

Chapter 3

PRE-1962 TAI YAI IMMIGRANTS AND POST-1962 TAI YAI IMMIGRANTS IN MAE HONG SON

3.1. Mae Hong Son: Its Historical Background

The geographic condition of the place is an important factor that characterizes the migration in that area. In the case of Mae Hong Son, which it is the stage for Tai Yai migration that this thesis focuses on, what makes it significant is its strong connection to the trans-Salween area on the Burmese side of border. Factors such as topography, history, and demography all work together to condition this connection. Thus, I will review these three factors that condition locality of Mae Hong Son in this section.

3.1.1. Geographical Setting

There is no historical period in which Mae Hong Son become the “center” of anything. However, it has always been a “crossroads” of various tribal peoples, trading goods and traders, and cultures from Thai and Burma through its connection to the trans-Salween area. This is caused by the geographical condition of Mae Hong Son.

Mae Hong Son is the northwest-most province of Thailand, facing the Shan State of Burma to the north, Tak Province to the south, Chiang Mai Province to the east, the Shan and Kayah states of Burma to the west. Mae Hong Son shares a land border with Burma for 300 kilometers, and mountains cover most of the border area. The rest of the land in Mae Hong Son, other than this border area, is also mostly mountainous. These overlapped mountains separate Mae Hong Son from other areas and has contributed to its peripheral existence in both the “Shan world” with its center in Shan state of Burma, and the “Lanna world” with its center in Chiang Mai.¹

The total area of Mae Hong Son is 13,232 k m², but 11,981 k m², 90.5% of the total of it is covered with mountains, and there is just 1,251 k m² of plain. In *Ampur Muang*,

¹ Murakami, op.cit., p.62; also see Map 2, p.117.

the place where I conducted the field survey, similarly has very little flat areas. There are 145 k m² of flat area in total 3,244 k m².²

This geographical condition of a scarcity of contiguous flat ground, makes it difficult to establish large-scale, or even small-scale, industries in Mae Hong Son. People in Mae Hong Son must buy non-agricultural goods from other areas, mainly from Burma and Chiang Mai³. Burma was the preferred destination for traders prior to the construction of roads to Chiang Mai, mostly because there were high-quality goods produced in the British factories in Burma, and it was easier to travel there than to Chiang Mai.⁴

In earlier periods, the people of Mae Hong Son had to trek through the forests and mountains for ten to fourteen days in order to get to Chiang Mai. Another possible route is to travel on boats to Burma, which is a more convenient way, since traders could carry more goods than the Chiang Mai route.⁵ The Pai River, which is the most important river in Mae Hong Son, providing water for agriculture, flows 135 km from the Pai district to Mae Hong Son, and then meets the Salween River in Burmese territory and provides a way of transportation from Mae Hong Son to Burma. The final destination of this route was Moulmein, a big port city of British Burma. Although the Salween itself was not navigable because of swift currents, innumerable rapids, and topography with a deep and rocky gorge,⁶ there was overland route connected to Moulmein. Textile, hardware and other British products were carried from Moulmein to markets in the trans-Salween area, and petty traders from Mae Hong Son could stock the goods at such markets, or could go

² Samnangkan Chanwat Mae Hong Son, *Prawai Mahathai Sam Phumiphak Chanwat Mae Hong Son*. (?), 1985), pp.30-31. (in Thai).

³ Parichart Ruangwiseet, *Mae Hong Son*. (Bangkok; Samnak Phim Sarakhadii, 1993), p.34. (in Thai).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.36.

⁵ Chakrit Noranitipadunkan, "Laksana khong Prahakon lae Gan tanthinthan khong Chao Mae Hong Son" (Population Characteristics and Patterns of Settlement in Mae Hong Son) in *Samkhom lae Watanatham khong Pak Nua Prathet Thai (Social and Cultural Patterns of Northern Thailand)*, ed. by Snit Smuckarn. (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1973). p.91. (in Thai).

⁶ Sao Saimong Mangrai, *The Shan States and British Annexation*. (New York: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 1965). p.217.

further to Moulmein.⁷ This business was facilitated by the ethnic composition of this area: the traders from Mae Hong Son were mostly Tai Yai, and the trans-Salween area is also occupied by Tai Yai residents. The use of a common language and customs surely made for smoother business transactions.⁸ This route, hence, has strongly connected people in Mae Hong Son to the trans-Salween area.

People of Mae Hong Son sold forest products to the people on the Burmese side and bought salt, cloth, medicines, and other utensils from them. These goods were re-sold them in the market of Mae Hong Son.⁹ Paul Durrenberger, who has done research in Mae Hong Son, wrote that he saw little evidence of commerce in Thai goods, although non-agricultural goods were still coming from Burma in the 1960s.¹⁰

There are now two all weather roads directly leading from Mae Hong Son to Chiang Mai. One is the southern road of Route 108 via Khun Yuam, Mae La Noi, and Mae Sariang, which was connected to Mae Hong Son in 1977. The other is the northern road of Route 1095 via Pai, which was just completed in 1992. Other than land transportation, there are also daily flights to and from Chiang Mai. These transport options make the connection between Mae Hong Son and Chiang Mai stronger, and allow more goods to be brought in from Chiang Mai.

This doesn't mean that Mae Hong Son lost its connection to the trans-Salween area on the Burmese side. We can still see various Burmese goods in the market of Mae Hong

⁷ Constance M. Wilson, "A Thai Government Survey of the Middle Salween, 1890 with introduction and translation" in *The Burma-Thailand Frontier over Sixteen Decades: Three Descriptive Documents*, ed. by Constance M. Wilson and Lucien M. Hanka, (Ohio: Center for International Studies, Ohio University, 1988), p.33.

⁸ Trading goods from Moulmein carried across the Salween went not only to Mae Hong Son, but also to whole Northern Siam. At the beginning of 20th century, about 75% of trading goods in Northern Siam was carried through Hot and across the Salween. Tai Yai people controlled most of this trans-Salween trade. Anan Ganjanapan, "The Differentiation of the Peasantry and the Complex Patronage Relationship under Forced Commercialization, 1900-42" in *Changes in Northern Thailand and the Shan States 1886-1940*, ed. by Prakai Nontaeasee, (Singapore: Southeast Asian Studies Program, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988), p. 260.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.82.

