Lives at the Mae Sai Border: Tai Lue Transnational Migrants and Ethnic Network as Resource

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Abstract

A border is an area where an ongoing flow of people and goods and an abundance of multi-culture can be found, as well as a location for displaced persons, migrants, and migrant workers. In such a context, various cultural practices of people exist who have a different historical background of mobility, exile, and transitional experience.

Under these circumstances, I investigate and explore the livelihoods of the recent Tai Lue migrants who live along the Thai-Myanmar border in the northern part of Thailand, and who have a range of professions; we find, for example, a singer and a monk, as well as an activist – who is a Tai Lue town ruler descendant – among them.

I examine the ethnic network utilized as a resource – together with other types of networks – by those Tai Lue migrants who live in a border context in pursuit of a decent life and economic or social opportunity.

The study suggests that borders are a transition zone where the interplay of many actors shapes their lives for better circumstances. The Tai Lue ethnic network is one of the vital basic resources used in different ways to acquire a different opportunity : to transform one's original status or position to a new, more favorable one.

Keyword

Tai Lue, Tai Lue transnational migrants, Mae Sai border, ethnic network

文化資源の観点からみたタイ・ルーの国境を越える移動と民族的なネットワーク　―メーサイ国境域の事例

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要旨

国境とは人々や物，幾多の文化が絶えず行き交う空間であり，強制的に移住させられた人々や移民，出稼ぎ労働者のための場でもある。このような環境では多様な文化的慣習が見られ，それは移住や国外追放，転々とした暮らしを経験してきた等，異なる歴史背景をもつ人々によってもたらされてきた。

こうした状況に鑑み，筆者はタイ北部のタイ・ミャンマー国境沿いに住む，たとえば歌手や僧侶，活動家といったかつてのタイ・ルー地区統治者の子孫たちのような今日のタイ・ルー移住民らの暮らしを調査，探究する。
本研究では，「まともな生活」や経済的あるいは社会的な好機を求めて国境という環境で生活するために，資源として活用される彼らの民族性や民族ネットワークを他の様々なネットワークとともに分析・検討した。
元々のあるいは以前のステータスや立場からより条件の良い，新しい場へ移るためには様々な機会があるが，タイ・ルーの民族ネットワークは，重要な資源の一つとしてこのような異なる機会に応じて様々な方法で活用されている。本研究は「国境」とは「変化の場」であり，そこではよりよい環境を求めて，それぞれの生活や人生を形づくる様々なアクターたちの相互作用が起こっていることを示している。

キーワード
タイ・ルー，一時的な移住民であるタイ・ルー，メ・サイ国境地域，民族ネットワーク

Introduction[1]

The Mae Sai border in the northern part of Thailand does not only give a different meaning to different actors but also clearly shows the power and social relations in border at different scales. The opening of the Mae Sai border allows us to see the Thai state's power and its control as well as relationship, interaction, and contestation from many actors who have varied history of culture and migrations. Tai Lue is a Tai-speaking group, an ethnic group that initially settled in the Sipsongpanna area, China and migrated to this Mae Sai border several decades ago.

This paper focuses on an individual scale by examining how the recent Tai Lue transnational migrants utilize their Tai Lue ethnic network together with the other kinds of networks as resources to negotiate for a decent life in terms of social and economic opportunities within and across the borders of the Thai nation-state.

Their life stories will demonstrate an individual life at the border, their mobility, the struggles of migrants, the change, life opportunity, and an adaptation to the new setting. The chosen case studies present Tai Lue migrants' lives who have different migration experiences, and who practice a range of professions, for example, a Tai Lue singer, a Tai Lue monk, Tai Lue activist who is a Tai Lue town ruler descendant. I hope this study would fill the shortage in knowledge of this group of people and transmit voices and lives of marginalized people to be heard or made visible by Thai society.

Methodology

This research includes qualitative research; data were collected from related documents, participatory and non-participatory observations, and in-depth interviews of informants. I collected the data by conducting an ethnographic fieldwork. My research was carried out in the two undocumented Tai Lue transnational migrants' villages－Rong Pra Jao village and Chum chon Tai Lue village－along the border of Thai and Myanmar in Mae Sai district, Chiang Rai province, Thailand in September 2017, March

2018, and from August 2018 – January 2019.

The three case studies were chosen from these two villages because their narratives of movement not only disclose individual life processes along the Thai-Myanmar border but also illustrate networks of connections, a type of consciousness, a mode of cultural reproduction, an avenue of capital, a site of political engagement and flows of diverse resources as they craft a diverse set of livelihoods at the Mae Sai border. They were carefully selected from different backgrounds to ensure gender, age, and their different livelihoods in order to demonstrate the lives of Tai Lue migrants and the utilization of various types of network along the border.

Mae Sai: a Thai - Myanmar dynamic borders town in the development context

This section offers a general idea of Mae Sai border town, where the lives of the case studies are situated. The town of Mae Sai is a major border crossing between Thailand and Myanmar. The district is Thailand's northern-most district. According to the static records from Mea Sai District Municipality, Mae Sai district is filled with 29,103 people (13,480 males and 29,103 females). There are, at least, ten ethnic groups include Tai Yuan, Tai Lue, Shan, Khun, Ya, Yunnan, Lahu, Akha, Dara-ang and Lawa people. Therefore, Mae Sai is a complex area of engagement for different groups of people.

