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The Rise of the Bo: Autonomous Strongmen, Opium Capital, and State Formation in
Mainland Southeast Asia (1948-1996)

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Abstract

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The Shan State of Burma became one of the most politically fragmented areas of the post World War II period. In rural areas, autonomous strongmen exercised social control independently of central state leaders and became a pervasive form of political authority.

This dissertation examines the conditions under which autonomous strongmen emerge. It draws on a state and society approach to argue that where local access to resources coincide with societal dislocations individuals can, by careful use of rewards, sanctions, symbols, and meaning-laden practices, gain acceptance of their rulemaking authority from society. It starts with an examination of the booms in opium production taking place in Mainland Southeast after 1940. Next, it examines the dislocations in Shan State and the

emergence of autonomous strongmen. A final part looks at the configuration of authority in Kachin State of Burma, northern Thailand, and northern Laos. Comparative analysis of these sub regions shows the importance of the configuration of society, the availability of revenue from resources, and whether strongmen can offer segments of society strategies to meet their material and psychological needs in accounting for the emergence of autonomous strongmen. My argument challenges several tenets of the conventional wisdom about strongmen. One, it contests the belief that coercion or financial inducement is the primary basis for their domination of society. Two, it disputes the view that the presence of valuable resources, such as opium, accounts for the emergence of powerful strongmen. Additionally, the argument refutes the notion that state weakness in peripheral areas allows for their emergence. Finally, my findings indicate that autonomous strongmen are likely to remain a feature of the contemporary world order.

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Abbreviations

AFPFL – Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League
BCP – Burmese Communist Party
BDA – Burma Defense Army
BSPP – Burmese Socialist Program Party
CAS-B – Civil Affairs Service (Burma)
CPB – Communist Party of Burma
CPT– Communist Party of Thailand
FAA – Frontier Area Administration
FACE – Frontier Areas Commission of Enquiry
KDA – Kachin Democratic Army
KIA – Kachin Independence Army
KIC – Kachin Independence Council
KIO – Kachin Independence Organization
KKY – Ka Kwe Ye
KMT – Kuomintang (Chinese nationalists)
KNDO – Karen National Defense Organization
KPLA – Kokang People’s Liberation Army
KRF – Kokang Revolutionary Force
KNU – Karen National Union
LNA – Lahu National Army
LSA – Lahu State Army
MCC – Military Coordination Commission
MIS – Military Intelligence Service
MNDA – Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
MTA – Mong Tai Army
NDAA – ESS – National Democratic Alliance Army - Eastern Shan State
NDA-K – New Democratic Army - Kachin
PDP – Parliamentary Democracy Party
PNA – Pa-O National Army
PNDF – Pawngyawng National Defense Force
PNLO – Pa-Oh National Liberation Organization
PNO – Pa-O National (Liberation) Organization
PSLF – Palaung State Liberation Front
PVO – People’s Volunteer Organization
RC – Revolutionary Council
RLG – Royal Lao Government
RTA – Royal Thai Army
RTP – Royal Thai Police
SEATO – Southeast Asian Treaty Organization
SNIA – Shan National Independence Army
SNUF – Shan National United Front
SSA – Shan State Army
SSA-South – Shan State Army South
SSIA – Shan State Independence Army
SSCC – Shan State Command Council
SSCP – Shan State Communist Party
SSNLO – Shan State Nationalities Liberation Organization
SNLF – Shanland Nationalities Liberation Front

SSPFL – Shan State People’s Freedom League
SSPLA – Shan People’s Liberation Army
SSPP – Shan State Progress Party
SSRA – Shan State Revolutionary Army
SSWC – Shan State War Council
SUA – Shan United Army
SUPC – Shan Unity Preparatory Committee
SURA – Shan United Revolutionary Army
SLORC – State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC – State Peace and Development Council
TNA – Thailand National Army
TRA – Thailand Revolutionary Army
TRC – Tai Revolutionary Council
UMP – Union Military Police
UASA – United Anti-Socialist Army
UWSA – United Wa State Army
WNA – Wa National Army

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For my Parents,

Introduction

Strongmen and Local State Formation

The problem of how to define the physical limits of political groups has plagued men for as long as they have struggled for power and property.

-Hawkins, "Contours, Cultures, and Conflict," 1973

Generally, it can be concluded that there exists a large body of literature emphasizing on the issues of 'opium kings,' but very scant literature that delves into the lives of the 'opium slaves' who are the majority in the hierarchy of the opium business.

-Sai Lone, *The Political Economy of Opium Reduction in Burma*, 2008

On November 22, 1959, an unlikely pair – Bo Mawng, a former police officer, and Kyaw Toon, a former student activist from Rangoon University and member of the Shan aristocracy – led a column of approximately 300 armed men to seize the government-controlled town of Tangyan in Shan State of eastern Burma (See Figure 0.2). After capturing Tangyan, the counter attack by the Burmese Armed Forces,¹ also known as the *Tatmadaw*, involved aerial bombardment. The attack forced the rebels to retreat into the nearby hills. As Bo Deving (n.d.), a battle participant, noted, "The attack was a military fiasco, but an astounding political success." As news of the raid spread, over three dozen small armed resistance bands spontaneously sprung up across Shan State. To present, this event is recognized as the beginning of the Shan uprising.² It also marks the beginning of the era of the strongman.

In the late 1950s, a dramatic reconfiguration of social control took place in Shan State. This involved the proliferation of autonomous strongmen as the most pervasive unit of authority in rural areas. Autonomous strongmen are individuals, who exercise social control independent of state agents. The ability of strongmen to command societal compliance with

¹ After 1988, the English term for *Tatmadaw* became Defense Services.

² An ethnic Shan-led armed resistance organization known as the *Num Suk Harn*, or Brave Young Warriors, was formed in Mong Kyaw in Mongton Township on May 21, 1959 (Lintner, 1999, p. 186). But as Sao Sengsuk, a member of the *Num Suk Harn*, notes in an interview, "It was not a proper army and no one had any real idea of political organization of military strategy" (Lintner, 1999, p. 195).



Figure 0.1: Myanmar, including states and regions, 2010

their rules reflects their capabilities to provide people with ideational and material components necessary for their survival. Records indicate that at least 37 strongmen-led bands had emerged by 1960.³ By the early 1970s, Jimmy Yang (also known by his Chinese name Yang Kyein Sein), a strongman in his own right, estimated that the number of "armed bands roaming the Shan hills" had risen to over 100 (cited in McCoy, 1972, p. 332). From a world historical perspective, Shan State experienced one of the highest degrees of political fragmentation in the post-World War II period. The fragmentation involved the proliferation of cellular political structures led by individuals that became the dominant unit of political authority across an area of 60,155 square miles in size, roughly equivalent to Nepal or the U.S. state of Michigan. While several autonomous strongmen served as field commanders for armed resistance organizations and others participated in *Tatmadaw*-sponsored militia programs, it is important to recognize that they operated independently of these larger organizations.

The armed resistance directed by strongmen and armed resistance organizations against state officials, both civilian and military, severely constrained the ability of state agents to operate in rural areas. In an arrangement reminiscent of the British colonial administration (1886-1942), bureaucrats performed administrative tasks in cities and towns protected by armed garrisons, while the *Tatmadaw* deployed units to protect roads, which were vital for communication and resupply. According to Adrian Cowell (US Congress, 1975), a documentary film maker and one of the handful of researchers with extensive access to rural Shan State, the level of armed resistance to state officials became so severe that "[n]o Burmese [officials] dares go into the interior [of Shan State], particularly the opium regions [of the eastern part of Shan State], without an escort of 250-500 soldiers" (p. 15). While

³ For an account of these bands, see Yawnghwe (2010, pp. 9, 35), Shan State Army, (1975, pp. 259-263), and an English-language translation of an excerpt from "History of the Shan Revolution" authored by the Central Committee of Shan State Progress Party in 1985 and recorded in Lintner (*Journal X*, 1986, pp. 301-302). Also see Appendix Two, which contains a list of the strongmen-led bands that emerged in this period.

many Shans recognize the Battle of Tangyan as the beginning of the Shan uprising, it was an earlier collision of economic and political forces that resulted in the emergence of strongmen-led, micro-power centers.⁴

In the period predating this political fragmentation, two far-reaching changes took place in Shan State. One is the gradual replacement of a traditional system for local administration coordinated by 33 hereditary chiefs, known locally by the Shan language title of *saopha* or “Lord of the skies.”⁵ The *saopha* publicly announced their intentions to withdraw from their role in administration in 1952. However, it was not until 1959, when they formally transferred their authority over local affairs to the state-level administrative body of the Shan State Government. By that time, civilian and military agents from the state and national-level government had assumed many of the administrative functions performed by the *saopha*-led bureaucracy.

The deployment of the *Tatmadaw* to subdue local armed resistance organizations and the remnants of Chiang Kai Shek’s Kuomintang Army (KMT), all of whom had moved into Shan State in the late 1940s, provided the *raison d’être* for *Tatmadaw* units to enhance their influence in Shan State. The *Tatmadaw* mounted military operations against armed groups. Military commanders gradually took on many of the administrative duties of the *saopha*-led bureaucracy. The *saopha* also encountered pressure from ethnic-Burman leaders, particularly those of the *Tatmadaw*, and Shan State-based, anti-feudalist groups to renounce their hereditary rights.⁶

A second change was a transformation of the agricultural sector. Most farmers engaged

⁴ For analysis of the significance of the Tangyan attack to the onset of the ethnic Shan-led resistance movement, see Khuensai Jaiyen (1999), Lintner (1999, pp. 195-198), and Yawnghwe (2010, p. 18).

⁵ The chiefs were hereditary rulers of small principalities located in Shan State, who initially retained their role in local administration in post-Independent Burma. They are also known as *sawbwa* in Burmese.

⁶ The government recognizes 135 ethnic groups of which seven ethnic groups have received status within their own constituent states: Arakan, Burman, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon, and Shan. The use of ethnic classifications in Burma and Shan State involves several approaches. For example, the government recognizes Shan as one of eight “Major National Ethnic Races,” which comprises 33 of 135 “ethnic groups” recognized by the government (U Min Naing and Hpone Thant, 2000). For a critique of the government’s classification system, see Gamani (2012).

in subsistence agriculture. Beginning in the early 1950s, the cultivation of opium began to switch from a mode of production geared towards subsistence to a mode increasingly oriented towards commercialized production. This marked the beginning of a four decades-long boom in opium production (See Appendix One). Burma achieved the notoriety of becoming the world's leading producer of illicit opium, with a peak output of an estimated 2,500 tons per year taking place in the late 1990s.⁷

The inability of either the *saopha* or state-level government officials to check the *Tatmadaw* abuses against the civilian population in their counter-insurgency operations provided an opening for strongmen to gain support from the rural population. One of the principal goods offered by strongmen was protection from *Tatmadaw* and other predatory armed groups. At the same time, revenue accrued from the opium trade provided strongmen with resources to enhance their coercive strength and provision of goods to the rural population. From the 1950s onwards, the opium trade took on a new and significant role in state formation.

Several strongmen strategically positioned themselves as intermediaries along illicit, transnational opium supply chains. They thus accrued “narco-capital,” which served as a critical resource for them to extend their authority. The most dominant of these strongmen, Khun Sa, commanded a well-armed military force with an estimated peak strength of roughly twenty thousand soldiers. At the apex of his power in the early 1990s, he controlled opium smuggling routes along Burma's border with Thailand, administered a base area with over 10,000 people, and claimed an estimated annual revenue of over US\$200 million from opium-related activities (McCoy, 1998, p. 311). In 1996, Khun Sa's tenure as one of the world's most powerful strongmen ended, when the ailing leader surrendered to the Burmese government. In return for a blanket amnesty that involved the government's refusal of his

⁷ By 2000, as levels of opium production in Afghanistan increases, it surpassed Burma to become the world's leading producer.

extradition to the United States to face drug charges, Khun Sa received a secure residence in Rangoon, access to medical care, and business concessions (McCoy, 1999, pp. 320-321; ("Burmese refuse to extradite drug lord," 1996, February 11). His surrender in 1996 represented an end to the dominance of autonomous strongmen and the endpoint of the span of this study. Their existence, albeit on a less dominant level, continues. Many of the post-1996 strongmen are statist strongmen who rely on support from central state leaders. By contrast, the type of strongmen that are the subject of this dissertation, such as Khun Sa and the others mentioned above, exercised authority independent of state leaders and therefore were autonomous.

Contrary to the expectations that both capitalism and the modern nation state are homogenizing forces that inexorably advance on instances of personalized rule by autonomous strongmen, this seemingly anachronistic form of authority persists in Angola, Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Colombia, Liberia, Mexico, Peru, Somalia, and Sierra Leone. Autonomous strongmen are compatible with processes associated with modernization, such as global capitalism, state building, and globalization. They are not a type of pre-modern fusion of political and economic power that periodically reemerges in weak states. A survey of recent media reports shows that their influence persists as demonstrated by pirates in the Horn of Africa, such as Somalia; so-called "warlords" in Afghanistan, Angola, Liberia, and several other African states; and drug lords in Latin America. As this dissertation argues, autonomous strongmen are products of these "new" forces, rather than an aberrant vestige of a bygone "medieval" social order.

Their existence raises questions about the nature and the limits of state authority, the impact of transnational flow of resource on civil wars and institutions, and the mobilization of anti-state resistance. Surprisingly, no systematic study exists to account for the emergence of strongmen that are autonomous of state officials. Instead, scholarly studies of strongmen

often examine "statist strongmen" and warlords. Statist strongmen benefit from their ties to state officials and flourish under conditions where central state incapacities are limited. State dependent strongmen are fundamentally different from autonomous ones, who challenge state authority. Several scholarly studies also examine contemporary warlords, who, like autonomous strongmen, command instruments of violence and also may challenge state authority. The study of warlords draws on a security-oriented perspective that emphasizes their use of coercion as the principal basis for imposing social control, thereby ignoring the non-coercive means through which they may also exercise rulemaking authority. We know little about why and how powerful autonomous strongmen emerge, especially those who are autonomous from state actors. This study is an attempt to fill in some of these gaps.

This chapter presents puzzles and a problem related to the study of autonomous strongmen and proposes a new approach for understanding their emergence. The following sections provide a review of the scholarly literature on strongmen, establish a definition of autonomous strongmen, and examine the explanations for their emergence in the discipline of political science. The rest of the chapter presents the main arguments of the dissertation and provides an overview of its methodology, case selection, data sources, and policy implications. Finally, the last section lays out a roadmap for the remainder of the dissertation.

Puzzles, Questions, and a Contradiction

The continued presence of powerful individuals wielding authority autonomous of central state leaders raises several puzzles, questions, and at least one contradiction. The postcolonial world faces a contradiction between the centrality of the nation-state as the basic organizational unit of the international system and the absence of central state leaders' rulemaking and enforcement authority in some areas within their respective jurisdictions. In many developing countries, state leaders have not succeeded in extending their rulemaking authority throughout the entirety of their political boundaries.

Scholars have developed several approaches to examine this contradiction. One is the recognition of a distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* states. The former are those recognized by the international community. The latter are those without official international recognition but exercise authority autonomous of the *de jure* state (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982). Another approach focuses on “non-state” spaces located in Zomia, a term that references areas located in the uplands of Asia by James Scott (2009, p. 13). He emphasizes the constraints posed by the "friction" of topographical impediments – mountains and other difficult to negotiate physical barriers – to the ability of state agents to extend authority across territorial space. A state-centric, security-oriented literature identifies Grey Area Phenomena or "GAP" zones. This approach focuses on threats to the stability of sovereign states posed by non-state actors or non-governmental processes and organizations (Chalk, 1997; Hiltner, 2008; Ward, 1995). Examples of GAP phenomena involve several different forms of security threats include terrorism, drug trafficking, and armed resistance organizations. These approaches draw attention to the existence of non-state spaces. They do not go into detail about the content of politics taking place within these areas. This examination of autonomous strongmen contributes to this field of study by examining one form of political authority – autonomous strongmen – that operates in these zones.

The political cartographies of Burma illustrate the gulf between the hegemonic image of the *de jure* state as the principal unit of political organization and the empirical reality of an area with multiple power centers. A political map of contemporary Burma depicts the hegemonic image of the state organization exercising control across its territory (See Figure 0.1). In principle, the subnational administrative units convey the exercise of authority by local administrative agents. Of these, the most enduring are divisions (renamed as regions in

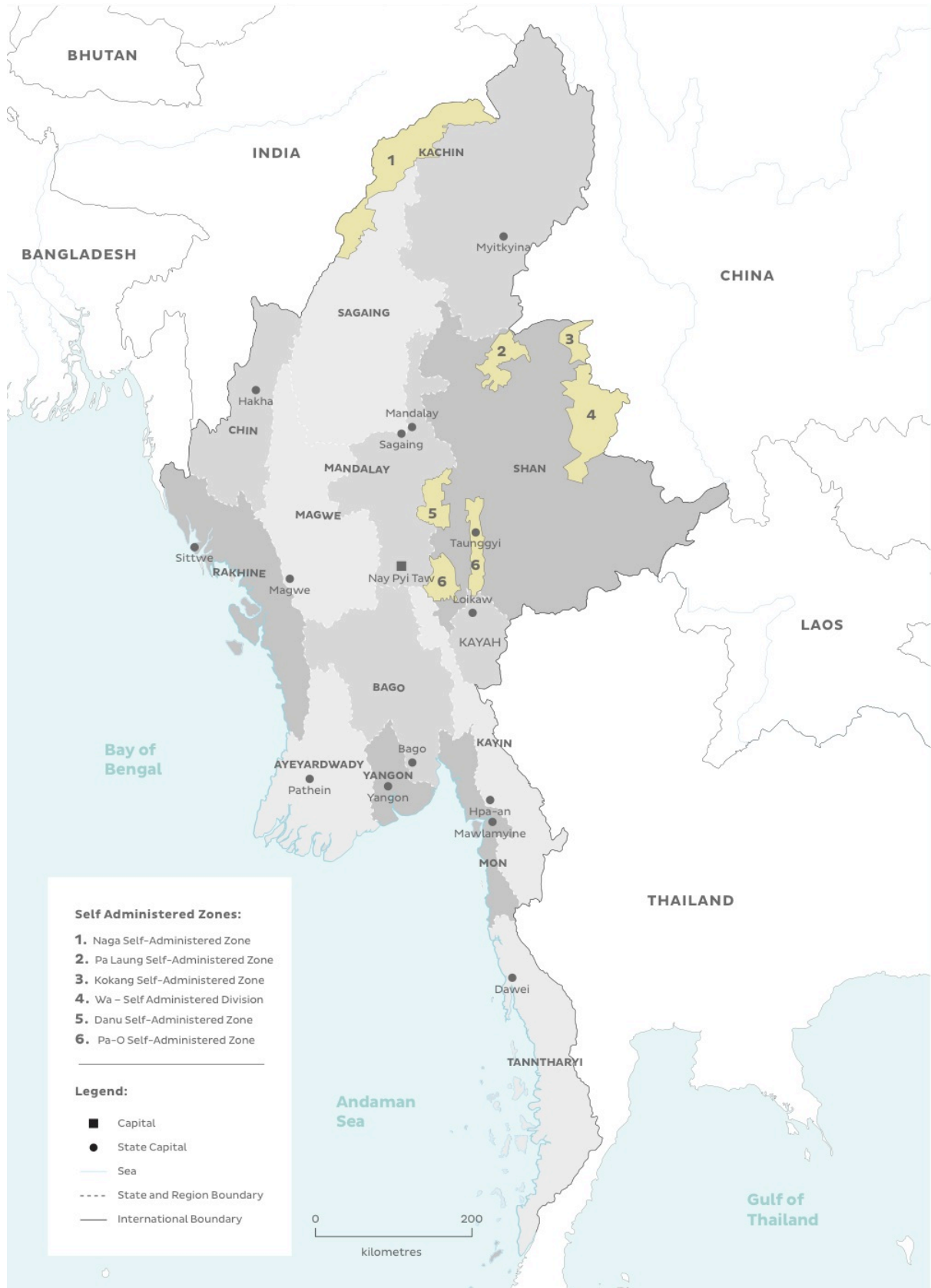


Figure 0.3: Special Administrative Areas and Zone, Myanmar, 2010

2010) and states.⁸

But over time, cartographic revisionism has tacked on new administrative entities that reflect local arrangements between the central state and local authorities in non-ethnic Burman areas (See Figure 0.3). These include the establishment of special administrative status for areas formerly under the authority of armed resistance organizations and inhabited by ethnic groups who are a minority population in one of the states named for a major non-Burman ethnic group. Military maps provide a clearer view of political power on the ground (See Figure 0.4). They often feature a mishmash of various hues or patterns to dramatize the division of authority between state officials and armed resistance groups.⁹

The updating and redrawing of political and military maps fail to depict with sufficiently granular clarity the operation of power on the local level. They prove silent on questions about who makes the rules in specific areas. For instance, who taxes the population? To whom does the population turn to adjudicate disputes? The inclusion of armed resistance organizations in military maps provides a more focused portrait of power than political maps. However, a limitation is that military maps often impart spatial representations of territory under the influence of armed resistance organizations. These cartographic snapshots do not go beneath the formal organizational layer of armed resistance organizations to reveal that in some cases, the authority of its ruling executive committee or chairman was illusory.

Attempts to pinpoint the locus of power within an armed resistance organization through examination of its chain of command or tracking charts of their hierarchy sometimes can amount to a fool's errand. Instead, this dissertation demonstrates that in some instances

⁸ Burma contains an ethnically heterogeneous population, in which ethnic-Burmans, or *Bamar*, are the largest single ethnic group. Shan State also features an astonishingly high level of ethnic diversity. The ethnic Shans are the most populous ethnic group. Other non-ethnic Shan groups are Akha, Burmans, Chinese, Danu, Kachin, Gurkha, Indian, Intha, Lahu, Pa-O, Palaung (Ta'ang), Padaung, and Wa. The designation of subnational bureaucratic units as states and divisions, which reflects ethnic demographics: non-Burman, ethnic majorities, for the states, whereas ethnic Burman majorities for the regions.

⁹ For examples of these military maps, see Lintner (1999), McCoy (1972), Smith (1999), and Trager (1966).

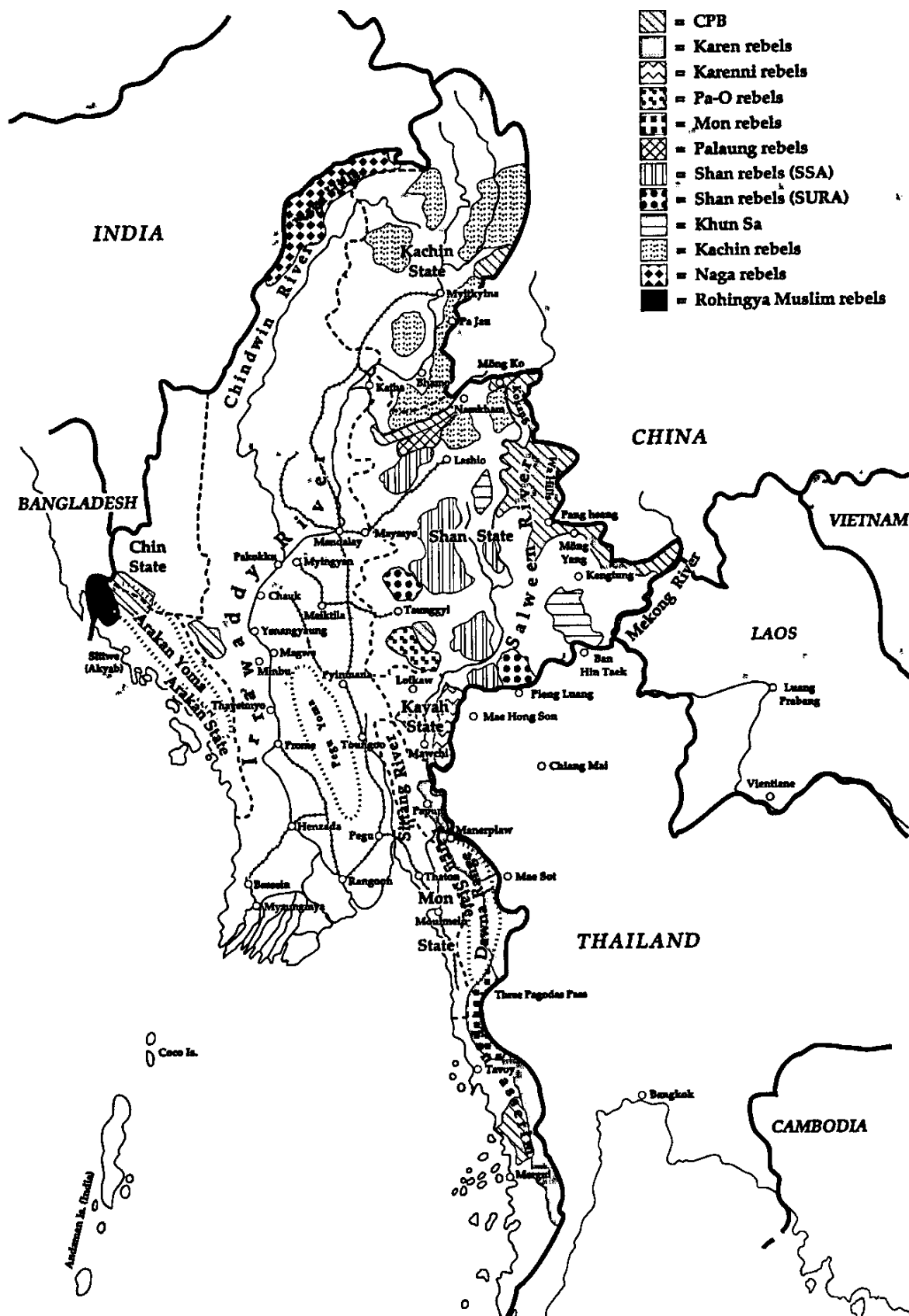


Figure 0.4: Military Map of Burma, December 1976¹⁰

¹⁰ This map, December 1976, is from Lintner (1999) and reproduced with permission from Bertil Lintner.

strongmen are the basic units of authority in armed resistance organizations. As was the case in Shan State, many strongmen served as middle-ranking officers in armed resistance organizations. They sometimes commanded battalion level units. And they exercised authority independently of the leadership of the armed resistance organization. Shared views on the need for political reforms and antipathy towards the *Tatmadaw* were a basis for cooperation and coordination. However, the distribution of authority within the organization was not always concentrated in the formal leadership of the organization.¹¹ A focus on strongmen provides a lens for an examining local state formation that goes beyond the conceptualization and assumptions of armed resistance organizations as unitary actors.

These dynamics raise a number of puzzles. Several sub-regions in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, including those with valuable resources, have encountered disruptive shocks with potential for triggering upheaval, armed conflicts, and other forms of resistance. However, Shan State is one of the few areas where autonomous strongmen emerged in the wake of such shocks. Several studies of state formation (its collapse, conflict, warlords, and strongmen) point to the inability of central state leaders to control peripheral regions as a condition for the emergence of strongmen.¹² Several areas of Burma possessed similar levels of central state incapacity, violent disruptions, and opportunities for the emergence of strongmen such as windfall profits from the black markets in the post-World War II period. Autonomous strongmen proliferated in Shan State, but not others. Areas fraught with upheaval – such as Kachin, Karen, and Mon states – experienced highly centralized armed resistance organizations. But what accounts for the predominance of autonomous strongmen in Shan State but in not the other areas?

Several influential studies of civil war employ a political economy approach and

¹¹ For two perspectives on issues of unity among ethnic Shan resistance movement, see the article by Adrian Cowell (1996) and a response by Sao Sengsuk (1996), former commander of the Shan State Army.

¹² For studies that point to the role of state weakness in the emergence of powerful and influential individuals, see Kaldor (1999), Reno (1998), Rich (1999), and Sidel (2004).

identify the economic opportunities presented by the presence of lootable resources in their explanations for the outbreak of militarized conflicts between states and non state armed actors (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Fearon, 2004). Lootable resources are commodities, which possess high value-density (price/volume). Their wealth compactness makes them easily smuggled and, therefore, useful for non-state armed groups. Some examples of these commodities are diamonds, coca, and opium. Their presence purportedly increases the likelihood of civil war by creating financial incentives or enhancing the capabilities for armed resistance organizations to challenge state authority. This perspective suggests that the presence of opium in Southeast Asia provided the incentives and the means for the emergence of autonomous strongmen. This perspective fails to explain why it is that autonomous strongmen proliferated in Shan State, but not in northern Laos, northern Thailand, and Kachin State. All of these areas experienced opium production booms and long-running conflicts in the post-World War II period. This comparison suggests that resources in themselves are not sufficient conditions for their emergence.

At first glance, the higher level of opium production in Shan State relative to neighboring drug production zones suggests that its greater volume is a candidate explanation. Francisco Thoumi (2003, pp. 281-284), a scholar of the Andean drug trade, finds that in the case of the three coca-producing countries of this region – Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia – more production does not necessarily increase violence. It is Colombia, which until the late 1990s had the smallest share of the illegal drug sector, where coca capital has had the greatest impact on society. Drug-associated violence was very low in Peru and Bolivia but very high in Colombia (Thoumi, 2003, pp. 281-284). If the amount of narcotics production has limited bearing on violence and coercion wielding organizations, then what are the mitigating factors, aside from opium, that led to the varied trajectories of local state formation in the opium-producing areas of Mainland Southeast Asia? Thoumi's findings in

Latin America suggest that it is not simply a case of lower production in Laos and Thailand, but that other factors may also have an influence.

An additional puzzle is that the materialist orientation present in resource-oriented explanations suggests that strongmen possessing roughly equivalent access to opium should also possess roughly equivalent levels of authority. However, this perspective fails to adequately explain why Shan State strongmen operating during the same periods and possessing roughly similar levels of opium capital developed varying levels of authority and strength. In some cases, the range of influence exercised by strongmen possessing extensive resources fell short of other armed groups with only limited material resources.

A final theoretical puzzle that emerges from the persistence of autonomous strongmen is that processes of rationalization, capital penetration, and state building associated with modernization are often assumed to support state consolidation. However, these factors have also produced centrifugal forces and violent competition for resources between state officials and strongmen. The Shan State case defies this conventional wisdom. This indicates the need for a closer examination of the roles played by illicit commodity capital accumulation in state formation.

The overarching questions of this dissertation are as follows: Why is it that autonomous strongmen emerge in some regions of contemporary developing states, but not in others? Why did autonomous strongmen proliferate in Shan State, but not in others areas – like Thailand, Laos, or Kachin State – also experiencing opium booms, central state incapacities, and violent conflicts? What accounts for the dramatic differences in the influence of autonomous strongmen possessing relatively equal access to opium revenue?

Overview of Strongmen

A critical problem with examining the role played by powerful strongmen in state formation is a lack of consensus among scholars on how to define them. The term is often

associated with other personalized forms of authority such as "warlords." To address this confusion, this section reviews different conceptions of strongmen found in studies of Shan State, warlordism, and Southeast Asia and then provides a definition of autonomous strongmen useful for analyzing state formation. The aim is to provide a clearer conception of strongmen that applies to the varied trajectories of state formation, particularly when strongmen develop the capacities to operate independently of the state.

Shan Studies: Strongmen and Local State Formation

The strongmen of Shan State in the post-World War II period are analyzed in several articles and chapters and mentioned in several scholarly studies. To date, there is no in-depth analysis of them.¹³ The scholarly research on Shan State politics explores the armed conflict, the opium trade, and the deep-seated political disagreements between ethnic-Burman political elites (civilian and military) and political leaders from Shan State. This dissertation provides the first systematic analysis of both state formation and autonomous strongmen in Shan State.

Scholarship on ethnic conflict Shan State often contains an elite bias in its analysis of the roots of armed political conflicts in Shan State. This bias reflects an emphasis on high profile political issues often germane to the urban population of Shan State in accounting for the emergence of opposition to state authority. For instance, the domination of the central government and *Tatmadaw* by ethnic Burmans and insufficient levels of local autonomy over

¹³ For comprehensive studies of the post-colonial political history of Shan State, see Sai Aung Tun (2009), Ba Thann Win (n.d.), Chao Tzang Yawngwe (2010), Lintner (1984), Samara Yawngwe (2013), and Silverstein (1958). Both Smith (1999) and Lintner (1999) provide in-depth historical analysis of Shan State politics in their impressively comprehensive studies of the Burma's civil wars. For overviews of armed conflicts in Shan State, see Bo Yang (1987), Boucaud and Boucaud (1992), Lamour and Lamberti (1974), and Sadan (2016). Scholars have also examined the politics and armed resistance by specific ethnic movements, such as Kachin (Lintner, 1997; Sadan, 2013, 2016), Kokang Chinese (Li Yang, 1997; Sai Kham Mong, 2005), the Kuomintang (Clymer, 2015; Gibson and Chen, 2011; Hill, 1998; Lamour and Lamberti, 1974; Taylor, 1973; Wen-Chin Chang, 2002, 2009, 2014; and Bo Yang, 1987), Pa-O (Christensen and Sann Kyaw, 2006; Rolly, 1980), Palaung (Howard and Wattanapun, 2001), Shan (Boucaud and Boucaud, 1992; Lintner, 1984; Yawngwe, 2010), and Wa (Jelsma, Kramer, and Vervest, 2005; Ko-Lin Chin, 2009; Kramer, 2007; Renard, 2013; Takano, 2002). For autobiographies, biographies, and accounts of Shan elites, see Adams (2000), Aye (2009), Elliot (2006), Khun Sa (1983), Khuensai Jaiyen (1989), McCoy (1998, 1999), Sao Sanda (2008), Sargent (2001), and Yawngwe, 2010). The literature on Shan State has also examined the narcotics trade (Chouvy, 2010; Jelsma et al., 2005; Ko-Lin Chin, 2009; Lintner, 2000, 2003; Lintner and Black, 2008; McCoy, 1972; Renard, 1996; Yawngwe, 1993, 2005, 2010). For an account of the Communist Party of Burma in Shan State, see Lintner (1990a).

internal affairs are some examples of these issues. Another is the *Tatmadaw's* foreclosure of the possibility for a peaceful resolution to political disagreements through legal reform, when it executed a *coup d'état* in 1962. *Tatmadaw* units detained the leaders of the reform initiative – known as the Federal Movement – as part of the 1962 *coup d'état*. Many of its members were from Shan State.

A consequence of the emphasis on these issues is that it discounts the impacts of the *Tatmadaw's* infringement on the livelihoods and practices of the rural population and the departure of the *saopha* from their leadership positions. Some accounts portray the 1962 military takeover as a critical rupture that accounts for the Shan rebellion. The establishment of a military dictatorship precipitated an influx of support for ethnic Shan armed resistance movements. An emphasis on the *Tatmadaw's* seizure of power and the subsequent growth in resistance in 1962 does not take into consideration the earlier emergence of autonomous strongmen or the formation of an ethnic-Shan, armed resistance movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹⁴

This study contributes to the understanding of Shan State by taking into account the importance of the everyday politics. In particular, it emphasizes the experience of non-elites in its analysis of patterns of social control. This approach provides a more extensive account of conflict and state formation by identifying the critical role played by predatory practices of various armed groups and their impact on rural politics.

To date, the scholarship of Alfred W. McCoy, a historian of Southeast Asia, provides the most thorough analysis of strongmen in Shan State. *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (McCoy, 1972) stands out in terms of its originality of analysis, its depth of research, and its linkage of local opium production to Cold War era politics in East Asia. Nevertheless, McCoy's analysis does not focus on the origins of strongmen. It chiefly concerns exposing

¹⁴ Some of the earliest ethnic Shan-led insurgent groups were the *Num Suk Harn*, the Shan State Independence Army, and the Shan National United Front.

the involvement of CIA supported armed groups in drug trafficking and other government agencies turning a blind eye to their activities. McCoy (1997, 1998) also provides two shorter, in-depth studies of Khun Sa, the preeminent strongman of Shan State. The studies' focus on Khun Sa and the politics of ethnic identity provides valuable insights about the emergence of strongmen in Shan State. Its primary concern is one individual, rather than the broad phenomena of strongmen.

Warlords, Men of Prowess, and Strongmen

An analysis of local state formation must address the conceptual confusion over the terms strongmen and warlords. Even though strongmen (and women) along with warlords are a persistent feature of political and social organization in the developing world, scholarship has not reached a consensus regarding what characteristics constitute a strongman or a warlord.¹⁵

Both scholars and the news media employ several terms for local leaders wielding coercive power and exercising authority over localities in non-official capacities. In Shan State alone, the terms applied to strongmen include warlords, bandits, rebels, terrorists, dacoits, drug lords, and, even, state builders. Many of these terms are not mutually exclusive. At times, they are simultaneously applied to one person. Moreover, these terms alternatively convey pejorative, laudatory, or even neutral connotations and often illuminate the relationship between narrator and subject, rather than providing an objective assessment.

One of the problems with the employment of these terms is a lack of consensus among scholars about their constitutive characteristics. For example, the term "warlord" has traditionally been the domain of scholars studying a period in the early 20th-century history of

¹⁵ It is noteworthy that the first strongman was, in fact, a strongwoman. Olive Yang (Yang Jinxiu), the daughter of the *saopha* of Kokang. She partnered with the KMT and put together one of the first large scale drug trafficking organizations in the Shan State. The government detained her in 1952 for supporting the KMT. After her release, she played ruled over Kokang from 1960 to 1962. *Tatmadaw* authorities again imprisoned her from 1963 to 1968 (Lintner, 1999, pp. 120, 190, 230-1, 366, 522). For more information on Olive, also see Yang Li (1997).

China. The term has become a commonplace appellation used by academics, policymakers, and journalists in reference to strongmen in contemporary Africa, Afghanistan, the Caucasus region, and Shan State.¹⁶ The expansion of its usage to a wider range of empirical phenomena shows only limited regard for the term's constitutive characteristics. From a methodological standpoint, scholars have ignored the admonishments of Sartori (1970) concerning concept stretching whereby the expansion of a concept to cover a larger universe of cases lacking commonality may diminish its analytical utility.

The term warlord is inappropriate for examining the role of autonomous strongmen in state formation for several reasons. One, the term suggests that reliance on the threat of violence is the principal basis for their exercise of authority. Two, the term is often considered pejorative. Its use often implies a preference for state rule. The use of warlord by state leaders reflects their concerns for threats posed by these powerful non-state actors. Three, its employment is often subjective, reflecting the relationship between those who use it and the subject of derision. For example, neighboring strongmen or state leaders can label rivals with this term in an attempt to discredit them. The use of the term can reveal more about the attitudes of those who employ it, rather than the subject of derogation.

The term contains implicit assumptions that do not consider that, as in the case of eastern Burma, segments of the population viewed so-called "warlord" rule, even when despotic, as more desirable and legitimate than that of predatory state agents, such as the Burmese government. Several Shans have expressed this sentiment, noting "Better to be ruled by a Shan warlord, than a Burman despot."

Charles Tilly's (1985) recasting of the state as a criminal organization provides a useful perspective for assessing the relationship of "warlords," or strongmen, to society vis-a-vis the state. Tilly strips the state bare of its pageantry and normative appeal by framing its

¹⁶ For examples of the use of the term warlord, see Martens (2012), Reno (1998), and Rich (1999).

core practices as analogous to those of criminal organizations in that they both engage in the extraction of rents in exchange for "protection." In essence, the threat of coercive sanction underlies the state's claims to taxation from the population.

Tilly's conceptualization of the state is useful for contextualizing the roles of strongmen in society. It demonstrates the shared roles of state leaders and autonomous strongmen as extractors and protectors. From a statist perspective, the difference is that states are assumed to possess legitimacy or the popular consent to extract, or tax. By contrast, taxation and rule making by non-state actors, including autonomous strongmen, are presented as illegitimate, when not sanctioned by state officials.

Scholars have sometimes overlooked the non-coercive basis through which strongmen exercise influence over a community. When considered, the depiction of their domination often connotes their exercise of social control in terms of deviance and primitivism. Some examples are a common religious beliefs, which, in the case of a militant religious organizations, is sometimes portrayed as fanatical; a traditional clan or tribal system, based on social bonds; or profit-motivated loyalty hinging on access to spoils or patronage. These perspectives do not adequately take into account that some states engage in authoritarian practices. Its agents may not recognize basic human rights and tyrannize its population. In such cases, so-called "warlord rule" may be preferable to that of government rule.

An emphasis on the coercive basis of authority offers incomplete explanations for understanding the means by which strongmen exercise social control. Strongmen must carefully manage their engagement with society in order to gain and maintain compliance. Aspiring strongmen face the challenges of attracting followers and exercising social control over segments of society. In Shan State, the rural population experienced claims on their agricultural surplus and labor by strongmen and other groups. The demands varied, but one of the most commonplace was for resources, namely rice and opium.

Maintaining compliance requires that strongmen balance the means by which they gain acceptance of their commands. This balancing act involves risks that are analogous to walking a tightrope. If one leans too far to one side and relies on coercive sanctions to compel obedience, then a strongman can "fall" as people flee or, as in some cases, challenge his or her supremacy. Alternatively, if one leans too far towards reliance on a non-coercive basis of authority, typically the provision of goods, then a strongman faces the risk of failing to command obedience from the population.

Strongmen also must acquire resources to develop the coercive capacities necessary to fend off challenges from state forces and other non-state armed groups and extend their authority. Resources are crucial elements for the provision of goods to the population. However, the attainment of resources and the extension of authority over territory and people also portends the threat of a backlash from state officials and rival armed groups. At the same time, the extraction of resources also requires coercion that entails the aforementioned risk of alienating one's support base. But coercive extraction also holds the possibility that the population will engage in wealth concealment and other methods that can raise the costs of extraction. Given these challenges, it is necessary to not only examine the coercive dimensions of compliance by communities but also to take into account that strongmen of Shan State also offered rewards and drew on social bonds constituting a non-coercive basis for extending power. Attention to these ideational elements of the exercise of social control by powerful figure helps understand why people faced with an assortment of armed groups making rules for society decided to obey a strongman rather than others.

Southeast Asian Strongmen

The scholarship on Southeast Asia has a rich tradition of concepts describing different forms of strongmen authority. Wolters' (1972) conception of 'men of prowess' is a traditional one common to most areas of Southeast Asia. In addition, several studies examine modern

strongmen. John Sidel (1990) employs the term “boss-ism” to describe statist strongmen reliant on coercion, capital and electoral politics as a basis for wielding authority. The inspiration for the term is a clique of political bosses operating in an earlier period of American history and associated with their office at Tammany Hall. *Chao pho* is a term used by scholars in reference to Thai statist strongmen often involved in illicit economic practices, manipulation of electoral systems, and violence (Chantornvong, 2000; Ockey, 1992, 1993, 2000, 2004; Phongpaichit and Baker, 2000; Phongpaichit and Phiriyarangsarn, 1996, pp. 57–107). “Banharn-ism” is the term coined by Nishizaki (2006) to describe a basis for political authority wielded by a Thai political leader named Banharn Silpa-archa. Elements of this authority involve non-coercive practices such as fussiness, attention to detail, and “pork barreling.”

The literature on traditional strongmen emphasizes the importance of shared belief systems about the basis of an individual's power and the historical processes that influenced these beliefs.¹⁷ These include popular beliefs about an individual's endowment with extraordinary qualities, such as their adherence to moral conduct; their possession of “soul stuff,” which is an attribute associated with powerful individuals;¹⁸ and their continued success in performing deeds that are viewed as heroic, decisive, and even ascribed to supernatural attributes.

These cultural-based conceptions of authority wielded by traditional strongmen help us understand the practices and symbols of moderns ones. Belief systems shared among some segments of society that provide explanations for one person's success continue to resonate.

¹⁷ For discussion of traditional concepts of power in Southeast Asia politics, see Anderson (1990b), Keyes (1995), Reynolds (2015), Wolters (1982), and Yawnghwe (“Patterns of Authority,” n.d.). Other terms associated with strongmen in Southeast Asia include *nak leng* (in Thai, a specialist in boldness), *phu mi bon* (in Thai, a person with power or merit), and *phu mi ittiporn* (in Thai, a person with influence). The use of Thai language terms is reflective of the empirical focus on Thailand by scholars of traditional conceptions of strongmen. Nevertheless, scholars acknowledge that these conceptions of powerful people are present in other areas of Southeast Asia.

¹⁸ Soul stuff is a common attribute of people possessing a traditional basis of authority in Southeast Asia. The concept is expressed as *phon* (Burmese), *boon* (Thai) and *hpong* (Shan). See Yawnghwe (“Patterns of Authority,” n.d.) for a discussion of *phon*.

The manifestation of these traits provided individuals with abilities to gain acceptance of their commands. However, explanations for their power that draw upon cultural factors are sometimes suspect, because they are often made *ex post facto*. In this case, taking cultural explanations at face value runs the risk of putting forth a tautological explanation, in which because strongmen are imbued with some kind of power, they succeed in accruing authority. But at the same time, because strongmen command authority, they are often viewed as possessing elements of traditional power. To address potential misinference, my analysis pays careful attention to the use of evidence based on cultural explanations and takes popular perceptions seriously.

The study of modern strongmen in Southeast Asia primarily focuses on those who derive authority through ties to the central state.¹⁹ These statist strongmen often relied on the central state for their economic and coercive resources. But at the same time, they also benefited from central state incapacities.²⁰ Consequently, these studies provide only limited insight for understanding strongmen who operate independently of state officials.

Unlike statist strongmen, the autonomous strongmen in Shan State did not rely on the state for resources as a basis for their authority. Furthermore, they possessed sufficient rulemaking and coercive authority to operate autonomously of state authorities and attempted to create alternative political orders to that of the state. In contrast, studies of local strongmen in other parts of Southeast Asia have focused on those that position themselves as local, state-sanctioned intermediaries between central state officials and the population. That is, they are reliant on access to state resources. However, strongmen in Shan State possessed access to an alternative source of revenue, namely opium capital, which was useful for developing rule-

¹⁹ Studies of modern conceptions of Southeast Asian strongmen in the post-World War II period have tended to focus on instances in individual countries: Thailand (Nishizacki, 2011; Ockey, 1992, 1993, 2000, 2004; Phongpaichit and Baker, 2000; Chantorvong, 2000), the Philippines (Abinales, 1998; Cullinane, 1994; McCoy, 1993; Sidel 1999), and Burma (Callahan, 1998). Two exceptions are Sidel (2004) and Trocki (1998) who provide article- and chapter- length comparative analysis of modern strongmen in Southeast Asia.

²⁰ For example of studies that focus on state weakness as a key condition for the emergence of strongmen, see Cullinane (1994), Nishizaki (2011), Ockey (1993), and Sidel (2004).

making authority.

Several Southeast Asian strongmen succeeded in inserting themselves into transnational opium supply chains that funded their political networks with revenues. These include Phao Sriyanond and Sarit Thanarat in Thailand and Vang Pao and Ouane Rattikhone in Laos.²¹ However, a critical difference between these "statist" strongmen and those in Shan State is that the former benefitted from their positions as state officials and worked to uphold the *status quo*. By contrast, strongmen in Shan State sought to replace state authority with that of their own and took advantage of the opportunities afforded by their access to narco-capital. Revenue accrued independently of the government provided them with the maneuverability to displace the authority of the state.

Autonomous Strongmen: A Definition

At this point, it is helpful to present a definition of autonomous strongmen. A useful starting point is a conception of strongman provided by Joel Migdal (1998, 2001). He describes them as individuals, who dictate the rules of behavior for much of the population. A key basis of their authority comes from their ability to offer people elements of their "strategies of survival" by providing a combination of "rewards, sanctions and symbols" (Migdal, 1988, p. 27). Migdal defines strategies of survival function as,

blueprints for action and belief in a world that hovers on the brink of a Hobbesian state of nature. The basis of their power to dictate behavior stems from a mixture of both material and ideational (or moral) factors that make up segments of the population's 'strategies of survival' (Migdal, 1988, p. 27).

One basis of their authority stems from their ability to offer people rewards derived from their control of resources, such as land, credit, and jobs (Migdal, 1988, pp. 106, 257). In addition to these rewards, the threat of sanction is another pillar of their ability to command compliance. For instance, sanctions involved punishments for the violation of rules.

²¹ For discussion of statist strongmen and their involvement in the opium trade in Laos and Thailand, see Fineman (1997), McCoy (1972), and Chaloehtiarana (2007).

Meanwhile, the configuration of symbols or packages of symbols also offers a non-material basis for authority.

This conception of strongmen is useful for understanding the autonomous ones operating in Shan State in that it points to the importance of their control of crucial resources, such as land, credit, and jobs. The strongmen that Migdal (1988, p. 257) mentions are landlords, caciques, local businessmen, and moneylenders. But a necessary, but not sufficient, characteristic of the strongmen under consideration in this dissertation is that they possess commodity resources independent of state agents and therefore also operate autonomous of them and commanded paramilitary forces with significant strength.

The autonomous strongmen considered in this study possess the following characteristics: One, they control resources independent of state officials agents. The accumulation of capital from resources provides them with the means to develop significant coercive capacity and capabilities for providing people with rewards. Two, they command instruments of coercion. Their command of paramilitary forces provides them with capabilities to directly and violently challenge the authority of the state and impose sanctions on society or other non-state armed groups. Three, they exercise social control independent of state authorities. Strongmen established rules and codes of conduct for the population. Among these were rules about taxation and social order. Four, they exercise rulemaking authority on the basis of their ability to provide people with both the material and psychological components useful for them to develop strategies of survival. It is important to recognize that the basis of their authority involves both their material capabilities and their ability to meet people's psychological needs.

In Shan State, they sometimes come into direct violent conflict with agents of the state. Therefore, the autonomous strongmen examined in the Shan State are fundamentally different from those described in the literature on Southeast Asian strongmen and many of

the other conceptions of strongmen. Considering the opportunities provided by access to opium revenue is critical in understanding their autonomy, as their accrual of narco revenue occurred independently of state agents.

A few autonomous strongmen reached accommodations with state leaders. For example, strongmen became *Tatmadaw*-allied militias. These instances of cooperation are not necessarily reflective of a strongman's lack of autonomy. In some cases, the arrangement reflected the mutual interests between the strongmen and government officials. When strongmen maintained access to revenue independent of state authority and coercive capabilities limited, the state authorities were unable to exercise control over them. In other cases, strongmen who became *Tatmadaw*-allied militias or engaged in ceasefire arrangements with the military government became dependent on the *Tatmadaw* for resources. The necessity for strongmen to maintain good relations with *Tatmadaw* officials served as leverage for the state leaders to dominate these strongmen. These strongmen cannot be considered autonomous. Instead, they were statist strongmen.

***Bo*-ism: Autonomous Strongmen and Commodity Capital Accumulation**

This study introduces “*Bo*-ism” as a concept for examining autonomous strongmen and the capabilities acquired through access to commodity capital independent of state agents. A survey of records of strongmen in Shan State and Burma reveals that many of them held the title of *Bo*, which is a Burmese language term employed to describe a broad range of influential individuals, ranging from British colonial officials to military leaders. It is also used to denote someone exhibiting military prowess as well as a rank in the *Tatmadaw*. Several high-profile figures of Burma's armed political struggles possessed the title of *Bo*. Some of the best-known examples in Shan State are Bo Mawng, who led the attack on Tangyan in 1959, and Bo Mo Heng (also known as Kornzurng), a veteran Shan strongman and leader of the several armed resistance organizations. A survey of the early strongmen of

the Shan State reveals that many of these also possessed the status of *Bo* (See Appendix Two). In this context, *Bo* refers to individuals possessing military prowess and signifies recognition of their status by society as a proven military leader. That strongman had the title *Bo* conferred on them by others indicates recognition among segments of society of their manifestation of leadership traits.

Bo-ism is a concept useful examining the operation and patterns of political authority involving strongmen and possessing commodity accumulation. It refers to strongmen who exercise social control through many of the same practices as other types of Southeast Asian strongmen. The *Bo* along with *chao pho* and bosses employ coercion as a basis for exercising social control. They wield instruments of coercion, possess reputations for “roughness,” and accumulate resources useful for funding patronage. Like Banharn and men of prowess, the *Bo* also engaged in practices and exhibit traits not associated with violence and intimidation.

Key features that distinguished the *Bo* from other types of statist strongmen is that their access to opium provides resources to pursue many of the strategies of other strongmen, but often on a grander level. The armed forces under their command were much larger and better armed than many others. Their exercise of social control autonomous of state agents and sometimes engaged in armed conflicts with them; their provision of patronage involved a broader range of goods. The infusion of narco capital enhanced the capabilities of the *Bo* so that they resembled *chao pho* on steroids. The accumulation of opium capital independent of ties to the state and control over formidable instruments of coercion are capabilities that distinguish them from statist strongmen and provide them with the autonomy of action.

Explanations for Strongmen Emergence

The field of political science has several sub-literatures that examine a range of issues related to strongmen. Scholars of conflict attribute the economic opportunities presented by the presence of valuable natural resources as accounting for a range of practices, capabilities,

and motivations by non-state armed groups that are also applicable to strongmen. On the other hand, scholars have advanced "state failure" arguments drawn from a state-centric literature. They focus on the central state's inability to maintain control over peripheral regions as the primary explanation for the emergence of strongmen. A critical review of the literature on resources and resistance nexus comes first, and a discussion of statist explanations follows.

Resources and Resistance

The study of civil war experienced a reorientation and renewed scholarly interest during the 1990s. Previously, the scholarship on civil wars had included a focus on the roles played by grievances in accounting for the mobilization of resistance against the state (Gurr, 1970; Scott, 1976). New studies introduced "greed" dynamics – shorthand for economic explanations for various dynamics of militarized conflict – into the mainstream of conflict studies.²² They argue that economic opportunities presented by valuable natural resources provide more explanatory power in accounting for several civil war dynamics than those focused on grievances.²³ This research agenda spurred extensive scholarly output on the role of natural resources in militarized violence and more detailed examination of the onset, duration, and intensity of civil wars.

This field of conflict studies may initially appear unconnected to autonomous strongmen given its apparent orientation towards intrastate conflict and focus on armed resistance organizations. But these subfields share overlapping theoretical concerns, address similar questions, and examine many of the same phenomena. One, they both share a focus on armed resistance organizations. The focus of the conflict literature on belligerents opposed

²² The use of econometric models employing advanced statistical techniques and the availability of comprehensive conflict datasets conflicts allowed for the identification of statistical relationships between the presence of valuable natural resource and several conflict dynamics.

²³ Several studies show that the presence of valuable natural resources is positively associated with the increased likelihood of the emergence of a civil war (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 2003), longer duration of fighting (Buhaug, Gates, and Lujala, 2009; Fearon, 2004; Ross, 2004b), and increased intensity (in terms of casualties) (Ross, 2004a).

to the central state that are non-state armed groups – often pursuing a strategy of insurgency – does not disqualify autonomous strongmen. Many of them also adopted the practices of insurgency and in some cases were also members of armed resistance organizations. A few strongmen in Shan State commanded large armed resistance organizations. Two, the explanatory variable – presence of valuable commodities – and the conflict related outcomes considered by this literature are useful for answering the central questions regarding strongmen posed in this dissertation: Why and how do counter state political orders the violently challenge central state authority emerge? What are the impacts of natural resources on the relationship between state and society?

The methodological mainstay of "greed" oriented studies is quantitative analysis employing sophisticated statistical techniques and detailed cross-national, time series datasets. The literature posits that the value compactness (price/volume) of some natural resources – e.g. diamonds, coca, and opium – provides the means and incentives for non-state armed groups to initiate, sustain, and escalate conflicts and also create disincentives for peace settlements.

There are several concerns about the validity of the models that provide the empirical support for “greed” explanations.²⁴ One, several studies attempting to replicate the findings by using alternative measures have found the correlation between natural resources and conflicts to be weak or non-existent. Two, research on the resource-conflict nexus is extensive. But a consensus has not emerged among scholars on why and how natural resources related to armed conflicts. One concern is that the proposed causal mechanisms are not well developed and there is only limited testing of these mechanisms through qualitative methods.

Three, several scholars have questioned the validity of the measures for proxy

²⁴ The literature critiquing methodology of quantitative studies of civil wars is extensive. For critiques, see Beardsley and McQuinn (2009), Blattman and Miguel (2010), Ross (2004a, 2004b), Sambanis (2004), and Zartman (2005).

variables employed in models. Nicholas Sambanis (2004), a scholar of armed conflict, points out statistical models often employ "macro-level data to test hypotheses about civil war that are based on ideas about micro-level behavior" (p. 259). Therefore, the application of national level measures to subnational phenomenon may generate spurious findings, because of a mismatch between the measures and empirical reality. As Beardsley and McQuinn (2009, p. 626) point out, the variables used in many studies do not assess rebel organizations, but, instead, describe "the characteristics of the state" (p. 626). Therefore, the use of state-oriented measures to assess civil wars runs the risk of not taking into the internal dynamics of a non-state armed group and their impact on conflict. And as Blattman and Miguel (2010) argue, the relative sophistication of proxy measures for material factors to that of non-material factors – e.g. grievances – “makes it difficult to reject that non-material factors are playing some kind of role” (p. 45).

A final and significant concern is that the specification of baseline models may generate a bias toward resource-deterministic explanations. One influence of this perspective is that they discount the potential role played by political grievances in popular mobilization, resistance to state authorities and, unexpectedly, the presence of narcotic crops. Baseline models rely on the questionable assumption that the presence of valuable natural resources and grievances are unrelated. But, if the presence of natural resources – such as drug crops – is not independent of other conditions that foster civil wars, then the models that provide the empirical basis for "greed arguments" may be spurious (Ross, 2004b).

In other words, variables, such as the presence of valuable natural resources, may be a *symptom* of another omitted variable, such as state-led repression, rather than a *contributing factor* or *cause* of rebellion. The presence of valuable minerals and diamonds is unlikely related to grievances, as they are the product of distinctively apolitical, glacially slow, geological process. By contrast, the presence of opium and coca – lootable agricultural

commodities – is inherently social and political, as their presence reflects crop-planting decisions of farmers. The Shan State case reveals the assumption that there is no relationship between the presence of opium and grievances rests on unfounded empirics. As the next chapter argues, the opium boom in Shan State was in part a response to predatory militarization by the *Tatmadaw*.

Scholars have categorized armed resistance organizations into a dichotomous typology of those seeking justice or ideological goals and others pursuing profit or criminal objectives (Cornell, 2007; Hoeffler, 2011). The bifurcation of armed resistance organizations into “one” or “the other” typologies presents several problems for the study of state formation and civil wars.²⁵ This approach ascribes motivation on the basis of a group’s actions. But the assessment of the motivations of armed resistance organizations is often very difficult, because of the need for data that provides insight into the decisions made by its leadership. Otherwise, one runs the risks of incorrectly inferring motivation from actions without the benefit of knowing much about the operations, goals, and strategies of armed resistance organizations. This is a concern for analysis at the higher levels of abstraction involving “large-n” statistical analysis of aggregate data commonly found in the “greed” literature.

Two, the use of dichotomous typologies imposes an analytical constraint. This approach does not consider that the adoption of practices oriented towards both political and economic ends can be mutually compatible. The leaders of armed resistance organizations may adopt revenue generation practices as one of many activities aimed towards political purposes. Instead, a “one or the other” approach forces an implicit normative assumption that politically motivated groups should abjure from “excessive” involvement in economic

²⁵ The use of typologies that classify non-stated armed groups as seeking either “profit” or “justice” represents an imposition of a normative judgment about the involvement of non-state armed groups in the narcotics trade without taking into account either their motivation for involvement in drugs or local attitudes about drug production and use. This position ignores the relatively recent emergence of anti-opium norms and a global narcotics prohibition regime and the imposition of anti-narcotics norms on rural communities in Southeast Asia.

activities, particularly ones categorized as illicit by national and international laws.²⁶

This perspective also ignores that armed groups require resources to acquire weapons, ammunition, feed troops, and purchase supplies.²⁷ Indeed, the logistics of organized resistance against the state is dirty, messy and, as Tilly (1985) reminds us, similar to the practices of states, in that it often requires the expropriation of resources from civilian populations. In some conflict zones, high value commodities – such as opium and coca – are the only resources available to support an armed group's activities.

State Weakness Explanations

An emphasis on the state, whether it be in terms of its strength or incapacities plays a central role in many studies of both state formation and strongmen. For instance, in his comprehensive study of Burma's political history, Robert Taylor (2009), a political scientist focusing on Burma, provides an illustrative example of a state-centric approach. He argues “most of the time it is the state that is expected to be, and is, the determining partner in such relationships” between “the official state and non-official institutions“ (p. 4). As Elizabeth Remick, a political scientist and scholar of China, (2004, pp. 9-15) notes, state-centric theories commonly assume that state building at the local level is analogous to state building at the national level. This assumption acknowledges neither the lack of uniformity in the relationship between state and society across states, nor the differentiation between national states and local states in terms of their functions and capacities. National-state-centered approaches to both state-building and state formation are often insufficient to account for variations in local political structures within a national state.

²⁶ By this logic, two of the armed groups involved in the most far-reaching revolutions of the post-World War II period – the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Vietminh – are profit-seeking because of their respective involvement in the opium trade in each movement's early periods of existence. The "Long March" period of the early CCP featured its reliance on opium taxes. The involvement of the Vietminh in the highland opium trade played a role in the ill-fated decision by the French commanders to construct a garrison in Dien Bien Phu.

²⁷ Succinctly summarizing this imperative is Napoleon Bonaparte's famous epithet that “An army marches on its stomach.”

Several studies of strongmen also employ state-centric perspectives. An illustrative example is John Sidel's (2004) comparative study of strongmen in Southeast Asia. He finds that it is central state incapacity that allowed for the emergence of local strongmen in the Philippines and Thailand. Whereas in Indonesia, the strength of the state prevented their emergence. That Sidel finds central state strength as a primary factor accounting for the presence of strongmen in both Thailand and the Philippines and their absence in Indonesia is not surprising given that the type of strongmen he considers are statist ones who rely on ties to central state agents. This approach may account for the absence of statist strongmen in areas where the state is dominant. But in instance of state incapacities, state-centric explanations fail to account for the different forms of strongmen. In particular, this approach does not offer much in explaining whether autonomous or statist strongmen emerge.

Another problem with focusing on changes taking place at the central-state-level is the inability to adequately explain variations in the timing and location of significant changes in local political authority within Burma and the forms of political power that emerge. The periodization of Burma's political history often points to changes in central state structures in accounting for political change. The *Tatmadaw*-led coup of 1962 stands out as the definitive rupture in Burma's post-1948 political history. It marks the end of the initial period known as Parliamentary democracy and the beginning of the period of military dictatorship. However, attention to this rupture fails to adequately explain the earlier emergence of new counter state political authorities, such as in the Shan and Kachin states during the period before 1962. Another shortcoming of centric perspectives is the inability to account for why resistance to the state took different forms. For Shan State, multiple armed groups including those led by strongmen and other armed nationalist organizations emerged. By contrast, Kachin State experienced a highly centralized insurgent organization – the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

During the 1990s, an apparent rise in the phenomenon of warlordism led to increased interest in the topic. Academics, policy analysts, and journalists, particularly those reporting on Africa, employed this term to describe a recent resurgent form of primordial, autonomous authority. The conceptualizations of contemporary warlords vary. But a common perspective is that economic interests dominate their motivation, they thrive in circumstances of state weakness and rely on coercion as main instrument of authority.²⁸

Despite the different conceptualizations of modern warlords, some accounts for their emergence possess biases that limit their generalizability. Scholars have focused on exogenous changes occurring at the end of the Cold War as the primary conditions supporting the emergence of warlords: the realignment of the international system (Kaldor, 1999) and shifts in global economic flows (Duffield, 1998). These changes constrained central state leader's institution building capacity (Duffield, 1998; Reno, 1998) and supported new forms of organized violence (Kaldor, 2006). The focus on warlords occurring in the post-Cold War period (Kaldor, 1999; Reno 1998) may also bias our understandings of local state formation towards structural explanations. The focus of the "new warlords" literature on recent global processes and changes associated with recent trends of globalization limits its applicability to other instances of warlords and autonomous strongmen in earlier periods (such as during the Cold War). The presence of warlords and autonomous strongmen is not a new phenomenon. Nor are many of the factors identified in the "new warlords" literature as accounting for their emergence, such as trade in illicit commodities and erosion of state authority.

Studies of weak states and warlords have primarily examined case studies within the region of Africa and during the post-Cold War period. This regional focus on Africa during this period may bias our understanding of how autonomous strongmen emerge. The

²⁸ William Reno (1999) provides a more neutral approach. He argues that warlordism in contemporary Africa is a form of patrimonial rule employed by state leaders in which they abandon the provision of public goods and instead maintain a narrow base of supporters through their provision of private goods.

prevalence of neo-liberal economic practices, the low levels of interstate war, and the patterns of resource endowment in Africa differ from other regions.

Arguments and Goals

This dissertation examines carefully selected cases in Southeast Asia to explain why autonomous strongmen emerge in some areas, but not in others. One aim is to provide tools for understanding the basis of their authority through identifying the social, economic, and political conditions present at their emergence. A focus on relations between state and society provides the underlying basis for understanding the mechanisms whereby strongmen wield rulemaking authority. However, insights from the study of the resource-conflict nexus and multidisciplinary studies of strongmen are also employed.

This dissertation's focus is on the endogenous factors that account for the emergence of autonomous strongmen, rather than exogenous ones. Several studies have identified the role of exogenous factors in supported non state armed groups: diasporic remittances (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Ballentine and Nitzchke, 2005); booty futures, which refers to advance payment by corporations to secure economic concessions in the future (Ross, 2004a); and the provision of resources from third-party states (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). These dynamics involve theorization of a range of transnational interactions, particularly the terms of conditionality from third parties in return for support, which may constrain their action and their autonomy. Therefore, they are beyond the aims of this dissertation. Below is an overview of key concepts and theoretical perspectives underlying the argument explanations and then the main arguments.

State and Society Approach to State Formation

A state and society approach focuses on the configurations of social structures in accounting for patterns of state formation. Central to this approach is an emphasis on the distribution of social control among organizations within a population and their provision of

components of people's strategies of survival. Social control refers to the ability of organizations and individuals to generate compliance with their commands within a society. In the case of state leaders, social control, as Migdal (1988) describes, “involves the successful subordination of people's own inclinations of social behavior or behavior sought by other social organization in favor of the behavior prescribed by state rules” (p. 22). Likewise, strongmen exercised social control on the basis of their ability to deliver key components, both ideational and material, of people's ‘strategies of survival.’ As noted earlier, strategies of survival are defined by Migdal (1988) as people's “blueprints for action and belief” that provide both “a basis for personal survival but also a link the individual from the realm of personal identity and self-serving action (a personal political economy) to other spheres of group identity and collective action (a communal moral economy)” (p. 27). The focus on how strategies involving rewards, sanctions, and symbols underscores the importance of taking into account both the material and ideational dimensions of people’s actions.

A state and society approach highlights the competition within societies among actors – the state, religious organizations, strongmen, and others – to develop the authority necessary to mobilize populations to obey their rules and increase their capacities. These actors have adopted a wide range of activities and practices to gain acceptance of their rules for behavior. Migdal (1988) highlights the sources of resistance to authority of state leaders,

The ineffectiveness of state leaders who have faced impenetrable barriers to state predominance has stemmed from the nature of the societies they have confronted — from the resistance posed by chiefs, landlords, bosses, rich peasants, clan leaders... through their various social organizations (p. 33).

In Shan State, strongmen emerged to make the rules of conduct for significant segments of the rural population. Their rulemaking conflicted with those of the state and its agents.

Societal dislocation is necessary for this reconfiguration in the distribution of social control to take place. Highly disruptive forces must first weaken the population’s existing

strategies of survival and render the prevailing authorities' basis for social control untenable (Migdal, 1988, pp. 26-27). But it is not a foregone conclusion that it will inevitably lead to the consolidation of social control by central state leaders. As this dissertation will show, when societal dislocation occurs in the absence of state commodity regulatory capability and the presence of valuable resources, the emergence of autonomous strongmen is possible.

Presentation of Arguments

The overarching questions of this dissertation are as follows: First, why is it that autonomous strongmen emerge in some regions of contemporary developing states, but not in others? Second, why did autonomous strongmen proliferate in Shan State, but not in others areas – like northern Thailand, northern Laos, or Kachin State – also experiencing opium booms, central state incapacities, and violent conflicts?

This dissertation makes two principal claims. They are interrelated and address the question of the circumstances necessary for the emergence of strongmen. The first central claim is that autonomous strongmen cannot emerge without exogenous shocks that generate dramatic societal dislocation and access to resources independent of state agents. Put differently, the emergence of autonomous strongmen reflects the needs of society, as well as the ability of individuals to meet them. Societal dislocations produced by shocks present an opening for individuals to displace the authority of local state agents. Access to resources independent of state control offers individuals the opportunity to develop capacities useful for exercising social control.

The second central claim is that strongmen exercise social control by offering material and psychological components, which are useful for people to construct new survival strategies. In other words, whether societal dislocations and access to resources lead to the emergence of autonomous strongmen depends on their ability to design strategies that resonate with local needs and customs. To do so, strongmen engage in the provision of

rewards, the imposition of sanctions, and the employment of meaning-laden symbols and practices. Together, these components provide people with the chance to develop new strategies of survival useful for pursuing their livelihoods and compelling rationales to accept the rules of strongmen. The ability of strongmen to offer these components accounts for why one strongman rather than other groups – such as states and armed resistance organizations – and influential individuals gained compliance from segments of society.

The construction of four carefully selected case studies provides the basis for assessing these claims. An in-depth examination of Shan State supports my first claim that societal dislocations and access to resources independent of state actors are necessary conditions for the emergence of strongmen. In the 1950s, societal dislocations precipitated a breakdown of people's strategies of survival. Predation and destructive warfare by various armed groups – the *Tatmadaw* and non-state armed groups; the revocation of the traditional administrative structures headed by local chiefs or *saopha*; and comprehensive reforms of local administrative practices and organizations are sources of these shocks. Collectively, these changes disrupted many survival strategies for much of the rural population. The ensuing disorder created an opening for strongmen to foster social ties necessary for gaining compliance with their rule.

Two, the presence of opium – a value dense commodity – and the inability of state agents to block access created opportunities for strongmen to accumulate commodity-capital. Individuals positioned themselves within the upstream portion of a blossoming, transnational opium supply chain. They accrued "rents" from the opium sector through several methods. Among these were the taxation of farmers and traffickers, predation of convoys, and the service as armed guards for the convoys. A few powerful strongmen provided security for opium refineries operated by international criminal syndicates in exchange for payment. The amassment of opium revenue provided resources useful for exercising social control

independent of state authorities.

The societal dislocation in conjunction the accumulation of commodity capital independent of the state created opportunities for a dramatic reconfiguration in the patterns of social control in Shan State. Strongmen employed capital as a basis for exercising social control by offering people components useful for developed new survival strategies.

Evidence from other sub regions in mainland Southeast Asia demonstrates the necessity of these two conditions for the emergence of strongmen. The absence of autonomous strongmen in the lowland areas of northern Thailand – where societal upheaval was limited – supports the claim that societal dislocation inducing shocks are a necessary condition for strongmen. Unlike the upland areas located adjacent to northern Thailand's borders with Laos and Burma, the lowland valleys in the central part of northern Thailand did not experience dislocations from state-led counter-insurgency operations. The presence of autonomous strongmen in these lowland areas would disconfirm the proposition regarding the necessity of upheavals for the emergence of strongmen.

My claim that access to opium is a necessary condition for the emergence of autonomous strongmen is supported by the four case studies. All four sub regions were opium-producing areas. The ability of autonomous strongmen to access opium in northern Laos, northern Thailand, and Kachin State was limited. The absence of autonomous strongmen in these areas where societal dislocation took place shows that access to opium, rather than its mere presence, helps account for the emergence of autonomous strongmen. In northern Laos and northern Thailand, state leaders and their agents dominated the trade. In Kachin State, an armed resistance organization – the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) imposed restrictions that limited access to opium. By contrast, access to opium in Shan State involved negotiating several impediments, but this was not beyond the capacity of strongmen. The emergence of autonomous strongmen in areas where other groups blocked

access to opium would weaken my proposition. These cases do not provide any evidence of this. As this dissertation will show in detail in later chapters, statist strongmen reliant on ties to the state helped block access to resources.

The cases of strongmen within Shan State and subnational regions across mainland Southeast Asia provide evidence to support my second claim. Specifically, strongmen exercise social control by providing people with material and emotional components useful for constructing new strategies of survival. Their bestowal of rewards, the imposition of sanctions, and their use of meaning-laden symbols and practices that resonated with beliefs held by segments of society offered people opportunities to develop new strategies of survival to cope with societal dislocations.

Examination of Shan State that includes close analysis of six autonomous strongmen demonstrates the importance of the material and ideational elements of their authority. The material elements involved their provision of rewards and imposition of sanctions constitutes the “hard power” of strongmen. Their provision of rewards involved the employment of resources to develop coercive capacities useful for providing people with protection from predatory armed groups and social order. They also employed resources to offer society a wide range of other goods and rewards. For instance, well-finance strongmen support education health and other civic services for the population. But, limited resources often constrained the ability of many to do so on a large scale.

Strongmen also imposed sanctions against those who violated their rules. Punishment was a necessary step for the provision of rewards related to the maintenance of security and order. Strongmen and their proxies employed instruments of violence against members of predatory armed organizations and individuals, who failed to comply with the directives issued by strongmen. These directives involved a broad range of rules that ranged from prohibitions against disrupting civil order to the payment of taxes. The penalties for violation

were not always violent. But they were backed up by the threat of coercion for failure to comply.

Strongmen also employed symbols and followed practices that created personal ties and an affective basis for compliance with their rules. Among the elements of their “soft power” was their manifestation of traits and practices recognized as congruent with traditional patterns of authority, the invocation of symbols of identity, and adoption of state-like practices. Compliance with strongmen manifesting these traits offered people a basis to meet their psychological needs by giving them a purpose for social action.

An examination of Shan State provides examples of ways in which strongmen utilized a combination of symbols and practices to penetrate society and develop an affective basis for domination. Assessing this ideational basis of social control requires close attention to people’s beliefs, norms, and traditions. For instance, the symbols and practices of strongmen lent meaning to people's behavior. And through adherence to practices recognized by the community as appropriate, individuals gained acceptance among segments of society of their claims to rule. In some cases, the reformist political goals of strongmen also offered the promise of relief from the trauma of civil war. Another basis was that strongmen filled the role as a symbolic protector for a community and functioned as a patron, who provided support in times of need.

For instance, many autonomous strongmen drew on the rituals and practices used by traditional leaders as a basis for their claims as rule makers. Strongmen emulated practices associated with Buddhist kingship. They adopted royal titles, supported religious activities, and sponsored for philanthropic projects. A reputation for heroic exploits and decisiveness were other channels for mobilizing support by exhibiting traits recognized by society as possessed by effective leaders. The manifestation of symbols of ethnic identity provided another basis for strongmen to develop social ties necessary for exercising rulemaking

authority. They may also obtain loyalty by adhering to practices that people recognized as being compatible with the appropriate or moral exercise of authority. This included the use of commodity capital as a basis of providing patronage and rewards in accordance with local practices. Strongmen possessing substantial resources, such as Khun Sa, adopted state like practices involving the creation of government structures and other activities associated with sovereign states. He effectively developed a state within a state.

The allocation of resources helped meet peoples material needs. At the same time, this practice helped a strongman to position himself or herself into the role of a benefactor for society. The provision of goods by an individual often resonated with societal norms about the duties and obligations of society towards benefactors, which serve as a basis of dominance by strongmen.

At the same time, the diversity of Shan State society also meant the use of symbols that resonated with some segments did not always have the same effect on others. The salience of ethnicity as a key feature of identity posed a challenge for strongmen attempting to extend authority over a multi ethnic society. For symbols and practices to be effective, they had to resonate with the population. For instance, the ability of a strongman to speak the same language of a community was one means for generating bonds based upon shared ethnic identity. This was most effective when the speaker used language in a way that marked him or her as a member of an ethnic community. In some cases, the inability of a strongman to speak the language in a way recognized by a community as appropriate for a member of the community – such as having the accent of non-native speaker – limited the effectiveness of appeals based upon common ethnic identity.

Strongmen, such as Chao Noi, the founder of the *Num Suk Harn* – the first Shan-led armed resistance organization, and Khun Sa, the most powerful of the Shan strongmen, attracted a large, multi-ethnic following from across Shan State by framing their goals in

terms of ending oppression from the Burman-dominated state. For such pronouncement to serve as a basis for domination, the commitment by the strongman had to be credible and resonate with the population. One benefit of this approach is that it was not specific to a particular ethnicity. Another element for achieving trans-ethnic support by strongmen, such as Khun Sa and Kornzurng, was fluency in multiple locally spoken languages.

Many strongmen encountered difficulties in attempting to extend their influence over communities with whom they did not possess social ties. Their inability to draw on shared ethnicity was one of many impediments. The lack of success of northern Thai-based, ethnic Chinese statist strongmen who were former members of Chiang Kai Shek's Kuomintang Army to exercise authority over local population shows the importance of the ideational basis of social control. Li Wenhuan and Tuan Shiwen possessed extensive resources from their involvement in the opium trade. While Thai government authorities kept them in check, their inability to establish social ties with the local population and offer them appear rationales to support them limited their ability to exercise social control.

The inability of strongmen to extend authority across ethnic cleavages demonstrates the importance of the ideational elements of authority. Many ethnic Chinese strongmen in Shan State commanded resources and instruments of coercion handy for dispensing rewards and sanctions. Their possession of hard power did not translate into the ability to extend social control over broader segments of society. The case of Lo Hsin Han, one of Shan State's most powerful, ethnic-Chinese strongmen, provides an illustrative example. Lo Hsin Han acknowledged that his alliance with the Shan State Army reflected an attempt to shore up his status within Shan society and obtain resources to provision his army from them. While ethnic Shan farmers provided rice to ethnic Shan strongmen and the SSA, they were often unwilling to sell large amounts of rice to him (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.). This dynamic runs counter to materialist perspectives that suggest that armed groups with greater access to

resources and possessing superior firepower would have more success in gaining support, than others with fewer resources.

At the same time, several Shan strongmen exhibiting traits and capabilities that satisfied the emotional needs of segments of the population through the deft employment of symbols and practices fell short because they lacked capital. One of the few ethnic Shan strongmen to extend authority on a translocal level was Kornzurng. His alliance with the KMT provided access to resources necessary to extend authority on a translocal basis. Khun Sa's success in marshaling both the soft power useful for exercising authority over a multi ethnic population and the hard power to build an army reflects his ability to offer strategies of survival that cut across the social cleavages present in Shan State society.

In short, autonomous strongmen have achieved social control through successful appeals to people's needs, both emotional and material. This success allowed them to move beyond a form of authority based upon selective punitive sanctioning of those who do not comply with their rules. Instead, this approach encouraged acceptance of their commands on the basis of their appropriateness, which allowed strongmen to extend their influence and capabilities and develop into autonomous strongmen.

In particular, an examination of the strategies pursued by local strongmen in their attempts to extend social control over more people reveals the necessity for the accumulation of resources. It also shows the critical importance of meeting people's psychological needs through adherence to meaningful practices and use of symbols that provided a basis for gaining compliance with their rule.

The variation in the presence of value-dense commodities and the states' regulatory capabilities accounts for whether strongmen have opportunities to access commodity-capital. However, the configuration of social structures also mediates their exercise of social control. If shocks produce societal dislocations that render the population's existing strategies of

survival ineffective, then strongmen have the opportunity to extend their influence. In the absence of such societal dislocation, strongmen's efforts to exercise social control are unlikely to achieve sustained success or allow for their expansion.

Alternative Explanations

The leading candidate explanations for the appearance of strongmen point to either state weakness or the presence of valuable natural resources as the cause. In the four cases under consideration, neither of these explanations can account for the patterns of social control involving the presence of autonomous strongmen. Cross case comparisons help rule out alternative explanations that focus on either state incapacity or the presence of valuable resource in accounting for the emergence of autonomous strongmen.

Comparisons of four sub regions within Southeast Asia demonstrated that the presence of resources in themselves was not sufficient for the emergence of autonomous strongmen. All of these areas experience opium booms that began in a period from 1940 to 1950 and continued until at least the 1970s for Thailand and Laos. In addition, militarized conflicts between the state and armed resistance organizations produced severe societal dislocations among the rural population in Burma's Kachin State, northern Thailand, and northern Laos. Only in Shan State did autonomous strongmen emerge. In the other areas, the patterns of social control involved the state-led orders and those of armed resistance organizations.

