

**On the Move across Phnom Dangrek:
Mobilities and Silences in the Thai-Cambodian Borderland**

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Abstract

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This dissertation is a historical and ethnographic study of a mountainous landscape of Phnom Dangrek where it has always been the periphery of various political entities and marked by violent Cold War struggle and regional politics. Through analysis of mobility and silence and engagement with decolonizing methodology, this study demonstrates how people live, labor, and remember at the border, amidst the state's fragmented 'battlefield to marketplace' policies. This study not only captures the movements and silences across the border checkpoint and its prior history of Cambodian civil war through the lived experiences of border dwellers. It also investigates how the Chong Chom border market and Surin Province became one of the popular destinations for Cambodian migrant workers in the post-war era and how this border economy has caused ambiguity and in-betweenness among the border migrant community through their daily movements across two countries and strategies of survival of both Thai and Cambodian border dwellers. The chapters are chronologically organized by materials and research sites in order to reflect the way I approach the studies of cross-border mobility and silence that impacted by warfare namely Chapter 1 Phnom Dangrek border landscape; Chapter 2 Thailand and the Cambodian civil war; Chapter 3 Border camps and its post-war land use changes; Chapter 4 Thailand's Immigration policies on displaced people and migrant labors; Chapter 5 Market, checkpoint, casino, and post-war border economy; and Chapter 6 Border dwellers' strategies of survival in the post-war forest sanctuary.

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life goal of being an anthropologist from Surin. I wish to dedicate this research to those who died trying during the Cambodian civil war and people in Surin and Oddar Meanchey Province. I hope our ties will keep tightening and healing one another.

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Timeline

Cambodia	Thailand
<p>French Colonial Era</p> <p>1863 France colonizes Cambodia as part of Indochinese protectorate/colony for 90 years.</p> <p>1941 Prince Norodom Sihanouk is crowned king under the French Cambodia after the Japanese Occupation during WWII.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Partial Annexation of Cambodia by Thailand (Siem Reap – Battambang – Sisophon)</p> <p>1946 France re-imposes its protectorate. Communist guerrillas allied with the Viet Minh against the French</p> <p>Post-Colonial Era</p> <p>1953 Cambodian Independence from France. Kingdom of Cambodia establishes</p> <p>1955 Sihanouk becomes prime minister. His father becomes king</p> <p>1959 Cambodia files complaint to the ICJ over Preah Vihear temple ownership</p> <p>1960 Sihanouk becomes head of state after his father dies</p> <p>1962 Preah Vihear temple belongs to Cambodia according to The ICJ rules</p> <p>1965 Sihanouk allows North Vietnamese guerrillas to set up bases in Cambodia against the US and the US-backed South Vietnam government</p> <p>1969 The US secret bombing campaign on Ho Chi Minh trails in Laos and Cambodia</p>	<p>New Political Era</p> <p>1868 – 1910 King Chulalongkorn Reign (RamaV)</p> <p>1904 & 1907 Siam signs treaties with France on border demarcation which Phnom Dangrek region</p> <p>1927 Thailand's first Immigration Act</p> <p>1932 Constitutional monarchy by Khana Ratsadon (bloodless coup/revolution)</p> <p>1933 Coup by Phahon Phonphayuhasena</p> <p>1939 Coup by Plaek Phibunsongkram</p> <p>1939 Siam changes its name to Thailand</p> <p>1940 – 41 Franco – Thai War (Indochinese Annexation by Phibun administration)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">WWII – Japanese Occupation in SEA</p> <p>1946 End of Annexation, Japan loses the WWII</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Thailand allies with the US</p> <p>1947 Coup by Phin Choonhavan</p> <p>1947 Military coup by Phibun. The military retains power until 1973.</p> <p>1950 Post-WWII Immigration Act</p> <p>1957 Sarit Thanarat overthrows Phibun</p> <p>1958 Sarit self-coup</p> <p>1963 Sarit dies – succeeded by Thanom Kittikachon</p> <p>1965 The US uses Thailand as the airforce bases throughout the Vietnam War period</p> <p>1967 ASEAN established</p>

1970	Coup by Lon Nol. Sihanouk exiles in China. Cambodia becomes the Khmer Republic. North Vietnamese and communist Khmer Rouge guerrillas gradually takes over Cambodia against Lon Nol.	1971	Thanom self-coup
		1973	Student Uprising brings about the fall of the military government
		1973	October –February 1975 – Sanya Thammasak Administration
	Cambodia Year Zero and Genocide	1975	- February - March – Seni Pramroj Left because of Parliamentary disapproval of formal policy
1975	Khmer Rouge by Pol Pot overthrows Lon Nol. The first wave of Cambodian refugees to Thailand (Old refugee)		- March - April 1976 – Kukrit Pramroj administration
			- July – Thailand establishes diplomatic ties with China
1976	Khmer Rouge rules the country as Democratic Kampuchea.	1976	Military takes over the government again
1976	Ieng Sary visits Thailand	1976	- April - Seni Pramroj becomes prime minister again
			- October - the <i>Thammasat Massacre</i> . Sangad Chaloryu overthrows Seni Pramroj
1977	Clashes with Vietnam	1977	Thanin Kraivichian Administration
			- November –March 1980 – Kriangsak Chomanan Administration
1978	The Vietnamese Invasion	1978	New constitution promulgated.
			Thailand's first Alien Employment Act
1979	January – The Vietnamese takes over Phnom Penh. Khmer Rouge flee to the Thai border region. The People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) is established. The Cambodian civil war at the Thai border begins.	1979	Preah Vihear Massacre
			New Immigration Act
1981	The Vietnamese-backed Party wins election. The government-in-exile (CGDK) is formed and holds its seat at the United Nations.	1980	Prem Tinsulanonda becomes prime minister
1985	Hun Sen becomes prime minister. Intense fights along the Thai border.	1981	The Young Turk Rebellion
		1983	Prem forms a civilian government and re-elected in 1986.
1989	Vietnamese troops withdraw. The country is renamed to State of Cambodia	1988	Chatichai Choonhaven Administration
1991	Paris Peace Agreement is signed. Sihanouk becomes head of state.		Chatichai announces “Changing Battlefield to Marketplace” policy
1993	UNTAC sponsors a general election. Two Prime Ministers (Funcinpec's Prince Norodom Ranariddh as the first prime minister and Hun Sen as the second prime minister); Sihanouk becomes king again.	1991	Coup by Sunthorn Kongsompong; Anand Panyarachun Administration.
		1992	General Suchinda Kraprayoon take overs Anand's cabinet which leads the May Uprising.
			Anand temporarily returns to the position before Chuan Leekpai becomes prime minister. (Sep 1992 – July 1995)

1994	The Kingdom of Cambodia revived; CGDK loses its seat at the UN. Amnesty are given to thousands of Khmer Rouge guerrillas	1995	Banharn Silpa-archa becomes prime minister (July 1995 – Nov 1996)
1997	Coup by Hun Sen. Pol Pot is prisoned by Ta Mok in Anlong Veng. The clashes between Hun Sen's state troops and Prince Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC in O'Smach area	1996	Chavalit Yongchaiyudh wins elections
1998	April – Pol Pot dies in Anlong Veng July –Hun Sen's CPP wins election; Khmer Rouge ends after Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea defect	1997	Asian financial crisis. Thailand receives loans from the IMF; Chuan Leekpai becomes prime minister
1999	- Oddar Meanchey is re-established as a province. - Cambodia joins ASEAN	2001	Thaksin Shinawatra becomes prime minister
2003	- January – Famous Thai actress accused of Cambodia of stealing Angkor Wat from Thailand. Hundreds of Thai nationals are evacuated from Cambodia amid angry protests in front of the Thai embassy in Phnom Penh - May – UN approves agreement on Khmer Rouge Trials - July – General elections	2002	Chong Chom – O'Smach Border Checkpoint officially opens
2008	Cambodia applies the Preah Vihear as UNESCO World Heritage site	2005	Thaksin wins election for the second term
2011	Cambodia requests reinpretation of the meaning of Preah Vihear's vicinity	2006	Coup by Sonthi Boonyaratglin
2013	ICJ affirms Cambodia's temple ownership and request the withdrawal of Thai soldiers in the disputed area and general election	2007	General election
2015	The Implication of ASEAN Community	2008 – 2011	Military clashes at the border near Preah Vihear temple
2016	New Implication on promoting Free Movement and Labor across ASEAN Countries	2008	Two prime ministers from People's Power Party removed by constitutional court - December - Abhisit Vejjajiva becomes Prime Minister
2018	Cambodia's general election	2010	Red Shirt Protests
2020	Hun Sen's Thirty-fifth year in power	2011	Yingluck Shinawatra wins election
2020	Covid-19 Pandemic The Thai-Cambodian Borders close since April 2020	2014	Coup by Prayuth Chan-O-Cha
		2017	Thailand's latest constitution
		2019	Thailand's general election

Abbreviations

AAMNP	ASEAN Agreement on the Movement of Natural Persons
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BCO	Thai-Cambodian Border Coordination Office
BLO	Border Liaison Office
BPP	Border Patrol Police
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
DPPU	Displaced Persons Protection Unit
ERW	Explosive Remnant of War
FUNCINPEC	Front Ui National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique Et Coopératif (The National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia)
HMAU	Humanitarian Mine Action Units (Regional Units of TMAC)
ICEA	Integrated Landmine Clearance to Promote Cross-Border Economy (in ASEAN Countries) Lesson Learned from Thailand
ICJ	International Court of Justice
KID	Khao I Dang Transit Camp
MDU	RTAF's Mobile Development Unit
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand
MOI	Ministry of Interior of Thailand
NSC	National Security Council
NTFPs	Non-Timber Forest Products
OCDP	Operating Centre for Displaced Persons
PAO	Provincial Administration Organization (อบจ. - องค์การบริหารส่วนจังหวัด)
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
RFD	Royal Forest Department
RTA	Royal Thai Army
RTAF	Royal Thai Armed Forces
SAO	Subdistrict Administration Organization (อบต. - องค์การบริหารส่วนตำบล)
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
TDA	Thai Civilian Deminer Association
TMAC	Thailand Mine Action Center
UNBRO	United Nations Border Relief Operation
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority for Cambodia
VDS	Voluntary Development and Self Defense Village

Introduction

Gone Away to Come Back

Prologue

This study began from my own route from my hometown - Surin, the border province in the lower Northeastern Thailand (*Isaan Tai*) close to Cambodia to pursue higher education at the University of Washington, Seattle. It all began when I moved to Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand, to study at one of the most privileged schools and universities in the country. This pattern of migration was the pathway that many descendants of middle-class families from Isaan would take in order to live a better life with a good education. That said, it is a journey of how I find my way back to my birthplace, the place that I did not know much about but that is engrained within me. Initially, this research project started with my attempt to understand the Thai-Cambodian relations through the local Surin point of view. Born and raised in Surin Province from a family speaking both Thai and Khmer, I have never been thought to speak Khmer properly. When I was young, I once naively asked my father, “Why do people in Surin speak Khmer but not people in Cambodia speak Thai if we have been taught that Thailand is so influenced in the region?” I realize how much the lower Isaan region shares similarities in values, traditions, and religious beliefs with Cambodia and Laos. Nevertheless, the nationalistic sentiments have always been suppressive and distancing Isaan from its neighboring countries.

Through my interests in ASEAN¹ regional cooperation and the study of local historiography of Surin Province, I explore how the local history was written synchronously with the national narrative and successfully subjugated the minorities under the state governmentality (chapter 1). However, understanding how provincial identity has been made is not enough. I found knowledge

¹ the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a supranational organization of Southeast Asian countries established during the Cold War in 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand.

of Khmerness and cross-border relations with Cambodia is lacking and estranged by a Thai standardized education and bureaucracy. My goal is to find ways to reconnect and search for what has been shut by national boundaries beyond the identity politics that is made up of historiography. The unspoken or silenced stories that I have never learned about my hometown due to the historical amnesia and Bangkok-centric education.

Ashley Thompson's article, "Oh, Cambodia! Poems from the border" (2015) was my first reading about the refugee camps in Thailand during my first year in Anthropology, and third year in America. The article tells of the relationship between the author who used to work as camp staff and the English teacher and Cambodian kids who resided in the Site II camp in Sakaeo Province. The article provoked me to ask my parents about the existence of the camp in my hometown. I was so surprised to learn that there was a camp so close to my grandparents' house where my father grew up. Why has the history of refugee camps been out of my sight for this long? Why did my discovery of the camps take place so far away from its location?

From self-awareness turned responsibility, this dissertation is an ethnography about the lived experience across Phnom Dangrek mountains based on how I rediscover where I came from. The ways I narrate and approach my subjects thus usually begin with the moments I realized that I might not have known about such stories. Instead of telling a classic line of how ethnographers first encounter their informants or first arrived at the field site, I tell the stories of returning home. Throughout this dissertation, I try not to shy away from acknowledging my naïveté and inexperience. This approach allows me to open the door to hear from my informants and leads to a multitude of actors, both human and nonhuman entities. I aim to provide the nuanced and complex accounts from the vantage viewpoint. More broadly, this presents the interconnection between local, national, and regional politics. In the marginalized space like the Phnom Dangrek region, it has been being neglected of its contribution in telling episodes of political regimes since its existence from the ancient time, colonial-made nation-states, Cold

War, and the current authoritarianism in Southeast Asia. I embrace myself to share these accounts to expose the rotten structured prejudice that conditioned the lives at the border from both sides.

Phnom Dangrek / Phanom Dongrak

This research is situated in the Dangrek Mountains specific to provincial boundaries of Surin Province, Thailand, and Oddar Meanchey Province of Cambodia. Phnom Dangrek has always been the periphery of various political entities that could reach its power to the region from ancient times to the presence of Thailand and Cambodia (Vail 2011). The mountains connect the Khorat Plateau and the lower Khmer plain. Phnom (ភ្នំ) in Khmer or Phanom (พนม) in Thai means ‘mountain’; Dangrek in Khmer means ‘carrying pole’ given as the edge of the Khorat Plateau meanwhile Dongrak in Thai, a loanword but homophonic twist from the Khmer language, has the literal meaning ‘jungle of love.’ It is also the name of the newest border district of Surin Province, founded in 2007². For the whole manuscript, I will use the term ‘Phnom Dangrek’ for broader scholar accessibility.

For centuries, people had crossed the Dangrek range through countless rugged mountain passes before it was demarcated during the colonial era. The manifest of movements across the mountains at an early age is the Angkorian temples that were built near the mountain cliffs such as Preah Vihear Temple, the most academically and politically well-known ruins due to the border dispute issue.³ Dangrek mountains became the frontier between Thailand and Cambodia by the 1904 and 1907 Franco-Siamese (Thai) treaties’ border demarcation projects. The accomplishment of these treaties was the turning point for the political transformation in Southeast

² Phanom Dongrak District (Amphoe) was originally part of Kap Cheong District before becoming an independent sub-district in 1995 and followed by the new Thai administrative law that had upgraded all the sub-districts in the country to become the official district in 2007.

³ The Preah Vihear border dispute case was the fight over the ownership of the temple and its vicinity. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) declared the ownership to Cambodia back in 1962 during the post Cambodian Independence era. It became an issue again in the late 2000s (2008 – 2010) due to the internal politics that crashed over at the ancient Hindu temple at the border.

Asia. It created the new imagined communities and the geo-body (Anderson 1991; Winichakul 1994) of Cambodia as part of the French Protectorate/ Colony (Indochina) and Siam (Thailand).

The emergence of the border did not hold much practical meaning to those who lived in this region at first; the nomads and homesteaders continued their living across the mountains as there was little enforcement or state coercion controlling them where to live and where to cross. The border only began to create a conscious of the substantial difference in nationality for the highlanders who were mostly oriented politically and economically toward Siam (Vail 2011). In other words, the border's existence has changed the way people understand the Dangrek landscape and created new imaginations regarding borders, boundaries, and their border-crossing practices, which resulted in a deep awareness of crossover realities in a binational environment (Rösler and Wendl 1999). It also split the ethnic Khmer groups, who have extensively lived across the mountainous area, into different nationalities. Cross-border relations between Thais and Cambodians became less visible in practice and imagination. Especially during the Cold War period, the Cambodian civil war caused the massive displacement of the Cambodian refugees to the Thai border camps after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. The directions of human flows changed when both Thailand and Cambodia announced the official border closure because of the war in the mid-1970s. It was the moment that the Thai state began to develop and publish the immigration and refugee laws and policies. The management system and practical guidelines for state officials were created to manage the displaced persons from its neighboring countries, including Cambodia, Laos, and Burma (Derks 2013), and transform to migrant workers to fulfill a high demand in country's industrial development since the 1980s.

To be more precise, my field research was mostly conducted within the Chong Chom – O'Smach community. This border pass became one of the official entrances because of its geopolitical location since the Cambodian civil war. O'Smach is a small Cambodian lone town located at the escarpment of Dangrek mountains as the result of the watershed measurement. It

was a perfect location for the last stronghold of the Prince Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC party against the Hun Sen government at the end of the twentieth century (1997-99). Throughout wartime, the security enforcement got stricter, and the authorities limited the crossing options through only provided passes. Chong Chom pass was one of few passes that were chosen to remain in operation. The construction of the border casinos and the border market have created the border community and flourished the post-war border economy. Therefore, this study not only captures the movements and silences across the border checkpoint and its prior history of Cambodian civil war through the lived experiences of border dwellers. It also investigates how the Chong Chom border market and Surin Province became one of the popular destinations for Cambodian migrant workers in the post-war era and how this border economy has caused the ambiguity and in-betweenness among the border migrant community due to several forms of exclusion yet limited daily movements across two countries.

Approaches

Overall, this research is situated at the intersection of cross-border mobility studies and memory studies concerning the Southeast Asia region, particularly in the period of the Cold War era. On the one hand, *border studies* emphasizes the characters of the border and its situated marginality, the lived life of border dwellers or minority groups caused by the division of the nation-states, geopolitics, and border transformation through different forms of sociopolitical conflict (Tsing 1993; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007; Donnan and Wilson 2012; Newman 2012). On the other hand, there are border scholars who tend to shift their focus to the movements of subjects and their circulation across the border with noticeable changes in performative acts and how to consider the border as the permeable gates, as the sites of negotiation between state and non-state actors (Sturgeon 2011; Nail 2016). Then, I connect these border literature to *mobility and migration studies* in order to concentrate on both actions of mobility that occurred throughout the existence of the border in multiple forms and by different agents and temporal-

spatial confinement of migrant labors at the border zone (Ananta and Arifin 2004; Ong 2005; van Houtum 2005; Cresswell 2006; Pongsawat 2007; Salazar and Smart 2011; Schiller and Salazar 2013). Lastly, considering mobility as a social experience, I rely on *memory studies* to further stress on the catastrophe of the Cambodian civil war that also happened at the Thai border through the acts of silence and war memory transmission from the war generation to the post-war generation of both Thais and Cambodians, as they had vastly different roles and experiences during the Cold War (Minh-ha 1989; Tanabe and Keyes 2002; Chbib 2004; Ricoeur 2006; Kwon 2008; Uk 2016).

Deconstructing Thai Exceptionalism by Decolonizing Methodologies

My young self has been taught to be proud of this statement, “*Thailand has never been colonized.*” The sense of exceptionalism can be found in the national narrative and has been embedded in Thai society. Speaking from my experience when first encountering it, the idea of decolonization was challenging for me to perceive and to share any experience or comment on colonization. It was the moment I realized that the rhetoric became problematic because the exception made it harder to understand what other countries, especially the neighboring countries, have been through. In *Ambiguous Allure*, Peter Jackson (2010) points out the common reaction of Thai people upon hearing the word ‘colony’ (อาณานิคม - *ananikhom*)⁴ is of something that happened in the past, long-gone and irrelevant to Thailand. This exception also distances and excludes Thai studies to participate in the scholarship of decolonization within the region and across the globe. Here is one of the critiques of Thai studies by Micheal Herzfeld, stating that:

The lack of theory in Thai studies is more an epistemological effect of colonialism upon the production of knowledge about this in Western universities, disciplines such as anthropology built their theoretical corpus from case studies that drew empirical data primarily from directly colonized societies, while overlooking non-colonies (Herzfeld 2002 cited in Jackson and Harrison 2010, 42).

⁴ The members of this family include notions such as “indirect rule”, “informal empire”, “cultural imperialism”, “internal colonialism” (*ananikhom phai-nai*), “auto-colonialism”, and “crypto-colonialism” (*ananikhom amphrang*) (Herzfeld 2002). The Thai Marxist author Udom Srisuwan coined the expression *keung-meuang-kheun* to translate the Maoist term “semicolony” in the 1940s. “Keung” is a Thai adjective meaning “half” or “midway” (Jackson, 2010)

This statement reflects how Thailand (formerly Siam) claims to be a non-colony country. It was the result of the Siamese elites succeeding in avoiding colonization while other traditional political entities in the region could not. The historical background and its debate surrounding Thai studies brought me to take Sandoval's approach in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000). In order to bring Thai studies into dialogue with decolonial thinking, it needs to accept the fact that the academic corpus of Thailand is not free from Western ideology and, arguably, is colonial in its own way that has been well adopted into state-led education.⁵ Objecting to critical works that implicate Western concepts to demonstrate sociopolitical phenomenon can obscure the possible ways in which they might make social difference more understandable.

While the postcolonial approach has already been discussed in Thai studies, Jackson (2010) insists that the characteristic of Thai studies is “empirical richness but epistemological weakness” (42), leading to a number of calls for theory in the field. I see this as resulting from approaching postcolonialism from the perspective of binary opposition that only reserves academic discussion for the colonizer vis-à-vis the colonized states. How could we expect Thai studies to participate in such a binary world? Thus this study is a call for a new order so that it can defend against the binary oppositions that ground Western philosophy (Sandoval, 148).

I argue that it is because knowledge production in social studies, particularly in Southeast Asia, began in the realm of area/regional studies. Vincente Rafael (1994) states that “area studies have been integrated into larger institutional networks, ranging from universities to foundations, which have made possible the reproduction of a North American style of knowing” (92). Area studies and regionalism could not get away from Orientalist legacies but only changed its form.

⁵ Shane Strate points out how Western historiography on Siam's entry into the modern world was heavily influenced by one of Siamese Royal Family, *Krom Phraya Damrong Rajanubhab (Damrong)*'s works. Western scholars tended to analyze the driving forces behind Siam's transformation by stressing how Siamese court dealt with colonial encounters through the reform of the political system and the creativity of the Siamese elite for the kingdom's success. Most scholars seemed to consider “Siam as an exceptional country where the monarch gave birth to the nation, limited Western influence, and formulated an alternate path to a uniquely Thai modernity” (Strate 2015, 16).

Arguably, it became difficult for most Thai people who receive education from official pro-nationalist historical textbooks to perceive Thailand as another colonizer as these standardized texts portray Thailand as if the country has been a (modern-like) nation-state ever since the establishment of the Sukhothai Kingdom, the period that Thai script was created.⁶

Similar to Chayan Vaddhanaphuti's interview with Celia Lowe tells us that "We could not go to Vietnam, Laos, or China because there were considered socialist countries. So, we have not developed much understanding of our closest neighboring countries" (Lowe 2004, 89). Based on this statement, I found the opportunities to learn about Cambodia and Thai-Cambodian relations by situating my research in *Isaan Tai* (อีสานใต้) – the lower Northeastern Thailand in four decades after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. It allows me to see the possibility of engaging decolonization and overcoming Thai exceptionalism. This idea makes room for considering colonialism in the context of modern Thailand. Elites of the country that were able to protect their power over the newly constituted territories and negotiate to stand firm. At the same time, other traditional realms in mainland Southeast Asia were defeated and formally colonized by the British and French Empires. What does it mean for Thai authorities to claim that to be such non-colony country is to be proud of this term "never colonized" and to highly honor the monarchy that had remained in the power of the fight and pressure from both the British and the French? This pride is deeply embedded in Thai people's sentiments even though not all of them are ethnic Thai; they are proud to be Thai regardless of ethnic origins, whether Thai, Lao, Khmer, or Chinese.⁷ Also, the neighboring countries have been portrayed as the inferiors or the rivals that never meant to get along with Thailand.

⁶ Thai Scholars estimated the original formation of Sukhothai Kingdom as the Angkor outpost and later rebelled against the Khmer Kingdom in the mid-thirteenth century. The Kingdom was symbolized as an independent Tai (Thai) state before the emergence of Ayutthaya Kingdom in the fourteenth century.

⁷ There are many more ethnic minorities in Thailand that assimilated and became Thai citizen. Except the Malayu people in the Southern part that could be considered as only case of explicit resistance.

There are multifaceted factors that led to what happened during the colonial period in Southeast Asia. This argument is displayed in the first two chapters. In chapter 1, I explore the construction of the Khmer-Thai identity as the subset of subordinated groups (Lao-speaking groups in Isaan region) through the shift of meaning from mountain landscape to the border landscape that gradually emerged from border demarcation in the early twentieth century. Both the new formation of border identity and the border could also be understood by examining the shifts in the practices of mobility across Phnom Dangrek. In chapter 2, I historicize this border area by juxtaposing the modern history of Thailand and Cambodia to portray how colonialism confused and eventually blocked the border dwellers and their freedom to move between the plateau and the lower plain.

Decentering Cold War in Southeast Asia

The juxtaposition of Thai and Cambodian national histories chronologically and its relation to WWII and the Cold War opens new room for me to explore what has been absent from Thailand's formal education curricula. As told in the prologue, the history of Cambodian refugee camps along the Thai border is what I was looking for to extend the knowledge corpus to and participate in decolonization. Hence, I approach the period of Cold War from the vantage point of Thai-Cambodian borderlands. The border can be examined not only in terms of political relations between state actors within the region and in relation to other major states, namely the United States, Soviet Union, and China. The border can also be examined by searching for war remnants in the form of landscape changes and memories of those affected by war; indeed, this is vital to provide another side of the history that offered in the postwar condition.

In other words, landscape is a prompt for history and memory, a site for theorizing. In chapter 2, I depict the continuation from colonialism to WWII and Cold War. I unpack the role of Thailand in the prolongation of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, shifting the focus of the American War in Vietnam to the Cambodian civil war and the fall of Khmer Rouge. The Thai

military had much to gain from being an ally with the U.S. and later China. I argue that the particular period was another turning point that cemented Thai involvement in politics through the anticommunist ideology, a turning point that configured and was configured by the border.

In chapters 2 and 3, I take a step further from illustrating the relationship between state actors to what Nordstrom (2004) called “*shadow of war*.” That is, there are invisible sides of wars that usually are not represented in the general debate on the process of peacemaking and war prolongation or suspension. The idea of “shadows” reflects “the complex sets of cross-state economic and political linkages that move outside formally recognized state-based channels which is not solely to criminal, illicit, or illegal activities but cross various divides between legal, quasi-legal and downright illegal activities” (106). The vast networks of shadows consist of extra-state activities that constitute cultures of shadow networks that blur the distinction between state and non-state actors that were enabled through the international corporation for certain economic activities (107). Her hypotheses lead to the unconventional way of thinking about wars which usually considers the trade route of weapons and humanitarian intervention for peace.

Thereby, I temporalize the Dangrek landscape by delving into the Cambodian refugee encampments along the Thai border. Rather than directly interviewing the lives of the refugees who were displaced in the border camps, this study concentrates more on the aspects of the locals who lived through the civil war period, which I call the war generation. These border dwellers were not only impacted by the counter-communist insurgency propaganda by the Thai state, but they also witnessed and were affected by the guerrilla movements disguised in Phnom Dangrek close to their homes, or participated in the camp operation themselves. With this approach, it breaks the conventional perception of the Cold War (Democracy versus Communism) and allows the fragmentation within the same political umbrella and flexibility in alliance formation. The border operation manifests not only the complexity of the past war but also the postwar border-crossing practices that I continue to explore in Chapters 3 to 6.

Mobilities and Borders are not Antithetical

“Mobilities and borders are not antithetical,” is an argument made by Salazar and Smart (2011, iv) that addresses what I would like present in this research. The border has its paradoxical centrality as the edge that emerges from boundary setting through human interaction with the earth's surface, between communities, or even digital boundaries. As Schiller and Salazar (2013) and Tim Cresswell (2006) put forward their ideas to “mobility turn” and provide forms of mobilities as an integrated system, these can be observed at a range of scales and linked by migration flows and human social ways. The studies of mobility turn aim to enhance and reshape the study of “flows” as fundamental to understand the human conditions and differential ability to travel across different spaces and scales by not discounting the nation-state as an actor in questions of international migration or silencing internal migration.

In this study, I focus on cross-border mobility as movements at the border imply the nuanced aspects of the movement. Earlier, I describe the emergence of the national border. The border's existence does not stop people from moving or crossing the mountains. However, wars and conflicts between states do interrupt and shift the nature of mobilities. In this study, I apply the concept of mobility (Cresswell 2006) to discuss the variety of movements that occurred in Phnom Dangrek through political and economic factors. Throughout this manuscript, the mobilities are portrayed through specific sites, political strategies, and social implications of the observable mobilities across the Dangrek border. As Cresswell states that “Movement is the general fact of displacement” (2006, 3), I observed and captured what I witnessed and learned from my informants during my fieldwork, and narrate how people move from one place to another, or back and forth, or within confined space that situated in the border zone where the concepts of spatial-temporal confinement and un-/bordering processes come into play.

Border Landscape as Process of Subject-making

In chapter 1, I set forth on the depiction of Phnom Dangrek landscape to introduce the field site. Drawing from Ingold's conception of landscape and taskscape (1993), and I define "border landscape as a process of subject-making" where humans recognize or experience things at the borderland. I indicate the set of boundaries or sites of differences (Abbott 1995).

Landscapes are navigated by the experiences of those who share from the angle of vision to explain the perspective of what the landscapes offer to them and constitute the social-spatial formation of its socio-political entities. "What is a boundary when it is blurred? What happens when boundaries move around?" (Mol and Law 2005, 637). This research attempts to answer these questions to demonstrate the theorization of the paradoxes, variations, leakages, and fractionalities of boundaries that are no longer solely about geographical spaces (here and there) but also about identities (self and other) that move around here and there (Mol and Law). With the long history of human crossing practices at Phnom Dangrek and Chong Chom checkpoint, I shall present its complexities of subjects I encountered throughout my fieldwork spatially and temporally to argue that "it seems likely that semipermeable boundaries are crucial to all ordering" (Mol and Law 2005, 641) e.g. ethnic identity shifting (chapter 1), from displaced persons to migrant workers (chapter 4), and the everyday in-betweenness of the frequent border crossers (chapter 5). The subject formation of this study is thus investigated through the bordering and un-bordering processes that are always fluid and blurred. Inclusions and exclusion could explicitly or implicitly become performative acts, such as the interaction of state authorities and variety of border crossers classified by nationality. The border is where identity and its boundary move around and interfere one another.

As the movements of subjects - humans, things, or ideas – that travel from one place to another would generally get caught and pause at the border, these subjects and the border co-produce each other. In other words, humans, things, and ideas do not come to the border that is

fully formed but are also re-formed in bordering practices. I focus on how borders have been socially constructed and transformed into a reality, a default situation, and how the bordering and un-bordering processes become performative acts when the subjects have entered or left the permeable gates from or to different regimes. It is the acknowledgment of not staying still, but moving, being in the motion. Mainly in chapters 5 and 6, I argue that it is not always necessary to have bordering practice at the border checkpoint, as there are legal and policing acts anywhere within the state. At the same time, moving across checkpoints can also be a form of everyday practice where flexibility is given to specific groups of people for economic interests. For example, in chapter 5 I interrogate why Cambodian merchants may not need to get stamped every day, but every 14 days or a month depending on their immigration and employment status. On the other hand, Thai gamblers who visit the checkpoint just for the casino do not need to get a stamp on the Cambodian side, as they usually do not cross the border to travel to inner area of Cambodia. These practices highlight how illegality has always been arbitrary. In other words, ambiguity and flexibility does not emerge only by the limited choices of movement but also by state authorities that agree to do so for the sake of economic cooperation. In sum, I examine borders by capturing movements in order to get a broader sense of border dynamics and its series of practices and be able to problematize all these imaginations of the border and un-/bordering processes.

Spatial and Temporal Confinement

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I explore the concept of spatial and temporal confinement as movements do not merely mean freedom when state authorities take part in controlling and confining spaces within the period of time to allow certain groups of people to move within the provided zones. Cross-border mobilities that are allowed in the border areas of Chong Chom and Phnom Dangrek become modes of exploitation (Salazar and Smart 2011). For example, the stories of border encampments illustrate a type of confinement that affected the camp residents

who were subject to stay inside Thailand temporarily under the care of humanitarian agencies and the Thai military while pending for resettlement or repatriation and could not leave the camps without permission, as told in chapter 3. The advancement of spatial and temporal confinement becomes even more explicit through the analysis of Thailand's immigration policy in chapter 4, and the bordering practices at the border checkpoint in chapter 5.

In terms of citizenship and immigration policies, borders also create agents of inclusion and exclusion through the perpetuation of social and spatial compartmentalization (Newman, 2011: 36). I point out that the Cambodian civil war was the turning point for Thailand's immigration policy as the authorities had to deal with the influx of Cambodian displaced people. The authorities found ways to take advantage of the situation by transforming the displaced persons who would not be likely to be granted refugee status as migrant workers, as labor supplies for economic growth. In chapter 5, I further explore how spatial and temporal confinement impact the lived experiences of Cambodian migrants in Thailand and the Thai border dwellers. They have been suppressed by less economic opportunities that lead to less freedom to move. Thus, in chapters 5 and 6 I highlight the multilayers of economic disparities that resulted from the civil war and have given people limited choices of movement, yet they are still eager for strategies to move around the border in order to survive.

Breaking the Silences

Since I propose the topic of the Cambodian Civil War that can be another prominent debate for the studies of borderlands and Phnom Dangrek Mountains and the shifting nature of mobility practices across the border through times. Here, I discuss the ideas of silences based on the literature of memory and landscape in relation to the acts of remembering and forgetting. Throughout this study, I demonstrate that silence can be tackled as a refusal to partake in the story that provides us with a means to gain hearing (Minh-ha 1989). Silence can be a space in which actions can take place without words or a range of communicative functions (Chbib 2004).

Silence also means an act of social control as part of the manipulation of collective memories and national history, which leads to the concept of cultural censorship.

Placing history and memory in national boundaries is vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, which leads to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting when the intimate fund of memory is reconstituted and evolves as part of the nationalistic narrative (Nora 1989, 12, 16). The interactions with colonialism or any practice that suppressed them from independence in their early days. One way to think about all these leaders' intention to imagine their idealistic national communities and to cultivate the national history is to discover their journeys and education. In chapter 2, I refer to Indochinese and Thai revolutionists that carried the Marxist and nationalist ideologies from Europe and their colonizers to their newly constructed nation-states. The memories of their journeys across the continents between where they were born, visited, and studied influenced how they defined nationalism, and shaped how they envisioned their regimes and national histories. In other words, the Western/colonial experiences led them to interpret and transform into revolutionary actors in their own countries through, for example, the network of the international Communist party from China to Southeast Asia, or in the Thai case, through revolution against the elitism of the monarchy. The common trace is that nationalism emerged from the journeys of the elites before the nationalistic perception could be transmitted to their citizens and become attached and eventually enable the sense of belonging defined by a territorial boundary.

As Tanabe and Keyes (2002) argue, “the contemporary social memory constructed by the people works in entering modernity” (2) and the milieu of modernity emerged in the form of the postcolonial nation-state. There are ruptures with their past, which became cultural crises that people have experienced in various ways in their lives through the politics of the present. Tanabe explains how remembering is a socially constructed process that produces social memory articulated and embodied in society. Social memory is a product of socially constructed

remembering processes. Oftentimes, groups being marginalized means the possibility of being encouraged or even forced to give up their intimate memories, instead of remembering what national ideologies have offered to them as part of the population package and the process of nation-making. To illustrate this, citizens within its territory have received standardized education along with the countless production of bureaucratic documents such as birth certificates, report cards, or medical records (Anderson 1991, 204). These documents manifest a state of belonging even before starting school education or any commemoration and ritual ceremonies. Through all these factors combined, national identity ultimately becomes embodiments “by will a society deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal” (Nora 1989, 12). The national boundary does not only work at physical territorialization but also at the psychological level where memories are organized by socially constructed narratives intersected with national identity. That said, the pre-existing, colonial, and post-war conditions are contested and even more confused when linking these conditions to the Siamese (Thai) concept of territorialization and identification such as Lao-ness, Thai-ness, Isaan-ness (Lao ethnics with Thailand), Khmer-ness, and Khom (Khmer-ness in Thai perception). Even though the state-led narrative has been circulated in less than fifty years, it is quite actively engaged with current generations who might or might not experience the events as they are being transmitted from the older generations. In this study, I highlight the period of the Cold War and Cambodian civil war as an essential factors in complicating social memories and national identities with displacement, encampment, and landscape, changes that could be more confusing and lead to more silences as people already embedded in the context of colonialism and nationalism for the past century.

Silence in the border landscape

Taking the ideas of “silencing the past” from Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2015), silences are not merely the erasure of what happened in the past, but also the memory of what could not be said because it was unthinkable in the Western framework in its time. I interrogate how the Thai

border dwellers remember the past war and how they have connected to the Cambodians. They may have forgotten the years in which the events occurred, yet many are still able to recall what they witnessed or experienced themselves. Therefore, another task of this study is to explore all possible forms of silence that have emerged in Dangrak mountains not only in the wake of the Cold War but that have been spatially constituted and attached to the landscape and the history of nation-state making in this area (Tyner et al. 2012, 855, emphasis mine).

I propose a methodology of attending to border dwellers attending to the landscape. This method involves observing and walking with people through their sites of work and transit, asking about life in certain places as a way to elicit political memory to provide new perspectives of the border reality (Dwyer 2009, 135). I do so in order to not let silence transform into the absence of history as it may remain within human's minds or memories or through non-verbal transmission through generations. I aim to make this study a project of memory transmission by questioning silence to rupture the status quo of the border. I also wish not to make this research "a classically heroic ethnographic tale of discovery, insight, and exposure" (138), but as a descendant of the community who must remind myself of my educational privilege. I would instead expose my own ignorance and the moment I was first learning about the silences as a consideration for the ethics of research and how I could write about such sensitive issues including trauma from wars and the stigmatization of talking politics in the authoritarian atmosphere. For reasons of safety and topic sensitivity, especially of war-related issues, I thus approach silences by moving myself through the landscape together with those who may have memories of the past war and telling their stories about interacting with the post-war landscape organically, either deeply on their current living conditions or their past war experiences, depending on conversation flow and trust that informants and I offered to one another.

Field Methodologies

I conducted ethnographic and archival research between 2016 and 2020. The project began with a pilot fieldwork in 2016 which focused on former refugee camps in Surin province and developed into archival research through official documentation during the Cambodian civil war and refugee management by Thai state. I spent six months of intensive ethnographic fieldwork (April – September 2018) primarily in Kap Choeng District, Surin Province,⁸ and multiple day trips to O'Smach town and Samrong District in Oddar Meanchey as a singular site that can reveal the travels of identities (Lowe 2006) across or between two countries. I embedded myself in Chong Chom border community to observe human and non-human flows specifically at the border checkpoint, and border crossers and dwellers' connections through their daily routine around the checkpoint and beyond. With support from my family who live just outside Surin Province and a Cambodian student who helped me as an interlocutor, I conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty-two Cambodian merchants in the border market and with multiple government representatives of both sides who are involved with border work. To highlight the studies of mobilities, I regularly traveled by a public van taxi from home to the border by myself. This travel routine helped me learn about van drivers and commuters' behaviors and backgrounds by joining their conversations. I applied for the Border Pass, which is another type of travel document that Cambodian merchants use for daily border crossing. I also occasionally traveled with my parents to conduct interviews or visit the war-related places where there was no access to public transportation.

Materials

A variety of materials that appeared in this manuscript began from finding the sites of the past war, including former refugee camps and other war-related locations. These sites were

⁸ Also the Districts of Sangkha, Phanom Dongrak, Prasat and Muang Surin of Surin Province and side trips to Aranyaprathet, Sakaeo Province and Khun Han District of Sisaket Province.

introduced by my parents and several informants whom I asked about war issues. For the site visits as seen throughout the manuscript, I primarily used Google Maps for marking the locations and guiding to the destinations. Throughout this manuscript, I use photographs that are mostly taken by me, unless stated as representational strategies beyond descriptive statements in relation to writings on the post-war landscape and cross-border activities (Hoffman 2007 emphasis mine). I regularly took these images when I was inside the vehicles in order to portray how I traveled during the fieldwork which sometimes I also had conversations with the informants during the trips as well. At the end of the day, I would write daily notes about as much as I remembered. For the interview sessions, I mostly took notes during the interview in front of my informants. I sometimes asked them to draw objects or maps on my notebook to illustrate connections between key locations that appeared in their stories. I sometimes would simply listen to the informants without taking notes (or both) if they allowed voice or video recording techniques to pay attention to what they said. I was also accompanied by a Cambodian translator whom I thanked for helping create a comfortable atmosphere during the market interview sessions with Cambodian merchants.

Also, I used primary and secondary documents such as the humanitarian and demographic reports of Indochinese refugee camps written by the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand, Bangkok-based Thai scholars, and foreign humanitarian staff who used to work or conducted research in the camps. For the local historiography, I used the provincial reports, history textbooks, and local academic research produced or found in local universities namely Surin Rajabhat University and Rajamangala University of Technology Esarn Surin Campus where I also met with a few scholars and received recommendation how I should conduct research in the province properly. I also used legal documents such as the immigration acts and ministerial notifications accessed through the government gazette and the cabinet

resolution.⁹ Regarding the images beside my own photographs, I also used scanned photos that were permitted by the owners who were my informants and from the exhibition on the actual sites.

Positionalities and Autoethnography

“if ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), autoethnographic texts are representations that the so defined others construct in response to or in dialogue with those texts” (Pratt 1991, 35)

In the prologue, I share a glimpse into how I became interested in this area of study because of the self-discovery and the approaches to capture the silences in border landscape as a point of departure in becoming a researcher who is politically and socially constructed in ways that affect the whole process of doing ethnography and its written production. I deployed an autoethnographic method not only as a constructive approach to revisiting the Cold War in Southeast Asia from the vantage point of Thai-Cambodian borderland. I also took it as a self-reflexive practice to apprehend the conflicting moments of self, young-self, and academic-self in dialogues with the informants whom I may have known or may have been introduced during my fieldwork. Pratt (1991) defines autoethnography as a self-representation in response to the clashes between being part of the studied community and becoming a U.S.-trained scholar to value stories of struggle, oppression, humiliation, failure, and resistance (Adams and Jones 2008). My multilayered positionality plays an essential part as I have carried various positions in the field that were dependent upon with whom I interacted. Acknowledging and using the self as the instrument of knowing (Ortner 1995) to get to know people in the field and understand how they perceive the world is part of being accountable for my own root and routes that led to this situated knowledge production (Clifford 2013).

⁹ The Government Gazette <http://www.mratchakitcha.soc.go.th/> and the Cabinet Resolutions <https://www2.soc.go.th/>

Lastly, I did not try much to detach myself from my family. So, I would like to acknowledge my parents and relatives as fieldwork companions and as contact persons who had helped me connect to the informants they knew personally throughout the process of ethnographic fieldwork. Rather than putting this part only in the acknowledgment section, there was an inevitable influence of



Figure 1: A photo of me and my mother talking to the villagers separately taken by my father during our first field visit to Tabtim Siam 04 village, Sangkha, Surin (04/20/2018)

my parents who were born and had been living in Prasat, Surin, for most of their lives.

Throughout the manuscript, I am cautious to indicate their contribution, whether I visited or met the informants with them. They sometimes gave their opinions and asked questions they had with the informants themselves. Traveling along the border zone and inside the wildlife sanctuary required driving with a personal vehicle. Because I do not drive, I often traveled with my parents or my cousins to the locations where there was no public transportation. I sometimes felt that I should not rely too much on their connection and went to contact and interview people by myself with the formal letter from the Surin Governor, whom I had to ask for permission to carry out the research in Surin Province. However, there were times when people saw my last name; they would start asking whether I am a daughter of my parents or my uncles/aunts.

Conducting research in my hometown was definitely a chance to reflect on how my family has been rooted in the community. Being a returnee and a female researcher with a government scholarship in the field site in which I had to be careful about sensitive political issues brought so many ideological encounters that I attempt to convey throughout six chapters. In conclusion, I reflect this study in linking with the current situations I witnessed and experienced across the continent during the global pandemic and political protests here and there.

Chapter 1: Crossing the Mountains:

The Emergence of Phnom Dangrek Border Landscape

“Dangrek mountains, a range that extended like a wall two hundred meters high from east to west (leaning slightly to the southwest). A few leagues to the right, these mountains made a sudden, sharp curve to the south before finally turning northeast and spreading into sandstone plateaus toward the mouth of the Moun. Thus, they formed the southern border of the basin of the tributary of the Great River,¹⁰ from its source to its confluence.”
(Aymonier 2000, (1895) 181)



Figure 2: Phnom Dangrek looking west from O'Smach point of view (18/08/2018)

Phnom Dangrek (ភ្នំដងរែក) or Phanom Dongrak (พนมดงรัก) described by Étienne Aymonier¹¹ indicates how the colonialist voyagers would depict what they observed along their journey to the remote areas and how they recorded the landscape by situating themselves in relation to other landforms and rivers. The 300-kilometer-wide Dangrek mountain range drains the rains northward to the Mun River and trends westward from Mekong river in Ubon Ratchathani Province to merge with San Khampaeng Mountain range in Nakhon Ratchasima (Khorat) Province and Sakaeo Province through Sisaket Province, Surin Province, and Buriram Province. This dry evergreen forest, which has been covered under the name of Huay Tabtan – Huay Samrarn Wildlife Sanctuary since 1994, comprises multiple types of slopes, small hills, steep escarpments and plains separating Khorat Plateau¹² in Thailand and facing southward to the

¹⁰ Moun is the river in the Northeast Thailand, the Great River is Mekong river.

¹¹ Étienne Aymonier was a director of the École Coloniale, Finot, director of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) who shaped representations of Indochina at the world exposition in the early twentieth century. He published three volumes of Inventaire Descriptif des Monuments du Cambodge on an inventory and description of Khmer monuments based on his voyages within Cambodia across the Dangrek mountains and to Siam. According to Charles Keyes (1978; 2002), Etienne Aymonier was one of the first Westerners who visited many towns in Isaan region along their mission to record the archeological sites and everything he witnessed and how he encountered with the locals, their hospitality, traditions along the journeys. (224-5)

¹² The name Khorat (โคราช) is a distorted word from Angkor Riaj or Nokor Raj which means the center of the Angkor Empire in the highland (Surin Samosorn 2013)

lower Khmer plains of the Northern part of Cambodia from Preah Vihear Province to Oddar Meanchey Province and Banteay Meanchey Province of the Northwestern region.

For this chapter, I introduce the border landscape of Phnom Dangrek as the area of study throughout the dissertation. It primarily focuses on the perspective of becoming the border landscape of Dangrek mountains represented by a multitude of actors who were involved or participated in mobilities across the mountain-turned-state border relations and through the local historiography of Surin Province where the majority are the Khmer-Thai speaking groups. The analysis will be based on the materials that are mostly written by Aymonier, the French colonialist voyager, local and international scholars of the history of Surin Province and scholars of the Preah Vihear temple dispute to provide a historical landscape for what remains to unfold in the following chapters. In the first section, I discuss Phnom Dangrek landscape and its boundary through the practices of human mobilities and the construction of Dangrek mountains landscape that is tied to the perception of the border in terms of geographical difference and nature-human interaction in the ancient days through *prasat*¹³ ruins and *chong(s)* - mountain passes. This emphasis is based on the archeological sites found through the route from Angkor temple to Khorat and the place names across the mountain. In the second part, I highlight the shift in language use in identifying the Dangrek inhabitants from the Khmer Lue to the Khmer Thai situated in the state margins according to the emergence of nation-state and citizenship that limits the freedom of movement across the mountains. This is combined with the sense of national belonging, othering, and becoming Thai citizens of the ethnic Khmer and Kui in the case of Surin Province through the interrogation of the provincial historiography. In addition, it reflects identity politics through the processes of becoming ethnic Khmer-Thai and distancing themselves from Cambodia's Khmerness.

¹³ *Prasat* (ปราสาท) in Thai also means Angkor temple and other forms of fortified building, most used for the Middle Age castle or the royal palace. It is also the name of my hometown district in Surin Province.

The scholarship of the Southeast Asia mainland comprises a handful of profound works on the characteristics of traditional kingdoms or political entities and borderlands. There has been discussion regarding the concepts of *mandala* (circle of kings), *zomia* – marginal and autonomous locality, and the plurality of state centers (Chutintaranond 1990; Reynolds 1995; Wolters 1999; Scott 2009). These concepts temporally explain how the precolonial entities challenged one another to become the greater kingdom through wars to occupy lands, resources, and labors. When bringing the Dangrek region into the conversation of Southeast Asian studies or giving its contribution to these theoretical debates, its location has always been one of numerous peripheral zones for all kind political entities. Meanwhile the literature that mentions Dangrek mountains often contains the geographical narrative claiming that its mountainous setting is a self-manifestation of being a natural border. However, the separation by the mountain also carries an ambiguous meaning due to the demarcation process in the past (Raymond 2005; Ollier and Winter 2006). In other words, the meaning of natural and national border would always overlap with how humans have given the meanings through mobility practices, interactions with the nature which create the perception of how the mountains become the border.

Drawing from Van Houtum's (2005) argument regarding trends in border studies, the distinction between natural and non-natural borders has signified that human-made borders are often seen as artificial and bad borders. He insists that the nature of the border has been overemphasized from a military point of view, political disputes, and physical demarcation and underemphasized the borders during normal times (675). He believes that this is “an extreme politicization of the naturalistic and organic view on borders” which caused “radically turned away from describing borders as natural” as if “there are no natural borders” (Van Houtum). Although I agree with Van Houtum about the debate of border studies leaning too much toward the demarcation of the boundary, the demarcation of the boundary between the Cambodia and Thailand in the Dangrek mountains has significantly contributed to geopolitical and cultural aspects that impacted by nationalistic ideology and sequels of the political crashes from the

ancient to the present times. For instance, the Angkorian temple of the Preah Vihear became a political tool for nationalistic movements since the post-independent era and remains as a stigma for the Thai-Cambodian border commissioner to eventually seek mutual agreement in the future.¹⁴

Van Houtum's (2005) claims lead me to question whether Dangrek mountains can be considered as the natural border that we could explore through its mountain landscape, or if it is unavoidable to perceive this mountain as a human-made border through its border landscape? His suggestion clearly leans toward anthropological perspectives on "the social formation and socio-spatial manifestations of borders and identities" (van Houtum 2005, 676). Accordingly, this chapter intends to emphasize what constitutes the Dangrek range as the border landscape, and what kind of manifestation that have distinguished the way humans see this mountain as the border rather than simply the mountain landscape.