Mae Sai once used to be a small town surrounded by hills and valleys. However, later on, the town has turn to be one of the strategic locations for economic activity and cross border trading as well as tourist destination since the development of Thailand's economy in the 1980s, for instance the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) cooperation program in 1992, the economic cooperation of the market known as a Quadrangle and the development of infrastructure or the R3B Route.

Since this town is known for trading, an investment center, a duty-free zone (at Tachileik market). Numerous of tourists from other parts of Thailand and nearby countries come to shop and enjoy border tourism. Furthermore, many borderland people take the opportunity with the opening of the border, which offers on all types of different forms, to earn and enhance livelihood. Over the decades, a variety of borderlanders on both sides have been crossing the Mae Sai - Tachileik borders for trading and exchanging many kinds of goods.

The Map of Mae Sai
Source: https://pastorqkim.wordpress.com/2013/02/17/d-21-worship-at-mae-sai-tamlaung-church-2013-02-17/http://contestwar.com/contest/3427

The Recent Tai Lue Migrants in Mae Sai: The Resettlement in Mae Sai Borderland

Tai Lue is one of the ethnic groups living in a dynamic Mae Sai border town. In the last 20 -30 years, the Mae Sai town has been one of the destination places for Tai Lue immigrants. Nowadays, there are twenty-seven Tai Lue villages residing in eight sub-districts in Mae Sai District.

This paper focuses on the recent Tai Lue migrants living in the two undocumented Tai Lue transnational migrants' villages-Rong Pra Jao village and Chum chon Tai Lue village. These two villages share similar characteristics which are migrant communities, unregistered villages, that are registered in the name of nearby villages. Geographically, it has a territory connected to Tachileik, Myanmar, separated by a small channel and rice fields. During a summer, the water is dry that one can see the soil and easy to cross.

The Tai Lue migrants living in those two villages are facing many challenges: firstly, they live without a Thai citizenship; secondly, as recent migrants, they are marginalized by majority people and the other Tai Lue in a multi-ethnic culture on the Thai -Myanmar border; lastly, there are others in a new setting, at the same time, being connected to several places-origin country and a host country.

In such a context, they have to negotiate particular constraints and opportunities (economic, social, etc.) that encounter as they relocate around the Mae Sai borders Therefore, they must come up with many strategies and practices to deal with these challenges in order to negotiate their ways in a new place. They use many kinds of network that they have; one of them is a Tai Lue ethnic network.

By looking into their practices as they craft a set of livelihoods for a better life, we will find the dynamic relationship between actors that encounter and interplay along the border and this will reflect a several type of networks that are generated as well as a complex set of how recently Tai Lue migrants, things, ideas, ethnic relation, and power relation get repositioned in a new settlement.

The Recent Tai Lue Migrants and Ethnic Network Used as Resource along the Border

Before turning to the finding from case studies, I wish to address the approach used in this paper. Border areas became the new dynamic centers of Southeast Asian countries in terms of seeking border conflict resolutions and economic development (Limijo, 2018: 27). Border studies are characterized by the themes of opportunity (Agnew, 2008: Seglow, 2005) -whether economic, social or culture-and constraints or a sit of struggle (Tyerman, 2016: Pitch, 2007: De Genova, 2014). However, the main theme of this project is to explore Mae Sai border as a complex set of human relationships, networks, control mechanisms, economic, social and cultural practices: it is where the flow of any type of resources takes place.

Similar to the Mae Sai border, it is not only a limit or line; instead, an arena where there is an on-going flow of people from diverse backgrounds, goods, full of a multi-culture and also migrants. Social relation, power relations and ethnic networks are reproduced and generated in the continuous process of negotiation between various actors within and across the Mae Sai border.

In this sense, this paper suggests thinking about the Mae Sai border as a dynamic town for seeking to improve the economic well-being

and enhancing the life of Tai Lue transnational migrants and their descendants. I argue that, on the one hand, borders present challenges to people daily; on the other hand, they provide social and economic opportunities across the confines of a nation-state.

I propose to think about borders as a 'transition zone' (Newman, 2003) where Tai Lue migrants resettle and remake their lives in a new setting, to pursue a decent life in terms of economic or social opportunity that extend beyond the border of a Thai nation-state.

Along a border, we can see a form of a transition where a set of multiple networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are exchanged, organized, and transformed.

Newman's term a 'transition zone' is a place where old boundaries run within cooperation, and an interaction increases and that creates borderless interactivity zones. Along the border, we can see a form of a transition zone where a great deal of hybridization takes place (Newman, 2003: 19-20). This zone of transition generates and continuously reproduces social and power relations, and ethnic network between various ethnic groups or even or within the same ethnic group in their trade and daily activities within and beyond the border.

Looking through these interactions and interplays will allow us to see their cross-border network, the flow of resources, and the exchange of ideas, knowledge, culture, and power applies.

On account of this paper, it will uncover the lives of Tai Lue transnational migrants on the Thai-Myanmar border. Each Tai Lue migrant confronts different challenges and constraints in their livelihoods. This paper pays a great attention to what extent Tai Lue migrants utilize their ethnic network as vital resources to live in the border context to pursue a decent life in terms of economic or social opportunity and how Tai Lue migrants, ideas, ethnic hierarchy, and power relation get repositioned in the new settlement.

