intimate and symbiotic relationships between borderlanders and the border.

Embodiment of the border

At first, they were stationed in the islet of the Moei River.⁸¹ The process of building the wall to prevent floods along the Thai side of the riverbank began in early April 2005 when I was conducting field research. I was upset with the concrete wall in the initial building process because it seemingly appeared to block the Burmese vendors on the pretext of blocking floods. Moreover, the ferroconcrete building which stretched in the early building stage along the riverbank totally mismatches the landscape of the border, reflecting an abuse of the environment by the state. I wondered how the vendors would survive in the face of this blocking wall. I rode my motorbike to the border as often as possible to see the vendors' reaction to the wall in the final stages of my field research. The wall was being raised step by step but it was still possible to climb over the wall to reach them in the islet. By the time I left Mae Sot in July, there were still people crossing over the knee-high wall to purchase products. Some vendors also crossed over the wall and encountered customers on the Thai side. While I was absent in Mae Sot, I was curious about the riverbank situations.

When I revisited Mae Sot in December 2005, I hastily went to the border. I was relieved to see that the complete form of the wall was not as inharmonious with the landscape of the border as I had expected. People conveniently strolled along the path on the wall equipped with benches and lamps. What struck me most was the new formation in the grouping patterns of the vendors. Now they were positioned beside the path along the wall. They built their new stalls with wood along the path to meet the height of the wall. Some of them were positioned inside the path. They resiliently appropriated the new building for themselves. The border was packed with many

⁸¹ Initially the islet was in the middle of the River without any land connection to either side of the riverbank. However, during the process of building the Friendship Bridge, the islet became contiguous with the Thai side of the riverbank. Subsequently, the Burmese people exploited the land for cultivating crops and setting up vending stalls (Maung 2002: 113; Bangkok Post 11 April 2005). Some Burmese also built makeshift houses.

people and the Burmese vendors enjoyed more tourists and customers than in the past. They cling to the border no matter how the state attempts to change the landscape of the border. As Flynn mentions (1997: 319) in the case of the Shabe border residents of West Africa who claim that “We are the border!” to maintain their freedom of movement and economic opportunities through smuggling against the controlling practices of the state, the Burmese vendors embody the border, subverting the external force’s detaching practices imposed between them and the border. Their deep placement with the border over time enables them to transcend imminent projects such as the wall which blocks them from the border. As Van Schendel (2005b: 61) mentions, “Their power is based on a detailed knowledge of topography, social fields, and overlapping scales that allows objects and persons to navigate the border safely.”

Smuggled goods and smugglers as part of the border economy

The number of riverbank merchants is estimated to be around a hundred.⁸² They arrive in the Thai side as early as 6 am and go back to Myawaddy around 6 pm. Their border-crossing is not standardized: some people cross via the Bridge, while others cross by boat. Though they do not pay any tax to Thai authorities, they pay some taxes on the Burmese side. According to them, they usually pay 100 kyat per person and 150 to 200 kyat separately for goods, depending on the size. In addition, in the riverbank, I observed that they paid twenty baht to rent a big sun-blocking parasol from the Thais. As the price of the parasol is over 500 baht, they cannot afford to buy it. Some shrewd Thai locals benefit from this parasol rental business.

Goods that they deal with are from various areas in Burma: fresh and dried fishes are from Moulmein; dried chilies, tobaccos and alcohols are from Rangoon; fresh

⁸² This figure is from my own observation and various talks with riverbank merchants. However, a report of Bangkok Post (11 April 2005) estimates 200 people.

vegetables are from Myawaddy; and sunglasses and rings are made in China but arrive through Rangoon.

These goods are not only traded at the riverbank but also in inner parts of the town. The riverbank market is firmly integrated into Mae Sot's economy. It is like a springboard for Burmese goods. From the riverbank, Burmese goods move to town markets, notably the central market. Many Burmese agricultural products and dried fishes at the central market come from the riverbank merchants. There exist trading chains between the riverbank and the town markets. Smuggled goods, not unlike normal goods, advance and spread into the very center as well as other parts of the town.

Some individual Thai locals, though not merchants, are loyal customers. They ride to the border to buy goods at cheap prices. For example, here the price of onion per kg is around ten baht, which is cheaper by two to five baht than in the central market. The prices of other goods per kg in the riverbank market are as follows: twenty five baht for garlic; one hundred baht for dried shrimps; one hundred baht for crabs; and 318 baht for king prawns. My wife and I also sometimes bought fresh crabs and prawns from them. Many of my local Thai informants frequently went to the border to acquire what they need. When local friends prepared a farewell party for us, we enjoyed lavish dishes of crab acquired from the riverbank market.

My frequent visits to the riverbank and subsequent efforts to approach them led to the development of cordial relationships between us. They were never insidious smugglers that the state labeled them as. Rather, they are "normal" merchants constituting the economic landscape of the town and the borderland. I heard some personal stories when I built up personal relationships with them. Most of the riverbank merchants are Muslims. Ali has been doing business here for almost six

years, and had worked in Malaysia before. He wanted to go to Malaysia again but has decided to stay here because he does not want to separate from his wife and three children. Hlaing Zaw had worked in a factory in Nakhonsawan for four years before he began to sell sunglasses, rings, and other kinds of souvenirs here seven years ago. His mother is staying in Um Phiem Mai Camp but he does not want to stay there due to the limited freedom of movement. Many of them have their family members in Myawaddy though they are originally from various places such as Rangoon, Arakan and Moulmein. The fact that they are Muslims gives a glimpse into their intimate relationships with Burmese merchants in the town markets. In practice, Ali often makes visits to the central market of the town for various commercial or personal reasons.

When I asked the riverbank merchants about the intervention of the authorities, they told me that they did not have serious problems. What worries them more is the amount of money they get rather than threats from Thai authorities. In other words, to them, matters of economic gain come before rhetorical intimidation. Beyond the discourse of state intervention, the border is their living environment where they pursue their livelihoods. It explains their stable and persistent presence along the border despite the stark existence of state agencies.

Plate 4.4 Riverbank Merchants before the Construction of the Wall



Plate 4.5 At the Outset of Building the Wall



Plate 4.6 The Wall in the Building Process



Plate 4.7 The Complete Form of the Wall and the Merchants



Plate 4.8 The Complete Form of the Wall and the Merchants



Border-crossing of goods

What perplexed me in terms of the border-crossing of goods at the initial stage of my field research was that the movement of goods by boat was considered normal and part of the trading patterns in Mae Sot, unlike my assumption that the Bridge was the sole medium whereby bilateral trade was generated and continued. This led me to raise a question: why does this pattern, which existed during the period of black market operation, continue at the present time given that the two states of Thailand and Burma seem to dominate border trade? Is it the long-lasting residual of the black markets?

There are several reasons that account for the unofficial cross-border movements. They are mainly related to the Burmese government's policies and management of trade and border politics amid long-existing people's way of life which is rooted within a close and autonomous relationship to the border.

In the late 1980s, the Burmese government initiated the open door policy and subsequently developed Myawaddy as a point for bilateral trade with Thailand in an attempt to officiate trading patterns by replacing the black markets along the border. The Thai-Burma Friendship Bridge, which was built in 1997, was an offspring of these endeavors. Indeed, the Bridge has been used as an important passing point since then.

However, the government policy was not a full-scale open door policy. As an underdeveloped country, Burma needed to protect some industrial sectors for their own development. Thus, it was imperative to restrict some imported items. At the same time, Burma was sanctioned, on the ground of the violation of human rights, by other countries, notably by the USA. Based on these sanctions, the export of goods from these countries to Burma is restricted.

These circumstances led to the scarcity of some goods which ordinary Burmese need in their daily lives. Those items include seasoning powder (*ajinomoto*), beverages (notably coca-cola), biscuits, chewing gum, cakes, wafers, chocolates, canned food, rice noodles, liquor, beer, tobacco, fresh fruits, plastic products, and other restricted items.⁸³ These goods enter into Burma, not passing through the Bridge but passing through boat piers. Interesting enough, the export of these items from the Thai side is well recorded and legalized by the Mae Sot Customs Office, while the import of these items is unofficial and is not legalized by Burmese customs authorities.

⁸³ The list of items was acquired from the Tak Chamber of Commerce and the Mae Sot Customs Office.

Here we see the ironic integration between the legal/official in the Thai side and the illegal/unofficial in the Burmese side.

As a result, it witnessed a parallel development in trade patterns: while on the one hand the Bridge has become an important passage-way, on the other hand border-crossing by boat has sustained a substantial portion of trading volume. In addition, people who are engaging in border trade do not want customs officials to be involved in their trading activities. It is mainly because they do not want to bear taxes on trading items. Ordinary borderlanders used to retain autonomous trading methods, and even now they want to continue their *withi chiwit* against the Burmese state authorities.

In general, it is estimated by many local traders and Customs officials that more than sixty percent of the export volume goes to the Burmese side by boat, and around fifty percent of import volume comes to the Thai side by boat too.

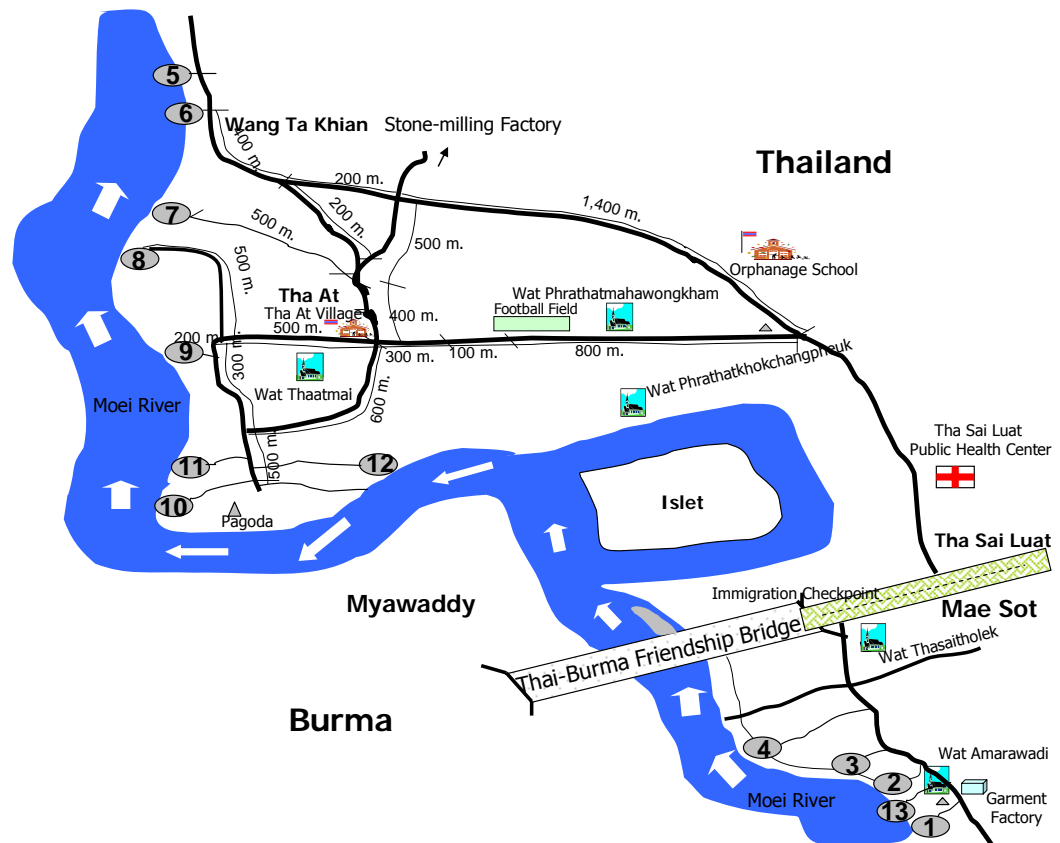
It is impossible for the Mae Sot Customs Office to fully regulate the cross-border movement of goods, given the geographical formation of the porous border and the limited capacity of the Office where only thirty five officials are in charge of three provinces – Tak, Kamphengphet and Sukhothai. However, the export volume from Thailand to Burma is relatively well recorded because exported items are not taxed so as to promote export. Thus, Thai exporters in general appear to conform to the checking activities of the Office. Therefore, most of the items that are moved from the piers of the Moei River on the Thai side are well tracked in the records of the Office. In contrast, the Customs Office imposes taxes on imported items – thirty percent of Customs tax and seven percent of VAT, depending on the types of product. It is said that the Thai importers are very reluctant to record those items, and the Customs Office is not able to keep a close surveillance on them.

Moreover, the actions of the Customs Office are not consistent, as the following incident shows. According to a report by the Irrawaddy (10 August 2004), officials of the Mae Sot Customs Office seized 309 sacks of Burmese rice that were smuggled into the Thai side. Sometimes, Burmese rice traders on the border pay off Thai officials to allow contraband rice to enter the country. Thai traders then carry the contraband grain to the interior provinces. The report delivers a statement of a Burmese trader: “But sometimes they [customs officials] don’t take our money and seize our rice instead.” He goes on to complain that Thai authorities often seize Burmese rice at the river as it enters the country, but then allow Thai traders to transport the rice to the inner places of the country without any problems. According to him, “It is just to show that Customs is preventing the smuggling of Burmese rice into Thailand.” The incident demonstrates that the Customs Office’s actions of prohibiting smuggling are discursive and ritualistic. Also, it shows that categorization of “smuggled items” are negotiable and not very strict and that through this negotiation between traders and Customs officials these items can be integrated into the entire circulation system. Abraham and Van Schendel (2005: 8) make similar arguments that “state definitions of what is illicit are situational” and that “states themselves often find it hard to pinpoint the exact cutoff point between licit and illicit state trade.”

The Customs Office has been strengthening its engagement in border trade, though its actions are often inconsistent and at odds with local traders. When I interviewed the head officer of the Customs Office, he boasted that one of his main accomplishments was to build thirteen warehouses along the border to cater to the needs of traders for convenient logistics. But it also seemed to engage in tracking and

controlling the movement of items by building these warehouses. Local traders feel that this kind of engagement disturbs their autonomous trading methods.

Map 4.2 Locations of Thirteen Warehouses Built by the Mae Sot Customs Office



(Source: Mae Sot Customs Office)

Even though export and import records are not all about border trade, it is necessary to have a general understanding of the trade. Below, accounts of trading volumes are shown.

Table 4.1 Volumes of Export and Import through the Mae Sot Customs Office (2000-2005)

(Unit: Baht)

Year	Export	Import
2000	3,979,185,004.72	677,666,652.29
2001	3,155,117,602.21	1,664,686,375.62
2002	2,763,612,084.74	540,037,735.83
2003	5,733,374,016.73	473,640,618.76
2004	11,736,342,217.34	644,854,079.48
2005*	11,371,358,776.44	675,058,029.32

* From January to November of 2005
(Source: Mae Sot Customs Office 2006a)

As shown above, export volumes are much higher than import ones. It clearly vindicates the advancement made by the Thai industry. But it could be also interpreted that imported items are so evasive that the authorities cannot keep track of them.

In terms of the export volume from Mae Sot, recent years have seen a massive increase compared to the year 2000. However, with regard to imports into Mae Sot, though it has been growing since 2003, it does not show a considerable improvement compared to a few years before.

Mae Sot's central position in border trade with Burma when compared with other border towns was enormous. The total amount of Thai-Burmese border trade was worth 20 billion baht per year, with about half generated from the Mae Sot checkpoint and the rest from border-crossing points from Chiang Rai and Ranong Provinces, according to a report by Bangkok Post (20 October 2004). The table below shows Mae Sot's important position in border trade in comparison with other northern border towns.

Table 4.2 Comparison between Mae Sot and Other Border Towns in Northern Thailand in 2004

(Unit: million baht)

Town	Export	Import
Mae Sot	11,736.3	644.9
Mae Sariang	257.6	315.9
Mae Hong Son	25.1	190.4
Mae Sai	2,039.6	628.4

(Source: Bank of Thailand 2004: 10-11)

In terms of export, Mae Sot's position is conspicuous in comparison with other towns, while with regard to import, Mae Sai is close to Mae Sot. Previously Mae Sai used to be a major exporting place, together with Mae Sot.⁸⁴ But now the gap between Mae Sai and Mae Sot has widened tremendously.

Items mainly traded through Mae Sot are shown in the two tables below.

Table 4.3 Major Export Items through the Mae Sot Customs Office (October 2004 – September 2005)

Item	Unit	Amount (baht)
Seasoning powder	21,869.39 ton	1,003,068,519.68
Cooking oil	26,894.89 ton	694,747,324.72
Polyethylene for covering wire	12,102.08 ton	522,433,578.87
Cotton cloth	10,101,581.13 yard	303,915,854.38
Plastic powder	6,951.24 ton	278,361,725.93
Pure polyethylene	7,481.79 ton	269,773,317.41
Plastic pills/tablets	5,180.69 ton	252,339,687.09
Condensed milk	6,066.26 ton	234,449,262.42
Medicine	2,552,061 box	207,693,462.61
TV	40,150 set	188,650,379.00

(Source: Mae Sot Customs Office 2006b)

Table 4.4 Major Import Items through the Mae Sot Customs Office (October 2004 – September 2005)

⁸⁴ In 1994, export through Chiang Rai Province was 1,696.9 million baht while that passing through Tak Province was 2,057.9 million baht (UNESCAB 1997: 116). Chiang Rai Province has been witnessing a slow increase since then, whereas Tak Province has been surging in the export sector due to the expansion of Mae Sot throughout the years.

Item	Unit	Amount (baht)
Fresh crab	5,213.82 ton	202,212,440.43
Live cow	36,630 head	146,520,000.00
Fish	5,203.93 ton	115,346,780.31
Live buffalo	14,841 head	59,364,000.00
Dried fish maw	88.12 ton	43,685,927.00
Dried chili	1,025.88 ton	20,485,904.62
Bamboo	10,092.40 ton	19,766,584.00
Fresh shrimp	101.53 ton	19,032,489.66
Manufactured wood items (except teak)	2,146.72 ton	17,691,708.58
Powdered shellfish feed	842.40 ton	16,848,000.00

(Source: Mae Sot Customs Office 2006b)

The two tables above show some contrast between export and import items. The exported items include mainly consumer goods and industrial goods. In contrast, raw agricultural products and fishes are main items that Thailand imports from Burma. Interestingly enough, though seasoning powder is not allowed into Burma by the Burmese government, it comprises the largest portion among the imported items into Burma through Mae Sot. Plastic products banned by the Burmese government are ranked as major items too. Ironical though it may seem, this constitutes the actual operation of cross-border trade around Mae Sot. While these products are illicit/illegitimate import items on the Burmese side, these are seen as licit/legitimate export items from the Thai side. Passing-through by boat mediates the trading of these products. As mentioned before, we see integration of the official/legal in the Thai side and the unofficial/illegal in the Burmese side in border trade.

The ethnic political group, border politics and border trade

It is interesting to see that ethnic politics and the political development of Burma are very much involved in border trade. In the previous section, I mentioned that the policies and the management of the Burmese government are intimately related to border trade. What is more intriguing is that the government uses it as a “carrot” for ethnic groups, especially the DKBA, to sign ceasefire agreements. In return for collaborating with the government, the DKBA was allowed to be in charge of controlling some border-crossing points and extract some revenue from the taxation of goods and people. Among several piers they control, the nearest is several minutes’ walking distance from the Bridge. People crossing the Moei River through the piers have to pay around five hundred kyat. In addition to the movement of people, many imported and exported goods pass through these points.

The patron-client relationship between the DKBA and the Burmese government was initiated and strengthened during the time of former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt until he was ousted as a result of power struggles in October 2004. When he was in power, the DKBA received huge benefits from delivering Japanese used cars through its crossing points along the border. It was the sole party in charge of transporting those cars. Therefore, individuals and business partners who wanted to engage in the second-hand car business had to contact the DKBA and maintain good relationships with the group. One of my informants who was from Moulmein admitted that while she was doing the car business in Moulmein and the Three Pagoda Pass, it was impossible to run the business without contacting the DKBA.

The delivery operation scale of the used car by the DKBA was enormous. Thus, according to many local traders’ witnesses, during the heyday, huge numbers of cars passed through the River by boat on a daily basis. In addition to the Mae Sot point,

the Three Pagoda Pass was a major point of entry for cars making their way into Burma.

The DKBA was allowed to do other businesses as well. It makes money from logging, cattle and through collecting taxes from villagers. It is also assumed that the DKBA is involved in the drug trade (Thornton 2006: 72). All of these businesses were backed by the Burmese government. Major General of the DKBA Maung Chit Htoo admitted in Thornton's book (2006: 72), "We get support from the SPDC, they let us do business and use the roads for our bus services, boats, and tax gates."

Thai local exporters are aware of the political development on the other side of the border. They send their goods through the DKBA checkpoints. After going through the checking processes at the Mae Sot Customs Office, they bring their items to a boat pier. Then, the DKBA moves them to the Burmese side. After that, Burmese importers are taxed for the imported items and these goods are then carried into the inner areas of Burma. What struck me was that for the Thai local exporters, the DKBA was a normal partner in charge of some parts in their business affairs, especially in the shipment sector. The inclusion of the DKBA as a normal border trading partner problematizes the conventional image of the DKBA portrayed as a dangerous armed band that is always trying to instigate splits among the Karen. At the border, the DKBA is one of main collaborators that keep border trade active.

Even for the Mae Sot Customs Office, the DKBA is a regular partner too. The Office cannot avoid interactions with the group. My interview with the head officer of the Office revealed that the DKBA involvement constitutes a common landscape of border trade. It seemed that the building of warehouses, which he plays a very active part in, needs collaboration with the DKBA on the ground, because it was necessary

to have similar warehouse capacities at both sides of the border for efficient and optimal use.

Plate 4.9 Movement of Goods at a Boat Pier



(Source: Mae Sot Customs Office)

Plate 4.10 Movement of Goods at a Boat Pier



(Source: Mae Sot Customs Office)

Plate 4.11 Movement of Goods at a Boat Pier



(Source: Mae Sot Customs Office)

Plate 4.12 Movement of Goods through a DKBA Point



(Source: Mae Sot Customs Office)

Plate 4.13 Movement of Goods through a DKBA Point



(Source: Mae Sot Customs Office)

However, the ousting of Khin Nyunt on 19 October 2004 had a great impact on the border situations. I heard the news from an NGO worker that night. The next day, the Burmese in Mae Sot were excited and were talking about the incident. People's sentiments were divided. A Karen informant of mine expressed that he was happy since at least something had been changed at the top level of politics and that it would lead to splits within the military itself, which could eventually bring about democracy. The Thai locals were also very aware of this happening. My local Thai friends were passionate in their political analyses with discussions taking place at football fields and in their homes. Then Prime Minister Thaksin, who was in Mae Sot on 19 October 2004, cancelled his plan to visit Myawaddy and headed back to Bangkok. NGOs in Mae Sot held emergency meetings and calculated the foreseeable outcomes in relation to the refugees. For several days after the incident, the people of Mae Sot exchanged many rumors, prospects and analyses.

On 20 October 2004, I rode my motorbike to the border to see if there were any restrictions on the movement of people. There, I met a Burmese tour guide near the immigration check point who had guided me on my visit to Myawaddy a couple of months ago. I asked him if he was allowed to cross the Bridge after the incident. He replied bluntly, "No problem. No change even after the sacking of Khin Nyunt. People can cross the border as usual." As he mentioned, at the surface level, the border situations seemed to be normal. Unauthorized Burmese merchants were still selling contraband liquor and tobaccos and I did not get any sense of strengthening security. Small scale movement of goods and people was not affected.

However, the political impact on the overall border trade itself was noticeable, especially for the DKBA. It lost its business opportunities, notably the transportation of Japanese used cars that some staff of ousted Khin Nyunt granted. It was alleged

that one of the reasons for ousting him was the corruption which he was involved in (Bangkok Post 20 October 2004). While he was in power, especially whilst he was in charge of the Military Intelligence Service, like the case of the DKBA, he and his staff used border trade to implement policies against ethnic political groups such as the United Wa State Army. While he attempted to make ceasefire agreements with those ethnic political groups, he granted various business opportunities to them in return for these agreements. He and his men were accused of corruption in doing this mission. Many of Khin Nyunt's former staff and aides were arrested and put into custody not only in the Thailand-Burma border but also in the China-Burma border.⁸⁵

The scene of cars passing through the DKBA check points was no longer observed after that. Although the DKBA was still in charge of passing points, its revenue from border trade decreased heavily.

The removal of Khin Nyunt influenced the volume of export from Mae Sot. It is indicated in the below table.

Table 4.5 Monthly Export Volumes through the Mae Sot Customs Office from January 2004 to November 2005

(Unit: baht)

Month	2005	2004
January	1,197,743,381.04	748,778,599.65
February	1,466,015,733.35	811,954,235.71
March	1,368,204,295.84	983,303,899.01
April	1,022,498,947.49	874,571,824.36
May	966,688,009.80	1,060,129,740.02
June	1,023,909,205.25	1,061,915,690.97
July	726,271,761.61	1,052,872,974.68
August	697,691,974.09	1,164,748,712.99
September	864,300,646.60	1,120,671,745.87

⁸⁵ See Bangkok Post 20 October 2004, 24 October 2004, 27 October 2004, and 31 October 2004.

October	993,252,369.80	861,672,954.04
November	1,044,782,451.57	843,066,276.88
December		1,152,655,563.16
Total	11,371,358,776.44	11,736,342,217.34



(Source: Mae Sot Customs Office 2006a)

Before the incident, the export volume stabilized at the level of over 1 billion baht between May and September 2004. But in October and November, the volume saw a sudden decrease, most probably due to the unstable political situation in Burma.

The export volume recovered from December 2004 and increased until the early part of 2005. It might be interpreted that even though Burma saw a reshuffling of the cabinet, the basic open door policy continued. However, one can clearly recognize the abrupt fall of the volume during the third quarter of 2005, especially in August. At that time I was in Singapore and was initially unaware of the development. But on 30 August, I contacted my local Thai friend who engaged in exporting consumer goods to Burma through online chat programs. He revealed to me that his export volume was suffering because Burmese authorities checked all the cars and contents at three checkpoints on the way from Pa-an to Rangoon. After the downfall of Khin Nyunt, the Burmese government carried out anti-corruption campaigns intermittently with a specific focus to eradicate corruption related to border trade and customs offices in

Burma. The decrease in export volume from Thailand was due to this massive operation. After the operation, the volume began to recover.

In 2006, these campaigns were also conducted from time to time. On top of the ongoing anti-corruption campaigns against the customs-related matters, this year the Burmese government tightened import and export regulations to deal with rising inflation mainly due to the salary increase of government officers and soaring diesel prices. In these campaigns, at least twenty Burmese merchants, including the president of the Myawaddy Chamber of Commerce,⁸⁶ were reported to be arrested by Burmese officials. Consequently, export volume from May to July, according to news reports, slumped to 700 million baht a month.⁸⁷

What is the impact of political developments on the import volume? Compared to the export volume, the Khin Nyunt incident did not affect the import volume. However, the sluggish trend after the second quarter of 2005 explains the influence of the government's anti-corruption practices vividly.

Table 4.6 Monthly Import Volumes through the Mae Sot Customs Office from January 2004 to November 2005

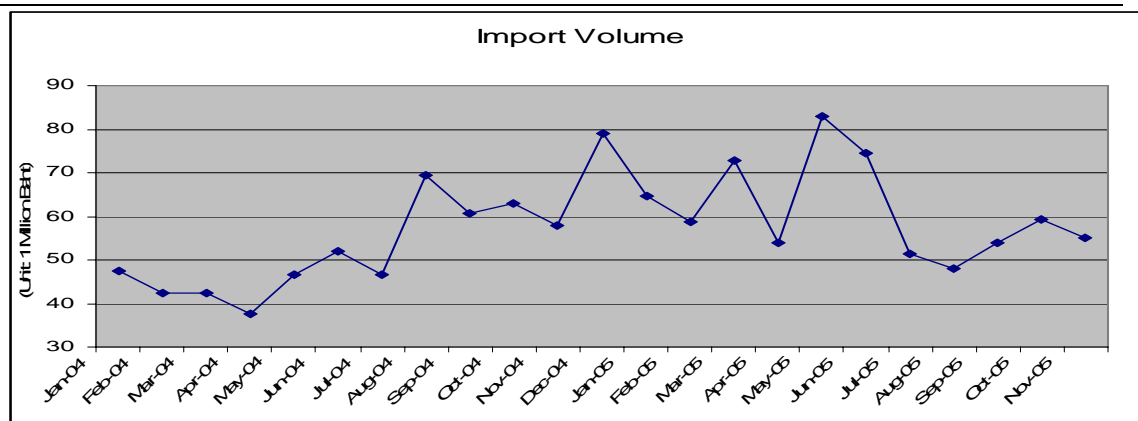
(Unit: baht)

Month	2005	2004
January	64,552,805.70	47,444,191.35
February	58,823,046.67	42,389,200.48
March	72,807,172.84	42,358,458.08
April	53,849,437.65	37,539,184.07
May	82,912,964.98	46,751,741.52
June	74,367,840.96	51,878,856.94
July	51,423,085.83	46,690,865.32
August	47,893,953.37	69,305,539.87

⁸⁶ I met her occasionally in Mae Sot during my fieldwork. I also met her in Myawaddy when I took part in the Thai-Myanmar Bicycle Project.

