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## INTRODUCTION

### Guest Editor's Introduction to the Special Issue

Alexander Bukh

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The idea for this special issue emerged out of a conference on borders and civil society in East Asia jointly organized by Northeast Asian History Foundation, Thammasat University and Victoria University of Wellington. The conference was held at the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University on November 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

This special issue constitutes one of the first academic attempts to explore the relationship between borders and civil society in Asia. The papers in this issue share the broad definition of civil society proposed by Charles Taylor in his 1990 article "Modes of Civil Society." Thus civil society is defined here as a web of autonomous associations of citizens that share a common concern, independent from the state but which can have an effect on public policy through their actions or just by their existence.

Most of the extant scholarship on civil society in Asia and beyond either focuses on domestic associations of citizens, or, alternatively, is driven by the "global civil society" paradigm introduced by Mary Kaldor in her *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (2003). The latter construes civil society as a global, territorially unbound network of different autonomous groups, bound together by certain norms and ideas. As such, the domestic focused scholarship on civil society construes states' borders as a natural boundary that delimitates their scope of inquiry, while the latter perceives borders as simply irrelevant.

Borders however can have important implications for the ways civil society groups operate and function. In its traditional definition, borders in International Relations refer to geographic boundaries of political entities, i.e. states. These

boundaries affect the structure of civil society groups, their ability to mobilize people and resources, as well as the scope of their activism. In cases of territorial disputes, borders can be the object of civic activism.

The importance of borders however becomes even more obvious if one follows the definition proposed by the inter-disciplinary field of Critical Border Studies. The latter defines borders as a set of practices. Namely, borders are not seen as static geographical boundaries but as a dynamic ensemble of socio-cultural practices that produce and reproduce the discursive boundaries between the “self” group and the “other” group, the “inside” and the “outside.” Borders defined as a set of practices have important implications for the study of civil society. Socio-cultural practices play an important role in the processes that shape social understanding of certain issues and their possible remedies. Thus it can be argued that borders play an important role in facilitating the emergence of certain civil society groups and precluding the emergence of other. Moreover, borders as practices are an integral part of the frames developed by civil society groups and utilized in their mobilization activities and efforts to influence policy.

Articles in this special issue focus on various instances of civic activism in Asia. They draw on both the traditional and the critical definitions of borders and explore the various roles these geographical boundaries and bordering practices played in their respective case studies.

The special issue consists of six articles. In the first article, Timur Dadabaev’s article explores the effects of border redrawing in post-Soviet Central Asia on local communities and their responses. Dadabaev shows the everyday life difficulties faced by communities that live along the recently created administrative boundaries which transformed a generally unimportant domestic boundary into an international border. The article also examines the role of ethnicity as a bordering practice in shaping the delimitation of inter-state borders and depicts the responses of local communities to the numerous difficulties created by these borders.

Alexander Horstmann and Decha Tangseefa focus on the Thai-Burmese borderland. Horstmann’s article explores the effect of the dichotomized bordering practice between the “good” Karen National Union (KNU) and the “evil” Burmese army, dominant among the Western NGOs, on the construction of Karen ethno-nationalism. It explores the blurred boundaries between civil society, social development and the cultural practices of international humanitarian organizations. It argues that Karen identity which construes not only the Burmese but also other minorities in Myanmar as its “other” was developed in tandem with the aid that poured into the area controlled by the KNU from overseas.

Tangseefa’s article focuses on Burmese migrant workers along the Thai-Burmese border. It explores the dual effects of this administrative boundary on the

Burmese that migrate into Thailand. On one hand, the porous nature of the border enables the Burmese to cross into the neighboring country in search for work. On the other hand, the lack of Thai citizenship and the subsequent illegal nature of their presence in Thailand create vulnerability and instability in their lives. Tangseefa's article also explores the multiple functions of the Mae Sot borderland. It shows that the role of the borderland is not predetermined or static. The area encompasses conflict but also accommodation, it also functions as the site for cultural translation and negotiation.

Ora-orn Poocharoen's article shifts the focus to Thailand's border with Malaysia and explores the intersection between civil society, insurgency and development in the South of Thailand. Based on extensive fieldwork in Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani provinces Poocharoen explores the challenges both insurgency and the central government's responses create for the local communities and their leaders. The article depicts the complex reality of these communities, which, to a large extent, is shaped by the bordering practices of the central government. The latter, the article shows, does not capture the complex reality in the South, but creates a rigid and dichotomous delimitation between pro-government and pro-insurgency communities. As Poocharoen shows this is very much a result of the language deployed by the authorities which depicts nationalists as separatists, citizens as villagers and divides all the local people along the pro-government/anti-government line.

Pichamon Yeophantong compares civic activism in Cambodia and Myanmar (Burma). Yeophantong examines local responses to Chinese backed resources development projects and analyzes the reasons for the stark difference in the ways civil societies in the two countries responded to similar challenges. The article argues that in the case of Myanmar network activists played a critical role in raising public awareness and attracting the external support necessary for spearheading a sustained campaign. At the same time, the article shows that the bordering practices of the international community played an important role in enhancing the capacity of the local activists. Namely, the placement of Myanmar within the realm of authoritarianism facilitated the framing of the protests against Chinese-led oil and gas pipelines projects as an integral part of the country's democratization and resulted in intensive international coverage of the issue and assistance from international NGOs.

Simon Avenell's article on the connection between environmental activism in Japan and in Southeast Asia in the 1970s concludes this special issue. Avenell explores the domestic factors in Japan that enabled the emergence of environmental activism as well as the reasons that spurred the interest in environmental issues in other East Asian countries among the Japanese activists. Avenell shows that

the discursively constructed borders between the local and the national as well as between the state and the people, played an important role in shaping the understanding of the widespread pollution and related problems among the Japanese activists. Their ability to cross geographical borders and to participate in various international events helped to create an understanding of pollution as a transnational issue. The Japanese Anti-Vietnam War movement that construed Japan as being an integral part of Asia, juxtaposed with the “West” helped to communicate instances of pollution by Japanese companies in Asia to domestic audience and by this contributed to shaping their agenda.

The articles in this special issue are quite diverse in terms of their geographical focus, methodology and arguments. They do not seek to offer any generalized conclusions regarding the relationship between borders and civil society in Asia but to suggest that this relationship is important and deserves further academic scrutiny.



## **“We Want a State of Our Own!” Reconstructing Community Space in Bordering Areas of Central Asia**

Timur Dadabaev

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동북아역사재단

### Abstract

This paper focuses on the processes of institution of borders in post-Soviet Central Asia and offers highlights of how some of the local communities cope with the decisions made by the central governments in the region with respect to borders. In particular, this paper offers insights into the cases when certain decisions of the governments conflicted with preferences of the population residing in the bordering areas. This in turn resulted in the situations when local communities in the affected bordering areas decided to protest such decisions by rather untypical means such as declaring “independence” from their respective countries and annexing roads and water facilities which they believed were vital for sustaining their communal life. Such examples exemplify the cases when interests of local communities do not necessarily fit into the plans of central governments resulting in inter-state border frictions.

### Keywords

territorial disputes, community life, independence, Central Asia

## INTRODUCTION

The issues related to borders and their institutionalization in post-Soviet Central Asia has been a topic which has been dealt with from various perspectives. The process has been detailed and analysed in a number of studies, and provided empirical details of how the post-Soviet republican frontiers have turned into a “proper” borders (Sengupta 2002; Dadabaev 2012). Some others also focused on the issues of securitizing the notion of borders and how the discourse of danger has been connected to framing Central Asian border issues into the context of threats (Karagulova et al. 2011). Anthropological studies of community life in the bordering areas have focused on certain empirical cases of communities and social life in the bordering areas (Reeves 2013). Although these studies provide useful insights into the history and current state of border delimitation in Central Asia, very few studies have looked into the issue of how local communities reacted to border delimitation initiatives undertaken by central governments. There is a gap in studies which details how local communities in bordering areas dealt with situations when their announced interests contradicted the actions and decisions of the governments of the states to which these territories formally belonged.

In order to fill in this gap, this paper focuses on the processes of institution of borders in post-Soviet Central Asia and offers highlights of how some of the local communities cope with the decisions made by the central governments in the region in respect to borders. In particular, this paper offers insights into the cases when certain decisions of the governments conflicted with preferences of the population residing in the bordering areas. This in turn resulted in situations when local communities in the affected bordering areas decided to protest such decisions by rather untypical means such as declaring “independence” from their respective countries and annexing roads and water facilities which they believed were vital for sustaining their communal life. Such examples exemplify the cases when interests of local communities do not necessarily and always fit into the plans of central governments resulting in inter-state border frictions.

This paper aims to address the issue of borders in post-Soviet Central Asia and the impact of this issue on the way that communities in frontier areas were affected by this process. How have the borders of the present Central Asian states evolved over time? What lies behind the present border frictions in this region? How have border delimitations in the post-Soviet years affected the livelihood of the local populations in Central Asia? What are the ways in which people cope with this state-led delimitation? We address these questions in the present paper.

The paper is divided into several sections each explaining different aspect of the process of border delimitation. The first section briefly describes the borders

and frontiers of pre-revolutionary Central Asia and then details the logic of the delimitation policy implemented in post-revolutionary Central Asia. The second section depicts the complexities of the regional geography and discusses the region's territorial enclaves. The third section analyzes the determinants of the border delimitation process in post-Soviet Central Asia. The fourth section examines unilateralism as the prevailing mode of thinking with regard to border delimitation and the consequent lack of trust among the states in the region. The fifth section attempts to detail specific cases in which complications have arisen between specific regional states over borders and territories. Finally, the paper makes some concluding remarks and suggests what can be done to alleviate present tensions on the borders.