¹⁰ Paul Durrenberger and Nicola Tannenbaum, *Analytical Perspectives on Shan Agriculture and Village Economics*. (New Haven; Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1990), p.6.

Son. It is not only the flow of goods, but also the flow of people coming and going over the border that illustrates the ongoing relationship between these two areas. All of these connections are conditioned by Mae Hong Son's geographical setting as a thickly-forested and mountainous border zone between Thailand and Burma.

3.1.2. Historical Background

A history of Mae Hong Son cannot fail to mention the Tai Yai migration from Shan State into this area, because this migration is a factor that has contributed to history of Mae Hong Son.

The establishment of hamlets in mountainous Mae Hong Son dates back around 170 years. Pang Muu, a village in *Amphur Muang*, and the adjacent areas are said to be the mold of the community of Mae Hong Son, where Tai Yai pioneers and immigrants from the Shan State came to live. At that time, these scattered settlements in and between the forests and mountains had neither a formal political organization nor a governor.¹¹

In 1831, the Prince of Chiang Mai sent a survey team to the Salween basin located west of Chiang Mai in order to look for the place for hunting and training elephants and to ascertain the condition of Salween. Cao Keaomuangmaa was the person in charge of this survey and went to Mae Hong Son. He left Chiang Mai and passed through Pai and Pang Ma Pa, and then reached the large river basin, around which Tai Yai people lived. Cao Keaomuangmaa saw that it was a suitable place to establish a village. He gathered scattered populations of Tai Yai from around the area and established a village, and appointed Pakamong, a Tai Yai immigrant from Shan State with long residence in that area, as leader of the village. This is the present village of Pang Muu. After establishment of Pang Muu, Cao Keaomuangmaa proceeded farther and reached another river basin. This was also deemed a good place to form a community, so he gathered the local population and established another village. This place eventually became the district capital of Mae Hong Son.¹²

¹¹ Samnakgan Canwat Mae Hong Son, op. cit., p.34.

¹² Ibid., pp.34-39; Wilson, op. cit., pp.34-35.

The importance of this area, up until the 19th century, was: (1)being a strategic point when the Burmese army proceeded to attack Ayuthaya or Chiang Mai; and (2)being one of the tributary states for Chiang Mai.¹³ Other than these factors, Mae Hong Son had no significant importance in politics in this area, because it was too far and too difficult to access.

Since the middle of 19th century, the boom of teak trade changed the importance of Mae Hong Son in two aspect: (1)Mae Hong Son's importance as a border post started to be recognized; and (2)the boom of the teak trade increased the population of Mae Hong Son.

The area of Mae Hong Son was rich in good teak, and everyone sought the right to exploit this highly profitable natural resource. Traditionally, the wealth and power of the states in this region had been based on manpower, not natural resources, thus, the territory and the boundary had not been important. Renard writes, "The availability of lucrative stands of timber on both side of the Salween changed how Kayahs and Thai viewed territory in this region."¹⁴ The Kayahs, living on the west side of the Salween, started to expand eastward in search of timber and frequently entered teak areas claimed by Chiang Mai. Thus, the Chiang Mai Prince felt anxious about this movement and recognized the importance of the Salween basin as a border post. After this period, the British commissioners found s series of Siamese posts with the white elephant flag of Siam along the Salween.¹⁵

The growth of the population was associated with the coming of British teak business into Mae Hong Son. British traders had originally conducted this business in Burma, but they moved to the area of Lanna because of the decrease in the number of teak forests in Burma. The Borneo Company began trading in the North in 1856, and Bombay Burmah Corporation followed in the 1890s. With the coming of the British teak

¹³ Ibid., p.34.

¹⁴ Ronald D. Renard, "Delineation of the Kayah States Frontiers with Thailand: 1890-1984" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. 18 (1) 1987, p.88.

¹⁵ Sao Saimong, op. cit., p.227.

traders, people engaging in that business, such as foremen and clerks also came into Mae Hong Son and settled down there. Most of them were Karen, Tai Yai, and the Burmese of the British subject, who had been trained to work with the British already, and were therefore more useful as clerks and laborers than the local population.¹⁶

At the same time as the coming of teak trade, there were conflicts between the Princes of the Shan States (1856-1866), and thus refugees from these wars fled to the villages of Mae Hong Son. Tsao Kolan, the prince of Mawk Mai and the person involved in the establishment of Mae Hong Son as a political entity, was also one of refugees who escaped to Mae Hong Son with his family and followers. The relationship between him and Mae Hong Son is told as follows:

In 1865 Tsao Kolan, a prince from Mawk Mai state, along with approximately one thousand followers entered the Mae Hong Son area. Before this, he had disputed the right of Moeng Nai officials to collect Burmese head taxes in Mawk Mai, spent some time in a Burmese prison, and escaped, going first into Moeng Mai and then to Mawk Tsam Pe. At that time, Moeng Mai was a small principality ruled by an official appointed by the Chiang Mai prince. Tsao Kolan took over and the Chiang Mai appointed official fled to Pai. Tsao Kolan left one son to rule Moeng Mai while he and most of his followers went to Mawk Tsam Pe, and established village with connections to Pang Muu, another large Shan village. Eventually Tsao Kolan and most of his followers returned to Moeng Mawk Mai, but a niece and nephew-in-law stayed and established Mae Hong Son Town in the 1870s.¹⁷

The town of Mae Hong Son was established in 1874. Up until this period, Mae Hong Son had grown larger by absorbing the population of teak traders and of refugees from the Shan State caused by the conflicts of the princes there.

The Chiang Mai Prince saw this expansion and development of Mae Hong Son and recognized its importance as a base for teak trade and as a strategic post in the border area. So in 1874, he appointed Chankalce, who was the nephew-in-law to the above-mentioned

¹⁶ Parichart, *op. cit.*, p.29, Micheal R.J. Vatikiotis, "Ethnic Pluralism in the Northern Thai City of Chiang Mai", Ph.D. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1984, p.32.