Locating Dangrek landscape and its sites of difference

From the open plains here, they could see the Dangrek range about four leagues to the south. These mountains were still visible probably because they stretched toward the north at the latitude of the Koulen mountains near Angkor (Aymonier, 2000, 184)

From Rout Srei Srenoh (step of the girl's regret)'s point, one could clearly view much of the lower plain, including all the mountains and hillocks of the provinces of Sisaphon, Battambang, Phnom Srok, Chong Kal and Siem Reap. (233)

Aymonier's description of Dangrek mountains in his travel records should be viewed as a colonial legacy that turns to the most cited literature and a key figure for the local historiography. The way he recorded his voyages not only portrays the natural landscape along the routes but also pinpoints significant archeological sites and traces of ancient settlements between the lowland and Khorat Plateau (Kim 2009, 3). His records illustrate the pre-modern directions and landforms of the Dangrek range in relation to the assumably of known spots from the vantage point in the

¹⁴ There were two major disputes over the Preah Vihear temple. First was back in since the last confrontation because of the Preah Vihear dispute during Abhisit's and Hun Sen's administration at the end of the last decade (2008-2011), the government and army sectors of both countries have avoided mentioning about borderlines or any demarcation issue outside the border commission meetings. Many Thai authorities insisted that there is a slight chance that they would come to an agreement in finalizing the delineation process anytime soon (Chachavalpongpun 2012; Pawakapan 2013; Jenne 2017).

lower plains so that readers or travelers would be able to imagine its property of the mountains and how it is constructed by connecting to other entities. His sojourn indicates that he traveled from the Khmer plains as he was able to describe the height and sudden, sharp curve of it.

This section discusses the socio-spatial construction of border landscape in Dangrek range drawing from the manifestation from the ancient time to contemporary perception and utilization of the mountain landscape as the borderline. As Ingold (1993) states that:

The landscape is not 'nature' nor is it on the side of humanity against nature. 'A landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing or symbolizing surroundings'... The landscape... can only become a boundary, or the indicator of a boundary, in relation to the activities of the people (or animals) for whom it is recognized or experienced as such (153, 156).

He insists that the landscape is a living process that is generated in movements through what we see around us - the *tasksapes*, the interactivity between human beings and nature through practical involvement with their environments (162, 166). That is to say, the elements of creating or imagining landscape through human's patterns of the dwelling, forms of journeys, routes, bodily movement from one place to the other and distance measurement between two places that creates vistas along the route and a single picture from the observation point. His interpretation of the border landscape focuses on perceptual and experiential aspects of the landscape. It is "an act of remembrance that engages perceptually with an environment." He suggests that we can learn from the human interaction with the hills and valleys, the paths and tracks, the trees, and among the people.

This is similar to the idea of using the suffix -scape by Appadurai (1996), indicating that it is important to provide the common scape in relation to the angle of vision that is chosen to explain any perspective of the story which is "inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors... as well as subnational groupings and movements,... and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighborhoods, and families" (33). The landscapes are navigated by the experiences of those who share what the landscapes offer to them and constitute the social-spatial formation of its socio-political entities. Therefore I take

the concept of taskscape to investigate the Dangrek landscape not from spatial aspects for representational purposes, but instead I look at the practices and storytellings of dwelling (154-5) in order to learn about the temporality of the taskscape which is always social, as they would feel each other's presence (160, 456).

Accordingly, the border landscape indeed has its relation to the concept of boundary. Abbott (1995) also addresses the issue of imagining boundaries that either occurs prior to or after the existence of entities by considering “to whom or to what unit do these properties appertain..., who bring different, enduring qualities to interaction?” (Abbott 1995, 863). Boundaries and landscapes are spaces that are constructed as the reference to or parts of the universe or neighborhoods near the defined entities for subject formation. The mountain is considered as the landscape that is also a driver of change and cultural construction (Carrol 2018). It exists if we can assign the points and the directions to generate or compliment the neighborhoods and social interaction across the mountains (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Thus, it is likely that the neighborhood system that can be fluctuated by the general notion of difference. In this case, the highland and the lowland was eventually marked by the mountains and the Dangrek range became what Abbott called “sites of difference” (Abbott 1995, 862). In the following part, I provide the production of sites of difference that reveal the taskscapes which occurred in the Dangrek landscape through different times reflected in the surface of the mountains.

Prasat and Ratchmakka Route

“Even though we would barely be able to imagine the living conditions around Dangrek region during the prosperous Angkorian time. And we do not know how people in the past visited each other. One thing that the remnants of the past tell us is that the human civilization never stop but it has always been on the move.” (Surin Samosorn 2013, 20)¹⁵

¹⁵ The original text is: “แม้ว่าในปัจจุบันเราไม่อาจจินตนาการเห็นสภาพบ้านเมืองรอบพนมดงรักในช่วงแห่งยุครุ่งโรจน์ของอาณาจักรนครหลวงได้ และไม่รู้ว่าการไปมาหาสู่กันของผู้คนในสมัยนั้นทำกันอย่างไร แต่ร่องรอยที่ยังหลงเหลืออยู่ในพื้นที่ทำให้พบความจริงว่า อารยธรรมความเจริญของมนุษย์ไม่เคยหยุดนิ่ง แต่ตรงกันข้ามกลับมีการเคลื่อนย้ายเสมอ”

Inspired by Ingold's 'taskscape,' I take an archeological-anthropological approach to look at the Dangrek landscape through a living process in the past that generated movement as a subject to study. Despite the fact that archeological projects may face difficulty in proceeding the studies in Phnom Dangrek region due to the dangers of landmines (see chapter 6), there are several works have attempted to study *Prasat* as part of ancient route which called '*Ratchamakka*' - the Royal Road System starting from the Angkor Wat to the Khorat Plateau (Talbot and Chutima 2001; Lertlum and Shibayama 2009). *Prasat* ruins can be seen as the features of landscape that "remain available for inspection long after the movement that gave rise to them has ceased as a solid medium that history can declare itself" (Ingold 1993, 162). *Prasats* were not used to mark the boundary, but rather demonstrated the continuity and utility of the construction during the Angkor period when *prasats* were built for religious and health purposes for travelers who embarked on their journeys between the lowland and the highland. In this sense, it gives the meaning of natural border back to the Dangrek mountains.



Figure 3: Map of the Khmer road system at the local exhibit in the Buddhist temple near former site 2 camp in Sakaeo Province

In both Khmer and Thai languages, *Prasat* means the Angkor temple. It is considered as the objects used for tracing the route between the lowland and the highland. According to Penny Edwards (2007), *Prasat* routes are debatably a central point of reference of taskscape that occurred in the mountains before the border demarcation. *Prasats* were not only the reference to Khmer cultural and spiritual life, as it was constructed either at the escarpment or upon the summit of the mountains in its center exclusively for the residence of the gods Siva and Vishnu (Mikusol 1984). Debatably, considering *prasat* as a cultural representation is something that emerged later during the colonial period, but it is also the reference to human movements in relation to the nature of the mountain. The conceptual revitalization in a later period shows how

the locals have re-appropriated and paid respects to the ancient ruins. It is mostly involved with religious beliefs (Buddhism and animism) (Edwards 2007, 22–23, 26; Keyes 2002, 221) and annual tradition such as Songkran (new year) celebration (Surin Samosorn 2013).

The studies of the Khmer road system (Hendrickson 2010) or *Rachamakka* (the royal route - រាជ្យវិហារ) (Surin Samosorn 2013)¹⁶ can be considered as the manifestation of human mobility that left the traces in the mountain, not only *prasat* ruins but also the ruins of stone bridges such as Tep Bridge (ត្រពាំងទឹក); the lifted road (*Maha Thang Din* - মহាព្រះវិហារ) in Chong Kal district, Oddar Meanchey that the road was elevated from the ground more than one meter (Surin Samosorn). Accordingly, the remains of many *Prasats* (i.e. Prasat Preah Vihear, Prasat Ta Muan, Prasat Phnom Rung, and Prasat Phimai) from the distant past along Dangrek mountains and the royal road system could be seen as a distinctive legacy of the Angkor Empire during the reign of Rajendravarman II (A.D. 944–968) upon the death of Indravarman III in A.D. 1243 (Talbot and Chutima 2001, 179). Its extensive network of roads, hospitals (Arogyasala) and resthouses (Dharmasala) linked between Angkor Wat and Angkor Riag in the Khorat Plateau from the most notoriously known Preah Vihear temple on the eastern side to the inner part of the plateau such as Phimai temple, one of the major centers of the Angkor polity, in Nakhon Ratchasima Province (Khorat) (Talbot and Chutima 2001; Kim 2009).

Crossing at Chong and Dan

The Cambodians began to climb the mountains at the bend of the V at a pass called Dan Ta Pou. The cart road followed many sharp twists to climb the successive terraces, which the Cambodians called 'Rout'. The lower terrace was called Rout Sokkram and the middle one Rout Phteah Dan, 'terrace of the police post'. These long terraces were slops only where the cart road pass through. At shouting distance to the west, a footpath ascended more or less straight up the mountain toward the upper plateau. The Phteah Dan terrace got its name from a guard post, abandoned a

¹⁶ Rachamakka based on the published article in the local magazine called *Surin Samosorn* is the mysterious route of Phnom Dangrek – the ancient route in the 7th Javaramana linking Angkor Thom to various haumuangs of Khmer Empire from the folktale - Praeng Angkor Thom toward northwest to Kralanh River (ancient bridge – sapien tuap between Prasat Phrom Gale and Prasat Cheung Tien (Chong Kal District (Siem Reap – Oddar Meanchey) after crossing the bridge, it is the route to O'smach and Phnom Dangrek (the route has already gone)- Banteay Chmar– Ta Moan Complex – Phnom Rung – Phi Mai (Angkor Riag Khmer Leu center)

long time earlier, that the lords of Koukhan had built 120 metres east of the road, near a pool in the rocks that held water all year round. From this terrace one could reach the upper plateau only by unyoking and carrying one's luggage; even carts had to be carried up. On the descent, the carts rolled down the track empty, while the luggage was carried via the western footpath to the base of the mountain (Aymonier, 181)

The great road to the Chup Smach Pass at regular intervals, there were shelters for the white elephants that were customarily led along this road en route from Bassak to Bangkok. One such shelter was on the banks of the Kap Teal and another one was a league farther along Damnak Trepeang Kou besides a large basin that had been dug in ancient times. There were no ruins by the basin. (Aymonier, Chapter 23)

In Thai, *Chong* (*chóng* - ชอง) means Pass or Channel and *Dan* (*dān* - ด่าน) means Barrier or Checkpoint. These two terms play a crucial part in this study not only because these are part of the place names of my research sites (*Chong Chom* – ชองจอม and *Ban Dan Subdistrict* – ตำบลบ้านด่าน) but also as the socio-spatial representation of the cross-mountain relations for both humans and animals can be found throughout the length of the mountains since the ancient time and throughout its major changes of state border controls during the Cold War. The Dangrek mountains are comprised of numerous mountain passes that humans have found or created with their ability to travel through the mountain landscape. Only in Surin Province, there are over twenty to thirty mountain passes that were used in the past before the establishment of a single official border pass at Chong Chom. These passes were mostly named in Khmer language by what the locals used as marks for crossable locations and village names. For example, Chong Ta Muan, Chong Ta Khwai, and Chong Khana were named after *Prasat* names along the range.¹⁷ Chong Chup Smach, as it appeared in Aymonier's journey, used to be one of the most used passes in the Dangrek range for transporting the white elephants to Bangkok and oxcart trade trails between the highland and the lowland. However, this pass is no longer an active pass and its name was changed to the Thai word 'Chong Samet' (see figure 4). There are also several oral histories written by Surin historians recounting the local journeys across the Dangrek range to

¹⁷ One of the park rangers I interviewed told me about his routine inspecting near mountain passes in the wildlife sanctuary area that he became to understand why specific area would be given certain names such as Chong Krating Long (wild gaur pass) has its name because gaurs could be seen to use this pass crossing to the lowland (Interviewed at Huay Tabtan – Huay Samran Sanctuary Surin Office on September 9, 2018).

buy dried fish and *Prahok* (fermented fish paste) from Battambang or rock salt from Thung Kula Ronghai (desert-like fields) of Isaan region. People normally traveled with oxcarts through Chong Samet, Chong Taku, and Chong Chom which took approximately one month for a round trip from Surin to Battambang. Another pass nearby called ‘Chong Krang’¹⁸ used to be one of the main passes during the Cambodian civil war as it was used to the path for timber imports from Cambodia (see chapter 6) before its closure in 2009 due to the Preah Vihear border conflict (Nithichaianan 2013).

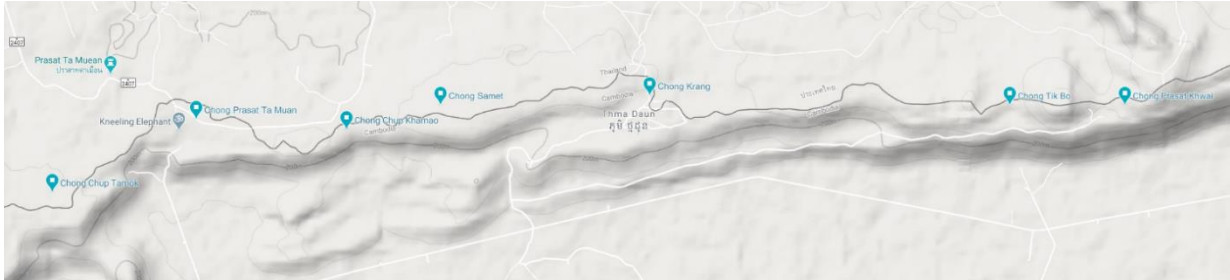


Figure 4: Terrain view from Google Maps with bookmarks of Chub Smcah Pass (Chong Samet) and nearby chong(s) between Surin and Oddar Meanchey

Likewise, the words that signified the movements and stops such as the word Thanol (ថ្នល់) or Thanon (ถนน) which means ‘road’ in Khmer and Thai appeared to be the name of villages along the mountains until these days. For example, Phum Thanol Bod (swerving road village), Phum Thanol Tateung (wide road village), Phum Thanol Bum Baq (intersection village), Phum Thanol Daj (blocked road village). (Boonreung Katchama cited in Surin Samosorn 2013). Even though some of the village names in Thailand were already simplified into Thai language, the word “Thanon” remains as an essential element to study the connection between this land to the ancient routes and, just like *prasat* ruins across the region, could be considered as ‘a tangible reminder of the former breadth of the ancient Khmer empire’ (Denes 2012, 170).

Chong Chom was the first mountain pass in Dangrek region to have a road since the French colonial period for the logging business to transport timbers to Tonle Sab (Surin

¹⁸ See the location of Chong Krang here <https://goo.gl/maps/g5oP2pvGvQ3SCJMC7>

Samosorn 2013; Nithichaianan 2013) and was later named Route 68. On the Thai side, the road was first constructed during the Franco-Thai war (early World War II) called Route 214¹⁹ (see chapter 2). It was part of the Prime Minister Plaek Phibunsongkram's policy in connecting Isaan with Siem Reap and Battambang as Thailand won the war with the French. They succeeded in dealing with Japan during WWII to govern six provinces of Cambodia and reorganized as three provinces of Thailand²⁰ (Jintasakul 1985). Although the Thai administration lasted only six years (1941-1946), it shifted the flows of people who found the opportunities to relocate and resettle between the plateau and the lower plain. A retired Surin local officer share his story with me about how easy Surin people would cross Chong Chom to Samrong (Oddar Meanchey Province) for selling goods or visiting their relatives and how close the government officers of the two provinces were as they visited one another regularly in the early days of Cambodian post-independent period.²¹ Not to mention, there were four *chong(s)* that had accessible roads for vehicles, but Chong Chom has remained the only pass that successfully turned into international border checkpoint in the year 2002 (Surin Immigration Office 2019).²²

This means there was no strict regulation in crossing the mountains even after WWII and the Vietnam War. It was normal to have family relatives living on both sides and visiting one another without any concern until the Khmer Rouge seized power in Cambodia in 1975. The human flows changed its form to clandestine movements throughout the civil war, as there were less and less *chong(s)* that people could move around or cross freely. There were only select *chong(s)* the state authorities started actively involved in border surveillance and immigration controls. Accordingly, people could no longer travel across the mountain without travel

¹⁹ Route 214 starts from Kalasin Province (the upper Isaan) and ends at Chong Chom which connect to Route 68 in Cambodia

²⁰ This also includes Champassak and Xaignabouli of Laos. See further discussion in chapter 2)

²¹ Interviewed at Surin Rajamongkol University on June 14, 2018

²² There are five passes with car-accessible roads in Surin Province namely Chong Prig, Chong Pran, Chong Plod Tang, Chong Chom and Chong Krang https://www.surinimmigration.go.th/?page_id=22

documents and proper safety. With the infrastructure that kept the route most accessible and manageable, Chong Chom has continued to be the most used pass for the postwar community as the official border checkpoint was established in 2002.

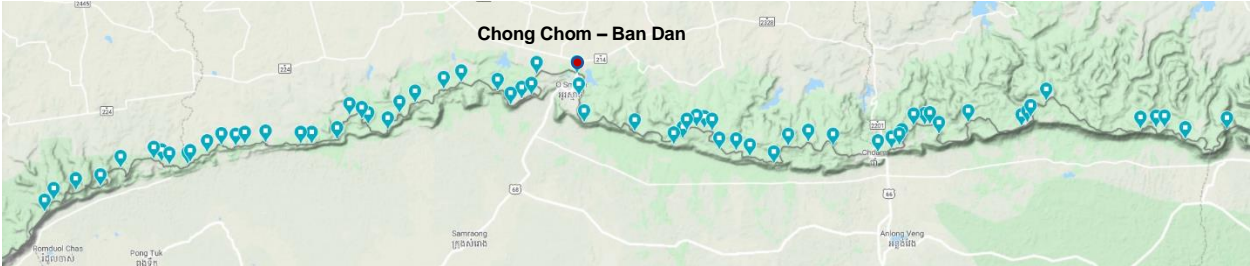


Figure 5: Google Maps with bookmarks of Chong(s) throughout Dangrek range from Buriram-Surin-Sisaket and Oddar Meanchey

When ‘Chong’ becomes the country’s gateway, there is ‘Dan,’ the term used for the immigration checkpoint when the nation states had come to perform sovereign power at the border more than just demarcating the lines (see chapter 5). Although, the development of the checkpoint at the Thai-Cambodian border came after the civil war²³ due to the need to control the influx of Cambodian refugees who escaped turmoil from their country. It is a coincidence that my research site is located in Ban Dan subdistrict of Kapcheong District in Surin Province. It is actually not named after the creation of the Chong Chom border checkpoint, but it existed



Figure 6: The photograph of the immigration officers at Dan Chong Chom (ด่านของจอม) in 1957 (image courtesy: oknation blog, May 2011)

with this name long before. *Ban Dan*, or *Phteah Dan* in Khmer language, is the common name for the villages that are located at the rim of the mountain²⁴ given from a guard post where the travelers might be asked for inspection. As this village name also appeared in Aymonier’s records at more than one location, such as the description

²³ The immigration offices of both countries in the pre-war period were located in the inner areas of the provinces not close to the border lines.

²⁴ The name ‘Ban Dan’ can be found as the name of village, subdistrict (*tambon*), or district (*amphoe*) in Ubon Ratchthani, Sisaket, Surin, Buriram, Sakaeo and also in other areas inside Thailand where this place name hold its historical meaning as a transitional space like in the Dangrek mountains.

shown at the beginning of this section, it could be implied that the Dangrek dwellers have long portrayed this mountainous space as the transitional zone in moving toward the change of the landforms. Although it does not mean to prevent people from moving from one place to another, which could be seen the cross-mountain sociocultural connection through Khmer and Kui ethnic groups and language that broadly speak in Sisaket, Surin, and Buriram Provinces, along with the Lao ethnic group, the majority ethnicity in the Northeastern Thailand. For instance, there are also many stories I learned from Ban Dan residents, and storytelling from local publications, who have relatives who used to live, or still live, in Cambodia.

Another Khmer Leu and Khmer Krom

“When I was young, I used to visit my relatives on Khmer Krom.

“I usually went with my parents, sitting on my dad’s neck going to Samrong by a walk on the red road (terra rossa) to see Ram Tone (Khmer village traditional dance). It was in the lowland not in O’Smach.” (Informant 1)²⁵

“My father is from Khmer Krom. I used to travel down to visit my relatives in their village. But because of the war, they moved to the US after staying in the refugee camp in Surin. They just visited us a year ago.” (Informant 2)²⁶

“It used to be very difficult to travel across Chong Chom – Osmach when this Chong was still a deep forest. We walked through it with barefoot. I was so afraid because of the dark of the jungle it but it was okay because I traveled with many adults. Leaving home in the early morning would arrive my relative’s house in the highland in the evening” (Surin Samosorn 2013)²⁷

Apparently, there are several examples showing how directions and interactions with the landscape and geographical distinction (Vail 2007) lead to the creation of neighborhood and place names to identify the locations. For instance, ‘Isaan’ (the Northeast) region has been established as an administrative unit of Siam due to its location is on the northeastern side of Bangkok (Mikusol 1984; Denes 2006). For the locals in Dangrek mountains, they also take the

²⁵ Interviewed with a female Dan villager at Chong Chom market on August 19, 2018

²⁶ Interviewed motorcycle taxi driver near Chong Chom Checkpoint on September 3, 2018

²⁷ Translated from the article in Surin Samosorn by Kraisak Sriphanom (2013, p.34). Surin Samosorn (Surin Club) is the quarterly local magazine produced by the local scholars with the purpose on telling the stories of the local people by their own. Therefore, there are various articles about Surin published non-academically which include the stories about the historical places and its origins, prasat, the records of the royal visits by the locals whom witnessed the king and the queen, ethnic groups and Chinese migrants, Khmer cultures and beliefs, folk music and festivals, the stories about ghosts, the travel memoirs of Etienne Aymonier, and knowledge about Khmer language etc.

height difference of mountains to distinguish people's origins by using the Khmer language terms 'Khmer Krom (Khamen Tham)' – 'Khmer Leu (Khamen Soong)'. These terms used by Dangrek dwellers are different from the context of Cambodia. In Cambodia, both terms were created after the country's independence in 1954 aiming to integrate the ethnic minorities into the majority ethnic Khmer population initiated by King Norodom Sihanouk and his Sangkum Reastr Niyum's policy of 'Khmerization' of the population (Uk 2016). He labeled the ethnic groups from the highlands near the Southern Lao and northern Vietnam as 'Khmer Leu' (Kampuchea Leu)²⁸ as opposed to the 'Khmer Krom' in the South (Uk). Meanwhile, the 'Khmer Krom' (Kampuchea Krom) is not only the term for the ethnic groups in Southern Cambodia, but also for the Khmer ethnic group in Vietnam that were separated and governed by the Vietnamese administration during the French decolonization. They have been considered as the ethnic minority of Vietnam and no longer fully Khmer (Taylor 2014). Arguably, state territorialization and instituting citizenship has brought about the emergence of ethnic minority or the marginalization of autonomous regions (Sturgeon 2011). This statement could be investigated through the history of the Khmer speaking group in the lower Isaan region of Thailand which will be discussed in the following section.

Constructed Roots and Route Shifting

Considering the theoretical concepts of 'route' and 'root' is useful for comparing the settled community members and the travelers by looking at the social construction of marginality and the local acceptance of Siamese/Thai State which appeared in the contested histories in the local historiography. It also explores the self-perception of being a Khmer minority in Surin Province and the forms of creating the root of its own community in the highland and othering and distancing themselves from the Khmers in Cambodia as the result of

²⁸ The Khmer Leu used to call themselves 'Phnong' was banned and replaced by Khmer Leu, "the Khmer from above," as part of a logic of negation of particularisms (Uk 2016)

new regulation for citizenship. In other words, this section offers how the historiography of the local community had eventually merged with the Siamese/Thai discourse as part of carrying forward the process of social life from the past to the present (Ingold 1993, 157). Consequently, I propose to investigate the multidimensions of colonization and nationalization in order to debunk the constructed roots and shifting nature of routes in Dangrek range. First, drawing the lines not yet limiting free movement across the border. Second, the sublimation of the local historiography by national narrative in the 1990s through the story of elephants and the Kui that tied with the national pride. Third, the emergence of marginality in the state periphery and the creation of ethnic identity within national entity that caused the differentiation between the terms Khom and Khamen, not Khmer and Cambodia, and the idea of the oppressed in the oppressed. Lastly, the silenced history of the Cambodian civil war, a contemporary issue in which the border clearly plays an important part, but that barely made it into the conversation of global history.

Having a careful examination on both roots and routes could be an effective approach to redefine marginalized identities and the relationship to culture and place extensively and to understand the role of landscape and shifting nature of cross-Dangrek mobility which is the main theme of this study. “Routes begin with the assumption of movement” (Clifford 1997, 2) thus make senses of people going from place to place. A view of human location indicated in routes created by movement and displacement from one to another location begs the question of how we could discuss the locations of certain routes in order to delve into the landscape which becomes part of the journey. He questions the statement claiming that “roots always precede routes” (3) and insists that “Roots and routes are not necessarily opposed but rather intertwined” (4). He also claims that the practices of dwelling, travelling, and crossing have been overshadowed by the privilege of colonialist voyagers that could travel and record their dwelling lives without considering their freedom of movement that contrast with the perspective of local representation that could not account for all groups of people (Clifford 1997, 5) like the Kui and the Khmer in Surin Province.

While routes value mobility, movements, encounters, exchanges and mixtures, roots value place attachment, place-based community, territoriality and identity. It signifies “emotional bonds with the physical environment that often contain notions of local community, shared culture, and so forth” (Gustafson 2001, 670). The routes theme may focus on mobility, on traveling, on discovering and exploring new places and different cultures (Gustafson). For this study, I draw attention to the mobility that once was part of daily lives of the Dangrek dwellers. It is the way to rediscover routes that were cut during the processes of border demarcation and further with technological advance in border surveillances. Scott (2009) said “the nature of the routes of access was itself crucial” (53), meaning that exploring routes could reveal the connection between the points of origin and destination that linked the highland and lowland together. Also, this is to understand how the processes of bordering and political division since the colonial period played a crucial part in changing routes and shifting patterns of mobility across the mountains.

Like other regions, the production of marginal people and landscapes on the Dangrek range has occurred primarily at a national scale by the state definitions of peoples and forests (Sturgeon 2011). To retell the stories from Dangrek, I avoid casting the border dwellers as the cultural representation of certain ethnicities or minorities. But rather I focus on the shifts from their ancient routes to rootedness in nationalization and marginalization which is caused by the political enforcement and bordering processes that border populations embraced and rooted themselves (Tsing 1993; Langford 2013). This can be seen through how they define themselves and how they interact with and the border landscape. To argue that mountains do not divide people, but the emergence of the nation-state does, I draw the attention to the rhetoric of language shifting and the way the locals identify themselves and their neighbors as Thai or Cambodian. The local historiography also points out how the Khmer-Thai identity is coming alive and running away from the relationship with the Khmer from lowland Cambodia and how the intention by Thai state did not want to give a spotlight to the Khmer ethnic group, even in

the local history which could have so many issues to debate. To put it simply, it is an attempt to revisit the local history based on previous anthropological studies on Surin Province which include Mikusol (1984), Chungsatiansup (1998), Denes (2006; 2012) . I aim to develop the arguments from these major works and other significant scholarly works on Isaan region and Thai studies such as Smalley (1994), Kasetsiri (2003), and Keyes (2002; 2014) by looking at an account of the local history written by local scholars that are associated with national narrative and the nation-building processes (Donnan and Wilson 2010).

A Local Historiography of Surin Province

To begin with, I would like to provide a summary of Surin history as a glimpse of what will be discussed for the whole section. I combine the official books produced by Surin National Museum (2007); the Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Interior (MOI) (2012); and the academic book by Siriporn Sumetharat (2011)'s *"The Local History of Surin Province."* Two of the three books begin with the prehistorical period and the ancient kingdoms: namely Funan, Champa, Dvaraviti, Chen La, and later the Angkor period. In Sumetharat's book, this period focuses on the archeological works of the Angkor temples that can be found in the province. The books skip several centuries and portray the shifting history from the Angkor period to the Thai chronicle on the region's relationship with the Siamese dynasties in accordance with Thai official history which begins with the Sukhothai reign and the migration of ethnic Thai to the region, then the Ayutthaya rule. Particularly, the richly detailed story of the ethnic Kui as elephant hunters and the escaped white elephant from Ayutthaya²⁹ is the key event that insists that Surin had become a part of Siam/Thailand without any significant rebellion. This is followed by the period of the country reforms by King Chulalongkorn on how Surin have now turned to be one of many administrative units that is directly controlled by the central government in Bangkok.

²⁹ The oral history regarding Kui leaders lived in Surin area helped capture a sacred white elephant that escaped from Ayutthaya Court. Chiang Phum, one of the Kui leader was given the title Luang Surin Pakdii from Ayutthaya court for the first time and became the tributary to the court at Ayutthaya (Sumetharat 2011).

The contemporary period highlights the royal visit during the Cold War period that depicted the bond between the province under the supreme authority of the Thai monarchy.

The purpose of demonstrating the synopsis of the local history is to point out the generalized ideas regarding how the local historiography was chronologically produced by state-led narratives could be problematic, as the Dangrek people lived through many centuries without being parts of either Thai national history or Cambodian history. The turning point is that Siam was the first state to authenticate and appropriate its power over this autonomous region. The narrative has left a historical amnesia that had no evidence of encounters between powerful polities in the Southeast Asia mainland. It could be said that the local history could not be fulfilled by simply inserting Ayutthaya and Siam into a sliding scale of time and authenticating it as part of the national history in the contexts of Dangrek region. This is similar to what Penny Edwards argues on how the French tried to depict the Angkor ruins with European aesthetic standards (2007, 28–29). Accordingly, I find both pros and cons of reiterating the chronological historiography that would be difficult to complete its missing period gaps and mostly relied on the national narration. In other words, there are alternative approaches to narrate the history of Dangrek region that does not necessary fulfil the missing periods, but provides the livelihood of the Dangrek inhabitants through the temporality of the landscape as provided in the first section. For the following part, I integrate the studies of local historiography in relation to the construction of rootedness in ethnic identity, marginality, and nation state formation as a Siamese colonial project.

Colonialism and Huamuang Khamen Padong

During the period of colonialism throughout Southeast Asia, Siam began to fear that the expansion of British and French colonialism might endanger their power over local and regional autonomy. Due to that fact, Siam rulers saw colonialism as a threat to their power in the region. Siamese Court had dealt with the pressure from the French and the British by embracing the

same colonial practices³⁰ through the selective and gradual integration of Western principles of governance and philosophy as they wished Siam to be as civilized and powerful as the Europeans. Starting in the late nineteenth century under the rule of absolute monarchy of Chakri Dynasty during the reigns of King Mongkut (Rama IV) and King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), the administrative reforms included the changes in the Siamese Court that turned into the Siamese central government in Bangkok; the development of infrastructure; the expansion of communication and transportation networks such as the post and telegraph offices and railway construction, which helped to bring other regions into more intimate contact with the central Thai and to make them aware of Bangkok as an economic and political focus (Mead 2004).

Additionally, a system of royal commissioners began assigning administrative units under the *Thesaphiban* system (เทศาภิบาล - provincial administration).³¹ Each administrative unit (*Monthon*, circle - มณฑล) was divided into provincial domains (*Huamuang* - หัวเมือง) that had prior existed in the areas.³² The northeastern region, a situated direction toward the Northeast from Bangkok, was divided into four divisions.³³ For the Dangrek region, the area that used to be autonomous and had their own local leaders occasionally sent forest products as tributes to the court at Ayutthaya, was grouped as the domain of the ethnic Khmer, Kui, and Lao

³⁰ According to Peter Jackson (2010), there are several terms that scholars in Thai studies use for describing the qualified form of colonialism in Thailand in response to the Western colonization in Southeast Asia such as “semicolonialism” “indirect rule”, “informal empire”, “cultural imperialism”, “internal colonialism”, “auto-colonialism”, and “crypto-colonialism” and “semicolony” to denote the country’s colony-like character (41).

³¹ The Thesaphiban Act of 1897 was promulgated to radically reorganize the administrative system by replacing local lords with salaried governors dispatched from the central state government (Tej Bunnag 1977).

³² In the first series of major governmental reform laws proclaimed in 1893, the administration of all *huamuang* that had formerly been under the jurisdiction of several quasi-ministries was centralized under the Ministry of Interior. These were designed to bridge the gap between the central government and the *huamuang*. While *Monthon* were administered by officials appointed by Bangkok that help the government step closer to direct control over the outer provinces in Northeast area. The *monthon* system was abolished by the 1932 constitution and was replaced with *Changwat* (จังหวัด - province) and *Amphoe* (district) instead.

³³ In 1890, the region was divided into four divisions known as *monthon*, each with its own royal commissioner. The divisions comprised Lao Phuan (Nong Khai), Lao Kao (Champasak), Lao Isan (Ubon) and Lao Klang (Khorat). There also was another one *monthon* in the present-day Cambodia territory based on Sisophon (Atthakon 1962 cited in Mikusol 1984).

groups called *Huamuang Khamen Padong* (Forest Khmer Domains) including Surin, Sangkha, and Khukhan³⁴ under the management of Bangkok authority as part of *Monthon Ubon*. The local ruler shared administrative duties with the second ruler appointed by Bangkok until the eighth local governor died in 1888. There were no more local governors appointed by Bangkok's administration (Surin National Museum, 2007). To put it differently, it could be seen as a regional implication of national decision-making and policy implementation that was eventually centralized by the elites from Bangkok to take charge of the regions of the non-Thai ethnic majority during King Chulalongkorn's great reformation (Keyes 2014).

In addition, I found another interesting point on how Siamese government designated the units of Monthon that were not considered by the ethnic differences or ethnical closeness, but geographical setting, even before the official border demarcation in the early twentieth century. Accordingly, there were several accounts and oral history from local scholars regarding the relations between *Monthon Burapha* (Eastern circle)³⁵ which was comprised of Battambang, Sisophon, Phanomsok (Oddar Meanchey) and Siem Reap and Huamuang Khamen Padong. These stories illustrate the passages of different colonial agencies that had been through Dangrek range and the connection between the lowland and highland before it was divided into two countries and appeared in the local magazine called *Surin Samosorn*, which was publishing about the relations between Battambang, Sisophon, Chong Kal, and Surin cities. For example, in 1880 (B.E. 2423), there were British Tamil merchants who traveled by ox carts from Battambang to Surin. These merchants traveled with the letter from the Battambang Governor to the Surin Governor informing him that they were under the British rule and they should be welcomed with hospitality.³⁶ Their route started from Battambang via Surin to Ubon Ratchthani to sell

³⁴ Sangkha is now part of Surin Province and Khukhan is now part of Sisaket Province.

³⁵ *Monthon Burapha* (The Eastern Circle) lasted only a decade approximately (1896-1907) due to the 1907 Franco-Thai Treaty. The circle was ceded to the French Indochina since then.

³⁶ Translated from the article: They should not fight with the merchants because they were under the British government, Siam did not have power to punish them. In other words (in between the lines), "avoid these merchants,

goods along the trip. However, the story in the magazine was about the dispute between the merchants and the oxcart guide that was provided by Siamese government. As there were misunderstandings and arguments during their stop in Surin, they could not continue their trip and had to head back to Battambang instead.³⁷ Paitoon Mikusol also found that the *chaomuang* (governors) of the Huamung Khamen Padong, the Lao and the local elites traveled to Bangkok annually through the passes (Chong Chom, Chong Sai Tagu, Chong Chup Smach) via Prachinburi toward Bangkok for paying tributary taxes, trades, and to receive royal appointments from the Siamese Court (Mikusol 1984).

Another story was about Luang Phichit Preechakorn (พระเจ้าน้อยยาเธอกรมหลวงพิชิตปรีชากร), the Governor of Monthon Lao Gao that comprise Huamuang Khamen Pa Dong. He was first assigned this position in 1891 and made his 77-day journey with more than 200 officials and security guards and equipment from Bangkok since November 1891 via Aranyaprathet, Sisophon, and Surin to Ubonratchathani in February 1892. Throughout his journey, the governors of each Huamuang would need to accommodate his stays. From Sisophon to Surin, Phra Chai Narong Bhakdi (Bunnag), the acting Surin Governor at that time had ordered fifty-five elephants to welcome the new governor at Chong Chup Smach (Surin Samosorn 2015). At last, the trip from Bangkok to the lower Isaan region was rerouted after the construction of the Northeast train route via Dong Phayayen mountains (the western end of Dangrek range) that used to be a deadly route due to its difficulty to pass through the deep forest and Malaria fever.

With the presence of the officials from Bangkok, and after many altercations with the French, people who lived in this region were technically entitled as Thai citizens at a state level,

they are wicked and more dangerous than a poisonous snake” (อย่าได้ยุ่งกับคนพวกนี้ มันมีพิษร้ายยิ่งกว่างู). (Surin Samosorn 2013)

³⁷ The goods were stolen, so they asked the Surin Governor to compensate with a threatening note from the British. The story resulted in angst among Surin locals as the Surin Governor had forced them to compensate the Tamil merchants one baht per household which was a very high amount of money that they could have at that time. It caused such a tearful and hateful feeling for the money they lost for the merchants (Surin Samosorn 2015).

but their identities were still represented according to their ethnicities at a local level, as appeared in the names of *Monthon* and *Huamuang* (Mikusol 1984). Consequently, they were able to maintain their distinctive identity and cultural autonomy relative to the Thai state. However, the impact of the administrative reforms could focus on educational reforms, which could be seen as the most effective mechanism to turn Northerners into Thai citizens.

In other words, Siam's rulers had reformed from various perspectives in order to centralize the power in non-Thai regions, which included Dangrek region, and turned the local population into Thai citizens. They did so by disenfranchising local communities of their relative economic and cultural relations that were identical to the lowland in nearly every respect and convincing them that the reforms were good for the people because the Siamese government would protect them from the foreign threats (Winichakul 1994). The development in the process of nationalization in Siam had created a new form of imagined community and citizenship of people who came to see themselves as state members (Anderson 1991; Sturgeon 2011). The political divisions were made by geographical not ethnic settings. Therefore, the Khmer and Kui people in the *Khamen Padong* domain who used to travel across Dangrek Mountains to the lowland Cambodia without national identification suddenly had to choose their nationality – Thai or French Khmer. The ethnic Khmer in Siamese sovereignty become slightly unable to connect with the Khmer in Cambodia and only receive socioeconomic influence from Bangkok.³⁸ This finally made them integrated into the Isaan region and undistinguished from ethnic Lao in the upper Northeast which, indeed, put them in marginalized and disempowered positions (Keyes 1994 cited in Sturgeon 2011).

The word *Isaan* that once signified the Lao speakers was eventually meant for the whole region. Other ethnicities unavoidably had been silenced since then. To clarify, the Khmer

³⁸ Pan Saeng Rung (2015), Documentary program on the ethnic Khmer in Thailand aired on ThaiPBS Channel. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUpSRttx06k>

speakers have become separated with the Khmer in the lowland and stereotyped as Isaan people without minority status, which means they were automatically becoming native Thai.³⁹ Even though there were several attempted acts of resistance by the group of people who held to the older pre-colonial ideas of political authority, the central government successfully suppressed the rebellions in time⁴⁰ (Mikusol 1984; Keyes 2014).

Marginality and Autonomy

“If the Angkorian ruins suggest the borderscape was once part of civilization or at least semi-periphery to the center of Angkor until the empire declined in the fifteenth century. There is little doubt that the region has been anything but a backwater. The decline of Angkor also precipitated the linguistic differentiation of highland and lowland Khmer. This area serves utterly peripheral status both for its trade and labor market as the remotest corners of the Siamese empire and the French protectorate” (Vail 2011, 84)

According to Vail (2011), Dangrek mountains have always been the periphery of any political entity that could reach the region. Though, Vail’s statement on Dangrek borderscape seems only to reiterate the rhetoric that Isaan region could not be anything but the margins. There are scholarly works that share the same observation, claiming that this region fell into obscurity, dark age or a backwater for over three centuries because so little is known of the history of this region prior to the late-eighteenth century after the collapse of the Angkor Empire (C.15 - 18) and before reappearing again in the Thai national historiography as a tributary chiefdom⁴¹ to Ayuttaya court, and later, Siamese court in the wake of the colonial encounter in the nineteenth century (Mikusol 1984; Talbot and Chutima 2001; Denes 2006, 2012; Vail 2011). To subsume the power of autonomous power in the region and centralize the newly Westernized political

³⁹ Population Registration Office (1999) classifies the ethnic minorities in Thailand into eighteen categories and defines ethnic minorities as the groups of people who do not have Thai citizenship. They are less in number than the owner of the country. Their cultures, customs and traditions differ among each other and from the national ones. They entered and stayed in Thailand in many different ways (Cited in Theraphan Luangthongkum, 2007)

⁴⁰ *Phu Mi Boon* (ផ្ទៃដីឃ្លា - man of merits) Rebellion was primarily due to the reason that the new tax system required people to pay tax in a form of cash (money) which at that time money was not common among local people. The leaders were also regarded by their followers as ascetics with supernatural powers and the religious nature which enabled them to lead the uprising.

⁴¹ It was a ritualized tributary relationship between the central court and the autonomous entities that the latter would offer forest products and slaves and periodic military conscription to the court (Paitoon 1984).

entity, Siam began to eliminate place names that denoted by autonomous identity and replaced by Thai words (Winichakul 1994 cited in Denes 2006).

The territorialized border was defined just over a hundred years ago by 1904 and 1907 Franco-Thai treaties when watershed became a matter for border delineation and later as a center of the border dispute over Preah Vihear temple and its vicinity in the 1960s and the late 2000s. This could be seen as a turning point regarding the relationship of people across Dangrek ranges since the national boundaries were made, and the border dwellers became conscious of the substantial difference in nationality that they were mostly oriented politically and economically towards Siam (Denes). Even though the borderlines did not hold much practical meaning to the nomads or homesteaders who live in the margins, they could settle wherever they could get the most productive land for cultivation whether the land was in Cambodia or whether it was in Thailand (Denes). This has been the practice of the borderlanders up until the Cambodian civil war as there was little enforcement or state coercion controlling where to live and where was cross-able. The border has split and bifurcated Khmer speakers into different states. Cross-border relations between Thais and Cambodians along the Dangrek Mountains become less visible in practice and imagination since then (Denes). In other words, it is a border reality of Dangrek mountains when the locals were influenced by the acts of the state and created their new imaginations regarding borders, boundaries, and their border-crossing practices which resulted in a deep awareness of crossover realities in a binational environment (Rosler and Wendl 1999, 8).

However, I wish to highlight the wake of historicization and archival works that are appropriate for claiming the hierarchical relations between the precolonial entities within Southeast Asia during the colonial era. Rather than simply giving the Dangrek range a marginalized status, it is also possible to see the region as autonomous entities that had been persistent to their Angkorian legacy until the crashes between Siam and the French Empire.

Contestation in the oppression: Thailand's Khmer, Kui, and Elephants

The generalization of the Surin official history highlights how the local history was first written by the Siamese officials that were assigned from Bangkok to govern *Monthon Isaan* and *Monthon Khamen Padong* in the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries. For example, *The Chronicle of the Northeast*, written in 1904 by Mom Amorawong Wichit (1963), a deputy governor who was stationed in The Northeastern Circle (*Monthon Isaan*) from 1893-1910, presented a narrative that ethnic Kui and Khmer were willing to be loyalty to the Siamese court at the precise historical moment when central administrative reforms were undermining the relative autonomy of the northeastern principalities. This chronicle become the normalized plot of the local history by classifying the narrative of the white elephants' capture by the ethnic Kui, the elephant keepers, as a "constructed historiography" (Chungsathiansap 1998, 71). However this chronicle reiterated the national plot and selectively presented only some aspects of social memory which might not be accurate, particularly during the epoch of the Khmer Empire that Mom Amorawong chose to ignore local elements of *Prasat*, the stone temples, which could be commonly found in the region, and left out context and began Surin history with the incidents related to Chiang Pum, the first leader of the ethnic Kui whom shown to willingly incorporate with the Ayutthaya court. Since Mom Amorawong's chronicle is considered as *Phongsawadan* (พงศาวดาร), which was convincingly the most reliable in the first place, the state-led narrative became more successful in gathering the spontaneous consent (Gramsci cited in Denes 2006) of the Surin's populace in the contemporary period, although the plot was about its constitutive provinces in its domain and their historical relations to Bangkok. Consequently, this historiographic form of this Chronicle of the Northeastern Domain could be considered as the narrative and practices of the ruling lords which was able to indicate loyalty to the nation and the monarchy due to an intensive colonial confrontation and negotiation in the nineteenth century. Winichakul (1995) explains that the local historical narrative would be made to befit the newly established territorial-based administrative regime in order to unify the kingdom into

united, inseparable provinces each with their deep roots of historical connections to Bangkok through the modern Siamese national history, which seems to be emphatically the submissive links by which the peripheral realms subjugated by the center (Chungsathiansap 1998).

Beside the ruins of Angkorian empire in the region, it was a dark time for the Dangrek region because no records or *phongsawadan* had mentioned anything about the region between the thirteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. That is, until the officials from Bangkok began to narrate the story of the city founder which was claimed to be the ethnic Kui and their relationship to elephants. The account was linked to the elephant catching/hunting practices which is a specialty of the ethnic Kui throughout the region. The contested point is about the original history of the province that had laid down on the Kui leader (Chiang Pum) who paid loyalty to Ayutthaya court by helping the king catch the escaped white elephants, and then receiving the royal title *Phraya Surin Phakdi Srinarong Chang Wang* (พระยาสุรินทร์ภักดีศรีณรงค์จางวาง)⁴² from Ayutthaya, which meant that the city came under Siamese rule since then. The elephant, the holy animal for the kingdom, was therefore made to be the provincial icon and Surin became the name of the city. This text which came from the *Chronicle of the Northeast* became the indisputable authority in fixing Surin's history around this singular event. The incompleteness of the state's codification of Surin's provincial identity as the region of marginal ethnic groups was suggested to constitute the selectively heroic feature of local history and the social practice which best fit within the Thai national imaginary (Dense 2006, 154).

Nevertheless, there is skepticism over the notion of claiming the city's founder was ethnic Kui while the majority of province is ethnic Khmer. I do not mean that this is impossible, but rather, as Denes (2006) found, the history regarding ethnic Khmer has been silenced and little is known about the continuation after the fall of Angkor Empire. It would be interesting to

⁴² This title contains the word "*Phakdi*" ภักดี means 'to be loyal to'. It indeed reflects the national narrative in the Surin historiography which is portrayed by the stories of Phraya Surin Phakdi that showed the strong loyalty to the Siamese court.

study further what makes people accept the protagonist of Surin history to be ethnic Kui when the proportion of citizen statistically dominated by ethnic Khmer. The answer might be explained by the contemporary narratives regarding the figure of Phraya Surin Phakdi, as the founder's cult presented as an interrupted continuity with its pre-colonial form in the midst of dramatic social and economic change at the local level. Therefore, this could be seen as the state's re-ordering of the local that was aimed at rationalizing the myths and practices surrounding beliefs associated with founder's cult as the ontology creating the ever-present possibility of the founding return in order to perform the loyalty to the nation and the king. Therefore, considering the relationship between local and official history in Thailand, in this case, the history was written with strategically selective local narratives and practices which suit the task of nation-building. To make an actively co-opted, while unassimilated past narratives have to be silenced, ignored and downplayed in order to foster solidarity and loyalty to the King from every province, yet able to retain some regional cults of tributary devotion to Siamese court by reconfiguring these founder cults into provincial narratives of faithful national heroes (Denes 2006). Overall, the local historiography relied too much on national narratives that construct the Khmer ethnic group as an invisible minority under the Lao-turned-Isaan (Northeastern) region, and less on the relationship between landscape and human society in the way that "landscape and environment shape human action and agency and driving historical change." The border landscape is a social construction that could "demonstrate its symbolic power through myths and memories" that lived within it (Carrol 2018, 167).

In conclusion, the movements of revitalizing the Khmer identity in the 1990s to the present that has been developed and rewritten with nationalistic ideology. The movements have been actively involved by the provincial administration. Various campaigns and events are operated annually within the guided history by incorporating local histories and practices into the national narrative and symbolic icons (Chungsathiansap 1998; Denes 2006, 2012). The state-sponsored program may be considered as a potentially positive social and economic

implication for ethnic Khmer population by renewing senses of place and pride in their cultural difference. Considering Thongchai Winichakul's concept of “*the others within*” that properly applies to any marginal area whether it fits local interests or not, the making of local history and identity requires Thai nationalism and it should be understandable in Thai discourse (Winichakul 2000) as seen in the reproduction of three main characters of Surin's identity namely the city founder, elephants, and three major ethnic groups – Khmer, Lao, and Kui.

From Khmer Leu to Khmer Thai of Isaan Region

During my fieldwork in June 2018, I was invited to attend the provincial seminar on Khmer language (Northern Khmer dialect) for schoolteachers in Surin sponsored by the provincial cultural office. The main objective of the seminar was to encourage teachers to let their students learn and speak Northern Khmer dialect that the linguistic local scholar considered the dialect as a local language called ‘*Phasa Khamen Thin Thai*’ (ภาษาเขมรถิ่นไทย Khmer-Thai language) at the public schools. There was an interesting comment from the Surin Governor who came for the opening ceremony of the seminar on the significance in learning Khmer language in order to be able to communicate with Cambodians that have increasingly visited Surin for medical healthcare and tourism. He raised a question of whether this project could have been developed to learn standard Khmer or how could the local Surin people speak a Surin Khmer dialect with the Cambodians. He said that if the students could learn and embrace themselves to speak Khmer, it would be very beneficial to the local economy by commodifying the local language competency.