Paired comparison of Shan State with Kachin State shows that the weaknesses of the central state in itself cannot account for the emergence or absence of strongmen. These two areas experienced roughly similar trajectories in approaches by the central state leaders to the local administration in both the colonial and postcolonial periods. Attempts by British colonial authorities to impose indirect rule began in 1886 through traditional leaders. After 1948, the system for local administration in rural areas initially retained these leaders. Later,

reforms and warfare led to their displacement. In Shan State, this began in the 1950s with the gradual erosion of the *saopha*-led bureaucracies. In Kachin State, it took place in the early 1960s. Both the *Tatmadaw* and the KIA displaced local chiefs known as *duwa*. After 1962, the central state imposed a new administrative arrangement across Burma with the formation of Security and Administration Councils (SACs). In both cases, efforts by central state leaders to impose new rules were not effective, and agents of the central state were not capable of exercising social control. One of the most palpable symptoms is that central state agents encountered violent armed resistance from local armed groups.

The transformations in the patterns of social control in the two constituent states operating under the same centralized state structures led to dramatically different configurations of authority. In Shan State, a fragmentation of social control involving the emergence of autonomous strongmen and armed resistance organizations took place. For Kachin State, the transformation of social control did not feature the proliferation of autonomous strongmen. Instead, the formation of two competing orders emerged: One, the central Burmese state and the Kachin revolutionary order.

This dissertation puts forth an explanation for the emergence of strongmen that moves beyond a focus on the state and resource endowments instead looks at the configuration of society. Several explanations suggest that looking at structural forces such as state incapacity or resources endowment are useful for understanding the emergence of strongmen. This study employs a more complex account that includes an examination of illicit capital accumulation and strategies of survival as key elements for understanding patterns of authority involving autonomous strongmen.

Methodology, Case Selection, and Data Sources

Through the construction of in-depth studies of carefully selected cases, this dissertation employs comparative analysis to assess explanations for the emergence of

strongmen through qualitative methods. The cases under consideration are as follows: the main case study is Shan State. Three other "mini case" studies – Kachin State, northern Thailand, and northern Laos assess my propositions.

The case study method possesses valuable properties useful for testing hypotheses and theory development. This method has the potential for achieving high conceptual validity and strong procedures for fostering new hypotheses. It involves close examination of the hypothesized role of causal mechanisms in the context of individual cases and possesses the capacity for addressing causal complexity (George and Bennett, 2004).

The use of qualitative case studies helps address some of the concerns raised by scholars about qualitative studies about the nexus between lootable commodities and militarized conflicts. Studies using statistical methods have identified positive correlations and developed causal mechanisms about the commodity-conflict linkage. But they have not emphasized the development and testing of causal mechanisms for the proposed relationship. The case study approach helps more clearly examine the mechanisms through which resources influence the practices of armed groups. At the same time, this approach also examines the impact of armed groups on the presence of lootable commodities. In this case of opium, the disruptions caused by armed groups led farmers to adopt opium as a cash crop.

The selection of cases aims to provide those that confirm or disconfirm theorized relationships between relevant variables and outcomes through various qualitative techniques – process tracing and Mill's method of difference. The method of "within case" comparison uses observations from within a single site, or case, and assesses the importance of material and non-material factors in accounting for the variation in the authority of strongmen. This approach is useful for evaluating materialist arguments by comparing strongmen possessing similar access to opium revenues. Comparative analysis of instances of strongmen within Shan State demonstrates that contra to the expectation of resource deterministic perspectives

strongmen commanding roughly equivalent access to opium achieved by most any measure divergent levels of social control.

The application of Mill's method of difference to two Burmese cases — Shan and Kachin states — aims to assess state weakness explanations. The roughly equivalent levels of state incapacity guide the selection of these cases. The presence of other similar features — majority, non-ethnic Burman populations, the mountainous terrain, armed resistance, the role of traditional leaders in local administration, and societal dislocations — is also advantageous. Paired comparisons of these cases help rule out state weakness as an explanation for the emergence of strongmen.

Mill's method of difference also assesses "greed" explanations, namely the importance of the presence of lootable commodities. The presence of opium production guides the selection of three cases — Shan State, northern Thailand, and northern Laos. All three regions experienced post-World War II opium "booms." The selection of these cases is guided by the presence of other shared features: societal dislocations and disruptive, violent conflicts among armed groups. Like the earlier comparison with the Kachin and Shan states, case selection is advantageous because the similar values for many key explanatory variables help assess whether the presence of opium accounts for the emergence of strongmen.

Opium is a commodity that is methodologically and theoretically appropriate for examining the impact of natural resources on state formation. Given its wealth compactness and the perception of its profitability, it is popularly recognized as a natural resource that is likely to have several theorized effects on conflict. Even so, the causal mechanisms linking opium to armed conflicts are not well understood because of the difficulty in obtaining data on illicit narcotics flows. Moreover, scholars have not yet engaged in the use of case study method for assessing the impact of opium on conflict and state formation in Burma.

Data on strongmen and their involvement in the narcotics industry can be difficult to

collect. Those involved in profitable, illicit economic activities take measures to limit awareness of their actions, and access to conflict zones is difficult and dangerous. The problems of locating archival data on this topic are also numerous. Many government records are missing or remain classified. Many records kept by non-state armed groups are also missing. Informants are often reluctant to discuss the trade with researchers, because of concern that information on narcotics trafficking will be used to discredit them or used to benefit law enforcement officials. As Thoumi (2003) points out the lack of data "precludes the use of many common research sources and techniques and impose strong constraints on the interpretation of available information" (p. 2). By consequence, as Peter Andreas (2004) notes, "the illicit dimensions of the global economy are largely overlooked in the international political economy literature" (p. 641). He argues conventional approaches to political economy often separate licit and illicit economic activities. This study highlights the necessity of taking into account illicit economic activities and their impacts on state formation.

My study draws on a unique collection of data gathered during three years of fieldwork. Much of my data was either unavailable to or ignored by other scholars. I spent 18 months in Burma visiting archives in Rangoon and Mandalay and conducting interviews in Shan State and Rangoon. I also spent eighteen months in Thailand doing interviews with members of the Burmese dissident population and engaged in archival research. I also spent two months in Washington, DC, and London examining archival materials.

This study engages with three types of data. One source of data is over forty interviews, conducted with a broad range of informants. These include former and current members of non-state armed groups, former narcotics enforcement officials, retired government officials, journalists, and researchers. The second source of data is archival. Newspapers, government documents, and the field notes of two researchers embedded with

several non-state armed groups in the opium and conflict zones of Shan State are some of the most revealing sources. This data includes an unusually granular account of the "nuts and bolts" operations of strongmen and their daily interaction with rural populations. Finally, the compilation of statistical data on opium production in Laos, Thailand/Siam and Burma from various sources helps identify long-term trends in opium production (See Appendix One). Many of these sources appear in an academic study for the first time.

These sources help address and correct potential biases in previous studies of opium that run the risk of misinference from reliance on data from either government data or insurgent sources. Given these potential biases, a paucity of data and efforts by groups and individuals to downplay their involvement in the opium trade, this dissertation employs a method of triangulating sources in an attempt to enhance the validity of its findings.

Policy Relevance

This dissertation considers issues related to policy making about conflict resolution and narcotics control policy in opium and coca producing states. Unless we fully understand the linkages between opium and conflict, then studies of militarized conflicts in opium producing areas will be of limited use to policy makers. The stakes for determining if and how lootable natural resources affect civil war are high as they have important policy implications. If, as several scholars (Cornell, 2007; Fearon, 2004; Ross, 2004a) have argued, the presence of lootable commodities — such as gemstones, diamonds, narcotics, and valuable minerals — tend to lengthen wars by either providing resources to buy weapons and avoid defeat or creating disincentives for surrender because of lost opportunities for predation, then policy makers may eschew intervention in bloody conflicts, as advocated by Luttwalk (1999) and, instead, focus on limiting access to resources. However, if these effects are independent of resources, then policy makers may consider more interventionist approaches.

The extension of “greed” arguments to include a classification of non-state armed groups as either justice- or profit- seeking also serves to delegitimize their political claims (Cornell, 2007; Hoeffler, 2011). However, if, as this dissertation asserts, this totalistic dichotomous classification lacks utility and “profit” and “justice” oriented activities are compatible, then this perspective is an inappropriate framework for viewing non-state armed groups and analyzing armed conflicts.

This dissertation also contributes to policy debates about narcotics enforcement. Current narcotics control efforts follow a supply side approach premised on the belief that the illicit production of opium and coca is an economic or technical problem. However, the recent rise in illicit opium production in Burma and Afghanistan in conjunction with ongoing interventions supported by governments involving massive amounts of resources indicates the need for further examination of current strategies.

This study points out the inherently political roots of the onset of commercialized production in Burma. It argues that state practices, including predatory militarization and counter-insurgency actions, led farmers to adopt opium cultivation as a strategy to mitigate threats to their food security. It asserts that narcotics control strategies benefit from going beyond technical approaches and taking into account issues of governance.

This dissertation also considers whether narcotics production is also the result of political and governance issues, rather than just economic factors, such as greed or poverty. If the former play a role, then identifying the grievances, their source, and the mechanisms through which they impact producers provides useful information for policy makers. As this dissertation will demonstrate, the militarization of Shan State by the *Tatmadaw* that generated grievances also contributed to increased opium production. By consequence, policymakers may benefit from moving beyond a technical approach that addresses economic symptoms and also incorporates appropriate measures to address governance issues involving

infringement by state agents in people's livelihoods.

Roadmap for the Dissertation

This dissertation contains four empirical chapters and a concluding chapter. The empirical chapters contain three parts. Part one looks at opium cultivation from comparative and historical perspectives to examine the factors that account for increasingly commercialized production in the highlands of eastern Burma, northern Thailand, and northern Laos in the post-War period. Chapter Two considers the initial boom in opium production in these areas. The main argument is that predation and conflict by armed groups threatened the livelihoods of farmers, and opium cultivation formed part a strategy to mitigate these threats. The chapter examines the processes in which opium cultivation in eastern Burma, northern Laos, and northern Thailand transformed from one oriented towards subsistence production to become increasingly commercialized. It identifies shortcomings of market-based explanations in accounting for spatial and temporal patterns of this transition. Instead, it argues for the inclusion of non-profit-oriented concerns of farmers that structure their selection of crops.

Part two is an in-depth case study of Shan State and contains three chapters. Chapter three examines the sources and processes of societal dislocation that began in Shan State in the early Independence period. The chapter looks at changes in Shan State's rural society in the early independence period and the shocks caused by predatory militarization and the introduction of rationalized, ineffective bureaucratic system in place of the traditional bureaucracy. The resulting societal dislocation is a necessary condition for the emergence of strongmen because it weakened ties between the rural population and the state officials and created an opening for strongmen.

Chapter four examines the processes through which individuals became autonomous strongmen by analyzing how they establish social control. To achieve this, the chapter

employs an ideal type strongman as a heuristic device to identify both the material and ideational components of their rulemaking authority. Finally, the chapter employs in-depth studies of three strongmen to demonstrate the mechanisms through which they achieved compliance with their rules.

Chapter four examines translocal strongmen. It looks at the factors that impeded local strongmen from extending their authority over larger populations. When strongmen attempted to extend their authority beyond the confines of a locality, usually their native region, to include others areas and populations, they encountered economic, topographical, and social impediments. This chapter utilizes in-depth studies of three strongmen to identify different approaches utilized by strongmen attempting to extend their authority over society.

This chapter draws attention to the challenges faced by some strongmen in accessing the opium sector and the disincentives for their use of violence in gaining access to revenue for opium. The analysis helps dispel perceptions that often exaggerate the violence and profitability associated with involvement by strongmen in the illicit narcotics trade. In addition, the chapter also shows the importance of taking into account both the material and ideational elements of strongmen by looking at the strategies utilized by three strongmen to achieve translocal status.

Part three looks at local state formation and strongmen from a comparative perspective. Chapter five employs three additional “mini case” studies from Mainland Southeast Asia — northern Laos (1953-1975), northern Thailand (1950-1985), and Kachin State (1961-1994). This comparative analysis identifies the critical importance of societal dislocation and the access to valuable commodities in accounting for the emergence of autonomous strongmen. A useful contribution made in this chapter is that it identifies different types of strongmen that include those operating on local and translocal levels and those that are autonomous and statist.

This dissertation concludes with a final chapter that reviews its main arguments and considers its implications for understanding state formation. It assesses the implications of the study for policy making regarding counter-narcotics efforts and resolving conflicts involving valuable natural resources. Finally, it assesses the future of autonomous strongman and considers further research issues.

Chapter One

Coercion and Cultivation: Transformation in Southeast Asia's Opium Sector

Opium does not go looking for money. Money comes looking for opium.

-Hmong saying

The most widely held view, popularized by the Western media and encouraged by Rangoon, is that opium cultivation in the Shan State is widespread because the people are forced by Shan rebels and warlords to grow poppy.

-Chao Tzang Yawnghwe (2010)

A far-reaching transformation of the highland agricultural systems of eastern Burma, northern Thailand, and northern Laos took place in the period from the early 1940s to the early 1970s. Opium production shifted from a semi-subsistence mode to an increasingly commercialized one. By the early 1970s, the area had emerged as the world's leading source for illicit opium. To answer this dissertation's questions about the role played by strongmen in state formation, it is necessary to understand the processes that led to the dramatic and sustained increase in opium production in the upland areas of Mainland Southeast Asia.

This task requires looking beyond the conventional economic perspectives that focus on market forces in accounting for this agricultural transformation. Recently, scholars of illicit drug markets in other regions have also argued against the market-oriented explanation for drug production. As Francisco Thoumi (2009), a scholar of the Andean drug trade, notes, "the frequently made statement: 'when there is a demand there will be a supply' is not a sufficient condition for the production of a good or service" (p. 106). He points out that despite the potential for high illegal profits, most countries that can cultivate coca or opium poppy do not do so. Likewise, the assumption that demand is a sufficient condition for supply cannot explain the post-World War II concentration of illegal opium production in only three countries: Afghanistan, Burma, and Laos. In contrast, many other countries, for example, Nepal and Bulgaria, possessing appropriate ecological conditions have not experienced sustained, illicit production on a sizeable scale.

This chapter considers the reasons farmers produced opium commercially in some times and places, but not others. It questions why, given the abundance of other ecological niches conducive to opium production (in parts of Europe, North America, Africa, Australia and other tropical regions of the Southern Hemisphere) widespread, commercial production developed in only a few places during the twentieth century.²⁹ In particular, this chapter asks why the levels of production in mainland Southeast Asia's "opium belt" — the areas possessing the endowments necessary for commercialized opium production — remained below the region's potential opium-carrying capacity. An examination of this transformation reveals several misconceptions that muddle analysis of the relationships between violent conflict, opium production, and state formation.

One shortcoming common in analyses of opium production in Southeast Asia is the notion of the "Golden Triangle" itself. The "Golden Triangle" is a term by scholars, journalists, and drug enforcement officials. The "Golden Triangle" is relatively recent, dating to the Nixon administration, and its coinage reflects the U.S. Government's concern about growing domestic consumption of opiates from Southeast Asia. Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, first used the term in 1971 during a White House press conference (Allman, 1973, p. 37).

As a geographic designation for the opiate-producing regions of eastern Burma, northern Thailand, and northern Laos, the term implicitly assumes that the sub-regions within the "Golden Triangle" are sufficiently similar to form a useful unit of analysis. This assumption may make sense from a distance, such as Washington, DC, where the term first appeared in the public domain. A closer examination of the localized processes that led to

²⁹ The United Nations reports that between 2001 and 2011, 16 countries engaged in the eradication of opium cultivation – Afghanistan, Burma, Colombia, Egypt, Guatemala, India, Laos, Lebanon, Mexico, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, Thailand, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Vietnam (UNODC, 2012, pp. 27-28). Licit opium cultivation for pharmaceutical use occurs in 19 countries: Austria, Australia, China, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Japan, India, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, the Ukraine, and the United Kingdom (Chouvy, 2010, p. 194).

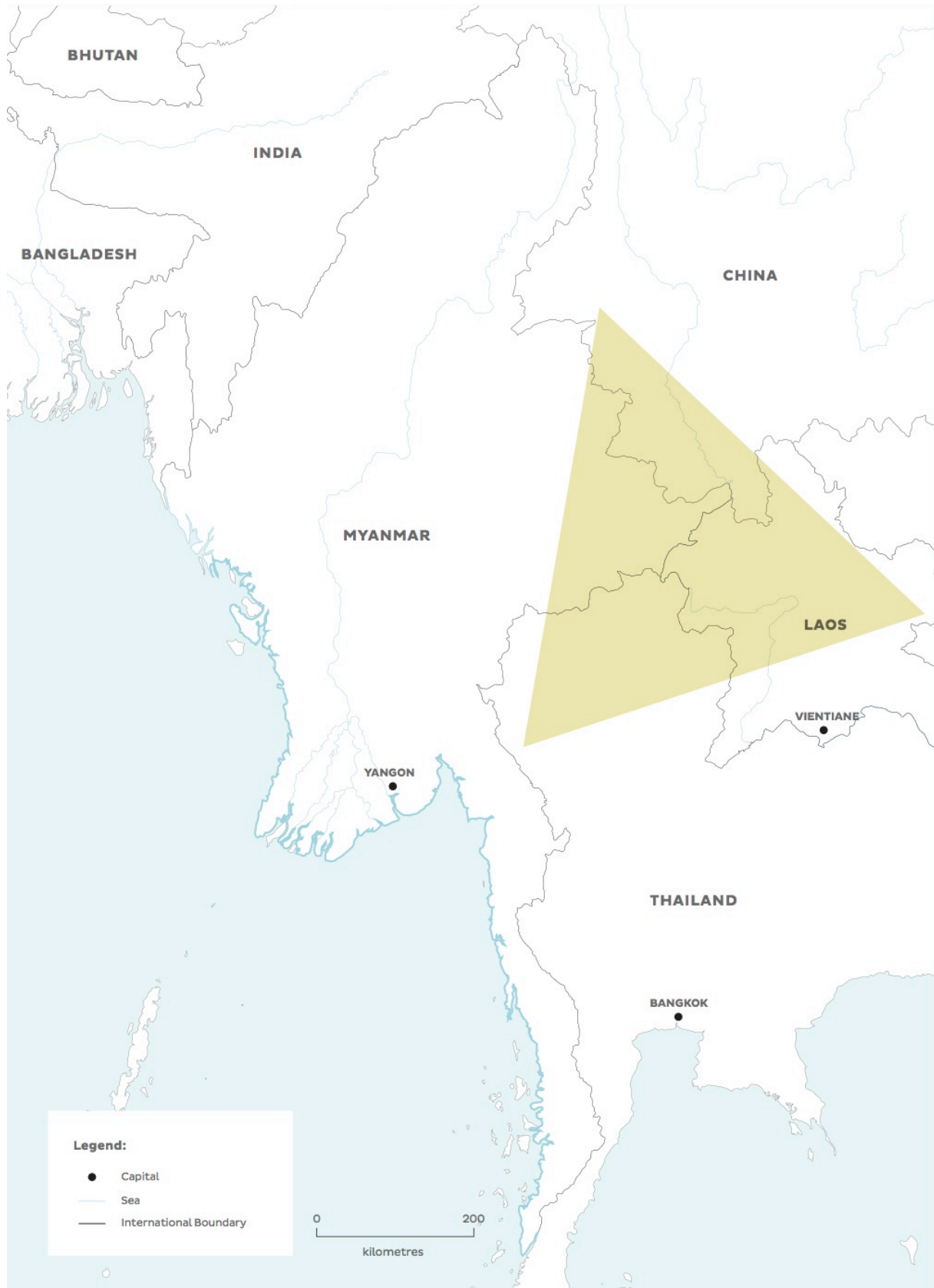


Figure 1.1: The “Golden Triangle”³⁰

³⁰ This map is based up on several references to the “Golden Triangle” and is not intended as a definitive demarcation of the “narco-body.” A consensus on the boundaries of the “Golden Triangle” among scholars

opium commercialization in Mainland Southeast Asia reveals the serious limitations of treating it as a single analytical unit. As this chapter will demonstrate, the intensification of opium cultivation within Southeast Asia's "opium belt" took place at different times and places, reflecting localized processes and forces. A clearer understanding of these localized factors can provide scholars and policymakers better tools for analyzing and addressing the problems associated with ongoing illicit opium production.³¹

A second misconception that muddles is a focus on market-oriented perspectives for understanding the rise in production after World War II. Several accounts of the development of Southeast Asia's opium sector in the period between 1940 and the mid-1970s put forth explanations grounded in market-based logics.³² These studies argue that a decrease in the supply of opium relative to demand served as a sufficient stimulus for increased production. Explanations drawing on market forces suggest that a price increase was the primary catalyst for the growth in opium production.

Market dynamics offer a compelling logic for understanding the shift from limited export production to increased export production. But they proffer incomplete explanations for the sustained and widespread transformation of the rural economy of the "Golden Triangle" in the early period (the early 1940s to early 1970s). This approach cannot adequately explain the spatio-temporal patterns of commercial cultivation — specifically, why it emerged in some places much earlier than others. This is because the logic of supply and demand does not take into account the varied, localized circumstances that structured

and narcotics enforcement officials has not emerged. Yawnghwe (1990) disparagingly critiques the vagueness of the term noting,

it sometimes refers to the Shan State, and sometimes to an undefined place 'where meets the borders of Burma, Laos and Thailand.' As a consequence of the second definition, visiting American secretaries of important departments, congressmen, presidential aides, and ignorant tourists, are obliged to visit a patch of grass and sand where meets the three borders — the confluence of the Maesai [River] with the Mekong River (p. 42).

³¹ Estimates indicate that the region's production levels rose from a pre-World War II output of 40 tons to at least 400 tons by 1960 (See Table 1.1). This growth transformed the region from a net importer to a net exporter of opiates (McCoy, 1972).

³² For studies that emphasize the role of market forces in the explanations for the emergence of illicit opium production, see Felbab-Brown (2009), McCoy (1972), and Paoli, Greenfield, and Reuter (2009).

farmers' crop planting decisions. An examination of the disruptions produced by warfare and militarization helps account for spatial and temporal patterns of production. This approach highlights the limitations of market-based models and demonstrates that opium specialization is a strategy of risk mitigation among farmers threatened with starvation and other threats stemming from militarized conflicts. These conditions are critical for understanding the roles that opium cultivation plays in state formation.

Admittedly, the selection of crops is part of a complex livelihood strategy by farmers. Their decisions reflect calculations that take into account economic, cultural, ecological, and other concerns of which the details are beyond the scope of this chapter. An important caveat to my argument is in order. It noteworthy that since the transition to commercial-oriented agricultural production took place in Burma, its integration into a global commodity supply chain has led market dynamics to play an increasingly influential role in the selection of crops by farmers. The development of a functioning market system has provided a measure of predictability, and many rural households have grown accustomed to opium. This chapter offers an alternative framework that emphasizes the practices adopted by farmers to mitigate threats to better account for the timing and location of the onset of commercialized opium in Southeast Asia's "opium belt."

The chapter first provides historical background on opium cultivation in Burma, Laos, and Siam-Thailand.³³ It then presents an assessment of explanations for the transition to commercial opium production. The first draws on market dynamics. The second takes a closer look at the conditions that structure farmer's crop planting decisions, paying close attention to their responses to the threats to their livelihoods and the properties of opium that make it an appealing crop for farmer facing challenges of living in a conflict zone. In conclusion, the implications for understanding opium, state formation, and conflict are

³³ In 1939, the official name of the Kingdom of Siam was changed to the Kingdom of Thailand. In 1945, the official designation reverted to the Kingdom of Siam. In 1949, the country underwent another name change and became the Kingdom of Thailand again.

presented.

Opium Production in Upland Mainland Southeast Asia

The vast majority of opium cultivation in Southeast Asia has taken place in three regions: northern Thailand, northern Laos, and northeastern Burma (Kachin and Shan states). It is useful to organize the recent history of opium production from roughly the advent of the colonial period to the present into two periods. A defining characteristic of the first period is that production was primarily subsistence. In the latter period, beginning in the early 1940s, farmers gradually shifted towards production on a semi-commercialized basis.

In the period of subsistence-oriented production, which took place from the early nineteenth century to World War II, opium production was not on a capitalist basis. Instead, peasants bartered often used opium as a medium of exchange, rather than money. Farmers grew opium for personal consumption and exchanged it with traders for basic goods, such as salt, rice, and essential household items. Historical records indicate that farmers in the mountainous areas of the Wa, Kokang, and Loi Maw regions in the Shan States produced opium on a widespread basis (See Figure 0.2).³⁴ However, it is difficult to determine the degree to which production was commercial in character. Several studies suggests that colonial period reports of high concentration of production were likely reflective of food security needs, rather than geared towards accumulating capital (Cowell, *Opium Cultivation*, n.d.; Maling Ukhu, 1997). A limited increase of surplus production for export occurred in the 1920s, which shows some influence of market forces. At the time, India – the largest opium exporters in Asia – was scaling down production and this limited the supply for Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, this move towards specialization in the 1920s was a "hiccup" compared to the later boom, as commercialized production was not sustained.

The period of semi-commercial production in the uplands of Mainland Southeast Asia

³⁴ Surveys by British colonial officials provide accounts opium cultivation in the Shan State but do not provide estimates of the volume of production. For example, see Scott and Hardiman (1983 (first published in 1899)).

began in 1940 and continues to the present. The "Golden Triangle" slowly blossomed from a regional to a global supplier. In the 1950s, surplus opium flowed to regional markets in Asia. However, in the early 1970s, production in Burma continued to increase and supply global markets. By the mid-1970s, the levels of production in northern Laos and northern Thailand began to decline. By contrast, production in Burma continued to climb. The peak opium production in Burma took place in the late 1990s. This growth represented a tripling in volume from the levels of the early 1970s (See Table 2.1).

Subsistence Production (19th Century-1940)

The widespread consumption of opium in Southeast Asia is the product of colonial period revenue imperatives. However, its cultivation is rooted in the extension of Chinese trade networks into the uplands of mainland Southeast Asia.³⁵ Records indicate that the presence of opium by the 1830s in the Shan States and as late as 1885 in northern Laos. For northern Siam, cultivation appears to have begun by the 1860s.³⁶ Three mechanisms help account for the initial growth of subsistence-oriented opium cultivation in this period: the caravan trade between Yunnan and these highland zones; the settlement by of people fleeing intermittent militarized conflicts in southwest China; and the establishment of state-sponsored opium monopolies in Burma, Laos, and Siam.

The expansion of long-range caravan trade into the highlands was an early catalyst for opium cultivation in the highland areas of Southeast Asia located adjacent to China. As early as the eighteenth century, mule-borne Muslim Chinese traders from Yunnan regularly traversed these rugged highlands. They bartered lowland commercial goods and resources, such as kerosene, salt, and sewing needles, for highland commodities like chili peppers,

³⁵ A consensus as to the date of the adaptation of opium cultivation by hill peoples in China has yet to emerge. Grandstaff (1979) argues that it was likely during the 1860s when "the Hmong and other hill tribes of southern China entered the opium market" (p. 74).

³⁶ For accounts of opium cultivation in Mainland Southeast Asia the pre-World War II period, see Grandstaff (1980), McCoy (1972), and Scott and Hardiman (1983, Vol I, 1: pp. 276, Vol I, 2: pp. 358-361).



Figure 1.2: Shan State with cities, towns and geographic references³⁷

³⁷ Adopted by author from colonial period maps and geographic references.

opium, and wildlife products.³⁸ The trade served as a conduit for the integration of remote upland communities into the lowland economy and stimulated an increase in opium production as upland peasants produced poppy to barter with traders.

Recurring warfare in southwest China from the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century also played a role in the spread of opium production to Southeast Asia.³⁹ This unrest prompted both farmers and traders to flee, and many settled in the highland areas of present-day Burma, Thailand, and Laos (Geddes, 1976). Farmers cultivated opium as their main cash crop and used it to barter for food and other essentials. The traders came to play a significant role in the commercial life of the upland communities. They opened shops offering lowland products, served as one of the few sources of credit, and extended their trading networks further into remote areas (Forbes, 1986, 1987; United Nations, 1964). They came to occupy an important economic niche as intermediaries between the highland and lowland economies, which formed the foundation for the growth of regional opium trafficking in the early 1950s.

As subsistence opium production expanded, government officials established state-controlled opium monopolies in Burma, Laos,⁴⁰ and Siam. Between 1824 and 1893, the British and French colonial governments of Burma and Laos and the Siamese monarchy created legal frameworks whereby these countries imported foreign opium (from India, China, Turkey, and Iran) and regulated its distribution through local retailers.⁴¹ These governments established tax-farming systems for the state-sanctioned distribution of what was known as excise opium. The sale of excise opium at inflated prices provided a significant

³⁸ For information about highland agriculture during this period, see Westermeyer (1983, p. 49), Forbes (1987), and Hanks and Hanks (2001, p. 44).

³⁹ These include Hmong uprisings (1796-1804); the T'ai P'ing (1853-64), Nien (1855-68) and Muslim (1855-93) rebellions; the Warlord Era (1916-28); and the Chinese Civil War (1927-1950).

⁴⁰ From 1893 to 1954, Laos was part of the French colony of Indochina.

⁴¹ British colonial expansion into present-day Burma occurred in three waves. After the conquest of the coastal region in 1824, the colonial officials established opium monopolies. But British imperial conquest did not take place in the Shan State until after the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1886.

source of revenue for state coffers. However, the growth of local consumption and addiction, notably among ethnic Chinese users, fueled a demand for cheaper opium. In this case, market dynamics stimulated limited local production and also diverted Chinese-produced opium from the Chinese market to those in Southeast Asia (McCoy, 1972; Thompson, 1941, p. 730; Trocki, 1999). To minimize revenue losses from the use of untaxed opium, known as contraband opium, state officials in all three countries amended existing laws and passed new ones to create a series of increasingly detailed regulations for the cultivation, possession, and sale of opium.⁴²

The British colonial government's decision to gradually phase production in British Indian in 1908 led officials administering the opium monopolies across Southeast Asia to search for new sources of opium. Responses to the shortfall ranged from the seizure and sale of contraband opium to alternative sourcing from other foreign producers, such as Iran. In some cases, state officials also granted dispensations to local opium producers for limited, regulated production (Forbes, 1986; McCoy, 1972, p. 95). In the interwar period, some of these areas saw limited surplus production, resulting from both the preemptive purchases by local opium monopolies and ongoing contraband production. This shift reflects an apparent adjustment of the market from Indian sourcing to state-regulated local production. Although it appears there was increased production during this period, evidence indicates no further steps towards continued commercialization (See Table 1.1). Alfred McCoy (1972, p. 116) estimates that pre-World War II production in this region peaked in the 1920s at sixty tons per year, and argues "the region still remained a minor producer in the decades before World War II" (pp. 95-96).

⁴² For an overview of the legalized sale of opium through government sanctioned monopoly systems, see McCoy (1972) and Trocki (1999). For studies of specific countries, see Maule (2002), Renard (1996), and UN (1964) on Burma, Adams and McCoy (1970) and Westermeyer (1983) on Laos, and Bunnag (2009), Renard (2001), Seagrave (1995), and UN (1967) on Siam/Thailand.

Semi-Commercialized Production (1940-1996)

With the advent of World War II, opium cultivation in highland areas began a gradual and sustained take off. The rise in production first began in Laos in the early 1940s. But for Burma and Thailand, the onset of a boom in cultivation did not begin until the early 1950s (See Table 1.1). The agricultural system of the highlands became gradually organized around the semi-commercialized opium production for export. By 1972, a combination of a sustained increase in cultivation and a turn in US government policy towards drugs created the political conditions for the “Golden Triangle” to emerge.

Table 1.1: Selected estimates of opium Production in Burma, Thailand (Siam), and Laos by ton (Pre-War to 1996)⁴³

	Burma	Thailand	Laos
Pre-World War II	12.7 (1939)	7 (1923)	7 (1940)
1955	150	25	50-125
1960		30	
1967	705-775	145	80-150
1968	400	200	100-150
1971	400-600	200	35
1975	440	30	50
1980/81	500	50	50
1996	1760		

Sources: Boonwaat, 2006; CIA, 1955, 1956, 1959, 1978; Geddes 1971; League of Nations, 1923; McCoy 1972; Tapp 1986; United Nations, 1967; United Nations International Drug Control Program, 2001; US Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, 1970; US Congress, 1971; US National Narcotics Intelligence Consumer Committee, 1983.

⁴³ Table 1.1 provides a compilation of estimates of opium production from a variety of sources. However, a few notes are necessary to contextualize and qualify the data and its comparative analysis. The lack of a consistent methodology for estimating production makes comparison difficult. In some cases, researchers cite estimates of production without any elaboration on their methodology. These omissions raise questions about the validity and reliability of the estimates. And the frequent revisions of methodologies for estimating drug production also raise questions about the validity of time series and cross-national analysis. However, comparison of statistical trends with qualitative data gathered from an extensive review of various government sources, interviews, and ethnographic studies serves to address these concerns. The evidence confirms trends of increased production in each country within the period from 1940 to 1996. This compilation is intended to identify trends in opium production levels, rather than pinpoint a reliable estimate of production. For more detailed estimates of production, see Appendix One.

Market-Oriented Explanations for Opium Commercialization

Market-oriented frameworks explain trends in opium production as the outcome of changes in supply and demand.⁴⁴ This perspective posits that rising opium production reflects a reduction in supply relative to demand, which unleashed market forces and incentives for peasant farmers to increase cultivation. This explanation suggests that changes in price are a central factor in the selection of crops by farmers.

From a market-oriented perspective, the growth in opium production in the highlands of mainland Southeast Asia from 1940 to 1970 reflects a decline in regional supply relative to the demand from consumers in Southeast Asia. The decrease in regional supply stemmed from the successful implementation of opium prohibitions in China and Iran in the early 1950s.⁴⁵ These two countries served suppliers for the region. Meanwhile, demand remained relatively constant. And in the late 1960s until the mid-1970s, the growing US military forces stationed in Mainland Southeast provided a new market, which further fueled demand (McCoy, 1972).

The relationship between the forces of supply and demand undoubtedly played a role in stimulating production by raising expectations of a more reliable market for consumption. But market-based explanations cannot adequately account for variations in the timing and location of intensified opium cultivation after 1940. The timing of the shift to sustained commercialized production varied from place to place. For instance, the boom in production in northern Laos commenced in the early 1940s. By contrast, it was at least a decade earlier than in eastern Burma and northern Thailand. Two, the timing of the increase in commercial opium production in Shan State staggered across space. In the Trans-Salween region (See Figure 1.2), the Kokang, Wa, and border areas experienced an upsurge in production in the

⁴⁴ For example of market demand dynamics, see McCoy (1972) and Wiant (1985, pp. 126-140).

⁴⁵ Chinese officials implemented four separate anti-opium campaigns in Baoshan county of Yunnan province in 1952, 1954, 1964 and 1965 to suppress opium production (Zhou, 1999). McCoy (1972) indicates that a dramatic decline in both China and Iran as a key development behind the increase in Southeast Asian production.

early to mid-1950s. However, widespread commercialized production in the areas west of the Salween River did not take place until after 1963. The mountainous areas on the west bank of the Salween River, notably the Loi Maw region, and small pockets in southern and eastern Shan State are the exception as records indicate earlier production in these areas (Cowell, *Opium Cultivation*, n.d.; Yawngghwe, 2010, p. 55). In addition the scale of cultivation in the three countries also varied considerably (See Table 1.1). In Burma, the annual output of opium exceeded that in both Laos and Thailand during this period. Detailed estimates of opium production in Kachin State are not available, but existing data overwhelmingly points to a level significantly lower than in Shan State (Maling Ukhu, 1997; United Nations, 1964).

The inability of market models to explain the patterns of production reflects their lack of specification. Market-based logic reduces the complexity of the power relationships among actors in the upstream sector of transnational opium supply chains to a rudimentary economic function. From a market standpoint, peasants in areas possessing similar ecological endowments conducive to opium production and roughly equivalent levels of market access should respond uniformly to changes in market dynamics. To address this puzzle and identify the factors that account for opium production, it is necessary to understand that market models do not take into account the substantial interventions required to produce wholesale reorientation in farmer's crop planting decisions.

Market oriented models do not take into account that conservatism of farmers engaged in subsistence agriculture and their reluctance to alter their time-tested crop selection strategies, such as specialization in opium as a cash crop. Households engaging in subsistence agriculture face a precarious existence. A miscalculation in their crop planting strategies or disruption during cultivation period portends a serious threat to their food supply. Farmers' preoccupation with survival makes them inherently conservative and risk averse. This perspective helps explain why it is that despite the alleged allure of profit, many farmers were



Figure 1.3: Opium cultivation in Shan State before and after 1963⁴⁶

⁴⁶ This map is adapted from one produced by Yawnghwe (2010, p. 55) and other archival sources. Yawnghwe cites “Situation Reports and Intelligence” from the Shan State Army General Headquarters Office as his source.

unwilling to specialize in opium, and in some cases refused to grow it at all. According to interviews conducted by Cowell (*Journal Two*, n.d., 1985, p. 16) with members of armed resistance organizations (SSA and SURA) faced difficulty in prodding farmers in areas that did not traditionally grow opium to switch over to the crop.⁴⁷

Opium is also a notoriously unreliable crop. The risks of a poor harvest discourage farmers from specializing in opium production.⁴⁸ Sources of crop failure include adverse climatic conditions, such as heavy rainfall in the early planting season, drought, temperature fluctuation, and even severe winds.⁴⁹ In response to questions submitted by Joseph Nellis, a high-ranking, US Government official, Khun Sa remarked, “It's very difficult to estimate. If the weather is good, the whole of Shan State produces 400-450 tons. In a bad year it's about 200-250 tons” (US Congress, 1978, pp. 264-266). For instance, unfavorable weather conditions taking place in Burma in 1974 led to a dramatic reduction of as much as 100 tons in production (US Congress, 1975; CIA, 1975, February 20). According to a CIA report (CIA, 1985, p. 3), a drought during the growing season of 1984/1985 decreased yields per hectare in northern Shan State to levels consistently below four kilograms (and in some cases as low as one kilo) in areas that normally averaged an estimated ten kilograms. Episodic market price fluctuations also create uncertainties about the reliability of opium specialization as a livelihood strategy.⁵⁰

Another shortcoming of market-based models is that they do not take into account the substantial profit differentiation within opium supply chains. Profits from illicit drugs are famously high. But, as a rule, the price increases roughly in relation to the distance from the

⁴⁷ It is noteworthy that other groups, such as the KMT, succeeded compelling farms to grow opium. But this entailed their use of violence against them, leading to the loss of support from the population.

⁴⁸ The threat posed by the Burmese government's support forced eradication of opium fields was initially negligible. State-led opium eradication campaigns only become widespread in the late 1970s. See Maung Wint Thu (2003) and U Thaung Wai (2009).

⁴⁹ For example, Lewis (1985) notes, “Freakish weather, especially rains during harvest, can cause them (opium growers) to lose 50% or more of their crop” (p. 10). The use of scarecrows in opium fields in northern Thailand was reportedly aimed to ward off the threat of infestation by monkeys.

⁵⁰ See Young (2011, pp. 35-36) for one of the few extensive accounts based on information from an individual involved in the opium trade in this period.

source. As Table 1.2 indicates, the prices for opium in Shan State were dramatically lower at the production stage than at successive downstream transactions at the Thai border and Bangkok. Opium in Bangkok retailed for an estimated five to seven times more than in Shan State.

Table 1.2: Estimated Price (US\$) of opium per kilo at various stages of transport from Burma to Thailand and Hong Kong, 1955-1974

Stages of Transport	1955	1974
Producers (Uplands)	15 (per kilo)	17-18
Kengtung, Burma	44.1	35
Thai-Burma border	59.2	56
Chiang Mai, Thailand	76	53
Bangkok, Thailand	106	101
Hong Kong	NA	292

Sources: CIA, 1956, p. 11; 1975, p. 2.

The opium marketing system resembled an inverted pyramid. Opium flowed from peasant producers in the highlands to petty traders, moved further along the supply chain to wealthier merchants (and other traffickers), and finally to members of international criminal syndicates located at buying points in the lowlands (McCoy, 1972; Lintner, 2000, pp. 10-11; Yawnghwe, *Actors and Markets in the Opium-Heroin Politics*, n.d.). The flow of opium along a commodity supply chain involves transactions at multiple points. Thus a market perspective does not always recognize that price incentives are lower for producers than for intermediaries and others positioned further along the opium supply chain. Thus, while opium is profitable, the profits tend to accrue to those positioned further along a supply chain.⁵¹

The labor inputs required for poppy cultivation are high and can serve as a constraint on its profitability. In discussion of why opium is not produced on wider basis, Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy (2010), a scholar of opium production, points out, “Harvesting opium is...a long and arduous manual process that requires an abundant and above all cheap workforce if the

⁵¹ Similarly, price differentials also existed in Thailand and Laos.

production process is to be economically viable.” (p. 194). Cowell (1975, January 24)

identifies a lack of surplus labor as another constraint that limited farmers from taking advantage of increased prices. He describes that,

among some tribes a price rise often means a fall in production, and since nearly all opium is cultivated by the family unit without hired labor production is limited to the labor resources of the individual family and could not be greatly increased (p. 2).

The fixed productive capacity of a household and the lack of seasonal wage labor made it difficult to raise productivity to take advantage of price increase.

Finally, the limited access to affordable credit in the highlands also played an important role in opium production. The availability of credit in the impoverished remote highlands was extremely limited. Credit was predominately provided by village merchants or shopkeepers, who were often ethnic Chinese, known locally by the Chinese term *lao ban*, meaning "boss."

Households facing rice shortages that portended starvation bartered opium in exchange for rice from the *lao ban*. This arrangement sometimes took the form of forward purchasing agreements, in which farmers received rice in exchange for the deferred payment of either a percentage or a set amount of their next opium crop. Given the lack of alternative sources of credit and the risks endemic to lending, interest rates were extremely high. By one account, the monthly interest rates were as high as ten to twenty percent of the value of the loan, and the repayment of loans was often in opium (United Nations, 1964, p. 13). In some instances, such as that of a poor harvest, farmers became enmeshed in a cycle of debt, whereby they cultivated an increasing amount of opium to meet their obligations.

This impact of the lack of affordable credit appears to have been prevalent in the Trans-Salween area. Endemic water shortages in the highlands led to post-harvest shortfalls in rice that often lasted for three to four months, leaving families in crisis (United Nations, 1964, pp. 13, 68-69). Many farmers turned to opium to make up for shortfalls in rice

production stemming from indebtedness and poor conditions for food crops, a key reason that this area became one of the most productive opium-growing regions.

Coercion and the Social Elements of Crop Selection

To apprehend the forces that account for Southeast Asia's opium boom and the spatio-temporal patterns of semi-commercialized opium production it is also necessary to take a comprehensive perspective that moves beyond a singular focus on market forces. Cultural practices, ecological considerations, and market forces all play a role in the farmers' crop choices. To better understand why opium production occurs at some times and places and not others, an incorporation of power dynamics between local authorities and farmers that shape the latter's strategies for securing sustenance is also necessary. Drawing on insights from agrarian studies, this non-market-oriented perspective assumes that subsistence farmers in the highlands regions are risk averse in their crop planting strategies.⁵² As a result, their strategies of survival emphasize mediating threats to their food supply, rather than on maximizing profit.

In an environment where government officials and armed groups engaged in destructive violence and predatory practices, specialization in opium production formed part of new livelihood strategies for farmers. Among these were relocation or flight to far away places and increased reliance on opium production. The following section examines responses by farmers to threat to the sustenance-procurement strategies of cultivators posed by other actors. This perspective helps account for the patterns of increased opium production in terms of where and when the transition to commercialized production took place.

Northern Thailand

Opium production in the highlands of northern Thailand experienced a steady and

⁵² For discussion of the subsistence ethic, see Scott (1976).

sustained increase in the period after World War II.⁵³ Determining the extent of the increase and the timing of its onset is difficult, given the lack of a reliable baseline estimate for opium production before 1955.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, evidence from ethnographic studies and other estimates provides a basis for tracking trends and identifying the forces driving an initial boom involving to threefold increase in opium production from a pre-war level of seven tons per annum to twenty-five tons per annum in 1955. McCoy (1972) indicates “there was surprisingly little poppy cultivation in Thailand until the late 1940s.” By the 1970s, the amount had skyrocketed to an estimated 200 tons per year (McCoy, 1972).

Warfare and migration indirectly spurred opium production in northern Thailand and other areas of Mainland Southeast Asia. The opium producers in northern Thailand were primarily highland-dwelling peoples who fled the insecurity caused by earlier fighting in Yunnan, Shan State, and northern Laos. Continued infringement on their livelihoods by armed groups in neighboring countries led these migrants to seek sanctuary, where they could engage in economic activity without outside forces disrupting their livelihoods. The rise in production reflects a complex, two-part process of “mountain hopping.” First, people encountering these violent disruptions in neighboring countries fled and eventually settled in the highland areas of northern Thailand. And, second, when unable to produce sufficient levels of food, they cultivated opium as a cash crop.⁵⁵ This strategy became an increasingly common way to mitigate threats posed by wars and violence in migrants’ areas of origin, and those posed to food security in the areas they settled.

⁵³ The region of northern Thailand encompasses 13 provinces located in the country's northernmost reaches. The area covers an area of 93,691 square miles, roughly size of Hungary, and includes the provinces of Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Uttaradit, Phrae, Nan, Phayao, Chiang Rai, and Mae Hong Son.

⁵⁴ Knowledge about the social and economic structures of the highlands of northern Thailand during this period is extremely limited compared to neighboring colonized states. While Burma and Indochina had polyglot, colonial bureaucrat scholars, such as James G. Scott (1983), producing detailed studies, the English language research on the highlands of northern Thailand did not emerge until after World War II.

⁵⁵ This assessment draws on ethnographies produced by the first generation of researchers, including botanists, missionaries, and anthropologists, conducting primary field research in northern Thailand and Shan State in the 1940s and 1950s. These include Geddes (1976), Lewis (1957), Moermann (1968), Saihoo (1970), Seidenfaden (1932) and Young (1962, 2011).



Figure 1.4: Thailand (Source: University of Texas. Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection)

Until the 1920s, the highlands of northern Thailand were sparsely populated. A few settlements, including relatively recent arrivals from the Shan States, were found in the highlands (Dessaint, 1971; Hanks, Hanks and Sharp, 1965; Seidenfaden, 1932; Young, 1961). However, after World War II, a trickle of migration turned into a flow. People fleeing violence and poor harvests in Yunnan, northern Laos, and Shan State settled in the remote uplands of northern Thailand. The migrants were predominately highlands dwelling peoples from a variety of ethnic communities, such as Hmong, Iu-Mien (Yao), Akha, Lisu, and Lahu.⁵⁶ The insecurity posed by warfare led them to press onward to Thailand (Crooker, 1988, p. 245; Hanks and Hanks, 2001; Lewis, 1957; Wang Liulan, 2006; Young, 1962, 2011). Most of them settled in highland areas of Northern Thailand, specifically in the remote mountainous provinces of Tak, Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, Chang Rai, and Nan, all located adjacent to international borders.⁵⁷

A survey of early ethnographic and agricultural research in this region reveals a complex interconnection of ecological and socio-agronomic factors that favored opium production. Many migrants found themselves in a precarious state and an unfamiliar region. The limited availability of lowland fields for settlement and threats posed by lowland populations, appear to have influenced their decision to settle in the highlands. The earlier settlements on arable land in the valleys of northern Thailand left newcomers with limited options for settlement (Cohen, 1984). By the 1960s, the Thai government's ban on swidden agriculture at the source of rivers further limited the areas available for settlement (Hanks and Hanks, 2001, p. 48). Paul Cohen (1984, p. 15), an anthropologist, notes the severe shortage of

⁵⁶ For accounts of migration into the highlands see Hanks, Hanks, and Sharp (1965), Cohen (1984, p. 157), Dessaint (1972), and Dessaint and Dessaint (1975). Dessaint (1972, p. 195) notes that migration of ethnic Lisu from Kengtung State in Burma to Fang and Chiang Rai in Thailand occurred between the 1900s to 1930s in response to poor harvests, high taxes, and bandits in Burma. Cohen (1984, p. 157) records that the Hmong population in the western highlands of Northern Thailand experienced a sizeable influx of Hmong after World War II.

⁵⁷ A declassified CIA (1985, October 15, p. 6) report indicates that as of 1986, the migration of hill-tribe people from Laos and Burma accounted in part for the expansion of opium cultivation in northern Thailand. Despite the increase in areas of production, the rise in total production, a dramatic reduction of yields per hectare due to soil erosion likely offset this gains in production.

dry rice-producing lands in northern Thailand as one of the reasons Hmong in the Chiang Mai area settled the nearby highlands.

Discrimination in lowland market exchanges, harassment by state officials, and predation by bandits also appear to have influenced decisions to settle the highlands. In Gordon Young's (2011) biography of Chanu Khek, an ethnic Lisu-Lahu man from Shan State who was in northern Thailand in the 1950s and 1960s, an account of the relationship between the upland and the lowland population are as follows,

[V]ery few mountain people came into the Thai towns, and they had few people they knew and much less that they trusted. Shopkeepers, be they Thai or Chinese, were necessary evils to the mountain people, and you avoided having to go down into their towns to meet them on their own terms (p. 38).

Other accounts identify the threats of theft by bandits and extortion by local officials operating in the lowlands as influencing the decision to settle in the highlands (Hanks and Hanks, 2001). As a result, many communities engaged in self-imposed socio-economic segregation from the lowland social and economic system. The presence of the familiar ethnic Yunnanese-operated opium purchasing system in the Thai highlands facilitated upland trade and provided a means for these farmers to trade for rice in times of food shortages.

The highland areas available for settlement were not conducive to the cultivation of food crops. Many migrants pursued a strategy of growing opium as a cash crop to trade for rice. Estimates indicate a steady rise in opium production from the mid-1950s until 1970, in which production increased by as much as 8 times from 25 tons in 1955 to 200 tons in 1970.

Eastern Burma: Opium Production in the Shan and Kachin States

The concentration of opium cultivation in post-World War II Burma took place in Shan State, but notable production, but significantly less appears to have also taken place in Kachin State.⁵⁸ The increased production in these areas took place gradually and reflects

⁵⁸ Reports indicate that limited opium production took place in the areas of present-day Chin and Karenni states and Sagaing Region (United Nations, 1964, pp. 6-7; U Khant and Ne Win, 1978, pp. 51-59). Production in these areas continues but is relatively smaller compared to Shan State.

displacement and predation by armed groups. In the pre-World War II period, the Kokang, Wa, and Loi Maw regions in the present day Shan State and the Hukawng Valley in present-day Kachin State were notable opium-producing regions. As mentioned, limited cultivation took place and opium was used to barter with caravan traders, and some producers had come after fleeing conflicts in China. As Table 1.1 indicates, Burma experienced an explosive growth in production during the period between 1950 and 1997.⁵⁹ However, this initial production boom took place in different areas, during specific times, and for separate reasons.

This section examines the increases in three major opium-producing regions: One, areas of Shan State on the east bank of the Salween River, or the Trans-Salween region; Two, the areas of Shan State located west of the Salween River, or the Cis-Salween Region; And, three, Kachin State (See Figure 1.2). The patterns of increased production stem from discrete, but at times overlapping factors — coercive taxation, predatory militarization and forced migration — that infringed on the sustenance procurement strategies of farmers and led them to cultivate opium as a means to access food.⁶⁰

One process that accounts for the increased production of opium was the inflow of people from China. Ongoing turmoil in Yunnan province led many people to flee into the Trans-Salween region of Shan State. The population shift of highland peoples had earlier roots, as farmers had engaged in a mechanism of "mountain hopping" in the areas of Yunnan China, northern Thailand, northern Laos, and eastern Burma in the period from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s. As in Thailand, upland farmers fled the insecurity in a neighboring country — in this case, China — to Burma. Several waves of migration to eastern Burma took place during this period. This exodus was a response to the disruptive turmoil posed by the continued militarized violence in southwest China. These included the dislocations

⁵⁹ A comparison of opium estimates by country (Appendix One) from the 1940s to the early 1970s indicates that the largest increase in opium production in Southeast Asia during this period occurred in eastern Burma.

⁶⁰ The data for this section draws on primary sources compiled by researchers with first-hand access to Shan State during this period. These include accounts by Cowell, Lewis (1957), and Lintner.

resulting from the Chinese civil war and the reforms implemented by the newly ascendant Communist government, which targeted KMT supporters, landholders, Christians, and opium producers (Whittman and Ohn Myint, 1956, February 15; Whittman and Ohn Myint, 1956, August 19). After reaching areas in Kachin and Shan States adjacent to the Burma-China border, some migrants found that the areas available for settlement were unsuitable for food crops. For instance, the poor soil quality in the Wa and Kokang areas did not allow for the production of rice, leading people to specialize in opium production (United Nations, 1964).

The coercive imposition of opium taxes by remnants of Chiang Kai Shek's KMT forces is another catalyst that helps account for the initial boom in opium production in eastern Shan State. The KMT units began retreating into Shan State in 1949 to escape the ascension of the communists in Yunnan province. Early efforts by the *Tatmadaw* to drive out these KMT remnants were ineffective, in part because of involvement in putting down unrest in other areas of the country. The KMT troops fortified control of areas along the border with China and began trafficking opium from Shan State to Thailand. They received support from the emerging anti-Communist bloc of the United States, Taiwan, and Thailand as part of a plan to check China's interest in Asia. While a pre-existing government-sanctioned opium trade operated in Burma until the mid-1960s, the KMT succeeded in developing a parallel illicit trade.⁶¹

KMT officers instructed their units to implement a tax, which was payable in opium, on the villages near their positions. As a consequence, opium production rose as the KMT expanded its control across Shan State (Government of Burma, 1953; Gibson and Chen, 2011; McCoy, 1972). Adrian Cowell (2005), describes the process, "the KMT dramatically increased [opium] production in the 1950s by presenting the villages under their control with

⁶¹ Until the mid-1960s, government-licensed private companies that purchased opium produced in Cis-Salween and sold it within the Shan State. The trade generated revenue for the government. Information about the state-sanctioned sale of opium in the early post-colonial period is limited, and the operation of the system is not well understood by scholars. For the few sources that provide limited analysis, see Gibson and Chen (2011, p. 120), McCoy (1972), Maung Wint Thu (2003), Renard (1996), and United Nations (1964).

quotas that had to be fulfilled under pain of death, usually that of the luckless headman" (p. 16). The threat of coercive retribution for non-compliance proved effective in prompting an increase in opium production. Elaine Lewis (1957), an American missionary living in eastern Shan State from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, notes that in some instances, when villagers could not meet the tax requirements, soldiers executed the village headman or burned down the village. The opium tax also indirectly spurred production by stimulating a new secondary market for opium. Villagers unable to meet their tax demands acquired opium from others to fulfill the tax burden (Lewis, 1957, p. 226).

The production of opium in Shan State for export to consumers in Southeast Asia existed before the KMT's arrival; however, the amount was small compared to the sharp upswing in cultivation that began in the early 1950s. As Table 1.1 indicates, pre-war production levels, estimated at 12 tons, rose to 150 tons by 1955 and between 400 and 600 tons by 1970. In Cowell's (*Kengtung to Bangkok*, n.d.) account of his first visit to Shan State in 1958, he notes that "[the KMT] have turned a piece-meal trade into a professional racket lucrative enough to maintain a small army and to earn high profits for their officers and pay their men" (p. 5).

Predatory militarization by armed groups in Shan State precipitated the exodus of agrarians to the relative sanctuary of the uplands, where opium cultivation became a strategy to address food security concerns. Militarization refers to instances in which armed groups take on an enhanced role in society. In particular, they determine the distributions of resources. The militarization of Shan State began by 1950, as armed groups, ranging from bandits and small resistance groups to larger organizations such as the KMT and the *Tatmadaw*, operated across the Shan State. The predatory elements of militarization included

armed groups' engagement in the following practices: forced portering,⁶² seizures of rice and livestock,⁶³ the destruction of personal property, and abuses of the civilian population.⁶⁴

Despite orders to compensate villagers for supplies, many units of armed groups failed to do so. The demands of operations in remote areas with overstretched and unreliable supply lines, conditions for the debilitating expropriation of resources and labor from rural populations.

Several accounts indicate that the KMT buyers sometimes paid for rice, but at a price significantly under the market value.⁶⁵ These practices impinged on the ability of farmers to produce and secure resources — whether starches such as rice, or protein from livestock — that were essential for their survival.

The form and intensity of predatory militarization varied across the Shan State. It first took root in the eastern Shan State in the 1950s, but gradually expanded to the areas of the Shan State located west of the Salween by the mid-1960s. This continuing predatory militarization precipitated a shift in the agricultural practices of the rural population, as cultivators adapted to the threats presented by armed groups by “running to the hills.” As an account produced by the Department of Information of one Shan armed resistance organization (Government of the Tailand Revolutionary Council, 1986) describes, “people had to flee their villages [in the lowlands] to evade the oppressing Burmese Army and have to resettle in deep, remote places where there is not enough land for providing their needs to

⁶² While central government officials announced that people would receive remuneration for their services, reports indicate that compensation was not forthcoming in all cases. For reports of forced conscription by *Tatmadaw*, see “Acting head,” 1961, May 30; “Army also to blame,” 1961, May 30; SSA, 1975.

⁶³ The seizures of foodstuffs by armed groups became a common procedure. Elaine Lewis (1957), an American missionary living in Kengtung area of the Shan State from 1947 to the mid-1960s, notes,

For many years, there have been large numbers of Chinese Nationalist [KMT] troops in the area demanding food and money from people. The areas in which these troops operate are getting poorer and poorer and some villages are finding it necessary to flee” (pp. 226-227).

⁶⁴ The burning of villages and arrest of people suspected of supporting, or even sympathizing, with armed groups was another component of the *Tatmadaw*'s counter-insurgency strategy. See accounts in Cowell (US Congress, 1975), Elliot (2006), Lintner (1999), SSA (1975), Tailand Revolutionary Council (1986, pp. 63-64), and Yawnghwe (2010).

⁶⁵ A declassified CIA report (1953, December 10, p. 6) indicates that in the early 1950s, KMT units in Wa States and Mongyang, Mongyawng, and Mong Hsat areas called the headmen together and ordered them to collect rice in exchange for receipts, which would be payable to their bearer when the KMT defeated the Chinese Communists. For other accounts of KMT units in the Shan State, see CIA (1951, p. 2), Cowell (*Journal Two*, n.d.) and Wen-Chen Chang (2002, 2009, 2014).

survive simply” (p. 201). These “deep, remote places” were often safe havens located in difficult-to-access upland areas, where opium production provided one of the few livelihood strategies. In some cases, farmers maintained their lowland settlements, but cultivated opium in remote plots located several hours’ walk from their villages (CIA, 1971, p. 3; Sai Aung Tun, 2008, p. 107).

The destructive violence of war, the diversion of agricultural labor to forced portering, and destruction of property had a predictably debilitating impact on rural food security. People often escaped the danger of the lowlands and fled to the mountains, which entailed the abandonment of their lowland rice plots, vegetable gardens, and fruit orchards. This mechanism of relocation to the remote uplands shares aspects of the “mountain hopping” strategy, but because it was a response to a broad process of predatory militarization, and featured localized relocation by predominantly lowland farmers, its presented as a distinct mechanism.

The practice of “running to the hills” to escape predation by armed groups helps account for the patterns of increased opium production in Shan State. The Cis-Salween region – with the exception of Loi Maw and a few other pockets - was not a traditional opium producing area. As Cowell (*Opium Production*, n.d., p. 2) notes, in areas west of the Salween River (with the exceptions of Loi Maw and other remote upland areas), agrarians had not traditionally grown opium, because of the high rice-producing potential of the lowland valleys. But in an accumulation of disruptions in Cis Salween area led to the emergence of opium production in this areas (Cowell, *Opium Production*, n.d.; Yawnghwe, 2010).

The intensification of *Tatmadaw*-led counterinsurgency activity also helps account for regional variations in the transition to increasingly commercialized opium production. As noted earlier (See Figure 1.3), patterns of commercial production in Shan State exhibit a trend whereby a significant increase occurred after 1963 in the areas west of the Salween. On

the opposite bank, in the Trans-Salween area, the transition took place earlier. Cowell (*Opium Production*, n.d.) suggests that the increase in areas of Shan State west of the Salween River was the result of predation by the *Tatmadaw*. He argues that the “sources of food insecurity west of the Salween [River] are man-made, as they are the result of a climate of unpredictability and seizure” (p. 4). He identifies the *Tatmadaw*’s practice of soliciting bribes to avoid portering (ranging from 500 to 2,000 kyats per month), their confiscation of crops from the rice purchasing system (as much as 30 percent), and predatory taxation as catalysts for opium production in this area (*Opium Production*, n.d., pp. 3-5). The increase was a response by farming households engaged in flight or "running to the hills" helps account for this process. After the onset of the civil war, when farmers moved to the hills, they adopted opium as a cash crop to address their food security concerns. The change in crop selection reflects the conditions of the highlands, which did not support large-scale rice cultivation.

The continued insecurity faced by farmers in Shan State over the next three decades spurred a sustained increase in the production of opium. Reports from narcotics enforcement agencies indicate that production in Burma, of which the majority came from Shan State, peaked in the 1990s, when estimates placed production at between 1,650 and 2,650 tons per annum (See Appendix One). This period rising opium production reflected the entrance of more farming households into the opium sector and their increasing reliance on opium.

Meanwhile, the emergence of well-organized, ethno-nationalist insurgencies in the early 1960s led state security officials to continue the militarization of these areas and expand the scope of counter-insurgency operations. The practice was formalized in the mid-1960s, as part of the notorious "Four Cuts" campaign. The "cuts" refers to the strategy of weakening armed resistance organizations by denying them access to food, recruits, information, and

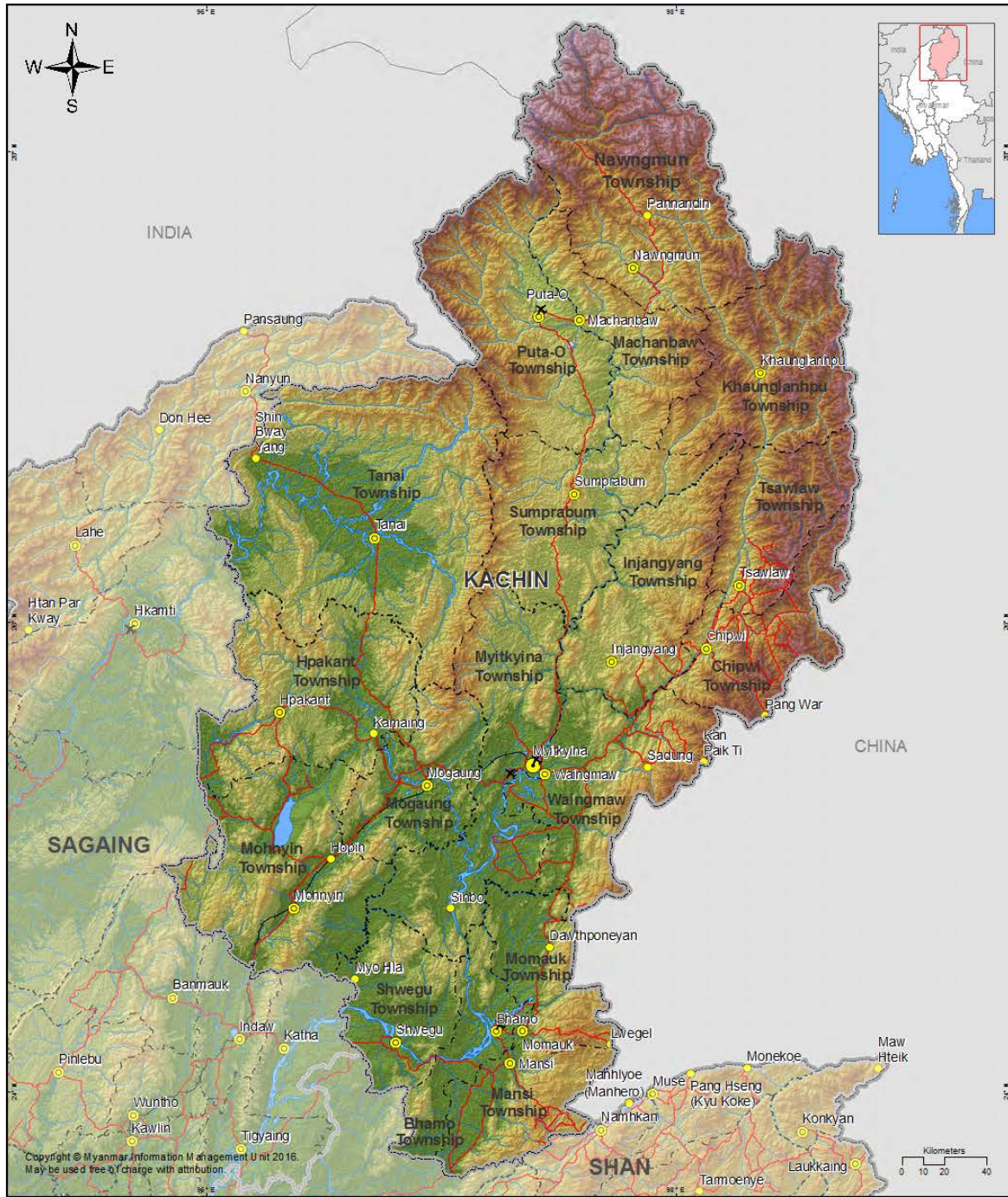
funds from the local population.⁶⁶ The confiscation and destruction of civilian food supplies, in particular, had an adverse impact on villagers. Non-state armed groups, including armed resistance organizations and others, also appropriated supplies from local populations through threat of coercion. However, their requisition of supplies was often motivated by survival, rather than as part of a punitive "Four Cuts" campaigns of the *Tatmadaw*. As Cowell (*Journal One*, n.d.; *Opium Production*, n.d., p. 2.) points out, the reliance of armed resistance groups on the population for food, recruits, and intelligence tended to ameliorate to their predation in their areas of operation and recruitment. While precise survey data on the extent of the increase in cultivation caused by the militarization process is not available, Cowell estimates that predation "doubled or trebled" the output during this period (*Opium Production*, n.d.). The role of armed groups other than the KMT helps account for the ongoing increase in opium after the KMT's withdrawal to Thailand in the early 1960s.

Opium cultivation in the area presently known as Kachin State dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. But production in this area has paled in comparison to Shan State, and for that reason information on opium production is limited. Production in Kachin took place primarily in the Hukawng Valley in Tanai Township and the Triangle region and supplied local consumers in nearby areas.⁶⁷ As was the case in Shan State, the effects of predatory militarization spurred the growth of opium production in the Kachin State. In 1961, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) began its revolt against the Burmese government. The *Tatmadaw* responded by deploying army units and conducting counterinsurgency operations. Their predatory counterinsurgency practices in the Kachin State were similar to those in Shan

⁶⁶ For details on the "Four Cuts" or *pya leh pya* in Burmese, see Defense Services Historical Museum and Archives (1997-1998, pp. 139-158), Maung Aung Myoe (2009, pp. 25-26), Selth (2002, p. 91), and Smith (1999, pp. 241, 258-262).

⁶⁷ A United Nations report indicates reports that Hukawng Valley cultivators' practice of collecting opium on strips of cloth that had no market outside areas of cultivation (United Nations, 1964, pp. 13, 16). Maling Ukhu (1997) notes that communities with access to riverine gold deposits traditionally panned for gold as a means of generating cash and only produced opium for personal consumption. However, they switched to commercial opium production in response to an increased security threats.

KACHIN STATE - MYANMAR



<p>Map ID: MIMU182v05 Creation Date: 16 August 2016.A3 Projection/Datum: Geographic/WGS84</p> <p>Email - info.mimu@undp.org www.themimu.info</p>	<p>Legend</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● State/Region Capital ● Main Town ● Other Town ✈ Airports — Road — Railway - - - Township Boundary - - - District Boundary — State/Region Boundary — International Boundary — Stream ○ Non-Perennial River/Water Body ○ Perennial River/Water Body <p>Elevation (meter)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0 - 250 251 - 500 501 - 750 751 - 1,000 1,001 - 1,500 1,501 - 2,000 2,001 - 2,500 2,501 - 3,000 3,001 - 4,000 4,001 - 5,000 5,001 - 7,002 	<p>Data Sources: MIMU Base Map - MIMU Boundaries - WFP/MIMU Elevation: SRTM Place names - Ministry of Home Affairs (GAD) translated by MIMU</p>
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Disclaimer: The names shown and the boundaries used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Figure 1.5: Kachin State (Myanmar Information and Map Unit)

State. The *Tatmadaw* engaged in mass arrests of the population, forced impressment of villagers, and confiscation of foodstuffs, and committed abuses against the civilian population (Maling Ukhu, 1997; Tegenfeldt, 1974).

As in the case of Shan State, many Kachins adopted the strategy of “running to the hills.” They abandoned the insecurity of their lowland rice paddies for the security of upland redoubts beyond the reach of armed groups. As Maling Ukhu (1997), an ethnic Kachin researcher, notes,

Kachin villagers, sandwiched between Burmese Government troops and the KIA were compelled to turn to opium as a cash crop, which was both easier to carry than rice and a more convenient currency for barter (for rice) than gold in the war zones (p. 612).

Herman Tegenfeldt (1974, p. 248), an American missionary working in Kachin areas in the years following independence, explains that lowland districts experienced depopulation as people shifted their agricultural plots to the highlands, beyond the reach of predatory armed groups.

Table 1.3: Selected Estimates of Opium production in Kachin State, 1962/63-2004

Year	Amount (Tons)
1962/63	69
1971	50
1974	Over 200
1991	56.1
2004	9

Sources: KIO, 1991; United Nations, 1964, p. 45; US Congress, 1975, p. 166; UNODC, 2004, p. 13.

The limited data on opium production in Kachin State makes estimating the impact of predation difficult.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, available data points to a rise in production from a baseline estimates ranging from 69 tons in 1963 and 50 tons in 1971 to over 200 tons by 1974.⁶⁹ This

⁶⁸ Assessing the amount of opium cultivation in Kachin State is made difficult by a lack of data over time. This likely reflects that limited opium production in the area, relative to Shan State, meant that efforts at estimating production were not a priority and the remoteness and ongoing war made collecting data difficult.

⁶⁹ The first figure of 69 tons for 1963 is from a United Nations report (1964, p. 45). The estimates of 50 tons in 1971 and over 200 tons in 1974 are from a study conducted by Hamilton (US Congress, 1975, p. 161).

is supported by other accounts that point to increased production during this period (Maling Ukhu, 1997; Pangmu Shayi, 2017, March 14).

Northern Laos⁷⁰

Opium production in Laos traditionally took place in the mountains located in the part of the country.⁷¹ Despite some fluctuation, statistical data indicates a sustained, long-term trend of increased production began in 1940 and continued until the early 1960s (See Table 1.1). This trend differed from those in Burma and Thailand, in that increased production in Laos began earlier. Detailed data on the extent of opium production in Laos during this period is difficult to obtain. Nonetheless, a review of historical sources shows that coercive taxation accounted for the initial upsurge in production and inflow of migrants from China contributed to the continued rise in production (Adams and McCoy, 1970; McCoy, 1972; Quincy, 1995; US Congress, 1972; Westermeyer, 1983).

The government's coercive imposition of taxes is one mechanism behind the initial increase in opium production in Laos. In 1940, the French colonial government of Indochina implemented an opium tax in an attempt to address its revenue shortfall. By 1940, the ongoing civil war in China had limited the Indochinese government's import of Chinese opium. The Opium Purchasing Board, a government organization charged with implementing the tax, not only raised the tax per capita in the opium-growing province of Xiangkhoang, but also accepted opium instead of currency (Quincy, 1995, p. 142). In Nong Het district of Xiangkhoang province, the government raised the tax from three silver piasters to eight. McCoy (1970) notes that officials also implemented a kind of an agricultural extension program to promote opium production in which,

⁷⁰ The term northern Laos refers to the provinces of Bokeo, Houaphan (Huaphan), Louang Namtha, Louang Phrabang (Luang Prabang), Oudomxai, Phongsali (Phong Saly), Xaignabouri (Sayaburi), and Xiangkhoang (Xieng Khuang). The total area is 113,283 square kilometers, roughly equivalent in size to Cuba or Liberia.

⁷¹ The ethnic Hmong in the provinces of Xiangkhoang, Houaphan, and Louang Phrabang were the main producers, whereas ethnic Iu Mien (Yao) in Louang Namtha province and ethnic Kha in northwest Laos also participated, but on a much smaller level, producing as little as 10 percent of volume (Westermeyer, 1983; Feingold, 1970, p. 328).

French officials scoured every ridge and mountaintop in northern Laos for poppy fields, offered Meo [Hmong], Yao [Iu-Mien] and Tai tribes fantastic prices for their produce in an attempt to outbid the smugglers, and even supplied seeds and instructions to tribes and villages who had not previously grown opium (p. 96).

This policy resulted in an estimated increase in production from around fifteen tons to forty tons per annum (McCoy, 1972, pp. 115, 119; Quincy, 1995, p. 142). In the view of Keith Quincy (1995), a historian of the Hmong in Laos, the new tax transformed "much of the traditional Hmong economy in Laos from subsistence to cash crop farming" (p. 149).

The procurement methods of the government in Laos appear to have been more benign than those of the KMT in Burma. Nevertheless, the process of opium extraction contained elements of coercion. Taxation drove many Hmong into debt. Reports indicate that some of them sold their children to procure sufficient opium for the tax (McCoy, 1972, p. 121). Quincy (1995) notes that "few Hmong welcomed the tax," as officials significantly undervalued the price of opium used as payment in kind, which "reduced the potential income of Hmong farmers and created hard feelings between them and their leaders" (pp. 142-143). Unlike the position of the KMT in Shan State, tax officials in Laos were often local civilians rather than members of a foreign army. But while the coercion they applied was not an infringement of the same proportion as coercive taxation in Burma, it nonetheless helps account for increased production in Laos.

Adaptation to forced migration through "mountain hopping" and opium production was another mechanism that helps account for opium production in northern Laos as well as in Thailand and Burma. The post-World War II inflow of highland peoples, primarily from China, contributed to an increase in opium production. A study (Barney and Halpern, 1957) based upon field research in Xiangkhoang province from 1949 to 1953, notes that the population grew from roughly 30,000 to 45,000 during this period, and the majority of the newcomers were ethnic Hmong from southwest China. Since Hmong households, by and large, engage in opium production, this inflow accounts for a significant increase in



Figure 1.6: Laos (Source: University of Texas. Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection)

production (Barney and Halpern, 1957). An interview conducted by Wilbur Garrett (1974, pp. 78-111, cited by Westermeyer, 1983, p. 280) with a Hmong headman who had fled from China to Laos, provides supporting evidence for this mechanism: "Our clan came to Laos to

grow opium. We had to, because Chinese opium growers [in China], fearing our competition, cut down our poppies." However, Westermeyer (1983) suggests that the destruction of the poppies was unlikely to have been motivated by competition from Chinese growers, and instead was the result of one of the Chinese Communist Party's opium eradication campaigns.

Coercive forces that included warfare, militarization, and taxation impinged on farmers' livelihoods and spurred them to make dramatic adjustments to address threats to their lives and access to sustenance. The responses included flight from zones of insecurity and the greater reliance on opium as a cash crop. A focus on these non-market related processes often involved threats of coercion provide an alternative explanation for the increase in opium production in the "Golden Triangle" region after World War II. A focus on dislocation caused by violence and coercive taxation and predation also more clearly accounting for the location and timing of increased opium production across the "Golden Triangle." Moreover, a focus on non-market forces provides a framework that better accounts for how localized events disrupted agrarians' survival strategies and led them to adopt or expand opium cultivation.

Opium: A Farmer's "Best Friend"

As Paul Collier, a scholar of armed conflict in Africa, once noted, "diamonds are a guerilla's best friend" (Kahn, 2000, June 16). His statement draws attention to the utility of the wealth compactness (price per volume/weight) of diamonds relative to most other commodities, which makes them easily smuggled and a useful source of revenue for financing an armed movement. Albeit less eloquent, I suggest that opium is a farmer's "best friend," when that farmer faces coercive threats to her or his livelihood. Like diamonds and coca, opium is not only a valuable commodity with a high-value density relative to other commodities, but also possesses other attributes that make it a desirable crop in times of violence and threat. Several material properties of opium, along with its unusual marketing

system, make it an ideal crop for farmers facing threats of competition and military predation. These features help account for why peasants in Southeast Asia's "opium belt" sometimes specialize in opium rather than other crops. Its cultivation also entails risks that do not exist for other crops, which is why it is often not illicitly produced on a commercial basis in non-conflict situations.

As previously noted, opium is vulnerable to fluctuations in weather, animal infestation (such as monkeys), and market failure. It also requires regular attention. These factors along with the conservatism of subsistence cultivators and their risk-averse behavior help explain why opium production is not more prevalent in other areas that possess the natural endowments necessary for its cultivation. However, in times of militarized violence and insecurity, opium's attributes — its high-value density, non-perishability, early maturation, fungibility, and purchasing system — make it a conflict crop *par excellence*. Opium specialization is, therefore, a useful strategy for farmers seeking to mitigate threats and enhance food security.

Just as rebels prefer to employ concentrated units of wealth in the form of diamonds and other value-dense commodities, so do farmers. The ease of opium's concealment, portability, and convertibility assists them in their efforts to evade predation and regulation. For farmers facing wealth confiscation and other threats from armed groups, specialization in opium has several advantages. Its value concentration makes it both portable and concealable, which is beneficial for farmers facing threats of coercion and taxation that may require them to take flight. Moreover, valuable commodities of compact size are well suited for transportation over difficult terrain. In remote areas of Southeast Asia with mountains and a paucity of roads, the opium's wealth compactness allows for greater portability. The wealth compactness of opium also allows for easy concealment. Burying opium is a common practice of wealth concealment in the highlands. In contrast, bulk agricultural commodities,

such as teak logs, are difficult to conceal and can be easily expropriated by predatory armed groups.

Unlike most food crops, opium is relatively non-perishable, being useable several years after its extraction from poppy (Lewis, 1985, p. 10). When farmers face confiscation from predatory armed groups, they can hide their produce until the danger subsides without depreciation in value or spoilage. In contrast to food crops, which require timely sale and consumption, opium has a much longer shelf life. The non-perishability of opium also benefits opium traffickers and producers. Its longevity permits farmers and traffickers to wait out lulls in prices.

Moreover, compared to many other cash crops, opium does not require extensive preparation and offers potentially rapid economic returns as long as it is properly cultivated. Opium allows for a marketable harvest within four months, whereas other bulk crops that grow in the highlands, like coffee, tea, rubber or fruit, require several years of maturation before becoming profitable. Unlike wet rice cultivation, opium does not require planting techniques that require labor-intensive land preparation. Instead, the clearing of land through slash and burn methods is sufficient for production. Important inputs for the crop are regular weeding and labor-intensive extraction. The quick turn around time between planting and harvest is advantageous for producers with short time horizons, such as transient populations or those facing armed threats and considering flight. Opium is also fungible. In his testimony before the US Congress, anthropologist David Feingold (US Congress, 1975, p. 8) referred to opium as the American Express traveler's checks of the highlands. He described it as a transnational and trans-ethnic currency that served as a medium of exchange. Commercial transactions in the highlands did not always take place in national currencies, but instead, opium and Indian rupees were the common items used for barter trade. The liquidity of opium within this region offered incentives for production, as it was easily convertible (US

Congress, 1975, p. 8; Young, 2011, pp. 36-8).

Finally, the purchasing system for opium has an unusual feature that reinforces its role as a conflict crop. To my knowledge, it is the only cash crop in Southeast Asia for which buyers come directly to the growers. To understand the incentives provided by this “farm gate” purchasing system, it is useful to compare this purchasing system with those for other crops. In the highlands, farmers typically sell their surplus produce at markets. Depending on the location of a farmer's fields, transporting crops may take several hours or days. In times of insecurity, the farm gate purchasing system provides incentives for the production of opium. In Shan State, armed groups ranging from the *Tatmadaw* to bandits obstructed commerce as they frequently “taxed” or seized commercial goods on their way to market.