⁸⁷ See the reports of Bangkok Post 27 July 2006 and the Irrawaddy 22 June 2006 and 10 August 2006.

September	53,910,627.92	60,737,851.14
October	59,408,549.61	62,975,950.65
November	55,108,543.79	57,896,237.01
December		78,886,003.05
Total	675,058.029.32	644,854,079.48



(Source: Mae Sot Customs Office 2006a)

On the one hand, the change in trading volume seems to demonstrate the power of the state in engaging in border trade. However, on the other hand, the fluctuation of the trade shows that the Burmese state has yet to achieve strong control on a permanent basis to place border trade under its reign. Whether it is the case of the former or the latter, it reflects the correlation between border trade and political developments. Thus, this incident suggests that a fuller understanding of border trade requires a consideration of the politics of the state.

However, this consideration should not play down the local autonomy of border trade. The arrest of the Burmese merchants and the restrictions on trade are nothing new. A Thai trader told me that his customers had often been arrested but they were released after bribing the Burmese local authorities. At the individual level, they can carry on their business by evading the regulating actions of the state through various means.

Moreover, the fact that the import volume has not been affected much by these series of actions demonstrates that the items that have a relatively strong base for local

level consumption maintain stable transactions, aside from the fact that import volume is too negligible to be affected in comparison to the more voluminous exports.

Understanding the border and border trade

The stories of unauthorized riverbank Burmese merchants, cross-border movement of goods and the relations between politics and border trade that this section has dealt with demonstrate a fuller picture of the border and border trade. It goes beyond the official notion of the border where security issues are dominant, and also beyond the conventional notion of border trade where the focuses are on the official bilateral transactions between states and on various kinds of statistics. The border in the vicinity of Mae Sot contains the paradoxical coexistence of the informal/illegal and the formal/legal, which constitutes the socio-political landscape of the area. On the one hand, borderlanders root their lives in deep and mobile relationships with the border, while on the other hand the state imposes symbolic meanings on the border as the marker of state sovereignty by stationing state agencies. The border contains these two patterns of engagement. The cognitive map of the border as imagined by the borderlanders does not correspond to the physical map that the state draws (Van Schendel 2005a: 375-377; 2005b: 55). Thus, it might be expected that there could be many kinds of tensions between borderlanders and the state in appropriating the border for their own purposes. In fact, the arrests and confiscation of unauthorized moving people and goods take place, which could be interpreted as the exercise of state power in the border. However, borderlanders are not passive actors as conventionally described. As Van Schendel notices (2005b: 56), “Often, state practices are ignored by borderlanders who continue to scale their world in ways that do not coincide with state borders.” As seen in the case of their adaptability to the

building structure along the riverbank, their rootedness to the border is strong. They transcend the dividing boundary between illegality and legality in pursuing their livelihoods.

This kind of transcendence is observable in the cross-border movement of goods too. Banned items constitute sizeable portions in border trade and the ethnic military band as a trading partner play a part in the trade. The written and official boundary dividing allowed and disallowed items is negotiable and flexible. Moreover, smuggling is a normal part of border trade and is integrated into the broader circulation system. Smuggling is not necessarily portrayed as insidious, dangerous or contaminated as the state has labeled it to be. Even the state at times is inconsistent in dealing with smuggling.

This section has shown that border trade contains political issues beyond mere statistics. It reflects the imminent political situations of border politics. The understanding of border trade is incomplete without the consideration of border politics. Especially in the Thailand-Burma borderland, where ethnic political groups are present and lots of conflicts, compliances, and negotiations between the government and ethnic groups take place, the consideration of border trade in the context of political developments is very crucial.

CONCLUSION: ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF OTHERS

This chapter has dealt with the economy of Mae Sot, with a specific focus on the town market and border trade. In terms of the central market of the town, it has described and analyzed the participation of others. Also, it has touched on the issue of legality that is nullified and appropriated by the participants. The participation of others is vividly observable at the border. Riverbank merchants selling untaxed or

smuggled items constitute a prominent part of the economyscape of the border. It does not connote legally authorized or sanctioned modes of economic participation. Though they are unauthorized, their contribution in illegal but regular ways is a base for sustaining the economy and the trade of the town.⁸⁸ The starkest example of the contribution of others would be the case of the DKBA. Though it is considered to be an insidious group, the DKBA plays some part in making border trade possible.

In fact, the contributions of others are pervasive in almost every part of the economic sector, including factories, shops and even the domestic arenas. But the focus of this chapter has been confined to the areas of the market and border trade. Industrial areas must not be dismissed. However, the industrial contribution of others has somewhat different features in comparison to the market and border trade. The development and expansion of the industrial sector in Mae Sot was mainly initiated and sponsored by the Thai state. This mass participation of foreign labor takes on organized and collective patterns, though not all. Chapter 7 will engage in this issue in dealing with the state's massive involvement in development projects in the town and its impact on the town.

The contribution of others that this chapter has addressed takes on rather indigenous patterns with intimate relationships to the living environments. Legal enforcement hardly breaks down this kind of indigenous relationships between borderlanders and the border as a living place as we have seen in the case of the riverbank merchants who embrace the border as the living world. Even the state has difficulties disrupting their living environment. This chapter has demonstrated that the

⁸⁸ I do not necessarily mean that informal or illegal ways of doing economic activities are only observable in border areas. Other areas such as big cities accommodate informal or illegal patterns of economic activities. However, in those areas informal parts seem to be confined to low-class or less-privileged groups of people as a means of survival strategies while in border areas informal economic participation is not confined to certain groups. In border areas, the informal pattern of economic participation is prevalent, regardless of class and ethnicity.

indigenous ways in which others have participated even nullifies and transcends the dividing line between the illegal/informal and the legal/formal.

CHAPTER 5

MIGRANT SCHOOLS: EMERGENCE OF EDUCATION INSTITUTION OF OTHERS

This chapter is concerned with migrant schools in Mae Sot. As mentioned, what distinguishes Mae Sot from other border towns and the inner parts of Thailand is the noticeable presence of migrant institution in the form of migrant schools. There are more than thirty migrant schools accommodating over 3,000 migrant students. With a sizeable establishment of the migrant education system in Mae Sot and its vicinity, we need to consider the roles played by the schools in constituting the lives of those in the town.

In conventional approaches to the study of migration and migrants' adaptation to host countries, education is often analyzed to offer insights as to how minority students adapt to the educational environments of the host countries (e.g. Eldering *et al.* 1989; Hien 1999). Studies on how the minority population makes use of education as a strategy for upward social mobility in host societies have also drawn much attention (e.g. Moldenhawer 2005). What is common in these studies is that they revolve around the migrants' education within the educational settings of host countries. Thus, only the education system of the host countries was regarded as a field where they pursue education. What makes the case of Mae Sot different from these cases is that the migrants in the town have their own educational institutions and therefore maintain their own schooling systems. Therefore, they do not necessarily need to adapt or conform to the education system of the host society. Migrant education as a regular form of education system substantially and explicitly runs alongside the Thai education system in the town.

The emergence of migrant schools also makes differences in social patterns between the present and the past. The operation of these schools did not just spark the beginning of an education system for the migrants but the creation of a form of migrant institution with systematic operations and regular participation. In other words, the settling type of others became more regularized and organized as a result of the establishment of these schools. What needs to be stressed is that the regularization and organization of the migrants' education and their lives in general did not come from the state's controlling endeavors but were driven by the migrants themselves, with the help of international relief organizations.

Another point observed is that this institution is not based on the legal and formal structures laid down by the state. Although informal and illegal, migrant schools operate on a persistent and regular basis. Therefore, institution-building does not necessarily require the adherence to the laws and regulations laid down by the state. In conventional understanding, the establishment of institutions is often linked with recognition and authorization from the state or other authorized parties. However, the case of migrant schools in Mae Sot demonstrates that institution-building and its operation are possible without recourse to state sponsorship. We could call the type of migrant schools in Mae Sot "non-state informal institution" which is run by non-citizens. However, the operation of migrant schools had become so prevalent to the extent that the state needed to recognize them as a formal institution. Hence, we see the transition of an informal migrant educational institution to a formal one.

This chapter would first show the overall features of migrant schools. Here, the basic operation of the schools would be mentioned. Second, it will deal with their relationships with partners, such as refugee camps, NGOs and Thai locals. Finally, it

shall deal with the state's recent engagement with migrant schools. Here, I will show the changing status of migrant education in Mae Sot.

GENERAL FEATURES OF MIGRANT SCHOOLS

There are several contributing factors to the establishment of migrant schools. First, political activists had played a great role. After moving to Mae Sot in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, they expanded their scope of activities beyond democratic movement in order to accommodate the welfare of Burmese migrants. Here, although Dr. Cynthia was not considered a political leader, her role was pivotal in creating migrant schools and the migrant clinic. After establishing the Mae Tao Clinic in the late 1980s, she turned her attention to educational issues for migrant children in the early 1990s. Thus, an adjunct migrant school was established near the Clinic. Since then, she has been directly or indirectly involved in setting up other migrant schools in the town. She played a big role in organizing the BMWEC which was the umbrella organization of migrant schools. Her high personal profile became a symbol of human rights at the border and attracted international attention for the protection of the welfare of the Burmese migrants in Mae Sot.

Second, migrants' lives became related to the emergence of the schools. Burmese migrants found it relatively easy to bring their children with them. In other countries, whether or not they are given legal status, it would be very difficult for low-skilled migrant workers to bring their children not only because the host countries do not allow it, but also because they cannot afford the overall welfare of their children in foreign countries. For example, in Singapore, most low-skilled foreign workers are single-stayers because state regulations do not permit the entry of their children. In

South Korea where there are a lot of unauthorized migrants, it is very hard to see family-units. In contrast, this is possible in Mae Sot mainly because of the geographical proximity between their hometowns and Mae Sot, easy border-crossing and relatively low cost of living. This family unit migration contributed to the engendering of the migration compounds all over Mae Sot. To maintain family lifestyles, they need a house even if it is a make-shift one. Eventually, these houses became clustered in certain places, resembling a village. Migrant-living based on family-unit settlement and migrant compounds laid favorable conditions for the establishment of migrant schools. As I have mentioned earlier, these migrant schools played other roles such as administering and uniting migrants beyond educational matters.

Third, without financial assistance and participation from international organizations or individuals, these schools would not have been sustainable. Even though the Burmese activists initiated these educational endeavors, it was foreign contribution that sustained the schools' operation through the provision of salary for teachers, food for students and building of proper infrastructure. Therefore, few migrant schools could stand on their own feet without foreign aid. In some cases, the creation of migrant schools was exploited just to extract financial assistance from innocent foreigners. I observed during my stay that proposals for the setting up of local NGOs and small-scale migrant schools were becoming more popular among migrant leaders and refugees partly for the purpose of material extraction from foreign partners. Assuming that their own income is either limited or absent, these external financial sources would comprise a significant part of their sustenance.

Last, the part played by Thai locals in the operation of these schools should not be dismissed. Though their contribution in the form of financial assistance and other

practical aid is much lower compared to international parties, their part is very critical in matters such as providing or renting out land and buildings for schools. For example, some migrant schools are accommodated within local mosques, whereas a Thai Karen rented out his land to a Karen migrant school. Recently, Thai relief agencies also became involved in migrant education matters together with international parties.

Present state

There are over 30 migrant schools with about 3,000 to 5,000 students enrolled. The difficulty in attaining accurate figures stems from various factors. The town has witnessed a trend of the frequent establishment of new migrant schools and with many foreign givers coming forward to help on an individual basis, this has led to the growth of many small-scale migrant schools and to the difficulty in grasping exact figures on the number of the migrant schools. Also, student enrolment is difficult to estimate as their attendance is inconsistent, depending on the level of organization and operation of the schools. During my stay in Mae Sot, according to the chairperson of the BMWEC, the number of schools and students was around 30 and 3,000 respectively. However, according to a recent report (Guinard 2006: 7), in Mae Sot and its vicinity in the 2005-2006 academic year, about 5,000 children were enrolled in 43 Burmese migrant schools with 350 teachers.

However, despite the growing number of schools, a significant number of migrant children are still not enrolled in the education system. A research conducted by the National Health Education Committee (NHEC),⁸⁹ which is an umbrella organization

⁸⁹ For detailed information on the NHEC, see the website (<http://www.nhecburma.org>).

for the health and education of ethnic nationalities and democratic group, revealed that in 2004, out of 10,000 migrant children, only fifty-five percent were attending migrant schools while five percent were studying in Thai schools.⁹⁰ Forty percent of these children were estimated to not attend any school (Guinard 2006: 7).

A list of schools which are relatively well recognized and for which information is available is shown below.

Table 5.1 Migrant Schools in Mae Sot and Its Vicinity

Name ⁹¹	No. of Students	No. of Teachers	Grade Offered (up to)	Supporting Partner ⁹²	Location
Hsa Thoo Lei	237	16	6 th	BMWEC	Hua Fai
BMSOH	74	5	8 th	OSI	Mae Pa
Paramee	150	7	5 th	RENGO	Mae Pa
Phi Chit	70	2	6 th	Canadian group	Hua Fai
NLD LA Youth School	26	2	4 th	NLD branches of Japan and Korea	Near Wat Don Chai
Moe Ma Kha	46	4	Child care	Dr. Cynthia	Islam Community
Life Page	170	3	6 th	APEBC, SAW	Thung Thong
Ahnar Ga Pan Khin	64	3	2 nd	No partner yet	Ansua
Nursery and Day Care	102	7	Child care	Dr. Cynthia	Mae Tao Clinic

⁹⁰ During my fieldwork, I found out that some migrants sent their children to Thai schools. They told me that their children could receive Thai education up to the level of sixth standard (*prathom* level). Close connections with the top management of certain Thai schools such as the headmaster enabled their children to receive this education. Recently the Thai government offered more favorable opportunities for migrant children, regardless their legal status to attend Thai schools up to high school level (*mathayom* level). I will discuss this issue later.

⁹¹ Acronyms for school names are as follows: BMSOH (Boarding Middle School for Orphans and Helpless Youths); CDC (Children's Development Center); and KYLMTC (Karen Youth Leadership and Management Training Center).

⁹² Acronyms for the partners not mentioned earlier, including some information about their activities, are as follows: OSI (Open Society Institute, the USA); RENGO (Japanese Trade Union Confederation); APEBC (Assistance Program For Education Of Burmese Children, Burmese exiles and Korean activists in Korea organized this group with its base in Korea); SAW (Social Action for Women, it is a Burmese NGO with a base in Mae Sot); CCFD (Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development, France); and NCCM (National Catholic Commission on Migration, it is a Thai NGO)

Hleh Bee	80	4	4 th	BMWEC	Buakhun
CDC	203	18	6 th	Dr. Cynthia	Thasayluat
KYLMTC	30	6	Further study program	KYO, CCFD	Mae Pa
Elpis Center	150	5	4 th	Filipino group	Mae Pa
Say Ta Nar	73	2	4 th	APEBC	Thung
Boy Ka La	43	2	1 st	BMWEC	Pu Ter
Nyaung Kyo Met	58	2	6 th	NCCM	Near Asian High Way
Our School	124	6	6 th	NCCM	Islam Community
Pyo Kin School	104	5	6 th	NCCM	Near UNHCR
48 Km	128	3	6 th	NCCM	Phop Phra
New Blood School	189	3	6 th	NCCM	Nong Bua
St. Peter	82	3	6 th	NCCM	Phop Phra
Dek Kam Phra	65	5	6 th	NCCM	Wangtakhian

(Source: Fieldwork and NCCM documents)

Among these schools, schools such as Hsa Thoo Lei, Nursery and Day Care, CDC and KYLMTC are under Karen leadership. The chairperson of the BMWEC, who is a Karen, is in charge of Hsa Thoo Lei. Therefore, the school plays a central role in organizing the inter-school activities and external financial assistance is channeled through this school, witnessing frequent appearances of foreign individuals and groups. The facilities in these Karen schools such as the building, learning materials and computer equipment are relatively better than others.

Though migrant schools receive external financial assistance, the school management is usually under the leadership of the Burmese. As I have mentioned, we can find former political activists running many of these schools. Notably, NLD LA as an organization runs its own school with the help from overseas branches of the NLD from Japan and Korea. Former members of ABSDF's are also active in running the schools. Life Page school was established and run by members of the group.

Religious groups are also notably involved in running these schools. Filipino missionaries run Elpis Center in collaboration with a local Thai church. They are

directly in charge of school management unlike other schools where they are managed is under the Burmese leadership. Recently the NCCM, a domestic Catholic NGO, has also become more active. Apart from operating several schools, it also seeks to bridge the migrants and the state authorities in educational matters.

Schools such as Moe Ma Kha, Our School and Pyo Kin School are accommodated within Muslim migrant compounds and mosques. However, the source of finance for these schools had been from Dr. Cynthia, a devout Christian, and the NCCM. I heard complaints from a priest of the NCCM on a Muslim school which he felt had focused too much on teaching Muslim subjects such as Arabic and Quran rather than general subjects. He joked, “Ironically the Catholic organization promotes Muslim education.”

Teachers

On average, a teacher takes care of twenty students. Though the ratio of the teachers to the students appears reasonable, teachers of smaller schools are required to handle many other duties such as administrative management, transportation and food arrangement for students and fund raising. Teachers are involved in the affairs of migrant living compounds as “leaders.” Thus, matters such as sanitation and health require their attention too.

The backgrounds of teachers vary. Some of them are former political activists; some came from Burma through the recommendation of friends and relatives; and some of them are from refugee camps.

The wages of teachers ranges from 1,000 and 3,000 baht, depending on the schools and their seniority. Teachers of Hsa Thoo Lei School usually receive between 2,000

and 3,000 baht, while teachers in small-scale and Muslim schools get around 1,000 baht. Moreover, the wage is irregular especially for teachers in small-sized or less-recognized schools. A teacher of a migrant school located within a mosque told me during my visit to the school in January 2005 that for several months a Japanese organization had supported teachers' wages, paying out 1,100 baht per teacher. However, it had ceased its contributions in January 2005. Sometimes his friends gave 500 to 600 baht and some gave him food. However, he still has to spend a portion of his wage for his students' transportation. At that time, he was desperate to find other sources of funding. This led him to ask the chairperson of the BMWEC for financial support. The wage of the teachers in Hsa Thoo Lei School came from the Federation Trade Union of Burma (FTUB) which is an organization of exiled Burmese laborers based in Bangkok. It seemed that the acquisition of financial assistance is dependent on the diplomatic ability of each school, with the more capable schools receiving more funding. During my stay, the BMWEC, despite the status of the representing organization among the migrant schools, did not seem to guarantee the financial stability of individual schools though it began to coordinate with external agencies in financial and administrative affairs in an attempt to distribute resources evenly to all migrant schools.

Educational levels and curriculum

In the Burmese national education system, students receive eleven years of education from the primary to the secondary or high school level. Primary education

comprises KG⁹³ to Grade Four; middle school education consists of Grades Five to Eight; and high school education comprises Grades Nine to Ten.

The migrant schools in Mae Sot also follow this structure. However, as seen in Table 5.1, none of the migrant schools are offering up to the Tenth Grade. Only BMSOH School provides certain levels of higher education. Most schools offer below the Sixth standard. Thus, migrant students who want to further their education need to transfer to BMSOH School in Mae Pa. Nonetheless, some schools have attempted to offer higher levels of education. For example, Hsa Thoo Lei School was preparing to offer up to the Seventh grade starting from the year 2006.

According to BMSOH School⁹⁴ which has a total of seventy four students, there are only twenty four students enrolled in Grades Five to Eight. This means less than twenty students are enrolled in high school education out of the 3,000 to 5,000 migrant students. A reason for this could be the inadequacy of existing school facilities and manpower. However, this reason might not be very convincing as there were many qualified teachers holding university degrees capable of teaching at the high school levels. Another reason could be that the number of students aged between 15 to 18 years, the age of which they are expected to be receiving high school education, is small. However, one often encounters many of these teenagers in and around Mae Sot who are not attending high school education. Therefore, the most probable reason would be that most teenagers of this age group are working in the town and its vicinity to support their families instead of pursuing higher education. Especially since the fulfillment of education in migrant schools does not guarantee

⁹³ Usually the KG (kindergarten) grade offers one-year education. However, those who are not qualified to enter the first grade need to study two years at the KG level.

⁹⁴ See the website (<http://www.rainbowends.org/bmsoh/bmsoh.htm>).

entry into the Thai job market, these teenagers lose interest in continuing their education in migrant schools.⁹⁵

KYLMTC offers the post-Tenth grade program under the management of the KYO. Most students are Karen from refugee camps and Karen State. They seek accommodation in the school. The subjects taught in the school include English, social studies, history, computer literacy and management studies. Some foreigners also take up teaching position voluntarily for three months.

In terms of textbooks, standard Burmese school textbooks are used in teaching. However, Karen migrant schools and Elpis Center use refugee camp textbooks whereas Muslim migrant schools incorporate Arabic and religious subjects into their curriculum.

Subjects offered in BMSOH are as follows: at the primary school level, basic English literature, basic arithmetic, Burmese, geography and basic general science; and at middle and high school level, English language and basic grammar, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, Burmese, geography, and general science. In the case of Hsa Thoo Lei School, which is a Karen school, the subjects taught include Burmese, Karen, Thai, English, mathematics, geography, sciences, history, and sewing and handicraft. Inclusion of Karen language is conspicuous in the composition of the curriculum, compared to non-Karen migrant schools. The school refers to Burmese national textbooks at the primary levels, whereas at the secondary level, it makes use of refugee camp textbooks. Life Page School offers English, Burmese, Thai, mathematics, social sciences, history, sciences, Burmese culture, art and music, and

⁹⁵ It is different from the case of a refugee camp, Mae La Camp. In the Camp, out of the total population of around 43,000, the number of primary level students is 6,272; that of middle school students 2,739; and that of high school students 3,333 as of January 2005. This figure was acquired from the MOI office of the Camp. The enrollment of high school students is very reasonable. It is related to relatively stable living conditions of refugee camps, geographical confinement and the high level of mobilizing and organizing. I will deal with the issue of refugee education later in this chapter.

sewing and handicraft. In the case of a Muslim school, Arabic, Thai, English, Burmese, mathematics, and sciences are offered. Most migrant schools teach Thai though inconsistent and irregular. Thai Karen or local Thai individuals take the job of teaching Thai.

In terms of time table, the case of CDC is illustrated in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Time Table of CDC Migrant School

KG

Mon	English	English	Science	Burmese	Break	Thai	Math	Math
Tue	English	English	Science	Burmese	Break	Thai	Math	Math
Wed	English	English	Science	Burmese	Break	Thai	Math	Math
Thu	English	Burmese	Science	Burmese	Break	Thai	Thai	Math
Fri	English	Burmese	Science	Burmese	Break	special activities		

First Standard

Mon	Burmese	Burmese	Science	Thai	Break	Math	English	English
Tue	Burmese	Burmese	Science	Thai	Break	Math	English	English
Wed	Burmese	Math	Science	Thai	Break	Math	English	English
Thu	Burmese	Math	Science	Thai	Break	Math	English	English
Fri	Burmese	Math	Science	Thai	Break	special activities		

Second Standard

Mon	Burmese	Burmese	English	Math	Break	English	Thai	Science
Tue	Burmese	Burmese	English	Math	Break	English	Thai	Science
Wed	Burmese	Thai	English	Math	Break	Math	Thai	Science
Thu	Burmese	English	English	Math	Break	Math	Thai	Science
Fri	Burmese	English	Science	Math	Break	special activities		

Third Standard

Mon	Math	Math	Thai	G/H*	Break	English	G/H	Burmese
Tue	Math	Math	Thai	English	Break	G/H	Science	Burmese
Wed	Math	Science	Thai	G/H	Break	Burmese	English	Thai
Thu	Math	Science	Thai	English	Break	G/H	Burmese	Burmese
Fri	Math	Science	English	English	Break	special activities		

* Geography/History

Fourth Standard

Mon	English	English	Thai	Burmese	Break	Science	Math	G/H
Tue	English	Thai	Math	Burmese	Break	Science	Math	G/H
Wed	English	English	Science	Burmese	Break	Thai	Burmese	G/H
Thu	English	English	Science	Math	Break	Math	Thai	G/H
Fri	English	Math	Math	Burmese	Break	special activities		

Fifth Standard

Mon	Science	Math	Math	Math	Break	English	English	Thai
Tue	Science	Math	Burmese	G/H	Break	English	English	Thai
Wed	Science	Math	Burmese	G/H	Break	English	Computer	Thai
Thu	Science	Math	Burmese	G/H	Break	English	Computer	Thai
Fri	Science	Burmese	Math	G/H	Break	special activities		

Sixth Standard

Mon	Thai	English	English	Science	Break	Math	Burmese	Math
Tue	Thai	English	G/H	Science	Break	Math	Burmese	Math
Wed	Thai	English	G/H	Science	Break	Computer	Burmese	Math
Thu	Thai	English	G/H	Science	Break	Computer	Burmese	Math
Fri	English	G/H	G/H	Science	Break	special activities		

The example of CDC should not be taken as a model for all migrant schools because it is relatively well-organized. Under the management of Dr. Cynthia and the Mae Tao Clinic, it has adequate teachers and enjoys relatively good facilities and funding. Other schools, especially the small-sized ones, face difficulties in keeping to the time schedule due to a shortage of teachers and study rooms for each level. Thus, it was commonly observed that a teacher run a combined class comprising students of different levels.

Nevertheless, the time schedule of CDC provides a general picture of subjects taught in migrant schools. As we can see from the table above, students from all levels have thirty two hours of learning per week, except for special activities on Friday afternoon. Students study for four hours before lunch, after which they continue for three hours.

With regard to the composition of the curriculum, Burmese, English, Thai, Math and Science are taught in all grades, whereas from the third grade onwards Geography and History are added. Computer lessons are offered from the fifth grade. It is noted that from kindergarten level, migrant children are required to learn three languages – Burmese, Thai and English – which could be a burden for them. English takes up the largest component of teaching hours, as shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Teaching Hours of Subjects (Weekly)

Subject	KG	First Standard	Second Standard	Third Standard	Fourth Standard	Fifth Standard	Sixth Standard	Total
English	8	8	8	6	8	6	6	50
Burmese	7	7	7	5	5	4	4	39
Thai	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	32
Math	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	48
Science	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	33
G/H				5	4	4	5	18
Computer						2	2	4

The emphasis on language education, especially in English is not specific to CDC. Other migrant schools also place more emphasis on English than the other subjects. This is not unrelated to the specific conditions of the town where international organizations and foreign individuals constitute a notable position in educational matters as well as in many other sectors of society such as labor and democratic activities. According to one of my informants and from my observation, Mae Sot might rank first in terms of the number of foreigners per capita in Thailand. Migrant leaders encounter them on a daily basis. Here, English draws much attention due to the migrants' attempts to communicate effectively with the foreigners. Many migrant activists and refugee leaders revealed that the most conspicuous difference observed since they came to Mae Sot was the cooperation with international parties and individuals. This was reflected in the running of the migrant schools where teaching English was the top priority. For some people, the bias towards teaching English over other subjects was deplorable. My informant in an Educational NGO lamented, "English is not a medium of education any more but became all about education here." However, many Burmese leaders regarded it as a means for survival in a vulnerable situation and in keeping pace with the changing world. In some measure, it shows how the less-privileged people confront their difficulties through education.

Inclusion of Thai in the curriculum also demonstrates this coping strategy in Thai society.

Joint school activities

The migrant schools have a series of joint activities under the leadership of the BMWEC. These efforts to unite and cooperate make migrant education a regularized institution. Otherwise, each school would have been run on a separate individual learning program without a confederated organizational base. As a consequence, they would not have formed the collective institution of migrant education.