However, I asked permission to conduct a short survey with the attending teachers, including the interview with the host speakers.⁴³ Most of the attendants believed that Khmer Thai should be taught for the sake of language perseverance for the local community. I found these

⁴³ Interviewed on June 13, 2018 at Ratchmongkol Surin University, Surin Province

contradictory points of view really telling of the local perception that was affected by the Thai national ideology. It portrays the attempt to distance the Khmer dialect that is used in Thailand as a different language from standard Khmer. To learn standard Khmer is somehow equal to the possibility that local students would not be able to learn the local dialect. In other words, they would lose a chance to preserve the local language according to the national policy on local language (through the aspect of the project runners). This story leads me to the discussion of how the Khmer speaking group in Surin and also surrounding provinces from the language perspective in relations to the ethnic minority and marginalization issue in Thailand. It will be discussed by the emergence of Khmer Thai and Surin historiography within the Thai national narrative.

The recent event I attended partly demonstrates how Khmer language is embraced under the Thai local curriculum project. It draws back to how Surin Province where the majority population is a Khmer speaking group along with the Kui and the Lao speakers. Khmer-Thai refers to ethnic Khmer people living in Northeastern Thailand which can also be more specific with the province such as Khmer Surin (Saren/Sourin⁴⁴) or Khmer Buriram. The term is used to differentiate the reference of the Northern Khmer from the Khmer living in Cambodia and speaks the same Northern dialect not only in the sense of geographical distinction but also the nationality of the speakers.

⁴⁴ '*Sourin*' is largely used by Cambodians in the lowland. Meanwhile Surin people would call themselves Khmer '*Saren*'. According to Seng (2013), there are various words to call Khmer living in Northeastern Thailand by linguist scholars, researchers and Khmer Surin themselves such as Northern Khmer, Khmer of Surin, Surin Khmer, Thai-Khmer, ethnic Khmer, Thailand's Khmer, and Khmer minorities.

The overlay of two maps of linguistic surveys and a regular static map as shown in Figure 7⁴⁵ indicates that the Khmer people have been living across the mountains long before the emergence of the nation-state, provincial system and the borderlines. However, all these political units and toolkits that created the separation between Thailand and Cambodia have affected the way the locals identified themselves. For instance, the border demarcation and the making of national ‘geo-body’ through the process of mapping led to the domestication of the margins that was central to the establishment of boundary and nationhood⁴⁶ (Winichakul 1994). Thus the ‘geo-body’ has influenced many dimensions of people’s lived experiences including the locals’ self-identification and their adaption to the process of nationalization which enables us to have a better grasp of the social phenomena in the Dangrek region (Donnan and Wilson 2010 emphasis mine).

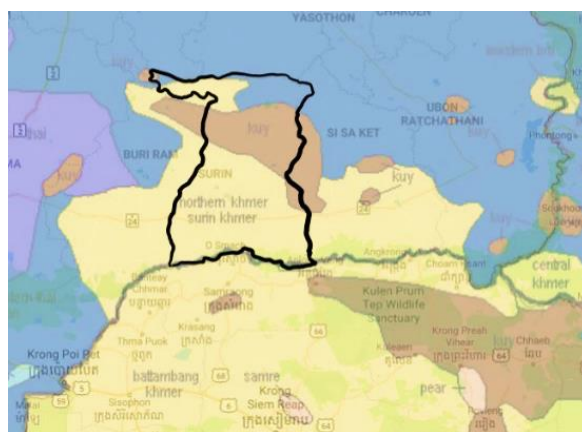


Figure 7 The overlay of two maps shows geographical and linguistic settings of Surin Province (Google Maps 2020; Muturzikina 2009)

⁴⁵ Geographical map is retrieved from Google Maps and Linguistic Map is retrieved from <http://www.muturzikin.com/>. This website is created by independent weber based in Canada who aims to publish language maps display the ethnic and linguistic complexities around the world crossing international border. This is for visual illustration in an insular order where it characterizes socio-linguistic landscapes which does meant to portray the exact or current language usage in one region in a single image.

⁴⁶ Thongchai Winichakul (1994) coined the term ‘geo-body’ as a response to Benedict Anderson’s ‘Imagined Community’. He extends the ideas of how the nation is configured by language and media in human imagination through the idea of maps/mapping that bring national identity to reality, not simply the imagination anymore.

The politics and confusion of words: Khmer versus Khom⁴⁷

In the last decade, there was a controversial issue about the word “Khmer”: there is more than one problematic usage of the words, *Cambodian* versus *Khmer* that demonstrates a complete differentiation in defining Khmer heritage in Thailand and Cambodia. In other words, there are synonyms of Khmer in the Thai language that were created to divide Khmerness in Thailand from Khmerness in Cambodia. Charnvit Kasetsiri (2003) explains how they use the words *Khom*, *Khmer* (*Khamen* in Thai) in various contexts that have been used in conventional Thai history and general usages without the similar meaning and connection to Cambodia as a country. For instance, the historical textbooks for primary school level claim that there were groups of Khom settled in their communities long before Thai people arrived then fought those Khom to move out and finally established the Sukhothai Kingdom as happened to be the first kingdom of Thailand in according with national history. This description avoids relating the Khom people with the ancient Khmer of Angkor Empire and its great influence politically and culturally over mainland Southeast Asia. In Thai historical contexts, they used the word Khom instead of Khmer in order to differentiate the word Khmer, which always evokes the sense of being Cambodian. This word distinction was used by a significant number of Thai elites who wished to assimilate the ethnic Khmer group to become Thais and resulted in the Khmer speakers distancing themselves from their former close relationship with Khmer people in Cambodia. Eventually the Khmer speakers rejected any cultural connection with Cambodians in Cambodia as much as possible. Moreover, those same Thai elites also created the feeling of superiority over Cambodia and other neighboring countries like Laos and Burma in order that this ongoing process can be seen in a nationalistic stance of creating and sustaining official Thai history (Kasetsiri 2003).

The confusion around the word “Khom” is derived from the old Thai Khmer Krom, meaning lowland Khmer. In spoken Thai, Khmer was gradually dropped, leaving only Krom which over time became first Klom or Kalom and eventually Khom. Local histories of Surin written by Siriporn Sumetharat (2011) also agree with Kasetsiri on this argument. Sumetharat believes that the word “Khom” has never been used for any Khmer kingdom or ethnic Khmer in Cambodia, whereas this word has appeared in Thai historical works for a long time. There are several arguments regarding this word, and the author proposes her argument that the word Khom was from the word “Krom” which means the groups of people who live in the southern part of Dangrek Mountains to the Ton Le Sap arena. Khom is, thus, a Thai word used to refer to people in the area since the period of the Angkor Empire. Sumetharat concludes this part of her argument by suggesting that future scholars study the roots of these significant words to better understand the cultural, ethnic, and national connections in mainland Southeast Asia.

⁴⁷ This is a side story that depicts the political intention of how the Khmerness was differentiated by the acts of Thai state with their bitter relations with Cambodian state after the colonial period when both nations were trying to find their ways to revive their national prides against colonialism that deepen in their societies.

Conclusion

The hidden route: Searching the war memory that has left in the mountains

“a history of state violence and millennial rebellion that remained invisible in the eyes of judges and lawyers. In their eyes, nonetheless, there was something 'forbidding' about the landscape.” (Cuasay 1998, 883).

My hypothesis resonates with Cuasay's argument but proposes a different take. His work primarily focuses on the temple of Preah Vihear based on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) judgment and the oral pleadings to point out how the judge resolved the case with a map rather than 'capitulate to achievements of sheer conquering force' (Cuasay 1998, 850). He argues that we pay attention to what may have been forbidding from the landscape. His statement indeed shows how important it is to focus on the temporality of the landscape so that there will be a high possibility to disclose any significant movements in this area. Instead, this study concentrates on the mountainous landscape itself beyond the border dispute that would allow exploring other aspects of the region as viewed by the border dwellers. As Tsing (2015) states, “This kind of memory requires motion and inspires an intimate historical knowledge of the forest” (245). How have they experienced and lived with the mountains as part of their lives? In other words, there are also threads of life history which weave a more complex pattern of experiential knowledge and dimensions of dwelling (Ingold 1993). Memories prompted by place can give a fleeting sense of familiarity, but these findings suggest a deeper dynamic at work. Memory appears to have a role in supporting an ongoing recognition and working out of how one might belong in a new place. Experiences of remembering landscapes can be a restorative means of envisaging how everyday life continues beyond the strangeness. (Rishbeth and Powell 2013)

Taking landscapes as aids to remembering the past would help memories not being seen as a passive process that tend to fade of their own record and it has its own character based on the sociocultural background of each area. This statement reflects how border inhabitance and their interactions with the landscape can be seen as a material technology of memory/forgetting.

In other words, it is 'a repository of the past' that the physical environment functions as for keeping or silencing the inhabitants' memories (Darby 2000, cited in Harrison 2004). In doing so, the war history may look like it is going to be forgotten with fading memories. However, during the moments I interrupted the work of forgetting by conducting the interviews with the Thai locals, such eventful stories have been recalled. It provides another side of the Cambodian civil war history that may have left behind for decades. The war memories are not yet forgotten. It has only been silenced or forbidden, from what I have speculated in the previous section. The next chapter shall discuss the history of Cambodian civil war at the Thai-Cambodian border.

Chapter 2 Movements in Disguise: The Cambodian Civil War in Phnom Dangrek

Something forbidding about the landscape

Aranyaprathet is the center of cross-border movements and the destination for Cambodian asylum seekers to get into the ICRC-led transit camp, Khao-I-Dang, in hopes that they could join the resettlement program to the Western countries. During my visit to Khao-I-Dang to explore this former transit center (refugee camp) in Sakaeo, my friend and I contacted the caretaker of the camp-turned-sanctuary area. We met local residents by chance and had an informal conversation with them about the former camp. One informant said to me ‘*this is not our history, why do you study about this?*’⁴⁸ That sentiment has been stuck in my mind since then. What made the Cambodian Civil War “an unthinkable history” to the Thai locals even though it happened on the Thai side as well? Does this mean the state-centric narrative succeeded in promoting national ideology throughout its border zone which played an important part in manipulating what people choose to remember and how they remember it?

Although my home in Prasat District is an hour driving distance to the border at Chong Chom, Kapcheong District, this does not mean I am familiar with the border town. There was only one time when I was young that I recalled I visited the border casino when it first opened in the early 2000s after decades of the armed conflicts. There were camouflage tents of the Thai army troops at the forefront of the border, but I had no clue what was going on at that time. I have no memory of anyone telling me there once was a war that caused Cambodians to flee the fight from the



Figure 8: A sidewalk on the O'Smach side right after passing the immigration station (06/19/2018)

⁴⁸ An informant near the former refugee transit center, Khao-I-Dang, Sakaeo Province

other side of the border. Like other concerns over the rising amount of ignorance about the holocaust in Europe or now in Myanmar, ignorance about the Cambodian Genocide may give a disquieting picture of how little awareness there was in acknowledging and understanding the war and genocide history by a country like Thailand that did not experience the trauma themselves, yet played an important role in the course of events. Blaming the educational system and school curriculum might not be enough to figure out why such history has been rarely taught in Thailand and less transmitted verbally through generations, in the case of border inhabitants who interacted with refugees, soldiers, and foreign volunteer agencies (volags). Indeed, the nationalistic perception of the Genocide that occurred in the neighboring country has confined Thailand from feeling obligated to educate the younger generations regarding what happened to its neighbors.

What I discovered this from the border residents in the district of Sangkha and Kapcheong, they would barely talk about the Cambodian civil war or shared their stories with younger generations about how they were affected by the war in certain ways. However, they were welcoming and willing to share their stories with me more than I expected. Since talking about the past war topic is quite sensitive, it was a challenging task for me as an ethnographer to conduct the interviews with those who experienced the war themselves in ethically appropriate ways. With the assumption that nationality would give different perceptions toward the past war, I refrained from asking my Cambodian informants about their war experiences directly, but carefully asked for interviews with those who lived in the former refugee camps and surrounding areas, particularly in the districts of Sangkha and Kapcheong.

In the previous chapter, I delved into the local historiography of Surin province, the formation of marginality and nationalization within the newly constructed national boundary of Thailand over the past century. The findings from Chapter 1 reveals the disconnection and no specific acknowledgment of the Cambodian Genocide and the Khmer Rouge regime, which is

one of the most significant periods of Cambodian history. Therefore this chapter continues to seek out the reasons why there are no relevant texts relating to the event and how Surin became one of the locations for the refugee camps, or even stating how the Surin locals had been affected by the war. First, I juxtapose the political history of Thailand and Cambodia to find the interrelation between the politics of the two countries in the context of Cold War. Starting from the beginning of modern history of Thai politics on the national level, at the same time I look at the local level in regard to how Surin was impacted by the second World War. Second, I dig deeper into the guerrilla movements during the Cambodian civil war that occurred in Phnom Dangrek in disguise with the permission from the Thai government besides the refugee encampments along the Thai border. This leads to the discussion of the three factors explaining why Thailand was part of the cause of the war prolongment including historical rivalry, humanitarian aid, and the war economy. Third, I further explore the Phnom Dangrek landscape by traveling with and interviewing the border dwellers who experienced or witnessed the war in the forest to prove that the postwar generations could learn from the war generation, not directly from their experience, but through the conservation about the landscape.

My question concerns how silence works to forbid or hinder people from talking about and remembering the war. What does it mean to think about forgetting as parallel to remembering, while silence leads to forgetting? The most straightforward answer is that Khmer Thais and Khmer Cambodians hold different nationalities, and that processes of nationhood created a sense of othering and being separated from each other even though they share the same ethnicity. The border dwellers from both sides were forced to relocate to safer places during the fights. In Paul Ricoeur's (2006) "Memory, History, Forgetting," he indicates that "forgetting" reveals a sense of discontinuity and disappearance that could lead to questions of memory representation. Both memory and forgetfulness are subject to being intensely manipulated by the power concerning representation of the past and the use and abuse of memory. For Ricoeur (2006), there are three types of memory and forgetting as two sides of the

same coin: blocked/repressed memory where wounds and pains “are stored in the archives of the collective memory” (79); manipulated memory by ideology as the temporal component of identity; and obligated/forced memory, a trained memory in the service of the remembrance (81, 85). Accordingly, the problem of forgetting with blocked memory is something about pain, mourning, and melancholia. He found that “forgetting is itself termed a work to the extent that it is the work of the compulsion to repeat, which prevents the traumatic event from becoming conscious” (445). Ricoeur’s (2006) argument on blocked memory could help us understand the absence of Thai discourse about the Cambodian Genocide. On the other hand, there are mixed types of memory presentation on the Thai side of the war experience. Manipulated memory by ideology, as the temporal component of identity, could reflect why Thai border dwellers did not explicitly keep their war memories, and it affects how the stories have not been represented in local history in addition to the assumption of nationalization and exclusion by national ideology.

My research builds on Ricoeur’s (2006) theory of memory and forgetting to interrogate how the landscape figures within practices of remembering and forgetting war that also brought about changes in mobility across the natural-turned-national border. I investigate the Thai-Cambodian relations in the context of the Cold War from local perspectives. Based on the oral history told by the border villagers, the retired soldiers, and the border patrol police (BPP), the findings provide stories from what they witnessed, the clandestine movements around the Cambodian border camps and Phnom Dangrek forests. Not only the camp dwellers, but also the border dwellers have been impacted by the clashes or bombs that were planted by all sides, the guerilla movements that hid in the mountains with a secretive control by the Thai Army.

According to Heonik Kwon (2008), revisiting the bi-polarization of the Cold War and the unthinkable history that one country could share with its neighbor potentially helps us to explore the local accounts and the changing political terrain throughout the conflicts particularly in mainland Southeast Asia. Drawing from Kwon’s (2008) statement: “The cold war was a global

conflict, but this does not mean it was an identical phenomenon worldwide...which contradicts how the wider non-western postcolonial world experienced the same epoch with a series of vicious civil wars and other exceptional forms of organized political violence” (4), the studies of Cambodian civil war cannot be explained by the discourse of binary opposition between the US and USSR. Rather it was because of the swings between the Cold War alliance and rivalry that kept the Khmer Rouge and other Cambodian resistance parties alive at the Thai border with the help of Thailand, China, the U.S., and ASEAN⁴⁹ (Asia Watch Committee 1989; Kiernan 1990; Battersby 1998; Jones 2007; Hinton et al. 2013; Oesterheld 2014). In other words, this study highlights the shift in Cold War alliance on how the conflicts had broken the binary opposition in the Cold War narrative. It also reveals the complex postcolonial situation of Mainland Southeast Asia along with its internal politics that shaped the regional politics as the way it was back during the late Cold War days. Specifically, the sequence of regional politics from the colonial era to World War II and the Cold War arguably offer a unique complexity of conflicts. Phnom Dangrek was one of the battlefields of the Cambodian civil war, guerilla stronghold and humanitarian shelter for Cambodian refugees who fled to Thailand to escape the political turmoil in their country. I propose that looking at this mountain can shed light on how the Thai border became the frontline of the Cold War (Jenne 2017) and the site of clandestine movements which contributed to the prolongation of Cambodian civil war and the continuity of political fraction in Cambodia until these days. As Tsing (2005) states:

“The closer we examine social and geographical mobility, the less useful it seems to think in terms of overcoming such friction. This is where movement as mobility and mobilization can be of use. Movement helps us visualize forms of mobility with cultural and political definition—not just transcendent freedom. The specificity of the trajectory of movement is important for what results” (214)

There are few scholarly accounts that concern the clandestine movements along the Thai-Cambodian border due to a lack of reliable sources (Oesterheld 2014). Thus I draw on Tsing’s

⁴⁹ the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a supranational organization of Southeast Asian countries established during the Cold War in 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand.

(2005) concept of friction and mobility to highlight the Dangrek landscape in relation to the Cambodian civil war in hopes to offer nuances of this historical event based on the evidence or traces of the war left in the forest and discovered during my field trips to several sites of Dangrek mountain. Along with the ideas of forbidding and silencing memory and landscape, I share the oral histories from the border dwellers as they were both witnesses and victims themselves based on their interaction with the war. These fractured stories change the way I perceive Dangrek Mountain. It reveals how much people across the mountain had long connected before the war ruined it and formed the new way of relations that creates more distance, more nationalistic perception toward each other. Within the limits of the research sites, the accounts from the Dangrek are not meant to offer a complete version of Cambodian civil war history, as I did not cover the whole Thai-Cambodian region. This chapter will primarily focus on the historical accounts of the Cambodian civil war together with the stories of clandestine movements in the Dangrek mountains that might have been silenced or forbidden for different reasons. The stories will not only illustrate the complexity of the regional conflicts but also the possible factors that have prevented people from sharing their war stories to the younger generations. They also address the overall atmosphere of the Chong Chom border community in the postwar era in ways that will be discussed in the following chapters.

In other words, I believe that there are chances to break the silence in order to not forget and turn to remember instead. I examine this hypothesis by taking an opposite turn to learn about the Cambodian civil war through the voices of the Thai locals who live in Surin Province. The perception of othering may be strong as it has silenced what happened and how it is associated with Cambodian history. However, when I started to interview people along the border, even with the topic of the contemporary period, oftentimes the conversations developed organically to the stories of the war and their memories of struggles during the wartime.

Juxtaposing Thailand and Cambodia in the Global and Regional Context

In this section, I provide the cross-national historical overview of Cambodia and Thailand at the intersection and the analysis of Thai foreign policy in the context of the Cold War. Along with historical accounts and literature of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, there will be stories of the Dangrek landscape concerning the clandestine movements and the oral histories from the local Thais who were directly affected by the conflicts and unsettled territory arising from World War II; the movements of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the Northeast of Thailand towards the Khmer Rouge regime until the last fight of the Cambodian civil war in O'Smach in 1998 while they consumed the news from the Thai media outlets that mostly reported from the Thai aspects of the war situation.

1930s – 60s: Late Colonialism, WWII, and the beginning of Cold War

1930s: The modern history of Thailand arguably began with the 1932 Revolution when one hundred civilians and military officers of the Khana Ratsadon (People's Party) overthrew the absolutist monarchic rule of King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) (1925-1935) and changed the system of government to a constitutional monarchy in 1932 (Loos 2006).⁵⁰ When the revolution was caused by the coup, the country suffered from the recurring coup d'état throughout history since then.⁵¹

Late 1930s – 1950s: During the first term of the Plaek Phibunsongkram (Phibun)⁵² Administration, Phibun ruled the country with series of nationalist and cultural revolutionary policies.⁵³ He also had a colonial mindset that envisioned a greater Thailand as it existed before

⁵⁰ The first Thai Prime minister is Phraya Manopakorn Nitithada assigned by Khana Ratsadon

⁵¹ There are thirteen successful coups including the 1932 revolution. The latest one was in 2014 by Prayuth Chanocha <https://www.thaienquirer.com/13406/grading-thailands-13-successful-coups/>

⁵² Phibun was in power for two terms: 1938 – 1944 and 1948 – 1957

⁵³ Important policies include country's name changed from Siam to Thailand and several cultural mandates known as "*Rataniyom*" (รัตนियม) such as greeting words, wearing hats and many political and cultural propagandas. This new nationalist government encouraged people to become more ambitious and patriotic (Landon 1943).

the arrival of colonialism. He followed the footsteps of Japanese imperialism⁵⁴ (Strate 2015) through the act of war. The clashes between Thailand and Vichy France in 1940 and turned into the Franco-Thai war. The incident led to Thailand's territorial expansion to the French Indochina⁵⁵ with Japanese support in exchange with Phibun's declaration of war against Britain and the United States to help Japan eliminate Western Imperialism in Asia (Paloczi-Horvath 1995; Strate 2015, 96).

During WWII: Phibun governments named his short-lived provinces: Phra Tabong (Battambang), Phibunsongkram (Sisophon and partial Siem Reap⁵⁶), Nakhon Champassak (Preah Vihear and Champassak) and Lan Chang (Luang Phrabang and Xaingabouli) (Suwannathat-Pian 1996; Sasagawa 2015). These provinces lasted only six years from 1941 to 1946 before returning to the French protectorate status and the border that outlined in the 1907 Franco-Thai treaty due to provisions of the 1946 Washington Accord (Strate 2015) when Japan and the Axis surrendered. To put it simply, the result of the Franco-Thai war replicated the short life of Siam's colonial-like territorial expansion into Cambodia during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910) (See Chapter 1). Once again, Thailand was not able to continue its claim. Even though the mission failed, nationalistic sentiments remained. The Phibun government not only recreated and preserved the rhetoric of lost territories and anti-colonialism by creating national humiliation, but it antagonized its neighboring countries that have been embedded in Thai historical textbooks (Strate 2015).

⁵⁴ Strate highlights Phibun's remarks regarding the unique bond between Japan and Thailand that was built on the common experience of defeat and humiliation by the Western aggression with an example of Phibun's radio address from Krom Khosanakan, December 1941 stating that: *"In 1864, warships from the four nations of England, Holland, France, and America simultaneously attacked the city of Shimonoseki in Japan and forced the Japanese to pay the amount of 3 million gold coins to all four countries. Thirty years later in 1893, French warships invaded the Chao Phrya River and forced Thailand to pay 3 million baht. You can see that our countries have met with the same type of hardship."* (Strate 2015, 110)

⁵⁵ The whole area of Battambang province, north of Siem Reap and Kompong Thom, and the western bank of the Mekong River at Stung Traeng (Sasagawa 2015). Phibun also petitioned for control of the Shan State in British Burma but failed (Strate 2015)

⁵⁶ Angkor Wat complex was excluded and remained as the French colony

*Surin and The Franco-Thai War (1940-1)**



Figure 9: Maps published in the funeral guest book in honor of Luang Weerawatyothin (Bangkok, 1969)

In November 1940, Thailand sent troops from all over the countries to the Northeastern and Eastern provinces including Nakhon Phanom, Ubon Ratchathani, Surin, Prachinburi, Chanthaburi and Trat. Isaan Army Units were later established to guard the Northeastern region which comprises three divisions – Udon, Ubon and Surin. Within Surin Division, the Thai Army recruited military units from other provinces such as Phra Nakhon (Bangkok - the 7th Infantry Battalion); Phitsanulok (the 29th Infantry Battalion); Roi-Et (the 5th Guard Troop); Nakhon Sawan (the 10th Artillery Battalion); Ratchaburi (Engineer Company). The Surin Division was led by Lt. Col. Luang Weerawatyothin, a Phuket-born Commander in Chief. He was first assigned to train the soldiers in the border villages and Dangrek region in the Provinces of Sisaket, Surin, and Buriram to familiarize themselves with the landscape.

In January 1941, the clashes between the French reconnaissance unit (Vichy France) and the Surin Division troop began at Chong Chan Thob Phet and Chong O’Bok in Prakonchai, Buriram. The Chong Chom area was guarded and became a national fortress to protect from territorial invasion by the French Army. Later on, the clashes were getting bigger and became the Franco-Thai war as the Thai army took a proactive move. Phibun government was able to pressure the French army and successfully seize partial lands of Indochina by the attacks of the Isaan Army i.e. Ban Du, Champasak in Lao and Samrong-Chong Kal in Cambodia. They expelled the French soldiers out of the seized areas.

Lt. Col. Luang Weerawatyothin and his troops from Surin Division were praised by the Phibun government as he succeeded in controlling the strategic route in Northwestern Cambodia from Chong Chom to Ban Kongwien – Samrong – Chong Kal. It effectively blocked the French Army from receiving military support from other Indochinese areas. The successful seizure made Luang Weerawatyothin become a frontrunner of the Thai Army in the Greater East Asia War (the Japanese Occupation) and the WWII that occurred right after the Franco-Thai war in Shan State and Northern Thailand.

**Translation and modification from a funeral guest book in honor of Luang Weerawatyothin (1969)*

Late 1950s - 1960s: Because of the Indochinese intrusion during WWII by the Japanese-backed Phibun administration and the abrupt shifts from being a Japanese to a U.S. ally,⁵⁷ Sihanouk showed his resentment toward Thai imperialism and Thai support for U.S. interests in Indochina during the the Vietnam War. Yet, in time, Sihanouk and his supporters would seek refuge in Surin, a fact that exemplifies the ambiguity of Thai-Cambodian relations. Sihanouk celebrated the death of the Thai Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat in December 1963 for seven days by announcing school closures. Officials could take two-hour breaks during the celebration, which also mentioned the deaths of US President John F. Kennedy and the South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem (Kukrit Pramote 1970; Chandler 1991).

On December 9 (1963), Sihanouk spoke about Sarit's death in a Cambodian-language broadcast that had a profound effect on U.S.-Cambodian relations. "At two-week intervals," he said, "our enemies have departed one after the other. At first the one in the south [Diem], then the great boss [Kennedy], and now the one in the west [Sarit]. All three have always sought to violate our neutrality and make trouble for us, to seek our misfortune. Now they are all going to meet in hell where they will be able to build military bases for SEATO. Our other enemies will join them. The gods punish all the enemies of neutral and peaceful Cambodia. The spirits of our former kings protect us." (Chandler 1991, 136)

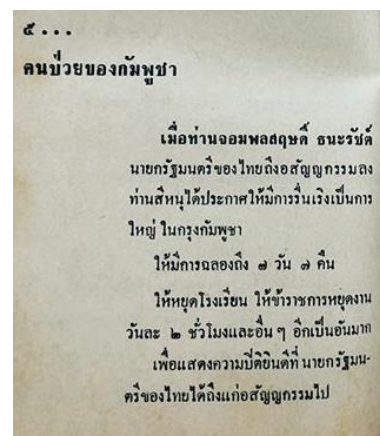


Figure 10: A chapter title called 'A Sick Man of Cambodia' written in Thai by Kukrit Pramote (1970)

Furthermore, Khien Theeravit gives an emphasis from the Thai perspective and insists that on a reason why Sihanouk was dismissed by the Phibun government during Sihanouk's self-imposed exile in the 1940s (Theeravit 1982; Branigin 2012) and why he would never find his true alliance. It was because of his neutrality policy and "his political style that made no honest friends and at best garnered only collaborators" as he kept switching his stance during the Cold War (Theeravit

⁵⁷ After Japan and the Axis lost to the Allied Expeditionary Force in WWII, Thailand managed to switch the alliance to side with the U.S. and Britain at the end of the war through the secret lobbying by the Seri Thai movement whose members used to be the members of Khana Ratsadon, same as Phibun, but against Japan and fragmented into civilian and military sides. The Seri Thai, or Free Thai movement represented a progressive force in Thai politics at the time, with many members were from Isaan region (Streckfuss 2012).

1982, 561). For example, Thailand chose to support the Khmer Issarak, the U.S. ally, instead of Sihanouk's anti-French movements (Turkoly-Joczik 1988). Consequently, Thailand became a rival to Sihanouk. He was never fond of Thai governments and started to stir up the border conflict at Preah Vihear temple as "a symbol of unsettled boundary problem" (Theeravit 1982, 567).

Without strong ties with Thailand, Sihanouk managed to rule the country since the Cambodian Independence until General Lon Nol overthrew his government in 1970 by coup d'état with support from the United States. Lon Nol accused Sihanouk of authoritarianism, economic mismanagement, and being soft on communists (Sangmpam 1995). Along with the massive, years-long covert US bombing campaign in Eastern Cambodia before the 1970 coup. The bombing campaign indeed destabilized neutral Cambodia. Sihanouk saw no choice but to align with other insurgency groups (Kiernan 1996), which led to the rise of the Khmer Rouge's dramatic strengthening after 1968. Sihanouk's stays in Thailand will be discussed in the following section to demonstrate the contradiction and ambiguity of the Thai-Cambodian relations that occurred in the Dangrek border zone.

In Cambodia, the anti-French movements and insurgencies that emerged amidst the turmoil of WWII when the French was about to abandon their Indochinese colonies (Kiernan 1996). Similar to other Southeast Asian colonies, their local elites had attempted to liberate their countries from colonial rule. Besides the King Sihanouk-led independent movement, there was the Khmer Issarak (ខ្មែរឥស្រាវៈ),⁵⁸ which was the first Khmer nationalist anti-French movement that emerged in 1946.⁵⁹ Led by Son Ngoc Thanh, the Khmer Serei consisted both of rightists and leftists, and did not associate with Sihanouk's movement (Galway 2019). They had sought help

⁵⁸ Issarak means 'independence'. Later, the party changed its name to 'Khmer Serei' (ខ្មែរសេរី). Serei means 'free'

⁵⁹ By 1954, the Khmer Issarak had recruited five thousand Cambodian fighters and village militias that supported by the Viet Minh. The party was initially spearheaded by the communist members of the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (Kiernan 1996) before it was split and transformed to the Khmer Serei movement under the American camp resided in Thailand and South Vietnam. In the early 1960s, their movement against Sihanouk was neither effective nor received strong support from the US. They became inactive and shifted its forces from Thai border to Mekong Delta (Turkoly-Joczik 1988).

from Thailand and Vietnam (Dy and Dearing 2014) in forming its movements and hiding in the Dangrek mountain and Southern Vietnam. The movement went underground and fragmented after Cambodian independence was declared by Sihanouk in 1953.⁶⁰ The Khmer Serei failed to drive political changes but persisted due to the country's instability.

1970s – 80s: The Chaotic and Obscure Decades

Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge, so named by Sihanouk, had grown out of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. The movement founded by Pol Pot (Sloth Sar) and Noun Chea in Phnom Penh around 1960. Pol Pot was inspired by revolutionary Maoism that aimed for Cambodia to be a country of peasants. At the end of the Vietnam War, the Khmer Rouge parted way with the Vietnamese communist party (Shawcross 1984). With the support from China against the Soviet Union, the Khmer Rouge had strengthened its organization and succeeded in seizing Phnom Penh in April 1975 and established the government of Democratic Kampuchea. Initially, Cambodians viewed the Khmer Rouge regime as liberators who fought against the corruption of Lon Nol's regime and the intense U.S. bombing. The extreme agrarian revolutionary program led to the mass relocation of people, most notably from urban centers to the countryside, but also between rural areas, in order to irrigate land and grow rice. This program struggled to make a dramatic transformation and underwent a period of social chaos and the most severe economic repression. More importantly, it caused one of the most catastrophic genocides in world history, over one to two million people died as a result of starvation, disease, hard labor or execution (Kiernan 1996).

In the meantime, Thailand continued to have internal conflicts among the elites and was involve in regional politics throughout the Cold War era. From nationalist propaganda by

⁶⁰ The official names of Cambodia since its independence namely The Kingdom of Cambodia (1953 - 1970); The Khmer Republic (1970-1975); Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979); People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979- 1989); State of Cambodia (1989-1993); and back to the first name since 1993 to the present.

Phibun administration to the junta regime of Sarit Thanarat and his successor, Thanom Kittikachorn, the government shifted its strategies that mutated the propaganda to promote an anti-communist counterinsurgency propagandas. The junta revived the role of the royal family through the extra-bureaucratic development projects and the royal visits to the remote areas of Thailand in order to grow national loyalty and articulate modern Thainess⁶¹ to all ethnicities that are not only as part of the national identity in the making during the Vietnam War (Hyun 2014). However in the year 1975, it was the time that the U.S. withdrew its armed forces from



Figure 11: King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit first visited Surin Province in 1955 (Surin Samosorn Magazine)

Thailand after the loss in the Vietnam War and Kukrit Pramote, appointed as the Thai Prime Minister, had established the diplomatic relationship with China, three years after Richard Nixon visited Beijing in 1972. Subsequently, there were also rapid shifts in Thai foreign policy toward Cambodia. Described by Rungsawasdisap (1999) as “The two-faced diplomacy,” it is the policy that has been common practice for Thai governments.

Thai politics in the 1980s was another turning point for the Thai military as they could no longer be explicitly active in politics. During the Prem Tinsulanonda administration (1980 - 88), *the Prime Minister Order 66/2523* was the vital government strategy to continue the works of counterinsurgency and as the new source of legitimacy for the military to preserve and protect national security outside the internal politics where they already lost their credibility, yet were able to hold their responsibility for the border security due to the massive influx of Cambodian

⁶¹ Sinae Hyun (2014) discusses the sense of Thainess and the Cold War nation-building propaganda to the highland tribes and in remote border areas by the means of the Thai Border Patrol Police (BPP) school project. The Thainess that was created by the propaganda was aiming to spread national loyalty against the communist party rather than defining what it means to be Thai, unlike Phibun’s nationalist cultural revolution. Hyun argues that the work of BPP had contributed to building a modern territorial nation-state as it “narrow the gap between the “border of Thailand” and “border of Thainess” (Thongchai 1994 cited in Hyun 2014).

refugees after 1978 (Bamrungsuk 1999; Pathmanand 2001 emphasis mine). This was a shift from proactive propaganda against the communist movements by issuing amnesty laws to partially decriminalize CPT members who agree to leave the insurgency which led to the fall of CPT (Ruth 2010; Haberkorn 2018). At the same time, the government publicly recognized Democratic Kampuchea and aided the Khmer Rouge that hid along the Thai border which reflects Thailand's military culture and that their involvement in Thai politics not only by several coups since the 1932 revolution, but also throughout the existence of the Indochinese conflict. Indeed, the military involvement in Thai politics has explicitly and implicitly bargained the power with major countries (e.g. China, Soviet Union, and the U.S.) in order to maintain their own power and position. In other words, 1975 was the turning point that led to an even more complicated relationship between political movements within Southeast Asia.

The dual absences of Thailand in histories of the Vietnam War, and of the Vietnam War in Thai historiography, obscure important political entanglements (Ruth 2010). Besides the fact that Thailand had to initially deal with Vietnamese refugees,⁶² the fear of communist movements among the Thai authorities prompted the massive counterinsurgency propaganda to convince the public how evil Communism and the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) were ever since the Communist ideology arrived Southeast Asia along with the support from the US during the Vietnam war. It also led to the use of coercive measures to hysterically destroy the communist party.⁶³ Due to the fact that the CPT also reached its peak in 1975-6 and the Thai government began to lose its credibility due to the outrageous corruption of the Sarit and Thanom regimes, it

⁶² The first wave of Indochinese refugees was the groups of Vietnamese refugees during 1930s - 1950s. the Vietnamese whose against the French Indochinese government and supporters of Viet Minh had crossed the Mekong River from Laos to the Northeastern Thailand's border provinces and partially to the Eastern region via Cambodia to Chantaburi. At first, they were allowed to travel and choose the place to stay freely along with the local Thais and the Thai government support. Until the changes in internal Thai politics and shifted to strong ties with the U.S. The US-Thai alliance made Thailand immediately and officially the enemy of all the revolutionary and communist peoples of Indochina. (Varophas 1966; Flood 1977)

⁶³ The "search and destroy" operations was the military operation in which potential enemies or communist suspects of the state under the US-Thai counterinsurgency strategy were killed in oil tanks. The incidents were reported to the public via the newspapers until the pressure from the 1973 uprising had successfully forced to limit this brutal operation (Bamrungsuk 1999; Hyun 2017).

resulted in the October 1973 uprising and the 1976 massacre (Bamrungsuk 1999). Arguably, it is thought that the 1976 Thammasat massacre⁶⁴ in Bangkok was meant to stop the CPT movement that was doing well throughout the country. The massacre occurred a year after the Khmer Rouge seized control of Cambodia and communist forces controlled Laos and Vietnam, and was not merely coincidental but was a strong reaction, an attempt to stop CPT movement in Thailand. Because of the incident, young members had escaped the government killings and fled to the Cambodian border, where they joined the CPT and the Khmer Rouge.

Another side of the story came from a former Khmer Rouge member whom I unexpectedly met and interviewed as a merchant from the Chong Chom market.⁶⁵ He recalled that in the early days in the Khmer Rouge he used to work with “Thai Daeng” (literal meaning - Thai Red - CPT) during the 1970 coup and suddenly his Thai colleagues never showed up again⁶⁶ even before the Khmer Rouge succeeded in establishing the regime in 1975. He told me that he quit the Khmer Rouge in early operation and escaped to Thailand working as construction worker in Bangkok for several years before coming to O’Smach and joined FUNCINPEC Party later, when the party fell off from the area. He settled down in O’Smach and started business both in Chong Chom market and O’Smach. However, the October 14 incident had exposed Thai society to communist infiltration. By early 1976, the Thai public repeatedly stressed Indochina’s military support for the expanding Thai communist movement. The Khmer Rouge also helped the Thai communists establish an organization called “Angkar Siem,” which provided terrorist training for Thai youths from three provinces on the Thai-Cambodian border: Si Sa Ket, Buriram and Surin (Rungsawatdisap 1999).

⁶⁴ The 1976 Thammasat Massacre (October 6) was the extrajudicial killing incident that caused the deaths of the students taken place at Thammasat University, Bangkok and was used to justify the coup on the day of the massacre by Sangad Chaloryu. Students and activists who survived the massacre were being prosecuted for grave crimes over revolt, lèse majesté, and communist activities (Haberhorn 2018, 111).

⁶⁵ Male 70 years old, interviewed on August 19, 2018

⁶⁶ CPT gradually reduced political activity and died in the mid-1980s since they were forced out of its bases in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia

Accordingly, the anti-Communism of the Thai government was not absolute even with the coercive measures. The Thai government did not strictly control movements across the border, movements that linked Communist networks throughout Asia.⁶⁷ Following the Vietnamese invasion that ousted the Khmer Rouge in 1979, and during subsequent Heng Samrin government, the Thai government supported the Khmer Rouge by allowing them to hide in the jungle along the Thai border. Indeed, the Cold War narrative has overshadowed regional connection beyond ideological beliefs. My approach to the absence of regional Cold War history is to testify by searching for the evidence hidden in Surin Province and the Dangrek mountain. How did the politics of the Cold War reach to the border province of Thailand? How could the border as the smallest unit of the Cold War events help expose the complexity of regional politics that gone silenced by forbidden/secret alliance between the Cambodian resistance and the Thai army?

Lending the Dangrek to the Cambodian resistance groups

“It was impossible to defend and left Thailand strategically exposed. Echoing traditional strategies for protecting the core of the Thai Kingdom, material assistance and refuge were given to antigovernment movements of its neighbors. An approach to border security that perpetuated and exacerbated political divisions among its neighbors” (Battersby 1998, 474)

This quote is a response to the argument I made in the previous section as a prompt to demonstrate how Thailand was one of the most important players in the prolonged Cambodian civil war. Since the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978 led to the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, a coalition of former Khmer Rouge members and Vietnamese forces formed a pro-Vietnamese government headed by Heng Samrin and changed the country’s name to “the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK).” It was a chaotic time for the Thai border as there was an influx of civilians fleeing the Vietnamese invasion. The Khmer Rouge had been overthrown,

⁶⁷ Another interesting account is about Nuan Chea, a law student at Thammasat University Thailand, who had a close connection with the CPT and later became the Khmer Rouge brother no.2 reveals such interesting intersection that illustrates how the Khmer Rouge had its connection to Thailand. Nuan Chea was born in 1926 in Battambang and went to Bangkok in 1942 to pursue higher education, taking the Thai name Runglert Laodi (Laodee). He did the two-year preparatory course at Thammasat, then entered university as a law student before abruptly abandoned his studies and his government job to join the anti-colonial struggle in Cambodia (Murashima 2009).

but it was only the beginning of the long fights as the anti-Vietnamese groups, including the Khmer Rouge, attempted to seize power from Heng Samrin; nonetheless, they were forced to flee the jungle close to the Thai border where they started to conduct the guerrilla forces to fight against the government at Phnom Penh. In 1982, three resistance factions including the Khmer Rouge, the Kampuchean People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) and King Sihanouk's FUNCINPEC⁶⁸ party formed the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) to gain international recognition (Niksich 1981). The continuing fights between the parties of pro- and anti- Vietnamese government prolonged the civil war in Cambodia for more than a decade. The situation was escalated again in 1983-5 due to the Vietnamese offense to the Thai border (MFA, 1985: vi). Eventually, the peace negotiation began in 1987 and was followed by the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops in 1989. The peace agreement was finally signed on 23 October 1991 in Paris. The peace settlement could not be completed immediately after the negotiation. An interim government was set up under the United Nations Transitional Authority for Cambodia (UNTAC) to prepare for a mandatory election in May 1993 (in which the Khmer Rouge declined to participate)⁶⁹ and the repatriation of displaced persons from Thai border camps. A coup in 1997 by Hun Sen compelled thousands of Cambodians to seek refuge again in Thai border camps in Surin, called Huay Cheong camp, that operated until 1999, the final year of the encampments along Thai-Cambodian border.

Thailand was the front-line state of the Indochinese war because of its shared border with Cambodia and its on again, off again offer of refuge to anti-Phnom Penh movements and

⁶⁸ Full name of FUNCINPEC is in French: **F**ront **U**i **N**ational pour un **C**ambodge **I**ndépendant, **N**eutre, **P**acifique **E**t **C**oopératif or The National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia in English

⁶⁹ "There were four parties participated the election: the royalist party (FUNCINPEC), the party led by the former leaders of the Vietnam-backed regime (cpp), the Republican Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP) and the anti-communist party (MOLINAKA). They obtained, respectively, 58, 51, 10 and one seats in the new Assembly. Also, Prince Sihanouk was re-crowned king in September 1993 and made the head of state" (Sangmpam, 1995: 627)

encampments residing along the border over several decades.⁷⁰ The country was not directly affected by the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia but did hold responsibility for prolonging the conflict. In other words, Thailand not only faced the most serious threat out of the other ASEAN nations due to its front-line location next to Cambodia, but also due to a national narrative that portrayed Vietnam as the threat to Thailand's national security, obscuring the fact that its new ally, the Khmer Rouge, used to be allied with the CPT, the number one enemy of Thai state in the early period of Cold War. The Thai army and the BPP stationed a huge number of troops along the border to protect Thailand's sovereignty which implicitly benefited the resistance forces. Three factors proving that "Thailand played the most important role than any other state in supporting the Khmer Rouge faction" (Thun 2010, 71) are as follows:

First, the historical rivalry between Thailand and Vietnam. Drawing upon a pre-colonial pattern of rivalry between Siam and Annam kingdoms (Goscha 2012) which appeared in most Thai historical textbooks, Thailand was likely to believe that the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia was a sign of Vietnam as an expansionist power (Kershaw 1980) and its ambition in reviving the "Indochina Federation."⁷¹ The idea that the communist revolution in Laos was led by the Vietnamese (Kershaw 1980) also fit within the rhetoric of domino theory.⁷² Even though Pol Pot's forces were no match for the Vietnamese, the Khmer Rouge was still seen as the only effective challenge to the Heng Samrin government in Phnom Penh. However, the plan to "make the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia costly" (Thun 2010, 5) was still caught in its traditionally duplicitous relationship with Cambodia of enmity and fraternity (Thompson 2015). Thailand welcomed refugees and large encampment along the border for decades, but this was

⁷⁰ The last set of the border camp were Ban Mamuang camp, Ban Sae Prai camp, and Khao Phlu camp. Available at <http://www.websitesrcg.com/border/border-camps.html>

⁷¹ Thun's claim based upon Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs published in 1985 stating that "there is clear evidence that Vietnam wants to annex the 17 northeastern provinces of Thailand into its Indochinese federation plan" (MFA 1985, p. 8 cited in Thun 2010, 71).

⁷² Vietnam's dominant influence its "advisory" position was formalized in Laos by the Friendship Treaty of July 1977 and more especially in Cambodia by the similar Treaty of February 1979 (Simon 1979)

at most the creation of a buffer region because there were speculation and fears that Vietnam yearned to annex the Northeast of Thailand too (Thun 2010, 71).

Second, humanitarian aid. “The Khmer Rouge could never have remained in power had other countries not supported them” (Jaya Ramji, DC-Cam Issue 8, 2000, 43). This quote echoes the discussion of the political history of Thailand and Cambodia in the Cold War context after Thailand established diplomatic relations with China in 1975. This happened in the same year when the U.S. withdrew its troops and military bases withdrew from Vietnam and Thailand. The shifting in this bipolar politics of the Cold War resulted in the massive aid to the Khmer Rouge and other resistance parties from both China and the US. With Thailand’s intermediary act, China was able to provide military supplies to the Khmer Rouge⁷³ in exchange for ceasing its military support for the Thai communist insurgents (Thun 2010).⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the U.S. and other Western countries also sponsored the humanitarian aid in the border through the management by Thailand and the resistance groups themselves.⁷⁵ The more direct and practical assistance was from Thailand giving the hideouts deep in the jungle along the border and supplying all essential needs to their troops (Thun 2010) and clandestine military practices in the unidentified mountains close to the border. These practices were exposed by the journalists (Rungsawatdisap 1999)⁷⁶ and confirmed by retired soldiers and villagers who lived nearby the camps.

⁷³ “By 1980, Thailand was accused of shipping 500 tons of arms to the Khmer Rouge every month (cited in Lee, 2007: 528)

⁷⁴ From 1985 to 1989 alone, Chinese provided financial aids to to the Thai government in total \$283 million and the military also gained preferential access to advanced weapons technology and oil from China (Kiernan 1993: 218; Shawcross 1984: 126 cited in Jones 2007)

⁷⁵ Except for the transit camps where the camp dwellers were granted the refugee status and legible to file the resettlement program to move to the third countries.

⁷⁶ For example, The Japanese news agency Kyodo reported in September 1979 that about Pol Pot troops gathered and seek medical supplies near the Aranyaprathet border from Thailand. The Associate Press reported a story of the Khmer Rouge’s troops and the Thai army collusion with the guerrillas in military activities along the Thai-Cambodian border. In December, Sunday Times journalist revealed the supply-line (Chinese weapons and food + American Weapons issued to the Thai army) to the Khmer Rouge from the Thai border. (Rungsawatdisap 1999)

Moreover, there was a limitation in humanitarian acts supported by UNBRO⁷⁷ and the Western countries because they could not avoid political involvement among Thailand as a host country and several Cambodian resistance groups that controlled the camps independently. Not to mention, most of the resistance leaders were allowed to receive medical treatment in Thai hospitals,⁷⁸ many guerilla soldiers regained their strength from humanitarian aids. Also, the leaders of CGCK were permitted to travel to Bangkok with the protection by the Thai army. This was one of the reasons why the resistance coalition party was able to maintain its international recognition and hold onto its seat in the UN General Assembly until 1990. Indeed, the amount of financial assistance through Thailand, China, and the U.S. was an essential factor that helped perpetuate the encampment along the border (Benson 1993) and civil war in Cambodia. It could be seen as a response to the first factor as a political intention to counter with the Heng Samrin government that allied with the Soviet-backed Vietnamese government and its ideology of making Indochinese federalism in the postcolonial era.

Third, War economy. Thailand was not only situated as a front-line of the war or benefited from being the intermediary agent for China and the U.S. in supporting the Khmer Rouge. Thailand also benefited from the war economy through cooperation with the Khmer Rouge. French (2002) argues that the massive attacks under the K5 Plan caused changes in border trade as Thai traders turned to work directly with the resistance leaders. Border trades along with timber and gem trades between the Khmer Rouge and Thai business companies with a special connection with the Thai authorities (DC-CAM 19; Ikunaga 1999). In the post-war border economy, the border markets and casinos were built to replace the war economy. However, the profits remain with those who were involved with the Cambodian civil war until

⁷⁷ The United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) (1982-2001) was a special UNHCR humanitarian mission for Cambodian refugees along the Thai-Cambodian border.

⁷⁸ According to Phillip Short, “most of the times his leaders, including Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, and Khieu Samphan stayed and went to the hospital in Thailand. They were given the protection by the Thai army’s 3rd Bureau, headed by the Military Intelligence Chief, General Chaovalit Yonjaiyuth” (2004, p. 408).

today, which will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. For the following section, I will continue the exploration in the Dangrek landscape where the traces of war have been left in silence yet remained in the memories of those who witnessed on the other side of Cambodia.

The K5 Plan

“I hid in silence in the jungle when I realized the Vietnamese were coming.”

“How did you know they were Vietnamese?” I asked

“Because they were talking in Vietnamese.”⁷⁹

This was a part of a conversation I had with one of motorcycle taxi drivers at Chong Chom checkpoint. It reveals the key event that led to the intense fights along the border in the second half of the 1980s. It was my first encounter with the story of Vietnamese troops in the Dangrek mountain. Later on, this story matched with what I found about the mid-1980s period. The most mentioned years in the B.E. year system were around 2527-28 (1984-85) in several interviews with the Surin locals when there were intense fights at the border. Even though most of them did not mention Vietnamese soldiers, these stories led me to search for any evidence or policy from Cambodia and Vietnam that fit with these fragmentary puzzles.



