

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Since 1962, following the coup and the establishment of the military government in Burma, there has been a huge influx of Tai Yai refugees/ displaced persons into Northern Thailand. The fights between insurgencies and the Burma Army have taken place in the home villages of the Tai Yai people, who have also been deprived of many cultural and human rights due to the assimilationist policy of the military government, and who have suffered as the Burmese economy deteriorated along the "Burmese Way to Socialism". The Tai Yai refugees/ displaced persons left their country because their lives were being destroyed.

Although there has been a constant flow of immigrants into Northern Thailand, these post-1962 immigrants are generally considered to be a distinct group, and are categorized as refugees/ displaced persons. These refugees/ displaced persons moved to various destinations in Northern Thailand where there existed strong connections with the Shan State of Burma, their ancestral home.

The community of Mae Hong Son has been a preferred destination of the post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants. This is due to the fact that it is located along the border and has maintained a strong connection with the Tai Yai community in Burma. Separated by overlapped mountains, Mae Hong Son has kept its close relation to the trans-Salween area rather than adjoining area of Thailand. Migration movement between these areas also shows this on-going connection. Since its establishment about 170 year ago, Tai Yai community in Mae Hong Son had grown by absorbing the population of Tai Yai immigrants from the Burmese side of the border.

The population of Mae Hong Son after 1962 has been separated into two groups: one group is the legitimate Tai Yai residents with Thai nationality, and the other is the post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants without Thai nationality. The difference in their socio-

economic status, which is derived from the possession of citizenship and land, certainly produces some gap between these two groups, but it does not mean they are completely separated one.

There are two main patterns of residential location of the post-1962 immigrants in the village. One is the pattern that the immigrants living among pre-existing community of host villagers, and the other is the pattern that they establish new communities in separate areas. Their places of residence differ depending on their length of stay in Thailand, timing of entry, and most importantly, their relationship with local villagers. The immigrants living in pre-existing community tend to have more frequent interactions with the host villagers. However, the one living in newly established communities also have chances to interact with the local villagers as their lives intersect at school, grocery store, temple, on the street, and in the fields. The host Tai Yai residents, or earlier immigrants, originally came from Burma, and their descendents interact with the newly arrived immigrants as they can easily trace their connection to the immigrants or to the immigrants' home country.

The accumulations of such daily interaction and the relations built in everyday life form a network, that is, the network of the hosts and the immigrants. The pre-existing relations between the immigrants and the host, which induce their active interaction, are important in the immigrants' settlement lives. At the same time, the expansion of pre-existing relations and establishment of new networks are also important. The networks they built up in their settlement life include the one of neighborhood, of co-workers, of kinship, and of economic and religious lives. This set of networks provides the immigrants with aids and companionship, and eases their difficulties as newcomers to the community.

Pre-existing relations together with newly established networks embrace the immigrants and the host into "circle of relations". This circle spreads over the border and connects its members with the feeling of being "we" through the recognition of the direct relations between them. The immigrants involved into "circle of relations" by

establishing the direct relations with the host members become “we” for the host members. At the same time, involvement with these networks and sharing of the daily activities cultivate the immigrants’ feeling of being “we” with the host society, and the newly arrived immigrants soon are absorbed into the local Tai Yai community.

Their assimilation into the local Tai Yai community, in other word, going into Tai Yai “circle of relations”, is relatively smooth because of the common culture, frequent daily interaction, and underlying historical continuity of the migration movement. However, while it may be relatively easy for the new immigrants to assimilate into the local Tai Yai community, it is much more difficult for them to be accepted by the larger host, Thai society. Although they might be culturally assimilated into Thai society, it is difficult for them to overcome the structural obstacles to assimilation. This disparity of cultural and structural assimilation influences the immigrants’ adaptation behaviors in Thai society.