To offer some examples, school health meetings where the education for sanitation and health are planned and organized. Monthly training sessions for migrant teachers where teachers are taught about subject contents, teaching skills and classroom organization methods are also held with the help of NGO trainers. Besides, there are several seminars and conferences on children's rights and the development of children's leadership. To some degree, these activities are influenced by Western education which places a lot of emphasis on the "rights" of children and women.⁹⁶

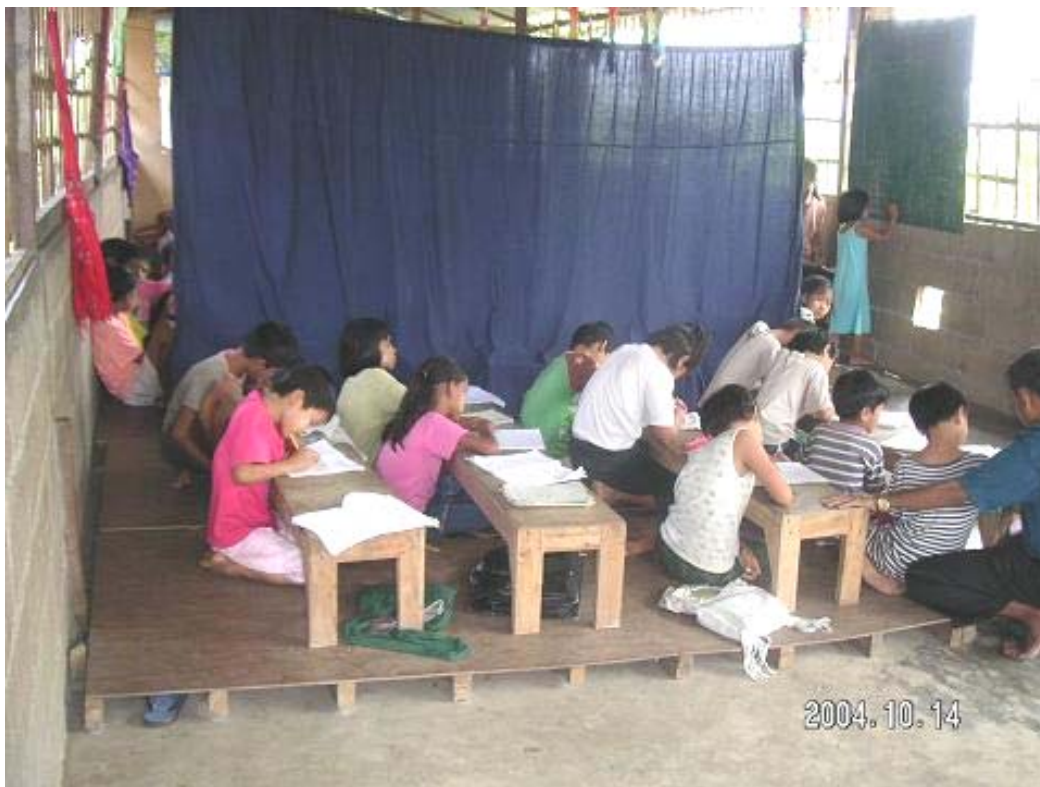
Migrant students have many opportunities to participate in sporting activities and cultural performances. During the Christmas season, I observed many schools which held these inter-school activities. Children enjoyed participating in competitions such as volleyball and football matches against other schools. Supporters from each school cheered for the participants at the playgrounds. After the events, prizes were awarded to the participants.

⁹⁶ This case is also observed in refugee education. While Western education NGOs and the UNHCR had discouraged the Karen's ways of disciplining children by some forceful means, other people involved in the education scene complained that this had caused disobedience amongst students and lacks the consideration for Karen culture in general which emphasizes respect for senior people.

Interestingly enough, traditional Burmese or Karen performances are practiced and performed in migrant schools. During those festivals, groups of migrant students would sing and perform traditional dances for the audience. I often saw Karen migrant students performing “bamboo dances”⁹⁷ during those occasions.

These joint activities lead us to rethink the constitution of the migrants’ social lives beyond educational matters. Unlike the conventional image of oppression, they have autonomy and agency in pursuing positive aspects of their lives even in precarious situations.

Plate 5.1 Classroom of a Migrant School



⁹⁷ In bamboo dance, sets of eight to twelve long bamboo poles are placed in a grid. Participants kneel on the ground and bang the poles together in tune to the music, while dancers step in and out of the openings in the grid. See the website (<http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Karens.html>).

Plate 5.2 Parents Meeting at Elpis Center



Plate 5.3 Transportation



Plate 5.4 Sports Activity



Plate 5.5 Children's Play



Plate 5.6 Performance of Karen Migrant Students



Challenges

There are other challenges in running the migrant schools apart from financial issues. The first is related to the language medium used in teaching. In most of the migrant schools, the Burmese language is used as the medium of communication. However, some ethnic students do not have knowledge of the Burmese language. Schools that accommodate a sizeable number of Karen students face this problem. For example, Karen students constitute half of all students in Hsa Thoo Lei School. Among the Karen students, the Pwo Karen are more numerous than the Sgaw Karen. Teachers in the school would have to use both languages in their classes because the Karen students do not understand Burmese while the Burmese and Arakan students do not understand Karen. Even the usage of Karen does not guarantee full understanding

by the Karen students since the Pwo Karen students do not speak the language of Sgaw Karen. Therefore, the learning atmosphere in classrooms is scattered and desultory.

The second challenge is that the role of migrant parents in their children's education has been negligible at the moment. This is mainly because they cannot afford to pay much attention to their children's education in the face of solving basic everyday needs. Thus, they do not have suitable positions in the migrant schools, compared to other stake holders. The inconsistent attendance of students in schools is partly due to the limited role played by parents. However, there have been some efforts in mobilizing these parents. For example, when I visited Elpis Center, the school had gathered a hundred parents in an attempt to set up a parents' association with which the school administrators cooperate in the educational matters of the school.

The third challenge is to care for the orphans as well as abandoned children whose parents were jailed or had gone to work in Bangkok. In these cases, schools had taken in these students but this requires a lot of sacrifice and causes financial burden to the schools.

The fourth is threats from the Thai authorities. As ordinary migrants face difficulties, these migrant schools have had to deal with them. It was observed that some migrant schools had paid money for the villages for security costs. Hsa Thoo Lei School paid 3,000 baht to the Thai police every month. Otherwise, according to a school teacher, "They would tease the school."

Other educational programs

Apart from migrant schools, there are other educational programs in Mae Sot which run independently from the BMWEC. Most of them are English-learning programs run by organizations with the help of foreign volunteers. For example, the ABSDF, the KYO, and the ALP operate English-learning classes where foreign English speakers, mostly Westerners, conduct classes on a daily basis. Several of my Burmese informants took up these classes for free. Upon completion of these courses, they also took up other programs. Mae Sot has many of these English programs operated by organizations and various individuals. No other towns or cities in Thailand would provide similar opportunities to learn English

The reasons for the proliferation of English-learning programs would be the similar to the motivation behind the importance placed on the language in migrant schools. However, the difference lies in the foreign individuals' participation that appears more visible. They do not necessarily come from organizations which engage in running English programs. Instead, these individuals include tourists, students, political activists, philanthropists, medical interns, researchers and so on. Even short-term visitors are often requested by Burmese organizations and individuals to contribute something beneficial towards the migrants. This usually takes the form of teaching English. Vulnerable people know how to appropriate the presence of foreigners.

Some English programs operate on a regular and systematic basis. In this case, external organizations run the programs. For example, the Burma Volunteer Program (BVP) runs some English programs in the ABSDF⁹⁸ and mobilizes voluntary teachers.

⁹⁸ See the website of the organization (<http://www.geocities.com/maesotbvp/index.html>).

In addition to English classes, there are other forms of education for migrants such as leadership training, media training and human rights education. These programs are organized by political and ethnic groups like the KYO and the KWO. For example, the Karen Information Center (KIC) which publishes newspapers on issues concerning refugees and migrants had received training on editing and layout of newspapers from an American NGO.⁹⁹

In the case of the Peace Education Center (PEC) established by a Japanese volunteer in May 2002, refugees take programs which focus on critical thinking as well as English. The PEC has more connections with the refugee camps rather than the migrants in Mae Sot since its objective is to produce community leaders among refugees. Those who have completed the post-Tenth programs such as Further Study Program (FSP) within the refugee camps would then pursue further education in Mae Sot.

The Mae Tao Clinic plays a big role in health education beyond treating migrant patients. The various trainings provided by the Clinic include Nursing Care Training, Laboratory Training, Health Assessment Training, Maternal & Child Health Care Training, Traditional Birth Attendant Training, Basic Eye Care Training and Computer Training. Most importantly the Clinic trains medics from various ethnic groups under the name of “the Border Internship Program.” I met people from some Shan and Kachin organizations. They were selected from these ethnic organizations to take training courses here for a varied period of time (usually from six months to two years). After completing the training, they are supposed to go back to their original organizations to practice their skills. Dr. Cynthia pays a keen attention to building a

⁹⁹ Interview with the head of the KIC (11 November 2004).

healthcare network where various ethnic groups are jointly involved, including the Thai authorities and international partners.¹⁰⁰

As I have shown, a lot of learning opportunities exist in Mae Sot without much intervention from state authorities. The operation of these educational programs also makes the Burmese presence at Mae Sot rather unique when compared to other border towns such as Mae Sai where these kinds of migrant education system do not exist. Migrant education, whether in the form of regular schooling or otherwise, demonstrates that the Burmese lives in Mae Sot have been relatively holistic, despite the lack of legal sponsorship as compared to other Burmese border towns.

CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER PARTNERS: REFUGEE CAMPS, INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS, THAI LOCALS AND MIGRANT SCHOOLS

In the previous section, I have argued that the migrant schools do not stand on their own feet. However, it should not be interpreted that these schools lack a strong foundation. In some measure, it could be true that the absence of independent financial sources could prevent the endurance of these schools. However, the participation of external partners is already a main component behind the establishment of these migrant schools. In other words, from the beginning, these connections have been an important, inherent part of running the schools. Thus, the relevant question is not the question of whether the migrants are able to run the schools on their own accord but the question of how and to what degree these schools are run through their relationships with other actors.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Dr. Cynthia (8 December 2004). For details on the trainings, see the website of the Clinic (<http://www.maetaoclinic.org>).

This section delves into these relationships or connections more deeply. Though some aspects of these relationships have been dealt with in the previous section, this section offers more detail with respect to three aspects of these relationships: connections with refugee camps, international partners, and Thai locals.

Connections with refugee camps

Geographical proximity and human flow between Mae Sot and the refugee camps create opportunities for exchange of information regarding education. If we compare the two education systems, the refugee education system runs more systematic and organized manner than the migrant education system. This is because the Karen have a long history of running their own education system and even in the refugee camps their education system has been maintained although it accommodates the participation of external partners. Also, the geographical conditions of the refugee camps have made it more conducive for the mobilization of educational matters and administrative affairs. Furthermore, the role of the KED as the representative of Karen education in Karen State and the refugee camps has been pervasive. Almost every school in Karen refugee camps follows the regulations and directions of the KED.

In contrast, migrant education has not seen such outcomes although it seeks to emulate the refugee education system. Therefore, many of the migrant schools are indebted to the refugee camps for textbooks, teachers, and teachers' training system. This tendency is more prominent in Karen migrant schools. It is not because they lack capacity as compared to other migrant schools but because they have more intimate relationships with refugee camps which stems from ethnic affinity. The KED is involved in Karen migrant schools such as Hsa Thoo Lei School. These schools adopt textbooks that the KED uses in refugee camps and include Karen as a regular subject.

Teachers from refugee camps also teach in some of these schools. For example, in Hsa Thoo Lei School, five out of sixteen teachers are from refugee camps – four from Mae La Camp and one from Um Phiem Mai Camp. These teachers received their training from the Bible school and the Teacher Preparation Course (TPC) which is a training course for teachers at refugee camps. Many other migrant schools have benefited from these refugee camps. In another example, a teacher from Um Phiem Mai Camp had taken up a teaching position at Life Page School.

Student exchange programs are also organized between schools in Mae Sot and the refugee camps. As we have seen in the cases of the PEC and the KYLMTC, many refugee students had come to Mae Sot for educational visits. They stayed in Mae Sot during school term and return to their camps during the holidays. In turn, migrant students with good academic performance have taken the opportunity to pursue higher level education at the FSP and bible schools at the refugee camps. Here, many Karen students are more exposed to educational opportunities either in Mae Sot or in the camps due to their ethnic affinity.

The migrant schools had also allowed the children of refugee families to continue their education whenever the latter had to reside temporarily in Mae Sot. I met a family from Um Phiem Mai Camp who stayed in Mae Sot while they were undergoing a resettlement program sponsored by the UNHCR. For several months, their children attended Hsa Thoo Lei School without any entry restrictions.

The involvement of NGOs in migrant schools also strengthens the connectivity between the educational institutions of the refugees and migrants. Among ten NGOs involved in refugee education, three NGOs – the WE/C, the IRC, and the JRS – have begun similar activities for migrant education. Other NGOs such as ZOA, for example, feel the necessity to expand their operations to the migrants. However, they have yet

to enter the arena of migrant education due to the lack of mandate and their scope of work which was exclusive to the interest of refugee education.¹⁰¹ Among the three NGOs named above, the IRC and the JRS have offered financial support to the migrant schools, whereas the WE/C employs method used by the TPC in training teachers in migrant schools.¹⁰² However, the involvement of the NGOs in the migrant educational institutions appears less systematic or organized due to their recent participation. In the case of the WE/C, they began their involvement in 2003 and a section for migrant education started in 2005. However, the team has yet to figure out the direction for migrant education. Besides, they encountered some practical problems such as the use of Burmese language in daily activities which the NGO workers who are mostly Karen are not familiar with, and the need to deal with so many parties such as migrant school leaders and Thai authorities, compared to the case of refugee education where they only deal with the KRC and the KED.

Nevertheless, educational NGOs in general agree that since refugee education has been efficiently run by the KED with the relatively well-organized support of the NGOs, they now need to turn to migrant education and engage themselves with expanding and developing their present roles and scope of activities. Thus, these NGOs decided to engage in school management and special education for the migrants. Donors of refugee education have also begun supporting migrant education (Kraft 2004). It is expected that the know-how of refugee education would be more applicable in the migrant education sector in the future with more stable funding sources.

¹⁰¹The ranges of NGO activities are heavily influenced by donors' interest as well as the regulations of the Thai authorities.

¹⁰² Interview with a migrant education team leader of the WE/C (26 April 2005).

Connections with international partners

The supporting partners in Table 5.1 do not constitute all external participants in the migrant schools. The aforementioned partners are just main supporters for the schools listed. Besides, there are many other organizations and individuals directly or indirectly involved in migrant education. Individual schools have other partners in several sectors besides these main participants. Taking the example of Hsa Thoo Lei School, the wage of teachers is from the FTUB, food is provided by the Burma Refugee Care Program (BRCP),¹⁰³ and computers and student stationeries are offered by individual foreigners and organizations. Children's Dream was carrying out several infrastructure-building projects in Mae Sot such as a learning center complex in Hsa Thoo Lei School and the extension of the learning center in CDC.¹⁰⁴

Besides material support, many international parties and individuals participate in other areas such as in administrative matters and training of teachers, as we have seen in the case of education NGOs such as the WE/C.

The fact that the BMWEC is indicated as a supporting partner in Table 5.1 should not be misunderstood that it is an original funding source. As mentioned before, it channels outside funding from various organizations to individual schools. Though the BMWEC itself nominally represents the migrant schools, its finances are heavily dependent on external partners. The OSI is a main supporter for the BMWEC among many other organizations.

The styles of engagement by external partners in migrant education and migrant affairs in general do not appear to be as coordinated and systematic as those of the activities of refugee education partners. In the case of refugee education affairs, as

¹⁰³ Previously the TBBC had provided food for some migrant students including Hsa Thoo Lei School. However, it was terminated due to instructions by the Thai authorities that TBBC food assistance should be only for the refugees and not for migrants (Interview with a TBBC worker).

¹⁰⁴ For details, see the website of Children's Dream (<http://www.childrensdream.org>).

mentioned in Chapter 3, various relief organizations are divided into sub-sectors such as health, education and food under the umbrella committee, the CCSDPT, for which monthly meetings for information sharing and coordinating refugee-related activities are held, although it does not prohibit individual participation of non-members and individuals in relief affairs. In contrast, migrant education has not achieved this level of cooperation and coordination. It would be in part because, in comparison to refugee camps, organizations engaging in migrant education do not have entry restrictions into Mae Sot. It is relatively easier for them to begin relief activities without state recognition and endorsement. The openness of the town to external partners was made conducive for the migrants to make individual connections with them. This continuous in-flow of external actors has made it difficult to coordinate activities that take place in the town.

However, this does not necessarily undermine the cooperation between migrant schools. It was observed that migrant education leaders felt it was crucial for them to be more cooperative and united, despite the uncoordinated activities of other partners. Thus, the role of the BMWEC was expected to expand in order to cope with these issues. But it must not be interpreted that external partners are staying away from the running of the schools. Rather, it suggests that stakeholders of the migrant schools are required to work out their respective roles within the system set up by the migrants.

All in all, whether it is partly cooperative or scattered, partly concerted or dispersed, the connections with international partners play an important role in operating the migrant schools.

Relationships with Thai locals

As we have seen earlier, Thai locals did play some part for the migrant schools. For example, the compound of Hsa Thoo Lei School was rented out by a Thai Karen, a Thai mosque accommodated a migrant school, and a local Thai church cooperated with Elpis Center. Directly or indirectly, many Thai locals had made contributions to the migrant schools.

However, not all Thai locals have positive attitudes towards the migrant schools. They might complain that the presence of the migrant schools disturbs their daily lives by causing noise pollution and possibly spreading diseases. Although these concerns were frequently expressed, very few Thais were disturbed by these migrant schools. As mentioned, most migrant schools are located within migrant living compounds which seldom accommodate Thai locals, and therefore cases of interference with the locals rarely take place.

Although it might seem that the migrant schools have benefited more from Thai locals, in reality, the Thai locals could also take advantage of migrant schools. Some examples are shown below.

Hsa Thoo Lei School sends their English and Burmese language teachers to a nearby Thai school in Hua Fai village where they teach everyday. It is done in exchange for friendly relationships between the two schools. For the Thai school, it is greatly beneficial to learn Burmese and English from native Burmese and English speakers. The headmaster of Hsa Thoo Lei School seemed to think that sending its teachers to the Thai schools was an essential obligation in return for the allowance of utilizing land space for the school.

There were some cases where migrant schools were open to Thai students. A migrant school in a mosque accommodated Thai students on weekends where they

studied Burmese and English. In exchange for allowing the school's operations within the mosque, it was required to take care of some Thai students.

Individual Burmese were also involved in teaching Thai students. A former ABDSF member who used to be involved in Life Page School had taught a group of Thai students English every night while he was waiting to be resettled in the USA.

For individual Thais, the subjects of the Burmese and English languages are of high priority. Particularly, many Thai locals wanted to acquire the Burmese language to facilitate business dealings with the Burmese and to do investment in Burma in the long term. The migrant schools, for them, are learning places to meet their practical needs.¹⁰⁵ These examples clearly demonstrate that the presence of migrant schools benefit not just the Burmese migrants but the Thai locals as well.

Migrant students have also taken part in the activities of the Thai schools. For example, three students of BLSO School were the winners of a province-wide poetry reading and public speaking competition where students read and spoke in Thai, competing against other students in their age group. They were commended for winning a competition against native Thai speakers (BLSO 2006: 1). Though we have not seen extensive inter-school interactions between migrant schools and Thai schools yet, the former is getting more recognition from the latter as partners with more collaborating activities.

¹⁰⁵ To the same extent, refugee camp education is also employed by nearby Thai locals as additional but important learning opportunities for the subjects of Karen, Burmese and English. Some Thai Karen send their children to learn *authentic* Karen from refugee camps. Even Thai Karen adults who are illiterate to the Karen scriptures take classes there.

THE STATE AND THE MIGRANT SCHOOLS

In some measure, migrant schools face the threat of having to cease their operations due to state intervention. Migrant education would be in serious jeopardy without buildings to accommodate migrant students. However, in general, migrant schools in Mae Sot managed to continue their existence even without being accorded legal status. The most probable reason could be related to the nature of migrant education which is formed as institution. Collective efforts from various partners were prominent in setting up of migrant education. This made it possible for them to have a relatively stronger leverage over the state, in comparison to individual migrants' dealing with the state. In addition, local state agencies' inertia, as mentioned in Chapter 3, whether they are considered deviant or locally adapted, inadvertently became conducive to the continued existence of the schools.

The state used to be indifferent to the management of education in migrant schools. The state's involvement was only limited to checking the legality of the schools without engaging in curriculum, training for teachers, and school management. Thus, the schools, despite threats from the state in terms of legal establishment of the buildings, maintained their own system at least at the management level without much interference from the state.

However, the state has recently begun to actively engage in migrant education. This signals the increasing prominence of the migrant schools. Here, the state's stance towards education for migrants appears to be positive in the sense that it attempts to incorporate migrant schools into the educational system of the state. Accordingly, interactions between the stake holders of migrant schools and the state have been more observable with the integration of unofficial domains and official domains in the

educational sector. The following section covers recent state policies towards migrant education and deals with the stake holders' reactions to these policies.

State's recent policies

There have been cases where non-Thai students are accepted in Thai schools. From a humanitarian stance, it was initiated as one of development projects for the underdeveloped hill tribes. The Thai monarchy, especially Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, championed the education project. Through these opportunities, those children coming from hill-tribes, though they do not possess Thai citizenship, could pursue education in Thai schools, regardless of whether they are the descendents of long-existing indigenous people or recent migrants. In these areas, the majority of students in Thai schools are from ethnic group backgrounds. In fact, when I went to Thai Karen villages near Phop Phra and Umphang, I witnessed cases whereby Karen students without citizenships were attending Thai schools.

However, these cases were very rare in Mae Sot. It is partly because ordinary migrant students would have difficulties adapting to the Thai education system due to language barriers, cultural differences and financial inability. However, it is mainly because they could pursue their own education in the settings of migrant schools without going to Thai schools.

Apart from the education for non-Thais in the Thai education systems, another education sector that sees the involvement of the state in relation to others or aliens has been refugee education. But as we have seen in the case of refugee education, the roles of the state are very limited, not closely engaging in refugee education; refugees

themselves shoulder their education matters by themselves with the help from some outside organizations.

In terms of migrant education, as I have mentioned earlier, the state's roles used to be negligible too. But stepping into the year 2000, this stance changed mainly due to the monarchy's new initiatives. Refugee education and illegal migrant education came under the name of "Education for All"¹⁰⁶ where regardless of legal status all children should be offered basic education without barriers up to a certain level.¹⁰⁷

It prompted the Ministry of Education (MOE) to come up with education policies for migrants and refugees. In January 2005, the MOE launched a survey on migrant education. MOE officials began to visit Mae Sot and organized meetings with migrant education leaders and education NGOs such as the WE/C and ZOA. Despite the absence of legality in their form of residence in Mae Sot, migrant leaders were invited or requested to join the meetings. While I was in Mae Sot, one of the meetings was held on 20 April 2005 in a Thai school named Phathraawithaya School which was run by a Catholic church that had relationships with the NCCM. Sixty three people gathered in this meeting including representatives from migrant schools, NGOs, and the Thai government. The NCCM's representative presented on migrant schools in Mae Sot and its adjacent areas, mentioning the problems and suggestions in relation to migrant education before the government officials. The government officials also explained about the future plan of the government for migrant children.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ In fact, the movement of Education for All is a global movement initiated and coordinated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It was launched in 1990. Alongside the UNESCO, other UN agencies and a number of INGOs are participating in this movement. For details on it, refer to the website (<http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/index.shtml>).

¹⁰⁷ Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's approaches to the education of refugees and illegal migrant people can be observed from her keynote speech at a symposium organized by the Refugee Education Trust set up by Sadako Ogata, former head of the UNHCR. The speech was reported in the Bangkok Post (4 October 2002).

¹⁰⁸ I acquired information on this meeting from the NCCM and some NGO workers.

In the end, the MOE came up with policies for migrant education and on 5 July 2005 a Cabinet Resolution on the education of undocumented and non-Thai persons was passed.¹⁰⁹ The resolution offers all migrant children, regardless of legality, education from kindergarten up to high school. In doing this, the resolution mentions that the budget for the education of non-Thai students will be at the same rate as Thai students. The students will be issued with a 13 digit personal identity number and will be given travel passes in order to allow them to travel to school (Asian Migrant Centre 2005: 122).

The main focus of the resolution is migrant education rather than refugee education. Regarding the latter, it mentions that the MOE will organize the appropriate education for refugee children, which will teach the Thai language and provide some occupational training by supplying teaching materials and organizing activities.¹¹⁰

After the resolution, the MOE continued to come up with subsequent policies and plans. Thus, migrant schools will be registered as “Learning Centers” which could be run by anyone and would only require qualified teachers for Thai subjects. In consultation with migrant schools and international organizations, the MOE has laid down some guidelines on the steps that migrant schools need to follow under the directions or jurisdiction of the MOE (Guinard 2006:8; Irrawaddy 11 May 2006). It demonstrates that migrant schools are to be integrated into the Thai education system.

Various government agencies are involved in implementing these policies. For example, the National Security Council is supposed to develop a strategy to deal with

¹⁰⁹ See Appendix C.

¹¹⁰ The Bangkok Post 9 April 2005. However, even before this decision, the MOI has been running a Thai program in Mae La Camp and many refugee schools have been teaching Thai. It is only now that the government seems to formalize it within the regular curriculum. In terms of vocational training where ZOA is involved, the government indeed has restricted actual practices inside refugee camps and the NGOs has kept asking for the setting up substantial work places such as vehicle repair shops within the refugee camps to allow the refugees to practice their skills (Interview with the vocational training manager of ZOA 1 February 2005).

the status and rights of migrant children in order to grant them status and basic rights; the MOI is supposed to conduct a survey to find out the number of undocumented and non-Thai students; and the Ministry of Defence is supposed to survey the educational institutes in areas which have restricted safety and security issues in order to coordinate with the MOE to allow children in these areas access to appropriate educational facilities (Asian Migrant Centre 2005: 123).

Reactions of migrant education leaders and NGOs

In the beginning, many of the migrant education leaders and NGOs were skeptical of the real intentions behind the government's involvement in migrant and refugee education. Some Mae Sot NGOs had interpreted the move of the government, through the MOE, as an attempt to take over the stakes of the education and place it under their total control, thus displacing the migrants and the NGOs from their current positions. Indeed, in the CCSDPT monthly meetings of May and June of 2005, I observed, educational NGOs highlighted this as a major issue. Some of them felt that the reason behind the move towards equipping the Burmese refugees and migrants with the ability to speak the Thai language was aimed at making use of them as a source of cheap labor. Others pointed out that in the long term, the expanded influence of the Thai government in the lives of the Burmese could give the government greater leverage, even in issues like repatriation of refugees and migrants. Furthermore, what seemed like an attempt to nurture the migrants and refugees as potential collaborators in education could be a strategy of the government to appropriate the educational methodologies of the migrant schools. Therefore, these

NGOs decided to keep the government at bay in so far as education is concerned and wanted the teaching of Thai subjects to remain informal.

Those Burmese involved in migrant education were not sure of the government's new and different stances at the outset too. The positive attitude of the government in the field of education was considered as contradictory given that the government continued to enforce legality in the town by the use of physical threats. Fear factors did not disappear in the minds of them even in the face of the seemingly benevolent attitudes of the government.

Even though the acceptance of Burmese migrant students in the Thai schools is favorable to the migrants, there are expected obstacles in the implementation stage. Above all, the cost for a migrant student to attend a Thai school is very high for a migrant family. It is said that nearly 3,000 baht is needed for one child per year to finance his schools expenses including the uniforms, transportation, books and food he or she needs. This financial burden would discourage migrant families to send their children to Thai schools. Another barrier is related to cultural and philosophical issues. Migrant students would rarely be taught Burmese subjects within the curriculum settings of Thai schools. This raises the question of the true meaning of education which had been highly associated with their sense of identity. The fear of arrest and deportation, as mentioned above, is also an undermining factor. Their lack of legal status and confidence prevents them from sending their children to Thai schools (Guinard 2006: 6-7).

The government showed some level of inconsistency in dealing with migrant schools, which in turn made the sincerity of the government doubtful. For example, in February and March 2006, five schools in Phop Phra District were ordered by the Thai authorities to close down. The reason given was that these schools were

operating without the permission of local authorities and that they could pose threats like the religious schools in southern Thailand (Irrawaddy 21 March 2006; FTUB Report 24 February 2006).

There was a counter-action from Thai advocates against this government action. For instance, on 19 March 2006, Thai Senator Jon Ungpakorn led a delegation to Mae Sot to meet several NGOs and assess the conditions of the migrants. He then promised to draw up a proposal to improve the living conditions of the migrant workers. Speaking on the closure of the migrant schools, he mentioned that citing national security as the reason for closing the schools was unreasonable. He also stated that the educational opportunities for migrant workers and their children needed to be expanded (Irrawaddy 20 March 2006; 21 March 2006).

Despite these inconsistencies, the government is generally inclusive towards migrant education. Thus the government maintains interactions with leaders of Burmese migrant schools. More than a hundred people, including high-level Thai authorities from Tak Province's education department, police and immigration officials and migrant education leaders attended a comprehensive meeting held in Mae Sot on 9 May 2006. Here Thai officials primarily addressed the issue of registering migrant schools by urging that Thai subject be included in the schools' curriculum to improve communication and promote better understanding of Thai culture between the Thais and the migrants (Irrawaddy 11 May 2006).