Figure 12: Cambodian resistance soldiers patrolling with a Thai soldier in Dangrek mountain (image courtesy: my uncle)

In the very first conversation I had with my uncle during my pilot research back in 2016, he showed his scanned image collection of border patrol appointments in the mid-late 1980s. He recalled his past duties with the Khmer resistance forces to keep an eye on the Vietnamese troops as commanded by his superior. At the time, I had no idea how the Khmer coalition worked at the border and how the Thai army was involved with the conflict. I asked why he happened to secretly patrol with the Khmer Rouge. Did they know that he was a Thai soldier?

⁷⁹ Interviewed with motorcycle taxi driver at checkpoint station on September 3, 2018

“The commanders were in touch with the leaders of the resistance groups, so other Khmer soldiers and himself knew each other,” he answered. There was no harm between the resistance groups and Thai soldiers as long as they were together. His narrative reflects the idea of how Thailand perceived the Vietnamese troops as the aggressor and the expansionist. His duty was to protect national territory as Vietnam might have eaten up the Northeast of Thailand. It made sense to ally with the Cambodian guerillas as they all shared the same enemy.

The fights at the border not only caused the influx of Cambodian refugees to Thailand; Thai border dwellers also had to move away from the border war zone, either compulsorily or voluntarily. Some might migrate to become laborers in the industrial areas in Central and Eastern Thailand. Moreover, in conversations with a retired teacher and villagers in Sangkha



Figure 13: Old-style Bunker in Ban Dan School, Kapcheong (08/07/2018)

and Kapcheong, they shared their experiences during the mid-1980s as they were forced to relocate to the shelters at the Buddhist temples in the inner areas of the districts several times, and a month at the longest. The frequent sound of bombs from unknown directions was the sign that everyone must hide in the holes that were dug in their house or the bunkers built in schools. For those who moved to Tabtim Siam 04 village, I asked if they were stressed from the clashes over many years. It was more than just feeling stressed; they feared for their lives as the lights and explosive shells passed over their heads in the middle of the day not far away from their houses.

Between 1984 and 1987 there was a mass mobilization of Vietnamese and Cambodian troops to the Thai border as part of the “K5 Plan” (Phenkar Kor Pram in Khmer).⁸⁰ The objective of K5 was to destroy the clandestine strongholds along the border, end the Cambodian conflict, unite the country, and gain recognition by the international community and end the resistance (Deth 2009a). Deth (2009a) insists that K5 weakened the popularity of the PRK and caused deep resentment against Vietnam in the long term, as it caused another influx of refugees to Thailand without proper management. It also repeated the rivalry rhetoric between Thailand and Vietnam. The attacks provoked distrust within regional politics that have not faded away due to the war prolongment by the K5 plan. The landmines were planted tremendously during this time, which became a shifting point for the border dwellers to restrain themselves from entering the forest due to the hazardous explosive landmines (see Chapter 6 for demining project).

Tracing movements and silences in the mountain

There is an opportunity to explore how silence and violence have remained in the damaged landscape. Could we see the landscape as the protagonist in which humans are only one kind of participant that destroyed nature? (Tsing 2015, 155). Demined forests became the new lands of opportunity for the villagers to search for wild goods and experience the forest again after its closure due to the active landmines and clandestine guerillas. How might the landscape evoke a sense of renewed possibilities that trigger a kind of memory that can expose motion and inspire an intimate historical knowledge of the forest? (Tsing 2015, 245, 258; emphasis mine). Because silence does not mean forgetting. The silent side of war history from my informants indicated that these silences involved both political and cultural censorship. It is like discourse that can be deconstructed and contribute to the discussion of a larger puzzle in

⁸⁰ According to Former PRK premier Pen Sovann, the term “K5” comprises 5 Khmer terms namely Kaen (mobilize), Komlang (forces/strength), Kab chhkar prey ([to] clear forest), Kar-pear prom-daen ([and] protect the border [of]), and Kampuchea. The K5 Plan included the destruction of the border bases, large-scale planting of landmines close to the Thai border, sweeping up resistance units and consolidated with the PRK regime, and the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia by 1990 (Pen Sovann and Neang Savun, 2002 cited in Deth 2009, 188).

multiple directions and forms. Self-, cultural, and political censorship intertwine with silence in the landscape and silence in the historical textbooks “to describe and define the politico-cultural consciousness of subordinate groups...in such a way that these interests are explicitly located within a range of differentiated and opposed social positions in which both linguistic and nonlinguistic forms of power are distributed.” There are power relations in silences that prevent people from thinking and saying, “once silences are revealed, what seemed natural comes to be negotiable” (Sheriff 2000, 114–15).

In addition, Chbib (2004, 89) describes how humans interact with silence through basic senses of hearing and seeing things and learn to respond to such silence. A silenced history is also socially constructed because its political meanings adhere to the national affiliation and the violence they witnessed. Silence thus can play an important role in the dissemination of how the Thai border dwellers understood and remembered the eventful war discourse by their nationality. It is different from the silence among Cambodians that have much more impacted in their lives, rather Thai border residents would be more willing to share their experiences with me, but not necessary as an everyday conversation that they would talk or reminisce in their daily life nor passing on to their descendants.

Therefore, this section explores the Dangrek landscape in various ways to further explain how the Cambodian civil war has left traces in the mountains and how it has shaped border-crossing practices from the traces in nature told and retold by the locals. For the Dangrek area between the provinces of Surin, Sisaket and Oddar Meanchey, there is evidence that the Khmer Rouge under Ta Mok and King Sihanouk’s FUNCINPEC party encamped in this area. I found that the mountain area of Surin Province held different, dynamic political forces from other border regions that may have belonged to the Khmer Rouge or other resistance groups. Since the mountainous landscape benefited resistance groups who hid in the jungle, the mountain passes, gigantic stones, cliffs, and waterfalls are unmovable markers of history in nature, in contrast to

the refugee camps that were mostly demolished by Thai state authorities. Fragmented stories of war will be grounded in landforms of the Dangrek landscape.

The Khmer Rouge's Anlong Veng and Ta Mok Lakeside House

Anlong Veng is one of the districts in Oddar Meanchey province that I visited on my way back home in Surin. During this homeward bound journey, I learned that my relative used to work as a staff for the French mission on Cambodian refugee camps between 1996-1999, the last bit of Cambodian civil conflict. He told me that he usually traveled with his boss to four camps: site B; O'Trao⁸¹; site 8; and Khao I Dang. During our stop at Anlong Veng, we went to Ta Mok lakeside house, the last stronghold of the Khmer Rouge in Oddar Meanchey Province, next to the Thai border at Sisaket Province. He recalled the days he worked in O'Trao that he had met Ta Mok⁸² in the camp. While walking through the exhibition around the house along with other visitors, he asked the house's caretaker about the rumor he heard about Ta Mok's properties. They took us to see the possible location where Ta Mok would hide his assets. It was a dark room with nothing inside. The Cambodian government has taken controlled Ta Mok's properties that he gained during the time he led the Khmer Rouge and business that he had across the border after he got arrested in 1999. The house is now opened to the public with exhibitions consisting of countless images of the Khmer Rouge comrades and wall paintings of Hindu temples. The violent past of this house contradicts new lifestyles of young students who would ride their motorcycles to rest nearby the lake or the upstairs of the house and some adults who would go fishing at the lake located in the back of the house. With another fifteen-minute drive, our last stop was at the site of Pol Pot's cremation, before going back home through Chong Sa-ngam

⁸¹ O'Trao and Site 8 were a Khmer Rouge controlled refugee camps located in Sisaket province and Sakaeo Province respectively. O'Trao was under Ta Mok whose bases in the Anlong Veng area. It was one of the least accessible to aid personnel due to the distance and safety reasons (Reynell 1986)

⁸² Ta Mok was the last Khmer Rouge leader who placed Pol Pot under house arrest in Anlong Veng where he died in 1998. Ta Mok was arrested in 1999 (DC-CAM Issue 8) after the last fight of the civil war between FUNCINPEC and Hun Sen.

checkpoint and meeting with my parents who waited for me on the Thai side. This place was a surprise for both of us. My relative had no idea about Pol Pot's last days of life, even though he had experiences working with the Khmer Rouge. He asked me how I found about the cremation place. "It's from a map app on a mobile phone"⁸³ I said. Before the trip, I did not know either how Anlong Veng was so crucial to the long survival of the Khmer Rouge. Pol Pot's forgotten death under a bed of burned car tires in 1998 was not the end of the Khmer Rouge until Ta Mok's standing trial.

It is interesting to look at how the Cambodian government has invested in and promoted dark tourism of the Khmer Rouge Genocide. For Anlong Veng, the town has not been developed much or promoted by the Hun Sen government yet. The town has recently gained attention from Thai investors for farming and agricultural purposes such as durian plantation.⁸⁴ There were many more Cambodian visitors than foreigners, unlike other Genocide tourist sites. Although this study does not focus on the post-war Anlong Veng. Indeed, searching for this silent side of this history can be possible through exploring what has been left inside and close to Dangrek Mountain. With assistance from my mom who was worried about my solo travel from Siem Reap to Surin, she asked her relative, Uncle Rath (pseudonym), whom I never knew was working in Siem Reap during the time of my field trip,⁸⁵ to drive me to the border and meet with my parents at the checkpoint. His agreement to drive me home changed my plan from traveling to Chong Chom to Chong Sa-ngam (Chaom) checkpoint instead as I accidentally found the location of Pol Pot cremation near Chong Sa-ngam on Google Maps. I took advantage of having my uncle drive for me and he agreed to do so.

⁸³ There is one more spot known as Pol Pot's house located in an isolated and dense jungle in the Dangrek mountain where the road is mysteriously zigzag into Thai territory and back in Cambodia again. Continue reading at the Phnom Penh Post (08 August 2015) <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/post-weekend/dark-tourism-anlong-veng>

⁸⁴ Interviewed with the head of Surin Provincial Office of Commerce (21 August 2018)

⁸⁵ My trip to Cambodia for archival collection involved a long-distance and cross-border route, starting from Bangkok, going to Aranyaprathet to cross the border via Poipet, then traveling to Battambang and to Siem Reap.

Talking and traveling with Uncle Rath became an unexpectedly fruitful conversation about the Cambodian resistance movements along the border. During our conversation along the trip to Anlong Veng from Siem Reap, Uncle Rath recalled his experience during the war and reflected his feeling toward the situation and his interaction with the Cambodian resistance groups. He thought that he felt more connected and sympathetic toward the Khmer Rouge because he felt that they were more sincere and treated him like other comrades, unlike people in Site B, mostly middle class who often interacted with Thai staff more like employees of the Westerners. It was a hierarchical relation within Site B, in his opinion. Regarding his war economy-related experience, once he was asked by the Khmer Rouge to help sell a large amount of Red Sapphire (from Pailin, in western Cambodia) but he rejected the request because he did not want to do an illegal business. He suddenly has a thought that he could have become rich if he accepted a quest from the Khmer Rouge to sell it at that time.



Figure 14: Ta Mok House and Pol Pot Grave in Anlong Veng, Oddar Meanchey next to Chong Sa-ngam border checkpoint to Sisaket Province, Thailand (05/30/2018)

However, Uncle Rath managed to earn money from the camp dwellers. He was often asked to get copies of photographs at the photograph shops in Muang Surin. He would accept the photo errands and rode his motorbike from Sangkha district to Muang Surin in the evening around eight o'clock and pick up the photos at five o'clock on the next day so that the shop

owner would not feel bothered. He told me, “Photographs were very important to people in the camp. Photographs could help people find their lost family members.” The highest earning was up to 500 baht a day (100 baht per work).

In conclusion, the story of my uncle sheds the light on the connection between the Khmer Rouge in the border setting. Ta Mok’s house and Pol Pot’s cremation site in Anlong Veng, the last stronghold of the Khmer Rouge, were not destroyed but rather are manifestation of how the years of struggle and violence ended with nothing. It was proof that the Khmer Rouge has a close relation with Thailand and a key factor of the Cambodian civil war prolongation. While Sisaket Province was known for the guerilla base of the Khmer Rouge, there was more complexity in fractioned allies of Cambodian anti-Vietnamese groups that could be investigated by which location in the mountain was on the Thai side and which groups resided there. Not only was the Khmer Rouge fraction secretly supported by several states, but the border of Surin Province has also been known to be a stronghold for King Sihanouk and FUNCINPEC Party which can be discovered through several locations in Huay Tabtan – Huay Samrarn Wildlife Sanctuary as well.

The Sihanoukist’s FUNCINPEC Between Kapcheong and O’smach

Tamor Roi Cliff



Figure 15: Palm plantation and Eucalyptus trees on the way to Tamor Roi cliff, Nang Mud, Kapcheong (06/28/2018)

My first Tamor Roi visit was with my uncle, two years after I interviewed him about his war experience. As he used to guard the border along the Dangrek forest, it was refreshing for him to recall what was like when patrolling this area. We passed on the villages, palm plantations, and temples nearby and reached the destination with the direction guided by a phone app as he has never been there by driving from home before. There are only a few signs informing us of the location of the cliff. He could not remember the landscape at first as there are eucalyptus trees, a non-native plant, grown along the road to the site. However, once he walked around the area and climbed up the stone cliff, he started to recall his patrolling experience in the jungle. Tamor Roi was one of the spots he used to stop by, but he never encountered King Sihanouk's troops in person because it was long-distance patrolling throughout the Dangrek range. He was at Tamor Roi only a few times, and the camp was inactive when he was there.

*“Memorial of the king in Khmer territory, Sacrifice for the nation. Jungle and mountain!
Please dwell in here to shield you”⁸⁶*

The script engraved on stone as part of partial remains of Sihanouk's shelter called Phā Tamor Rōi located in Nang Mud, Kap Cheong District, Surin Province around three kilometers from the borderline in the area of Huay Tabtan – Huay Samrarn Wildlife Sanctuary and a one-hour drive from Chong Chom checkpoint. I discovered this place through the interview with another relative who used to be a teacher for Cambodian students whose parents were superiors of the resistance factions. She told me about how these students were sent to Thai schools (elementary to high school levels) in my hometown, Prasat district, by special permission from the Thai army while the rest were sheltered in the refugee camps. Although she did not reveal much information about her students, she told me to visit Tamor Roi to see the place that used to be a temporary resident for Sihanouk and his troops.

⁸⁶ I did not manage to get a photograph of the script but later received information from Nangmud local administration office <http://www.nangmud.go.th/travel/detail/8/data.html>

In a span of the post-Khmer Rouge era from 1979 to the late 1990s, it was difficult to pinpoint how the encampments functioned in each location due to limited access and interaction among the locals, authorities, and the Cambodian resistance group members. The village head of Ban Klong Charoen in Tambon Nang Mud (sub-district) shared his experience during the active operation of the Funcinpec party. He was one of the villagers who were allowed to participate in the religious ceremony and socialized events at Tamor Roi. The fraction was more complex than it seemed. Tambon Nangmud, Kapcheong, used to be strategic locations for several groups of FUNCINPEC party. Besides Tamor Roi, a temporary shelter that was built for King Sihanouk's personal troop, there was a stronghold for Prince Norodom Chakrapong, the fourth son of Sihanouk located in Ban Khok Beng; and the unofficial FUNCINPEC refugee camp located in Ban Klong Charoen, Nang Mud as well. These shelters were demolished in 1992. Pha Tamor Roi has become one of the tourist destinations of Kapcheong district. The Nang Mud administrative office has promoted this place along with *Pha Jumnieng* (a lady-in-waiting) cliff as the outlooks for sightseeing Huay Tabtan – Huay Samrarn Wildlife Sanctuary. The official tourist promotion campaign presents Tamor Roi as the symbol of a good relationship between Thailand and Cambodia. This place is sometimes chosen to be a camping or visiting site for local boy and girl scouts' activities as well (See Figure 16).



Figure 16: Pha Tamor Roi, a temporary shelter for King Sihanouk during the Cambodian civil war (photo taken by me in June and September 2018)

Alongkorn and Laarnng Ta Thong Waterfalls

In addition to Tamor Roi, the mountain cliff that became a perfect guerilla sanctuary for King Sihanouk, and waterfalls now turned into the tourist spots intriguingly reveal the past war by its changing figure that illustrates how the war had left its pieces in nature. There were two waterfalls I visited by chance as a side visit after long interviews with my informants from both the Thai side and Cambodian side. The first spot is called “Alongkorn waterfall,” which was close to the most documented location about the war in Surin Province – a former Site B refugee camp that turned into Tabtim Siam 04 village located in Sangkha District (see Chapter 3). Two of my informants and my family went to the waterfall together for an observation purpose. The villagers in this area were aware of how the Cambodian guerilla movements hid in the jungle along with the Thai soldiers and how the dangerous forest could take their lives if entered without precaution. This awareness came from the experience of being forced to relocate to the shelter during the heavy bombs and their witness the movements inside the forest themselves. Alongkorn waterfall, like other natural landforms, was occupied by the guerillas. Its rocky ledge was damaged by landmines and the whole area was neglected until it was demined, renamed, and opened as a new tourist attraction after the Thai army built an accessible road to the waterfall in 2013. The opening ceremony was hosted by the district governor and the villagers who lived nearby.⁸⁷



Figure 17: A road to Alongkorn Waterfall in Sangkha District, Surin Province (04/21/2018)



The ceremony at Alongkorn waterfall (Thairath Newspaper, August 13, 2013)

⁸⁷ The news can be accessed here <https://www.thairath.co.th/content/363216>

Another waterfall is in O'smach on the Cambodian side called *Laarng Ta Thong* Waterfall. I went there with my informant's daughter and my assistant. The waterfall was ruined and renovated later for tourism; names were changed into the Thai language. The stone on the Cambodian side has the poems and unreadable script in both Khmer and Thai. According to Ban Dan residents, this waterfall used to be a halfway stop for mountain crossers between Surin and Samrong during the prewar time. The Cambodian civil war changed this waterfall into their stronghold as it was close to the cliff. Whether it was intentional or not that my informant asked his daughter to accompany me to visit this waterfall, what I saw there were countless engraved scripts in Khmer and Thai on different shapes of rocks. This area was an actual battlefield of the last fight between Funcinpec guerilla and the Hun Sen government in the late 1990s. This waterfall has recently developed into a recreational and tourist spot for Cambodians. There is no plan to promote this as dark tourism, as that would involve the storytelling of the political conflict in this area; nevertheless, this place reveals the remains of fierce fights that became a silenced past, without any words, but only with a sound of stream flows fall into the lower stream beds.

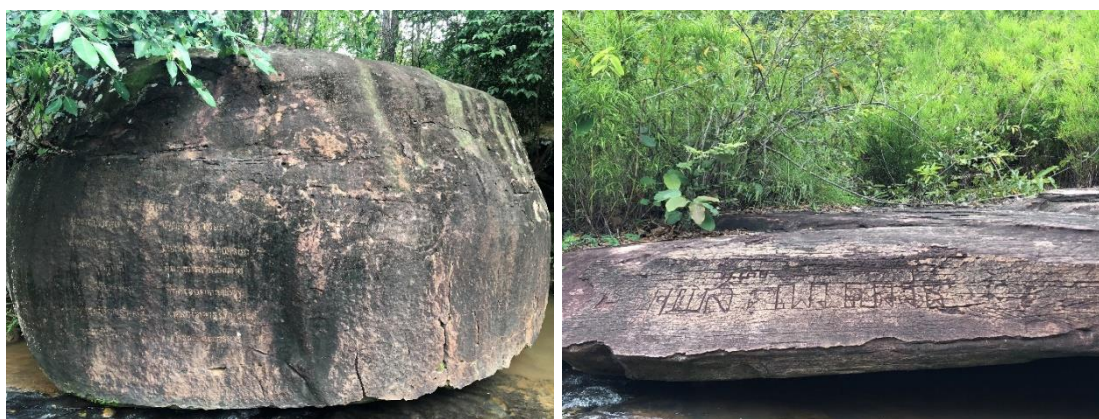


Figure 18: Carved scripts both in Khmer and Thai on the stones at Laarng Ta Thong Waterfall, O'Smach (08/18/2018)

Preah Vihear Cliff: Phnom Dangrek as the second killing fields

Following the Khmer Rouge's Ta Mok lakeside house in Anlong Veng District, Oddar Meanchey and the discovery of Tamor Roi Cliff where the residential site of King Sihanouk in Surin used to be, there is another cliff I would like to include in this chapter: Preah Vihear cliff, which is located in the area of Preah Vihear temple, a symbol of the unsettled boundary problem

between Thailand and Cambodia, as mentioned in the previous section. It is the place that I did not have a chance to visit properly as Preah Temple has not been opened from the Thai entrance yet. I did visit ‘*Pha Mor E Daeng*’ (Mor E Daeng Cliff) and Samrongkiat Waterfalls⁸⁸ on the Thai side in Sisaket Province before I learned about the violence that happened nearby. It is the untold story that has been rarely discussed both in public and in academia. There are few documents and scholarly works mentioning Phreah Vihear cliff as another killing field.

The documentary film “Ghost Mountain,” produced by a son of the survivor from the killing fields (Taing and Dean 2020), depicts the Preah Vihear Massacre as the second killing fields or “the Dangrek Genocide” (Hinton 2006, 462). In this horrific incident in 1979, soon after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, 43,000 Cambodian refugees recently arrived in Khao-I-Dang refugee camp were forced onto busses, and driven fourteen hours east to the area near Preah Vihear. They were then forced down the Dangrek cliff and over 10,000 lost their lives due to injury, starvation, malaria, and landmines (Hinton 2006; Tarwater 2001).⁸⁹ Those who refused to go down the cliffs were mercilessly shot by Thai soldiers (Deth 2009b). The film narrates the story of a survivor, Bunseng Taing, who revisited his nightmare journey between Preah Vihear and refugee camp in Thailand. His story echoes what Shawcross (1984, 84–92) describes of the terrible incident that occurred in 1979 as follows:

“A diligent UNHCR official, Ove Ullerup Peterson, heard that in Buriram province 826 Cambodians had been removed on April 15 (1979). The Thai district officer was unable to give any information, *“as the matter was under the responsibility of the army.”* Ullerup - Peterson learned, however, that they had been taken in buses about 230 kilometers to another part of the border. Peasants in the last village before the border saw the buses pass through full and return empty. Refugees in another camp then reported that the Cambodians had been ordered out of the buses and made to walk for two and a half hours *“to a large mountain, which had a steep cliff on one side, 150–200 meters high. The whole group was pushed over by Thai soldiers and killed.”* (Shawcross 1984, 85)

“The border had been sealed off by Thai soldiers; the area was flooded with troops. The refugees were ordered, busload by busload, to walk back into Cambodia. They were told that there was a path down the mountains but that on either side of it there were mine fields. They were also told

⁸⁸ The waterfalls is close to Tubtim Siam 07 village and the former Khmer Rouge’s O’Trao (Natrao) camp in Khun Han District, Sisaket (see further discussion of Tabtım Siam project in chapter 3)

⁸⁹ Alexander Hinton (2006) collected postings from the *Nation* webboard discussion (Thai media outlet).

that on the other side the Vietnamese army was waiting to welcome them. Thai soldiers also said, "Thai money will not be valid in Kampuchea; we ask you to make a voluntary contribution to our army." (89)

Only approximately two thousand people have managed to survive and escape back to Thailand with the help from the U.S. Embassy and UNHCR (Shawcross 1984, 91). The Thai government rejected the protest of the forced repatriation at Preah Vihear. It had drawn international attention toward Thailand's humanitarian policy that failed horribly to manage the influx of the Cambodians and how the Thai military involved in control both human and lands during the chaotic time at the border. This issue will be discussed in the following chapter.

At last, I have heard about how Preah Vihear became the face of Phnom Dangrek studies regarding the border/territorial dispute over the ownership of Preah Vihear temple and its vicinity which particularly focuses on political and historical pressures for conflict escalation (Jenne 2017). Neither Thailand nor Cambodia seem to be able to open the conversation of the incident. Thailand had managed to take control over the areas during the civil war by their military superiority (Jenne). Indeed, "the Khmer Rouge could not hold the temple without complicity from Thailand" (Barlow 2011, 46). They were allowed to exercise their guerrilla movements across Phnom Dangrek and control over Preah Vihear temple from 1973 until 1998 (Barlow).⁹⁰



Figure 19: Old Bunker at Samrongkiat Waterfall (06/17/2019) and Pha Mor E Daeng in Sisaket Province (08/16/2014)

⁹⁰ The Khmer Rouge generated the income from tourism of Preah Vihear temple in cooperating with Thailand as the Phnom Penh administration allowed a Khmer Rouge leader, Ieng Sary, to govern a semiautonomous region in western Cambodia as part of its plan to induce the Khmer Rouge to surrender (Barlow 2011, 47)

Conclusion

The overall theme of this chapter is an attempt to highlight the role of Phnom Dangrek as the Thai-Cambodian border through historical and geographical perspectives in relation to the regional and domestic conflicts. The historical intertwining of Thailand and Cambodia between the end of colonial era through the WWII and Cold War period in the first half of this chapter presents an alternative narration that allows the silent side of the Cambodian civil war history to be found at the Thai border. The Franco-Thai war and WWII became the interim period that allowed people to cross the mountains as there were no border lines. Certain war locations remained undisturbed within the forest after the war ended, particularly the second killing fields incident that has been silenced and neglected. On the one hand, the survivors tended to not wish to share their tragic stories to the postwar generations as they do not want to relive with it again.⁹¹ Shifting in narration or meaning of certain war-related spots such as Tamor Roi and waterfalls are made and redefined to benefit the communities and for tourism purposes.

Lastly, it is also important to acknowledge silence as a refusal and self-protection from painful memories or trauma and threat from state power. Silence becomes a strength or resilience for moving forward. The more I learned from my informants, the more I realized that war memories and traces are mostly fragmented. Prior to the fieldwork, I was not aware of whether there were major events that happened along the border due to the fact that the border has been situated as the transitional phase from Cambodia to the refugee camps and less stories from clandestine strongholds being recorded in the mainstream media. These findings began from fragmented stories told by those who experienced the war within the Dangrek mountain areas. To not let silence pose its own dangers and becomes a floating signifier of evil (Hinton 2005, 4), I take steps further to find ways in searching silences from other perspectives. I rather concentrate on how changes in border landscape can reveal how the war had effected nature and

⁹¹ The words from Bunseng Taing, the survivor from “Ghost Mountain” Documentary film.

“the possibility for change in their collective memories” (Jenne 2017) to open up for the discussion from both Thailand and Cambodia.

In the next chapter, I will discuss further the prolongation of war through the refugee camp operation and postwar land use changes. It will focus on how the border dwellers learned about clandestine guerilla camps and their personal experiences with Cambodian refugees. The ways Thai state controlled and participated in the Cambodian conflict could be seen through the development of Thailand’s refugee policy to current immigration policies and such ambiguous surveillance of state’s territory now and then.

Chapter 3 Limited Flows on the Edge:

Border Camps, Thailand's Humanitarianism, Post-war Land Use Change



Figure 20: These images were in the collection of Cambodian civil war exhibited in Tubtim Siam 04 community center in Sangkha, Surin Province (Courtesy Images: Tubtim Siam 04 Village)

January 22, 1993 was the date set for the closing ceremony of Site B in Sangkha, Surin Province. The caption written behind the image of colorful balloons (Figure 20) literally states that *“It is necessary that Thailand must send “Phu Oapphayop” back (to their country).”* Along with the image of farewell display *“Bon Voyage/Have a safe trip back”* in Thai language, it was the moment that Thailand publicly announced the repatriation program and the end of humanitarian aid for Cambodian displaced people at the border. These pictures are in the collection that was produced and sponsored by Surindra Rajabhat University (former Surindra Rajabhat College) and Chulabhorn Research Institute. The exhibition launched three years after the camp closure and the establishment of the “Tabtim Siam” (Siamese Ruby⁹²) Project where all these images and models were placed at the community center of the Tabtim Siam 04 Village.

⁹² The set of official flyers used the word “Red Sapphire” instead of ‘Ruby’ in their English translation. The name “Tubtim Siam 01 was originally named after Princess Chulabhorn’s visit to Trat Province which located next to Pailin Province of Cambodia. The name ‘Tubtim Siam’ is possibly taken from the fact that this area is known for gem business mainly rubies and sapphires (Rungsawadisap, 1999: 104). The Khmer Rouge had earned the revenue from the gem business with Thailand for many years during the Cambodian civil war period.

The image of the camp closing ceremony can be considered as the new beginning of the border reality. Not only were the Cambodian displaced persons forced to return their motherland by repatriation program and the general election in 1993 hosted by UNTAC, but also the Thai border dwellers, who had no land properties due to poverty and have been impacted by war for decades, could return to their border villages. The Thai government redistributed the lands that used to be the camp sites to the population in various forms. There are eight locations for the Tabtim Siam project that are differentiated by the numbers.

Post-Border Camp Land Use Change: Silencing and Suppressing the Past War

Due to the fact that there is no more operating camp in Surin Province for me to examine, I approach this matter by visiting the former camp sites where I was able to locate its existence. As I tackled the hidden history that can be found in the mountains, I focused on war stories from local Thais in Surin and the Khmer people in O'Smach and Anlong Veng that were elicited by moving through the landscape of Phnom Dangrek in the previous chapter. This chapter continues the objective of uncovering the silenced stories of the Cambodian civil war through the landscape changes specifically in former refugee/border camp areas by projecting to the land use changes to reflect Thailand's humanitarian policies narrating in parallel to build upon the juxtaposition and interconnection between Thai and Cambodian politics from Chapter 2.

Overall, there will be two parts in this chapter. The first part of this chapter will trace the encampments by searching for the former camp locations in Surin Province and also the most important one in Sakaeo, Khao-I-Dang, where many Cambodian refugees lived before resettling in the third countries. These camps have turned to something else — village, forestry reserve, military base. The impacts of war have been barely mentioned in the public sphere. Yet I tell the oral history of those who lived and worked in or near the camps and reflect upon different policies toward refugees over a roughly fifteen to twenty-year period to prove that Thai people also hold back the war memories and usually do not pass them on to the younger generations.

The latter part of the chapter revisits the origin of these border camps which have been changed to something else by the Thai authorities. I examine the role of the Thai government in controlling and containing the life of Cambodian refugees at the border through analysis of its refugee and humanitarian policies. The ambiguity of Thai refugee policy revealed double-edged sword effects that is reflected in the stories of locals who lived through this time varied in their interaction with the refugees and what they have gained during and after the camp existence.

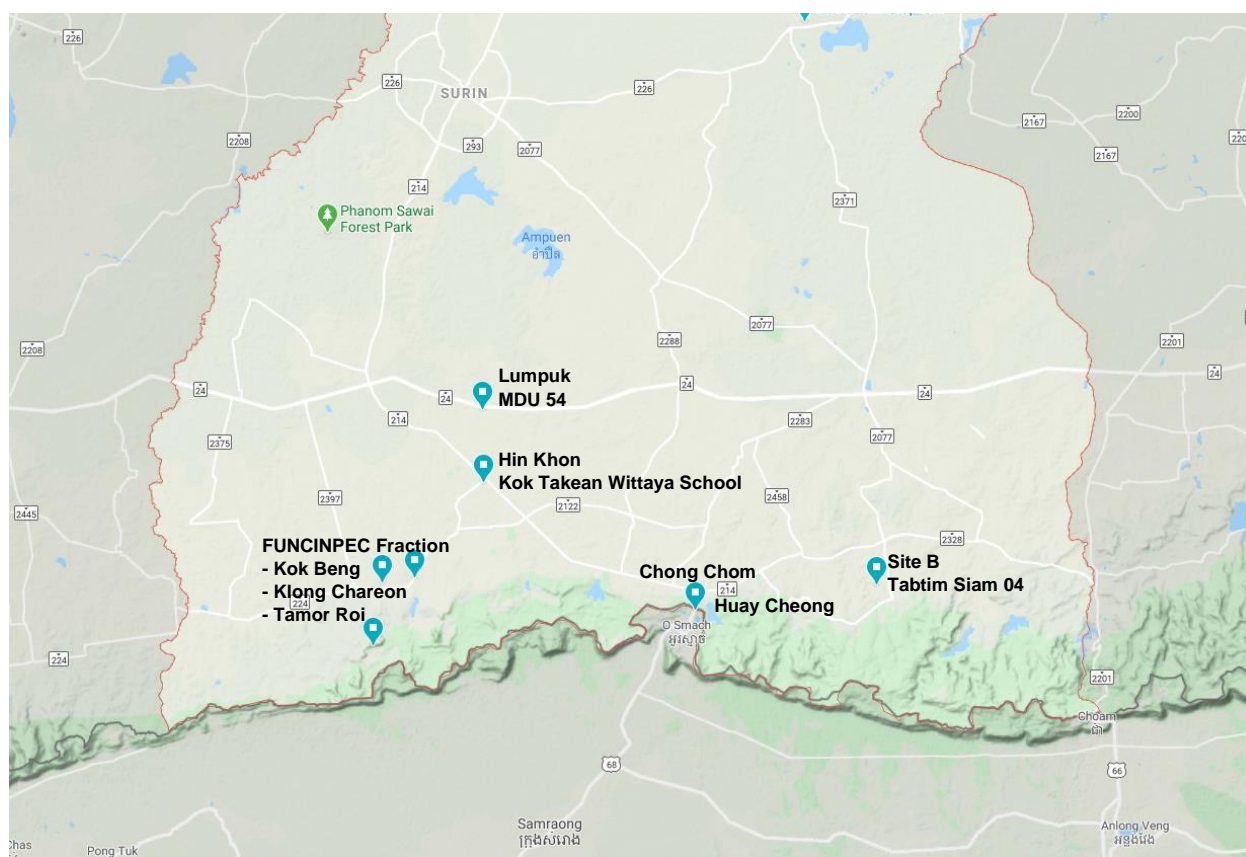


Figure 21: Map of former refugee border camps in Surin Province (modified by me on Google Maps)

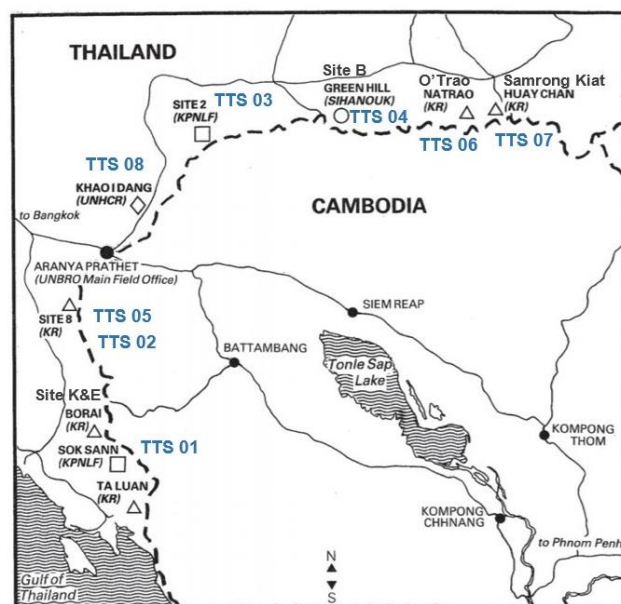
Tabtim Siam Project

According to the Royal Forest Department (RFD) official, Tabtim Siam, was a post-war land management project proposed by the Royal Thai Army (RTA)⁹³ in collaboration with

⁹³ This claim is from the interview but could not be found in any official documents as most of the project description in each Tabtim Siam page on the list of royal project would be written as this project initiated by Princess Chulabhorn.

Chulabhorn Research Institute⁹⁴ (See Figure 22). The initiation took place after Princess Chulabhorn, the fourth child of King Bhumiphol, visited the former Site K camp and Site E (*chomrom suksan*) camp in Borai, Trat Province⁹⁵ in December 1992. It was the first location that Thailand's royal family involved in the post-war land redistribution. It was first called Chulabhorn Pattana village which has a literal meaning of the village developed by Princess Chulabhorn. In the aftermath of her Trat visit, this project was announced as her initiation by requesting to redistribute the national reserved forest area⁹⁶ from the RFD to be given to Borai residents who did not own lands for housing and agricultural works.

Figure 22: Tabtim Siam Projects replaced the Cambodian refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border (Map from Tony Jackson (1987), "Just Waiting to Die? Cambodian Refugees in Thailand") as modified by me



Later, Princess Chulabhorn made another royal visit to Burapha Field Force (RTA) in Sakaeo Province in January 1993. It was reported that seven more Tabtim Siam Projects were announced in August 1993 in another three provinces including Sakaeo, Surin, and Sisaket for the areas that used to be the refugee camps that were closed down and already demolished before the project announcement. Tabtim Siam 02, 03, 05, and 08 are in Sakaeo. Tabtim Siam 04 is in Surin and Tabtim Siam 06 and 07 are in Sisaket. Six of eight locations were formed as the new villages in a grid-like structure of a hundred households approximately (Pye 2005a). The RTA would appoint their draftees (enlisted soldiers) to build a single-pattern house for all

⁹⁴ Chulabhorn Research Institute is a government-funded Scientific and technological research institute founded in 1987.

⁹⁵ Ban Kradook Chang (elephant bones) village, Moo. 1.

⁹⁶ For Trat province, the project requested the lands from Pah Khao Sa-mhing (Khlung Yai – Fai Mhai) for 33,000 Rai to be given to people in Borai District. The residential area is in between the former Site K and Site E camp areas.

selected residents. This package came with 2 to 10 rai (3,200 - 16,000 square meters)⁹⁷ for agricultural proposes.

This development project was based on an assumption that the areas of former refugee camps were already disturbed and destroyed by the encampment. The Thai authorities chose to redistribute to villagers

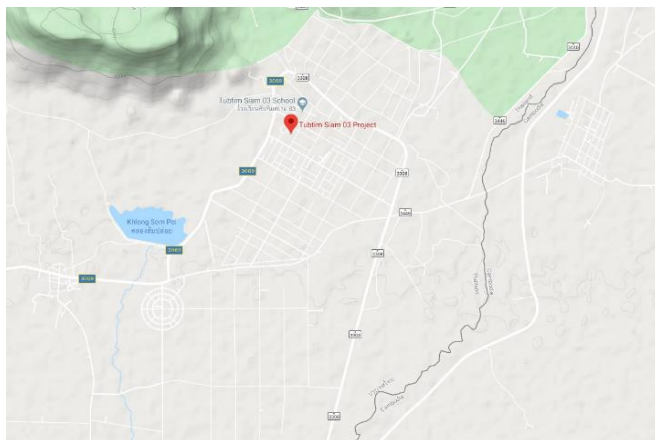


Figure 23: Map of a grid-like structured Tabtim Siam 03 village (former site 2 camp) in Ta Phraya, Sakaeo Province (courtesy: Google Maps)

instead of fully returning its status to the national reserve or sanctuary parks. The projects are mostly handed in a package which includes the new villages for Thai citizens who had no land properties with full community facilities and infrastructure, and the reservoirs for each village except the Tabtim Siam 02 and 08 in Sakaeo Province that became the reserved forests and the centers for vocational training for villagers and animal food research. Tabtim Siam residents would be invited to join vocational and agricultural training through any royal- or governmental-sponsored training projects for self-sufficient agricultural system. They would either choose to have domesticated livestock or plantation of designated plants that are subjected to change every few years. The training programs are also associated with the counterinsurgency campaigns which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Formerly Site B Camp, Currently Tabtim Siam 04

“We, the villagers are the child of the princess,” one of the residents of Tabtim Siam 04 told me. This village is a special unit located in the national reserved forest that used to be the area of Site B camp, the camp that was built for Sihanouk’s FUNCINPEC party. After the camp closure, everything was demolished except the temple which later was renamed to Wat

⁹⁷ Distributed lands are varied depending on which Tabtim Siam they moved in.

Thepprathan. Instead of returning the land to the Royal Forest Department, the camp area was handed to Suranaree Command, a military base of Surin Province before it was given to Princess Chulabhorn's Tabtim Siam 04 project. I visited this village with my parents as the police who are in this area are my dad's friend. We sat in the village upon our arrival while six-seven villagers came from their homes and sat with us. Together with my parents, my dad's friend, and the villagers, we have a casual group conversation – one – three informants at a time - I asked them to share their memories during the camp time when they still lived nearby. After that the former head of the village gave us a village tour from Wat Thepprathan, an old Buddhist temple that was the only thing remaining from the camp demolition; then we visited the community center where there is the exhibition about the Cambodian encampment in Thailand. The details are not specific to Site B but the whole history of the war up until the 1993 election. Our last destination was the Alongkorn waterfall (see Chapter 2).

The stories I learned from the village members were slightly different from the official reports that mostly contain the details of the camp operation and attitudes of the camp dwellers on social issues and their expectations for life. The voice of people who lived nearby the camp has been neglected by previous studies. Site B for the villagers was the place that Thailand provided humanitarian shelter for Cambodians who escaped the war from their country. They were able to tell me the timeline of the encampments that there were more than Site B but the rest was not recorded by the official reports. Starting from Lumpuk camp to Camp David (Tatum) that was in between the ninth and the tenth boundary mark before it moved to Site B location. They called FUNCINPEC as Khmer Prahok (Khamen Plara) in the same manner they called Khmer Rouge (Khamen Daeng). Their perception toward the camp and the relations to King Sihanouk was by comparing with King Bhumibol as they witnessed how Cambodians paid respect to King Sihanouk.

Regarding the interaction between the villagers who lived nearby the camp and later became Tabtim Siam 04 residents and the camp dwellers, they befriended each other through market activities. One female informant shared her experience of crying in front of the camp guard as they did not allow her to take food that she got from the camp to go home. She cried until they returned to the food to her. While one of the male informants asked the Khmer English teacher out on a date at the elephant provincial fair.⁹⁸ Some have maintained their friendship by having the annual meeting through the ceremony of the end of Buddhist Lent in Cambodia.



Formerly Khao-I-Dang Center, Currently Tabtim Siam 08

I visited Khao I Dang (KID) in Khok Soong district, Sakaeo for further clarification on the camp management and post-camp land uses. Khao-I-Dang turned Tabtim Siam 08 Project after the camp closed in 1993 and the lands were handed to the Royal Forest Department (RFD), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Thailand.⁹⁹ Tabtim Siam 08 differs from

⁹⁸ The fair is called the “Elephant Round-Up” Festival (งานช้างแฟร์ – *Ngan Chang Fair*). It is a major provincial fair that is held in November every year.

⁹⁹ Formerly operated as a department under the Ministry of Interior of Thailand.

other Tabtim Siam project as it is not transformed into the village but the reforestation and reservoir programs.

Stories from Neighbors of Khao-I-Dang

Before my friend and I met the RFD staff, we accidentally went to the wrong spot. Our first stop in Aranyaprathet was the office of Sakeao Wildfire Management Station that is in the RFD area. Khun Pin (pseudonym), who is a staff of Wildfire station, greeted and welcomed us as we introduced ourselves as Ph.D. students who research the refugee camps in Thailand. We had a casual conversation that was littered with the everyday presence of death and ghosts in the area. She told us that people have always mistaken the wildfire station as KID learning center because the locations are next to one another. We had a conversation about the area that was casual in tone but unsettling in content. “That car sometimes moved by itself,” she said matter of factly, pointing at a rusty old car that parked next to other wildfire equipment near the entrance of the station. I got chills down my spine. We learned that it is normal to hear hauntings or ghost stories in her office area since it used to be a cemetery zone of the KID camp. Skeletons of dead bodies covered by fabric sheets could be found in the jungle. Skeletons in pots could also be found in the reservoir, alongside discarded medical equipment, Khun Pin said. She did not tell us much about her own experiences, instead focusing on the landscape. She said that she could have been a tour guide for the KID learning center if the center could manage to run this place a tourist attraction because she was born and raised in Khok Soong. She witnessed the refugee camps herself.

We waited until we were confirmed to have a meeting with the RFD staff on the following day, we then decided to ask Khun Pin permission to have a formal interview. She instead took us to the village nearby so that we could meet the elderly who also lived in this area during the camp time. We followed her to the village for a five-minute drive. There were four-five people gathered by sitting on a big litter in front of a small shop selling snacks, drinks, food seasoning,

and bathroom items. Khun Pin introduced us to them and asked if we could have a conversation about the KID camp. They were willing to share their experiences which were very diverse depending on where they lived at that time.

Yai Lah (pseudonym), an elder who chose to live next to KID, had the most dramatic and insightful stories shared with us. There used to be only six households in this village including hers. At nights, the villagers had to hide in the jungle due to the frequent burglars who came here to rob their belongings. She and her husband hid money under the soil so that the burglars could not find it. She chose to live this close to the camp, though it was not encouraged by the Thai authorities, because she and her husband were doing business with people in the camp. They were the middlemen, to take requests from the camp residents to get goods such as cigarettes and silk from Aranyaprathet or Bangkok, or exchange Thai Baht for US dollars. She would secretly deliver goods to her clients in the camp, who would either use them or sell them. She had to risk her life to avoid being shot and pay bribes to the camp guards so that they could get into the camp by squeezing through two to three-layered of barbwire fences. That was how she earned money for 40-50 thousand baht a day (approximate value). The high income got her a gold necklace, and she got attacked many times if she wore it. She believed that because of her grey business and gaining wealth, there might be spy targeting and following her during the daytime and attacked her at night. Consequently, she sent her kids away to another province. After she realized that it was too dangerous for her, she sometimes had to hide in the jungle at nights and sometimes in the temple where the monk gave her a room for temporary stays. She endured it all because it was the only way to earn this much for almost a decade. After the camp closure, she no longer earns as much money as before. Her husband had relationships with two Khmer ladies from the camp. She said she was fine with it because it was temporary; people got into the camp and left for good, there was nothing to worry about. Although, I did not ask where her husband is nowadays as it was deemed inappropriate. This is one of many violent incidents that happened to the camp neighbors.

The story told by Yai Lah appeared to be rare and unpopular within Thai narratives, as I learned from several more informants who mentioned the violence they witnessed but denied to share any details or asked me not to write about it. Even within the Cambodian refugee themselves, the film “Site 2” by Rithy Panh about Site 2 camp, the largest campsite¹⁰⁰ of its time in Sakaeo located in the north of KID that has turned to Tabtim Siam 03. The film narrates the daily living in refugee camps by a female adult who takes the audience to see her life inside the bamboo hut, food distribution, camp activities, and their leisure time. It is similar to what Yai Lah told us that the facilitation fully functioned inside the camp. However, Yai Lah’s story portrays another side that only the locals could experience. As she lived at the edge of the camp, she learned where and how she could squeeze in and to what Sangkat (unit). The facilities that she remembered what was inside KID such as a hospital (only one spot that Thais could get access to the camp to receive medical services), hair salon, kitchen, small shops, Buddhist temple, a Christian church, learning and training center, and prostitute services. Due to the camp status of KID that differed from other border camps controlled by Cambodian resistance themselves, KID was the final relocation operated by UNBRO as a transit center that received Cambodian “displaced persons” who wished to resettle in the third countries. If they were qualified, their status would change to “refugee” and proceed to the resettlement program by life adjustment and language training programs in the camp. The duration in KID, thus, was varied. Since KID was under international organizations, there were Cambodian refugees from different political beliefs living in the same place, even though the camp operation had been separated by three political affiliations and designated by Sangkat No. 3, 5 and 9. Besides burglars at night outside the camp that have impacted on Thai villagers the most, there were crimes within KID between

¹⁰⁰ Site 2 is composed of five sub-camps with its own administrative structure. Lynch (1989) describes the prominence of Site 2 that “In contrast to the other major border camps, Site 2 has fairly busy roads, and a high degree of entrepreneurial activity, evidenced by the sizable markets and a number of restaurants.” Site 2 was politically affiliated with the KPNLF, the political party that rooted from the Khmer Serei, the anti-communist / anti-monarchy group formed in 1959 after the independence period.

the Thai soldiers from Special Forces Unit¹⁰¹ and Cambodian refugees or Cambodians who might own guns or poisons and fought against each other from time to time. Yai Lah was once in the middle of the conflict as she was ordered to buy watermelons for her client. Later there was news from the camp that some people got poisoned by watermelon! Not to mention, torture and rape cases could also be found inside and outside the camp, such as people might get forced to swim in the pond full of leeches.¹⁰²

We were fortunate to meet with Yai Lah who had a special connection with the soldiers and the camp dwellers. She provided us insightful details of the dark side of the camp that I did not have a chance to learn from the perspectives of government officials, soldiers or foreign volags. This was because Khun Pin who we met accidentally and was willing to let us meet with her neighbors. After we left the village and back to Khun Pin's office, I felt that she was more open with us as she began to share her own experiences when she was young and still lived with her mother. She told us that there were more clandestine camps along with the military combat training locations of the RTA in the mountains near KID opened for refugees who could not get into KID because of camp density. Her mother used to sell 'Khāotom Hø'(ข้าวต้มห่อ)¹⁰³ in this secret camp because the access was less strict than the KID. The activities of exchanging food were common to the camps in Surin Province. Khun Pin also witnessed the departure of the refugees who left KID by buses to go to Bangkok and ready for going abroad to the third country. Many informants both in Surin and Sakaeo shared the same belief that refugees who would be qualified and selected by the UN for resettlement program had to be clever. However, they did not know much about the repatriation program.

¹⁰¹ The special forces unit has its official name called The Royal Thai Army Special Warfare Command which also known as Pa Wai Airborne (ทหารพลร่มป่าหวาย). The headquarter is King Narai Camp located in Lopburi Province.

¹⁰² Yai Lah (Pseudonym, age unknown), interviewed on July 06, 2018.

¹⁰³ A savory dessert made of steamed sticky rice and coconut milk.

A day later, we met Khun Pong (pseudonym), an RFD staff who provided essential information about land management that has been intentionally left incomplete to the public. Tabtim Siam 08 reservation project has always owned by the RFD. However, Khun Pong told us that in the early 1970s before this area was assigned to build a refugee camp, the Thai army requested the government to lend this area for military training purposes such as tank and artillery shooting field (aiming at the mountain) for Burapha Field Force (East troops).¹⁰⁴ The army would normally request through Section 16 of the National Reserved Forest Act, B.E.2507 (1964) under the condition of “until it is no longer necessary” (จนกว่าจะหมดความจำเป็น).¹⁰⁵ This land was returned to the RFD after the camp closure with the royal support through the Chulabhorn Research Institute for ten years (1994-2004) and later managed by Sakaeo provincial office and Tambon Administrative Office.