## COLONIALISM AND CENTRAL ASIAN BORDERS

The delimitation of borders under the Soviet regime is rooted in the first Russian penetration of the Central Asian region in the 1860s, when Russia conquered lands that belonged to the Kazakh Middle Juz (or Zhuz) (Bregel 2003, 76).<sup>1</sup> The only states in the region that were powerful enough to resist the Russian conquest were the Kokand and Khiva Khanates and Bukhara emirate. However, the economic interests and military strength behind the Russian drive to convert Central Asian resources into profits made the Russian conquest of Central Asia inevitable.

In particular, from 1865-1866, the Russian Empire conquered the Kokand Khanate—dissolving it in 1876—and further continued its campaign to establish its dominance over the remainder of the region. In 1867, the Russian Empire classified Central Asia as the Governorate-General of Turkistan and emphasized its possession of the region in so doing. The Bukhara and Khiva Khanates subsequently accepted Russian dominance and became vassal city-states in 1868 and 1873, respectively. In addition, between 1881 and 1890, Russia conquered the lands occupied by the Turkmen tribes. Thus, by the turn of the 20th century, most of present-day post-Soviet Central Asia had accepted Russian rule and were administered by Russia in one way or another.

The Russian Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 brought the revolutionary move-

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1 Historically Kazakh society was divided into three major groups, termed zhuzes. Each was given a name: 'Junior,' 'Middle' and 'Senior.' According to Yuri Bregel, neither the circumstances of this division [into Zhuzes] nor the etymology of this term is known. In Russian sources the zhuzes were referred to as *orda*, and accordingly, in the West they became 'hordes,' although this term has no basis in Kazakh usage. Their names (Kishi, Orta and Uli) were also misunderstood as 'Little,' 'Middle' and 'Big,' implying size, while actually they refer instead to seniority (apparently a genealogical seniority): 'Junior,' 'Middle' and 'Senior.'

ment into Central Asia, which would have a significant effect on the future of the region. As noted above, Central Asia had historically never been divided into nation states according to ethnicity but had instead consisted of multi-ethnic city-states. With the spread of the Russian revolution into Central Asia, this reality changed drastically.

In April 1918, following Bolshevik military gains in southern Central Asia, the Bolsheviks proclaimed the Turkistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR), which excluded the cities of Khiva and Bukhara and some Turkmen territories. By 1920, the Khiva (Khorezmian) and the Bukharan People's Soviet Socialist Republic was established. In 1923, the name of the Khorezmian People's Soviet Socialist Republic was changed to the Khorezmian Soviet Socialist Republic, and in September 1924, the Bukharan People's Soviet Socialist Republic became the Bukharan Soviet Socialist Republic.

With the introduction of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the features, borders and names of the Central Asian republics changed drastically. There was an extensive debate among Russian and Central Asian revolutionaries about creating a single Central Asian Federation that would not involve delimitation into republics. However, the Bolsheviks' fears that, over time, pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic unity might become a significant opposition force against Communist rule resulted in the fragmentation of Central Asia and the formation of the republics. Some Central Asian territories (such as the Kara-Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Autonomous Oblast) were included in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and held the status of autonomous regions, making them administrative subjects of Russia until the establishment of the Kyrgyz ASSR in 1926. In 1924, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (UzSSR) and the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic (TSSR) were established. At that time, the UzSSR included the territory of present day Tajikistan, which was classified as the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Tajik ASSR). In 1925, Karakalpak Autonomous Oblast was established (within the Kazakh ASSR, which also was contained as part of the RSFSR) and in 1932 was granted the status of Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1929, the Tajik Autonomous Republic was granted the status of Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1936, with the adoption of the new USSR constitution, the Kyrgyz and Kazakh ASSRs were also established as Union Republics. In the same year, the Karakalpak ASSR was integrated into the UzSSR. As a result, by 1936, Central Asia was divided along ethnic lines into five states, which were named according to the majority ethnic group residing in those territories. This policy was called the "Policy of National Delimitation" ("Politika Natsional'nogo Razmezhevaniya") (Sengupta 2002, 71-78). At this time, "Soviet planners took great care not to construct republics whose ethnic composition would allow for separatist or anti-

Moscow sentiment to coalesce easily” (Asia Report 33, 2002, 1).

This policy of border demarcation was intentionally designed to leave large portions of the titular ethnic group of one state in the territory of another ethnic group so that Soviet authorities would “continuously be called upon by the people in the region to help them manage conflicts that were bound to emerge as a result of these artificial divisions” (Slim 2002, 490). Although it is not known how deeply calculated this policy was for the long term, Central Asian border delimitation certainly put Moscow in the position of the arbiter of many disputes. As a consequence, this policy left a complex configuration of republican borders.

To a great extent, the borders were administered with little significance or functional purpose. In fact, all the Central Asian republics were an integral part of a single state. None seriously considered a clear determination of republican borders and independence from the USSR could not be foreseen. In the 1940s, there were a few attempts to clarify the geographical and ethnic composition of certain republican territories and borders, but these did not produce any sensible outcomes.

The absence of clearly defined republican borders in the region was further complicated because the central Soviet government widely engaged in the practice of land swaps and temporary land leases from one republic to another, justifying such swaps by means of economic efficiency. However, indigenous intellectual and party elites within the republics most affected by these swaps were keen to argue about and question this policy. Even the strict Soviet regime could not prevent these elites from actively participating in the process of considering their identities and borders and generating mutual territorial claims. In particular, the debate between Uzbek and Tajik intellectual elites within the Communist Party heated up when the issue of ownership of Samarkand and Bukhara was discussed. The same type of debate also occurred between Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Kazakh party officials and intellectual elites (Komatsu 1995, 250-274).

What is clear is that debates regarding the disputed territorial claims of various republican elites were the outcome of the territorial delimitation policy, which in many instances ignored the historic, cultural and ethnic particularities of the region. For instance, the Union Republics were created along five main ethnic divisions. Smaller ethnic groups were either acknowledged by being granted administrative and cultural autonomy or were silenced.

Although the Soviet regime used various educational, economic and political policies to suppress and contain disagreements and dissatisfaction regarding borders, debates over these issues occasionally did occur.

## ETHNOPOLITICS OF CENTRAL ASIAN BORDERS AND ENCLAVES

The geographical position of enclaves and the issue of their status under the new border delimitation process remain problematic issues in relations among the present-day Central Asian countries. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are significantly affected by these enclaves within their territories. For instance, within the territory of Kyrgyzstan there are the Tajik enclaves of Vorukh, Chorkuh, and Surh, the Uzbek enclaves of Sokh and Shahimardan, and two smaller territories also belonging to Uzbekistan. Within Uzbekistan, there is a smaller Kyrgyz enclave settlement, Baarak, consisting of 627 households. Vorukh is a significant enclave that belongs to Tajikistan but is located within Kyrgyz territory. It is home to a community of 40,000 ethnic Tajiks.

One of the most typical enclaves in the Central Asian region is Sokh, which consists of 19 settlements totaling 52,000 residents and is an administrative unit of Uzbekistan. Sokh's ethnic composition is also notable because it is comprised of 99% ethnic Tajiks and only 0.72% ethnic Kyrgyz residents (Panfilova 2003).

The complexity of the present border situation contains another destabilizing factor: the inter-connection of regional transport communications, which not only separates enclaves from the possessing country but also separates various regions of the same countries. For instance, travelers from other parts of Uzbekistan must frequently cross the border of neighboring Kyrgyzstan several times to reach the enclave of Sokh, which not only seriously complicates travel into the enclave but also—and more importantly—gravely affects the local population by complicating trade, labor movement, livestock supplies, and, more recently, physical security. Tajikistan presents a similar case. In particular, to transport deliveries from Dushanbe (the Tajik capital) to Khudjand, one must use roads that pass through Uzbek territory (Usubaliev and Usubaliev 2002, 72). In yet another example, communication between the southern parts of Kyrgyzstan (specifically, the Osh and Jalal-Abad regions) can be effectively maintained only by passing through roads in Uzbekistan. In Uzbekistan, travelers journeying from Tashkent to Samarkand or Bukhara, must pass through Kazakhstan to avoid unreasonably increased travel time.

The cases discussed above illustrate the geographical complexity and inconvenience of borders in Central Asia, a condition out of which border disputes and political conflicts are prone to arise. With the increasing pace of the border delimitation process, these issues further expose weaknesses in regional cooperation and emphasize that unilateral solutions to such inter-related problems are impossible. Some such unilateral approaches are described in the section below. In addition, it must be noted that even some bilateral approaches, instances of so-called 'en-

clave trading,' have failed because of a lack of mutual confidence in the region. As explained below, some lands offered as compensation in 'enclave trading' schemes were rejected by one party or another. This type of problem has further increased mutual suspicion among negotiating parties and damaged regional confidence in cooperation.

## DETERMINANTS OF BORDER DELIMITATION IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

Border and territory related issues were at the center of the debate with the dissolution of the USSR and the achievement of independence by the former Soviet republics. At first, a consensus was reached that all the states of the former USSR constituted one integral security complex and that the borders among the former Soviet republics should be left transparent and open.