Migrant school administrators who have been involved in a series of meetings with Thai official saw these developments as an improvement and were optimistic about the move. Paw Ray, chairperson of the BMWEC and headmaster of Hsa Thoo Lei School, mentioned in the Irrawaddy (11 May 2006), "In the past, we always worried about when they will come and close our school down, but this concern has become

less now.” She also said in the report, “I have sat in five or six meetings with them [Thai officials] and I think things are improving.” In the face of this development, administrators from the Burmese schools intended to register their schools as Learning Centers in accordance with the guidelines laid by the MOE. Due to the lack of funds, it is difficult for them to follow all the suggestions put forward by the Thai officials such as hiring qualified Thai teachers. However, the overall sentiment towards the Thai officials and migrant education policies is positive.

CONCLUSION: INSTITUTION AND INTEGRATION

This chapter has provided general information on migrant schools, their connections or relationships with other partners and the state’s involvement in migrant education. It has shown that the difference between Mae Sot and the other towns is the integral role played by the schools in constituting the lives of the migrants. Despite their instability and the illegal form of their residence, they had succeeded in establishing migrant schools. This was made possible through the connections with other partners from refugee camps, the international NGOs and the Thai locals. These relationships were an intrinsic part in the formation and operation of migrant schools. This chapter has also revealed that recently the state had begun to engage in migrant education with seemingly positive approaches and that the migrant education leaders, despite harboring a certain level of uncertainty, had reacted to those changes optimistically.

The key notions of institution and integration are prevalent in this chapter. These notions explain the state of migrant schools and their lives in general over the years. It was the new phase in the life history of the Burmese in Mae Sot to build their own

institution in the form of migrant schools. This institution-building demonstrates collectivity, totality, positivity and determination of their lives even in the precarious situation. This goes beyond the conventional perception of these migrants as passive actors who lack capability to build up an institution. The establishment of the migrant schools is a remarkable development in the constitution of their lives. Though illegal or unauthorized, at least they can educate their children in the Burmese educational settings.

Recent attempts of integrating migrant education into the Thai education system signals state recognition and acknowledgement. It could be interpreted as an attempt by the state to control and regulate them in its own ways. However, in the sense that the state maintains the presence of migrant schools rather than destroy them, at least we can have a sense of the humanitarian postures of the state. Even if dubious, it shows to us that the notions of controlling and regulating do not precisely explain the current development of the state's engagement in migrant education. Rather, we could use the notion of integration, as the migrant schools are gaining legitimate and legal recognition by the state as an appropriate educational institution. This is done without losing their basic functions of educating migrant children. Here we can see the transition of migrant institution from the informal to the formal, from the illegal to the legal.

CHAPTER 6 CULTURE AND OTHERS

I have mentioned in Chapter 2 that in the history of Mae Sot, the cultural affinity between various immigrant groups, with most of them sharing the Buddhist belief system, provided an amicable condition for inter-ethnic relationships. This trait is still evident in modern day Mae Sot. The Burmese and the Thai locals share similar religious and cultural activities as seen in the celebration of various festivals. This cultural similarity, I suggest, is conducive for them to adapt with relative ease to the environments of the town even in the absence of suitable legal status: otherwise, they would face much more hardships in overcoming the tremendous task to culturally adapt to alien cultural circumstances.

On top of this cultural closeness, the recent multitude of migration brought in massive Burmese cultural elements together with population movement which offered more expanded and favorable conditions for them to live their everyday lives normally by consuming their own cultural products. They also managed to maintain relationships with peers with joining together in those their own cultural spheres. The pervasiveness and thickness of those Burmese cultural substances strengthened the relative holistic constitution of their lives even in precarious situations. Also, their rampant presence over the areas of Mae Sot made the town appear to be more Burmese rather than Thai.

However, it does not necessarily mean that the Burmese are not influenced by other cultures. They are widely exposed to different styles of Thai culture and international cultures. They are influenced by Thai culture through many sources such as the television. And through contacts with various foreigners, they are affected by

international cultures. Of course, recent development of advanced technology such as the Internet and mobile phones impacts on the cultural aspect of their lives. Cultural exchanges as well as cultural maintenance take place in their everyday lives in the town.

In that sense, the notion of cultural plurality that Furnivall described in the colonial societies of Indonesia and Burma cannot give adequate explanations for the state of cultural lives of the Burmese in Mae Sot. What dramatically challenges this notion is the fever of festivals in the town. Festivals nullify the boundaries between “us” and “them”, between illegal and legal, by inviting or accommodating even illegal migrants into the exhilarating festival moods. Here we even see the amicability between the state and them. It also leads us to rethink the associations made between rituals/festivals and the state by interpreting rituals/ festivals as the symbolic expression of the state power. In the context of traditional Southeast Asian kingdoms, according to Geertz (1980) and Reid (1988: 174-182), the rulers of those kingdoms demonstrated symbolic power by staging spectacular performances. The theatre states employed rituals and festivals to mould “images of power and authority, the popular mentalities of subordination” (Thompson 1974: 387, cited in Migdal 1998: 33). Migdal applies the traditional roles of rituals into accounting for why modern states stay intact. He (ibid) mentions that “the ability of any state to remain intact rests on its ability to produce that cultural frame, linking itself to the sacred through a set of rituals, and to transform itself so as to fit into a cultural frame that has resonance among key elements of the population.” To put it simply, rituals are means whereby the states assert their validity over the population.

Though this suggestion is informative in understanding political functions and certain aspects of rituals and festivals, it reflects an approach that is state-centered.

Thus, in this approach, rituals and festivals are considered as something to be manipulated for achieving state purposes. However, the case of festivals celebrated in Mae Sot is not necessarily associated with the maneuvering practices of the state. It would be a self-contradictory for the state to deploy festivals to achieve legitimate recognition from illegal people. Festivals in Mae Sot cast aside the engagement of the state and more or less take the form of autonomous celebrations. In the absence of the state's involvement, favorable conditions for transcending boundaries between the legal and the illegal are explicitly formed during periods of festivities.

This chapter seeks to understand how culture is associated with Burmese lives in Mae Sot. In the first place, it deals with how they maintain their own cultural lives by consuming Burmese cultural products. Second, it discusses the influences of other cultures such as Thai and international cultures in Burmese cultural lives. Last, the chapter pays specific attention to festivals. Here I focus on the roles of festivals in breaking boundaries between groups of people in Mae Sot.

MAINTAINING BURMESE CULTURE

In Mae Sot, we can find a variety of Burmese cultural elements: almost every cultural product can be found. The movement of human bodies accompanies with cultural substances with retaining consuming behaviors of them. The concentration of Burmese population in the town also brought with it a concentration of Burmese cultural things. Resorting to a Burmese diet, wearing *longyi*, enjoying Burmese movies and songs, and so on allow them to live as if they are in Burma. The presence of peer groups to spend their pastime makes the individuals feel relatively comfortable to be a Burmese as they are surrounded by other Burmese having similar

tastes. The collective consumption of cultural stuffs plays a crucial role in building up social relationships with other Burmese migrants.

Teashops

My investigation shows that there are over twenty teashops in the town: among them, about ten shops are concentrated in the Phajaroen Market; three of them are located near the UNHCR around which a garment factory and dormitories are also located; and several of them are placed around the central Mosque. The presence of several teashops is also observed in the vicinity of the town, for example, near the Mae Tao Clinic and around Moei Market.

The size of most of the teashops is relatively small, accommodating several tables. In terms of the types of tables and chairs, some teashops have low wooden tables and tiny stools as typically observed in Burma, whereas other teashops are equipped with plastic or metal standing tables and chairs. Some of tables and chairs are placed on the road side right in front of the teashops.

The walls of teashops are decorated with pictures of glamorous Burmese actresses with long hair reaching to the waist and also of popular English football clubs. These kinds of pictures are already part of the natural environments even in many houses of the ordinary Burmese. A television set and a DVD/CD player are equipped inside, showing Burmese soap operas and playing Burmese karaoke music all day long.

The price of tea varies from five baht to six baht: town area teashops sell at the latter price whereas shops in remote areas at the former price. Tea has different types of taste: for example, *cho hseint* has a sweet taste; and *paw hseint* is not overly sweet. In addition to tea, the items that they serve include coffee, soft drinks, various kinds

of breads such as the Indian-style bread called *naan*, several sorts of curry dishes with split-pea dips, even cigarettes and betel. Especially in the morning, *naan* is served as the main item with curry dishes for breakfast.

In the morning, especially from 7 am to 8 am, is the busiest time of the day. Teashops are packed with people eating breakfast. And many are standing on the road sides to purchase their *naan* with tea. The Thais constitute a sizeable part of the customers. During the day, many empty seats can be seen although there are some jobless Burmese hanging around. But in the late afternoon, it is packed again with customers. Every day, the total number of customers visiting a teashop, on average, varies from fifty to over one hundred, depending on the popularity of each shop.

Plate 6.1 Teashop



Burmese Muslims are the dominant figures in running the teashops. A Muslim man who has been staying in Mae Sot for over twenty years runs several teashops. He

seemed to use his connections with Thai Muslims in operating his teashops even in the absence of legality. Some teashops are owned by Pwo Karen. Interestingly, among these shops, one shop was run by a Pwo Karen who had come out of a refugee camp.

Most of these shops have about one to five employees assisting in their daily running. Some of shops operate with the help of family members and relatives. The monthly wages of teashop employees vary from 700 baht to 1,000 baht. Most of them are young people. I even encountered an employee whose age was as young as thirteen years old.¹¹¹

Tea is an integral part of Burmese cultural life (Larkin 2004: 14). Teashops do not just brew tea but also brew Burmese cultural identity and social relationships. The Burmese habitually kill time there. Once they get into the place, peer groups, the aroma of tea, Burmese television programs and songs make them feel at home. For the jobless, teashops are the place where they can release their loneliness, uncertainty and anxiety by hanging around teashops with small pocket money. Comedy dramas on television make the environment of the teashops more pleasant with the sounds of boisterous laughter. I was urged by my key informant who was fond of this delightful environment to go to the teashops as often as possible. In the end, it became my delighted habit too to be saturated in the atmosphere.

Sometimes teashops turned into extremely patriotic places. It happened whenever the Burmese national football team played in a competition. Teashops were crowded with Burmese migrants cheering for their team by clapping and shouting passionately. When goals were scored, the decibel level of shouting hit the zenith with spreading

¹¹¹ From my conversation with him, I came to know that his father was staying in Burma while his mother was in Mae Sot but she could not afford to bring him up. Several months later, he revealed that his mother had a new husband in Mae Sot. When I returned to Mae Sot in December 2005, he had already left the shop and I was not able to find him again.

over the air of Mae Sot. This clamorous noise appeared to proclaim that teashops are no other but Burmese territories.

One day in December 2003, while I was staying in Siam Hotel, a thunderous sound awoke me from my napping. I went out of my room and searched for the place that generated the sound. I headed for the corner of a corridor on the second floor of the guesthouse and peeped at a few groups of Burmese in the teashops clustered in the Phajaroen Market, through the crevices of the wall. And I saw a group of Burmese watching a match of the Burmese national football team. Their patriotic passion was prevailing right in the central place of the “Thai” town.

Teashops are places for exchanging information among the Burmese. As I have mentioned, the jobless were looking for job opportunities from their peers in teashops. Some of them shared the recent football results of English football matches, gossips about Burmese actors and actresses, their opinions on international affairs and so on. As for me, sitting there was like part of my data-collection activities beyond passing my time by meeting up with my Burmese friends.

Interestingly enough, teashops are also places for spreading or generating political rumors. Rumors on the political affairs of Burma arrived in Mae Sot from across the border and spread among the Burmese in Mae Sot with teashops playing a significant role in the circulation. For some time after the fall of Khin Nyunt, the town witnessed an abrupt increase in the spread of various political rumors. During that time, I often saw my Karen informant come to me, excited with such rumors.

Teashops are not always pleasant spaces for the Burmese. Teashops as political spaces are insidious and dubious since it is assumed that the Burmese intelligent agents are collecting information at the teashops. The heavy presence of anti-

government political groups and ethnic groups in the town is said to lend much credence to the assumption.¹¹²

Pastime

Betel is an essential everyday diet for many Burmese. The betel-chewing habit is retained in Mae Sot. Small-scale shops which are situated around the living compounds of Burmese migrants, without exception, sell the item. Even individual peddlers carry and sell it to passers-by. During my stay in Mae Sot, there were several small-scale construction sites (mostly house-building) in front of my house. I often saw child peddlers stop by these places, shouting, “Here is betel,” and Burmese construction workers put the brakes on their work to buy it from them. It is no doubt that this essential habit left the heavy presence of red spots on the surface of the roads all over the town. In response to it, Thai authorities put up a notice warning, “No betel,” indicating the fine in case of breaking the regulation. But I did not hear any cases of fine on them from even if I often saw many Burmese spit betel juice.

¹¹² In fact, the events which led to the 1988 uprising were triggered by a brawl in a teashop. In Burma, teashops are regarded by the government as potential breeding grounds for anti-government activities (Larkin 2006: 15).

Plate 6.2 A Notice of Warning against Spitting Betel Juice in Thai and Burmese



It is mentioned that the Burmese can watch Burmese television programs. It is because a local cable television station by the name of Star Cable transmits the television programs. The cable station relays two Burmese channels – Myawaddy TV and MRTV.¹¹³ Though their news programs seemed to be the propaganda shows of the Burmese government and the overall quality of the programs are not advanced in comparison to Thai channels, they are not short in terms of catering to the cultural

¹¹³ It should not be misunderstood that Myawaddy TV channel is a local television channel based in Myawaddy. Launched in 1995 run by the army, Myawaddy TV channel is based in Rangoon. The state-run MRTV began broadcasting in June 1980 (Irrawaddy 1 August 2001). In Burma there are more channels such as MRTV 4 (Myanmar Media Box) which contains non-formal educational programs and other entertainment programs and Channel 5 which broadcasts movies in different international languages with Burmese subtitle. For detailed information on television channels in Burma see the website (<http://www.myanmars.net/myanmar-travel/myanmar-yangon/yangon.htm>).

needs of the Burmese by providing them with Burmese soap operas, songs, and comic shows.

The Burmese enjoy various kinds of sports. I saw some groups of the Burmese play football and volleyball in the late afternoon almost every day in the field near the UNHCR. Factory workers having finished their daily duties would come out and join them with many other people surrounding the field while others would be watching the game from teashops opposite the field. Likewise, all over town, many lots and corners in the late afternoon were filled with the Burmese taking part in sports. During the rainy season when the fields of the town became muddy, they play sepak takraw and futsal in concrete fields.

Near the cluster of teashops in the Phajaroen Market, there was a big snooker place. My key Karen informant and I happened to get into the place after drinking a cup of tea in a teashop. I was surprised to see that all the people filling the spacious place which was equipped with over ten snooker tables were Burmese, especially youngsters. They threw suspicious gazes at us. It was as if I was not allowed to be in their territory. We played a couple of games which cost us twenty baht per game, despite having their continued dubious attention. Though uncomfortable, that experience evidently tells me how even amusement places in the central place like that were dominated by others.

The Burmese can acquire many kinds of books in Burmese, including newspapers and magazines from Burmese bookshops as we can infer from the story of a bookshop owner in Chapter 4. Burmese clerks often spend their unoccupied time in reading books. I often observed female clerks of Hong Long Mini Mart put Burmese novels below a payment desk and read whenever they did not attend to customers.

Some of the labor and political organizations in Mae Sot produce their own newspapers. For example, the BLSO publish and distribute their newspaper named *thin yebaw* which aims at informing Burmese workers about Thailand's alien migrant workers policy; sharing news from and about the factories operating in Mae Sot; and creating awareness of the current economic and political situation in Burma.¹¹⁴ The KIC also publishes monthly journals focusing on issues related to the Karen and Burmese political affairs as well as paying due attention to international affairs. It is assumed that these publications not only provide the Burmese with a pastime but also awaken and breed a political consciousness among the Burmese in Mae Sot.

Ethnic culture: living as Karen in the town

The presence of the Karen in Mae Sot is more conspicuous than other ethnic groups though their exact number cannot be estimated. However, it does not necessarily mean that the Karen have a separate form of life when compared to the other ethnic Burmese. Rather, ordinary Karen people stay together with the other Burmese in migrant living compounds. However, the relatively heavy presence of Karen political and social organizations in Mae Sot makes the existence of the Karen distinct by promoting Karen cultural activities in Mae Sot. Though seasonal, ordinary Karen people are likely to have more opportunities to manifest their ethnic identity by taking part in these events.

¹¹⁴ See the website (<http://www.burmasolidarity.org/news.html>).

I witnessed the ceremony of the Karen New Year Day on 10 January 2005.¹¹⁵ It was held in a Buddhist monastery in Mae Pa near Mae Sot. It was estimated that about five hundred people attended the ceremony. Most of them wore Karen traditional costumes. Karen political leaders took their seats on a big stage during the ceremony. Behind the stage, a big screen which took the form of the Karen flag was hung. The master of the ceremony spoke three languages – Pwo Karen, Sgaw Karen, and Burmese – one after another in introducing the programs of the ceremony. However, all the speeches by the other participants who spoke in a particular language were not translated into the other two: for instance, some speeches in Sgaw Karen were translated only into Burmese but not into Pwo Karen whereas some speeches were just conducted in Pwo Karen without translation into any of the other languages. It seemed that the official language was not compromised and decided yet among the Karen in Mae Sot. This leads to a confusion in people's intra-ethnic understanding, which is contrasted to the case of Karen refugee camps where Sgaw Karen is treated as the official and national medium.

Let me introduce some notable programs of the ceremony. The first speaker was the chairman of the KYO. He delivered his speech in Pwo Karen though he is Sgaw Karen. His speech suggested that the Karen must preserve their tradition, culture, language, clothing, and other customs. Following that, all participants sang together the Karen New Year Song in Pwo Karen. After that, another speaker talked about the history of the Karen with a specific focus on the suffering inflicted by the Burmese military. This speech was translated into Burmese by a different speaker. Someone read the speech of the President of the KNU, Ba Thin on his behalf. The speech was

¹¹⁵ According to the Karen calendar, it was the 2744th New Year. It is said that the Karen migrated to the land now known as Burma in B.C 739. See a Karen website (<http://www.karen.org>). The first celebration of the Karen New Year was conducted in 1939. See Saw Kapi's writing titled "The Karens' New Year: A Brief Introduction" (<http://www.karen.org/New Year/2005/intro.htm>, downloaded on 22 January 2005).

written in Sgaw Karen and its contents were as follows: to have their own political destiny is very important in maintaining Karen culture; the Karen must be “one” in spirit and mind; the Karen must respect other nationalities for mutual benefit; and the KNU will continue to make an effort to resolve the political problems in the interest of the Karen standing by the basic principles of the revolutionary movement and in firm cooperation with fellow ethnic and democratic forces.¹¹⁶ In addition, several other speakers either delivered their own speeches or read the speeches of important political leaders on their behalf.

The main organizer of this ceremony was the Karen Super Society (KSS). This group was said to contact Thai authorities to acquire permission to hold the event. The group was also believed to engage in security affairs in cooperation with other Karen political groups and Thai authorities.

I felt that most of the participants were united in this ceremony with active engaging in singing Karen songs and listening to the speeches despite the perplexing languages. Moreover, the Karen costumes strengthened their unity. It was inferred that religious factions were meaningless from the fact that Christian leaders delivered their speeches in the Buddhist monastery. In the name of the Karen, all sub-ethnic and religious factions were resolved.

According to my informant, the Pwo Karen constituted the majority among all those in attendance. This proportion paralleled the sub-ethnic composition of the Karen in Mae Sot. I happened to meet a Pwo Karen youth who was working in a gas station where I frequently went to fill fuel for my motorbike. Through our many contacts, I came to be very familiar with him. From my understanding, he was not a very strict Karen but rather a Burmese who was just engaging in his everyday work in

¹¹⁶ I obtained the English translation from the website (<http://www.karen.org/New Year/2005/president.htm>, downloaded on 22 January 2005).

Mae Sot for a livelihood, escaping his previous hard work in agricultural fields back in his hometown. Therefore, it was a big surprise for me to see him in this kind of the event that seemingly has nothing to do with his livelihood pursuits. Moreover, he spent thirty baht, the entire amount of his daily wage (he earned 1,000 baht a month), in hiring the motorbike taxi service from his workplace even to the extent of sacrificing his off day. Unlike in the gas station, he came to the place fully dressed up. He applied hair gel, put on a necklace and wore a neat Karen costume. On that day, he was not short of being a true Karen. He had acquired the information on this event from an invitation letter distributed by the organizers and from his friends several weeks before. It seemed that he had been excitedly anticipating taking part in this ceremony, which was evident in his fashion style and the sacrifice of money and holiday. His case shows how innocent ordinary ethnic individuals manifest his or her ethnic identity through participating in ethnic festivals and ceremonies.

After the ceremony, various cultural activities and sports events continued till the evening and many people remained there to take part in these programs. The Karen New Year ceremony was not just held in this place. Other Karen groups also had their own forms of celebration apart from joining the ceremony in the monastery. Members of a Karen church in Mae Sot came back to the church after the ceremony and gathered again to have a special service for the New Year. A leader reminded the members of the history of the Karen and the importance of preserving the Karen tradition. Hsa Thoo Lei School designated the day as a holiday and prepared various cultural events for the students one of which was conducted by a children-drama performing group from Belgium. The Mae Tao Clinic also celebrated the New Year in the morning and at night. Many members of the Karen church also went there to join

in the events. This festival played a role in linking the Karen of various places in Mae Sot.

Plate 6.3 Karen New Year Ceremony



Plate 6.4 Karen New Year Ceremony Attendants



There was another big Karen festival called “Wrist Tying” ceremony on 30 August 2004. On that day, I missed the event due to my voluntary work for a Korean medical team treating villagers of a Thai Karen village named Mae Ja Lao. But the Irrawaddy (30 August 2004) reported that more than 5,000 people, mostly Karen migrants, attended the ceremony held at a Burmese temple in the vicinity of Mae Sot. The ceremony is rooted in ancestral beliefs in spirits and is known as “*lah ku kee su*” in Karen. It occurs at the time of the August full moon, when the Karen tie white threads around the wrists to ward off illness and to maintain the Karen culture. The report went on to mention that some leaders of the KNU attended the event and urged the Karen to be united. Also it was reported that a trio of popular Pwo Karen singers conducted a cultural performance and a singing competition with an award presentation also held. Karen noodles and other snacks were served to the attendants. It has been celebrated in Mae Sot since 1992. The year 2005 also saw similar a number of participants on 19 August (Irrawaddy 19 August 2005). It is assumed, like the Karen New Year ceremony, that the Karen in Mae Sot take this opportunity to collectively show their identity as Karen even in foreign soil and in the absence of proper legal status.

Besides those festivals, various Karen organizations in Mae Sot which were dominated by the Christian Karen engaged in cultural activities in a strong and close connection to the Karen church, Hsa Thoo Lei School, and the Mae Tao Clinic. These three places are central for cultural activities. One evening in November 2004, I attended a big music concert in the Karen church organized by three Karen youth groups – the KSNG, the KUSG, and the KYO for the purposes of mobilizing Karen youths and raising funds for the Karen Unity Seminar. The number of people attending this concert was estimated to be 500. Most of them were young people. The

concert, entitled “Together to Victory, Happily Singing,” had various genres of music performed, including Karen traditional songs. Performers were very skillful in singing, dancing and playing instruments. Audiences were actively reacting to their performances with boisterous shouting and clapping. The church seemed to turn into a professional concert hall. A drama was presented too. The theme of the drama was about returning to the homeland, with the Karen scattered all over the world hand in hand in the end, overcoming hardships. Many of the scenes in the drama contained the brutal treatments of Burmese soldiers towards the Karen. Elsewhere, notably in refugee camps, I have often seen this kind of scenes as depicted in the Karen dramas. Not only through testimonies but through these sorts of cultural performances, the cruel image of the Burmese soldiers and government was perpetuated in the minds of the Karen.

During the Christmas season, the church witnessed the massive gathering of Karen in Mae sot with lots of cultural activities going on. Groups of people indulged in sports activities such as sepak takraw, football, volleyball, tug of war, and running races. Participant groups included the KSNG, the KYLMTC, and various NGOs, which saw a sizeable presence of Karen workers, such as the SMRU (Shoklo Malaria Research Unit), the TBBC, and the ZOA.¹¹⁷ Also, various cultural performances such as the performing of Karen traditional songs and dances and not to forget Christian dramas and songs were performed by migrant and Sunday school children.

Hsa Thoo Lei School also celebrated Christmas day with lots of cultural activities. The School invited students of other migrant schools to participate in sports and cultural activities. They played football and sepak takraw on a competitive basis. In

¹¹⁷ The Karen are preferred in the employment of NGOs since they need those who can speak Karen, Burmese as well as English in the relief activities for refugees. Since having legal status is necessary to hold positions in the NGOs, the Burmese Karen who have the Thai citizenship card are eligible to work there. It also witnesses the noticeable presence of Thai Karen in the NGOs.

the evening there was a music concert and prize presentations. Though many migrant schools were not associated with Christianity, they were active participants in the events prepared by Hsa Thoo Lei School.

Besides, the Karen church and Hsa Thoo Lei School were served as places for holding ceremonies such as weddings and funerals among the Karen. The church was more frequently used for these rituals since it has a spacious building to accommodate them. Especially those related to the KNU or other Karen organizations held those ceremonies in the Church or the School. Therefore, it often saw many important Karen political figures present in those places. Among several rituals, a funeral drew my special attention. The deceased was the father-in-law of the Hsa Too Lei School's headmaster who used to work with the KNU. The funeral service was held in Hsa Too Lei School and was attended by many Karen including political figures. After the ceremony, I was wondering, "Where did the dead body go for burial?" After a while, I got to know that it would be Mae La Camp. Several cars were heading for the Camp in array, carrying the deceased and the groups of the Karen. For the Karen in Mae Sot, refugee camps are final destinations in the absence of their homelands. Rather, it might be said that refugee camps are already their hometown in the actual world. This is due to their imagined hometown not coming true yet, and therefore there are no other places to be buried in. Refugee camps are now the places where one's journey starts and ends.

As we have seen so far, the Karen have their own ways of cultural life. Again, it does not necessarily mean that the Karen have a totally separate form of life compared to the other Burmese. Most of the ordinary Karen constitute their lives in mixing with the other Burmese in Mae Sot. However, at least there are cultural events that often awaken the Karen identity among them. The maintenance of cultural identity among

Christian Karen and those Karen involved in the activities of Karen organizations is more conspicuous as seen above.

NEW CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

The suggestion that the Burmese maintain their own cultural life does not necessarily mean that they are not exposed to and influenced by other cultures. It is inevitable for the Burmese to experience them in their everyday lives. There are various sources whereby they engage in this cultural experience: interactions with others, daily exposure to the media such as television, self-aspiration of tasting other cultures, etc are influential factors.

Other cultures do not just include Thai culture. International cultures are also prominent components of other cultures since international actors, for example, foreign relief agencies, have a noticeable presence in the town and thus their cultural influence is not negligible.

Thai cultural influence

Television is an important source for the Burmese to be exposed to Thai culture on a daily base. Though they do not exactly understand Thai television programs, they are impressed by the more attractive presentation. Some people said that compared to Thai television programs, Burmese television programs were very boring due to slow dancing styles and due to less-attractive actresses and actors in their fashion style. Even people in the border area of the Burmese side who had access to Thai television channels preferred to tune in to Thai channels. When I went through the process of

immigration in the Myawaddy immigration office, I saw officials of the office watch a Thai television channel, I TV. The Burmese from Kyaikdon town in Dooplaya District of Karen State told me that they liked to watch Thai television programs when I met them in a remote border village, called Buangkher, in Umphang District.

By watching Thai television programs, some Burmese learned about the popular culture of Thailand such as songs. I often saw some of my Burmese informants mumbling Thai songs. In general, they acknowledged the advancement of Thai pop culture. Thus, at the level of young Burmese, it led them to imitate the ways television programs are presented, for instance, in the sector of fashion.

Bazaars opened near the District Office and the Municipal Office whenever festivals were held. Bazaars were popular for Burmese migrants to buy cloths at cheap prices. From there, they could buy jeans at as low as around a hundred baht. They spent the money that they had saved in these night markets. Some of my informants preferred to wear those jeans that they bought in bazaars, taking off *longyi*.

Thai food also attracts the taste of the Burmese. There is a famous food stall serving chicken rice and pork rice, located several blocks away from the entrance of the Burmese market. It sells a dish of roasted and steamed chicken rice at twenty baht. It also sells a dish of pork cooked in a similar fashion at the same price. The food stall was dominated by Burmese customers. Since the price of the dishes was relatively cheap, ordinary Burmese could afford to make a visit to the place. I also frequently stopped by the place with my Karen informant who was fond of the food. Besides, such food as minced pork rice with basil leaves is a popular food among the Burmese in the town.