The purpose of the post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants in their settlement life in Mae Hong Son is to reconstruct normal daily life, that is to say, carry out sufficient economic activity to sustain themselves and their families, to maintain cultural activities, and to conduct social activities for recreation and spiritual stability. While survival was the primary impetus for immigration, and meeting the needs of daily life is their priority, the immigrants might want to enhance their lives through higher education and better paying employment is possible.

The Tai Yai community in Mae Hong Son provides the support necessary for immigrants to reconstruct their lives and support themselves independently. The Tai Yai “circle of relations” functions to help the immigrants with many everyday matters. This Tai Yai community in Mae Hong Son is an unofficial social space for immigrants and hosts, and supports all aspects of the daily life of immigrants, including economic activities and religious activities. The space is conditioned by the long-term accumulation of relations and experiences of the members of the space, and the existence of sympathizers inside the networks. Mae Hong Son as the social space for Tai Yai

immigrants physically occupies a certain part of Thai territory, but is not the place merely one region of Thailand as sub-category of the country, which is regulated and controlled by rule and order system seen as legitimate by the government. Mae Hong Son is actually two different spaces existing on a different level: it is both an administrative region of Thailand, and a Tai Yai sub-society, with its own scheme of order, conditioned by its own local history and the accumulation of relations and experiences of its members. For the post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants, this Mae Hong Son as Tai Yai sub-society is their social space. Under its scheme, they are allowed to exist and to carry out their dairy activities. The space is, however, physically overlaps with Mae Hong Son as part of Thailand and immigrants living in the space also exist on both of the spaces. They are regarded as members of Tai Yai society, living in the Tai Yai community of Mae Hong Son, but are, at the same time, regarded as illegal and unwelcome immigrants in Mae Hong Son as a part of Thailand. The meaning of the immigrants' existence varies according to perspective.

There is another way to analyze the Tai Yai migration after 1962. If we conceptualize the movement of the refugees as subjective action made for a specific purpose that can only be served in a new place, we can interpret the post-1962 immigrants' interactions in the host society as follows. They came to Mae Hong in order to regain and reconstruct their lost daily lives. They arrived at the Tai Yai sub-society in Mae Hong Son and settled down there. That space is filled with the supportive networks and potential supporters and sympathizers that make it possible for them to realize their purposes. By building networks with the host Tai Yai residents and becoming members of the Tai Yai sub-society, they can realize their purposes. They therefore actively approach this sub-society and are willing to be assimilated. However, other purposes with less priority, or additional goals, must be realized through legal and formal procedures in the institutional world of greater Thai society. However, there hardly be seen the active approaches by the immigrants to Thai society. This is partly because barrier to entering this Thai society are formidable, structurally high, for the immigrants

because of its regulations and rules exist in it, but also because they have no need to approach it. Not entering greater Thai society can be understood as a reasonable adaptation strategy. Immigrants choose the place in which to be assimilated, according to their purposes for migration and the goals which they have set for their settlement lives. Therefore, we cannot overlook the existence of member of the host society who can sympathize and supports the immigrants. They are a part of Thailand, as is their mechanism for receiving the immigrants. Because the migration process is composed not only of the formal and institutional factors, but also of informal and non-institutional factors, such accommodating nature of the receiving society side should not be ignored.

What we can see from the review of chapters is the fact that each element shown in each chapter interacts in a migration system and creates a migration process with involving actors on the both sides of the border.

The migration process of this case study starts on the Burmese side of the border. The immigrants whose daily lives were destroyed by the events in Burma try to reconstruct their lives by moving to another place. Then the stage of the migration moves to Mae Hong Son on the Thai side of the border. On the basis of existence of a common ethnic community, historical continuity, and supportive networks, Mae Hong Son equips the space for receiving the immigrants from Burma. The immigrants carry out their daily activities by placing themselves in this space. The immigrants' networks with other immigrants and the host villagers expand as a result of their daily activities and intercourse, and at the same time, they also try to build more intimate networks with the host villagers as sympathizers in order to achieve their purpose of reconstruction of daily lives. Through this process, the immigrants become a part of the Tai Yai community in Mae Hong Son.

