

POPULATION MOBILITY AND TRADE CONTACTS IN THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE: THAILAND, MYANMAR AND LAOS

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Abstrak

Persoalan perbatasan telah menjadi masalah yang signifikan di Asia Tenggara sejak berakhirnya Perang Dunia II. Penelitian ini dipusatkan pada wilayah perbatasan di Thailand, Myanmar dan Laos. Persoalan yang muncul ke permukaan adalah kesenjangan ekonomi, hubungan sosial dan budaya, pergerakan manusia yang tidak terdaftar atau imigran yang tidak terdokumentasikan di wilayah perbatasan. Pembangunan di wilayah perbatasan memberikan sumbangan pada peningkatan wilayah itu yang kita dapat menyaksikannya pada perkembangan kontak perdagangan, sebagai contohnya melalui alur sungai Mekong menuju ke Luang Prabang yang pada akhirnya mencapai wilayah yang terpencil di bagian timur Laos. Kondisi seperti itu disebabkan adanya pembangunan ekonomi transnasional, pertumbuhan ekonomi baru dan aktifitas perdagangan. Studi ini memberikan pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang kontak perdagangan di wilayah perbatasan di Asia Tenggara, khususnya suatu pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang persoalan seperti itu yang terjadi di Indonesia.

The border issue has become a significant problem in Southeast Asia since the end of the Second World War. Focused in the border regions in Thailand, Myanmar and Laos, this paper looks at the factors which have come to the fore, such as, those around economic gaps, cultural and social relations and movement of people who are not listed or are undocumented immigrants in the cross borders. The developments in the borders contribute to the improvements to the area which we can see in the development of trade contacts for instance, through the Mekong River to Luang Prabang and onto the remote areas in the eastern part of Laos. Such conditions are due to the development of a trans-national economy, new economic growth and trade activities. This study gives a better understanding of the trade contacts in the border regions in Southeast Asia, especially a better understanding of such issues that may be shared by Indonesia.

Keywords: Population mobility, trade contacts, the Golden Triangle and regional cooperation

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SOME NOTES ON THE BORDER ISSUES IN THE MAINLAND OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

The issues of population mobility and trade activities in the border areas have become very important in Southeast Asia, especially since the end of the Cold War, partly due to geopolitical developments in relation to trans-boundary transportation networks, called corridors of growth. The development of the infrastructure and the growing number of trading activities in the border areas have resulted in the discourse on a 'border bonanza' in Southeast Asia, especially in the areas that are known as part of the 'Golden Triangle' or Asia's 'growth circle'. Thailand, Laos and Myanmar (formerly called Burma), for instance, have a long, unique history relating to the frontier regions. The frontier regions between Thailand, Laos and Myanmar are important areas that have undergone radical changes during the past one hundred and sixty years. Most borders between Thailand, Laos and Myanmar were negotiated many years ago and have tended to remain fixed. The border between Thailand and Myanmar for instance, is about 2,400 kilometres long from the infamous 'Golden Triangle' in the north to Victoria Point or Kawthaung in the south. The 'Golden Triangle' is famous, becoming better known since this place has increasingly grown due to the development among the countries in the region; Thailand, Myanmar and Laos.

The great development of this northern region is related to what happened after the 1970s. At that time the trade activities in relation to the tourist industry were also developed by the Thai Government, not only in Bangkok but also in the Golden Triangle where the borders of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand meet. According to Renard (2001) it is an area which, 'implicitly recognized the absence from China'. The Golden Triangle area covers about 40,000 sq. km. and is notorious for opium cultivation. This 'opium' area includes Thailand's Chiang Rai Province, a large part of Myanmar's Shan State, and the Laotian Provinces of Bo Keo and Louang Namtha. In addition to this, Sop Ruak is also considered a centre. Opium certainly was and still is, a major product of the Golden Triangle region. However, the region's being an important poppy growing area is excluded when the term is defined (Hauser, 2004: 44).

Most of the border area is covered by forest and mountains and inhabited by various ethnic minority populations e.g. the Mon, the Karen, the Kareni, and the Shan (Maunati 2004: 60). Most of these minority groups are opposed to the Myanmar Government and have waged political and armed struggle for wider autonomy or outright independence. The Myanmar Government is actively suppressing these uprisings and political persecutions are widely reported from various areas. As a result of these conflicts, worsened by Burmese military attacks, many ethnic minorities have moved to the border areas inside Thailand and are living in several refugee camps. Focusing on population mobility and trade activities in the border areas this paper looks at the factors from different angles, including from the historical and anthropological perspectives. The analysis of these issues will mostly stress the period of the 1960s and 1970s since this period is considered as a particular time of growth.