The Burmese were influenced by modern styles of consumption. Let me introduce some cases. When Mae Sot got into the hottest season, especially in the month of

April, the place where I often went to avoid the scorching heat was Jumpin, a fast food restaurant equipped with air conditioners, providing a range of MacDonald's-like hamburgers, pizzas and other kinds of fast food in a fancily-decorated environment. It was located in the central area of town, a few blocks away from Siam Hotel and jewelry markets. The price of a set of hamburger ranged from sixty baht to a hundred baht, which exceeds the price level of normal food in Mae Sot. Whenever I entered the place, I saw it packed with Burmese who were also cooling themselves down while consuming fast food and cold beverages. It was assumed that the place was not for general Burmese migrants as their wage level could not give them such a prestigious opportunity. Many of the Burmese customers in Jumpin seemed to be merchants, especially jewelry traders or regular visitors from Myawaddy. The place was very popular for those merchants not only because it is very convenient due to its close proximity to the jewelry markets but also because it attracted them by providing food consumption of a modern style which they might not easily find in Myawaddy and other areas in Burma. It seemed that Jumpin played the role of a training place for contemporary consumption styles of food for them.

Though it was mentioned that it was out of the reach of ordinary Burmese migrants living from hands to mouths, Jumpin was not totally separate from them. Through contacts with foreigners and others with financial ability, they had chances to be there, though little. I myself also brought my informant to the place sometimes to escape the heat and to show some kind of gratitude in return for his help in my research. Like his case, Burmese migrants individually had opportunities to get into the place through personal relationships with others.

Hong Long Mini Mart takes a central position in terms of shopping not only for Thai locals but also for the Burmese. It is located in a central area of the town next to

the entrance of the Burmese market. All day long the nearby area of the Mart witnessed the constant movement of people. The Mart is not a “mini” mart but a big mart which might represent a modern-style shopping place in Mae Sot. Though there are several big marts in Mae Sot, Hong Long Mini Mart is the most popular shopping place due to its central location and the number of selling items and its fanciful and attractive display styles. The Burmese, especially people from Myawaddy, preferred to shop here. This place provides various kinds of necessities which the shops of Myawaddy do not serve. For the ordinary Burmese living in Mae Sot, the Mart is like an amusement place. Though they cannot afford to buy whatever they want, they are amazed at the variety of choices and the style of presentation of selling items.

Information and communication technologies give some groups of Burmese new cultural experiences. Though the usage of those technologies should not be exaggerated, they are not totally left behind in being influenced by advanced technologies. For example, it was often seen that the main customers of the Internet cafes were the Burmese. For those who engaged in political activities in Mae Sot, these Internet cafes were used to communicate with others in the outside world and for the dissemination of information.

Influence of international cultures

The noticeable presence of foreign individuals and organizations has brought into foreign cultural elements in Mae Sot. Particularly, the area between the Police Traffic Box and Wat Chumphonsiri along the Intharakhiri Road witnesses their relatively heavy presence. Western style restaurants such as “Bai Fern” and “Crocodile Tear” cater to foreigners, especially Westerners. Many foreigners, including the NGO workers and volunteers, often made visits to these restaurants for their social activities.

Their discussion ranges from their everyday affairs to serious concerns such as refugee-related issues and the political situation in Burma. This is discussed over nice food and in comfortable environments. Besides, several guesthouses and Internet cafes accommodating tourists make the landscape of that area very different from other areas of the town.

In general, many Burmese are beyond the influence of Western culture. However, those Burmese, especially those Karen who were working with foreigners in NGOs, are under the influence. As they spend time with foreigners not only in their working places but also in cultural spheres, they are naturally or advertently exposed to Western culture. What I observed, during my stay and interactions with the people from NGOs, was that parties or social gatherings took place very often among them. Some people said cynically, “Mae Sot is a party town.” Whenever a special occasion happened in a certain NGO such as the opening of new offices and the promotion of new people to higher positions of NGOs, united parties were called on. In many cases, they were held in spacious restaurants with buffet-style banquets. Throughout the party, the participants were attended to by restaurant employees. There were many kinds of drinks including wine. While others were eating, some people were singing on a stage equipped with Karaoke facilities. For those Karen NGO workers, these kinds of party styles are totally different from their traditional social gatherings which associate with traditional village life styles. However, it seemed that as time went by, they were familiar with these party styles.

Some of the Karen NGO workers attempted to apply the running styles of organizations that they learned in NGOs to the Karen church. They criticized the church for not running in systematic ways. For example, in their eyes, the positions and duties of members were not efficiently divided and therefore the church activities

lacked concise responsibility and efficient outcomes. They tried to reform the church for some time by using their working experience in Western organizations. But it brought about severe tensions between them and other church members. Their attempts ended without much “reformation.” However, the case was enough to demonstrate the influence of Western culture among certain group of the Burmese or Karen people in Mae Sot.

Western culture was not a sole force in representing foreign cultures. Asian cultural influences were also observed. Asians coming from Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Korea engaged in relief assistance activities for migrant people and refugees as NGO workers, missionaries, and volunteers. Of course, those Burmese who had deep relationships with them were influenced by them in the cultural sector. I as Korean, beyond the roles of an innocent researcher, sometimes reacted to the enquiries of my Burmese or Karen informants on Korean culture. While I was in Mae Sot, the Korean cultural wave, called “*hallyu*”, spread rampantly all over East Asia. Burma was no exception. Two Burmese television channels, Myawaddy TV and MRTV, in Mae Sot often broadcasted Korean soap operas, though very old ones. Many recent migrants had already begun their interest in those Korean dramas back in Burma. Whenever I encountered young Burmese migrants, they were very interested in talking about Korean actors and actresses. Some of these youths knew about them even more than me. At that time, as I had a number of Korean movies in the format of VCD and DVD, I often lent them to my informants. It was fun to see them mimic some Korean expressions from those movies. Also, my wife and I treated members of the Karen church to Korean food sometimes. Some women close to my wife often stayed over night at our home, watching television programs and movies. We were

one of the mediators delivering a somewhat different cultural experience to the Burmese or the Karen.

My suggestion again is not meant to exaggerate the influences of international cultures in the everyday lives of ordinary vulnerable people. Still, these new cultural experiences were only observed in particular groups of people. However, ignorance of the influences of those cultures might be led to an attempt at compartmentalizing cultures without looking at interactions with other cultures. Beyond the plural features of cultures, various cultures are going through the process of interactions which subsequently affect people's cultural lives. My suggestion is that Mae Sot sees this kind of new aspects of Burmese cultural lives.

FESTIVAL FEVERS: BREAKING BOUNDARIES

At the outset of my field research, in August 2004, I encountered a festival which celebrated the birthday of the Queen. There were two places that attracted many people to various fun activities with bazaars established: around the District Office and beside the Municipal Office. What struck me was that the Burmese were active participants in the various festival programs such as darts, merry-go-round, and many other kinds of entertainment typically found in amusement parks elsewhere. It was impressive for me at that time to see "others" invited to a "Thai" festival. Afterwards, whenever seasonal festivals were held throughout my stay in Mae Sot, I observed the continued participation of others in such Thai festivals such as the King's birthday, *loy krathong* and *songkran*.

Festivals brought together not only the Thai locals but also the Burmese. Festivals invited whoever stayed in Mae Sot, whether they were illegal migrants or not.

Nobody questioned the legal status and divided people according to racial or national lines. The Thais and the Burmese got together in the festivals by participating in various activities, though this togetherness is not on a persistent basis.

This section suggests that festivals and rituals in Mae Sot have a positive function which is to bring various groups of people together. They are not necessarily employed by the state to enforce legitimacy in a symbolic way. Rather, in such a delightful atmosphere, the festivals render state engagement in enforcing legality irrelevant and awkward.

This section deals with two big festivals – *loy krathong* and *songkran* – to show the participation of others in the festivals and the breaking of boundaries that occurred during the festival periods.

Loy krathong

Loy krathong takes place on the night of the full moon of the twelfth month of the Thai calendar. The festival is said to originate in Sukhothai as a kind of Thai Thanksgiving. The word “*loy*” in Thai means “to float” whereas “*krathong*” refers to “a cup” or “a bowl” which is traditionally made from banana leaves. Each float is decorated with joss-sticks, flowers, small amounts of money or coins, and a lighted candle. Decorated floats are then released on the water as an offering in giving thanks to Mae Khongka or the “Goddess of Water” for providing life-sustaining water throughout the year and in asking for forgiveness for polluting the water.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ See the following websites (<http://hawaii.cambodiaworldwide.com/lantern.html>; <http://www.chiangmainews.com/aboutchiangmai/details.php?id=21>; and <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/festival1.htm>).

While I was in Mae Sot in 2004, the day of *loy krathong* fell on 26 November. A few days before that, I had heard from my local friends with whom I played football that they would go to the Moei River on the evening of *loy krathong* to float some bowls and that various exciting programs would be held there. As the day came nearer, the town entered into a festive mood. On the day of *loy krathong*, none of my local friends came to the playground to play football. They were fully engaged in celebrating that festival.

When darkness was cast over the town, my wife and I headed for the River, on the motorbike. When I passed through the downtown area, I saw groups of people get on a car and head for the river too. I witnessed more people and cars as I entered into the Asian Highway connected to the border. Not long before I continued my journey in the Highway, I faced a heavy traffic jam. Cars crawled along bumper to bumper. Motorbikes and bicycles were also stuck in the heavy traffic jam. However, people on pickup trucks were already saturated in such an exhilarating festive mood and made boisterous noises with their peers on board. Some people got off a car and decided to walk all the way to the border. Though I saw the presence of the Thais, the dominant figure of the ethnoscape on the road was the Burmese. It seemed that they arranged for transportation, particularly pickup trucks, to get to the River. The number of cars was countless as if all the cars in Mae Sot came out to pick up the Burmese. Thai voluntary guards and policemen took charge of the safety of the people by trying to make the traffic and the movement of people fluent. The Burmese, though many of them were illegal, were also attended to by those security guards.

When I arrived in an area near the Immigration Office, it was already crowded with a great number of people. A stage was located there and some programs were about to start. I followed people heading for the Moei River, holding the *krathong*. On

the way to the riverside, I encountered my Thai neighbors also carrying it. They were a rather minority among the groups of Burmese. At the riverside, people lighted a candle in the *krathong* and prayed for some time before they set it on the water. The river was full of lighted floating containers, making the landscape of the river fully romantic. People at the riverside silently sat and gazed at the bowls which contained their longings.

What made the scenery of the River more impressive was that a large number of Burmese at the other side of the River in Myawaddy came out and floated lighted containers on the water. It was spectacular to see people at both sides of the border take part in the same activity. At that time, the border turned into the collaborating or accommodating place rather than a dividing and blocking obstacle. The floating containers released on each side were met in the middle of the river making it difficult or meaningless to differentiate their original place.

In fact, the Burmese in Burma also meaningfully celebrate this day though the name of the festival and the forms of celebration are different. The Burmese call the festival held on this day “*tazaungdaing*,” *tazaung* meaning light and *daing* referring to festival. In Burma, on that day, thousands of lights such as candles and oil cups are displayed at pagodas and outside of homes.¹¹⁹ However, the Burmese in Mae Sot and Myawaddy follow the Thai styles of celebration, transforming the Thai festival into their own festival.

After a while, I came back to the place near the Immigration Office. To my surprise, the barricade was removed and people were free to move across the Thailand-Burma Friendship Bridge. The Bridge literally became friendly to people without blocking their movement. No officials checked for legal travel documents. If I

¹¹⁹ See the website (<http://hawaii.cambodiaworldwide.com/lantern.html>). Taunggyi is famous for the hot-air balloon contest during this festival. See the website (<http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=4205&z=107>).

had not stupidly asked an official whether I as a foreigner could cross the Bridge, I would have had a chance to do that. However, such a privilege belonged to true borderlanders engaging their lives in the border. At any rate, I observed that the ownership of property of the borderland such as the River and the Bridge returned to the people.

Turning to the stage, various cultural performances such as singing and dancing were going on. Of course each program was interpreted in Burmese. Onlookers were surrounding the stage and enjoying those performances. Though I did not see the all the performances, the BBC Burmese radio service reported the next day that a group of cultural performances was invited from Rangoon and various Burmese cultural shows were also introduced.

When I came back to Mae Sot, I saw, at a park near the intersection of the outskirts of the town, groups of people floating containers on the water of a pond and placing candle lights all over the park. It seemed that those who did not go to the River came here instead. They were enjoying less crowded celebrations together with their friends.

The former bus station near the Municipal Office turned into an amusement park, hosting a night market. There, I encountered several Karen who were with their children. Some of them did not have legal status. But no one checked and questioned one's legal status in the place. They were freely going around the place. By taking this opportunity, it seemed that they wanted to show to their children the urban styles of amusement, though not fully advanced. I also played some games such as shooting and darts with my wife and we were nearly addicted to these fun games. We observed the excited mood in many faces of the people in the place too. Not exceptionally, the dominant group filling the place was the Burmese. Till late at night, we were in the delightful festival atmosphere with them.

Plate 6.5 Celebrating *loy krathong* at the Moei River



Songkran

Songkran festival usually falls between 13 and 15 April. It is the Buddhist New Year day and it is also called “Water Festival” because water takes an important position in the festival and people exuberantly engage in splashing water during this period. *Songkran*, a Thai word originating from Sanskrit, means “move” or “change place” as it is the day when the sun changes its position in the zodiac.¹²⁰ Not only Thailand but also the other mainland Southeast Asian countries celebrate the festival at the same time. The festival is called “*thingyan*” in Burma, “*chaul chnam thmey*” in Cambodia, and “*pimai*” in Laos.¹²¹

¹²⁰ See the website (http://sunsite.au.ac.th/thailand/special_event/songkran/index.html).

¹²¹ See the website (<http://myanmartravelinformation.com/mti-myanmar-festivals/thingyan.htm>).

During the festival in 2005, the official holidays were from Wednesday to Friday but the mood already started earlier and lasted till the end of the week. A few days before the official holidays, naughty boys began to splash water on the passers-by, bicycle or motor vehicle riders, placing unexpected persons like myself in dangerous situations causing potential damages. The festive mood was getting more exuberant as *songkran* came nearer. In the end, the town was saturated in water and was full of extreme excitement with various cultural activities and ceremonies during the *songkran* holidays. Whenever I rode my motorbike into the town during that time, I, without exception, was hit by baskets of water and ended up drenched. All the people in the town, whether they were Burmese, Thais, or foreigners, soaked themselves enthusiastically in the festivities.

During this period, various kinds of cultural and sports activities took place. In the evenings, a temporary movie theater was set up in the corner of the former bus station, the main celebration place, showing various movies. In a stage built in the middle of the square, such cultural activities as concerts and a beauty contest selecting Miss *songkran* attracted a multitude of people throughout the days. Unlike *loy krathong*, this time, celebrations and activities were concentrated in the square near the Municipal Office and more crowds came to the place to celebrate the festival. A temporary amusement park was also set up to cater to the needs of children by providing with more playing items than at the time of *loy krathong*. A bazaar selling many items at cheaper prices also attracted customers. Of course, the Burmese were the dominant figures filling this space. It was not rare to encounter my Burmese or Karen acquaintances with their kids at the place. In the mixture with other people, they wandered around the place of celebration, eating at food stalls, shopping around

the bazaar, playing some entertaining games such as shooting and bingo, and watching concerts and the beauty contest.

The border area also saw some organizing activities. For example, boxing matches were held in the place near the Immigration Office. Interestingly, Burmese players were invited from Burma to compete against Thai players. A Thai TV channel aired the matches nationwide. As in the case of *loy krathong*, cross-border cultural and sporting activities constituted important programs of the festival. The MP of Mae Sot constituency and *nayok* PAO of Tak Province were among the onlookers of the matches. It seemed that these sporting activities were organized in a concerted cooperation between public and private agencies.¹²²

In the day time, during the *songkran* holidays, the central area of Mae Sot was totally turned into a water battle field. The area was packed with a huge number of people. I heard the Burmese, Thai and Karen languages from here and there. Pickup trucks carrying groups of Thais and Burmese with water buckets passed by bumper to bumper. At the right time, people on both sides of the road waged “water war” against those in pickup trucks. People on the trucks also splashed water onto people on the road. Westerners were also actively joining this water war. Ethnicity never got in the way of these the exhilarating happenings. It was meaningless to differentiate those participants along racial or ethnic lines in the area, given that the exuberant atmosphere totally nullified the dividing criteria. Everyone was welcomed to the exchange of water, whether one was illegal or legal, Burmese or Thai. All the participants were resolved into one people of the town regardless of ethnicity, class, legality and status. They were fully saturated into the emancipatory world.

¹²² A noticeable cross-border program that does not take place in the festival periods is the Thai-Myanmar Bicycle Project mentioned in Chapter 3. It was also engendered by the combined efforts by the public and civil sectors across the border.

The most dramatic happening occurred when a group of Burmese in a pickup truck poured water on policemen who were guarding to ensure the safety aspects of the festival. At the right time, I was compelled to see what kind of reactions came from them. In response to the actions of the Burmese, the police gave a big smile and sprinkled some water back at them rather than showed any anger and frustration that might be possibly triggered by the bold actions of the seemingly illegal migrants. Existing tensions and conflicts between the police and the migrants seemed to be dissolved in amicable terms through the exchange of water. The boundary dividing the two extremes was nullified, and the Burmese experienced the transition from liminal or marginal status to the members of the town society in the redemption of the water, to adopt Turner's argument in the case of rituals of the Ndembu (e.g. 1967; 1969).

The elimination of the boundary was strikingly observed in the border too. When I drove my motorbike to the Moei River, I was speechless at what was happening in the River. A huge number of people, mostly Burmese, were swimming and dabbling in the River under the Bridge and around. At other times, I witnessed some individuals swim in the River and someone trying to cross the border on foot. But there had been no such massive presence of people in the River like during the time of this festival. A thought came to my mind, "Is it really the border?" and then the second thought that came up was "Are they not shot by Thai soldiers closely spying on them?" These naïve questions originated from my background that the border between South Korea and North Korea has been almost a death line and thus this kind of demoralizing the sacred border was absolutely unthinkable and dangerous. But all day long and throughout *songkran* days, the River was encroached by these groups of people

without any problem. I did not see any Thai or Burmese soldiers march into the River to scatter them.

The River totally lost its official function of dividing two countries. The ownership of the River returned to the borderlanders from the state, with a restored or refashioned function of accommodating or encompassing people. Though not always, at least the festival fever of *songkran* played a great role of nullifying even the international boundary. And it makes us rethink the ownership of the border which does not always belong to the states.

Plate 6.6 Water Splashing in Central Mae Sot during *songkran*



Plate 6.7 The Scene of the Moei River during *songkran*



CONCLUSION

This chapter has dealt with the cultural aspect of the lives of others in the town. It has suggested that they can maintain their own ways of cultural life by consuming their own cultural stuffs which are pervasive all over the town. Especially, taking the example of the Karen, this chapter has revealed how they maintained their ethnic culture through Karen organizations.

However, it has suggested that the maintenance of the Burmese or Karen culture is not meant to restrict the cultural interactions with other cultures. The chapter has shown that they are influenced by other cultures such as Thai and international cultures though the degree of the influence varies in accordance with individuals and groups.

The chapter has focused on festivals in showing how they play the role of breaking ethnic or geographical boundaries. The festivals do not question who enjoys them: everyone can join the joyful activities regardless of legality, ethnicity and class. The legal issue hardly finds its validity in the festive environments. The operation of festivals is beyond the hands of the state. In that sense, the state-centered notion of festivals where they are a symbolic means to legitimize the validity and control of the state towards the people is problematized. On the contrary, the case of festivals in Mae Sot proposes that they open up the space for the mingling of various groups of people rather than provide an opportunity for the engaging practices of the state. The festive moods of the town mould favorable conditions for inter-ethnic mingling. They also play a big role in invalidating the state function of the border by returning it to the borderlanders. In the festive mood, close and friendly associations between the place and the people and the refashioned meaning of the border, are truly recovered.

I do not necessarily dismiss the suffering and stress that the Burmese have to cope with in their everyday lives. My argument revolving around festivals should not be meant to apply to other conditions. By focusing on festivals, my aim is to demonstrate the active engagement of the Burmese in certain parts of their living environment.

CHAPTER 7

DYNAMICS OF THE BORDER SOCIAL SYSTEM

“Mae Sot is like a kindergarten for the Burmese where they go through the period of adapting to the Thai society by learning the basic language and culture of Thailand before leaving for ‘big places’ after a while” (A Thai rose farm owner).

“Now we are returning to the Stone Age in the absence of educated people. What we are going to learn in the future is only to make fire with using stones” (General Secretary of the KWO).

“For the KNU, the real threat does not come from the Burmese government but from the UNHCR and Western countries” (An NGO worker).

Previous chapters have demonstrated that others are prominent actors in constituting the society of the town. They are explicit components of the social system of the town even in the absence of proper legal status. Their massive presence forms a particular nature in the operation of the town’s social system. It is the integration of two seemingly opposite sectors of the legal or formal and the illegal or the informal in various sectors of the system such as administration, economy, education, and culture, as we have seen so far.

However, in addition to this characteristic, what more strikingly makes the social system of the border town distinguish from elsewhere is the continuous ebb and flow of people. The border social system is not static but dynamic. The society always reflects changing conditions brought by the movement of people.

To a great degree, the flow of people is generated by the geographical character of the Thailand-Burma borderland. This borderland is a highly complex and differentiated space. Border porosity is common. Thus many people do move back and forth across the border without much difficulty, except in zones where there is on-

going fighting and in militarized sections. However, this is not the single cause for the flow of people. Insufferable conditions and low-intensity warfare in some sectors and places have forced people to move to Thailand. In addition, Mae Sot's status as a border town offering economic opportunities has attracted many migrants.

Mae Sot is not only engaged in population circulation with connections with Burma but also has further connections with other places beyond the borderland such as Bangkok and even third countries. Once the Burmese get to the town, they soon find other compelling opportunities elsewhere beyond the town. On the one hand, the town is the small cosmos for many of people rooting their lives in the close connections with the place; while on the other hand, people make another further movement by taking the town as springboard.

During my stay in Mae Sot, it was a hot issue that Burmese migrants attempted to advance to Bangkok for better opportunities and refugees were excited in being resettled in third countries, mostly Western countries. I often heard from factory owners that they lost their Burmese employees because they had headed for Bangkok. Also, I clearly recognized that resettlement programs rampantly affected refugees in refugee camps and urban areas. This had a great impact on both the town overall and the lives of normal migrants and refugees. The town encountered this massive force of the flowing-out of people though it sees new people come over to town from the Burmese side. Though the ebb and flow of people is the natural characteristic of the border social system, it does not always take place without tension and impact on the society.

Another force that is challenging the current state of the town and generating the immense flow of capital as well as people is the massive economic projects, notably the Special Economic Zone sponsored by the Thai government and various

international bodies. These projects have been changing the landscape of the town through the development of infrastructure and the attempt to attract global investment. Accordingly, in a move to exploit the town as a base for the broader regional and global economic prosperity, this modern capitalistic development is increasingly exposing the town to the outside actors. The town is facing these exogenous modern economic forces at the moment while on the other hand it still sees people live their lives in intimate connections with the border.

This chapter deals with these challenges that the social system of the town is facing at the moment. Mae Sot acts as an intermediate node for the Burmese from the Burmese sides to Bangkok and at the same time, also attracts the Thai and international investors the other way around. Both the population drainage to other places and multitude economic projects have great impacts on the current society of the town. Though flows of population and external influences have been inherent characteristics of the town throughout its history, the current stage of events draws our special attention since they take place in the context of the global phase of population movement and capitalistic development.

DEPARTING THE BORDER

This section touches on the out-flow of people in Mae Sot. Present days see the massive flowing-out of others from Mae Sot to other places. There are two big factors in this ebb of people: the first is Bangkok Dream and the second is resettlement programs. These are the main causes of population movement to other places, making the social system very fluid and dynamic. However, despite the drainage of population, the town never becomes void because it also sees another flowing-in of

people from Burma still. Rather, these two incidents speed up the circulation of the ebb and flow of people, which remarkably distinguishes the town from other places.

Bangkok Dream

Nukphan was running a garment factory with 420 workers, mostly the Burmese, under her payroll. She began to operate the factory in 2000 after taking over the ownership of it. She took production orders from Bangkok in the form of subcontract of global brands such as Nautica. As recently as July 2005, she revealed to me that around 110 workers left her factory in that year; most of them had gone to Bangkok. This meant that she lost over twenty-five per cent of her entire work force. Her case was not exceptional. Suanpha, who ran a garment factory, producing clothes for the brand of Reebok, also disclosed to me that around ten per cent of her 120 workers had departed her factory. Most of them had also headed to Bangkok. These incidents were observed almost all over the factories in Mae Sot around that time. Bangkok Dream of the Burmese migrants was tremendously devastating the industrial sector of Mae Sot.

Farms and shops also witnessed their employees leave Mae Sot for Bangkok. Paradon running a rose farm near Phop Phra District mentioned that quite a number of his workers had quitted the job in his farm for advancing to Bangkok. According to him, “Mae Sot is like a kindergarten for the Burmese where they go through the period of adapting to the Thai society by learning the basic language and culture of Thailand before leaving for ‘big places’ after a while.”

When I revisited Mae Sot in December 2005 after five months of absence, I was bewildered by the fact that I could only recognize a few of the ten workers in a restaurant that I used to visit. Most of them that I had known of had already left the

restaurant. Neither did I see a teashop boy that I used to chat in a teashop. When I went around the town at that time, I saw in many shops that new employees replaced those whom I had known in the past. Despite the absence of the exact information of whereabouts of these previous employees, it can be easily assumed that they might have gone to Bangkok with little possibility of going back to Burma and working in other shops in Mae Sot. Though I had also sensed the frequent altering of employees in many of the shops during my year-around stay, the five-month gap gave me a clearer picture of the fast-changing flowing of people.

It was partly due to the labor transferring policy where the Tak Governor made an agreement with other provinces in need of cheap labors to transfer Burmese workers in Tak Province to those provinces-in-need in 2004. To take an example, a fishing net factory in Khon Kaen Province had been granted a quota to hire 1,800 alien workers after the manager of the factory had requested of hiring alien workers from Tak Province. The factory's request had been approved and the transfer took place after 15 November 2004 (Bangkok Post 18 November 2004). In implementing this policy, it was believed that some policemen and officials mobilized innocent Burmese workers, who were holding proper permits, to meet the requests of other provinces. It was also believed that some of these policemen extorted brokerage bribe from the Burmese migrants and even gangs were involved in this movement of workers (Bangkok Post 13 September 2005). This policy propelled ordinary Burmese workers, whether or not they were holding the Work Permit, to seek better opportunities in other places, beyond the border.

The factory owners' complaint against this policy grew and in the end erupted in the form of demonstration to annul it on 29 August 2005 at the District Office, as I have mentioned in Chapter 3. Finally, the policy ceased to be implemented after that

incident. But according to Metta, an official in the Mae Sot Labor Office, though the policy became defunct due to the objections, the illegal or unauthorized movement of Burmese laborers to Bangkok still continued, initiated by the Burmese themselves in connections with brokers (Interview 13 December 2005).

The effect of this policy was never negligible, enhancing the trend of leaving the border for inner places, notably Bangkok over the years. As Paradon mentioned, they spend some time in Mae Sot, gathering information on the opportunities of livelihoods in Bangkok after crossing the border, before embarking on another journey.

Above all, the higher job opportunities and the relatively higher level of wages encouraged the movement of the Burmese to Bangkok. In Mae Sot factories, an individual Burmese labor earns around 130 baht a day. But in Bangkok, he or she gets about 170 baht a day. For ordinary Burmese labors, this wage gap is a compelling reason for the Burmese to depart Mae Sot. Especially jobless Burmese and temporary workers in work places such as small-scale construction sites are very keen on seeking for a job in Bangkok as an alternative survival strategy in an effort to get over their precarious living conditions.

Not just from the stance of material gain but from the cultural stance, more modernized metropolitan environment play a certain role of attracting them to Bangkok. The news that came from their friends and relatives in Bangkok to Mae Sot included the showy description of the lifestyles of the global city. People circulated this news in their factories and teashops, contributing to the Bangkok Dream.

Not only Mae Sot but also Mae La Camp sees a similar phenomenon. One of my informants told me that it was not exaggerating to say that roughly each family had at least one family member working in Bangkok. According to his assumption, overall

ten per cent of the whole residents of the Camp were working in Bangkok whereas the similar number of people working in nearby areas. The condition that the job opportunities of the Camp are extremely limited propels refugees to make a movement to Bangkok.

The pathways to Bangkok are full of obstacles. They are to pass through several checkpoints guarded by soldiers and policemen on the road between Mae Sot and Tak. Some individuals attempt to climb the rugged mountain rather than take a car to evade those checkpoints. Once they get to Tak, it is relatively easy for them to take a car and head for Bangkok in the absence of checkpoints. Some of them even kept walking to Bangkok. A group of the Burmese from Chin State told me that they walked from Mae Sot to Bangkok for several days. In the case of Mae La Camp refugees, they climb the nearby mountain, keep walking through mountain pathways to Omkoi which is over 100 km away from the Camp, and then advance in the direction of Chiangmai to meet a main road. From there they get on a car to get to Bangkok. For the refugees, this route is more secure and convenient than to choose the Mae Sot-Tak passage.