If we place the host villagers and the immigrants of the various generations on the line connected between the Tai Yai community in Burma and Mae Hong Son in order of strength of relations and length of stay to each community, it does not show the separated groups centered on the Burmese and the Thai side, but show the continuous gradation

between them. Started from the position of the immigrants who would be received by the host society, they gradually changes their positions to the one of the members of the host society who receive new immigrants. The immigrants integrated into the host community become the channel that connects the host society to the Tai Yai community on the Burmese side of the border by maintaining the ties to their origin society.

There are cases that the people who had once been the immigrants from Burma have become member of the host society and act as mediators for the latest arrived immigrants. The new immigrants might not have any relations with the members of the host society. But if they have relations with the immigrants of former generations, who have become the member of the host society, they would never excluded as complete strangers because the host members could recognize the indirect relations through the intermediate of their relation to the old immigrants. Through this indirect connection, latest arrived immigrants are also given the chances to build firmer networks as their precursors had been.

This process, that is, the process they came to Mae Hong Son relying on pre-existing linkages and gradually become the member of the host society through the expansion of the networks, has been repeated among the immigrants in many generations. Most of the immigrants who have come to Mae Hong Son have experienced this: not only the post-1962 immigrants, but the host villagers, the pre-1962 immigrants, who had come from the Burmese side for many decades ago also experienced this process. We could understand their motivation to play the role as "sympathizers" for the newly arrived immigrants might be derived from their common experience as immigrants. This forms a cycle and the cycle has been repeated in the history of Mae Hong Son.

What we should pay attention is the fact that the migration movement has taken place on the accumulation of the history of the place. This also underlies the following conclusions from this research:

- (1)The integration of newly arrived immigrants into the host community is relatively smooth. This is no merely the result of active interactions between the host and

immigrants caused by their linguistic and cultural similarity, but rather owes to the fact that the historical accumulation of the related-ness (it also embraces linguistic and cultural similarity) works supportive to the immigrants.

(2) Such related-ness directly and indirectly connect members of the host society, the immigrants, and potential immigrants. These connections themselves are important elements which maintain the whole migration system.

But we must reconfirm that the factors shown in this case study cannot directly be generalized to the whole migration system of Thailand. As I mentioned earlier, the migration system includes various patterns because it is composed of combination of various elements: the migration takes place illegally or legally, receiving side has common ethnic community with the immigrants or not, the migration has historical continuity or not, etc. all influence the characteristics of the migration.

For example, the case of Karen immigrants cannot be placed on the same ground as the case of Tai Yai immigrants, even though both of Karen and Tai Yai people are equally put in the position of oldest residents of Mae Hong Son. The differences between these two groups lay on their community formation, one is valley dwellers who have relatively solid community, and the other is hill tribe moves their settlement often; on their religious tradition, one is Theravada Buddhists, and the other is mixture of animists, Buddhists and Christians; and on the perception from Thai people, one is regarded as ethnic relatives as "Tai" ethnic group and have formed a region of Thailand, and the other is called as "Yang" and have always been separated from the Thai people. All these differences are reflected on the characteristics of migration and settlement process.

Even among the cases of Tai Yai migration, not all of the cases follow the same process. The process is never the same among the cases of Mae Hong Son which has large Tai Yai communities and the cases of other places which have small or no Tai Yai community. In the same way, the cases of Mae Hong Son also differ depending on the situation of each village and their reactions to the immigrants. Compared with the reality that there found the cases that the village headman earns the bribes from the immigrants by taking advantages of their vulnerable legal status and the cases that the immigrants met

discriminative behaviors outside the village, it becomes clear that this case study shows the very unique example of the settlement pattern which is led by a village headman who has a unique policy. The settlement process of the post-1962 immigrants examined in this research can be characterized as the very successful case that the local villagers in the host society receive the immigrants without any negative image.