¹⁷ Durrenberger and Tannenbaum, *op. cit.*, pp.3-4; also see Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp.34-39.

Tsao Kolan, as the first governor of *Muang Mae Hong Son* and gave him the title "Paya Sinharatraja".¹⁸

In 1894, King Chulalongkorn and the British Minister in Bangkok agreed on the demarcation of the boundary between Thailand and British Burma. This agreement officially made Mae Hong Son a part of Thai territory.¹⁹ In 1890, *Muang Mae Hong Son* was named as "*Boriwen Chiang Mai Taiwan Tok* (Western Chiang Mai border area)" together with *Muang Khun Yaum*, *Muang Yuam* (present Mae Sariang) and *Muang Pai*. This later became to be known as "*Boriwen Phayap Nua* (Northern Phayap border area)" when Chiang Mai formed *Monthon Phayap*.²⁰ This *Boriwen*, as a part of Chiang Mai, was put under the *Monthon* (circle) system, a pyramid-like administration system with its peak in Bangkok. This *Monthon* system was brought to Northern Thailand in the course of interior administrative reforms by King Chulalongkorn and Prince Damrong. Several provinces formed a *Monthon*, and its head was the High Commissioner who was appointed from Bangkok.²¹ The *Cao Muang* (local traditional governor) was still the nominal head of the province, assisted by Permanent Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner, both of whom were Bangkok appointees, but these Commissioners could override the *Cao Muang*'s decision making. Through this centralized system and appointment of the officials from Bangkok, the northern states, including Mae Hong Son, became subject to the central government measures for the maintenance of law and order, national security, and for social and economic progress.²² In 1933, the new revolutionary regime abolished *Monthon* system, and these northern provinces in it came directly under

¹⁸ Samnakgan Chanwat Mae Hong Son, op. cit., pp.34-39; Nicola Tannenbaum, "Phaya Sinharatraja and the History of Mae Hong Son" Proceedings of the 6th International conference on Thai Studies, Chiang Mai, 1996, pp.357-359.

¹⁹ Renard, op. cit., p.91. At that time, Chiang Mai had already been a part of Thailand; thus the affairs concerning the tributaries of Chiang Mai became also under the authority of Bangkok.

²⁰ Samnakgan Suksathigan Chanwat Mae Hong Son, *Yong Roi Adit Muang Mae Hong Son*. (? , 1994), pp.3-4. (in Thai)

²¹ M.R. Rujaya Abhakorn, "Changes in the Administrative Systems of Northern Siam, 1884-1933" in *Changes in Northern Thailand and the Shan States 1886-1940*, ed. by Prakai Nontawasee, (Singapore: Southeast Asian Studies Program, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988), p.92.

²² Ibid., p.89.

the Ministry of Interior. On this occasion, Mae Hong Son finally became a province of Thailand and also came under the direct control of the Thai central government.²³

However, this does not mean that direct influence from the Thai central government reached Mae Hong Son right away. This was prevented by geography. Keyes writes that "Mae Hong Son has long been regarded as 'Siberia' of Thailand, for even into the 1970s, it was largely cut off from the rest of country."²⁴

In the 1970s, as Keyes wrote, the situation started to change, notably after the road from Mae Hong Son to Chiang Mai was completed. The completion of the first road to Mae Hong Son's provincial capital was the event in 1977, but the attentions and needs of the road to access this border area has already been raised since the 1950s. At that time, two factors required roads to connect Mae Hong Son to other part of Thailand. The first was a security problem concerning communist insurgencies, and the other was the teak trade with Burma.

Since the 1950s, the mood of anti-communism has been overwhelming in the Thai political scene and thus it has raised the amount of attentions paid to the border area. The Thai government saw security control in the area to be crucial to elimination of threats to Thailand's national security. This is because the area bordered with communist countries, had frequent armed conflicts caused by various insurgency groups, and held the population of various ethnic minorities whom the government believed to be more likely to be involved in communist insurgency groups' activities.²⁵ As Mae Hong Son was a "high risk" border area, it would be subject to the direct military control and the concept of "security through development"²⁶ that were the adopted strategies of the Thai

²³ Samnakgan Chanwat Mae Hong Son, op. cit., pp.34-39; Parichart, op. cit., p.29.

²⁴ Charles F. Keyes, *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation-State*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989) p.1.

²⁵ Robert.M. Hearn, *Thai Government Programs in Refugee Relocation and Resettlement in Northern Thailand*. (New York: Thailand books, 1974), pp.24-28.

²⁶ Border Patrol Police applied the policy to gain security through integration by winning the friendship of the hill peoples, rather than forcing them to cooperate. They offered development programs, such as educational, medical and agricultural programs, to achieve this "security through development". See, Tan Chee Beng, "Central Government and 'Tribal Minorities': Thailand and West Malaysia Compared" in *Farmer in the Hills: Upland Peoples of Thailand*, (Kuala Lumpur: University Sains Malaysia, 1975), p.192.

authorities. Roads leading directly to this area were required.

The first road from Hot to Mae Sariang, the base of teak trade, was completed in 1955. But further extension of the road to the provincial capital had to take more time because of the technical problems in the construction caused by its topographic feature.

In the 1960s, another factor that led to road construction was the 1962-coup in Burma. Before the coup, teak cut in the Salween area was carried to Burma which was a big industry for Mae Hong Son. But after the coup, it became difficult to send teak to the Burmese side and the traders had to find a way to sell them in Thailand.²⁷ This meant that roads were needed to transport teak from this area to other areas in Thailand. Then, in 1977, the road from Hot to Mae Sariang was extended to the provincial capital. This road started to connect Mae Hong Son to other cities in Northern Thailand and then to Bangkok, and consequently to the rest of Thailand.

One of the consequences of this road construction is boom of tourism in Mae Hong Son. Owing to the improvement of the transportation systems and rich natural and cultural resources, Mae Hong Son started to become one of the major tourist center in Northern Thailand. This was accelerated after the road via Pai connected Mae Hong Son directly to Chiang Mai in 1992. This coming of tourism, together with other development, such as construction of roads and bridges, has brought many new things, whatever it is materially or mentally, into this formerly closed Tai Yai community. Tannenbaum writes that Mae Hong Son is transforming from the Shan world to the Thai world.²⁸ However, in the areas other than the district capital and major tourist spots, villagers still lead their lives as they have been for a long time, because such businesses are usually organized by non-local people and there seem to be some separation between this tourism sector and local people.²⁹ Although they are influenced by this rapid

²⁷ Parichart, *op. cit.*, p.29.