However, these methods of evading the checkups were very rare options. Most of them were connected to brokers to whom they paid around 6,000 baht for bringing them to Bangkok without being caught at the checkpoints.¹²³ If they do not have this amount of the money, they could borrow money from brokers and the debt is paid off in the form of deduction from their monthly wages. As mentioned earlier, even some officials and gangsters were involved into this affair. Some people were deceived by brokers in transferring to Bangkok. According to one of my informants, he was told to be brought to Bangkok by them. But the place he reached in the end was Pattani in the

¹²³ According to my informants, the brokerage fee has been increased to 10,000 baht since November 2006. However, if they use a pick-up service after crossing over the mountain, the fee will be reduced to 8,000 baht.

southern Thailand. For some time, he had to work in fishing sectors and his monthly wages were taken by them. He was checked and arrested by the police there and was brought back to Mae Sot to be deported to Burma. But he was released before deportation.¹²⁴

There are consequences of individual people's movement to Bangkok at the level of families as well as at the level of economy. Family members saw separation. Due to parents working in Bangkok, remaining children in Mae Sot lack proper care. Though some migrant schools run dormitories for those children, it is a tough job to give enough care for them in the lack of manpower and funding. Also elderly Burmese do not have proper care from their sons and daughters working in Bangkok though remittance solves financial difficulties to some degree. In the case of factories, farms and shops, it discourages owners to conform to legality. Since the departure of their employees means the loss of their money in assisting them to apply for Work Permits at the initial stage, they are very reluctant to have their new employees apply for Work Permits again for fear that they too would leave soon. It partly explains why the state's legal enforcement fails in the town.

Resettlement programs

Throughout my year-around stay, resettlement programs were hot issues among urban political refugees – so-called “the POCs”¹²⁵ in Mae Sot as well as among ordinary refugees in refugee camps. It was, of course, a big issue for innocent Burmese migrants in the town given that those political activists, the number of whom

¹²⁴ For general information on human trafficking in Thailand, see the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2005).

¹²⁵ See Chapter 3 for discussion on the POCs.

was estimated to be around 1,000, were living together with them in the town and given that refugee camps are near the town.

At first when the programs were noticeably implemented in the early 2004, those POCs staying outside the refugee camps were only eligible for the programs and the UNHCR was in charge of moving them to other countries, mostly Western countries such as the USA, Canada, Norway, Sweden, and Australia. But stepping into the middle of 2005, the programs in charge by the UNHCR were in the process of being expanded to the refugees in the camps in cooperation between the UNHCR and the governments of those countries. Even before this expansion, there were individual cases of refugees' resettlement into other countries under the responsible sponsorships of individuals and organizations in the resettled countries and in recognition or approval of the resettlement by the concerned governments. But now the governments of those countries themselves massively expanded the opportunities of resettlement to ordinary refugees (Interview with the Head of the UNHCR Mae Sot Field Office 12 April 2005).

Through resettlement programs, as many as about 2,500 Burmese had left Thailand as of June 2005 since January 2004.¹²⁶ The figure has been surging up continuously and thus nearly 7,000 refugees have been resettled to third countries by the latter part of 2006 since 2004. In September 2006 alone, 1,119 refugees left Thailand for resettlement among whom 820 went to the USA and 93 to Canada (UNHCR News 13 Oct 2006). It was expected that 6,000 people were to be resettled in third countries in 2006 (Irrawaddy 7 September 2006; 18 September 2006). The UNHCR plans to resettle as many as 15,000 refugees from Thailand in 2007 (UNHCR News 13 Oct

¹²⁶ This figure was acquired from my attendance at the monthly meetings of the CCSDPT in May and June 2005 and especially from the documents and presentations of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) which is in charge of some parts of the resettlement processes such as transportation matters and medical checks.

2006; Irrawaddy 29 August 2006). Given the commitments of the UNHCR to the programs in the strong cooperation with individual governments of the countries such as the USA, Australia, the UK, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Norway, and Canada, more Burmese refugees are expected to be transferred to these countries in the future.

As people departed from Mae Sot through the programs, the minds of innocent people were intrigued to take the opportunities. Impressively, the UNHCR Mae Sot Field Office had to handle the massive and frequent visits of ordinary people to ask about the programs. The Head of the Office told me that as of April 2005, she received 2,600 cases of application. Whenever I passed the Office, I often saw people asking about application forms at the gate of the Office. It was an everyday scene during my stay. But according to her, many of them misunderstood that the application was about resettlement programs; indeed the application was about the entitlement of the POC. After screening the application form and an interview, one can be entitled to the POC. Then another round of interview processes for actual resettlement is conducted by the embassies of those resettled countries. Those who pass the embassy interviews are to have medical checkups. After that, cultural orientations where they learn about life styles of their destinations take place. Then they board on airplane from the Mae Sot airport for third countries with transit in Bangkok. Though the Office kept informing new applicants of these processes, the misunderstanding continued.

At any rate, the status of the POC gives the great priority in taking the opportunities since they received special attention from those countries under the grounds of the advocacy of democracy and also from the Thai government for the reason of security problem and thus in an attempt to remove them from Thai soils

with resettlement programs. During my stay, the Thai government took action for the POCs, attempting to move all of them out of urban areas to refugee camps by 31 March 2005, notably Noh Poe Camp in Umphang District where they were supposed to stay until they leave for third countries. The reason for this move is to prevent political activities from building up in urban areas (Bangkok Post 1 April 2005; Irrawaddy 30 March 2005). Urban refugees were kept transferring to the camps in 2006 too (Irrawaddy 18 September 2006). All of the POCs are meant to be resettled in the future eventually. Hence, for those who yearn to live in third countries, their status as POC allows them the privilege to take the opportunities easily. POC Status has become a sort of a “passport” and way out beyond the symbol of persecution.

At first, the UNHCR Mae Sot Field Office laid down the form of application that applicants needed to fill in but later the Office let them describe their personal biography by using their own styles of form. Here personal biography was regarded as most important in the process of screening. It was said that many, if not all, of applicants fabricated, exaggerated or omitted parts of their biographies while stressing the political persecutions from the Burmese authorities. An official of the Office in charge of the screening and interview job mentioned that he can tell the genuineness by using some know-how accumulated over the years. It is said that having the record of service as soldiers of opposition groups is beneficial for being selected. One of my informants who used to be a Karen soldier passed the screening process by proving his record in the form of showing his photos in the uniform of the Karen military. But he omitted some parts of his life that could raise the doubts of the interviewers. At the first stage, one of the conditions was that the applicants must not be camp refugees. But he had lived in a refugee camp during his pursuit of a relatively higher level of education though he was not registered as refugee in the camp. Another applicant that

I knew of stressed his relatedness to his relatives who were involved in the KNU activities though he himself did not have any evidence of political suffering. A middle-aged woman highlighted that she was not promoted to a higher position in the government organizations of Burma because of his relatives' involvement in political activities though it appeared that her retirement was seemingly due to natural age limit. Here we can see the politics of personal biography in play revolving around the application. People emphasize some points of their life history whereas omitting certain parts of their biography. I do not intend to judge it from a moral point of view. Rather what we see from these cases is that personal biographies are not neutral but selective and even political especially for those vulnerable people as an appropriating means for resettlement programs. And suffering and hardships that one had experienced indeed became resources that one can evidently appropriate in the application processes. It would be called "the resourcification of hardships and adversities."

The trend of increasing number of the application was outstanding among the Karen in Mae Sot, especially those who were involved in Karen organizations including the Karen church and the Mae Tao Clinic. It is not exaggerating to say that most of the young people in those groups submitted their applications to the UNHCR. In fact several of them left for other countries while several of them were ready for departure during my stay. Whenever youngsters got together at the church, the hot topic of their dialogues was about the application and the interview process. Successful applicants gave some suggestions on how to fill in the application form and how to prepare for the interview with the interviewers of the UNHCR or embassies with sharing their experiences in going through the processes.

In the Mae Tao Clinic, the medics and trainees shared their information on the programs while they were engaged in the activities of the Clinic. I often heard that the work ethic of the medics was becoming insincere due to the anticipation of taking the chances of the programs. A report of the Irrawaddy on 7 September 2006 delivered the complaint of an official in the Clinic that some 40 medics were leaving the clinic to seek resettlement.

The trend was strikingly observed among Burmese political groups too. It was reported that 600 Burmese exiles with UN documents left the so-called “Liberated Area” in 2004 (Irrawaddy February 2005). In the case of the NLD, it saw as many as 100 members have left the border for third countries during the period between 2003 and June 2005 with 250 members remaining in Mae Sot and its vicinity border areas as of June 2005. And the NLD was witnessing many of the remaining members applying for resettlement programs whereas some people were ready for leaving sooner or later. Given that the membership of the NLD was regarded as a convincing guarantee for the selection, it saw even innocent Burmese apply for the membership in an attempt to have an advantage in being entitled to the POC and resultant application for resettlement programs. However, the NLD took some processes of receiving new members in the basis of the records of previous activities of them with consents from old members (Interview with a person in charge of Foreign Relations and Youth of the NLD 21 June 2005). In the case of the Mae Sot-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), 21 of the 100 members of the organization resettled in 2004 in the USA and Norway with the rest, having applied for UN refugee status, likely to follow (Irrawaddy February 2005). The ABSDF also saw about 60 members choosing resettlement over the past two years although it kept

the rule of forbidding members to apply for UN refugee status to maintain the group's strength (Irrawaddy 7 September 2006).

Reasons for individuals' applying for resettlement programs vary from person to person though they share some obvious reasons. Most of political activists had to go through such difficulties in attempts to bring democracy into Burma in the border. But political situation of the country never improved and they were getting more and more discouraged in retaining a hope of political change. Furthermore, unstable conditions that they must tackle in their everyday lives caused by the lack of financial stability and proper legal status mounted more hardships. These prolonged adversities propelled them to make a decision to apply for the programs in the end. In the face of expanded opportunities of getting away from the hardships to seemingly promising future in developed countries, it was extremely tough for them to dismiss such chances.

Refugees were also fed up with protracted staying in confined refugee camps though the places were like their new hometowns with maintaining social and family relationships. In the absence of foreseeable solutions of their deadlock situations, the news of massive resettlement was like a welcome rain after long period of drought.

As they went through the long-existing difficulties in restricted conditions, the notion of "freedom" had become a form of nostalgia that existed only in their imagination but not in reality. They anticipated that resettlement in fully free developed countries would restore the full-scale of freedom to them.

My investigation reveals that there are other reasons. Many of young applicants mentioned "education" as a main reason. They did not have proper education in Burma in the appalling education system. They are very restricted in the pursuit opportunities of higher level of education in the Thai education system. But they

expect that it would be easy for them to take up those education opportunities in third countries in the sponsorships of individual governments of third countries.

For many of parents having their children, the reason of children education drove them to the approaching the programs too. I often heard from the parents that they themselves can stay here but they want their children to have better education without restrictions in third countries.

Usually the aged were not as fascinated as the young in the programs since they were afraid of newly adapting to totally new environments in the lack of language ability. But many of them just followed their sons and daughters to other countries rather than living a lonely life in the borderland. Some of them, especially the educated old-aged people, even took the programs as a way of spending their latter part of their lives in comfort with receiving pension from the governments.

Economic opportunities are also one of reasons. A refugee complained about free conscription of labor in a construction site of a camp, saying, "If I go to foreign countries, even toilet cleaning work would bring me seven dollars per hour." Like this case, though appearing to be confined, refugees know about the outside world and they attempt to seek much more livelihood opportunities beyond refugee camps if possible. Not only innocent refugees, but many of applicants in general expected economic prosperity in their future lives in resettled countries. Some people were determined to say that they would financially support their organizations in the border by sending some amount of their money earned in those countries.

Resettlement programs are the great impact on the level of organizations and communities. In the level of individuals, it might be regarded as a blessing that opens up numerous opportunities with starting a new life though they are facing imminent challenges in adapting to host societies. But in the level of organizations and

communities, it is a disaster in maintaining their capacity in the face of brain drainage. As shown in the cases of political movement groups, those groups lost a great number of members and constantly encountered the pain of expulsion. The ABSDF strength in border areas had shrunk to about 800 from a force which one numbered in the tens of thousands (Irrawaddy February 2005). Education system in refugee camps was being shattered because of the departures of qualified teachers to other countries. At the meetings of the CCSDPT in June and July, many of NGOs revealed that their refugee employees had left their organizations and it was difficult to find suitable teachers making up for the empty positions. The Mae Tao Clinic was also losing skilled medics. The Karen church witnessed faithful members gone abroad. Many other Karen organizations such as the KWO and the KYO also saw the drainage of human resources too.

Zipporah, the General Secretary of the KWO, sarcastically lamented in a talk with me, “Now we are returning to the Stone Age in the absence of educated people. What we are going to learn in the future is only to make fire with using stones” (Interview 14 January 2005).

Of course it is lessening the capacity of the KNU. An NGO worker mentioned: “For the KNU, the real threat does not come from the Burmese government but from the UNHCR and Western countries.” It was becoming difficult for the KNU to find committed young people, compared to in the past. And soldiers were deserting their battlefields in the face of the imminent opportunities for the better life. Even DKBA soldiers knew about resettlement programs and attempted to seek the chances. A soldier in charge of Burmese areas near Umphang District revealed his excitement to my informant who was a former classmate of his during my visit to Umphang District border areas.

Pado Man Sha, General Secretary of the KNU, showed his concern to me in acknowledging negative impacts of resettlement programs, mentioning “It is a real danger for the KNU given that educated people depart from the organization” though he defended, saying, “Not all people are leaving and those resettled would do some contributions in the future.”

People are divided with regard to the programs. The aching question to those supportive of it is how to carry on the missions of the nation or political changes without the presence of human resources. In contrast, the acute question to those opposing it is what alternatives individuals would have in the prolonged hardships. Here we see two notions – individualism and communalism – in play in these two conflicting stances. However, it seems evident that the force of individualism is triumphant in the current massive exodus of population. Political leaders are not clear about this issue because at the group level they have duties to maintain the capacity of human resources whereas on the other hand they have their sons and daughters for whom they want to give better educational opportunities in developed countries.

Resettlement programs enormously generated population movement: on the one hand it drives people from the border to third countries but at the same time on the other hand it induces a great deal number of people to Mae Sot and refugee camps. As mentioned earlier, many people voluntarily crossed the border and came over to Mae Sot from the Burmese sides such as Rangoon in a move to approach the UNHCR with the hope of taking advantage of resettlement opportunities. After submitting application forms, they continued to stay in the town with engaging some livelihood activities or taking part in group activities while they waited for interview appointments and screening results. Even if their cases were rejected, many of them

did not want to go back. One of reasons, I often heard, was that Burmese authorities would interrogate them on their approach to the UN agency.

Population inducement to refugee camps is also striking. The UNHCR began to carry out the registration project in October 2004 in cooperation with the MOI. The original MOI/UNHCR registration and headcount was carried out in 1999 and although initially new arrivals were added to the registration, there was no official registration of new arrivals after the end of 2001 when the Provincial Admissions Board (PAB) which determines the status of new asylum seekers in the camps ceased to function. (TBBC 2005: 2; 2004:2; 2003: 2). The project started from camps in the southern part and extended northward to the camps in Tak Province in 2005. Coincidentally, resettlement programs were expanded during this period. Hearing the news about the registration, people attempted to get into the camps to register their names as camp residents in the hope of putting their names in the lists of resettled people. But the main objective of the registration project was to re-register the original camp population for exact calculation. For the matter of registering new people, although the UNHCR and the MOI register their names, the PAB was supposed to decide the entitlement of camp residents afterwards. In other words, their status as asylum seekers and, hence, their resettlement chances were not confirmed. Whether they knew about the processes or not, it did not stop their strong determination to get into the camps by whatever means. Interestingly enough, innocent Thai Karen were also agitated by resettlement programs and they endeavored to get into the camps by using ethnic connections with Burmese Karen refugees.

The registration project brought back those refugees pursuing their livelihoods elsewhere such as Bangkok to the camps. During the period, when I came back from

Bangkok to Mae Sot by bus, I saw a lot more alien people than other times, seemingly looking like refugees, on board from Bangkok. On the way to Mae Sot, they were caught and assembled at the checkpoint close at the entrance of Mae Sot. They seemed to come back to refugee camps for the registration. Likewise, the project generated the great centripetal movement from other parts of Thailand to the camps in addition to inducing the cross-border movement.

Plate 7.1 Resettlers Taking a Boarding Process at the Mae Sot Airport



Plate 7.2 Resettlers Taking off the Mae Sot Airport



FLOWS OF CAPITAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mae Sot is a very promising town for those who have ambitions to expand their economic gains since it provides cheap laborers as well as potential opportunities for cross-border business and investment in Burma. Hence the town sees the participation of many outside people having resources and capital. First, this section deals with the current phase of border trade and the fact that the locals are losing their stakes to outside people. Second, it takes a look at the relocation of factories and patterns of production and relation between employers and employees. Here I identify how exogenous the operation of the factories and how the current stage of people's relations have been changed. Finally, this section touches on economic development projects rampantly undertaken by the state in cooperation with international bodies such as the ADB. The state is itself one of active participants in exploiting the town

and the border areas for expanding economic opportunities. The impact of these projects is immense; the landscape of the town is changing with the numerous development projects going on all over the town. All in all, it shows that the town does not exist without engagement of other actors but it is exposed to the outside world, which brings about more dynamic features in the social system.

Encroaching of Bangkok in border trade

One day when I attended a meeting of the Tak Chamber of Commerce, I witnessed serious discussions exchanged among participants. It was initiated by Ekamon, saying to them,

In the past, main participants of the border business were the people of Mae Sot. Though commodities were ordered from Bangkok, these had to stay for some days in Mae Sot before crossing the border with leaving some margin here. But nowadays these go directly to Burma without necessarily staying in Mae Sot due to the development of road conditions. Now it is happening that Bangkok businessmen directly contact partners in Rangoon and initiate shipment instantly to the Burmese side through Mae Sot. Mae Sot is becoming a mere transit point for them and thus margin generated from border trade for Mae Sot is becoming less.

His statement prompted many participants to express current patterns of border trade with converging on the concerns revolving around the massive participation of outside people in the border business, notably from Bangkok. Someone recollected the hectic days of the black markets, the time when Mae Sot was an exclusive center with inconvenient connectivity to Bangkok due to less developed infrastructure. Their concerns were not imaginative but reflect the current phase of the development of the

border business under the sponsorship of the state and international bodies in the form of the development of infrastructure and massive economic projects. In fact, the Chief Officer of Mae Sot Custom Office revealed to me in June 2005 that Bangkok's portion of the export volume to Burma through Mae Sot was 20% with the rest from Mae Sot and Bangkok's participation was increasing.

Though in the past, it also saw the participation of exogenous people, they were soon localized and became almost indigenous people with permanent settlement in the border and their business centering on Mae Sot. This was mainly due to the inconvenient transportation system that restricted their mobility between Bangkok and Mae Sot. However, due to current massive enhancement of road conditions and communication technologies, outside participants do not necessarily pursue permanent settlement to engage in border trade. The infrastructure development gives easy access to the trade, opening up new challenges and tensions for the locals.

Relocation of factories

Besides border trade, other economic spheres of the town saw enormous increases of outside participation, especially in the industrial sector. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, the number of factories increased from 118 in 1993 to 218 in 2000. It is said that 80% of factory owners are non-locals. The introduction of factories changed the economyscape of the town. The commerce-centered pattern of town's economy with hiring indigenous people gave way to the industry-driven pattern of the economy by employing exogenous people or migrants who had recently crossed the border. The number of Burmese factory workers in factories increased throughout the years: 3,708 in 1993, 4,716 in 1995, 6,735 in 1997, and 14,793 in 2000 (Maneeong 2006: 14). As

recent as January 2005, it saw 31,196 Burmese working in Mae Sot factories as shown in Table 3.3 in Chapter 3. However, actual number is assumed to be more because this figure only concerns registered workers.

The style of operation of these factories, dominated by garment factories, is very alien in the local context. The production orders are from Bangkok and other countries in the subcontracted form, not reflecting the need of the locals. And their products are sent to Bangkok or exported to other countries and not circulated and consumed among the locals. Also raw materials flow from Bangkok not from the local areas (Maneepong 2006: 18). In terms of the volume of production, it is not controlled by the local consumption power but by the demand of outside contractors in the global supply chain (Arnold 2006; Arnold and Hewison 2005). Likewise, the economic contribution of Burmese workers is not for the local consumption but for the global consumption, which is quite different from in the past when their labor was intimately attached to the local consumption.

As the factories do not reflect the needs of the local but are only interested in cheap labor cost, it is highly likely that they shut down and move to another place providing cheaper cost. Especially, due to the global supply chain where most of factories are tied, the possibility of removal of them increases and also it witnesses unstable and fluctuated production in competition with countries such as China. One day, on my visit to Nukphan's factory, I saw sizeable number of machines not in operation. To my question for the redundant machinery, she replied that since nowadays many orders turned to China she seldom utilized the full machines. It demonstrates again that production control is not based on local conditions but on global demand with so much vulnerability to global competitions.

The expansion of industrial sector changed the pattern of relations between employers and employees. Unlike previous relations based on personal closeness and traditional patron-client relationships, now it saw the contractual relationships between them which share common features in industrial sectors elsewhere. Hence, negotiations became tools of communications between them. Also various other means in pushing forward their interests are employed. For example, Burmese workers at times resort to strikes and sabotages in responding to the unreasonable treatments of their employers. Though indeed they experienced certain level of exploitation, they came to be conscious of their rights defended by regulations and used those tactics. Nukphan and Suanpha encountered these actions of their workers. Especially when they took new large volume of product orders and began to operate producing lines, they saw the workers raise a strike in an attempt to ensure their overtime charges beforehand. It shows that the workers know how to deal with their employers in collective actions.

A report told that more than 700 Burmese workers at a garment factory near Mae Sot walked off the job in protest at low pay and other conditions of employment (Irrawaddy 12 September 2006). There were even cases of legal actions taken by Burmese workers. For example, according to a report of the Irrawaddy on 27 March 2006, nearly 300 Burmese workers from three garment factories in Mae Sot filed legal actions in a local labor court against the factory owners, claiming they were underpaid over the past two years. There was a case of legal victory for Burmese workers. On 24 August 2004, the Thai labor court in Tak Province ruled that the owner of the Nut knitwear factory in Mae Sot must pay eighteen of his former workers a total of 1,170,000 baht in back pay and compensation for abusive treatment at the workplace.

And they finally received compensation on 7 October 2004 for unpaid back wages and exploitation (Irrawaddy 8 October 2004).

Here it saw the involvement of domestic and foreign activist groups in labor issues in cooperation with labor organizations of the Burmese themselves. In fact, in the above affair of legal victory, such groups as the Chiang Mai-based Migrant Assistance Program, the Thai Human Rights Commission and the Law Society provided the workers with legal assistance, protection, food and shelter in collaboration with Yaung Chi Oo Burmese Worker's Association, according to the above report. And connections with outside groups strengthened and Burmese workers became more and more aware of their rights. This fact shows that the current state of Mae Sot's human relationships saw the active engagement of non-local or exogenous groups centering on the issues of human rights and labor rights, which markedly distinguishes from the past.

Massive economic development projects

In the early days, Mae Sot saw the engagement of the state. As dealt with in Chapter 2, the town was administratively incorporated in the state system at the turn of century from 19th to 20th. However, the influence of the state at that time was only seen in the administrative sector. Throughout most of the last century, the penetration of the state in the border areas was halted due to the inconvenient transportation and communication, insurgent movements, and less promising economic opportunities in comparison to the central area of the country. But since the latter part of 1980s, the town has seen the strengthening trend of the state's engagement as the border became

more accessible with providing new economic opportunities for advancing into neighboring countries.

Over the 1990s and the 2000s, the attempts of the state to exploit the border resulted in concrete strategies and ideas. In the seventh development plan (1992-96) laid down by the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), border towns were referred as new economic bases for stimulating decentralization by linking regional cities to peripheral areas (Maneepong 2002/2003: 77). In the eighth development plan (1997-2001), it was identified that opportunity of industrial development should be created by establishing special economic zones and tax-free zones along the borders to promote trade and investment both inside Thailand and with neighboring countries (Tsuneishi 2005: 6). Also in the ninth development plan (2002-2006), the development of border provinces and towns draws special attention. In the plan, balanced regional development and the strengthening of economic relations and mutual prosperity in regions were emphasized. It was also mentioned that regional competitiveness through expanding markets and bargaining power over trade, investment and economic cooperation is necessary (Tsuneishi 2005: 6).

Not only through the domestic national plan but also through economic cooperation strategies with neighboring countries, the Thai government pushes forward its development ideas for the border areas. In 1992, the GMS Program was formed as a result of economic and integration agreement among Cambodia, Laos, Burma and Thailand, Vietnam and Yunnan Province of China; in 1993, Indonesia-Thailand-Malaysia Growth Triangle (ITM-GT) was set up; in 1997, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC) was established, the name of which was changed in July 2004 to the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation; and in 2003, Ayeyawady-Chao

Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) which is just called Economic Cooperation Strategy (ECS) was formed (Tsuneishi 2005: 12).

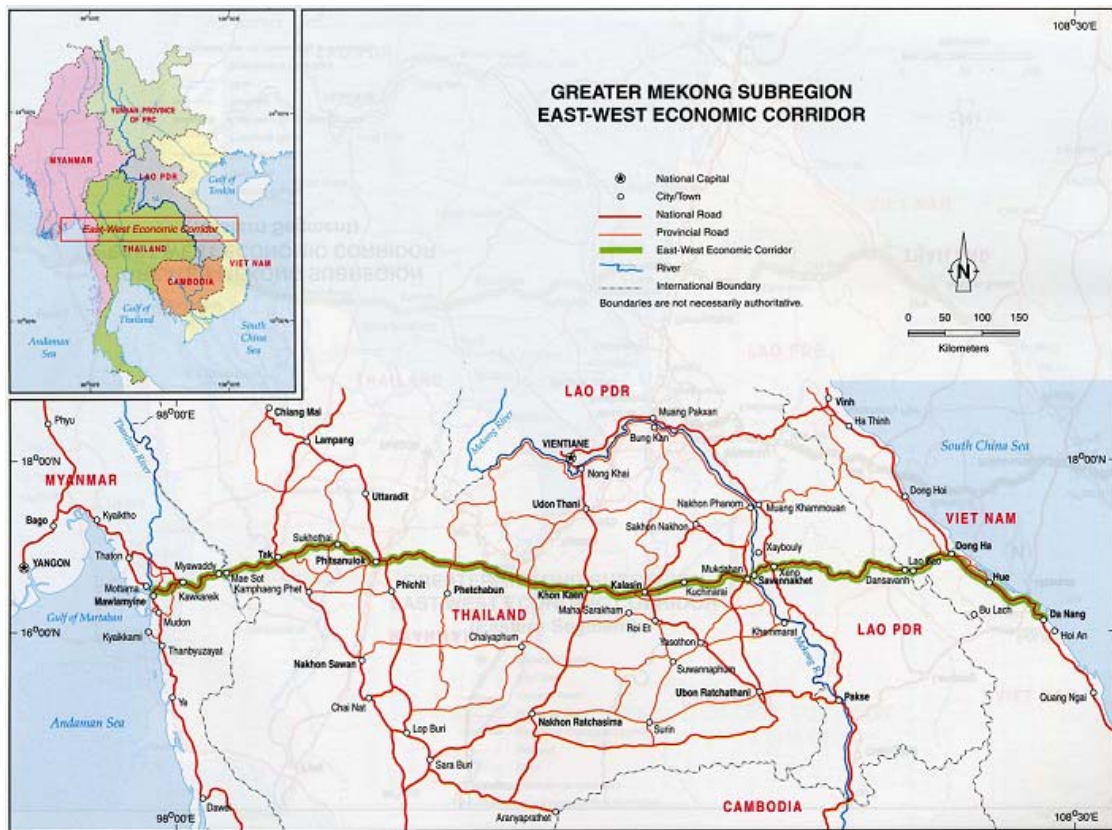
Among the programs, the ECS comprising Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand with Vietnam becoming a member in 2004 is the most significant in the direction of Thai policy since the concept is to implement the decisions and ideas created in the GMS Program by Thai Initiative (Tsuneishi 2005: 12). The ECS is based on two inter-related core promises: to curtail illegal migrant workers in Thailand, particularly in the Bangkok and central regions; and to concurrently decrease the disparity of incomes in the Greater Mekong Sub-region by relocating light manufacturing and agricultural production to border areas with exploiting the cheap labor and resources of neighboring countries (Arnold 2006: 27-28). A cornerstone of the ECS is to set up four Special Border Economic Zones (SBEZ, more commonly referred as SEZ) in Mae Sot-Myawaddy (Burma), Mukdahan-Savannakhet (Laos), Trat-Koh Kong (Cambodia) and the Chiang Rai SEZ (Arnold 2006: 28).