In the 1960s for instance, Thailand earned a reputation as one of the fastest growing and most successful developing countries in the world (*Thailand, 2000*).

It is not surprising that many people from Myanmar and Laos look for work in Thailand causing possible problems in terms of visas and other crucial matters like smuggling, illegal trade and so on. Therefore, the Thai Government tries to maintain a safe, conducive to progress and stability, situation in the border areas by developing the regions socially, culturally and economically. Why and how do the governments create this secure situation? To answer this, I think we should go back to the history of the regions since this affects current developments. Historically, the border areas were often 'grey areas' where people did not concern themselves about the borderlines because usually those living close to them were of the same ethnic groups. Borders are the result of the development of a modern nation state. The rapid flow of globalisation, the development of a trans-national economy, the process of economic growth in the newly industrialised countries in Southeast Asia and trans-national trading have become the important issues to be understood. This study, hopefully, will contribute to the understanding of these complex matters in the border areas between Thailand and Myanmar and also be useful for understanding similar issues in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

Empirical research was carried out in the Provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Nongkhai (Thailand), and in Savannhaket (Laos). I interviewed people particularly in the governments in Thailand and Laos and also other people who are also concerned with border issues. Discussions were held to obtain more information regarding trade relationships and the intensity of movements of the people and goods. I collected primary and secondary data from related institutions, through the internet, universities in Thailand and Laos, and also libraries in both countries. I sought data from different sources, including literature on Laos and Thailand by western, non-western and Thai and Lao writers and conducted in-depth interviews with many groups. I also interviewed people engaged in trade contacts in the border areas between Thailand, Myanmar and Laos, including owners of souvenir shops, the owner of a travel agency, immigration officials and traders. In addition to this, Bernard's discussion of the use of unstructured and semi structured interviewing was very useful (Bernard, 1995). Thick description, as proposed by Geertz in his research method, such as his conceptualization of fieldwork, was very important (Geertz, 1973). Although to obtain a thick description needs a long period of fieldwork, the understanding of this method is very useful for any researcher carrying out empirical studies.

POPULATION MOBILITY AND TRADE ACTIVITIES IN THE COLONIAL ERA

Burma, once colonized by the British, today is called Myanmar and has 15 ethnic groups (Frasch, 1999: 205). It consists of around 70% Burmese and 30% of several minorities, especially the Shan, the Kachin, the Karen and the Chin. The Shan and the Karen constitute about 16% of the total population of Burma. These ethnic minorities reside mainly in the border areas between Burma and Thailand and in Tenasserin. Kampe (1997: 22), using a 1996 research report, shows slightly different figures for hill tribes in Thailand with the population of major Thai hill tribes at 790,369 constituting 1.3 % of the total national population. Breaking it down to: Karen: 402,095, Hmong: 126,147, Lahu: 78,842, Akha: 48,468, Mien: 47,305, Htin: 32,755, Lisu: 31,536, Lua: 15,711, Khamu: 10,153 and Mlabri: 173. These indigenous peoples are inhabitants of the mountainous areas of the north and along the western border between Thailand and Burma (Kampe, 1997: 23). Ethnic Karens have long lived along the Irrawaddy River and in the valleys. In prior times there was no Karen political organisation and these people were marginalised and dispersed. The responsibilities of paying tax and being subordinated have resulted in the Karen's suspicion of the Burmese Government. Partly due to this circumstance, the conflicts in the border areas cannot be resolved. Myanmar is the most ethnically diverse state in mainland Southeast Asia. The Burmese comprise around 68% of the population of 45 million but there are said to be more than 100 ethnic groups in the country. The Burmese dominate the alluvial plains and the major towns and cities. The hills which border the neighbouring countries of India, Bangladesh, China, Laos and Thailand, are populated by ethnic minorities. These people have long resisted Burmese domination. The largest of the ethnic minorities are the Shan, the Karens and the Arakenese (on the Bangladesh border) (Church, 2003: 108-109).