²⁸ Tannenbaum, 1996, *op. cit.*, p.357.

²⁹ According to local NGO conducting eco-tourism project, most of the owners of guesthouses and other tourist-related business in Mae Hong Son are non-local people. Less than 15% of such business is conducted by local Tai Yai.

development including tourism, especially in the economical field,³⁰ the traditional ways of life, such as religious practices, traditional diet, and their language are relatively unchanged.

3.1.3. People

Mae Hong Son is known for its colorful mixture of tribal population, including Karen, Meo, Musu, Lisu, Lawa, Thong Sui, Jinho and Tai Yai.³¹ Among them, Tai Yai people occupy the majority of the population³² and have played a crucial role in the formation of Mae Hong Son as a community. Their own way of life characterizes the local culture of Mae Hong Son and has made people recognize that as Tai Yai world. We can still see the Tai Yai style in architecture, clothing, ceremonies, and foods in Mae Hong Son town and villages, which have been influenced by the Burmese style rather than the Thai style. There are some other Tai Yai settlements in Northern Thailand, such in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Tak, but they form a minority group there. There is no other place where Tai Yai occupy the dominant position in the formation of regional culture.

It is said that the first settlers in Mae Hong Son were Karen and Tai Yai in the Salween basin in Burma.³³ In the case of Tai Yai, they came from the Shan States of Burma, such as Muang Mawk Mai, Muang Nai, Muang Langkho and other places to find new lands for agriculture.³⁴ They first came to farm seasonally and went back to Burma after they harvested their crops. However, some of them found it inconvenient to come

³⁰ For details, refer to Paul Durrenberger, "Changes in a Shan Village" in *Highlanders of Thailand*, ed. by John McKinnon. (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Durrenberger and Tanenbaum, op. cit.

³¹ *Tamnap Chumchon bon phantlhi Suan nai Prathet Thai Phi 2538 (Directory of Highland Communities in Thailand, 1995)*, (Bangkok: Ministry of Labor and Social welfare, Department of Public Welfare, 1995), p.221. (in Thai).

³² According to provincial statistics in 1993, total population of Mae Hong Son is 210,102, with 48% of the population consisting of various hill tribes and 52% of lowland Thai people (include Tai Yai). Murakami estimated the population of Tai Yai in Mae Hong Son as about 50% of total by taking 7,000, the number of population in the provincial capital, from the total population of lowland Thais, because most of the non-Tai Yai population consists of government officials and business people who live in the provincial capital. See Murakami, op. cit., p.61.

³³ Chakrit, op. cit., p.82.

³⁴ Wilson, op. cit., pp32-36; Samnakgan Suksathigan Chanwat Mae Hong, op. cit., p.19.

and go and started to settle down in the area of Mae Hong Son.³⁵ This population increased when any political incidents or instabilities happened in the Shan State. As the population became bigger and bigger, then formed villages here and there.

The following population inflow was composed of hill tribes such as Musu, Meo, then followed by Lisu. This population also included the people who escaped from instabilities; however, most of them came into Mae Hong Son following the mountain ranges because of their shifting cultivation.³⁶

The fluidity of the population characterizes the demography of Mae Hong Son. Facing the adjoining border, the population movement between the two countries is a daily phenomena and it has never stopped even when the border posts were closed down. This is primarily due to the fact that the border can be crossed anywhere and not just at these points designated as official check points. Moreover, the local people know and are well accustomed to the topography around the border, so it is not a difficult job for them to find loopholes with immigration officials. This makes it very difficult for authorities to control the people's movement and produces the large population of illegal or undocumented immigrants.³⁷ Among them, Tai Yai immigrants from the Shan State form most of the population.

Other than population inflow from Burma, we can see increased population from other parts of Thailand caused by the improvement of infrastructure and transportation systems since the 1970s. Most of them come from adjacent provinces in Northern Thailand, and the rest is composed of ethnic Thais who come as government officials or who are engaged in business and tourism. Likewise there are Indians and Chinese who are doing business as well as other foreigners who decides to settle in Mae Hong Son.

However, non-Tai Yai immigrants are very few when compared to the Tai Yai and does not significantly change the demography of Mae Hong Son. Tai Yai still remains a

³⁵ Chakrit, *op. cit.*, p.78; Samnakgan Suksathigan Charwat Mae Hong Son, *op. cit.*, p.19.

³⁶ Chakrit, *op. cit.*, p.78.

³⁷ Estimated population of undocumented immigrants in Mae Hong Son is 23,054 in 1996, according to *Bangkok Post*, July 22, 1996.

majority of the population of Mae Hong Son and their position as prime residents in Mae Hong Son has not been changed. The Tai Yai population of Mae Hong Son is composed of immigrants who have come at various times. We can roughly divide this population into two groups: one is the earlier immigrants, who came prior to 1962, the original and legitimated residents of Mae Hong Son; and the other is the later immigrants who came illegally after 1962, and who remain unofficial residents in Thailand. A detailed description of these two groups will be presented in the following section.

3.2. Tai Yai Immigrants in Mae Hong Son prior to 1962

Members of the host society who receive post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants included of earlier Tai Yai immigrants and their descendants. In this section, I will review the earlier immigrants who came to Thailand prior to 1962 in order to clarify the reason why they are separated from the post 1962 immigrants, who are the people in focus of this thesis, even though they are all Tai Yai immigrants.

3.2.1. Population Composition of Earlier Tai Yai Immigrants

Migration of Tai Yai into Mae Hong Son in earlier time peaked several times. Parichart classifies the earlier Tai Yai immigrants into three groups based on the time and reasons for migration as follows:

The people who came to clear the lands for cultivation were those who have settled in this area before Cao Keaomuangmaa came to establish the community. Because there were no clear demarcation of territory and no obstacle to stop traveling, there were Tai Yai people, who came from the west of Salween such as Muang Mawk Mai, Mae Je, and Nam Mang, settled round this area in not small amount.