Major post-Soviet agreements such as the Minsk Agreement of December 8, 1991, the Almaty Declaration of December 21, 1991 and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Charter of June 22, 1992 mainly called for successor states to preserve the status quo. It became conventionally accepted that the CIS provided an appropriate forum for a coordinated transformation, which in turn eased the tensions that might have greatly strained relations between the former Soviet republics (Polat 2002, 172). With these agreements on the formation of the CIS in place, in addition to the Agreement on the Protection of State Boundaries and Maritime Economic Zones of the States-Participants of the CIS (March 20, 1992) and the CIS Collective Security Treaty (Tashkent, May 15, 1992), the integrity and transparency of the borders of the CIS states was maintained. This situation was both politically viable and economically rational because border demarcation, fortification and due enforcement would have led to additional costs and would have added political pressure on the leadership of these states to resolve thorny issues involving border disputes. Therefore, in the early 1990s, the leadership of these states chose political stability as opposed to nationalist rhetoric. Accordingly, for the time being, inter-republican borders were left off the agenda of summits and meetings. Nonetheless, several perceived threats remain that have increasingly disturbed the leadership of Central Asian states over the years, including following the spillover effect of the civil wars (Tajikistan and Afghanistan), the rise in religious extremism across borders, and unfettered drug-trafficking across borders as well as resource scarcity and fierce competition for water, gas and oil.

The leadership of the regional states has recognized the logic that long-standing dormant inter-ethnic contradictions caused by arbitrarily drawn boundaries,

large-scale population migrations, imperfect governmental mechanisms of the Central Asian states, and the people's natural desire for a new national sense of identity might result in a complicated development process and even crisis.

The fears described above have caused certain former republics to consider revisiting the notion of transparent borders and to consider shifting to costly border delimitation. In addition, delimiting state borders was supposed to prevent inter-state disputes over territory and natural resources—two issues that embody enormous potential for conflict in Central Asia (CA).

In keeping with the perceived threats outlined above, the trans-border movements of extremist groups that are manifest in the following three closely connected events and processes can be understood as the immediate reason that led the leadership of CA states to reformulate their border policies. The first of these was the Tajik Civil War, which generated increasing cross-border activities of extremist groups located in the war-torn territories of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The second was terrorism, which culminated in the bombings in Tashkent in February of 1999, which was a shocking event for a country that prides itself on regional stability and peace. These bombings also made Uzbekistan reconsider its policy regarding transparent borders with neighboring countries because certain perpetrators of the Tashkent bombings abused this policy, entering Uzbekistan from their bases in Afghanistan and Tajikistan and escaping back to those countries in the aftermath of the bombings (for instance, Trofimov 2002, 62). Finally, there was the series of incursions of militants from the self-named Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and other terrorist groups that claimed to represent local Muslims in their quest for the creation of a caliphate in the region. The latter came as another shock to the leadership of the CA states and significantly affected the development of inter-state relations in the region. Although the Tajik Civil War and the threat of its internationalization were anticipated in the region, incursions by these latter militants came as a complete surprise.

## **CULTURE OF MISTRUST AND BORDER DISPUTES IN CENTRAL ASIA**

The arbitrarily drawn borders in Central Asia have always held the potential for instability and conflict, and the Tajik Civil War was the turning point that led to the significant escalation of regional border issues. The borders of Tajikistan in 1992-1997 symbolized one of two frontiers between stability and civil war for the CIS and the remaining Central Asian states—the other frontier was Afghanistan.

There is a vast body of literature on the causes of the Tajik Civil War, the spe-

cifics of which are beyond the scope of this paper. However, Tajik borders have always been a point of dispute, leading to accusations of border violations by foreign powers, particularly during the Tajik Civil War and mostly by Uzbekistan (ex: Horsman 1999, 37-48; Trofimov 2002, 70). These accusations—which are mostly unsupported—were mostly made regarding Uzbek support for the Boimatov and Khudayberdiev militant groups which were armed groups led by ethnic Uzbek commanders that attempted to challenge the central government in Dushanbe in 1995, 1997 and 1999.

According to Tajik claims, Uzbekistan was responsible for facilitating armed clashes between Tajik border guards and unidentified militants along the Tajikistan-Uzbekistan border—or at least for tolerating those militant groups in its territory. Dushanbe also alleged that in October of 1998, Makhmud Khudayberdiev and his militants entered Tajikistan from Uzbekistan to take over the northern part of Tajikistan and establish an independent government. These allegations were difficult to either prove or reject. Uzbekistan strongly denied these accusations and in turn accused the Tajik government of not doing enough to prevent drug trafficking, religious extremism and terrorist activities within Tajikistan (Yunusov 2003). Uzbekistan implied that destabilization in the entire region had been caused by the ineffectiveness and lack of political vision within the coalition government of Tajikistan. However, the 1997 Peace Accords, which ended the Tajik Civil War, gave some hope that Tajikistan would stabilize.

The situation was further complicated in 1999 due to the terrorist bombing of the Uzbek capital in February by individuals who were alleged to be members of Islamic extremist groups seeking to overthrow the government. After the failure of the coup, some found refuge in Tajikistan or fled from persecution through Tajik territory into Afghanistan. It was also not coincidental that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)—a terrorist organization aiming to overthrow the secular government of Uzbekistan and to establish an Islamic state—was founded in terrorist training camps in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. These groups used civil wars and instability in those countries to safely continue their activities or temporarily provide a setting for their bases. Naturally, Uzbekistan was concerned and alarmed by these facts. Although IMU followers blame the Uzbek government's anti-religious campaign for their own resistance, this argument hardly justifies the causes for the formation of this movement.

Further, in 1999 and 2000, the IMU carried out incursions into Kyrgyzstan and attempted to enter Uzbekistan. Some reports alleged that members of the Tajik government helped the militants access the Kyrgyz border. According to the same reports, after being repelled by the joint forces of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, these militants were helped by the same officials of Tajikistan to escape from Kyrgyz and

Uzbek search operations across the Tajik-Afghan border toward a safe zone. As independent analysts note, Tajik authorities permitted IMU detachments to operate in eastern Tajikistan until at least 2001, which allowed the flow of narcotics to remain a major threat to the stability of the region (ICG report 33, 2002, 13).

Other regional observers drew parallels between the behavior of Uzbekistan during the Khudayberdiyev raids into Tajikistan and the attitude of Tajikistan toward the IMU incursions into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Some even suggested that the Tajik tolerance of groups such as the IMU was meant as Tajikistan's revenge for Uzbekistan's support of Khudayberdiyev and Baimatov raids into Tajikistan in earlier years. However, the government of Tajikistan flatly denied these accusations and made counter allegations that, if examined closely, might have in fact lent support to Uzbek claims that certain Tajik officials were tolerant of extremist groups. In particular, the official representative of Tajikistan to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) accused Uzbekistan in 2001 of having ambitions for regional domination and announced that Tajikistan intended to cease all cooperation with Uzbekistan with respect to the elimination of the IMU (Trofimov 2002, 70). Although Uzbekistan's heavy-handed approaches cannot be fully justified, it is equally obvious that Tajik authorities failed to assist other regional states in their attempts to establish secure crossing facilities and are thus partly responsible for regional instability.

The events discussed above fueled mistrust in the region and pushed all the CA states to clearly delimit and sometimes excessively enforce their borders. Thus, in 1999, Uzbekistan ended its participation in the Bishkek Agreement regarding visa-free travel for CIS citizens and strengthened control over its borders. In view of further severing its control over borders, the Uzbek side began laying minefields on borders with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, saying it lacked other alternatives, even if mining implied resettling its own population away from bordering towns and mountainous areas, in particular. Uzbekistan also mined its borders with Kyrgyzstan in those locations close to the Uzbek enclaves of Sokh and Shahimardan. Uzbekistan feared that enclaves would become an easy target for terrorists and that they needed protection as a result.

Moreover, Uzbekistan refused to hand over minefield maps to the Tajik and Kyrgyz governments, justifying its reluctance because the mined territories were within Uzbekistan, which meant that there was no need to notify foreign countries of their locations. This refusal was thought to be a result of the Uzbek government's fundamental lack of trust in the capacity of neighboring governments to keep the information from terrorists and others with maleficent intentions, bearing in mind that those mines were laid as protection against such groups in the first place.

Above all, mistrust between the regional states were manifest when Kyrgyz parliamentarians refused to ratify the Military Cooperation Treaty, which was signed by the presidents of the two countries on September 27, 2000 as a joint response to possible terrorist attacks on both countries (Jumagulov 2001). The draft of the agreement envisaged that both countries had a right to deploy their troops in the territory of the other when a threat to regional security was perceived. However, Kyrgyz parliamentarians considered that the agreement would unfairly benefit Uzbekistan because it offered an opportunity for the latter to deploy its forces within Kyrgyz territory whenever it opted to do so. Despite arguments from some parliamentarians that Kyrgyzstan would also benefit from the treaty by obtaining free mobility throughout the region and access to ground and air communication routes that crossed Uzbek territory, the majority rejected the treaty as disadvantageous for Kyrgyzstan.

These actions were regarded cautiously by neighboring countries. Kyrgyzstan accused Uzbekistan of violating the Kyrgyz border and mining both Kyrgyz territory and Uzbek territory. Many analysts and government officials in Kyrgyzstan attribute the mining of Kyrgyz territory by Uzbekistan to the regional ambitions of the latter. However, it is more reasonable to suggest that the border mining by Uzbek armed forces resulted in misplaced mines that are the result of the absence of clearly determined borders in the region. In the end, this ambiguity of borders led to misperceptions and increasing mutual territorial claims.

Uzbekistan was not alone in its unilateral security responses. Kyrgyzstan also introduced the practice of severing border controls and laying mines in areas adjacent to Tajikistan without informing the Tajik government of the exact location of its mines. Kyrgyzstan also destroyed mountain passes with explosives to make them impassable for IMU militants (Slim 2002, 494).

Instability following the Tajik Civil War and the chain of incursions described above damaged inter-state trust and relations, paving the way for unilateralism in the region. The lack of mutual understanding on ways to defend against common security threats fueled these unilateral approaches. This situation convinced governments that although declarations of regional solidarity among these states could be heard at every meeting of the heads of these states, the regional capacity to enforce these emotional statements was lacking. Unilateral approaches in providing for one's own security held precedent over the establishment of any realistic common regional security system. Unilateralism in providing for security came to a head again in the rash of inter-state border disputes and negotiations discussed below.