The farm gate purchasing system meant that producers of opium did not have to risk the predation of their agricultural surplus by the numerous armed groups operating in the countryside. Rather than face possible theft on the way to and from regular markets, opium specialization minimized threats to farmers' livelihood. It was the opium traders that came to farmers to make direct purchase that incurred the risks of transporting the commodity (Lintner, 2000; Maling Ukhu, 1997). This strategy limited their exposure to the anarchy of a Hobbesian marketplace, as their remoteness made it unlikely that predatory groups would expend the costs necessary to monitor and extract surplus directly from individual households.

Another facet of the system that contributed to opium production was its advanced purchasing system. Yunnanese Chinese traders extended not only rice but also credit and opium seeds, in exchange for a portion of the next crop (Gibson and Chen, 1979, p. 27). Faced with a precarious existence in which crop shortfalls could lead to malnourishment or starvation, farmers frequently turned to these traders as a source of credit. In the remote highlands, traders were often the only groups with sufficient capital to provide credit. The

merchants offered goods, rice, and cash in exchange for either a portion or exclusive rights to the upcoming opium crop (Chavalit Yodmani, 1980; Young, 2011).

Farmers faced with livelihood threats from armed groups, including their engagement in predatory practices such as taxation, looting, and confiscation, adopted or intensified opium production as part of their survival strategies. As noted above, opium's properties made it a more reliable source of income and food security in times of violent conflict. Admittedly, opium specialization was not without hazard, as its cultivation runs the risks of low yields. However, when faced with the insecurity of violence, extortion, and military predation, farmers chose opium cultivation as a form of risk mitigation.

Conclusion

The transition of the highland agricultural sector had profound implications for state formation in the region. The rising levels of opium production and the inability of state enforcement agents to regulate its flow provided opportunities for individuals to insert themselves as intermediaries within the transnational supply chains that linked highland producers with consumers across the globe. The trade provided the means for strongmen to accrue revenue and resources that were useful in developing and expanding their authority.

Southeast Asia's opium boom reflects farmer's reliance on opium to mitigate threats to their access to food. Market-oriented explanations have pointed to the role of shifts in the regional supply and demands to explain the initial take off of production. But market-based explanations have difficulty in accounting for the timing and location of the transition to increasing commercialized opium production. The reduction in supply relative to demand produced forces that offered market incentives, but this alone cannot account for the patterns of production. A broader framework that incorporates non-market factors fares better in accounting for these dimensions. An advantage is that it takes into account the concerns that structure farmer's crop planting strategies, the threats present in a zone of violent armed

conflict, and the properties of opium and its purchasing system. In particular, the violence and predation by armed groups against the population were the most influential and pervasive of the changes in the region.

This chapter also draws out the shortcomings of the “Golden Triangle” paradigm by drawing attention to the distinctive localized processes within its constitutive sub-regions. “Triangle”-oriented analyses focus on broad, structural factors common to the region, which fare poorly in accounting for different levels of localized opium production. It is symptomatic of the narrow depiction of the sources behind the presence of drug crops and relationship between drugs violence found in studies produced by scholars, journalists, and narcotics control organizations about of the nexus between conflict and narcotics in this region and others.

In Shan State, farmer’s adoption of opium as a cash crop was a response to the disruptive interventions by armed groups, including the *Tatmadaw*. As this chapter demonstrates, opium production can be viewed as a symptom of destructive violence, rather than its cause. At the same time, opium also provided a local resource easily smuggled by armed groups to finance their operations. In this sense, opium is both the result and indirect supporter of militarized conflicts.

Chapter Two

Upheavals and Societal Dislocations in Shan State

For years countable by the thousands, the Union of Myanmar stood as an independent and sovereign nation, with her own civilization.

-Senior General Than Shwe, former Chairman of the SPDC

The Shan and Kayah States face an entirely different situation: an integrated social structure exists, but it is built up around a system, which appears to be an anachronism to the leaders of the new democratic Burma. And so an attempt is being made to sustain an entirely new system of government, which if it should be carried through, will certainly produce far-reaching effects upon a social order which has remained stable for many hundred of years.

-Hugh Tinker, a British scholar of Burma (1967)

This vigorous exercise [by the *Tatmadaw*] to restore stability resulted instead in an armed uprising in which Shan rebels captured the town of Tangyan in 1959.

-Chao Tzang Yawngnhe (2010)

In 1964, a village headman in eastern Shan State received a letter from the local *Tatmadaw* commander. The letter directed the headman to prepare an inventory of the land and livestock holdings for the village's households. The headman suspected that the request was part of an unpopular government-led land redistribution program rumored to be taking place nearby. Rather than comply, he set out with the letter in hand to seek counsel. The headman delivered the letter to Samlor, an officer in the Shan National Army (SNA) – an ethnic armed organization – and a local strongman. The headman proposed a deal. In return for Samlor stationing of 100 troops in the headman's village, the villagers would feed them until the end of the war. His proposition reflected the concerns that a government-led land program would accompany predation by the *Tatmadaw* and a disruptive redistribution of land and property.⁷²

The headman's commitment posed significant risks. In the case of a bad harvest, the allocation of rice for the troops would cut into the village's food supply. The deal also entailed the villagers' acceptance of the authority of the strongman. Their support for a rebel

⁷² For an eyewitness account, see Cowell (*Journal One*, n.d.; *Rebels on a Cold War Frontier*, n.d.). Also see *The Unknown War* (1966), a documentary film by Cowell.

strongman portended punitive reprisals by the *Tatmadaw*. Acts of resistance such as this village's defiance of state rules become a common occurrence in Shan State by the early 1960s. The frequency of villages' rejection of state authority became so pronounced that it precipitated a fragmentation of political authority into dozens of strongmen-led micro-centers.

To understand the origins of this new pattern of social control, it is useful to examine the situation in Shan State in the period after Independence, when autonomous strongmen had not yet proliferated. After World War II, when the British acceded to Burmese demands for independence, the local chiefs of the Shan State, locally known as *saopha*, retained their responsibilities for local administration.⁷³ The 33 *saopha*-led bureaucracies operated at the local level in conjunction with the Shan State Government, an arm of the state bureaucracy operating at the state level. Exceptions to the *saopha* local administration were the municipalities established during the British period. They came under the authority of the Shan State Government.⁷⁴

The continuity of traditional leaders as powerful, local administrators into the early Independence period (1948-1959) is a feature that distinguished Shan State from other areas of Burma. Although the *saopha* were not elected and lacked a democratic basis for legitimacy, their continued presence reflected an agreement reached between *saopha* and leaders of other ethnic groups. In 1959, the *saopha* formally transferred their duties to the state-level government.

In the early independence period (1948-1962), local administrative structures of Shan

⁷³ Before 1947, the heads of the Shan principalities held various titles conveying different ranks within the feudal hierarchy and included *sawbwa*, *myosa*, and *ngwegunhmu*. These ranks conveyed varying levels of status among the leaders. In 1947, the leaders agreed to adopt the title "*saopha*" (Mangrai, 1965, p. 312).

⁷⁴ In the British colonial period, municipal governments were established in the towns of Lashio, Taunggyi, Hopang, Loimwe, and Loilem and administered by British colonial authorities. This practice of separate administration for municipalities continued into the early post-Independence period. Agents of the Shan State Government administered these areas.

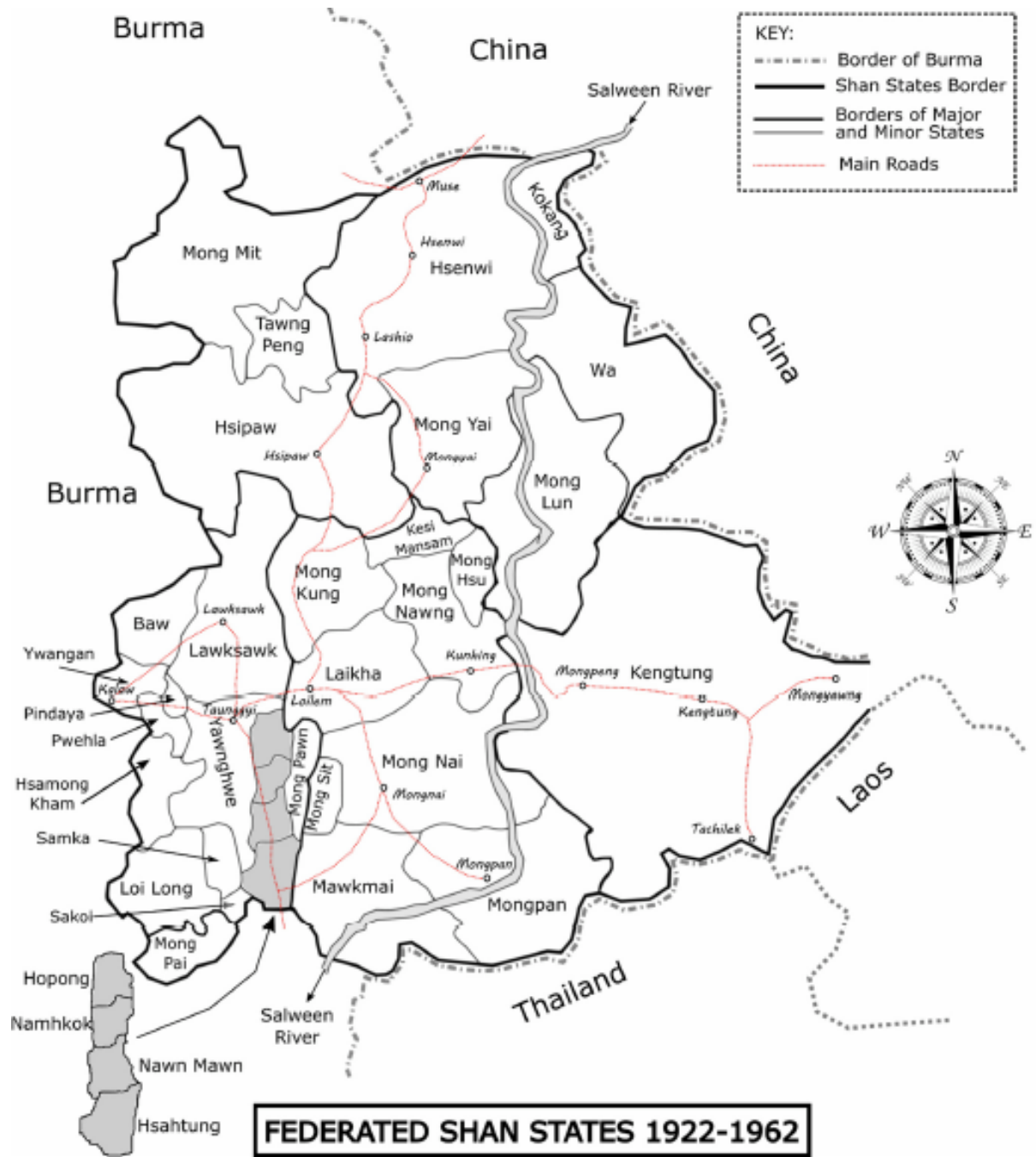


Figure 2.1 Saopha Statelets⁷⁵

State experienced reforms intended to homogenize diversity across their *de jure* territories.⁷⁶

The instruments of homogenization included the gradual displacement of traditional *saopha* authority with the introduction of rationalized bureaucratic structures, new procedures, and

⁷⁵ This map is one that appeared in Sao Sanda (2017, p. 18). She notes that “Victor Ong redrew the map using a loose map at the back of *Burma Handbook* (1943) and from a map issued by the Commissioner's Office, Taunggyi, Federated Shan States in the 1940s.” It was given to her husband, Peter Simms, in 1959/1960.

⁷⁶ James C. Scott (1998) has attributed these modernist efforts by state leaders towards achieving uniformity as motivated by their interests in making societies and resources more legible for administrative purposes.

unfamiliar rules for behavior. This process involved the extension of uniform laws and attempts by the *Tatmadaw* at extending control over the instruments of coercion. In the early 1950s, *Tatmadaw* leaders also dispatched armed units to neutralize armed resistance to their administration.

The reforms aimed at centralizing authority did not fare well. The administrative overhauls encountered resistance in various forms – political parties, popular protests, and, finally, armed rebellion. In rural Shan State, widespread non-compliance with government rules and acceptance of the authority of strongmen was the most significant change. Within ten years of independence, the order began to fragment as micro-power centers comprised of strongmen emerged in the countryside.

The resulting fragmentation of authority reflects a shift in the patterns of domination in Shan State. Joel Migdal (1994) characterizes domination as the ability for an organization or person to gain compliance with their rules of behavior. He details two different forms of domination useful for understanding changes in Shan State. One is *integrated domination* in which, "the state as a whole (or possibly even other social forces) establishes broad power and in which it acts in a coherent fashion" (p. 9). By contrast, *dispersed domination* is another form "in which neither the state (nor any other social force) manages to achieve countrywide domination and in which parts of the state may be pulled in very different directions" (p. 9).

The changes in the pattern of domination within Shan State reflect a deepening of dispersed domination from a state of partially integrated domination to one in which autonomous strongmen became the basic units of authority.⁷⁷ After independence in 1948, the local, state, and national level administrative units initially coordinated their administration in a roughly coherent fashion, relative to the next period. The operation of the

⁷⁷ For a discussion of patterns of domination, see Migdal (1988, 1994, 2001).

administrative system involved bureaucratic units executing tasks in accordance with their responsibilities. The ambiguity of the overlapping systems created confusion among different state organizations. In particular, tension surfaced between the *saopha* officials and the *Tatmadaw*. At the same time, state agents, whether *saopha* officials or *Tatmadaw*, encountered pockets of resistance from armed organizations. The initial period of armed resistance organizations (1948-1958) did not make deep inroads with society and were limited in scale compared to the subsequent period of armed conflicts taking place from 1959 to 1996.

This chapter's examination of the impact of disruptive forces experienced by society and changes in the socio-political structure is a necessary step in understanding the emergence of autonomous strongmen. Its focus on society presents an alternative tack to that of state-centric analysis in understanding the failure of government-led state-building efforts and the fragmentation of authority. Specifically, this chapter considers the sources of failure for central-state led efforts at local administrative reforms. These efforts dramatically impinged on the population and created the opportunities for a reconfiguration of social control. The chapter also addresses why it is that efforts of central state leaders to extend their authority by reconfiguring local administrative structures and introducing new rules resulted in the further "dispersion of domination" rather than achieved greater centralization of authority and a deepening of domination as intended by central state leaders.

Their failure reflects that the breakdown of people's survival strategies, which created opportunities for a reconfiguration in the patterns of domination. Upheavals rendered people's survival strategies untenable and led them to search for new ones. Such upheavals included predatory militarization by armed groups, the dismantling of the traditional socio-political order, and the introduction of unfamiliar and ineffective administrative systems. The inability of newly empowered state organizations and agents to offer people elements useful for

society opened the door for autonomous strongmen.

The chapter contains five sections. Following this introduction, a second section examines the background on the pre-Independence socio-political structures of the Shan States. A third section looks at the establishment of Shan State within the Union of Burma and disruptive political dynamics taking place in the Shan State. Finally, there is an assessment of the impact of shocks on the population and the ensuing dislocation that supported the proliferation of autonomous strongmen.

Early Patterns of Political Authority in the Shan States (13th Century to 1945)

The socio-political structures of the contemporary Shan State before 1945 can be divided into three periods. The first is a pre-colonial period that spans roughly from the 14th century to 1886. The second is the British colonial regime, which operated from 1886 to 1942. The third period of Japanese and Siamese rule took place from 1942 to 1945. A significant feature is the emergence and continuation of a system of traditional rule into the post-colonial period.

Pre-Colonial Period (13th Century-1886)⁷⁸

A feudal political system comprising dozens of statelets ruled by local chieftains took root in the areas that comprise the postcolonial Shan State as early as the thirteenth century.⁷⁹ The Burmese term is *sawbwa*, but the Shan term is *saopha*. In this period, *saopha* came under the influence of other more powerful monarchical systems, such as those of the Burman and Siamese kingdoms. The *saopha* acknowledged the suzerainty of these powers and remitted taxes to them, but held the responsibilities for local administration.

⁷⁸ For an examination of the early history of the Shans, see Mangrai (1965, pp. 17-18) and Sai Aung Tun (2009, pp. 89-110).

⁷⁹ The system encompassed an ethnically diverse population. The lowland valleys contained a predominately ethnic Shan population, but also ethnic Burman, Chinese, Danu, Indians, Intha, and Pa-O groups. Lowland rural areas predominately engaged in wet rice cultivation, whereas urban areas featured commercial activities. By contrast, an ethnically diverse population – including Akha, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Kokang Chinese, Lahu, Lisu, Padaung, Palaung (Ta'ang) and Wa – settled in the highlands. These communities engaged in subsistence, swidden agriculture as their primary form of economic activity. For a discussion of the distinctions between highland and lowland societies in Burma, see Leach (1960) and Scott (2011).

Buddhist conceptions of kingship provided a politico-religious basis of legitimacy for the *saopha* system for the predominately Buddhist peoples in the lowlands.⁸⁰ Hugh Tinker (1967), a British scholar of Burma's political history, characterizes *saopha* authority as absolute, noting that, "The sawbwas [*saopha*] ruled their little kingdom like medieval rulers with powers of life and death" (p. 160). A basis for the exercise of *saopha* authority for the animist groups in the highlands drew on a pre-Buddhist tradition of reciprocity. Victor Lieberman (1984), a historian of Burma, notes that the power relations between the *saopha* and highland groups followed a pattern found in other areas composed of ethnic-Tai people,

Tai rulers often claimed dominion over the mountainous tracts separating the scattered valleys in which their Tai subjects lived, and demanded tribute. Yet given the inaccessibility and extreme decentralization of the upland tribes, success in enforcing such claims was at best sporadic (p. 135).⁸¹

This relationship featured ritualistic displays of obeisance by the highland villagers in which local leaders publically acknowledged the authority of the chief in exchange for his promise of protection.

Colonial Period (1886-1942)

The Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885-1886) served as the final act of a three-part conquest of Burma and extended British claims from the coastal lowlands and Irrawaddy River valley to the Shan plateau.⁸² Rather than construct a bureaucracy to directly administer newly claimed territory, colonial authorities opted for a strategy of state building "on the cheap."⁸³ This approach employed a system of indirect rule also present in other areas of colonial period British India whereby local chiefs – in this case, *saopha* – administered their

⁸⁰ The Shan tradition of Theravadic Buddhist kingship differed from those present in central Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos, where rulers possessed a semi-divine basis of authority. As Susan Conway (2006) indicates, "Although the princes had special status in Shan society, the tenets of the Yuan [common to the Upper Mekong area] sect of Theravadic Buddhism viewed the destiny of rulers as dependent on merit and not divine incarnation" (p. 18).

⁸¹ The term Tai refers to an ethno linguistic groups of Tai language speakers. Tai-speaking groups are located in Thailand, Laos, Shan State, Yunnan province of China, northern Vietnam, and Assam in northern India.

⁸² The First Anglo-Burmese War (1826) led to the annexation of the coastal areas, which includes present-day Arakan and Mon states and Tanintharyi Region. After the Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852) the Pegu (Bago) regions were annexed and came under British control.

⁸³ For analysis of this period, see Sao Mangrai (1965).

respective principalities according to customary law in return for their recognition of British authority and remittance of taxes (Taylor, 2009, p. 92).⁸⁴ The colonial government asserted its influence by garrisoning troops in the area and appointing two superintendents to supervise the *saopha*.⁸⁵ An exception to direct *saopha* rule was the administrative towns – Taunggyi, Lashio, and Hopang – and civil stations – Loilem and Loimwe – established by the British (See Figure 1.2). Colonial state leaders appointed agents and drew up laws to create a separate administrative system (Ba Thann Win, n.d., p. 10; Silverstein, 1958, p. 49).

The Shan States were initially administered directly by the British-appointed Governor of Burma. Burma was part of British India until 1937, when the colonial government separated it and gave it the status as a new administrative unit with its own Constitution. Earlier, in 1922, the Governor of Burma established the Federated Shan States, which involved the creation of a Council of *saopha*. In 1925, the Shan States came under the authority of the newly created Commissioner of the Federated Shan States, who reported directly to the colonial appointed Governor of Burma (Furnivall, 1960; Taylor, 2009, p. 97). The exception is that the ethnic-Wa inhabited areas on the east bank of the Salween River were not part of the Federated Shan State, and there was no permanent British administration in this area (Furnivall, 1960, p. 11; Maule, 1992, p. 15).⁸⁶

During this period, the British attempted to level the formalized hierarchy among the chieftains. In the colonial period, the ruler of each statelet held a title, based upon their rank within the traditional system of kingship. The highest rank was *saopha*, followed by the lesser positions of *myosa* and *ngwegunhwus*. In the late 1930s, there were six *saopha* in

⁸⁴ The Burma Laws Act of 1898 vested the *saopha* with the legal authority within the British system over civil, criminal, and revenue administration. The British colonial government established the Federated Shan States in 1922, which became known as one administrative unit of the Frontier Areas of Burma. See Shan State Manual, 1933, pp. 333-335) and Universities Historical Research Centre (1999, pp. 6-7).

⁸⁵ One official in Lashio presided over the *saopha*-led statelets in northern Shan State, and another based in Taunggyi administered southern Shan State (See Figure 1.2).

⁸⁶ Furnivall (1960) provides an example of the limits of British colonial reach in that they did not make attempts to administer the Wa areas until 1935 and, afterward, administrative efforts remained limited. Only after 1935, the Wa areas came "under the supervision of the Superintendent of the Northern Shan States" (p. 11).

Southern Shan State and 11 *saopha*, 11 *myosa*, and four *ngwegunhwus* in Northern Shan State. After Independence, all rulers became known as *saopha* as the formal use of the hierarchy was discontinued (Furnivall, 1960, p. 11; Mangrai, 1965, p. 312).

The British annexation had two indirect and long-term influences on the development of Shan State's political structures. One, the advent of *Pax Britannica* (1886-1942) insulated the traditional *saopha* system from external and internal threats. Many administrative systems, both indigenous and colonial, succeeded in vanquishing feudal rulers, such as the Siamese monarchs displacement of the local rulers, known in Thai as *chao*, in northern Thailand in the early 1900s. This colonial era "security umbrella" supported the entrenchment of the local administration by feudal elites into the post-World War II period.

Another influence was the division of British Burma into two separate administrative groups. In the lowland areas, known as Burma Proper and predominately inhabited by ethnic Burman, an administrative system of rationalized, direct rule operated. By contrast, in the upland, non-Burma areas, known as the Frontier Areas, an administrative system involving indirect rule through local, traditional leaders operated.⁸⁷ A feature of this arrangement was the use of distinct legal codes for different areas. One set of laws was applied in Burma Proper (or British Burma), while other legal codes operated in the Frontier Areas. In some cases, the laws and regulations for units within Frontier Areas also lacked uniformity. For instance, the law and procedures in the Shan States, codified in the *Shan State Manual* (1933, first published in 1910), were sometimes different from other parts of the Frontier Areas. After 1935, the terms of the Government of Burma Act (1935) further institutionalized divergent rules and administrative practices. The Act created two distinct administrative arrangements. The Excluded Areas, or Part I Areas, came under the direct

⁸⁷ Frontier Areas included the Shan States, the Karenni states, and Wa districts, the Karen hills, the Arakan Hill Tracts, the Chin Hills, the Kachin Hills, the Naga Hills, and other smaller jurisdictions. For more on administrative of Shan State, see Ba Thann Win (n.d.), Sai Aung Tun (2009), Mangrai (1965), and University Historical Research Commission (1999).

authority of the Governor of Burma. The Partially Excluded, or Part II Areas, described by Furnivall (1960) as “more politically advanced was within the sphere of Ministers responsible to the Legislature, though they could be over-ruled by the Governor” (p. 10). An implication of the British administration is that the territory became divided into different administrative units, rather than one. This development would pose challenges for national unity in the post-colonial period.

World War II (1942-1945): Occupations by Japan and Siam

In 1942, Japanese and Siamese armed forces engaged in a brief occupation of the Shan States. J.S. Furnivall (1960), a British scholar of Burmese politics and administration, characterized the interlude as featuring the relative continuity of administrative practices retaining “the same [British colonial] machinery, though adapting it to suit their own convenience” (p. 102). In the case of the Shan States, the Japanese officials sought the endorsement of the *saopha* and retained them in a quasi-formal role.

The Shan State experienced disruptions from the conflict. Most of the cities of the Shan State experienced bombing. Fighting took place with the Allied forces of the British colonial armies, Kuomintang, and the Americans pitted against those of the Japanese and Siamese. However, Japanese commanders took steps to restrict the operations by ethnic-Burman-led, Japanese-allied forces in the Shan States (Sai Aung Tun, 2009, pp. 191-195).

Japanese efforts to exercise control over the Shan States included the establishment of the Japanese Military Administration and the prodding of the *saopha* to take an oath of allegiance (Cady 1960, p. 442). In December 1943, the Japanese government transferred all of the Shan States (except for Kengtung and Mongpan (Mong Pawn)) to the Minister of Home Affairs, under the Japanese-installed Government of Burma (Furnivall, 1960, pp. 17, 93; Taylor, 2009, p. 228).

The population of the statelets of Kengtung (the largest of the Shan States) and

Mongpan, located to its west, experienced a different intervention. In 1942, the units of the Siamese military occupied these areas (adjacent to Siam) with the permission of the Japanese government.⁸⁸ The Japanese government ceded the two statelets to the Siamese government. The decision to transfer these areas along with others in French Indochina and British Malaya appears to reflect Japanese efforts to sustain Siam's continued position of neutrality in the war.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the treatment of the population by Siamese troops is characterized by several sources as being more severe than that of the Japanese (Personal Communication, Gordon Young, March 15, 2012). Their actions incited at least two revolts: one in Kengtung, which was led by an ethnic Lahu leader known for his prowess as a hunter, and the other in Mong Pawn which was led by an ethnic Shan (Personal Communication, Gordon Young, March 15, 2012).

The brief occupation produced at least three legacies for state formation. As suggested by Furnivall (1960, p. 24), the fascist nature of the Japanese-imposed unitary state structure left local leaders skeptical of the merits of a unitary structure for the future Union of Burma. Two, the Siamese occupation generated an unpopular disposition among segments of the population in Kengtung and Mongpan towards Siam/Thailand. This contempt would play a role in the decision by Shan leaders to join with others in forming the Union of Burma, rather than pursue status within Siam.⁹⁰ Three, the creation of the Burma East Asia Youth League, a mass organization supported by Japanese allowed for the formation of trans-ethnic political alliances among Leftist, anti-Imperialist political activists. These wartime developments would influence on immediate post-war politics of Shan State.

⁸⁸ From 1939 to 1948, the Kingdom of Thailand temporarily reverted to its earlier name – the Kingdom of Siam.

⁸⁹ For discussion and information about the Siamese occupation of Shan States during World War II, see Elliot (1999), Forbes and Henley (2015), Kerdphol (2014), and Trager (1971).

⁹⁰ Sao Sailong, the *saopha* of Kengtung, noted in an interview (United States Embassy, Rangoon, 1956, June 6, p. 3) that there was “no sentiment in Kengtung for rejoining Thailand...even the Japanese were better and had been a restraining influence on the Thais.”

Patterns of Authority in Post-World War II Shan State (1945-2011)

Sub-national administrative practices in the post-war Shan State can be divided into four periods that reflect the formal changes in local administrative systems: one, a transition period (1945-1948), involving the reassertion of rule by the *saopha* and the establishment of the Union of Burma; two, the *saopha* period (1948-1959), featuring hybrid structures of both local *saopha* administration and the Shan State Government, but also gradual formal and *ad hoc* expansion of the role of the *Tatmadaw* in administration; three, the Shan State Government period (1959-1962), characterized by a continued transition involving the formal transfer of authority from the *saopha* administration to the Shan State Government and continued informal and formal role for *Tatmadaw* in civil administration; and, finally, a long running period of military dictatorship (1962-1997), led by *Tatmadaw* officers and appointees, which engaged in far-reaching economic and political reforms.

During this period *Tatmadaw*-led forces addressed both military threats and political opposition through increasingly coercive measures, rather than engage in political compromise. In Shan State, the *Tatmadaw's* deployment initially focused on addressing armed challenges foreign and domestic in origin. By 1958, the growing assertiveness by society and the politicization of the secession clause led to mission creep, involving the *Tatmadaw's* increased use of coercion sanction to dampen any possible agitation from society. And while the threat from the first wave of armed insurrection dissipated, the political deadlock at the national level provided an opportunity for *Tatmadaw* leaders to step in and take control of the Union government. Under the first brief period of direct, military rule (1958-60), a restructuring of the administrative system involving the formal transfer of the *saopha* authority to the Shan State Government took place. And the second *Tatmadaw* take over in 1962 initiated a prolonged period of *Tatmadaw* rule that lasted until 2011.

Transition to Independence (1945-1948)

In 1945, when the Japanese had surrendered, the *saopha* resumed in full administration tasks executed during the colonial period (Taylor, 2009, p. 230). Yawnghwe (2010) notes that their activities included support for "judges, ministers, officers, clerks, policemen, guards, some categories of teachers, upkeep of religious institutions and edifices, expenses of local administration, and jails and court-houses had to be met" (p. 79). Their continued support for religious organizations highlights the pervasive influence of the *saopha* in the daily life of the predominately Buddhist population and an informal, traditional basis for their power. In the period from 1945 to 1948, a transition period took place involving the establishment of the Union of Burma and negotiation of arrangements between the local authorities and the central government.

By 1945, the British military authorities had also returned and established the Civil Affairs Service (Burma) (CAS-B). Officers appointed by the CAS-B played a supervisory role in the interim administration of Shan State.⁹¹ But reports (Mangrai, 1965, p. 307; Tinker, 1956, p. 160) indicates that officials from the colonial period Frontier Area Services administered the Shan and other non-Burma areas after World War II, but were replaced by Shan State Civil Service of the Shan State Government in 1948.⁹² In April 1947, at a meeting in Panglong, both *saopha* and people's representatives formed an executive body known as the Shan States Council to represent the Shan States.⁹³ At this point, the crumbling of the British Empire presented a juncture in the Shan States' political history as its political leaders faced decisions over their future political status.

Earlier, a white paper issued by the British government in May 1945, indicated its

⁹¹ Harold Young, an American missionary in China and Shan State and advisor to British during World War Two, served as resident in (Marn Long) Manglung during this period (Personal Communication, Gordon Young, March 15, 2012).

⁹² The Burma Frontier Service formed the bureaucratic arm of the Frontier Areas Administration, which was directly responsible to the Governor of Burma. Under the military-government led by General Ne Win from (1958-1960), a new special border administration program took this name.

⁹³ The Shan State Council initially had 15 members but was later expanded to 66 members.

willingness to support a union of the Frontier Areas with Ministerial Burma, noting that the former “be subject to a special regime under the Governor until such time as their inhabitants signify their desire for some suitable form of amalgamation of their territories with Burma proper” (*Burma: Statement of Policy by His Majesty's Government*, 1945, pp. 9-11). In early 1947, Aung San, the preeminent leader of the Burman nationalist movement, traveled to London for negotiations and secured approval from the British government for independence.⁹⁴ Non-Burman leaders were not present. Some expressed concern that negotiations did not take their interests into consideration.⁹⁵ After Aung San's return from London, leaders from ethnic Burman, Chin, Shan, and Kachin areas met for discussions in Panglong, a village in the Shan States in February 1947. The leaders agreed to come together and form the Union of Burma and issued the Panglong Agreement. Included in the agreement was the provision that “Full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas is accepted in *principle*.”⁹⁶

The agreement is sometimes uncritically celebrated as a foundational event for the Union of Burma involving cooperation among multi-ethnic leaders. Several scholars point out the discourse on the Panglong Agreement and its significance has shifted over time. Mandy Sadan (2013) notes, “The Agreement itself made clear that its objective was primarily to speed up the process of independence rather than attempt to determine all details with absolute clarity beforehand” (p. 272). She further argues that as early as 1953, the expedient nature of the agreement began to be downplayed in public understanding and gave way to a revised concept known as the Panglong spirit (Sadan, 2013, p. 272). Yawngghwe (2010) indicates that Shan leaders “were made to understand that changes, if desired, would be made

⁹⁴ See *Aung San – Attlee Agreement* (1947).

⁹⁵ Several secondary sources note that Sao Shwe Thaik – the *saopha* of Yawngghwe – reportedly dispatched a telegram to British officials explaining that Aung San did not have the authority to negotiate on their behalf (Elliot, 2006, p. 162; Lintner, 1984, p. 407; Yawngghwe, 2010, p. 134). Burmese politicians and the *Tatmadaw* reportedly branded the Yawngghwe prince as unpatriotic for sending this cable (Yawngghwe, 2010, p. 134).

⁹⁶ *Panglong Agreement* (1947), emphasis mine

[to the 1947 Constitution] after independence. The important point was to gain independence as soon as possible” (p. 35). Sadan provides a perspective counter to the dominant nationalist narrative that the meeting was not the focus of attention by the public at the time. It was considered something that merely paved the way for more concrete negotiations around the nature of the new Kachin State.⁹⁷ From these and other perspectives, the agreement can be considered an *ad hoc* and motivated by political expediency.

After the Panglong meeting, on July 19, 1947, a political rival assassinated Aung San, the Burman nationalist hero, and six of his cabinet members. U Nu, a Burman nationalist leader, presided over the final negotiations for independence from Britain, the drafting of a new Constitution, and became Burma’s first Prime Minister.⁹⁸ Members of the Constitutional Drafting Assembly (CDA) spent only a little more than three months drafting the 1947 Constitution of the Union of Burma.⁹⁹ The Constitution embodied several of the political demands discussed among leaders at the meeting in Panglong in 1947, but not all. Silverstein (1958) points out, "The formal language of the Constitution does not give evidence of all the concessions in the agreements which the Burmese and frontier areas people made both prior to and during the drafting of the Constitution" (p. 47).

Chapter X of the 1947 Constitution – popularly known as the "secession clause" – emerged in the mid-1950s as the most politically contentious issues coming out the negotiations.¹⁰⁰ The provision enumerated the right for the Shan State¹⁰¹ (and Karenni State) to hold a referendum on secession after ten years. Josef Silverstein (1958) describes the clause as “a measure of protection for those hill peoples who were dubious about allying

⁹⁷ For a critical discussion of Panglong Agreement, see Sadan (2013, pp. 272-273).

⁹⁸ Sao Shwe Thaik, the *saopha* of Yawnghe, became Burma's first President. Under the 1947 Constitution, the position involved mainly ceremonial duties with limited political power.

⁹⁹ Yawnghe (2010) points out that the absence of available records about the CDA limits our knowledge of the process.

¹⁰⁰ A similar clause enumerating the rights of ethnic states to secede present in the 1924 Constitution of the USSR served as the inspiration for the inclusion of Article X in the 1947 Constitution of the Union of Burma.

¹⁰¹ The Shan States became Shan State in 1948 under the 1947 Constitution. The term Shan States is used to denote the area before 1948.

themselves with the dominant and politically more advanced state of Burma proper” (p. 55).

Within a few years, the politicization of the secession issue served as a basis for the deterioration of relations between an ethnocratic-Burman state and the population of Shan State.

***Saopha* Administration (1948-1959)**

A ceremony held in Rangoon on January 4, 1948, marked Burma’s formal independence. However, this watershed had no immediately discernable impact in rural Shan State. Instead, the practices of administration resumed earlier patterns operative in the colonial period. The retention of a feudalistic administrative system represents a continuity of the colonial period arrangement. However, the Shan State Government and the *Tatmadaw* gradually took on the duties of the *saopha* administration and eventually replaced it.¹⁰²

The governing structures of Shan State reflect a hybrid arrangement featuring semi-feudal administrative of *saopha* and the Shan State Government.¹⁰³ The operation of the official administrative structures in Shan State in the period from 1948 to 1962 is difficult to piece together for several reasons. Until 1962, the system was complex, fluid, not uniform, and distinct from other areas of Burma. As several sources point out, the 1947 Constitution did not clearly define the powers of the *saopha* and in some instance put forth provisions that were contradictory to one another.¹⁰⁴ A further complication is that the 33 *saopha*-led statelets differed in terms of their size, wealth, and the number of administrative personnel.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² One difference is that the formalized hierarchy among the chieftains had become level. In the colonial period, the ruler of each statelet held a title, which based upon their rank within the traditional system of Shan kingship. The highest rank was *saopha*, followed by the lesser positions of *myosa* and *ngwegunhwus*. In the late 1930s, there were six *saopha* in Southern Shan State and 11 *saopha*, 11 *myosa*, and four *ngwegunhwus* in Northern Shan State. After Independence, all rulers became known as *saopha* as the formal use of the hierarchy was discontinued. See Mangrai (1965, p. 312); Furnivall (1960, p. 11).

¹⁰³ For analysis and details about the Shan State Government, see Furnivall (1960, pp. 99-104) and Chapter IX Article 160 of the 1947 Constitution (Government of Burma, 1947).

¹⁰⁴ For further discussion, see Ba Thann Win (n.d., pp. 38-39) and Constitution Revision Steering Committee (Shan State) (1961).

¹⁰⁵ For instance, the size of the *saopha*-ruled statelets varied from roughly twenty to about 12,000 square miles. The number of statelets fluctuated over time so that there were around 40 at the time of annexation, 32 when the Japanese invaded, and 33 in the period after Independence. Furnivall (1960, p. 10)

Another challenge is that many administrative records useful for close analysis are not available. They are reportedly lost or destroyed. This means that many features of the period are not well known.

An overview of the structure of the administrative system of Shan State featuring the Shan State Government and the *saopha* system¹⁰⁶ in this period from 1948 to 1959 is useful for understanding the impact of reforms.¹⁰⁷ Under the 1948 Constitution, a state-level government structure became one of four subnational administrative units in the Union of Burma.¹⁰⁸ The Shan State Government functioned as the executive branch for Shan State. Furnivall (1960, p. 103) and Tinker (1967, p. 158) described the machinery of the Shan State Government as closely paralleling the arrangement found in Burma Proper. In this system, the Prime Minister appointed the Minister of Shan State, also known as the Head of Shan State (also referred to as the Union Minister of Shan State). The Minister of Shan State had an office in the Government Secretariat in Rangoon and another office in the Shan State Secretariat in Taunggyi. The Shan State Government also had a Cabinet of State Ministers. Its members were its Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and state ministers. The latter were the heads of the various ministries and departments operating in Shan State.¹⁰⁹

The Shan State Civil Service was the operational arm of the Shan State Government. In term of direct administration, Furnivall (1960, p. 103) notes a division of administrative labor between territorial and functional orientations. The Shan State Government officials involved in functionally oriented activities were the state level officials of government

¹⁰⁶ For discussion of the *saopha* administrative system, see Ba Thann Win (n.d.), Sai Aung Tun (2009), and Sao Noan Oo (n.d.).

¹⁰⁷ For analysis of the basic structure of the state-level Shan State Government, see Ba Thann Win (n.d.), Furnivall (1960), Maung Maung (1959, pp. 176-179), and Tinker (1967, pp. 158-163).

¹⁰⁸ The three others were the Kachin, Kayah and Karen states. States and divisions were subnational administrative units below the national or Union-level government. States are areas, which non-Burman populations make up the majority. The 1974 Constitutions established the Chin, Mon, and Rakhine states.

¹⁰⁹ Tinker (1967, p. 158) notes that the Shan State Government operated a Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance and Revenue, and Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Works. Furnivall (1960) offers a different account, noting that after 1956, “the Vice-Chairman was in charge of Home Affairs, and the other Ministries dealt respectively with National Solidarity and Information; Education and Health; Finance and Revenue; Land utilization; and Public Works and Irrigation” (p. 101).

ministries.

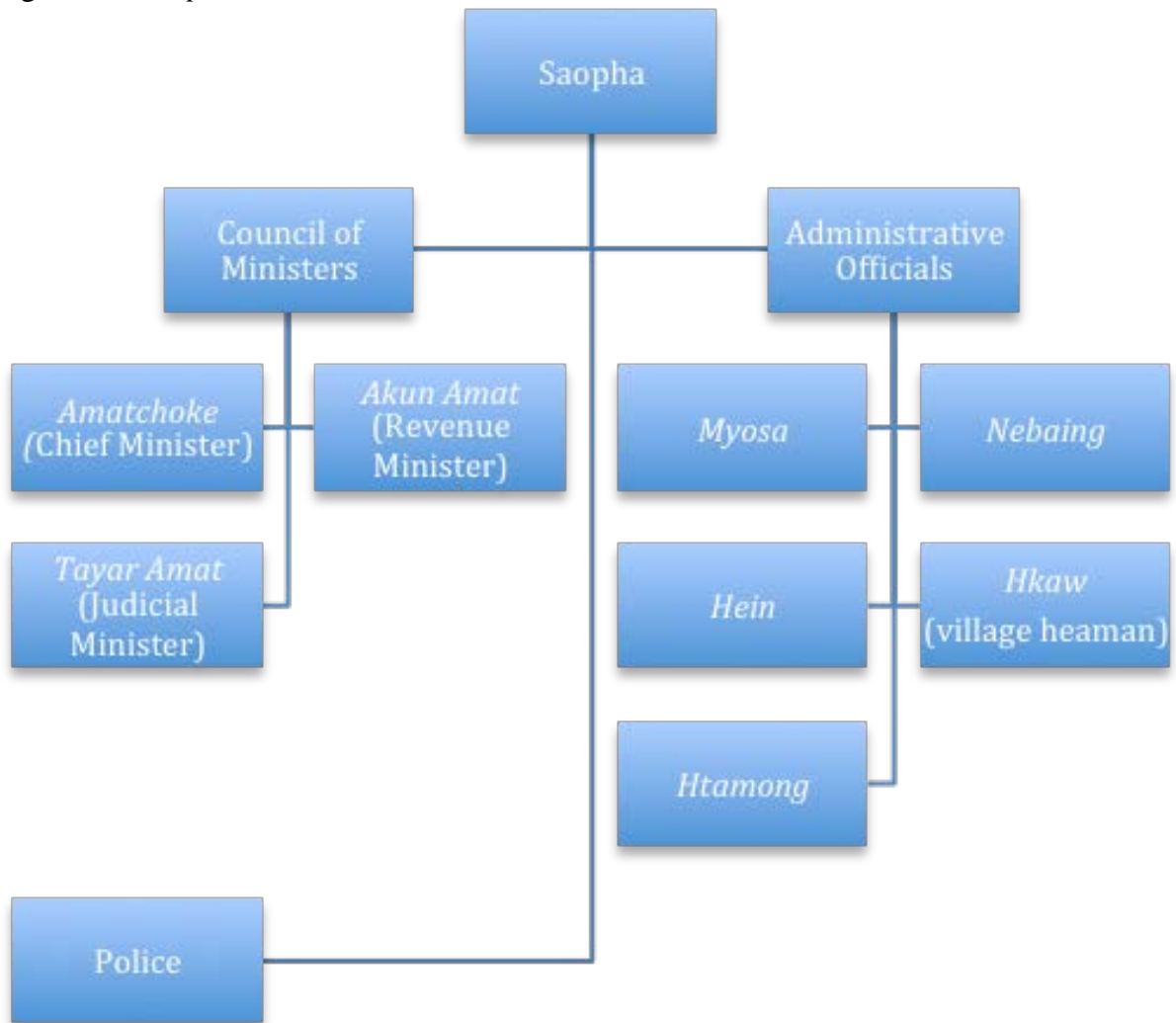
A complimentary coterie of bureaucrats engaged in territorial administration. These included officials with the positions of Residents, Assistant Residents of the Senior Branch, and Assistant Residents of the Junior Branch.¹¹⁰ The duties involved oversight of the *saopha* and other functions (Furnivall, 1960, p. 93). The residents continued the colonial practice directly administering the five municipalities – Taunggyi, Lashio, Hopang, Loilem, and Loimwe – and had other administrative responsibilities for surrounding areas that were administrative districts: Northeastern Shan States (Lashio), Northeast Special District (Hopang), Eastern Shan State (Loimwe), Loilem District (Loilem), and Taunggyi District (Taunggyi). The judicial functions also involved hearing cases not under the purview of customary law, such as those between ethnic Shans and foreigners (Ba Thann Win, n.d.). The Shan State Government also operated police forces known as the Shan State Police. They operated in the municipal areas and other special zones such as the mining enclaves in Bawdwin and Namtu in Namtu Township. Outside of these areas, the police forces of the *saopha* had jurisdiction (Shan State Government, 1961).

A central feature that distinguishes the administration of the Shan State different from areas of Burma Proper in the period from 1948 to 1959 is the *saopha*-led bureaucracy. *Saopha* officials initially retained their local administrative duties performed during the colonial period, involving responsibilities for revenue, justice and law and order. In each of the 33 statelets, a *saopha* presided over a traditional administrative hierarchy distinct from the Shan State Government. At the upper strata of the administration were senior officials, such as *Amatchoke* (Chief Minister), *Akun Amat* (Revenue Minister), and *Tayar Amat* (Judicial Minister). They comprised a Council of Ministers, who advised the *saopha*. Officials

¹¹⁰ According to Furnivall (1960, p. 103), the Senior Branch corresponded to the Burma Civil Service (BCS) in Burma Proper, and the Junior Branch correspond to those of a subordinate of the BCS also found in Burma proper. The officials held "appointments of Township Officer, Headquarters Magistrate, Treasury Officer or Additional Magistrate."

holding the positions of *myosa* and *nebaing* made up the mid-level strata and coordinated their administration of village circles through lower level functionaries. These included *hein* (a minor official in charge of a small district), *htamong* (a minor official in charge of an area smaller than that of a *hein*), and *hkaw* or village headman. The *saopha* also operated a local police force charged with maintaining order.

Figure 2.2: *Saopha* Administrative Structures, 1948 to 1959



(Sources: Ba Thann Win, n.d.; Sai Aung Tun, 2009; Sao Noan Oo, 2009.)

The *saopha* exercised control through their prerogatives as the chief administrator for his bureaucracy and the power of appointment of his officials. Many of the *saopha* officials maintained trans-generational bonds of service and loyalty to the *saopha*. The thrust of administration involved their local authorities such as *heng*, *nebaing*, *htamong*, *hkaw*, and

police. The *saopha* system drew upon customary practices developed over several hundred years.¹¹¹

In addition to local administrative authority, *saopha* also exercised legislative powers. The 1947 Constitution vested legislative responsibilities in a national-level Union Assembly made up of two bodies.¹¹² For the Chamber of Nationalities, the representatives from Shan State were chosen by the *saopha* from among themselves. Constitutional reforms in 1959 ended this practice (Sai Aung Tun, 2009). The *saopha* were not eligible to serve in the Chamber of Deputies (Furnivall, 1960, pp. 37-39, 100-102; Government of Burma, 1947).¹¹³

For Shan State, its representatives for both chambers of the Union Assembly served as members of the Shan State Council, which functioned as Shan State's parliament. The Shan State Council exercises authority to legislate on matters proscribed within the limits of the State Legislature List in the 1947 Constitution (Government of Burma, 1947). For laws that the Shan State Council was not designated as competent to legislate, it exercised the authority to make recommendations to the Union Assembly (Furnivall, 1960, p. 101).

The Shan State Government initially possessed only limited capacity. For instance, the top officials at first based themselves in Rangoon, rather than Taunggyi, the administrative capital of Shan State. Only in April 1951, did the organization move to Shan State (Ba Thann Win, n.d., p. xiii). Furnivall (1960, pp. 103-104) indicates that Shan State Government initially had only a few officials and lacked capable officers with knowledge of Shan State.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Some features of the traditional system varied from place to place. For instance, the names for positions within system varied from region to region. The *saopha* statelets in the north used different terms for officers than those in the south. For multi-ethnic areas, such as the ethnic Kachin inhabited areas of Kutkai in northern Shan State, the system incorporated tradition Kachin local administrative customs based upon the leadership of local chiefs known as *duwa* into the *saopha* system.

¹¹² The Chamber of Nationalities represented the constituent territories. In 1954, after the addition of Karen State, membership totaled 125 of which twenty-five were from Shan State.

¹¹³ The Chamber of Deputies represents the population with one representative per 100,000 people. There were 250 members of which 25 came from Shan State.

¹¹⁴ Available data indicate that in 1956, the territorial administration consisted of five Residents, twenty Assistant Residents (Senior Branch) and twenty Assistant Residents (Junior Branch). In addition, three

It is also important to recognize the different patterns of interaction between the officials from the *saopha* and Shan State administrators with the population. The *saopha* system directly interfaced with the population through lower tier functionaries, such as *htamong*, *nebaings*, and *heng* and implemented rules in accordance with customary practices developed over hundred of years. By contrast, Ba Win Thann (n.d., p. 262), a scholar and Shan State native, notes that as late as 1959, some villages had hardly any contact with Shan State Government.

Challenges to the *Saopha* Order

In the period from 1948 to 1959, the population experienced several changes that disrupted people's lives. The outbreak of sustained armed conflicts produced dramatic upheaval. The deployment of *Tatmadaw*'s troops to address threats presented by armed groups involved the expansion of the military's role in society. At the same time, several continuous political issues emerged. One was the opposition to feudal authority by leftist political groups within and beyond Shan State and pressure against supporters of the secessionist movement. The other was growing resentment within Shan State about the political arrangements between the Shan State and the central government.

In 1949, war erupted in Shan State. The conflicts involved armed resistance by ethnic Pa-O, Karen, Kachin, and Communist organizations and an incursion by Kuomintang (KMT) troops – fleeing from China's newly ascendant Communist Party-led government – pitted against the *Tatmadaw* and local state security forces. Conflict began in late 1949, when the defection of Lu Han, the Governor of Yunnan province in southwest China, to the Communists triggered the collapse of the KMT's position. The KMT units folded like a house of cards and began escaping the onslaught by retreating to Burma and Indochina.

departmental officials ran the six separate departments. Of these, the Education Department was the most organized and staffed by 10 officials.

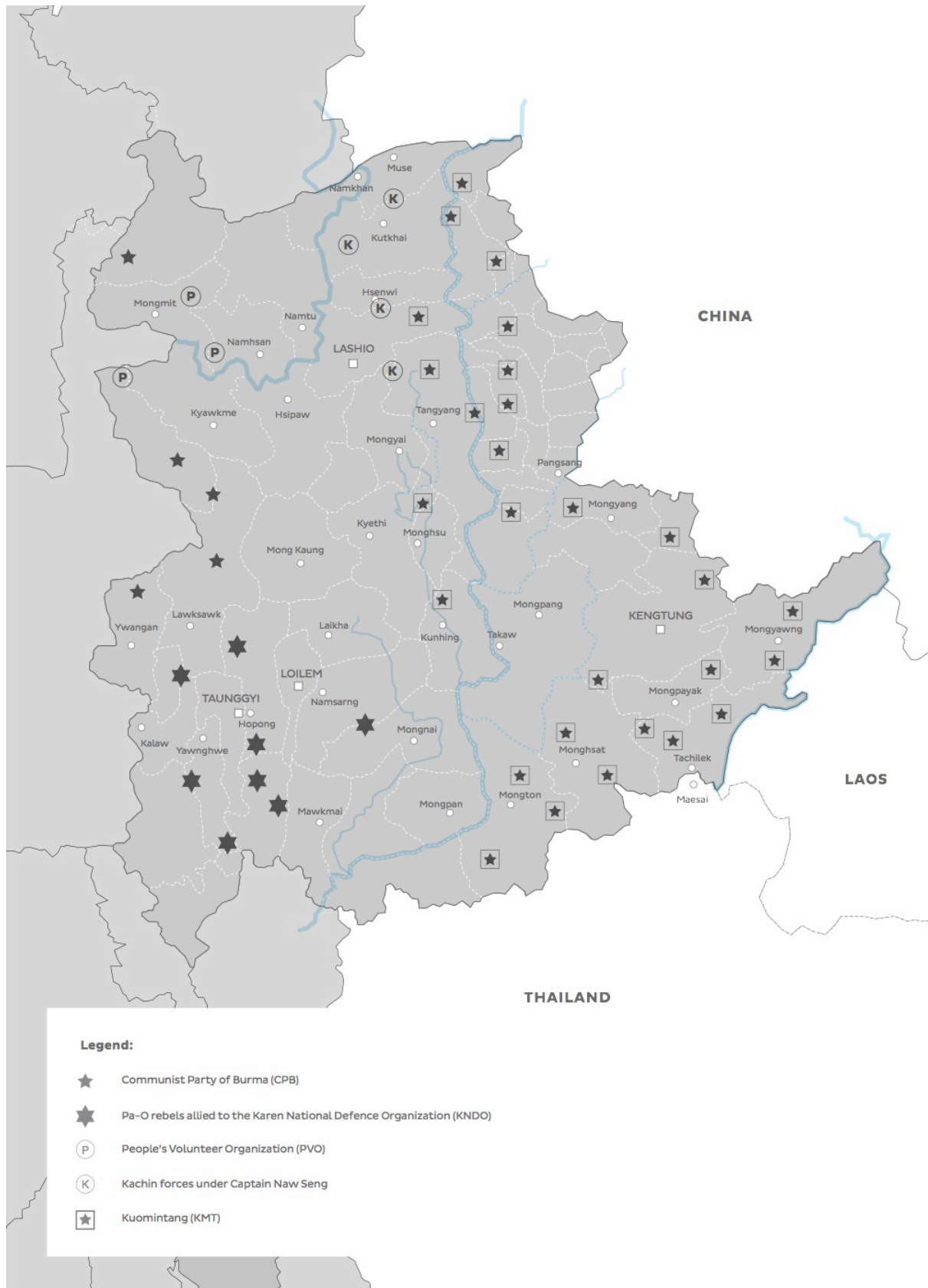


Figure 2.3: Major Armed Resistance Organizations in Shan State (1949-1951)¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ This map was adapted by the author from Yawnghwe (2010) and based on other sources including Lintner (1999) and Smith (1999).

Burma's local and national security forces proved incapable of effectively subduing the KMT. The *Tatmadaw* leaders had deployed units across the country to put down numerous revolts and did not possess the resources necessary for sustained operations against the KMT. In an effort to address this overstretch, *saopha* officials hastily raised local levies to defend villages (Yawnghwe, 2010, p. 34). A stalemate ensued between the KMT and government allied forces. The KMT leadership focused on shoring up its position, while *Tatmadaw* units engaged in limited campaigns to contain the KMT.¹¹⁶ Finally, in late 1960 and early 1961, the *Tatmadaw* engaged in joint operations with the Chinese People's Liberation Army to drive out the KMT from their bases located in areas along the Mekong River (Maung Aung Myoe, 1990).

The KMT remnants experienced a dire situation in Shan State. When they first arrived, they were unwelcome intruders in a foreign country with limited access to food and arms. The leadership adopted several strategies in an attempt to elicit support from a broad range of groups with mixed results. One is that the KMT engaged in a campaign aimed to gain support from the ethnic Shan population. The KMT leaders distributed propaganda leaflets imploring the local population to join them in fighting the Burmese. They also approached several *saopha* and their relatives and asked for assistance. Their efforts at garnering support from ethnic Shans had only limited success (Elliot, 2006).

While they failed to make inroads with the lowland ethnic Shan population, their efforts to gain support from the non-Shan populations in the highland areas along the Burma's border with Yunnan fared better. Many ethnic Lahu, Wa, and Akha communities located in areas adjacent to the China border supported with the anti-Communist position of the former KMT and shared a common *lingua franca*, the Yunnanese dialect of Chinese. By

¹¹⁶ For analysis of KMT troops in Shan State, see Gibson and Chen (2011); Government of Burma (1953), Lintner (1993, September 16, pp. 56-58), Taylor (1973), and Sai Aung Tun (2009, pp. 303-326).

the mid-1950s, the estimated number of troops had ballooned to over ten thousand troops (Government of Burma, 1954).

The KMT forces also procured resources by tapping into the powerful anti-Communist coalition of the Taiwanese, Thai, and US governments. The KMT remnants presented themselves to anti-Communist governments as a frontline bulwark against the threat of Chinese Communist expansion into Southeast Asia. The Eisenhower administration engaged in a classified program of material support for the KMT known as Operation Paper. The initiative reflected America's Cold War concerns in Asia. The classified program aimed to use the KMT to attack Yunnan and compel the Chinese government to divert troops from the Korean conflict.¹¹⁷ But more importantly, the aid provided a critical infusion of support that allowed them to assert control over the opium trade.¹¹⁸

The KMT incursion had significant political consequences. Their presence provided an opportunity for General Maung Maung to wrestle the *Tatmadaw* out from under President U Nu's nominal control and also to take on a greater role in the "administration" of Shan State (Callahan, 2003). Regarding the impacts of the KMT on Shan State's population, Yawnghwe (2010) observes "though the Chinese KMT were exploitative, they rarely brutalized villagers nor did they go out of the way to express contempt for things Shan, as did Burmese soldiers" (p. 105).¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, practices by the KMT that hampered the efforts of the ethnic Shan resistance movement led many Shan nationalists to conclude that the KMT was attempting to suppress the emergence of a unified Shan movement, which presented a potential rival for

¹¹⁷ An important legacy of this policy is that it involved the first operation in which the newly formed Central Intelligence Agency supported proxy forces for political objectives. For discussion of the role of support for the KMT in Burma as part of US policy of containing communism in Asia, see Clymer (2015), Gibson and Chen (2011, pp. 45-56, 87-96, 130-8), Lintner (1993, p. 56) and McCoy (1972, pp. 126-135).

¹¹⁸ The KMT forces adopted a "Southern Strategy" that involved the formation of alliances with ethnic Karen and Mon insurgents operating in areas of southern Burma near the Andaman Sea. The KMT constructed a string of military bases running from Shan State to the Karen and Mon areas. Attempts at resupply by sea proved unsuccessful for logistical reasons (Ba Thann Win, n.d., pp. 101-102; Gibson and Chen, 2011, pp. 121-130; Sai Aung Tun, 2009, pp. 306-309).

¹¹⁹ Studies of the KMT in Burma often focus on their mistreatment of the Shan State population (e.g. Lewis, 1957). For a perspective of the KMT, their dependents and other refugees from Yunnan in Shan State, see Chang (2014) and Ba Thann Win (n.d., pp. 142-143).

foreign support.¹²⁰

Table 2.1: Armed resistance organizations in Burma by strength, 1945-1958

Organization	1948 (March)	1948 (August)	1945-50	1951-52	1955-56	1958
Communist (White Flag)	3,000	5,000	10,000	12,000	7,000	2,000
Forces that Went Underground (mutinies)		3,000	5,000			
People's Volunteer Organization (White Band)		5,000	15,000	8,000	3,000	
People's Volunteer Organization (Red Flag)		1,000	1,500	1,000	500	300
Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO)			10,000	10,000	7,500	5,000
Mujahid		1,000	1,500	1,000	200	150
Mon			1,500	800	400	50
Pa-O			1,000	700	400	
Total	3,000	15,000	45,500	33,500	19,000	7,500

(Source: Yebaw Thit Maung, 1990)

Multiple instances of armed resistance against the government erupted within Shan State in the late 1940s and presented a challenge to state authority. In this first period of militarized conflicts (1948-1958), units of armed resistance organizations operated in several regions within Burma (See Table 2.1). The groups operating in the Shan State included leftist insurgencies of the “White Flag” faction of the Communist Party of Burma and the “White Band” faction of the People’s Volunteers Organization (PVO), ethnonationalist movements led by ethnic Karen, Kachin, and Pa-O, and the short-lived Shan State Communist Party (SSCP) (See Appendix Three). The latter represents a fusion of leftist and ethnonationalist ideals.¹²¹ Aside from the ethnic Pa-O uprising, the insurrections attracted only limited local support. Several groups originated in areas located beyond Shan State, and many – such as

¹²⁰ For discussion of tensions between KMT and Shan population, see Elliot (2006), McCoy (1972), and Yawnghwe (2010).

¹²¹ The short-lived Shan State Communist Party, established in 1956 by ethnic Shan members of the Burmese Communist Party in response to their concerns about ethnic discrimination, succeeded in attracting approximately 400 members. The group never posed much of a challenge and its influence quickly folded in response to the government’s “Arms for Democracy” amnesty program in the late 1950s. Many members either accepted the amnesty or joined the embryonic Shan ethnic resistance movement (“Shan State Communist Party,” 1956, August 22).

CPB and PVOs – appear not to possess well-developed ties to local communities (See Table 2.1).

The Pa-O rebellion presented one of the most durable of these. Unlike the other groups, the Pa-O movement directed its efforts against the ethnic Shan *saopha*, rather than the national government. The movement constituted a reaction against domination by ethnic Shan that took the form of an anti-feudalist movement. Its operations concentrated among ethnic Pa-O communities in southern Shan State. In 1959, after the *saopha* had transferred power to the government, the Pa-O leaders established a political party and contested the 1960 election. But, when the *Tatmadaw* seized power in 1962 coup, many of the Pa-O went underground again and resumed armed struggle. They directed their resistance towards the Tatmadaw-led government (Lintner, 1999, p. 403).

At the same time, Leftist political movements operating at both the local and national level and pursuing anti-feudalist goals presented a challenge to the rule of the *saopha*. The Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League (AFPFL), a coalition of ethnic-Burman-led political parties, and the Shan State Peoples Freedom League (SSPFL), a Shan State-based political party, are the two political organizations that took the lead in advocating for the abolition of the feudal authority of the *saopha*.

The anti-feudal movement within Shan State germinated during the nationalist struggles against colonial rule. Several students attended schools and institutions in Rangoon during the immediate pre-war period and developed contacts with the Burman-student-led *thakin* faction of the Burmese nationalist movement. The *thakin*, such as Aung San and U Nu, later ascended to dominate national politics as heads of the AFPFL. During World War II, many students also participated in the East Asia Youth League (after 1944 called "All Burma Youth League") – a mass-based, political organization operating during the Japanese Occupation. Through this organization, they gained exposure to leftist ideologies and Burman

nationalist principles and developed personal ties with ethnic-Burman political leaders.¹²²

Several of these political activists established the SSPFL in 1946. The platform of the organization advocated anti-feudalism, but also shared other positions common to the AFPFL. Among these shared issues were support for anti-colonialism, Shan-Burmese unity, independence, and Socialism (Ba Win Thann, n.d.; Government of the Tailand Revolutionary Council, 1986, p. 36). The SSPFL achieved some success in electoral politics, but its appeal was largely limited to the urban areas.¹²³ In an attempt to create a mass-based organization to challenge the pro-*saopha* sentiment in rural areas, the party leaders also established the Shan State Peasants' Organization. However, this appears to have also had only limited success in making inroads with the predominantly pro-feudal rural population. Nevertheless, the anti-feudal movement succeeded in applying political pressure on the *saopha* to implement political reforms through organizing mass rallies. The provision of support to the SSPFL by AFPFL and *Tatmadaw* leaders led several feudalists to conclude that the SSPFL was a political instrument of the Burman political establishment established to weaken their authority (Yawnghwe, 2010, p. 107).

“War Making and State Making” in Shan State

In 1948, when Burma became an independent country, relations between the ethnic dominated Union government and the Shan State population reached an unprecedented level of interconnectedness. Previous interactions between ethnic Burmans and the population of Shan State were limited. Just as ethnic relations were limited, the Shan State did not have any background of regular administration directed from either early Burma kings or the British government. Tinker (1967) suggests, “the impact of the British rule upon the Shans was probably less significant than upon any of the remaining peoples of Burma” (p. 159).

The central feature of relations between the agents of the central state and Shan State

¹²² For a list of the SSPFL committee members, see TRC (1986, pp. 35-36).

¹²³ Josef Silverstein (1958, p. 50), an American academic conducting research in Shan State in the late 1950s, placed its membership in the thousands.

society was an escalation of tension operating on several levels. One was a political tension between the central and local state. Two, the ethnocentric dimension of states society relations involved Burman dominated central government and *Tatmadaw* efforts at asserting control over the population of Shan State. Three, the mistreatment of the local population by units of the *Tatmadaw* was another source of resentment.

Relations between the Burman leadership of the AFPFL-led government and the *Tatmadaw* with society in the Shan State became increasingly contentious over time. One source of tension was the continued pressure for the *saopha* to give up their authority and the secession clause. In 1952, the *saopha* formally announced in principle their relinquishment of authority. But the process involved getting thirty-three *saopha* on board and identifying an arrangement agreeable to all parties.¹²⁴

The ethnic-Burman-dominated national political elites and *Tatmadaw* leaders presented a far more formidable challenge to the political authority of the *saopha*. Political leaders, security officials, and other Burman nationalists opposed the *saopha* on several grounds. One reason was ideological. The retention of a feudal-inspired political order did not mesh with their socialist inspired vision of society. A second is ethnocentric. The *saopha* presented an impediment to the ability of the Burman-dominated government to exercise authority in Shan State. A final basis of opposition reflects the security concerns of the *Tatmadaw*. Specifically, they feared that Shan State leaders could employ the secession clause to hold a referendum. This held the prospect of secession and possible entanglement in Cold War driven politics of the region. A few progressive *saopha* also acknowledged that the semi-feudal arrangement was no longer viable and a more democratic form of administration was necessary. But, the process of finding a suitable arraignment was difficult. As Silverstein

¹²⁴ The question of when the *saopha* committed to give up their authority is difficult to determine and reflects their difficulties in forming a consensus on the terms of their withdrawal. Yawnghwe (2010, p. 137) notes that the *saopha* had planned to give up their authority since 1952. Tinker (1967) indicates that in December, the *saopha* announced their intentions to transfer judicial responsibilities to the Shan State Government and on August 18, 1951, they announced plans to surrender administrative authority.

(1958) notes, the “*saopha* faced the challenge of how to transfer their administrative power to the people and what compensation they should receive” (p. 49).

Burman elites engaged in a broad range of activities aimed to undercut the influence of the *saopha*. Central government leaders reportedly dispatched agents to the Shan State to spread anti-*saopha* propaganda as early as the mid-1940s.¹²⁵ The provision of support and guidance by leaders of the AFPFL to the Shan State Peoples' Freedom League (SSPFL) was example of support for a political movement that opposed the *saopha*. At the same time, relations between *saopha* and politicians of the AFPFL were cordial.

The print media also disseminated propaganda in an attempt to discredit feudal rule of *saopha*. The *Tatmadaw*'s Military Planning Staff, the predecessor to the Department of Psychological Warfare, published stories with anti-feudal themes in *Myawaddy*, a popular, monthly literary magazine established in 1952.¹²⁶ The *Tatmadaw* also sponsored the publication of popular novels containing anti-feudal themes. One of the most prolific novelists of the anti-*saopha* genre was Bo Ni and described in several accounts as the pseudonym of an officer in the Military Intelligence Service. Bo Ni penned several novels featuring a Burman, *Tatmadaw* officer as the protagonist, who "saved pretty Shan lasses from the clutch of corrupt, treacherous feudal lords" and “foiled dark plots to dismember the Union” (Yawngghwe, 2010, p. 138).

On December 1, 1952, Colonel Aung Gyi addressed a crowd of approximately 5,000 people in Taunggyi. He made two important announcements. One detailed the government's plans to launch an ambitious welfare initiative, known as the *Pyidawtha* ("prosperous royal country"). The other was about new security measures taking place as part of the imposition

¹²⁵ The Secretary of the Shan State Government filed a complaint to General Ne Win, then the Supreme Commander of the *Tatmadaw*, to halt interference in Shan State political affairs after an agent of the Military Intelligence Services, named Maung San Aung, was found expressing anti-*saopha* sentiments (Ba Win Thann n.d., pp. 60-61).

¹²⁶ The *Tatmadaw* founded *Myawaddy* as a means to disseminate anti-Communist propaganda. Apparently, anti-feudalism directed towards *saopha* rule accorded with their goals (Callahan, 2004, pp. 182-3; Bo Bo Lanzin, 2010).

of martial law in parts of the Shan State under the guise of addressing security threats. He boldly heralded the gathering as the second most important in the history of Shan State aside from the one held in February 1947 at Panglong (Ba Thann Win, n.d., pp. 145-146). But rather than mark the dawning of a "golden age" of peace and welfare, the event instead signaled a further militarization of society and efforts by the *Tatmadaw* to extend control over Shan State. The Burmese news media took the opportunity to denigrate the *saopha* and their supporters by publishing articles containing misinformation. As John Cady (1960) remarks, several Burmese newspapers hailed the establishment of military administration in Shan State in 1952 "as a bloodless revolution marking a milestone in the political development of the Shan people and in the destruction of feudal fetishes carried over from British (and pre-British) times" (pp. 638-639).

In December 1952, the *Tatmadaw* imposed martial law over two-thirds of the *saopha*-ruled statelets to assist in combating the KMT and multiple insurgencies (Silverstein, 1958, p. 51). To do so, the *Tatmadaw* established the Military Coordination Committee (MCC) to take over the judicial and security duties of the civilian administrators. The *Tatmadaw* had two times earlier imposed martial law in Shan State.¹²⁷ But this time, it was more both more extensive and significant. Martial law was for a longer duration, almost two years in some places, and its territorial scope was far wider, including 22 of the 33 *saopha* statelets.

Military administration had several, long term implications for Shan State. One, its establishment curtailed the *saopha* authority. Chief among the new procedures was the creation of military courts that tried criminal cases traditionally presided over by the *saopha* according to customary law. An important legacy of the military courts is that some of segments of the local population perceived them as overly lenient towards military personnel

¹²⁷ The government imposed military rule in Shan State in two earlier instances: the Shweli Valley of northern Shan State (June 24, 1950 to June 1951) and Kengtung (August 7, 1950 to August 1, 1951), but it was brief and followed by the resumption of *saopha* authority (Ba Thann Win, n.d., p. 71; Callahan, 2003, p. 156; Tinker, 1967, p. 49).

charged with abuses against the civilians and contributing to an atmosphere of impunity (Ba Thann Win, n.d., p. 149; SSA, 1975). In conjunction with military rule, newly established local level administrative committees led by *Tatmadaw* officers took on a role in coordination the activities of government administrative organizations.

As historian John Cady (1960) explains, “the hereditary Shan chiefs (Sawbwas) resisted firmly early postwar efforts at Burman political infiltration, but during the Kuomintang emergency of 1952 they had agreed to relinquish certain executive powers to the central authority” (pp. 638-639). Callahan (2004, p. 158) cites a report from a British embassy official written after a trip to Shan State in 1953, which supports the view that martial was a response to *saopha* resistance to administrative reforms which would abrogate their “ancient feudal rights.”

After the formal revocation of military administration in late 1954, many *saopha* did not resume some of their earlier administrative tasks. Several duties assumed by *Tatmadaw* administrators during martial law were transferred to the Shan State Government or continued by the *Tatmadaw* (Ba Thann Win, n.d., p. 189; SSA, 1975, p. 257; “Surrender of powers by Saophas,” 1960, November 15).¹²⁸ Shan State Government appointed township officers took on the administrative roles of *saopha* officials (Ba Thann Win, n.d., pp. 152-156, 193). Nevertheless, as the Shan State Government remained under capacity, state officials asked *saopha* officials in some areas to continue their duties (Taylor, 2009, p. 272; Ba Thann Win, n.d., p. 191). At the same time, *Tatmadaw* units exercised both formal and informal influence over society. According to Ba Thann Win (n.d., p. 189), coordination committees established by the *Tatmadaw* under martial law continued to operate, and the *Tatmadaw* established new security and peace preservation committees in each township to

¹²⁸ For a discussion of the early efforts by the *saopha* to transfer authority, see Ba Thann Win, (n.d., pp. 155-157).

coordinate administration.¹²⁹

With the back of the communist insurgents in other areas of Burma broken, and the ethnic Karen insurgents losing cohesion and steam due to the death of Saw Ba U Gyi, their supreme leader, the *Tatmadaw* was able to send more units into Shan State. By the mid-1950s, it had established itself as an extra-legal (and unconstitutional) super-authority (Ba Thann Win, n.d., pp. 152-156; Taylor 2009, p. 272; Yawngghwe, 2010, p. 34). *Tatmadaw* officials also overhauled security forces. In the early independence period, an array of security forces under control of national, state, and local level authorities operated in Shan State (See Table 2.2). National-level organizations were the *Tatmadaw* and the Union Military Police (UMP), a paramilitary unit under the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Shan State Police, whose functions included maintaining order in the Shan State Government-administered municipal areas. At the local level were the *saopha* police and the Shan levies operated by the *saopha* administration.

Table 2.2: Selected State Security Forces in Shan State by Administrative Level, 1948-1962

Name	Controlling Body	Status	Duties
Local Level			
<i>Saopha</i> Police Forces	<i>Saopha</i>	Gradually Disbanded	Civic Policing
Levies	<i>Saopha</i>	Disbanded for lack of funds	Village Defense
State Level			
Shan State Police Force	Shan State Government	Reformed in 1962	Civic Police
National Level			
Union Military Police	Ministry of Home Affairs	Transferred to <i>Tatmadaw</i> in 1962	Paramilitary
<i>Tatmadaw</i>	Ministry of Defense	Expansion	Military/Civil Administration
Frontier Area Administration	Office of the Prime Minister	Disbanded	Military/Civil Administration

In areas of *Tatmadaw*-led administration from 1952 to 1954, *saopha* police forces came under the supervision of the MCC (Ba Thann Win, n.d., p. 187; Shan State

¹²⁹ According to Maung Maung (1974, p. 126), the government did not consider its declaration of military administration as martial law as the *Tatmadaw* took over civilian officials administrative, executive and judicial duties in disturbed districts and safeguarded the fundamental rights of the citizens.

Government, 1961; Taylor, 2009, p. 271). After military rule ended in 1954, local police forces in several areas became integrated into the Shan State Police force.¹³⁰

Local armed units – known as the “Shan levies” – were also disbanded. In the early 1950s, *saopha* raised these forces from among local population to defend against the KMT and other armed resistance organizations. As Ba Thann Win (n.d., p. 170) notes, expected financial support from central state leaders never materialized and contributed to their dissolution. The UMP absorbed some members of the levies.¹³¹ *Tatmadaw*-led reforms of the security and police forces represented a step towards their centralization of control over instruments for coercion.

After martial law expired in late 1954, *Tatmadaw* efforts to address security threats involved continued expansion in civilian affairs. In Shan State and other non-Burman inhabited areas, such as Kachin State, *Tatmadaw* leaders encountered circumstances that differed from the Burman-inhabited areas of earlier operations. Mary Callahan (2003) points out,

field commanders suddenly found themselves acting as administrators and not as the heroic guerilla fighters they had been in the past. Their experience of allying with local Socialist politicians and former *thakin* pocket army leaders in central Burma during the early insurrection period was nothing like the experience of running local governmental affairs in the Shan states, where no ties to local population existed (p. 158).

To remedy the lack of local ties, *Tatmadaw* leaders established advisory committees to engage with local civilian leaders. During a period of martial law from 1952 to 1954, the MCC coordinated the activities by administrative organizations. After 1954, the *Tatmadaw*

¹³⁰ The extent of the integration of local police forces into the Shan State Government in the period between 1954 and 1959 is not clear. A document produced by the Shan State Government (1961) indicates that *saopha* forces in Kehsi (Kyethi) and Mongpang came under the Shan State Government in 1954. Ba Thann Win's (n.d., p. 187) account suggests that the *saopha* police forces in other areas came under the Shan State Government. In 1959, all *saopha* police forces, except for those in areas of eastern Shan State, such as Kengtung, were abolished.

¹³¹ An exception is the levies in the Kokang area of northern Shan State. They retained their weapons and became a local defense force, which was supported by the *Tatmadaw*. The retention by the *Tatmadaw* reflects the concerns that because they were Chinese speaking soldiers, their integration into the UMP with many non-Chinese-speaking-Burmans and other groups would be difficult (Sai Kham Mong, 2005, pp. 44-45, 121).

employed security and coordination committees staffed by military and civilian officials (Ba Thann Win, n.d., p. 149). The formation of *Tatmadaw*-led committees operating at various levels of government became a regular feature of its efforts to enlist local civilian officials to exercise social control.

Tatmadaw units also introduced new rules requiring the population to adopt new behaviors. In the early 1950s, the central government launched a nationwide registration system and issued identification cards to participants. Checking whether people possessed identification cards became a tool for state security forces to control the population. For instance, the purchase of tickets for travel by bus, train, and airplane required identification cards. *Tatmadaw*-manned checkpoints proliferated. Travel between villages and movement after curfew often required identification cards.¹³² People without identification cards faced restrictions on travel and scrutiny from state security officials (Cowell, *Journal One*, n.d.).¹³³

Gun control efforts by *Tatmadaw* officials were one of the most intrusive attempts at regulation. In May 1953, *Tatmadaw* officials took on responsibility for regulating weapons licenses (Ba Thann Win, n.d., p. 150). Village headmen found possessing unlicensed firearms, including antiquated rifles used for hunting, or suspected of hiding them were subject to detention. In some cases, reports indicate *Tatmadaw* soldiers interrogated and mistreated them (Elliot, 2006; Sargent, 1994, p. 143; SSA, 1975, p. 256; Yawngnwe, 2010, pp. 6, 35, 115).

The weak civilian-led central government also continued to provide formal legal authority for the *Tatmadaw* to address security threats. In addition to martial law, the Home Ministry Notification Law issued by Prime Minister U Nu on November 2, 1957, and the Emergency (Temporary) Amendment Provision Act, 1958, approved by the Parliament,

¹³² The government established a National Registration Department in 1951, which began issuing identification cards (Government of Burma, *Burma: The Twelfth Anniversary*, 1960, pp. 89-94; Maung Aung Myoe, 1999).

¹³³ Cowell (*Journal One*, n.d.) notes that in the mid-1960s an entire village in eastern Shan State that had registered and received identification cards burnt them in efforts to sabotage government efforts to regulate the rural population.

granted *Tatmadaw* officers the legal power to interrogate or arrest any Burmese national without a warrant (“Army can summon,” 1961, July 26). The extent of *Tatmadaw* influence reached the point by the late 1950s, whereby, as Yawngghwe (1990) suggests,

the ultimate power in the Shan, Kachin and other [ethnic] states, rested not in the hands of the state government, nor with the AFPFL in far away Rangoon, nor in the Parliament, but in the hands of army commanders on the spot" (p. 132).¹³⁴

As the 1958 deadline for when the secession clauses would become operative, the issue became increasingly politicized and contentious. As Frank Trager (1966), a historian of Burma notes, “opponents [to the secession clause] engaged in a public relations campaign intended to construct advocates of secession as anti-Burmese” (p. 192). For instance, several Burmese newspapers published unsubstantiated reports from *Pravda*, a Soviet news agency, that the United States was encouraging the Shan chiefs and dissidents to secede as part of an effort to construct air bases for the United States in Shan State.¹³⁵ These reports suggested that the *saopha* were going to bring destructive superpower intervention prevalent in other areas of Southeast Asia to Burma. This type of propaganda likely had the greatest influence on ethnic-Burman communities and contributed to popular anti-*saopha* and anti-secessionist, or “Unionist,” attitudes.¹³⁶

One response to the changes in Shan State was the emergence of Shan nationalism on an unprecedented level. Early signs of ethnonationalist sentiment appeared after World War II. At the Panglong meeting in 1947, a flag and anthem produced by Dr. Ba Nyan become recognized as those of the Shan State (Sai Aung Tun, 2009, pp. 298-99). Yawngghwe (2010)

¹³⁴ Yawngghwe (1990, p. 132) adds that the predominance of *Tatmadaw* authority reached a point where the population referred to Colonel Chit Myaing, who served as commander of northern Shan State and based in Lashio, as “the King of Lashio.” Colonel Thein Doke, head of the Taunggyi-based military commander, became known as the “King of Taunggyi.”

¹³⁵ According to Ba Thann Win (n.d.), articles referring to the original report from *Pravda* appeared in at least five other Burmese newspapers. For example, one newspaper, *The Rangoon Daily*, published the article with the headline “Shan States to join SEATO after seceding from Burma.”

¹³⁶ A speech given by U Nu in Lashio on April 27, 1957, proved a pivotal moment. His praise of former American President Abraham Lincoln’s efforts to prevent the Confederates States of America from seceding led many people in Shan State and other areas to doubt whether the ethnic-Burman dominated state and *Tatmadaw* would not honor their interpretation of the Panglong Agreement and Constitutional guarantees.

notes that the translation of revered Buddhist texts from Burmese language script to a Shan script in the mid-1950s had the effect of "Shan-izing" Buddhism and catalyzed "a mini-cultural revolution and resulted in the revival of Shan literature which in turn increased national awareness and activities" (p. 7). A growing salience of Shan-ness as part of one's identity precipitated a widespread interest in Shan forms of artistic expression and cultural production. Cultural organizations promoting "Shan-ness" were a driving force. These activities involved traditional Shan dance performances; Shan cultural seminars;¹³⁷ an outpouring of Shan language cultural, historical and political publications; and student-led Shan language literacy programs (SSA, 1975, p. 278).