These programs are sponsored by international bodies such as the ADB and the UNCESCAP. For example, the ADB approved \$1.2 billion in loans from 1992 to 2003 for regional development projects and mobilized another \$922 million in cofinancing. In addition, the ADB together with cofinanciers and GMS governments has provided \$79 million in technical assistance for projects preparation and for studies to promote effectiveness (ADB 2004: 27).

Mae Sot has been situated in the vortex of these massive programs. Especially Mae Sot lies in the East-West Economic Corridor connecting between Da Nang in Vietnam and Moulmein in Burma via Mukdahan in Thailand and Savannakhet in Laos which

the GMS Program identifies as one of flagship programs.¹²⁷ In the Corridor, Mae Sot plays a role of node in connecting between Burma and Thailand.

Map 7.1 The East-West Economic Corridor



(Source: ADB 2001: xiii)

To implement this plan, concrete development projects began to be implemented. Construction of an 18 km of highway in Myawaddy across Mae Sot is currently underway under the project (Arnold 2006: 31). The 18km stretch will run between Myawaddy and Thingan Nyi Naung, Kawkareik Township, and will form part of a

¹²⁷ To further focus on the GMS Program, eleven flagship programs were identified and endorsed at the GMS Ministerial Conference of the ten-year GMS Strategic Framework. These programs are as follows: North-South Economic Corridor; East-West Economic Corridor; Southern Economic Corridor; Telecommunications Backbone; Regional Power Interconnection and Trading Arrangements; Facilitating Cross-Border Trade and Investment; Enhancing Private Sector Participation and Competencies; Developing Human Resources and Skills Competencies; Strategic Environment Framework; Flood Control and Water Resource Management; and GMS Tourism Development (ADB 2002: 32). For details on each program, see ADB (2002: 57-72).

1,300km road from Mae Sot to Moreh in India via Rangoon (Irrawaddy 3 February 2005). The road construction connecting Mae Sot and Pa-an in Myanmar the length of which is 153km was requested by Burma in 2003. Thailand is scheduled to grant 80 million baht to improve the 18km road in the first place. This 153km construction is an ambitious plan for Thailand to become a crucial point along the East-West Economic Corridor to transport goods from India to Vietnam (Tsuneishi 2005: 17). Here the importance of Mae Sot as node in this plan is conspicuous.

As mentioned above, the government has pushed forward concrete steps in establishing the Special Economic Zone in Mae Sot and its vicinities. On 19 October 2004 when Thaksin and his cabinet members held a mobile meeting in Mae Sot, the cabinet approved the setting-up of the Special Economic Zone in Mae Sot, Phop Phra and Mae Ramat districts. Mae Sot is to be developed as the center for industry, commerce and tourism whereas Phop Phra and Mae Ramat are to be the center the agricultural industry. It was agreed that the government gives various tax and labor incentives to induce investors in the Special Economic Zone. Also in the plan, the establishment of duty-free shops, transport and packaging centers and warehouses was included. To facilitate transport and travel, more hotels and hostels would be built. Other projects that won the nod of the cabinet on that day included a 40 million baht expansion project for the Tak-Lansang section of Tak-Mae Sot road; a 192.2 million flood prevention project for Mae Sot Municipality; a 46.55 million baht tap water system for the new zone; and a 50 million baht illegal alien labor deportation center. The cabinet also agreed on feasibility studies for such projects as the development of Mae Sot airport, the setting-up of manufacturing bases in Tak's industrial estates and the construction of a Mae Sot cargo terminal. The ultimate objective of the plan of the Special Economic Zone is to turn Mae Sot and its vicinities into a major industrial

base for the Greater Mekong Subregional Development Project (Bangkok Post 20 October 2004; MOCT News 19 October 2004; Tsuneishi 2005: 20-21).

Not only in Mae Sot, but in nearby Burmese towns such as Myawaddy, Pa-an and Moulmein, the Thai government attempted to engage in the building of industrial zones as part of the projects of the ECS. The Thai industrial Estate Authority surveyed the project zones and completed a feasibility study as recently as July 2006. The project is to provide enough local employment to halt the Burmese from illegally entering Thailand to work as migrant laborers (Irrawaddy 7 August 2006; 27 October 2005).

Throughout my stay in Mae Sot, I encountered various responses to the plan of the Special Economic Zone from the locals. Indigenous civil groups such as Mae Sot Civil Society mentioned that in principle they agreed on the plan to develop Mae Sot. But while they agreed that Mae Sot would be a center for commerce and tourism, they showed a very critical stance towards an industrial center, highlighting that it would deteriorate the environments of the town to the serious degree. In fact, current conditions of Mae Sot's environments are in worse condition due to over-population and the sprawling of factories. The future industrial development, according to them, would drive the town to face appalling environmental problems. This concern was shared by many other activists nationwide. When the government approved the draft bill on Special Economic Zones in the form of a Cabinet resolution in 11 January 2005, national NGOs and activists criticized that the move for establishing Special Economic Zones was unconstitutional as the Zones would be exempted from laws governing national parks, forest reserves, irrigation, labor, the environment and land with creating environmental problems. Also they mentioned that the bill aims to transfer the power of the public to a committee on Special Economic Zones headed by

Prime Minister and only a small number of investors would be benefited from the Zones (Nation 3 February 2005; 4 February 2005; 6 February 2005; Bangkok Post 13 February 2005).

Factory owners in the town were cautious about the plan because on the one hand, they would benefit from the sponsorship of the state but on the other hand, they would have to face massive flowing of big-size factories and the competition between them would not be favorable in view of their current capacity. Local businessmen were also afraid that though economic pie would be bigger due to the Special Economic Zone, they would lose sizeable portion of it to the outside people holding capital and resources under the sponsorship from the government. But they expected that Burmese labors would have more economic opportunities created by this development which would continue to be mainly dependent on cheap laborers from Burma.

At any rate, the plan of the Special Economic Zone gave rise to the economic boom in the town and its vicinities. For example, it accelerated the sales of property in Mae Sot, Mae Ramat and Phop Phra up to 90% increase in 2004 in the wake of the Special Economic Zone. The Mae Sot branch of the Tak Land Office handled transactions valued at 648 million baht in 2004 generating 50 million baht in taxes (Arnold 2006: 30). All over the town, throughout my days there, small and big-scale constructions were underway with the expansion of the Asian Highway too. Thai locals who were conscious of this development prepared themselves to take potential chances by equipping the language skills of Burmese. When I talked with my local classmates in a Burmese language class, they often opined that having Burmese language ability would be more crucial in the future in doing business with the Burmese in Mae Sot and in nearby Burmese areas. The news of developing the border also attracted a body of Burmese businessmen. I observed that one of my Burmese

informants made a phone call to his father in a village near Pa-an and persuaded him to prepare for the future in order to benefit from development projects. In truth, some Burmese businessmen established some stores like computer shops in Mae Sot and attempted to expand his business to Burmese border areas with taking Mae Sot as base.

CONCLUSION

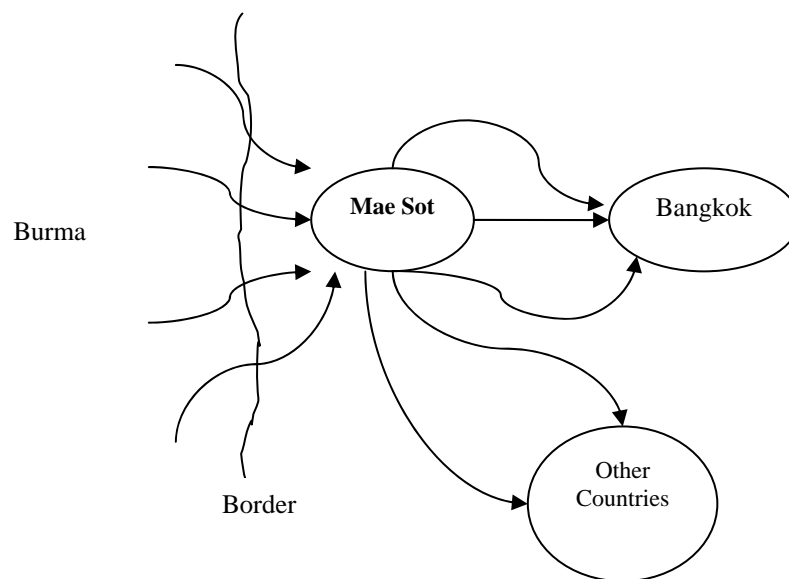
This chapter has dealt with population flowing and massive economic projects. These make the social system of the town more dynamic at the current stage than ever and other places. The presence of vulnerable people in Mae Sot is never static or passive but active. They always pursue other opportunities elsewhere beyond the particular boundary. The border is like a springboard for them to approach to other places. The border is an embarking point for further movements on the one hand while it is their living environments on the other hand. Both characteristics of the border coexist without necessarily dismantling the social system of the border.

While Mae Sot sees the flowing-out of people, it observes the flowing-in of people across the border. Though the ebb and flow of population has been inherent nature of the border throughout the history, the current stage draws our specific attention due to the multitude size of the incident. It also reminds us of the necessity to take a look at the town with respect to other places. The presence of places like Bangkok providing more economic opportunities generates this massive out-flow of people from the town. Mae Sot is never a disconnected place but is exposed to the influences of other places.

The population movement does not necessarily take place within a particular country. Resettlement programs demonstrate that others are transferred to third

countries beyond the geographical limit. Though this transcendental movement appears to be unnatural and unprecedented, it shows the current state of population movement in the age of globalization with participations of many other outside actors beside the particular government in resettlement programs. The above discussion on the movement of the Burmese beyond the border is vividly illustrated below.

Figure 7.1 Cross-Border Movement of Burmese Population



While Mae Sot experiences the flowing-in and out of others, it encounters incredible encroaching of outside people in the sectors of border trade and industry. Also it sees rampant movement of the state and the capital undertaking massive economic development projects in Mae Sot and its adjacent border areas. Here Mae Sot draws a specific attention not just in the development of the town but in the broader regional development including the neighboring country. The nature of this development is exogenous because it is undertaken by outside people, in view of the lack of the participation of the locals. Thus production does not reflect local consumption; products are not circulated within the producing place; and resources

are from the outside. The plan of Special Economic Zone also only reflects the objectives of the state without much consultation with the local partners.

How does these challenges relate to the issue of the presence of the unauthorized Burmese? Seemingly, the penetration of the state and the industrial development appear to regulate the town in the state's own right. However, current stage of development would have not been possible without the participation of illegal migrant workers. In other words, illegal Burmese have been the essential partners of Mae Sot's development. Future development also would need to rely on the labor of others. However, it needs to be pointed out that they would not be confined to the limited place. Once they see other promising opportunities, they would transcend the particular place and embark on another movement. The flowing-in and out of people nullifies state's regulating practices.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

This study has explored how the presence of others is prevailing in the social system of the town and its vicinity in the Thailand-Burma borderland. The society of the town is not possible without the contribution and the participation of others. This study attempted to overcome the conventional description of others as victims and thus passive actors. In the common understanding, the roles of others in operating the social system are either absent or rarely recognized. This understanding mainly comes from the assumption that the absence of legal status in the type of settlement in the town does not allow them to have a proper position in the society and moreover it drives them to be vulnerable to physical threats from state authorities. Obsession with the existence of legality as a prerequisite for analyzing a particular society obscures the possibility that the social system can be possible in the absence or lack of it. Unlike pathological approaches to illegal people's ways of life, this study rather attempted to make a deeper understanding of their lives and give credence and due recognition to them in forming the social system of the town in the borderland.

The case of Mae Sot explicitly vindicates such a possibility that the society is not just founded in the legal base. Despite the situations that the type of residence of others is preponderantly illegal, unofficial or unauthorized, the society of the town never becomes disarrayed. This study proposed that it is quite necessary to take into account illegality as a norm in constituting the society to achieve an adequate explanation in the formation of the society in the town. Furthermore it suggests that to integrate these legal and illegal domains gives a holistic understanding of the society.

The pervasiveness of illegality is very much due to the geographical traits of the Thailand-Burma borderland, the place where people's cross-border movement is not seriously restricted and where the interference of two neighboring states cannot be firmly exercised. Though an ideological boundary is delineated, the borderland is not fully placed under the control of the states. Still we witness flexible and fluctuating geographical domains in the borderland, which framed the geographical nature of pre-modern states in the Thailand-Burma borderland (Rajah 1990: 127). Based on this trait, Mae Sot as a central place in the borderland saw a unique social system which the flowing of alien people across the border played a great role in establishing. In the border social system, it is extremely difficult and meaningless to distinguish between the legal and the illegal since these two domains are pervasively integrated into the system. We have seen that any attempts by the state to root the legal domain did not take place without discrepancy. In the border town, it is an inherent characteristic to accommodate the unofficial domain in almost every sector of the system.

At the first place, this study sought to excavate the historical traits of the town by tracing the development of the social system. In doing this, it disclosed that the history of the town is the history of others. In the historical processes of the development of the town from a mere passing point to a substantial settlement area, the migration of other ethnic groups played a great role. They began to fill the place by establishing and developing the town throughout its history. Even the current stage of development witnesses the pervasiveness of the contribution of others with much more expanded roles in every sector of the town.

This study delved into how others are administered in the governing systems of the town. Here it revealed that the administrative system of the state does not monopolize the governance. Apart from it, other governing systems engage in the lives of alien

people. This research pointed out the problems of common understanding of the modern state since other regimes too participate in governing a sizeable portion of the population, rendering the town into another *state* having unique features in administration and governance, accommodating even unauthorized people.

In dealing with the town's economy, this study vividly illustrated how the Burmese actively engage in economic activities inside the town together with the Thai locals. Also it described the lives of unauthorized traders at the border by highlighting the integration of smuggled goods in the whole system of the town's economy. It showed that the cross-border movement of goods is still unofficial to a great degree, involving political and ethnic issues too.

This study gives a special attention to migration education since it shows a new phase in the presence of alien people. Throughout the years, it has seen the development of migration institution taking root in the town. It provides an alternative education for migrant children even in the precarious situation and in the absence of proper legal status. Especially we see the state's positive involvement in migration education and thus the positive trend of integrating between the Thai education system and the migrant education system.

This study touched on the cultural aspect of the lives of others. It described how they maintain their own culture by consuming Burmese cultural stuffs. This study also engaged in how other cultures influence their cultural lives. Above all, this study focused on the roles of festivals in bringing various groups of people together in celebrating activities. Festivals do not raise the issue of legality; rather they nullify the boundary between legality and illegality and even the statist function of the border. This study vividly describes the occurrence of boundary-breaking incidents during festivals.

Finally, this study has dealt with current challenges generating the massive flow of people and capital in the town. Here it focuses on Bangkok Dream and resettlement programs that drive the Burmese out of the border. On the other hand, we witness the flow of capital into the town due to huge economic development projects. These facts demonstrate that the social system of the town does not remain static but encounters dynamic changes. Mae Sot continuously sees the movement of people and goods, including outside forces such as the state and international bodies. It is the crucial part in constituting the border social system

Throughout the chapters, the lives of others in various sectors of the social system have been illustrated. The main theme overarching these chapters is the integration of the informal and the formal in the border social system. Throughout this study, we see this integration in various sectors of the border society such as in the field of administration, economy, education and culture. Also, these chapters show the dynamics of the border social system by dealing with the flow of population and the challenges from outside.

The findings of this thesis and its theoretical arguments will contribute to the better understanding of the border society in particular and other societies in general by proposing more holistic approaches to people and place and the relationships between them.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abraham, Itty, and Willem Van Schendel
2005 Introduction: The Making of Illicitness. *In Illicit Flows and Criminal Things*. W. Van Schendel, ed. Pp. 1-37. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- ADB (Asian Development Bank)
2001 Preinvestment Study for the Greater Mekong Subregion East-West Economic Corridor Volume 1 Integrative Report. Manila: ADB.
- 2002 Building on Success: A Strategic Framework for the Next Ten Years of the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program. Manila: ADB.
- 2004 The GMS-Beyond Borders: Regional Cooperation Strategy and Program 2004-2008. Manila: ADB.
- Alvarez, Robert R.
1984 The Border as Social System: The California Case. *New Scholar* 9:119-134.
- Anek Laothamatas
1994 Business Associations and the New Political Economy of Thailand: From Bureaucratic Polity to Liberal Corporatism. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Anurak Phanthurat
1998 A Hundred Years of Mae Sot's History (in Thai). Mae Sot: Mae Sot District Office.
- Appadurai, Arjun
1996 Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Arghiros, Daniel
2001 Democracy, Development and Decentralization in Provincial Thailand. Richmond: Curzon.
- Arnold, Dennis
2004 The Situation of Burmese Migrant Workers in Mae Sot, Thailand. Working Paper Series No. 71, Southeast Asia Research Centre, City University of Hong Kong.
- 2006 Capital Expansion and Migrant Workers: Flexible Labor in the Thai-Burma Border Economy. Masters Thesis, Mahidol University.
- Arnold, Dennis, and Kevin Hewison
2005 Exploitation in Global Supply Chains: Burmese Migrant Workers in Mae Sot, Thailand. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 35(3):319-340.
- Asian Migrant Centre
2005 Resource Book: Migration in the Greater Mekong Subregion. Hong Kong: Asian Migrant Centre.
- Aung Kin
1983 Burma in 1982: On the Road to Recovery. *In Southeast Asian Affairs* 1983. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Aung-Thwin, Michael
2002 Lower Burma and Bago in the History of Burma. *In The Maritime Frontier of Burma: Exploring Political, Cultural and Commercial Interaction*

- in the Indian Ocean World, 1200-1800. J. Gommans and J. Leider, eds. Pp. 25-57. Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen.
- Bailey, Kenneth D.
1994 *Sociology and the New Systems Theory: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
- Bank of Thailand
2004 *Economic Situations of Burma and South China and GMS Project*. Bangkok: Bank of Thailand.
- Bastian, Adolf
2004[1866] *A Journey in Burma (1861-1862)*. W.E.J. Tips, transl. Bangkok: White Lotus.
- 2005[1867] *A Journey in Burma (1863)*. W.E.J. Tips, transl. Bangkok: White Lotus.
- Battersby, Paul
1998/1999 *Border Politics and the Broader Politics of Thailand's International Relations in the 1990s: From Communism to Capitalism*. *Pacific Affairs* 71(4):473-488.
- BLSO (Burma Labour Solidarity Organization)
2002 *The Struggle of Burmese Migrant Workers*.
- 2006 *Min-gala-ba: The Newsletter for Supporters of the Burma Labour Solidarity Organisation and Its School (Edition 1 2006)*.
- Bo Mya
n.d. *Bo Mya's Biography (in Karen)*.
- Boeke, J. H.
1953 *Economics and Economic Policy of Dual Societies as Exemplified by Indonesia*. New York: Institute of Pacific Relations.
- Bowles, Edith
1998 *From Village to Camp: Refugee Camp Life in Transition on the Thailand-Burma Border*. *Forced Migration Review* 2:11-14.
- Buszynski, Leszek
1994 *Thailand's Foreign Policy: Management of a Regional Vision*. *Asian Survey* 34(8):721-737.
- Buzan, Barry
1991 *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Chaiyan Rajchagool
2002 *Tambon Administration Organization: Are the People in the Dramatis Personae or in the Audience?* Bangkok: UNESCAP.
- Chang Wen-Chin
2003 *Three Yunnanese Jade Traders from Tengchong*. *Kolor: Journal on Moving Communities* 3(1):15-34.
- 2004 *Guanxi and Regulation in Networks: The Yunnanese Jade Trade between Burma and Thailand, 1962-88*. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35(3):479-501.
- Chiang, Adeline Hsu Leen
2002 *Beyond Humanitarianism: Power and NGO-Karen Refugee Relations*. Honours Thesis, National University of Singapore.

- Damrong Rajanubhab
2001 *Out Wars with the Burese: Thai-Burmese Conflict 1539-1767*.
Bangkok: White Lotus.
- Dauvergne, Peter
1998 *Weak States, Strong States: A State-in-Society Perspective*. In *Weak and Strong States in Asia-Pacific Societies*. P. Dauvergne, ed. Pp. 1-10.
Canberra: Allen & Unwin in association with the Dept. of International Relations, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.
- Donnan, Hastings and Thomas M. Wilson
1999 *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Eldering, Lotty, and Jo Kloprogge, eds.
1989 *Different Cultures, Same School: Ethnic Minority Children in Europe*.
Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger.
- Evans, Grant, Christopher Hutton, and Kuah Khun Eng, eds.
2000 *Where China Meets Southeast Asia: Social and Cultural Change in the Border Regions*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Farrington, Anthony, ed.
2004 *Dr Richardson's Missions to Siam 1829-1839*. Bangkok: White Lotus.
- Flynn, Donna F.
1997 "We Are the Border": Identity, Exchange, and the State along the Benin-Nigeria Border. *American Ethnologist* 24(2):311-330.
- Foucault, Michel
1979 *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. A. Sheridan, transl.
New York: Vintage Books.
- Frank, Andre Gunder
1969 *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Frasch, Tilman
2002 *Coastal Peripheries during the Pagan Period*. In *The Maritime Frontier of Burma: Exploring Political, Cultural and Commercial Interaction in the Indian Ocean World, 1200-1800*. J. Gommans and J. Leider, eds. Pp. 59-78.
Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen.
- Furnivall, John S.
1944 *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1956 *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India*. New York: New York University Press.
- 1991[1939] *The Fashioning of Leviathan: The Beginnings of British Rule in Burma*. Canberra: The Department of Anthropology, Australian National University.
- Geertz, Clifford
1963 *Agricultural Involution: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1980 *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Giddens, Anthony
 1979 *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. London: Macmillan.
- 1984 *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Grundy-Warr, Carl
 1993 Coexistent Borderlands and Intra-State Conflicts in Mainland Southeast Asia. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 14(1):42-55.
- 2004 The Silence and Violence of Forced Migration: The Myanmar-Thailand Border. *In International Migration in Southeast Asia*. A. Ananta and E.N. Arifin, eds. Pp. 228-272. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Grundy-Warr, Carl, and Ananda Rajah
 1997 Security, Resources and People in a Borderlands Environment: Myanmar-Thailand. *In International Boundaries and Environmental Security*. G. Blake, C.L. Sien, C. Grundy-Warr, M. Pratt, and C. Schofield, eds. Pp. 149-209. London, the Hague, Boston: Kluwer Law International.
- Grundy-Warr, Carl, et al.
 1997 Power, Territoriality and Cross-Border Insecurity: Regime Security as an Aspect of Burma's Refugee Crisis. *Geopolitics and International Boundaries* 2(2):70-115.
- Grundy-Warr, Carl, and Elaine Wong Siew Yin
 2002 Geographies of Displacement: The Karenni and the Shan across the Myanmar-Thailand Border. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 23(1):93-122.
- Guinard, C.
 2006 Promising "Education for All" in Thailand: What Are the True Benefits for Migrant Children behind This New Policy. *Burma Issues Newsletter* 16(2):6-7.
- Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson, eds.
 1997 *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson
 1997 Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference. *In Culture, Power, Place: Exploration in Critical Anthropology*. A. Gupta and J. Ferguson, eds. Pp. 33-51. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Hall, David
 1981 *A History of South-East Asia* Fourth Edition. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Halliday, R.
 1913 Immigration of the Mons into Siam. *Journal of the Siam Society* 10(3):1-13.
- 1917 *The Talaings*. Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma.
- Hannerz, Ulf
 1996 *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Harvey, G. E.

- 1967 History of Burma: From the Earliest Times to 10 March 1824, the Beginning of the English Conquest. London: Cass.
- Hien Duc Do
1999 The Vietnamese Americans. Westport, CN: Greenwood.
- Hinton, Peter
2000 Where Nothing Is as It Seems: Between Southeast China and Mainland Southeast in the "Post-Socialist" Era. *In Where China Meets Southeast Asia: Social and Cultural Change in the Border Regions*. G. Evans, C. Hutton, and K.K. Eng, eds. Pp. 7-27. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Hirsch, Philip
1995 Thailand and the New Geopolitics of Southeast Asia: Resource and Environmental Issues. *In Counting the Costs: Economic Growth and Environmental Change in Thailand*. J. Rigg, ed. Pp. 235-259. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Hovemyr, Anders P.
1989 In Search of the Karen King: A Study in Karen Identity with Special Reference to 19th Century Karen Evangelism in Northern Thailand. Stockholm: University of Uppsala.
- ILO (International Labour Organization)
2005 Human Trafficking and Forced Labour Exploitation: Guidance for Legislation and Law Enforcement: ILO.
- Inkeles, Alex
1969 Making Men Modern: On the Causes and Consequences of Individual Change in Six Countries. *American Journal of Sociology* 75:208-225.
- Jonsson, Hjorleifur
2005 Mien Relations: Mountain People and State Control in Thailand. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Kearney, Michael
1991 Borders and Boundaries of State and Self at the End of Empire. *Journal of Historical Sociology* 4(1):52-74.
- Keyes, Charles F., ed.
1979 Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- 1979 The Karen in Thai History and the History of the Karen in Thailand. *In Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma*. C.F. Keyes, ed. Pp. 25-61. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Khaing So Naing Aung
2000 A Brief History of the National Democratic Movement of Ethnic Nationalities.
- Khin Maung Nyunt
1988 Market Research of Principal Exports and Imports of Burma with Special Reference to Thailand (1970/71 to 1985/86): Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University.
- Kraft, Richard J.
2004 Thailand/Burma Health and Education Activities Review: Education Sector Final Report: USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and MSI (Management Systems International).
- Lang, Hazel

- 2001 The Repatriation Predicament of Burmese Refugees in Thailand: A Preliminary Analysis. Working Paper No. 46, UNHCR.
-
- 2002 Fear and Sanctuary: Burmese Refugees in Thailand. Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications.
- Larkin, Emma
- 2004 Secret Histories: Finding George Orwell in a Burmese Teashop. London: John Murray.
- Leach, Edmund R.
- 1964[1954] Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Lebar, Frank M., Gerald C. Hickey, and John K. Musgrave
- 1964 Ethnic Groups of Mainland South-East Asia. New Haven: Human Relations Area File.
- Lee Sang Kook
- 2001 The Adaptation and Identities of the Karen Refugees: A Case Study of Mae La Refugee Camp in Northern Thailand. Master's Thesis, Seoul National University.
-
- 2004 Connected People and Linked Places: The Karen Refugees, the Refugee Camps, and Connection. International Conference on Impact of Globalization, Regionalism and Nationalism on Minority Peoples in Southeast Asia, 15-17 November 2004, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2004.
-
- 2005 Bluntness of Tentacles: Localization of State Agencies in a Border Town in the Thai-Burmese Borderland. International Conference on Transborder Issues in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand, 2005.
-
- 2006 The Historical Development of the Social System in the Thailand-Burma Borderland. ASEAN Graduate Student Forum on Southeast Asia Studies, Singapore, 2006.
- Lieberman, Victor B.
- 1978 Ethnic Politics in Eighteenth-Century Burma. *Modern Asian Studies* 12(3):455-482.
-
- 1980 Europeans, Trade, and the Unification of Burma, c. 1540-1620. *Oriens Extremus* 27:203-226.
-
- 1984 Burmese Administrative Cycles: Anarchy and Conquest, c. 1580-1760. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
-
- 2003 Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lintner, Bertil
- 1999 Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Mae Sot Customs Office
- 2006a Volume of Export and Import through the Mae Sot Customs Office (2000-2005) (in Thai).

-
- 2006b Major Export and Import Items through the Mae Sot Customs Office (October 2004 – September 2005) (in Thai).
- Mae Sot District Office
2004 An Activity Report of Mae Sot District Office, Tak Province (in Thai). Mae Sot: Mae Sot District Office.
- Mae Sot Labour Office
2005 Employment Sectors of Migrants in Mae Sot District Registered during the Period of 1 June 2004 to 17 January 2005 (in Thai)
- Mae Sot Municipality
2003 A Proposal for Setting-up a New Province Comprising Five Border Districts (in Thai). Mae Sot: Mae Sot Municipality.
-
- 2005 An Activity Report of Mae Sot Municipality (in Thai). Mae Sot: Mae Sot Municipality.
- Maneepong, Chuthatip
2002/2003 Policy Thinking and Impact of Economic Promotion in Border Towns, Thailand. *Tinjauan: Policy and Management Review* 5:75-98.
-
- 2004 Comparative Borderland Developments in Thailand. *ASEAN Economic Bulletin* 21(2):135-166.
-
- 2005a Dynamics of Industrial Development on Border Region of Laos-Myanmar-Thailand. *In The Naga Challenged: Southeast Asia in the Winds of Change*. V. R. Savage and M. Tan-Mullins, eds. Pp. 255-298. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic.
-
- 2005b Comparative Role of Local Government and the Local Private Sector in Thai Border Towns in Industrial Development and Cooperation. Conference on Trans-Border Issues in the Mekong Sub-Region, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand, 2005b.
-
- 2006 Regional Policy Thinking and Industrial Development in Thai Border Towns. *Labour and Management in Development Journal* 6(4):1-29.
- Maung Aung Myoe
2002 Neither Friend Nor Foe: Myanmar's Relations with Thailand since 1988: A View from Yangon. Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University.
- McCargo, Duncan, ed.
2002 Reforming Thai Politics. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.
- McVey, Ruth, ed.
2000 Money and Power in Provincial Thailand. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Migdal, Joel S.
1988 Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
-
- 1998 Why Do So Many States Stay Intact? *In Weak and Strong States in Asia-Pacific Societies*. P. Dauvergne, ed. Pp. 11-37. Canberra: Allen & Unwin

in association with the Dept. of International Relations, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.