## POLITICS OF ENCLAVES AND BORDERS: THE DEBATE ABOUT LEGAL DOCUMENTS

The water- and energy-related issues are not the only issues that have necessitated close collaboration between these states. In addition to water and energy, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have a number of territorial and border issues to resolve following the escalation of regional security problems.

The common cause of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan against IMU incursions offered some hope that the two nations would strengthen their cooperation against terrorism. Nevertheless, their approaches to fighting militants, to delimitating borders and to controlling these borders were far from coordinated. Even during the joint campaign against the IMU, Kyrgyzstan repeatedly accused Uzbekistan of bombing militants on Kyrgyz territory without authorization, and Uzbekistan accused the Kyrgyz government of tolerating and even negotiating with terrorists (Polat 2002, 56). As a consequence, border mining, the introduction of entry visas, and strict border controls by Uzbekistan with all states of the CA region annoyed Kyrgyzstan, causing it a variety of problems.

In July of 1999, in response to Uzbekistan's mining of the border, Kyrgyzstan proposed the delimitation of the borders, particularly in the most disputed areas. The most challenging part for both countries was managing the four main Uzbek enclaves left within Kyrgyzstan: Sokh (discussed above), Shakhimardan, and two smaller settlements.

Later, when a joint commission was created, major differences between the two parties emerged over the issue of a legal basis for border delimitation. The Uzbek side suggested adhering to documents created in 1924-1928 regarding border delimitation between the two countries. Kyrgyzstan opted for border-delimitation documents from 1955 (Uzbekistan Daily Digest, December 12, 2002). The 1924-1928 documents preferred by the Uzbek side included an entire package of acts on the administrative division between the two countries that was passed during the 1924-1928 period. Specifically, these included the document dated March 17, 1925, which was approved by the Central Asian Liquidation Commission (*Liquidcom*) and described the borders between the two countries. Other documents include clarifications to the document of 1925, which were approved on November 9, 1925 by the Central Executive Committee of the Russian Federation and adopted by a Resolution of the Central Executive Committee in 1926 and in 1927. These documents served as the basis for drawing the borders between the two countries during the early period of their formation as part of the USSR.

However, Kyrgyzstan insists that these documents did not contain a description of the exact location of the borders between the two countries and therefore

cannot serve as a basis for border delimitation. The Kyrgyz side insists on using the documents of 1955, which include the Resolutions of the Council of Ministers of Kyrgyz SSR N 497, adopted on October 22, 1955, and the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbek SSR N 534, adopted on August 3, 1955. These resolutions endorsed the findings of a joint deliberation commission on disputed areas. The Presidium of the People's Representative Council of Kyrgyz SSR adopted a resolution in 1955 that approved the findings of the joint commission. However, the same body of the Uzbek SSR voiced concerns over the disputed territories of Northern Sokh. Importantly, the Presidium of the People's Representatives of the USSR did not approve the resolution of the Kyrgyz SSR, thus rendering the document void and of no effect. Nevertheless, the Kyrgyz side insists that the documents of 1955 include a detailed description of the borders between the two countries and are thus the only legitimate basis for present-day border delimitation.

What can be concluded from analyzing negotiations both in the 1950s and more recently is that both sides have made efforts to manipulate the documents that best suit their interests and claims. Criticism of the process can be heard from both sides. For instance, the Uzbek national newspaper *Narodnoe Slovo* (*The People's Voice*), which often reflects the government's position, accused Kyrgyz parliamentarians of populism and "pseudo-patriotism." It blamed the Kyrgyz side for the lack of progress in addressing territorial issues between the two countries. It also noted that internal political intrigue in Kyrgyzstan translates into constant changes in the composition of the Kyrgyz commission and frequently results in external interference in its work. In its response article, the Kyrgyz newspaper *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* (*Voice of Kyrgyzstan*) denied these accusations and harshly accused the Uzbek newspaper of unsubstantiated attacks on Kyrgyzstan (Kerimbekova 2003). In strong wording, it countered that it was Uzbekistan that aimed to apply both internal and external pressure on Kyrgyzstan to gain the desired outcome of the delimitation process. As both sides blame the inefficiency of the process, the border and territorial disputes remain unresolved, resulting in suffering for residents of neighboring regions and travelers in these regions (Kim 2002).

Despite such significant differences, the commission was still able to produce some outcomes. For instance, on February 26, 2001, Uzbek Prime Minister U. Sultanov and his Kyrgyz counterpart K. Bakiev signed an agreement on the issue that symbolized the reaction of the regional states to the increased security concerns and attempts by terrorist groups to enter Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (Panfilova 2003). Moreover, this agreement included the confidential Memorandum on Regulation of the Legal Status of Border Delimitation, which included a provision in which Kyrgyzstan agreed to swap a 40 km land corridor with Uzbekistan in the interest of regional security, allowing the latter to consolidate its enclave of

Sokh, which was previously left isolated and therefore vulnerable to terrorist attacks. In return, Kyrgyzstan was offered the same type of corridor to consolidate its enclave of Barak.

The agreement was signed but remained subject to approval by both parliaments. During the process of consideration within the Kyrgyz Parliament, the confidential memorandum was uncovered and leaked to the press. The agreement was not approved; both the Kyrgyz Prime Minister and Kyrgyz parliamentarians concluded that the land plot offered by Uzbekistan as compensation for Kyrgyz territory was not of equal value and demanded that the government freeze the agreement. In addition, the outrage of the Kyrgyz parliamentarians was fueled by the behavior of the executive which is not authorized to sanction border changes under the Kyrgyz constitution (Jumagulov 2001).

Above all, Kyrgyz parliamentarians justified their arguments against any land swaps with Uzbekistan based primarily on two reasons: First, the swap would effectively make Kyrgyzstan's Batken region an enclave, and second, complying with the Uzbek request for allocating a land corridor along the river Sokh would deprive Kyrgyzstan of control of valuable water resources. In reaction to these events, Uzbekistan further proposed considering the Kyrgyz preferences for a land swap, but because of distrust, such moves by Uzbekistan were considered simply to be a plot to annex land in Kyrgyzstan.

In the meantime, the bordering areas and enclaves remained mined and culturally isolated, which resulted not only in the maiming and killing of residents in neighboring villages on either side of the border but also in moral and psychological damage (Eurasia News, January 14, 2001). The consequences of such stalled disputes are high rates of unemployment and cultural and linguistic isolation, in addition to a lack of medical services, educational institutions and information channels for the benefit of the residents of these enclaves (Jumagulov 2001; Babakulov 2002). At some point, the governor of the Batkent region of Kyrgyzstan, M. Aibalaev, emotionally announced that he intended to unilaterally start de-mining the border areas within the territory of Kyrgyzstan, which were previously mined by Uzbekistan (ICG report 33, 2002, 14). Although this intention did not extend beyond words, it demonstrated the level of insecurity felt by the local Kyrgyz population and the Kyrgyz authorities. In 2002, in response to a shooting that occurred at the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, Kyrgyz Deputy Prime Minister Membertov made a statement claiming that the Shahimardan enclave of Uzbekistan legally belonged to Kyrgyzstan (ICG report 33, 2002, 16). Further, during the Summit of the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, in December of 2002, the president of Uzbekistan, I. Karimov, expressed his dissatisfaction with the endless border negotiations and called upon his Kyrgyz counterpart, A. Akayev, to speed up the

process ("Karimov urges...." 2003).

The events of May 15, 2003 further motivated the Uzbek leadership to preserve its minefields and maintain strict enforcement of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz borders. On this day, a group of young men attacked the police office in the city of Jalalabad in Kyrgyzstan ("V Djelalobade...." 2003). The attackers disarmed police officers and made off with more than 30 pieces of light weaponry. They were all caught a few hours later after a highway automobile chase. The leader of the group, Adyl Karimov, was previously suspected of conspiring to overthrow local authorities in Southern Kyrgyzstan.

This terrorist act once again demonstrated the vulnerability of security in the region and strengthened the belief within the Uzbek establishment that the border must be kept secured. Uzbekistan alerted its armed forces in the border area, which immediately took all strategic locations and facilities under their guard. The same type of regime was activated in the mountainous border regions, with Uzbek aviation commencing reconnaissance missions over affected territories ("Tsentral'noi azii ugrozhaet...." 2003).

However, Kyrgyzstan did not regard these events as a justifiable argument for Uzbekistan to maintain the mined border territory. On July 11, 2003, Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev ordered the unilateral removal of land mines in Kyrgyz border areas, basically ignoring Uzbek concerns ("Kyrgyz government orders...." 2003). However, the capacity of the Kyrgyz side to deliver on such a pledge was limited. As a consequence, it requested Russian assistance in training local mine-clearing specialists, and it remains unclear whether and when the work will start and whether clearing the border will resolve the deadlock over regional security between the countries.

In addition to political aspects, border and enclave disputes between the two countries are also motivated, in part, by economic concerns ("260 nesoglasovannykh kilometrov" 2003), such as the matter of the oil fields located in Kyrgyzstan's territory and leased to Uzbekistan under agreements formulated by the Soviet government. These areas include Northern Rishtan, Sary-Kamish, Sary-Tok, Chaur-Yarkutan and others, totaling 194 wells, which had to be returned to Kyrgyzstan. These wells have the capacity of delivering 60 tons of crude oil and 34,000 cubic meters of gas daily (Borisenko 2003).