The nationalism expressed political themes as well. For example, publications produced by U Htoon Myint,¹³⁸ Sao Kengtung (alias) B. Pauk,¹³⁹ and the Shan Literary Societies contained political themes that asserted a distinct Shan identity and the political tensions between the Shan State and the Burman dominated government and *Tatmadaw*. For instance, the Shan State Sangha Union, a Buddhist organization, issued leaflets titled *Know thyself Shans*, which Ba Thann Win (n.d., p. 235) characterizes as describing "how the Burmans were usurping the Shan State." Lintner (1984) points out the parallels between the origins of the Burman nationalist movement and the later emergence of Shan nationalist moment as a reaction to political repression by other ethnic groups. He explains, "If the

¹³⁷ In April 1958, a Shan cultural conference held in Hsipaw sponsored by students from universities in Rangoon and Mandalay reportedly attracted 150 participants. Among the attendees were 50 scholars, representatives of pro-*saopha* political parties, and followers of U Pandita, a Buddhist monk in hiding because of his publications of books containing themes of "anti-Burmese, Shan Burma separatism, big brother Burmese chauvinism" ("Shan youths stage," 1958, May 11).

¹³⁸ U Htoon Myint (Taunggyi), a Shan intellectual and founding member of the SSPFL, authored several books analyzing the political relationship between Shan State and the central government. These included *Whither Shanland?*, *The Secession Issue*, *Shanland's Grievances*, and *Equal Shan State within the Union*. A testament to the extensive influence of his writing on Shan nationalism is in the foreword to an abridged English language translation of *Whither Shanland?*,

Why do Shan youths, despite incredible odds, keep on coming in droves to the hinterland to fight, disable themselves, face many hardships and die? Blame it on Shan history. Blame it on Panglong. Blame it on the 1947 Constitution. Blame it on the Burmese. Above all, blame it on Htoon Myint of Taunggyi (Khuensai Jaiyen and Friends, n.d.).

¹³⁹ According to Ba Thann Win (n.d., p. 235), A. Pauk is the name of an author who wrote books that included those with nationalistic titles such as *Our Shan Laymen Should Take Great Heed and Defend the Shan State by Sword*.

Burmese nationalist movement in the 1920s and the 1930s had been a reaction against British colonial policy and Indian economic stronghold, the Shan national movement was born out of Burmese encroachments in the Shan states and KMT terror” (p. 413).

Students and others from Shan State engaged in activities related to Shan nationalism nationalist experienced harassment by state security forces (H.T., n.d., p. 36; SSA, 1975). As one account by the Shan State Army (1975) notes, “the Army and its Military Intelligence Service (M.I.S.) began to crack down on the dangerous malcontents and traitors which the Shan nationalists were, in their eyes” (p. 258). This reflected the view by the ethnic Burman government and *Tatmadaw* leaders that the secession clause represented a national security threat, rather than a domestic political issue. *Tatmadaw* operations succumbed to mission creep. As was the case across Burma, the scope of its activities expanded from countering existing active armed resistance to include attempts to stave off the possibility of the spread of armed resistance.

At the same time, efforts by the civilian government to address threats posed by armed resistance through political means also began to pay off. The armed groups – particularly the Communists in central Burma and those in Shan State – dissipated in part due to their acceptance of the U Nu-led government's nationwide amnesty for insurgents – the "Arms for Democracy" program. The U Nu-led regime had earlier offered amnesties to members of armed resistance organizations as a political approach to resolving ongoing violence (Smith, 1999, pp. 167-169). By 1958, many members of units of CPB, PVOs, SSCP, and the PNO operating in Shan State surrendered their arms and returned to civilian life.¹⁴⁰ After a split in the AFPFL-led ruling political coalition, General Ne Win in October 1958 seized control of the government for a brief two-year period, known as the Caretaker Government. With direct command of the central state, *Tatmadaw* leaders imposed further

¹⁴⁰ According to government sources over 3,500 insurgents surrendered in the period from November 1, 1958, to December 31, 1959 (Government of Burma, *Is Trust Vindicated?*, 1960, pp. 31, 37).

reforms aimed to enhance their authority and address security and political concerns. In the view of Yawngwe (2010), after taking over power,

the military really got down to, in its own unique style, restoring stability and law in Shan State. Units were sent into the countryside to clear the whole region of rebels, foreign intruders, and those planning rebellion and secession (p. 7).

During the Caretaker government period, the *Tatmadaw* consolidated its position as the country's most dominant actor. Their efforts involved a broad range of reforms. The scope varied from nationwide initiatives to Shan State specific level changes.

In 1958, reforms by the General Ne Win-led government reforms weakened the UMP, a rival paramilitary force under the Ministry of Home Affairs. General Ne Win reduced the allocation of resources to the organization and drafted *Tatmadaw* officers into its ranks. As Andrew Selth, (2016) a scholar of Burmese security forces notes, "Ne Win always resented the fact that the *Tatmadaw* did not enjoy a monopoly of the means to exercise state force."

The Caretaker government also restructured local administration across Burma by establishing security councils, referred to in Burmese as *Na La Ka*. The councils operated at the national, division/state, district, township, and village tract levels. *Tatmadaw* officers chaired the councils, while other civilian and military officials served as members (Ba Thann Win, n.d., p. 189). The council supervised other departments engaged in administration, security, peace, and economic development (Kyi Pyar Chit Saw and Arnold, 2014).

In 1958, the secession clause of the 1947 Constitution became operative. Despite the legal authority to hold a referendum on secession, Shan State leaders did not. The issue was a prominent political topic. Determining the level of support is difficult. Josef Silverstein (1958), a political scientist living in Burma in the late 1950s, wrote in 1958, "It probably will not be invoked until the people of the state are faced with a 'real' issue and have no other recourse for the protection of their interests" (p. 56).¹⁴¹ Yawngwe (2010) explains that many

¹⁴¹ For analysis of the secession issue, see Silverstein (1958).

saopha “were by nature conservative and traditional men who feared more than anything else the chaos of rebellion and revolution” (p. 99). This helps account for their support for legal solutions that would later involve a proposal to amend the Constitution.

Transition Period (1959-1962)

The Shan chieftainship – a six-centuries-old institution – ended at a ceremony held in Taunggyi on April 29, 1959. After several years of intermittent negotiations, the *saopha* formally transferred their hereditary prerogatives of local administration to the Shan State Government. In return, they collectively received a lucrative royal “buy out” totaling over twenty-five million kyats (US\$ 523,000 (1959 prices)) by the central government (Mangrai, 1965, Appendix XII, p. Lxxx). The decision among the *saopha* reflected their realization that feudal rule was outdated and presented an obstacle to progress. That the *Tatmadaw* had seized direct control of the central government, occupied many parts of Shan State, and engaged in detaining and harassing Shan nationalists on suspicion of plotting secession likely led them to conclude that transferring the authority to the Shan State Government was a step towards resolving this situation.

Not much is known about the administrative arrangements in the period between the formal end of *saopha* rule in 1959 and the beginning of the military rule in 1962. A gradual erosion of *saopha* administrative responsibilities had begun as far back as the early 1950s, when the military administration had first taken hold. The Shan State Government and the *Tatmadaw* agents had taken on the responsibility for the duties implemented by the traditional bureaucracy, as early as 1952.

The administration of the *saopha* principalities southern Shan State came under control of the Shan State Government in April 1959. A few months later, most of the principalities in northern Shan State also came under its control. In early 1960, the Trans Salween areas of Wa and Kokang came under the authority of a newly established

government organization known as the Frontier Areas Administration (FAA) (Government of Burma, *Burma: The Thirteenth Anniversary*, 1961, p. 13). In some areas, officials from the feudal bureaucratic were offered positions in the Shan State Government (Ba Thann Win, n.d.). The one exception was in remote areas of eastern Shan State, where *saopha* continued to exercise authority, such as in the areas of Kengtung and Mong Lun (Marn Long) (See Figure 2.1) (Mangrai, 1965, p. 9). The transfer entailed significant administrative changes. This included the abolition of the *saopha* police forces. Some received appointments to Shan State Police Force (Shan State Government, 1961).

In late 1959, the Caretaker government established a new administrative body – the Frontier Areas Administration (FAA) – to exercise authority in border areas in Arakan, Kachin and Shan states, where the central government exercised limited control. In Shan State, the FAA assumed administrative authority for Wa and Kokang areas. According to reports (“Special administration,” 1959, December 29). “FAA classes opened in RGN,” 1959, January 26; “Fr. admn. Commission,” 1959, August 20; Government of Burma, *Is Trust Vindicated?*, 1960, p. 505; United Nations, 1964), the FAA intended to compensate for the limited economic development by state-level governmental in these areas, make the frontier people more “Union conscious,” and promote friendly relations with neighboring countries. A dispatch by the British Embassy (1965) in Rangoon notes that despite these pronouncements, “we believe the F.A.A. was set up by a military government primarily to hold a watching brief of the frontier and the inhabitants” (p. 1). The FAA was under the jurisdiction of the General Ne Win’s Office of the Prime Minister. Silverstein (1997) characterizes this move as “technically unconstitutional,” noting that local leaders “could not resist: the national government was backed by the army” (p. 186).

The *Tatmadaw*-led central government continued bureaucratic reforms. One was the abolition of the security councils and the establishment of Coordination Committees, known

in Burmese as *Ya Ta Pa Ah*. These committees operated on all administrative levels including the Township level. Civilian and *Tatmadaw* officers staffed the committees and served as an instrument for *Tatmadaw* officials to exercise social control through use of local civilian administrators (Government of Burma, *Burma: The Thirteenth Anniversary*, 1961, p. 13; *Burma: The Fourteenth Anniversary*, 1962, p. 1).

This first instance of direct military rule on the national level was short-lived. In 1960, General Ne Win relinquished power. After winning an election, U Nu resumed his position on April 4, 1960. One significant development in the security situation took place began in late 1960. The *Tatmadaw* launched Operation Mekong against KMT forces in December 1960, which continued into early 1961. The military operation involved the covert participation of an estimated twenty thousand troops of the Chinese People's Liberation Army against the KMT. The operation succeeded in driving a significant portion of the KMT troops out of Shan State and into northern Thailand (Maung Aung Myoe, 1999, pp. 308-309). Some units managed to region hold of smuggling routes located in near the Thai border in southern Shan State, but their presence was limited.

In Shan State, there were many different kinds of responses to the activities by the *Tatmadaw* and central government agents. One was advocacy for political reform, which was an initiative led by veteran political leaders. The transfer of *saopha* authority removed the divisive issue of feudalism from Shan State politics. Many former political rivals – the *saopha* along with their supporters and anti-feudalist political leaders of the SSPFL – closed ranks and began to address their common political concerns through legal means. Their efforts became known as the Federal Movement. A resolution produced by these leaders serving as members of the Constitution Revision Steering Committee for the Shan State (1961) carefully detailed grievances over the 1947 Constitution and proposes several

reforms.¹⁴² This resolution became known as the Shan Federal Proposal (p. 32). The movement achieved trans-ethnic support from Burman and non-Burman leaders from beyond Shan State. The former included Prime Minister U Nu and Chief Justice U Myint Thein.

The Federal Movement encountered opposition from Burman nationalists. For instance, the Rangoon press continued to denigrate the *saopha*, even after they had surrendered their administrative authority. The Burmese language *Mandaing* newspaper published an article (“Plans of some Sawbwas,” 1961, June 1) detailing plans by the *saopha* to secede from Burma. The 1962 *coup* put a stop to a seminar attended by leaders of the Federal Movement, but *Tatmadaw* subsequently invoked their concerns that the leaders were plotting secession as the justification for their seizure of power.

A second reaction came from a militant group that supported armed struggle against the government. The Shan insurgencies began on November 15, 1959, with the attack on Tangyan. Preparations for armed struggle had begun earlier. According to an account issued by the Shan State Army (1975), a few unnamed Shan nationalists tapped Saw Yanda, a skilled orator (later known by his *nom de guerre* Chao Noi) “to secretly prepare grounds for an armed resistance movement when the need arose” (p. 259). He established a camp in a remote area located along Shan State’s border with Thailand. As the *Tatmadaw*’s attempted to pacify the population, popular resentment against the Union government grew. By 1958, several nationalists – students, officials, farmers, and monks – went underground to join Chao Noi.¹⁴³

A transformation in the patterns of domination took place by the late 1950s. The attack

¹⁴² Many politician and legal scholars felt that the 1947 Constitution did not provide a sufficient level of internal autonomy for ethnic states. U Chan Htoon, a legal scholar and advisor to the Constitutional Drafting Assembly, tersely summarized the document with the epithet: “though in theory federal, [it] is in practice unitary.” This appraisal refers to the limited authority wielded by the four ethnically demarcated states (Kachin, Karen, Karenni, and Shan) over matters related to legislation, taxation, and finance. For a summary of the chief concerns of the Constitution Revision Steering Committee, see the Shan Federal Proposal (1961, p. 27).

¹⁴³ The students included those from Rangoon University, who established the Shan State Independence Army and later the Shan State Army.

on Tangyan in 1959 triggered a spontaneous emergence of resistance bands led by strongmen. The rural population had begun shifting from obeying the laws of state officials to those of local strongmen. One example is the population's contravention of the government's rules by providing support in the form of weapons, recruits, and supplies for armed resistance groups deemed by the state as illegal. The level of support surpassed the earlier armed resistance organizations. This growth of widespread opposition and the emergence of new armed resistance organizations achieving broad based support marked a new period of conflict in Shan State (See Appendix Three).

Military Rule in Shan State (1962-1997)

Tatmadaw rule in Burma began in 1962 and continued until 2011. There were three phases of military rule by different ruling bodies in the period of this study: the Revolutionary Council (1962-1974), the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) (1974-1988), and the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) (1988-1997).

On March 2, 1962, General Ne Win led a *coup d'état*. Its execution involved the detention of the participants in the All Nationals Conference on the Federal Proposal taking place in Rangoon at that time.¹⁴⁴ Many of the detainees were supporters of the Federal Movement. Along with ranking ethnic Burman leaders, such as Prime Minister U Nu, President U Win Maung, and Chief Justice U Myint Thein, the *Tatmadaw* placed many prominent *saopha*, along with formerly anti-feudalist leaders, such as U Htoon Myint into protective custody.¹⁴⁵ Authorities held many without trial for six years. The *Tatmadaw's* justification for the *coup* was its concern that Shan leaders were plotting to secede.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ For a detailed account of the conference, including excerpts from many speeches, see Sai Aung Tun (2009, pp. 425-481).

¹⁴⁵ For a list of those arrested by the Revolutionary Council, see Sai Aung Tun (2009, pp. 485-486). Among the Shans that were arrested were Sao Pye (*Saopha* of Mong Nai and Chairman of the Shan State Steering Committee for the Revision of the Constitution), Sao Shwe Thaike (*Saopha* of Yawnghwe and former President of Burma), Sao Num (*Saopha* of Laikha), Sao Sai Long (*Saopha* of Kengtung), and other members of the Parliament from Shan State.

¹⁴⁶ For the *Tatmadaw's* account of the rationale for their seizure of power, see *Hanthawaddy* (1962, March 8), cited in Department of Historical Research (Vol. IV, 2011, p. 166), and Taylor (2015). Taylor's (2015)

General Ne Win established the Revolutionary Council (RC) – a ruling body comprised of 17 senior military officers – and executed on a broad range of far-reaching reforms. It suspended Parliament, stopped holding elections, and formed its own political party – the Burma Socialist Programme Party. All other political parties became illegal. A comprehensive package of economic reforms involved the demonetization of commonly held banknotes with only limited compensation, attempts to introduce agricultural collectives, and the nationalization of major companies.¹⁴⁷ The reforms were ineffective in promoting the economic growth. Instead, a thriving black market economy emerged. As Yoshihiro Nakanishi (2013), a political scientist, describes, “the regime targeted existing political parties, foreign capital, private industries and landowners for ‘destruction’ as they were seen as the cause of the failure of socialism to develop in Burma, and their activities were banned by the RC” (p. 10).

The RC engaged in further reforms of the local administration. In 1962, the establishment of Security and Administration Councils (SACs) provided a multi-layered organization that extended from the capital in Rangoon down to the village level. The SACs functioned as the principal body for the RC to exercise control over the population authority through the use of local administrators. The councils included representatives of the *Tatmadaw*, local police, and civilian officials. The scope of their activities was broad, ranging from local administration and intelligence activities to also include animal husbandry and agriculture (Nakanishi, 2013, pp. 150-152; Silverstein, 1977, pp. 46, 93-94; Taylor, 2009, pp. 315-316). Silverstein (1977) characterizes the SACs, the BSPP, and RC-established People’s Peasant and People’s Workers Councils as an attempt to co-opt civilians into assisting them.

biography of General Ne Win suggests that the General might have overheard discussion about plans for secession at one of the tea breaks during the meetings to discuss the federal proposal. Taylor (2015) argues “the turmoil in neighboring Laos and the involvement of the United States in both Laos and Thailand at the time could easily lead a cautious assessor of what was being planned [or mentioned within ear shot of the chief of the military] to draw the conclusion that preemptive measure [a coup] was necessary” (p. 254).¹⁴⁷ For analysis of the Revolutionary Council’s economic reforms, see Mya Maung (1991, pp. 117-143).

Silverstein (1977) notes that the members of these bodies “were carefully screened to ascertain whether they retained their loyalty to former parties, leaders or institutions” (p. 46).

The RC also expanded the FAA in terms of territory and functions. The Manglung Sub-district and Kengtung came under FAA authority in 1962 (“3 more areas added,” 1962, July 16; “Kengtung comes under F.A.A from Jan 1,” 1963, January 2). The FAA Act of 1962 empowered the organization to establish village defense units and magisterial courts (“FAA to be vested with admin powers,” 1962, February 10). In 1965, the RC canceled the FAA. The areas under its jurisdiction became amalgamated into the contiguous district administrative system (“Frontier Area Administration to be abolished,” 1965, September 5). A report by the British Embassy in Rangoon (1965) interpreted the move as “largely an administrative rationalization” (p. 2).

Tatmadaw leaders continued to direct the centralization of security organizations. One of their moves was the absorption of the Union Constabulary (formerly the UMP) into the *Tatmadaw*.¹⁴⁸ In 1964, the national police force – the civil counterpart of the Union – was reformed into the People's Police Force (PPF). The *Tatmadaw* placed its officers in senior positions of the police force (Selth, 2016).

To address the growing insurgency in Shan State, local *Tatmadaw* commanders conferred the status of *Tatmadaw*-allied militias on strongmen-led armed bands. In return for their participation, state security officials tacitly permitted militia involvement the illicit opium trade.¹⁴⁹ The use of militias reflected the *Tatmadaw*'s recognition of their need for a broader national security vision encapsulated by its adoption of the military doctrine known

¹⁴⁸ The official justification for the reforms of the UMP is that AFPFL politicians – including AFPFL leader Kyaw Nyein – had used them as “pocket armies” (Taylor, 2009, p. 249). This appears to have reflected in part the politicization of UMPs as under the control of civilian politicians. Also see Maung Aung Myoe (1999, p. 142), Government of Burma (1960, p. 507), “Union constabulary,” (1962, March 11), and “Union constabulary,” (1962, May 6).

¹⁴⁹ In an interview with Adrian Cowell, Lo Hsin Han reported making payoffs to officers from Military Intelligence Services to obtain transit permits for transporting opium through government-controlled areas (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., p. 249)

as “people’s war.”¹⁵⁰ In Shan State, where opium production was increasing, the crop provided a means for militias to be financially self-reliant. The militias’ involvement in the illicit opium trade helped advance the *Tatmadaw*’s counter-insurgency goals. The militias limited the amount of opium available to armed resistance groups.

In 1968, a massive offensive by elements of the CPB launched from China signaled the onset of a third period of conflict (See Appendix Three). CPB slowly pushed out from along the border and consolidated territorial control. By the mid-1970s, they exercised control over adjacent to the Burma's border with China. During this period, the number of armed resistance organizations in Shan State grew. The CPB’s offer of material support to armed resistance organizations in Shan State precipitated splits among them. For instance, Kornzurng, a strongman and the Brigade commander of the SSA, broke away and established the Shan United Revolutionary Army. He cited his concern that the SSA was becoming too closely allied with the CPB. In 1973, the *Tatmadaw* ordered *Ka Kwe Ye* militia leaders to surrender their weapons and either disband or join *Tatmadaw* units. Powerful militias led by strongmen, such as Lo Hsin Han and Mahasan, refused. They allied with the armed opposition movements and formed their own armed resistance organizations (Cowell, 1975; A Tatmadaw Researcher, 1991, p. 107).¹⁵¹

The period from 1974 to 1988 featured the formalization of one party rule of the BSPP. In 1974, the military government held a nationwide referendum on their proposed adoption of a new constitution, which proposed the transfer of power from the military to the *Tatmadaw*-controlled BSPP. A measure of the lack of support for the regime in Shan State is

¹⁵⁰ For analysis of the militia system from *Tatmadaw* sources, see Defense Services Historical Museum and Archives (1997-1998, pp. 139-158) and A Tatmadaw Researcher (1991, p. 107).

¹⁵¹ A consensus on the rationale behind the *Tatmadaw*’s decision to disband the *Ka Kwe Ye* militias has not yet emerged among researchers. Cowell (US Congress, 1975) suggests that this reflected that government concerns that their continued support for militias involved in the smuggling of opium to the international market and contraband goods for the domestic market undermined their authority. Renard (1996) argues that the decision reflected the attempts to engage with the US government and gain military assistance under the guise of counter-narcotics cooperation. Lintner (1999) indicates that the decision reflected the poor performance of the *Ka Kwe Ye* militias in combat.

that only 60 percent of the population voted, as opposed to 90 percent in ethnic Burman-dominated areas of Burma Proper (Steinberg, 1982, pp. 87-88). In rural Shan State, the changes associated with the adoption of the 1974 constitution had only limited direct bearing on their day-to-day lives. One reform involved the reorganization of the SACs into People's Councils. The People's Council continued to operate at all administrative levels from the national level down to the villages. Nakanishi (2013, pp. 159-160) cites several government records that indicate that the *Tatmadaw* leaders' transfer of military personnel to the BSPP and the People's Councils. Like the SACs, the People's Councils continued to provide a mechanism for the *Tatmadaw* to exercise control over local administrative agents.

Central state-led initiatives failed to promote widespread socio-economic development.¹⁵² At the same time, people in Shan State continued to face impingements on their livelihoods stemming from warfare and militarization. The central government's adoption of more stringent narcotics policies involving large-scale poppy eradication campaigns disrupted opium cultivators. In addition, the restrictions on imports supported the black market trade. Smuggling provided one economic lifeline. However, many socio-economic measures indicate that the Burma economy continued on a downward trajectory. By 1987, economic stagnation had reached a point where the United Nations downgraded Burma's economic status to that of a Less Developed Country (Mya Maung, 1991).

The period between 1988 and 1997 featured a military government known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). In 1988, the *Tatmadaw* responded to nationwide protests demanding an end to one-party rule with a violent crackdown and the establishment of a new ruling clique – the SLORC.¹⁵³ SLORC leaders built up their strength

¹⁵² For a detailed account of Burma's economic stagnation in the period from 1974 to 1988, see Mya Maung (1991, pp. 145-232).

¹⁵³ For an account of the 1988 uprising, see Lintner (1990b).

through acquisition of military hardware and expansion of its ranks.¹⁵⁴ In 1989, after the sudden collapse of the CPB, *Tatmadaw* engagement with armed resistance organizations that formed in its aftermath provided opportunities to concentrate efforts on neutralizing the Mong Tai Army (MTA) – an armed resistance organization led by strongman Khun Sa.¹⁵⁵ The new SLORC regime also disbanded the People’s Councils in 1988. In their place, the *Tatmadaw* created a Law and Order Restoration Council (LORC). Like the SACs and the People’s Councils, they operated at each level of government and staffed by members of the *Tatmadaw*, the police and civilian officials (Kyi Pyar Chit Saw and Arnold, 2014, p. 10).

The military government offered ceasefire arrangements to armed organizations as a new approach to managing conflict. By 1994, SLORC leaders achieved ceasefire arrangements with all major armed resistance organizations in Shan State except for the MTA. In the early 1990s, encirclement by *Tatmadaw* units and United Wa State Army troops – one of the armed groups that emerged after the CPB collapse – squeezed the MTA. In 1996, Khun Sa surrendered. Unlike other armed resistance organizations, his agreement was for a complete surrender, rather than a ceasefire arrangement. This event marks the decline of autonomous strongmen. A few continued to operate. But, many became reliant on *Tatmadaw*-provided resources and, therefore, they cannot be considered autonomous. None have come close to approaching Khun Sa in terms of influence.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, central state-led efforts at deepening their domination of Shan State society had the opposite outcome. The *Tatmadaw* centralized control over bureaucratic organizations and instruments of coercion. It weakened, took over,

¹⁵⁴ After 1988, the *Tatmadaw* engaged in dramatic expansion of its size and modernization. Selth (1996, p. 19) estimates an increase in size from 200,000 members in 1988 to 400,000 members by 1997. Selth (2002, p. 138) also indicates an increase in weapons procurement from a level of roughly US\$20 million to US\$280 million in 1997.

¹⁵⁵ The military concluded ceasefire agreements with the four groups that emerged in the power vacuum created by the collapse of the CPB: the United Wa State Army, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, New Democratic Army (Kachin) (NDA-K), and the National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS).

and abolished administrative and security organizations not under its influence. It harassed, incarcerated, and even killed opponents.¹⁵⁶ While local state organizations slowly came under the control of the central state and, later, the *Tatmadaw*, the ability of its agents to exercise control weakened.

An account from Yawnghwe (2010) published in 1987 describes just how far the gap between the *Tatmadaw*-led government and its ability to marshal support from society in Shan State had grown,

Despite the post-1962 Burmese claims about its successes in Shan State, Burmese control and presence in this area were, at best, tenuous. The regime may have been able to set up a party and administrative organs ...but these do not function as support-generating dynamos for the Burmese. Even in "white" areas, that is, areas under the shadow of major Burmese army garrisons, there is no feeling of loyalty, only an apathetic form of submission (p. 114).

The inability of central state leaders to achieve predominance raises the following questions. What accounts for the inability of government officials to gain compliance with the rules prescribed by them? Why did population support groups and individuals oppose central state authority?

Sources of Societal Dislocation: A Bottom-Up Approach

The rural population experienced disruptive societal dislocations as a result of the *Tatmadaw*'s and state leaders' coercive approach to state building. To understand this process, a close look at society through a bottom-up approach is helpful. The sources of societal upheavals were as follows: Predatory militarization by armed groups infringed on the livelihoods of the rural population. The dismantling of the *saopha* system ruptured the traditional social, political and economic order. State agents of new bureaucratic organizations demanded that the population comply with new rules offering only limited benefits and requiring people adopt new modes of behavior. As a result, segments of the

¹⁵⁶ The deaths of Sao Kya Seng, the *saopha* of Hsipaw, and Sao Shwe Thaike, the former President of Burma and the *saopha* of Yawnghwe, both took place while in *Tatmadaw* custody. For accounts, see Sargent (2001) and Yawnghwe (2010).

population adopted new strategies of survival. One that began to take root in the late 1950s was alignment with autonomous strongmen. This repositioning also entailed following the rules of a strongman rather than those of government agents or even other armed groups.

Predatory Militarization

Predatory militarization was an important cause of societal disruption. The earlier occupations by Japanese and Siamese forces generated upheaval. Towns experienced bombing, though fighting in rural Shan State was not as extensive as in other areas of Burma. The initial post-War period offered stability. Rural communities had brief opportunities to resume traditional practices. The peace was soon interrupted by an outbreak of conflict. Several armed anti-state and state-allied groups began to play an increasingly dominant role in society. The predation by these groups directly impinged on the people's survival strategies.

Chief among the predatory practices carried out by armed groups were their demands for labor and food from the rural population.¹⁵⁷ The forcible conscription of villagers to perform labor for armed groups was one of the most debilitating of these demands. Many armed groups forcibly impressed villagers as unpaid laborers. The *Tatmadaw*, with their superior numbers of troops and larger territory of operations, used forced labor extensively. *Tatmadaw* units operated in remote areas. Its supply lines for food and ammunition were spread out in “hostile” territory. *Tatmadaw* officials conscripted civilians from villages to carry supplies under threat of violent retribution. In a rare government admission of *Tatmadaw* fallibility by a government official, Sao Wunna, former head of the Karenni State Government, told the Burmese press that the *Tatmadaw*'s widespread use of forced conscription in the 1955 Yangyi Aung campaign against the KMT was one of the main

¹⁵⁷ Predation by the *Tatmadaw* in urban areas appears to have been moderated and less violent. Nonetheless, the *Tatmadaw*'s commandeered property in urban areas. As a declassified CIA (1953, May 26) report about *Tatmadaw* campaigns against the KMT in 1953 mentions, “Burmese troops have requisitioned all of the best buildings in Kengtung.”

factors giving rise to the Shan rebellion (“Acting head,” 1961, May 30; “Army also to blame,” 1961, May 30). In 1974, Maung Maung (1974, p. 100), a historian of Burma and former Prime Minister for a month in 1988, describes the Yangyi Aung campaign in 1955 as “the biggest combined operations ever launched by the Burma Army in its history.”

Other armed groups, as well as *saopha*, also employed forced labor. Of the non-state armed groups, the KMT appears to have been the most egregious abuser. By contrast, the local armed groups, such as ethnic armed organizations and strongmen-led bands, possessed ethnic and familial ties with communities and relied on them for support. These connections and a need for continued support often mitigated the severity of impressment. Nonetheless, Cowell (*Journal One*, n.d.; *Journal Two*, n.d.) indicates that they drew on civilian labor.

Forcible conscription can have devastating effects on rural households. The absence of an able-bodied family member significantly curtails a household’s productivity and ability to sustain itself. The impact was particularly severe during planting and harvest seasons. In some instances, people conscripted by armed groups never returned or suffered disabling injuries from landmines, combat, and abuses perpetrated by their captors. Villagers who escaped impressment by flight ran the risk of severe punishment.¹⁵⁸

Another component of predatory militarization was the confiscation and destruction of foodstuffs, livestock, and property. The practices of dispossession varied and most often included armed groups procuring food and supplies from villages. Refusal often meant reprisals. The requisition of food supplies from villagers was a common practice for units of the *Tatmadaw* operating in the remote countryside beyond regular supply lines. Villagers also experienced pillaging by the KMT and other armed resistance organizations. As was the case with conscription, reliance on communities for support appears to have moderated the degree

¹⁵⁸ The option of paying bribes for exemption from forced portering entailed significant risks. Most households appear to have had meager savings often reserved for the purchase of emergency rice provisions and the requirements for credit, if available at all, entailed the risk of indebtedness and the forfeiture of land (United Nations, 1964).

of coercive extraction of food by local armed groups. Armed groups without local ties to a community, most often the *Tatmadaw*, plundered resources on a more extensive level (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.).

The *Tatmadaw*'s targeting of the rural population for suspected support for armed resistance groups was another element of militarization. Reports indicate that the *Tatmadaw* burned houses and looted the property of villagers suspected of supporting armed resistance groups (Ba Thann Win, n.d., p. 175; Cowell, *Journal One*, n.d., *Journal Two*, n.d.). The *Tatmadaw* also engaged in sweeps of villages suspected of supporting insurgents or violating gun control laws by caching unregistered weapons. In many cases, villagers, particularly headmen, suffered detention, arrest, torture, and in some cases death (Cowell, *Journal One*, n.d., *Journal Two*, n.d.; Elliot, 2006; Risser, Oum Kher, and Sein Htun, 2003; Yawnghwe, 2010).

Predatory militarization heightened unpredictable demands on society. In the post-war years, the respite from conflict was broken in some areas as early as late 1949, when KMT units arrived and the first wave of insurrection broke out. *Tatmadaw* leaders responded with deployments. As the number of troops and armed groups increased, so did the strain on villagers. The thousands of armed men operating in remote areas required food. Unlike taxation by the *saopha* often paid at regular, predictable intervals, farmers now faced demands on their food and livestock made by armed groups at a moment's notice. Inability to accurately predict these demands made it difficult to mitigate their impact. Villages located near roads and heavily traveled jungle trails experienced repeated taxation by multiple armed groups (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.). As a consequence, their routines for meeting basic material needs become increasingly ineffective.

Changes in the patterns of appropriation also violated norms of appropriation in rural areas. As Scott (1976) notes, wealth appropriation, or taxation, is a central concern of farmers

practicing subsistence-oriented agriculture. He argues that popular attitudes towards tax collectors are mediated by a moral economy in which the circumstances of the collection, rather than the aggregate amount, are judged according to peasants' notions of appropriateness. Under the *saopha* administration, taxation reflected a reasonably predictable schedule attuned to seasonal agricultural cycles. One arrangement was that *saopha* officials received initial payment in October and the remainder in March. Taxation often took place in conjunction seasonal religious festivals, or *pwe* (Mi Mi Khaing, n.d.). Admittedly, not all *saophas* were the same and some engaged in predatory practices (Ba Thann Win, n.d.; Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.). However, the additional demands by armed groups, such as the *Tatmadaw* and the KMT, which both lacked ties to the community and engaged in harassment of population violated local norms and often lacked predictability. Their appropriation of supplies in conjunction with conscription, violence, and the destruction of property disrupted people's carefully crafted food security strategies, jeopardized their livelihoods and portended the possibility of starvation.

While the material toll of predatory militarization is often readily discernible, its emotional and psychological effects are not. Assessing the impact these shocks can be difficult. Nevertheless, several scholars (Migdal, 1988; Scott, 1976) stress the importance of the non-material elements of shocks on society and point to the role that they play in shifting popular attitudes toward the organizations making demands on them. For example, the coercive and sometimes violent expropriation of materials necessary to people's survival can elicit a broad range of powerful feelings that include fear, insecurity, outrage, and trauma. In the Shan State case, the actions of the *Tatmadaw* ranging from seizure of property to punitive sanctions for failure to adhere to new rules and codes of behavior constituted one of the most egregious infringements on the people's strategies of survival.

The Consequence of an End to a Traditional Order

The formal transfer of *saopha* authority in 1959 to the Shan State Government signaled the end of a well-entrenched, centuries old system. It is noteworthy that the *saopha* themselves along with the population recognized that a more democratic system of administration was necessary. In 1952, the *saopha* announced intentions to transfer their authority. But identifying an effective system to replace was one concern. The *saopha*-led order was more than an administrative system. The *saopha* also played important symbolic and functional roles in their respective communities. Their withdrawal from positions of authority coupled with the hardships of predatory militarization produced material and psychological impacts on society.

From a material perspective, the end of the *saopha* administration had several overarching effects. The piecemeal abrogation of the system disrupted an intricate web of patron-client relationships. The *saopha* administration resembled a pyramid. The *saopha* sat at the top with strata of ministers, lower-level officials, and the population, or "subjects," positioned below. The conferral of appointments to offices within the feudal bureaucracy provided individuals with resources and influence that formed the basis for a multi-tiered system of patron-client relations. Clients provided loyalty and services to their patrons – such as members of the *saopha* bureaucracy – in return for assistance. In times of crises, the system functioned as a shock absorber, as a client could call on his or her patron to help address hardships.

The dismantling of this system occurred in fits and starts at varying rates in different places. The administrative officials who were the direct beneficiaries of this system no longer enjoyed access to resources and positions commanding authority. The curtailment of their access to the resources and influence that cemented patron-client ties led to their weakening. Through interaction with village heads and the population, traditional functionaries, such as

htamong and *nebaing*, often served as direct intermediaries between the upper echelons of the system and the society. Their dismissal removed an established system for interfacing with the population.

The end of the system also meant that its provision of goods and services also ceased. The *saopha* performed the role of benefactor for his statelets and directed the delivery a broad range of public goods and benefits. Their extent and type varied from one *saopha* to another. Some commonly found projects included support for Buddhism, sponsorship of cultural and community activities, provision of order through their police forces, and financial assistance to students (Mi Mi Khaing, n.d.; Yawnghwe, 2010). Sao Shwe Thaiké's sponsorship for translating Buddhist texts into Shan script, as noted earlier, is one example of support by a *saopha* for cultural activities. After the end of the *saopha* rule, when they no longer engaged in taxation and their administrative responsibilities came to an end, they lacked the means necessary to provide for the public good.

From an ideational perspective, the replacement of the traditional order of *saopha* with a rationalized one removed an element critical to a popular belief system among many Shans. *Saopha* served as chief administrators of the population, but also played the symbolic roles of the chief patron of the Buddhist clergy and the benefactor for the community. Their positions as political leaders and the prominent roles in religious rituals dramatized their status as the protector of the Buddhist order.¹⁵⁹ Their provision of public goods reinforced their role as benefactors of the population. Collectively, *saopha* held responsibility for looking after the general welfare of the people.

This *saopha*-led order drew on tenets and practices of Buddhist kingship found in the

¹⁵⁹ Susan Conway (2006) notes that the princes played important roles in ceremonies which involved the animistic guardian spirits of their principality (*phi muong*), rain making rituals intended to guarantee crop fertility, and paying tribute to ancestral spirits (*chao muong*). They also accrued authority through expressing devotion to the well being of the Buddhist clergy by sponsoring ceremonies, supporting monasteries, and leading laypersons in religious processions. These included activities such as attending ritual sacrifices, funding of fireworks displays, and supporting Shan-style martial arts competitions.

pre-colonial Theravadic Buddhist world of mainland Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka.¹⁶⁰ For over six centuries, the feudal political structure became the key referent for socio-political organization within Shan State. From this perspective, they played a symbolic role as protector of their communities, and the Buddhist-inspired system provided the basis for the construction a moral order that helped the population come to terms with existentialist questions. They played a foundational role in a belief system adopted by individuals to give meaning to their daily lives and a sense of security. In particular, the system helped to address people's basic questions about justness and governance.

The departure of the *saopha* removed a key component of this Buddhist-inspired belief system through which segments of the population organized their worldviews.¹⁶¹ The elimination of *saopha* likely created a vacuum in the people's moral universe. Under the new system, *saopha* continued to coexist with the population and serve as members of state and national Parliament until 1962. However, they no longer performed kingship rituals that emphasized their role in supporting the religiopolitical order. The suspension of their provision of public goods meant that they no longer delivered the services that manifested their role as benefactors. The gradual reconfiguration of their police forces meant that they no longer performed the symbolic role as protectors. After 1962, the *Tatmadaw* detained many of the *saopha* for up to six years. As Yawnghwe (2010) argues that “the 1962 coup not only crushed the reform movement, but terrorized and removed the traditional leaders [*saopha*] and politicians from the political scene for four to six years, a socio-political vacuum was created in the Shan State” (p. 114). The newly established government organizations proved incapable of filling the vacuum created by the termination of the *saopha*-led order.

¹⁶⁰ Similar to several other areas of the Theravadic Buddhist world – mainland Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka, Buddhist-inspired notions of kingship provided a basis of legitimacy for rulers, but also a foundational component of the population's belief systems (Keyes, 1995, p. 39).

¹⁶¹ Of course, other some members of the population, particularly anti-feudalists and non-Buddhists in the highlands, subscribed to other worldviews. However, the adoption of the role as a benefactor by the *saopha* provided another basis his claims to authority among non-Buddhists.

When the *saopha* stepped down, their loss of status as rulers constituted a shock to the popularly held Buddhist-inspired moral order. For many people in Shan State, the *saopha* played a symbolic role as an arbitrator between the cosmological and secular world. Their departure removed an important component for this popular framework. The impacts of their departure on the population varied but served as an additional source of societal dislocation. The government's attempts to replace the traditional order of the *saopha* with a rationalized one led to a crisis of authority within Shan State.

Administrative Incoherence

The gradual transformation of local administration produced a system that was alien, unpredictable, and at times unreliable. The bureaucratic reforms taking place in Shan State during the 1950s and early 1960s introduced new bureaucratic arrangements that involved ongoing changes in personnel and rules contributing to administrative incoherence. Admittedly, the Siamese and Japanese had also posed challenges to the population. However, these were short-lived. The experience of independence for many people represented a significant change from the colonial period. As Tinker (1967) notes, there was "no background of regular British Administration or of dependence on Rangoon, there is instead a strong tradition of local freedom and local rule" (p. 158).

The familiar administration by the *saopha* system gave way to one featuring multiple organizations staffed by unfamiliar agents imposing new rules. Sanctions imposed by the *Tatmadaw* for violations of rules were severe and sometimes lethal. The new order required people to make adjustments to their behavior and practices or face possible sanctions. Adherence to these rules offered no guarantee of security from infringement by stage agents. The ineffectiveness of the new order and the adjustments that it required contributed to societal dislocations.

Unfamiliar new agents arrived from various organizations, including the *Tatmadaw*,

the Shan State Government, and several newly established administrative organizations, such as the MCC, FAA and others. Many agents were ethnic Burmans who were not from the Shan State. One declassified CIA document (1953, December 10) reports that, “The people of the state never had any dealings with the Burmese in pre-independence days; in fact, the great majority of those living in the districts never saw a Burman.”

The inability of many new state agents to effectively communicate with the rural populations posed problems. The lack of a *lingua franca* for *Tatmadaw* and rural population made communication difficult. The use of Burmese in many rural areas was uncommon, and very few soldiers spoke Shan or the other languages prevalent in the highlands of Shan State. The implicit requirements for effective communication between administrators and subjects required linguistic aptitudes beyond those in either group. In some cases, miscommunication reportedly led harassment by the *Tatmadaw*, which contributed to their reputation for brutalizing the civilian population (Elliot, 2006).

From the perspective of rural Shan State population, the familiar agent of the *saopha*, who likely spoke Shan and likely other languages of the highlands, engaged in similar social customs (or likely had some familiarity with them), and possessed personal ties to villagers within their jurisdictions were gone. In their place were unfamiliar soldiers and civilian officials, often speaking a little-known language, possessing different social customs, and imposing a different set of rules.

The new groups introduced new laws and codes of behavior and imposed sanctions on people who did not follow the new rules. Commonplace practices became banned. People were required to adjust their behavior or face the possibility of punishment. Many rules were designed to assist the *Tatmadaw* in addressing security concerns. However, they were also intrusive. For instance in the 1950s and afterwards, *Tatmadaw* units insisted that people undergo detention, interrogation, and inspection at security checkpoints. Demands for food

and labor by *Tatmadaw* units operating in remote areas were common. Villagers were sometimes asked to carry an identification card and to register their weapons. Frequently, the practices proscribed by officials were not consistent with local customs and practices.

An examination of the *Tatmadaw's* expansion of operations to include local administration dramatizes the difficulties posed by the introduction of new rulemaking agents for the population. The *Tatmadaw's* enforcement of lapsed gun control laws illustrates the gulf between state agents' rules and local practices. Carrying firearms was a common practice among men throughout rural Shan State. Hunting was a traditional source of nourishment. In a biography of Sao Hearn Hkam, a former Member of Parliament and later Head of the Shan State War Council, Patricia Elliot (2006) notes that "The Shan habit of carrying a rifle – as common as wearing a hat – had long alarmed and frightened the army men" (p. 237). In the early 1950s, *Tatmadaw* units began a gun control campaign that involved the seizure of weapons from the population. Their efforts included searches of villagers and detention of people possessing or carrying unregistered weapons. Elliot (2006) adds,

Now that they [the *Tatmadaw*] had a greater license to make arrests and confiscate weapons. Villagers were interrogated and tortured for suspected sympathies towards the communists and ethnic organizations – in short, for supporting anyone not allied with the power center in Rangoon (p. 237).

Intrusive and at times violent enforcement represented an attempt by state leaders to monopolize the instruments of coercion and weaken the potential of resistance. The regulation of access to firearms constrained the population from developing the capacity to defend itself and also led to detention and worse for suspected violators. The enforcement of the law represented one of the several unwelcome intrusions into people's daily practices by agents of the *Tatmadaw*.

Adherence to these codes of behavior prescribed by the agents of the state did not insulate villagers from impositions on their livelihoods by state agents. *Tatmadaw* units

detained village headmen on suspicion of supporting rebels. These actions were ostensibly aimed to help restore order. Instead, they produced grievances that fuel support for armed resistance. Reports indicate that soldiers beat many and killed villagers. Yawnghwe (2010, p. 107) has argued the *Tatmadaw* aimed "to disarm the populace whom they saw as potential rebels and to seek out hidden arms caches, disrupt the alleged preparation by the princes [saophas] for an uprising, and strike terror in the hearts of the Shans so that they would not even dare think seditious thoughts."

The assumption of power by new government organizations and their expansion into civil administration activities required the population to adopt new modes of interaction with state agents. These rules replaced the customary law of the *saopha* administration had followed customary law. One adjustment by the population was to come to terms with the operation of the new system. The form and practice of local administration morphed into a system adopted from the Burmese Civil Service developed in the ethnic-Burman constituent areas and different from the *saopha*-led administrative order. In addition, several *ad hoc* arrangements took place. These included the temporary imposition of martial law, an expanding role for *Tatmadaw* personnel in civil administration, and the formation of new organizations, such as the FAA, introduced previously unknown, rule-making organization into people's lives.¹⁶² The enforcement of rules by state agents requiring identity cards meant that people traveling from one village to another without identification faced the possibility of detention. Many people in the remote highlands did not (and still do not) possess identification (Cowell, *Journal One*, n.d.; Elliot, 2006; Yawnghwe, 2010).

The reconfiguration of the system also produced dislocation. One palpable adjustment

¹⁶² Until independence, the population had only limited experience with ethnic Burma armed units, and the earlier experience with other similarly "foreign" militaries was generally unfavorable. Aside from the familiar *saopha* police forces, the rural population's interaction with foreign armies – Thais, Japanese, and the KMT during World War II and afterward – often entailed abuses and mistrust. During the war, Japanese officials limited operations by the Burma Independence Army, a predominately ethnic-Burman armed group led by General Aung San and initially allied with Japanese forces, in the Shan States.

to the *Tatmadaw*'s harassment of the civilian population was that many rural people avoided unnecessary travel because of concerns of not only bandits but also *Tatmadaw* units garrisoned along roads and on patrol. Both portended the possibility of theft and, in the case of *Tatmadaw*, detention or worse.

The new governmental organizations lacked widespread appeal and were unable to provide an alternative basis to fill the vacuum created by the erosion of the Buddhist-inspired moral order of the *saopha*. Attempts by the central government organizations to legitimize themselves through an emphasis on rationalized goals of development and socialist inspired economic systems did not resonate with the population. The government's attempts to justify reforms by reference to socialist principles for rectifying the inequalities of feudal rule failed. For many, the concept of socialism did not resonate, when enduring hardships resulting from conflict and counter-insurgency operations.

Compliance with civilian government officials did not offer immunity from the threat of *Tatmadaw* units coming into their village. The new system of government also failed to offer psychological components useful for crafting survival strategies. Its modernist ideology drawing on principles of socialism and democracy did fulfill the promise of better governance. It proved incapable of providing an alternative to the *saopha* system.

Relations between the *Tatmadaw* and the population began with popular support for its assistance in containing the KMT and combatting the first wave of insurgents. The toll taken by the *Tatmadaw*'s heavy-handed engagement with the civilian population reached a point where, as Chao Tzang Yawngnwe explains, the *Tatmadaw* "became just another foreign occupation force no better than the KMT, especially in the eyes of the rural people." And the Shan State Government was powerless to curb the toll by the *Tatmadaw* counter-insurgency campaigns on the civilian population and ineffective in offering benefits from the population. In the view of U Tun Aye, a prominent anti-feudalist politician and a leading

proponent of the replacement of feudal administration, the Shan State Government “seems to lack the capacity to govern” (“Shan Admin. Indifferent Towards Insurrection,” 1961, April 22).

Continuation of Shocks and Further Fragmentation

Disruptive forces that prompted the initial fragmentation of the late 1950s continued, and new ones emerged. After the 1962 *coup*, predatory militarization intensified. The economic and counter-insurgency practices by the Ne Win-led central state and *Tatmadaw* worsened over time.

During the 1960s, an intensification of violent warfare occurred as the rebellions became better organized and more widespread and the *Tatmadaw* adopted new measures to crush them. The *Tatmadaw*'s counterinsurgency efforts became more intrusive after its adoption of the “Four Cuts” (Burmese: *phya leh phya*) approach. This approach to counterinsurgency targeted the rural population suspected of supporting armed resistance organizations. The strategy aimed to weaken these groups by denying, or “cutting,” their access to food, recruits, information, and funds from the local population. The rural population was forcibly relocated into camps located near military bases and free fire zones were established in the depopulated areas where soldiers received orders to shoot anyone on sight (“‘Four denial’ scheme explained,” 1975, December 4; Maung Aung Myoe, 2009; Selth 2002, p. 91; Smith, 1999, p. 241).

One of the most far-reaching and disruptive practices of the RC was its demonetization of the currency as part of its economic reforms. On May 17, 1964, the government unexpectedly announced that the most widely held denominations of its national currency, 100 and 50 *kyat* notes, would no longer be accepted. The authorities provided a seven-day window for holders to surrender their notes to the township Security Affairs Office in exchange for a limited amount of their value in other denominations (Trager, 1966, p.

206). The aim of the measure appears to have been to increase the government's control over the economy, weakening the power of merchants and black marketers by wiping out their privately held capital reserves (Mya Maung, 1991, pp. 135-6). An additional consequence was that it obliterated the capital reserves held by armed groups.¹⁶³

The demonetization had a devastating effect on the population of Burma as many lost their savings.¹⁶⁴ Even in the highlands, where some communities lived on the margins of the lowland, monetized economy, people maintained limited, but important, cash holdings. This money was intended for the purchase of manufactured household necessities and served as an emergency fund. Many areas did not have well-developed transport, and information networks and news often spread slowly. News of the demonetization did not reach several remote communities until the deadline for conversion was closing. By consequence, as Martin Smith (1999, p. 94) notes, the move "effectively robbed poor hill farmers of all their saving." News of the nullification precipitated an armed revolt among a group of ethnic Karenni led by Shwe Aye, who later formed the Kayan New Land Party (Smith, 1999, pp. 94, 219-220). Even Khun Sa, at that time a local strongman and head of a small, *Tatmadaw*-allied militia group, responded by leading his men into a short-lived rebellion that involved the formation of the United Anti-Socialist Army (Khun Sa, 1983; Yawnghwe, 2010, pp. 156-157).

Demonetization deepened resentment towards the *Tatmadaw*-led government and further widened the gulf between state officials and the population. One unintended consequence with far reaching implications was that many shopkeepers in rural areas

¹⁶³ The shocks precipitated major changes in people's livelihoods. People moved their residences and farmers adopted new livelihood practices. As described in chapter two, one was relocation to remote mountainous areas and increased reliance on opium production as a cash crop to reduce their exposure to potential security threats and limited travel to markets to sell agriculture crops and buy basic household necessities.

¹⁶⁴ Over twenty years later, the government implemented another demonetization in September 1987, which nullified 25, 35, and 75 kyat notes, and had a similar impact. In Rangoon, students led protests against the policy. This protests marked one of the early signs of resistance against the regime, which became more pronounced in 1988 (Smith, 1999, pp. 94, 219-220).

eschewed payment in *kyat*. Instead, they engaged in barter, in which opium became a common medium for exchange (US Congress, 1975). As David Steinberg (1993), a scholar of Burma notes, “All peoples began to hold commodities instead of cash, thus increasing the demand for the only easily available commodity in the hill areas—opium” (p. 3).

In the late 1940s, Shan State society became enveloped in tumult involving warfare and administrative change. The KMT incursion and the outbreak of local rebellions and the subsequent deployment of *Tatmadaw* troops to address these threats militarized society and the predation by armed groups disrupted people’s livelihoods. A transformation of local administration involved the rationalization of the system to replace traditional rule by feudal elites. By the late 1950s, the emotional and material benefits offered by the *saopha* system were no longer in place. In its place, new rulers enforced new rules for behavior but did not provide relief from violent upheavals.

While these mounting upheavals fostered societal dislocation prompting individuals to seek new survival strategies, various agents of the state, including the bureaucrats of the Shan State Government and the RC also attempted to provide new ones. State agents engaged in the provision of public welfare, such as agricultural extension and the construction of schools and medical dispensaries (Government of Burma, *Is Trust Vindicated?*, 1960, *Thirteenth Anniversary*, 1961, *Fourteenth Anniversary*, 1962). However, these efforts proved ineffective in meeting the needs of the population for several reasons, chief among which was the inability to provide security. Rather than provide protection from destructive violence, government agents became harbingers of trouble. Sporadic efforts by *Tatmadaw* officials to provide assistance were largely ineffective. For instance, state leaders promised to provide the population with assistance and protection. However, this aid was frequently not forthcoming. As the *Tatmadaw* stepped up its role to counter threats from armed resistance organizations, their meddlesome and depredatory conduct altered the rural perception of

government officials as a whole.

Previously, the primary interface between agents of the state and the local population had occurred between village leaders and lower-level *saopha* officials. The cultural affinity and common language that formed the basis of personal relations between villagers and *saopha* officials and that at times provided them protection from abuses no longer mattered. The feudal administrative system was by no means inherently benign. However, its excesses were likely moderated by its highly personalized nature and its predictability. By contrast, the new rulers made new demands on the people, and the lack of ties to the community removed an influential basis for accepting their demands.

Conclusion

This chapter began with an account of a village headman striking a bargain with a strongman. The apparent trigger was a letter from a local military commander. However, his decision along with those made by countless others over the next four decades to accept the authority of an autonomous strongman was a response to broader changes. Changes and disruptions generated societal dislocations that rendered ineffective many people's strategies of survival.

In this new environment, the previous practices no longer worked and abiding with new rules imposed by government authority no longer offered protection against interference or violence by other groups. People began to make sweeping adjustments to their lives to manage threats. The range and extent of the adjustments are difficult to discern, but adoption of new approaches for procuring sustenance, evasion of armed groups, the curtailment of unnecessary travel and schemes for wealth concealment were common. Another that had enormous implications for the patterns of social control was the acceptance of the authority of strongmen.

In the initial period of independence, several state organizations administered the rural

population and achieved relative coherence. Central state leaders initially employed local agents of the state and feudal bureaucracies to impose order. This hybrid administrative structure gave way to an increasingly centralized one. The *Tatmadaw* and the Shan State Government, and later officials appointed by the military government, took on the administrative duties previously performed by the saopha-led bureaucracies. These new agents proved incapable of governance permitting people to adapt to or minimize dislocations caused change.

Rural populations began searching for new survival strategies. Powerful strongmen were able to provide them with an environment in which people could address challenges successfully. The patterns of domination morphed from one of relative integration to one of dispersion, as localized, counter state, political orders led by autonomous strongmen emerged. The agents of the government at the national and state level in the subsequent periods lacked the ability to command social control and popular compliance with their rules and regulations.

Chapter Three

The Rise of the *Bo*: Local Autonomous Strongmen in Shan State

It was a pool of guerrilla anarchy in which the forces of nationalism, feudal regionalism, and narcotics ricocheted off each other in a series of counter-reactions, but not in a national movement united in war of independence.

-Adrian Cowell, film documentary maker, 1996

I would rather beg to differ [with Cowell] and say that the Shans were totally united in wanting independence and there was a national movement.... It is the opium traders, KMT remnants who dealt in opium, and their affiliated drug gangs exploiting the Shan situation that confuses and blurs the Shan resistance picture for foreign observers.

-Sao Sengsuk, former leader of the Shan State Army, 1996

Although the SSA spends a great deal of time trying to politically educate Shan peasants and the many independent Shan rebel groups, many of the latter still choose the path of petty warlordism rather than join a truly unified Shan revolutionary movement.

-William P. Delaney, journalist, 1974

U Gondara was a well-respected Buddhist monk from the town of Kengtung in eastern Shan State. He became the head of one of the early ethnic-Shan armed resistance organizations. During the early 1950s, he earned recognition for his efforts in raising money to support orphanages for the survivors of the violent fighting between the *Tatmadaw* and Kuomintang. He later gained prominence for his public expression of sympathies for the Shan secessionist movement. For this, local state security forces detained and severely beat him. After his run-in with the authorities, he fled Kengtung and went underground (McCoy, 1972, pp. 309-311).

Concomitantly, the leaders of the incipient Shan rebellion recognized that the anti-government sentiment in the Kengtung area made it ripe for an expansion of their operations. The favorable impression made by U Gondara on Sao Sengsuk, one of the early resistance leaders tasked with recruiting new leaders, led him to tap the monk to support the Kengtung effort (Lintner, *Journal XVI*, 1986, pp. 22-23). U Gondara possessed many qualities that made him well suited for leading a rebel operation. In addition to his reputation in Kengtung

as a moral and committed nationalist, he, as McCoy (1972) notes, possessed “remarkable personal magnetism” and was "one of the few genuinely charismatic commanders the Shan rebellion produced" (p. 309).

By 1961, he had covertly returned to Kengtung and contacted several of the armed resistance bands that had sprung up in the countryside.¹⁶⁵ According to one account by the Shan State Army (1975), "Gondara was well known there and with his fiery oratory he managed to win over the small separated groups operating there" (p. 262). He received a financial windfall when Sara Ba Thein – a local official who became second in command of the group – absconded with the funds from the Kengtung treasury. The pair proceeded to Laos, where they purchased weapons from officers in the Royal Laotian Army (McCoy, 1972, pp. 306-315). By 1963, U Gondara had not only jettisoned his monk name and adopted a Shan *nom de guerre* Chao Gnar Kham (in English, *Lord Golden Tusk*), but had also severed ties with the Shan State Independence Army (SSIA) and established an armed group known as the Shan National Army (SNA).

U Gondara assumed the position of President of the SNA, and many leaders of the armed bands in the countryside received commissions as officers. He also issued identification cards to members of the organization. The SNA also issued its own currency. US State Department records indicate that a Washington-based lobbyist applied to register as a lobbyist on behalf of Sao Ngar Kham of the SNA, in an apparent attempt to gain support from the US Government.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ The circumstances by which U Gondara became the head of the SNA and independent of the SSIA remain unclear. Yawnghwe (2010, pp. 38, 170, 227) records that the SSIA employed U Gondara along with other leaders, including Chao Way, a son of the Kengtung *saopha*; Kyaw Toon; and Sai Hla Myint (also known as Bo Farang) as the SSIA representatives in Kengtung. They established the Kengtung Brigade of the SSIA. Their deaths apparently left U Gondara the undisputed leader. He reportedly succeeded them in late 1962. Counter to the wishes of the SSIA leaders, U Gondara severed ties with them and established an independent organization. Another account authored by the leadership of the SSA indicates that Sao Sengsuk escorted U Gondara to Kengtung and "left him with the necessary credentials and authority," but does not mention the other leaders (SSA, 1975, p. 262).

¹⁶⁶ US Government records indicate that their rejection of the application (United States Government. “Foreign Agents Registration Act,” (1965, January 26); United States Government. “Foreign Agents Registration Act:

By many measures, Sao Ngar Kham appeared to be the commander of an ethnonationalist insurgent organization. However, his authority proved illusory. Two British film documentary makers, who spent five months embedded with SNA units in 1964-65, observed, "[R]eal power [within the SNA] lies with the Majors who obey orders only when they choose, and it would be far more accurate to describe the SNA a grouping of independent warlords loosely tied into a weak federation with a President as a figurehead" (Cowell and Menges, 1965, pp. 1-2). Sao Ngar Kham held the *pro forma* position of President of the SNA. However, he wielded only limited influence over "the Majors." These middle ranking officers were, in fact, local autonomous strongmen wielding authority over the population independent of both armed resistance organizations and government officials.¹⁶⁷

This chapter addresses how local autonomous strongmen, rather than the central state or armed resistance organizations, emerged as the most pervasive unit of political authority in rural Shan State. By the late 1950s, a series of devastating shocks had begun to take their toll on the rural population. The survival strategies for the rural population started to break down and led people to search for new ones. The ongoing disruptions, including predatory militarization and the replacement of the traditional administrative system with an ineffective one, unhinged people from their routine practices, thereby providing an opening for strongmen and other organizations to achieve rule-making authority.

The emergence of local autonomous strongmen as the most pervasive form of authority in rural Shan State reflects their provision of components useful for people to put together strategies of survival. Their ability to address their material and existential needs engendered the population with the obligation to comply with their commands. To do so,

Inter American Development Corporation" (1965, July 2).

¹⁶⁷ British documentary filmmakers Adrian Cowell and Christopher Menges spent several months with Major Samlor, who was a local autonomous strongman holding the rank of major of the SNA. For an account of their experience, see Cowell and Menges (1965), Cowell (*Journal One*, n.d.) and their documentary film *The Unknown War* (1966).

strongmen offered rewards and imposed sanctions. However, the ability to dispense rewards and impose sanctions does not alone explain the emergence of autonomous strongmen. A principal constraint on their successes in garnering popular support was that their actions had to resonate with local needs, beliefs, and customs. Thus, strongmen also used culturally or religiously appropriate symbols and meaning-laden practices to forge the ties of loyalty that were necessary for their extension of authority.

This chapter helps clarify the confusion present in the employment of security-oriented approaches in the analysis of state formation in both Shan State and other war-ridden areas. In studies of civil wars, including those of Shan State, armed resistance organizations and the state often are the primary units of analysis. Consequently, the role played by strongmen and other armed groups is often overshadowed by a focus on armed resistance organizations.

Applying perspectives from security studies presents several limitations in understanding state formation. One shortcoming is the inability to explain the fragmentation of authority in Shan State that involved a bewildering number of splits and mergers among armed resistance organizations. A second limitation is the inability to distinguish clearly which groups or individual wield authority in an area. The failure of Chao Gnar Kham to exercise authority over local strongmen in Kengtung dramatizes the difficulties in identifying the locus of power within armed organizations. Symptomatic of these shortcomings is a bias in which explanations for the ability of armed organizations to mobilize support draw on threats of coercion and opportunities for profit, as in the case of "warlords," or solidarity stemming from shared class interests or ethnic identity.

This chapter addresses the biases found in the security studies approach by moving beyond the fixation on armed resistance organizations and considers the role of strongmen. To do this, analysis incorporates the following perspectives. One, it takes a bottom-up

approach that includes an assessment of the dynamics taking place on a "meso level" located between armed groups and the population.¹⁶⁸ This approach helps identify the role of strongmen in state formation and examine how they became the primary units of authority in Shan State. Two, it moves beyond the materialist orientation found in rationalist approaches to understanding militarized violence and shows the ideational basis of strongmen's authority. This chapter shows that the focus on material factors and the threats of violence are inadequate in accounting for the predominance of strongmen. A clearer distinction between autonomous strongmen and non-state armed groups, including armed resistance organizations, is necessary to address this conceptual basis of confusion.

At this point, it is helpful to provide a clearer conception of autonomous strongmen and their varying levels of authority. They are autonomous because they operate independently of other organizations, whether those of the state or armed resistance organizations. The types of autonomous strongmen considered in this dissertation are local and translocal. Almost all of the strongmen in Shan State have been local. They operate within the spatial confines of a locality, which is often their village of origin and surrounding areas. This chapter primarily focuses on local autonomous strongmen. However, a few autonomous strongmen became translocal by extending their authority beyond the confines of a locality. The next chapter examines these translocal strongmen in greater depth.

Understanding the distinction between a non-state armed group, such as an armed resistance organization, and strongmen is necessary for examining state formation in militarized areas experiencing violence. Taken at face value, the term 'insurgent organization' conveys that an organization employs a particular practice or technology of warfare against an internationally recognized "state." Many other features of the insurgent organizations (and non-state armed groups) are assumed, and the shared traits by both insurgent organizations

¹⁶⁸ For a discussion of meso-level conflict dynamics, see Christia (2012).

and strongmen make it difficult to distinguish between them.

To address the potential for confusion, the term armed resistance organization refers to groups often described as insurgent organizations. The characteristics of these groups are that, in addition to employing tactics and strategies developed from theories of insurgencies, they also espouse political goals directed towards transforming the political practices of the national-level state and possess clear organizational command hierarchies.¹⁶⁹ Strongmen may adopt some of these features and even operate as part of an armed resistance organization. Their membership within an armed resistance organization makes it difficult to determine who wields authority within an area. A significant difference is that the decision-making authority of strongmen-led organizations is personalized. By contrast, armed resistance organizations have a collective leadership. This sometimes involves a central committee of leaders. Understanding these differences draws attention to the different mechanisms through which organizations derive authority from and over the populations.

This chapter first introduces the strongmen in Shan State from a historical perspective. It briefly traces their ascendancy as a primary unit of authority and assesses some of their practices. Next, the chapter highlights the dynamism of social control and the inadequacy of employing a security perspective to ascertain how autonomous organizations generate authority. Finally, it examines the varied means through which strongmen succeeded in extending their rule-making authority.

Historical Overview of Strongmen in Shan State

The proliferation of autonomous strongmen in Shan State began in the late 1950s. In rural areas, strongmen began to take on many of the responsibilities often provided by local state officials. These included their maintenance of order and security. This involved resolving disputes, meting out punishment for crimes, and offering protection from other

¹⁶⁹ Fearon and Latin (2003, p. 75) define insurgency as "a technology of military conflict characterized by small, lightly armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare from rural base areas."

armed groups. In return, the population accepted their rule. Of these, taxation was one of the most important. Taxes were critical for the development of coercive capabilities. Many strongmen also succeeded in mobilizing people to serve as soldiers and assist in other logistical activities. These ranged from monitoring and ambushing the *Tatmadaw* to procuring supplies.

The tradition of strongmen in the area of the present-day Shan State dates back to the pre-colonial period. Colonial period records indicate that strongmen-led bands, sometimes referred to as *dacoit* or “bad hats” that operated in the hills beyond the reach of colonial and *saopha* security officials.¹⁷⁰ At the same time, some of the administrative officials serving the feudal *saopha*-led statelets also possessed several traits of strongmen. However, their adherence to the rules of the *saopha* indicates their dependence on his endorsement. Like many of the statist strongmen in contemporary Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia, the ones that operated in the Shan States during the colonial period depended on and reproduced local power structures involving state organizations. Their loyalty reflects the benefits offered by supporting the *status quo*.

It is impossible to assess the exact number of strongmen. They often do not feature in the reports of state bureaucrats and the pages of history. This stems in part because the “state” was so “thin.” In many areas, state officials lacked systems for monitoring and collecting detailed information. As discussed in more detail later in this chapter, scribes, whether researchers or state officials, tended to view Shan State through a security-oriented lens. Armed resistance organizations, rather than strongmen, held their gaze. The paucity of government records aggravates this situation. Nevertheless, a survey of various sources ranging from diaries and government documents to interviews and academic studies provides the empirics for this study.

¹⁷⁰ Colonial period government reports contain reports of dacoits in Shan State. For examples, see Scott and Hardiman (1983) and Crosthwaite (1912).

In the late 1950s, the number of autonomous strongmen began to emerge to the extent that they far surpassed the number of those in the past. Over thirty autonomous strongmen appeared in the period from 1958-1960 (Lintner, *Journal X*, 1986, pp. 301-302; Yawnghwe, 1990, pp. 8, 35). In the period after 1960, dozens of new ones arose. By the mid-1980s, a shift in patterns of social control began in Shan State. The number of autonomous strongmen began to decline.

This change reflects two processes. The first is the rise of Khun Sa, the most successful of Shan State's strongmen. He managed to extend his authority across Shan State and supplant the authority of many local strongmen. The second was the government's ability to undermine the autonomy of strongmen. In 1989, the newly established, *Tatmadaw*-led government, known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), initiated ceasefires negotiations with armed groups as part of a new approach to managing conflict.¹⁷¹ The agreements eroded the authority of strongmen and armed resistance organizations and created incentives for them to cooperate with the *Tatmadaw*-led central state. Several autonomous strongmen allied with central state and became local "statist" strongmen.

The Rise of the *Bo*

By the late 1950s, a significant change in the role played by strongmen in state formation began to take place in Shan State and altered the patterns of social control.¹⁷² As far-reaching changes precipitated shocks to people's strategies of survival continued to bear down on the rural population, the patterns of social control transformed from one that featured relatively integrated domination of the *saopha* at the local level to one increasingly dispersed among autonomous strongmen operating in the countryside. The attack led by Bo

¹⁷¹ For a discussion of the *Tatmadaw*'s use of ceasefires to manage conflict, see Smith (2007).

¹⁷² One of the early manifestations of strongmen in the post-colonial period was Olive Yang, a "strongwoman," also known by her Chinese name Yang Kyin Siu. Olive drew on her status as the daughter of the Kokang *saopha* as one pillar of authority. She also possessed organizational and business acumen. Together with the remnants of the KMT, she established one of the earliest large-scale operations for exporting opium from Kokang to Thailand. In 1952, the government detained her for cooperating with the KMT. For more on Olive Yang, see Lintner (1999, pp. 120, 190, 230-1, 366), McCoy (1972, p. 129), and Yang Li (1997).

Mawng and Kyaw Toon on Tangyan in 1959 revealed the extent of the inability of both central and local state organizations to command authority from the rural population as strongmen-led armed bands began violently resisting state-allied forces.

Strongmen came from various backgrounds. Some had served as village headmen and as officials in the *saopha* administration. Others were adventurers, bandits, and monks.¹⁷³ The World War II occupation by Japanese and Siamese forces was a formative period for many of the first generation of strongmen. Several had participated in resistance bands, developed military skills, and assumed roles as the protector for their communities.¹⁷⁴

The primary characteristics of this new pattern that distinguishes from those of the past were that strongmen exhibited a higher degree of autonomy and were more numerous. Strongmen possessed far greater capabilities to operate independently of other actors and organizations. Their newfound autonomy reflects a combination of their access to valuable resources and the massive dislocation among the rural population. Opium revenues provided the basis for developing coercive capacities and patronage capabilities. Societal dislocation made people open to accepting adopting new practices, which included following strongmen.

The rise of the *Bo* in the late 1950s represents a dramatic departure from the previous patterns of social control. In the initial postwar period, a political order emerged that featured a multi-tiered administrative system included officials of the *saopha*, the Shan State Government, and the *Tatmadaw*. The first wave of insurrection in Shan State (1948 to 1958) featuring Leftist and ethnonationalist inspired armed resistance organizations is an instance of early resistance to domination by state authorities. However, these challengers proved

¹⁷³ Yawnghwe (2010) provides background on early strongmen,

Each band has not more than thirty men, loosely organized, and led by assorted types ranging from former village level leaders such as Bo Gang Yoom, Hso-gyam, Pawlam Ho Mang; adventurous souls such as Bo Ngaa-muang, Bo Wa, Bo Deving, Bo Gunzate; former Shan bandits such as Gun-hok, Bo Paan, and Hso-lae; Chinese bandits such as Pao Yung, to name but a few (p. 35).

¹⁷⁴ The emergence of strongmen took place in central Burma during the early independence period and described as "*Bo*." Many of them were politicians with ties to the ruling coalition of the AFPFL. However, a key difference is that many of these were reliant on access to central state resources. For a discussion of these strongmen, see Callahan (2004).

incapable of providing the rural population with the components necessary to gain widespread support. They achieved only minimal local support, operated in small pockets of territory, and encountered levies raised and supported by local officials – including by *saopha* – to fight them (Ba Thann Win, n.d., p. 170). In the mid-1950s, the amnesty offered by the central government led many insurgents to give up their struggle and return to civilian life (Smith, 1999, pp. 168-169).¹⁷⁵

Government officials, civilian and military, strove to impose law and maintain order according to the government's directives. However, by the late 1950s, their success in establishing order was mainly confined to the administrative centers and areas surrounding the military outposts established along the key roads of Shan State. The threat of ambush by armed resistance groups constrained government officials' attempts to perform administrative tasks in rural areas. State officials remained mostly in their cantonments in towns, while the *Tatmadaw*'s patrols and military campaigns in the countryside often required deployment *en masse* to ward off attacks (Cowell, 1975, p. 15).

By 1959, a second wave of insurrection had emerged. Armed resistance organizations advancing ethno-nationalist principles challenged the authority of the state. One strategy aimed to advance their reformist political goals was their engagement with strongmen to enhance the strength of their movement. They achieved cooperation through a combination of cajoling and coercion. Yawnghwe's (2010, pp. 18, 38) account of his time as an SSA officer from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s notes that he applied both persuasion and threat of force to gain strongmen's acceptance of his authority, noting that efforts by the SSA were not always successful. In one instance, Bo Lai Oo, a local strongman, “put himself nominally under the SSA 2nd Brigade (of Bo Mawng).” But, two years later, he became a *Tatmadaw*-allied *Ka Kwe Ye* militia (Yawnghwe, 2010, p. 186). This event and others indicates that in

¹⁷⁵ Not all of the members of the early rebellions responded to the government's offer of amnesty. For instance, Kornzurng left the faltering Shan State Communist Party and joined the *Num Suk Harn* forces led by Chao Noi.

some cases even the well-organized armed resistance organizations did not exercise control over its members.

The decision by powerful strongmen to reach an accommodation with an armed resistance organization provided opportunities for them to enhance their appeal to the population. Strongmen aimed to channel the esteem held by the population for armed resistance organizations derived from their advocacy of armed struggle against the Burmese state. A connection with an armed resistance organization helped strongmen differentiate themselves from other armed bands engaged in banditry and drug trafficking. As was the case with the strongmen affiliated with the SNA and the SSA, some strongmen continued to operate independently and were not accountable to the leadership of any armed resistance organizations or other groups. As a political history of Shan State produced by the SSA notes (1975), "Some battalions [of the SSA] were no less than a confederation of small bands, while others were controlled by the sheer weight of the personality of the commander concerned" (p. 261). In some cases, the SSA achieved a modicum of influence over weaker strongmen, who subordinated to a political-military battalion council. Others submitted because of their conviction that coordination with an armed resistance organization represented one of the best ways to pressure the central government into accepting political reforms.

On a few occasions, powerful strongmen went it alone. Among the most successful were Kornzurng, Pu Kyaung Long, Lo Hsing Han, and Khun Sa. Rather than ally with an armed resistance organization, they created their own. Distinguishing between a strongman-led band and an armed resistance organization is sometimes difficult. Some of the changes made by strongmen involved the promulgation of formalized political goals. A few strongmen took additional steps by establishing political wings to their armed

organizations.¹⁷⁶ They also participated in political and military alliances with other armed resistance and political organizations.¹⁷⁷ By adopting the trappings associated with armed resistance organizations, strongmen aimed to enhance their support by demonstrating their responsiveness to the interests of the population. Nevertheless, power remained personalized and concentrated in one individual.

While some strongmen sided with the resistance groups or went it alone, others reached an accommodation with the *Tatmadaw*. By 1961, *Tatmadaw* officials began offering strongmen-led armed bands the status of government-allied militias as part of its counter-insurgency program. This militia arrangement became widely known as the *Ka Kwe Ye* militia program.¹⁷⁸ The government issued "travel passes," which allowed members of militias to bypass state security checkpoints located on strategic road networks across Shan State. These passes effectively gave strongmen *carte blanche* to traffic opium with limited obstruction by government officials. Many militias helped transport opium for the KMT and opium merchants.¹⁷⁹

The accommodations made by strongmen with armed resistance organizations and the *Tatmadaw* were not mutually exclusive. The *Tatmadaw*'s limited leverage over strongmen, coupled with their access to resources – namely opium – independent of these organizations,

¹⁷⁶ These include those led by Pu Kyaung Long, Maha San, Lo Hsin Han, and Khun Sa's Loi Maw militia.

¹⁷⁷ As early as the 1950s, armed resistance organizations attempted to coordinate their activities through the formation of united front political and military organizations. Of these, the National Democratic Front (NDF), founded in 1976, was the most successful at coordinating the political and military activities of non-Burman armed organizations.

¹⁷⁸ The usage of the term "*Ka Kwe Ye* militia," or defense militias, to describe these groups creates confusion because authors have used it to describe at least two separate phenomena. The term sometimes refers to militia units, or Homeguards, in general. At other times, the term describes the arrangement between the government and leaders of militias in Shan State involving tacit approval to traffic opium and hold arms. For instance, Yawnghwe (2010) uses the term to describe localized paramilitary militias that have operated in Shan State as early as the 1930s. However, at other times, he refers to it as a particular arrangement between militias and the government in the 1960s and early 1970s. For a discussion of different types of militia arrangements in Burma and the development of the militia system, see Buchanan (2016).

¹⁷⁹ After joint military operations involving both Burmese and Chinese armed forces dislodged the KMT from their bases and drove them into northern Thailand, the KMT relied on local strongmen as the chief conduits for moving opium from Shan State to the Thai border. With each successive shipment of opium to the border, they expanded their forces by parlaying opium for guns. As *Ka Kwe Ye* leaders, strongmen such as Khun Sa and Lo Hsin Han built up forces reaching an estimated strength of 1,500 and 700 men, respectively (US Congress, 1975).

provided them with maneuverability. Some strongmen flip-flopped between alignment with armed resistance organizations and the *Tatmadaw*. Moreover, some of the strongmen that served as *Tatmadaw*-allied militias defied the rules by cooperating with other strongmen and armed resistance organizations. These transgressions included their payment of transit taxes when moving through areas controlled by armed resistance organizations and their sale of weapons and ammunition to them (US Congress, 1975; Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.). Some militia rejected *Tatmadaw* demands for them to assist in combat operations against armed resistance organizations. The *Tatmadaw* often lacked the leverage to impel these groups to fight other groups. In some cases, service as *Tatmadaw* militias undermined the autonomy of strongmen-led groups as they became increasingly dependent on the *Tatmadaw*. In other cases, strongmen retained their autonomy and benefitted from the militia arrangement. Strongmen, such as Khun Sa and Lo Hsing Han, took advantage of their status as *Tatmadaw*-allied militias to reap further profits from the opium trade. They used these funds to strengthen their armed forces.

“Guerilla Anarchy” in Shan State: Splits and Mergers of Armed Resistance Groups¹⁸⁰

The presence of dozens of armed groups ranging from armed resistance organizations to ragtag bands led by strongmen makes the politics of Shan State appear chaotic and difficult to understand. In particular, the staggering number of splits and mergers involving armed resistance organization defy many conventional approaches for understanding state formation and armed civil conflicts.¹⁸¹ In a period of fewer than fifteen years (1956 to 1968), Kornzurng participated in splits from at least three separate armed resistance organizations (e.g. the

¹⁸⁰ Guerilla anarchy is a term employed by Cowell (1996) to describe the situation of militarized conflicts in Shan State involving many armed groups involved in splits and mergers. One dimension was that the armed groups in Shan State were “not a national movement united in war of independence.” Sengsuk (1996) responded to this assessment, noting that,

All were fighting against the Burmese military who were committing aggression against the Shan federation. It is the opium traders KMT remnants who dealt in opium, and their affiliated drug gangs exploiting the Shan situation that confuses and blurs the Shan resistance picture for foreign observers.

¹⁸¹ For instance, a comparison of datasets on armed resistance organizations generated by the Correlates of War Project and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) to the list of groups listed in Appendix Three suggests that datasets significantly underestimate the number of armed groups operating in Shan State.

CBP, the *Num Suk Harn*, and the SSA). In the course of his career, he also played a role in the establishment of at least six armed resistance organizations: SSCP, SNUF, SSA, SURA, TRC, and MTA.¹⁸² Across Shan State, over three dozens armed resistance organizations operated in the period between 1948 and 1996 (See Appendix Three). In the early 1970s, Jimmy Yang, a strongman from Kokang and former SSA commander, told McCoy (1972) in an interview that, "it would take a computer to keep track of them [the armed bands] all" (p. 291).

Several armed resistance organizations experienced splits and mergers. In some instances, a faction of one group would break away and either set up another organization or join another. In 1960, one of the most far-reaching splits occurred. A group of former Rangoon University students from Shan State, who earlier had left university to join Chao Noi's *Num Suk Harn*, cut their ties with him to establish a new armed resistance organization: the Shan State Independence Army (SSIA).¹⁸³ Three years, later they helped form the Shan State Army (SSA).

An additional element of complexity is the frequent cooperation and mergers among armed groups. Among the many, the merger of three-armed resistance organizations – the SSIA, the SNUF, and the KRF – in 1964 that produced the Shan State Army is an early example. Its establishment reflected the growing recognition of the need for unity among resistance groups in Shan State. The SSA became the most respected armed resistance organizations in the Shan State. Several of its leaders could continue to play an influential role in Shan State politics for the next five decades. Another notable merger resembled a hostile takeover. In the mid-1980s, Khun Sa brought the Thailand Revolutionary Army (TRA)

¹⁸² A few of these organizations, such as the Kornzurg-led Thailand Revolutionary Army, were short-lived. And in most cases, the creation of a new name was an attempt to signal that a group had either merged with another or had split to form a new organization.