Thailand had a population of around 16.5 million in 1945. More than 90% of the population was involved in the agrarian sector. In Northern Thailand the Karen is the largest single upland group. It is estimated that their number is from above 125,000 to approximately 200,000. In Thailand ample provision and a large settled population made the valley an important staging point on routes which linked it with the lower Chao Phraya Basin, with lower and upper Burma, with northern Laos and Vietnam and with southern China. This has been so since ancient times, armies marched, caravans traded and people migrated. Most of the migrants were Yuan or Yonok, who are believed to be Tai people, of the same stock which elsewhere gave rise to such groups as the Siamese, the Lao, and the Shan. It was the Yuan who founded Lan Na (*Chiang Mai and the Hill Tribes* 1998: 10). Until the 17th century, the mountainous south was governed by rulers, among whom, it is believed, were Hmong 'kings' who were subject to the Emperor of China. When the Manchu pushed their power southward, they instituted the direct control exercised by ethnic Chinese officials. Entering the 18th and 19th centuries there emerged conflicts over dissatisfactions among

the local people. To take advantage of the prospect of prosperity opened by opium production, Hmong pioneers moved further south (ibid.:49). This means that the Hmong are the mountain people, who probably are the most recent migrants to arrive in the area in the north of Southeast Asia (Culas and Michaud 2004: 61). Their history of residence is the second longest of those groups still living on the uplands; with only the Lu'a having lived longer in northern Thailand. The Karen live in the backcountry along the Thai/Burma border, with the majority of the Karen living in the hills of eastern Burma with their language related to Tibeto-Burman. Buddhism and Christianity are among their religions. Some literature mentions that the S' Kaw Karen oral tradition, for instance, is scanty in central Chiang Mai. The original migration into the area came from the west, from either 'the banks of the Salween' or from west of the Mae Chaem River. This movement of pioneering families is said to have taken place over two hundred years ago and to have been followed by secondary movements within the larger geographic area in north Thailand as the valleys of the main rivers and streams were populated by their respective founding families. Some Karen settled in the lowlands and took up the customs of their neighbours while others remain in the hills and retain the old ways. They work in the logging industry and in the fields of other ethnic groups or own and operate elephants in northern Thailand (ibid.: 77). The Lisu presumably originated in Tibet, but the centre of their population is now northern Yunnan west of the Salween River. The Lisu are found living scattered throughout the nine Northern Provinces such as the Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Mae Hong Son, Tak, Lampang, Sukhotai, Kamphaeng Phet and Phetchabun (Technical Service Club Tribal Research Institute, *The Hill Tribes of Thailand* 1998: 6). They have a language which is a branch of the Tibeto-Burmese family but Lisu from elsewhere have difficulty understanding the dialect spoken in Thailand. Local people, however, are often able to speak Yunnanese, Shan or northern Thai and Lahu, closely related to Lisu (*Chiang Mai and the Hill Tribes* 1998: 94).

Table 1. Levels of urbanization by region 1990-2000

Region	1990	2000	1990-2000
BMA (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration)	100,00	100,00	0
Bangkok and its vicinity	54,09	66,15	12,06
Upper Central Thailand	27,96	34,74	6,78
East Thailand	33,55	43,52	9,97
West Thailand	29,16	35,32	6,16
Northeast Thailand	17,92	24,68	6,76
North Thailand	23,76	30,18	6,42
South Thailand	20,20	25,74	5,54
Thailand	32,30	38,92	6,62
Region	1990	2000	1990-2000
Thailand	32,30	38,92	6,62

Source: *Thailand 2000*, 1993: 79

Table 2. Tribal Populations

Tribes	Villages	Households	Persons	Percentage
Karen	2,132	60,385	321,900	46.34
Meo	243	16,146	124,211	17.88
Lahu	421	13,307	73,252	10.54
Akha	258	8,050	48,468	6.98
Yao	173	5,525	40,371	5.81
H'tin	148	6,090	32,755	4.71
Lisu	135	4,802	27,899	4.02
Lua	53	2,923	15,711	2.26
Khamu	32	1,988	10,153	1.46
Total	3,595	19,216	694,720	100

(Source: *Technical Service Club, Tribal Research Institute, 1995: 5*).

The Akha live in the east of Sip Song Pan Na in the mountains along the Black and Red Rivers in southeastern Yunnan. The people living here, whom the Chinese call the Hani, include the Akha. In the past, the Akha spread into Vietnam, Laos and Burma. One of the reasons why they migrated was due to the chaotic conditions during the 19th century, and starting from 1900 the Akha migrated to Thailand from Burma. The Akha settlement has remained concentrated north of the Kok River in the Chiang Rai Province. Apart from that, villages have been founded in more southerly areas of Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai. The total number of people is approximately 25,000 (*ibid.*: 34). The Technical Service Club, *Tribal Research Institute* (1995: 5) reports the total population of the hill tribes in 1995 and names the Karen as the biggest amongst the hill tribes recorded in 1995.