In June of 2000, Uzbekistan transferred these wells to the jurisdiction of the Kyrgyz oil company Kyrgyzneftegas. As reported, the outcome of these transfers was not what Kyrgyzstan expected. In preparation for the transfer of the sites, the Uzbek oil-drilling company Uzneftegasodobycha removed all equipment that it legally owned. This unexpected removal prevented the Kyrgyz oil company from beginning to extract oil and gas. Kyrgyzstan must acquire and deploy proper

equipment before it can extract any energy resources from those lands.

Obviously, the situation after this transfer involved losses on both sides. Uzbekistan lost oil and gas fields, and due to the lack of extraction equipment, Kyrgyzstan lost any real opportunity to benefit from the transfer of the wells. If Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan had reached a deal on the joint exploitation of these wells, both could have profited from cooperation. This failure of cooperation ought to serve as a lesson for both sides during deliberations on transfer of the remaining disputed wells.

In particular, cooperation between both sides should be considered in light of the July 2003 round of deliberations of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz commission on border delimitation, when the Kyrgyz government proposed a discussion regarding the issue of transferring oil and gas deposits in Severny Sokh and Chongara-Galcha. In addition, Kyrgyzstan raised the issue of underground gas storage facilities. Kyrgyzstan wants Uzbekistan to hand it technical documentation regarding five gas pipelines running through Kyrgyz territory. These will likely be the issues that will dominate the agenda of the commission in the foreseeable future. For resolution to be mutually acceptable, the commission will have to look for cooperative rather than divisive approaches.

After several incidents on the border, the two sides agreed on common measures to increase the work on coordinating protection of borders. However, the incidents continued as Uzbek border guards arrested three Kyrgyz border guards near the Sokh enclave next to the Vuadyl border crossing (Zpress.kg, 2009). A similar incident was recorded in which two Uzbek border guards were reported to have been arrested by Kyrgyz border guards. Another incident involved the killing of a Kyrgyz border guard who was accused of illegally crossing the Uzbek border while on leave from his duties (Ferghana.ru, June 6, 2009). Similarly, the attempt by Kyrgyz border guards to install border guard posts without prior consent from the Uzbek government led to another confrontation in April of 2013 between local residents and Kyrgyz border guards, resulting in casualties on both sides (Obidov 2013). These types of incidents, rooted in a complicated geography of enclaves in the region and poor coordination in implementing the policies of the two countries, caused the Kyrgyz parliament to address its Uzbek counterparts in an effort to kickstart the dialogue on ways to coordinate measures to protect their borders (Ferghana.ru, May 29, 2009). However, these border incidents, some of them lethal, became the daily routine, and reports on border-related crimes, shootings and mine blasts on the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border were common (Dudka 2010; Ferghana.ru, March 4, 2010). In view of this problem, in April 2013, border guard agencies of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan agreed to regulations that oblige them not to use lethal weaponry or firearms during daytime (Ferghana.ru, April 24, 2013).

A similar agreement has been reached between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In addition to political concerns, border and enclave disputes between the two countries are also motivated in part by economic reasons. One example is the case with the oil fields located in Kyrgyzstan's territory and leased to Uzbekistan under the Soviet government that were discussed above. These economic aspects further complicate the resolution of the enclave issues.

Unilateralism on the part of both sides in addressing this issue characterizes Uzbek-Kyrgyz border disputes. This unilateralism is increasingly apparent in their actions. Although there are some signs of cooperation in border delimitation, such as an increase in border check points, both countries still consider the interests of the other as part of a "zero-sum game," assuming that a gain for one side means loss for the other. In the CA context, this perception is not necessarily accurate. Both sides can benefit from cooperative agreements, particularly when issues of security and economic development are concerned because neither of these issues can be achieved through the individual efforts of any single state. The concept of regional sovereignty, as opposed to national sovereignty, should be given deeper consideration in negotiations over bordering areas.

## THE INDEPENDENT STATES OF TURKESTANETS AND BAGYS?

As discussed above, Uzbekistan initiated the process of border delimitation under security pressures related to IMU incursions and the expansion of religious extremism practiced by the terrorist network of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir party. The situation on the Uzbek-Kazakh border was no exception. The most peculiar cases of this complicated process of border delimitation can be exemplified by the villages of Turkestanets and Bagys.

In May-June of 1999, Uzbekistan first moved armed troops into the Uzbek settlement of Nazarbek on its border with Kazakhstan. It then commenced the process of demarcating the border by placing observation towers along the path it had identified as the rightful border. Naturally, Kazakhstan protested these actions and called for a joint border delimitation commission to be established. In October of 1999, Uzbekistan made a decision to create a joint Uzbek-Kazakh commission, and by the next month, the heads of the border guard units of the two countries undertook an observation flight over the border (Trofimov 2003, 63).

Tensions on the borders between the two countries were not calmed simply by establishing the joint commission. For instance, in 2000, reports appeared in the press that Uzbekistan tried to unilaterally construct border installations in the settlement of Bagys. These types of incidents highlighted the importance and ur-

gency of the commission's tasks.

By September 2000, the joint delimitation commission had met three times. By mid-2000, both sides had agreed upon 96% of their borders, with 4% remaining difficult to resolve. On November 16, 2001, President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan and President Karimov of Uzbekistan signed an agreement on the 96% border delimitation. They also agreed to jointly cooperate in considering the remaining 4% of their bordering territory. Nevertheless, border-related incidents did not stop with the signing of this agreement, and there were several reports of civilian casualties. Local residents were not yet used to living in border areas, and they often became victims of strict border control when looking for stray cattle or other animals, which traditionally graze in the pastures that now constitute national borders (Dosybieva 2002a). Such incidents led to deterioration in the relations between the two countries. In the words of Jamarkan Tuyakbai, the speaker of Kazakhstani Majlis, “[O]n both sides, there are cases of beatings of citizens of the neighboring country, stealing of cattle and inappropriate use of force....” (Dosybieva 2002a). There have also been registered incidents of armed attacks on border guards by the members of smuggling gangs (Dosybieva 2002b). In many cases, the tensions described above arise in the unresolved 4% of the border areas.

Problematic issues with the remaining 4% are exemplified by the cases of the settlements of Baghys and Turkestanets on the Uzbek-Kazakh border. The population of these two villages is primarily ethnic Kazakh, whereas the territory falls under the jurisdiction of Uzbekistan. The village of Bagys is located exactly on the border; one part of the village is in Uzbek territory, and the other is in Kazakh territory. These settlements were leased to Uzbekistan by the resolution of the politbureau of the Communist Party in 1956. For most of their history, they constituted lands used for collective farms that served the needs of the Central Asian (Turkistan) Military District (TURKVO). After the collapse of the USSR, this district was transferred into the sole possession of Uzbekistan.

The problems began at the end of 2000. The residents of the two settlements expressed their dissatisfaction with the pace of border delimitation negotiations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In anticipation of an unfavorable outcome, they demanded that the villages be re-united with Kazakhstan. Ethnically, the villages housed a Kazakh majority, but their citizenship was defined as Uzbek.

The situation escalated when residents declared so-called ‘independence’ from both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, which led to a reported confrontation between local residents and the Uzbek military (CNN 2002). The situation with these two villages has also been used by certain nationalistic figures like Aidar Abdramanov and nationalistic groups supporting him like Azat. These groups used this situation in order to boost their image of advocating Kazakh interests. In or-

der to do so, they not only initiated declaration of Bagys Kazakh Republic but also elected (for four-year term) the parliament and president of this republic (for a two-year term). Therefore, declaration of independence of this village had different meanings for different actors. For politicians and nationalist movements this was another opportunity to boost their image and increase their public support in the eyes of general public of Kazakhstan. For residents of this village it was rather the case of necessity to sustain their livelihood and their identity. The issue at stake was not only the village itself but also lands used for stock breeding and water facilities situated in the nearby areas. At the end of the day, the leaders of self-declared republics were temporarily detained and reprimanded while the issue of declaration of independence has been completely ignored and forgotten.

As in the case of Uzbek-Kyrgyz negotiations, one of the major disputed issues was that of the documents to be used in delimiting the territory. In the case of the village of Bagys, Uzbekistan used maps dating from 1963, on which the village is shown as a part of the Bostandyk municipality of Uzbekistan. Local residents insist that maps and documents dating from 1941 should be used, in which the village is shown as a part of the Saryagash municipality of Kazakhstan (Dosbiev 2001).

A resolution to this conflict has been found by reaching an inter-governmental agreement, according to which the settlement of Bagys would be transferred to the jurisdiction of Kazakhstan (Matveev 2003), and Turkestanets would remain within Uzbek territory. According to the agreement, residents of Turkestanets who are willing to move into Kazakhstan and residents of Bagys who are willing to move into Uzbekistan will be given assistance and support from the relevant government. As a result around 100 families were relocated from Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan. Yet other specifics of these decisions were not properly detailed and documented which led to further protests with the latest one registered in August 2014 in which women from Bagys and Turkestanets demanded that issues with water facilities and land for stockbreeding be decided and implemented by governments.

The border disputes between these two countries have long histories and therefore require negotiations and a common vision of Soviet and post-Soviet history.

As described above, the borders in the region, whether for security or for economic reasons, remain under the strictest control. In the case of both Uzbek-Kyrgyz border disputes and Uzbek-Kazakh border disputes, different historical documents and protocols of border delimitation are widely used by both sides to achieve outcomes that are self-serving. It is obvious, though, that border delimitation is not an objective but a perceived means to achieve regional security. In this respect, doubts remain as to whether border delimitation, even if successful,

would actually mean increased security for the region. In fact, over the long term, it might bring about the reverse.