Tabtim Siam 08 Forest Sanctuary is covered by trees. There are few roads left for staff transportation. Except for the Khao-I-Dang learning center located at the front of the project, the landscape change gives no hint that this place used to be a refugee camp with numerous huts and roads that kept refugees within a small area. The center and its exhibition are sponsored and provided by the ICRC and former UNHCR staff who used to work in the camp. At the beginning of the center, they were able to hire students from Tubphraya school as youth guides for the center but discontinued because of a lack of budget. There are always Cambodian visitors who came from Western countries or Cambodia. The visitors often leave the messages on the guest book reminiscing the time they were in Khao-I-Dang. Khun Pong initially planned to build “Bamboo city” to replicate the camp-style residence for dark tourism, but the budget was not allowed to do so. The RFD manages to hire six employees through the budget of the royal

¹⁰⁴ They still practice here nowadays and every time they do, they will inform the communities as people live their lives by searching for wild goods i.e. mushroom to not enter the area. (interviewed with Khun Pong 07072018)

¹⁰⁵ This statement is from the interview, he actually stated another Forest Act (B.E. 2484 - 1941) which is about forest concession and section 16 is about logging licensing; however, his explanation fits the National Reserved Act B.E. 2507 (1964).

project. They are also allowed to live in the project area along with the RFD personnel and soldiers from a special army unit. One of the employees was recently granted Thai citizenship after living with stateless status for thirty years since he was adopted by a family who lived nearby Khao-I-Dang.

A story of becoming Thai (Rot, 43)

After the conversation with Khun Pong, he took us on a tour around the former camp area inside the preservation zone that was filled with dense and lofty trees and what remains in this newly planted forest. He also introduced us to Rot (pseudonym), one of his staff that worked for Tabtim Siam 08 since 1994. Rot was adopted by the Lao-speaking family in Sakaeo. We asked for permission to interview Rot for his experience in KID. However, he could not remember anything about the camp as he arrived at KID at a very young age, according to what his adoptive parents have told him. His parents saw him playing alone after a group of Cambodian refugees were in Aranyaprathet town for sightseeing. When everyone left, they approached Rot and learned that he got lost and left alone. His parents attempted to return him to KID 4-5 times through a Western camp staff who they called “*Yai Phom Khao*” (a white-hair granny); however, he strongly refused to return to the camp. They eventually decided to adopt him and let him live with the family without any proper identification documents.¹⁰⁶

Rot has lived in Sakaeo for the rest of his life as a stateless and undocumented person. He grew up speaking Lao at home as his family migrated from Northeast Thailand. He also speaks Thai but cannot speak Khmer, and has never been Cambodia, the country where he was originally from. Rot could not go to school or the hospital. He would visit the local clinics if he gets sick. Eventually, in 2015, the Thai government announced they would grant citizenship for village-proved undocumented persons who have lived in Thailand for more than twenty years.

¹⁰⁶ As of 2018, his adoptive parents already passed away and their biological children are in the age of 60s, almost twenty years apart and now he is taking care of his nephews and nieces.

Rot applied for this grant and passed the qualification as his village head helped him by providing all necessary documents and “village agreement” (ประชาคมหมู่บ้าน) to verify his residential status. He finally became a Thai citizen and was legally hired by the FRD and gained access to public healthcare services.

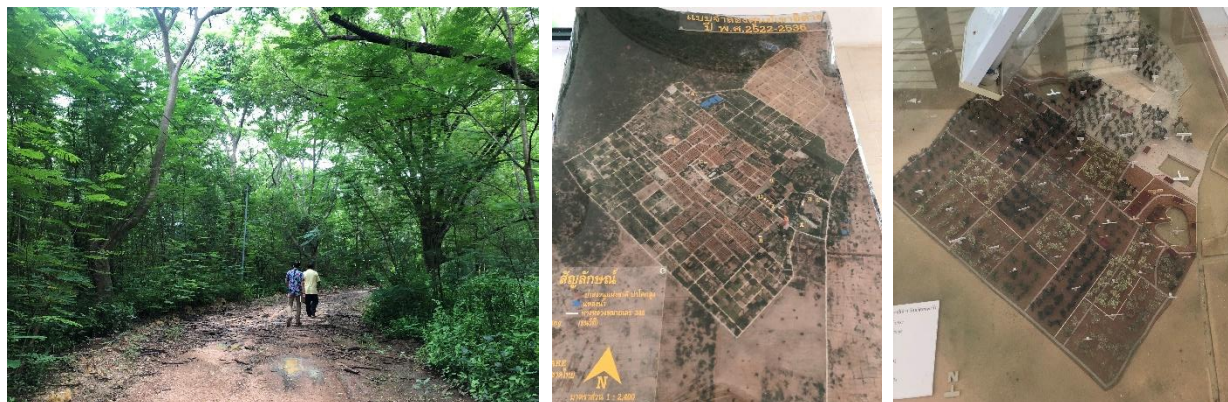


Figure 25: Khao I Dang Learning Center as part of Tubtim Siam 08 Project (left); a poster of KID camp (middle); and a model for tree planning program from the exhibition (right) (07/07/2018)

A Khmer-speaking Thai staff in KID

Aunt Fang (pseudonym) was a kitchen staff under the CARE organization during the last ten years of KID operation. Her story is similar to the stories of my relative who once worked closely with the Khmer Rouge in Chapter 2, the Thai language instructors in Lumpuk camp and many other Khmer-speaking Surin locals who took advantage of their language skills to participate in the camp operation beyond Surin territory either via humanitarian organizations, government sectors, or economic relations with the camps. With her energetic personality, she told her experiences so vividly. Here is a transcription of a conversation I had with her during her break from kitchen work in the schools for disabled students of Surin Province. Her generosity has kept her doing the greater good for people who need help and social support.

Me: How did you get a position in KID?

Aunt Fang: When I was in high school, I learned that there was a war, people were fighting near Kapcheong area. I did not expect that I would end up working in the refugee camp. However, after I graduated with a vocational certificate degree in Surin, there was recruitment I heard from my aunt who worked in Bangkok. She saw an advertisement in the newspapers that the INGOs were searching for Thai citizens who speak Khmer to

work in the refugee camps as the local staff. In 1985, I accepted the offer to work with CARE organization even though I knew nothing and no one about the place I was going to work because of the high salary. My dad and I were happy to take this job, it was better than to apply for a teacher position in Surin. I took a bus from Chong Sai Taku, Buriram to Aranyaprathet.

Me: What did you do in the camp?

Aunt Fang: I was assigned to be a staff in the camp kitchen. I cook food for the camp residents in different Sangkat(s), to the staff and patients at a camp hospital, a mental health clinic, a temple where was also a learning center for kids (ages lower than five). At first, we cooked in a charcoal stove and was changed to a gas stove in a few years later.

Me: How did distribute the food to these Sangkat(s)?

Aunt Fang: I had to drive an old-school farmer's truck (รถอีแต๋น) to deliver food that put in huge blue containers to each Sangkat with Cambodian staff. Food comprised steamed bread (1-2 thousand pieces a day) and rice with pickles and other side dishes, three meals a day for those who couldn't cook for themselves. All food supplies were supported by UMBRO.

Me: Where did the rice and other food supplies come from?

Aunt Fang: The rice actually came from Surin (Golden Dragon Rice Mill)¹⁰⁷. That's why there were many camp staff from Surin Province, either worked as local staff in the camps or the as the drivers who transported rice from Surin to Sakaeo. That was because we speak Khmer with the refugees.

For other food supplies, it was brought from Bangkok. They also distributed fresh foods to every household in the camp.

Me: How did the cottages for the residents look like? How was their living condition?

Aunt Fang: The houses were made from bamboo with a grass roof (*ya kha*)¹⁰⁸, provided by UNBRO. Although the camp had such protective barbwire fences, some camp residents were allowed to travel back and forth between Cambodia and the Thai border.

Me: Who else that you were in contact during your stay in the camp?

Aunt Fang: I had to coordinate with several international organizations to confirm the number of meals that I had to distribute every day for those who provided facilities in the camp beside the camp dwellers. As I was a CARE staff for food matters, there were COR (Christian Out Reach), ICRC, JSRC, and a few more for electricity and water supplies.

Me: How did you learn about the Cambodian refugees? Did you befriend them?

Aunt Fang: Yes, I befriended them through language study program. They were diligent, especially learning the Thai language. And I learned the Khmer language from them, Cambodian staff. I knew a little bit about how political fractions worked and how the camp organized or separated by political affiliations. To my knowledge, the Khmer Serei was in KID and

¹⁰⁷ Rōngsī Mangkōn Thōng (โรงสีมังกรทอง)

¹⁰⁸ Imperata Cylindrica (หญ้าคา)

the Vietnamese in Site 2 (south), the Khmer Rouge in Trat. I also visited other camps if there were special requests through the CARE organization.

I somehow became a rude person because I had to shout and ask the camp residents to be in lines or to be on tracks as there were so many people. Waiting could frustrate their satisfaction; some of them were choosy and demanding.

Me: Do you remember any scariest moment while you worked there?

Aunt Fang: Probably the sound of the bomb. For the first time that I heard the sound, I did not know that was bombing sound. Weeeeeeeed Boom! until I was told by other staff in the camp.

There was a fire in the camp, I couldn't help much but I appreciate how they used the tractor to stop the fire.

Another time that my bus got robbed, it was my friend that lost her money and stuff while I was safe. The burglars happened often, the Cambodians would come out of nowhere along the border road while the staff was traveling between provinces.

Every time that the crashes got intense at the border, the camp staff and volags would be asked to get on the buses and travel to the Lam Nang Rong reservoir in Buriram Province to stay in the provided bunkers. We had to stand by and wait in line until the situation went better. Everyone anxiously waited in the quiet mode. But I must say that the international humanitarian organizations, they took care of Thai staff very well.

Me: What else did you get a chance to do besides cooking and delivering food?

Aunt Fang: In the final year, I was asked to help with departing registration for those who were leaving for the third countries or sent back to Cambodia by buses. The camp organizers and the RTA controlled the process of registration by recruiting more staff to help to fill the names. Departure names must match with the registered ones when first arrived.

Me: How do you feel now as looking back at your experience?

Aunt Fang: It was a feeling of excitement and anxiety rather than being scared. My farang (white) colleague once expressed their curiosity about why Thai staff was not scared as much they did. It was actually scary, but my teenage self was not scared at all. Thinking about the dark scenery of the mountain near KID at night, it was not enjoyable. I worked there for ten years until the camp closure in 1993.

Me: Do you still keep in touch with your colleagues?

Aunt Fang: Yes, I have many friends who I have been in touch with. Some moved to Phnom Penh by marriage. Some moved back to Surin and became teachers in the public schools as it was supposed o after the graduation if they did not decide to work in KID.



Figure 26: Camp activities based on Aunt Fang experiences as a kitchen staff hired by CARE (courtesy images of Aunt Fang)

Non-Tabtim Siam Post-Camp Land Use Change

This section highlights the other two former camps located in Surin Province that are not part of Tabtim Siam project. First, a former Lumpuk camp in Prasat District became the military base of the Mobile Development Unit 54. Another is a former Hin Khon Camp in Kap Cheong District that has turned to the public school named Kok Takean Wittaya School. Unlike the Tabtim Siam project, these former camp areas were not returned or redistributed to the residents in the district. The records of camp operation have never been published, yet it resides within the memories of the residents who have lived in the surrounding areas.

Formerly Lumpuk Camp, Currently Mobile Development Unit 54

Lumpuk camp was the first official refugee camp in Surin which was under the RTAF's Mobile Development Unit 41. As I stated in the Introduction chapter, this camp was the first story I learned about Cambodian refugees in Surin Province through the conversation with my

dad. It was a former refugee camp that was close to my grandparents in Tambon Tabao (sub-district). Lumpuk camp residents were allowed to leave the camp to get employments for rice harvesting or minor labor works nearby. There were goods exchanges and sales between the Thai villagers and Cambodian camp residents on the weekends under the regulation set by the Thai authorities. Moreover, there was another residential home for King Sihanouk in Lumpuk camp which turned to a private residence for a “red cap” unit, RTAF’s special force group.¹⁰⁹

According to the 1980 report of Operating Centre for Displaced Persons (OCDP),^{110,111} this camp was founded as a shelter for Cambodians who seek refuge from the Khmer Rouge regime through 36 Chong(s) along the Thai-Cambodian borders (e.g., Chong Samet, Chong Prasat Ta Muan). There were first-aid temporary shelters in Kapcheong and at Provincial Scout Camp in Muang Surin (central) district. Later, the Ministry of Interior ordered the construction of the Lumpuk Camp located in Tabao, Prasat District in 1975. The camp residents were relocated from temporary shelters in other provinces by busses under the RTAF supervision. Based on the official reports, it was initially managed by Thai authorities at the provincial level and the ministerial level. It was until 1978 that the camp had begun to receive financial aid from UNHCR and international NGOs such as Food for the Hungry Organization. There were several local authorities involved in humanitarian task forces, namely the local Red Cross unit of Surin; contracted teachers who were hired to teach the Thai language as a required education for camp dwellers; volunteer defense corps, village headmasters in the camp area and soldiers from Task Force 80 as the guards of the camp. The camp residents would be allowed to guard themselves

¹⁰⁹ The house is closed and unknown to the public. However, there was one informant who believed that there is nothing wrong to state this fact. It could become a historical site for local education as same as the SAO of Nangmud subdistrict in Kapcheong has been promoting another King Sihanouk’s residence in Surin for tourism and educational proposes.

¹¹⁰ The government has appointed the Ministry of Interior to be responsible for the administration of Indochinese refugees which are detained in refugee camps. The supervisory board of OCDP comprising representatives from Government agencies concerned and headed by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior is set up. Its main function is to formulate policy and guidelines for the implementation of refugees through the OCDP.

¹¹¹ The 1980 OCDP Report provides a background on Thailand’s humanitarian actions stating that the refugees from Indochina first arrived in April 1975.

within the camp area and self-governing policy which included the head of the refugees, heads of the units, head of the buildings and several camp committees (i.e., food distribution committee, sports committee, discipline committee, healthcare, and hygiene committee and education committee) under the supervision of the Thai authorities. This camp could be seen as the first attempt by Thailand to deal with the influx of the Cambodians in the early stage of Cambodian conflict after Thailand had dealt with Lao and Vietnamese refugees in the Upper Northeastern region during the Vietnam War and Secret War in Laos in the 1960s and early 70s. The operation period was between 1975 - 1982 (OCDC, 1980; Rogge 1990).

There were two Thai language instructors in the Lumpuk camp staff I was able to interview about their camp experiences. First, Kru Mai (pseudonym) was one of ten teachers who were hired by the camp operation officer through a local advertisement recruiting Khmer-speaking Thais for teaching positions. While she was waiting for a teacher recruitment process after she graduated from Surin Teacher College, she decided to apply to work in the camp until she got an official offer to teach in the public school. There were three languages taught in Lumpuk, namely Thai, Khmer and English. She took care of adolescent classes on weekdays. Khmer teachers who were the camp residents taught the Khmer language in the afternoons and English for adults taught during the weekends by Cambodians and three Westerners.

Regarding security and life in the camp, what she witnessed did not totally match with the official reports. The Thai soldiers were the most authoritative party in the camp operation, not the OCPD and the Ministry of Interior as the reports stated. She had a chance to have casual talks with Cambodian teachers when they had leisure time and built enough trust in one another to share their escape stories. Kru Mai noticed that there was a separation between wealthy and poor camp residents. “These people ran away from Cambodia with golds in their bags - *Hob Thong nhee ma* – หอบทองหนีมา,” she said. Some wealthy residents would be permitted to have their own cabins and go out for shopping or some might be allowed to go out for work by paying

bribes to the gatekeepers in exchange. However, for those who tried to escape the camp without permission, they might get shot or punished by the soldiers. The relationship between camp dwellers and local residents happened through the barter market in the mornings. They would gather in the market time to exchange food and goods with no cash, such as coconut and vegetable exchanged with rice, the main agricultural product of Surin Province. Kru Mai met her husband during her work in the camp, he was the staff who took care of the refugees and sent them to Bangkok awaiting to travel the third country for resettlement program. He accommodated these refugees to travel to Bangkok by busses for their flights. Along with the official reports, this means Lumpuk camp was opened for the early refugees who managed to escape the Khmer Rouge from the beginning, so that their periods of stay were shorter than those who left Cambodia after the Vietnamese invasion in 1978. Since the Lumpuk camp was closed in 1982, the rest who did not make it to the third country were transferred to Site B or Hin Khon camp in Kapcheong District.

After the camp closure, Lumpuk camp was transformed into the Mobile Development Unit (MDU) 54 under Suranaree Command.¹¹² MDU was initially established in 1962 by the Thai Government for politically anti-communist insurgency propaganda to develop the remote sections of the country. Along with the US-sponsored Mobile Adult Education Training Program,¹¹³ the government aimed to engage people in the rural areas by helping them decrease the impoverished living conditions and limiting their chance to get scouted and exploited by skilled insurgents (Huff 1967; Soonthornrojana 1986). MDU 54 is formally labeled as MDU 41 and located four kilometers away from Lumpuk camp. Its office was relocated to the Lumpuk camp area in 1981, a year before the camp closure. Then it was reassigned unit number to MDU

¹¹² There was a dispute over the land between the former owner of the land before the camp was built. They managed to reclaim their lands to build their houses. One of the informants who lived nearby MDU 54 told me that the residents returned after the camp closure and were facing the lawsuit with the MDU. Although the result is unknown.

¹¹³ The Mobile Adult Education Training Program had taught simple vocational skills to Thai people in approximate 842,000 students in 1968 fiscal year (Soonthornrojana 1986)

54 in 1991. According to its official website,¹¹⁴ it is currently under the fifth Regional Development Office, the Armed Forces Development Command.



Figure 27: Former Lumpuk camp site, currently under Royal Thai Armed Forces' Mobile Development Unit 54 and Tabao households (08/20/2016)

Although the MDU mission was initially created as a joint civilian-military team under the Thai National Security Command. The structure of this organization has been under the RTAF from the beginning. As Soonthornrojana (1986, 231) states, that MDU is a governmental tool for "preventive counterinsurgency" that was closely advised and sponsored by USOM.¹¹⁵ Thus, MDU could be seen as the legacy of the anti-communist insurgency that continued the military task force for non-war related projects on rural development. The office involves in any sort of development in infrastructure, agriculture, forestry, disaster relief, and government propaganda that somehow its tasks overlapped with the works of the civilian subdistrict administrative organization (SAO).¹¹⁶ Thus, many provincial and district projects and events,



Figure 28: a new road built by MDU near Takao Reservoir (09/10/2018)

¹¹⁴ <http://mdu54.rtarf.mi.th/index/>

¹¹⁵ According to Soonthornrojana (1986), "USOM provided vehicles and equipment such as trucks, films, pamphlets, and other materials. By showing films and distributing pro-government propaganda materials, the people could identify with the Bangkok regime. The units tackled development projects beyond local skills, such as road building. They also assisted villagers with simple improvements. At the same time, the MDU gathered intelligence about any communist activities." (231).

¹¹⁶ SAO in Thai, called "องค์การบริหารส่วนตำบล (อบต)," was first established in 1994, 32 years after MDU. It is the local administration that was established outside of military influence by the Ministry of Interior.

there would be both military and civilian agents work together with one project (see Chapter 6 for further discussion on the relationship between the military and the forest).

Formerly Hin Khon Camp, Currently Kok Takean Wittaya School

This was another camp that was built for transferred displaced persons from Lumpuk Camp. In the survey conducted by Amara Pongsapich (1984), 850 Cambodian refugees claimed Thai citizenship while stayed in Lumpuk camp.¹¹⁷ They were transferred to Hin Khon camp while waiting for entering the process of naturalization for five years. However, the approval of naturalization never happened in Surin Province according to the staff at Kapcheong District Office.¹¹⁸ Hin Khon camp lasted until 1993 like other camps in Surin. The camp was transformed into a public school called Kok Takean Wittaya School since May 1993 with 86 students of Grade 7.¹¹⁹ The camp buildings remained in use for classrooms. Students have learned about their school's history from their families, but there has been no official history of Hin Khon camp taught in the school yet.¹²⁰ At first glance, these sites seem to be more challenging to trace back to the period of camp operation, unlike Tabtim Siam project in which each location directly indicates the camp existence by name. What is more concerning is that the camp stories are likely to be only verbally transmitted within the group of the affected families, but not in the

¹¹⁷ There are the publications of research documents in 1979 – 1984 produced by academic institutes such as the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT); Union for Civil Liberty and Chulalongkorn University containing varied topics i.e. the problems of refugee law implementation, the immigration patterns, refugees' life expectation and attitudes toward Thailand, and the possibility of national integration. Here is a list of the documents published in Thai language and translated by me namely The Seminar on the Refugee Relief Problem - Union of Civil Liberty, Thailand (1979); Cambodian Refugees and the Opportunity for National Integration - Chulalongkorn University (1981); The Comparative Study of the Laotian, Khmer, and Vietnamese Refugees - Chulalongkorn University (1982); Indochinese Refugees: Status and Attitude – National Research Council of Thailand (1983); Indochinese Refugees in Thailand in 1983: Socio-economic and demographic status and parental plans – Demographic Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University (1983); and Indochinese Refugees: Expectation in Life – Social Research Institute, Chulalongkorn University (1984)

¹¹⁸ Even with the recent government announcement in 2015 when Rot at KID was granted Thai citizenship. There was no case in Kapcheong. The staff member expressed her opinion that it would be difficult to happen as most of the Cambodians in Kapcheong nowadays are new immigrants, and the children who were born in Surin Province will not be qualified within the short period of time. It could take more than twenty years like Rot to file the claim for nationalization process. (Interviewed on August 31, 2018)

¹¹⁹ The official website of Kok Takean Wittaya School <http://www.koktakean.ac.th/>

¹²⁰ Interviewed with Kok Takean teacher on September 4, 2018.

broader circle. The silence in the institution like school means less chance of memory transmission for the younger generation to learn about what happened right at, or close to, their homes.

In the next session, I return to the period of the Cambodian civil war to delve into the Cambodian refugee/border camp operation. It aims to echo what the ethnographic accounts and oral history from the first session introduce, the local perspectives told from the post-camp narrative which aims to integrate into the understanding of the structural framework of Thailand's humanitarianism and immigration policies. I argue that the investigation of the refugee policy can lead to the understanding of its relation to legal implementation toward migrant workers in the postwar period, which will be elaborated in the next chapter.



Figure 29: Kok Takean Wittaya buildings that formerly used in Hin Khon camp (photos by me taken on 09042018)

Chronicle of Thailand's humanitarianism and refugee policy implementation

“Thailand alone could not possibly sustain the burdens of caring for hundreds of thousands of unfortunate refugees now seeking sanctuary in Thai territory. It is imperative therefore for Thailand to do its utmost in quickening the momentum of international relief efforts to alleviate such human suffering, the fact of which remains obvious to the international community at large.” (MFA, 1980)¹²¹

“The ASEAN Foreign Ministers expressed their serious concern over the act of aggression by Vietnam along the Thai-Kampuchean border and the intrusion of their troops into Thai territory. This irresponsible and dangerous act will have far-reaching and serious consequence

¹²¹ An English statement on “Thailand and Refugee Problem” by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand (1980)

and constitutes a grave and direct threat to the security of Thailand and the South East Asian region” (ASEAN Ministers Joint Statement, 1980)¹²²

“Since the Kampuchean people overthrew the genocidal Pol Pot regime, the Thai ruling circles while outwardly claiming to be neutral in the Kampuchean problem, have in fact acted in collusion with the Chinese expansionist and the US imperialists, and allowed their henchmen, the Pol Pot clique, and other Khmer Reactionaries, to use territory as a sanctuary for training and re-equipping and a staging base for disruptive and subversive activities against the People’s Republic of Kampuchea.... The Thai ruling circles have increasingly pushed ahead and brazenly interfered in the internal affairs of Kampuchea” (Vientiane Statement, 1980)¹²³

As discussed in Chapter 2 regarding the factors that caused the war prolongment, my intention in quoting these statements written by Thai authorities, ASEAN, and pro-Vietnamese countries appearing in 1980, is to point out the ambiguous role of Thailand in managing the border camps along with international humanitarian organizations. There were no principles or clear-cut policy for taking care of refugees in Thailand, even before the Cambodian civil wars (Muntarhorn 1992, 163). Thailand has never been a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, similar to other ASEAN members, except for Cambodia and the Philippines.¹²⁴ Thus, humanitarian facilitation at the border that emerged from the negotiations among several actors did not necessarily follow the 1951 Refugee Convention guidelines. For instance, Thai authorities created several terms that are not abided by UNHCR. The term “*Phu Lee Phai*,” or “Refugee” as defined by the Thai government, means only the person who would be granted the opportunity to apply for resettlement program, thus limiting the category to individuals who were qualified to enter transit/holding centers operated by UNHCR/UNBRO for resettlement program to third countries. Given the definition by the Ministry of Interior, the rest of the refugees would be classified as “*Phu Oapphayop*” – “displaced persons” as someone “who escapes from dangers due to an uprising, fighting, or war,

¹²² ASEAN Joint Statement by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers on the situation on the Thai-Kampuchean border, Bangkok, 25 June 1980 published in “Documents on the Kampuchean Problem 1979 - 1985”, Department of Political Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Thailand (1985)

¹²³ Indochinese Documents collected by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand

¹²⁴ See <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b73bod63.pdf> and <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/505187992.pdf>

and enters in breach of the Immigration Act” (Grundy-Warr 2004) or “*Phu Lopnheekaomuang*” - illegal immigrants who have received a special allowance for a temporary stay in the provided shelters.

An essential difference was the mobility of refugees; for Khao I Dang and Sa Kaeo holding centers, moving in and out of the camps was restricted but these were only camps that completely neutral and controlled by no faction (Robinson¹²⁵ 1996, 139). The border camps run by Khmer Resistance groups and monitored by Thai authorities were less strict. The camp residents¹²⁶ frequently made trips outside the camps with permission (93). This policy of temporary camp confinement was subject to be only pending resettlement or repatriation (149). In other words, the camp residents must leave Thailand at their earliest convenience, whether returning to their country of origin or resettling in third countries. Also, there was a noticeable separation between a holding center and a border camp. Besides, the international aids were limited only in assigned areas and were required to cooperate with Thai military and Cambodian political parties of each campsite depending on the political situation of each period. According to Rogge (1990) and Viti Muntarbhorn (1992), the evolution of encampment could be divided into four phases as follows:

Phase 1 The preventive and retaliatory phase of 1975-1979: Prior to the acknowledgment of the immigrant movement by Thai officials for the first time in 1977 (Benson 1993), the Thanin Kraivichien administration formulated the policy of voluntary repatriation and its law against aiding illegal immigrants, as the conflict in Cambodia was part of the Communist movement. The assistance was not public and was restrained for the belief that these evacuees could have had a connection to the Communist Party of Thailand. Thus, the Cambodian asylum seekers

¹²⁵ Courtland Robinson started working on refugee issues in Southeast Asia in 1979 with the Indochinese Refugee Action in Washington DC and followed by three years as Program Coordinator for the NGO Consortium at Phanat Nikhom, Chonburi, Thailand. His major publications includes “Double Vision” with Chulalongkorn University (1996) and “Terms of Refuge” in 1998.

¹²⁶ I use the term camp residents or dwellers interchangeably with displaced persons as most of my informants would normally state them as “Phu Opphayop.”

who fled to the Thai border were considered as “illegal aliens” from the beginning. This group of asylum seekers was mostly civil servants and soldiers who supported Lon Nol and people who, against Pol Pot, set up squatter areas in the Buddhist temples or adjacent to border villages (Robinson 1996, 23). According to the 1980 OCDP, Thailand, the influx of displaced persons was not only from Cambodia, but also from Vietnam and Laos. There were fourteen OCDP for Cambodian, Lao, and Vietnamese displaced persons throughout the country; two temporary holding centers for the boat people (Vietnamese); provincial centers for illegal immigrants; and four transit centers in Bangkok for those who were in the process of resettlement programs. For example, Lumpuk camp, in the previous section, was one of the first of fourteen official camps operated by OCDP which located in Prasat, Surin Province, the nearest former camp to my home, and the first known camp that helped to start this dissertation project.

Phase 2 The open door phase of late 1979 and early 1980: During this short time after the Khmer Rouge lost power over the country, they continued fighting against the new government as guerilla troops, and the Thai government became more tolerant towards asylum seekers. The open-door policy was initiated by Prime Minister Kriangsak after he visited the border camps in Chantaburi and Trat Province. This program was seen as solely for showing a measure of humanitarianism and avoiding external criticism (Muntarbhorn 2004) but it did not change the core of preventive and retaliatory policy as Thailand would allow the refugees to stay temporarily, and eventually they must leave for third countries or to go back to the motherland (Limpoka 1985, 6). The open-door policy did not last long due to internal politics at Bangkok and the regime changes,¹²⁷ as it was impractical and lacked support from the military that controlled national security at the borders. Noting that, the Preah Vihear Massacre was not

¹²⁷ Robinson (1996, 67) states in his analysis that open-door policy was mainly Kriangsak's initiative and support for him in Thai army circles was at low ebb by late 1979. On February 1980, Kriangsak resigned and was succeeded by Army Commander-in-Chief, Gen. Prem Tinsulanond. Although dissatisfaction with his economic policies was the primary reason for Kriangsak's downfall, he had come under heavy criticism for his lately liberal attitude towards refugees and fell victim to domestic Thai politics.

mentioned as the key event that received protest from international refugee agents (see Chapter 2). The shift to the open-door policy could be marked as the turning point that brought ambiguity and complexity in camp management and war prolongment for the whole following decade (the 1980s).

Reports from the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand not only said that they received the displaced Khmer for the sake of humanitarianism or charity, reflective of the religious ideology as Buddhists that should be open-minded and be willing to help those who suffered from the wars, they also said that this is about keeping the country's image on the global stage. This implies that Thailand implemented its act of humanitarianism differently from the UN protocol and this idea allowed sovereign powers to control the Khmer refugees in their own way. As Limbu (2009) argues, the nation-state utilized the concept of humanitarianism to allow in people who fled from war because of its generosity. So, in this context, to critique how the refugee became "uncapturable and nonfigurable in the discourse of human rights" (Limbu, 258) was beyond the discussion of human rights and international burden. Instead, they became tools for the war negotiation somehow without proper public consent which led to the resignation of Prime Minister Kriangsak Chamanan at the end of phase 2 (1979-1980).

Phase 3 the humane deterrence phase from 1980 to 1989: This period relied on Thailand's relations with the major power such as the U.S. and China and political shifts by the Order 23/66 (see Chapter 2). The plight of refugees, not only from Cambodia but also Lao and Vietnam, became more criticized at the international level. Since Thai authorities were reluctant to accept more refugees, instability in refugee policy and humanitarian treatment turned out to help strengthen the Khmer Rouge guerilla and resistance fractions resulting in the camp protraction. Most of the camp operation was self-managed and fragmentary. Camps were affiliated with one of three coalition forces fighting the Cambodian government: KPNLF, the Khmer Rouge, and Sihanouk's FUNCINPEC.

Furthermore, in the latter half of the 1980s, the camp situation was worsened. The orders to transfer the refugees from camps to camps were getting questioned more, and were viewed skeptically by the refugees as they could not know whether they would be moved to the transit centers or would be enslaved or killed by Thai soldiers or any Khmer fraction (Robinson, 1996, 65). To the extent to which UNBRO could experience in the joint relief operation, for example, “Site 2 is monstrous, disastrous, and tragic. Hundreds of incidents of violence such as domestic crimes, suicides, Thai security gunshots without warning and for no apparent reason, and confrontation among Khmer police, guerrillas, and Thai armed forces¹²⁸ drastically occurred alongside the growing overcrowding numbers of the refugees. Site 8, the camp was moved closer to the mountain, and UNBRO did not have any power to push back the relocation” (126, 133).

Phase 4 the swinging door phase of 1989-1999: The term “swinging” refers to the switch of open-and-close door policies depending on the tension at the border whether due to Cambodia or Thai internal politics. Most of the camps were forced to close in 1992-3, including KID and all camps in Surin, due to the Cambodian election that was pushed to take place in 1993, except Huay Cheong camp next to the Chong Chom. The camp residents who were not qualified and proceeded to the resettlement program were repatriated to their motherlands. The number of camps declined and entirely closed in 1999 after the last fight ended in O’smach, Oddar Meanchey (see Chapter 5).

The paradox of Thailand’s humanitarianism

There were four different phases of how Thailand dealt with Cambodian refugees and displaced persons in border camps. This is coherent with the juxtaposition of Thai and Cambodian history discussed in Chapter 2 in regard to how humanitarian intervention in the Thai border camps was one of the factors that caused war prolongation for over two decades. Thai

¹²⁸ For example, in 1986, UNBRO had reported 205 incidents of violence in the border camps. In 1987, 462 incidents of killing themselves in unrelated suicides or being beaten then shot to death by Thai security (Robinson 1996, 125).

perspectives towards the Cambodian refugee issue were intended to be flexible and welcoming; however the Thai government confirmed to protect its national sovereignty with the remaining fear of communist expansion from Vietnam.

Below I emphasize the paradox and ambiguity of Thailand's humanitarian intervention, situating the Cambodian camp dwellers as the object subjugated by the sovereign power of sending and host countries that left them no choice but to live in the refugee camps, as told by camp residents, border villagers, camp staff, and academic documents. The paradox demonstrates both good and bad aspects of humanitarian intervention at the Thai border. It reveals the controversy caused by the direct and indirect actions of the Thai military as part of the reasons why the Cambodian civil war had lasted for over twenty years.

First, many thousands of refugees were able to flee from the warzone and poverty after the Pol Pot regime and resettle in the third countries through the UNHCR program. With the resentment and distrust in the Vietnamese-backed government of Phnom Penh, Cambodians chose to flee and reside in the border camps in hopes that whether the political party they supported would become the government, or that they would be the ones who would be granted a new life abroad or Thai citizenship (Suksamran 1981, 50).¹²⁹ In exchange for their wishes, they had lived in Thailand with the illegal status as "*phu oapphayop*," not "*phu lee phai*." The longer they stayed in the camps, the more the groups faced hunger and malnutrition (Crossette 1985). Not everyone received what they asked for, and they had to endure were crimes and violence during their times in the camp, especially for those who did not have money to pay bribes to the camp guards. Their illegal and poor status became "de facto" settlers that caused tremendous problems for security, shelter, and sanitation (Braille 2005, 4). With the control of the Thai military special division called Task Force 80 and fears of the Vietnamese military and minefields

¹²⁹ According to his survey, almost fifty percent of Thai-ethnic Cambodians expressed their desire to claim Thai citizenship while staying in the border camp.

that they might have already experienced during the outbounds, it was indeed discouraging for them to decide whether to return to Cambodia, change the camp residency, or move further into Thailand (Unger 2004). They eventually got stuck within the enclosed camp for many years until the repatriation program.

Task Force 80

Task Force 80 (TF80) is a unit of paramilitary border guards under the Ranger Special Forces Regiment. TF80 was created by Prime Minister Kriangsak Chamanan who placed the affected border districts under martial law in response to the influx of Cambodian refugees since 1979. Their responsibilities were to guard the camps, protect and secure food for the refugees, along with defensive duties. TF80 was accused of numerous accounts of violation and human rights abuses. Instead of protecting the refugees and guarding the camps, they often took bribes or threatened the evacuees. TF80 was the only authoritative agent that could order the mass relocation of the camp dwellers from one to another camp. For example, in 1985, 62,000 evacuees were moved from Nong Samet camp to the area next to KID. In order to move from one to another by their own decision, the evacuee had to pay a bribe to TF80 for 7,000 baht. Some could have been beaten, raped, or killed at the hands of TF80. Some took advantage of the camp markets (Unger 2004). This unit was disbanded in 1988 due to its notorious reputation that raised the concerns by UNBRO and called for the replacement of the camp guards with trained civilian security called the Displaced Persons Protection Unit (DPPU) in 1988 (Rogge 1990; Robinson 1998, 87–94; Wilson 2015). Besides the duties over the Cambodian refugees, TF80 also managed to receive funding through the U.S. – Thai Antipiracy Program since 1981 to target boat people from Vietnam throughout the 1980s (United States Department of State 1981, 16). TF80 could be seen as the continuation of the Border Patrol Police (BPP) from the early Cold War period but from the Thai military. Sinae Hyun (2014) emphasized that it is the project that creates the human edge of the country¹³⁰ concerning fear of communist penetration and the regional, territorial and political changes. It thus became a survival strategy for Thailand against the intensifying Cold War in the region (Hyun, 340).

Due to the fact that Thailand not only allowed the Cambodian evacuees to reside in the border camps, but also the paramilitary personnel of all Cambodian resistance fractions was permitted to clandestinely patrol and train with Thai soldiers along the border, it appeared to be

¹³⁰ From the early Cold War period, Bangkok had sent forces from the Police Aerial Reinforcement Unit (PARU), a paratrooper unit of the BPP, to the country's northern and northeastern borders to collect information about the condition of border populations, particularly ethnic minority groups as an effort to relocate and contain these ethnic minorities as a part of Bangkok's anti-communist counterinsurgency strategy (Hearn 1974 cited in Hyun, 2014).

flexible and welcoming while publicly declaring to be neutral toward the Cambodian crisis. It did not sincerely help to end the Cambodian civil war nor care about which political faction could have been legitimate or had the right to control Cambodian citizens (Terry 2002, 142). In other words, Thai authorities would find ways to protect their sovereignty with the capability of dealing with other agents, either Khmer resistance factions, China, or the West, that were involved with the refugee issues that often came with violence and human rights abuse inside and outside the camps by claiming the importance of protecting national sovereignty, security, and national interests (Theeravit 1985).

Second, the procedures of the Khmer border camp system partially allowed the humanitarian operation as they agreed with the Cambodian resistance group leaders to not receive full humanitarian support from the third parties (Lischer 2005; Terry 2013). It led the aid workers, both foreigners and Thai staff, to experience the frustration and ambiguity of continuing to work for the Khmer refugees. With the most terrifying event of the Preah Vihear incident in 1979, they came to realize that somehow, humanitarian assistance had been misused for the military activities of both Thai military and Cambodian resistance parties, such as food supplies, especially for the Khmer Rouge, which controlled their refugee camps alongside the Thai-Cambodian border.

Coherently, the primary documents I have found in the previous works of Vickery (1987), Lynch (1989), Benson (1993), Shawcross (1994) and Robinson (1996; 1998) affirmed that the aid workers in Khmer refugee camps had no choice but to be responsible for the humanitarian assistance, yet unavoidably cooperated with the political guerillas. In reality, the operation had been embedded into the camp structure. It could be no longer separated and thus, letting UNBRO and international NGOs work in refugee camps that were politicized by declared resistance parties became a controversial issue (Vickery 1987). There was an ethical concern among the aid workers of both UNBRO and NGOs. The aid workers began to question whether

their involvement might indeed help to perpetuate the civil war since 1982 when the resistance coalition under the name of CGDK requested official humanitarian aid with the establishment of UNBRO (Benson 1993). However, it was impossible for the aid staff to choose whether to reject providing assistance, because the guerillas had taken advantage of services for the civilians, or to continue the support operation and indirectly became partners of the paramilitary groups. In this respect, the UNHCR apparently noticed the limitation to achieving the humanitarian goal since there were no purely humanitarian efforts that could avoid political engagement for the Cambodian case where the host country, Thailand, and its allies could be considered as essential actors that helped to perpetuate the encampment as well (Benson, 1993).¹³¹

Lastly, the impact of the war and crashes at the border on the lived experiences of border dwellers. The local Thais in the border provinces have received a disproportionate amount of income and economic development compared to the industrialized regions and the capital city. The fact that the Thai locals had to beg for food exchange or distribution from the border camp reflects that the Thai state did not pay much attention to their citizens, instead I focused on the benefits that certain authorities would secretly gain from the political or economic deals with the Cambodian resistance parties.

Moreover, the post-war land redistribution and the resettlement of the border residents in the former camp areas indicates not only the attempts to erase the violent past and pay tribute to the refugees and victims of state brutality. It also suggests how the military may have taken advantage of the war to control the remote villagers in risk locations that were affected by Communist movements, both the Khmer Rouge and the Communist Party of Thailand,

¹³¹ On the other hand, this notable statement did not stop the immigration to the border camps. As Vickery found, the asylum seekers mainly came to the camps not only for receiving the primary care from the international relief aids, but they also expected to be qualified to resettle in third countries in the developed world. Vickery's statement helps explain why Thai border camps were a magnet drawing tens of thousands of people who would otherwise have remained to work productively in a pro-Vietnamese regime which causes the destabilization of the already fragile Cambodian economy (Vickery, 1987). These two points of views from both Volags and Refugees themselves, which seemed to be in the same direction, made it harder to persuade the refugees to go back to Cambodia.

particularly in the mountains in Loei, Nakhon Phanom, Chiangrai, and Surin (Robinson 1996, 100; Pye 2005a, 326–29). This includes the initiation of an extensive road network and setting up volunteer counterinsurgency villages and Forest village program namely the Voluntary Development and Self Defense Village (VDS) - โครงการหมู่บ้านอาสาพัฒนาและป้องกันตนเอง (อพป) in 1975 and the Self-Defense Border Village Program - โครงการหมู่บ้านป้องกันตนเองชายแดน (ปชด) in 1983.¹³² These programs have been developing until now as the tool to monitor the population who are likely to have different political ideologies from the military-led politics. I learned from the Tabtim Siam 04 villagers who had participated in these programs before applying to resettle in the former Site B camp in 1993. After moving in, they must follow the developmental programs provided by the authorities. They would be asked to attend the training in agricultural programs such as field crops, mulberries for silk production, dairy cattle or fruit farming¹³³ at Weerawatyothin Military Base (25th Military Circle) in Muang Surin district¹³⁴ as part of the training program for life skills development (อบรมคุณภาพชีวิต).¹³⁵ It is interesting to see the dynamics of military-villager relation through these programs. Due to the fact that they have to follow what the authorities guided them to do, yet have remained in poverty, I thus question the transparency of the program in relation to the issue of economic disparities for the Thai border dweller which shall be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Conclusion

“Thailand provided the location for the FUNCINPEC command center in Ban Pluang, Prasat District during our last fight with Hun Sen government” – one of Cambodian veteran soldier

“Is this considered a secret? Should I not write about this?” I asked him for permission

¹³² the Voluntary Development and Self Defense Village (VDS) was issued by the Parliament Act, whereas the Self-Defense Border Village Program was announced by the cabinet resolution.

¹³³ The programs are subjected to change by the market demand.

¹³⁴ It is unknown which unit they got trained since there are several military units located in the same areas.

¹³⁵ This is not an official title for the program but the exact words I learned from my informant.

“Why not, it’s not a secret, it’s just the past!” He replied¹³⁶

The interview with one of the former FUNCINPEC soldiers discloses shocking information to me, as the location he mentioned was so close to my house. The issue of self-censorship crossed my mind as well (see Introduction chapter). It is almost impossible that I could get such a straightforward answer like this from the Thai informants. Numerous conversations with Thai locals about the Cambodian civil war in this chapter, if not sharing their own experiences in participating in the camp works, were the stories of witnessing violence that they felt uneasy to share even they were not the victims themselves. One may choose to avoid mentioning it all. One may share it with me, but I was told to not write about it. This contrasts to the villagers that were impacted directly by war, as they were more opened to share with me. The findings pinpoint the ambiguity and the paradox of Thailand both from the civilian and state perspectives. Even so, the war remnants may be left in the mountain without care. There are also parts that the Thai state which chose not to speak about the brutality of war and replace the violent past. Cruelty, power abuse, and military acts toward the refugees have been barely discussed in public. The confusion in policy direction, as if they did not care about the living condition, rightful status, and safety of the Cambodian refugees, allowed the encampment to become solely an unavoidable condition for war strategy. As Tyrell Haberkorn (2015; 2018) criticizes, the impunity’s role in state formation of Thailand through amnesty laws and military’s political intervention ever since country’s revolution in 1932 to the 6 October 1976 massacre incident. In this respect, I believe that the Khmer and Indochinese refugee case is also the act of impunity of Thai state that was used to abuse the refugee lives at the border in the name of humanitarianism.

In general, this chapter introduces the practices of spatial confinement that occurred during the civil war as the military managed to limit the movements of Cambodian resistance

¹³⁶ Interviewed on August 17, 2018.

and the flows of refugees and displaced people to be on the designated sites, and how the Thai authorities controlled the post-camp land uses. In the two following chapters, I will be examining the postwar spatial confinement in terms of legal implementation (Chapter 4) and everyday experience of the border communities at Chong Chom checkpoint (Chapter 5).

**Chapter 4: From the Displaced Persons To Migrant Laborers:
Shifting Nature of Thailand's Immigration Control and its Ambiguity**

“The Khmer Rouge lied to them about justice, about equality, about happiness, about progress, about everything. And these same poor still dig dirt today” (Missing Picture 2013)

This is a script from the end of Rithy Panh's film, *Missing Picture*, narrating how the Khmer Rouge has ruined the life of Cambodian people which has held them back from a better life. The refugee crises and displacement along the Thai border as discussed in the previous chapter leads to the aftermath of the Cambodian civil war and how Thailand's immigration policy has shifted throughout the Cold War period. This chapter goes through the textual elements of Thai immigration law and contextualizes it with the encampment of Indochinese refugees from the 1970s. The continuation of the refugee influx from not only Cambodia, but Laos and Vietnam, since the Vietnam war and Secret war in Laos to Thailand apparently had an impact on the refugee and immigrant regulation of Thailand as the host country. In other words, the history of migrating to Thailand for Cambodia has been bitter due to the political violence that caused the massive forced migration and displacement to the border of Thailand since 1975 as part of the Indochinese refugee crisis after the Vietnam War ended. The regional politics is thus a major factor that influenced the Thai government to outline the immigration and employment acts that have been contingent and ambivalent about regulations and practices through multiple types of identification and residency, whether migrants have entered the country legally or illegally (Pongsawat 2007; Laungaramsri 2018). Although, Thailand has been under authoritarian regimes multiple times through the political turmoil and internal conflicts between civilians and the military. The economic growth has gradually expanded and is in need of the vast numbers of laborers feeding the industrial manufactures, especially since the late 1980s, which has carried on neoliberalism to the recent economic cooperation with Southeast Asia through ASEAN Free Trade Agreement in 2015.

This chapter is thus divided into two parts. First is to underline the turning point of Thailand's immigration policy and the economic-driven incentives that have shifted the patterns of Cambodian migrants from forced migration to the desire of a better life in Thailand; second is to point out how the immigration policy has been very much ambiguous and variable in order to take the most advantage of migrant labors by utilizing the immigration and foreign employment laws to limit their freedom of movement spatially and temporally. Overall, receiving countless refugees but not granting legal status was a massive application of criminalization and enforcement to suppress the evacuees to become illegal migrants or displaced persons. The actual logic of the law and state structures has been designed to create the conditions for human-rights abuses, suppression and exclusion from not protecting migrants' access to their human rights, in most cases just because they are not the citizens of the country they live in (Derks 2013; Campbell 2018). This structure denies migrants' rights that are granted only to its citizens (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2004 cited in Derks 2013).

Therefore, I primarily focus on the "cross-border migrants" in the scope of anthropological works and related disciplines on border and migration studies in the post-Cold War context. It aims to look at the intertwining between the border regimes and the labor migrant regimes in order to shed light on the legal and spatial arrangement of migrant labors as a negotiated outcome between multiple agents with hierarchical power (Pallitro and Heyman 2002). As Campbell (2018) also approaches in his study of a politics of precarity of migrant workers at the Mae Sot industrial zone on the Thai-Myanmar for understanding how "regulatory arrangements organize and control workers at particular sites" (6), the spatial and temporal specificity of a given border regime serves as a point of departure to look closely at the migrant workers at this specific area.

From Politics to Economics: The History of Thailand's Immigration Control

As stated in Chapter 1, before the Cambodian civil war, people along the border had been traveling across Phnom Dangrek for centuries without any proper immigration enforcement. Even after the demarcation agreement, there was slight consciousness about separation and the social dynamics of holding different citizenships (Vail 2011) because the border was not yet conceived of as a static or a concrete border (Chayan's interview with Kittisenee 2011, 316). Not to mention, the result of the French-Siamese War in the early 1940s that led to the Siamese temporary occupation in Cambodia and Laos for five years (1941-46) had stopped people from moving freely and forced them to settle one of these countries after Thailand had to return the occupied lands to the French in 1946.¹³⁷

In Thai Studies, scholarship on the movement of labour has focused on prisoners of war (*chaloai* – เอลอย) and payment of tribute (*suai* – ส่วย¹³⁸) between kingdoms in the nineteenth century or tributes (Chintayananda et. al. 1977 cited in Grundy-Warr 2004). Pawakapan (2017) states that forced migration within the Mekong region was the basic element of manpower control of Siam. For example, there was evidence of forced migration from Cambodia to Siamese-controlled areas to become laborers in the production process of sugar and rice¹³⁹ during the fourteen years of the Siam-Annam war called “Siamese depopulation policy” to counter the evacuation by the Vietnamese.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Thai displaced persons in Cambodia were shown as ethnic Thai in the academic surveys of border camps as discussed in Chapter Three.

¹³⁸ See Chapter One for the history of ethnic Kui as Suai for Siamese court.

¹³⁹ Siam became a major exporter/trader and producer of sugar and rice by the needs of colonial economy and China in the early nineteenth century during the reigns of King Rama II and Rama III. The King Rama III started to monopolize the sugar industry after gaining laborers from Mekong region in addition to Chinese laborers. However, the Kingdom has shifted its export production to rice cultivation as sugar production could not compete with sugar from Java and Luzon. Mead states that this shift to rice carried the economic advantage of involving the Thai peasantry and forced Mekong migrants as a labor force for cultivation, whereas the sugar production and processing industry had been monopolized by Chinese labor and entrepreneurs. (Mead 2004; Pawakapan 2017)

¹⁴⁰ According to Pawakapan (2017), During the fourteen years of Siam-Annam war which began in 1833, there were a series of Siamese expeditions and depopulation campaigns in Cambodia particularly in the areas under strong

Meanwhile, other kingdoms of mainland Southeast Asia were colonized by the Western imperialists. The Siamese kingdom continues its traditional statecraft encountering the Westerns, and King Rama V was the first administration to issue the Act to restrict the annual quota of immigrants to Siam after the sugar industry reached its peak. The majority of laborers from China in the latter period were the workers in the infrastructural construction such as canals and railroads.¹⁴¹ With the long-time influx of Chinese immigrants for several decades, Thailand found it difficult to assimilate and integrate the Chinese newcomers into Thai society as seen from the ethnic tension during the Phibun administration before World War II.¹⁴²

According to Pitch Pongsawat (2007), Thailand's first Immigration Act in 1950 (B.E. 2497) was created along with the enforcement of national identification cards to suppress the growing numbers of Chinese immigrants that emigrated from China during the Chinese civil war until 1950.¹⁴³ The Cold War came after, since the late 1950s, soon enough to push large numbers of war evacuees from Vietnam, and later from Cambodia and Laos, to seek refuge in Thailand. Whereas Thailand was dealing with communist movements in the country as discussed in previous chapters, it also included the establishment of several governmental organizations such as the Border Patrol Police (see Chapter 2) and the National Security Council (NSC) to take care of intelligence matters and crimes in relating to drug smuggling, border crime, trafficking, and

Vietnamese influence such as the east bank and the coastal areas – Phnom Penh, Hatien and Sombok. Pawakapan (2017) found the King Rama III's remarks to urge bring people to resettlement Siam to serve as manpower for agricultural cultivation in central Chao Phraya Basin or forest product foraging in Khorat Plateau.