In this paper, ethnicity is considered as one of networks used as a resource to earn a better life. The Oxford Dictionary (2012) defines a network as "a group or system of interconnected people or things." However, network is not only show how people and things are connected but it is also a useful way of thinking about relations that do not rely on static; but a dynamic of cultural and social links, for example what links people together across time and space, how things and people are connected and are embedded economically, politically, and culturally (Mitchell, 2003: 392).

Networks of ethnicity are relational social and economic ties that formulates on some common shared by a group of people. One of the accumulation of networks of ethnicity across country is migration because international migration links migrants that move between two societies. On the one hand, ethnic network helps to enlarge a group's identity. On the other hand, it becomes an essential resource for social and economic life in a mobility and an adaptation of migrants (Ibid.: 393-396).

Numerous migrants make use of their transnational networks in order to be move across country, find an employment, find houses, adapt to new communities, and transmit information (Shephard, 2014: 222).

From this perspective, the continuous mutual exchange in the information and culture throughout the mobility process provides many economic and socio-cultural benefits to migrants who are involved in ethnic networks.

In the next section, I will demonstrate the lives of the three recent Tai Lue migrants' lives as they utilize their Tai Lue ethnic network as a vital resource to negotiate for social, cultural, economic opportunities within and across the borders of the Thai nation-state.

Findings: Lives of Tai Lue Migrants along the Border

1.1 Case Study: Tai Lue Singer

A Younger Girl in the Old Day at Muang Yawng[2]

A beautiful long hair with fair skin named Vassana Namlae is a forty-eight-year-old lady who has been now resettled in Chum Chon Tai Lue village in the Mae Sai district. Vassana Namlae is Tai Lue singer who loves to make merit. She has never been to school but claims to have street knowledge. She expands her business in a direct sale by using the Tai Lue network in many different ways. The villagers called her, "Jhey[3] Vad." or so-called (most of the villagers call her) "Mae Leing[4] Vad."

Her younger life on the other side of the border – Muang Yawng, Myanmar was a tragedy. She was born in a poor family with seven siblings: two in Thailand; the other four in Muang Yawng; and one has passed away. She had never been to an actual school due to the lack of money.

However, she was interested in "khap Lue" when she was a teenager. "Khap Lue" is a Tai Lue style singing accompanied by a flute called "Pee Lue." Singing Lue or "khap Lue" needs an aptitude and a tact of a singer to improvise lyrics instantly. The stories in Buddhism or Tai Lue tradition as well as people's daily lives or activities are used as lyrics to "khaping lue." However, the lyrics in "khap lue" are composed instantly with no fixed rules in composing any words (Ongark, 2013).

She used her free time after doing agriculture by visiting a Tai Lue singing teacher's house. "He is very famous and honorable, there are many people who came to be his students, and I was one of them." She said. She then told me as follows:

> *"I learned 'singing Lue' from a 'Lue singing teacher at the village', even though I had never been to school but good thing I have a 'good head' (smart) and have street knowledge, to learn 'singing Lue.' You have to be wise enough to sing with other because there is no lyrics fixed, but you have to talk about many things from simple things – daily life to sky, heaven and beliefs... I think I am gifted in 'Khap Lue.'"*

She 'learn [ed] it through the back door.' Besides learning the style of Khap Lue,' she also learned about the Buddhist story in order to use for the lyrics, as well as Tai Lue tradition. Later on, this singing skill helped her in making a living within and across the border.

Life Across Border

"Jhey Vad" or "Mae Leing Vad" did not just wish to spend the rest of her life at a small hometown – Muang Yawng. She decided to leave a small town in her late twenty with three siblings to Mae Sai district because she thought there were many job opportunities for her. She states,

> *"before I moved here, I thought Mae Sai was more developed then my hometown. I wanted more life experiences and perhaps a nicer life. There is trade going on, a big market, restaurant, or*

even agriculture, I thought I could ask my friends and my relative who have lived there to help us find jobs."
"My siblings and I first came with, what people said, "a mat and a pillow" [empty-handed]... Hoping we will find luck or luck will find us... in the early year, we did many types of job for example, construction working, farming, waitress at a restaurant, sell goods at 'above market' [Mae Sai Market]."

Later, she was relocated to Chum Chon Tai Lue village in Mae Sai district in 2011. She is holding an "immigrant card no.0" and bought the land on behalf of her relatives living in a nearby village.

Her turning point was when her friend who has been in a direct sale business asking her to join the group around seven years ago. The business is under the brand "Bansamonprai Chaimonkol," selling a chlorophyll fiber that claims to help flush toxins, stimulate excretion, helps relieve allergy symptoms, helps to lower blood pressure, reduce coronary artery disease, etc.

Working in a direct sale, the direct seller may earn money from both direct sales to customers and by sponsoring new direct sellers and potentially earning a commission from their efforts. Therefore, she needs to both sell the product and find her 'downline' so that she could earn a commission. Therefore, she uses Tai Lue network to help expanding her business.