From the historical evidence it is noted that Thailand has never been colonized by European powers and pre World War II was called Siam. Although, it is true, Thailand has never been colonized by western powers, it has often been threatened by its neighbours (Grundy-Warr and Wong 2001:101). During the Second World War, after 1941, parts of Cambodia and Laos, once under the power of Siam, were attacked by their neighbours and two years later, Thailand reintegrated into itself the Kentung area which had been seized by Burma. As in Burma, the majority of people in Thailand (around 90%) rely on agriculture (Terwiel, 1999: 121 and 329). It is also widely known that in each country there is a dominant ethnic group: in Thailand; the Thai, while in Myanmar it is the Burmese. The geopolitical changes in the region have given rise to stronger relationships at state level. Now, the Burmese military has a presence in the region which was previously under the military of the Yangon ethnic minority, which effectively controlled the border since Burmese independence (Lintner 1995). The ethnic minority in Burma reside permanently in the *peripheries* such as Arakan, Shan mountain areas and in the border area between Thailand and Burma such as in the Mon and the Karen ethnic group areas in the Chin valley, particularly in the Union system under the autonomous system. However, as noted

by Frasch many border issues are related to the political conflict within their neighbouring states (Frasch 1999: 206).

Outside Thailand, the Lahu, for instance, are found in Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and China, with the greatest density between the Mekong and Salween Rivers west of the Sip Song Pan Na in southern Yunnan. A conflict emerged between the Lahu and the Chinese government authorities causing a migration to the southern regions. The Lahu migrated to Thailand in the 19th century and western explorers and missionaries came across them in the hills between Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai Provinces in the 1890s. As has already been said, during the second half of the 19th century, poppy-growing tribes began to settle in the Golden Triangle. Yunnan, in southern China was still in turmoil with an uncertain political situation, following the suppression of a wide-spread Muslim rebellion, driving various hill tribes deep into Burma and bringing gangs of plundering Haw Chinese to northern Laos. In northern Thailand, Lan Na was still at war with Burma and British and French colonial encroachments had become another threat. Because of that, large parts of this area were depopulated. The Lahu grew poppies and paid taxes to the local prince. The Lahu Nyi, who were the first settlers, were later followed by the Lahu Shehle. Other sub groups like the Lahu Na, the Lahu Shi, and the Lahu Hpu have been migrating to Thailand since the 1950s.

The Thai-Burma-Laos trade connection has been increasing since 1988, when the Thai Government participated in encouraging it with the Myanmar Government's SLORC (*the State Law and Order Restoration Council*) which later fell as a result of its suppression of students in pro democracy demonstrations. Ten years later, in 1998, the total number of the Lahu, most of whom reside in rural areas with most living in northern Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son Provinces, was 30,000. In addition to this, there are some Shehle as far south as the Tak and Kamphaeng Phet Provinces (*Chiang Mai and the Hill Tribes* 1998: 112). Relations between the ethnic majority and the minority vary from country to country. For instance, Thailand does not always share the problems of Burma. In Burma life has often been disturbed by ethnic conflicts, especially in the border areas and the country has always had the problem of disintegration. Unlike Burma, Thailand and Laos are relatively calm and have experienced few ethnic conflicts.

Osborne (1991: 58) notes that in each country the number of indigenous minorities is less than 20% of the total population. Indeed Osborne (*ibid.*: 56) reports that since the 18th century the population on the borders has had good relations with people in the mountain areas fostered by trade with present economic activities in the border areas continuing to develop. In Thailand, many small cities on the borders have developed rapidly. Mae-Sai, Mae-Hong Son and Me Sariang in the Province of Chiang Rai, Mae Sot in the Province of Tak and Kra Buri and Ranong in the southern part of Thailand have important roles in economic activities in the border areas (Grundy-Warr, King and Risser 1996: 88). There are two networks in the border areas between Thailand and Burma which have developed strongly: the Keng-Tung-

Taschileik-Mai Sai-Chiang Mai and the network line connecting Myawaddy and several cities on the Thai border like Mae Sot, around 6 km. across the Moei River. In the southern direction there are several villages like Kawthaung and Ranong. Towns on the Thai borders such as Mae-Sai, Mae-Hong Son and Me Sariang in the Chiang Rai Province, Mae Sot in the Tak Province and Kra Buri and Ranong in southern Thailand, play a major role in the issues (ibid.). The development of the border areas can be seen in the policy of the Government to create opportunities to increase the income of the people in those areas by particularly promoting legal goods and by encouraging them to become centres of 'duty free' shopping. This fast development cannot be separated from the influences of globalization in Southeast Asia (Moses 2006) where attention must also be given to human rights issues.