¹⁸³ Among the students who join Chao Noi and later established the SSIA and SSA were Sai Toon Aye, Chao Kyaw Toon (Hso-won), Sai Hla Aung, Sai Myint Aung, Sai Pan (Boontai), Sai Kyaw Sein (Hso-Ten), Sai Gaw Kham, Sai Yawt, Khun Thawda, and Sao Sengsuk (Yawnghwe, 2010, p. 35).

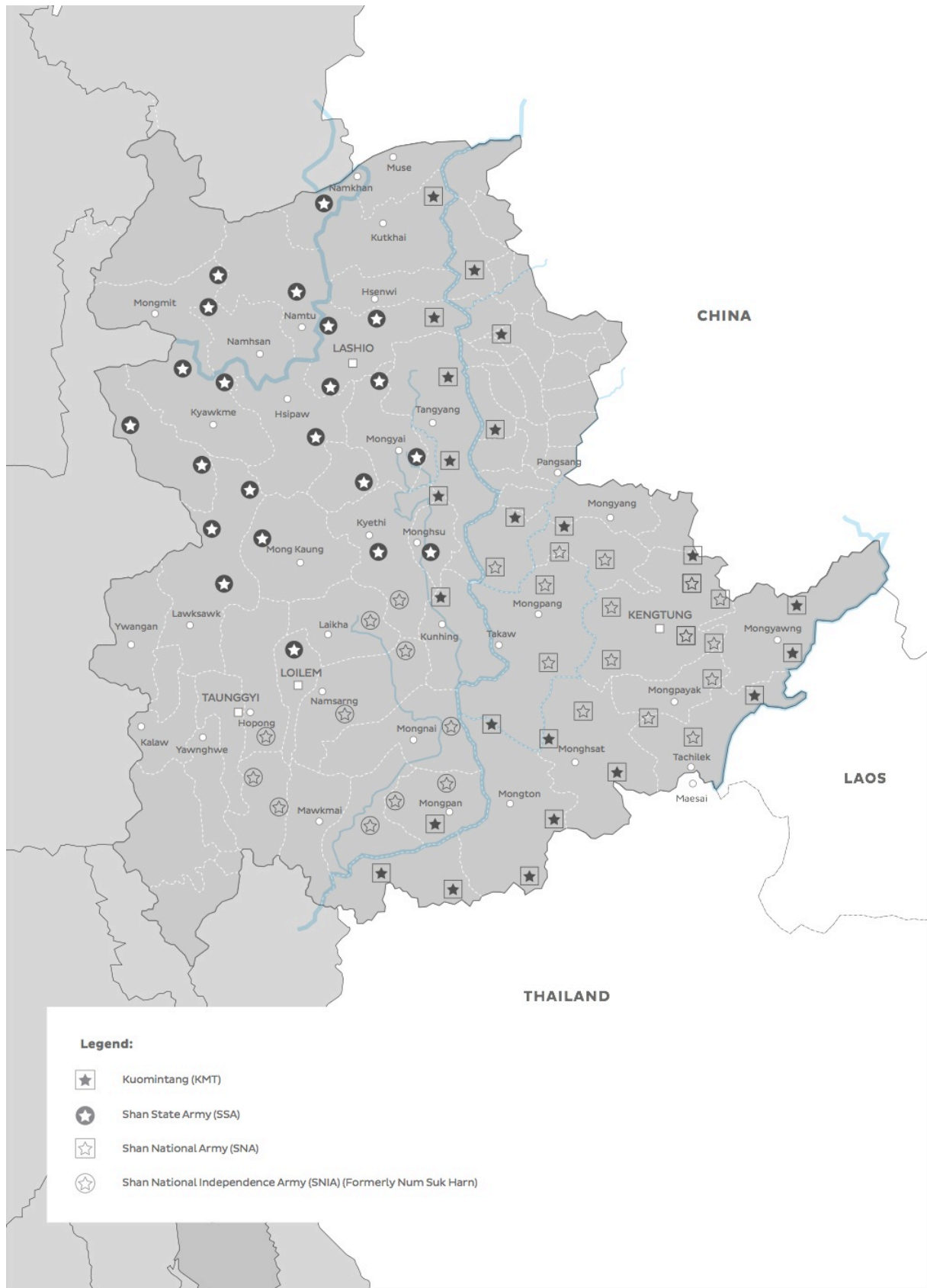


Figure 3.1: Selected Armed Groups in Shan State, 1965-1966¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ This map is adopted from Yawngwhe (2010).

under his influence, rechristening the expanded force as the Mong Tai Army (MTA). The establishment of the MTA in part reflected the continued calls for unity among some Shans. But, the union also involved coercive threats by Khun Sa against the TRA.

The splits among armed organizations involved other processes. On several other occasions, armed resistance organizations experienced defections in which mid-level commanders led their units to join the *Tatmadaw's* militia program. In some cases, the leader of an entire battalion or brigade led his unit to become a *Tatmadaw*-allied militia.¹⁸⁵ Several armed resistance units also split over the issue of allying with the powerful CPB. The communist proffered access to their Chinese government-supplied arsenal to members of armed resistance groups in exchange for cooperation that sometimes involved acceptance of their political position. After 1989, the *Tatmadaw*-government's offer of ceasefire arrangements also produced splits within armed resistance organizations.

Several units also accepted the KMT's offer of material support and resources and allied with them. The KMT dominated the opium trade and provided funds and weapons, along with preferential opium trading privileges, to armed units in return for acceptance of their authority. For instance in 1968, the SSA encountered a split precipitated by the KMT. Kornzurng led the SSA troops under his command to establish the Shan United Resistance Army (SURA) and allied with the KMT. Similar to the KMT, CPB forces offered Chinese-supplied weapons to armed groups in return for an alliance. Their offer precipitated splits within at least four armed resistance organizations.¹⁸⁶

State Formation and Conflict: Units of Analysis

The numerous defections and mergers among armed groups highlight the dynamism

¹⁸⁵ Examples of defections, include Sai Nang of the Shan National Independence Army – an offshoot of the *Num Suk Harn* in 1968 (Yawngwe, 2010, p. 201); Sai Pan-mai, the Commander of the SSA Third Brigade in 1968 (Yawngwe, 2010, p. 206); Chao Hso Noom of the SSA's Second Battalion in 1967, he rejoined the SSA in 1970 (Yawngwe, 2010, p. 167); and Bo Lai Oo of the SSA Second Brigade in 1967.

¹⁸⁶ At least four armed resistance organizations in Shan State experience significant splits related to the CPB, including the SSA, the PNO, the SNA, and the LSA.

and often unpredictability of Shan State politics. How does one make sense of these ongoing reconfigurations of authority? What accounts for the frequent shifts involving splits and the consolidations of power involving mergers? These patterns of realignment defy many conventional approaches found in the both the scholarly literature on civil wars and studies of Burma's civil wars.

A common lens for approaching an understanding of the operation of power present in security-oriented studies of civil wars is to conceptualize non-state armed groups, including armed resistance organizations, as unitary actors. Quantitative approaches employing econometric models and detailed datasets conceptualize civil wars as consisting of dyadic relationship between the state and its challenger.¹⁸⁷ Qualitative approaches to civil war often incorporate a broader conception of these groups.¹⁸⁸ Nonetheless, analysis focused on such organizations often misses many critical dimensions of state formation.

A conception of conflict as dyadic relationships between the state and a challenger does not fair well in accounting for the frequency in splits and mergers among units of armed groups both allied and in opposition to central state. Often armed resistance organizations are viewed as discrete units devoid of internal politics. This view tends to treat armed resistance groups as more or less the same. To the extent that politics within and among armed groups are considered, they are often limited to analysis of intra-elite power struggles.

Another shortcoming of a dyadic conceptualization is that attention to the activities of armed resistance organizations often neglects their relations with society. The analysis of this substratum often relies on classification schemata drawn from social science theory to assess

¹⁸⁷ For example, see the conflict related datasets produced in conjunction with the Correlates of War Project and Peace Research Institute Oslo (Gleditsch, Wallensteen, Eriksson, Sollenberger, and Strand, 2002; Lacina and Gleditsch, 2005; and Singer and Small, 1994).

¹⁸⁸ The central role of militarized violence in Shan State politics for the last half-century has led many scholars to approach its political history through a security lens. One indication of this approach, undoubtedly encountered by students of Burma's civil wars, is the long list of acronyms in many studies of the post-World War II civil wars in Burma (Linter, 1999; Smith 1999). These lists serve as handy ciphers for readers to negotiate the dizzying multitude of armed resistance organizations.

the basis of solidarity between armed groups and society. These include typologies of armed resistance organizations, which characterize the role played by a mixture of their political goals and deployment of symbols of identity as the basis for mobilizing people. Of the many classifications, ones invoking either ethno-nationalism or Leftist ideological goals are the most prevalent in Shan State.

Theoretically inspired typologies for armed resistance organizations also prove incapable of apprehending the shifting patterns of authority in Shan State. Marxian-inspired explanations that suggest an individual's economic class account for his or her political interests do not fully explain the patterns of alignment and sources of cohesion in Shan State. For instance, the strongmen came from diverse backgrounds that included farmers, aristocrats, clergy, members of the *saopha* administration, and merchants. That strongmen came from almost all strata in the social hierarchy of Shan State runs *contra* to the prediction of many Marxian-inspired explanations.

The contention by some government officials and scholars that the Shan rebellion was a conservative royalist movement aimed at restoring the authority of feudal leaders is an explanation adopted from Marxian thought that misses its mark. This interpretation of the feudalist orientation of the movement cannot account for either the absence of *saopha* in leadership positions and the opposition by segments of society to leaders with ties to the *saopha*. In general, the *saopha* publically opposed the rebellion. Some accounts point to limited support by a few *saopha*.¹⁸⁹ Yawngwhe (2010), a son of the *saopha* of Yawngwhe and Sao Hearn Kham, attributes the lack of support for revolution among many of the *saopha* to their conservatism and "their loyalty to whoever was the constitutional authority" (p. 117).

Opposition to the leadership of Sao Hearn Kham points to the resonance of anti-feudal sentiments among some quarters of the Shan resistance movement. She embodied

¹⁸⁹ For accounts of *saopha* support, see Lintner (1999) and Cowell (*Journal Two*, n.d.). Many of the leaders of the armed resistance movement were relatives and former members of the *saopha* administration.

militant Shan nationalism as an outspoken former Member of Parliament (1958-1960) and Head of the Shan State War Council (1964-1969), a committee created to coordinate the efforts of armed resistance organizations in Shan State.¹⁹⁰ However, her ties to the feudal order through her marriage to Sao Shwe Thaike, the *saopha* of Yawngwhe, and her royal lineage as the daughter of the *saopha* of Hsenwi made her position as the top leader of rebel forces in Shan State unacceptable to several leaders of the Shan resistance. Several refused to either join the SSA or cooperate with the Shan State War Council (SSWC).¹⁹¹ According to Yawngwhe (2010) and Cowell (*Journal One*, n.d.) opposition in part reflected anti-feudal sentiments.

The classification of armed resistance organizations as ethno-nationalists also does not adequately account for many of the dynamics. Ethno-nationalist insurgencies often draw on shared identities based upon ethnicity as the basis through which armed groups mobilize popular support and maintain solidarity. However, the conflation of shared ethnicity with the support for armed groups advocating political goals and providing protection for "in-group" members falls short in addressing some dynamics occurring within Shan State.

One, the political divisions among ethnic Shan elites demonstrates that government practices did not catalyze solidarity, among all Shans. Instead, the response to threat by the ethnic Burman-dominated *Tatmadaw* was mixed. Many engaged in resistance by supporting or joining the armed resistance movement. However, some groups sought accommodations with the *Tatmadaw* and enlisted in pro-government militia program. In many cases, people of one ethnicity also joined armed resistance organizations led by members of another ethnic group.

Two, the conflict that took place between armed resistance organizations with

¹⁹⁰ Members of the Shan State War Council were Sao Hear Kham (Chairperson), Kornzurng (Vice Chairperson and Chief-of-Staff), Sai Myint Aung, Sai Pan (Vice Chief-of-Staff), and Khun Thawda. In 1966, Jimmy Yang of the SSA Fifth Brigade became a member (Yawngwhe, 2010, p. 39).

¹⁹¹ According to sources, these included Sao Gnar Kham, Bo Gang Yoi, Bo Deving, Chao Noi, and Bo Hso Lam (Cowell, *Journal One*, n.d.; Yawngwhe, 2010, p. 35).

common political objectives and shared ethnicity also defies the expectations.¹⁹² For instance, this perspective does not adequately address Khun Sa's shifts between alignment with the *Tatmadaw* and armed opposition to the government. Nor does it address steps taken by Khun Sa that weakened other actors in the Shan resistance movement. On several occasions, he attacked Shan armed groups such as the one led by Bo Deving, the SSA, and the SURA. He also attacked non-Shan armed resistance groups. Moreover, in the early 1980s, Khun Sa reportedly led a campaign of assassination targeting senior political leaders of the Shan movement. A view expressed by many people in Shan State is that Khun Sa's bi-cultural heritage as the son of a Shan mother and Chinese father meant that he was not "Shan." From the perspective of Sao Sengsuk (1996) and others, Khun Sa's actions were another example of the meddling by ethnic Chinese opium interests. Nonetheless, by 1990, Khun Sa succeeded in bringing most of the ethnic Shan resistance groups under his command – the Mong Tai Army – and built the largest and best-equipped army in the history of the Shan rebellion.

The patterns of conflict and cooperation that reflect the exercise of authority within Shan State are complex and not well understood. In some cases, such as the SNA, the leadership of the organization, whether the chairperson or a central committee, lacked the authority to command its middle-level functionaries, such as its local commanders. In other instances, an organization's leader had ties with his followers that were personalized to the extent that the distinction between loyalty to the organization and its leader was blurred and hence immaterial. By consequence, analysis can marginalize the importance of internal dynamics within groups.

An understanding of the loci and operations of power within an armed resistance organization requires moving beyond conceptions of groups as discrete units. This approach

¹⁹² For example, Bo Gang Yoi's band attacked the SSA First Brigade in Northern Shan State in 1968 (Yawnghwe, 2010, pp. 156, 158).

often implicitly assumes that hierarchical organization charts detailing the chain of command of an armed group mirror the actual exercise of power. To assess the shifting patterns of social control, it is necessary to look "under the hood" of armed resistance organizations and better understand their basis of their cohesion and sources of disunity.

Strongmen: The Building Blocks of State Formation in Shan State

An examination of strongmen provides a perspective useful for understanding the shifting alliances among armed groups and morphing patterns of social control. Their ascendancy as the principal unit of authority in the rural Shan State reflects a shift in which the population began accepting their rules rather than those prescribed by state organizations. This reflects their ability to offer people workable survival strategies. Key components of this were their provision of rewards, their imposition of sanctions for failure to obey their rules, and finally their employment of symbols as a basis for bonds of affectation with individuals.

Rewards

The provision of rewards is a component through which strongmen exercised social control. The most common element of these rewards involved their assumption of many of the duties typically associated with state organizations. Among these were the maintenance of security and order. The employment of coercive force to protect a population from other armed groups is one of the most prevalent and effective means through which strongmen established social control. The rural population lived in a realm of anarchy in which they faced threats of pillaging, retribution for perceived support of resistance forces, and the life-threatening prospect of being caught in the midst of violent combat. Strongmen engaged in consultation with local village leaders to coordinate the maintenance of security and order through policing and the adjudication of disputes. Strongmen deployed their soldiers to deter pillaging and attacks by other predatory armed groups, including bandits, militias, insurgents, and the *Tatmadaw*. The presence of members of strongmen-led resistance band was a

provocation for attack by the *Tatmadaw*. Strongmen coordinated network of soldiers and villagers to monitor troop movements by the *Tatmadaw* (Cowell, *Journal One*, n.d., *Journal Two*, n.d.). This provided opportunities for villagers, flee or hide possessions, and for members of a strongmen-led band to disperse.

Another good provided by strongmen was that they imposed order in villages. This involved their adjudicating of disputes and dispensation of punishments for offenders. For most strongmen, the provisions of rewards included basic elements of governance. As strongmen became more prosperous, they engaged in supporting schools and health services. However, these capabilities were usually only available to translocal strongmen.

Sanctions

Strongmen also drew on the threat of sanctions as another basis for enforcing social control. Their possession of coercive capacities meant that people faced the possibility of retribution in some form for deviation from the rules of strongmen. The penalties for non-compliance with their rules varied from one individual to another. The scope of behavior that strongmen regulated was broad and often aimed to maintain order in a community.

For instance, many strongmen took on the duties for resolving disputes and dispensing punishment for crimes. As Sai Ker, a follower of a strongman serving as a Major in the Shan National Army in the early 1960s, notes (Cowell, *Journal One*, n.d.),

If a man steals or kills or takes a girl and she does not agree, we send spies to ask the people what is he doing. We have rules for this. Then we send him to HQ or make him work very hard. Or we call his uncles and family and keep them as guarantees...If a soldier goes to the Burmese and we catch him again and no family or headman came for guarantees, sometimes we shoot him. If the soldier goes back to the Burmese, we take what things the uncles gives for guarantee [such as a pig or water buffalo] (p.19).

In other instances, the violation of the rules meant that the transgressor faced possible

banishment from one's village, imprisonment in a pit, and execution.¹⁹³ In this case, the involvement of strongmen in maintaining order represents both a reward for the population and at the same time sanction for individuals who violated rules. Some strongmen reserved capital punishment for offenses critical to their maintenance of coercive capacity. In some instances, repeated desertion, desertion with one's weapons or cooperation with other groups meant execution (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.).

The threat of sanction by strongmen also provided a basis for people's adherence to the requests for taxes. Cowell (*Journal One*, n.d.) observes that villagers in Kengtung paid taxes to local strongman "because they wished to do so, but there is also no doubt that...they meet the full quota of taxes in a bad year from a certain amount of fear" (p. 143). In some cases, strongmen employed violence for the failure to pay taxes. However, its infrequency suggests that this was used strategically, rather than indiscriminately. The reliance of strongmen-led bands on the rural population for support – including their assistance in hiding them from the *Tatmadaw* – created incentives to maintain amicable relations.

Symbols and Practices

A discussion of archetypal or "pure type" strongmen provides a useful entry point for examining their use of meaning-laden symbols and practices as a basis for developing relations necessary for exercising social control. In Shan State, the background of an archetypal strongman provided experiences that provided skills and experiences useful for gaining rulemaking authority. He was a polyglot, raised in a multicultural environment through which he acquired a command of locally spoken languages. He attended a local village school and spent time as either a monk or a novice. These experiences provided the cultural background that served as referent and means for fostering social ties with the rural population of which village headmen were the most important for gaining support.

¹⁹³ The imprisonment of criminals in a pit for varying lengths of time was a widespread form of punishment in Shan State.

As a young man, service as a soldier or policeman afforded the opportunity for him to develop martial skills and distinguish himself. Through acts of courage during combat, he acquired a *nom de guerre* from his comrades. His success in surviving dangerous situations often provided him with a reputation for possessing a supernatural basis for protection and extraordinary prowess or power. Service as an official of the feudal bureaucracy conferred status and indicated that the *saopha* had confidence in his abilities to serve as a competent administrator. The association with the *saopha* also channeled the prestige and political authority of the feudal administration.

Another means for gaining a moral basis for the exercise of social control came through his association with the Buddhist Sangha. An individual's public commitment to the precepts of Buddhism and sponsorship of Buddhist ceremonies dramatized their possession of moral authority. The Buddhist belief system common to Shan State holds that one's social position is reflective of the accumulation of merit in one's previous lives. Consequently, the status as a patron of Buddhism demonstrated one's inherent possession of merit and conferred authority.

The archetypal strongman received acceptance from segments of society for his role as a benefactor of a community. Interpersonal bonds of loyalty and kinship with a community provided a basis for strongmen to take on a leadership role. Shan State is both ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous. Linguistic ability in one of its locally spoken languages provided a basis for forging powerful bonds based upon shared identity with people who also spoke the same language. He also drew on symbols that transcended ethnicity and appealed across ethnic lines. These included practices that conveyed determination to advance people's security interests, which served as an alternative to ethnicity as a basis for gaining popular support. Among these was a commitment to drive *Tatmadaw* units out of Shan State and gain greater political autonomy for Shan State. An independent Shan State and an end to abuses

by *Tatmadaw* members was a common goal espoused by strongmen that resonated across ethnic cleavages of Shan State society.

This archetype is for heuristic purposes. While the symbols and practices varied, most strongmen possessed several, but not all of these traits. However, their preponderance among strongmen draws attention to the importance of symbols and meaning-laden actions and practices in fostering an affective basis for compliance with their rules through the development of powerful emotional connections to the population. For individuals to achieve this, they needed the resources and ability to generate and maintain these ties.

The social ties and bonds between strongmen and society provided a powerful pillar for strongmen to exercise social control. They provided the psychological elements useful for people's survival strategies. Almost universally, the interpersonal ties formed by a strongman with their native community provided a powerful motive for compliance. Just as some members of a family or community have responsibilities to take on specific duties for a group, other members have responsibilities towards its members recognized as leaders. These individuals, in turn, possess the position to command compliance from members of the group.

They also drew on practices and symbols recognized by the population as fitting with traditional patterns of authority as a basis for forging ties with communities. The mobilization of symbols of identity provided a basis for forming emotional bonds with individuals. The manifestations of symbols served as a basis through which strongmen achieved a familiarity and rapport with segments of society. Together these personal ties and use of symbols generated an affective basis for the acceptance of their rules among a community.

Ongoing efforts by the central state leaders to restructure people's behaviors through administrative reforms and rural society's unfamiliarity with their rationale meant that traditional patterns of authority often retained their resonance. The central state leaders'

promotion of the *Pyidawtha* welfare program in the 1950s and the Burmese Way to Socialism in the 1960s embodied its reformist goals for postcolonial Burma. In Shan State, the central state leaders' espousal of a commitment to the principles of social justice did not translate into widespread support. One factor is that the efforts to implement the plans were limited. Instead, the experience of the rural population of the Shan State with the government largely involved the *Tatmadaw's* engagement in counter-insurgency activities. The government's espousal of support for justice became just another one of its unfulfilled promises.

In this milieu, the manifestation of symbols and practices recognized by the population as associated with the traditional authority retained their resonance. The recognition by segments of society that an individual possessed power or *hpon* is one element that provided an affective basis for strongmen to exercise social control. Yawnghwe describes *hpon* as akin to charisma, glory or power, noting that it “entails both the physical and mental image of the follower towards his leader. In the Burmese case one cannot become a leader without *hpon*” (Yawnghwe, *Patterns of Authority*, n.d., p. 11). The attribution of *hpon* to an individual reflects recognition of their achievement and practices. While this is akin to Weber's notion of charisma and its routinization, these instances take place in a context where society viewed strongmen as wielding power or *hpon*, or, as Wolters (1999, p. 94) notes, “soul stuff.”

A critical element common to conceptions of traditional authority is that people recognize individuals adhering to these practices as powerful individuals. These range from possessing prowess, religious attainment or high social status. As Yawnghwe (“Pattern of Authority in Pre-colonial Burma,” n.d.) notes, “The followers would not dare to resist or challenge the leader as long as they believe that he had great *hpon*. They were ready to comply with his wishes and obey his commands” (p. 2).

Regular religious ceremonies are the centerpiece of social life in rural Shan State. Participation in religious life provided strongmen with opportunities to dramatize their claims to moral authority and possession of *hpon*. The promotion of Buddhism by *saopha* is part of a historical tradition of kingship common to many parts of mainland Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka, which served to legitimate their authority. After 1959, the role of *saopha* in society declined. In 1962, the *Tatmadaw* detained many of the *saopha* for six years and encouraged the remaining ones to keep a low profile. Many strongmen adopted the roles in Buddhist ceremonies reserved for *saopha* and other lay leaders, who had achieved status for Buddhist accomplishment. Participation demonstrated their commitment to a moral system widely accepted by the population. By adopting the practices followed by the *saopha*, strongmen presented themselves as chief patron and defender of the Buddhist Sangha in the same ways that the *saopha*.

Another way through which strongmen manifested their position as righteous leaders was their display of support for Buddhism. The donation of funds for the upkeep and construction of Buddhist temples and sponsorship of the Buddhist Sangha are also practices adopted by strongmen.¹⁹⁴ Kornzurng's expression of his commitment to principles of Buddhism and its concepts of morality is likely unrivaled by most any other strongman. He not only sponsored the construction of temples and Buddhist ceremonies but also interwove several of the precepts kept by Buddhist monks into the official code of conduct for officers in his organization. Precepts include abstinence from sleeping in a soft bed and drunkenness. In this way, the adherence to Buddhist codes of conduct by the leader and senior members of the organization manifest his commitment to Buddhism and through this tapped into

¹⁹⁴ Khun Sa, Mo Heng, and Lo Hsin Han all donated money for the construction and renovation of Buddhist temples. Mo Heng paid for the rebuilding of Wat Fa Wiang Inn in Piang Luang in 1968 shortly after he took control of the lucrative smuggling route. The temple served as both a school and orphanage for local villagers, his followers and refugees fleeing strife in Shan State. Khun Sa donated the funds for the construction of temples in Baan Hin Taek and Homong. Lo Hsin Han also sponsored building project at a Chinese temple in Lashio.

Buddhist notions of moral authority (See TRC, *The Shan State and the TRC*, n.d.).

An individual's ties with the *saopha*-led *anciens régime* also provided a basis for strongmen to exercise social control. Several strongmen were relatives of the *saopha*,¹⁹⁵ served as administrative officials in the feudal administration,¹⁹⁶ or worked as members of the *saopha* police force.¹⁹⁷ After the abnegation of the *de jure* authority of the *saopha* in the late 1950s, the officials formerly within his retinue continued to possess prestige and authority based on their earlier positions within the feudal administration. As Yang Li (1997), the daughter of the Kokang *saopha*, notes, "the ties between *saopha* [sic] and the people although officially severed was still very strong. For the simple people of Kokang, they do not understand nor appreciate the legal aspects of the transfer" (p. 89). Many strongmen channeled the prestige and moral authority of the *saopha* by manifesting their ties to his regime. In this way, strongmen adopted the symbolic role of benefactor previously held by *saopha*. But in some cases, there was strong opposition to *saopha* authority from society. For instance armed resistance among ethnic Pa-O communities to the *saopha* in the 1950s and the support for the anti-feudal leaders are clear examples. Nonetheless, the increased salience of Shan identity, the *saopha* became a potent symbol of Shan nationalism.

From a statist perspective, the *saopha* officials who formed armed bands and resisted government authority had become enemies of the state. By contrast, a local perspective highlights the continuity of their role as local leaders. In many cases, the lack of endorsement by state officials – popularly viewed as antagonistic and having limited or no justifiable claims to rulemaking authority – had limited bearing on the standing of these strongmen in

¹⁹⁵ For example, Maha San, Jimmy Yang, Olive Yang, and Chao Hso Noom were the children of *saopha*. Khun Thawda was a relative of the Hsipaw *saopha*.

¹⁹⁶ For example, Bo Gang Yoom, Hso Gyam, Bo Gun-hok, and Sai Pan Mai had served as village headmen. Long Khun Maha was Chief Minister for the *saopha* of Mong Yai. Bo Zinda was a driver for the Hsenwi *saopha*. Sao Hseng Kham, the son of the Chief Minister in Mong Kawng, mobilized a band of roughly 100 soldiers and liaised with Shan insurgents. Khun Sa was the son of the *myosa* of Loi Maw.

¹⁹⁷ For example, Kornzurng, Bo Deving, Bo Mawng, Pheung Kya Shin, and Lo Hsin Han had served as members of the *saopha* security forces.

their communities.

The use of titles and honorifics is a social convention in Shan State, which signals one's position within the upper echelon of its social hierarchy. For instance, the title *chao* is reserved for the *saopha*, whereas his male progeny took the title *khun*. Several strongmen deviated from this convention and took royal titles in an apparent attempt to generate support among the rural population. Chao Noi, Zau Seng of the Kachin Independence Organization, and several ethnic Chinese militia leaders adopted this honorific despite their lack of royal pedigree or credentials.

It is unclear to the extent that this practice resonated with the population. It may have proven effective with groups who were not aware of the non-royal pedigree of these individuals. Attempts by ethnic Chinese from Yunnan to pass themselves off as members of the Shan feudal aristocracy failed. The predominately ethnic Shan leadership of the SSA derided the practice of fictive royalty, as it did not accord with social conventions (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.). Chao Noi created the impression among his followers and Thai government security officials that he was a relative of the Kengtung *saopha* and enjoyed his financial and moral support.¹⁹⁸ Later, when his links to royalty proved nonexistent, several of his detractors, including the SSA leaders, mocked him for his attempts to present himself as someone possessing a royal pedigree (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.; Shan State Army, 1975; Yawngwhe, 2010). Nevertheless, the practice of “fictive royalty” demonstrated the effectiveness of the connection with the *anciens regime* as a basis of authority when utilized in accordance with local norms of appropriateness.

A second pattern of traditional authority is the expression of traits associated with men of prowess. According to Wolters (1982), these are individuals who exhibit

¹⁹⁸ Yawngwhe (*Written Answers to Questions*, n.d.) notes that the leaders of the early Shan resistance, such as Chao Noi, Sai Tun Aye, Sao Gnar Kham, and Sara Ba Thein, gave Thai elites “the impression that they were sent by the princes and that there was a well-organized clandestine organization in place. They liberally made use of the names of the princes and prominent SS [Shan State] figures” (p. 4).

extraordinary degrees of cunning, bravery, and accomplishment. The success of individuals in performing feats that require these traits often meant that people in Southeast Asia recognized them as possessing power or *hpon* (Heine-Geldern, 1956; Wolters, 1982). Several strongmen manifested traits recognized by segments of society as ones possessed by extraordinary individuals often regarded as men of prowess or as “*phon [hpon]kan shi thaw thu*” (in Burmese, “person with glorious power”) (Yawngwhe, “Patterns of Authority,” n.d., p. 13).¹⁹⁹

According to this belief system, one's success in accomplishing difficult deeds or surviving dangerous situations reflects their accumulation of *hpon*. Individuals accepted the authority of these strongmen possessing *hpon* with the expectation that their proximity or closeness would provide benefits to them. Some of the processes through which strongmen achieved recognition as possessing *hpon* are as follows.

Names, titles, reputations, and even tattoos served as markers recognizable among the population as indicative of an individual's accomplishments. For instance, the use of a *nom de guerre* is a practice adopted by those who have exhibited martial prowess. Often this included feats of bravery or valor in battle, which are extraordinary and unexpected. The adoption of the title or honorific *Bo* is one marker of martial accomplishment. However, some strongmen, like Mo Heng, adopted a *nom de guerre* entirely different from their given name.²⁰⁰

A reputation for possessing supernatural abilities is another signifier of power. A popular belief that some individuals receive supernatural assistance and protection based upon their adherence to moral precepts and tattoos endowed with magical powers has

¹⁹⁹ There is variation in the pronunciation of the term in Shan, Thai and Burmese languages as well as various forms of transliteration including *phon* and *hpon*.

²⁰⁰ For example, Mo Heng is the name acquired by Kornzurng during his early military career. U Gondara, the monk who became head of the SNA, became Sao Ngar Kham.

historically served as a basis authority for political leaders in Southeast Asia.²⁰¹ The case of the rebel leader Saya San – who led a revolt against the British colonial government in the 1930s – illustrates the persistence of this belief.²⁰²

Several strongmen developed a reputation for possessing a connection to the supernatural. This aura provided a basis for attracting followers. Strongmen took part in rituals performed by Buddhist monks in which the tattoo – often imprinted in sacred Pali or Sanskrit language scripts – in conjunction with a magic spell provides supernatural protection for its bearer from piercing objects such as knives or bullets. However, a popular understanding is that for protection tattoos to be effective, the individual must also keep at least one of the precepts followed by Buddhist monks. Most often adherents were perceived as engaged in abstinence from sexual activity, intoxicants, or the eating of meat.

The attribution of their success in surviving extraordinary threats to the effectiveness of their magical tattoos and reputed adherence to Buddhist-inspired codes of moral conduct reinforced their prowess and suitability for leadership positions. The pervasiveness of this belief system is illustrated by Hso Ten, a student activist and commander in the SSA. He recounts that after hearing from villagers about their strong belief in the protection offered by magical tattoos, "We would have been stupid to say no when hundreds of people were talking about it. So we said come on then tattoo us" (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., p. 284). Sai Sai, a former *Ka Kwe Ye* militia member and doctor, explains that the reason that one member of his militia group had become its leader was that he possessed a tattoo that many believed made him invulnerable to bullets (Personal Communication, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2011).

An instructive way to understand cultural explanations for power based upon

²⁰¹ For a study of the use of traditional practices of magic by the police in contemporary Thailand, see Reynolds (2014), Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit (2013, p. 229), Tannenbaum (1987), and Spiro (1982, Chapter 4).

²⁰² In the early 1930s, a Burmese man, Saya San, led one of the largest peasant revolts in the history of modern Southeast Asia. Many of his followers believed that he possessed supernatural abilities, including invulnerability to bullets, in part because of his possession of a magical tattoo. Inspired by the initial success of his revolt and the belief in his connection with supernatural prowess, many of his followers also received tattoos (Aung-Thwin, 2010).

supernaturalism is to recognize that one's achievements are often attributed *ex post facto*. For instance, when a person possessing a protection tattoo overcomes a life-threatening event, his survival provides a basis for people to attribute supernatural abilities to him. Beliefs about an individual's connection with the supernatural provide grounds for a person to exercise authority. The possession of powers not available to most others is a distinguishing feature that lends credence to a strongmen's claim to authority. However, when such an individual dies in combat from wounds, a common interpretation is that the person did not take the steps necessary to maintain protection, such as keeping the Buddhist precepts.

Strongmen also generated powerful ties with the population by mobilizing meaning-laden symbols that resonated with people's identity. Of these, the use of symbols and adherence to practices conveying mutual recognition of membership within a community generated powerful emotional bonds between strongmen and society. For these to be effective, they had to be credible and legible with potential followers.

Strongmen tapped into the growing salience of ethnic identity as a basis for developing social control. The flourishing of Shan nationalist sentiment in the mid-1950s provided materials for strongmen to draw on to develop powerful emotional connections with communities. To do so, they drew on themes and symbols of "Shan-ness" as a basis for demonstrating their commitment to protect and nurture it. The symbols associated with the *saopha* became one expression of Shan identity. Another means of manifestation support for Shan identity was supporting the cultural production of "Shan-ness." Several strongmen, including Khun Sa and Kornzurng, became patrons of Shan culture and supported writers and the publication of literature, poetry, and history in Shan language.

The growing tension between the *Tatmadaw* and society also played a role in the increasing salience of identity politics. The rising awareness of ethnicity as a constitutive part of one's identity provided a prism for viewing the ethnic-Burman dominated *Tatmadaw's*

repression in Shan State as being caused by ethnic antipathy. A political history of Shan State produced by SSA (1975) leaders expresses this sentiment,

When there occurred murder, robbery, theft or rape in which the Burmese soldiers were involved the Shans villagers would see it as deliberate acts of destruction against the Shan nation and not as acts of individual crimes by unruly elements of the Burmese Army (p. 256).

This passage points out that many Shans attributed the perpetration of violence by Burmese officials against Shans to inter-ethnic antipathies stemming from the inability of ethnic Burmans and Shans to coexist peacefully. The growing salience of Shan identity coupled with the popularity of this framework for interpreting violence through a lens of ethnicity provided opportunities for strongmen to mobilize support.

The identification of individuals as members of a discrete Shan nation and the view that elements of their identity encountered significant threats provided strongmen with opportunities to employ symbols of ethnicity as one avenue for gaining people's acceptance of their authority. To do so, strongmen engaged in practices in which they symbolically adopted the role as a defender of Shan identity. One method was by framing their objectives in terms of preserving ethnic identity against threats from non-Shan groups. The effectiveness of this approach required drawing on existing narratives and producing others that included themes that dramatized the threat to "Shan-ness" and their commitment to preserving it. Dissemination of this took place through various channels, including frequent addresses by strongmen and their subordinates to villagers, print media, and the tradition of village theater.²⁰³ For people suffering trauma incurred from injuries and deaths of family members caused by the *Tatmadaw*, support for a strongman committed to vanquishing government forces provided a sense of purpose. The success of this appeal is observable in the case of

²⁰³ Cowell (*Journal Two*, n.d., p. 74) describes a performance that he attended in the mid-1970s in which an SSA unit employed a theater troop from Hsipaw. The performance contained many of the elements of a traditional pwe, involving slapstick and "classical" singing style. However, the narrative included themes or propagandistic elements in which Burman soldiers raped a Shan girl, killed her father, kicked monks and beat their porters. Forty years later, several of the themes in the performance remain the same. This author attended a similar performance in Wan Hai, Shan State in April 2014.

strongmen, such as Chao Noi, Bo Mawng, and others, as well as armed resistance groups, including the SSA, the TRA, and the MTA, which attracted widespread support by portraying themselves as defenders of Shan national identity.²⁰⁴

The use of symbols by strongmen that presented themselves as possessing the commitment to protect and preserve “Shan-ness” helps account for the initial success of Chao Noi, the leader of the *Num Suk Harn*, in attracting followers from across Burma. Chao Noi’s political goals involved protecting Shan State’s population from the threat presented by the *Tatmadaw*. As news of Chao Noi's army spread throughout Shan State after the Battle of Tangyan, the *Num Suk Harn* received a massive infusion of recruits. As one account notes, "Hundreds of young people, many of them high school and middle school students, trekked furtively to the border."²⁰⁵ His ambition to drive the *Tatmadaw* out of Shan State and achieve greater political autonomy for Shan State appealed to many people and helped him attract hundreds of supporters from a broad range of backgrounds, including farmers, students, and members of the Shan feudal elite.

The invocation of symbols in themselves was often not sufficient for individuals to elicit support. For example, the earlier mentioned adoption of fictive kingship by individuals in Kengtung indicates that the population must also view individuals who take on symbolic roles as credible and committed to their cause. For symbols to be effective, a strongman's appeal for the acceptance of his rules on the basis of his symbolic claims to authority had to resonate convincingly with the population. The decision to accept the authority of one group or individual over others involves processes not readily discernable.

²⁰⁴ Though not a strongman-led group, the success of the leaders of the SSA in attracting volunteers demonstrates the effectiveness of mobilizing symbols in generating support. Sao Sengsuk, a former head of the SSA, estimates the organization could have raised an army of over 40,000 men during one of his early recruitment drives to central Shan State in the early 1960s. Instead, units had to turn away recruits because of a lack of weapons (Smith, 1999, p. 191).

²⁰⁵ In 1958, Chao Noi along with an estimated 50 men established the *Num Suk Harn* in a village located on the Shan-Thai border. As word spread about its existence, students and monks also furtively trekked to the border. After the Tangyan attack, the 300-strong force of Bo Mawng and 200 other people joined the *Num Suk Harn*. By 1960, the *Num Suk Harn* had 700 men (Lintner, 1982 Part 4), p. 11).

Perhaps self-evident, communication in a common native language provided the personal ties for the development of an affinity between strongmen and individual communities. However, ethnic diversity in Shan State also meant that different communities spoke a variety of languages. The lack of a *lingua franca* inhibited the ability of *Tatmadaw* soldiers to communicate with rural populations and served as an obstacle to forging social ties. Similarly, the inability of strongmen to communicate effectively with communities also inhibited their ability to make social ties. In some cases, a strongman possessed competency in a locally spoken language. However, his inability to speak it in a manner recognized as a native speaker limited his ability to generate ties based upon shared ethnic identity. For instance, Sai Kyaw, an ethnic-Shan teacher from Kengtung and a native speaker of Shan, indicates that as a young man a militia leader attempted to persuade him and his friend to join his group. Sai Kyaw reported that the inability of the militia leader to speak Shan without an accent led him to reject his offer. His inability to clearly speak Shan signaled that he was an outsider (Personal Communication, Sai Kyaw, Chiang Mai, Thailand, February 2012). In other instances, interactions in a common language often signaled to the participants that they shared membership in the same group, possessed similar values, and provided an affective basis for strongmen to exercise social control.

The predominance of multiple ethnic groups in Shan State also posed a constraint on the effectiveness of using symbols of ethnicity as a basis for extending authority. The use of symbols specific to one ethnicity rarely held resonance to those who identified with another. This lack of resonance helps explain why a strongman's reliance on symbols of ethnicity as a basis of support seldom led to his extension of social control to other ethnic groups. Most strongmen were not able to convincingly demonstrate their commitment to protecting two separate ethnic groups at the same time. As discussed in the next chapter, a handful of strongmen succeeded in establishing sizeable counter state orders, which included trans-

ethnic populations.

Portraits of Three Local Strongmen

A closer examination of three local strongmen – Bo Mawng, Pu Kyaung Long, and Chao Hso Noom – illustrates the basis through which strongmen achieved social control. Each of these strongmen possessed many attributes of the archetypical strongmen. These portraits show some multiple channels through which strongmen gained compliance by the population.

Bo Mawng

The career of Bo Mawng (1917-1980) illustrates the critical importance of understanding that strongmen, rather than armed resistance organizations, were a primary unit of political authority in Shan State. Bo Mawng was an ethnic Wa born in Mong Lun (Marng Long) (See Figure 2.1) area of the Wa hills. His early life mirrors those of many other strongmen. In his early career, he served in the *saopha* police force and, later, as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Union Military Police (Lintner, 1982, Part 3, p. 5). He distinguished himself through displays of martial prowess. For his performance in fighting the KMT, he received a medal from the Burmese government. He also acquired the title of *Bo*, marking him as a formidable warrior (Lintner, 1999, p. 509).

In 1959, Bo Mawng embarked on his career as an autonomous strongman by leading the attack on Tanggyan that launched the Shan uprising. Afterward, he went to join Chao Noi's *Num Suk Harn*. Like many others, Bo Mawng had a falling out with Chao Noi. Yawngwhe (2010, p. 193) attributes this discord to the discovery that Chao Noi's claim of possessing American arms and supplies proved to be false. Bo Mawng joined the group of former Rangoon University students that had also left Chao Noi. Together they formed the Shan State Independence Army (SSIA). He persuaded the students to use their limited financial reserves to support his return to his native Wa Hills to establish one of their first

base areas. He later served as the commander of the SSA's 2nd Brigade. The unit possessed an estimated strength of two thousand soldiers and operated in Mong Lun and part of Mong Yai. The force had two ethnic-Wa battalions and one ethnic-Shan battalion (SSA, 1975, p. 265). In the early 1970s, as the CPB forces pushed into Wa areas, Bo Mawng refused to engage with the CPB. His career as an autonomous strongman ended in Tangyan, where it had begun in 1959, when he surrendered to the *Tatmadaw* (Yawngwe, 2010, pp. 193-194).

As Yawngwe (2010) describes, Bo Mawng was “very influential among the Wa.” For instance, the KMT courted him to assist in procuring opium from the predominately ethnic-Wa population in Mong Lun and surrounding areas. In the early 1960s, when Bo Mawng returned to his native Wa Hills as part of the SSIA, he experienced an outpouring of support from the population. Boon Tai, one of the Rangoon University students *cum* rebels who accompanied Bo Mawng, attributes the donation of weapons (old rifles) and rice from the population as reflective of his position of authority within the community (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.). His relationship with the local Lahu community was not as harmonious. Bo Mawng's SSA unit and ethnic Lahu armed groups in the Mong Lun area engaged in repeated fighting (Yawngwe, 2010, p. 232).

Bo Mawng possessed many attributes that provided a basis for exercising social control. He possessed communal ties to the local population. Like other strongmen, he and his family had a history of service to the local *saopha*. According to an interview with Ser Kham, an officer in the Shan United Army, conducted by Cowell (*Journal Two*, n.d., p. 151), Bo Mawng's grandfather and father had served as an officer for the local *saopha* in Ving Ngun (Wa area) and Loimaw (Mong Yai Township), respectively (See Figure 0.2). Between 1953 and 1957, the local *saopha* appointed Bo Mawng to lead a force to fight the KMT. For distinguished service, the government gave him an appointment to serve in the Union Military Police (SSA, 1975, p. 256). In 1958, he briefly served as an official in the *saopha*

administration in the Loimaw area of Mongyai (See Figure 0.2) (Lintner, 1982, Part 1, p. 14).²⁰⁶ His previous service as an administrator and paramilitary provided him a basis for taking on the unofficial role as protector of the community.

Bo Mawng also manifested many attributes associated with men of prowess. An account by the SSA (1975) remarks that it was "the personality and the reckless courage of Bo Mawng that kept his followers together" (p. 262). One story circulated about him is that on five occasions he allegedly told someone to shoot him and each time the gun reportedly misfired. Cowell records that one popular interpretation was that his tattoos and frequent use of a solvent endowed with supernatural properties protected him from harm (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., p. 24). Even the Rangoon-based Burmese media picked up on Bo Mawng's supernatural beliefs. In the coverage of the Battle of Tangyan, one Burmese newspaper noted that his followers "place great reliance on the gold amulets and charms which they wear about their persons" (Maung Aung Nyunt, 1959, December 4).

Bo Mawng's role in launching the Shan resistance movement provided another pillar for attracting support. As the leader of the raid on Tangyan, he achieved the status of a rebel hero in Shan State. Bo Mawng also played a leading role in the Shan rebellion. He was a founding member of the SSIA and the SSA. An SSA document (1975) noted that Bo Mawng was "greatly respected by all parties of the Shan resistance" (p. 262). According to an account by Martin Smith (1999) first published in the early 1990s, Bo Mawng is "still much revered by Wa nationalists" (p. 349).

Bo Mawng also possessed access to resources. His area of control in the Wa Hills was one of Burma's largest opium producing areas. He became an opium trader and worked with both the KMT and Khun Sa (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., p. 151). In addition, his position as commander of an SSA Brigade also meant he exercised command over a two-thousand-

²⁰⁶ Before he went underground and led the attack on Tangyan, he appointed Khun Sa as his successor (Lintner, 1982, Part 1, p. 14).

strong fighting force.

While Bo Mawng was the Commander of the SSA's 2nd Brigade, his ties with the SSA were loose. Accounts by SSA members describe Bo Mawng's affiliation with the organization as nominal, indicating that he exercised authority independent of the organization (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.; SSA, 1975; Yawngwhe, 2010). As Yawngwhe (2010) describes, Bo Mawng "remained nominally attached to the SSIA and later the SSA of the students" (p. 193). His autonomy stems from reliance on his personal bonds with the community rather than ties to the SSIA or SSA. His association with these organizations pursuing armed struggle to achieve greater local autonomy for Shan State likely reinforced his claims to authority. However, his ability to offer the population the material and ideational components for their survival strategies provided a basis for personalized power. Among these was his ability to provide order and the threat of sanction common to other strongmen. His manifestation of traits associated with both men of prowess, his ties to the traditional political order of the *saopha*, and his opposition to the Burmese also provided a critical component useful for gaining support. Nonetheless, his ongoing feud with the Lahu communities demonstrates the limits of his appeal. Details on this conflict are limited. But this tension likely reflects in part an inability to forge social ties and the limited appeal of accepting his leadership.

Pu Kyaung Long

In the ethnic Lahu inhabited areas of Mong Hsat and Mongton (Mong Hton) townships west of Kengtung, a man known as Pu Kyaung Long (unknown-1980), or "the old man of the monastery," emerged as the most influential strongman of the area (See Figure 0.2). As his name suggests, he was a religious leader and held the title of *payah* or Buddha. Bertil Lintner (1984, February 2, p. 14) describes this fusion of political and religious authority into one position as the Lahu equivalent of Tibet's Dalai Lama. Pu Kyaung Long is

one of several strongmen with a reputation for possessing supernatural powers. His career as a strongman illustrates the resonance of traditional patterns of authority for exercising social control.

Mong Hsat Township, including Pu Kyaung Long's home village of Loi Kham Long, was one of the first areas of Shan State to become embroiled in militarized violence. In the early 1950s, KMT forces seized an airfield in Mong Hsat and clandestinely received shipments of American military equipment by Taiwan. However, in 1954, local Lahu assisted the *Tatmadaw*-led military campaign – Operation Bayinaung – to drive the KMT out of Mong Hsat.

After the demise of the *saopha* in 1959, Pu Kyaung Long emerged as a dominant authority in the area. He took on the role of the *saopha* in appointing village headmen on the condition of their acceptance of his authority. The villagers paid taxes and village headmen annually paid respects to Pu Kyaung Long through ritualized ceremonies of obeisance in which local leaders kowtowed to him as a symbolic act of submission (“Story retold of Lahu nationals,” 1973, February 4). In 1959, he became the head of a *Tatmadaw*-allied militia (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., p. 200). His entry into service as a militia reportedly took place after members of Chao Noi's *Noom Suk Harn* tried to coerce him into paying taxes to them (Linter, (1982) Part 3, p. 2). Throughout the 1960s, he assisted the *Tatmadaw* in their counter-insurgency efforts targeting various Shan rebel factions (Yawnghwe, 2010, pp. 151-152).

In the late 1960s, local *Tatmadaw* officials attempted to rein in Pu Kyaung Long's authority. *Tatmadaw* units reportedly began enforcing gun control laws, seizing weapons from ethnic Lahu militias under his control, and disrupting his taxation and opium trafficking activities. In a final direct challenge to his authority, the *Tatmadaw*-led government attempted to introduce rationalized administrative practices in these areas. According to

Colonel Aung Khin, Deputy Commander of the *Tatmadaw*'s Eastern Command, the government agents took "all the men who had formerly been appointed by Pu Kyaung Long and had discussed with them handling of cases according to law" ("Story retold of Lahu nationals," 1973, February 4). State officials insisted that local leaders operate within the government's system for local administrative. This involved the establishment of local Security and Administration Committees (SACs), supervised by the *Tatmadaw* members. The *Tatmadaw* also seized one of Pu Kyaung Long's opium shipments, some of which they reportedly sold themselves (Linter, 1984, February 2, p. 14).

Pu Kyaung Long took umbrage at the at the government's challenge to his authority.²⁰⁷ He reportedly sent his son to Thailand to purchase more weapons from the KMT and Jimmy Yang. He also dispatched letters to Lahu village headmen calling for an armed uprising against the government.²⁰⁸ On January 10, 1973, Pu Kyaung Long broke with the government. He drew on his ties with local leaders and coordinated attacks on *Tatmadaw* patrols in Mong Hsat and Mongton townships. One of the letters sent by Pu Kyaung Long to other Lahu leaders in preparation for the attack reportedly contained the message (translated), "It is high time! Ready yourselves for the armed uprising against the government at the end of 1972" ("Story retold of Lahu nationals," 1973, February 4).²⁰⁹ With the assistance of the SSA, he established an armed resistance organization – the Lahu State Army (LSA) – and a political wing – the Lahu National United Party. In 1976, he moved to the mountainous areas of Doi Lang located on the Shan State-Thailand border and established a haven for lucrative heroin refinery complex and casinos operations. Chinese financiers reportedly paid him protection fees estimated at US\$ 2,000 per month to operate heroin refineries in this area (Lintner, 1984, February 4, p. 14, Lintner, 1999, p. 363-364; Smith, 1999, pp. 347-348).

²⁰⁷ Sai Hla Aung, an SSA officer, attributes Pu Kyaung Long's opposition to the *Tatmadaw*'s confiscation of his weapons (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., p. 194).

²⁰⁸ For an account by Colonel Aung Khin, see "Story retold of Lahu nationals," 1973, February 4

²⁰⁹ For accounts of the Lahu uprising, also see M.B.K. (1973, February 6) and Cowell (*Journal Two*, n.d., p. 194).

Pu Kyaung Long's career as a strongman draws attention to the importance of both the material and ideational elements in people's strategies of survival. The decline in the efficacy of people's livelihood strategies posed by the ongoing disruptions involving the *Tatmadaw's* campaign against the KMT and other rebel groups created opportunities for a reconfiguration of authority in the Mong Hsat area. In particular, it demonstrates that strongmen can manifest symbols that draw on people's beliefs that others possess supernatural powers as part of a system through which to gain compliance with their commands.

Like other strongmen, local access to opium provided the means for Pu Kyaung Long to purchase weapons. He possessed the coercive capacity necessary to both provide rewards such as protection and order, but also to dispense sanction if necessary. However, an integral part of his ability to command compliance was his interpersonal ties with the local population. As a Lahu and native of Mong Hsat, he possessed the linguistic and cultural aptitudes necessary to convincingly deploy symbols of Lahu identity and gain acceptance of his leadership. Pu Kyaung Long's personalized authority also crossed national boundaries, seen in his ability to recruit ethnic Lahu soldiers from Thailand (Smith, 1999, pp. 347-348).

Pu Kyaung Long also drew on his reputation as a man of prowess as a basis for exercising social control. Like Saya San, he was also considered by many of his followers to be a future Buddha or "divine deliverer." He also had a reputation for possessing supernatural powers. These included longevity, as he was rumored to be over 100 years old (Yawnghwe, 2010, p. 151; Lintner, 1984, February 4, p.14). Some of his followers believed he had the ability to foresee future events and the power to transform rocks into precious stones.²¹⁰ People's recognition of his unusual abilities provided another rationale for them to accept his leadership and obey his commands.

²¹⁰ According to an interview with Kya Le by Cowell (*Journal Two*, n.d.), Pu Kyaung Long said, "that everyone must worship him and then all the stones will become gold and silver" (p. 201). For more on background about Pu Kyaung Long, see Lintner (1999, pp. 277, 323, 515), Smith (1999, pp. 94-95, 347-348, 428), and Yawnghwe (2010, pp. 151-152).

After his death in 1979, his son Char Ui (sometimes spelled Kya U) inherited the title of *payah* and his father's role as a strongman. His succession is a rare instance of a trans-generational succession among strongmen. However, Char Ui appears to have lacked his father's charisma. Several of his troops broke away. The Lahu in his area of influence became one of the first victims of Khun Sa's campaign to extend his control across the Thailand-Shan State border, when his forces drove them out of their stronghold in 1982. Char Ui responded by allying with the *Tatmadaw* as a militia in January 1984. However, this proved temporary as he moved to the village of Mong Na located in Thailand along its border with Shan State and established the Lahu National Army in 1995 (Lintner, 1999, pp. 323-324, 500).

Sao Hso Noom

During the *saopha* period (pre-colonial-1959), the institution of Buddhist kingship prescribed that hereditary lineage guides the selection of *saopha* and determined who became the politico-religious leader for a community. In the period after the *saopha* transfer of power, several strongmen drew on the norms of the practice that recognized their authority on the basis of their aristocratic lineage. Sao Hso Noom (1947-1984), translated as "the Young Tiger" in the Shan language, was the son of the last chief of the Wa state of Mong Lun. His career illustrates how one's connection to the traditional authority of the *saopha* can be channeled to gain support from the population.

By the age of sixteen, Sao Hso Noom had attracted a band of armed followers and led them to join the SSIA in 1963. He rose through its ranks and became the commander of the SSA's 2nd Battalion. In 1967, the *Tatmadaw* offered him the position as the head of a *Tatmadaw*-allied militia. He accepted and directed members of his unit to transform into a *Ka Kwe Ye* militia. Later, in 1970, his unit defected from the *Tatmadaw* and returned to the SSA. He regained his standing within the SSA and briefly served as its head in 1983. A few

months later he became ill and passed away of natural causes (Lintner, 1999, p. 502; Smith, pp. 343-344; Yawngwhe, 2010, pp. 43, 167).

Sao Hso Noom's career draws attention to the importance of the tradition of hereditary kingship in Shan State as the basis through which strongmen extended social control. As Lintner (1983, April 14, p. 23) explains, "As the son of the last sawbwa (local prince) of the Wa state of Mong Leun [Mong Lun], he enjoys considerable respect and support from the Wa population in the BCP [CPB]-held territory adjacent to the Chinese border in northeastern Shan state" (p. 23). A tenet of this belief system is that people who rank among the upper echelons of a social hierarchy possess moral authority because of their accumulation of merit from their previous lives. Bonds of shared ethnic identity further cemented ties, as both Sao Hso Noom and the majority population were ethnic-Wa. He also displayed martial prowess. Lintner (1984) describes Sao Hso Noom as a "professional soldier since the age of 15" (p. 442).

The obedience exhibited by the soldiers under his command indicates the resonance of traditional patterns of authority as a basis for exercising social control. Their acceptance of his orders to shift their support from the SSA to the *Tatmadaw* and then back to the SSA demonstrates their allegiance to him rather than the SSA. Another account shows the effectiveness of his links to the *saopha* as a basis of authority. In the mid-1970s, he returned to his native Wa region as part of the SSA's first delegation to visit the CPB's headquarters in Panghsang. As Lintner (1985, February 7, p. 63) records,

When this representative of the feudal past entered Panghsang, thousands of Wa much to the embarrassment of the BCP's [CPB] Marxist theoreticians – reportedly streamed out to welcome him, shouting: "Our sawbwa has returned! Our sawbwa has returned!"

His homecoming and tacit endorsement of the CPB reportedly bolstered its legitimacy (Lintner, 1985, February 7, p. 63). This indicates the continued resonance of hereditary kingship as a basis for exercising social control.

Hso Noom's career also highlights the role played by strongmen in armed resistance organizations and the difficulties of identifying the loci of authority among non-state armed groups. Throughout his career in the SSA, he appears to have accepted the authority of the SSA's leadership. One exception is his decision to break away from the SSA and briefly ally with the *Tatmadaw* as a militia. This instance indicates the degree to which personalized authority provided a basis of social control independent of his position within the SSA. In his early career, when as a teenager, he also displayed personalized authority by raising an armed band that later followed his lead and allied with the SSIA. Although details about this episode and his access to opium revenue are limited, his success in mobilizing support suggests his ability to offer strategies of survival that met people's material and psychological needs.

These three cases help illustrate the basis through which local autonomous strongmen across the strongmen achieved support. Examining these strongmen moves beyond a discussion of opium and violence and instead offers some fascinating accounts of how strongmen drew on local conceptions of authority as a basis for exercising social control. In the case of Pu Kyaung Long, local beliefs about his supernatural power provided a critical component of his authority. Chao Hso Noom's royal pedigree also demonstrates the salience of traditional elements of power. The case of Bo Mawng illustrated the limits and challenges faced by strongmen in their attempts to extend authority. His inability to command support from ethnic-Lahu communities reflects the difficulties of penetrating communities.

The Economic and Social Foundations of Local Strongmen Authority

By the late 1950s, the strains and trauma of societal dislocation reached a point where old strategies for survival no longer offered solutions to the problem of meeting people's needs. As militarized violence spread, many faced the prospects of starvation, the possible dissolution of their family, as well as the psychological stress caused by the nagging uncertainty about the future. These dire circumstances opened up opportunities for different

groups and individuals to establish control over the population. Various military and civilian governmental organizations, armed political groups, and strongmen vied to fill the role through their access to resources, organizational ability, and aspirations. However, it was strongmen who possessed the authority to command obedience to their rules.

Studies examining the sources of power in areas experiencing fighting involving multiple armed groups have typically relied on materialist indicators. These include the perspective that the size of an armed group and the extent of its weaponry is a determinant of the scope of its influence. From this perspective, the promise of protection from other armed groups marauding throughout the countryside and the threat of retribution for failure to follow their rules provided a rationale for accepting an armed group's demands. These materialist-oriented explanations do not account for either the predominance of strongmen or that in some cases one particular strongman gained decision-making authority over another. After all, lots of strongmen and armed organizations offered protection. They also possessed capacities for coercion. The strongmen who achieved predominance are the ones that provided the population with a compelling rationale to follow them. Their success reflected their ability to offer components that advanced their material well-being but also to meet people's emotional needs and provide them with a sense of purpose.

One means through which strongmen distinguished themselves from among others organizations and individuals making demands on them involved the practices and use of symbols encoded with meanings that are not always readily discernable. For instance, interpersonal bonds between leader and follower draw on local norms and practices whereby they each take on obligations towards the other. The difficulty in pinpointing this basis of authority reflects the inability of the materialist perspectives to account for why some strongmen who possess superior material capabilities to other strongmen fail to achieve the same level of authority as their less endowed counterpart. Rationalist perspectives that frame

the decision of individuals to support strongmen through cost-benefit calculations miss the broader affective basis of support. The failure of the KMT to make inroads with the ethnic Shan population shows the limits of material resources for establishing social control. Other less well-financed strongmen, such as Pu Kyaung Long, succeeded in gaining more extensive local support, than their wealthier KMT rivals.

It is necessary to take into account the roles played by non-material factors to understand the basis through which strongmen exercised authority. In Shan State, the manifestation of traits associated with men of prowess and their employment of meaning-laden symbols provided the means for strongmen to gain people's acceptance of their authority. However, the difficulty faced by strongmen is that meeting people's emotional needs entailed that their symbols and practices resonate with society. The mixed success of Bo Mawng in commanding authority in multi-ethnic areas dramatizes that symbols and practices are not universally recognized. While he received support from Wa and Shan communities, his inability to penetrate Lahu society meant that he could not mobilize support from among them. In a culturally diverse society with populations holding different ideas about the proper wielding of authority, the ability of strongmen to manifest attributes compelling to a large population was difficult. This underlines the critical role played by their ability to offer groups emotional palliatives that satisfied their estimation of a moral leader.

The ability to command people to obey rules meant that strongmen could harness the capabilities of a population and direct them to achieve goals. The capacity to command social control often meant the payment of taxes in the form of rice, money, or opium. However, this also included a broad range of compliance with other rules and practices. These included non-cooperation with the *Tatmadaw*, the provision of information on their movements, acceptance of strongman's codes of behavior, and acquiescence to punishment for infractions.

Conclusion

Strongmen proved adept at helping rural people meet their needs and in turn gained their support. The combination of rewards, sanctions, and symbols offered by strongmen provided a compelling alternative to those provided by other organizations and their agents. A framework focused on strongmen moves beyond a focus on armed resistance organizations as the primary units of analysis. This approach provides tools for more clearly understanding processes of state formation that involved morphing patterns of social control.

The examination of three local strongmen also reveals the shortcomings of rationalist focus on material elements of political power and provides a more comprehensive understanding of strongmen and state formation. An implication of this assessment is that the basis of local strongmen's political power reflects localized circumstances. That most strongmen operated within areas where they drew on previous social connections indicates that social ties are critical to understanding power dynamics. Nevertheless, continued attention to the interaction between materialist and ideational elements in the formation of counter-state spaces is necessary for accounting for the emergence of translocal strongmen.

Chapter Four

The Economic and Social Foundations of Translocal Strongmen

Should the rebel forces need to become active again, they could very rapidly increase their drug income. Farmers in the region have the know-how to immediately expand [opium] production if needed.

-United Nations report, 2010

Khun Sa may be Southeast Asia's most notorious drug baron in Washington's eyes, but to many of his followers he is the symbol of the Shan people's hopes for freedom from the government in Rangoon.

-Bertil Lintner, 1994, January 20

I won't deny trafficking in opium. But it wasn't us who started the trade in this area.

-General Tuan of the Kuomintang, 1976

Hill tribes in Burma grow the opium. Insurgents in the Shan State transport it. Yunnan Chinese tax it. And Chaozhou Chinese buy and export it.

-Anonymous²¹¹

In the early 1970s, a former *Tatmadaw*-allied militia from the Loimaw region of Shan State underwent the first of several makeovers intended to broaden the organization's appeal by painting over the blemishes accumulated during a decade-plus of affiliation with the *Tatmadaw* and changing its public perception as an ethnic-Chinese drug trafficking organization. The first step was a new name – the Shanland United Army, signaling that the group was rebelling against the Burmese central state.²¹² The of its leader – Khun Sa – by state officials in 1969 left Zhang Hsu-chuan – a Manchurian-born, ethnic Chinese military advisor – in charge. As part of the makeover, he adopted a Shan name – Hpalang, meaning Thunder – to emphasize his Shan ties. In 1976, Khun Sa eluded state surveillance and returned to his army. From that point, he took great care to frame his actions in terms of devotion to the Shan nationalist cause. For instance, he emphasized that he had returned to his men on Shan National Day (*Khun Sa*, 1993, p. 48).²¹³ Khun Sa also took steps to enhance

²¹¹ Cited by Liu (1979, p. 38).

²¹² The English name was later shortened to Shan United Army.

²¹³ Shan State Day commemorates the unification of Shan principalities and population through the formation of the Shan State Council on February 7, 1947. The new council replaced the Federal Council of Shan States. For more information, see “7 February,” 2012, February 6.

his appeal as a leader. To do so, he launched a public relations program to disseminate news of his accomplishments, ramped up his patronage activities, and surrounded himself with a coterie of Shan nationalists with impressive revolutionary credentials.

He started to shed his reputation as the leader of a ruthless band of pro-government drug trafficking opportunists and assume the mantle as the champion for the independence of Shan State. By 1985, the makeover began to pay off. Several hundred predominantly ethnic-Shan soldiers and their families came over to Khun Sa's side. The adoption of Mong Tai Army (MTA) as the name for this group marked his continued ascendancy. A ramped up recruitment program led to the expansion of his force. His consolidation of control over the opium sector provided the financial means to support them. In the view of historian Alfred McCoy (1998), Khun Sa had become "history's most powerful drug lord" (p. 301).

This chapter shows that the presence of opium did not in itself provide the means for strongmen to extend their authority. Amassing large amounts of revenue from the opium sector required that strongmen overcome several barriers. But, the enhanced capabilities afforded by accumulating significant levels of revenue were often insufficient for strongmen to extend control on a translocal basis. For this, strongmen had to develop a rapport with the population. Paradoxically, strongmen possessing revenue useful for the provision of public goods on a translocal level often faced difficulties in providing rationales to follow them that resonated across Shan State's ethnic cleavages. At the same time, many strongmen adept at meeting people's emotional needs often lacked access to significant material resources.

The implicit materialist orientation of the concepts of "drug lord" or "warlord" emphasizes the role of coercion as their basis for power. Journalists and scholars have reinforced this point of view by portraying Shan State as an anarchic realm where drug lords use violence to acquire revenue from the opium trade. By framing Khun Sa's path to power as a makeover from "drug lord" to "freedom fighter," the chapter attempts to draw an explicit

contrast to materialist-oriented analysis. This study also takes into account the roles of symbols, reputations, and identity politics in conjunction with the agency of strongmen in order to examine the transformation of autonomous strongmen from local to translocal ones.

This chapter examines how local strongmen become translocal ones. By taking a closer look at their engagement with the opium sector, it shows that economic factors, topographical features, and social institutions both imposed constraints and created opportunities for strongmen to accrue the opium capital necessary to develop their capacities on a translocal level. At the same time, the identity politics related to the acquisition of opium resources often impeded the ability of strongmen to exercise social control on a broader level. Profiles of three translocal strongmen show the impediments encountered by each, and their efforts to overcome them.

The Structure of the Upstream Opium Supply Chain in Shan State

In the 1950s, the highlands of Shan State became an opium production platform that anchored a transnational commodity supply chain. The area initially supplied consumers in domestic and regional markets. By the early 1970s, the chain extended to reach users in Europe, Australia, and North America. Framing the opium trade as a transnational commodity supply chain, rather than a violent criminal enterprise, provides an insightful perspective and less value-laden analysis. This approach involves disaggregating the upstream portion of the opium supply chain into different stages and identifying the actors performing specific functions. The opportunities for autonomous strongmen to substantially profit from the opium trade were limited. Indeed, only a very few strongmen accrued massive wealth from the opium trade. Instead, the vast amount of profits went to businesspersons associated with criminal syndicates.

The epigraph that opens this chapter suggests that armed groups possess the power to ramp up opium production by compelling farmers to alter their crop selection through the

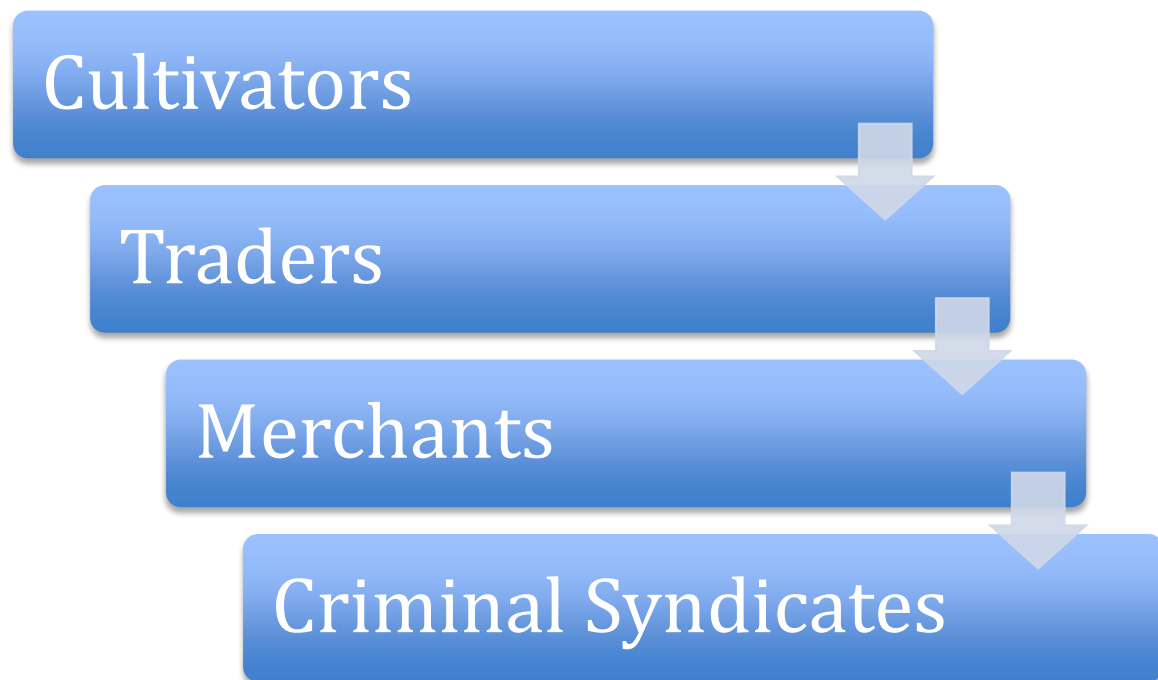
threat of force — but this seldom occurred (UNODC, 2010, p. 260). The KMT was the organization that came closest to achieving this position. But their reliance on coercion to squeeze opium out of farmers cost them politically. They lost popular support among the local population. In testimony given to the US Congress (1975) — after spending over a year in Shan State, Cowell provided the assessment that “As foreign mercenaries, the KMT have no political future in Shan State, and are hated by the people for their cruelty and extortion” (p. 26).

Another misconception is that the opium sector featured the vertical integration of strongmen and armed groups along multiple stages of the opium supply chain. This view suggests that strongmen accrued profits from their direct involvement in the production, transport, processing, and distribution of opiates. However, closer examination shows that this is also unfounded. Strongmen indeed benefitted from the trade. A commonplace method was the imposition of an opium tax on farmers. Another avenue was to provide protection services for merchants shipping opium overland to the Thai border. A more profitable method was to transport and sell opium to buyers at the border for a sizeable profit. In many cases, ethnic-Shan strongmen and Shan-led armed resistance organizations were locked out of ethnic-Chinese-dominated opium network and had to rely on direct taxation and other means to generate revenue.

The upstream portion of the opium supply chain in Shan State featured several types of actors other than strongmen. These actors engaged in the production, collection, trafficking, and processing of opium (See Figure 4.1). To better understand the access by strongmen to opium revenue, it is useful to examine the upstream portion of the opium supply chain in greater detail.

The upstream portion of opium supply train involved different types of actors performing specific tasks.²¹³ Farmers in the uplands, many of them ethnic Akha, Lahu, Lisu,

Figure 4.1: Upstream portion of transnational opium supply chain



Pa-O, Palaung, Kokang Chinese, Wa, and Shan, cultivated the opium. Local traders played an important role in purchasing opium from farmers. Traders traveled the remote mountain trails to buy opium and sell basic household goods. Some of them also operated stores in villages and provided a rare source of credit for highland farmers.²¹⁴ Direct connections to both cultivators in the hills and merchants in the cities provided traders with the networks and resources necessary to procure large supplies of opium. As many traders were ethnic Chinese, their common language, and cultural practices provided networks useful for linking them with ethnic Chinese merchants located in towns.

Merchants provided an important source of investment capital to finance the initial purchase of opium for the export market. Many were businessmen, who operated trading houses in Shan State towns; possessed working capital necessary for trading opium; and employed traders as agents to purchase opium on their behalf. The merchants were civilian businessmen, who were not involved in military activities. Until the mid-1960s, some

²¹⁴ In instances when farmers depleted their rice stores before the rice harvest, they often entered into forward purchasing agreements with traders in which the trader provided rice in exchange for a set amount of next season's opium harvest (United Nations, 1964).

merchants not only received government-issued licenses to buy opium from farmers and sell it to government-sanctioned retailers, but also traded contraband opium. In the mid-1960s, when the government began to crack down on the trade, the continued involvement by merchants previously engaged in the state-sanctioned opium trade became illegal (M. C. Tun, 1979, February 16).

Merchants employed mule caravans and trucks to transport opium from Shan State to markets located in border areas near Thailand and Laos. These border runs entailed risks of predation by armed groups. As most merchants did not possess armies, they often employed members of *Tatmadaw*-allied militias to protect their shipments. By the late 1950s, the threat of predation by armed groups reached the point where a few traders used their status as officially sanctioned opium merchants to charter flights on government-operated civilian airlines to ship opium to airports near the Thai border. The discontinuation of this practice reflects the government's greater scrutiny following a scandal that involved the use of chartered flights to subvert local rules.²¹⁵

International criminal syndicates played a critical role in the supply chain once the opium reached the border areas. Syndicates involve actors that pool resources and capabilities to purchase and distribute opiates to global markets. These included the technology and finance to establish morphine and later heroin refineries, the organizational capacities to finance large shipments, logistical support for shipments, strategic use of bribes to narcotics and customs officials, and access to distribution networks. Finally, syndicates laundered profits so that the proceeds were beyond the reach of law enforcement authorities.²¹⁶

Processing raw opium into morphine or heroin is one method to add value to the

²¹⁵ In 1961, a scandal involving the illicit transport of Kokang produced opium on commercial airline flights from Lashio to Kengtung provoked public outrage and greater government scrutiny of the opium trade ("10,340-Lbs Opium Transported," 1960, August 17; Delaney, 1974, p. 19; Kuhn and Kuhn, 1962; Lintner, 1999, p. 189).

²¹⁶ The critical role played by members of criminal syndicates in financing the illicit narcotics trade is often marginalized in reports produced by drug control agencies, such as the UNODC, which instead focus on traffickers, particularly "kingpins."

commodity and thus increase profits. Initially, the value-added processing that took place in Shan State was limited to refining opium into morphine and other derivatives. The transfer of heroin-processing technology from Hong Kong to the “Golden Triangle” did not take place until the late 1960s. But recruiting chemists trained in heroin processing and procuring foreign produced precursor chemicals necessary for the refinement proved beyond the capabilities of most strongmen and armed groups. Instead, syndicates dominate heroin-processing activities. One avenue for strongmen to generate revenue from heroin processing was to provide security for heroin refineries operating in Shan State.

The different roles played by actors in the opium sector exhibited patterns reflective of ethnicity. Ethnic groups in the highlands produced opium. The cultivators represented ethnic communities, such as Akha, Chinese (from Yunnan and Kokang), Kachin, Lahu, Palaung, Shan, Wa, and others.²¹⁷ By contrast, many traders, merchants, and members of the syndicates shared a Chinese cultural heritage and the *lingua franca* of Chinese, which cemented their business ties (US Congress, 1975, p. 28). The ethnic-based networks provided the basis for ethnic-Chinese actors to maneuver into positions, where they reaped profits from the opium sector. While ethnic-Chinese actors dominated the opium sector, strongmen representative of different ethnic identities managed to carve out roles for themselves. However, their ability to tap into the opium sector as a source of revenue required negotiating various obstacles.

Economic and Social Impediments to Becoming a Translocal Strongman

Most strongmen operated within the confines of their native regions. Communal ties were often a principle element of their authority. The provision of goods complemented social ties. Like their local counterparts, translocal strongmen relied on a combination of

²¹⁷The ethnonym Chinese refers to groups that engaged in similar cultural practices recognized as constituting “Chinese-ness.” The groups often spoke different dialects of Chinese as their first language. For instance, Panthay Chinese in Shan State often spoke Chinese dialects common to Yunnan. The groups migrated to Shan State from southwest China and can be considered “overland” Chinese. By contrast, “Overseas Chinese” often spoke dialects common to southeast China, such as the Teochiu and Hokkien.

provision of rewards, the imposition of sanctions, and the use of symbols as a basis for exercising social control. However, they often ran into trouble when they attempted to extend their authority over new communities, discovering that what had proven successful in their native communities did not always work in others. Efforts to extend authority over a larger number of people entailed new challenges.

Most strongmen did not succeed in extending their authority beyond a local level. When strongmen reached out to communities with whom they lacked familiarity and social ties, they often found that they were unable to achieve acceptance of their rulemaking authority. Some strongmen overcame this by taking on the role of protector or benefactor for the community. But this required that society accept them as leaders. For many strongmen, this entailed the possession of resources and the generation of bonds with the community that were often beyond their capabilities.

A second challenge was that translocal strongmen required resources. To exercise social control on a translocal level, strongmen had to both possess sufficient revenue to provide resources to a wider range of people and identify symbols of authority that resonated with the population. However, accumulating greater resources often entailed steps that alienated people. For these reasons, translocal authority proved elusive for most strongmen.

Constraints on Strongmen's Ability to Access Opium Revenue

Both policy and academic analysis suggests that the presence of opium (and often natural resources) provides strongmen (and armed groups) with opportunities to amass significant wealth. In some cases, studies indicate that strongmen and armed groups in Shan State were able to compel farmers to grow opium.²¹⁸ However, accounts by the few researchers with access to opium growing areas do not always support these claims (US Congress 1975, 1978; Lintner 1994, 1999; Yawngghwe 1993, 2010).

²¹⁸ For example, Cornell (2007) and UNODC (2010, p. 260).

Lo Hsin Han, one of the so-called "kingpins" of the "Golden Triangle," nicknamed "the Prince of Death" by the US Attorney General in 1972, was one of the wealthiest and most powerful strongmen. But in an interview with Adrian Cowell taking place in 1973, Lo Hsin Han acknowledged that while he had indeed led some of the largest opium caravans to Thailand, only fifty percent of the opium on any given shipment belonged to him. As Cowell (Public Broadcasting Service. *Frontline*) explains,

He actually didn't have the capital to buy up all the opium. He obviously did have some capital, and did buy and sell some of his own opium. However, he was by no means one of the biggest sort of merchants in the business.

As McCoy (1972) notes, while some Shan rebel bands and militia groups "collect a heavy tax from tribal opium farmers and itinerant small merchants who transport raw opium to major Shan States market towns, they control very few of the caravans carrying raw opium south to refineries in the tri-border area [of Thailand, Laos, and Shan State]" (p. 286). The vast majority of opium profits went to business people, rather than strongmen or warlords. These members of the business community were local merchants operating legitimate businesses and business tycoons often based in large Asian cities. Often these business possessed ties to syndicates (Lintner, 2002; Seagrave, 2010; US Congress, 1978, pp. 151-184). These people did not possess armies and often engaged in respected business activities along with opium trading. Very few strongmen actually amassed fortunes from the opium trade, as a broad range of obstacles hindered their ability to accumulate drug revenue. Topographical, economic, and institutional constraints closed off many opportunities for enrichment from the opium sector.

Topographical features are among the geographical factors that played a role in determining whether or not strongmen gained access to opium. One determinant was whether people in the areas proximal to the zones where strongmen operated cultivated opium. KMT forces achieved some success in coercing farmers to grow opium in the 1950s. But this

approach came at a high political cost and was not sustainable over time. For instance, one option exercised by farmers experiencing high levels of taxation was flight. And the punitive measures taken by some KMT remnants against farmers who failed to meet their opium quotas soiled their reputation. These abuses fostered widespread resentment and made it more difficult for KMT units to make inroads and develop social ties with the local population.²¹⁹

Another avenue for generating revenue from opium was the taxation of opium trade routes. This approach had the benefit of not directly alienating the rural population. However, the success of this strategy depended on whether strongmen operated in areas transited by opium-trafficking caravans. Yawngghwe (*Actors and Markets in the Opium-Heroin Politics*, n.d.) explains the difficulties faced by strongmen in his discussion of rebel taxation,

The benefits accruing [from opium trade] depend on the particular rebel army's control of jungle trade routes which in turn is determined by its size, efficiency and reach (i.e. the ability to provide protection from other rebel groups and from govt [sic] forces, and the ability to tax individuals and groups engaged in the opium business and cultivators (p. 1).