"Jhey Vad" is taking advantage of 'Tai Lue events' in order to expand her business network. She told me that she always brings some sample products and small placards with her, in case she has an opportunity to sell or to find a 'downline.' Therefore, I asked her to describe her feeling and opinion of being a Tai Lue singer and seller of her products.

Me: How often do you join or "khap Lue" in any events?
"Jhey Vad": I mostly join in every single event here [Mae Sai] ... I "khap lue" whenever there is a festival and I get invited from both here and from Muang Yawng... actually I just got back from Muang Yawng two weeks ago, there was a festival where I was invited to "khap Lue" ... It was so much fun... I received around 20,000 baht for singing there.
Me: How could you get invited to sing both here and there?
"Jhey Vad": 'Here,' they already know that I usually sing, for example, "Luang Keaw" (a villager) just came to my house and asked me to "khap Lue" at our village for our Tai Lue festival two year ago.... For 'there,' I still keep contact with friends both who into "khap lue" and who is not... I maintain our friendship by visiting them every time I comes back, so whenever they have a festival or in need of Tai Lue singer, they would call me up.... we also have our 'Line', and be friends on Facebook.
Me: How do you feel about it?
"Jhey Vad": About "Khap Lue"? ... I love it because it is fun and I can make some money... Not everybody can do, "khap lue" is not an easy task... it requires 'good head' (smart) and sagacity, you have to have lots of knowledge and information in your head... being a Lue singer, I have an opportunity to go out (social life), get dress. I am known by many of (brothers and sisters of) Tai Lue.
Me: You told me you could sell your product

and get a new contact in those events? (she mentioned it earlier before, I then ask her again)

"Jhey Vad": Yes, since I am known by other Tai Lue as "khap lue" singer ... actually being Tai Lue singer, people will admire you and it give you a good image ... anyways, whenever there is a chance I get to meet or talk to people at the event, I will make sure to tell them about this business.

Me: How is your business now?

"Jhey Vad": It is growing!!! ...some of them (Tai Lue) are interested in the business.... now we become a family (doing business together)...

Furthermore, she not only finds nor makes her network through those festivals but also at the religious ceremonies. She always makes sure to sell her product and invite people to be her 'downline' at the religious ceremonies.

Those religious ceremonies for example, "Ngan Poi Luang" which is a ceremony to make merit to give merit to parents, grandparents or relatives who passed away held at a temple. The "Ngan Poi Luang" is a mutual joy for local people where people and relatives will gather, and there are a variety of entertainment performances.

The "Ngan Poi Luang" is one of space where she can meet Tai Lue and the others (for example, Tai Yai) and generates her network. She said, "I love to make merit and so do all the Tai Lue because we want to make much merit for our next life that will be better. Besides that, when there is a religious ceremony, I love to go out not only to meet merit and to meet people, get to talk...." She further described, "There is a saying: 'it is okay to have nothing to eat, but it is not okay to not make merit ... making merit is to show your capacity if you make small merit (give little money), villagers will gossip about you."

To do making merit, she always shows up at a

Ms. Vassana is preparing herself for ""Ngan Poi Luang"
Source: from Ms. Vassana

Ms. Vassana at a Tai Lue event. She is the ten in line from the right
Source: From Ms. Vassana

ceremony and takes this opportunity to expand her direct business. She told me she could sell her product or even make a 'downline' there. She always donates an amount of money; on the one hand, due to her belief in the next life (so, she could born in a better circumstance), on the another hand, this is to present that she can make money from her jobs and that would help enhance her image, as well as in a direct sale business.

Crafting a 'New' and 'Better' Life?

"Jhey Vad" is now a goal premium member in her direct sale business and "khap lue" (singing Tai Lue) part-time.

Concerning her life story is mentioned, I would like to address her case study in three aspects: 1) how Tai Lue ethnic network is used as a resource to gain a better life in such context; 2) how she as a Tai Lue migrant manages and negotiates her relationships or reposition in a new setting; and 3) as such, how those practices generate or reflect social and cultural network of Tai Lue migrants in border context.

1) She uses Tai Lue ethnic network to pursue a decent life in terms of a social opportunity, an economic opportunity, and new social status and as such 2) she gets repositioned in a new setting by receiving a new title for herself.

As a Tai Lue singer, she has received a 'social opportunity' : she is continuously invited to sing both in Mae Sai and in Muang Yawng. Attending to several events as a Tai Lue singer: she has an opportunity to go out (social life), gets dressed beautifully and is well known by many of the Tai Lue people, and that opens up an 'economic opportunity' for her. She has more chances to sell her products. She works and socializes herself at the same time. "Jhey Vad" always makes sure to sell her products and invite people to be her 'downline' at both at the events and the religious ceremonies.

Liking to make merit by donating money to a temple enhances her image in a direct sale business as a working woman who can make many from her job. With that, it is easier for her to invite or challenge other people to join the business. "Jhey Vad" always update her life on social media. This is to display her lavish life and that she gained a new title from the villagers – "Jhey Vad" or "Mae Leing Vad," she is widely called by most villagers, migrants and other people.