On the border between Thailand and Burma there is a border pass and an immigration office in Chiang Rai (Thailand). The region has increasingly grown to sell various products, at half price and is considered a centre for smuggling, illegal drugs and as the place providing 70% of the world's heroin production (Grundy-Warr and Wong 2001: 108), along with the sex industry which has a negative impact on the spread of HIV/AIDS (Grundy-Warr, King and Risser 1996: 86; 90-91, cf. *Regional Outlook: Southeast Asia 2002-2003*: 27, Lamijo 2004: 79). Here, however, HIV/AIDS and risky behaviour among sexually active homosexual men are much less than among the sexually active homosexual population in general, in the extensive male sex industry in the major cities in Thailand (Storer 1999: 1). There are many businesses which depend on political stability in Burma. In 2002, for instance, the shops located in Mae-Sai were closed due to political unrest in Burma. This of course, affected Chiang Rai in a border area between the two countries. The border between the two countries in the Chiang Rai Province has facilitated the movement of humans and trade in the divided region. This caused human movement in Thailand itself and it can be noted that between 200,000 and 500,000 Burmese live there illegally. Among them are students and political activists who fled to Thailand to avoid being arrested by the SLORC as a result of instability in Burma (Grundy-Warr, King and Risser 1996: 88). The Thai Government tried to improve the relationship with Burma (*Regional Outlook, Southeast Asia 2002-2003*: 27). Therefore, from the existing contacts we can see the importance of movements of people which are not only related to the people themselves but also their ideas on culture which is of course different from one state to another (Grundy-Warr 1996). Even the similarity of religion caused some disagreements among them which resulted in the deaths of several people.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POPULATION MOBILITY IN THE BORDER AREAS AT PRESENT

It seems to me that the border areas of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos are not 'backyards', but rather 'front yards' where the governments have successfully paid attention to the region so that the concept of 'a backyard of a house' has changed into 'a front yard of a house'. From this perspective I think we need to learn more from

the lessons of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos. From interviews with people in the region, it seems that people in the Thai border area still perceive a threat if the political situation in the Myanmar border area is uneasy. If the political situation is uncertain, the Thai Government closes the passes between the two countries. Not only political unrest but also cross border flows of marginalized minorities, the so called 'hill tribes' could come to be perceived as a 'threat' to the state (Toyota 2004: 1). The term 'hill tribe' in Thailand designates ethnic minorities, most of which live in the remote highland areas of the north and southwestern parts of Thailand. According to the Technical Service Club Tribal Research Institute those people attracted the serious attention of the Thai Government in 1959, when the National Committee for the hill tribes was set up (*The Hill Tribes of Thailand* 1998: 1). As we can see from recent developments both countries maintain good neighbour policies although if we compare between the Thai and the Myanmar border areas it seems that the Thai border area is more developed. On the Myanmar side, for example, there seem to be more jobless men. In addition, there are many more Burmese women selling their goods in Mae Sae than Thai women doing so. It is calculated that more than 1000 people enter the Thai border area but not so many from Thailand go to Myanmar. Myanmar people like the Lao people for instance, depend on the Thai border since Thailand is more developed than Myanmar and Laos in terms of the tourism industry. Many handcrafts and agricultural products from Myanmar and Laos are sold in Mae Sae in Thailand.

Toyota notes (2004: 1) that the category 'hill tribe' in Thailand was constructed in the 1950s and 1960s during a period when there were major concerns about security in the Thailand–Myanmar border zone. She adds that the creation of the category was intended on the one hand to provide a generic term for upland minorities, and on the other, as a way of affirming Thais as the 'core' of the nation state. She argues that in the process of formation of the nation state, 'hill tribe' people were downgraded to being non-Thai and could therefore be excluded from citizenship for security reasons, as they were seen as a threat to the integrity of the state. They use two currencies namely the Thai currency (*Baht*) and the Myanmar currency (*Kyat*). Mae Sae is closed if conflict breaks out between the Thais and the Burmese. One reason is that the people along the borders have two nationalities, Thai and Myanmar, as we can see in Mae Sae. Meanwhile there are between 40-60% of 'hill tribe' people who have a legitimate claim to Thai citizenship, remaining without it. Mika Toyota writes that as a consequence of being denied Thai citizenship they are deprived of many rights, such as freedom to travel between provinces and access to government health care schemes. In addition they do not get an official certificate after finishing school, which deprives them of the opportunity for higher education and the chance for the better forms of employment. They are also unable to vote or buy land and are usually expected to accept lower wages than fellow Thais in employment (Toyota 2004: 1).