The group of people who escaped from wars includes those who escaped from the conflicts between Tai Yai countries in the Shan State such as the period of Chankalee coming to refuge. [And it includes the people who came] the period when British came to attack and captured Burma as its colony.

The last group was the people of British subjects who were engaged in teak

industry and trading.³⁸

The first group came before the 1830s, the second came throughout the 19th century, and the third came since the middle of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. Especially the second group, who escaped from wars, has had a significant importance by including high-ranked persons such as princes and aristocrats. These people, like Tsao Kolan and Chankalee, later became the leaders of Mae Hong Son.

These above-mentioned groups are the main streams of the immigrants in very first stage, but other than these groups, there were constant inflows of ordinary people who just had crossed the border.

What is peculiar to these earlier immigrants is the characteristic of being pioneers. They found the land, cleared the forests by themselves, and established their own communities. The establishment of such pioneer communities by the free movement of agriculturists is found not only in Mae Hong Son, but also everywhere in the rural societies of Southeast Asia.³⁹ According to Kitahara, such societies could be found in central Thailand until the 1930s.⁴⁰ In the case of Mae Hong Son, such a situation existed at least up until the 1950s.

Even in the case of the village along the basin of the Pai River, which is less than four kilometers from the town of Mae Hong Son, most of the area was covered with forests in the 1950s. The villagers could own land by clearing these forests.⁴¹ This newly-established community has grown by the entrance and inclusion of other families, relatives and friends whom the earlier immigrants invited, by the birth of their children,

³⁸ Parichart, op. cit., p.41.

³⁹ Atsushi Kitahara, "Kaitaku Shakai no Seiritsu" (Establishment of Pioneer Society) in *Tonan Ajia no Shakai (Societies in Southeast Asia)* ed. by Yoshihiro Tsubouchi, (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1990), p.72. (in Japanese)

⁴⁰ Kitahara, op. cit., p.95.

⁴¹ "There were ten to fifteen households in the village and the rest was still covered with forests when I came to the village. I cleared the forest and cultivated the land and made them my property. There was no one to disturb me to do this because there was plenty of lands which had no owner and the person who devoted the labor to clear land had a right to get that land. Not only I but also other people who had come before me and who came in the same period did like me. So, I did the same and got the land." From the interview with a villager, 70 years old, who came to Mae Hong Son from Mawk Mai in 1951.

and by the arrival of immigrants from other Tai Yai communities in Mae Hong Son, such as Khun Yuam, Pai, and Mae Sariang.

Most of the immigrants since the beginning of the 20th century seemed to have traced the networks of trading partners, friends, former neighbors, and kinship relations when they came to the village to settle.⁴² But it did not mean they only associated with the earlier immigrants they knew. There still were plenty of undeveloped lands to clear. So, new comers were also able to find lands to clear and cultivate, and consequently to own.

The migration that formed the original population of Mae Hong Son can be characterized by its pioneering nature. It became possible because the control of the border and registration of the land had not been strict at that time, and of course, there was plenty of undeveloped land with no owner.

3.2.2. Their Present Status

The earlier immigrants have lived in Thailand for a long time and have established their lives in Thai society. They are secure in their status in Thailand by virtue of Thai citizenship.

The people who came to Thailand earlier than others got better lands in large enough amounts, and are also more secure economically. This is the general characteristic of a pioneer society.⁴³ These earlier arrivals tend to be in leadership positions, such as that of the village headman, head of *Tambon* (sub-district), and other officials. This official status is supported by their socio-economic status in the village. The refugee princes and their descendants keep their higher status because of their background as aristocrats in the Shan State, and their time-honored position as legitimate leaders in Mae Hong Son.

⁴² For example, one informant came from Mawik Mai was a neighbor with the former informant when they had been on Burmese side. He had heard news about his former neighbor and decided to come to Mae Hong Son in 1957. Another informant had been engaged in cattle trade and he had some partners on Thai side who invited him to come, then decided to come to Mae Hong Son in 1954.

⁴³ Kitahara, *op. cit.*, p.99.

The other immigrants may not be leaders but are socially and economically secure, although may be not as secure as the former. They possess enough of their own land to feed their families. Most of them are farmers who grow rice and other crops on their own lands, and some rent their land to others for a fee and do other business at the same time, leading relatively stable lives.⁴⁴ Here, we can see the status change of the earlier immigrants. Through the ownership of land and use of it as commodity, their economic status has been changed from agriculturists to more capitalistic direction. This is associated with changes of the occupation pattern and life style. Other than economic status and ownership of lands, the possession of Thai citizenship visibly differentiates earlier immigrants from post-1962 immigrants. The status as a Thai national guarantees various rights and services from the government, such as rights to own land, to receive compulsory education and social welfare. Because this status is valid anywhere in Thailand, people continuing to higher education, going to find better jobs, and establishing their own businesses in other provinces can be found in this group. Murakami wrote, "By receiving education in Standard Thai... They have centripetal orientation which heads to the center of the nation as a member of nation of Thailand."⁴⁵ That might be the departure from the traditional agricultural Tai Yai society to modernized capitalistic Thai society.

3.3. Tai Yai Immigrants in Mae Hong Son after 1962

The new era of Tai Yai migration into Mae Hong Son started in 1962. In this section, I will discuss the general situation of these immigrants in order to lead the discussion in the following chapters.

⁴⁴ "There still was much undeveloped land left when I came here. I could get as much land as I endeavored to cultivate, so I worked hard and cleared a very large area. There still were much undeveloped lands left, but I stopped there because I have already gotten enough land. Now I sold almost all the land, leaving some part of it for my children and me. I opened a grocery shop with the money I got from selling land. My daughter and I bought some cars and started a transportation service of *Son-Tew* from the village to town of Mae Hong Son. Thanks to these businesses, I feel very secured economically." Interview with a villager, 62 years old, who came to Mae Hong Son in 1954.

⁴⁵ Murakami, op. cit., p.64.