### **“WE WANT THIS ROAD AND WATER, TOO!”: BORDER DISPUTES BETWEEN KYRGYZSTAN AND TAJIKISTAN**

The border-related disputes between these states are primarily concentrated in the Fergana Valley. Although relations between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan do not involve harsh antagonism, the territorial disputes make relations between these two states complex. One of the regions that receive continuous attention from both sides is the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan. The territory is under the jurisdiction of Kyrgyzstan, and there have been no official claims from the Tajik side on it. However, there is the memory of historical injustice between various ethnic groups in the region.

One of the major points of dispute in the relations between the two states is the enclave of Vorukh, which is separated from Tajikistan by a 20-km stretch of land that is rich in water reserves and pastures (Jumagulov 2003). It is this piece of land that generates disputes. The area has been the subject of land and jurisdiction claims from both sides. Due to the absence of an agreement between the two countries on the borders, disputes of all types have occurred in recent years.

In the spring of 2002, Tajikistan began erecting border posts and checkpoints in areas bordering Kyrgyzstan. Those lands often included disputed territories. These arbitrarily erected Tajik checkpoints and border posts fueled outrage among the local population because they placed an additional burden on them every time they traveled through the territory, which, until that time, they had considered to be their own (regardless of national borders). For instance, in October of 2002, reports claimed that Tajik border guards blocked the highway road and made several vehicles turn into Tajikistan's Isfara region, claiming tax for the load (Karym kyzi 2002). Protests on the Kyrgyz side were ignored while this type of incident repeatedly occurred in the region. The Tajik side claims it acts within its own territory and does not violate the borders of any other country. Kyrgyzstan responded to such actions by erecting its own border posts and introducing harsh control over its borders.

Further, on January 3, 2003, approximately 200 villagers from the Sogd region of Tajikistan stormed the border with Kyrgyzstan and smashed Kyrgyz customs posts. In retaliation, Kyrgyz villagers from the Batkent region of Kyrgyzstan demolished a recently established border checkpoint (Jumagulov 2003). Some warned that this event might signal the beginning of a return to the events of

1989 and inter-ethnic violence in the region (Jumagulov 2003). Such warnings unfortunately came partly true in the form of intercommunal ethnic clashes in 2010 in the south of Kyrgyzstan between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities. Such clashes also emphasized the importance of dealing with intercommunal conflicts not only at the level of governments but also from the perspective of everyday needs of the communities living in bordering areas.

## CONCLUSION

The main message of this paper is to suggest that border-related issues in Central Asia are dealt from the position of unilateralism. While there are some signs of cooperation in border delimitation, Central Asian countries still consider each other's interests along the lines of a "zero-sum game," assuming that gain on one side means defeat for the other. This further complicates the situation, making the progress in border delimitation very slow. According to some scholars, as of 2008, out of 1,385 kilometers of common border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, only 993 kilometers were agreed upon at the level of delegations authorized to conduct delimitation of the borders (Matveev 2013). According to Kyrgyz official estimates (the Department of Delimitation of Borders and Development of Bordering Areas under the President of Kyrgyzstan), by 2013 only 1,007 kilometers of common borders have been agreed upon out of 1,378 kilometers of total Uzbek border. The remaining 400 kilometers consist of 58 disputed areas which are a matter of continued negotiation. It needs to be pointed out that such situation of border tensions can be seen across Central Asia. For instance, because of the similar issue with enclaves, only 519 kilometers out of 907 kilometers of Kyrgyz-Tajik border have been delimited, while the rest remains the issue for further negotiations (Meterova 2013).

What further complicates this situation is that non-state actors and interests are often ignored in the process of border delimitation. While Central Asian countries face all possible evils such as environmental hazards, economic shortcomings and border-related problems, these problems cannot be addressed without localizing public dissatisfaction and creating public consent within the smaller communities like those exemplified in the cases above.

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## **Uneasy Pairs: Revitalizations of Karen Ethno-Nationalism and Civil Society across the Thai-Burmese Border**

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### Abstract

Building on Wimmer (2012) and other critical scholarship on ethnic nationalism, I explore the reproduction and increase what I like to call here a humanitarian or refugee nationalism of the Karen in the context of a humanitarian civil society in the borderland of Thailand and Myanmar. While this ethno-nationalism is of course tied to the parochial and local image of Karen cultural identity firmly rooted in the rural and mountain landscape of Southeastern Burma, I argue that Karen ethno-nationalism is very cosmopolitan in that the revitalization of this idea of an imagined homeland for the Karen (Kawthoolei= land of the free, without evil) is fabricated and socially embedded in the wider globalized networks of organizations in Southeastern Burma, in the refugee camps, the many Karen civil society organizations on the Thai border, and not least in the growing diaspora resettled to the many countries in the West.

### Keywords

Karen, Burma (Myanmar), nationalism, displacement, exile, diaspora, ethnicity, civil society

The Karen are an ethnic minority living in Thailand and Burma/Myanmar, constituting about 4 million people in Burma (Kwanchewan 2003, Hayami 2004). Its nationalist organization and movement rally round the notion of an autonomous Karen nation called *Kawthoolei*, an “imagined community” in the sense of Ben Anderson (1983), which exists in the aspiration of the Karen and is performed as such in public ritual. After decades of civil war in Southeastern Burma, Karen villages in the conflict zone were left devastatingly poor, lacking even the most basic resources. The education and health sector in this area were mostly never really developed and physical violence and constant taxing and looting of the villages resulted in severe food crises and large-scale displacement and migration. This displacement and migration led to a re-location of the nationalist movement to the nine refugee camps along the Thai border with Burma. A new partnership with Western, mostly Christian humanitarian organizations enabled an amazing effort to provide emergency health and educational services to devastated communities in Burma and displaced households in the camps (Horstmann 2011, Horstmann *fc.*).

The hardships faced by the Karen in Southeastern Burma at the hands of the Burmese army generated a strong swell of sympathy and social support from various international networks and church congregations. This follows a pattern of over 200 years of intensive contact between the Karen people in Southeastern Burma and American Baptist missionaries. As a consequence, even though only a small segment of the mostly Sgaw-Karen language speakers are actually Christians, they formed the core of the early nationalist movement and the Karen are known in America and in the global West as Christians, where else the majority is in fact Karen Buddhist. Karen Baptist and other Christian-Catholic, Seventh-Day Adventists, charismatic, evangelical and Pentecostal-congregations have over time built impressive trans-national church networks and receive modest financial support. For example, when the famous bible school in Maela refugee camp was burned to the ground in a fire in 2011, the reconstruction lasted only a few months as financial support readily flowed in from around the globe.

Even when the social fabric of Karen society in Southeastern Burma was torn up by war, I argue that Karen ethno-nationalism survived and was even greatly strengthened by the growth of humanitarian aid and services and transnational Karen diaspora networks, especially, but not only, in the refugee camps (Horstmann *fc.*). Karen ethno-nationalism is widespread and has also strongly influenced the young civil society in Southeastern Burma. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to critically reflect on the continuous reproduction of the ideology of a Karen race and its performance in the Karen ritual calendar, especially in Karen New Year celebrations in Southeastern Burma, in Maesot, in the camps, and in the Karen

diasporic groups in the West. As Gravers insightfully points out, the historical development of ethno-nationalism in association to Karen Buddhist visions of millenarian utopian orders of a just and reciprocal society and, in a Christian and ultimately Western modern version was fostered in the close alliance between the Karens and American missionaries (Gravers 2007a, 2007b). Dudley comes closest to the approach presented in this paper in her fine study of Karenni education and of the reproduction of nationalist ideas as a central element in camp education. As McConnachie, in her fine study on governing refugees posits, the Karen were able to reverse the power relations reigning in Southeastern Burma and construct a cultural hegemony in the refugee camps (McConnachie 2014). Thus, in the following, I explore the continuous vitality of Karen ethno-nationalism in the face of military defeat and the reconstruction of the idea of a Karen nation in exile. The Karen National Union (KNU), the largest Karen political organization and armed group, was forced to reconcile its position and, since 1976, has opted for advocating for a semi-autonomous Karen state in a federal system in the Union of Burma. But who speaks for Karen nationalism and who is included in this? For example, what is the meaning of Karen ethnic ideology for various cultural minority groups within the Karen groups? What is the meaning of Karen nationalism in the context of stark poverty among the majority of the Karen? And what is the ontology of everyday nationalism as experienced by ordinary Karen? Karen nationalism is built on a bundle of identity markers, legends and myths about the origin of the Karen, Karen clothes, Karen rural identities, Karen arts and beliefs, but also the mobilization of political identity statements in the nationalist movement and masculine Karen military culture (Dudley 2010, Fink 2001, introducing San C. Po). Where Karen ethno-nationalism may well be based on traditional ideas of a just order elsewhere (Gravers *fc.*), my question is whether this nationalism can be mobilized to persuade people to sacrifice their lives for the abstract and constructed idea of a Karen race by joining fighting, or seeing fighting as the only solution. Another question closely related concerns the way that nationalism engenders processes of inclusion and exclusion.