Her new title – "Jhey Vad" or "Mae Leing Vad" – shows a new power and economic relationship of her to other people. "Mae Leing" is a word to call any potential women who could support others in financial, have lots of money, and have an influence. Similar to "Jhey," a word that has two connotations: one is to call anyone other than you; the other is a person who has money. In this context, she gains this title because she is identified as a potential woman who has financial support and is frequently able to influence others due to her job, making merit, and the excellent presentation of her social life. This is a changing status from living in poor condition to a better, a new status.

All things considered, she uses Tai Lue network as a resource to venture from the old title/status at a young age – a younger girl, born in a poor family, without having a formal education – to a new title as "Jhey Vad" or "Mae Leing Vad" as she expands her business in a direct sale.

3) Thinking about 'network,' not only Tai Lue network is used in her case but also a different kind of networks are used. For example, she uses her family network to be

mobile and buy a house (As a migrant, she has no right to own any property) in her early stages of relocation to Mae Sai. A friend network is also important to her, for her friend invited her to join the direct business, and that has changed her life; she could make money from it.

Later, she gains a better life in a new setting by using Tai Lue network as a resource to expand her direct sale business. She found her Tai Lue network via religious ceremony and the Tai Lue events. Within this arena, we can define the flow of resources – for instance – exchange of knowledge as she tries to sell her product; of goods; of money; and power applies as she receives her new title – "Jhey Vad" or "Mae Leing Vad."

1. 2 Case Study : Tai Lue Monk

Life of a Cross Border Monk

This section reveals the life of a cross-border monk from Hmak Yang village, Tachileik district, Myanmar. Somchai Sangnam or also known as "Pra Somchai Yanwaro" (this is a name used as a monk) was born in 1985 in Tachileik from a mother who migrated from Chiang Tong, Sipsongpanna, China. He first came to Mae Sai for a pre-school education at the age of five, living with his aunt who married with a Thai and lived here.

After finishing a fifth grade, he decided to ordained as a novice following his friends so that he would not have to go to school, as he did not like to study. Since then, he never left the monkhood. As a novice, he was interested in learning to read and write Dai/Tai characters, and the Myanmar alphabet as well as Dharma preaching.

At the age of fifteen, he came across the border again to acquire a higher Dharma education. "Pra Somchai Yanwaro" is now in his fourth year of getting, "Bachelor of Arts Program in Buddhism" from Mahachulalongkron Rajavidyalaya University, Chiang Rai campus.

As time passed, he concerned that, "being a monk, I have to improve myself ... having a high school certificate is not enough, so I continue attending to Mahachulalongkron Rajavidyalaya University. Studying is not easy... many people cannot access to it cause there is not enough support... there is a saying that you have to sell a pitch of paddy field to send your kid to school; but for me, I have (money) sometimes, but many times I do not have any (money) ... that is a taste of life..."

A Monk Away from Home and an Educator

As being away from his family and his hometown, he has a strong intention to gain as much Dharma education as possible, then he will return to his town to be a monk teacher. During his time at Rong Pra Jao temple, Rong Pra Jao village he was the only monk, while the others were novices.

As a cross-border monk, he fortunately was welcomed from the villagers. He told me that many monks had come here not for disseminating Dharma but for 'something else,' those monks could not stay long. His home village is literarily situated across the border – the other side divided by a small river and rice fields, at least, this assures to the villagers where he is from; nevertheless, he still has to prove himself that he is here for both study Dharma and disseminate it. I then asked him about life in Mae Sai border, he said,

> *"living in Mae Sai is more like we live separate lives, not knowing everyone personally ... since this town has been*

developing, the (migrant) card is used ... the government issued it and gave to migrants, if you have kids here, they will be able to get Thai citizenship. In term of education, living near the border has its advantage: I get to study Thai, Burmese, and a little bit of Chinese. Regarding border crossing, my home town is quite near here, I can take public transportation for 20 baths (100 Yen=30 baths)... if I want to cross the border, I will use my monk student ID card, I will get to stay there for seven days. Many times, I don't need to pay since I know of many immigrant officers (he even mentioned their names) because I often cross the border at least once or twice a month, and they also come and make merit at Kong Pra Jai temple.... the other days, I led some of the Tai Lue Buddhist followers from the village to my hometown to visit the abbot at Hmak Yang temple."

Since he brought 'border' into the table, I then asked what he thinks about the border as he is a border commuter. He answered, " I do not see the border as two places separated by line but as one because we are 'relatives' when we have religion ceremonies people always join one another... Mae Sai is located in a border area which makes its special: novices can come easier... people along the border, some people come from 'there' and some people from 'here,' then move 'there' because it is easy to cross and it all connected and that makes it even more accessible when it comes to tradition, communication.... when there is a religious ceremony people from 'there' always come and when there is a ceremony 'there,' people from 'here' also come regularly, never lacked."

As an educator monk, he does not only learn Dharma but also connect Tai Lue through religious ceremonies or events. Regarding religious ceremonies as I quoted his speech above, he regularly leads some of the Tai Lue Buddhist followers from the village to visit the temple over there – Hmak Yang village. Similarly, when the temple here holds a Buddhist ceremony, Tai Lue from over there, not only from the monk's village but Tai Lue from others, will come to participate.