3.3.1. General Trend of Tai Yai Migration after 1962

As mentioned in the former chapter, post-1962 immigrants mainly consist of the groups of refugees/ displaced persons in contemporary context. The factors behind this flow of people are also mentioned in the previous chapter.

The years of entry of informants ranged from the 1960s-1990s, and we can see that the flow of the people is not a temporary one, but rather is a constant one. However even though the flow has remained constant, the context of the flow includes many different patterns and changes within it. We can categorize the trend of migration roughly into three periods.

The first period covers the 1960s to the 1970s, when it involved specific people who were directly concerned with or had contacts with Burmese or Tai Yai armies, no matter whether they did so voluntary or involuntary in its earlier phase. Then it also involved civilians who were close to the battlefields on the second stage. The actors of migration in this period included single males, who escaped from forced labor or from being porters for the Burmese government⁴⁶ and hardships of being in Tai Yai's independent armies, such as Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army (MTA) and Shan United Revolutionary Armies (SURA),⁴⁷ and civilian families having sons.⁴⁸ The fact that stated by my informants was about the brutality of the Burmese and Tai Yai soldiers. Sometimes, the ethnic minorities tend to be regarded as the supporters of the insurgency groups composed of their own ethnic members.⁴⁹ But here, the ethnic insurgency soldiers were not in the positions that attract the civilians' supports. The villagers afraid them and saw them as interrupters of

⁴⁶ "I was taken as a porter for the Burmese army who fought against anti-governmental forces. Burmese soldiers treated us very badly and I felt that I would die if I stayed like this. So I decided to escape." The immigrant, 44 years old, who came in 1978.

⁴⁷ "I was conscripted to be a soldier of the Tai Yai army, but life in the army was very hard. There was not enough foods and we had to walk and fight in the jungle. When there is no battle, we had to do hard exercises and senior soldiers always bullied us. My friend escaped first, and then I followed him." The immigrant, 45 years old, who came in 1972.

⁴⁸ "I was afraid that my sons would be drafted into the Tai Yai army or taken to be a porter for the Burmese. So, I decided to move to Thailand with my whole family." The immigrant who has two sons, came in 1979.

⁴⁹ An obvious example of this perception is the Burmese military's rational for the forced relocations that aim at separation of civilians from ethnic insurgencies.

their quiet lives in the villages just like the Burmese soldiers.

The following decade, since the middle of the 1970s, was the period of expansion of battlefields and crossfire into villages where ordinary villagers were living. As war disasters spread, more ordinary villagers suffered from physical danger caused by battles⁵⁰ and economic breakdown caused by war conditions and other policies of the Burmese government such as high tax rate. At the same time, the misbehaviors by soldiers in the site also escalated as their frustrations accumulated through the ceaseless warfare. They stole rice, chickens, pigs and other properties, burnt houses, and sometimes, women were raped. Many Tai Yai people started to move their whole families, including women, children, and old people to safer ground in Thailand.

In third period of the late 1980s-1990s, we can see the migration of single persons or sometimes with whole families, who relied on the friends or relatives who had already emigrated.⁵¹ The informants who answered that they came to work or look for job in Thailand can be seen since this period, the first one came in 1989, but mostly since 1993 to 1997. We also can find the immigrants who had no one to rely on in the receiving society received guidance of recruiting agencies or farm owners also started to be found in this period.⁵² This owed to the rise of the wage of Thai labors associated with economic development in Thailand that increased the demands on the much cheaper labor of Burmese people. This is entangled with the immigrants' wishes to establish the safer and more stable lives, and produced the wave of Tai Yai immigrants who are refugees/displaced persons as well as illegal workers.

Other than these trends, some cases among informants can be seen as consequences of certain events on the Burmese side of the border such as: flow of immigrants from Loi

⁵⁰ "The village I used to live in often became a battlefield for fights between Karen or Tai Yai armies and the Burmese army. We had to find a place for refuge every time there was a battle. We could not stay there anymore." The immigrant, 62 years old, who came in 1982.

⁵¹ "I came to Mae Hong Son because my sister, who was living there, told me that there is a good job. I had no job when I was in Burma because Burmese soldier occupied my paddy field, so decided to come. It was gardening of a resort hotel." The immigrants, 28 years old, who came in 1991. His sister had come to Mae Hong Son in 1989 under the guidance of recruiter.

⁵² In the village, three informants were recruited by an owner of a resort hotel, and five were recruited by a farm owner.

Kaw in 1988-1989 caused by forced relocation; flow of ex-porters from Lang Kher and Mawk Mai area in 1991-1992 caused by operation of the Burmese military there; and flow from Ho Mong in 1996 caused by entry of Burmese soldiers after the surrender of Khun Sa⁵³.

This change of trends indicates the gradual expansion of deterioration of situation in Burma and accumulated sufferings of people there.

Most of the immigrants walked to Thailand on the routes that had been used for trading or visiting by local people. Stern and Vatikiotis pointed out this relationship between migration routes and pre-existed trading or traveling routes, respectively in migration of Maekhong sub-region and in migration of Northern Thailand.⁵⁴ The route from the Salween basin to the town of Mae Hong Son via Ho Mong, Hai Nam Pung, and Thin Doi was one that had been used for the cattle trading and trading of other goods. Cattle and Burmese products such as medicines, clothes, books and utensils traveled this route, and the immigrants who sought refuge traveled the same route. This was the traveling route most frequently used by informants, but this simply owes to the fact that most of them come from the area of the Salween basin⁵⁵ and they could save time and labor by choosing this established and shortest route.

The route became a route to Thailand, but it does not seem to be a return route for immigrants. Most of immigrants tend not to go back to their place of origin, except for some short trips to visit their relatives. Immigrants live on Thai soil on a long-term basis or permanently, rather than for a short time or temporary refuge. The informants

⁵³ After the surrender of Khun Sa, whole scale relocation program in Central Shan State has started in 1996. That aimed at the separation of the village population and insurgency group in order to cut off the support from villagers. Over 300,000 people are told to have been ordered to move. 80,000 of them are estimated to have fled to Thailand during year 1996-1997. Most of them headed to Fang in Chiang Mai province, Mae Sai in Chiang Rai province and Mae Hong Son. See Shan Human Rights Foundation, op. cit. p.43 and Map 3, p.118.