In order to begin a critical and reflexive work on Karen ethno-nationalism I find inspiration in the path breaking work that has been done on nationalism and ethno-nationalism. Wimmer, for example, has skillfully analyzed the mobilization of cultural resources in nationalist indigenous movements (Wimmer 1997). And the increasing commodification of ethnicity in the articulation of modern discourses on indigenous rights has been discussed in critical scholarship such as that of Comaroff. Moreover, in a classic comparative study of what he calls hierarchical and egalitarian nationalism, Bruce Kapferer has shown the resilience of legends and myths in the making of nationalist ideology (Kapferer 2012). Wimmer

has also argued that the essentialist perspective of ethnic group identity and ethnic boundaries has been underestimated by approaches that focus on a constructionist perspective of identity (Wimmer 2012). Building on Wimmer and other critical scholarship, I explore the reproduction and increase what I like to call here a humanitarian nationalism of the Karen in the context of a humanitarian civil society in the borderland of Thailand and Myanmar. While this ethno-nationalism is of course tied to the parochial and local image of Karen cultural identity firmly rooted in the countryside and mountains of Southeastern Burma, I argue that this Karen ethno-nationalism and national identity is very cosmopolitan in that the revitalization of this idea is fabricated and socially embedded in the wider globalized networks of organizations in Southeastern Burma, in the refugee camps, the many Karen civil society organizations on the Thai border, and not least in the growing diaspora in the many countries in the West. My thesis is that today's Karen ethno-nationalism is not only associated with the nationalist movement and to the different Karen armed groups, but is a dynamic social phenomenon that takes its strength from close networked civil society groups in Burma, Thailand and in the world. It is a way that the Karen educated middle class rather than ordinary Karen villagers present themselves to the world and define their identity within it.

Resentments are already starting to grow in the refugee camps among the non-Karen populations in the camps in Thailand as animists are becoming exposed to dominant Karen nationalist ideology and (soft) Christian proselytizing. The KNU is one of the major players in the loose alliance of ethnic minority armies, despite being greatly weakened by major splits and withdrawals from military leaders who set up their own militia or, in the case of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), to develop a counter-army consisting of Buddhists in opposition to the predominantly Christian leadership of the KNU. Even within the KNU, there are strong disagreements and tensions as to how to proceed with the fragile peace process. Some leaders strongly support the peace process, while others prepare for further fighting and all the suffering that would entail for the civil population. Nevertheless, the KNU continues to represent the strongest force in the cease-fire negotiations. For the KNU the fact that they are allowed to govern in their "liberated areas" within the Karen state and their inclusion in the peace process is taken as evidence of the great success of their decade long armed struggle.

## THE FRAME

While conducting fieldwork in Eastern Burma and in the refugee camps on the Thai border, I was struck by the overwhelming influence of Karen ethno-nationalism on the civil society of the Karen.<sup>1</sup> Whether it was the head teachers in the migration school or the head teacher of the boarding school in Maela camp, or the young new Karen leaders, NGOs, in unison they urged the Karen to stand together, boosted T-shirts with KNU slogans (*We never surrender*) and the national hero of the Karen nationalist movement Saw Ba U Gyi, the flying of the Karen flag, training in Karen drilling skills, and more general beliefs in the purity of the Karen race. Moreover, the KNU also regularly hoist the Karen flag and hold ritual days, such as the national day and the martyr day to commemorate national heroes. While the Karen nationalist movement has been closely associated with the influence of American Baptist missionaries (Keyes 1979), Karen ethno-nationalism is just as widespread among Buddhists as it is among Christians. The DKBA holds Buddhist as well as nationalist rituals and the KNU and DKBA actively compete to represent the Karen nation. DKBA's patron, monk U Thuzana who was identified as a Maitreya, a figure who has descended from heaven to liberate the Karen from suffering and to bring prosperity to the Buddhist kingdom, is a stern nationalist. During my last ethnographic project on bottom-up/grassroots humanitarianism, young people working for Karen NGOs looked to the KNU for leadership and often directed my attention towards the "Karen unity" meetings in which the KNU leadership took a lead with the aim of overcoming strife and competition between the various political factions. Moreover, during the Karen New Year festivities I found that female and feminist community leaders stood side by side with the main male and expressively macho Karen militia leaders. During the Karen New Year festivals the performance of the Karen *Don* dance has become the emblem of Karen nationalism. The same dance is performed by dance troupes from every region in Karen state, each troupe representing a different color of the Karen flag. The performers train no less than six months in advance to perfect the movements. The meaning of the Don dance as a central symbol of village cohesion and fertility has slowly shifted to a symbol of the imagined Karen nation. During the Karen New Year celebrations in Shwekoko the flags of the Karen militia, the Karen

1 The paper incorporates recent observations from my project funded by the Thailand Research Fund entitled *Humanitarianism from Below* community-based organizations of the Karen and the role of the international community. Fieldwork for the project was conducted in conjunction with the project group "Streams of Knowledge along the Thai-Burmese Border Zones: Multiple Dimensions of People, Capital and Culture," coordinated by Decha Tangseefa (Thammasat University, Bangkok). All data collected are my own and based on observations gained from ethnographic fieldwork. I would like to thank Decha Tangseefa and Su-Ann Oh for their warm and friendly support and for inspiring this article.

Peace Council and Border Guard Forces, were flown while those of the DKBA and KNU were notably absent.

Although the Karen national project as it was first conceived may have limited future prospects, the idea of a sovereign homeland remains at the core of the different Karen militia's territorial aspirations as they negotiate with the military government in Myanmar. My main thesis is that the humanitarian economy in the Karen case has been decisive for the emergence of a pioneer civil society, consisting of organic, indigenous intellectuals, such as students, teachers, artists, writers, monks, pastors, and local politicians. Many of these local intellectuals who were forced into exile in the early 1980's, have later received extremely lucrative and highly sought after jobs in NGOs, human rights groups, self-employed colleges and universities, and camp schools. The KNU has been forced to re-organize itself in the Thai borderland and has been incredibly creative and industrious in doing so, establishing many different grassroots organizations, which I look to look into here. While the violent fissure of the KNU and DKBA had disastrous consequences on the KNU and heavy reprisals on the civil population (including camp attacks by the DKBA), Karen nationalism can equally be found among Christian pastors in the camps and along the KNLA-controlled border areas, as among charismatic Buddhist monks in Hpa-an town and Karen state.

This explains the existence of religious nationalism among Buddhist militias that revitalize traditional cycles of Karen millenarian and anti-colonial movements among the leadership of the Karen National Union which, until recently, was in the hands of a Seventh Day Adventist, who governed the KNU with an iron fist, not hesitating to execute members who were identified as betrayers of the national cause. Therefore, a minor aim of this article is to explore the ambiguous relationship between civil society and vibrant Karen ethno-nationalism and how this may hamper the peace process in the sense that Karen society and the nation of *Kawthoolei* is persistently imagined by the nationalist movement as exclusively Karen, leaving little space for peaceful coexistence of the Karen with the Burmese majority.

In a recent article on human rights in Southeastern Burma I argued that the KNU holds a monopoly on the human rights discourse (Horstmann 2012). The KNU discovered the discourse on indigenous minorities at a time when there were serious doubts among anthropologists about the essentialist definition of ethnic identities. I further contended that the KNU exercises a form of symbolic violence by underplaying internal differences within the Karen. While the Karen are estimated to comprise anything between 4-6 million people in Southeastern Burma this number includes groups such as the Karenni, the Pa-o, who are vastly different for those who traditionally identify as "Karen." Even among those who

do identify as ‘Karen,’ there are considerable differences in language, modes of livelihood, and cosmologies between, for example, Sgaw and Pwo Karen. I contend that Karen cultural identity was in the refugee camps and within the frame of the emergent humanitarian sector having hardly existed in Southeastern Burma in this homogenous form before.

What I describe here is how the highly commendable humanitarian work and the outstanding efforts to help Karen to reconstruct their fragmented lives also served to build the foundation for the Karen ethno-nationalist project. The emplacement of the Karen individual within this organized humanitarian framework shaped Karen social and cultural selves and produced new personalities who are ready to risk their lives for the sake of an imagined Karen collectivity.

## KAREN CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE THAI BORDERLAND

Karen civil society got off to very rocky start in Southeast Burma. The brutal civil war devastated the social fabric of Karen society leaving many schools and sometimes whole villages burned to the ground, forcing many villagers into the forest, into exile in the Internally displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Burma or the refugee camps in Thailand, or to Thai Karen communities on the Thai border. Certainly, the sheer physical violence of the military regime in Myanmar did not allow for the operation of open political opposition, which would be suicidal in the face of military repression. But it is possible to argue that the civil society in southeast Burma was also squeezed by the KNU who purged left wing elements within the nationalist movement and put intensive pressure on the civil population in KNLA-controlled provinces. While the assaults by the Myanmar military were far graver, peasants were also threatened by KNLA-commanders and the KNU continued, and continues to exercise pressure on peasants in the military bases. The KNU was reconstructed and bolstered by a partnership with the newly emerging humanitarian sector. Western missionary networks and Christian humanitarian organizations regularly identified the KNU as the aggrieved party and such were considered as the “good guys.” This eventually led European humanitarian organizations to form the very productive Thailand Burma Border Consortium, which efficiently organized humanitarian assistance to the desperate Karen and increased transparency of aid distribution to private households (TBBC 2010).

The Border Consortium not only provided crucial rations of rice, charcoal and clothes, but also worked together closely with many humanitarian organizations to provide training, education, health services, and produced highly reliable

and well-researched reports on the human rights situation, poverty and displacement in Burma. The Border Consortium provides crucial support to local Karen organizations, which it has funded and supported from the very beginning, and thus, contributed greatly to a hugely active and dynamic civil society on the Thai border.<sup>2</sup>

The Karen had a high level of organization in their social support networks and alternative security networks. The traditional security networks were established to protect the waterways against being poisoned and to patrol the villages with volunteer guards. When the first refugee camps began emerging, the Karen established internal committees to share the administration, and especially, the crucial distribution of aid rations to the vast number of refugee families who sought shelter there. The KNU benefitted from the resources that were channeled to the Karen, military aid, and from human rights campaigns led by the democratic opposition and student movement, that were represented in the United Nations, who were allied with the KNU. From a practical perspective, the emerging humanitarian sector could only operate under the protection of active KNLA troops.