Just as opportunities to directly tax opium cultivators depended on farmers' crop selection strategies, the ability to tax opium shipments is contingent controlling areas containing opium trafficking routes.

A lack of transportation infrastructure combined with the presence of difficult to traverse mountains and rivers were a mixed blessing for strongmen. Shan State's topography features highland valleys surrounded by mountains. The road network consisted of a few strategic roads linking urban centers and a complex network of trails and pathways that crisscross its mountains and valleys.²²⁰ The Salween River posed another impediment for transportation. The deep gorges made crossing the river difficult, and the few areas suitable for ferry crossings became chokepoints often contested by armed groups.

This rugged terrain presented strongmen with several advantages. The paucity of

²¹⁹ For accounts of abuses committed by KMT units against the population and effect on attitudes towards the KMT, see Cowell (1975, p. 26), Lewis (1957), SSA (1975), and Yawngghwe (2010, p. 99).

²²⁰ For an account of road network in Shan State, see Ba Thann Win (1976).

modern transport infrastructure in the highland areas made it difficult for the *Tatmadaw* and other state agents to extend their influence into these regions. Operating in the highlands afforded strongmen and armed groups the vantage point to track the movements of *Tatmadaw* units often operating in lowland valleys and forests useful for concealment. The rough terrain also made resupply operations for *Tatmadaw* units difficult and limited mobility. The *Tatmadaw* deployed along roads and in towns made forays into the countryside only in large groups. Collectively, these dynamics limited their ability to regulate the opium trade and disrupt the activities of strong men and other armed resistance forces.

The remoteness and inaccessibility of the trails crisscrossing Shan State proved advantageous for evading enforcement efforts by state officials. One reason that farmers turned to opium is that it is difficult for predatory armed groups to locate small plots located in remote mountain areas. But, the remoteness as well as the limited production of food crops also posed constraints on those transporting contraband in bulk. Transporting cargo along the rugged narrow, paths that wound through the rolling hills of Shan State was difficult. Mules and other pack animals became the dynamos of the opium trade. These animals possessed the efficiency required by opium traders. Mules were able to cover fifteen to twenty miles per day along rugged mountain trails, while bearing loads of up to 125 pounds.

Despite their efficiency, the caloric needs of the pack animals made it necessary for convoys to provision rice supplies along their routes. For instances, a convoy of 500 mules may consume approximately one ton of unhusked rice per day (Cowell, *On Tactics of Opium Warfare*, n.d., p. 5). One of the problems faced by strongmen was a limited amount of surplus rice in the countryside. This scarcity had an important impact on mule-born opium caravans, but also the behavior of strongmen. Cowell (US Congress, 1975) points at an important dynamic often absent in studies of civil war, “you can have as much money as you want but you can't buy rice” (p. 32). Cowell's observation refers to the difficulty faced by armed

groups in their efforts to procure rice from farmers in remote areas. The subsistence levels of production made farmers reluctant and even vehemently opposed to giving up rice. This lack of food supplies contributed to the forcible seizure of rice by armed groups. The availability of rice for purchase in government-controlled towns also provided an incentive to become a *Tatmadaw*-allied militia. For members of illegal armed groups, such as those led by strongmen, who could not access towns freely, the lack of rice surplus in the countryside provided another impediment for large-scale opium trafficking.

As is the case with the trade in other agricultural commodities, a certain level of business acumen and resources were required to overcome basic economic obstacles and make a profit in the opium trade. These resources and skills were beyond many strongmen. The need for operating capital to finance the purchase and shipment of opium presented one constraint on the ability of strongmen. In the absence of such capital, strongmen were unable to purchase the volume of opium necessary to cover the costs of shipments to border based purchasers on a scale to reap profits. For many strongmen, the required working capital was simply beyond their means. Instead, they often sold the opium collected from farmers, rather than purchasing larger amounts to trade in volume. And in some cases, they turned to providing protection for opium convoys as their primary source of revenue (McCoy, 1972; US Congress, 1975).

In an illicit market, the flow of market information is often limited. And this along with a lack of broader knowledge about opium markets presented another check on opium profits. In particular, ethnic Shan strongmen faced the prospect of being cheated by merchants involved in opium trading, because they often lacked ties to people possessing knowledge about the details of the opium sector and were thus unfamiliar with the operation of the trade. As explained by Sai Hla Aung, a veteran SSA commander, opium trading merchants and members of syndicates paid members of the SSA below the market price,

because the latter did not possess up to date information on opium prices (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., p. 192). By contrast, several strongmen, such as Lo Hsin Han, Khun Sa, and others, drew on ties to Chinese opium merchants and their knowledge of the trade.

Caravans traversing rural Shan State with loads of opium valued in the millions of dollars presented an alluring target for strongmen. Compared to small-scale extraction, the seizure of dozens of tons of opium from a single mule caravan that sometimes spread out in a three-mile-long procession was a slow-moving target. Direct extraction from the fields was costly in terms of time and labor. This involved identifying small opium plots scattered in the remote mountains, seizing harvests from individual households, and transporting it to centralized collection points. Given these high labor requirements, predation was an attractive option.

The material and logistical requirements for caravan hunting were also beyond the financial and logistical means of many strongmen. Caravan hunting entailed maintaining a large, mobile strike force devoted to tracking their movements and overwhelming them by force. In Cowell's view, the strike force required modern automatic weapons, which was a costly investment and pursued by only a few strongmen and armed groups (Cowell, *Article II on Opium Warfare*, 1974). Tracking caravans required a sizeable network of informants and communications equipment. For instance, the joint SSA-SUA operation that captured one of Lo Hsin Han's convoys employed fifty radio sets manned by units spread out across various smuggling routes, and an estimated force of 1,500 men to track and attack the convoy of 530 mules (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., pp. 4-8). The material and logistical requirements for caravan hunting were also beyond the financial and logistical means of most strongmen. Most strongmen-led groups possessed only rudimentary, semi-automatic weapons and lacked the monitoring capacity. Instead, they often deployed their troops for protection and taxation purposes. Even for the strongmen who possessed the capabilities for caravan hunting, the

long-term prospects of revenue generation from predation required them to exercise self-restraint and limit their plunder.

The symbiotic relationship between armed groups and opium merchants also imposed constraints on predation by those few armed groups that possessed the resources to monitor and attack caravans. Successful parasites are careful not to kill their hosts. Parasitic armed groups took care not to bankrupt opium merchants. The concern that opium merchants would adapt to the loss of profits from excessive predation weighed on the mind of Hpalang, the master strategist of Khun Sa's caravan strike force. In an interview with Cowell, he noted that the toll of unrestricted predation might lead opium merchants to shift from using large caravans to smaller caravans, thereby increasing the monitoring costs and limiting the returns from predation (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., pp. 2-4). Thus, for the few strongmen who possessed the material resources to hunt caravans, long-term time horizons led some to adopt a parasitic strategy of restrained predation.

The emergence of a monopolistic pricing system among groups that informally regulated opium exports to foreign markets posed another constraint on strongmen's efforts to generate opium revenue. KMT units (from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s) and Khun Sa (early 1980s to the mid-1990s) established dominance over the trade. These groups limited the expansion of strongmen by imposing taxes and suppressing opium prices. Critical to their success was the formation of a *de facto* customs bureau and control of the areas located along the Shan State-Thai border, where opium trafficking routes funneled out across the Thai frontier. These groups regulated the border trade by establishing outposts along the mountain surrounding the smuggling trails to monitor opium caravans approaching the border. Teams of armed inspectors trained in determining the value of opium and its purity intercepted the caravans and assessed the value of the cargo (Cowell, 1972, June 24).

The KMT's success in establishing a monopoly stemmed in part from supplies

provided by their anti-Communist allies. The US, Taiwan, and Thailand provided KMT units with resources critical for achieving a first mover's advantage in establishing control over the emerging opium sector. The American planes ferrying covert supplies from Taiwan to the anti-Communist KMT also reportedly returned with local opium for export (McCoy, 1972; Government of Burma, 1954, pp. 11, 37). Once established, the KMT leaders charged a border tax on opium and often purchased opium directly from merchants. As Pikey, who served as a soldier in both the Third and Fifth Armies of the KMT, describes, "If [the merchants] refused to pay, he [General Li Wenhuan] attacked and robbed them" (Cowell, 1972, June 25, p. 2). Despite their efforts, the KMT monopoly experienced some leakage. Nevertheless, the KMT remnants went to great lengths to prevent the emergence of rival power centers by selectively restricting market access to armed groups.

An attempt made by Khun Sa in his early career to evade the monopoly by coordinating a large opium convoy to Laos led KMT leaders to dispatch troops to capture the convoy. A showdown took place between them at the village of Baan Kwan on the banks of the Mekong River in Laos and became known as the 1967 Opium War (See Figure 0.2). The challenge presented by Khun Sa to the KMT temporarily dissipated. General Ouane Rattikone of the Royal Laotian Army seized the opium, and the Burmese government arrested Khun Sa in 1969. When Khun Sa returned to his men in 1976, he began rebuilding his army. Once it had become strong enough, he began whittling away their control of the border. By the early 1980s, he had displaced the KMT and emerged as the dominant force along the border.

Control of the border trade, whether by the KMT forces or Khun Sa's troops, provided opportunities for them to accumulate massive profits by taxing opium and manipulating prices in their favor. When heroin-refining technology came to the Thai-Burma border in the late 1960s, control of border territory created opportunities for groups to collect rents from

criminal syndicates by offering them secure space to operate heroin refineries. From a strategic perspective, the monopoly provided the means to curtail the emergence of rival power centers that might challenge them.

The legal codes regulating opiates and the enforcement thereof also structured the strategies strongmen pursued to amass opium revenue. Analysis of Burma's opium sector in the post-Independence period often does not fully examine these legal codes or the impacts of the criminalization of opium taking place in the 1960s and 1970s. This section takes a closer look at the process of illicitization and its impact on the opium sector.

Ronald Renard (2006), a historian of Burma's opium trade, draws attention to variation in laws regulation opium across Burma. He identifies a “dual system of opium regulation” rooted in colonial administrative practices that remained in effect until at least the mid-1960s (Renard, 2006, p. 27). Colonial period opium regulations created two distinct zones of enforcement. In the predominately Burman-inhabited, lowland area, where eco-environmental conditions inhibited the large-scale commercial cultivation of opium, the laws governing access to opiates were more restrictive. By contrast, the legal regulations for the non-Burman, opium-producing areas of Shan and Kachin State were relatively lenient. In the early Independence period, this dual approach to enforcement continued.

Three distinct periods, characterize the government's regulation of opium within Shan State in the period from 1948 to 1996. The first period (1948 to the mid-1960s) featured the retention of a state-sanctioned opium monopoly, in which the government officials taxed and closely regulated the cultivation, trade, and use of opiates. A central feature of this tax-farming arrangement was the licensing of non-state businesses to operate the opium franchise. However, the different regulations for opium operating for areas within Shan State created confusion over its implementation. For instance, the Burma Opium Act (1910) provided the rules for regulation opium in Burma Proper. The Shan State Opium Order

(1923) and the Shan State Excise Order (1925) superseded the Burma Opium Act in most

Table 4.1: Periods of Opium Regulation in Shan State, 1948-1996

Time	Period	Key Legislation and Developments
1948-mid-1960s	State-sanctioned opium monopoly	- Shan State Opium Act - Burma Opium Act
Mid-1960s-1973	Increased Regulation	- Enforcement of Opium Den Act (1950) in Shan State - Government exemptions to ban on cultivation - Cancellation of <i>Ka Kwe Ye</i> militia system (1973)
1974-1996	Criminalization of Opium	- 1974 Narcotics and Dangerous Drug Law - <i>Tatmadaw</i> -led Opium Eradication Operations begin in 1975 - Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) established in 1976

parts of the Shan State. Lashio and Taunggyi retained their colonial period designation as "notified towns" and remained subject to the more restrictive opium regulations operating in ethnic Burma areas. Agents of the Department of Excise enforced drug laws in these towns. A shifting array of regulatory organization including the *saopha* administration (until 1959) and later the FAA, and Department of Excise operated in countryside. An editorial in the state-run *Working People's Daily* ("Opium and drug laws to be unified," 1967, August 9) points to the effects of this mismatch of laws on their enforcement, noting that the Burma's Opium Act "is interpreted in different ways in different regions while in some it is either ignored or unheard of."²²¹

During the second period (mid-1960s to 1974), central state officials gradually introduced further restrictions on opium. The government took steps to limited the state-sanctioned system that issued permits for firms to transport opium produced in Burma to state-sanctioned distributors ended by the mid-1960s. Transportation of opium without a document issued by a designated government official and beyond the allotted quota was

²²¹ A Burmese language song popular in the 1960s draws attention to the dual system for regulating opiates and its effect on the patterns of opium use. The title of the song can be translated as "Visitors to Shan State Seldom Return Home." The song refers to the visit of officials from Lower Burma to Shan State to use opium (Personal Communication, retired civil servant, Lashio, Shan State, November 2, 2015).

considered a violation. This reflected state-led efforts aimed to prevent the entry of contraband opium into the domestic market and its export to foreign markets. A practice by some traders to subvert the system was to obtain official permits for delivering opium to licensed dispensaries and opium dens and use the same documents as cover for shipment to lucrative foreign markets. Reports indicate that traffickers altered permits and transported amounts beyond their allocated quota (Delaney, 1974; Khun and Kuhn, 1962; "10,340-Lbs Opium Transported," 1960, August 17).

The government also closed the private companies involved in the legally sanctioned trade of excise opium. In an interview with Adrian Cowell, Khun Seng, an opium trader at that time and a relative of Khun Sa, recounted delivering several consignments of Shan State produced opium by truck to Rangoon, Mandalay, and Moulmein in the period from 1962 to 1964 (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.). He notes that at that time there were five companies in Shan State at that time, which included his Loimaw-based firm in addition to others in Kokang and Kengtung.

The government took steps to close the remaining opium dens that continued to operate outside of Rangoon after the Opium Den Act (1950) were closed as the system for the purchase of opium for the opium dens ended.²²² As Deputy Home Minister U Ohn Kyi explained, "the government's closure of licensed opium shops throughout the country in 1965 turned some 'opium kings' into 'opium insurgents'" (Cited in M.C. Tun, 1979, February 16, p. 31). The legal status for the cultivation of opium in Shan State at the time remains unclear. Government officials granted exemptions for farmers to continue opium cultivation in some

²²² The Opium Den Suppression Act (1950) provided the legal means to suppress illegally operated opium dens (U Khant and Ne Win, 1978, p. 54). A United Nations sponsored journal (United Nations, 1953) reported that state officials delayed closing opium dens outside of Rangoon. There were an insufficient number of drug treatment centers outside of Rangoon.

areas.²²³ For instance, the central government directed officials from the Department of Excise to purchase opium from producers in eastern Shan State in the mid-1960s (“Kunlong abandons poppy growing,” 1966, June 27; “State bought 60,000 tolas opium,” 1966, July 9).

A third period (1974-1996) features the increased criminalization of opium. Under the Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Act of 1974, the *Tatmadaw* government implemented new laws that restricted the range of access to opiates and increased the severity of penalties for violating the laws. The government also took steps to centralize its efforts at addressing legal production. One was the establishment of the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC), which coordinated drug control efforts by several Ministries. By the mid-1970, the *Tatmadaw* initiated opium eradication campaigns that involved the forcible destruction of opium fields. In the mid-1970s, government officials initiated annual opium eradication campaigns to destroy poppy fields. (Maung Wint Thu, 2003; Tun Wai, 2009).²²⁴

In 1974, state officials extended exemptions to opium farmers in eastern Shan State until at least 1979 (“The end for narcotics,” 1974, February 21; “Exempted areas in Shan State,” 1974, February 21).²²⁵ Despite increased illicitization and forced eradication, the opium sector continued to grow steadily. Production increased from an estimated 400 to 600 tons per annum in the mid-1970s to over 1,600 tons in 1993 and 1996 (US Congress, 1975, 1978; UNDOC, 2003, p. 8).

The efforts by state agents to reduce opium production, use, and trafficking failed on many fronts. On the one hand, the exemption of some areas from enforcement provided

²²³ In the early 1970s, the CPB had begun extending its influence over the primary opium producing areas located in the Trans Salween regions. By consequence, the CPB blocked the military government from any efforts at opium eradication or regulation in areas under their control.

²²⁴ In 1974, after President Nixon declared a "war on drugs," the Burmese and US Governments engaged in a bilateral agreement on the suppression of illicit narcotics. The program involved the sale of American aircraft and helicopters to aid the *Tatmadaw*-led government in its destruction of opium fields and interdiction of opium shipments. The total value of the assistance provided by the US Government until 1988, when the US Government imposed sanctions and terminated support, is cited by Maung Win Thu (2003) as US\$86 million.

²²⁵ In 1974, the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs issued a notification that exempted a total of 18,734 acres located in 413 village tracts in 16 townships of Shan State from penalties for opium cultivation contained in Narcotic Drugs Law of 1974 until 1979 (“The end for narcotics,” 1974, February 21; “Exempted areas in Shan State,” 1974, February 21).

people with opportunities to continue their livelihoods. But the unrelenting effects of warfare continued to disrupt rural people's lives.

As this section shows, the difficulties in accessing opium revenue served as a check on the growth of many strongmen by limiting their ability to acquire resources necessary to extend control. Strongmen possessing knowledge of the drug trade and access to Chinese business networks managed to overcome these impediments. But access to greater resources proved only limited success for strongmen trying to extend control on a translocal basis. For this, they also had to develop a rapport with the population. Paradoxically, the strongman with greater resources for providing public good often had a harder time in forging the social foundations necessary to becoming a translocal strongman.

The Social Constraints to Becoming a Translocal Strongman

Strongmen attempting to assert authority on a translocal level also encountered challenges posed by identity politics. McCoy's contention (1999, p. 304) that "ethnicity writes the text of Shan State politics" points to the role played by identity politics in state formation. The salience of ethnic identity provides a useful perspective for understanding the patterns of translocal strongmen's authority and why so few emerged. Shared ethnic identity between strongman and individuals provided one useful element for strongmen to garner support. Local strongmen of one ethnicity most effectively exercise social control over communities with the same ethnicity. Pu Kyaung Long had Lahu followers. Bo Mawng received an outpouring of support from among ethnic Wa, but not ethnic Lahu. Ethnic Shan strongmen tended to succeed in gaining support from ethnic Shans. However, ethnicity was not a definitive basis for mobilizing support. For instance, Kornzurng is noted for his success in gaining support from a broad range of followers that included Shan, Pa-O, and Palaung. Bo Mawng, the man that led the battle that triggered the Shan uprising and helped form the SSIA and SSA, was ethnic Wa. Chao Noi, who established the first ethnic Shan nationalist

group, was considered Shan, but he was born in Yunnan, China (SSA, 1975). As the case of Khun Sa demonstrates, the ethnic-based barriers were not insurmountable.

Two trends that reflect the role of ethnicity in identity politics involve ethnic Shan and ethnic Chinese strongmen.²²⁶ Ethnic Shan strongmen tended to succeed at appealing to the psychological components of rural Shan people's livelihoods, and their social control usually extended over ethnic Shan communities. In some cases, they also received support from non-Shan ethnic groups. But their inability to accrue revenue limited their ability to distribute material goods to the population, which served as a constraint on their authority. In contrast, ethnic Chinese strongmen excelled at generating revenue. Often they drew on their social ties with the merchants and traders involved in the opium sector. Despite this superior access to resources, however, they often failed to extend their social control because of an inability to offer local populations the psychological components that help make up their strategies for survival. To borrow an economic perspective, the patterns of "resource endowments" in terms of labor and capital were such that ethnic-Shan strongmen tended to be labor rich, but capital poor. Conversely, ethnic Chinese strongmen were often capital rich, but labor poor.

For strongmen to operate on a translocal local, resources were necessary to provide goods to the population. These included the possession of coercive force large enough to provide people with protection from other armed groups and maintain order. Strongmen also need resources to support other activities that helped him take on the position as a benefactor for a community. For many Shan strongmen, the lack of capital stemmed from their inability to penetrate the ethnic Chinese-dominated opium sector composed of traders, merchants, and syndicate members engaged in cultural practices mutually understood as Chinese. In particular, the ability to speak Chinese served as a shibboleth that often signaled shared experience and provided a foundation for social bonds, which served as the basis of cohesion.

²²⁶ For discussion of ethnic politics concerning Khun Sa, see McCoy (1998,1999) and *Khun Sa* (1983).

This sector tended to exclude non-Chinese members, although the ethnic Akha, Lahu, Wa, and other non-Shan ethnic groups played some role in the trade. These ethnic groups are transnational and several possessed kinship networks in both Shan State and adjacent areas in Yunnan province in China and northern Thailand. These groups tended to be familiar with both the Chinese language and cultural practices considered Chinese.

Another rationale for exclusion was political. Under the leadership of the KMT, the ethnic Chinese opium network attempted to block ethnic Shan-led armed groups from amassing enough strength to challenge their dominance of the opium trade. After the 1967 Opium War, when Khun Sa attempted to evade the KMT opium tax, the KMT took measures to limit the profits of ethnic-Shan-led armed groups from opium. McCoy (1972) reports that after the 1967 Opium War, the KMT remnants "explicitly refusing to allow any [ethnic] Shan opium caravan larger than one hundred mules to enter Thailand" (p. 333). The prospect of a strong ethnic Shan political movement presented a threat to their control of the opium trade. A strong Shan military force also offered a potential alternative conduit for assistance from the anti-communist coalition. In the view of Chao Tzang Yawngwe, the KMT wanted to be their only recipient of aid in Shan State (Yawngwe, *Written Answers to Questions*). Therefore, as he (Yawngwe, *Written Answers to Questions*) argues, "the KMT was opposed to the Shan cause and were most probably successful in keeping the Americans from becoming involved or interested."

Shans faced difficulties in penetrating opium networks. Chinese found it hard to gain support from Shan communities. Their sources of difficulty were myriad. One is that the many Chinese strongmen did not possess social ties with Shan communities and their inability to channel "Shan-ness" limited their ability to forge such ties. In addition, the harsh treatment meted out by KMT units to the ethnic Shan population, particularly in the period before 1961, created resentment among many Shans towards KMT leaders that sometimes

spread over to groups associated with them. Another basis of opposition was the view that activities by KMT groups constituted meddling in Shan political affairs and attempts to weaken the Shan armed resistance movement. Several Shan leaders cited Kornzurng's split from the SSA in 1968 and his cooperation with the KMT remnants as one example of their determination to keep the Shan political movement divided.²²⁷ The steps taken by KMT leaders to limit Shan armed groups acquiring profits from the opium sectors after the 1967 Opium War are another example.²²⁸ These efforts generated resentment among some Shans, who argued that activities of the KMTs not only constituted interference in Shan politics but also impeded the political goal of addressing the Burman-dominated government.

The Shan population's antipathy towards the KMT units often spread to the armed smuggling bands that were their business associates. For many Shans, distinguishing between the KMT remnants and the strongmen-led groups involved in trafficking opium was difficult. Many of these groups were regarded as related to the KMT because their members spoke Chinese and engaged in drug trafficking. One former black market trader of household goods from eastern Shan State explained that he viewed the Chinese merchants he regularly encountered on smuggling routes into Thailand as foreigners. He reported disliking them because they failed to learn local languages and adhere to social practices that were unfamiliar to him (Personal Communication, former smuggler of black market goods, Taunggyi, Shan State, October 15, 2015). From a political perspective, the groups' involvement in opium trafficking, disinterest in integrating socially, and interference in Shan State politics suggested that they were not concerned about key interests among Shan State's population and willing to undermine efforts to address them.

Strongmen aiming to expand their influence faced a paradoxical situation: the

²²⁷ For analysis of the KMTs involvement in Shan politics, see Cowell (*Journal Two*, n.d.), "Kornzurng: His last will," 2000, September 13 and Yawnghwe (2010).

²²⁸ McCoy (1972) reports that after the 1967 opium war, the KMT remnants "explicitly refusing to allow any [ethnic] Shan opium caravan larger than 100 mules to enter Thailand" (p. 333).

accumulation of resources needed to extend social control often entailed steps that proved counterproductive to this status, as these practices alienated segments of the rural population. The process of ascending to the status of a local strongman was not inherently beyond an individual's means: one simply had to offer a combination of goods that helped people to meet their material and emotional needs. However, as strongmen pushed to extend their authority, they faced new challenges from social and material structures that presented obstacles to their ability to fulfill the same roles as translocal strongmen. One limit was the inability of strongmen to create ties with the populations that identified as possessing another ethnicity as a basis of identity. Through the use of different strategies, a few strongmen managed to overcome these obstacles and become translocal strongmen.

Portraits of Three Translocal Strongmen

This section examines three-translocal strongmen from Shan State. Their experience shows the impediments posed by social and economic institutions on their efforts to extend authority on a translocal basis as well as strategies employed in an attempt to overcome these forces.

Lo Hsin Han: A Kokang Chinese Strongman

Lo Hsin Han (1934-2013) was born in Ta Tsu Chin village in the Kokang area of northern Shan State. His renown as a strongman grew to the extent that a US Government counter-narcotics official dubbed him "the kingpin of the heroin traffic in Southeast Asia." Despite his wealth, his inability to forge social ties with ethnic Shan communities constrained his abilities to traffic opium and extended social control.

As a young man, Lo Hsin Han honed traits and developed skills that later helped him become one the most formidable strongmen in Shan State. As the son of a locally prominent Chinese family, Lo Hsin Han was well positioned to develop ties with the predominately

ethnic Chinese community in Kokang and northern Shan State.²²⁹ He grew up speaking a Chinese dialect common to the Kokang area and Burmese, which contained an accent associated with non-native speakers.²³⁰ It is not clear whether or not he spoke Shan, but it is unlikely.²³¹

As a teenager, he found a capable mentor in Olive Yang, the daughter of the last *saopha* of Kokang and a “strongwomen.” He served as an aide to Olive, whose partnership with KMT units in the early 1950s led to the emergence of one of the earliest, large-scale illicit opium trafficking operations in Shan State. As one childhood acquaintance of his notes, “about the only activity he excelled in was the military service ” (Quoted in Paul, 1973, p. 32). Lo Hsin Han first served in the Kokang *saopha*’s security force, a well-trained paramilitary organization.²³² In 1958, at the age of twenty-four, Lo Hsin Han became an opium trader working with a Kokang-based opium firm led by members of the ruling Yang clan.

An account by Maung Wint Thu (2003, pp. 36-37) records that in 1963, state authorities arrested Lo Hsin Han for possession of 1.6 tons of opium in Mongton Township near the Thai border. This account does not detail which opium regulation he violated. The proximity of Mongton to Thailand suggests that he was transporting opium for illicit export to Thailand. Olive Yang had earlier used a smuggling route from Kokang to Thailand that passed through Mongton (Lintner, 1982, Part 4, p. 1).²³³ Several accounts (Boucaud and Boucaud, 1992, p. 26, Paul, 1973, pp. 32-33, Yawnghwe, 2010, p. 191) indicate that a deal

²²⁹ An example of the prominence of the Lo (or Luo) clan was that Lo’s brother, Lo Hsin Ko, served as the Chief Inspector of the Kokang police force.

²³⁰ For footage of Lo Hsin Han speaking Burmese and Chinese, see Cowell’s *Opium Series* (1978).

²³¹ When Thai authorities detained Lo Hsin Han in 1973, he was with Sai Du, an ethnic-Shan member of the SSA, who was serving as his interpreter.

²³² Many *saopha* maintained police forces, but the security forces commanded by the Kengtung and Kokang *saopha* resembled paramilitary forces rather than ones for policing. They were larger and better armed than other *saopha* police retinues. This likely reflects the wealth of these two *saophas*, the large size of their areas of administration, and their location adjacent to border regions.

²³³ For background on smuggling practices, see Kuhn and Kuhn (1962) and “10,340-Lbs Opium Transported in UBA Planes.” (1960, August 17).

took place whereby the authorities released Lo Hsin Han from custody, and he became a *Ka Kwe Ye* militia leader.

After the CPB launched their campaign in eastern Shan State in 1968, they pushed Lo Hsin Han and his forces out of Kokang. He operated out of the towns of Lashio and Tangyan, where he maintained a large garrison for his soldiers and opium stores. Nevertheless, he continued to send agents into CPB-controlled Kokang to purchase opium from the farmers and gathered intelligence on CPB operations for the *Tatmadaw* (Lintner, 1999).

In 1972, reports that *Tatmadaw* officials would revoke the *Ka Kwe Ye* arrangement and either demobilize the militias or integrate them into the *Tatmadaw* spread through the network of militias in Shan State. Lo Hsin Han and others, notably an ethnic-Wa strongman named Maha San, took the path previously trodden by Pu Kyaung Long and Khun Sa's lieutenants. They made contact with the SSA and went underground. In January 1974, Lo Hsin Han concluded an alliance with the SSA and SUA and declared himself the leader of an armed opposition group known as the Shan State Resistance Army (SSRA). The terms of the SSA's alliance with Lo Hsin Han was his support for their proposal to sell the entire opium crop to the US Government.²³⁴ At that time, he aimed to establish control over an area located adjacent to Thailand and open up a new smuggling route in an attempt to attract opium merchants using routes controlled by the KMT (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.).

An apparent lapse in judgment by Lo Hsin Han ended these plans. After concluding an alliance with the SSA, he led a mule caravan loaded with goods and 450 of his men to the Thai border. He planned to scout out areas for his new base. However, Thai Border Patrol Police forces detained him, when he crossed into Thailand on July 17, 1973. A few months later, the Thai government sent him to Burma for trial.²³⁵ In 1976, a Burmese government

²³⁴ See *Proposals to Terminate the Opium Trade in Shan State* (1973). This proposal was an effort by the SSA to enlist support from the United States and bring greater international attention to the political and human rights situation in Shan State through engagement on the opium issues.

²³⁵ For an account of his arrest featuring footage of his extradition, see Cowell's documentary *Opium* (1978).

court sentenced him to death and ordered the confiscation of his assets estimated to value US\$ 3 million (Lintner, 1984, p. 424).²³⁶ His sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. However, in June 1980, the government released him as part of its nationwide amnesty program. He reestablished his authority in northern Shan state and received permission to form a militia.²³⁷

The career of Lo Hsin Han holds several lessons for understanding the limits of strongmen authority. On the one hand, he succeeded in extending his authority on a translocal basis, acquiring one of the largest private armies in Shan State and achieving the notoriety of being singled out by the US Government for his involvement in drug trafficking. Despite the combination of his wealth and formidable army of over 1,000 men, he could not effectively exercise social control across ethnic lines. His inability to forge social ties with Shan communities became a critical constraint on his power and helps account for his decision to seek alliance with the SSA.

Lo Hsin Han possessed several traits and qualities effective for exercising social control. His family position in the Kokang elite meant that he possessed bonds of kinship and loyalty to draw upon as the basis for gaining compliance within the Kokang areas. While serving in the Kokang *saopha's* paramilitary force, he developed personal relations with other officers and men, and also served as an assistant to Olive Yang. To extend his authority beyond Kokang, Lo Hsin Han also drew on bonds of shared ethnic identity. Raised in a Chinese household, he shared many customs, beliefs, and experiences that formed the basis for social relations with other Chinese. His employment as an opium trader provided opportunities to develop business and social ties with merchants, traders, and agents involved

²³⁶ In 1976, the Burmese government convicted Lo Hsin Han on charges of high treason and obstructing the establishment of the Socialist economic system. However, the court did not convict him of violating drug laws. For an account of his trial see “‘Opium king’ Lo gets death sentence,” 1976, November 18; “The unconventional weapons,” 1982, June 18/24, p. 28; Swain, 1974, January 25.

²³⁷ After the collapse of the CPB in 1989, Lo Hsin Han played a significant role in negotiations between the *Tatmadaw* and the groups that emerged out of the implosion of the CPB.

in the opium trade.

Lo Hsin Han also employed rewards and provided goods to society. For instance, in the mid-1960s, before the CPB asserted control over Kokang, he had taken steps to develop an agriculture extension programs for farmers in the area (Personal Communication, Former civil servant, Lashio, Shan State, November, 2011). As an employer and business partner, Lo Hsin Han became the benefactors for the over one thousand members of his militia, the muleteers located in settlements along the opium routes that connected the northern Shan State to the Thai border, and merchants and agents across Shan State. Through these activities, he established himself as patron able to assist people in times of need.

As a native speaker of Chinese, Lo Hsin Han was able to make a credible claim to be a defender of the Chinese population. He also reinforced this claim through actions such as sponsoring the construction of a Chinese temple in Lashio, schools and other projects (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.). This declaration provided a basis for gaining support among the Chinese population, who faced discrimination from members of non-Chinese ethnic groups and the Burmese government.²³⁸ Bo Yang (1987), a Taiwanese journalist, provides an account based on interviews with members of the KMT and SUA conducted in the Thai-Shan border areas

the people of the north Thailand region, including ethnic Chinese and other minority peoples, all revere Luo Xinghan [Lo Hsin Han] despite his past involvement in the narcotics trade. I have heard it said that the bulk of his income from narcotics trafficking was spent on the construction of Chinese schools and the relief of poverty (p. 147).

Through his patronage and provision of support Lo Hsin Han also took steps to position himself as a benefactor for ethnic Chinese in Shan State (Yang Li, 1997).

A closer look at his response to the *Tatmadaw's* order to terminate the *Ka Kwe Ye* militia arrangement provides instructive insights into the challenges presented by identity

²³⁸ For instance, there were anti-Chinese riots in several areas of Burma in 1967.

politics in extending social control. In an interview with Adrian Cowell (*Journal Two*, n.d., pp. 257-262) after his alliance with the SSA, Lo Hsin Han explained that an important motivation for his alliance with the SSA was to gain the support of ethnic Shan farmers. To understand his actions, it is necessary to look more closely at the indirect, but at times critical, connections between the difficulties of exercising social control and opium trafficking. The decision by Lo Hsin Han to ally with the Shan State Army illustrates this interconnection.

By 1973, rumors that the *Tatmadaw* planned to cancel the *Ka Kwe Ye* militia program sent many strongmen scrambling for new strategies to maintain their access to opium revenue. The revocation portended an end to their access to government-controlled roads and towns of Shan State. In particular, the loss of militia status meant that strongmen and their followers also lost access to the towns and stores of rice essential for feeding both soldiers and mules. If they were to continue their trafficking operations, they required another reliable source of food for their operations.

In many rural areas of Shan State, most peasants are semi-subsistence farmers, and granaries for surplus rice were not common. By consequence, procuring rice was ongoing concern for military leaders operating in the field and drug trafficking convoys (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., pp. 257-262). Lo Hsin Han noted the despite earlier attempts to purchase rice from ethnic Shan farmers, he could not get them to part with the fruits of their labor. His inability to penetrate rural Shan society and gain basic support such as rice served as a constraint on his ability to move opium. By contrast, ethnic-Shan-led armed resistance organizations and strongmen – such as those with the SSA – often possessed much closer ties with ethnic Shan communities and enjoyed their support. This support took the form of taxes paid in rice. In an interview with Cowell (*Journal Two*, n.d., pp. 257-262), Lo Hsin Han indicates that his affiliation with SSA was an attempt to gain a basis for developing social ties

with farmers and gaining their support.

He took several steps to reposition his relationship with society in an effort to gain support from broader segments of the population. His adoption of the name Shan State Resistance Army for his group was a symbolic move towards his positioning as an anti-government group. The SSA proposed an alliance that included Lo's support for the Shan Opium Proposal. The proposal which was an attempt by leaders of the SSA and the SUA to coordinate the sale of the entire Shan State opium crop at cost to representatives of the international community in a bid to draw international actors into resolving the Shan conflict and help Shan leaders achieve their goals of greater local autonomy.

His cooperation with the SSA did not purely reflect an interest in forming a military alliance against the government. The alliance was an also attempt to enhance Lo's bargaining position with ethnic Shan farmers. Faced with a lack of access to government-controlled towns and their rice depots, Lo Hsin Han hoped to utilize the SSA and its leaders' political influence over ethnic Shan villagers to forge ties necessary for gaining access to food and information (Cowell, *Article II on Opium Warfare*, 1974, pp. 3, 8-9).

The case of Lo Hsin Han highlights the salience of ethnic identity politics and their importance in developing social linkages with the population. The material resources at his disposal surpassed the amount held by most strongmen. He had the capital necessary to develop formidable coercive capacities. He possessed sufficient revenue to purchase rice from farmers. If necessary, he also wielded the requisite force to coerce farmers to hand over rice. In rural areas, where farmers engaged in subsistence agricultural, surplus rice production was limited, that was not enough. In this case and others, he encountered limits on his ability to develop social control among communities beyond his native region. This became apparent when he explained his motivation for allying with the SSA noting that his newly acquired outlaw status meant that he could no longer access granaries in the Burmese

controlled towns. With his access cut off, he had to rely on rice to feed his caravans from the rural populations. His alignment with the SSA was an attempt to position himself as an ally of the Shan nationalist movement as a means through which to develop social control through a new basis of social ties that his money and guns could not. In this case, the social organization structured the strategies by strongmen to exercise social control. In the case of Lo Hsin Han, this led him to reach an accommodation with an ethnic Shan nationalist armed organization.

Kornzurng (Bo Mo Heng): A Shan Strongman

Most strongmen in Shan State were of ethnic Shan background. With the exception of Kornzurng (1923-1991), they seldom exercised authority on a translocal level. Despite possessing the capacity to meet people's psychological and material needs, most ethnic-Shan strongmen failed to extend their authority on the scale beyond a local level. Of the Shan strongmen, Kornzurng managed to penetrate the ethnic Chinese-dominated opium networks to gain resources and access revenues on level likely beyond most any other ethnic Shan strongman. Nevertheless, for a time, his reliance on Chinese network for access opium constrained his extension of authority. He gained access to significant amounts of opium revenue through his cooperation with the KMT. But his association with the KMT also diminished his influence among some Shans.

Kornzurng was born in Wan Pa Hko village in Hopong Township, west of Taunggyi in the southwest of Shan State. Like many ethnic Shan strongmen, he came from a farming background, received a traditional education at a local village monastery, and acquired a *nom de guerre* as a soldier. During World War II, while still a teenager, he joined the local anti-Japanese resistance. After the war, he served in the *saopha's* police force. During the early period of the Pa-O uprising, his village came under attack. Pa-O rebels burnt his house. According to Sai Hla Aung, after Kornzurng's efforts to push the local *saopha* to retaliate

against them proved ineffective, he joined the White Flag faction of the CPB operating in the southern Shan State in 1950 (Khuen Sai Jaiyen, 1989; Lintner, *Journal XI*, 1986, pp. 253-4). However, Kornzurng and several of his Shan comrades became upset about the dominance of ethnic-Burman leaders in the CPB. In particular, their mistreatment of the local ethnic Shan population was a concern.²³⁹ He joined with Min Thaung to break with the CPB. Along with others, they established the Shan State Communist Party (SSCP) on May 12, 1956 (“Shan State Communist Party,” 1956, August 22).²⁴⁰ Within two years, the party dissolved as many of its members accepted the government’s “Arms for Democracy” amnesty initiative (Lintner, 1999, p. 481; Smith, 1999, p. 169).

Soon after, Kornzurng joined the embryonic Shan resistance movement led by Chao Noi. He went to Mong Kaung-Laikha-Lawksawk area in Shan State to organize an armed resistance force (Yawngwe, 2010, p. 195). An account by the TRC (*The Shan and the T.R.C.*, n.d.) points to the importance of local social ties in establishing his embryonic army noting that,

The place he chose to establish his ideas was his old hometown area, which being his old stomping grounds [Mongkaung-Laikha-Lawksawk], the people there trusted and supported him since 1952, when he had joined the BCP (p. 11).

However, three years later, he followed the exodus of students from the *Num Suk Harn*, who became fed up with its incompetent leadership and severed ties with Chao Noi. In 1959-1960, when Sao Sengsuk arrived in Laikha as part of efforts to establish the SSIA, he encountered Kornzurng’s groups (SSA, 1975, p. 262). To prevent a potential clash, the two leaders decided to form the Shan National Unity Front (SNUF) on July 16, 1961. One account by the SSA (1975) described the group as “well organized politically and with an efficient

²³⁹In particular, he opposed the CPB’s implementation of land reform policies under the guise of agrarian revolution. The Central Committee regarded his opposition as reactionary and issued orders to take action against him and his comrades (Khuen Sai Jaiyen, 1989, p. 3). For a more detailed account, see *T.R.C. President Sao Kwon Jerng’s [Kornzurng] Speech*, 1984, July 4.

²⁴⁰According to Sai Hla Aung, who served with Kornzurng, “it is doubtful whether he understood anything about ideologies when he joined with the White Flag faction of the CPB. He was just upset with the Pa-Os” (Lintner, *Journal XI*, 1986, pp. 253-254).

administration system” (pp. 261-262).

In April 1964, the SNUF merged with other resistance organizations to form the SSA. Kornzurng became its Chief of Staff, and his former SNUF units formed the SSA’s Third Brigade. He retained command of three battalions comprised primarily of ethnic Shan and Pa-O soldiers, operating in Lawksawk, Yawngshwe (Nyaungshwe), Mong Kaung (Mongkaung), Mongpan, Laikha, and parts of Hopong and Kyethi (Kesi) (SSA, 1975, pp. 263).

Kornzurng's early life provided him with skills useful for maintaining control over a large multi-ethnic population and becoming a translocal strongman. His agrarian roots, monastic education, and polyglotism provided common reference points helpful for developing social ties with the rural population. These aptitudes endowed Kornzurng with a rustic rapport, which distinguished him from other aspiring strongmen. For instance, ethnic Shan intellectuals and aristocrats, members of the student movement, and ethnic Chinese leaders often lacked experience with village life and Buddhist monastic education. This experience proved useful for Kornzurng and other strongmen when engaging with village leaders and rural population. Kornzurng's ability to speak Pa-O in addition to Shan helped forge social ties across ethnic groups. The inability of other strongmen to clearly speak more than one locally used language limited their ability to extend their influence across the ethnically heterogeneous areas of Shan State.

Kornzurng exhibited many of the features recognized as those possessed by men of prowess. As a young man, Kornzurng demonstrated his competence as a military leader. In his stint with the CPB, he rose from the rank of company commander to provincial military commissar within one year (Khuensai Jaiyen, 1989). Later, after achieving a reputation for prowess in combat against the *Tatmadaw*, he acquired a *nom de guerre*, Mo Heng, or "Thunder" in Shan and the title of Bo. Moreover, the loss of his arm in a battle provided a

dramatic visual reminder of his martial experience.

He also possessed the types of credentials earned by other strongmen that signified their position as someone responsible for the well being of a community. His participation in the anti-Japanese resistance earned him a reputation as a defender of his community. Later, his service as a police officer in the *saopha* forces signaled both the *saopha*'s confidence in him and his ties to the traditional political order. Although he joined the CPB, his decision to break with them and form the SSCP demonstrated his opposition to Burman rule, regardless of its ideological basis. According to Sao Sengsuk, when Kornzurng surrendered to Burmese authorities in the mid-1950s, he told them he was primarily a Shan and that the communists were becoming anti-Shan (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., p. 3). His subsequent membership in the *Num Suk Harn* and later position as the Chief of Staff for the SSA demonstrated his commitment to the Shan nationalist cause. In 1968, at the age of 43, he severed ties with the SSA and later adopted the name Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA) for his band of followers. This decision marked the beginning of his transformation from local to translocal strongman.

In 1968, Kornzurng ordered the troops of the SSA's Third Brigade to cross the Salween River, where, with the help of General Li Wenhuan and his KMT force, they occupied the village of Piang Luang in Thailand's Chiang Mai province (Smith, 1999, p. 334). They took control of the village from the Shan National Independence Army (SNIA), a splinter group of the *Num Suk Harn*. This move signaled Kornzurng's split from the SSA and his step towards becoming a translocal strongmen.

On January 20, 1969, he established a new armed resistance organization – the Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA). The army retained soldiers from the SSA's Third Brigade, many of whom had served with him in the SNUF and SSA. He also allied with General Li Wenhuan, who operated out of Tam Ngop, a nearby base also in Thailand's

Chiang Mai Province (Lintner, *Journal X*, 1986, p. 267). Cooperation with the KMT offered not just the benefit of increased revenue from opium access, but also ties to anti-Communist organizations, such as the Thai military, the CIA, and the Taiwanese government. Since the KMT's arrival in Shan State, these groups had continued to provide support, although it appears to have tapered off in the mid-1950s (Gibson and Chen, 2011; "Kornzurng: His last will," 2000, September 13).

Kornzurng explained the split from the SSA and his subsequent alliance with the KMT in ideological and military terms. He cited the influx of CPB units into Shan State and signs of the potential alliance between the CPB and SSA as a threat to the Shan nationalist cause (Khuensai Jaiyen, 1993, July 10; Tailand Revolutionary Council (TRC), 1984). In a speech delivered by Kornzurng (TRC, 1984) in 1984, he explained his actions in greater detail,

there is no way for either the Ne Win Burmese government or the Than Tun/Ba Thein Tin Burma Communist Party to peacefully and with goodwill, give the Shan State and its people independence. Therefore we must mount our stand against these two Burmese groups as clear and definite (p. 3).

But while he publically presented anti-Communism as a driving force in his decision, other accounts point to the role of financial interests offered by General Li Wenhuan.²⁴¹

General Li Wenhuan's engage with Kornzurng offered several benefits. After military operations by the Burmese and Chinese had driven most KMT forces from Shan State, the KMT faced the problem of how to protect the supply of opium from Shan State. As Lintner points out, his soldiers and their families had become accustomed to the relative comforts of Thailand and did not want to return to the difficult life of soldiering in Shan State

²⁴¹ Several other accounts offer additional factors behind his decision. A few sources cite Kornzurng's frustration and disagreements with the leadership of the SSA. Like many of the Shan leaders lacking formal education, Kornzurng did not trust intellectuals such as the student leaders of the SSA. Sao Sengsuk suggests the split reflected manipulation by General Li Wenhuan, noting that the general led Kornzurng to conclude incorrectly that Sao Sengsuk was preparing to purge him from the party. Sao Sengsuk also argues that the origins of the arrangement lay in Kornzurng's debt to General Li Wenhuan, who, in 1968, had provided him an initial loan reportedly amounting to US\$15,000 and later several gold bars. The debt was to be repaid with taxes collected from opium convoys (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., p. 5; Yawngwe, 2010, p. 39).

(Citation). The partnership provided General Li Wenhuan with additional Shan troops to protect opium convoys traveling from Shan State to the Thai border. An important element of the agreement with Kornzurng was that KMT soldiers operating within Shan State alongside SURA soldiers wore SURA uniforms (Smith, 1999, p. 221). General Li Wenhuan needed to maintain the pretense that KMT forces were no longer involved in the opium business, so as not to attract the attention of the Burmese government and the international community (Lintner, 1999, p. 303). In the early 1970s, this fiction became increasingly important, as counter-narcotics objectives took on a more prominent role in US Government policies towards Burma and Thailand.

For Kornzurng, cooperation with General Li Wenhuan provided access to resources useful for extending his influence. But, at the same time, Kornzurng's alliance with the KMT forces damaged his image as a committed Shan nationalist and frayed his ties with Shan population. For instance, soon after the alliance, the first battalion of the newly formed SURA in Mongpan Township defected to the SSA (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., p. 3). Attempts to integrate KMT officers into positions of command within SURA units apparently created discord in the ranks, as some soldiers did not want to accept their orders.²⁴² Kornzurng also experienced condemnation by influential ethnic Shan Buddhist monks. One of his former aides notes that this hurt him deeply because he considered himself a devout Buddhist ("Kornzurng: His last will," 2000, September 13). Some Shans despised General Li Wenhuan and his army because of the involvement by some KMT units in abuses against the rural Shan population. General Li Wenhuan's meddling in the internal politics of Shan State was another source of resentment ("Kornzurng: His last will," 2000, September 13). The SURA and SSA became involved in strategic competition, which involved limited clashes (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.; Boucaud and Boucaud, 1992).

²⁴² Majors Sang Hkam and Mong Tserng of the SURA joined with Pan Aung of the SSA (Cowell and Menges, 1973).

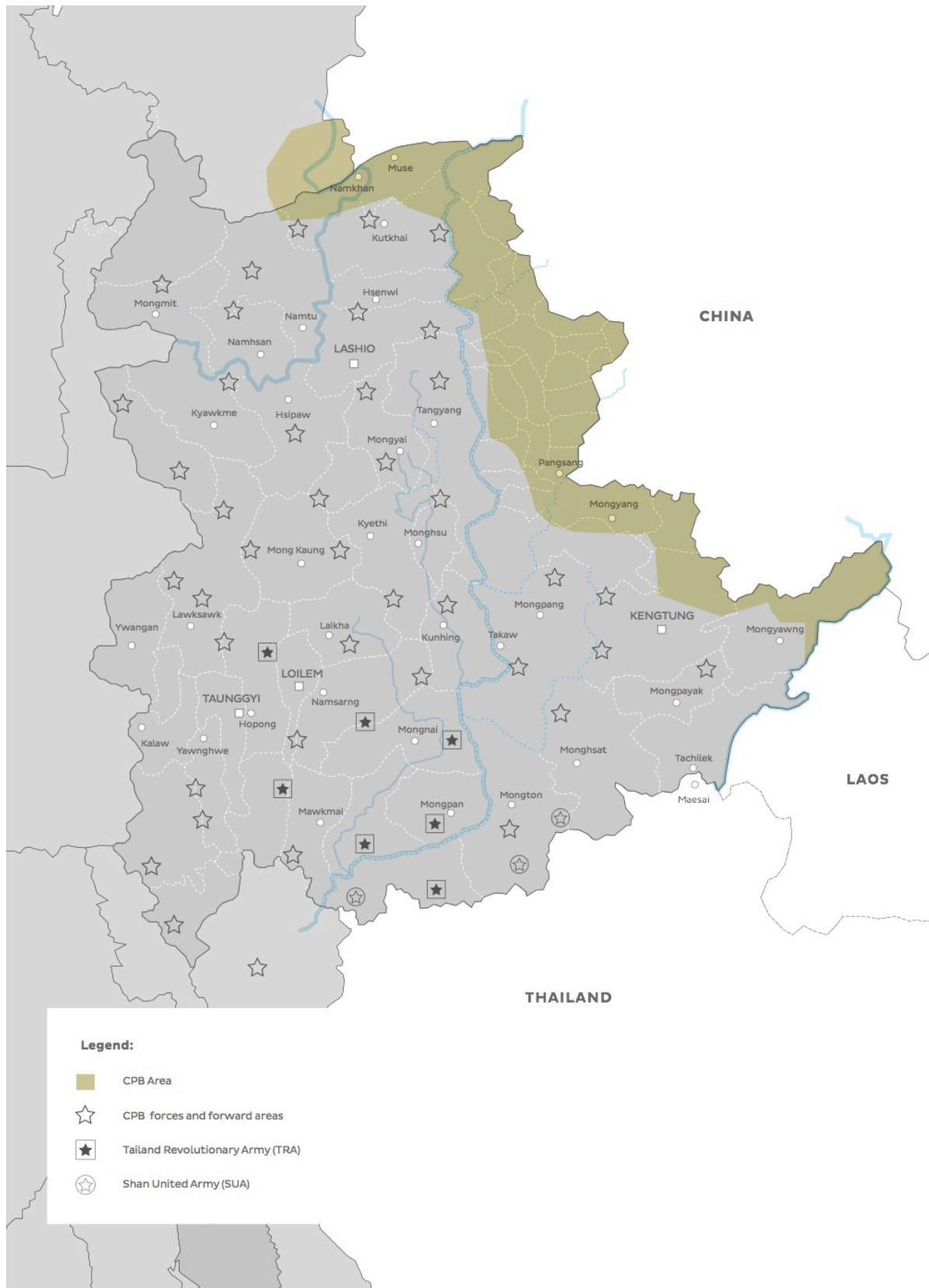


Figure 4.2: Selected armed groups in Shan State, 1983²⁴³

²⁴³ Adopted by the author from map produced by Yawngwhe (2010, p. 132), which he notes was “compiled from intelligence data obtained from Shan State Army (SSA), Shan United Army (SUA) and Shan United Revolutionary Army and (SURA), 1983.”

On the other hand, the alliance brought several benefits useful for Kornzurng to expand his patronage abilities. One of the most tangible was control over Piang Luang and adjacent areas in Shan State. The village located in Thailand served as a secure base area for his forces and their families. Through his alliance with the KMT remnants, he gained support from Thailand's military leaders. The Royal Thai Army faced a local communist-inspired insurgency – the Communist Party of Thailand – and therefore its leaders were concerned about armed communist movements in, Shan State and China. The ties to Thai security leadership provided by the alliance with the KMT proved useful for SURA's continued access to Thai territory adjacent to the border.

By the early 1980s, Kornzurng's managed to recover his position among ethnic Shan society. One of the most striking illustrations of Kornzurng's ability to extend his authority took place in 1982 when he succeeded bringing over an estimated 1,000 soldiers along with their families into his fold. This reflected the decision by Sai Zam Mai, leader of the SSA's 2nd Brigade, to join with Kornzurng.²⁴⁴ The earlier split with the other SSA faction occurred over the issue of accepting assistance from the CPB and left the 2nd Brigade weak. Concerns that the CPB's political stance did not sufficiently recognize the demands for the Shan State to have greater political autonomy also led SSA soldiers to defect to SURA (Kearns, 1982, p. 38). Together the SURA and the SSA 2nd Brigade, established the Tailand Revolutionary Army (TRA) and its political arm, the Tai Revolutionary Council (TRC). With this move, Kornzurng reached new heights of influence for an ethnic Shan strongman (See Figure 4.2).²⁴⁵

Control of the Piang Luang and surrounding areas provided Kornzurng with increased

²⁴⁴ The SSA had become sharply divided over whether or not to accept support from CBP. Zam Mai led one faction operating in areas near the Thai border. Several leaders of the pro-CPB faction, including Hso Ten and Sai Lek, operated in northern Shan State (Boucaud and Boucaud, 1992, pp. 108-109).

²⁴⁵ Once he broke with the KMT, he expanded his influence to include not only ethnic Shans but also other ethnic groups. For instance, Eric Naw Pha, a Western-educated, ethnic-Palaung prince and strongmen from Namsan Township in northern Shan State, briefly served as the Secretary General of the TRC (Boucaud and Boucaud, 1992, pp. 108-109).

access to tax revenue from the opium trade. The area adjacent to the village was a smuggling corridor used by opium traffickers and other smugglers. General Li Wenhuan employed ties with opium merchants to encourage the use of the route. The two groups split the revenue collected at the tax gate located on the route (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., p. 2). In the early 1970s, the advance of CPB across eastern Shan State led other merchants to switch from using trafficking routes in eastern Shan state to the SURA/KMT controlled route (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., p. 3). With the resources, he strengthened his forces to as many as 4,000 troops (Yawngwe, 2010, p. 141; CIA, 1983, p. 232). He also managed to extend the area under his control from beyond the Thai border and eastern Shan State to the west and north (Yawngwe, p. 2010, p. 132) (See Figure 4.2).

As noted earlier, this collaboration with the KMT did not sit well elements among the ethnic Shan population. Given these sentiments, how did Kornzurng manage to tap into their resources without incurring social consequences for his collaboration with the KMT, an act that would typically undermine a Shan strongman's authority?

His success was partly because unlike other most ethnic Shan strongmen, Kornzurng managed to generate significant amounts of opium capital. A central facet of his access was his cooperation with KMT General Li Wenhuan. Estimates indicate that the SURA and KMT jointly taxed between ten to eighteen tons per year in the mid-1970s (US Congress, 1975, p. 25; US Congress, 1978, p. 246). Kornzurng also maintained an armed force estimated between 700 to 1,000 men. Estimates suggest that this rose to as many as 3,000 soldiers before severing ties with the KMT in the early 1980s (US Congress, 1975, p. 49; US Congress, 1978, p. 230; Lintner, 1982, Part 3, p. 14).

The access to increased revenue flows provided the basis for him to provide rewards to a broader segment of the population. Kornzurng employed many of the same elements of traditional authority as other local strongmen. One of the elements of Kornzurng's success

was his ability to forge ties with the population. From World War II to 1984, when he merged his forces with Khun Sa, he gained recognition as a protector of the community through his involvement in local resistance groups. For instance, like many strongmen, he possessed a reputation as a capable soldier. His track record surpassed those of many others. Indeed, he had served in almost every major ethnic-Shan armed resistance organization dating back to World War II.

But a key element of Kornzurng's success that helps distinguish him from many other strongmen is that he extended patronage on a much grander scale. While many strongmen made donations to Buddhist temples, Kornzurng built temples and renovated an entire temple complex near his headquarters in Piang Luang. In contrast to strongmen who provided protection to villages, he presided over the transformation of Piang Luang from a small village into a bustling trade town surrounded by fortifications. This secure base area located in Piang Luang adjacent to the Shan-Thai border provided protection and other opportunities for his followers. By 1983, Kornzurng had opened a hospital in Piang Luang, sponsored eighteen primary schools, and supported a program for teachers of the Shan language.

While some strongmen possessed reputations for Buddhist accomplishment, Kornzurng's reputation for devotion to Buddhism was fanatical, according to one account penned by his associates ("Kornzurng: His last will," 2000, September 13). His accomplishments included sponsoring the Buddhist clergy, strictly adhering to Buddhist precepts, and incorporating these precepts into his army's code of conduct (Tailand Revolutionary Council, n.d., Appendix II, X). One visible impact, as noted by Sai Lek in an interview with Cowell (*Journal Two*, n.d.), was that on religious days, the SURA soldiers strictly adhered to Buddhist practices that included abstinence from the consumption of meat and liquor. By contrast, soldiers in other armies, notably the MTA, exhibited less ardent

adherence to Buddhist practices.²⁴⁶ From the vantage point of the Buddhist population, the discipline manifested displayed by Kornzurng's soldiers emphasized both his adherence to Buddhist conceptions of morality and the power that he held over his followers.

Another dimension of Kornzurng's success in extending authority was his establishment of a sophisticated public relations organization. To achieve this, he attracted several Shan intellectuals, who put together a sophisticated information network to promote him. In the 1980s, the SURA began publishing a variety of materials in Shan, Burmese, and English, which included a weekly newspaper and political books.²⁴⁷ This dissemination of information aimed to raise awareness of the political issues, but also provided a forum for presenting Kornzurng as a leader to a broader population. The publications presented narratives of Kornzurng, which drew on many of the tropes of authority common to other strongmen.

Unlike other strongmen who possessed qualities that resonated only with the local populations, he succeeded in extending his reputation on a translocal level. Kornzurng also took great care to justify his actions in terms of advancing the Shan political cause and the importance of supporting anti-Communism. A principal component of this was his invocation of threats posed by the Burman-dominated government as well as the CPB. Unlike the political positions of these two groups, Kornzurng's primary goals for Shan State were to achieve autonomy from the ethnic-Burman-dominated central state. He justified his cooperation with the KMT as a necessary step for ensuring the continuation of the Shan political movement (Kearns, 1982, November 26, p. 38; Pratyā Sawetvimon, 1987, May 25). Despite having been a member of two Communist insurgent groups, Kornzurng managed to stake out a position as an ardent anti-Communist. His alignment with the KMT troops

²⁴⁶ Lintner (*Journal X*, 1986, p. 252.) notes that they would “kill pigs and cows and drink liquor and smoke opium.”

²⁴⁷ Kornzurng's press also published several books. For an example, see *Historical Facts about the Shan State* (TRC, 1986). For a discussion of Shan exile media, see Ferguson (2006, p. 3).

emphasized this position. Kornzurng also provided funds to support Shan language education program. His support for the latter activity reinforced his reputation as a Shan nationalist as the government had dropped Shan language instruction from the curriculum of state schools in Shan State by the mid-1960s (Ferguson, 2006).

As Kornzurng's authority expanded, keeping a disparate, multi-ethnic base together of required resources. His personal magnetism no doubt played a significant role in keeping his followers under his influence, but a steady flow of income was also necessary to support his army and provide goods for the population under his tutelage. Khun Sa managed to leverage this need for resource access to advance his interests. In the early 1980s, the SUA slowly enveloped Kornzurng's headquarters through the piecemeal conquest of surrounding areas. Facing an economic blockade and diminishing revenue from the opium trade, he accepted Khun Sa's demands for an alliance. In 1985, he joined ranks with Khun Sa to form an enlarged TRA, which later became the Mong Tai Army (Boucaud and Boucaud, 1992, p. 171). As the chairman of the newly fused organization, Kornzurng served as the public face of the organization. Real power lay with Khun Sa. Six years later, Kornzurng succumbed to cancer. His death cost Khun Sa one of his most powerful symbols of "Shan-ness."

Khun Sa/Zhang Shee Fu: The Power of Cultural Hybridity

A man known by the Shan name of Khun Sa (1934-2007) and the Chinese name of Zhang Shee Fu became the most powerful strongman in Shan State. Elements of his success include his domination of the lucrative opium trade and the power provided by his wealth and coercive capabilities. This depiction presents a popular Khun Sa as warlord narrative.²⁴⁸ This perspective often ignores the non-coercive elements of his authority, which included his role as a benefactor for many people of Shan State.

To fully appreciate the extent of Khun Sa's power, it is necessary to consider the

²⁴⁸ For an example of the portrayal of Khun Sa as warlord, see the lead in his obituary in the *New York Times* (Fuller, 2007, November 5), which refers to him as “the publicity-loving Golden Triangle drug lord who thrived in the kill-or-be-killed cauldron of ethnic rivalries and heroin-financed private armies.”

significance of his extraordinary capacity, albeit short-lived, to deploy of two distinct personae: One was as an ethnic-Shan, and the other as an ethnic-Chinese.²⁴⁹ To many Shans, he was Khun Sa, a staunch advocate for Shan nationalism. For many Chinese, he was Zhang Shee Fu, a successful, reliable business partner. Cultural hybridity allowed him to fuse the Chinese opium capital network with ethnic Shan labor into a counter state order. With this capability, he managed to access both the opium capital necessary for the provision of resources and fulfill people's needs for an acceptable leader.

Khun Sa was born in Hpa Perng Village of Tangyan Township. The cosmopolitanism of his bi-cultural upbringing of an ethnic-Palaung-Shan mother and a Chinese father proved significant for his later career (Khun Sa, 1993). The cultural practices and linguistic aptitudes in Shan and a locally spoken Chinese dialect acquired at a young age imbued him with tools needed to forge ties with both Shan and Chinese communities. Another critical aspect of Khun Sa's childhood was that his ethnic Chinese grandfather, an official of the *saopha* in the Loimaw region of Tangyan Township, raised him. Moreover, his family's involvement in the opium trade helped Khun Sa better understand the intricacies of the business itself and the network of contacts required to utilize it (Khun Sa, 1993, p. 45).

Al McCoy (1998) notes “[d]uring the first 30 years of his career, Khun Sa remained a typical Haw opium warlord – speaking Yunnanese, trusting only Chinese officers, and avoiding any lasting commitment to the Shan cause” (pp. 306-307). As a young man, he became a *saopha* official in Loimaw, when Bo Mawng appointed him as his successor. In 1959, at the age of twenty-five, he formed a small armed group.²⁵⁰ The group served as *Tatmadaw*-allied militia from 1959 to 1964. When the government instituted its first demonetization of the currency, Khun Sa broke from the government. His group took the

²⁴⁹ Several scholars have discussed the importance of hybrid identities. For an insightful analysis of Khun Sa and his employment of bi-cultural heritage as a basis for authority, see McCoy's (1998, 1999).

²⁵⁰ According to account by Cowell (*Journal Two*, n.d.), Khun Sa “recruited a private army based in Mong Yai in 1959” (p. 14).

name of the United Anti-Socialist Army and joined the ethnic-Shan armed resistance movement (SSA, 1975, p. 262.). This first period of rebellion was brief. By 1966, Khun Sa had resumed his position as head of a *Tatmadaw*-allied militia force, known as the Loi Maw *Ka Kwe Ye* militia. During this second stint as a militia leader (1964-1969), he achieved status as the *de facto* head of the government's *Ka Kwe Ye* militia program (Yawnghwe, 2010, pp. 18, 276-277).

Like other strongmen, a lack of both capital and ties to communities outside his native region impeded Khun Sa's path to power. In the mid-1960s, when Khun Sa briefly flirted with rebellion, he moved his headquarters to Ving Ngun.²⁵¹ The area is one of the most productive opium regions in Burma. McCoy (1972) provides one of the few available accounts of this period noting that Khun Sa “he established an independent fiefdom...and his ruthlessness commanded the respect of even the wild Wa” (p. 192).

In 1966, when Khun Sa had resumed his participation in the *Tatmadaw*'s militia arrangement, he embarked on an almost two-decade-long effort to wrest control of the opium trade away from the KMT. The KMT taxes on opium cut into Khun Sa's profit margins. By consequence, he lacked the resources to purchase the weapons necessary to overcome the blockade imposed by the KMTs (Boucaud and Boucaud, 1992; Khun Sa, 1983, p. 47). His attempts to tax the mule caravans transporting opium for the KMT that crossed his areas of control was his first challenge to their dominance of the trade.

His next move was even more daring. Khun Sa attempted to completely bypass the KMT tax regime by sending opium to buyers in Laos, rather than Thailand. His efforts precipitated a violent three-way battle involving forces of the KMT and Royal Laotian Army, which became known as the 1967 Opium War.²⁵² In 1967, Khun Sa purchased "unprecedented quantities of opium in the northern Shan and Wa states" and invited opium

²⁵¹ In 1964, he also attempted to establish control over a remote area in Thailand near the village of Baan Hin Taek along the Thai-Shan border. The KMT leaders thwarted this attempt (Khun Sa, 1983, p. 47).

²⁵² For accounts of this conflict, see Gibson and Chen (2011), Lintner (1999), and McCoy (1972).

merchants to join his caravan (McCoy, 1972, p.322). He also employed a broker to arrange the sale of the opium to General Ouane Rattikone, the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Lao Army. The caravan contained 300 mules and transported sixteen tons of opium for the 200-mile trek from Ving Ngun to Baan Kwan in Laos (See Figure 0.2) (McCoy, 1972, pp. 297-307).

KMT leaders responded by dispatching hundreds of soldiers in an attempt to intercept the convoy. The prospect of a large opium convoy evading their border cordon meant that Khun Sa would likely reap the profits necessary to increase his army's strength and thereby challenge their domination of the trade. A sawmill located on the banks of the Mekong River near the village of Baan Kwan became the site of the 1967 Opium War. On July 30, 1967, KMT forces launched an armed assault on Khun Sa's forces deployed around the perimeter of the sawmill. Three days later, General Ouane Rattikone dispatched Laotian Air Force planes to attack the sawmill, forcing the two armies to retreat. General Ouane directed his soldiers to collect the opium.

In October 1969, the detention of Khun Sa by Burmese officials halted temporarily his challenge to the KMT. A Burmese court convicted him of violating Section (5) of the Public Tranquility Law and sent him to Mandalay prison. Many details of Khun Sa's arrest remain unclear. Several accounts suggest it reflected the government's concern that not only had his militia's strength grown very powerful, but that Khun Sa might also join forces with the Shan State Army (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.; Yawngnwe, 2010). According to an account (Maung Wint Thu, 2003) published by the Burmese government, "in view of their [Khun Sa's group] military buildup and frequent violations of the law it was conceivable that they would no longer be loyal to the government" (p. 36).

Khun Sa's arrest impinged on his ability to exercise social control.²⁵³ In prison, he was no longer in direct contact with his followers. In his absence, the officers in charge of his armed group encountered several challenges. The group had lost its official status as the Loi Maw *Ka Kwe Ye* militia and was now considered an illegal organization by the Burmese government. His lieutenant – Zhang Hsu-chuan – proved to be an ideal proxy leader. As a Manchurian native and former KMT soldier, he lacked the local ties and political base useful for usurping power. Zhang also brought a rough-handed ruling style in which he expelled disloyal followers, reportedly leading several of his men to go over to the SSA (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., p. 13). The organization also reached out for support from the SSA and engaged in limited cooperation with them.

Khun Sa's return to his men in 1976 marked the beginning of a new stage in his career as the head of an armed resistance organization. Earlier in 1973, his men led a daring raid on Taunggyi in which they kidnapped two Soviet doctors. General Kriangsak Chamanan of the Royal Thai Army negotiated an arrangement in which the SUA freed the Soviets, and the government released Khun Sa (Lintner, 1999, p. 305). Once back underground, Khun Sa began rebuilding his army. In his absence, the force dwindled from roughly 2,000 men to perhaps 1,000 men (McCoy, 1972, p. 197). By 1977, Khun Sa claimed to have expanded the strength of his force to 3,500 soldiers with an additional 1,500 reserves (US Congress, 1978, p. 4). In the early 1980s, he used his might to push units of several separate armed groups – WNA, LNA, SSA, and KMT – from their positions along the Thai-Shan frontier as part of a step towards consolidating control over the opium sector (Lintner, 1999; Smith, 1999).

Khun Sa's merger with Kornzurng's TRA in 1985 marks the beginning of his ascendancy toward becoming Shan State's most powerful translocal strongman. Kornzurng's public endorsement of Khun Sa was an important factor in mobilizing support for Khun Sa

²⁵³ Efforts by the *Tatmadaw* to detain and disarm his troops failed. For instance, troops stationed at his base in Tangyan manage to withdraw before the arrival of *Tatmadaw* units (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.)

from ethnic Shans (“Kornzurng: His last will,” 2000, September 13). The two leaders of the newly fused forces publically presented the merger as recognition of the need for unity among Shan groups. But the SUA's earlier encirclement of Piang Luang and imposition of a trade blockade financially weakened the SURA (Boucaud and Boucaud, 1992, p. 171). When taking into account that Kornzurng faced the prospect of continued revenue shortfalls and likely loss of support, the merger of the SUA and SURA looks more like a shotgun wedding than mutual recognition of the benefits of a union.

In 1989, the collapse of the CPB – the *Tatmadaw*'s most formidable threat in Shan State – led state security planners to shift their focus to containing Khun Sa's MTA. Previously, Khun Sa had eschewed military offensives against the *Tatmadaw* and tended to fight only defensive maneuvers. Several sources point to a meeting between Khun Sa and *Tatmadaw* Brigadier General Aye San at Mongton Township on March 7, 1984, as the genesis of this arrangement.²⁵⁴ The tacit peace represents an accommodation between the *Tatmadaw* and Khun Sa.

The walls began to close in on Khun Sa. In the early 1990s, the *Tatmadaw* along with the newly established United Wa State Army – an armed group formed by ethnic Wa units of the CPB – slowly surrounded Homong. In a move that caught most people – even many trusted advisors – by surprise, Khun Sa and the *Tatmadaw* secretly negotiated a surrender agreement, which came into effect on January 7, 1996.

For over a decade, Khun Sa managed to bind together an ethnic Chinese-dominated opium-trading network together with a predominately ethnic Shan armed resistance organization. While most other strongmen had managed to tap into one or the other, this amalgamation allowed him both capital and labor. This fusion provided a basis for him to

²⁵⁴ According to Bertil Lintner (1990, June 28), Khun Sa met Brigadier General Aye San, head of the *Tatmadaw*'s Eastern Regional Command at Mongton Township on March 7, 1984. At the meeting, they finalized "the details of a joint-cooperation agreement" (p. 26). Several reports allege that Khun Sa also made payoffs totaling several million dollars to General Maung Aye (Bernstein and Kean, 1996, p. 14).

establish a counter state order of unprecedented size for Shan State. How did he achieve this success while other strongmen had failed? Specifically, how did he exercise social control over both ethnic Shans and at the same time gain dominance over the opium trade?

Khun Sa's ability to dominate opium sector and exercise social control over the ethnic Shan population was a feat not accomplished by other strongmen. A critical element to Khun Sa's ability to exercise control over a large population stems from the massive amounts of wealth generated from the opium sector. In his early career, Khun Sa generated revenue from practices common to several other strongmen. He trafficked opium, provided protection to opium merchants and syndicates operating opium refineries in his areas of control, and preying on opium convoys.²⁵⁵ By the mid-1980s, his dominance of the opium trade reached an unprecedented level for a strongman. He achieved control of the Thai-Shan State border by displacing several armed groups – including the KMT – from their positions and absorbed the TRA. Control of the Thai-Shan border in the mid-1980s opened up new avenues for generating revenue. As McCoy (1999) points out,

Khun Sa's influence did not rely upon occupying the best opium territory, which was in fact further north in the rugged Wa hills, but instead of his control, direct and indirect, over heroin processing and marketing along the Thai-Burmese border (p. 311).

Khun Sa was also able to collect lucrative protection fees from criminal syndicates operating heroin-processing facilities and tax (Boucaud and Boucaud, 1992, p. 30; White, 1987, January 24).

The amount of revenue acquired throughout his long career his difficult to estimate. In 1989, Khun Sa told a reporter that he earned over \$200 million per year from his taxation of heroin refineries (Liu, 1989, May 15, p. 42). The resources at his disposal provided the basis for exercising social control through his provision of a wide range of goods to the population. In many ways, his practices came to resemble those often provided by governments but

²⁵⁵ For analysis of Khun Sa's engagement in the opium sector, see Lintner (1999) and McCoy (1999).

neglected by the Burmese state. The range and types of goods he offered the population are extensive.

The steps taken to achieve dominance over the opium trade involved practices that sometimes made it difficult to exercise social control over a multi-ethnic population. Khun Sa's earlier track record involved practices that created obstacles for exercising social control over segments of Shan society. In his earlier career, Khun Sa had served as a *Tatmadaw*-allied militia leader. He had attacked armed resistance organizations led by both Shans and non-Shans. His engagement in opium trafficking, rather than opposing the *Tatmadaw*, also created an impression that he was not committed to the political objectives of the Shan resistance movement. Instead, like several other strongmen that had served as *Tatmadaw*-militia units, his interests were economic. Finally, his partial Chinese heritage served as a source of opposition to his role as the leader of the Shan resistance movement.²⁵⁶ Khun Sa's unwillingness to engage the *Tatmadaw* led to public criticism for being more interested in drug trafficking than advancing the Shan political cause through armed struggle. Despite following many patterns of behavior – such as engagement in opium trafficking and close ties with both Chinese criminal syndicates and previous service as *Tatmadaw*-allied militia – that had prevented other strongmen from extending their authority, Khun Sa managed to extend his control over a multi-ethnic population.

What distinguished Khun Sa from other strongmen was his masterful tailoring of rewards, sanctions, and his use of symbols and adherence to practices that matched the needs of individuals from various social and ethnic cleavages. In particular, several elements set him apart from other strongmen. For one, his accumulation of resources provided the means to deliver rewards on a grander level than any of the other strongmen. But unlike many other wealthy strongmen, the forms through which he employed it involved practices and the

²⁵⁶ For discussions of the politicization of Khun Sa's partial Chinese heritage, see *Khun Sa* (1983) and McCoy (1998, 1999).

careful invocation of symbols that resonated with the Shan population. Khun Sa managed to present both Chinese and Shan populations with a compelling rationale to accept his leadership. Like a Janus-faced statue, he seemingly projected two distinct images. Each presented shared cultural characteristics that proved useful in creating powerful social bonds to multiple groups. He gained rulemaking authority from his ability to provide a compelling rationale for people to follow him, rather than other organizations and individuals who were also jockeying for their support (McCoy, 1998, 1999).

Khun Sa's transformation of Homong (Homein) from a small village into a bustling town is one example of his provision of goods. After being pushed out of his Thai base in Baan Hin Taek in 1982, Khun Sa relocated his headquarters to Homong. Lintner (1994, January 20) describes the town, which he visited several times,

There are schools, a Buddhist monastery, a well-equipped hospital with an operation theatre and X-ray facilities, video halls, karaoke bars, two hotels, a disco and even a small public park complete with pathways, benches and a Chinese-style pavilion by an artificial lake (p. 22).

Homong offered opportunities for people to escape the insecurity of life in the war-torn countryside and relief from the *Tatmadaw*. The population grew from that of a small village to an estimated ten to twenty thousand people (Bourne, 1994, May 6; Lintner, 1994, January 20, p. 22). The town offered an efficient system of administration and other services, such as medical care. In particular, settlement in Homong and its surrounding areas located south of the Salween River under the control of the MTA. This offered protection from predation and arbitrary taxation by other armed groups.

Khun Sa also employed resources to support an extensive network of clients. He was famous for his generosity. In times of need, he was offered assistance to his followers. These ranged from bestowing financial rewards to people who had served him, paying medical fees for influential figures, supporting orphanages, and other acts of generosity (Lintner, 1999, p. 20). Khun Sa also offered a broad range of financial goods. Service in his army offered

limited payment but provided its members with food and shelter and employment. He provided benefits for disabled veterans of his army (Personal Communication, former MTA soldier, Taunggyi, Shan State, October 2015).

Khun Sa drew on an array of symbols embedded with meanings and engaged in practices compatible with local norms about the appropriate or moral use of authority as a basis for extending social control. These symbols and practices drew on traditional concepts of authority, interpersonal bonds, and mimicking the adoption of state-like practices. Effective elements of their success were his carefully tailored practices designed to resonate with specific communities and his use of the media to propagate his qualities that made him suitable for leadership. But at the same time, he took steps aimed to neutralize the objections to his authority.

Khun Sa displayed personal attributes associated with men of prowess. For instance, he possessed a reputation for cunning, propagated by numerous stories of him using his wits to outsmart his foes. He claimed to have survived at least 40 assassination plots by an assortment of rivals, including the United States government (Gooi, 1993, December 19). Khun Sa also conveyed the impression that he possessed martial prowess, although he rarely engaged directly in combat. Nonetheless, his command of one of the largest armies in Burma was a testament to his ability to lead, while his adoption of the title of general reinforced the image of his role as a military leader.²⁵⁷

Like other strongmen, Khun Sa invoked his association with the former feudal regime. Khun Sa disseminated stories about the service of his family and himself as officials in the feudal hierarchy.²⁵⁸ By drawing attention to his connection to traditional *saopha*

²⁵⁷ Khun Sa also invoked his knowledge of Chinese classical texts as the basis for his military and leadership prowess. According to one of his authorized biographies, the only book available to Khun Sa during his prison term was *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, which is a 16th-century Chinese text reputed to provide insights about developing strategies to solve challenging problems (Khun Sa, 1983, p. 48).

²⁵⁸ An apparently authorized biography of Khun Sa presents him as the latest in a long line of local rulers in his family. The book also notes that one of his ancestors became a chieftain, or *chao muang* in Shan, of the

authority, Khun Sa offered a rationale for following his rules that drew upon traditional norms and practices of authority. Khun Sa's also engaged in practices that demonstrated Buddhist accomplishment. He spent time ordained as a Buddhist monk, participated in Buddhist ceremonies, financed the construction and renovation of several Buddhist temples, made regular donations to support the Buddhist Sangha, and patronized several well-respected ethnic Shan monks (Khun Sa, 1983, p. 47).

Khun Sa expended time and resources to overcome this opposition and develop stronger ties with ethnic Shans. He employed symbols and practices considered by many Shan as constituting "Shan-ness," which enhanced the credibility of his claim to advance the interests of both ethnic Shans as well as the other ethnic groups in Shan State. In Shan State, people often judge strongmen and other political leaders by the company they keep. Khun Sa drew on his associations with influential Shan leaders as a mechanism that channeled their prestige. One of Khun Sa's earliest bids to acquire Shan revolutionary credentials involved enlisting the support of Long Khun Maha – a former Chief Minister in the Mongyai feudal regime, thereby gaining his tacit endorsement of Khun Sa as a leader. Long Khun Maha was also a well-known Shan nationalist. In his early career he was a politician, poet, writer, and journalist.²⁵⁹ During his first, brief foray as a Shan revolutionary, he joined the *Num Suk Harn* and later sided with the students and became the first President of the SSIA ("The unconventional weapons," 1982, June 18/24, p. 26; 1999, p. 505). After Burmese officials arrested him in 1961, he returned to Taunggyi. In the late 1970s, Khun Sa's offer of a printing press for his use served as an enticement for him to settle at the SUA headquarters in

Loimaw and lists his grandfather as the chief of Loimaw and his stepfather was the chief of Mongton (Khun Sa, 1983, p. 46).

²⁵⁹ Before going underground, Khun Long Maha published *Khitthit Shan Pye*, a local newspaper in Shan State, and served as the Joint Secretary General of the Shan People's Unity Party, a political party in the pre-1962 period.

Baan Hin Taek.²⁶⁰ In the mid-1980s, Khun Sa managed to attract several other prominent Shan leaders to join his organization.