⁵⁴ Aaron Stern, "Cross-Border Population Movements between Countries in the Greater Mekhong Sub-Region: A Regional Overview" A paper presented at the 2nd Technical Consultation on Trans-National Population Movement and HIV/ AIDS in South East Asian Countries, 28-30 May, 1997, p.6; Vatikiotis, op. cit., 1982, p.77.

⁵⁵ See Map 4, p.119.

explained the reasons why they do not go back to their homeland such as; (1)there are no land anymore,⁵⁶ (2)they are afraid of the brutally Burmese Army station there,⁵⁷ (3)there are less chance to receive education,⁵⁸ and (4)the political and economic situation in Burma are still unstable.⁵⁹ Most of them, more than 80% of the informants, answered that they do not want to go back.⁶⁰ In the case of the immigrants who came with family, their children might be born in Thailand, go to Thai schools and grow up in Thai society. In the case of the immigrants who came alone, they might have gotten married to Thais and have families in Thailand. These factors also make immigrants' stay a longer and more permanent one.

3.3.2. Profile of Immigrants

As mentioned before, the predominant factor that differentiates the immigrants who came to Thailand after-1962 from earlier immigrants is the possession of Thai citizenship. It is very difficult for post-1962 immigrants to obtain Thai citizen status. They are put in a very subtle situation because they neither are treated as "refugees" by the policy of the Thai government, nor become Thai citizens like earlier Tai Yai immigrants. This made the post-1962 immigrants structurally stand somewhere between these two positions.

If categorized by legal status, there are found to be mainly three groups: (1)those holding official Thai ID card as Thai citizens; (2)those holding ID cards for displaced persons of Burmese nationality; and (3)those having no ID card at all.

⁵⁶ "We abandoned all land we had possessed. We, being farmers, cannot live in a place without land to cultivate. In Burma, it is not like in Thailand, it is difficult to find a job as a wage laborer. So, we cannot do anything without farming land." The immigrant, 48 years old, who came in 1979.

⁵⁷ "Burmese occupied my land saying that the place is a strategic point." The immigrant, 53 years old, who came in 1972. "Burmese officials will catch and torture us if we go back to Burma." The immigrant, 25 years old, who came in 1992.

⁵⁸ "My children go to school in Thailand. If we go back to Burma, it is not certain whether they can go to school or not." The immigrants, 42 years old, who came in 1983.

⁵⁹ "Political situation in Burma is not predictable. It is too dangerous to go back because there could be further deterioration." The immigrant, 37 years old, who came in 1988.

⁶⁰ The rest answered that it depended on the situation. Some informants answered that they missed their homeland but did not want to go back.

We can find very few immigrants that can be categorized in the first group, because it is extremely difficult to get Thai citizenship since the 1960s under the provision of the Nationality Act in 1965.⁶¹ This has resulted in very few immigrants getting official ID cards as Thai citizens.

Most of the post-1962 immigrants with official Thai ID cards are those who came in the very early 1960s when the administrative procedure was still not so strict,⁶² those who live in very remote villages where it is difficult for the administrative influence to reach,⁶³ or those who get it through some illegal and unofficial route.⁶⁴ Other than acquisition of the ID card through legally legitimated procedures, immigrants tend not bother to get it since it costs too much⁶⁵ and involvement in illegal arrangement makes them feel uncomfortable. They also say that there are not so many occasions in their lives in village when they need to use an ID card.

The second group of people, who have ID cards for Burmese displaced persons, can be found in the groups of immigrants who came to Thailand ten to twenty years ago. There are various ID cards that the Thai government issued⁶⁶ and the possession of them guarantees the immigrants' rights to take refuge in Thailand. It doesn't mean, however,

⁶¹ Refer to Chapter 2.

⁶² Vitit reports that prior to 1975, the Thai government's policy towards displaced persons was a relatively liberal one and there even were cases of granting Thai nationality to these people, however it was mostly to Vietnamese and ex-Chinese Nationalist army. Vitit, *op. cit.*, p.133.

⁶³ "I could not obtain an ID card, but my friend could. He came to Thailand in the 1980s but lives in very remote village from the town. Because it is located very far and difficult to reach, the registration procedure is not so strict. The village headman arranged everything for him. He was lucky to choose that village." Interview with the immigrants who have a friend in far northern village. He came to Mae Hong Son in 1976.

⁶⁴ "I put my name into the house registration of Tai Yai with Thai nationality by pretending that I am the foster-son of the person. Being a monk, I could meet many people who offer their kindness to me. The person who became my foster father was also one of them." This immigrant, 30 years old, who came in 1980 to study Thai language and electronics. "I bought the ID card of a person who died. It cost 25,000 Baht. There are some brokers who sell ID cards regularly. They prepare all the documents needed, including house registration and birth registration." The immigrant, 26 years old, who came in 1989.

⁶⁵ From interview with the immigrants. Concerning the price of ID card, it ranges from 8,000 Baht to 60,000 Baht. It is said that the price was raised after the registration of illegal immigrants in 1996 and the beginning of intensive repatriation program in 1999.

⁶⁶ Refer to footnote 27 in chapter 1.

that their status the same as ordinary Thai citizens. They are subject to many regulations: they have to ask for approval from the district office each time they travel out of Mae Hong Son Province; they have limited access to job opportunities; and they cannot own lands. Among the informants of this study, I could find holders of blue and pink cards. The longer their stay in Thailand became, eight to twenty years stay, the more blue card holders could be found, and for the immigrants of five to eight years stay in Thailand, pink card holders could be found. But immigrants said that there were no clear standards for determining what kind of card they can get, it is more a matter of the timing of registration than qualification of immigrants.⁶⁷ Calculating these immigrants' year of entry, most of them came to Thailand before 1990 or in the early 1990s. According to Vitit, the Thai government's policy towards Burmese immigrants had been a liberal one and they had been permitted to stay temporarily in Thailand before 1989. However, the policy changed in 1990 to be more restrictive and forced many immigrants back to Burma and many Burmese were also arrested.⁶⁸ So, the possession of ID cards indicates that these immigrants came during the period of liberal policy of the Thai government towards displaced persons, which let these immigrants stay in Thailand by registering them.