¹⁴¹ There were 162,505 Chinese immigrants as reported by the 1909 Bangkok Census (Ananta and Arifin 2004).

¹⁴² During WWII, Thai xenophobia against the new Chinese immigrants became visible through the government policy toward ethnic Chinese who rejected assimilation into Thai society by declaring Thai citizenship. That was the last time Chinese may become Thai citizens by naturalization. After that, Chinese migrants were classified as a minority group with political affiliation that Thai government had paid attention to their political intention of entering Thailand. Some Chinese descendants have successfully assimilated into Thai society and succeeded in creating strong economic influence in the country and closely tied to the Thai elites ever since (Chirof and Reid 1997).

¹⁴³ According to the Bureau of Registration Administration, Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Interior, the members of the Kuomintang Army Battalion 93 was classified as one of the sixteen minority groups in Thailand. This category includes only the veteran soldiers from Taiwan who were stationed in Burma and moved to Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Mae Hong Son, the Northern provinces of Thailand during the conflict between Kuomintang party and the Communist party of China since 1954. Only their children of this group were granted Thai citizenship by a cabinet resolution in 1984 (Pongsawat 2007).

illegal immigration (Grundy-Warr 2004). However, the military remained a key agent in controlling both the anti-insurgency campaigns and the arrival of the displaced persons from the Indochinese states.

Pongsawat (2007) elaborates three essential regimes of citizenship that separate the newcomers from Thai citizen holders, namely:

First, nationality status gained by birth from a parent who was holding only Thai nationality. Clear distinctions have emerged between migrants who entered Thailand before the 1960s when Thai administrative procedures were still not so strict and more likely to obtain official Thai identification cards (Grundy-Warr 2004, 243–44).

Second, immigration status for a non-Thai nationality, a foreigner or an alien born from non-Thai parents, would be granted a legal immigration status for a temporary stay in the kingdom with several types of valid visa authorized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or minority groups could obtain various types of identification that guarantee refuge in Thailand but do not necessarily mean that their status is the same as ordinary Thai citizens based on the 1950 Immigration Act.¹⁴⁴

Moreover, there have been displaced persons who were considered illegal immigrants and would not be received any legal status in Thailand, but who were allowed to stay in the designated shelters along the border. It is arguably not a coincidence that the 1979 Immigration Act was created in the same year when the Vietnamese troops successfully controlled and formed the post-Khmer Rouge government in Phnom Penh that caused the massive relocation to the Thai border.

¹⁴⁴ The Immigration Act which was first introduced in 1927 (Pongsawat 2007)

Third, employment status for immigrants. Thailand began to recognize and allow immigrants to receive a work permit as stipulated by the 1978 Alien Employment Act.¹⁴⁵ This Act was meant to allow immigrants to fulfill labor shortage since the Thai economy had grown significantly through global industrial investment and neoliberal economic policy since the early 1980s. However, the groups of Phu Oapphayop were not yet to be eligible for the legal employment under the 1978 Act until the rectification in 2005.

In sum, these three citizenship regimes help define how the person would be treated by their nationality, immigration status, and employment status. Thailand has been the primary destination for refugees fleeing civil wars and persecution in neighboring countries. The immigration and alien employment laws were not merely created to deal with the Indochinese refugees from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos but also to alleviate labor shortages and to facilitate the country's economic growth in the 1970s (Chalamwong 2004, 354; Srivarathonbul 2010, 99).

Most literature on Thailand's immigration studies center a case of Myanmar migrants and stateless ethnic minorities along the Myanmar-Thai border due to the political changes in Myanmar and the Chartichai Chuhavan Administration's economic policy called "Turning Battlefield to Marketplace" toward former Indochinese countries both occurred in 1988 (French 2002). This caused the highest number of migrants influx to Thailand at the Myanmar border side. However, I argue that the case of Cambodian migrants in Thailand could be seen as a context that paved the way for how the Thai government had to deal with Cambodians that were in desperate to come to the border (446). They eventually invented its immigration, alien employment, and citizenship laws. Thailand's Immigration Control has not been tightened until the Indochinese civil wars in the 1970s. At the same time, the neoliberal economy shifted the

¹⁴⁵ Apart from the work permit requirement, the Alien Occupation Act also restricts 39 occupations only for Thai national citizens

need for cheap labor for Thailand's rapid industrialization (Grundy-Warr 2004). Ever since the Indochinese wars, Thai immigration policy became more restrictive to refugees and migrants as obtaining legal documents became mandatory (243–44). However, the development of immigration law in Thailand did not simply decrease undocumented migrants, but also invented multiple categories of *immigration status* for ethnic minority groups and registered illegal immigrants (Phu oapphayop).

To illustrate this, the 1979 Ministerial regulation was created after the 1978 Alien Employment Act prohibited the 16 listed minority groups¹⁴⁶ including the Refugee with Thai Origin from Kong Island, Cambodia,¹⁴⁷ and “Phu Oapphayop” Illegal Migrants from Cambodia who entered Thailand without immigration procedure and lived in the border camps.¹⁴⁸ These required that minority groups, who were deemed as security risks or undesirable, were not allowed to work until the 2005 rectification by the Ministry of Interior's Central Registrar Office Regulation (Pongsawat 2007). By this means, the *employment status* used to be nothing for Phu Oapphayop. However, due to the demand for cheap labor from Thai booming businesses, the displaced persons had entered the labor market illegally due to the strict immigration law. It left room for human trafficking and labor brokers to recruit the displaced persons and transformed to undocumented migrant workers in various industrial zones or fishery business. Although the

¹⁴⁶ According to the Cabinet Resolution on 24 April 2012 (B.E. 2555), there are 19 types of ethnic minority groups that have been registered by the Ministry of Interior namely 1) Vietnamese Immigrant; 2) Members of the Kuomintang Army Battalion; 3) The Haw Refugee; 4) The Independent Haw; 5) Ex-Malayan Communist Party Insurgents; 7) Tai-Lue ethnic group 8) Laotian Refugee; 9) Nepalese Refugee; 10) Displaced Person Who Has Burmese Nationality; 11) Refugee with Thai Origin from Kong Island, Cambodia; 12) Illegal Migrants from Cambodia; 13) The Yumbri Tribe; 14) Displaced Burmese Immigrant of Thai Origin; 15) Illegal Immigrants from Myanmar; 15) Highlanders; 16) Community of Highlanders; 17) Hmong People in Wat Tham Krabok; 18) Mountainous Lao people; and 19) Morgan People

¹⁴⁷ Kong island was part of the Siamese kingdom. The island then belonged to France as part of French Indochina colonization in the early 20th century. After decolonization the island became part of modern Cambodia. The political conflicts in Cambodia in 1975 led to the migration to Thailand. The Thai state accepted those who fled to Thailand from 1974 to 15 November 1977 who had Thai origin as the person of this category. The person of this category have been granted Thai citizenship in 1983, 1984, and 1991.

¹⁴⁸ This category included both the person who had Thai origin who entered Thailand from Cambodia after 15 November 1977 and all non-Thai origin immigrants who entered Thailand without immigration process. These people are registered as illegal immigrants and are not allowed to move away from the registered area. This is similar to the Laotian immigrant.

Thai economy has implicitly absorbed migrant workers into its economy (Galemba 2013) as seen in the solution by registering post-immigrated illegal workers from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia that fully started in 1996. The character of immigrant employment acts since the 1970s were more security-oriented (Srivarathonbul 2010). The contribution of migrant workers has been concealed from public interests and has been always negative toward their existence in Thai society.

Another major shift was during and post 1997 economic crises when there were layoffs that forced migrants to return homes. The policies were switched to economic-oriented when Thaksin Shinawatra was elected in 2001. His immigration and employment policies attracted the wave of migrant workers into the Thai economy before it was paused again by the 2007 coup. An undemocratic loop of Thai politics from 2007 until the present indeed created ambiguity over Thailand's immigration control as Thai immigration and citizenship laws began to shift. It reveals how easily individuals can slip between the categories of undocumented / documented or irregular / regular migrants (Ford and Lyons 2012, 444).

Flexible Illegality: How to produce an illegal worker out of a refugee?

For the case of Thai-Cambodian migration and border issues, the reviewed literature of migration studies and border studies in this area has been fragmented. There are no more “refugees” from Cambodia, and the situation of Cambodian migrant workers has become overshadowed by the much larger number of migrants from Myanmar. In the earlier works, the studies of short-distance migration to national borders are neither simply considered as internal migration nor international migration. It delves into refugee displacement, irregular or forced migration studies to explore how refugees travel to the border as a pathway to leave their unlivable or unstable home country and seek resettlement in other countries. There are also the studies of the refugee communities in the border camps which consider the complex geopolitics of cross-border migration. Instead, the Thai-Cambodian border studies are more likely to be

explored through the lived life of border dwellers or minority groups, particularly in contexts of protracted social, political, ethnic minorities, and military conflict but not much of forced migration or the concept of border partial citizenship. In this section I juxtapose insights on regimes of citizenship from the Thai-Myanmar border with insights on migrant workers' rights from the concept of state's illegality to understand the complexity of Thailand's immigration laws that have been developed to exclude the minority population and neighboring citizens by creating separate immigration status and designing specific employment regulations that offer inadequate access to public services, limit freedom of movements to designated zones, and constrain the stay period, but are open to countless renewals.

As discussed in the previous section about the regimes and categorization of citizenship, it is important to address the issue of historical context, political incentive, and ethnicity to understand how nationalism works through a neoliberal economic system. It is also important to address the persistence of the border camps. These are spaces where Thailand has allowed displaced persons to stay, but without protection by the Thai state, they are excluded from citizenship and from legal work visas. In other words, "alien" is defined by nationality and classified by types of visa,¹⁴⁹ which include the status of residency or immigration and employment permits with an identification card in terms of length and methods of entering the kingdom. Cambodian migrants, considered as the oppressed group from the war act, normally had no identification documents which subjects them to prosecution and deportation. This has been a pattern for many illegal migrants that may have entered Thailand illegally or overstayed with certain valid documents. They would usually receive a second chance to extend their stays if they proceed with all the documents the authorities needed. The employment regulations still manage to provide the flexibilization of work permits as registered migrant workers, which

¹⁴⁹ issued by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to enter the country legally (non-immigrant, tourist, or transit) and will be allowed to stay in Thailand for a short period of time. To stay in Thailand for a longer period, a resident permission is needed, i.e. an alien identification card and a household registration certificate for aliens.

Pongsawat (2007) called the system of “partial border citizenship.”¹⁵⁰ The logic of partiality is articulated in a spatial arrangement in the domain of inter-provincial cooperation through the growth of the cross-border community.

On human rights and immobility in the Thai context, Derks (2013) argues, “it is impossible to see the law as central to the protection of migrant workers’ rights” as they face many types of abuses and violations from state authorities who threaten or assault migrant workers with impunity (Human Rights Watch 2010 cited in Derks 2013). This has been how the state authorities have treated immigrants since the war period. The system does not support human-rights problems but has been a part of it. Derks’ argument is similar to Heyman and Smart (1999) who state that, because state law must create its counterparts, illegal migrants cannot stand apart from the law and criminalization of border-crossing practices after it was set under the condition of others, the counterparts, holding a different nationality that is projected to not be protected by the host/receiving countries. It increases the extent of policing and imprisonment and limits the access to universal human rights in every aspect. Heyman and Smart offer an analytical complexity that is more productive when delving into the production of immigration law chronologically along with the political situation within the region and economic incentive that attracted the migrant workers keep moving to Thailand for decades: the analysis of state-society relationship as processual not static (1).

Accordingly, I examine the development and implementation of immigration law along with learning from the perspectives of the migrant workers and employers in Surin Province,

¹⁵⁰ Pongsawat (2007) debates the concept of border partial citizenship that he uses for explaining the minority immigrant and the registered illegal migrant worker regimes. These two labor systems became a major contribution to Thai-Myanmar border development, its economic activity and how the form of surveillance take place in controlling cross-border mobility and from the border to the inner parts of the country which could be discussed by the concrete set of immigration procedures and visa types. In his study, he looks at the creation and regulating process of minority card and registered illegal migrant worker card identification by explaining the logic and practice of partiality of entitlement, control, and exploitation get articulated in a certain spatial arrangement as both concrete historical product and process that creates the growth of the cross-border area.

which will continue in the discussion in the following chapter. Some of the Cambodian migrants in Surin were living through wartime, but most of them are post-war generations that gain very limited access to wealth and economic opportunity due to the past war. Their hardship thus can be seen as the result of the war along with the designated law and regulation that made the possible journey for them to work and live in Thailand whether legally or illegally. Hence this is the discussion of the distinction between what it means to be included or excluded and to be protected or punished if it does not follow rules that designate foreign workers as part of the state system. It is the conditions that make migrants into governable and exploitable subjects (Derks 2013) which, in Thai case, migrants only from three neighboring countries are situated in this condition. De Genova (2013) takes the concept of illegality and addresses it in policy debates and bordering strategies by considering juridical status that entails a social relation to the state in opposition to citizenship as a political identity and to be located in economic dynamics of the country. The ethnographic accounts from migrant experiences evoke “the kinds of densely descriptive and textured interpretive representations of everyday life” (421).

The socioeconomic disparities and nationalism have formed a sense of othering and exclusion toward Cambodian migrants in the post-ASEAN 2015 era. The migrants’ routine negotiations with Thai authorities also expose how the Thai state enforces immigration laws actively at the border using local-level processes. I argue that looking at the encounters between states and migrants due to immigration and employment regulation. Overall, it could be said that the social economy of Chong Chom – O’smach border has been transformed from a war zone to the illicit entertainment complex along with the authoritarian control of labor at the border. It is a form of everyday uncertainty for Cambodian border dwellers, living in-between two countries. They have to face state violence and discrimination every day. The benefits fall into those officials that eat up the bribes from non-citizen border crossers. Examining both the visible and immediate results from the intense immigration regulations at the checkpoint, and also the invisible and unspeakable acts that migrants encounter with the state agents in their

everyday experience in the market and town, it is clear that Thailand's immigration controls are ambiguous and flexible.

Some of my informants told me that this policy had frustrated them because there are no appropriate laws that could provide the actual legal status to work in Thailand with dignity. Thai immigration law lists only two types of work, laborer and housekeeper, for which migrants from Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia can apply for permits. For example, "merchant" is not included in the law, which caused the issues of transparency, confusion, and ambiguity for the Cambodian merchants. (The stories of Cambodian merchants will be discussed in the following chapter). When the market manager at Chong Chom encouraged Cambodians to apply for work permits, they were faced with the fact that their work does not fit into the state immigration categories of "laborer" or "migrant." Thai employers and Cambodian workers feel insecure whenever the Thai officers came to inspect immigration status, a more explicitly exploited subject as they have never been protected by the authorities due to the different nationalities.

The hierarchical relationship of Cambodia to Thailand leads to the suppression of the lived life of migrants, which Salter (2012) calls "in-built anxiety" (741). "Some are more vulnerable to de-citizenship than others" as the result of the sovereignty constitution through its interaction with other sovereign states (741, 745). The interprovincial MoU that Thailand has signed with its neighboring countries on the Alien Employment Act, particularly with Myanmar, Lao PRD, and Cambodia, is evidence of a mutual understanding of being unequal neighbors.

The relationship between Thailand and Cambodia has never been balanced and has gone deeper from historical and cultural dimensions into legal implications (Moré and Dominguez 2011), as seen in the Thai immigration laws that embraced varied discriminatory acts. For example, a Thai newspaper, "Thairath," recently reported on an impromptu visit to Prasat municipal market by Surin immigrant police officers, in addition to their daily routine of public van inspection in the early morning. The article's title contained the aggressive phrases "alien

migrant gang” and “stealing jobs from Thai people.”¹⁵¹ It was reported that an integrated team of national security officials, including immigration police, district police, border patrol police, and provincial employment officers, blocked off the fresh market to inspect migrant workers after receiving reports that these migrants came to take Thai citizens’ jobs in the market. The police officers found twenty migrant workers, and fifteen of them are legally permitted to work. The officers still encouraged Thai entrepreneurs to proceed with legal employment and routinely check their migrant workers’ work permit status. Nonetheless, there were only five out of twenty who overstayed and have no work permits.

Cambodian Employees in Retail Shop in Prasat District Market

I joined a one-day trip with Patt (pseudonym, a female retail shop owner, 30), her sister-in-law and Jin (pseudonym), one of Patt’s Cambodian employees to Jin’s hometown - Samraong. Samraong is a central/governmental district of Oddar Meanchey Province. In the past, Samraong has been long connected to Surin as the frontline town when traveling between Chongs to inner areas such as Chong Kal and Siem Reap. It used to be a military base for Hun Sen’s CPP government against FUNCINPEC party in O’smach. Nowadays, it takes less than a one-hour drive from Chong Chom - O’Smach to Samraong with a better road, Route 68. According to our conversation during the trip, Jin and Patt told me that there are more Cambodians from Samraong and other villages near Chong Chom who chose to work in Surin Province as it is close to their home. It does not take too long to travel back and forth; they normally travel by motorcycles either personal-own or taxi services. There was no public transportation provided between two provinces.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ “บุกตลาดสดจ.สุรินทร์ ทลายแก๊งต่างด้าว แยงอาชีพคนไทยทำมาหากิน.” accessed June 12, 2019. available from <https://www.thairath.co.th/news/crime/1589230>.

¹⁵² There used to be a bus running between Surin and Siem Reap started in 2015, but it was discontinued a year after due to lack of passengers.



Figure 30: Jin's relative holding her phone during a videocall with her daughter who works in Prasat, Surin (left) and our group photo at Rolous Thommachiat in Samraong, Oddar Meanchey (right) (photo taken on 06/22/18)

Speaking in the Thai language fluently, Jin told me that her extended families would have at least one person in household who work in Surin Province. Other households in the same village have similar patterns of migrating to Thailand. It has been almost four years since Patt first hired Jin's cousin before recruiting more through family connections, as Patt has built trust with them and is willing to have more employees from the same family. As we visited several places in Samraong besides Jin's house including the public market, Independent Park, a hotel for lunch and Rolous Thommachiat,¹⁵³ there would be people in these spots who have been to Thailand for work. One woman in the public market was walking past us and asked in Thai if we were from Thailand. I said yes, and she replied me that she used to work in Khon Kaen, a province in the upper Northeast Thailand. It was one of several random short conversations that I had from traveling with them. Most of the goods and foods in Samraong are imported from Thailand. The wholesale business of Patt's relative in Muang Surin was also partnered with Cambodians in Samraong to regularly export goods to the retail shops in the market. For Samraong residents and the surrounding area, working in or traveling to Surin has been their

¹⁵³ A tourist spot features spectacular rock formations from soil erosion close to the foothill of Phnom Dangrek. 30-minute drive from Chong Chom

realistic choice due to the immigration regulation and language skills, in spite of the limited stay duration and strict employment controls.

Patt's retail shop opened in the public of Prasat District, Surin Province. She allowed me to learn why and how she decided to hire Cambodian workers for her business. In 2012, her shop first hired migrant workers from Laos through a migrant broker. The broker came to her shop to offer foreign labor, which had commission fees for both employer and employees.¹⁵⁴ There was no inspection by the police, as Surin was not a hotspot for attention from state authorities in such a local market at that time. It was mostly short hiring periods – two to three months as the migrants came and gone for another job opportunities in Thailand.

In 2014, Patt began to hire a mixture of Cambodian workers and Thai workers. However, she found it was not a decent situation because of ethnic/national hierarchies in the workplace. Not only was Thai labor scarce, but Thai workers also could not tolerate hard labor and sometimes refused to get work done. Thai laborers would feel superior and did not wish to do the same work as Cambodians. She decided to keep Cambodians for her business. During the time when the immigration police started to visit the market and look for illegal migrants, she was aware that it could be dangerous for her employees without a proper work permit. Patt began to work on documentation, although she had never done it before. Seven was the highest number of migrant workers whom she hired; at the time I talked to her, she only had three workers in the shop due to the economic recession in Thailand.

Based on the interview with one of the staff in the Provincial Labor Employment Division in Surin Province, there are six categories of foreign migrants who could obtain the work permit.¹⁵⁵ The latest category came along with the invention of Border Pass as designed for

¹⁵⁴ The employer had to pay for 2500 baht per one migrant and migrants themselves had to pay for a broker for 2000 baht.

¹⁵⁵ From Surin labor employment division monthly report (June 2018).

citizens in border provinces and limit usage for traveling within the province's counterpart on the other side. It could be said that registration for identification prevents the free movement of labor "by fixing them into certain spaces, or by spatializing them with certain entitlements" (Pongsawat 2007, 9). On the other hand, this is a precise function of borders as a forefront technology to regulate a spatially delimited population of migrant workers (Campbell 2018, 160–61). The processes and the practices that the migrants may encounter upon arrival in the host country can have just as much bearing on their legal status. In the West, after the terrorist attack on the September 11, security and immigration regimes often pinpointed this event as heightening concerns over transnational crime, terrorism, national identity, and societal security (Isotalo 2009, 67). Meanwhile, security concerns over Thai-Cambodian borders could be said to have heightened since the Khmer Rouge regime when both state agencies and social scientists witnessed the refugee issue as the result of the Cold War in the region.

Patt has a very healthy and supportive relationship with her Cambodian employees. So, she was willing to accept more of their relatives as they have stayed with her for more than three years. During the time I was allowed to observe their business, Patt was preparing documents for an employment permit (Section 64) application for Gill, a new employee who is another relative of Jin. Patt had to learn how to communicate with the government sectors so that everything would go smoothly and no unnecessary cost. She became an expert in the market, and other business owners came to ask her how to process the applications for their Cambodian workers. Her current responsibility is reminding her employees to be alert for permit renewal dates, so there will not be a problem when there are visits from the immigration police officers.



Figure 31: A warning sign at Surin Labor Employment Office (06/05/2018)

For the employment process, Patt was told to begin with citizenship/nationality verification. She mentioned the difficulty when it was introduced to her for the first time in contact with the Provincial Labor Employment Division in Surin, even though the system was not settled yet. It was confusing to her as the officers were not well trained yet, either. When migrants received a verified status, they would receive a work permit. Her first hired group received one-year work permits. This interview was conducted before the interview with the government division, so I barely knew how the process of verification worked. I was only curious why Thailand as a labor host country has an obligation to verify migrants' nationality since they would have some identification card from the homeland. Then I was informed by the employment division officer¹⁵⁶ that this happens because the migrants did not have valid passports due to the cost of application fee and long process to receive one. It took two years for her first group to get the passport and official work permit.¹⁵⁷

Based on the interviews from both perspectives of the employer and the provincial employment office, all cross-border migrants who mostly apply for Section 64 (formerly 14) work permit have to file a nationality verification process whether they are a valid border pass holder or a passport holder. Once the verification is approved, they must visit the checkpoint to get the immigration stamp in order to proceed to the medical check-up at Surin Hospital. Then they have to revisit the checkpoint to show the immigration officer their medical certificate to ensure that they are in good physical health and free from any defect. Finally, the migrants present all required documents to the provincial employment office to receive a three-month work permit. All the processes are required to be repeated every three months for Border Pass holders, and every six months for passport holders. This shop hires both types of travel

¹⁵⁶ Interviewed on July 13, 2018

¹⁵⁷ This was before "Border Pass," a new type of travel document used for interprovincial employment agreement between Surin and Oddar Meanchey and other partnering border provinces between Thailand and neighboring countries.

documents. She did not worry about her employee status, but only wanted to make sure that they would visit the checkpoint by the due dates.

Types of Work Permit for Migrants from Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar since ASEAN 2015

under Foreigners' Working Management Emergency Decree B.E. 2560 (2017) and No.2 B.E. 2561 (2018)¹⁵⁸ according to Labor Employment Division¹⁵⁹

1. Temporary permit through Section 59 (formerly Section 9 of 2008 Foreign Working Act)
2. Temporary permit for investment boosting proposes through Section 62 (formerly Section 12)
3. Temporary permit through Section 63 under cabinet's resolution for undocumented migrants and awaiting nationality verification
4. Temporary permit through MOU between Surin Province and Oddar Meanchey Province and Section 64 (formerly Section 14)

This was a case for migrants who already have been in Thailand during the visa-free period but do not obtain the work permits yet, or the previous permits have expired without leaving the country. This could happen because citizens from ASEAN member countries are free to travel within the region under the ASEAN framework agreement on visa exemption.¹⁶⁰ In order to understand the transition from a temporary visitor to becoming a legal labor migrant, I followed them through the processes of employment registration after they were verified and received a



Figure 32: the stamps on the border pass showing the edited expiration date for one-month stay period (06/05/2018)

¹⁵⁸ During the time of fieldwork (2018), the types and sections that were used in the procedure of employment permits were different from the latest version of the foreign employment act in 2019.

¹⁵⁹ There are more than four types of permits but only four are used in Surin Province

¹⁶⁰ ASEAN citizens can travel within ASEAN countries with their valid travel documents either passport for fourteen days or border pass for seven days <http://agreement.asean.org/media/download/20160831072909.pdf>

certificate of identification. We went to Surin labor employment office, Surin Provincial Hospital, and Chong Chom checkpoint.

There was one incident when I was traveling to the checkpoint with one of the shop employees who was already granted the work permit with her border pass. There was a problem with the stamped date on her border pass, as she was supposed to receive one-month stay permit based on her employment status. However, she received a one-week renewal as it was for non-resident border pass holders. She ran to me before we went to inform the immigration officer about the mistake. We tried to negotiate with officers so that she did not have to pay an unnecessary fine for overstays. I asked the officer whether it could be fixed as soon as the problem solved. It was a long conversation as the officers first denied the mistake and told us “you knew too well.” It was a long negotiation, but we looked through the stamps on the border pass together and clearly see every single stamped date over the recent months were one-month stay permits. After the officer discussed with his colleague and his supervisor, the stamped date was changed to a one-month period.

A Story of Sugar Factory in Prasat District

During a visit to Surin Employment Division Office with Patt and Gill, there were people who came to register employment for themselves or for their employees. I talked to the person who sat next to me while I was waiting for Patt and Gill to process the documents with the officers. I introduced myself and asked for a contact in case I could conduct an interview with them, a couple who are the owners of the subcontracting company at the Sugar Company.¹⁶¹ I

¹⁶¹ This sugar mill in Surin Province is one of the 29 sugar mills in Isaan region approved by the national 10-year Cane and Sugar Strategy Plan (2015-2024) according to the Isaan Records’ series “Sweetness and Power,” each sugar mill would have its own biomass power plant that raised concerns for the locals about the development that will impact well-being of communities and pollute the nature and communal resources. See the map of 29 sugar mills here <https://isaanrecord.com/2019/09/16/sweetness-and-power-part-8/>

interviewed Soo (pseudonym), the wife, who is a caretaker of the migrant workers. All of them live on the other side of the factory. Here are essential details of the interview:

Me: How did you manage to recruit Cambodians for your company?

Soo: In 2015, we heard the news about ASEAN 2015. The government was promoting the policy on free labor movements across ASEAN countries. Due to the labor shortage in the Northeast and Surin Province, our family was originally from Korat (Nakhon Ratchasima) but a new factory set up in Surin, so we moved here for running the business. I found an opportunity to hire Cambodians as the factory built not so far from the border and got recommended by the workers in a fertilizer factory in Prasat. At first, we got 5-6 Cambodians and now we have 20 of them working and living with us.

Me: What kind of job they are doing here?

Soo: Our company is a contracted subsidiary group that work for the Sugar factory. The Cambodian workers are hired to work as coolies assigned to carrying ready-for wholesale sugar bags (50 kilograms).

Me: Could you tell me about the documentation work and other logistics support for them?

Soo: I have to provide documentation for the hired workers include work permit application and place to stay close to the factory. Most of them brought the family members to live altogether. These dependents were given the work permits as well as the workers because the company wanted every foreign worker to have legal documents. (a Cambodian spouse wearing pajamas came to the interview table with her infant). They do not have to work but only stay here, cannot go anywhere else except the checkpoint when the renewal of stay permit is due.

Me: Does the immigration police come here often?

Soo: Sometimes. Because the polices are aware that the factory hiring the migrant workers. They would come here randomly to inspect if there might be the undocumented or overstayed migrant workers. I would make sure that all my employees are on track and renew their permits when it dues. So we rarely got into trouble when the police came and would not be charged for any illegal activities.

Me: May I ask your opinion about immigration and employment process that you have to work for the migrant workers under your care?

Soo: The fact that they have to go checkpoint is the waste of time in view of employer, I don't understand why they have to pay too much for immigration office, they ended up to pay either they were on time or overstayed. There were times that they could not renew a stay permit as indicated on the documents. When the police visited and found the overstayed migrants. They were not sent to the border but just had to pay the bribe for the police. Although, I felt at ease more and more as now everyone obtained work permits legally. The employment process has been improved, in the right direction unlike the first period of new system that require many documents.

Unfortunately, I did not have a chance to interview any of her Cambodian employees as I went to the factory neighborhood when a night shift started. Everyone went inside the factory

and the day shift workers were about to rest. However, I thanked Soo for her time and courage to share her thoughts and experience. There are several actors involved in ensuring the migrants able to gain limited access to things in foreign lands to substitute for the hard laboring jobs that Thai nationals no longer want to work.

The exclusion was manifested by the actual experience of migrants in Surin, how they got to work in Thailand and how the regulation has forced them to maintain legal status and the punishment or tactics that would keep them stay working in Thailand. Even though Thailand has tried to move forward with the process of legalization, the process has intensified degrees of criminalization. It indeed reflects the country's character as a response to political-economic transformation. The findings offer a possibility to think about migrant workers through a critique of the state immigration regime insofar as regional politics can be considered along with nationalism.

The significance of ASEAN is not only for the authorities as the reference for legal implementation, but it has been mentioned by the migrant workers and the employers as well. Thus, I look how Thailand and ASEAN has promoted new mobility regulation created by ASEAN state members at the end of 2015. ASEAN put forth a statement committing to promote free flows of people and resources within the region as part of the regional cooperation called The 2012 ASEAN Agreement on the Movement of Natural Persons (AAMNP).¹⁶² Here are words from the declaration that I found most interesting for the purpose of comparing to the actual practices in the case of cross-border migrant flows from Cambodia to Thailand:

DESIRING for an effective mechanism to further *liberalise and facilitate* movement of natural persons towards free flow of skilled labour in ASEAN through close cooperation among related ASEAN bodies in the areas, including and not limited to trade in goods, trade in services, investment, immigration, and labour.

¹⁶² See the full statement at <http://investasean.asean.org/files/upload/ASEAN%20MNP%20Main%20Text.pdf>

ALSO DESIRING to *eliminate substantially all restrictions* in the temporary cross-border movement of natural persons involved in the provision of trade in goods, trade in services and investment within the provisions of this Agreement.

A Member State shall not accord recognition in a manner which would constitute a means of *discrimination* against another Member State in the application of its standards or criteria for the authorisation, licensing or certification of service suppliers, or a disguised restriction on trade in services. Where appropriate, recognition should be based on multilaterally agreed criteria.

Based on the declaration, the objectives of this agreement are to streamline the procedures of immigration to be more convenient and transparent for ASEAN member states; to allow for managed mobility or facilitated entry for the movement of persons engaged in trade and investment that according to the prevailing regulations of the receiving country. The statement could be seen as the continuation of neoliberalism in the region, as it believes in liberalizing and encouraging people to seek jobs outside their own countries, and that the receiving countries should welcome the flows of labor. In reality, the direction of the labor flows has not changed much from prior to 2015. It remains from the poorer to the richer countries. I also found that the desire to eliminate all restrictions for temporary cross-border movement and discrimination against another member state is difficult to achieve. In actual practice, the required documents including Cambodian National Identification Card, Work Permit, and Cambodian passport which could be seen on the right bubble. While at the checkpoint, the workers might be asked for bribes if they wished to continue working in Thailand and do not hold all required documents or one of these has already expired. The state authorities and immigration laws play an essential role in deciding who will be allowed to work in what space and for how long. As described in the regimes of citizenship, their status as non-Thai citizen Cambodian migrant workers has excluded them from accessing full rights of citizenship which depend on their immigration status, indeed impacting the way they interact with the immigration officers and employers. Not to mention the ambiguity in the complex employment regulations that keep changing every year after the ASEAN implementation on free labor movement within the region that tends to be more flexible in the context of Surin – Oddar Meanchey border community.

Working with ambivalent immigration regimes: Local officials and their technologies

I met with several local government agencies that work together on the cross-border issues between Surin Province and Oddar Meanchey Province. There is number of government sectors involved in cross-border relations includes Kap Cheong District Office as an integral coordinator for civilian officials¹⁶³ along with the army representatives from their regional units and Thai-Cambodian border information coordination unit. During the fieldwork, I was introduced to each of them through the series of inter-government events in Kap Cheong District. The frequent meetings and events made them familiar with my presence in the field.

At the biannual meeting between provincial-level officers called Border Liaison Office (BLO) Meeting, I came to a better understanding of how interprovincial state-led cooperation has taken shape in the Chong Chom checkpoint region. The meeting title in Thai: ประชุมคณะกรรมการสำนักงานประสานงานแก้ไขปัญหายาเสพติดชายแดน indicated that the meeting would focus on the drugs problem. However, the actual meeting, at least the one I attended in September 2019, covered all the border issues, including migrant workers. The dialogue between Thai and Cambodian delegates concerned the complexity and unaffordable cost of the process of getting travel documents, and how this results in illegal immigration to Thailand. The Cambodian officers denied the accusation and claimed that they have assisted the Cambodian workers as much as they could. It was somehow miscommunication and lack of response between the officials of both provinces. The overall perspective of the Thai authorities, as I observed and witnessed the meeting, is that they often claimed that Thai law has been designed to respond on illegal migrant issues based on these expressions: “Cambodian passport fee is costly,” “Facilitations were requested by Cambodian authorities,” “the immigration technology we used to have was inefficient to fully control immigration.” My findings also reveal the different

¹⁶³ Consisting of immigration police officers, district police, volunteer defense corps (VDC), police’s special action force unit, Huay Tab Tan – Huay Sam Ran Sanctuary rangers, Kap Cheong Hospital, and excise provincial officers.

aspects of what Thai authorities often claimed was the power dynamics between the Thai authorities and Cambodian migrants - which have put the migrants in a place of no power in negotiation and therefore, must follow the orders from the Thai authorities - that does not always reflect what appears in the law, which also always keep changing due to the inconsistency of the government and cabinet resolutions. Consequently, it is also necessary to understand the perspective and roles of the Thai immigration office specifically in the area of Chong Chom checkpoint.

Flexibility and Uncertainty in Border Surveillance Technologies

I was able to interview Niti (pseudonym, the checkpoint officer) in Kap Cheong District where the provincial office is located fifteen kilometers from the checkpoint. I asked about the important issues regarding Chong Chom checkpoint, including both immigration policy and practices on the ground. According to the officer, there are three types of travel documents that the immigration officers would allow foreigners to enter the country. First is the Border Ticket, which was primarily used until the late 2000s. Until Thailand and Cambodia agreed to provide visa exemption for short-time travelers, a passport was required for border crossing. In 2015, Surin and Oddar Meanchey signed the inter-provincial memorandum of understanding and launched the Border Pass according to the bilateral agreement between two countries to promote cross-border relations along the borders of Thailand and Cambodia. As I asked about the issue of migrants as frequent crossers who work in the market but live on Cambodian side, he replied “I wouldn’t put it in that way” (จะพูดอย่างนั้นก็ไมถนัดนัก). Instead, he mentioned that the “Border Pass” has not had a micro-electronic chip yet. It has been difficult to track the migrants who are also frequent crossers, meaning there is no way to have an actual record of how many people are in this category. He repeated that this is due to substandard technology in travel documents that caused unreliable numbers in statistics.

In my conversation with Niti, there was no mention of how the law is mismatched with the border situation at Chong Chom. So, I asked this question to another border officer at the checkpoint. He replied, “It was because of Cambodia’s request for Thailand to be flexible in checking travel documents. This helps the merchants in the market in order to facilitate and enhance cross-border economic growth.” It was similar to practices for Thai gamblers who frequently travel to the border casinos, as if its locations were designed to provide the legal exemption for Thai border crossers who do not need to go to the checkpoint and get immigration stamps on the Cambodian side. The gamblers would pass Thai immigration points to enter and leave the casinos right away. For this crossing pattern, the statistics became understandable to me regarding why this border pass is not popular for Thais or other nationalities to travel to the inner areas of Cambodia. However, the number of Thai border crossers is much more than Cambodians. This was partly because frequent crossers have not been recorded on their actual practices as they travel back and forth between homes and the market more than one time a day.

Furthermore, I asked Niti about how Cambodian migrants applied for work and live in Surin Province. He used the word “Tang Dao” (ต่างด้าว – alien/foreigner) in explaining the issues including the importance of residency of migrants that must inform the immigration office. He admitted that strict regulation can cause a problem. Yet the patrol is still needed as a direct obligation. Not only for the workplace, but also housing, they would go and check regularly to make ensure that the employer reports correctly. For the checkpoint, he insisted that, in the past, it was difficult to control the arrival and departure of migrants due to the lack of surveillance technology. It has been improved over time, even though a physical appearance of Chong Chom checkpoint remains the same, but they have installed advanced technology, the same as the immigration points in the airport, as all traveling and criminal records can be tracked from the system. Indeed, my interviews with Niti shed light on how the immigration

office avoided clear and consistent explanation and did not address illicit practices that were secretly known by frequent travelers at the checkpoint. In other words, it could be elaborated as the border's economic underworld where states' normative and regulating powers are contested by people who make a living across the border (Donnan and Wilson 2012).

Conclusion

All stories in this chapter are somehow echoed by a painting of a hornbill (Thai) Immigration Officer with thought bubbles about immigration documents and its cost (Figure 33). I interpret that this painting, which is drawn by a Cambodian student from Phare Ponleu Selpak School, Battambang, is about how migrant workers must obtain the valid documents and have money in order to be eligible to enter



Figure 33: Painting by Cambodian Student from Battambang Province (owned by me, 2018)

Thailand.¹⁶⁴ The meaning of the painting described by staff in the gift shop in Siem Reap where I bought it demonstrates how Cambodian children perceive their transnational living conditions across the Thai-Cambodian border that presumably require valid documents for entering and living in Thailand legally.

¹⁶⁴ The original painting drawn by a student from Phare Ponleu Selpak School, an NGO school and professional arts training center in Battambang. This school is founded by a group of former refugees based in Site 2, Thailand. Phare, the Cambodian Circus, in Siem Reap is a home for Cambodian contemporary art performance. All sales support the free education, professional arts training and social support programs of Phare Ponleu Selpak <https://pharecircus.org/about/>

Chapter 5: Market, Checkpoint, and Casino: Life of In-Betweenness And Cross-Border Circulation

“Because no socio-spatial category can ever incorporate its exteriorized interior or constitutive outside without itself dissolving, it also “fails to secure the very borders of materiality” that produce it, and so can never be completely and permanently closed or sealed off”
(Butler 1993 cited in Kaiser 2012, 523)

Surin Provincial Governor announced the closure of public and gathering locations including Chong Chom border and Chong Chom market¹⁶⁵ as there was the first three COVID19 patients reported in Surin province.¹⁶⁶ It was five days before the Thai government announced the Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situation B.E. 2548 (2005) on March 26, 2020,¹⁶⁷ and spread throughout the country from those who attended the event along with the abrupt closure of public and business sectors that caused unemployment and forced workers to return their hometowns. After the Decree announcement, Surin Province announced that Chong Chom checkpoint will be temporarily closed until further notice started from April 8, 2020 onwards.^{168,169} The most recent closure of Chong Chom checkpoint comes after the last one in 2011 due to gunfire exchanges during the Preah Vihear temple dispute.¹⁷⁰ These unexpected closures would never be permanent but have always leaked through the process of bordering (Nail 2016), either with humanitarian or emergency reasons as had happened during the past war, although the world has been trying to figure out how to deal with the COVID19 pandemic. We all know that

¹⁶⁵ <https://www.komchadluek.net/news/local/423694>

¹⁶⁶ These patients were in the same cluster who got infected from Lumpini Stadium on March 6, 2020 in Bangkok. This cluster became a turning point for Thailand as the news of Thai celebrity couple got infected from hosting this boxing match. The news eventually urged the government to aware the biggest cluster of COVID19 infection.
<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1923040/matthew-lydia-receive-wbc-award>

¹⁶⁷ <http://www.mfa.go.th/main/contents/files/news3-20200326-161207-994002.pdf>

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/surinimmigration/photos/a.707238146366781/946061312484462/?type=3&theater>

¹⁶⁹ Cambodia is included as Disease Infected Zones of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak in Notification of the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand (edition 2) B.E. 2563 (2020) published on April 21, 2020
<http://www.mfa.go.th/main/contents/files/news3-20200507-132704-591037.pdf>

¹⁷⁰ <https://www.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Asia/Story/A1Story20110423-275223.html>

viruses do not carry passports (Ong 2016). Still, the government has been trying to pause mass mobility across the border as one of the solutions that has been used to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus.

This story of border closure during the COVID19 pandemic can be added to the history of Thailand's immigration control through emergency response. By temporalizing the work of immigration control, I argue that it could help us understand how the subjects – the displaced people and migrant workers – experienced cross-border migration and immigration procedures through political incentives and legal frameworks since the Cambodian civil war period and the economic boom in Thailand. It also highlights how temporal confinement that was enacted as a legal implication of periodic permission to stay in Thailand had also caused the contingency and disembedding of citizenship of the Cambodian migrants (Pongsawat 2007; Laungaramsri 2018) in the post-ASEAN 2015 era. In the past, the border closure and the intense fights during the Cambodian civil war had never entirely blocked people from both highland and lowland staying in contact or escaping the war in Cambodia to Thailand. Immigration procedure and cross-border mobility at Chong Chom checkpoint have followed the guidelines from the central governments of both Thailand and Cambodia, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, this region has never caught attention as the foremost zone where the central authority would promote as Special Economic Zone (SEZ) or include it in the primary route for Economic Corridors as part of economic policies that allows flexible and exceptional governmental measures to do business only at the border (Laungaramsri 2015). Instead, the border economy of Chong Chom has relied on the local communities, war economy, and currently more on the enthusiasm from the local agencies that create its own flexibility as much as the state policies would allow it to do so.

Overall, this chapter delves into a specific site of Surin as a border province to manifest the spatial aspect of the border dwellers who are living through the existence of the Chong Chom

checkpoint, border market, and casinos.¹⁷¹ I explore how the lived experiences of Chong Chom – O’Smach border communities are characterized by in-betweenness and a continual division is produced through regulation of flows of border crossers and things. The political economy of Chong Chom – O’smach border has transitioned from an extreme warzone to become the illicit entertainment complex along with the authoritarian control of labor at the border. It is a form of everyday uncertainty for Cambodian border dwellers, which could be seen from their daily mobility living in-between two countries, which still prevails during the pandemic time (see Figure 34). They have been facing state violence and discrimination every day. The benefits fall into those officials when non-citizen border crossers would be asked for the money (*tong hai ngern tormor*). The three sections in this chapter interrogate the creation of Chong Chom border market; the in-betweenness of Chong Chom border community; and the hierarchical relationship between Surin and Oddar Meanchey local authorities particularly the state control of mobility on the Thai side.



Figure 34: Cambodian Migrant Workers prepared to go back home on April 7, 2020 before temporary border closure (Left and Lower Right - Image courtesy of Pui Osmach's Facebook); The Governors of Surin and Oddar Meanchey met on the day before Chong Chom market closure on March 21, 2020 (Upper Right – Image courtesy of Komchadleuk Newspaper)

¹⁷¹ In Cambodia, the casinos have mushroomed since 1993 in border towns located in Koh Kong, Poipet, Pailin, Chong Jom near Thailand, in Bavet, Ha Tien, Phnom Den near Vietnam, then in Sihanoukville, and finally in the capital, Phnom Penh. There are now nearly 57 casinos spread throughout the country. In 2014, the gambling industry generated USD 25 million in tax revenue, an increase of 15% per year. Cited from Tan, Danielle. 2016. “The ‘Casino Strategy’ in Laos and Cambodia: A Risky Bet on the Future” Accessed June 10, 2019. <http://www.gis-reseau-asie.org/en/casino-strategy-laos-and-cambodia-risky-bet-future>.

Chong Chom – O’Smach Border Checkpoint



Figure 35: Terrain map of O’Smach located at the rim of Phnom Dangrek (courtesy of Google Maps)

In Chapter 1, I discuss a history of Chong Chom as the pathway for the mountain crossers that turned into one of the major checkpoints between Thailand and Cambodia. On the other side, O’Smach is Oddar Meanchey’s¹⁷² uppermost border town located right next to Ban Dan, Kap Cheong, Surin

Province that was transformed from an abandoned grassland and battlefield littered with bombs, to a busy border town. O’Smach is a manifestation of the colonial legacy of a borderline delineated by watershed measurement methods. According to the memories of Ban Dan villagers, most of their stories mentioned O’Smach back in the prewar days as the abandoned grassland and the jungle next to the cliffs. It was one of the Chong(s) for the oxcart route used for traveling across the mountains. Such a lifestyle at the border came to a halt when the Khmer Rouge seized power. Similar to the Khmer Rouge’s stronghold at Preah Vihear temple, O’Smach was used as the last stronghold of Prince Norodom Ranariddh’s FUNCINPEC party. The final round of Cambodian conflict happened after the 1997 coup by Hun Sen pushed a ten thousand Cambodians refuged to the Thai border (Huay Cheong Camp).¹⁷³ The election in 1998 brought about the “win-win policy for national reconciliation” that Hun Sen announced had integrated every political fraction into the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (Deth, 2018). Hun Sen claimed his policy was completed in 1999 when the Khmer Rouge’s Ta Mok was captured, and Cambodia became the tenth member of the ASEAN organization.

¹⁷² Oddar Meanchey Province was first established in the early independent era and later became an administrative no-man's-land, with its alternating status between a province and a district under successive regimes before reestablished the province in 1999 (Phnom Penh Post: July 6, 2001) <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/coup-casinos-forgotten-frontier-oddar-meanchey>

¹⁷³ This final round of prolonged Cambodian civil war lasted over a year and a half thanks to the assistance of Ta Mok, the last survived Khmer Rouge leader, who resided in Anlong Veng, not far away from O’Smach.

The status of the Chong Chom area could be seen as a destination community for cross-border migrants, similar to the cases of Aranyaprathet-Poipet towns, the most significant border pass between Thailand and Cambodia, and Mae Sot town on the Thai-Myanmar border (Pongsawat 2007; Aung 2014; Campbell 2018). Although these border communities undoubtedly were constituted by conflicts and wars, the differentiation lies in the fact that Chong Chom has neither any policy for area development to become a special economic zone (SEZ) nor regional production networks.

Instead, the economy of Chong Chom emerges from the consequence of the war economy, as seen from the construction of two casinos.¹⁷⁴ Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen once addressed the reasons why he allowed the construction of casinos along the border next to Vietnam and Thailand after he received criticism over his decision in 2012 by stating that

"I don't like casinos, but the biggest goal for giving permission to build casinos is to protect the border... One can remove border markers, but one can't remove five-story hotels. Don't be stupid!... You force me to talk about it. This should be a secret strategy to protect the nation" (Bangkok Post August 9, 2012¹⁷⁵)

Even though Hun Sen's statement was in a sarcastic and feisty fashion, it highlights the explicit intention of casino construction at the border within Cambodian territory. Beyond his words, it demonstrates how border casinos became multifaceted strategies for the country that is reviving from the prolonged civil war, yet run by a strongman who is involved in shaping the country to be in this way. Cambodia's border casinos can be considered not only as a form of protecting the border, but also as contributing to the dynamics of border economy in many ways.

¹⁷⁴ The first casino is 'O'Smach Resort' owned by Ly Yong Phat (LYP Group) built in the year 2000. Another casino is "Royal Hill Hotel" owned by Lim Heng Group, a joint investment between Cambodia, Thailand and Singapore. (Panyakaew 2018, 170). More details about Ly Yong Phat <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/special-reports/334020/ly-yong-phat-the-king-of-koh-kong>

¹⁷⁵ <https://www.bangkokpost.com/world/306888/casinos-are-ecret-strategy-to-protect-cambodia-pm>

I want to illustrate how the post-war era of Chong Chom – O'Smach checkpoint became dependent on two border casinos which built right after the checkpoint opened on the Cambodian side and Chong Chom border market on the Thai side.¹⁷⁶ First, the border casinos become profitable because Thailand still enacts the 1935 anti-gambling law (B.E. 2478)¹⁷⁷ and the prohibition from the law leads Thai gamblers to cross the border checkpoint, so it would not be considered illegal as the acts of gambling occur outside Thai state territory. Second, casinos create employment for Cambodians who are not allowed to gamble but are allowed to be the employees. There are Cambodians from the inner cities who migrate to the border town to seek jobs. The continuous migration flows to the border also create a migrant community that is distinguished from pre-war border community. Lastly, the success of luring Thai gamblers to keep visiting and spending money at the casinos contributes to the liveliness of border. Cambodians have choices to work at casinos or at the market or other business around this area. With the agreement between Surin and Oddar Meanchey provincial authorities, both Thais and Cambodians are allowed to cross the border. In other words, without the completion of immigration procedures on the daily basis, their movements are subjected to be circulated with periodic immigration status, within limited space (casinos or market). For Thai gamblers, it is less complicated than crossing the checkpoint to casino that is located one hundred meters away from Thai immigration station which would only require a valid passport or border pass to be eligible for crossing. While for Cambodians who work in Thailand are required to have valid documentation for immigration and employment status and could be checked anywhere anytime when entering into Thai territory.