Khun Sa was not always successful in attracting Shan leaders to rally to his side. In the early 1980s, he tapped many of the first generation leaders of the Shan revolution for recruitment as senior advisors. These leaders included the students that had left Rangoon University in the late 1950s to join Chao Noi's *Num Suk Harn* and later established the SSA. By 1980, most of them had retired from the SSA, and many were living in northern Thailand. Nevertheless, they commanded respect from many Shan nationalists for their role in initiating the armed revolt against the government. None of them accepted Khun Sa's appeal for unity among ethnic Shans. Instead, many became targets of assassination plots. By several accounts, the murders of 7 former leaders of the SSA and its political wing – the Shan State Progress Party – were attributed to Khun Sa (See Lintner, *Journal XIII*, 1986, p. 152). Many of them went into hiding in Thailand, while those with the means to do so migrated to foreign countries to escape his reach.

One of the most important endorsements to the support he received from Kornzurng. After the merger of SUA and TRC, the veteran Shan leader joined Khun Sa in Homong and participated in publically ceremonies where he voiced his support for Khun Sa. In addition to Kornzurng, he enlisted the support of Bo Deving, a participant in the Battle of Tangyan and veteran Shan revolutionary. After Kornzurng's death, Bo Deving briefly served as the head of the Shan Sate Restoration Council (1992-1993) – a government body established by Khun Sa. Khun Sa surrounded himself with other respected Shan nationalists and influential Shan monks.²⁶¹

Another important practice that set Khun Sa apart from several other strongmen is that

²⁶⁰ One article on the SUA ("The unconventional weapons," 1982, June 18/24, p. 28) describes Long Khun Maha as the "only Shan of any prominence who has rallied behind Khun Sa."

²⁶¹ Among the Shan nationalists, he persuaded his erstwhile rival Bo Dewing, famed for his participation in the Battle of Tangyan, to join him in Homong. Khun Sa also attracted Khun Kya Oo, a well-known Shan nationalist, by providing funds for the establishment and operation of the Shan Human Rights Foundation.

he not only spoke Shan, but that he spoke it without a Chinese accent (Personal Communication, former schoolteacher from eastern Shan State, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2010). By speaking Shan with a pronunciation common to other native Shan speakers, Khun Sa projected a familiarity that provided the basis for the formation of social bonds with the ethnic Shan population. His knowledge of cultural practices in Shan State such as ordination rituals of the Theravadic tradition and the experience as a Buddhist monk was shared with many Shan men and not typically associated with ethnic Chinese. This along with his advocacy for the preservation of cultural practices associated with "Shan-ness" reinforced his credentials as a Shan nationalist.

Khun Sa employed his resources to present himself as a benefactor on an unprecedented level for the Shan State. The range of his activities is extensive and took various forms. Some resembled that of the *saopha*. For instance, he supported the Buddhism Sangha, participated in Buddhist rituals, and supported other philanthropic and welfare programs. In addition, he also engaged in activities that took the form of state like practices.

Early in his career, Khun Sa recognized the powerful role that the command of goods can play in expanding authority. Figure 4.3 (below) contains a photo from 1969, which provides an early example of Khun Sa positioning himself as more than the head of an opium-trafficking, *Tatmadaw*-allied militia. In this image taken from a Burmese newspaper, he is donating medical equipment to the Lashio People's Hospital. This action served to demonstrate his abilities as a patron of unusual capabilities. Moreover, in a country where the government grossly neglected the medical sector, Khun Sa's donation provided an early example of his assuming the role of the state. Khun Sa managed to reap the prestige of a patron when the picture of the event appeared in a national newspaper. Other instances of patronage over the course of his career involved his financial support for the construction of schools, Buddhist temples, hospitals, and health clinics. His authorized biography indicates

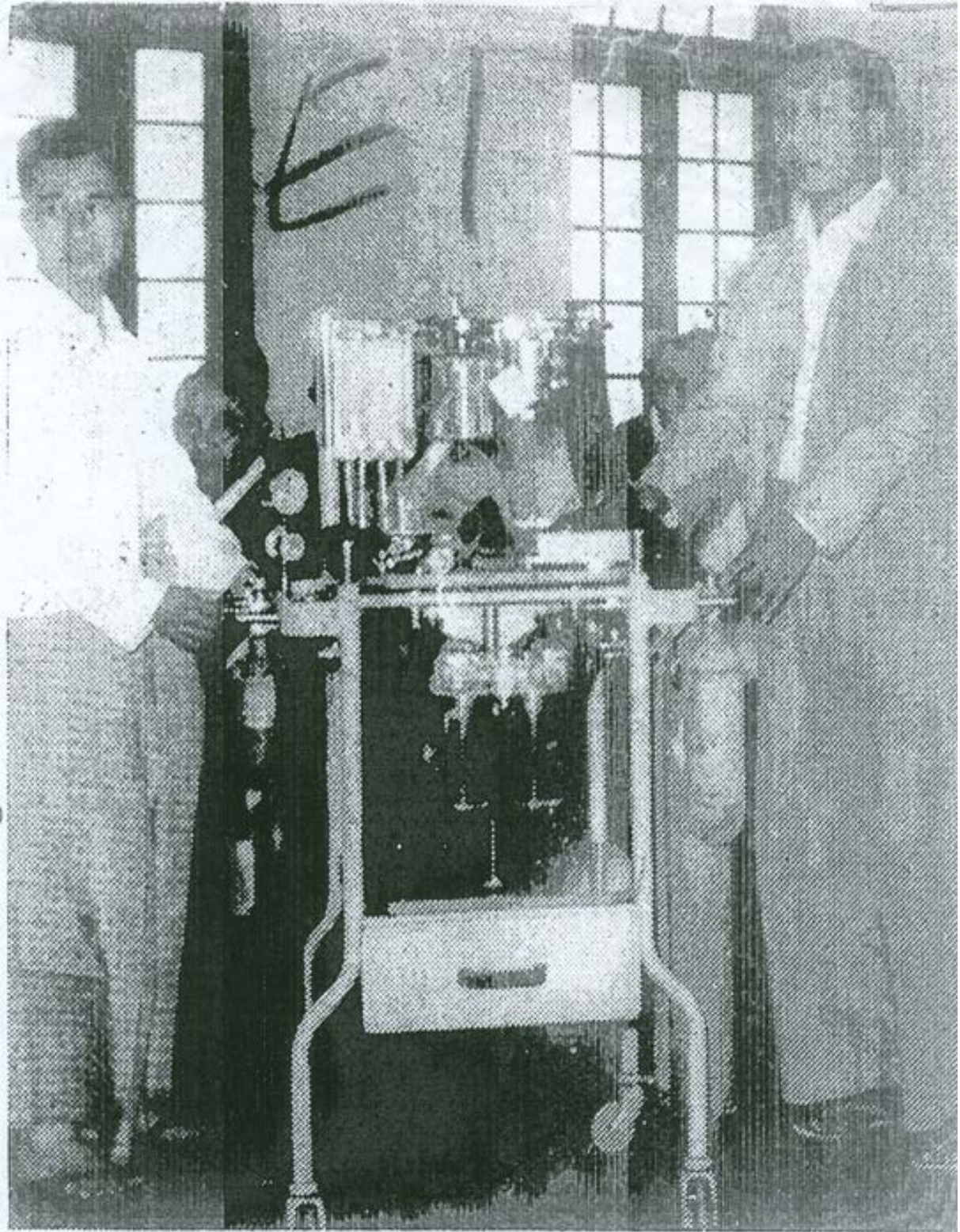


Figure 4.3: Loi Maw Militia Leader Khun Sa donating medical equipment to the Lashio General Hospital, Lashio, Shan State, 1969²⁶² (Khun Sa on right)

²⁶² Figure 4.3 is a reproduction of an image dated June 11, 1969 from the press clippings of the American Embassy in Rangoon available at the US Library of Congress. Aside from the date, there are not identifying details of the source of the image.

that he built two hospitals and more than eighty schools (Khun Sa, 1983, p. 47).

Khun Sa not only manifested traits associated with traditional authority, but also engaged in practices that transcended ethnicity or traditional values and appealed to a larger population. Several of these practices involved reproducing state-like administrative system that consciously emulated the form of a state in terms of structure, nomenclature, and practices. The administrative structure included ministries assigned with specific responsibilities. Khun Sa also supported other projects, including the establishment of the Shan Human Rights Foundation as well as other environmental conservation initiatives.²⁶³ Khun Sa also incorporated democratically inspired principles, practices, and institutions as a way of presenting a more inclusive decision-making process. In April 1992, Khun Sa hosted 204 leaders (e.g., village headmen and others) from across Shan State at his Homong capital to form a new governmental body for Shan State that was independent of the Burmese government. The leaders established the Shan State People's Representative Assembly.²⁶⁴ Over the next few weeks, the representatives drafted a Constitution, elected a 70-member Congress, and eventually declared Shan State independent from Burma. Not surprisingly, the Congress elected Khun Sa as President. His relatives and close followers served in other key positions.²⁶⁵ He also held the position as leader of the Shan State Restoration Council (SSRC), which was the governing organization. Later, Khun Sa transferred authority to the Shan People's Representative Committee, which was headed by Bo Deving. However, Bo Deving was President in name only, as Khun Sa retained the ultimate decision-making authority.

²⁶³ For example, he established Shan State National Park and also allocated funds for environmental activist from Shan State to participate in the UN Rio De Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992 (Personal Communication. Adrian Cowell, 2011, September 11).

²⁶⁴ In December 1993, the Shan State People's Representative Assembly became the Shan State National Congress.

²⁶⁵ For more information on the governance structures implemented by the MTA, see Raksakul and Kheunkaew, 1993, December 19) and *Interim Constitution of Shan State* (1993). Khun Seng, Khun Sa's uncle and, served as the Speaker of the Upper House and oversaw financial affairs. Gun Jed became the Leader of the Lower House. In 1995, Gun Jed replaced Khun Sa as the head of the SSRC.

Adopting the trappings of a representative body was an attempt to enhance Khun Sa's rulemaking authority. These organizations provided a new means through which he justified his commands based on the principle that a source of his authority was its delegation to him by the popular consent. In December 1993, the Shan State Restoration Council (SSRC) declared Shan State independent of Burma. Previously, in his capacity as President of the Shan State People's Representatives Assembly, President Deving had also taken steps to apply as the representative for Shan State in the United Nations. Through the establishment of state-like structures and procedures, Khun Sa's attempted to draw on ideas involving the principle of sovereignty to justify his authority. For example, he employed the interim constitution promulgated by the Shan State Assembly to justify his conscription of soldiers.²⁶⁶

Khun Sa also presented himself as a statesman by cultivating associates from foreign countries and Burma.²⁶⁷ A motley collection of well-known guests made high-profile visits to meet Khun Sa his headquarters in Baan Hin Taek and Homong. The pageantry of these visits resembled that of diplomatic exchanges. For instance, General Bo Mya, the head of the Karen National Union, an armed ethnic opposition group operating in central and southern Burma group visited Homong with a delegation in 1987 (Boucaud and Boucaud, 1992, p. 178). In 1994, he received a visit from Peter Bourne, the former Director of the Office of Drug Abuse Policy under US President Jimmy Carter, during Bourne's visit to Homong (Bourne, 1994, May 6; 1994).

Khun Sa assembled one of the largest, best-equipped rebel armies that many people in

²⁶⁶ The SSRC surpassed the capabilities of local Burmese government officials operating in rural Shan State in many ways. One example is that the organization possessed a monitoring capacity, which included collecting birth records and household registration records. Agents of Khun Sa's organization employed this data to identify young men for conscription into his army. The rule was that each household was to provide at least one son. The punishment for desertion was death. See Khun Sa (1993, p. 53), Shan State National Congress (1993) and White (1985, January 24).

²⁶⁷ These visitors included "Bo" Gritz (a POW/MIA investigator from the United States), British socialites, journalists, and an earlier visit to the SUA headquarters in Baan Hin Taek by Joseph Nellis (former White House Chief Counsel during the Carter administration) and his American aides.

Shan State had ever seen. The arsenal of the MTA reportedly included Soviet and Chinese-made assault rifles, mortars, and surface-to-air missiles (Lintner, 1995, March 9, p. 26). For many supporters, the promise that Khun Sa would topple the regime appears to have trumped concerns about his past as a drug trafficker or that he lacked social ties. With the demise of other armed resistance organizations in Shan State, Khun Sa presented an opportunity for achieving a solution to the conflict through armed struggle.

An element that accounts for the effectiveness of Khun Sa's efforts at portraying himself as a suitable leader was his deft employment of print media to disseminate news and information. The fusion of TRA/SURA with the SUA provided Khun Sa with access to the Shan intellectuals that had directed Kornzurng's public relations apparatus. Like Kornzurng before him, Khun Sa used the media to produce biographic narratives that presented him as a qualified leader, and at the same time addressed criticisms of his leadership style and Chinese ancestry. Khun Sa had biographies published in the English, Thai, and Shan languages, and also supported the publication of a newspaper known as *The Independence*. Through media, he propagated a carefully constructed narrative that contained elements that presented him as an ideal leader.

Khun Sa responded directly to critiques that his Chinese heritage made him unsuitable to lead the Shan nationalist movement. His official biography (Khun Sa, 1983) suggested that questioning his Chinese heritage was a ploy to weaken the Shan movement by creating divisions within it. His biography cited other instances of bi-cultural political leaders of Chinese heritage in Southeast Asia,

Idle talk like "Khun Sa, is he not Chinese?" are only meant to divide us. Other nations also have leaders who come from Chinese background (like King Taksin in Thailand and Aquino in the Philippines, and even Ne Win, himself, in Burma), yet nobody has made issues out of them (p. 55).

Another approach aimed to address this concern was through comparison with other revolutionary leaders that were not of the same ethnicity or place of origin as they

movements that lead. In her study of Shan revolutionary media, Jane Ferguson (2008, 2015) points out that an article in a newspaper financed by Khun Sa compared him to Che Guevara, who as an Argentinean and, like Khun Sa, an outsider, played a leading role in the Cuban revolution. By drawing on an instance of other foreign leaders of revolutionary movements, Khun Sa attempted to overcome any stigma associated with his "Chineseness" and involvement in narcotics trafficking and instead present himself as a committed Shan nationalist.

An examination of the changes in the ethnic composition and size of armed forces under Khun Sa's demonstrates the broadening of his support. Lintner (1990, June 28, p. 26) provides a useful account of the composition of the SUA. "There were some Shan in the SUA, but the bulk of its rank-and-file were Wa or Lahu hill tribesmen. Nearly all the officers were ethnic Chinese, either born in Shan State or remnants of the KMT."²⁶⁸ After instituting a draft and the MTA began regular recruitment drives that involved one son from each household. By the early 1990s, estimates of the size of his force ranged from between 20,000 to 30,000 soldiers including reserves (Lintner, 1994, January 20, p. 24).

Khun Sa's network far surpassed the commercial networks of earlier ethnic-Shan led armed resistance organizations. He possessed ties to opium purchasing agents, muleteers, and merchants from within Shan State, as well as connections to buyers in Laos, Thailand, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States (Yawnghwe, *Actors and Markets in the Opium-Heroin Politics*, n.d.).²⁶⁹ His Chinese background played an important role in maintaining these contacts. By contrast, Kornzurng relied on General Li Wenhuan. It is hard to imagine an ethnic-Shan strongman with a network of this breadth and reach.

Khun Sa's tenure as Shan State's most powerful strongmen lasted little more than ten

²⁶⁸ For example, Zhang Su-Chuan, an ex-KMT and from northeastern China was the *de facto* second in command of the MTA.

²⁶⁹ In 1988, a United States District Court in Brooklyn, New York indicted Khun Sa on charges of importing or attempting to import more than 3,500 pounds of heroin into New York between September 1986 and February 1988.

years. The decade or so after Khun Sa joined with Kornzurng represented a dynamic period in terms of the broad range of ideas that Khun Sa and his advisors drew upon to provide fresh alternatives to their authority. At the same time, Shan communities remained divided about Khun Sa's worthiness as a leader.

In the early 1990s, the ties that had united his order began to fray. In Shan State, the configuration of society with cleavages that cut across class, locality, ethnicity, and ideology coupled with shifting political pressures proved too much for one man to hold together. Several contentious issues surrounded his military, and political goals began to surface. To the extent that the MTA had a military strategy to achieve its political aims through practices and proclamations by Khun Sa, it revolved around accumulating wealth from the opium trade and attempting to avoid unnecessary entanglements with the government. At times, he invoked classic Chinese war texts, to justify his strategy of prioritizing economic interests. This approach involved the build-up of economic resources necessary to deliver a single crippling blow to the government as a means to achieve his political demands (*Khun Sa*, 1993). The lack of engagement with the *Tatmadaw* afforded Khun Sa and his business associates the opportunity to continue to accumulate great personal wealth.

Over time, a lack of military offensives against the *Tatmadaw* taxed the patience of his military commanders. The image of Khun Sa as being committed to the Shan political cause began to fade, and with it, the bonds of loyalty many Shans felt toward him. Indeed, several ethnic Shan units began to peel away. After his attempt to lead the Shan nationalist movement in the mid-1980s, he experienced some pushback from ethnic Shans. After the merger of the TRA and SUA, Gun Yod, a trusted lieutenant, refused to cooperate with Khun Sa. As a member of the TRC and later MTA, he formed a *de facto* alliance with the remaining units of the Shan State Army operating in northern Shan State. In 1995, Gun Yod mutinied with over 1,000 soldiers to form another armed group – the Shan State National

Army. According to one account, Gun Yod claimed that "Chinese businessmen [were] using the Shan national cause to conceal their involvement in the drug trade" (Lintner, 1995, October 19).

Coercive sanctions offered a basis for achieving compliance. Khun Sa's organization gained a reputation for using violence to punish individuals and communities for failing to abide by its commands. In the early 1990s, as Khun Sa's grip on power began to loosen, he resorted to increased use of violence in an attempt to shore up his crumbling authority. Symptoms of his inability to command compliance included defections by military units and also villagers' reluctance to abide by his rules. In February 1993, attempts by his soldiers to rein in local villagers, who had reportedly sold their opium to another gang triggered a deadly firefight among village militia groups, the *Tatmadaw*, and the MTA. On March 20 of the same year, a second incident that claimed over 100 civilian lives took place at the Nam Mai Pan ruby mine near Mong Hsat. The miners' refusal to comply with Khun Sa's efforts to tax them caused him to order his troops to engage in retribution against those who failed to follow his rules (*Geopolitical Drug Dispatch*, 1993, May, pp. 2-3; Cowell, *Condensed Interview about Pang Tawt Massacre*, 1993; Cowell, *Notes after Interview with Sao Hpa Lung about the Mong Hsat Massacre*).

Disparate forces came to a head by the mid-1990s, which prompted Khun Sa to look for a way out. He faced the deterioration of his ability to command compliance with his rules. Units of the *Tatmadaw* and the UWSA had encircled him. The ceasefires with the CPB had also offered drug traffickers new areas to base their heroin refineries. Khun Sa experienced health problems. There are also many other factors that likely contributed to his decision to secretly negotiate terms for surrender with the *Tatmadaw*. One explanation proffered by McCoy (1999) draws attention to Khun Sa's success at state building, which also undermined his ability to maintain his status as an autonomous strongman. Constructing Homong as the

capital of his counter order cost Khun Sa the maneuverability integral to the survival of insurgents and other opponents of the state. Homong became a fixed target for the *Tatmadaw*.

Strategies of Translocal Strongmen

A review of these three strongmen shows that several features set them apart from most others. One is their success in inserting themselves into positions within the opium supply chain that created opportunities to accrue substantial revenue. Their strategies involved approaches that had important consequences for the ability to wield social control.

Lo Hsin Han took advantage of his status as a *Tatmadaw*-allied militia leader to accrue opium resources. His access to government towns and roads limited his reliance on trans-ethnic support. Mo Heng reached an accommodation with the KMT. General Li Wenhuan provided both revenue and ties to the Thai state, which were useful for Kornzurng to extend his patronage capabilities. Khun Sa initially engaged in the same approach as Lo Hsin Han and took advantage of his status as a militia to generate revenue. After his break with the *Tatmadaw*, Khun Sa reached an informal accommodation with them and achieved dominance over the opium trade.

The accumulation of opium capital enhanced their ability to bestow rewards and dispense sanctions as a basis for exercising social control on levels not reached by other strongmen. But another component of their success was their ability to offer rationales that satisfied the psychological need of a society featuring multiple ethnic cleavages.

In the case of Lo Hsin Han, his ability to use symbols and practices as a basis for achieving influence appears not to have transcended ethnic Chinese and non-Shan ethnic groups – e.g. Lahu and Wa – possessing cultural and familiar ties to China. His efforts to ally with the Shan State Army indicate his recognition of the importance of developing ties with the ethnic Shan community. Whether this approach would have worked is uncertain. His arrest by Thai authorities and imprisonment halted his efforts.

Kornzurng's case shows the important role that access to opium revenue provided for ethnic Shan men seeking to extend authority. Like many ethnic Shan strongmen, Kornzurng possessed the aptitudes for providing the psychological basis for gaining support from multiple ethnic groups. Aside from Kornzurng, their limited resources constrained their ability to extend dominance. Kornzurng's accommodation with General Li Wenhuan provided greater access to resources needed for extending his authority to a level greater than most other ethnic-Shan strongmen. Nonetheless, he came up against Khun Sa and again was forced to make an accommodation.

Khun Sa's ability to access opium revenue independent of other groups and at the same time effectively mobilize symbols and practices that resonated with many ethnic Shans provided the basis for him to exercise social control on a supra-regional level. His counter state order came to resemble a *de facto* state. Holding together this order required maintaining a continued inflow of resources and mobilization of support. Eventually, sustaining a coalition of a Shan revolutionary army and drug trafficking organization proved impossible even for Khun Sa.

Conclusion

Like local strongmen, the ability of translocal strongmen to engender compliance with their rule reflected their ability to provide people with components of their strategies of survival. When strongmen attempted to extend rulemaking authority to more communities, they often encountered two chief impediments. One is that they required resources to offer a certain level of material goods to the population. The other is that they also needed to develop social bonds with communities of which many lacked any preexisting ties. For most strongmen, the steps necessary to overcome these obstacles by tapping into the opium trade proved inimical to their extension of authority on a translocal basis.

As an agricultural commodity – opium – provided one of the few accessible sources

of revenue. However, economic impediments along with measures taken by actors in the market limited their access. Even in the opium sector, identity politics played an integral role in determining who had access to opium capital and who did not. In particular, the collusion among purchasing agents and rent-seeking organizations positioned in the upstream portion of the opium supply chain prevented the emergence of competitors – such as strongmen – powerful enough to displace their monopolistic roles. The economic interests and social bonds based upon shared cultural practices associated with Chinese identity cemented the solidarity of the opium entrepreneurial network. The non-inclusiveness of this network limited the opportunities for non-Chinese strongmen, particularly ethnic Shans, to generate revenue. At the same time, the network also cooperated with some strongmen. Almost exclusively, these were ones that drew on shared cultural practices associated with "Chinese-ness."

Identity politics was also a vital factor in determining whether or not strongmen could forge ties with broad segments of society and move beyond a locality to become a translocal strongman. The methods used to amass opium revenue to provide material goods and extend authority often included steps that paradoxically limited the strongman's ability to forge ties with certain segments of the population. The social structures featured social cleavages expressed as ethnicity. The interethnic antipathy between ethnic-Chinese groups possessing access to opium capital and ethnic Shan groups made it difficult for a strongman to assemble the elements necessary for extending authority on a translocal level.

As the case of Khun Sa shows, it was possible for dynamic individuals to tailor strategies of survival to multiple communities. A crucial element of his success was his ability to draw on his reservoir of knowledge and abilities acquired through his bicultural heritage and present powerful symbols to diverse groups as a basis for forming bonds of loyalty. This allowed him to broaden his power base across broad segments of society, and

for a while extend his authority into a counter state political order. However, over time, social groups that had been bonded together for years by rewards, sanctions and symbols began to weaken. As Khun Sa no longer proved adept at meeting their needs, his trans-ethnic coalition began to fall apart. As his followers sought new strategies for survival, the Khun Sa order gave way to the emergence of new patterns of domination featuring an amalgamation of *Tatmadaw*-allied militias and formerly armed resistance organizations now enmeshed in ceasefire arrangements with the *Tatmadaw*. The age of autonomous strongmen had come to an end.

Chapter Five

Cross Case Comparisons from within Southeast Asia

You follow drugs, you get drug addicts and drug dealers. But you start to follow the money, and you don't know where the fuck it's gonna take you.

-Detective Lester Freamon, character from *The Wire*

Phao Sriyanond was one of the most powerful strongmen in Thailand's recent history. As Director General (1947-1957) of the forty-thousand-strong Royal Thai Police (RTP), he dominated the opium trade in Thailand from the late 1940s to the 1950s. He employed the troops under his command to transport Burmese opium purchased from the KMT units in northern Thailand to criminal syndicates for shipment to Asian regional markets (McCoy, 1972, p. 92).²⁷⁰

Under Phao, the RTP and the Royal Thai Army (RTA) developed a rivalry that transcended competition over political power to also include the emerging drug trade. In 1950, for instance in the northern province of Lampang, an armed standoff took place between military and police forces. An RTP unit halted an opium convoy led by RTA units as they neared the northernmost terminus of the rail line to Bangkok. When the RTA unit refused to hand over the opium, RTP units dug in and threatened violent action. A resolution to the impasse took place only after Director General Phao and General Sarit Thanarat, head of the RTA, arrived at the scene and agreed to split contraband (McCoy, 1972, p. 138).

Despite access to opium revenue and command of formidable coercive capacity, neither Phao nor Sarit were autonomous strongmen. They engaged in elite power struggles that involved the use of force and violation of narcotics laws. But, rather than create an alternative political order, they maintained allegiance to the Royal Thai Government. Phao and Sarit are examples of powerful strongmen who operate in Southeast Asia and other regions on behalf of the state, without challenging it.

²⁷⁰ At that time, both groups – the army and police – directly engaged in the illicit trafficking of opium to foreign countries. For an account of the involvement of Thai officials in the opium sector, see McCoy (1972, pp. 135-145).

This chapter examines statist strongmen and contrasts them with autonomous ones, both local and translocal. The distinction between statist and autonomous actors is useful for understanding the different approaches adopted by strongmen to secure and maintain access to resources. Statist strongmen rely on the state for access to resources. For some, a high-ranking position in the military, police, or national parliament is a basis through which they exert influence over state officials and security forces for resources. For others, close ties to leaders and state security organizations provided access to resources and materials.

One far-reaching implication of their reliance on access to state resources is that statist strongmen do not attempt to develop a counter state order. Statist strongmen may engage in violent competition with other rivals. But while their conduct may deviate from the law, these leaders support the *status quo*.

Table 5.1: Typology of Strongmen

		Reliance on State	
		No	Yes
Range of Authority	High	Translocal Autonomous Strongman	National-level Statist Strongman
	Low	Local Autonomous Strongman	Local Statist Strongmen

Just as there is variance in the strength of autonomous strongmen, notably translocal and local ones, there are also differences in the levels of authority among statist strongmen (See Table 5.1). Phao is an example of a statist strongman operating on the national level. National level strongmen often rely on their positions as high-ranking government officials to access state resources and agents – such as security forces – useful for exercising social control. Their command over state policies and budgets is a source of personal wealth useful for developing client relations.

The influence of statist strongmen detailed in this chapter – Mahtu Naw, Vang Pao, and Ting Ying – did not reach national levels. Local statist strongmen resemble local autonomous ones in that both employ mixture of rewards and sanctions along with symbols and practices as a basis for exercising social control. Their access to state resources is often

indirect. The reliance on ties to agents of the state makes access to resources uncertain. The threat that state leaders will take steps to diminish or cut off benefits was leverage for constraining the behavior of local statist strongmen.

The rural populations of northern Laos, northern Thailand, Shan State, and Kachin State possessed many of the conditions conducive to the development of powerful strongmen. Destructive violence and predation by armed groups were common sources of upheaval rendering survival strategies ineffective for many communities in these regions. Opium cultivation was one approach adopted by rural population to cope with threats to food access. This response precipitated a region-wide opium boom, which made resources available for would-be strongmen. Even though many people in these four sub-regions experienced disruptions in their routines and the presence of opium offered a source for revenue generation, it was only in Shan State that the reconfigurations of social control involved the proliferation of autonomous strongmen. The three case studies below reveal shifts in the patterns of order resulting in the emergence of statist strongmen and armed resistance organizations, but not the proliferation of autonomous strongmen. Comparative analysis of these cases with Shan State helps rule out alternative explanations for the emergence of autonomous strongmen and illustrates the logic and validity of my arguments about strongmen formation.

Kachin State (1961-1994): Divided Authority

In the period from 1961-1994, Kachin State experienced many conditions favorable for the emergence of strongmen. Central state leaders exercised only limited control over the population. Like the Shan State, government officials and the *Tatmadaw* were based in towns and the rural areas experienced “light” administration. In the years following independence, the conduct of central and local state officials of the newly constituted Union of Burma departed from many people's ideas of what constituted acceptable governance and spurred the

mobilization of armed anti-state resistance. In 1961, militarized conflict erupted between the *Tatmadaw* and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) – an ethnic Kachin-led armed resistance organization. The civil war raged until 1994 when a ceasefire agreement put a temporary halt to the conflict.²⁷¹ The conflict also produced societal-level dislocations that involved the displacement of large segments of the population and spurred increased opium production.

The patterns of social control that emerged in Kachin State in the period from 1961 to 1994 featured two dominant groups – Burmese government officials and the Kachin revolutionary order. Unlike the fragmentation of authority in Shan State, the counter state order that emerged in Kachin State featured a coordination of social control by one group. The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and its armed wing – the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) – functioned as a coherent organization achieving widespread – but not complete – compliance from both its lower level commanders and population in rural areas.²⁷²

Background

Kachin State is in northern Burma (See Figure 1.5). Its topography features mountain ranges and valleys. The population is ethnically heterogeneous. The most populous ethnic group is Kachin. Kachin social structure features a complex organization of tribal and clan based relationships.²⁷³ The main subgroups of Kachin are Jingphaw, Zaiwa, Lawngwaw, Lisu, Nung, Rawang, and Lachik. Other smaller Kachin subgroups include Ngochan, which is a language group often categorized as related to the Lachik sub groups. One characteristic

²⁷¹ Militarized conflicts between the KIA and the *Tatmadaw* resumed in 2011. For an English language translation of the 1994 ceasefire agreement, see Keenan (2010, Appendix One).

²⁷² The Kachin independence movement features three organizations. The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) is its political wing. The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) is its army. The Kachin Independence Council (KIC) which is an organization responsible for administering areas under the control of the KIA/KIO and comprised of KIA and KIO members. As Sadan (2016) comments, "deciding when to use the terms KIO and KIA is sometimes difficult, even for local people" (p. Xix). In this chapter, the term KIO denotes the organization and its activities, but the KIA refers to its military wing.

²⁷³ For anthropological analysis of ethnicity and its fluidity in Kachin State, see Leach (1954) and Sadan (2013).

of these groups is that they each speak a distinct dialect of Kachin. Other sizeable ethnic groups present in Kachin State include Chinese, Gurkha, Shan, Burman, and others.

After 1886, the area that is contemporary Kachin State gradually came under the influence of British colonial authorities. During the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885-1886), the British colonial army pushed into the Kachin hills, over which the Mandalay-based Burman monarchy had previously exercised limited authority.²⁷⁴ Similar to what occurred in the Shan States, the British extended a system of indirect rule featuring the retention of traditional leaders, known as *duwa*, and the appointment of officials to supervise local administration. Aside from the trial of serious offenses attended to by central-state appointed Deputy Commissioner, the *duwa* administered his area according to tribal customs. The scope of *duwa* authority ranged from roughly ten to 100 villages (Furnivall, 1960, p. 11; Tinker, 1956, p. 328).²⁷⁵ In 1948, the administrative districts of Myitkyina and Bhamo and the Kachin Hills became a constituent unit of the Union of Burma known as Kachin State. The system initially retained a role for *duwa* as local administrators in rural areas (Furnivall, 1960, p. 104).²⁷⁶

The events leading to the emergence of the KIA/KIO are complex.²⁷⁷ By the early 1950s, engagement with the new political system under the 1947 Constitution of the Union of Burma coming to terms with new rules and arrangements for people in Kachin State. Mandy Sadan, a scholar of Kachin history and identity, notes that throughout the 1950s there was a build up of social hostilities and resentment and an increasing sense of unfairness at the outcomes of independence among Kachins (Sadan, 2013, p. 317).²⁷⁸ One source of unease

²⁷⁴ The first British soldiers arrived in Bhamo in December 1885, but it was not until the end of the 1930s that the British could enter areas of the region near the confluence of the Mali Kha and Mai Kha rivers without sizable armed escorts (Lintner, 1997, p. 70).

²⁷⁵ The position was hereditary passing from father to youngest son.

²⁷⁶ The *duwa*-led administrative system was also operative in the ethnic Kachin areas of northern Shan State. The system operated at the lower tier of the *saopha*-led order.

²⁷⁷ For accounts of the origins of the Kachin resistance movement, see Lintner (1997) and Sadan (2013, 2016).

²⁷⁸ For another account of Kachin grievances, see Law Yone (US Congress, 1975, pp. 201-213).

was that the central government with the assent of local ethnic-Kachin leaders ceded three village tracts located in southern Kachin State to China to resolve a border demarcation dispute with the Chinese government.²⁷⁹ Another instance of the new government's attempts to impose new rules was Prime Minister U Nu's support for adopting Buddhism as the state religion ("State religion bill," 1961, August 19). At the time, elements of Kachin society increasingly embraced Christianity (Sadan, 2013; Tegenfeldt, 1974). Edward Law Yone, a Sino-Kachin former newspaper editor from Kachin State, notes that the deployment of *Tatmadaw* units to Kachin State also generated resentment against the government (US Congress, 1975, p. 205).

These are a few of the most striking instances of the impact of the new regime's attempts to introduce new rules and far-reaching changes into society. These actions taken by *Tatmadaw* and central government leaders generated the popular discontent expressed through public protests and were evidence of resentment among the population toward the local system for governance and some local leaders. The border resolution issues led people to erroneously conclude that many areas located along the Kachin-China frontier would be ceded to China. Kachin students protested the arrival of Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai to Rangoon for negotiations to resolve the border demarcation dispute. Protestors in Myitkyina, the capital of the Kachin, pushed a train transporting a Buddhist image revered by many Buddhists several miles after impeding the train's advancement by lying across the train tracks (Sadan, 2013, p. 320).

In response, a group of Kachin nationalists also began to organize an armed resistance movement.²⁸⁰ Many of them considered the governing institutions led by both ethnic Burman-led central state officials and the ethnic-Kachin local government officials as

²⁷⁹ On October 1, 1960, the Burmese government formally agreed to cede the village tracts of Hpimaw, Gawlam, and Kamfang located in Chipwi Township areas adjacent to China. See Kozicki (1957, p. 35) and Pangmu Shayi (2015, May 6).

²⁸⁰ For a detailed and personal account of the early period of the Kachin nationalist movement and establishment of the KIA, see N'Chyaw Tang (n.d.).

incapable of performing their proper roles (Sadan, 2013, p. 324; Sadan, 2016, p. 52). By 1957, an underground student movement had formed (KIO, 1987, p. 5). The next year, an “above ground,” or formal, legal organization known as the Kachin Youth Uplift Association emerged. On February 5, 1961, some members of the latter group formed the KIA in Hsenwi Township in northern Shan State and initiated a campaign of armed struggle.²⁸¹ The movement spread out from northern Shan State to Kachin State.²⁸² It pursued armed struggle as a means to achieve the introduction of a new political system and establish an independent Kachinland.

The outbreak of conflict between the KIA and *Tatmadaw* produced widespread dislocation. As in Shan State, armed conflicts led to the further militarization of society. This involved forced conscription, demands for crops, and the destruction of property by armed groups. The toll taken by the conflict on the population involved combat deaths, destruction of villages, danger-inducing flight, and predation by armed groups. A report compiled from KIO records lists 33,336 civilian casualties by *Tatmadaw* forces in the period from 1961 to 1986 (KIO, 1991, June 30, p. 1).

One response by farmers to the disruptions caused by the spread of conflict was opium production (See Chapter One). A lack of reliable data makes it difficult to estimate the volume of growth in Kachin State with any sense of accuracy (See Table 1.3).²⁸³ However, the estimates of production point to an upward trend in cultivation taking place from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s. From the mid-1970s, estimates indicate a decrease in production.

²⁸¹ As Sadan (2016) notes, "The official date taken as the founding point of the KIO is 25 October 1960, while the founding date of the KIA is commemorated as 5 February 1961" (p. xix).

²⁸² Most of the founding members of the KIA were from northern Shan State, but the ethnonationalist orientation of their political goals involved Kachins in Kachin State. The members chose the Kachin area of Shan State to launch their armed struggle for strategic reasons after rejecting proposals to initiate their revolution in Kachin State. One of their first actions was to rob the government treasury in Lashio to finance their operations.

²⁸³ A United Nations (1964, p. 45) study on opium production in Burma provides a tentative baseline estimate based upon data from Burmese government officials not trained in field survey techniques of 41,660 viss or roughly 68 tons in the 1962-1963 growing season. The study notes the absence of any earlier estimates of production of opium in Kachin State.

In the early 1960s, the emergence of the KIA, the *Tatmadaw's* seizure of state power, and its establishment of the ruling Revolutionary Council signaled further changes in the socio-political order. Both the KIA and the *Tatmadaw* began a concerted effort to neutralize possible threats presented by *duwa*. As in other areas of Burma, the newly ascendant military government instructed its officials to form local administrative structures, known as Security and Administrative Councils (SACs). The leadership of the SACs was made up of *Tatmadaw* leaders and civilian supporters of the government (Silverstein, 1977, p. 46). The SAC supplanted the authority of the *duwa* in many areas. In this period, the KIA/KIO also began to displace *duwa* leaders and appointed its own members to take their places. As a consequence, the population experienced a rupture of its traditional socio-political structures and the introduction of new administrative institutions.

Beginning in the 1960s, realignment in the distribution of social control among the Kachin State's population also took place. The tenuous hold of state bureaucrats stationed in towns and *Tatmadaw* units in rural areas began to weaken.²⁸⁴ The KIO/KIA gradually expanded across Kachin State and established an administrative system to exercise social control. By the mid-1980s, the KIO administered over 40,000 square miles or seventy percent of Kachin State, comparable in size to South Korea (US Congress, 1975, p. 174). The lack of information about the administration in difficult to access mountain enclaves presents challenges for analysis. The population in these remote areas likely encountered agents of both the *Tatmadaw* and the KIA/KIO. But attempts by either of these two groups to extend authority over the remote and sparsely populated areas appear limited.

One notable exception to this divided order in Kachin State was in Chipwi Township in Kachin State (see Figure 1.5). In 1968, after the CPB launched an offensive from China into northern Shan State, the CPB succeeded in expanding its influence into Kachin State by

²⁸⁴ In 1955, the *Tatmadaw* dispatched a survey team to northern Kachin State led by Colonel Saw Myint, later appointed Chief Office of the Foreign Area Administration. According to a record of the expedition, it was the first *Tatmadaw* unit to visit many of these communities in northern Kachin State (Hla Thein, 2012, p. 23).

enticing Ting Ying, the Commander of the KIA's Third Brigade to switch sides.²⁸⁵ Under the CPB, the area initially became the CPB's 101 War Zone. Later, the CPB designated the region as its Northern Kachin State District as part of broader administrative reforms of its wider zones of operation (Lintner, 1990a, p. 77). After the collapse of the CPB in 1989, Ting Ying established a new organization – the New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) – and received recognition of his authority from the military government as part of a ceasefire arrangement (Lintner, 1999, pp. 366, 521; Smith, 1999, pp. 377-381).

Changing Patterns of Social Control in Kachin State and Beyond

Unlike the splintering of social control in Shan State giving rise to the proliferation of autonomous strongmen, the counter state order that emerged in Kachin State featured the advent of the KIA/KIO administrative zone. The organization generally achieved compliance from both its lower level commanders and population. Elite level political struggles²⁸⁶ and limited local level resistance by strongmen took place.²⁸⁷ But these instances of opposition were rare and did not entail the fragmentation into numerous pockets led by strongmen. This pattern continued to operate up to the 1994 ceasefire agreement between the *Tatmadaw* and the KIA/KIO. Despite the presence of opium, the societal dislocation and the widespread resentment against the government-led order, what accounts for the pattern of social control characterized by the absence of autonomous strongmen? And how did the KIA/KIO achieve predominance over its mid-level commanders?

The absence of autonomous strongmen reflects at least three dynamics. One is that the

²⁸⁵ The CPB units fought not only with the *Tatmadaw*, but also became entangled in conflicts with the other armed groups, including the KIA and pro-*Tatmadaw* militias. In July 1976, the CPB and KIA agreed to form a military alliance and eight years of fighting between the two groups stopped.

²⁸⁶ The assassinations of the key members KIA leadership in 1975 is one of the few instances of violent internal disorder within the KIA. In August 1975, a young KIA soldier killed General Zau Seng, the founder and commander of the KIA, along with Zau Tu and Pungshwi Zau Seng in northern Thailand at their based located near the KMT's Third Army Headquarters at Tam Ngob (Lintner, 1999, p. 286; Smith, 1999, pp. 330-331). In 2004, the internal political struggles within the KIA led to rifts and a breakaway by Lasawng Awng Wa, then chief of the KIO's Intelligence and National Security Department, who eventually entered into a ceasefire agreement with the *Tatmadaw*. In 2009, his force became a *Tatmadaw*-allied militia.

²⁸⁷ These include the two splits from the KIA by Ting Ying and Mahtu Naw and a brief period of resistance in the 1960s by a small group of Rawang, subgroups of Kachin, against the KIA in Kachin State.

KIA/KIO officials took steps in the early stages of their movement to weaken potential local contenders for their authority. The *duwa* represented one stratum of society that possessed the influence with their communities and the material endowments necessary for transforming into powerful strongmen. As local hereditary chiefs, communities endowed *duwa* with authority to make decisions about their administrative matters and accepted their rules in accordance with traditional practices. Many *duwa* wielded coercive authority through their command of village defense militias.

Mandy Sadan (2013) provides an account of the rationale behind the KIA/KIO's decision to neutralize these potential contenders,

The realities of modern conflict meant that the residual social powers of local chiefs disrupted the operational logistics of the uprising. It was felt that some chiefs were refusing to allow villagers to sign up or were refusing to make payments to the war fund or to donate food and resources to the movement. Passing through the territory of these chiefs began to cause problems as they demanded payment of the dues from the KIA and tried to intervene in activities taking place in their domains (p. 333).

The steps taken by the KIA/KIO involved disarming *duwa*-led militias and village defense forces. In one instance, agents dispatched by the KIA assassinated a *duwa* from a Kachin area in northern Shan State, who had refused to hand over his weapons. The weapons collected from the population assisted the KIA's war effort against the *Tatmadaw*, but also had the effect of weakening the authority wielded by *duwa*.²⁸⁸

Difficulty in generating revenue from commodities also helps account for the absence of autonomous strongmen. Kachin State was the second largest opium producing area in Burma in this period. The level of production is significantly smaller than Shan State. In the 1960s, reports indicate that major opium production centers for Kachin State were in the Hukawng Valley of Tanai Township, the Triangle area north of the point where the Mali and

²⁸⁸ Mandy Sadan (2013) notes that KIA/KIO's efforts were aimed "to remove the potentially obstructive capacities of local chiefs" (p. 334). Other sources of weapons included those left over from World War II, but revenue raised from the taxation of farmers and the trafficking of opium and jade provided another source of income for the purchase of weapons. After 1976, the KIA also received weapons from China as part of an alliance with the CPB.

the N'Mai Rivers meet to form the Irrawaddy River in northern Myitkyina Township, and the areas of Chipwi Township located adjacent the Chinese border (See Figure 1.5) (United Nations, 1964). Aside from jade, opium was one of the few valuable commodities present in Kachin State. Two main constraints limiting access to revenue from these commodities were the relatively small-scale production of opium and the difficulties of transporting them to distant markets.²⁸⁹

The concentration of opium cultivation in a few areas denied potential strongmen access to revenue. Steps taken by the KIA/KIO further restricted its access to non-KIA/KIO members. In 1964, the KIA/KIO's issued orders forbidding the cultivation of opium and initiated opium suppression campaigns. Later, KIA/KIO modified the ban. People displaced by fighting and living in areas unsuitable for cultivating food crops received exemptions (KIC, 1991, September 15, p. 2). In June 1983, the KIA/KIO issued instructions to administrators detailing punishments for drug law offenders, known as Council Law Order No. 1/83 (KIC, 1983). The order continued the exemptions for some farmers (KIC, 1991). The new directives issued in 1991 represented a shift towards a zero tolerance approach to drug control by the KIA/KIO. New rules involved the revocation of the exemptions for some opium cultivators (KIC, 1991, April 15; KIC, 1991, September 15, p. 4; KIO, 1991, April 15). This decision likely reflects the KIA/KIO's concerns that recent allegations in media of their involvement in drug trafficking would discredit their political standing ("Opium War," 1989, February 24).²⁹⁰

Local consumers and KIO tax collectors further restricted access to opium. KIO tax

²⁸⁹ The closure of China's border after the Communist takeover in the 1940s coupled with difficulties in reaching local consumers and the logistical challenges for its use as transshipment point meant that China was not an appealing market for drug trafficking. China's economic reforms in the early 1990s enhanced its appeal as both a market. The increased border trade made shipment easier and growing social dislocation contributed to growing local demands for drugs.

²⁹⁰ One notable exception to the KIA/KIO's 1991 designation of Kachin State as an Opium Free State was the area under the control of former CPB commander Ting Ying, operating as the head of the ceasefire NDA-K group (KIO, 1991, April 15).

collectors reportedly accepted opium as payment in kind from households engaged in subsistence agriculture. Efforts to limit production by the KIA initially had only limited impact on production levels. The few available estimates (See Table 1.3) indicate increased production from 69 tons recorded in the 1962-63 growing season to over 200 tons in 1974. However, a decline in production appears to have taken place later, as one estimate indicates annual had dropped to a level of 56 tons by 1991.

Another impediment constraining access to commodity revenue was the difficulty posed by the marketing system. Until the 1990s, most opium purchasing agents operated in the tri-border areas of Burma, Laos, and Thailand.²⁹¹ Compared to Shan State, the transport costs were higher and also entailed greater risks presented by bands of predatory armed groups operating along smuggling routes. The resources necessary for transporting significant amounts of opium from Kachin State to these distant markets were beyond the means of most groups and individuals. The KIA was the only organization possessing the strength to run a gauntlet of roving bandits on a regular basis to transport sizeable quantities of goods to the border. The bulk of the cargo was not opium, but jade. An estimate provided by William Young, an operative for the CIA, indicates that in 1967 only three percent of all illicit opium exported from Burma was shipped by the KIA, while ninety percent was controlled by the KMT (through *Ka Kwe Ye* militias), and the remaining seven percent was in the hands of ethnic Sham armed resistance organizations (McCoy, 1972, pp. 247, 314-15, 428).

The presence of massive jade deposits in Kachin State presented another resource useful for generating revenue. Unlike opium, the vast majority of jade is in Kachin State's Hpakant Township. Its "fixedness" makes it easy for one group to block others from collecting "rents" from it. The KIA/KIO did not exercise territorial control over the jade

²⁹¹ The closure of China's border after the Communist takeover in the 1940s coupled with difficulties in reaching local consumers and the logistical challenges for its use as transshipment point meant that China was not an appealing market for drug trafficking. China's economic reforms in the early 1990s enhanced its appeal as both a market. The increased border trade made shipment easier and growing social dislocation contributed to growing local demands for drugs.

mines in Hpakant Township. Instead, KIA units operating in the areas surrounding the mines established a system for taxing jade shipments *en route* to markets. Their command of the surrounding areas limited the ability of others to accumulate capital.

The resonance of the KIA/KIO's use of symbols and practices with the population also helps account for its dominance. That the movement grew from a small network into one of the largest armed resistance organizations in Burma dramatizes the strength of its appeal. Among the elements of its success were that its reformist political goals resonated with the deep-seated resentment towards government officials found in Kachin society. Another component of its success was the widespread support for the KIA/KIO expressed by influential leaders of local Christian churches.

The institutional arrangements adopted by the KIA/KIO also help account for the cohesiveness of its order. The arrangement that emerged between the officials of the KIO and KIA involved a division of labor. The KIO members performed administrative duties that included taxation. The KIA members were responsible for defense. This separation helps prevent local officers from accruing resources and weapons. Lintner (1999) describes the KIA as one of the best-organized ethnic armed organizations in Burma.

The two instances of defections experienced by the KIA/KIO in the period from its inception in 1961 to its ceasefire with the Burmese government in 1994 represent the limits of fragmented social control. The first instance involved Ting Ying, who broke from the KIA in 1968 to establish a counter state order in southeast Kachin State. The second involves Mahtu Naw, another ethnic Kachin KIA officer, who led members of the KIA's northern Shan State-based Fourth Brigade into a ceasefire arrangement with the military government in 1992.²⁹² In each case, these former KIA officers drew on support from another organization – either the *Tatmadaw* or the Chinese government-supported CPB. Their

²⁹² This unit operated in northern Shan State. Its inclusion in this section on the Kachin State reflects that it was part of the KIA/KIO supra regional counter state order and operated in an area with large ethnic-Kachin populations.

reliance on another organization for access to resources entailed accepting the rules of the supporting organization that limited their range of action.

Ting Ying

In 1968, Ting Ying, commander of the Chipwi Township-based KIA's Third Brigade, broke with the KIA and joined the CPB.²⁹³ The CPB designated the remote, sparsely populated area under Ting Ying's control as the 101 War Zone. Later, it became the later the Northern Kachin State Division of the CPB. Ting Ying served as the military commander of the area. His forces included the 400 members formerly serving under him in the KIA and an infusion of CPB soldiers.²⁹⁴ The CPB also appointed dispatched members to work in the area. These officials, including a political commissar, served as a link between the CPB Headquarters and the 101 War Zone. In 1989, after the CPB's collapse, Ting Ying established a new organization – the New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) – and engaged in a ceasefire arrangement with the *Tatmadaw*-led government. The *Tatmadaw* designated this area as Kachin State Special Region One. The litany of names for the administrative units operating in this area reflects the differing arrangements made by Ting Ying and dramatizes some of the difficulties in determining whether or not Ting Ying can be considered an autonomous strongman.

The political order headed by Ting Ying does not reflect the emergence of an autonomous strongman. Ting Ying possessed many elements useful for exercising social control. He drew upon shared membership of the Ngochan subgroup of Kachin as a basis for forging social bonds of loyalty with the community in the area. He spoke the Ngochan dialect of Kachin commonly spoken in this area. Sadan notes that this was a key element of his support (Sadan, 2013, p. 450). As the commander of a KIA Brigade, his rank provided him

²⁹³ In 1967, Ting Ying, then an officer in the KIA, first made contact with the Chinese. At this time he was a member of a Kachin delegation attending a meeting with Chinese security officials.

²⁹⁴ Their defection involved approximately 400 men from the two columns (Numbers 5 and 6) under their command (Lintner, *Notes on the Communist Party of Burma, Vol. 1*, 1986, p. 9).

with basis to exercise control over members of his unit. Several informants – both Kachin and Burmese – that met Ting Ying describe him as possessing charisma (Personal Communications, Journalists, NGO worker, 2015). These attributes help account for his ability to lead soldiers under his command to join the CPB and exercise social control in his region.

Throughout his career, Ting Ying utilized ties to powerful organizations to gain access to gain resources.²⁹⁵ As a CPB member, he received material support, soldiers, and CPB-appointed administrators. After 1968, Lintner describes the support initially provided by the Chinese government to the CPB as “massive” (Lintner, 1990a).²⁹⁶ In 1989, when the CPB collapsed, Ting Ying engaged in a ceasefire arrangement with the *Tatmadaw*-led government. His new status as a *Tatmadaw*-allied group helped him gain concessions to harvest valuable timber in Kachin State (Woods, 2011). The inflow of revenue from timber and other natural resource concessions provided a financial windfall to make up for the loss of assistance from the CPB. Access to these resources provided the means for Ting Ying to present himself as a benefactor to the people in Chipwi area. Throughout his career, he presided over the construction of hospitals, clinics, and over sixty schools in the impoverished region under his control (South, 2008, p. 153).

The reliance of Ting Ying on other organizations for access to resources constrained the range of his actions. In the period of alignment with the CPB, the appointment of a political commissar by the CPB’s Central Committee and the integration of CPB troops into his area provided a basis for the CPB to check Ting Ying’s influence. Without the infusion of support from the CPB, it is highly unlikely that Ting Ying would have effectively wielded

²⁹⁵ The degree of support he received from the KIA is not clear. Nonetheless, it is likely that he received material resources from KIA/KIO and invoked his membership in the organization as the basis of his authority to engage in the taxation of the area.

²⁹⁶ Lintner (1990a, p. 26) notes that the assistance provided by the Chinese to the CPB was greater than that provided outside of Indochina. The support included uniforms, modern weapons, and other supplies (e.g. foodstuffs, trucks, jeeps and petrol). The Chinese government also supported the construction of two hydropower plants in CPB-controlled areas.

social control. He lacked the resources necessary to provide the material components of people's strategies of survival and operate autonomously of outside authorities.

When the CPB collapsed in 1989, Ting Ying found himself cut off from resources provided by the CPB and vulnerable to attack from the Burmese government.²⁹⁷ He also encountered desertion by some troops and their families (Personal Communication, Bertil Linter, 2017). This suggests that in the absence of his association with CPB and its support, Ting Ying was not able to effectively exercise social control on the levels achieved in the past. The *Tatmadaw's* offer of a ceasefire arrangement provided an opportunity to find a new source for resources. These resources were useful for Ting Ying to support his provision of rewards and maintain control over coercion. As was the case with the CPB, his reliance on the *Tatmadaw* government for resources limited his autonomy. The presence of *Tatmadaw* troops near his area presented a threat of coercive sanction. While he maintained a degree of limited autonomy in local affairs, the concern that any deviation might elicit a response by the *Tatmadaw* constrained his actions. Thus, while the central government delegated to him a measure of autonomy within his region, he cannot be considered to be an autonomous strongman. Unlike autonomous strongmen who enjoyed access to opium "rents," Ting Ying lacked access to resources independent of other organizations.²⁹⁸

Mahtu Naw

The second incident of a split within the KIA involved its Fourth Brigade based in the Kutkai region of northern Shan State (See Figure 0.2). In late 1990, while the brigade's newly appointed commander was away at general headquarters, Mahtu Naw, a brigade major, entered into negotiations with the *Tatmadaw* leaders. In early 1991, Mahtu Naw, a senior

²⁹⁷ Lintner (1990a, p. 77) describes Ting Ying's organization as receiving massive support from the Chinese, who were also providing support for the CPB.

²⁹⁸ In 2009, the directives issued by the *Tatmadaw* demanding a reduction in the size of his military force, the integration of *Tatmadaw* soldiers into his ranks, and compliance with their guidelines requiring his retirement from his position as commander of the NDA-K forces demonstrated the leverage that the *Tatmadaw* exerted over him and the limits of his autonomy (Burma News International, 2013; Sithu Aung Myint, 2014, May 19).

officer in the Brigade formed an organization known as the Kachin Democratic Army (KDA) and his zone of operations in the Kutkai area became designated by the government as Northern Shan State Special Region Five. The exact circumstances leading to his break with the KIA/KIA are not clear. One account notes that when faced with ongoing military pressure by the *Tatmadaw*, Mahtu Naw accepted their offer for a ceasefire arrangement and promise of economic support. Other accounts point to a growing rift between the KIA/KIO leaders and members of the Fourth Brigade (KIA, 1992, January 11).

The local conditions in northern Shan State created opportunities for local Kachin leaders to exercise social control over segments of the predominately ethnic Kachin population independent of the KIA/KIO. By the early 1990s, the local population and Fourth Brigade members had experienced several decades of warfare and other upheavals that generated support for new political arrangements as part of their search for effective strategies of survival. Like other autonomous strongmen in Shan State, the KIA/KIO order offered people elements useful for crafting survival strategies as a basis for gaining compliance with their rules. The shared identity of Kachin was one means through which KIA commanders formed ties with the ethnic Kachin communities in the area. The KIA troops also offered the rural population protection from predation and counter-insurgency campaigns by the *Tatmadaw*. The reformist political goals of the movement also provided a rationale that inspired support from some segments of the ethnic Kachin population.

The emergence of the KDA led by Mahtu Naw illustrates the limits of these strategies. The common Kachin identity and espousal of political goals aimed at alleviating the continued intrusions into their livelihoods were not a sufficient basis to maintain compliance. A confidential report compiled by the KIA about Mahtu Naw's defection notes that the Fourth Brigade commander appointed in 1990 lacked combat experience; and, while he was Kachin, he was not from northern Shan State. The memo (KIA, 1992, January 11) notes,

This action [the appointment] taken by the KIO Central Committee obviously alienated the low-level officers (majors on down) and soldiers. It left them thinking that as if the HQ doesn't care for their feeling, or welfare and morale.

Another KIA report on the defection notes that the last wireless message received from the Fourth Brigade before their split notes "they [the Fourth Brigade group] will decide the fate of the North," an apparent reference to the Kachin inhabited areas of northern Shan State (KIA, 1992, January 11). Together the continued coercive pressure from the *Tatmadaw* and a rift between the leaders of the KIA/KIO and the members of the Fourth Brigade created an opening for a reconfiguration of political authority that was filled by Mahtu Naw.

The appeal of the Kachin counter order surpassed those of many other strongmen and armed organizations operating in northern Shan State. Mahtu Naw managed to offer strategies of survival that resonated with the predominately ethnic Kachin population. The ceasefire deals proffered by the *Tatmadaw* government after 1989 offered an appealing arrangement for war-weary members of armed resistance organizations.

As was the case of the *Ka Kwe Ye* militias and other ceasefire groups, such as Ting Ying, the accommodation reached between Mahtu Naw and the *Tatmadaw* government involved arrangements provided economic resources. For Mahtu Naw, his position as the head of a ceasefire group provided opportunities for trafficking opium. Maling Ukhu (1997) explains that he "was allowed to operate a drug business by the SLORC" (p. 618). These accounts and others (Meehan, 2011, 2015) point to the indirect reliance of statist strongmen on the *Tatmadaw* for access to revenue. Similar to the earlier *Ka Kwe Ye* militia arrangement, his status as a *Tatmadaw*-aligned armed group provided opportunities useful for generating revenue. At the same time, they fostered dependency that limited Mahtu Naw's range of actions. Like Ting Zing, Mahtu Naw received a measure of autonomy in his affairs, but it was contingent on keeping in line with the priorities of the *Tatmadaw*.

In these two cases, the KIA/KIO's approach proved insufficient for exercising social

control over broad areas. The ability of individuals to provide people with elements of their strategies for survival created opportunities for the emergence of new power centers allied with the central state or another armed resistance organization. Nonetheless, these statist strongmen reached accommodations with *Tatmadaw* officials and the CPB as a basis for acquiring the material resources necessary for operating their organizations.

An examination of the shifting distribution of social control in Kachin State and the exercise of authority by the KIA/KIO in northern Shan State demonstrates the following: One, the importance of access to resources, particularly the critical role played by marketing systems in determining who could and could not generate revenue from resources. In Kachin State, the limited access to opium and the high costs and difficulties of transporting it to market restricted strongmen from accruing revenue from the opium sector. Two, the critical role played by the psychological components of the strategies of survival offered by both armed resistance organizations and strongmen. The ability of the KIA/KIO to offer compelling strategies of survival helps account for the absence of autonomous strongmen in Kachin State. In exchange for economic opportunities and a respite from ongoing disruptions of attacks useful for providing strategies of survival, groups cease challenging the authority of the *Tatmadaw*-controlled government.

Northern Thailand (1950-1985): A Semi-Coherent Order²⁹⁹

In northern Thailand were found conditions conducive for the emergence of autonomous strongmen. Segments of society located in remote mountainous areas along its border experienced dislocation. One source of upheaval was the disruptive warfare in neighboring countries; leading refugees seek sanctuary in Thailand. Among the arrivals were members of foreign armed groups from Burma and China and their dependents. The

²⁹⁹The topography of the area features mountain ranges and upland valleys. The population of the lowlands consists of people classified as Thai, the majority population, as well as ethnic Chinese, Indian, and others. In the highlands, an ethnically diverse population of non-Thai peoples includes groups such as Akha, Karen, Hmong, Lahu, Mien, and Shan. Over the century before World War II, many of these people settled in this area after fleeing conflicts in southwest China, northern Laos, and the Shan States.

widespread cultivation of opium by the refugees helped transform northern Thailand into a major opium producing area. The RTA-directed counter-insurgency operations targeting members of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) also generated dislocation. Despite the disruption experienced by the population and the presence of opium, autonomous strongmen did not emerge. The patterns of social control that appeared featured the dominance of the central Thai state and a short-lived, limited challenge presented by the CPT movement operating in a few pockets of the sub region, rather than a proliferation of autonomous strongmen.

Background

The traditional political system in northern Thailand shared many features of the *saopha* system in Shan State. Local rulers known as *chao* drew on concepts of Buddhist kingship as a basis for exercising social control. Beginning in the late 19th century, the Bangkok-based Siamese political center gradually brought northern Thailand into its orbit.³⁰⁰ As was the case in Shan State almost half a century later, the process involved the replacement of traditional administrative structures led by local princes (*chao*), with new officials appointed by state leaders in Bangkok.³⁰¹

In the post-World War II period, segments of the population experienced destructive breakdowns. Warfare in neighboring countries and predation by armed groups led many people to seek refuge in northern Thailand. As Race (1974) notes, "In the early fifties there was no government presence in the rugged forests [of northern Thailand]...Upland peoples roamed back and forth at will from Yunnan to Burma to Laos to Thailand, without any reference to abstract national borders" (p. 90). Settlers included both civilians and members of KMT units from Yunnan.

³⁰⁰ For accounts of state formation in Siam/Thailand and the extension of Bangkok's influence to northern Siam, see Bunnag (1977) and Penth (2000).

³⁰¹ Measures taken by Bangkok-based officials to extend authority in northern Siam precipitated peasant revolts in the period from 1880 to 1905. However, Bangkok-based authorities of the Siamese state crushed uprisings in the areas of present-day Chiang Mai and Phrae provinces. For an account, see Ramsay (1979).

The early 1950s also marked the beginning of efforts by central state officials to extend their influence into the highland border areas. The imposition of new rules and practices upon people unaccustomed to regulation by local state agents was a new source of dissatisfaction. For instance, state officials attempted to restrict the movements of highland dwelling peoples who practiced swidden agriculture. These communities also encountered extortion by lowland officials.³⁰² And in the late 1960s, the spread of operations and activities by the CPT to northern Thailand led to an intensification of counter-insurgency efforts directed by Thai security officials and militarized conflicts in some areas.

The origins of the CPT date back to as early as 1942. When the military-led government outlawed the CPT in 1952, many party members went underground. Party leaders members adopted Maoist-inspired strategies of rural armed struggle. In 1960, fighting between the CPT and the RTA first erupted in northeast Thailand.³⁰³ Their first reported engagements in northern Thailand did not take place until seven years later in Nan province (Race, 1974, p. 96). In northern Thailand, the activities of CPT forces were in two areas. The largest was an eastern zone adjacent to Laos, which included Chiang Rai, Loei, Nan, Petchabun, Phitsanulok, and Uttaradit provinces. Another smaller zone of activity was in Tak province located to the west along Thailand's border with Burma (See Figure 1.4).

The response by the RTG to the upsurge of CPT activities in the 1960s reflects its preoccupation with Communist movements in Asia. The emergence of a Communist regime in China in 1949 and the emergence of communist-backed armed movements in Korea, Vietnam, and Laos alarmed leaders of several states in Asia and the United States. One concern of Thai and American security officials was that the CPT posed a possible challenge

³⁰² For examples, see Hearn (1974, p. 40), Race (1974, p. 89), and Young (2011).

³⁰³ For a translation of a history of the CPT written by a leading party member in the 1970s, see Baker (2003). The document was published in Thai for the first time in early 2003. Somsak Jeamteerasakul, the publisher, describes it as "one of the most important documents in the history of the Communist Party of Thailand" (Somsak, 2003, p.155 cited in Baker (2003, p. 510). For an account of the internal party politics, see Chutima Gawin (1990).

to the stability of the Thai government. One response was the build up of an array of security forces in northern Thailand. This included the strengthening of the RTA, RTP, and local paramilitary organizations.³⁰⁴ In addition, Thai security forces enlisted the support of foreign armed groups – such as the KMT, SSA, SUA, and SURA – as part of a buffer zone approach to maintaining security along its borders with Burma (McCoy, 1972, p. 180).

By early 1967, as the CPT intensified its armed uprising in northeastern Thailand, Thai security officials received reports that highland peoples—including ethnic Hmong—from northern Thailand had traveled to Laos and North Vietnam to receive training from the Pathet Lao and Vietminh forces (Race, 1974, p. 94). This news raised concerns among Thai security officials about the possibility of the spread of CPT resistance in northern Thailand (Race, 1974, p. 98). The RTA responded with increased deployment of units to northern Thailand in 1967.

The escalation of violent conflict in 1967 produced massive dislocation in some areas (Hearn, 1974, pp. 44, 53, 61-70).³⁰⁵ One of the most dramatic instances involved the so-called "Red Miao" revolt and increasing violence between ethnic Hmong communities and government officials in Chiang Rai province.³⁰⁶ The counter-insurgency efforts by Thai security forces involved a broad range of activities, including aerial bombardments and massive sweep operations referred to as suppression campaigns in Chiang Rai and other areas of CPT activity (Hearn, 1974, p. 44).³⁰⁷ Renard notes that highland areas of southern Chiang Rai and Nan provinces became free fire zones in early 1968 (Renard, 2001, p. 42). Other related actions included the relocation of these remote populations orchestrated by the Public

³⁰⁴ For an account of the Thai Border Patrol Police, see Ball (2013) and Hyun (2014).

³⁰⁵ A full analysis of the dynamics of conflict in northern Thailand and the politics behind it is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Race (1973) and Hearn (1974) provide two of the most thorough accounts of the CPT in northern Thailand to date. For an account of the violence perpetrated by state officials and right-wing groups against farmers unions in northern Thailand, see Haberkorn (2011).

³⁰⁶ For detailed accounts of the event, see Hearn (1974) and McCoy (1972, pp. 329-331). Miao is another term used by Thai authorities for ethnic Hmong.

³⁰⁷ According to an account by Abrams (1968, p. 17), the Royal Thai Air Force had by 1968 destroyed 100 "dissident villages."

Welfare Department (Hearn, 1974, pp. 142 -159). This effort involved the transfer of peoples in the mountains to lowland areas, where government officials introduced lowland agricultural techniques, such as wet-rice cultivation (Hearn, 1974, p. 85).

An escalation of conflict between the RTP and highland non-Thai groups with ties to the CPT broke out in Tak province (Hearn, 1974, p. 148). After 1967, Tak province also became an area of increased violence. The proximity of Tak to CPT base areas located to the west portended the possibility that the CPT forces could link up and disrupt travel and commerce between northern Thailand and Bangkok.

By the late-1970s, the military threat posed by the CPT in northern Thailand had abated. In 1979, Thai security forces launched an assault on the CPT's last stronghold, located in the Khao Kho and Khao Ya mountain ranges cutting across the tri-province zone (Loei, Phitsanulok, and Petchabun provinces).³⁰⁸ RTA troops took control of the area and crippled the CPT. After the government offered amnesty– Prime Ministers Order No 66/2532 – in April 1980, many CPT cares accepted.³⁰⁹ By the early 1980s, the CPT challenge had disappeared.

Opium cultivation served as a lifeline for many of the people pouring into the highlands of northern Thailand to escape militarized violence in nearby areas. The lack of reliable baseline data for opium production makes analysis difficult. Nevertheless, production estimates collected and cited by various sources point to a significant increase in cultivation in the north from 7 tons in the period before World War II period to as much as 200 tons in the 1970s (See Table 1.2). After the 1970s, estimates indicate that a trend involving decreased production with reports of annual cultivation ranging between 30 to 50 tons in the period from 1975 to the 1980/81 growing season.

Table 5.2: Selected estimates of opium cultivation in Thailand by tons, 1923-1996

³⁰⁸ The campaign included "Poo Kwang," a military operation described by one journalist (Daniel, 1972, March 13) as the "largest military foray ever on Thai soil" (Cited in Hearn, 1974, p. 178).

³⁰⁹ For a discussion of the amnesty and its impacts, see Kerdphol (1986).

	Thailand
Pre-World War II	7 (1923)
1955	25
1960	30
1967	145
1968	200
1971	200
1975	30
1980/81	50

Sources: Boonwaat, 2006; CIA, 1956, 1959, 1978; Geddes 1971; League of Nations, 1923; McCoy 1972; Tapp 1986; United Nations, 1967; US Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, 1970; US Congress, 1971; US National Narcotics Intelligence Consumer Committee, 1983

Faced with dislocations, insurgent CPT and a short-lived opium “boom,” the patterns of political authority in northern Thailand in the period from 1945 to 1985 reflect a relatively coherent order directed by the central Thai state. The CPT was the exception to state dominance. During this period, central state leaders relied on local state agents to exercise social control. One challenge was the extension of influence into the highland areas. Central state leaders dispatched local agents to the highlands to engage in counter-insurgency activities and civic action programs and to enforce new regulations. This did not spur the proliferation of autonomous strongmen. Instead, the state's ability to exercise social control was constrained in the areas of CPT operations.

Local political authority featured an amalgamation of village headmen, local officials, and other state-oriented strongmen operating more or less in conjunction with rules put forth by state leaders. Nevertheless, the patterns of social control continued to include personalized power, involving allegiance to an individual, rather than an organization. *Chao pho* are one manifestation of local statist strongmen identified by scholars of Thailand. The term means godfather in Thai. *Chao pho* refers to influential individuals engaged in mafia-like illegal

practices that involve the extrajudicial use of violence and illicit economic activity. It is important to recognize that *chao pho* and many other varieties of strongman operating in Thailand are distinct from the autonomous strongmen in Shan State. Like other instances of statist strongmen, they rely on resources derived from their ties to the state order. While they may at times deviate from the directives of state officials and laws, they did not stray too far. Their reliance on ties to the state meant that they did not try and create an alternative order. Instead, like many other organized criminal organizations, they benefited from the *status quo*.

In some places, the population did experience dramatic social breakdown. The presence of opium provided resources useful for strongmen to exercise social control independent of ties to the state. These included the mountainous areas of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces, where refugees had settled to escape conflict in neighboring countries and the zones of CPT activities, where counter-insurgency activities by the Thai security forces had caused disruptions. What accounts for the absence of autonomous strongmen in these areas?

Constraints on the Emergence of Strongmen

The absence of autonomous strongmen reflects the following conditions. One, societal dislocation was not widespread, particularly in the lowlands. For instance, much of the region did not undergo disruptive administrative reforms or violent warfare. Instead, the local administrative system in rural areas featured the continuity of the core features of the village headmen system tied into a centralizing authority. Admittedly, lowland society encountered shocks. But the response sometimes involved allying with powerful patrons. These were statist strongmen rather than autonomous ones. In some cases, they were likely local *chao pho*. In many places, changes during this period were not dramatic enough to render people's strategies of survival ineffective and lead them to seek an accommodation with new power centers.

The exception was in zones where the RTA's counter-insurgency operations crippled many people's survival strategies of survival. In these areas some communities complied with the orders from Thai government officials and moved to the lowlands as part of the relocation campaigns in which state leaders provided resources to begin new lives. Others remained in the highlands, and either pursued a strategy of self-reliance or allied with the CPT.³¹⁰

A second factor was the inability of potential strongmen to earn revenue sufficient to exercise social control. Opium was one of the few valuable resources available in northern Thailand. The control exercised over the opium trade by KMT and central state leaders restricted access by others. During peak periods of production, a succession of high-ranking security officials engaged in trafficking opium and used the proceeds to fund their political networks. These included General Phao Sriyanond of the Royal Thai Police, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat of Royal Thai military and Prime Minister (1957, 1958-63), and later Colonel Narong Kittikachorn (McCoy, 1972; Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.).³¹¹ By the late 1970s, production had begun to decrease significantly.³¹² In the 1980s, Windle (2016), a researcher of opium suppression efforts, remarks, "high-ranking state employees' support for drug traffickers began to wane" (p. 67). Another contributing factor is that local demand absorbed local production.³¹³ Consequently, domestic consumption and the command over the trade by the KMT and powerful state leaders limited the availability to strongmen of opium.

³¹⁰ The extent of CPT support in north Thailand is difficult to estimate. One estimate is 4,000 to 5,000 soldiers (Hanrahan, 1975, p. 16). Race (1974) notes that the CPT "established its own hill-tribe supra-village apparatus. The ethnic composition at the lowest levels was still mainly Meo and Yao, though there was some reported Karen participation on the western border" (p. 109). He estimates of the size of the anti-government hill-tribe groups in the northern Thailand varied from agency to agency. A coalition of reports by various Thai agencies in 1970 revealed a total of about 2,000 men under arms, consisting of 600-650 men in Chiang Rai province, 700-800 in Nan province, 150 in Uttaradit province, 200 in Tak province, and the remainder in the tri-province area of Petchabun-Pitstanulok-Loei. Race (1974, p. 109) notes that while the operated with CPT units, they were not members of the party.

³¹¹ McCoy (1972) notes, "By 1955 Phao's National Police Force had become the largest opium trafficking syndicate in Thailand, and was intimately involved in every phase of the narcotics traffic" (p. 140).

³¹² The drop reflects a combination of the decline of violence, efforts by the government and international development agencies to promote agricultural development, and the continued growth of the Thai economy (Renard, 2001).

³¹³ Renard (2001) cites a study of opium conducted in the 1965/66 growing season and notes that the estimated 145 tons produced were insufficient for the needs of local users. See *The World of Coca Campaign* (1993, p. 7).

The Thai state leaders involved in the opium were statist strongmen operating at the national level. Their involvement provided resources useful for developing a power base within the structure of the formal state-centered Thai political system. By contrast, autonomous strongmen employ resources to develop the capabilities to exercise social control independent of the state. The reliance of statist strongmen on the benefits afforded by positions in the state system constrained the exercise of social control.

Local statist strongmen, such as General Li Wenhuan, Commander of the Tam Ngop-based Third KMT Army, and General Tuan Wenshi, Commander of the Maesalong-based Fifth KMT Army, were unencumbered by the need to maintain official standing in state hierarchy (See Figure 0.1). They had slowly gained influence over areas along the Thai-Shan State border. KMT units first settled in remote areas of northern Thailand in 1953-54. In 1961, after an assault by the *Tatmadaw* and China's People's Liberation Army against the KMT in Shan State, the bulk retreated to Thailand. The KMT leaders developed the opium trade into a thriving sector of the regional economy (Gibson and Chen, 2011). However, by the mid-1980s, Khun Sa wrestled control over the trade away from them. In the period from the late 1950s to the mid-1980s, vast opiate revenue and an arsenal of weapons provided resources useful for KMT asserting social control. KMT leaders became local statist strongmen in Thailand. This development reflects the ability of Thai officials to keep KMT in check and their inability to expand their ties with local communities. Together, these served as constraints on KMT exercise of social control independent of Thai officials.

Thai security authorities and the KMT reached an arrangement in which KMT forces enjoyed wide latitude in their activities in their mountain enclaves. In return, KMT units supported Thai security efforts and limited their engagement with the local population. A central component of this arrangement was that the KMT forces assist the Thai security officials in a wide range of security efforts. In two periods, the Thai security officials

employed KMT troops in operations against the CPT. The first took place in Chiang Rai province in the period from late 1972 to late 1973. The RTA mobilized KMT forces ranging from over 600 to 800 men in three separate campaigns to capture CPT positions (Gibson and Chen, 2011, pp. 293-296). A second mobilization took place in April 1981, when KMT troops supported the RTA assault on the CPT stronghold located in Khao Kha and Khao Ya mountains of Petchabun province. After receiving limited "refresher training" and modern armaments, the KMT units estimated between 300 to 400 men deployed to assist the RTA in taking over the areas (Gibson and Chen, 2011, pp. 300-301). The KMT casualties in the conflict were reportedly 26 deaths and 45 wounded (Keomongkol, 1973, June 8).³¹⁴

During the late 1970s, KMT units also provided protection for Thai road construction crews involved in building strategic highways in areas of CPT activity. KMT units under the supervision of Thai military officers fended off CPT-led attacks on road construction crews in Tak and Chiang Rai provinces (Gibson and Chen, 2011, p. 296-298). KMT units also functioned as a bulwark against possible encroachment by foreign armed groups into Thailand to block linkage of CPT and CPB forces. Their assistance was part of a buffer zone approach employed by Thai officials. The arrangement involved various Burmese armed resistance organizations enlisted to defend Thailand's borders and provide information about activities of other armed groups and political developments in China to Thai security officials.

Other restrictions imposed by the Thai security forces were less demanding but effective. For instance, Race (1974, p. 100) indicates that KMT members and their families were not allowed to leave their highland enclaves. KMT leaders received special treatment. They were required to wear civilian clothes when visiting their homes in Chiang Mai and Bangkok and to keep a low profile.

³¹⁴ For a detailed and well-researched account of KMT support for the RTA, see Gibson and Chen, 2011, Chapter 24).

Thai security forces imposed a system to monitor and regulate KMT forces. Initially, Thai authorities directed the settlement of KMT units and their dependents to remote mountain enclaves away from major population centers. To monitor the KMT, the Thai military stationed liaison officers at KMT bases. By 1962, the Thai government had recognized six KMT villages in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces with approximately 5,000 residents. The officials stationed in KMT areas registered KMT members and dependents as part of a system for monitoring the population of the camps and their movements.

Similar to their situation in Shan State, KMT leaders were foreigners to northern Thailand and found it difficult to gain support from society. While they possessed ample resources, their inability to forge social ties with the local population limited their ability to exercise social control. One factor that accounts for this was their reputation for abusing the local population. Gibson and Chen (2011, p. 294) indicate that KMT leaders engaged in the forced conscription of highland populations in Shan State for service in Thailand and publicly beat and executed deserters. The use of violence and abuse, as Hearn (1974) remarks, continued in northern Thailand and generated resentment among the local population. As in the Shan State, abuse of local populations impinged on their ability to gain support. Rather than extend authority and operate independently of state officials, the KMT leaders and their followers adopted a strategy of integration into Thai society.

Northern Thailand experienced forces of dramatic change from 1950 to the mid-1980s. The presence of opium and hardships faced by highland communities suggested that autonomous strongmen were likely to emerge. The fact that this did not happen draws attention to the importance of access to opium. Opium revenues flowed into the hands of the KMT and statist, nationalist strongmen, rather than others. In addition, the KMT were unable to couple the provision of resources and use of sanctions with appealing rationales exercise

social control. Steps taken by Thai security officials also constrained KMT ability to extend influence and exercise social control over a broader population. The imposition of travel restrictions and a monitoring system segregated KMT from society. Aside from the CPT, the distribution of social control in northern Thailand featured relatively integrated domination by agents of the Thai state, rather than the proliferation of autonomous strongmen.

Northern Laos (1953-1975)

Between 1953, when civil war broke out, and 1975, when the communist Pathet Lao forces achieved victory over the US-backed Royal Lao Government, northern Laos evidenced several conditions the emergence of autonomous strongmen. The region experienced an opium boom that transformed it into one of the world's major producers. The population also experienced disruptive shocks from a civil war that involved one of the most destructive aerial bombing campaigns in the history of warfare. But unlike Shan State, the configuration of authority involved two distinct orders engaged in violent competition. One side was the American-backed, anti-communist Royal Lao Government; the other was the communist-supported Pathet Lao-led order. In 1975, the Pathet Lao prevailed and established the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Background of the Conflict

The Kingdom of Lan Xang exercised authority over northern Laos until 1893, when it became part of French-ruled Indochina.³¹⁵ Like Shan State, the traditional, feudal bureaucrats continued to serve as local administrators, and colonial appointed agents supervised them.³¹⁶ During World War II, Japanese forces occupied Laos as part of an agreement with the Vichy French regime. At the end of the war, the Laotian monarchy declared independence. A Lao

³¹⁵The region that comprises northern Laos includes rugged mountains and valleys. The ethnic composition of northern Laos is segmented into lowland areas primarily inhabited by ethnic Laotians, and the highlands are ethnic inhabited by non-Lao ethnic groups, mostly ethnic Hmong but also ethnic Mien and other groups.