Population mobility is closely correlated with the poverty of a region, especially in comparison with Bangkok, the northern region is a constant, but the gap is widening slightly. The growth rate of the rural population is, however, rapid in some provinces

such as those in the northeast and south. A large number of migrants come to Nong Khai, Kamphaeng Phet, Petchabun, Kanchanaburi, Mae Hong Son and Tak with urbanization increasing faster than the rural population. Ao Udon has more than 71,000 inhabitants. Following the implementation of the Eastern Seaboard the urban populations of Chon Buri and Rayong have doubled reaching 760,500 in 2000 up from 378,300 in 1980. Urban areas follow the communication routes out of Bangkok. The number of people in Bangkok itself, in 2000, was around 8 million (Torres 2004: 48 and 52) and of Chiang Rai in 2000, it was 1,259,988; in 2001, 1, 263, 169; and in 2002, 1,274,214. Meanwhile the total population in Chiang Mai in 2000 was 1,590,327, in 2001, 1,600,850, and in 2002, 1,595,855 (*Pocket Thailand in Figures 2004*: 336 and 338).

The Kao Wao News Group (2004: 2) reported that most local traders and businessmen have joined hands with the ceasefire camp to boost border trade through illegal activities. Some motor vehicles crossing the border are the biggest supporters of revenue for the ceasefire camps and the Burmese troops during the dry season. Local car dealers sell used cars to Burmese traders under a common agreement at the border cross points. The problems at the borders of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos, namely, criminal activity as well as illegal trade, can be deduced from the presence of the Wa armies, the national identity of which is basically unclear, unlike its involvement in opium and illegal weapon trading (Tagliacozzo 2002: 193-220 and Tagliacozzo 2007). There is a small ethnic group in the Burmese army called Wa. This group is small and unorganized and the population of the Wa armies is less than of the Karen or the Sha ethnic groups. They are like 'warriors' living in Myanmar. Their role is particularly obvious in the diversification into amphetamines in the Burmese areas controlled by the Wa armies. This has led to a surge in speed addiction in Thailand and has caused a social problem which has eclipsed the formerly opium and heroin caused one. In 2003, at the cost of hundreds of human lives, concerted actions by police and military brought the amphetamine trade in Thailand to a halt (Hauser 2004: 44). According to Thai scholars, the Wa are often manipulated by the Chinese in illegal businesses, like in the illegal weapons trade. The Wa ethnic group is considered as a buffer for Myanmar; strongly encouraged by the Chinese in South China (Yunnan) but is also considered to act as brokers who protect illegal trade in the border area. Aung Su Shin (2003) notes that importers and exporters on the Thai-Burma border have been badly hit by increased US sanctions and the economic spillover from political chaos inside Burma. According to the Mae Sot Customs Office, in 2002, Thai merchants only exported 315 million baht (US \$ 7.5 million) in commodities to Burma down from the previous more than 400 million baht in goods across the Mae Sot border. Imports from Burma, were also down. It is reported too that Thailand bought around 80 million baht worth of goods from Burma, but recent figures plummeted to 30 million baht. It is important to note, as Suchart Tritwattana, deputy chairman of the Tak Chamber of Commerce, said, there was nothing border

traders could do about the lull in economic activity. They just had to wait until Burma's political situation returned to normal (Aung Su Shin 2003).