¹⁷⁶ According several informants, in the early period of border reopening, the market was more active on O'smach side, Thai people could cross the border to buy things when the checkpoint was more securitized and allowed Cambodians to have shops in the market. So Thai no longer cross the border for shopping, but gambling instead.

¹⁷⁷ The 1935 anti-gambling law (B.E. 2478) was the first anti-gamble act after the 1932 revolution that included several forms of gamble to be banned from the public and reserved for the elitist clubs before being forced to close due to public criticism (Siriphongphaew 2014). Retrieved from the Office of the Council of State of Thailand's Law for ASEAN project <http://www.thailandntr.com/en/trade-in-services/laws/organization/EN.pdf>

This flexibility does not mean that the role of the immigration checkpoint is less important. On the contrary, border checkpoints (Dan/ด่าน) become more hypervisible to reassert the power of states and its sovereignties where the political division was made, and to justify the bordering practices (Galemba 2013). Chong Chom is considered a medium-size checkpoint by the average number of border crossers, according to Surin Immigration officer.¹⁷⁸ Unlike a large-scale Klong Luk checkpoint (Aranyaprathet-Poipet) between Sakaeo and Banteay Meanchey, this medium scale was helpful for me to observe the dynamics of the border reality. Indeed, checkpoints have made the daily crossers aware of switching hierarchical status all the time. According to Nail (2016), there are four consequences defined by the existence of the border (See Introduction chapter). Border does not mean the limits of a sovereign state, but the social process of division. “The border is precisely ‘between’ countries... it is also a third thing in between the two sides that touch the states” (3 - 4). The bifurcation and circulation that is produced by the division still hold the same pathway, whether it redirects the flows or continues ahead.

Hence, this section examines the state control of mobility on the Thai side as I have gained the access through official permission from Surin Governor¹⁷⁹ to observe Chong Chom checkpoint and interview several sectors involved in border crossing inspection. According to the officials with whom I spoke, there are three essential bordering procedures upon the arrival for all nationality in the post-ASEAN2015 era, called ICQ protocols: *Immigration, Customs, and Quarantine*:

First, the border crossers are required to go through ICQ protocols starting from ‘Q’ for ***Quarantine*** station for health and disease screening conducted by staff of the Department of

¹⁷⁸ Interview on July 18, 2018

¹⁷⁹ With a letter from the office of Civil Service Commission, I was able to contact the Surin Provincial Office and receive a permission to contact any governmental agents to conduct the interviews and participant observation.

Disease Control (DC Station). Cambodians have preferred to receive medical treatment in Thailand regardless of their financial status. The DC Station at Chong Chom checkpoint performs multiple roles, including screening, diagnosing, and managing legal entry for health care. Even before the pandemic, they were charged with detecting any patient with the potential to spread infectious diseases to the Thai population, according to the Communicable Disease Act B.E. 2558 (2015). The DC also has to manage and facilitate the patients without proper documents to visit hospitals in Surin Province legally. Their additional jobs are to primarily diagnose and make the decision whether the patient is in urgent need to visit the hospital or not.

During the first few years of this regulation, DC would allow most patients without travel documents to visit the Thai hospitals by requesting them to contact the Thai-Cambodian Border Coordination Office (BCO) to get a special permit for medical purpose only. Once the patient receives the letter from the BCO, the DC staff would document their entry records to share with the hospital the patient was desiring to visit. The DC used to allow patients without documents to reenter the Kingdom for the second or follow-up visits only with a doctor's appointment. However, within a three-year span (Jan 2016 – July 2018), there were more than twenty-six thousand patients with and without travel documents that have requested to visit hospitals in Thailand that filed records with the DC Station. It caused an overload of work for Chong Chom DC station that only has two staff per day. There was usually a long line in the mornings. Eventually, the authorities agreed to no longer provide special documents as they believe that Cambodians should be able to obtain the border pass or passport from their government easier than it used to be.¹⁸⁰



Figure 36: Chicken roaming around in front of the disease control station where I sat and observed the border crossers upon their arrival to the Thai side of Chong Chom checkpoint (09/04/2018)

¹⁸⁰ Interviewed with the DC staff in July 2018 and during the post-fieldwork visit in 2019.

Second, 'I' for **Immigration**: the crossers with any type of travel document may walk pass the DC station since there is no screening machine or personnel to conduct physical screening. The crossers can head to the following step of Immigration procedure. There are two lanes for passport holders and border pass holders at which everyone must follow the guideline in order to enter the country. Next to the Immigration station is the office of the second unit Area Thai-Cambodian Border Commission (ศูนย์ประสานงานชายแดนประจำพื้นที่ 2). This office is under supervision of the first unit Army Area (กองทัพภาคที่ 1) which primarily operates on any Thai-Cambodian cooperation issues including administrative work, border surveillance, interprovincial relations, and national security issues. The BCO regularly initiates or joins any tasks and events of all border-related work. This unit differs from another military unit from Suranaree Command that also sends the military personnel to patrol in the checkpoint area as well.



Figure 37: (Left) People walking from Immigration station to another screening at an integrated station; (Middle) Zaa, a trained soldier dog waiting to search for illegal drugs; (Right) A banner of plant quarantine list (all photos taken on various dates)

Third, 'C' for **Custom**: the inbound goods from Cambodia that are carried by the crossers may be taxable under the tax called “*Phasi Pak-Rawang*” (ภาษีปากระวาง) for small portions and are not given an exemption by ASEAN Free Trade Agreement.¹⁸¹ There is an

¹⁸¹ For imported business goods, the importers must obtain the permission from Chong Chom Customs House and report to other related offices prior to the entry. At Dan Chong Chom, the importer/driver must report to the authorities and the vehicle can only drive through the provided route that the Customs assigned.

integrated checkpoint service for another screening set up by the rest of state authorities including nonhuman quarantine and custom tasks which comprise of plant quarantine; fishery quarantine; animal quarantine; excise department for banned/taxable goods control; CITES officer for wild animal control; and forestry department for wild plant control. Moreover, there are also officials from Kap Cheong district and the police to take care of traffic and national security issues from time to time.

Besides multiple short trips across the checkpoint, I was able to observe the flow of border crossers in Dan Chong Chom on the Thai side at the disease control station and the integrated station if time was available.

Especially at the latter one, I usually sat with the staff after I introduced myself and became familiar with them. Since they were aware of

my status as a PhD researcher, there was no significant denial for letting me observe with them. We sometimes had casual conversations mostly asking about my research or my asking about their routine at this station. I also witnessed the law enforcement checking a pack of cigarettes and alcohol that the crossers could carry exceeding amount of the controlled goods. The Thai authorities seem to be familiar with the Thai crossers who visit casinos on the Cambodian site regularly. They would walk through the ICQ protocols and stop at this station while waiting for the van services to return home (the casino business will be discussed after the market section). This station is less intense than DC and Immigration stops as it is located on the sidewalk next to the road where everyone could walk pass easily if they do not have any susceptible objects to be checked.



Figure 38: The announcement from the Excise Department regarding the banned/taxable goods and fine rates for exceeding imported cigarette (09/07/2018)

Last but not least, there is another checkpoint set up by the Thai Army for all vehicle screenings, where there would be a soldier asking the Cambodian driver of the car to check the driving licenses and the passengers who either ride the motorcycle or van taxi services. The soldier would enter the van and ask all passengers to show identification cards for Thai passengers and travel documents for foreigners. This screening is aimed at Cambodians, as they are subjected to be checked thoroughly. The soldier would check the stamped date on the travel documents to make sure that they have valid permission to enter the inner towns. However, I occasionally showed my I.D. to them, and sometimes they would skip me if I told them that I am Thai.



Figure 39: This photo was taken by me while waiting for the soldier to check other passengers inside the Van (06/05/2018)

Chong Chom Border Market

At the Chong Chom market, Cambodian merchants are one of the more visible groups who are included and excluded at the same time. They received a special opportunity to be on the move between two countries on a local scale while subjected to being scrutinized by Thai authorities from time to time. In 1993, Surin Provincial Governor and Representative from FUNCINPEC Party signed a Memorandum of Understanding to promote cross-border trade between Surin Province and Oddar Meanchey Province (see Figure 40),¹⁸² a proposed *border market* or *a point for goods exchange* (literal translation) was allowed to set up within a 500-meter distance from the borderlines on March 13-14, 1993. The signed MoU proposed the

¹⁸² Memorandum of Understanding between Surin Provincial Governor and Representative from Funcinpec Party signed on March 3, 1993 at Surin Provincial Hall. Funcinpec Cambodia also proposed Chong Krang and Chong Tamor Don to be another checkpoint for border trade (Surin Provincial Office of Commerce, 1996)

market operating twice a month during the first and third weekends of every month from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with the condition of a weapon-free market. They agreed to provide a free pass for border crossers from both countries. However, no vehicles allowed to cross the border led to the emergence of the motorcycle taxi services by the Thai locals from Ban Dan subdistrict, where the current Chong Chom market located. Since then, Chong Chom became a temporary checkpoint for border trade (จุดผ่อนปรนเพื่อการค้า) to facilitate cross-border trade flows and transportation between two countries at the provincial level (Onnom 2008: 27).

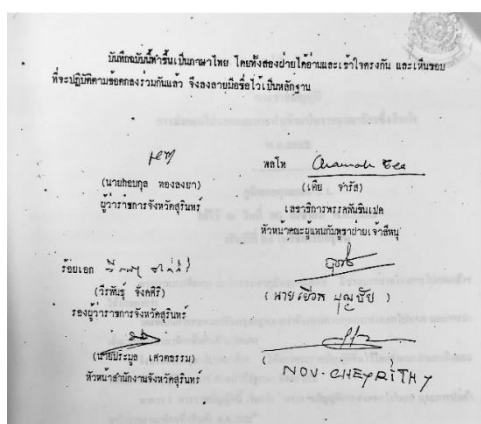


Figure 40: A copy of the 1993 MoU signed by Surin Governor and Representative from FUNCINPEC Party (Surin Provincial Office 1996)

The MoU between Thai local authority and Cambodian political party a few months before the UNTAC-sponsored Cambodian national election in July 1993 demonstrates how local authorities played a significant part in pushing economic relations between two countries at the local level. However, the MoU gave no details about the Cambodian conflict situation at the border. The fact that it was signed by the representative of

the FUNCINPEC Party suggests that O'Smach in the 1990s was the stronghold for the Cambodian resistance party. On the one hand, it is unknown how much the military was involved in the decision-making process resulting in the 1993 MoU. On the other hand, this MoU signaled the new era of Chong Chom – O'Smach that was ready to officially reopen after the prolonged fights of the Cambodian civil war. However, this first attempt for economic exchange was interrupted by the 1997 coup in Cambodia.

Chong Chom border market was re-founded again by Provincial Representative, Sombat Srisurin during the O'Smach fight. It was built in the wildlife sanctuary area that covered 179 kilometres² (Yongsiri 2004, 63-4 cited in Sukantararat and Nithichaianan 2015, 36-7). Later in 2007, the market was forced to relocate and handed over to Surin Provincial Administrative

Organization (PAO) due to the local politics,¹⁸³ an attempt to legalize the operation by moving away from the checkpoint to the inner areas. However, the negotiation failed, and the PAO sought out a different location, eventually settling in the Treasury Department's property.¹⁸⁴ The PAO made a request to the treasury department on January 1, 2010 by referring to the Ministry of Interior's policy on border development projects that they could give a concession to a bid-winning private company to operate the market starting from April 1, 2010 (current location). Currently, the market has 60 units for 900 vendors, and opens daily from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. The market's revenue is collected from the vendors in the market weekly and monthly to manage waste management, restrooms, and security. The buildings are comprised of 60 units made of wood and tin roof. Eighty percent of vendors are Cambodians who came from various provinces of Cambodia (Sukantarat and Nithichaianan 2015, 37).

Theoretically, marketplaces have been the focal point through the chains of production, distribution, and consumption and are defined by the movements of people and supplies (Agnew 1986 cited in Leshkowich and Endres 2018). The authorities thus control the market operation in a similar manner with the border control over the movements such as locations, business and stockpiling hours, goods qualities, types of stalls, fixed grids of sell units, entrances, exits, and floorplans of the market. These dimensions reflect not only a physical boundary, but also a conceptual boundary according to its market capacity as "the creation of particular circuits of mobility" (Leshkowich and Endres 2018). This is to regulate and confine the flows of people and commodities which unavoidably limit or advantage one's economic power to participate in commercial exchanges that occurred in the markets (Leshkowich and Endres).

¹⁸³ A personal interview with the local officer.

¹⁸⁴ The Surin Provincial Treasury Department as a lessor has rented out the royal land supply no. SR 904. The Treasury Department has appointed the Surin PAO to be a manager in land utilization by bidding procedure under the Ministerial Regulation on the Organization of the Department of Local Administration B.E. 2543 (2000). For Chong Chom market is now under the management by Kijchaithawee Ltd. with a year-to-year contract since April 1, 2010 and inspection by Surin PAO.

Most of my informants who moved to work in the market since the market relocation in 2010 came from every part of Cambodia. Even though the majority of Surin people are ethnic Khmer, they do not regularly communicate in Khmer. The merchants prefer to speak Thai with their customers. Most of them tell me that either they learned the Thai language from customers and colleagues or by watching Thai TV programs. They are capable of speaking and listening to the point that they could communicate with me fluently. Another reason is that Khmer language in Surin has its own local dialect, which is close to the Northern dialect in Cambodia. Whereas the newcomers mostly are from areas where they speak standard Khmer, Khmer speakers in Surin barely understand standard Khmer dialect. Communicating in Thai is preferable for selling activities. The language choice reflects the distance between the same ethnic Khmer with different citizenship. The interaction in the market demonstrates the recreation of intimacy in a way other than I would have imagined before the fieldwork started. For the interview sessions, we agreed to interviewing in Khmer language in the way that I would ask them in Thai, and they would answer me in Khmer. Then my interlocutor would translate for me, as it would help the informants to be more expressive and more precise on their journeys to Chong Chom market.

First, the story of Phon (pseudonym, male, 48, from Battambang) from Chong Chom market. Our conversation was in Thai, as he speaks Thai fluently. Phon is a long-time merchant in Chong Chom. He started his business since the wartime. He told me about the time when he graduated high school in Sisophon and decided to move to Chong Chom a few years before the 1993 election to sell goods in O'Smach, a dangerous warzone at that time. He stayed with FUNCINPEC soldiers long enough to make him decide to join the troops, along with a few friends. He lived in the Huay Cheong camp on the Thai side following the 1993 election, hoping to win over Hun Sen's Cambodian People Party. When FUNCINPEC failed to remain in power, he quit the party and continued to do business in the Chong Chom market with his wife.

Phon told me that most of the people who have lived along the border were people who *oapphayop* (flee) to seek refuge in the Thai border, not only from the fights itself, but also from the disgrace of a Cambodian educational system that could not support students to study and work in public service sectors. He believed that he was tricked into failing his exams, which forced him to search for a better life at the border. He did not apply for a resettlement program to a third country when the opportunity arose in the 1980s because he was afraid. He said it was too risky and that he could lose his life making it to the U.N. camp, as they had to escape both Vietnamese and Cambodian soldiers in order to reach the Thai border. I asked how he felt about the opportunity for Cambodian people in Chong Chom market.

“I am glad that I could live here; my life depends on this market because jobs are scarce in Cambodia. Even you did not want it; you will just have to do it. Whatever Thai law gives us to do all things, I will follow the rule in order to survive here.”

Phon said, as meaning that he is willing to follow the Thai regulation even if it keeps changing. Phon’s story illustrates a transition from being a war refugee to a cross-border migrant. His settlement has been determined and he wanted his children to receive Thai citizenship in the future.

Throughout the interview session at the market, several Cambodian informants told me the same things about their techniques regarding the daily crossing with their travel documents (border pass or passport) and residential/work and vehicle permits. They usually would renew a staying period once a week or every two weeks, depending on which document they handed to immigration officers. However, soldiers are the ones who check their papers, not immigration officers. The soldiers would require only an unexpired date to let the merchants enter Thailand. They said that it is okay to cross many times a day in a week as long as the stamp is not expired. It is unnecessary and a waste of money to stamp in and out every day, since they are allowed to stay legally for a week because it costs too much to pay 50 or 100 baht per time to immigrant officers. The monthly cost is approximately 200 baht with another 200 baht if riding a

motorcycle. For example, many informants in the market would hold both a passport and a border pass. They usually use the border pass for crossing the border on a daily basis. They would use the passport for traveling to inner provinces of Thailand such as Bangkok and Nakhon Ratchasima. Cambodians who work in Thailand and Thai gamblers crossing into Cambodia have been treated differently by immigration officers. On the one hand, Thai gamblers may visit the checkpoint without entering Cambodia if they are here only to go to the casinos. They do not need to stamp the passports or border passes on the Cambodian side if they do not have plans to visit inner areas of Cambodia. On the other hand, Cambodians, who live on the Cambodian side, may travel back and forth without reporting to the immigration officers every day, as they are required to display their permitted documents to the authorities beyond the checkpoint zone, which could be anywhere within the province.

Living In-Between: Spatial confinement and politics of exclusion

Mobility control does not only construct and navigate flows at the border checkpoint. Nor is mobility control done only through documents of immigration and employment regulation. Many informants in Chong Chom told me that they barely travel beyond the market and their homes. They would occasionally visit shopping malls in Muang Surin and hospitals if they get sick, need a medical checkup, or are giving birth. Cambodian workers in the inner Surin area who work in agricultural or industrial sectors also live their lives between workplace and their temporary homes.

In this section, I show how spatial confinement is an important technique of mobility control, of the production of economic value, and of subordination by citizenship. As Leshkovich and Endres (2018) argue in their work on movements of traders between localities, regions, and nations in Vietnam and China:

Once mobilities become required or valued—economically, politically, socially, or personally—they lend themselves to **techno-governmental projects of spatial differentiation**, particularly in terms of urban and rural or local and global, that are bound up with the production of class, gender, ethnic, and other forms of differentiation. (10)

I take this idea of spatial differentiation quite literally, exploring how the production of economic value at the border depends on the confinement of Cambodians to particular places. The market, the mall, the school, and the hospital are not delimited like the refugee camp. Yet the confinement of Cambodians' movements to these select sites is a technique of bordering, re-bordering and policing those who are excluded from national protection (Rumford 2006). Mobilities and bordering must be investigated at the same time.

Based on thirty-four interviews with Cambodian merchants in the market, their living patterns are quite diverse. Some live in their own units. Some rent rooms nearby the market. Some live in O'Smach and cross the border every day to do business. The following short portraits from the informants who work in Chong Chom market convey the kinds of work Cambodians do, and the insightful notes of how living in between two countries could be varied depending on the limited choices that they could make. Here are the examples of how they live in-between two countries:

Dear (pseudonym, a shoe seller, female, 42) from Sisophon, Banteay Meanchey, migrated to Chong Chom with her daughter in 2011 because she wanted to try working in Thailand. We talked about daily routine and monthly expenses that they have pay for work permits, immigration stamps, shop rental, apartment rental, etc. I asked whether their income is enough for a living. She said that "even if it's not, I'll have to do it" (*mai por kor tong por*). She mentioned how the market has had fewer visitors over the past two years. She used to stay days and nights in her unit in the market because many merchants did the same thing. But people started to move out, and it became too quiet at night. She decided to move and stay in apartments on the other side of the market. She planned to go back home in the next few years as she felt that she could not make much money at the market and complained that "living here I have to pay for everything" (*yoo tee nee tong jaai took yang*).

Ten (pseudonym, a cloth seller, male, 20): "I rent a room in the apartments across the street (of Chong Chom market) living with my wife and my newborn child. I use a border pass to apply for a work permit. So, I usually drive my motorcycle to the checkpoint to get departure-arrival stamps once a week. It costs 50 baht for border pass and 100 baht for motorcycle (for every two weeks)." I try not to forget to go to the checkpoint; otherwise, I will need to pay a lot more.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Interviewed at Chong Chom market on August 19, 2018

Ranee (pseudonym, a jeans seller, female, 27): “I live in O’Smach. Every day I drive my moto to the market in the morning. I normally go back to O’Smach to pick up my kids who study in O’smach to have lunch together. My kids don’t have class in the afternoon. So they come with me to the market and stay with me until the market closes before driving back home in the evening.”¹⁸⁶

These stories represent different choices of living, whether they choose to live on the Thai or Cambodian side, crossing the border, and going to the checkpoint is still a mandatory task for them in order to live and work legally in Chong Chom. Their lived experiences also get more complicated and center the practices of in-betweenness through family matters as children in the market need proper education as well.



Figure 41: A photo of me interviewing one of the Cambodian merchants in Chong Chom market taken by my Cambodian assistant (August 2018)

Education as the practice of in-betweenness

I learned about how kids in the market are usually sent to schools, either public school or private schools in O’Smach and these students have to travel back and forth between two countries every day¹⁸⁷ from my informants and my relatives. They also run their shop in the market three days a week.¹⁸⁸ At the border school on the Cambodian side, I contacted and set up a meeting with the school owner, Udom (pseudonym, male, 33), the owner of a private school in O’Smach, and got permission to visit the school with him from the market where students would go back and forth between their schools, homes, and the market. This school has been owned by a former merchant in Chong Chom market for five years. Since he had experienced in teaching

¹⁸⁶ Interviewed at Chong Chom market on August 29, 2018

¹⁸⁷ There are also students whose parents decide to have them attend Thai schools such as Ban Dan School or Kap Cheong Mittraphap School in Kapcheong, Surin Province.

¹⁸⁸ There are special market (Market Fair) adding up to Chong Chom market for Thai merchants who would rotate from different places to set temporary vendors and sell their goods in front or at the back of the market every Wednesday and weekends called ‘ตลาดนัด’ (*Talad Nat*)

from Battambang and Siem Reap before moving to O'Smach, he started with group tutoring while running a shop in the market. He decided to open this school in 2016 because his business did not go well, and he was told to stop tutoring in the market by the Thai authorities. Hence, he found the opportunity to provide education services for children in Chong Chom in a more formal way on the Cambodian side.

My visit was set up to meet Udom at the Chong Chom market at noon, as the school routine is to take students to have lunch with their parents at the market and bring them back to school in the afternoon. I spent time observing their classes, which offer English and Khmer language for kindergarten, elementary, and adult classes for both part-time¹⁸⁹ and full time. Udom founded this school by renting the property owned by a person who lives in Siem Reap. It is an old medium-side wooden building and the classrooms are separated by wooden board and galvanized iron sheets with an indoor spacious area for meeting and school activities, such as singing and dancing at the end of the day. Each class has up to ten students. The higher grades tend to have fewer students, which leads to a shared classroom and teachers. With this condition, he aimed to expand his school area to the location nearby to build more classrooms and offer Chinese and Thai languages for students if possible.¹⁹⁰ This school runs as three-month semesters with formal exam format (midterms and finals). There is no long break like public schools as his school business needs to keep running for him to make a living, and parents are likely to rely on a private school in terms of trust in services as he is well-known in the market and also fewer student numbers comparing to public school. His vision in providing education for children at the border is impressive. He would go to Siem Reap for textbook purchases, and student uniforms are ordered from Phnom Pehn. Although it is not required, some students may wear a uniform of public school to attend his school as well.

¹⁸⁹ Some students also attend the public school in O'Smach and take additional class at Udom's school

¹⁹⁰ As of May 2020, his school was finally relocated to a more spacious area nearby the old location.

Besides affordable tuition fees, Udom also provides paid transportation services for students whose parents work in the market. With one school van, teachers and Udom himself would take turns picking up and sending students to their parents' units during the day, starting from 7 a.m., lunchtime, and 5 p.m. when day-time classes end. As I did travel from the market to school, it only takes less than ten minutes for one trip. However, it took a bit longer to cross with me as I was not a frequent border crosser and had to go through the immigration process and get a stamp on my border pass for both directions. On the way back to Chong Chom, he told me that if I intended to cross the border often, within the span of 14-day visa-free, I do not necessarily have to get stamped every day. With curiosity, I asked the authorities why and how Cambodians and Thais could travel without getting stamps every day until the current stamps expire. Several officials respond to me that it is because of the limited blank pages in the Border Pass. If the Border Pass holders get stamped every day, the document would be at full capacity in a short period. It would have added more cost for frequent crossers to renew their travel documents besides the costs of work permits and vehicles. Not to mention the incentive that it becomes unavoidable to pay for this act of convenience without any power to negotiate to not paying for it. This issue is a similar problem to the story in the previous chapter that Cambodian migrant workers in Surin had to face when renewing their stay permit at the immigration checkpoint.



Figure 42: Left - A school van dropped me off at the checkpoint to get an immigration stamp while they were heading to the market ; Right - Students gathering after classes ended (08/09/2018)

Another interesting point is that kids are exempted from travel document checks during their daily commuting routine.¹⁹¹ The immigration authorities acknowledge their service but would inspect Udom's documents from time to time. Due to the adolescent protection code, I did not have a chance to interview young students who I was with in the van and played with at the school. I asked their teachers instead of students' perception of living in-between. Do they know that they have been traveling between two countries several times every day? Teachers believe that students do not know and have the idea of national territory yet. However, it is difficult to tell which country they are living in. The most common answer would be Cambodia. It is also interesting that many students would come to try to speak Thai with me as they learned from living in the market, interacting with Thai customers, and consuming Thai media through television and mobile phone. During my visits, it was close to the exam period, so I got invited to their semester closing party; I joined them for a special lunch and played games with students. An unexpected result of visiting this school was that this bond created a comfortable atmosphere for interview sessions at the market, since students remembered me from my school visits. Their parents were at ease when their kids were around. They felt more comfortable sharing their stories with my interlocutor and me. Meanwhile, Cambodian students who attend Thai schools are likely to have a conflicting idea of identity. The fact that their parents are Cambodians who live in the Thai border but study in the Thai schools with Thai language. They would innocently think that they are Thai, yet their parents speak Khmer to them. For example, Phon's determination to proceed with the Thai citizenship application for his children who study at Ban Dan school.

¹⁹¹ They may be asked for birth certificate occasionally.

Repetitive Circulation: On the move with vans and motorcycles

Public vs. Private Van Services

This section focuses on the embodied movements of myself as the ethnographer who participated in the commuting routines of people who live in the border community of Chong Chom – O'Smach. Noting that I hold Thai citizenship led to incomparable experiences from Cambodian passengers. Yet, I valued and counted my routines of using public transportation, traveling and commuting around the field site to observe and interact with fellow passengers and the drivers who ride the public vans and motorcycle taxi services (*motorcy rapjang* – literal meaning: motorcycle for hire) on their daily basis and as part of my participant-observation as well.

Part of my fieldwork routine is commuting to Chong Chom from Prasat district where my home is. Prasat is situated on the halfway between Muang Surin (central district) and Kapcheong. I normally take public vans to Chong Chom and motorcycles between the market and checkpoint except any appointments outside of the route of public transportation. Public vans run every 15-20 minutes from Surin through Prasat, Kapcheong (where the bus station has been halted for many years due to the lack of construction funding for a new bus station), Chong Chom market, to a final stop at Chong Chom checkpoint. The vans would stop any spot the passengers ask for. It takes 70 – 80 minutes for one-way trip. At first, I did not expect to learn anything from commuting since my intention was simply to arrive my field site. However, the more I took the vans, the more I saw the dynamics of people's mobility in the distance between central district and the border area of Surin Province. Most vans I took in the different time schedules were always full, especially in the morning and the late afternoon, like rush hour in metropolitan area, to the point that I had to stand in the middle of the van.¹⁹² I also learned a bit

¹⁹² It happened during the beginning of my fieldwork and suddenly the province and the police became actively enforced the safety rule that the vans must not exceed passenger capacity.

about the drivers. For one, driving was a second job to being a Border Police officer. This illustrates further the entanglements of state/public/private and state and private enterprise. There are other public transportation services such as local buses and ‘*song thaew*’ (two-row seat buses). Van service has been the most popular choice since it is the only transportation service that reaches the checkpoint. The van would stop right in front of the immigration station within a minute walk before it makes a U-turn to park for 30 minutes at its station on the other side of the road and in queue for following rounds of service to Muang Surin.



Figure 43: Left – People selling foods at Prasat bus station before the van leaving to Chong Chom (08/29/2018)
Right - Me standing in the middle of the van on the way back home (06/05/2018)

The passengers are varied; namely students who study in Muang Surin, local residents who travel for multiple purposes such as hospital visits, Thai gamblers and Cambodians who travel to the checkpoint for immigration procedure and crossing the border for casinos or going back home in Cambodia. A rare early morning schedule with a rare front seat with the driver led me to a conversation with Petch (pseudonym, a van driver) as I was curious of many things I observed from several trips with a van service. I did not intend to interview him at first, but he was surprised by the questions I asked, and I ended up introducing myself as a researcher. Here is a partial conversation I had with Petch:

Me: Does the border patrol police (BPP) come to inspect the van passengers every morning at Prasat bus station (situated next to the district fresh market)

Petch: Yes. The BPP will come around 4–7 a.m. to inspect all the public bus and van at the terminal.

Me: I see, this is the first time I have seen the inspection because I never take a van this early.

Petch: How did you know it was the BPP?

Me: I saw a polo shirt they were wearing had an embroidered logo of BPP

Petch: This is a very Western style of observation to get this detail while observing the van routine.

I was surprised by his comment, so I introduced myself as a researcher and told him that is why I tend to look for every tiny details. As the van takes forty minutes from Prasat to Chong Chom, Petch shared his personal story how he became a van driver and how this van route operates.

Me: When did this van route start operating?

Petch: It started since the war ended in 1999. There is one company won the bidding from Department of Land Transport and receive a long-term concession to run the van services on this route. However, not all the vans owned by the company. In fact, the company has rent out the vans to individuals. The drivers' income thus come from fares paid by passengers of each trip they ride every day after deducting the payment installation and maintenance (฿40,000 per month). That is why sometimes the van had more passengers exceeding its capacity of thirteen passengers per trip to earn more money each trip.

Me: How many rounds you drive per day?

Petch: For this route I drive for two rounds a day, but I also have another van to drive between Surin and Khorat. So, I drive another round trip for another company.

Me: Who are the most frequent passengers of this route?

Petch: Cambodian workers! If there are no migrant workers, this route might not be successful like this from the beginning. The fare is cheaper comparing to other route with the same distance to attract more passengers who may take local buses as an alternative. And Prasat is the main destination to have passengers get on and get off.

Me: How have the authorities dealt with Cambodian passengers? Is there any problem you witnessed as the van driver?

Petch: As I told you, the BPP and the immigration officers may inspect the vans altogether at the bus station. There are also two traffic checkpoints along the way from Prasat to Chong Chom. First stop, the vans would be inspected by the BPP and the second by the soldiers assigned by Suranaree Command, Surin Division. It could turn to a trouble if the soldiers found illegal passengers that passed the first checkpoint without any proper punishment.

Me: Have you ever drive across the border to Cambodia?

Petch: No, there is no cross-country public transport services. Passengers need to get off at the checkpoint and change to different vehicles on the other sides. Same rule for both countries.

Indeed, this is what I witnessed myself for countless rides with the van services. The majority is Cambodians who are migrant workers. If there are no Cambodian passengers, the business would not survive. It is their route for work and immigration matters. As I previously explain, Chong Chom checkpoint became a mandate for every migrant worker to apply or renew their work/stay permits without the need of leaving the country. Chong Chom is also a convenient route for Cambodians who would go home with small luggage and packed boxes. There were not many interactions among the passengers as they would use mobile phones to watch video clips or to make phone or video calls.

However, there was another type of passengers who would go to Chong Chom for gambling at the border casinos right next to the checkpoint on the Cambodian side. During the multiple trips I was in, there were small talks in Thai, Khmer Surin, and Lao languages, depending on how many language skills of the drivers had. It was quite interesting to hear the driver switch the language simultaneously to talk different passengers at the same time. Even with the different timing and direction, a main topic I could hear about was the gambling issue. I sometimes had informal conversations with the gamblers about how it went in the casinos or how much money they lost or gained, and why they chose to do gambling, in exchange for my research story or what I bought from the market. Surprisingly, there are many retired people who did not know what to do and felt bored staying at home. Gambling became their excitement and alternative way of gaining some money. They also made friends with other gamblers who they would meet every time they were at casinos. It was a visible pattern of conversation that could happen if I or any other person sat next right to the gamblers. The conversation topics could get riskier, more serious, more of gossip stories about debts and other gamblers when there were two passengers who knew each other, in addition to the drivers who were mostly familiar with their frequent passengers. The gamblers who take the public van service were mostly individual local Surin residents.

Another pattern of crossing the border for Thai gamblers was private/chartered van services that are likely to get inspected by the authorities since these vans earn a license for personal usage. Without a chance to conduct any formal interview with a casino-related agent due to ethical and safety reasons, I learned about casinos and gambler routines from several other informants when our conversation would organically lead to the topic of border casinos. A private van service is an effort from the casino businessmen to lure Thai gamblers from inner Surin and other provinces to visit their casinos. The van owners became a middleperson themselves or team up with other middlepersons called “*Mae Tour*” (a tour leader) to recruit (*ha khon ma khuen* tour) a group of gamblers by providing van services for those who want to visit casinos. They would receive commission fees from the casinos for themselves and must distribute 200 – 300 Baht a day to their passengers as a small pocket money to spend in the casinos. Some used to be gamblers themselves and later became the drivers to earn less risky, yet grey, money from the casinos. Their routine is to deliver the gamblers at the checkpoint around noon. They would find spots for parking not far away and return to the checkpoint at the end of the day around 4-5 p.m. During this time, there would be so many gamblers walking back from casinos and crossing the border. Some of them are familiar with the officers. They would have casual conversation or even play with Zaa, a soldier dog, while waiting for their vans to go back to their provinces at the integral checkpoint spot. This pattern is considered a day trip.



Figure 44: a photo of many private vans waiting for their clients in the rainy afternoon taken from public van station (09/05/2018)

“*Mae tour*” or the van drivers would rotationally take their clients to different casinos along the border at Chong Chom (Surin), Chong Saitaku (Buriram), and Chong Sa-ngam (Sisaket). There are also long-stay gamblers who would rent the room in casinos or resorts on the Thai side.

In addition, another type of chartered/rental van services could be found on both Thai and Cambodian sides. For the Cambodian side, there is rental van service for tourism purposes. Tourists can hire the van to travel to inner provinces of Cambodia such as Siem Reap. There is also a public van service to Phnom Penh, but the schedule is inconsistent due to the low demand for this route. However, I met several van drivers who would wait in front of immigration checkpoints on both sides asking the crossers if they would need van or car rental service to travel any city in Cambodia. For the Thai side, there are thirty standby vans waiting for Cambodian passengers who would like to rent the whole van for any purpose. This service was initiated by the Border Commission and hospitals in Surin Province to provide transport service for Cambodian patients who cross the border for medical treatment. These vans have hospital stickers to facilitate their trip to the passengers' choice of hospitals with day rate (whole van for 1,500 Baht per day). Since the ASEAN Free Movement agreement was implemented in the early 2016, private Cambodian vehicles with an international driving license and car insurance can cross the border to drive in Thailand and vice versa. The system of vehicle transferring has shrunk and caused disruption on their service as they got easily beaten by the decreasing demand for Thai vans. Cambodians would rather drive their own cars from Cambodia to the hospitals in Thailand or hired illegal chartered vans from Cambodia that is cheaper than their services with individual pay rate (300-400 Baht per person) unlike a Thai service.¹⁹³



Figure 4245: Private van services on Thai side receiving Cambodian customers to visit a hospital in Surin (09/03/ 2018)

¹⁹³ The passengers would walk across the checkpoint to get in the hired van in order to avoid the prohibition of public van services across the country. They would act like this is a private car that all passengers are from the same family.

Motorcy Rapjang: An occupation for the locals of Chong Chom

Besides van services, “motorcy rapjang” (มอเตอร์ไซค์รับจ้าง - Motorcycle taxi service) was another service I used the most during my research at Chong Chom. I would take a motorcycle to the checkpoint to take a van to go back home because there is no permanent stop at the market for me to wait properly. A group of motorcycle taxi drivers at Chong Chom comprises the members of Tambon Ban Dan from several villagers who applied through “*Kamnan* (กำนัน),” a sub-district leader. From the interview with Kamnan, I learned about how the market got established and how the villagers participated in the border economy since the late Cambodian civil war period by joining a group of Motorcy Rabjang to give a ride to passengers from Chong Chom checkpoint to any short or longer destination, such as parking lot near the checkpoint, Chong Chom market on both sides of the road, and inner towns such as Kapcheong and Prasat. I learned not only their daily routine of taxi service, but also the history they have lived in this area before the war started, their hardship they faced during the wartime (see Chapters 1 and 2) for the drivers who are in their 60s, and their current struggles of how the border regulations have changed. Their job is to deliver the passengers to given destinations. They had to wake up early every day to get in a queue at their checkpoint to be assigned where they would be stationed and standing by for the service. Several motorcy rabjang drivers told me that their income recently dropped from 800-900 Baht to 300-400 Baht a day because Cambodians are allowed to drive their vehicles with international driving license to enter Thai side. It is the same problem with the van service. The ways they could earn more is to have customers for long-distance trips or monthly payments from Cambodian students who study at Ban Dan school and Kapcheong Mittraphap School. Some of them has to do more than taxi service and rice farming such as mushroom foraging and handmade goods for sale.

There are contradictory comments and perceptions from the voices of motorcy rabjang drivers toward Cambodians in Chong Chom, e.g.:

“I think the market already belongs to Cambodia because most of the merchants are Cambodians”

“Since they can drive their own motorcycle to the market, my income dropped drastically”

“I knew lots of merchants here, they invited me to visit their houses on Cambodian side for wedding ceremonies”

“We do not associate with Cambodians much, but we know each other”

These opinions from Thai border dwellers reflect the complex relations between Thais and Cambodians politically and economically. Their status and nationality define what the benefits are and what occupation they could take, and how they could move around the border checkpoint based on the agreement between state authorities at the local and national levels. Economic disparities are more nuanced than identifying what country is richer or poorer. This chapter underlines the dynamics of postwar border reality where people are struggling one way or another. With the COVID situation that shut the checkpoint for months, I could not imagine how much people at Chong Chom would suffer from this crisis.



Figure 46: Left - Motorcycle Taxi Station at Chong Chom checkpoint (09/05/2018); Right - Me taking the motorcy rabjang to Chong Chom market stopping at the inspection point operated by Suranaree Command (06/17/2018)

Conclusion

According to Nail (2016), circulation is another consequence of border existence that defines the social process of division that can be understood by circulation as it is always in between and in motion. The change in vehicle regulation is an example of how circulation is a

continually changing process (7). Thai transport services were the group that has suffered the most from the recent change through the ASEAN Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Cross-Border Transport of Passengers by Road Vehicles.¹⁹⁴ Cambodians were also not fully advantaged either, due to the ambiguity and complexity of immigration procedures. Its arbitrary fashion of bordering processes that only stress on migrant workers transformed the way they live and move across the border daily or weekly. Thai gamblers have played a major part in creating the regular flows across the border, just as the Cambodian merchants. As Kalir and Sur (2012) write about the border casino:

Their creation – not as exceptions or surreptitious hideaways but as everyday spaces – is predicated on political negotiations for which the state is one partner among others, resulting in state agents being routinely and profitably embedded in wide-ranging networks of informal transnational brokerage. States are often important partners in these networks and active players in the ensuing politics of licitness. (19)

Regarding the human flows and mobility controls, the authorities have been focusing on policing and checking documents, but not safety of passengers; not wearing a helmet or not having a seat in a van are fine. Petch's story on repetitive inspection and Udom's school operation echo how ambiguous the bordering practices are. The flows of gamblers in the dim interface between legality (immigration regulation) and illegality (casinos) at Chong Chom checkpoint has sustained the regime of permissiveness where it generates zone of licitness (Kalir and Sur 2012). In other words, this condition thus reveals the real-life stakes that state authorities may not be willing for its existence. However, it is clear that the casino business is one of the major incentives that keep the border economy and the community alive. It is such an ironic claim that a few male informants even called Chong Chom "*Chong Thang Haeng Kwam Sook*" (ช่องทางแห่งความสุข) – Pathway to happiness because of the casino business.

¹⁹⁴ <http://agreement.asean.org/media/download/20171208153146.pdf>

Being entitled to Thai and Cambodian citizenship could mean different benefits and treatment you would receive from the government. The categories define what migrants are expected to be treated, welcomed, or rejected to work in the host country. The actual practices prove Rajaram and Grundy-Warr's (2007, xxii) point on the politics over the identification document stating that “such identification allows for the questioning of the bordering practices of the norm.” Ultimately, the determination of the migrants depends on which jurisdiction is invoked, by which authority, and at what circumstance of the studied border. During my first encounters with the Cambodian merchants in the market, some of them were skeptical of my request for research interviews. They refused to talk to me until my Cambodian interlocutor helped connect the conversations, and we came to trust each other. Their frightened and ambiguous reactions provoked me to rethink of the concept of illegality. Those fears may indeed link to illegal activities (Donnan and Wilson 2012). Yet, it has also been heightened by the acts of immigration practices that seek to identify and punish undocumented migrants. The repetitiveness in discriminatory tones and actions toward migrants indeed has an impact on the level of fear and precarity in the transborder life of Cambodians in Surin Province. The merchants themselves have always been cautious because of the frequent, spontaneous inspections by the integrated patrol team from Kap Cheong district. They may close their shops and hide from the authorities.

Chapter 6: Strategies of Survival: War Remnant, Mushroom, and Timber Hunting in Huay Tabtan – Huay Samrarn Sanctuary

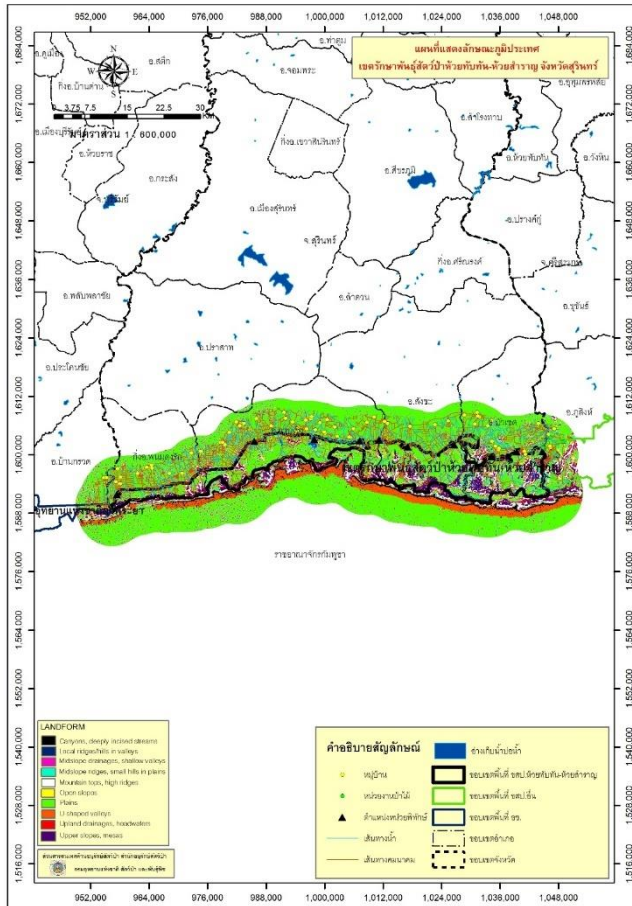


Figure 47: Landform Map produced by Royal Forest Department of Thailand (09/16/2016) <http://www.dnp.go.th>

Throughout chapters 1 - 5, I explore the bordering practices and processes that led to the emergence of national boundaries in the Dangrek range between Thailand and Cambodia, including armed conflicts within and between countries, humanitarian projects, migration, displacement, and forced repatriation, and practices of legal and extra-legal economic activities. This chapter is a final attempt to uncover what remains concealed in Phnom Dangrek. I explore the changing relations between the local community and the environment. I particularly look at Huay Tabtan – Huay Samrarn Sanctuary, whose mountainous

landscape was once the hidden war zone of the Cambodian civil war and also where Chong Chom – O’Smach checkpoint is located in the middle of the mountain. The secretive support of the Thai Armed Force to the Cambodian resistance parties in confronting the Vietnamese and Cambodian troops in the Dangrek ranges has left not only the silenced past that may be visible in the landscape as discussed on Chapter 2, but also the material remnants of war that can seriously harm all beings if they explode. In other words, I focus on the changing relations between the local community and nature due to the past war.

Meetings with the staff of a demining project and mushroom foragers near Chong Chom inspired me to further explore this border area beyond the post-war immigration controls and border market. Even though I did not have a chance to go inside the sanctuary due to safety reasons, I conducted observation of and conversation about intimate practices within the forest. I found that talking to people who work and live with the forest could share the war history as vividly as those who experienced the war themselves. For the locals who have lived through changes caused by political movements and conflicts, forests became a mythical place. The announcement of wildlife sanctuary turns the landscape to a sink for the past, somewhere in which to leave the war history silenced and forbidden. Discourse of environmental protection and natural resource management renders human encroachment in the revered forest areas illegal. Thus, I view the forest landscape and nonhuman entities as ways of understanding the border dweller's memory and forgetting. I highlight people's interaction with nature and their participation in the bordering and un-bordering processes through multilayered meanings of Phnom Dangrek mountains

Overall, this chapter delves into multitudes of human mobilities by considering a geographical location and its history of Phnom Dangrek on how environmental resources had been integrated into global trade flows since the colonial subjugation and the Cold War. The shifts of human mobilities throughout history transformed the ways people interacted with and exploited nature (Pye 2012). I explore the nonhuman agencies as the manifest of the military involvement back and forth between the past and the present. First, "*Huay Tabtan and Huay Samrarn Wildlife Sanctuary*" as the state declaration of human-nature separation besides its location where the borderlines have been active since the Franco-Thai Treaties (see Chapter 1). Second, "*Landmines*" – I trace the demining project after the end of Cambodian civil war in Oddar Meanchey Province, Cambodia, that the Thai military cooperates with the Thai Civilian Deminer Association (TDA) and foreign sponsors. Third, "*Mushroom and other Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs)*" – the interaction between mushroom foragers, forests, the past war,

and the soldiers turned another evidence of how the military knows well about the sanctuary area along the border. Lastly, “*Timber*” – the timber industry has been deep-rooted in Thailand since the close connection with the British colonial logging industry. The Thai state and military have been involved with and dominated the field until the logging trade ban in the 1990s when Thai companies had sought to do business with the Cambodian resistance parties and publicly with the Cambodian government since the general election in 1991. The problem of timber smuggling in the 2010s due to the demand from China thus indirectly relates to the past war. The threat to the forest involving the military task in protecting the forest became more and more legitimate while there is no public debate on how the military has taken the advantage from this claim to limit the access to the natural resources.

The Creation of Huay Tabtan – Huay Samrarn Sanctuary

To begin with the first nonhuman entity, I ask: how has the wildlife sanctuary transformed the damaged forest landscape from the past war? The emergence of Huay Tabtan – Huay Samrarn Sanctuary in Surin Province implies the spatial designation by the Thai authorities in accordance with its provincial boundary. Instead of using the existing Thai name “Phanom Dongrak” for the forest reservation establishment along the Thai-Cambodian border, they named the wildlife sanctuary¹⁹⁵ “*Huay Tabtan – Huay Samrarn wildlife sanctuary.*” Huay (ห้วย) means creek. Huay Tabtan and Huay Samrarn are the creeks where the headstreams located in Phnom Dangrek mountain that flow upward to the inner area of Surin Province. It was established by virtue of the Royal Ordinance Prescribing Forest Areas of Kapcheong, Sangkha, and Buachet Districts B.E. 2538 (1995),¹⁹⁶ which was three years after the

¹⁹⁵ an appointed reservation zone that have smaller scale than the National Park

¹⁹⁶ The full title of this Royal Ordinance is “The Royal Ordinance Prescribing the forest areas of Pa Thung Mon, Pa Bak Dai, Pa Ta Bao, Left side of Pa Huay Tabtan and Pa Huay Samrarn in the areas of Tambon Kapcheong, Tambon Khok Takhien, Tambon Takhien, Tambon Dan, Tambon Nang Mut, Tambon Ta Miang of Ampheo Kapcheong; Tambon Tatum, Tambon Thepraksa of Ampheo Sangkha; and Tambon A-Phon, Tambon Jaras of Ampheo Buachet of Surin Province to be Wild Animal Reservation Area B.E.2538” (1995). Unofficial translation by me.

announcement of the Wild Animal Reservation and Protection Act, B.E. 2535 (1992).¹⁹⁷ This Act replaced the Forest Act of B.E. 2484 (1941). The establishment occurred after her Royal Highness Queen Sirikit visited Buachet, Surin Province, in December 1993.¹⁹⁸ The Royal Forest Department acted upon the Queen's initiation to establish the sanctuary or wild animal reserved forests by announcing its status "Pa Triam Kan Sa Nguan" (literally, "prepared-to-be-reserve forest").¹⁹⁹ This area was deemed appropriate for the protection of wild animals and the prohibition of hunting because the forest was healthy and thriving.

The Thai government implemented the 1992 Wild Animal Reservation and Protection Act without mentioning the destruction caused by the war. Thus, it is an intriguing point to be highlighted here because the FUNCINPEC party still stationed its troops in O'Smach area at that time. The conflict with Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party was yet to get resolved until the late 1990s. In other words, it is essential to point out that the conservation act by Thailand was made not only during the transitional period of Cambodian politics after the general election in 1993 but also the political turmoil in Thailand after the Black May 1992 (*Phruetsapha Thamin*) student massacre. I argue that this was the crucial moment to understand the shifting relations between forest and humans through the emergence of forest conservation in Surin enacted by the Royal Development Projects of the Thai government.²⁰⁰ After all the Cambodian resistance parties were forced out of Thai territory, "no other person than the authorized officials or other officials on duty shall enter the wild animal reserved area unless permission has been obtained from the assigned authorized officials." This quote is from Section 37 of the Forest Act is not the

¹⁹⁷ http://web3.dnp.go.th/wildlifeweb/downloads/Unofficial_English_Translation.pdf

¹⁹⁸ the Royal Highness Queen Sirikit visited Surin Province on 27 December 1993. <http://www.rdpb.go.th/rdpb/visit.html>

¹⁹⁹ This status is prerequisite in preparation to be proclaimed as the wildlife sanctuary area. It aims to promote awareness among population who live near to not entering or encroaching the forest areas as it is deemed to be conserved by law.