Moreover, he was able to gather Tai Lue

The picture of the event, ""Getting ready to AEC ASEAN" led by the "Pra Somchai Yanwaro"

Source: From Pra Somchai Yanwaro

around forty to fifty people of age ranged from children to the elderly in Rong Pra Jao village to join the "Getting ready to AEC ASEAN" event. This event is held by Mahachulalongkron Rajavidyalaya University to promote the 'people' in ASEAN. As a Tai Lue monk, he is in charge of presenting Tai Lue culture in many aspects, for example, Tai Lue foods, Tai Lue clothes, Tai Lue dancing, etc.

I continue to ask, "as being a Tai Lue monk, a monk away from home and an educator, what do you think about these titles?" He stated, "Being a Tai Lue monk, I get to lead people from both sides for making merit sake and visiting the abbot, it is obvious that (brother and sister of) Tai Lue will never forget each other, we always connect through religious... I am glad to be part of the tied to hold people together. When I was young, I was an unruly one. I did not want to study; that is why I ordained as a novice... I now realize that education is essential tool, I wanted kids over there to receive one whether to go to a school or get Buddhist education." I later ask about his plan after his graduation here. He replied, "after I graduate I will head back home to be a monk teacher teaching at a temple in my home town... in the future if there is a novice or monk who wants to continue study in a higher Buddhist education, I can help them since I have a connection with the university here and know of many abbots here. ..." he spoke proudly.

Hope for the better at the border

Taking everything into account, we see that a young boy who does not like study or school. Then ordained as a novice at a young age, later became a monk and put values in education. He has a strong intention to returns to his hometown to be a monk teacher.

In this case, I would like to discuss how he crafts a set of livelihoods in the borderland and how religious network support any opportunity for him, and to which extent the new Tai Lue network is generated in this context. Lastly, how he gets repositioned within such context and what acquisition during the time in Mae Sai, Thailand benefits his life when he returns home.

First of all, I would like to discuss 'border.' Since 'border' for the educator monk holds different meanings. On the one hand, Mae Sai border presents challenges to 'boderlanders' daily; while, in his case, it provides social and educational opportunities for him. As a cross-border monk, he sees 'border' as a 'special area' where "novices can come [across the border] easier..." and a 'multi-cultural area.' It gives him advantage not only for cross over, but also he gets to study Thai, Burmese, and a little bit of Chinese. This transition zone allows Tai Lue from both sides to cross over easier when it comes to tradition, communication, and culture. For this reason, living near the border has its advantage in his opinions.

A Religious network is one of the networks that he uses to open an opportunity for himself in terms of improving 'his position' and this creates a different 'type of consciousness' –he becomes an educator monk. After he has become an educator monk, he gains respect from both Buddhist followers from both sides of the Thai-Myanmar border. He does not only learn Dharma or Dharma preaching but also link or connect Tai Lue through religious ceremonies or events. Religious and events are used to link Tai Lue people together across time and border, and that generates and strengthen a Tai Lue network.

Not only a religious network is related here,

but also Tai Lue network is generated, plus he uses this to find a social and cultural space for himself and the other Tai Lue. For example, at the event, "Getting ready to AEC ASEAN," he is in charge of presenting the Tai Lue culture in many aspects. This was a space for him to represent himself and the other Tai Lue as a Tai Lue to Thai society. Moreover, this space also gave him and the other Tai Lue to reproduce Tai Lue culture.

Consequently, he gets repositioned from a stubborn young boy to a monk educator. All he acquired during the time in Mae Sai, Thailand – a degree in Dharma, being an educator monk – will benefit him when he returns home to be a monk teacher in his hometown. He does not only bring the degree back with him but also a 'networks of Buddhist connections.' "

1. 3 Case study: Tai Lue Leader/Activist

Flee Away

Tune Wongsa is a sixty-two-year-old male. He descended from a Tai Lue who was a town ruler of Muang Yawng in Myanmar. He is holding an "immigrant card no.0" relocated in Chum Chon Tai Lue village. Mr. Tune is one of the founders of Tai Lue (Mae Sai) Association who has an intention to gather Tai Lue migrants together in Mae Sai.

His narrative of movement and resettlement discloses individual life at the margin, a struggle of migrant, and adaptation in the new setting. Those also reflects networks of connections and how he utilizes an ethnic network as a resource to negotiate for a social and cultural opportunities. Here, I wish to start with his early life within and cross the border of Mae Sai. He was telling me as follows:

> "I was born in Muang Yawng, [Myanmar]. My father was a Muang Yawng town ruler; our clan is pretty big because my grandfather has many wives, 5-6 wives. ... I first came here when I was 11 years old (1967), my father was seized power by the Myanmar military, we first ran into the forest, and my father was part of the independent army (National Salvation Army), later I came to Mae Sai with my Mom and ordained as a novice at Doi Wea temple [one of a temple near Mae Sai border], I then got an education in Dhamma. Moreover, I was interested in languages both Thai and Burmese, so I self-thought in writing of both languages... later, I left a Buddhist monk-hood at the age of nineteen."