-
- 2001 *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Minghi, Julian V.
1991 *From Conflict to Harmony in Border Landscapes*. In *The Geography of Border Landscapes*. D. Rumley and J.V. Minghi, eds. Pp. 15-30. London and New York: Routledge.
- Moldenhawer, Boletter
2005 *Transnational Migrant Communities and Education Strategies among Pakistani Youngsters in Denmark*. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31(1):51-78.
- Mya Than
1992 *Myanmar's External Trade: An Overview in the Southeast Asian Context*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Myat Thein
2004 *Economic Development of Myanmar*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Nelson, Michael H.
2002 *Thailand: Problems with Decentralization?* In *Thailand New Politics: KPI Yearbook 2001*. M.H. Nelson, ed. Pp. 219-281. Nonthaburi and Bangkok: King Prajadhipok's Institute and White Lotus Press.
-
- 2005 *Analyzing Provincial Political Structures in Thailand: Phuak, Trakun, and Hua Khanaen*. Working Paper series No. 79, City University of Hong Kong.
- Ng, Angie Lai Sze
2000 *Wait, Hope and Fight: The Karen Refugees*. Honours Thesis, National University of Singapore.
- Ohmae, Kenichi
1990 *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy*. New York: Harper Business.
-
- 1995 *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies*. New York: Free Press.
- Pamaree Surakiat
2005a *Thai-Burmese Warfare During the Sixteenth Century and the Growth of the First Toungoo Empire*. *Journal of the Siam Society* 93:69-100.
-
- 2005b *The Changing Nature of Conflict Between Burma and Siam as Studied from the Growth and Development of Burmese States from 16th to 19th Centuries*. SEAREP 10th Anniversary Conference: Southeast Asia, a Global Crossroads, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2005b.
- Panitch, Leo
1996 *Rethinking the Role of the State*. In *Globalization: Critical Reflections*. J.H. Mittelman, ed. Pp. 83-113. Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Parsons, Talcott
1991[1951] *The Social System*. London: Routledge.
- Pasuk Phongpaichit, and Sungsidh Piriyarangan

- 1994 Corruption and Democracy in Thailand. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Phua, Alice Sok Khim
2000 The Karenni Nationalist Movement: Contextual Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Framing Process. Honours Thesis, National University of Singapore.
- Pim Koetsawang
2001 In Search of Sunlight: Burmese Migrant Workers in Thailand. Bangkok: Orchid Press.
- Rajah, Ananda
1990 Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Nation-state: The Karen in Burma and Thailand. *In* Ethnic Groups across National Boundaries in Mainland Southeast Asia. G. Wijeyewardene, ed. Pp. 102-133. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- 1994 Burma: Protracted Social Conflict and Population Movements. *Transnational Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region: Problems and Prospects*, 1994.
- Reid, Anthony
1988 Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680 Volume One: The Lands below the Winds. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- 1993 Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680 Volume Two: Expansion and Crisis. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Renard, Ronald
1980a Kariang: History of Karen-Tai Relations from the Beginnings to 1923.
- 1980b The Role of the Karens in Thai Society during the Early Bangkok Period, 1782-1873. *Contributions to Asian Studies* 15:15-28.
- Rex, John
1980 The Plural Society in Sociological Theory. *In* *Sociology of South-East Asia*. H.-D. Evers, ed. Pp. 97-103. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Riggs, Fred W.
1966 Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity. Honolulu: East-West Center Press.
- Rostow, Walt W.
1960 The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scott, James C.
1972 Comparative Political Corruption. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- 1985 Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Smith, Martin
1999a Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity. London: Zed Books.
- 1999b Ethnic Conflict and the Challenge of Civil Society in Burma. *In* *Strengthening Civil Society in Burma: Possibilities and Dilemmas for International NGOs*. Burma Center Netherlands (BCN) and Transnational Institute (TNI), eds. Pp. 15-53. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

- Stern, Theodore
1968 *Ariya and the Golden Book: A Millenarian Buddhist Sect among the Karen*. *Journal of Asian Studies* 27(2):297-328.
- Sunait Chutintaranond
1990 *Cakravartin: The Ideology of Traditional Warfare in Siam and Burma 1548-1605*, Ph.D Thesis, Cornell University.
- 2002 *Leading Port Cities in the Eastern Martaban Bay in the Context of Autonomous History*. *In Recalling Local Pasts: Autonomous History in Southeast Asia*. Sunait Chutintaranond and C. Baker, eds. Pp. 9-24. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Tambiah, Stanley J.
1976 *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tannenbaum, Nicola, and E. Paul Durrenberger
1990 *Hidden Dimensions of the Burmese Way to Socialism*. *In Perspectives on the Informal Economy*. M.E. Smith, ed. Pp. 281-299. Lanham, MD.: University Press of America.
- Taylor, Robert H.
1987 *The State in Burma*. London: C. Hurst & Company.
- TBBC (Thailand Burma Border Consortium)
2003 *Relief Programme July to December 2003 (Including Revised Funding Appeal for 2004)*.
- 2004 *Relief Programme January to 2004 (Including Audit for July 2003 to June 2004 and Funding Appeal for 2005)*.
- 2005 *Relief Programme: July to December 2004 (Including Revised Funding Appeal for 2005)*.
- Tej Bunnag
1977 *The Provincial Administration of Siam*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Terwiel, Barend Jan
2002 *Burma in Early Thai Sources: An Essay on Models of Perception*. *In The Maritime Frontier of Burma: Exploring Political, Cultural and Commercial Interaction in the Indian Ocean World, 1200-1800*. J. Gommans and J. Leider, eds. Pp. 9-23. Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen.
- Thompson, E. P.
1974 *Patrician Society, Plebian Culture*. *Journal of Social History* 7:382-405.
- Thongchai Winichakul
1994 *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.
- Thornton, Phil
2006 *Restless Souls: Rebels, Refugees, Medics and Misfits on the Thai-Burma Border*. Bangkok: Asia Books.
- Tsuneishi, Takao
2005 *The Regional Development Policy of Thailand and Its Economic Cooperation with Neighboring Countries*. Discussion Paper No. 32, Institute of Developing Economies

- Turner, Victor W.
 1967 *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- 1969 *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- UNESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific)
 1997 *Border Trade and Cross-border Transactions of Selected Asian Countries*. New York: United Nations.
- Van Schendel, Willem
 2005a *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*. London: Anthem Press.
- 2005b *Spaces of Engagement: How Borderlands, Illegal Flows, and Territorial States Interlock*. In *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization*. W. Van Schendel and I. Abraham, eds. Pp. 38-68. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Vanderveest, Peter, and Nancy Lee Peluso
 1995 *Territorialization and State Power in Thailand*. *Theory and Society* 24(3):385-426.
- Walker, Andrew
 1999 *The Legend of the Golden Boat: Regulation, Trade and Traders in the Borderlands of Laos, Thailand, China, and Burma*. Surrey: Curzon Press.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel
 1979 *The Capitalist World-Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weber, Max
 1991 *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. London: Routledge.
- Wertheim, W. F.
 1980 *Changing South-East Asian Societies: An Overview*. In *Sociology of South-East Asia: Readings on Social Change and Development*. H.-D. Evers, ed. Pp. 8-23. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Wijeyewardene, Gehan, ed.
 1990 *Ethnic Groups across National Boundaries in Mainland Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- 2002 *The Frontiers of Thailand*. In *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand Today*. C.J. Reynolds, ed. Pp. 126-154. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Wilson, Thomas M., and Hastings Donnan
 1998 *Nation, State and Identity at International Borders*. In *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*. T.M. Wilson and H. Donnan, eds. Pp. 1-30. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolters, O.W.
 1999 *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- World Vision

2004 Research Report on Migration and Deception of Migrant Workers in Thailand. Bangkok: World Vision.

Wyatt, David

2004 Thailand: A Short History. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

NEWSPAPERS

Bangkok Post

- 4 October 2002, "Address by Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn: Formal Post-Primary Education and Vocational Training."
18 December 2003, "Striking Burmese Deported."
25 August 2004, "Couple Held for Smuggling, Hiding Illegals."
20 October 2004, "Khin Nyunt's Ouster Creates Dark Cloud."
20 October 2004, "Impact on Border Trade: Thai Businesses Still Hopeful."
20 October 2004, "Cabinet Nod for Tak Economic Zone."
24 October 2004, "Maung Aye May Put heat on Wa."
27 October 2004, "Junta Crushes Mafia Unit: Khin Nyunt's Cohorts Targeted by Hardliners."
31 October 2004, "The Downfall of Gen Khin Nyunt."
18 November 2004, "Gangs Benefit from Labour Transfer Plan."
13 February 2005, "Special Zones Spark Controversy."
14 February 2005, "Friendship Ride Attracts 1,000 Cyclists."
1 April 2005, "834 Burmese Report for Relocation."
9 April 2005, "Language, Job Training for Refugees."
11 April 2005, "Call to Demolish Islet, Settle Border Dispute."
12 May 2005, "Police Pocket up to B31bn."
13 September 2005, "Aliens Being Kept out of the System."
27 July 2006, "Trade Hit by High Inflation in Burma."
25 December 2006, "Former KNU Leader Gen Bo Mya Dies, 79."

FTUB Report

- 24 February 2006, "Migrant Schools Closed by Pop [sic] Phra District."

The Irrawaddy

- 1 August 2001, "Junta Launches New PR Offensive."
10 August 2004, "Thai Customs Seizes Burmese Rice."
24 August 2004, "Alleged Human Traffickers Arrested in Mae Sot."
30 August 2004, "Ethnic Karen Celebrate Wrist Tying Ceremony."
8 October 2004, "Burmese Workers Seal Legal Victory in Thailand."
February 2005, "Farewell to the Liberated Area" (A Report in Monthly Magazine, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=4425&z=10>).
3 February 2005, "Work Starts Soon on Burma Highway."
30 March 2005, "Burmese Refugees Relocate to Thai Camps."
19 August 2005, "Karen Celebrate Their Annual Wrist-Tying Festival."
27 October 2005, "Thais Help Search for Industrial Zone."
20 March 2006, "Thai Senator Reviews Migrant Conditions in Mae Sot."
21 March 2006, "Thai Authorities Close Migrant Schools in Phop Phra."
27 March 2006, "Migrant Workers Take Mae Sot Factories to Court."
11 May 2006, "New Thai Policy on Migrant Schools Welcomed."
22 June 2006, "Burma-Thailand Border Trading Slumps."
7 August 2006, "Thai-Backed Industrial Zones in Burma Suffer Delays."
10 August 2006, "Customs Officials, Traders Sentenced."
29 August 2006, "Burmese Refugees Leaving Thailand for US."

7 September 2006, "Brain Drain among Exiled Burmese Dissidents."
12 September 2006, "Burmese Migrant Workers Stage Protest Strike."
18 September 2006, "Urban Burmese Refugees Moved to Border Camps."
24 December 2006, "Renowned Karen Rebel Leader Dead."
26 December 2006, "Ten Thousand Attend Gen Bo Mya's Funeral."

MOCT News

19 October 2004, "Cabinet Approves Tak Special Economic Zone."

The Nation

3 February 2005, "Public Forum: Economic Zone Bill Lambasted."
4 February 2005, "Economic Plan: NGOs Escalate Opposition to Special-Zone Bill."
6 February 2005, "Special Economic Zones: Monks and NGOs Say No."

UNHCR News

13 October 2006, "In Search of Freedom, Burmese Refugees Head for New Life in American."

Appendix A: Number of Migrant Labour Requested, Quota and Work Permit Issuance 1 June – 30 August 2005

No.	Region/Province	Result of Migrant Labour Requested					Result of Work Permit Quota					Number of Work Permits issued				
		Employer	Myanmar	Lao PDR	Cambodia	Total	Employer	Myanmar	Lao PDR	Cambodia	Total	Employer	Myanmar	Lao PDR	Cambodia	Total
Total		240,297	1,354,309	306,616	238,906	1,881,529	237,753	1,276,609	275,063	222,707	1,673,349	205,562	539,416	90,073	75,804	705,293
Regions excluding Bangkok		166,376	1,134,121	209,451	195,809	1,521,079	164,743	1,065,346	182,393	184,976	1,431,685	137,495	447,704	52,707	60,862	561,273
Bangkok		73,921	220,188	97,165	43,097	360,450	73,010	211,263	92,670	37,731	241,664	68,067	91,712	37,366	14,942	144,020
Central Region		44,680	369,721	68,637	58,914	497,272	44,028	341,720	68,660	55,611	465,991	36,095	144,307	19,533	20,791	184,631
1	Nakornpathom	6,122	46,473	6,777	2,115	55,365	6,098	37,825	6,098	1,812	45,735	5,676	17,686	2,045	740	20,471
2	Nontaburi	8,077	28,669	12,072	9,807	50,548	8,077	28,669	12,072	9,807	50,548	6,636	10,244	3,312	2,370	15,926
3	Patumthani	7,646	35,739	12,883	14,129	62,771	7,574	35,359	12,683	13,929	61,971	7,212	18,508	1,866	3,648	24,022
4	Samutprakarn	8,866	54,101	14,594	24,150	92,845	8,741	47,276	12,954	21,205	81,435	5,024	14,839	6,250	11,436	32,525
5	Samutsakorn	6,032	170,725	11,788	2,447	184,960	5,987	160,711	15,342	3,176	179,229	5,623	69,455	3,771	670	73,896
6	Others	7,935	33,994	10,523	6,266	50,783	7,551	31,880	9,511	5,682	47,073	5,924	13,575	2,289	1,927	17,791
6.1	Chainat	308	1,362	341	153	1,856	307	1,357	341	153	1,851	208	547	38	38	623
6.2	Ayudhya	2,102	8,907	4,483	3,303	16,693	1,954	8,611	4,113	3,035	15,759	1,564	3,055	1,066	975	5,096
6.3	Lopburi	916	2,618	1,292	325	4,235	914	2,604	1,214	300	3,518	674	921	162	93	1,276
6.4	Samutsongkram	1,561	9,459	803	280	10,542	1,537	9,338	801	278	10,417	1,260	4,788	179	52	5,019
6.5	Saraburi	1,915	8,009	2,800	1,922	12,731	1,714	7,441	2,393	1,689	11,523	1,458	3,031	567	667	4,265
6.6	Singburi	295	1,402	263	100	1,765	291	1,018	149	57	1,224	188	455	40	20	515
6.7	Ang Thong	473	1,445	407	126	1,978	472	1,344	379	119	1,842	305	448	90	49	587
6.8	Uthaitхани	365	792	134	57	983	362	767	121	51	939	267	330	47	33	410
Eastern Region		25,156	75,255	35,216	105,644	216,685	24,890	71,312	31,597	99,505	202,414	19,590	25,266	12,488	34,068	71,822
1	Trad	3,670	6,350	692	20,882	27,924	3,661	6,255	658	20,205	27,118	2,935	3,354	94	8,557	12,005
2	Rayong	3,034	3,814	8,609	7,517	19,940	2,818	2,473	7,638	5,671	15,782	3,412	4,534	1,801	8,726	15,061
3	Others	18,452	65,661	25,915	77,245	168,821	18,311	62,564	23,301	73,629	159,514	13,243	17,378	10,593	16,785	44,756
3.1	Chantaburi	2,797	8,971	4,402	6,644	22,017	2,752	7,740	3,269	6,678	17,695	2,474	1,004	2,495	2,353	5,852
3.2	Chachoengsao	8,044	37,250	10,026	29,981	77,257	8,021	36,993	9,734	29,944	76,671	2,062	2,999	1,465	2,510	6,974
3.3	Cholburi	662	2,504	488	665	3,657	662	2,384	471	650	3,505	6,104	11,982	6,049	7,942	25,973
3.4	Nakornnayok	1,232	1,834	1,988	3,464	7,286	1,205	982	1,166	2,892	5,040	412	872	237	160	1,269
3.5	Prachinburi	3,761	14,885	8,890	20,578	44,353	3,761	14,260	8,540	20,353	43,153	815	457	337	749	1,543
3.6	Srarakew	1,956	217	121	13,913	14,251	1,910	217	121	13,112	13,450	1,376	64	10	3,071	3,145
Western Region		12,269	110,842	11,995	5,049	127,886	12,225	109,534	11,545	4,940	126,019	10,452	39,550	1,973	987	42,510
0.1	Kanchanaburi	3,282	35,088	1,414	670	37,172	3,282	35,088	1,414	670	37,172	2,820	11,912	196	118	12,226
0.2	Prachakirikhan	2,477	24,748	3,555	2,333	30,636	2,433	24,183	3,281	2,277	29,741	2,412	7,625	455	513	8,593
0.3	Petchaburi	1,061	5,206	1,731	300	7,237	1,061	4,550	1,607	247	6,404	950	2,396	488	112	2,996
0.4	Ratchaburi	3,612	36,065	3,996	1,160	41,221	3,612	36,065	3,996	1,160	41,221	2,855	13,534	532	103	14,169
0.5	Supanburi	1,837	9,735	1,299	596	11,620	1,837	9,648	1,247	586	11,481	1,415	4,083	302	141	4,526
Northern Region		36,254	270,834	8,621	1,547	281,002	35,925	246,192	8,126	1,452	255,770	29,299	109,762	2,811	547	113,120
1	Chiangmai	14,965	104,150	530	54	104,734	14,972	99,204	515	49	99,768	11,510	42,260	138	13	42,411
2	Tak	5,962	107,096	129	39	107,264	5,634	89,562	49	38	89,649	4,831	41,230	7	5	41,242
3	Others	15,327	59,588	7,962	1,454	69,004	15,319	57,426	7,562	1,365	66,353	12,958	26,272	2,666	529	29,467
3.1	Kampaengphet	1,485	10,695	890	397	11,972	1,485	10,560	890	397	11,837	1,169	2,950	282	211	3,443
3.2	Chiangrai	4,834	20,358	1,469	11	21,838	4,834	20,358	1,469	11	21,838	4,642	12,543	516	2	13,061
3.3	Nakornsawan	1,785	7,343	1,077	317	8,737	1,782	7,026	1,054	312	8,392	1,426	2,628	214	80	2,922
3.4	Nan	325	55	687	3	745	325	55	687	3	745	213	41	229	3	273
3.5	Payao	413	547	552	5	1,104	412	382	512	5	899	280	154	216	3	375
3.6	Pichit	683	2,327	198	204	2,729	683	2,293	202	135	2,630	450	888	62	41	991
3.7	Pitsanulok	768	1,835	614	192	2,641	768	1,654	554	185	2,393	565	585	203	30	838
3.8	Petchaboon	540	1,301	588	137	2,026	540	811	579	136	1,526	401	366	202	76	644
3.9	Prae	334	401	424	21	846	331	363	330	20	713	276	195	150	17	362
3.1	Maehongsorn	1,039	3,566	-	-	3,566	1,039	3,566	-	-	3,566	1,039	1,897	-	-	1,897
3.11	Lampang	674	1,717	793	41	2,551	673	1,559	658	41	2,258	458	967	217	6	790
3.12	Lampoon	1,532	7,952	120	21	8,093	1,532	7,336	83	21	7,440	1,325	2,950	13	1	2,964
3.13	Sukhothai	400	1,040	101	72	1,213	400	1,012	95	66	1,173	298	323	46	21	390
3.14	Uteradit	515	451	459	33	943	515	451	459	33	943	416	185	316	16	517
Northeastern Region		16,811	12,943	35,002	5,281	53,226	16,589	8,418	30,388	4,357	43,163	13,109	3,490	12,888	1,341	17,719
0.1	Kalasin	418	74	415	16	505	418	74	415	16	505	348	72	288	13	373
0.2	Khonkaen	1,070	4,108	4,242	268	8,618	908	720	834	39	1,593	908	720	834	39	1,593
0.3	Chaiyapoom	477	446	477	86	1,009	459	219	359	48	626	399	139	278	32	449
0.4	Nakornpanom	1,457	44	2,273	7	2,324	1,457	44	2,273	7	2,324	1,241	25	1,442	4	1,471
0.5	Nakornratchasima	1,788	4,294	3,978	1,987	10,259	1,788	4,289	3,970	1,924	10,183	1,307	1,588	813	478	2,879
0.6	Buriram	631	884	442	766	2,092	614	224	343	645	1,212	527	149	202	282	633
0.7	Mahasarakam	346	1,619	705	31	2,355	346	1,619	699	31	2,349	231	61	188	6	255
0.8	Mukdahan	857	9	2,311	6	2,326	857	9	2,311	6	2,326	716	8	1,000	6	1,014
0.9	Yasothon	440	74	542	12	628	440	74	542	12	628	366	61	322	9	392
0.1	Roi-et	551	137	593	45	775	546	132	551	35	718	491	118	390	24	532
0.11	Loei	1,234	90	3,401	11	3,502	1,234	90	3,369	11	3,470	944	54	1,183	10	1,247
0.12	Sri Saket															

Appendix B: Work Permit Application Form



กรมการจัดหางาน กระทรวงแรงงาน

แบบ ตท.๑๓

Form WP.13

- คำขอรับใบอนุญาตทำงาน ตามมาตรา ๑๒ (๒)
Application for work permit according to section 12 (2)
- คำขอต่อยาใบอนุญาตทำงาน ตามมาตรา ๑๕
Application for renewal of work permit according to section 15
- คำขอรับใบแทนใบอนุญาตทำงาน ตามมาตรา ๑๙
Application for substitution of work permit according to section 19
- คำขออนุญาตเปลี่ยนการทำงานหรือเปลี่ยนท้องที่หรือสถานที่ในการทำงานตามมาตรา ๒๑
Application for change of work or locality or place of work according to section 21

หมายเลขประจำตัวคนต่างด้าว

Alien Identification Number

ข้อมูลคนต่างด้าว (Alien Personal Data Statement)

ชื่อผู้ยื่นคำขอ นาย/นาง/นางสาว.....
Name of applicant Mr./Mrs./Miss

สัญชาติ พม่า ลาว กัมพูชา เพศ ชาย หญิง วัน/เดือน/ปีเกิด...../...../.....อายุ.....ปี
Nationality Myanmar Laos Cambodia Sex Male Female Date of birth Age Years

สถานภาพ โสด สมรส อื่น ๆ.....วุฒิการศึกษา.....
Status Single Married Others Education

ภูมิลำเนาก่อนเดินทางเข้าประเทศไทย เลขที่.....อำเภอ.....จังหวัด.....ประเทศ.....
Address before coming into Thailand No. District Province Country

สถานที่พักอาศัยในประเทศไทย เลขที่.....หมู่/ชุมชน.....ซอย.....ถนน.....อาคาร.....
Address in Thailand No. Lane Road Building

ตำบล/แขวง.....อำเภอ/เขต.....จังหวัด.....โทรศัพท์.....
Tambol District Province Telephone

ประเภทงานที่ขออนุญาต งานรับใช้ในบ้าน งานกรรมกร ในกิจการ.....
Type of work applied House maid Labour type of business

ระยะเวลาที่ขออนุญาตทำงาน.....เดือน/ปี ค่าจ้างที่ได้รับ.....บาท/เดือน/วัน
Period of employment month/year Wage Baht/month/day

สถานที่ทำงานของคนต่างด้าว เลขที่.....หมู่/ชุมชน.....ซอย.....ถนน.....อาคาร.....
Work place No. Lane Road Building

ตำบล/แขวง.....อำเภอ/เขต.....จังหวัด.....โทรศัพท์.....
Tambol District Province Telephone

เฉพาะเจ้าหน้าที่ For official use
เลขรับที่.....
วันที่รับ.....
ชื่อผู้รับ.....
ใบอนุญาตเลขที่.....
ออกให้เมื่อ.....
จังหวัด.....

ข้อมูลนายจ้าง (Employer Data Statement)

เลขที่บัตรประจำตัวประชาชน/เลขที่หนังสือเดินทาง.....เลขประจำตัวผู้เสียภาษีอากร (นิติบุคคล).....
I.D. card No. /Passport No. Tax identification No.

ชื่อนายจ้าง/สถานประกอบการ.....ประเภทกิจการ.....
Name of employer/company Type of work or business

ที่อยู่ปัจจุบัน/สถานที่ตั้ง เลขที่.....หมู่/ชุมชน.....ซอย.....ถนน.....อาคาร.....
Address of employer/company No. Lane Road Building

ตำบล/แขวง.....อำเภอ/เขต.....จังหวัด.....โทรศัพท์.....
Tambol District Province Telephone

ข้าพเจ้าขอรับรองว่าข้อความข้างต้นเป็นจริงทุกประการ

I hereby certify that the above statements are true in every respect.

(ลายพิมพ์นิ้วมือ).....ผู้ยื่นคำขอ
(Finger print) Applicant

(ลายมือชื่อ).....ผู้ยื่นคำขอ
(Signature) (คนต่างด้าว)
Applicant

วันที่.....เดือน.....พ.ศ.....
Date Month Year

คำรับรองของนายจ้าง ข้าพเจ้าขอรับรองว่าประสงค์จะจ้างบุคคลข้างต้นจริง และขอรับรองว่าข้อมูลข้างต้นเป็นจริงทุกประการ
Confirmation of employer. I hereby certify that the above statements are true in every respect.

(ลายมือชื่อ).....นายจ้าง/ผู้รับมอบอำนาจ
(Signature) Employer/Authorized person

(.....)

วันที่.....เดือน.....พ.ศ.....
Date Month Year

เฉพาะเจ้าหน้าที่
For Official Use

ก.งานตรวจสอบเอกสาร/พิจารณา	ข.งานบันทึกข้อมูล
<p>● การตรวจสอบเอกสารหลักฐาน</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> เอกสารและหลักฐานครบถ้วน</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> เอกสารและหลักฐานไม่ครบถ้วน.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>(ลงชื่อ).....</p> <p>(.....)</p> <p>เจ้าหน้าที่ผู้ตรวจสอบเอกสาร</p> <p>วันที่.....เดือน.....พ.ศ.....</p>	<p>● บันทึกข้อมูลคนต่างด้าวแล้ว</p> <p>ใบเสร็จเล่มที่.....เลขที่.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>(ลงชื่อ).....</p> <p>(.....)</p> <p>เจ้าหน้าที่บันทึกข้อมูล</p> <p>วันที่.....เดือน.....พ.ศ.....</p>
<p>● ความเห็นของพนักงานเจ้าหน้าที่</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> เห็นควรอนุญาต</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> เห็นควรไม่อนุญาต เหตุผล.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>(ลงชื่อ).....</p> <p>(.....)</p> <p>พนักงานเจ้าหน้าที่</p> <p>วันที่.....เดือน.....พ.ศ.....</p>	
<p>● คำสั่งของอธิบดีหรือเจ้าพนักงานซึ่งอธิบดีมอบหมาย/นายทะเบียน</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> อนุญาต</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> ไม่อนุญาต เหตุผล</p> <p>.....</p> <p>(ลงชื่อ).....</p> <p>(.....)</p> <p>อธิบดีหรือเจ้าพนักงานซึ่งอธิบดีมอบหมาย/นายทะเบียน</p> <p>วันที่.....เดือน.....พ.ศ.....</p>	

Appendix C: Cabinet Resolution, RTG (Royal Thai Government), 5th July 2005

Main points of the Cabinet Resolution, RTG, 5th July 2005

On Setting up the system to document the day, month and year of entry of undocumented or non-Thai persons into the education system (implementing the education of undocumented or non-Thai person

The Cabinet approved the setting up of a system to document the day, month, year of entry of undocumented or non-Thai persons into the education system according to the recommendations put forward by the Ministry of Education as follows:

1. To expand the opportunity for undocumented and non-Thai persons to enter into the education system, including groups who had previously been excluded from some levels of education. In order to make the education more widely available, there will no longer be restrictions on levels of education or on travel to educational institutes. Educational institutes will now accept, register and give certificates to all undocumented and non-Thai persons at all levels.
2. To allocate a budget per student for the educational institute which is giving education to the undocumented and non-Thai person, from kindergarten to high school. The amount per student will be the same as per Thai student. An extra budget of 6.5 million baht will be needed to support the entry of the 1,269 undocumented and non-Thai students and will be organized by the Office of the Committee for the Promotion of Private Education.
3. The Ministry of Interior will provide the 13 digit personal identity to undocumented and non Thai persons to be able to identify the status of undocumented and non-Thai persons. The Ministry of Interior will grant permission and facilitate children and youth who are restricted by law to live in certain areas, to be able to travel to the education facility according to the term times without have to ask for permission each time. Students “displaced by armed conflict” and POCs are excluded from this permission to travel to their place of study.
4. The Ministry of Education will organize the appropriate education for children and youth who are “persons displaced from armed conflict” to develop their quality of their life and solidarity.

(Source: Asian Migrant Centre 2005: 124)