³¹⁶During this period, the overlapping reigns of King Sisavang Vong (r. 1904-1959) and King Sisavang Vatthana (r. 1959-1975) took place. After the Pathet Lao takeover, King Sisavang Vatthana abdicated. Later, government authorities sent him to a re-education camp in northern Laos, where he died.

nationalist movement – the *Lao Issara* or Free Laos – attempted to form an independent government. The arrival of French troops in 1946 quashed this effort. The French reasserted control, driving the leaders of the *Lao Issara* into exile. In 1947, with the promulgation of a new constitution, Laos became a constitutional monarchy within the French Union. In 1954, after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, Laos achieved independence from France.

In the early 1950s, Laos became engulfed in a prolonged civil war between the rightist forces of the Royal Lao Government (RLG) and an armed, communist-inspired movement known as the Pathet Lao.³¹⁷ In 1950, Prince Souphanouvong, widely known as the “Red Prince” for his Leftist politics, resigned from the Thailand-based exiled *Lao Issara* movement and formed the Lao Resistance Front in northern Vietnam. Later, this movement became known as the Pathet Lao. Prince Souphanouvong established close ties with The Vietminh-led government in North Vietnam. Throughout the war, the materials and troops provided by the North Vietnamese government were critical to the Pathet Lao.

The first phase of the conflict (1953-1965) involved the increased involvement of foreign powers and an intensification of militarized violence. In 1953, the large-scale deployment of North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces into northern Laos marked the beginning of the conflict. By 1954, the Pathet Lao had established control of remote areas in Houaphan and Phongsali provinces adjacent to North Vietnam (See Figure 1.6). Efforts by foreign mediators to contain the conflict produced the Geneva Agreement of 1954. A central provision was that Laos was a neutral country. Any further escalation involving outside forces was prohibited.³¹⁸

Nevertheless, Laos became further enmeshed in regional and global rivalries

³¹⁷ One of the earliest reported episodes of violent conflict in northern Laos took place in 1946. The melee involved units of combined French and ethnic-Hmong forces with Vietnamese nationalists, or Vietminh (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993, pp. 41-44). However, the fighting was not sustained.

³¹⁸ According to the 1954 Geneva Convention, the provinces of Phongsali and Houaphan became "regrouping zones" for the Pathet Lao forces, but some North Vietnamese troops remained in the areas and established an administrative presence to consolidate their authority (Hamilton-Merritt, 1999, pp. 64-65).

characteristic of the Cold War. Foreign powers subverted terms of the Agreement. The Vietminh continued direct intervention and dispatched members of its armed wing – the North Vietnamese Army – to northern Laos. Among the other superpowers, the Soviet Union and China continued to supply the Pathet Lao. US Government support of the RLG involved CIA-sponsored military advisors, the extensive use of US air power, and substantial backing for the war effort.

As Laos became an active site of competition among regional and global powers, the conflict intensified. In 1960, an escalation of conflict took place in the Plain of Jars in Xiangkhoang province. A Soviet-supported airlift of weapons to Pathet Lao forces assisted their push into the area. Over the next fifteen years, the Plain of Jars served as a battlefield, with each side engaged in a struggle of costly advances and retreats by troops.³¹⁹

The dynamics that emerged by 1965 marked a second phase (1965-1975) of the conflict. The conventional war continued, but devastating US air power was brought to bear, and CIA-sponsored US military advisors worked in conjunction with ethnic Hmong paramilitary forces led by General Vang Pao to halt the expansion of Pathet Lao forces.³²⁰ The Plain of Jars and adjacent areas became the epicenter for the most massive use of aerial bombardment in the history of warfare. Ethnic Hmong paramilitary units served as ground units that complemented the air war in an unsuccessful effort to keep opposition forces from controlling the Plain of Jars.³²¹

Grant Evans (2002), a scholar of Laos, characterizes the civil war as taking place on "two different levels." One was akin to positional warfare, involving "a war along a relatively

³¹⁹ For accounts of the war, see Adams and McCoy (1970), Conboy (1975), Dommen (1971), Gunn, (1998), Fox (1986, 1997).

³²⁰ The US supported air operation took place from Long Tieng, which became the busiest airbase in the world and one of the largest CIA operations ever conducted. For accounts of Long Tieng and the "Secret War," see Branfman (2013), Conboy (1975), Leary (1995), Quincy (2000), and Warner (1996).

³²¹ Al McCoy (2013, p. 487) argues that the application of a colossal level of air power represented an unconventional military tactic aimed to assist the RLA. Its novelty was that the approach called for ground troops to take territory and the use of on air support, rather than infantry, to hold the territory.

well-defined line separating the two zones of control throughout most of the country. In some strategic locations, the forces of Pathet Lao and RLA contested each other, but in others, they reached an accommodation" (p. 139). The other involved US Government-supported, covert air war, known as the "Secret War." By contrast to positional warfare, the bombing campaign was intensely destructive and often waged with little concern for its impact on civilians.³²²

The devastation caused by the civil war produced widespread social dislocation. As Whitaker (1971) describes in an edition of the Area Handbook series intended for use by US military personnel,

In terms of economic destruction — towns fought over, captured, lost, recaptured, and destroyed in the process, villages bombed out of existence, crops ungrown, and the loss of manpower in its peak productive years — the cost was equally staggering to the entire nation" (p. 1).

Estimates indicate that US military forces dropped approximately 2,000,000 tons of bombs on Laos from 1965 to 1973 (Warner, 1996, p. 352; McCoy, 2013, p. 1).³²³ Aside from the bombing, other sources of dislocation were the demands imposed on the population by the armed groups. One of the most sweeping was conscription of men and boys for military service. In particular, the Hmong community experienced the decimation of at least one generation with far-reaching effects on their families. For the population surviving the destruction, flight was one widespread response. Many people relocated to the remote highlands away from fighting or refugee settlement areas in lowlands as far as away as Thailand.

Opium cultivation was one of the few viable livelihood strategies for the populations in the uplands of northern Laos. While taxation by the French in the early 1940s spurred an

³²² The portion of the Ho Chi Minh Trail running through southern Laos was one target, and the highland areas surrounding the Plain of Jars were another. Warner (1996, p. 352) estimates that the bombing tonnage per capita was two-thirds of a ton for each person.

³²³ As Al McCoy (2013) notes, "Not only does the 2.1 million tons of bombs dropped on Laos from 1965 to 1973 rank among the largest air wars of the twentieth century, exceeded only by the 2.7 million tons dropped on Cambodia, but it also was a precursor for the way wars would be fought in the twenty-first century and beyond" (p. 1).

initial increase in production, the continued disruptions caused by militarized violence led to continued rise in production until the late 1960s (See Chapter One). During the period from 1940 to 1968, opium production in northern Laos, primarily in Xiangkhouang province, rose from an estimated baseline of between 50 to 125 tons per annum in the mid 1950s to as much as 100 to 150 tons in 1958 (See Table 5.3). While there is dramatic variation in these estimates, it is useful to note that the armed conflict and remoteness of opium producing areas makes estimating production difficult. These estimates and other qualitative sources indicate an increase in production for a time. However, the level of production appears to have begun to drop in the early 1970s. This drop is surprising given the ongoing societal dislocation caused by the continued and intensifying violence of warfare.

Table 5.3: Selected estimated opium cultivation in Laos by tons, 1940-1981

	Laos
Pre-World War II	7 (1940)
1955	50-125
1967	80-150
1968	100-150
1971	35
1975	50
1980/81	50

Sources: Boonwaat, 2006; CIA, 1955, 1956, 1959, 1978; Geddes 1971; League of Nations, 1923; McCoy 1972; Tapp 1986; United Nations, 1967; US Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, 1970; US Congress, 1971; US National Narcotics Intelligence Consumer Committee, 1983.

To understand its dramatic decline during a period of intense societal dislocation, it is useful to appreciate that the destructiveness of the violence stretched the highland communities to their breaking point. As Westermeyer (1978) points out, “Between 1965 and 72 [1972], the intensification of armed conflict forced many opium-poppy farmers down from the mountains of northern Laos on to the flood plain of the Mekong River where opium-

poppy could not be grown” (p. 57). Faced with saturation bombing, the relative sanctuary of the highland and the properties of opium that made it a conflict crop *par excellence* no longer offered relief. The strategies of "running to the hills" and "mountain hopping," which had proved effective in mitigating the risks from violence were not effective. Rather than continue to run the risks accompanied with living in the remote mountains, many people moved down to settle in the lowland areas located away from the conflict. As resettlement sites and refugee camps began filling up, the rates of opium production began to fall.³²⁴

Divided Authority: The Pathet Lao and the Royal Lao Government

As the war unfolded, the new patterns of social control gradually emerged. One feature was the emergence and gradual extension of territorial control exercised by the Pathet Laos and North Vietnamese forces. In the 1950s, these groups established a base area in Phongsali and Houaphan provinces adjacent to North Vietnam. Later, they extended authority to Xiangkhoang province. Pathet Lao cadres established administrative organizations for collecting taxes and recruiting soldiers (Evans, 2002, p. 150). As Evans points out, the North Vietnamese military officers exercised authority in their regions as the Pathet Lao leaders and commanders were dependent on their economic and military aid (Evans, 2002, p. 136).

The other group exercising social control was the Royal Lao Government. The instruments for its exercise of authority included administrative officials operating in towns and villages and RLA officers operating in conflict zones. Financial assistance by the US Government gave the RLG resources useful for attracting support. The organization experienced power struggles among elites and attempts by leaders to hold the order together by making bargains and accommodations with other influential leaders. The outbreak of conflict and the inflow of foreign aid led the Royal Lao Army and Air Force to take on a more prominent role in asserting control over the population. Over the course of the war, the

³²⁴ In 1975, the ascendancy of the Pathet Lao and their establishment of a new revolutionary regime led to the dismantling of the Lao opium trafficking system. Many of the middle and upper-level RLG officials who had run the narcotics trafficking system had gone into exile (Everingham, 1975, April 30, pp. 26-27).

Pathet Laos and Vietnamese forces slowly secured strategic areas of the region. The withdrawal of US military personnel in 1973 weakened the RLG. In 1975, it agreed to Pathet Laos demands for national reconciliation.

The nature of the war made the exercise of social control difficult. The destruction brought about by violence led to frequent and rapid movements of the population. By the end of the war, militarized violence had contributed to the displacement of an estimated 700,000 people – twenty five percent of the population.³²⁵ The destruction of towns and small villages led some people to flee to the remote highlands.³²⁶ Population transience made it difficult for agents of either organization to establish ties with people necessary for exerting social control.

In some areas, territorial shifts by armed groups made the exercise of social control difficult. Rapid advancement of troops – and at times sudden retreats – prevented either side from establishing social control it difficult for either armed groups to establish social control in conflict zones. The destructive violence in the Plain of Jars taking place in the from the late 1960s to the early 1970s involved "see-saw"-like shifts of costly advances and withdrawals by opposing forces. Nevertheless, by the mid-1970s, the Pathet Lao had achieved dominance in northern Laos and began to consolidate control.

Northern Laos incurred shocks producing profound social upheavals in some areas. At the same time, opium production increased substantially. These simultaneous occurrences gave rise to conditions that could have led to the emergence of autonomous strongmen, but did not, for reasons discussed below. This was not the case. In the period from 1953 to 1975, the RLG and the Pathet Lao engaged in a bloody struggle to decide who would make rules by which people behaved. By 1975, through a combination of military pressure and negotiations

³²⁵ Several studies cite this figure (Carlin, 1989, p. 92; Robinson, 1998, p. 103) and likely originate from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

³²⁶ As noted earlier, when the highlands ceased to offer sanctuary, many moved to lowland resettlements camps under control of the RLG. Others settled in refugee camps in neighboring Thailand.

with the RLG, the Pathet Lao organization finally ascended to power.

Statist Strongmen in Northern Laos

The configuration of political authority did not involve the proliferation of autonomous strongmen. While personalized authority was an element of power, the individuals wielding influence were often statist strongmen dependent on either the RLG or the Pathet Lao. Similar to the northern Thai case, the dependence of strongmen on RLG ties for access to resources led them to ally with the state and abide their rules. To better understand this process, it is instructive to examine the case of an ethnic Hmong strongman named Vang Pao and the significance of access to foreign assistance played in his efforts to impose social control.

In the early 1960s, Vang Pao was a rising star in the RLA, when American military advisors tapped him to lead their operations in northern Laos. An ethnic Hmong from Xiangkhoang province, he had ties to the Hmong population that, along with his military training, made him ideally suited for the effort. From 1960 to 1973, Vang Pao directed the RLA and US-backed efforts to stave off Pathet Lao and Vietminh forces from taking over the strategically important Plain of Jars. Control of the area would have placed them within easy striking distance of the capital Vientiane. Vang Pao drew on ties to ethnic Hmong communities to recruit an ethnic-Hmong paramilitary organization that expanded to as many as 40,000 members.

Vang Pao possessed many of the attributes of autonomous strongman. He was charismatic, had social ties to local population based on common clan and ethnicity, and had access to resources useful for forging patronage-client networks. He was able to maneuver into the role of an intermediary between Hmong society and US security forces.³²⁷ By 1965,

³²⁷ McCoy (1972, pp. 267-268) notes that the French had reached a similar accommodation with Touby Lyfong, an ethnic Hmong leader, who served as a benefactor for Vang Pao.

he had achieved the rank of general and was head of the Military Zone Two.³²⁸ His command over American-supplied resources with based upon the approval of the RLG, which provided him with a level of resources unprecedented among many strongmen. He adeptly employed these resources to meet the needs of a society caught up in deadly conflict. He possessed authority to direct air power and artillery bombardment to vanquish approaching forces. He was empowered to use the CIA sponsored fleet to deliver rice and other supplies to villages facing starvation. He organized airlifts to evacuate entire villages at a moments notice when they faced onslaughts by communist troops (McCoy, 1972). In addition, his command of transport aircraft for delivery of supplies to remote areas also provided the means for accruing wealth from the opium trade.³²⁹ Because government leaders conferred these powers, Vang Pao was a statist strongman and did not operate autonomously of the RLG and their US government supporters.

The infusion of massive levels of support by foreign governments fostered patterns of social control, not involving autonomous strongmen. Local strongmen allied with power centers to gain access to foreign supplied resources useful for exercising authority their goals. The benefits derived from cooperating with the US Government backed Royal Lao Government discouraged the rise of autonomous strongmen. In the case of RLG order, several strongmen, notably Vang Pao, but also others, such as General Ouane Rattikhone, became statist strongmen.

Involvement in the opium sector provided statist strongmen like Vang Pao and Ouane Rattikhone an additional source of income – opium revenue. For Vang Pao, as McCoy (1972) points out, the access to aircraft for the delivery of rice to remote villages and also provided

³²⁸ Military Region Two encompassed the provinces of Xiengkhouang and Houaphan province in northern Laos and Borikhan and Vientiane provinces in central Laos.

³²⁹ Vang Pao also used American planes and later his own airline – Xieng Khouang Air Transport (financed by USAID and the CIA and financially controlled in part by Vang Pao and his relatives) – to transport opium from producers to his base at Long Tieng, where McCoy's informants indicate that he opened a heroin refinery in 1970 and shipped the heroin to Vientiane (McCoy, 1972, pp. 276-283).

a means to ship opium. The advantages of alignment with government are illustrated by General Ouane Rattikhone's dispatch of Royal Lao Air Force planes to ward off KMT forces trying to seize his opium shipment from Khun Sa during the 1967 Opium War. At the same time, access to resources entailed that strongmen to keep in favor with the US by maintaining coordination with the RLG.

The configuration of social control in northern Laos involved shifting zones of social control involving two organizations attempting to impose rules on the population and engaged in a violent struggle to eliminate the other. The patterns of domination became dispersed among several groups. However, rather than the fragmentation of authority that took place in Shan State, the dominant orders that emerged were those of the RLG and the Pathet Lao.

Conclusion: Different Types of Strongmen in Mainland Southeast Asia

These cases also show the persistence of strongmen, whether statist or autonomous, as a feature of political authority. At the same time, they reveal significant variations in the circumstance of their emergence and the means through which they exercised social control. There are at least two types of statist strongmen. The first are national-level statist strongmen, such as Phao Sriyanond, Sarit Thanarat, and Ouane Rattikhone. A feature of this type of statist strongmen is that they possess official positions in the government, providing a basis to exercise authority over state agents and departments as a means to generate social control. At the same time, their reliance on access to state resources creates incentives for them to work within the political system.

Local statist strongmen are a second type. These include Mahtu Naw, Ting Ying (post-1989), Li Wenhuan, and Tuan Shiwen. Their ties to the state provided opportunities to amass resources useful for exercising social control. Unlike national-level statist strongmen, they often lacked official positions within state organizations and therefore lacked authority

over state agents. Instead, through ties to state officials – often those charged with maintaining security – local state strongmen negotiated arrangements that provided them with access to resources in return for acceptance of the rules of the state. For instance, they gained economic concessions for natural resource extraction and experienced little interference in illicit economic activities by state officials.

The positions occupied by local and national level statist strongmen in relationship to state and society are different. National level statist strongmen rely primarily on agents of the state to exercise social control and do not possess extensive ties with society. By contrast, local statist strongmen are intermediaries between the state officials and society. Their power and usefulness to state leaders flows from their close ties with society.

Vang Pao's exceptional success stems from his capacity to developed strong social ties. At the same time, his position as a high ranking officer in the RLA also gave him access over to a wide range of state resources useful for extending social control. His close coordination and personal ties with US officials supervising his activities from Long Tieng likely accounts for the concentration of various channels for exercising social control in this single individual.

Conclusion

Opium trade and insurgency are interdependent and eradication of opium means the eradication of insurgency.

-*Burma Daily* (1971, June 1)

We have to continue to fight the evil of communism and to fight you must have an army, and an army must have guns, and to buy guns you must have money. In these mountains, the only money is opium.

-General Tuan Shiwen, Commander of the KMT Third Army (1967)

In 2011, two boats containing the corpses of 13 Chinese sailors washed up on the bank of the Mekong River in northern Thailand. Naw Kham, a riverine pirate and narcotics trafficker from Shan State, became the primary suspect in these murders. Local Thai investigators alleged that he had ordered the bloody hijacking of two Chinese cargo boats, which involved the execution-style killing of the crew.³³⁰

The response by Beijing officials was comprehensive and determined. Chinese authorities dispatched an estimated two hundred investigators to comb the areas adjacent to the Mekong River in Burma, Laos, and Thailand for Naw Kham. They also suspended all riverine trade by Chinese flagged ships along the Mekong River. This move was surprising as the Mekong River is a major transportation corridor for exports from its poor, landlocked provinces in southwest China. A Chinese government official also disclosed to the media that there was a discussion among high-level officials about the use of drone strikes to eliminate Naw Kham. One journalist (Marshall, 2012) investigating the event remarked, "So many shipping attacks are attributed to this 46-year-old ethnic Shan that it seems as if the Mekong ambitions of the Asian superpower are being foiled by a medieval-style drug lord with a few dozen hill tribe gunmen." With the apparent assistance of villagers and local officials in both Laos and Burma, Naw Kham evaded the Chinese-led dragnet for several months. Laotian

³³⁰ Naw Kham served in Khun Sa's MTA. After Khun Sa's surrender in 1996, Naw Kham became the leader of a small, *Tatmadaw*-allied militia in Tachilek, Shan State. In 2006, a misunderstanding with *Tatmadaw* officials about led him to cut ties with the government and begin his career as a river pirate (Shan Herald Agency for News, 2005).

officials eventually apprehended Naw Kham and sent him to China for trial.³³¹

The case of Naw Kham illustrates the continued relevance of powerful strongmen in contemporary politics. As this dissertation demonstrates, conditions supporting the emergence of strongmen of varying forms and levels of authority endure. Since World War II, dozens of strongmen of different levels of influence have emerged in the rural Shan State of Burma alone. Naw Kham is a recent manifestation of the phenomenon of autonomous strongmen. So-called “warlords” in Africa and Afghanistan and “drug lords” in Latin America are also recent instances of both strongmen and counter state orders.

This dissertation has demonstrated problems with the conventional wisdom about state formation and powerful strongmen through comparative analysis of carefully chosen case studies. Much of the literature on strongmen and examines those who rely on maintaining ties with central state leaders. This study shows that access to resources independent of the central state allows for strongmen to operate autonomous of state officials. It also finds that contrary to conventional wisdom, powerful strongmen not only rely on coercion, but also draw on social ties to form an affective basis for exercising social control. This dissertation helps fill in gaps about the emergence of strongmen. It argues that where local access to resources coincides with societal dislocations, individuals can, by careful use of rewards, sanctions, and symbols along with adherence to local practices, gain acceptance of their rulemaking authority from society and achieve the status of autonomous strongmen.

To explain their emergence, this study draws on comparative analysis of sub regions in Mainland Southeast Asia and autonomous strongmen in Shan State. Cross case comparisons of the Shan State with other sub regions – northern Laos, northern Thailand, and Kachin State – show the importance of access to resources, societal dislocations, and the ability of strongmen to meet societal needs. These cases also rule out explanations that

³³¹ For an in-depth analysis of the deaths of the Chinese sailors and the manhunt for Naw Kham, see Howe (2013) and Marshall (2012).

emphasize either the role of valuable natural resources in supporting non-state armed groups or state weakness as conditions for the development of autonomous strongmen. The study shows the importance of societal dislocations and access to resources independent of ties to state organizations as necessary conditions for strongmen to exercise social control and form counter state order. “Within-case” comparisons of strongmen in Shan State demonstrate the importance of both the material and ideational elements of their authority.

This chapter proceeds in three sections. The next section revisits the main arguments of the dissertation. The second section looks at some theoretical, empirical, and policy-related implications of my findings. The final section considers further study of issues raised in the dissertation and revisits the discussion about the tension between a state-centered system and the continued relevance of autonomous strongmen.

Main Arguments

The introductory chapter presented the puzzles of why is it that out of four sub regions possessing conditions ripe for the emergence of autonomous strongmen, their proliferation took place only in Shan State. In this dissertation, I have argued that the conditions necessary for the emergence of autonomous strongmen include societal dislocation produced by shocks and direct access to resources independent of state agents. To make this case, I have shown that the emergence of autonomous strongmen reflects a process in which shocks produced societal dislocations that rendered survival strategies for many people ineffective. Access to resources independent of state agents provided individuals with the means to exercise social control by offering people components useful for constructing new strategies of survival. But, whether strongmen can take advantage of these conditions to exercise social control independent of state authorities is contingent on their abilities to meet the material and psychological needs of society. Successful strongmen met those needs by offering a combination of rewards, sanctions, and powerful symbols and meaningful practices

that provided people with components to develop survival strategies. This provided a basis for them to exercise social control.

Conditions for Emergence of Autonomous Strongmen

Stated more formally, the three conditions necessary for autonomous strongmen to emerge are as follows. The first two are societal dislocation and access to resources independent of state control. The third condition involves the agency of individuals and whether their use of rewards, sanctions, symbols, and practices meets people's material and psychological needs.

Societal dislocation produced by shocks was necessary for the emergence of strongmen. The upheavals generated by shocks rendered people's strategies of survival untenable. For strongmen to have a chance to exercise social control, shocks must first unhinge people from their routine practices. When these strategies no longer proved effective, people sought new ones. The uncertainties of dislocation opened the door for autonomous strongmen. People's search for new ways to satisfy basic material and psychological needs entailed their acceptance of authority from new rulers.

Cross case comparisons demonstrate the critical roles played by shocks in generating the social dislocation necessary for strongman emergence. The destructive violence and predatory militarization associated with warfare was the most widespread source of dislocation. The replacement of traditional administrative systems taking place in the Shan and Kachin States in the 1950 and 1960s with new and often ineffective ones was another source of dislocation in Kachin and Shan states.

The scope of the changes taking place in these societies was sweeping and devastating for many people. Militarized conflicts destroyed houses, killed people, and maimed survivors. These shocks impinged on people's basic material needs. In some cases, armed groups seized crops and impressed people as porters. Violence often induced flight. The

livelihood practices necessary for meeting food requirements were no longer effective.

The psychological impacts of these intrusions were more subtle and varied. One of the most commonplace was trauma produced by warfare. In Shan State, bureaucratic reforms involved the replacement of traditional authority with new state administrators and a greater role for the *Tatmadaw* in local administration. The sweeping and destructive effects of these changes posed an existential crisis. For instance, the revocation of *saopha* authority and later detention of many *saopha* meant that they no longer served as a comprehensive symbolic source of stability and order in many people's lives. Other sources of trauma were uncertainty and insecurity. These upheavals also presented challenges to many people's worldviews and their attempts to understand and make meaning out of the suffering.

In the absence of these societal dislocations, the appeal of accepting the authority of an autonomous strongman is limited. Functioning strategies are already in place. People are reluctant to take the risks of jettisoning effective strategies and adopting new, unproven ones. When conditions render existing survival strategies ineffective, people are willing to make dramatic changes in their behavior involving the acceptance of new rules from a different authority.

The case of northern Thailand lends support for this claim that societal dislocation is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the emergence of autonomous strongmen. Societal upheavals were confined to populations in highlands areas adjacent to Thailand's borders with Laos and Burma. Warfare in neighboring countries had uprooted people and pushed them to settle in Thailand. And RTA-led counter insurgency operations also produced hardships and disruptions. By contrast, the lowland population in provinces located in the center of northern Thailand did not experience massive societal dislocations. The lack of autonomous strongmen in these lowland areas where massive societal dislocation did not occur provides evidence that societal dislocation was a necessary condition for the emergence

of autonomous strongmen.

Access to resources was another condition necessary for the emergence of autonomous strongmen. Resources provided individuals with the means to develop capacities useful for exercising social control autonomous of state authorities. Strongmen employed opium to enhance their coercive capacities by purchasing weapons and financing private armies. Control of instruments of coercion independent of central state authority provided a means to offer people protection from other armed groups and impose order. Resources also provided strongmen with materials useful for distributing goods to the population. The provision of rewards in conjunction with adherence to local norms and in ways that resonated with society provided strongmen with an affective basis for gaining compliance from society.

The presence of natural resources did not automatically translate into revenue for strongmen. Aspiring autonomous strongmen faced several challenges to their amassment of resources and capital. In the highlands of Mainland Southeast Asia, the rudimentary road networks, which facilitated the movement of bulk commodities, also enabled regulation, monitoring, and obstruction by state officials. State authorities' control of roads hindered the unauthorized accumulation of capital by strongmen.

The availability and value compactness of opium proved useful for autonomous strongmen and armed resistance organizations. The significance of value-compact resources to strongmen becomes apparent when taking into account that price per volume ratios of opium and a few other commodities – opium, jade, coca, and diamonds – allows for their shipment across difficult terrain and evasion of state authorities. By contrast, shipping bulk commodities—many agricultural commodities—by smuggling was financially unfeasible. For these reasons, it is difficult to imagine an autonomous strongman or warlord renown for a reliance on a bulk commodity, such as coffee or lemons.

In the “Golden Triangle” region, opium was one of the few commodities available for

generating revenue. However, its presence did not make it inevitable that aspiring strongmen could parlay opium into power. Several factors restricted access to opium and markets. The levels of cultivation in some areas were limited. Armed groups blocked individuals from taxing farmers in opium-producing areas. A short supply of investment capital limited the volume purchased from traders. In the absence of access to resources, strongmen were hard pressed to attract followers. They lacked the ability to offer material goods useful for developing authority.

Comparative analysis of four cases demonstrates the critical role played by access to opium in the emergence of autonomous strongmen. In Kachin State, northern Laos, and northern Thailand, the lack of access to resources impeded their emergence. In these three cases, armed resistance groups and statist strongmen restricted opium access to strongmen. The lack of resources impeded “would be” strongmen from developing the capacities necessary for social control. Only in the case of Shan State were aspiring strongmen able to tap into the opium sector and generate opiate revenue. Access to opium provided strongmen with resources useful for extending their capabilities and accumulating more resources. In sum, the inability to amass resources from the opium sector helps account for the absence of autonomous strongmen.

One other condition necessary for the emergence of autonomous strongmen was whether or not individuals can provide segments of society with the psychological and material components useful for developing workable strategies of survival. Through the bestowal of rewards, the imposition of sanctions, the use of symbols and adherence to practices that resonated with societal norms, strongmen achieve rule-making authority.

Rewards are one component of the strategies offered by strongmen. They took different forms. The provision of protection and public order was a common practice. Strongmen and their subordinates deterred pillaging by predatory armed groups, policed

communities, adjudicated disputes, and presided over the judgment and punishment of suspected criminals. These goods provided people a measure of security and allowed them to engage in livelihood practices with less threat of abuses, theft, or destruction of property by others.

Patronage related activities were another form of rewards. They also took varied forms. Strongmen provided support for education, welfare, and health project and engaged in charitable activities. They also served as benefactors for society. Strongmen offered jobs for people as soldiers and other opportunities to earn a living. The extent of their provision of good was contingent on the availability of resources. The range of goods provided by strongmen was similar in form to those provided by states. In the case of Khun Sa and Kornzurng, their form and practices of their organizations resembled states in many ways.

The imposition of sanctions was another way in which strongmen provided people with workable strategies of survival. The flip side to providing rewards – such as protection and order – is the necessity for the imposition of penalties. Strongmen employed the armed forces under their command to deter and attack predatory armed group that threatened civilians. Strongmen and their proxies dispensed punishments for people charged with violating their rules. This included people charged with theft, murder, or harm to others. Strongmen and their representatives also engaged in adjudicating disputes. The threat of coercive sanction by a strongman was another basis for people's acceptance of the decisions and rules by strongmen, including the payment of taxes.

The mobilization of symbols and adherence to practices that held societal meanings was another component of the survival strategies offered by strongmen. When employed in conjunction with local norms, they can elicit powerful emotions from individuals. For strongmen, their ability to tap into societal ideas about leadership and authority provided an affective basis for gaining compliance from society. The ways through which the practices

and symbols of strongmen satisfied people's psychological needs are manifold.

The adherence of strongmen to shared societal norms regarding the practices associated with the duties of patrons and responsibilities of benefactors was one way that strongmen in Shan State developed strong bonds with local communities. For instance, the norms of obligations including the responsibilities of family members and communities towards leaders provided one basis. And in return, leaders had responsibilities toward members of their community.

Strongmen engaged in customs and performed ritualistic roles as part of efforts to link themselves to the traditional political order. For instance, some strongmen emulated practices associated with Buddhist kingship. They adopted royal titles, served as patrons for religious ceremonies and Buddhist monasteries, and sponsored philanthropic projects, such as health clinics and schools. Their assumption of the role as a benefactor bolstered their authority by evoking popular Buddhist-inspired notions of just governance.

Adherence to practices that segments of society recognize as compatible with the appropriate exercise of authority reinforced the legitimacy of claims to authority. A reputation for heroic exploits and decisive action associated with men of prowess supported the claims of strongmen to a position of authority. In addition, participation in religious rituals and adherence to Buddhist practices signified religious achievement. Some communities recognized religiosity as a desirable attribute of a leader.

For these actions to be effective, individuals must employ these practices and utilize symbols in accordance with local social conventions. Strongmen could not simply participate in religious ceremonies, adopt a title, and provide rewards and have people follow their rules obeyed. As discussed in Chapter three, the ineffectiveness of efforts to exercise social control through the adoption of fictive royalty involving the use of titles employed by traditional leaders is an example of the challenges in using symbols. This instance of fictive royalty

failed to resonate with segments of the population. Cowell's account suggests that they did not align with the social logics of the Shan State, as they strongmen did not possess the other traits of royalty (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d.).

The invocation of symbols of ethnic identity also served as a basis for forming powerful bonds between strongman and society based on identity. Many strongmen employed symbols in accord with the local customs of an ethnic community in an attempt to gain its acceptance of authority. However, the population of Shan State is ethnically diverse. Many of the customs and symbols draw on beliefs and customs specific to one ethnic group. The manifestation of an array of symbols and adherence to practice that generated a basis of authority with members of one ethnic group often did not appeal to members of other ethnic groups. For this reason, many strongmen encountered difficulties in exercising social control over people of another ethnicity.

Engagement in practices that appealed to multiple ethnic communities was a useful approach for strongmen to extend influence on a translocal level. Polyglotism was one capability through which strongmen overcame obstacles presented by identity politics and helped bring together a multi ethnic base of followers. The pursuit of goals that offered benefits for broad segments of society was also useful means for garnering support from multiple segments of society. One approach was to support greater political autonomy and eventual relief from the intrusion by *Tatmadaw* troops. But for these appeals to resonate, the population had to consider the commitment credible.

In Shan State, the practices that strongmen employed to achieve rule-making authority varied from individual to individual. But, the conditions in which they proved effective involved societal dislocations and access to resources autonomous of the state. Together, these conditions provided opportunities for individuals to offer people ways to address the challenges. In the absence of any of these conditions, the distribution of social control was

unlikely to feature autonomous strongmen.

Alternative Explanations

Cross-case comparisons address the question of why the presence of opium or central state incapacities present in all areas led to divergent patterns of social control. In the case of Shan State, the patterns feature a proliferation of strongmen, non-state armed groups, and state agents. By contrast, the patterns found in northern Laos, northern Thailand, and Kachin State featured a competition of authority between two groups –state organizations and armed resistance organizations.

Cross-case comparisons rule out explanations that the presence of valuable resources is a sufficient condition for the emergence of autonomous strongmen. In all these sub regions, at least some of the areas produced significant levels of opium. However, autonomous strongmen proliferated only in Shan State. That they did not emerge in northern Laos, the second highest-ranking producer in Southeast Asia at that time, shows that resource deterministic explanations are inadequate.

Comparisons of these cases also refute the notion that state weakness in peripheral areas in itself allows for strongmen to emerge and consolidate their rule. In all four sub regions, state leaders exhibited incapacities. In particular, the comparison of Shan and Kachin states helps rule out this explanation. In both instances, the central state possessed relatively similar levels of inadequacy. But, widely divergent outcomes involving the transformations in social control took place. In Shan State, autonomous strongmen proliferated. By contrast, Kachin State experienced the emergence of a divided order featuring the local agents of the government and those of the KIA's counter state order as the dominant actors.

The absence of autonomous strongmen in northern Laos, northern Thailand, and Kachin State shows that explanations that draw on broadly structural orientations focused on the presence of resources or state incapacities neglect the importance of society. Attention to

society and people's survival strategies is important for understanding the divergent trajectories of state formation. For instance in Burma, state-centric explanations focused on central state incapacities provide limited leverage in accounting for either the different patterns of social control or the different types of groups exercising social control. Political authority in Shan State fragmented among autonomous strongmen, armed resistance organizations, and state officials; Kachin State and other non-ethnic Burman areas experienced armed resistance organizations and state agents. By contrast, many ethnic-Burman areas encountered only limited and fleeting armed resistance to state authority. Taking into consideration the diverse material and psychological needs of society and the efforts by strongmen to meet them helps understand the proliferation of autonomous strongmen in Shan State.

Implications

This dissertation engages with scholarly literature and debates on state formation, armed conflict, and resources. It does so by examining the means whereby access to commodity capital provides strongmen and armed resistance organizations with resources critical to their establishment of authority.

One contribution is a detailed account of the dynamics of the opium sector that is attentive to difficulties faced by strongmen in accruing rents from opium trafficking. This approach helps debunk several widespread beliefs about the nexus between opium and conflict. This study finds that the mere presence of opium did not mean that non-state armed groups could easily access revenues from it. Moreover, it presents evidence that refutes the notion that strongmen could easily compel people to grow opium. The KMT in Shan State appears to have had some success, but it was politically costly. By contrast, members of local armed resistance organizations indicate their inability to prod farmers to switch to opium as a crop (Cowell, *Journal Two*, n.d., 2005).

My arguments also challenge several tenets of the conventional wisdom about powerful strongmen. It contests the belief that the use or threat of violence is their primary basis of authority. This study shows that the focus of rationalist-materialist approaches on coercive threats and rewards cannot account for instances when strongmen possessing greater access to resources or superior firepower are unable to achieve authority on the same level as other strongmen with inferior resources. Moreover, materialist perspectives do not account for why strongmen faced with pressing military threats donated money to charities; devoted time to participate in rituals and celebrations; and even operated printing presses producing poetry, newspapers, and books. Taking into account both the ideational and material bases of domination by strongmen helps explain a broader range of dynamics state formation.

Several scholars focus on the reputations for the use of coercion by Thai statist strongmen – *chao pho* and *nak leng*.³³² Yoshinori Nishizaki (2005, 2006) makes the case that this emphasis is incomplete for understanding the dominance by local statist strongmen. He points out that Banharn Silapa-archa, a local statist strongman and politician from Thailand's Suphanburi province, did not manifest these attributes. Nishizaki (2006) attributes his success to his fussiness and attention to details. Reputations for fussiness and attention to detail are characteristic not often associated with strongmen. Nishizaki (2005, p. 1987) argues that Banharn's dominance of local politics reflects that the central state has "traditionally done little to meet the developmental needs of the population" and that his legacy of thoughtfully promoting development in rural areas provided a moral basis for his authority.

Strongmen in Shan State also possessed attributes and engaged in activities not

³³² As quoted from Nishizaki (2006),

Several leading scholars of provincial Thai politics, such as James Ockey, Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, portray many of these strongmen as having a set of common personality traits that are associated with *nakleng*. Various translations into English as rowdy, rascal, tough guy, rogue and scoundrel, *nakleng* refers to men who are violent, brutal, masculine, bossy, fearless, abrasive, belligerent, ruthless, hedonistic and law-breaking, yet at the same time generous, compassionate, big hearted, loyal, caring and protective towards their supporters (p. 267).

For examples of this portrayal, see Ockey (1992, 1993, 2004), Pasuk Phongpaichit and Baker (2000), and Pasuk Phongpaichit and Phiriyarangsarn (1996, pp. 57-107).

associated with violence and coercion, but useful for exercising social control. Several gained reputations for Buddhist achievement and civic-mindedness. Their prestige reflects their support for the welfare of people and other philanthropic projects. Strongmen provided financial assistance for the construction and upkeep of religious buildings, funded education programs, and built health clinics and hospital. Khun Sa designated forest areas as protected zones, established a human rights organization, and sponsored a trip for local environmentalists to attend a United Nations summit in South America. These activities are also not associated with warlords or strongmen involved in the illicit narcotics trade. These practices draw attention to the non-coercive elements of their authority.

Policy Implications

My findings also contribute to policy debates about narcotics enforcement, civil wars, and development in conflict areas. The roles played by violence and predatory militarization in catalyzing commercialized opium production is a finding that contributes to scholarly debates about the impacts of resource and resource wealth on civil wars and institutions and informs policy. This literature reflects two separate concerns about resource effects. The first examines "rentier states," in which reliance on rents or revenues from natural resources produces a broad range of undesirable state practices, such as authoritarianism (Haber and Menaldo, 2011; Mehlum, Moene, and Torvik, 2006; Ross, 2012) and poor economic growth (Ross, 2013; Sachs and Warner, 2001). A second assesses the impact of natural resources on various dimensions of civil war (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Fearon, 2004). One crux of current debates is whether resources are exogenous or endogenous to their proposed effects on institutions and conflicts. Proponents of exogeneity insist that resources are either given or unrelated to their effects. This perspective is prevalent in the conflict literature. On the other hand, recent studies argue that resources are not independent of their proposed effects or endogenous. The purported causality is either reversed or reflects an

omitted variable (Haber and Menaldo, 2011; Lujala, Gleditsch, and Gilmore, 2005).

The Shan State case suggests that widespread opium cultivation is endogenous to conflict. In other words, the availability of surplus opium was a result of violence and armed conflicts, rather than their cause. As detailed in chapter one, in the 1950s and afterward, the population suffered from predation and violence that involved the KMT, the *Tatmadaw*, and other armed groups. One source of disruptions was the involvement of *Tatmadaw* units in the forced conscription of civilians as porters, the seizure of agricultural goods, and the destruction of private property.

These practices that impinged on people's livelihoods had two significant but unrelated effects. One is that they generated popular and deep-seated grievances directed to the central state. Another is that the predation, violence, and destruction perpetrated by armed groups, particularly the *Tatmadaw* and the KMT, impinged on people's livelihoods. Farming households took steps that involved increased reliance on opium cultivation as a strategy to mitigate risks. The Shan State case indicates that purported relationship purported between the availability of opium and the emergence of armed resistance contains an omitted variable bias. A careful examination of the shifts in Shan State's agricultural sector and the origins of armed resistance that took place in the 1950s reveals that they are outcomes or symptoms of practices by the state. Nonetheless, opium has provided a resource useful for armed resistance organizations, and state security leaders have used opium laws as the basis for pursuing counter insurgency goals.

The transition of the opium sector to commercialized production in Shan State raises questions about the determination of exogeneity and endogeneity of a resource. Opium is an agricultural commodity. Unlike other commodities such as oil and minerals, it is a social commodity in that its prevalence reflects the crop planting decisions of thousands of rural households. In the period before 1950, cultivation was primarily subsistence, and the

availability of opium for export was limited. Only after the shocks of disruptive armed conflict and militarization did it become more readily available. This development suggests that resource effects, in general, may also reflect other dynamics and that careful attention to commodities and their properties is useful, rather than lumping all commodities into one category.

This study's findings hold several implications useful for policy makers. One is that concerns that the presence of value compact commodities, such as diamonds and opium, makes foreign interventions into civil wars risky. Access to resources may allow armed groups to sustain violent resistance. A prescription by Luttwalk (1999) is for efforts to alleviate armed conflicts limit access to commodity revenue. As this study indicates, it is important to take into account that not all commodities are the same. Unlike diamonds, opium is a renewable resource, and the rising rates of displacement caused by conflict escalation often mean that cultivation increases. Moreover, unlike diamonds, opium is illicit. Opium markets are underground. As the failures of drug control efforts indicate, they are difficult to regulate.

Several governments have invested massive amounts of funding into reducing the supply of narcotics through comprehensive socio-economic development projects and law enforcement efforts. Efforts to identify a “silver bullet” solution, such as an ideal replacement crop, are one part of this approach aimed to address economic needs by providing a sustainable alternative to narcotics production. The operation of global narcotics enforcement organizations engaged in the seizures of illicit drugs and targeting drug kingpins for arrest is another approach.

The recent rise in illicit opium production in Burma and Afghanistan indicates the need for further examination of current strategies and a better allocation of resources. In Afghanistan, the US Government spent US\$7.6 billion (2002-2013) on counter-narcotics

efforts (US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2014). In the same period, production rose from an estimated 3,400 tons in 2002 to an estimated 6,400 tons in 2014 (UNODC, 2003, 2014a). In Burma, a recent surge began in 2005, when the estimated amount of annual production was 312 tons (UNODC, 2005). By 2013, annual production increased to 870 tons (UNODC, 2014b). Since then, the level of cultivation appears to have plateaued.

This study's account of the transition to commercialized opium production in Southeast Asia offers valuable insights for current global narcotics control efforts in Burma and other places. It identifies the inherently political roots of the onset of commercialized opium production in Burma. In particular, it shows that state practices, including predatory militarization and counterinsurgency actions, led farmers to adopt opium cultivation as a strategy to mitigate threats to their food security.

This finding suggests that narcotics control strategies benefit from going beyond technical-oriented approaches that involve costly efforts at meeting people's basic socioeconomic needs and recognizing the inherently political dimensions of opium production. The Shan State case suggests that the pursuit of supply-side reduction approaches without addressing the issues related to governance amounts to a fool's errand. More assistance to farmers is not necessarily better; taking a broader assessment view that takes into account state practices, militarization, access to affordable credit, and governance in their strategies and that for many farmers opium is a survival crop is essential to effective narcotics control efforts.

The study also indicates that classification of non-state armed groups involved in the trade of illicit narcotics as profit-seeking is misleading and offers few insights. The perspective that financial gain motivates non-state armed groups involved in illicit economic activities serves as a basis for the delegitimizing their political interests. This viewpoint can

be detrimental to peace settlements when the political interests of non-state armed groups involved in narcotics trafficking, such as state-allied militias, are marginalized and not taken into consideration.

This questionable dichotomy fails to address the circumstances of the involvement of these groups in illicit economic activities or consider the role of state security agents in the narcotics trade. The historical processes of illicitization in Shan State and the practices of local armed groups provide a more nuanced perspective of their involvement in the trade. This broader perspective looks at the circumstances of the mobilization and their non-financial goals. Classifying non-state armed groups as profit-motivated ignores that armed groups require resources and that the "taboo" of involvement in trading narcotic crops reflects the recent imposition of norms and rules by states.

State Formation and Armed Conflict Reconsidered

Charles Tilly's shadow also hangs over this study. On the one hand, its portrayal of states and strongmen takes cues from Tilly's (1985) characterization of states as criminal organizations engaged in protection rackets, more politely known as taxation. Both states and autonomous strongmen justify taxation on the basis that it supports the provision of order and security. In Shan State, the support for autonomous strongmen dramatizes the lack of acceptance of claims to tax made by the central state. The framing of the activities by autonomous strongmen and state organizations in terms of criminality challenges the problematic assumption that states, no matter their regime type, are normatively preferable to autonomous strongmen.

This study is also a response to Tilly's influence on the study of state formation. The imperatives of warfare are the engines of state formation according to Tilly (1990). Both war and preparation for war produced state structures through a process in which rulers' need for resources led them to become enmeshed in reciprocal obligations with society (Tilly, 1990, p.

36). The empirics underpinning this claim are from Europe. Patterns of state making involved the emergence of autonomous strongmen in Shan State in the post-World War II period indicates that under some conditions war making supports state disformation. This development supports concerns raised by Tilly (1990) and others (Leander, 2002) that processes of state formation in developing states are distinct. This study builds on the work of Tilly through its examination of understudied cases in a region other than Europe and the conditions under which the presence of a valuable commodity generates patterns of local state formation involving the emergence of autonomous strongmen.

Tilly (1990) and others indicate that post-colonial state formation processes are not the same as earlier ones. A comparison of Shan State and northern Thailand shows that central state's efforts at extending its reach through bureaucratic reforms in two different periods involved distinct dynamics and outcomes. State building in Southeast Asia involved the displacement of traditional bureaucratic structures that disrupted the fabric of a socio-politico economic order.

The abnegation of the traditional authority in northern Thailand took place at the turn of the 19th century. The introduction of a new centralized administrative system by Bangkok-based, Thai officials involved the displacement of a traditional religiopolitical system similar to the one in Shan State and the introduction of new rules and officials. Local armed resistance in the areas of present day Chiang Mai and Phayao provinces was one response to these changes. The Siamese central authorities quickly suppressed the uprisings that emerged in the early 20th century (Ramsay, 1979).

Over half century later, efforts by Rangoon-based, central state authorities to introduce bureaucratic reforms in Shan State also involved the displacement of a similar traditional system of administration. The violent conflict that broke out in Shan State in 1959 continues to present. One of the fundamental differences between these two developments is

that the earlier instance took place at a time before advances in military technology allowed for more widespread access to powerful weapons. Take the Kalashnikov rifle: This weapon helped level the playing field for third world revolutionary movements during the Cold War. The Shan resistance movements also took place during a different period of world time, which involved access to modern weaponry.³³³

A second difference was that a gradual restructuring of opium markets took place in the period after World War II. The process involved a sea change in Southeast Asia's opium sector from one in which states regulations shifted from sanctioning the sale of opium imported from abroad to one restricting local production. By consequence, the opium trade went underground at a time when disruptions to the rural sector spurred an increase in production. Participants in the revolts taking place in northern Thailand lacked access to a global commodity, such as opium, which could provide funds to finance their movement. While global capitalism had taken root well before the 1950s and spawned global markets for opium, local production in Southeast was limited and state agents carefully regulated the opium sector to minimize the leakage of tax revenue from the state-sanctioned opium trade.

The Shan resistance that emerged in the 1950s operated in a milieu in which the tentacles of the opium supply chain had penetrated remote highlands of Shan State. The illicitization of opium meant that penalties imposed for involvement in the trade created barriers to entry. But at the same time, it created opportunities for wealth accumulation.

The resources available in Shan State in the 1950s are different from this earlier instance in northern Siam. This comparison raises questions about the changing nature of global capitalism and its impact on state formation and the regulation of narcotic crops. The globalization of the trade in commodities created resilient markets for commodities. The supply chains feeding these markets provided opportunities for strongmen to tap into them

³³³ The initial period of resistance groups using antiquated weapons. But opium provided the basis for some groups to acquire modern war weapons. For instance, Khun Sa reportedly possessed surface to air missiles useful for deterring airstrikes by the *Tatmadaw* (Shenon, 1996, January 6).

and accrue resources. At the same time, state authority also played a role in structuring the markets. The emergence of a global narcotics prohibition regime represents an intervention by state forces. State organizations imposed further restrictions and often strengthened state organizations to enforce these rules.³³⁴ Enforcement efforts raised the barriers to entry and limited supply thereby enhancing the value of opium.

The Shan State case shows how access to opium markets can provide resources useful for strongmen to exercise authority autonomous of state agents. Collier (Kahn, 2000, June 16) and others indicate that the value compactness of diamonds, opium, and a few other commodities create opportunities for armed resistance organizations to accumulate revenue to support their organizations and create counter state orders. The role of opium capital in state formation dates back to at least the colonial period. Colonial regimes in Asia employed taxed revenue from opium to finance a broad range of projects useful for exercising social control. The opium trade played an integral role in the growth of Hong Kong in the colonial period. In Singapore, opium revenues from the mid-nineteenth century until the first decade of the twentieth century accounted for approximately half of its revenue. Except for the American colony of the Philippines, opium revenues provided other Southeast Asian colonial states and British India with an important stream of tax revenue (Booth, 2007; McCoy, 1972; Trocki, 1990). It was not until the mid-1960s that the Burmese state officials ended the taxation of opium.

By contrast, the postcolonial period features steps taken by states to criminalize and restrict access to opium. This process presented new opportunities for state leaders to exercise social control. In Shan State, the selective enforcement of drug laws was a basis for state security to exercise influence over local strongmen. Strongmen used their status of alignment with state agents to access opium. This revenue strengthened their coercive and

³³⁴ The United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs Act (1961) contains principles for signatories to adopt in domestic legislation for restricting narcotics.

patronage capacities.

During the Cold War period, the foreign governments were another source of resources that also shaped state formation. In Southeast Asia, foreign assistance included weapons, supplies, troops, and financial aid for both states and armed resistance organizations. These materials enhanced the capabilities for different actors to exercise social control and extract resources from society. Aid from the US Government provided statist strongmen, such as Vang Pao, Phao Sriyanond, and KMT leaders with resources useful for asserting control over the opium trade and offering rewards to society. Foreign governments also supported armed resistance organization. CPB forces drew on resources from the Chinese government to extend their influence in Shan and Kachin states. Ting Ying received Chinese government supplied resources funneled through the CPB. Khun Sa's exertion of control over the opium trade indicates that foreign support was not critical for gaining control over opium revenues or exercising social control. Nonetheless, the foreign support for both states and armed groups opposed to state control is another example of resource flows that have had profound impacts on state formation in developing states in the post-World War II period.

Attention to strongmen helps overcome limitations to understanding civil war dynamics presented by a focus on armed resistance organizations. In Shan State, a focus on strongmen helps account for the frequent shifts in alliances among units of armed resistance organizations and the morphing patterns of social control. Its close attention to strongmen also provides perspectives for understanding the mobilization of resistance. For instance, it shows the limitations of perspectives that conceptualize armed resistance organizations as ethnonationalist or ideological in mobilizing support. In Shan State, several autonomous strongmen were members of ethnic armed organizations. These strongmen rather than the formal leadership of the organization exercised social control. The dynamics through which

strongmen exercise social control are sometimes different from those ascribed to efforts by armed resistance organizations to mobilize support. Unlike conceptualizations of armed groups that focus on ethnonationalism and ideology, strongmen were intermediaries between armed resistance organizations and society. Similar to armed resistance organizations, many strongmen invoked symbols of ethnic identity and political goals. But their ability to exercise social control reflects their ability to meet broader needs of society.

This study also offers insights useful for understanding processes of state formation and instances of armed conflict in other areas. For instance, the cultivation of opium and coca in Central Asia's "Golden Crescent" region, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan, along with the Andean Region of Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia also provided resources to actors state agents, strongmen, and non-state armed groups. Felbab-Brown (2009) has identified over sixty instances of belligerent groups in twenty-one countries engaged in some form of illicit narcotics activities. Of these, at least 35 groups operated in 10 opium-producing countries.³³⁵ The focus on opium and state formation also offers insights useful for understanding other areas possessing autonomous actors and value compact resources other than opium and coca, such as diamond producing areas in Africa.

Parting Thoughts

State formation in Mainland Southeast Asia involves dynamics in state society relations that differ from those identified by Tilly (1990) and others. In the war-torn, postcolonial period, the *Tatmadaw's* approach to state making has involved a combination of coercive assimilation and accommodations with non-state armed groups involving resource access. This approach has produced a situation in which the reach of central state leaders has remained limited in some areas.

One pattern of accommodation in Shan State involves government officials providing

³³⁵ Afghanistan, Burma, China, Colombia, India, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, and Turkey.

strongmen with access to resources in return for their acceptance of state authority. Until recently, this did not involve participation in the political process. Only since 2011, a new constitution has allowed for the emergence of a hybrid regime that features the establishment of a partially elected parliament and greater civilian participation in government. At the same time, there is limited local autonomy for non-Burman areas, such as Shan State, and continued dominance by the *Tatmadaw* on security issues.

These dynamics raise several questions for further research on the processes of state formation. Under what conditions do central state leaders pursue state making practices that involve coercion and accommodations involving access to resources, but limit participation in politics? Under what conditions do arrangements that involve access to resources bind strongmen to the state and their acceptance of state rule? Can state leaders restrict access to capital from these markets or influence access to markets and capital as means to exercise social control over strongmen? If so, what are the conditions?

This dissertation has shown the importance of opium capital accumulation in local state formation. Much of the literature on the resources conflict nexus focuses on the value compactness of commodities. Other than this characteristic, many studies treat value compact commodities as more or less the same. This study draws attention to the importance of a closer examination of commodities and their supply chains in structuring access to resource revenue. It highlights the characteristics of opium and its social functions as well as the obstacles that impeded access to revenue from supply chains. One avenue for further research is to examine and compare the impact of specific resources on conflicts and state formation. For instance, under what conditions do supply chains offer opportunities for strongmen to access resources independent of state officials. What are the properties of commodities that influence access? What are the characteristics of supply chains and society that structure access to commodity capital?

Whether or not domestic or international law restricts a commodity is an important characteristic that raises questions about the roles of states and markets in state formation. Illicit capital accumulation reflects a process of state interventionist regulations. After all, it is states and the state system that determines whether a commodity is illicit or not. In the Shan State case, the illicitization of opium involved state leaders' restriction on who had access to opium. Further research on this useful to explore the impact of the prohibition and illicitization of commodities on commodity markets and the relationship of these changes to state formation and armed conflicts. For instance, under what conditions can individuals accrue revenue from commodities independent of state? What are the effects of whether a commodity is illicit or licit on state formation and armed conflicts?

One unexpected dynamic encountered in the course of research was the dramatic influence of statist strongmen in the opium sector. For instance in Laos and Thailand, statist strongmen, rather than autonomous ones, dominated the trade. In Shan State, strongmen serving as *Ka Kwe Ye* militias functioned like sponges to absorb opium capital. Despite access to resources and possession of coercive instruments, many strongmen serving as militia leaders complied with *Tatmadaw* orders to disband. By contrast, the KMT remained subordinate to Thai state authorities. One question for further research is under what conditions can state agents exercise social control over powerful strongmen, so that they are statist strongmen. For instance, the inability of KMT leaders to offer compelling rationales to local groups indicates that importance of society and local attitudes towards authority. The mechanisms established by Thai security forces for monitoring the KMT suggest that institutional arrangements may also play a role. The mutually beneficial economic and political accommodations reached between KMT leaders and Thai officials also created a basis for cooperation.

The surrender of Khun Sa in 1996 marked the conclusion of this period of strongman

domination in Shan State. Afterward, the patterns of social control involved the subordination of many local strongmen to state authorities. These include several officers from Khun Sa's MTA, that became *Tatmadaw*-allied militias (Buchanan, 2016, p. 17; Meehan, 2015, p. 273; Shan Herald Agency for News, *Show Business*, 2003). Other strongmen engaged in ceasefire arrangements with the *Tatmadaw*. The leaders of the groups became enmeshed in financial ties with state agents that created economic dependencies. For instance, many of the ceasefire strongmen, including both Mahtu Naw and Ting Ying, became *Tatmadaw*-allied militias and received tacit authority to engage in taxation and other illicit economic activities. What conditions support the subordination of autonomous strongmen to state authority in Burma and other countries? Under what conditions do they break down?

The prevalence of statist strongmen in Southeast Asia and the decline of autonomous strongmen in Shan State since 1996 raises questions about statist strongmen. For instance, what happens to autonomous strongmen, when they become statist ones? What are the implications for political systems, when outlaws transition into statist strongmen? When reliant on the state for resources access, how do statist strongmen exercise social control? Do they continue to draw on their earlier practices for exercising social control? Through what means do they access resources?

The literature on Southeast Asian strongmen provides useful perspectives. Many statist strongmen engaged in electoral politics as a basis for accessing resources and exercising social control. As Burma undergoes political reforms that involve an expanded role for elected civilian representatives will electoral politics become an avenue for accessing resources and exercising social control? For instance, will statist strongmen in Burma with access to capital and command of violence follow the path of the Filipino bosses or Thai *chao pho* and employ violence within the parameters of the political system? Ben Anderson (1990a) notes that a rise in electoral and political violence by strongmen in Thailand during

the 1980s reflected the entrenchment of parliamentary democracy in which becoming a Member of Parliament offered reliable opportunities for illicit wealth generation. This suggests that when devolution of authority to parliament provides opportunities for accessing resources, strongmen may engage in electoral competition that involves their use of violence.

The dissertation has put strongmen front and center in its examination of state formation. It shows that the dominance of state organizations over society is overstated. Powerful individuals continue to emerge and prescribe rules of behavior that can be in direct contravention to those of the central state. These instances of non-state authority are incongruent with the current international system, which premises the state as the constituent unit of authority. Counter state orders are often castigated as deviant and undesirable and sometimes tagged as warlords. Nonetheless, the ability of strongmen to meet the needs of society provides them with a basis to exercise social control.

The dissertation began with an account of an attack on Tangyan that triggered an armed uprising. In Shan State, local state formation involving the proliferation of autonomous strongmen took place in areas of conflict and a thriving opium sector. Individuals offering people relief from the devastation of war became a pervasive unit of authority in the countryside. Most of the *Bo* did not assert social control on a translocal level. Those such as Samlor, Bo Mawng, and many others operated on a local level. Conventional wisdom holds that their authority would likely derive from their ability to accrue coercive capabilities. This materialist approach offers an incomplete picture. A closer look at the practices by Khun Sa, Kornzurng, and Lo Hsin Han demonstrates that it is necessary to take into account the social foundations of strongmen authority involving their ability to meet people's psychological needs. To understand the growth of the *Bo* and other autonomous strongmen, it is useful to apprehend the elements that make them strong. In addition to the use of coercion, they engage in a broad range of practices and employed symbols that

complemented their use of “hard” power that can also be considered “soft.”

As long as there are societal dislocations and individuals access resources independent of state authorities, then conditions are ripe for the emergence of autonomous strongmen. In the case of Naw Kham, reports indicate that he followed many of the practices of earlier Shan State strongmen. Protection fees from the riverine cargo ships on the Mekong River that transported both agricultural produce and illicit drugs provided a source of revenue independent of state authorities. He reportedly distributed cash to local villagers as rewards (Howe, 2013). The case of Naw Kham indicates that autonomous strongmen are likely to persist.

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**Appendix One: Estimated Opium Production (Burma, Laos, Siam/Thailand), 1930-1996
(metric tons)**

	Burma	Siam/Thailand	Laos
1909			3.5 ³³⁶
1923		7 ³³⁷	29 ³³⁸
1926	37 ³³⁹		
1930			3-5 ³⁴⁰
1932	31 ³⁴¹		
1934	19 ³⁴²		
1936	8 ³⁴³		
1939	12.7 ³⁴⁴		
1940			7 ³⁴⁵
1944			60 ³⁴⁶
1955 ³⁴⁷	150	25	125 (50-60) ³⁴⁸
1958	18 ³⁴⁹		
1960		30 ³⁵⁰	
1962		64 ³⁵¹ (75.7 ³⁵²)	
1964	300-400 ³⁵³		
1966		145.6 ³⁵⁴	
1967 ³⁵⁵	705-775	145	80-150

³³⁶ International Opium Commission (1909, p. 357).

³³⁷ League of Nations (1923, p. 187).

³³⁸ League of Nations (1937, pp. 46-47).

³³⁹ League of Nations (1940, p. 420).

³⁴⁰ AOM Paris Indochine 282 2480, Le Conte, Inspector General of the Colonies, 18 February 1930, as cited in Gunn (1998, p. 23).

³⁴¹ League of Nations. (1937, pp. 46-47)

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ League of Nations (1940).

³⁴⁴ This British Government proposed this estimate for submission to the League of Nations. Minutes by Morley, 16 Mar., 19Apr., 17 June 1940, as cited in Maule (2002, pp. 213-214).

³⁴⁵ Tapp (1986, p. 20), Boonwaat (2006, p. 52).

³⁴⁶ Boonwaat (2006, p. 52).

³⁴⁷ The estimates for 1955 come from a report by the CIA (1956). The report is significant as it refutes claims made by US government officials of illicit opium production in China in the 1950s.

³⁴⁸ CIA (1955, p. 2).

³⁴⁹ Yawngghwe (2010, p. 57).

³⁵⁰ This estimate by Geddes is based on data collected by Young (1962). Geddes notes that the “figure could have been very much greater, but it certainly could not have been less” (Geddes, 1971, p. 6). He suggests that this estimate represents the bare minimum of production in 1960.

³⁵¹ United Nations (1967). This estimate is based on a reinterpretation of the data collected by the Kingdom of Thailand’s Public Welfare Department (1962).

³⁵² United Nations (1964). Geddes notes that the small survey samples biased the survey and “the figures could have erred on either the high or the low side” (Geddes, 1971, p. 7).

³⁵³ United Nations (1964, p. 13).

³⁵⁴ United Nations (1967, p. 59).

³⁵⁵ United Nations (1967, pp. 59, 64, 68).

1968 ³⁵⁶	400	200	100-150
1971 ³⁵⁷	400-600	100-150	35
1975 ³⁵⁸	440	30	50
1976	400	50	50
1977	300 (800) ³⁵⁹	50 (45) ³⁶⁰	50
1978	300-350	70	50
1978/79 ³⁶¹	125	17	40
1979/80 ³⁶²	180	12	40
1980/81 ³⁶³	550	50	50
1981/82 ³⁶⁴	600	57	50
1982/83 ³⁶⁵	600	35	35
1983/84 ³⁶⁶	740	45	40 (25) ³⁶⁷ (30) ³⁶⁸
1984/85	490 ³⁶⁹	40 ³⁷⁰ (35) ³⁷¹	95 ³⁷² (100) ³⁷³
1985/86 ³⁷⁴	700-1,100	20-25	100-290
1988 ³⁷⁵	1,125		
1989	1,544		
1990	1,621		
1991	1,728		
1992	1,660		
1993	1,791		
1994	1,583		
1995	1,664		
1996	1,760		

³⁵⁶ United States. Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (1970). "The World Opium Situation," p. 10, cited in McCoy (1972, p. 379). Estimates are for all three countries and are rounded to the nearest five tons.

³⁵⁷ US Congress (1971, pp. 578-584).

³⁵⁸ For 1975-1978, CIA. (1978, p. 1). The report notes that estimates of Thailand are not comparable from year to year because of differences in coverage.

³⁵⁹ UNDCP (2001, p. 49).

³⁶⁰ UNDCP (2001, p. 49).

³⁶¹ National Narcotics Intelligence Consumer Committee (NNICC) (1983, p. 43.)

³⁶² NNICC (1983, p. 43).

³⁶³ NNICC (1983, p. 43).

³⁶⁴ NNICC (1983, p. 43); Mathijsen. (1982). This report cites figures by the European (Economic) Commission estimated that opium production in Burma was between 500 and 600 tons and in Thailand was between 50 to 110 tons in Thailand.

³⁶⁵ NNICC (1983, p. 43; 1987, p. 63).

³⁶⁶ NNICC (1987, p. 86).

³⁶⁷ CIA (1985, p. 1).

³⁶⁸ NNICC (1987, p. 86).

³⁶⁹ CIA (1985, p. 1); NNICC (1987, p. 86).

³⁷⁰ CIA (1985, p. 1).

³⁷¹ NNICC (1987, p. 86).

³⁷² CIA (1985, p. 1).

³⁷³ NNICC (1987, p. 86).

³⁷⁴ NNICC (1987, p. 86).

³⁷⁵ UNDCP (2001, p. 60). Estimates are for 1988 through 1996.

Appendix Two: Strongmen of Shan State by Location, 1958-1960³⁷⁶

Location	Names of Strongmen
Maw Hpa/Mong Leun	Sao Ton Kham
Tangyan/Mong Gao	Ngar Hseng Mong aka Bo Kong (2nd Bn SSA commander) Na Wai Polam Ho Mao
Mong Hsu	Sai Pan Mau aka Bo Mong Nam Gat
Mong Ha/Mong Heng	Sai Kai Kho Bo Hso Yin aka Bu Mong Kwan Kuk Na Wa
Mong Yai	Mun Sao (monk) Kyong Hseng Mong Sao Nor Mya
Wan Pon	Hso Lek (Alias) Bu Mong Wan Pon
Wan Sam/Kehsi	Hsang Onn, a police officer that went underground with more than 30 policemen with arms.
Kehsi	Sao Hso Peuk/Sao Lu Hsaw Pi Ta (younger brother of Bu Heng Hson Kye)
Loi Hko	Bo Gnar Mong aka Bo Sala Hseng Keng Bo Nan Hseng
Na Makaw	Bo Hsang Kong
Wan Tsang	Bu Lu Bo Mangala Bo Sam Hsoi Bo Hso Kam Mong (aka Bu Mong Pa Hsa) Bo Mong Mong Tun, Bo Hos Le Mong (from Peng Long/ Wan Le)
Lan To/Na Nang	Bo Man Hong La
Want Gat/Mong Pat/Mong Tom/Mong Ma	Bo Dewaing, later President of the Mong Tai Army
Kun Pang/ Mong Leun (near Mong Hsu)	Bo Kaw Kham (aka Sai Ywat Mong)
Namhsan	Bo Pan Ong Bo Nut
Mong Ket	Bu Dan Lang Htawng Bo Shang Kw Bo Deya Bo Hsu
Mong Kung	Bo Kan Hok Bo Hso Lam (Na Pui)
Mong Yawn/Mong Lang	Kwang Zerng
Kengtung	Man Sao (monk name) aka U Gondara aka Gnar Kham
Petkang	Sao Nor Mong
Pa Leung/Kengtung	Khun Myint On Sang Ho Yi Hseng Wan
Hsenwi	Bo Lao Woo (Wu) with 300 men

³⁷⁶ Central Committee, Shan State Progressive Party (1985, April 30). History of the Shan Revolution. Translated from Shan. In Lintner (1986, *Journal X*, pp. 301-302).

Appendix Three: Armed Resistance Organizations in Shan State By Period, 1949-1996

Name	Period	Leaders(s)	Notes
First Period 1949-1958			
Communist Party of Burma (CPB)	1949-1989	Various Factions	-Weakened by Government Amnesty, 1958
Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO)	1949-1958		-Weakened by Government Amnesty, 1958.
Pawngyawng National Defense Force (PNDF)	1949-1950	Naw Seng, 1949-1950	-Retreated into China, 1950 -Remnants returned in 1968 as members of the CPB
Shan State Communist Party (SSCP)	1954-1958		-Several members accepted Government Amnesty, 1958
United Pa-O National (Liberation) Organization (UPNO)/Pa-O National Liberation Army (PNLA)	1950-1958	U Hla Pe, 1948-58	-Surrendered in 1958. -Leaders participated in Parliamentary politics, but resumed armed struggle
Second Period 1958 – 1967			
<i>Num Suk Harn</i>	1958-1966	Chao Noi, 1958-66	-Munity, 1966
Shan National Unity Front (SNUF)	1961-1964	Kornzurng, 1961-1964	-Joined SSA, 1964
Shan State Independence Army (SSIA)	1960-1964	Long Khun Maha, 1960 Khun Thawda, 1961-1964	-Joined SSA, 1964
Shan National Army (SNA)	1961-1964	Sao Gnar Kham, 1961-1964 Sara Ba Thein, 1964	-Mutiny
Kachin Independence Army (KIA)	1961-Present	Zau Seng, 1961-1975 Tu Jai, 1975-1980 Zau Mai, 1980-2001	-Ceasefire, 1994-2011
Kokang Revolutionary Force (KRF)	1962-1964	Jimmy Yang, 1962-1964	-Joined SSA, 1964
Shan State Army (SSA)	1964-Present	Sao Hearn Kham, 1964-19 Sam Mong, 1970s-78 Sao Hso Lane, 1979-83 Sao Hso Noom, 1983 Sao Sai Lek, 1983-1995	-2 nd Brigade split to form TRA, 1984 -Ceasefire, 1989-2011 with SLORC/SPDC
United Anti-Socialist Army (UASA)	1964	Khun Sa, 1964	-Accepted status as government militia, 1964
Kayan New Land Party (KNLP)	1964-Present	Shwe Aye, 1964-2006	-Ceasefire, 1994
Shan National Independence Army (SNIA)	1966-1968	Hseng Saw, 1966-68	-Disarmed by Kornzurng -Some members became government militia.
Pa-O National Liberation Organization	1966-1968	Bo San Thein, 1967-68	-Became the Shan State Nationalities Liberation Organization (SSNLO), 1968.
Shan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)	1974-1976	Khun Myint, 1974-1976	-Merged into CPB-NEC as 768 th Brigade, 1976
Third Period (1968-1989)			
Communist Party of Burma	1968-1989	Ba Thin Thein, 1968-89	-Mutiny, 1989
Shan State Nationalities	1968-1974	Bo San Thein 1968-1972	-Split into two factions,

Liberation Organization (SSNLO)		U Hla Pe, 1972-1975	1974 (See below).
Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organization (SSNPLO)	1973/4-2008	Tha Kalei, 1974-2006	-Pro-CPB faction of the SSNLO. -Ceasefire with government, 1994 -Disarmed, 2008.
Shanland Nationalities Liberation Front (SNLF)	1973-1975/6	U Hla Pe, 1973/4-1975	-Formerly SSNLO. -Anti-Communist breakaway faction. -Formed PNA, 1975.
Pa-O National Army (PNA)	1975/6-2010	Kyaw Sein, 1976-1977 Aung Khamhti, 1977-2010	-Formed after armed group led by Hkun Ye Naing joined with U Hla Pe. -Ceasefire with government, 1991 -Became government militia, 2010
Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA)	1969-1982	Kornzurng, 1969-1982	-Formerly SSA -Formed TRA, 1982
Kokang People's Liberation Army (KPLA)	1968	Pheung Kya Shin, 1968	-Merged with CPB-NEC, 1968.
Shanland United Army (SUA)	1972-1985	Hpalang, 1972-76 Khun Sa, 1976-85	-Joined TRA, 1985.
Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA)	1976-2005	Kwan Tong, 1976-1979 Than Lwin, 1979-82 Aung Khaing, 1983 Kyaw Hla, 1983-1986 Ai Mong, 1987-2005	-Formerly Fifth and Sixth Battalions of the First Brigade of SSA -Ceasefire, 1991 -Disarmed, 2005
Lahu State Army (LSA)	1973-1994	Pu Kyaung Long, 1973-80 Char Ui, 1980-84	-Former government militia -Became LNA
Lahu National Army (LNA)	1985-unknown	Char Ui, 1985-	-No longer active
Wa National Army (WNA)	1974-Present	Mahasang 1974-2005? Ta Ai Nyunt, 2008	-Formerly Vieng Ngun <i>Ka Kwe Ye</i> -Peace Agreement with government, 1997
Shan State Revolutionary Army (SSRA)	1973-1981	Lo Hsing Han, 1973 Lo Hsing Min, 1974-1981	-Former <i>Ka Kwe Ye</i> . -Became <i>Pyithusit</i> militia, 1981.
Tailand Revolutionary Army (TRA)	1984-1985	Kornzurng, 1984-1985	Merger of SURA and SSA's 2 nd Brigade, 1984 SUA joins, 1985
Mong Tai Army (MTA)	1985-1996	Kornzurng, 1985-1991 Bo Dewing, 1992-1993 Khun Sa, 1993-1996	-Formerly TRA. -Surrender, 1996 -Several units formed RCSS/SSA
Fourth Wave (1989-1996)**			
United Wa State Army (UWSA)	1989-Present	Pao Yu Chang, 1989-Present	-Emerged from CPB collapse, 1989 -Ceasefire Arrangement, 1989-2011
Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)	1989-Present	Pheung Kya Shin, 1989-present	-Emerged from CPB collapse, 1989 -Ceasefire Arrangement, 1989-2011

Kachin Democratic Army (KDA)	1991-2009	Mahtu Naw, 1991-present	-Formerly KIA Fourth Brigade -Ceasefire, 1991-2009 -Become government militia, 2009
Pa-O People's Liberation Organization (PPLO)	1991-2009	Khun Okker, 1991-2009	-Faction of PNA opposed ceasefire. -Merged with the Pa-O National Liberation Organization, a splinter group of the SNPLO in 2009
National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS)	1989-present	Lin Ming Xian (aka Sai Leun), 1989-Present	-Emerged from CPB collapse, 1989 -Ceasefire Arrangement, 1989-2011
Shan State National Army (SSNA)	1995-2005	Gun Yawd, 1995-2004 Sai Yi, 2005	-Formerly MTA -Ceasefire, 1995-2005 -Disarmed, 2005 -Some forces merged with Shan State Army/Restoration Council of Shan State

Appendix Four: Cases of Known Involvement of Belligerent Groups with Illicit Drugs (Modified)

Group	Type of Narcotic	Type of involvement	Period
Afghanistan			
Mujahideen	Opium/Heroin	Taxation of cultivation and trafficking; processing	1980
Warlords	Opium/Heroin	Taxation of cultivation and trafficking; processing	1990s`
Taliban	Opium/Heroin	Taxation of cultivation and trafficking; processing; international trafficking ^a	1995-99 2001-
Northern Alliance	Opium/Heroin	Taxation of cultivation and trafficking; processing	1990s
Warlords	Opium/Heroin	Taxation of cultivation and trafficking; processing; domestic trafficking	2000s
Al Queda ^a	Opiates	Trafficking	2000s
Armenia			
Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia	Heroin	Trafficking	1970s-1980s
Burma³⁷⁷			
Communist Party of Burma	Opiates	Taxation of cultivation; domestic trafficking; processing	1970s-1980s
Kuomintang	Opiates	Taxation of cultivation, trafficking	1950-1980s
Kachin Independence Organization	Opiates	Taxation of cultivation	1980s-
Shan United Army	Opiates Methamphetamines	Taxation of cultivation; processing; trafficking Production; trafficking	1970s-1990s

³⁷⁷ Several other groups involved in the taxation of opiates in Shan State, but not listed are the Kokang Revolutionary Force, the National Democratic Army-Kachin, and Shan State Army, and several *Tatmadaw*-allied militias known as People's Militia Forces (*pyithusit*).

United Wa State Army	Opiates Methamphetamines	Taxation of cultivation and trafficking; processing; trafficking Production; trafficking	1989-
<i>Ka Kwe Ye</i> Militias	Opiates	Taxation of cultivation; trafficking	1960s-1970s
Mong Tai Army	Opiates	Taxation of cultivation; processing; trafficking	1989-1990s
Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army	Opiates Methamphetamines	Taxation of cultivation and trafficking Production; trafficking	1989-
Democratic Karen Buddhist Army	Opiates	Taxation of cultivation and trafficking	1990s
Shan State National Army	Opiates	Taxation of cultivation and trafficking	1990s
China			
Anti-Manchu underground groups	Opium	Trafficking; distribution ^b	Nineteenth Century
Chiang Kai-Shek	Opium	Taxation of cultivation; processing; distribution	1920-1940s
Communist Party of China	Opium	Tolerance; Taxation	1930s-1940s
Colombia			
<i>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia</i> (FARC)	Opium Cocaine Marijuana	Taxation of cultivation, processing, and trafficking; processing; trafficking	1980s-
<i>Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia</i> (paramilitaries) <i>Bandas criminales</i> and <i>grupos emergentes</i>	Opium Cocaine Marijuana	Taxation of cultivation, processing, and trafficking; processing; trafficking	1980s-
<i>Ejército de Liberación Nacional</i> (National Liberation Army)	Cocaine Marijuana	Taxation of cultivation; Protection of labs	1990s -
M-19	Cocaine	Facilitation and protection of trafficking	1980s
<i>Ejército Popular de Liberación</i> (Popular Liberation Army)	Cocaine Marijuana	Taxation of cultivation	1980s
Cuba			

Omega 7	Cocaine Marijuana	Protection of trafficking and distribution	1980s
India			
Sikhs (Punjab)	Opiates	Trafficking	1980s
Kashmiri Insurgents	Opiates	Trafficking	1980s-
Naxalites	Opiates Marijuana	Taxation of cultivation, trafficking	1990s-
National Socialist Council of Nagaland	Opiates	Trafficking	1980s-
People's Liberation Army (Imphal Valley and Manipur)	Opiates	Trafficking	1980s-
United Liberation Front of Assam	Opiates	Trafficking	1980s-
Kuki National Army	Opiates	Trafficking	1980s-
Indochina			
Hill Tribes	Opium	Cultivation	Until 1970s
Independence Movement	Opium	Trafficking	1945-1949
Lebanon			
Palestinian, Phalangist, Druze, and Shiite factions during civil war	Hashish	Taxation of cultivation; distribution	1970s-1980s
Hezbollah	Hashish Heroin Cocaine Methamphetamines ^a	Taxation of cultivation; trafficking Taxation of cultivation; trafficking Trafficking from Latin America to Europe Taxation of distribution in Canada and the United States	1980s 1980s-1990s 1990s- 1990s-
Nepal			
Maoists	Opiates	Trafficking	1990s-
Nicaragua			
Contras	Cocaine	Protection and taxation of trafficking	1980s
Northern Ireland			

Real IRA	Opiates, cocaine, and marijuana	Trafficking; distribution	1990s-
Irish People's Liberation Organization	Opiates, cocaine, and marijuana	Trafficking; distribution	Early 1990s
Ulster Defense Association	Opiates, cocaine, and marijuana	Trafficking; distribution	1990s-
Ulster Volunteer Force	Opiates, cocaine, and marijuana	Trafficking; distribution	1990s-
Pakistan			
Kashmiri militants	Opiates	Trafficking	1990s-
Baluchi militants	Opiates	Trafficking	2000s-
Taliban	Opiates	Refining; trafficking	2000s
Palestinian Territory			
Hamas	Opiates Cocaine	Taxation of trafficking and distribution (tri-border region of South America)	1990s-
Peru			
Shining Path	Cocaine	Taxation of cultivation; protection of trafficking; processing; money laundering Protection of trafficking	1980s-1990s 2000s
Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA)	Cocaine	Taxation of cultivation	1980s
Philippines			
Abu Sayyaf Group	Marijuana ^a	Production	2000s-
New People's Army	Marijuana	Taxation of cultivation; trafficking; distribution	1980s-
Moro National Liberation Front	Marijuana Methamphetamines	Taxation of cultivation Production	1990s
Russia			
Chechen mujahideen	Opiates	Trafficking	1990s-
Renegade Russian Armed forces	Opiates	Trafficking; distribution ^a	1990s-
Spain			

ETA	General	Trafficking; distribution; money laundering	1980s-
Sri Lanka			
LTTE	Heroin Cocaine Methamphetamines	Trafficking	1980s-
Turkey			
PKK	Opiates	Taxation of trafficking and money laundering; processing; trafficking	1980s-
Dev-Sol	Heroin	Trafficking	1970s-1980s
Gray Wolves	Heroin	Trafficking	1970s-1980s
Uzbekistan			
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan	Opiates	Trafficking	1990s-

^a Widespread allegations have been made without clear tangible evidence.

^b Trafficking refers to transportation in bulk to wholesale dealers, distribution refers to retail to drug users.

Source: Felbab-Brown (2009, Appendix A).