After that, he went to Sukhothai province with his friends, working as a lumberman for several years. He then moved back to Muang Yawng to married his puppy love at the age of twenty-one: unfortunately, he lost his wife to tuberculosis. In 1980, he decided to come back to Thailand joining his friends in a communist party – "Than krathing daeng" in Chiang Kham, Phayao province for a couple of years. At the age of thirty (1991), he went back again to Muang Yawng to marry and brought her back with him to Mae Sai since he has connection of some friends and relatives here. Since moving back here, he worked as a trader, selling any type of goods – foods, fruits, clothes, etc. in Mae Sai Market.

Later, he became one of the founders who established. Rung Pra Jai village and Chum Chon Tai Lue village (the two chosen village of my research) and Tai Lue (Mae Sai) Association. It was first started in the 1990s when he noticed that Tai Lue, in Mae Sai district, was scattered in many villages, not

know each other much and it would be difficult to help each other when it needed. Therefore, he was trying to help gather Tai Lue together as a community.

Not only taking a vital role in the Tai Lue community in Mae Sai but he has been collecting and writing many Tai Lue (particularly in Muang Yawng) historical documents. He wishes to publish them when he has more money. He stated, "I collect this one reason is to not forget about who I am. Since Muang Yawng township was abolished... we were scattered, I once went back to Muang Yawng asking my uncle, who was about to die, regarding our clan... I found out that 'this person,' 'that person,' we were relatives but many people have passed away. Another reason is for the students who are interested in this because there have always been students came over to ask for information."

His life illustrates that he had a lot going on in his life; going back and forth between Mae Sai and Muang Young and facing a wide range of sentiments – loss, pain, hope, and desire.

Life as Tai Lue Activist

He is one of the founders of Tai Lue (Mae Sai) Association. He always engages in Tai Lue meeting or gathering events and also encourages another Tai Lue to join as well.

In this section, I will detail his activities as a Tai Lue Activist in order to see the flow of networks of connections, exchange of ideas, knowledge, culture, and power applies. It demonstrates how he uses this opportunity to open up a social, cultural, and political space for himself and the other Tai Lue migrants.

When he was living in Mae Sai for a while, according to what he said, "...many Tai Lue will not reveal themselves as Tai Lue nor speak their own mother tongue [speak Lue] but speak the local language [northern Thai] or the central language [central Thai]." He, then, is the first person who aroused Tai Lue to gather as a club or an association in order to represent themselves as Tai Lue and to help each other.

Back in the 1990s, when he passed by a funeral thinking: there was a beautiful flower decorated with light flicking on and off; but sadly, there was not anybody waking. He then thought to himself: "I have relatives, but we are separated if we died there would be no one taking care of our corpses..." he said.

Therefore, he later made an appointment with the other Tai Lue migrants to talk about associating as a group for helping each other and to take care of each other. This is also to persevere their Tai Lue culture, and represent themselves as Tai Lue because there is no opportunity to present if there is no group.

He first started in 1995 by being a dealer selling a pitch of land to mostly Tai Lue people at an affordable price, and that became Rong Pra Jai village nowadays, and later on, in 2002, he did the same thing and there came a Chum Chon Tai Lue village. Regarding the Tai Lue association in Mae Sai, he and his Tai Lue friends living in Chum Chon Tai Lue village established it in 1996. He has been taking an important role in this association so far. For example, in the initial phase, he was the one who persuaded the villagers and Tai Lue in the other villages (27 villages) to join and agree to have a group.

After they formed a group, he contacted Tai Lue Association in Chiang Kam[5], Payao province for a visit and met with the other Tai Lue there. They ended up with walking in a parade in the Tai Lue Festival in that year held by Tai Lue (Chiang Kham) Association in Chiang Kam,

Payao province.

In 2010, the group took it to another level. It has become a Tai Lue association, and this group now visible and known by the other Tai Lue both in Chiang Rai province and the other provinces. Mr. Tune told me they had done many things on behalf of the association as he stated, "we joined Tai Lue in Tai Lue festival in Payao... we walked in the parade... we helped Tai Lue non-citizenship when he got arrested because of not having the id card... we made blood donation on Mother' s day to dedicate/ make merit for the queen... we try to present ourselves, and our entity by doing dancing, "khap lue," participate in many Tai Lue events in any provinces..."

After years of helping in the association, he is known as a "Tai Lue (migrant) activist" and "grandchild of Muang Yawng town ruler" Since then, he is invited personally or through the association to talk or to exchange knowledge.

For instance, he was invited personally in 2018 by a TV Chanel – "TNN24" the program named "Think for the nation" under the topic, "periphery people in the special economic area, Mae Sai: finding the problems and the solutions." He was able to give his opinions towards the ethnic groups living along the Mae Sai border regarding what the ethnic groups could gain or loss from the economic development in the Mae Sai town. Another event is the event by the government – "Asa Prasharat," this is to gather poor people, homeless, and non-citizenship together to hear their voices for improving their lives. He and his other Tai Lue friends, from Rong Pra Jao village, went to this event in 2016. They were spokespersons to transmit voices and lives of marginalized people to be heard or made visible by Thai society.