²⁰⁰ The main website of Huay Tabtan – Huay Samrarn Sanctuary indicates the budget of the sanctuary was funded by the Royal Development Project.

only reason, people choose or choose not to get inside the forest. The other three nonhuman entities in the following parts are essential factors that not only impact how they move within the forest, but also how they remind of the past war and their intention to get in with the strategies of survival (Tsing 2015).

Landmines and the Thai Civilian Deminer Association (TDA)

The Northern Highlands of Cambodia in the border zone with Vietnam and Laos were destroyed by intense bombing from 1969-73 along the Ho Chi Minh trail during the American War in Vietnam. The Cambodian-Thai border side was not affected by this first wave of the bombing. It was not until the Cambodian civil war moved to the Thai border, and particularly during the K5 plan in the mid-1980s, that the landmines were planted in the area. Besides the guerilla movements and the Thai soldiers, the local Thais were warned not to go inside. These mines were hard to detect in the jungle. Accordingly, the way people collectively perceived hazardous artifacts in the forest was different from people in Cambodia. The reported cases of mine explosions are a relatively small number comparing with the cases in Cambodia.

A sign of Thai Civilian Deminer Association (TDA) always drew my attention every time I traveled to the Chong Chom checkpoint. So, I contacted a TDA project manager through my friend who used to coordinate with TDA and Japanese Embassy, which was a donor to the demining project in Surin Province. By the time I had an interview with Khun Sathit (pseudonym, male), one of the TDA volunteers, the project was about to be completed after four years of hazardous work and the end of funding. My father and I visited Khun Sathit at the TDA temporary office, an open pavilion hidden behind a three-way junction en route from Chong Chom market either to Chong Chom checkpoint or Sangkha District. We sat around the big table, with the map and final report shown on the side.

- Me: Could you tell me about the landmines in Surin area?
- Khun Sathit: The landmines in this area run along the border from UR to Trat. They were planted by all actors during the Cambodian civil war including Thailand, Cambodian resistance parties, and Vietnam. For example, Khmer Rouge started to plant the mines after the Vietnamese invasion. Phnom Dangrek contained the highest number of landmines in all the border regions.
- Me: How were landmines planted and hidden in the forest and for what purposes?
- Khun Sathit: Landmines were concealed on the ground and activated by wires. The intention was to stop the Vietnamese soldiers from crossing into Thailand's territory.
- Me: How was TDA established and what is TDA's mission?
- Khun Sathit: TDA was established in 2000 as a civilian association to support the Thai Army's Thailand Mine Action Center (TMAC)²⁰¹ in detecting active landmines. We founded this association because Chuan Leekphai Administration ratified the Ottawa Convention with the United Nations in 1997²⁰². With the financial support from foreign donors such as Japanese Government through Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF), we are able to carry the operation for over a decade.
- TDA's mission is to search for all remaining landmines. We started almost twenty years ago. Our task is only to detect and locate where the landmines are and to cooperate with TMAC in clearance operation.
- Me: What about your current project that is about to end soon?
- Khun Sathit: This project is called "Integrated Landmine Clearance to Promote Cross-Border Economy (in ASEAN Countries) Lesson Learned from Thailand" (ICEA), and its purpose is to clear landmines in border areas for economic promotion in Surin Province to return safe areas to local people and authorities for public utilization.

Then he turned around to the report presentation on the side of the table and gave one copy to me and continued to talk about the project.

There was 16 personnel for two teams that collaborated with the trained soldiers from TMAC. We have completed detection and clearance except for the sensitive zone near the borderlines, where Cambodia does not wish to let TMAC operate because it has not been demarcated yet. You may have heard about multiple relocations of border mark in this area. The level of distrust and suspicion is persistent.

- Me: Did you have a chance to meet with any mushroom or forest product collectors during the operation in the forest?
- Khun Sathit: Of course, I often met foragers while working on the mission. Even though there were hazard symbols shown in the operating zone, I still had to inform them to stay away from the indicated area. Some foragers did not believe me because they used to walk through a

²⁰¹ TMAC has 4 regional operations subordinate Humanitarian Mine Action Units (HMAU). For southern Isaan region, Demining project is under the 3rd HMAU (หน่วยปฏิบัติการทุ่นระเบิดด้านมนุษยธรรมที่ 3)

²⁰² Full name: The Ottawa Convention on the prohibition of the use stockpiling production and transfer of anti-personnel mines

certain area without any explosion happened. They thought it would be okay to go as usual, but then TDA was able to detect the mines later. It was difficult to ask for cooperation with the foragers sometimes.

At the beginning of the war, many locals would get afraid and stop going into the forest, but later on they started to get into the forest again. They learned to avoid dangerous areas from the patrols. The problem was mostly with people who came from other provinces and were not familiar with the area. Even with the warning from the locals telling that certain spots might be dangerous, they could interpret that the locals just want to reserve the area for themselves or believe that mines are already old and ineffective.

Khun Sathit also gave me a final report of the project providing details of the program from the beginning. During this mission, TDA collected data from community surveys and meetings with the park rangers of Huay Tabtan – Huay Samrarn Sanctuary and HMAU 3 (TMAC regional unit) personnel who worked in the areas before this project. As the demining operation was close to the borderlines, there is a part that remains unsearched due to the border dispute problem, and it is terrifying to see how dangerous it was outside the road to the checkpoint when looking at the quiet thick forest with the signs “do not enter” and “hazardous zone.”



Figure 258: A scanned image from Thai Civilian Deminer Association (TDA) report of ICEA Chong Chom Project (2018)

Eventually, TDA and HMAU3 cleared 4,729,111 square meters in total. They removed approximately 9,954 units of landmines and Explosive Remnant of War (ERW) for disposal in the span of four operational years (2014 - 2018) with two demining projects, namely MRCT²⁰³ for Buachet District and ICEA for Kapcheong District of Surin Province. The reports published on the TDA website include countries of origin of the landmines, namely the USSR, China, Vietnam, and the USA. The most common type of landmines were anti-personnel mines from

²⁰³ The Implementation and Dissemination of the Experience of Minefield Releasing at Border Area with Cambodia in Surin Province, Thailand (MRCT)

the USSR.²⁰⁴ Although there is no evidence of direct involvement by the USSR, the K5 plan (1985-89) involved Vietnamese troops who were supported by the Soviet Union.

After the brief interview, I thanked him for sharing the insightful details of the demining operation that he has worked for almost two decades with several sponsorship and duration of the project. It was interesting to learn that there are civic volunteers who used to be in the military. TDA plays a crucial role in fund raising, communicating the donors through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and searching operation for demining projects. Demining is critical not only for human safety but also wild animals and environmental contamination by heavy metals deeply in the forest soil. With the total numbers of mines that have been demined at such a small scale, it is possible to imagine how many of the landmines were inside Phnom Dangrek that could not even be compared to the unexploded UXOs along the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos and Cambodia. The border persists as a force of uncertainty, prohibition, and tension between Thailand and Cambodia. Landmines became one of the most tangible obstacles that has a direct impact on people's mobility and safety besides political tension due to the unfinished border demarcation and the establishment of wildlife sanctuary that does not allow for the encroachment of non-authorized people.

Although TDA and TMAC continuously search for unexploded landmines, there are also newly wired mines that are planted for security purposes in sensitive areas such as near Prasat Tamuan and Prasat Ta Kwai in Phnom Dongrak district. These mines are mapped and recorded for border protection in a location that has no human guards. Even if there are the soldiers patrolling in the planted area, as they would know where to walk safely, an explosion can happen accidentally by broken branches falling from the big trees. Otherwise, it could be exploded by the border forest encroachers.

²⁰⁴ The models founded in Surin area comprise of Anti-tank mine (AT), Unexploded Explosive Ordnance (UXO), and Anti-personnel mine (AP). Data available at <http://www.tda.or.th/2018/2018/06/12/outputs-of-operations-supported-by-japan-asean-integration-fund-jaif/>

Mushroom Foraging

The unique characteristic of fungi in mushrooms produces countless mushrooms constantly throughout the rainy season, unlike other Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) that are difficult to find. These wild mushrooms sold in Chong Chom are mostly called by its colors i.e. “het khio – green mushroom” or “het daeng – red mushroom” (see Figure 49). The first time I saw it, I took a picture of mushrooms and shared it on social media. Many people were curious and seduced by its colorfulness and asked me whether these were edible mushrooms or not. My family reacted similarly to others who saw it online. They were in doubt as well. My sister told me to be aware of possible poisonous or contaminated mushrooms because of its fancy look. Meanwhile, my mom refused to cook it at first, but agreed to do so after my second attempt.



Figure 49: Baskets of various kinds of mushroom and wild fruits on the table from Huay Tabtan – Huay Sanctuary collected and sold by the villagers at Chong Chom Market. (08/28/2018)

During the first unplanned encounter with mushroom sellers in front of TDA Office, there were multiple conversations between the sellers and customers, including my father and I, everyone speaking to one another at the same time. I followed the flow of the conversation rather than asking targeted questions. My father, however, was direct:

“Aren’t you afraid of the mines at all?” My father asked.

“Yes, but I already get used to it, I know where to avoid the mines, the soldiers would tell me where there are the mushrooms. I even went to the patrol stations very close to the border”. One of the mushroom sellers replied.

They have done this for decades, yet not every local Surin person would be able to distinguish the edible or inedible ones or would know about the adventure of the long-time foragers in

Phnom Dangrek. In addition, since the foragers are also the sellers themselves, their lives are embedded in the market and the location nearby, where they interacted with multiple actors such as Cambodian mushroom sellers, van drivers, and Thai gamblers, deminers, and the soldiers patrolling in the forests. Their stories indeed portray the dynamics of border reality and its transition from the past war to the current border trade situation at Chong Chom.

Consequently, I decided to ask permission for interviews with a small number of sellers in two locations (TDA entrance and Chong Chom market) to examine another pattern of movement that connects human and nonhuman entities. Their strategies of mushroom searching are varied. Below are stories that offer nuanced aspects of entering the forests for mushrooms and other NTFPs foraging from the border dwellers who shared their experiences of in Surin Province with me.²⁰⁵

“I normally start to collect mushrooms a couple days after the first rain. More rain means more chance to get lots of mushrooms. I heard that a family of three collected mushrooms and earned ten thousand baht within three days of selling. For me, the highest I ever got was one thousand baht in one day. It is better than growing rice.”

“I get into the forest around four o’clock in the morning to search for mushroom. If you get in there late there would be no more mushroom, the soldiers’ chicken would destroy it all.”

“Because I did this for a long time, I learned to distinguish the edible and poisonous ones. I also eat the mushrooms I collected myself almost every day.”

“Mushrooms grow alongside the road not in the deep forests. You must not take its root/base to let them regrow again and again so that you can come back and collect more in a few days later repetitively throughout the rainy season”.

“Sometimes I walked across the district (Buachet to Phnom Dongrak) or even to the Cambodian village on the other side and had lunch with them. The soldiers knew that I was just a mushroom collector, they have never done anything to harm me”

Foraging skills include judging the right time to get the mushrooms starting from summer monsoon in April until the end of rainy season around October and at what time of the day that they could get the largest amount. They have learned to distinguish edible and poisonous ones.

²⁰⁵ Several interviews conducted at Chong Chom Market and in front of TDA Office (April 19, 2018, August 28, 2018, and September 4, 2019)

They have found their own ways of locating the mushrooms and the tactics to keep it growing in the spots they are familiar with the most, or they adventurously go further across the district or the border. Because wild mushrooms have gained popularity, there are more and more people travel to the border forest to search for mushrooms, as the earnings from selling these NTFPs are quite satisfying and complementary - or even better than - agricultural works. For example, growing rice takes a much longer time and make less profit than the cost of investment.

“I started collecting mushroom in the forest because the soldiers told me where it bloomed, they led us to those spots. I was not afraid of the mines. There was one time I even went to the spot where the soldiers found and was about to demine it.”

“In case of seeing the soldiers, I would try to avoid meeting them. Not because they would harm me but pretend not to see each other is better than confronting”

“It’s fun to walk through the forest to collect mushroom. Even though I am afraid of the bombs, I have never seen it and I have only met the soldiers both Thai and Khmer all the times.

“I usually go collecting mushroom by myself even if I would meet friends or people from the same villager, we would not for mushrooms together but rather take our own routes. We later meet at the market and sell together in the afternoon.”

“There are so many mushroom pickers these days, you could imagine a group of people who go to the (Buddhist) temple for “Thod Kathin” at the end of Buddhist Lent (more than a hundred attendants)²⁰⁶”

Both demining staff and foragers affirm the potential encounters with soldiers from both sides in the forest. Even though the soldiers noticed the foragers and gave the directions of where is safe to find the mushrooms, meeting with the authorities was not desirable. The foragers may enter the forest individually but are likely to meet acquaintances while searching for mushrooms during the peak hours. They also occasionally cross to socialize with the border dwellers on the Cambodian side.

Beyond their precautious foraging routine, to avoid active unexploded ordinance in the forest, one of the mushroom sellers also shared her experience during the Cambodian civil war. Like other border dwellers in Kap Cheong (see Chapters 2 and 3), the intense fights along the

²⁰⁶ The informant gave an analogy to explain the large number of people who get into the forest for mushroom foraging.

border also forced her family to temporarily move to the provided shelter. When in her own house, she was traumatized by bombing sounds and burglars at night. In order to survive, she had gone through various tactics of hiding from the “communists,” the unseen attackers in her memories. Collecting mushrooms thus could be seen as continuous survival strategies, both for making a living and acknowledging that there might be unexploded war remnants somewhere. They have been practicing foraging in the forest long enough to know where it is safe to walk. For instance, the interactions with the soldiers and deminers played an important part in ensuring their safety as they witnessed the procedure themselves. Yet they continue their foraging practice independently, the way it has been since the wartime, through the routes that they know are safe for finding the mushrooms and other NTFPs along the way.

Whether wild or commercially grown products, it is undeniable that mushrooms have been used as a basic ingredient for meals around the world. Anna Tsing (2015) mentions specifically the history of World War II, stating that “when Hiroshima was destroyed by an atomic bomb in 1945, it is said, the first living thing to emerge from the blasted landscape was a matsutake mushroom” (3). She argues that matsutake mushrooms show a kind of collaborative survival as a commodity for humans to exploit in the global political economy, from being foraged by the Lao and Cambodian refugees in the Northern hemisphere and shipped fresh to sell in Japan, where matsutake is sold at high prices due to its cultural value, an appreciable gift for families and colleagues. In other words, mushrooms help humans re-connect with the nature that allows us to explore the damaged landscape and “make a substantial contribution to livelihood wherever they are picked” as a collective strategy of surviving after traumatic war experience for those who are in precarious conditions (4). Similarly, the mushroom foragers in Phnom Dangrek found opportunities, besides rice farming, to earn additional income from selling mushrooms. The foragers are mostly peasants or the farmers who grow rice or other crops for a living. Their precarious condition from lacking economic capital or opportunities led them to solely rely on rice harvesting only once a year or daily low-paid jobs are undoubtedly not

enough for feeding the whole families. Reconnecting with the forest like it used to be before the war has fulfilled their basic needs – ingredients for meals and income earned from turning mushrooms into a commodity.

However, there is no systemically transnational trade for wild mushrooms from Phnom Dangrek except for occasional individual Cambodians who buy them for their own meals. It is interesting to learn that there are mushrooms brought from Cambodia to sell in Chong Chom market as well (See figure 50). They are mostly “*het pho* or *het thob* – Barometer Earthstar” which became popular in Thailand for *Kaeng Het Pho* (Het pho soup). With this high demand, the price has increased to at least three to four times higher than other wild mushrooms. There are also minor domestic trades by the van drivers who may buy from the foragers as they have known each other during the daytime while waiting for their “*luk tour*” gamblers at the selling spot in front of TDA office. These wild mushrooms are usually sold at the roof shacks along the side roads in neighboring provinces.²⁰⁷



Figure 50: Cambodian mushroom sellers selling “*Het Pho*” on the opposite side of Chong Chom market (08/28/2018)

The relationship between authorities and local villagers is somehow at odds. Even though the establishment of sanctuary means no trespassing the reserved forest. For the case of Surin Province, many informants shared their experiences of going inside the forest for non-timber forest products. Deminers, soldiers, border patrol police, and villagers themselves acknowledged their encounters in the woods, but not in confrontational ways. The deminer, Khun Sathit, insisted that back in the wartime, the villagers avoided getting into the forest because they were afraid of guerilla movements and landmines. They started to get in again during the near end of the war, even though there were mines left in the forest. Khun Sathit

²⁰⁷ Meanwhile, I also have seen the villagers in Sisaket Province trying to sell homegrown versions of straw mushrooms through its fungi as it gets more popular for those who are not the foragers or do not know how to distinguish edible and contaminated mushrooms as the appearance are almost the same.

thinks that the villagers are more knowledgeable of the forested mountains than the soldiers. They would not share their knowledge with the soldiers because they did not want authorities to control their movements over the mountains. There are old routes between two countries that have been used for generations. He believes that when people thought that they were more familiar with the mountain than soldiers, they have no fear in the mined areas.

In other words, the capacity of the human perception of animate beings and inanimate objects helps the foragers to be aware of their surroundings and know how to interact with the nonhuman entities, such as where to find mushrooms or where to avoid hazardous zones (Ingold 1993). For instance, in villagers' stories about secret encounters with Vietnamese soldiers, it is clear that some of the villagers never stop foraging in Phnom Dangrek, even during periods of intense fighting (see Chapter 2). Their foraging practices indicate the exception for Thai border dwellers/foragers who do no harm to the forest. They may have traveled across the borderlines to visit the Cambodian border village for a break. It reiterates the patterns of other Thai border crossers who would travel to the checkpoint but have no intention to travel further inside Cambodia. This practice could be seen as a remaining local connection across national boundaries besides the visits for other occasions such as wedding ceremonies or making merits in the Buddhist tradition. The authorities from both sides are likely to be able to differentiate the forest product foragers and the timber smugglers. It is the latter that they need to keep an eye on, since the timber exports were legally banned in 2002.

Logging Business and Timber Smuggling

The last nonhuman entity is "Timber," another commodity for human profits. The issue of illegal logging was addressed almost every time I talked to the local authorities. They expressed their concerns of unlawful logging in Huay Tabtan – Huay Samrarn and the greater Phnom Dangrek region. Many Thai informants would tell me when talking about illegal logging. "Cambodia has already run out of trees." "On the Cambodian side, Phnom Dangrek was all

deforested.” “If you look at the mountains on the Cambodian side, most of the trees are gone.” These comments lead me to search for the root causes of deforestation in Phnom Dangrek on the Cambodian side and illegal logging on the Thai side. In this section, I delve into the history of the logging business as the result of colonial capitalism and war economy to demonstrate the shifts from legal timber concession and cross-border timber trade permission to the and illegal logging business of “*Phayung - Rosewood*” due to the logging bans in the 1990s and the emerging timber demands from China since the early 2010s. This finding leads to the ongoing political issue of authoritarianism in Thailand after the 2014 coup/ASEAN integration in 2015. Linking back to the forest preservation projects and policies, timber smuggling is the other side of the same coin that needs attention to the political agents who have involved in the realms of forest/wildlife sanctuary and land redistribution for those who lived reservation areas.

Oliver Pye (2005a) studies Thailand’s forestry affairs by elaborating on three essential aspects of state environmental projects in Thailand. First, the role of the Royal Forest Department (RFD) has been weak from the beginning. It was established by the British conservator and dominated by the Europeans due to the economic integration of Siam into the colonial empires in the late nineteenth century to focus on Teak timber trade in Northern Thailand. Second, policies on national park conservation and wildlife sanctuary during the Cold War were developed by a network of interest groups namely state agents, military, and the private, what Pye (2005a, 325) calls “a tripod structure of corporate forestry.” Third, these sectors have benefited from logging since the Cold War period through the expansion of the paper industry.

The Royal Forest Department of Thailand (RFD) was established during the colonial era to control logging rather than protect the forest. It was founded by the former Deputy Conservator of Forests in Burma, Herbert Slade, in 1896. Thus most staff of RFD were European or British-trained who were hired as the revenue collector and the manager/distributor of “*Sak*

(สั้น) -Teak” concessions and trades with the British Teak companies in the Northern Siam (Lanna). It was not until 1952 when the British firms were replaced by state-run enterprises²⁰⁸ (Pye 2005a, 318–20, 323). Meanwhile, there was no clear evidence of logging business in Phnom Dangrek but rather as the pathway for timber transportation from Tonle Sap to Khorat Plateau (see Chapter 1). The failed revolution in 1932 meant the entry of the military as a strong influential group to national politics and economy which included forest business. The political shift had led to the RFD’s weakness and inefficiency in forest conservation projects. There have been many problems involved with national politics and military influence such as wildlife hunting,²⁰⁹ land distribution (agricultural land reform), and semi-permanent permission of land use by other state agents. For example, the military may continue to occupy the reserved areas from the RFD if necessary after the proposed duration ends. One of the RFD staff informed me of this and elaborated how the military are not likely to return, but rather to transform the borrowed lands into other forms of land uses such as Tabtim Siam project. As discussed in Chapter 3, the former Lumpuk camp turned into the office of the Mobile Development Unit (MDU) and a former Site B camp in Sangkha; Surin Province transformed into one of the eight Tabtim Siam projects in the bordering province after the termination of Cambodian refugee camps. This was part of the land reforms for farmers under the name of the Royal Development project.

²⁰⁸ Besides state-run companies (such as FIO - Forest Industry Organization (องค์การอุตสาหกรรมป่าไม้). The military had been directly involved through private companies set up by various factions for example the War Veteran Org., the Korean War Veterans Assoc. and the First WW Veterans Assoc The Thahan Co-operation Co. Ltd all played a major role in distribution and sale of timber products (Pye 323), and later, through the forest reservation project such as Pa Roi Tor case (see conclusion of this chapter).

²⁰⁹ There was the helicopter crash incident in Bang Len, Nakhon Pathom. Six passengers died on board who were later found to be military and police officers with the possession of the meat and rifles. The students from Kasetsart, Mahidol, Chulalongkorn and Thammasat universities reportedly learned that about 50 military and police officers went to Thung Yai National Park to poach wildlife. The government later reportedly interfered with the media requesting to not report about the incident, resulting in a protest from journalist’s organization along with photographic evidence of poaching in the area taken by the group of students from the natural resources and environment clubs who published “The Secret Note from Thung Yai”, documenting the ecological value of the area as well as the incident. They later increased their protests to call for a return to democracy which led to the start of mass protests against the military government by university students and the 14 October 1993 incident. Summary from <https://www.nationthailand.com/national/30338126>

The Cold War was the turning point in adding the role of forest management to the RFD as the social appropriation of forest resources (Pye 2005a). With Thailand's National Economic and Social Plan supported by the World Bank (Lohmann 1991), the country began the state-promoted expansion of cash crops and agricultural industry in the 1960s and the announcement of the highlands-turned National Parks culminating in the National Reserved Forest Act of 1964. This led to the ban of all forest resource usage and all agricultural activity in the forest, and prohibited forest access by farmers (Pye 2005a, 325). There were programs of land redistribution and land reform for those who used to live in the zones that turned to the National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries (smaller scale) such as Sor Por Kor²¹⁰ and Khor Jor Kor.²¹¹ The reforms economized land and forests, paving the way for three decades of deforestation by the Eucalyptus and Rubber plantation concessions, feeding the growth of paper²¹² and rubber industries (Lohmann 1991, 15). The authorities have used the rhetoric of ethnic minorities and the peasants being accused of involvement in deforestation due to their poverty and lack of land resources for cultivation while silencing the state concessions to private companies for mass plantation (Pye 2005a). The environmental devastation of the logging business, and its ties to the Burmese military regime, were exposed by the disastrous flood and mudslides that brought massive logs from the mountain to the lower areas in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Southern Thailand in November 1988. The public protest prompted a ban on all domestic logging concessions in January 1989 (Lohmann 1991; Forsyth and Walker 2012).

²¹⁰ Sor Por Kor (สปก - สำนักงานการปฏิรูปที่ดินเพื่อเกษตรกรรม) is a land certificate issued by the Agricultural Land Reform Office. It is the formalisation of landholding through extension of land reform to facilitate land transactions even though in principle these certificates are non-transferable (Hirsch 2009, 126).

²¹¹ Kor Jor Kor (คจก - โครงการจัดสรรที่ดินทำกินแก่ราษฎรผู้ยากไร้ในพื้นที่ป่าสงวนเสื่อมโทรม) is a military-led plan for the conservation-induced relocation project created after the 1991 coup in attempting to evict five million people from reserve forests (Pye 2005b)

²¹² Japanese companies had tried to ally with local figures in both business and government for paper industry, including the planting of 2,000 square kilometers of eucalyptus project for export through coordination with the Thai Royal Forestry Department and officials at the provincial and national level, as well as the BAAC and the private Tree Planters Association of Thailand (Lohmann 1991, 10).

Coincidentally, the “battlefields-to-marketplaces” policies were announced by the Chartichai Choonhavan administration the same year as the logging ban in Thailand. Logging concessions moved across the border to Cambodia. After years of a secret war economy between Thailand and Cambodian resistance parties throughout the prolonged civil war, the ban turned out to be an opportunity for Thai private sectors to begin logging business with Cambodia legally and publicly. The logging ban in Thailand resulted in massive deforestation in Cambodia, compounding the effects of intentional burning, or “anti-guerrilla tree clearance to reduce hiding places,” during the civil war (Ikunaga 1999, 4). According to Meguri Ikunaga (1999), there was not much of logging business in Cambodia from the 1960s to the early 1990s. The commercial logging concessions and timber exports were increasing rapidly from 300,000 cubic meters in 1990 and jumped after the conclusion of the Paris Peace Agreement in 1991 to 1.5 million cubic meters after 1993.²¹³ The notifications of the Ministry of Interior, Thailand, on temporary border opening for timber imports retrieved from 1991-1997²¹⁴ affirmed the logging business between Thai and Cambodian government and resistance parties at its peak.

Notifications of Ministry of Interior on Temporary Border Opening for Timber Import

Based on classified documents published by the Thai Government Gazette (Ratchakitchanubeksa), permission of timber import from Cambodia to Thailand appeared only from 1991 to 1997.²¹⁵ The first appearance, released as the notification of the Ministry of Interior, was in August 1991 right before the Paris Peace Agreement was signed in October 1991.

²¹³ Ikunaga wrote a report to International Development Research Institute (IDRI) - Japan claiming that “the amount of logging was 350,000 cubic meters per year in the 1960s and 100,000 cubic meters in the 1970s according to World Bank estimates. During the Pol Pot period, forests were not cut very much when the production of rice was encouraged and the timber was not exported. In the 1980s it increased steadily every year from a low of 19,000 cubic meters in 1981. The total amount of logging, which also includes illegal logging, is estimated at 1.5 times this rate in 1993” (5).

²¹⁴ All Ministerial Notifications available at <http://www.ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/> Searched key words on the Government Gazette portal: “เปิดจุดผ่านแดน – border checkpoint opening” “กัมพูชา - Cambodia” “ไม้ - timber”

²¹⁵ This archival analysis does not include documents on timber trades with Lao PRD and Myanmar which were also published during the same time as Cambodian case.

This timber trade permission was made to allow Thai-Japan Reforestation and Wood Industry Co. Ltd. to import (unidentified) timber products and to export timber equipment for Eucalyptus plantations to Cambodia for five years through Chong Chom checkpoint. These notifications are noticeably in the same format. The first paragraph states the necessity of timber trade permission in response to national policy on various reasons, such as to enhance timber imports from a foreign country; to solve the problem of domestic timber shortage; or to promote cross-border trade between Thailand and Cambodia as part of strengthening bilateral relations and in response to Cambodian government permission with timber trade quotas with Thailand.²¹⁶ This is followed by the statement of permission that the Ministry of Interior would authorize the temporary opening of the border checkpoint by virtue of Immigration Act B.E. 2522 (1979) Section 11 and 23. The documents also provide the details of concession companies, timber types (logs or lumbers), quotas (cubic meters), specified border checkpoints (Chongs), and the duration of permission. It would end with the restriction of any crossing activities that were not included in the permission, especially drugs and weapon trafficking or any illegal activities. The border must be closed after the completion of the imports, case by case. It is interesting to go through these classified documents because there were a few notifications that stated the exemption of requiring a certificate of origin (c/o) or evidence of approval to export from the exporting country²¹⁷ according to Notification of Ministry of Commerce on the Importation of Goods into the Kingdom (No.92) B.E.2535 (1992)²¹⁸ (see Figure 51 for an example of ministerial notification).

²¹⁶ The statements even further included the term “Cambodian government by the co-prime ministers” between 1994–95.

²¹⁷ The certificate of notification is normally used for international trade to guarantee its legal status of where the timber come from.

²¹⁸ This Notification was published after the first import permission in 1991 (See figure 51). On Clause 3 of the Notification states that “Woods and all types of wood conversions including wood made into a certain form, equipment, or other things made from wood which are imported through the Customs House shall have the certificate of origin or evidences of approval to export from the exporting country to present to the Customs during the import procedure. Imports of logs through the Customs House by the previous paragraph shall have the seal from the country of manufacture on those logs” It was never included in the Notification of Ministry of Interior on temporary border checkpoint opening for timber imports. Access available at <https://www.dft.go.th/การนำสินค้าเข้ามาในราชอาณาจักร2519.pdf>

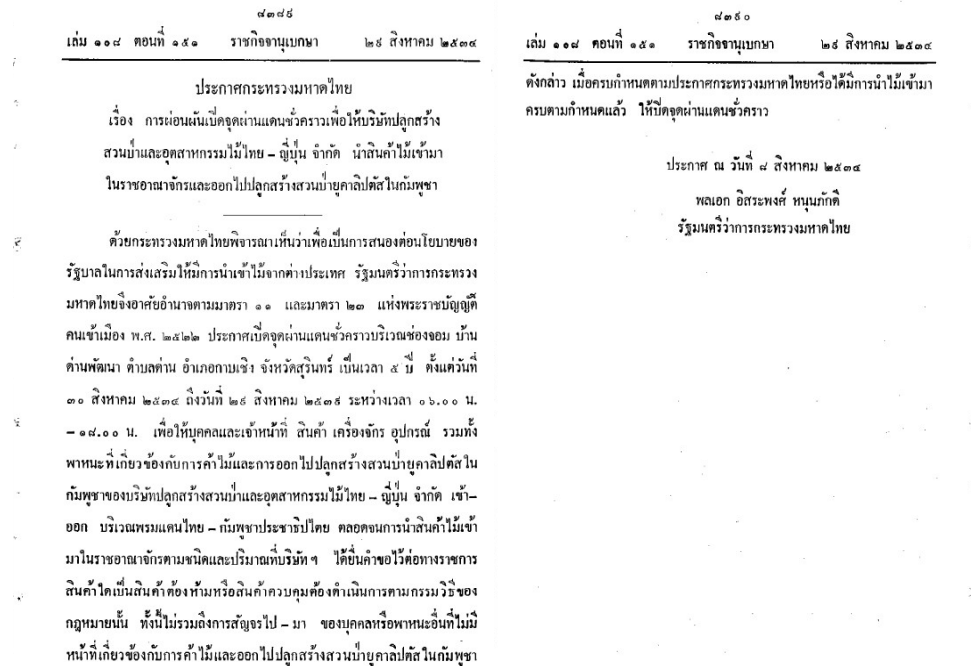


Figure 51: The Notification of Ministry of Interior on Temporary border opening for a company called " Thai-Japan Reforestation and Wood Industry co. Ltd." to import timber products to Thailand and to export Eucalyptus plantation equipment to Cambodia through Chong Chom checkpoint (published in Thai Government Gazette on 29 August 1991)

The official reports lasted until 1997 when logging was banned by the Cambodian coalition government in January 1997²¹⁹ which was followed by the Hun Sen coup and the beginning of the final round of civil war. Yet it is believed that most log exports seem to be continuing illegally until the present. Pasgaard and Chea (2013) argue that there are complex factors of deforestation in Oddar Meanchey, namely: 1) weak forest sector governance 2) agricultural expansion; 3) illegal logging caused by transnational commercial interests; 4) firewood consumption, and 5) poverty and population growth that pushing migrants to clear land and settle in the forest-rich remote provinces like Oddar Meanchey (335-6). This reflects how natural resource businesses have shaped Cambodian state formation in two paradoxical

²¹⁹ Before it resumed once again and was banned for another time in 2002 according to the 2002 Cambodian Forest Law.



Figure 52: Image courtesy of Aunt Mew taken around 1997-8. She wrote a photo caption telling that "Dangerous! Do not cross, walk, run over the marked lines. There are landmines!"

directions (Milne and Mahanty 2015). On the one hand, after the fall of Pol Pot's regime, the Cambodian resistance parties were involved in cross-border timber and raw gemstones trades seeking self-financial support beside foreign aids, as discussed in Chapter 3. On the other hand, the concession system created by the Cambodian government with assistance from the World Bank eventually generated export income from forest resources, which was also designed to counteract illegal logging by Cambodian resistance parties (Ikunaga 1999; Billon 2002). The CPP's local network backed by the military had helped facilitate the "formalization of forest exploitation" of the Hun Sen's regime and his alliance-building through the timber business by "removing the small players from the game" (Milne 2015, 207). Also, it became one of the post-1997 coup conditions for national consolidation and state centralization (Milne 2015).

Sonh (pseudonym, male),²²⁰ a former Thai soldier, told me about his experience as intelligence personnel in Chong Chom-O'Smach area which illuminates the mechanisms of military control of the border and its forest resources. During the coup conflict, Hun Sen's national consolidation policy had convinced everyone to become his allies. Since O'Smach was a last stronghold of FUNCINPEC, Hun Sen sent trusted officers to take care of border areas and give people land to settle along the border. His soldiers would take their family to resettle along the border and also earn a monthly allowance of about 400 baht, including lands and supplies, in exchange to protect the border by patrolling. Sohn said this policy was essentially: "if you want lands you need to be a soldier." This family/military settlement happened before the

²²⁰ Interviewed on September 6, 2018

issuance of land titles by the 2001 Land Law.²²¹ Later, the high-ranking soldiers started to control the land property for sale and business concession.

Since 2015, more and more business investment from Thailand and other countries landed in Cambodia. For example, along the way to Samrong from Chong Chom in Oddar Meanchey, there are several construction equipment suppliers and hardware shops owned by Surin businessmen. From interviews with staff at Surin Provincial Commercial Office, I learned that Surin province has encouraged local businesses to invest more in Oddar Meanchey. The provincial authorities have been promoting to cross-border co-investment in agriculture and infrastructure sectors such as Durian plantation in Anlong Veng District.²²²



Figure 53: my visit to the Thai company that received the concession from Cambodian government to operate wood chip for imports to Thailand to produce the biomass powerplant (photo taken by me with acknowledgement by the branch manager on 09/07/2018)

²²¹ <http://www.cambodiainvestment.gov.kh/investors-information/land-site-development.html>

²²² Interviewed on August 21, 2018

Siamese Rosewood (*Phayung* - *Dalbergia cochinchinensis*)

Siamese Rosewood (វង្ស - *Phayung*) is an ancient hardwood, a large evergreen tree of open semi-deciduous forests that is native to the Mekong region found only in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand, and Viet Nam. It is classified as a vulnerable species by Asian Regional Conservation, and Sustainable Management of Trees in 1998 and a CITES²²³ Appendix II listed species in 2013 (CoP16, Bangkok, March 2013).²²⁴ The main threat is exploitation of the prime timber. According to Thai media and local reports, the demand for Siamese Rosewood from China has been consistently high for carvings, classical Chinese-style furniture, and high-valued essential oil (Asian Regional Workshop (Conservation & Sustainable Management of Trees, Viet Nam, August 1996, 1998; Suriyapongse 2014; Land 2016). CITES Office in Thailand under the Department of National Parks, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation expressed their concerns about illegal logging and trading. Besides the initiative in Siamese rosewood dialogues in 2014 and 2016, Thailand's CITES Office also assigned their officers at the border checkpoint, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Rosewood logging business has dramatically boomed since 2010 due to the high demand in China's furniture market in China, either import from Southeast Asia or Africa. It is believed that Rosewood from Phnom Dangrek is part of illegal timber smuggling that logs would be sent through Cambodia or Laos to Vietnam without knowing the true origin of the woods by either marine vessels or ground transportation (Treanor 2015). Smuggling and illegal rosewood trade have proliferated because of laws prohibiting timber exports, as in Thailand, where all timber trades have been outlawed since 1989, thus heightened the need for rosewood protection by ratified CITES agreement. While Cambodia has banned Rosewood logs in 2013 under the 2002 Forestry Law after the export ban in 2002, which also became the beginning of smuggling saga in the newspaper since then (Treanor 2015). The smuggling network with local connections has facilitated and benefited from the smuggling and illegal transport of rosewood through the thick forest of Phnom Dangrek. The Thai officials have learned to differentiate the patterns of entering the forest. They could explain how wood smuggling operates in this area. They decided to keep adding more patrol soldiers and building more roads along the borders inside the sanctuary as they claim to be more helpful in catching the smugglers. The problem still persists as the smugglers know how to squeeze in and out and where to hide the logs before get transferred. It is believed that the smugglers use the methods of laundering illegal logs to efficiently legal supply that could be made during transportation either in forms of changing its name to sawn wood or country of origin (EIA 2014), which called "conversion timber." There is approximately 60 percent of rosewood that is being exported from Laos that was actually harvested in Thailand (EIA 2014).

²²³ CITES is an abbreviation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, also known as the Washington Convention

²²⁴ The species is annotated #5, indicating that the only parts and derivatives included are "logs, sawn wood and veneer sheets". <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/notif/E-Notif-2014-032.pdf>

Conclusion

“Happiness cannot reach everyone when natural resources like timbers, stone, or minerals become profitable or occupied by ventures.”²²⁵

Whereas Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) may be “difficult to control as private property” (Tsing), I would like to conclude this chapter with the words of the Cambodian informant who is a long-time government staff in Oddar Meanchey Province. He views natural resources as a source of happiness for all, which implies his opinion against commodification and business-government agents. The history of forest law implication regarding who gets permission to access the forest space in the name of the reservation area was not long ago. Recent news headlines in February and March 2020 are a rare public discussion of the serious problems of the state-military-corporate “tripod structure” (Pye 2005a) of logging in Thailand. MP Rome Rangsiman from the Move Forward Party (formerly Future Forward Party²²⁶) had held an out-of-parliament censure debate²²⁷ and publicly accused Prawit Wongsuwan, a deputy prime minister, of using the lands of the Five Provinces Bordering Forest Preservation Project for personal gain through his ties to Thai and foreign corporations.²²⁸ The exposure of military corruption indeed affirms the military involvement in forest politics that continued to benefit the authoritarian regime until now.

In the past, border dwellers were restricted from getting into the Phnom Dangrek forest by the danger of the war. Bombing sounds, fears of undetected landmines, guerillas in disguise,

²²⁵ Interviewed on June 20, 2018. He spoke with me in Thai fluently

²²⁶ The Future Forward Party was dissolved in February 2020 by accusing of violation the Thai constitution to have accepting a loan from a party leader, Thanathorn Jungroongruangkit to fund the election campaign. <https://www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2020/02/21/future-forward-party-found-guilty-disbanded-by-court/>

²²⁷ MP Rangsiman’s no-confidence motion was scheduled to be delivered against Prawit in a final day of the censure but due to time mismanagement among the opposition parties. He could not make it in time after the House Speaker refused to grant the extra time. He thus decided to expose the information of Prawit’s corruption without the protection from the parliament and eventually faced the lawsuit from the accused agents of the Five Provinces Bordering Forest Preservation Project. <https://www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2020/02/28/pheu-thai-denies-conspiring-to-save-prawit-from-censure/>

²²⁸ He later was filed a defamation suit by the representative of the Project (Thai Lawyers for Human Rights March 2020). <https://www.tlhr2014.com/?p=16967&lang=en>

caused people to live in fear with the haunted and unspoken memories of the violent past. However, in order to survive and make a living, the border dwellers do not give up their relationship with the forest by still searching for mushroom and other NTFPs. Learning that there are demining projects has reassured and increased the numbers of the mushroom foragers in this area.

The ambiguity and certainty in the forest space situated in the border zone complicates and allows humans to exploit and take advantage of border politics. As Tsing (2005) states that “Landscapes are simultaneously natural and social, and they shift and turn in the interplay of human and nonhuman practices” (29). For the case of Phnom Dangrek, the Cambodian civil war played an important part in the shifts in human and nature relationships. In the post-war era, we are witnessing the demining projects as an attempt to remove the war remnants to return the safe forest space in order to facilitate border economic cooperation while the states also intentionally leave some mines to protect the territories in the sensitive areas where the Thai-Cambodian border commission have not yet reached an agreement. So, it could be said that the forest will never fully return to what it used to be before the war. The reservation act prevents non-authority agencies from accessing, but all actors, authorities, foragers, and timber smugglers still manage to take their own interests in natural resources. The military still carved up the forest by constructing the roads that are searchable on Google maps. These findings provide a bigger picture of forest politics that could have been another dissertation project.

Another prominent task is infrastructure construction in the border zone. As I visited many border sites in the districts of Kapcheong, Sangkha, Buachet, and Phnom Dongrak in Surin Province, there are new roads built in the forest areas. Some informants said these roads are meant for the locals to have more accessible roads to their villages. Some said these roads are built for military patrol in the sanctuary area where there are more and more timber smugglings along the border. They expect to use these new routes to catch the smuggles faster.

Some roads are built for tourism, such as the road to Alongkorn waterfall near a former site B camp. Noting that, there have been clandestine roads within Huay Tabtan – Huay Samran Sanctuary area since the Cambodian civil war period. Once the forest closed and became the national sanctuary, only three major government agents have access permits to the forest including the several units of the Royal Thai Army, the Border Patrol Police, and the forestry officers. It is interesting to make a notice that these new roads in the border forest are shown on the Google map. Although not all routes are opened to public use.

Conclusion

The overarching theme of this study aims to revisit the border in the Dangrek range that has been known as nothing but the manifestation of the state margins. The border dwellers had enjoyed their freedom to move around in any direction between the highland and the lowland until the war in Cambodia expanded to the Thai border. Undoubtedly, the closure of the Thai border during the war changed the directions of human flows to become increasingly unequal politically and economically. It is the manifestation of disparities. Besides, casino visits were the reason why most of the Thai locals I encountered, including my extended family members, choose not to cross the border to Cambodia. It is neither simply because they believed in nationalism nor because of the border dispute over Preah Vihear ownership and the poverty that makes people not have money enough to travel internationally. It is also because they think that there is no reason to travel to Cambodia, which comes from the period of war. The struggle of Cambodian refugees that they witnessed themselves has created a negative image towards Cambodia. Many Thai officers often said to me “*Cambodia is like Thailand, but 40 years ago.*” In my opinion, this phrase only reflects the way Thai people think about how Cambodia has been stopped in time in the pre-Khmer Rouge era, but they do not really know what has been changed within since then and why Cambodian migrant workers remain to be subjected to discrimination and exclusion in Thailand. For these reasons, I see the opportunity to integrate mobility studies and memory studies and to analyze through the context of Cold War in Southeast Asia. This does not only provide the understanding of Cambodian migration to Thailand that has been in the same direction for almost fifty years, it also offers new approach to explore how the lived experience of the border dwellers has been disrupted since the wartime. Perhaps it is about how the knowledge of Phnom Dangrek region has been produced.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the field site by examining the emergence of Phnom Dangrek as the border landscape as a process of subject-making and its knowledge production through the legacy of colonialism and the relationship between the French Imperialism and the Siamese

Court, which claims to be a non-colonized country. Building on the Thai postcolonial scholarship, I revisit the power relations between Siamese court, which could be considered as the internal imperialists, the French Empire, and the local anarchist groups in the Dangrek region. Then I continued to interrogate the meaning and practices of human mobilities in the border landscape through the human perception of different landforms in relation to crossing practices such as *Chong* and *Dan*. The second half of this chapter discusses the local historiography of Surin Province, which I situate as the focal area of this study. This approach helps explain why the ethnic Khmer became an invisible minority that assimilated with the Lao people in the name of Isaan (Northeastern) region. The separation by national identity is so prominent in contrast to their shared cultural identity in Buddhism, Khmer dialect, and traditional customs in the (Northeastern) region. Overall, this chapter lays out the importance of what has been missed in the previous work of this region and what has to be interrogated in the following chapters on war memories and silences through the lived experiences of both Thai and Cambodian border dwellers.

I believe that the local students and community could learn from what the older/war generations witnessed and experienced during the Cold war and create awareness of what happened in the past. In this way, they might find new ways to interact with Cambodians with more critical knowledge to reconnect with the neighbor from their ethnic closeness and reduce discrimination toward Cambodian migrant workers and visitors. Like one of the Cambodian informants said this to me:

“Chong Chom is like “a stairway to heaven” because it is easier than other mountain passes to cross. People travel via this route have made familial connections for centuries. I think both sides should support the family reunion after all the disputes since the Cambodian Civil War. I truly believe that Cambodia is willing to reconnect with Thailand, but I am not sure that Thailand would want the same way...”²²⁹

²²⁹ This interview happened during the opening ceremony of “sai samphan song paen din” event between Buriram Province of Thailand and Oddar Meanchey Province in O’Smach, June, 2018

Perhaps this quote might be the ultimate dream for many border dwellers. I have seen a few stories of the family reunion from *Surin Samosorn Magazine* and the *Isaan Records*²³⁰ about how visiting relatives in Cambodia has been difficult and costly. The postwar generation, like me, does not have memories of long-lost Khmer relatives that nation-states and war have separated from us. Interrogating the historical and political aspects of how Phnom Dangrek turned into national borders and the battlefield in Chapter 2 helped me to understand what has been missing from the scholarship of Thai and Khmer studies. Thailand's territorial expansion to Cambodia during the WWII has confused and interrupted the flows of people across the Dangrek who found the opportunities to move around the plateau and the lower plain. Many families, including mine, used to have their relatives on both sides and were able to visit each other until the Khmer Rouge regime. Cross-border mobility and border communities were directly impacted by the Cold War in addition to the state propaganda against the Communist Insurgency across Thailand. When the Vietnamese invasion to Phnom Penh occurred and ended the Khmer Rouge, the Cambodian civil war just began through another massive displacement to the Thai border. The prolongation of the civil war was indeed provoked by the shifts in the Cold War alliance.

Phnom Dangrek was turned into a war zone after the fall of the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Invasion of Phnom Penh. The border landscape of Phnom Dangrek became the spaces that the political groups had taken advantage of. When the war ended, new capital in casino investment lured new migrants and gamblers in search of luck and the best opportunities in life. The socioeconomic status of the border dwellers has been like other areas of Isaan region. The poor people of the Isaan region have struggled to live their lives within their own country since the Cold War era when Thailand started to embrace industrialization from neoliberal policy. It was the socioeconomic status that has been marginalized and suppressed by the elites

²³⁰ <https://isaanrecord.com/2017/09/20/thailandcambodiarerelative/>

and wealthy people (Keyes 2014). Some decided to join the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) before their neighbor was taken over by the Khmer Rouge. When the CPT was destroyed by the military-led government, it was symbolically the poor from Isaan who had been defeated by the Bangkok elites once again. The continuity of poverty in the region has restrained them from giving their voice to make changes in Isaan. I interpret this struggle as transforming into a social norm that has been internalized throughout the centuries of Thai-zation in the Northeast Thailand. In other words, destroying CPT yet supporting the Khmer Rouge had obscured the political ideology behind the rationale of Thai state. It turned out to be what would benefit the Thai state as the neighboring and receiving country the most, rather than ideological disagreement as discussed in Chapters 3 to 6. The Thai army gained a gigantic advantage and military resources by allowing Cambodian resistance paramilitary troops to reside along the border for decades. The Thai economy also benefited from the policy, “Changing battlefield into marketplace,” that had turned those who were displaced along the border into cheap laborers along with people from Isaan region for industrialized projects. Exploiting the political tension of neighboring countries did not stop internal conflict within Thai politics. The neoliberalized growing country meant a growing democracy; people started to call ut the military off from Thai politics which led to the May Uprising in 1992. This was overlapping with the 1993 Cambodian UNTAC-sponsored election when Thailand was ready to repatriate all Cambodian camp residents back to Cambodia. With the lowest popularity of the Thai army, they turned toward themselves to take care of the border forest more openly in form of natural reservation. Under the Queen Sirikit and Princess Chulabhorn initiations, the Wildlife sanctuary and Tabtim Siam emerged as a way to protect the forest and re-utilize the camp locations since 1993. These projects shifted the way border dwellers interacted with the Dangrek once again. Not only did they have to learn how to live with the landmines and lose rights to access to lands and forests, but the illegal businesses, like timber smuggling, are the result of the expansion of deforestation that returned to Thailand after destroying the forest in Cambodia.

Epilogue

Since the 2014 coup happened in Thailand during my first year in the U.S., I realized what it was like following the news of the homeland from afar. It gets weirder and more confusing. No answers, but more questions, as I wrote this manuscript during the global pandemic, the Black Lives Matter Movement and the protests around the world, including Thailand. I was wondering how my work would contribute to the injustice in this world, particularly in the country where I came from. Just like many countries around the world, the political climate in Thailand has been getting worse even before the pandemic. Only within the short time span, there is news about forced disappearances, emergency degree that shut down the country and led to the increasing number of suicidal cases more than the number of death from COVID19. Their political culture of impunity is the main concern. This study is one of these that implicitly and explicitly criticizes the role of Thai military in multiple ways, as I closed Chapter 6 with the controversial issue of military-turned-politician in Thailand that I also recently discovered from the news headline. “*Par Roi Tor*” is one of countless uncovered stories of power abuse and appropriating natural resources for certain groups as the result of the prolonged Cambodian civil war along the Thai-Cambodian border. Another one of the key takeaways from this study is that the authoritarian regimes have benefited from regional conflict through the indirect participation in hostilities and gained essential momentum in the national politics, not on the sidelines, but at the heart of political crises in both Thailand and Cambodia. While unprivileged and marginalized groups have been exploited and left with the limited access to economic resources, the multiple disparities caused by marginalization and wars can be explained by tracing the shifting patterns of mobility across the Thai-Cambodian border.

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