However, we again have to be reminded that this is only a case happened in a limited place and limited period. Even in the village, the situation is not always the same. So far, there is no prospect of decreasing of immigrants from Burma judging from (1) the supportive function of migrant networks and (2) continuing instabilities in Burma. Rapid increasing of the immigrants since the 1990s might raise the another possible directions, both pessimistic and optimistic, to the migration movement in the village.

As for the pessimistic direction, we can anticipate the situation that the smooth integration of the immigrants would not take place anymore. If the speed of increasing of the immigrants is so fast that the integration capacity of the village cannot catch up, the conflicts concerning the land and resources could arise. That also could grow the negative image to the immigrants. The conflict between the village headman and the government officials could also be happened. So far, the headman has handled the issue of the Burmese immigrants in the village under his responsibility without reporting to the district officials. Now, he is rethinking his policy and looking for the better solution to this issue under the pressure of the government officials and rapid increasing of the immigrants that might exceed his capability to deal the issue by himself. But seeing from situation that the instabilities in Burma are lasting, and that the immigrants and their families started to establish their lives in Mae Hong Son, it is clear that the whole-scale repatriation cannot be the best solution to this problem.

As for the optimistic direction, we can expect the situation that while many Tai Yai villagers with Thai nationality left the village, the immigrants would be welcomed as substitute human resources, thus there would be no conflict. Murakami reports the case that the Burmese Tai Yai novices and monks are welcomed to village temples in order to

maintain the religious lives of the villagers.¹ Actually, main forces in the agricultural works are shifting to the immigrants because Thai Tai Yai villagers can have another types of occupation.

Anyway, the seeking of the solution to this problem is a very heavy task because it is composed of the elements interwoven with lives of the local people and thus that cannot be simplified or generalized. So, we must understand the situation in the local context first. Because there is no convenient solution, we must start with recognizing the complexity of the migration. The perspectives to see the migration phenomena should be flexible. Fixed and stereotyped perspectives against the immigrants can overlook the important factor for the hosts and the immigrants themselves and the social space they create.

Why do they cross the border and come to Thailand even the act is illegal?; why they do keep staying in Thailand even they are discriminated as irregular residents?; why do they keep practicing their dairy activities even they are under many regulations as outsiders?; why don't they want to be completely assimilated into Thai society? If we see the phenomena from national viewpoint which framed by national legal and order scheme, we cannot find the answer to these questions because their acts look unreasonable and incomprehensive. We need the viewpoint of immigrants themselves to understand it.

As the number of immigrants staying on Thai soil "illegally" is increasing, it is not adequate to view them merely as "outsiders" in Thailand. If we view immigrants in that way, how can we begin to understand the interactions between the host and the immigrants on the regional level? It is important to recognize their vulnerability as a structurally segregated group within the host society, but it is not all the aspect that movement of these immigrants shows. That is neither adequate to judge the existence of immigrants from a fixed perspective, and label their presence as "good" or "bad", or structurally "weak" or "strong".

¹ Murakami, *op. cit.*; also see footnote 15 in Chapter 5.

What the Tai Yai immigrants quietly living in Mae Hong Son want is not to be repatriated as illegal immigrants, not to be contained in refugee camp and wait aids from agencies, not to be blamed as opium growing tribe, and not to be labeled as insurgency guerilla. But they just want to be understood and to be given the chances to live normal lives. In order to get out of these stereotypes, we need some other angles to see them. This thesis has attempted to analyze their situation from the another perspectives separated from these stereotypes in order to understand them.

Analysis of migration phenomena only in the framework of the nation, or order system derived of nation's sovereignty can overlook the mechanism of birth, growth, and settlement of immigrants which is formed in the another space on a different level. In the case of Northern Thailand, where there is a regional context separate from the one of Bangkok, this mechanism of migration formed on another level is much influential and important for understanding of migration process there. We cannot analyze the migration scene without noticing this. On this line of discussion, the case of Tai Yai immigrants can show us the profound nature of migration system in Thailand, especially the ones in the border areas.

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