A picture of Mr. Tune giving the interview at "Think for the nation" program.
Source: from Mr. Tune

Finally, out of curiosity, I asked him why he does what he does. He said, "Since Muang Yawng township was abolished... many people fled away... some of us are scattered in many villages in Mae Sai district... If we are not being together in a group, it would be difficult to help each other out or to preserve the language, art, culture, traditions, etc.... and all of Tai Lue who moved here recently are in non-Thai citizenship, living in a new 'home' we live from hand to mouth even though we are here seeking a better life, but many time we feel insecurity and uncertainty of livelihood in term of money ... moreover, many (brother and sister of) Tai Lue are scared to reveal themselves as Tai Lue, this may cause to the loss of a sense of our entities ... therefore, I feel obligated to do something for 'us.' "

Aspiration for Decent Lives

He now has a small business – selling homemade ramen noodles, living with his wife and a teenage daughter. He is one of the Tai Lue migrants whose livelihood is better than the others.

In his case, I will focus on how Tai Lue ethnic network is used as a resource in such a context

to open up their social, cultural, and political space for him and how he as a Tai Lue migrant got repositioned in a new setting. I further discuss any types of network that are generated and used in this case study.

In his younger life, he had to cross border because if the internal conflict in Muang Yawng. He stayed in Thailand as a novice therefore, a religious network somewhat played an important part of helping him to live in a difference circumstance. At the age of his late twenty, he used his friend network in order to cross border and to find a job here in Thailand – working as a lumberman for several years and later as a trader.

After resettling in Mae Sai, he intended to gather Tai Lue migrants together as an association. He used Tai Lue network to empower the Tai Lue (Mae Sai) Association by joining the other Tai Lue groups in provincial scale. Tai Lue ethnic network also is used as a primary resource to open a social opportunity within such context aimed at maintaining or improving his position.

After years of helping in the association, he has gained respect from Tai Lue in Mae Sai. He is known as a "Tai Lue (migrant) activist" and "grandchild of Muang Yawng town ruler" due to his participation in many Tai Lue events and many appearances in meetings and on TV.

In this context, Tai Lue association became a platform for him to empower himself. It is now used to connect to the other Tai Lue and it becomes a site of connection where there is a flow 'network of connections.' This connection helps this group of Tai Lue visible and known by the other Tai Lue both in Chiang Rai province and the other provinces.

Conclusion

The narratives of three persons mentioned above reveal intertwined realities that come with a range of sentiments such as aspiration, struggle, desire, and ambition. Each case uses many types of network to survive in a new setting. However, Tai Lue ethnie network has become one of the essential basic resources in the borders for these recent Tai Lue migrants to use along the border, to open up their social, cultural, economic, political space for them – each person aims at a different space.

Taking everything into account, we can see that 'borders' are a 'transition zone' where the interplay of many actors crafting their lives for better circumstances happens. This 'transition zone' illustrates a set of multiple networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are exchanged, organized, and transformed. The Tai Lue ethnic network is used together with other kinds of network in different ways in this transition zone to acquire a different opportunity: to change from the original /former status or position to a new state, a favorable one.

For example, the case of a Tai Lue singer: she used Tai Lue ethnicity/network as a resource to venture from the old status at a younger girl, born in a poor family without having a typical education – to a new title as "Jhey Vad" or "Mae Leing Vad" as she expands her business in a direct sale. Family and friend networks are also important in this case. Family network is used to move a cross border and resettled. "Jhey Vad" also had her friend network that help her got a job and that a life changing for her.

Throughout her life story, we can see the circulation of resources – exchange of knowledge as she tries to sell her product and

a better life that comes with it; of goods; of money; and power applies as she receives her new title – "Jhey Vad" or "Mae Leing Vad."

In the case of a Tai Lue monk, he used religious network to cross border and to have an education in Buddhism and this offered him an opportunity – improving 'his position' or reposition – an educator monk. During the years of being a monk educator, he used this chance to represent himself and the other Tai Lue as a Tai Lue to the Thai society through various events. Moreover, he used religious ceremony as an opportunity to link Tai Lue people together across border.

Through that ritual activity, it creates a set of multiple networks of social relationships and interaction which resources are exchanged and transformed – money, offering, and it strengthens a Tai Lue network.

In the case of a Tai Lue activist, he first used a religious network to live to Thailand as a novice. He later left to his hometown then came back again with the help of his friend network, he was able to find a job and relocated in Mae Sai district.

After a resettlement, he used Tai Lue ethnic network as a primary resource in such a context to open up their social, cultural, and political space for himself aimed at improving his position and the other Tai Lue migrants. He is known as a "Tai Lue (migrant) activist" and "grandchild of Muang Yawng town ruler."

Notes

1 This paper is revised from my doctoral dissertation "The Recent Tai Lue Migrants along the Thai-Myanmar Border: Transnational Practice and Ethnicity Utilized to Live in the Border Context." in Graduate Program in Cultural Resource Management, Graduate School of Human and Socio-Environment Studies, Kanazawa University

2 Muang Yawng is a town in Shan State, Myanmar. The town has its long history with Burma, Lanna, Siam, Laos and the Sipsongpanna of China. The residents are mostly consisted of Lue people who descended from people who emigrated from Chiang Rung and other cities in Sipsongpanna, China.

3 Jhey is a word that has two connotations: one is to call any women the older than you; the other is a person who has money.

4 Mae Leing is a word to call any potential women who could support others in financial, have lots of money, and have an influence.

5 Tai Lue in Chiang Kam, Payao province is the first group, and the biggest Tai Lue group that started to associate.

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