The last group primarily includes the immigrants with less than ten years-stay in Thailand. They are treated completely as illegal immigrants because they have no legal ground for staying on Thai soil, even in Mae Hong Son. Thus they are in the most vulnerable position among these three groups of immigrants. They have to be very careful about their relationship with policemen and immigration officials, who have the authority to push them back to the other side of the border.

Except the first group of immigrants with official ID cards, these immigrants are not allowed to possess their own land. Unlike the pioneer period of few decades ago, they

⁶⁷ From interviews in Mae Hong Son.

⁶⁸ The reason of this change is told that "The attitude of the local policy-makers has been to avoid internationalizing the Burmese issue, and they have prevented international agencies from becoming involved." Vitit, *op. cit.*, p.131. This was the period when Thailand started to cultivate relation with Rangoon for the access to natural and energy resources, and large potential market. That was later followed by "Constructive Engagement" policy. Risser, *op. cit.*, pp.60-77.

no longer can declare their ownership of lands by clearing forest wherever they like. Because they are not legitimate Thai citizens, they do not have the right to own land and other property. They thus cannot live by farming their own fields as they had done in Burma. If they are lucky, they can rent lands from others and can grow rice, garlic, beans and other crops, but they have always to worry about their rent fee, which they pay in cash or in crops they get. They might be able to raise animals; pigs are preferred, to fatten and sell. The only hired jobs available for them in Mae Hong Son are: wage labor in agricultural works, such as gardening, planting and cutting rice, and seeding of garlic, beans, and onions; wage labor in construction works, such as road construction, bridge construction, and building houses; or wage labor in service industries in the town, such as waiter and waitress, sales person in shops and house maids. Immigrants can get wages from such jobs 50-80 Baht a day. Of course, there is no insurance or social welfare provided. Such situations put the immigrants economically in a difficult position when compared with earlier pioneering immigrants who have their own lands.

Other than these economic factors, according to the words of immigrants themselves, they lead lives similar to other Tai Yai villagers who are Thai citizens do. The children of these immigrant families can attend the Thai schools, though they cannot get official certificates when they complete their studies. As for higher education, no one among these immigrants can continue his or her study due to both economic and legal barriers.⁶⁹ One informant told me, however, that it is not such a big matter for villagers in such an agricultural society since Tai Yai who are ordinary Thai citizens do not receive higher education, so it doesn't produce any gap between these two groups.⁷⁰ This might be too simplified opinion because higher education is increasing its importance even

⁶⁹ There is only a primary school in the village of the research site. They have to go to schools in the town if they want to study more. They have to pay transportation fee for the school *Son-Tew* on a monthly basis and everyday lunch costs more in the town. They also have to buy textbooks and uniforms, which might be a burden for villagers with low income.

⁷⁰ Cf. "...According to Khanit, with the exception of him and his family, none of the Thai-Yai in his home village of 600 people have worked as civil servants. The simple reason for this is the lack of education due to their poverty and the fact that they live so far from any schools." Jitten Ritthirat, "Tai People Remain as Outsiders" *The Nation*, October 17, 1994.

within the villages of Mae Hong Son, but, it is much more moderate when compared with cases in Bangkok or other places. So, in the latter context, the immigrant's opinion might only be true, to a certain extent.

As for public health, they can use the health station in the *Tambon* (sub-district) and the hospital in the town. Not only the hospital and clinics in Mae Hong Son but other places in the border areas with large populations of illegal immigrants, such as Tak, Chiang Mai, and Ratchaburi offer treatment to these immigrants on a humanitarian basis. All of the female informants who have children born in Thailand answered that they gave birth to their children at the hospital in the town of Mae Hong Son. This is very different from the case of Tai Yai immigrant workers in the cities. Their illegal status keeps them from going to hospitals or clinics because they are afraid that their status might be revealed.⁷¹ This makes the immigrants' health condition worse. But this is not the case of Tai Yai immigrants in Mae Hong Son.

The only threat to their lives in Thailand is the fear of being repatriated. Usually, police and immigration officials do not often come to raid the village where the immigrants live, but they come if there are any intensive repatriation programs or any government campaign has launched. The repatriation to Burma means more hardships for immigrants: they have to go back to battlefields if they are deported. They have to worry about when they will be drafted as porters or forced labor if they go back; and they have to be afraid torture, imprisonment and fines by Burmese government because free emigration is regulated as illegal action and subject to punishment in Burma.⁷² That is why they keep staying on Thai soil even if they put themselves in an unstable economic and legal position. Some informants stated that in other villages, there are many cases where the village headman or other officials require them bribes by making use of the

⁷¹ There are many reports of cases of both Tai Yai immigrants and other ethnic groups. For Tai Yai case, see Shan Human Rights Foundation, op. cit. pp.44-48.

⁷² "According to Burmese Immigration and Manpower Act, all Burmese illegally leaving the country are subject to arrest, fines and/ or detention." Asia Watch and The Women's Right Project, *A Modern Forms of Slavery: Trafficking of Burmese Women and Girls into Brothels in Thailand*. (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993), p.111.

immigrants' vulnerable position. In the case of a village in the far north, according to an informant who has a friend in that village, the village headman requires bribes from immigrants each time they have any registration affairs, such as making documents for travel, extension and issue of blue or pink cards. These bribes range from 500 to 5,000 Baht a person depending on how much the headman needs at that time. If immigrants want some illegal arrangement such as making a false registration or ID card, it increases to as much as 20,000-50,000 Baht. These are not small amounts for immigrants living from hand to mouth, but they have no way to escape from that. Somehow they manage to collect the necessary amount of money each time, but it is certainly a big burden on their lives. Even though they are put in such positions, most of the informants agreed, "Anyhow, it is much better than living in Burma." This should be conditioned not only by the difficult situation in Burma, but also by the quality of their settlement lives in Thailand. Therefore the following chapter reviews the settlement of post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants and exactly how and why conditions in Thailand translate to a better life for them.



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