On the border of Burma and Thailand, two main overland routes are currently used most often; they are the Keng Tung – Tachilek – Mae Sai – Chiang Mai route and a route connecting Myawaddy and the Thai border town of Mae Sot, six kilometres across the Moei border river. Further south there is some trade across a narrow strait between Kawthaung and Ranong. The main border outposts along the Thai side of the border are Mae Sai, Mae Hong Son and Mae Sariang in Chiang Rai Province, Mae Sot in Tak Province, and Kra Buri and Ranong in the southern tip of Thailand (Grundy-Warr, King and Risser quoting Mya Than 1994). These are also key crossing points for the trafficking of women and children. Now that the Burmese military has pushed deep into the territory formerly held by ethnic minority armies, Yangon (Rangoon) has effective control over long stretches of the border for the first time since Burma's independence (Grundy-Warr, King and Risser quoting Lintner 1996: 88). Indeed new border crossings have been opened to facilitate cross border activities. Since the late 1980s, migration flows into Thailand have soared as a consequence of the socio-economic and political hardship in surrounding countries, which together with Vietnam form the Mekong basin region. Over the years, the same trafficking routes have been used, with two kinds of cross border junctions: the official checkpoint and the hidden jungle or river passes. Along the Thai-Burma border, six border outposts are used for cross border trade. They are Mae Sai, Mae Hong Son, Mae Sariang, Mae Sot, Kra Buri, and Ranong. In general, fishery products and charcoal, beans and pulses, are popular imports into Ranong, while live animals, precious stones and beans and pulses, are brought across the frontier into Thailand at Mae Sot. Mae Sai and Mae Sot are important cross border routes between Thailand and Burma in the north and Ranong in the south. From Burma, several other channels are used. Passages from Shan and Kayah States into the Province of Mae Hong Son have also been reported. The central channel refers to jungle passes from the Karen border areas into the Thai border district of Sangkhlaburi, in Kanchanaburi Province. (www.cwa.tnet.co.th). Sangkhlaburi relates Thailand with the Phyathoungsu or Three Pagoda Pass in Burma. Banya Hongsa (2003) reports that illegal trade, migration, smuggling and other activities seem just a part of the ordinary life of the local people along the Thai-Burma borders.

POPULATION MOBILITY AND THE FUTURE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

Thailand initiated the notion of a Joint Economic Quadrangle Cooperation (JEQC) consisting of four committees from the neighbouring countries. This grouping, established in 2001, aims to develop economic activities in the regions and improve import and export activities through the borders. In interviews with members of the

Chamber of Commerce of Chiang Rai, I was told that the flow of people and goods in the border is considered to have a positive impact on the Thai economy so the cooperation will be intensified in keeping with the notion of the JEQC. However, one needs to ponder whether this open area will give rise to the problem of illegal movements of people. By talking with a boatman in Chiang Saen, I found out that the southeast part of China is unlike other parts of China as it depends on the flow of agricultural goods from Thailand. Meanwhile, Chinese ships bring many products, including clothes. The daily movement of Chinese ships traveling to Thailand is more than of Thai ships to China. Chinese sailors have the ability to navigate the River. Indeed, on the Mekong River the Chinese sailors can better understand the river conditions, including those of the rocky areas. The flow of goods from China can clearly be seen in the Chiang Rai market and the markets in the border areas of Laos. In the near future, Chiang Rai in Thailand is expected to develop more than Chiang Mai for particular reasons. Firstly, Chiang Rai is the nearest important entry point for the movement of goods from Burma, China and Laos. Secondly, Chiang Rai is and is planned to continue to be the gateway for the movement of goods from Thailand to Laos, China and Burma. It is quite true, that in border areas like Mae Sae there is smuggling of electronics, with many Thais going there to buy radios, compact discs and other goods more cheaply than elsewhere. Good quality tape recorders, for example, cost only 2000 baht in Mae Sae while in Bangkok they cost around 15.000 baht.

The Thai Government has concerns that this rapid flow of goods may result in a weakening of the local economy. Therefore, it has come up with a strategy to encourage this economy, by the development of local handcrafts to become the most important means to counter any obstacles. Chiang Rai had been notorious for opium production, so to reduce the bad image of the border areas, the Thai Government has attempted to increase the prosperity of people in this region by increasing their skills, especially by involving them in small-scale enterprises. Based on our observations, there are many cottage industries, including ceramic production, clothes making and weaving, supported by the Government, in the area surrounding the city of Chiang Rai. This is simultaneously encouraging to the government policy of 'OTOP', *One Tambun (district) One Product*. The Thai Government's OTOP program has been a wonderful success with Thai products now receiving worldwide recognition for the quality of their workmanship. This applies to many local and hill tribe handcrafts in the northern parts of Thailand which appeal to both tourists and locals. The Thai Government has also attempted to establish a close relationship with neighbouring countries by using culture. For instance, Mekong Cultural Festivals are often conducted in the region. Many tourists visiting Chiang Mai from Europe, Asia and America almost exclusively go there to shop, although going to see the nature of northern Thailand is equally popular.

The night bazaars are famous and popular. As we know, in almost all markets in the surrounding regions, bargaining is a long practiced art. We can bargain to receive 20% to 30% off the given prices. This, however, in places such as department stores does not apply. When we were at the market, we noticed that a performance was arranged in turn, between singing and dancing, so that tourists would not get bored. Youngsters of the border areas, like of Chiang Rai Province, have learnt traditional dances. There were also dances from Sukhotai and Ayutthaya and other ancient places. It seems that the intention of the Thai Government is not only to change the image of border areas to be the front yard of the country with an attractive culture but at the same time to improve the people's economy. Almost every night we could see in Chiang Rai many hill tribe women, including some from the Akha ethnic group, trading in the market. If we compare this with the border of Sarawak and East Kalimantan in Indonesia, it seems that the image of the border between Thailand and Myanmar is more modern (Ardhana 2004a, and Ardhana 2004b).

Taschileik is a border post where passports are checked before people go to Myanmar. We paid five baht to go from the Chiang Rai terminal to Taschileik. Here goods like gold, silver and other handcrafts are sold at discounts of 30 % to 40 %. The price of T-shirts was around 200 baht. To go from the Golden Triangle to Laos by speedboat we paid 500 baht. Chinese clothes are also sold in the markets in Laos where people too sell drinks like *arak* made from the cobra and other snakes. The opening of this market has been a benefit for the local people. However, the Thai Government still worries in case there is illegal trade through illegal roads in the region, since there seems to be an increasing movement of people across the borders. The hill tribe people in the northern region in Thailand speak both Burmese and Thai and relations among these people are good as indicated by the mixed marriages among them. These factors were among the causes of their coming to the border, for instance, to Mae Sae, so easily and often in the past, leading to a good knowledge of the border officials. It is true that on the border we can see many products from other countries being sold, as well as many tourists. Because of this, many people on the Myanmar side offer to pose for photographs. They persuaded us to have photos taken even though we did not want to. In addition to this, we could see them offering illegal pornographic CDs to visitors.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of some of the interviews, historic evidence and reading of the available literature, it can be concluded as follows: From the historical perspective on the developments in the border areas between Thailand, Myanmar and Laos, there are some issues regarding the differences between Thailand, Myanmar and Laos based on their historical traditions (Ardhana 2005, 2007a and 2007b). For a long time the people of both sides have recognized the significant role of the developments

in the border areas, since they depend not only socially and culturally but also economically on one another, even though from the political perspective they are not in harmony, since in the past the Burmese were considered a threat to the Thai people. Over a long period, Sukhotai, Ayutthaya and finally Bangkok have been the main cities in Thailand. Despite occasional battles over time, both sides try to be good neighbouring states. However, the political development in one state often influences the developments in other regions, as we can see from the border issues between Thailand, Myanmar and Laos. Currently there is some misunderstanding particularly on the Burmese side which is reluctant to allow the eastern part of Thailand to be developed as a tourist area. In addition to this there is some change in relations in the border areas between Thailand, Myanmar and Laos though all sides have been successful in changing the image of the border from the backyard to the front yard at the entry gateway of a state. In the past, the border areas between Thailand, Myanmar and Laos were developed by opium production, through which Thailand is believed to have provided 70% of the world opium production. The Thai Government strongly encourages attempts to change the negative image of the border areas between Thailand, Myanmar and Laos, where the areas are considered to be places for smuggling, illegal drug trade, human trafficking, prostitution, illegal weapon sales and so on. Nowadays there is a significant policy of the Thai Government to try to enrich the local people by producing goods like umbrellas, ceramics, cloth and other crafts, which can be sold to the local, regional and international markets in relation to the concepts OTOP (*One Tambun One Product*).

By doing this, the local people, it is hoped, will forget their old tradition of making use of opium, which can now not be tolerated by the international world. Therefore, both sides try to coordinate better economic development by rebuilding the road infrastructure in the context of focusing on the border as a centre of economic growth on the mainland of Southeast Asia, particularly in China, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Malaysia. Up to now, we can see that the Burmese and Lao sides are less developed if we compare them to the Thai side. The Thai border area looks more modern than the Myanmar border area. In addition to this, the people in the Myanmar border area seem to be less economically developed, with many in the street wearing sarongs while selling goods like cigarettes, copied discs and craft products, while on the Thai border the people sell electronics, crafts and new products at much lower prices here than in other cities in Thailand.

One matter from which we can learn much is the security aspect in the border areas between Thailand, Myanmar and Laos where there is often instability and criminal activity. To avoid this problem the Thai Government continues to encourage the local ethnic groups such as the Akha, the Karens, the Hmong and the Lisu to use their rights to be Thai or Burmese, with the Thai Government a little more successful in this policy through persuading the local ethnic minorities residing in the border areas and providing training for them. As part of all this, many of their cultural products

are utilised in tourist development in Thailand. We need to learn better how to apply the Thai experience in arranging the border to be a place of economic development.

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