In a sense, the KNU has set out a course of suffering for the Karen in taking up arms, but also used this suffering as a tool to garner support and funding for its nationalist cause. In Maela, for example, I was able to buy a pirated copy of the film “*Blood Karen*” in which the horror of the civil Karen population was depicted by portraying a Burmese commander who shoots a young Karen girl in cold blood. This black and white, what best can be described as propaganda, film is routinely repeated in other Western representations of the Karen conflict such as film clips of the Free Burma Rangers and in populist scholarship where the Burmese army is portrayed as “evil” (Rogers 2004), constantly reproducing crude stereotypes and valorizing Karen nationalism. But the KNU also realized that, apart from the military arm, the organization needed civil partners to attract funding and resources from Western donors, and thus in the early 1980’s, numerous NGOs and CBOs were founded. While many of these organizations in their early stages stemmed directly from, or were closely associated with the KNU, most soon developed their own agendas, quite independent and sometimes in conflict with KNU positions and strategies. Together, these NGOs and CBOs soon formed

2 The Border Consortium—former Thailand Burma Border Consortium—consists of voluntary humanitarian organizations that oversee and manage humanitarian assistance and rations to the camp and support Karen voluntary groups working with the Karen on all aspects of livelihood in the camps. See the excellent report of the Consortium’s experiences and moving engagement in TBBC (2010). I would like to thank the board of The Border Consortium for answering to all of my questions relating to their wonderful work. The excellent reports and surveys on conflict, displacement and poverty are available for download on TBBC’s website <http://theborderconsortium.org/>.

a very impressive local and transnational activism, what I called a refugee public. Curiously, there is little critical scholarship on this important public sphere, with human rights reports from activist groups concentrating solely on human rights violations.

One such organization is the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), which emerged from an alliance of American and local human rights activists. The KHRG regularly issues excellent and precise documentation of human rights abuses and is exceptional in that they increasingly also cover human rights abuses committed by different Karen militias. Another private, non-profit organization that works on human rights is called Burma Issues, it focuses on training and empowering Karen villagers. Some of the activists active in both organizations were former KNLA soldiers or have relatives fighting for the KNLA. One of the central Karen NGO/CBOs is the Karen Woman Organization (KWO), which is an extremely sophisticated, strong and well-funded private non-profit organization that consists of many thousands of women. Originally associated with the KNU, the KWO has developed their own goals and is powerful enough to counter male KNU positions in the public sphere. The KWO defends women in refugee camps and IDPs, with a strong focus on childcare and violence against women, including violence perpetrated by Karen men.

Indeed there is a multiplicity of civil society groups active on the Thai/Myanmar Border today. The Karen Teachers Working Group (KTWG), for instance, organizes mobile schools for IDPs in the conflict zone, while World Education Thailand produced the schoolbooks and written the curricula. The KTWG is also active in the camps and many activists are former student activists who are close to the Karen refugee committees. Another such group, the Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) has established hundreds of small mobile teams that provide emergency health care in minority areas. Originally concentrating their efforts on the Karen state, the Back Packers are now active in nearly all ethnic minority areas of Myanmar. These organizations have been closely related to the KNU and as many KNU members and former soldiers found new jobs within these newly founded CBOs and NGOs. In a sense, Christians with strong affiliations with the KNU form an overwhelming majority of the staff of the different organizations, leaving little room for the multitude of ethnic minority organizations from other groups that are increasingly organizing in Maesot as CBOs and are securing a piece of the humanitarian cake. The manifold of Karen NGOs and CBOs has created a robust social network with deep transnational connections and are usually well funded, although sponsorship for the relatively independent small organizations, such as Burma Issues, are dwindling in the context of political system in Myanmar garnering steadily more legitimacy in the international community

which has led to the subsequent relocation of operations of many international humanitarian organizations across the border into Myanmar. The intertwining of humanitarian assistance, ethnicity, and nationalism can be seen clearest in the repressive, but partly protective spaces of the refugee camps in Thailand, the space I now turn to.

## **HUMANITARIAN GOVERNMENT AND CIVILITY IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS**

The refugee camp in Thailand, is not simply a depressed “non-space” where traumatized people are degraded to do little more than wait, dependent on rations and subjugated under the military administration, but is also a public space of “quasi-urban sociability” (Agier 2002), a space of possibility and hope in which residents make huge efforts to “occupy” the camps and make them more human. The potential, heterogeneity, and heterotopia of identity resources are constitutive to social interaction and to people’s “urban” aspirations. Indeed, even when marginalized and destitute, people tend to gather all their resources in order to reconstruct their lives and to shape the environment around them. While the “polis” is made up by community centers, community organizations and churches, the “urban” habitat is also characterized by the emergence of informal markets, shops in which foodstuff, clothes, cellphones, and pirated CDs and VCDs are sold for profit.

The crucial architecture of the polis in the camp relies on the construction of public space. Humanitarian organizations were able to base their assistance on the very high degree of organization present in the Karen Community based organizations and NGOs. The different actors address the camps from completely different angles. The Thai government sees the camp as a space for the establishing of power, confinement and control over refugees. The humanitarian sector, on the other hand, regularly sees the camp as a place of destitute refugees and victims that depend on aid. The refugees, by contrast, often aim to make the camp a space of their own to compete with the Thai government. The Karen National Union, for example, runs a parallel system of humanitarian government and administration, which remains very vulnerable to changing Thai politics. This is such that a pastor from the Karen Refugee Committee has called the camp as a “blessing in disguise” as it allows them to preach the bible to the Karen and reconstruct a “home” in exile. Even after the announced closure of the camps, the refugee organizations constructed a permanent public space, which is transportable in the Thailand-Burma border, and hence, counters the emphasis of the Thai government on the

transitory nature of the camps. For many refugees the camps in fact offer *mobility* in the form of resettlement and livelihood strategies between the camps, enclaves in Mae Sot's urban center, in the hilly Thai countryside in Northwestern Thailand and access to resettlement programs to a third country in the West.

While the refugee camp population benefits from the service and assistance of INGOs, refugees are not allowed to work and thus depend on remittances, illegal work, or relatives to subsist. This focus is important as it turns the attention away from the conception of refugees as a passive, anonymous crowd, to people who actively strive to shape their destiny and future in the camp. Moreover, community leaders in the camps keep multiple connections to centers outside of the camp for their survival and reproduction. We are now witness to the last incarnation of the refugee camps on the Thai-Myanmar border: humanitarian organizations are gradually withdrawing from the highly accessible and highly regulated camps to move directly to Burma. Only roughly half in the camps of the residents (mostly older, established) are registered with the UNHCR, and are thus, entitled to their international rights as a refugee, such that this category is not granted to displaced people residing in the hilly countryside of Northwestern Thailand who are inscribed in Thai law as simply illegal migrants, many of them without papers or identification (Tangseefa 2007).

An understanding of the camp management requires a short excursion through the history of the camps in western Thailand. There is a long history of Burmese Karen resettling to this area, yet permanent refugee settlement did not exist until 1984. Refugee camps were transformed into large agglomerations we see today only after many smaller and more temporary camps in the border-zone were shelled and raided by the Burmese army and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) troops in the early 90s. The assistance of Christian faith-based groups and Christian missionary networks was instrumental in the first phase of the establishment of these City-Camps. Christian groups had collected experiences with refugee camps on the Thai-Lao and Thai-Cambodian border in the 70s/80s so were well equipped to help when the humanitarian crisis emerged in hills and forests of Southeastern Burma after the large scale escalations in the conflict in the 80s and 90s.

Settlement into the camps is anything but spontaneous and is in fact regulated by the camp authorities. The governance and social control of the camps is two-tiered with the administration formally entirely controlled by the Thai Ministry of Interior, the camps being de-facto a state-controlled space. Refugee camps are called "temporary shelters" by the Royal Thai government (RTG) to underline their temporary status and refugees were forbidden from leaving the camp without governmental permission. However, while the formal administration of the

refugee camp lies with the Royal Thai Government, the practical day-to-day administration is left to the Karen.

After the Christian missionary networks moved to the Thai-Burmese border in the early 80's to help a huge wave of displaced people unable to return to Burma, the Karen Refugee Council (KRC) was the natural and obvious partner for the emerging Christian aid consortium to access the refugee population in Thailand and Burma at that time. The Karen Refugee Councils have been established by the KNU, but the KRC did not usurp the broader role of the KNU. Only a small proportion of the displaced population made it to the camps, and huge parts of the civil population remained internally displaced in the hills forest of Burma. A place in the camp became a privilege that could only be attained by those who had ties to camp residents and those who were able to find an entrance point to the camp. Over time the Christian consortium transformed into the secular Thai Burma Border Consortium, which administers a substantial budget to help with food, charcoal and other rations to 140,452 refugees in the camps, in the countryside and through another INGO, on the Burma side. Each camp has a refugee committee divided into sections or zones. In the early stages of the camps positions on the committees were members of KNU friendly groups such as the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Pastors, Karen community leaders and elders.

McConnachie (2014) argues that this military and political structure of the camps has enabled community participation in humanitarian assistance. The KRC has preferred to handle penal cases internally, involving the Thai administration as little as possible. Moreover, the KNU has expelled families from the refugee camps if they found them a security threat to the governance of the camps. However, in time, the Karen Refugee Committee has become more civilian and elders have been appointed to complement existing representatives. The Thailand Burma Border Consortium has also begun to reflect more critically its own identification with the KNU and has placed more emphasis on the accountability of the humanitarian aid they provide.

The urban or "polis" in the camp is constituted by the presence of international organizations such as the UNHCR, the EU, international humanitarian organizations and community based organizations, organized by the educated spectrum of Karen refugees.

Orphanages, schools and churches can be conceptualized not only as shelters, but also as disciplinary institutions. Mediating the suffering of the Karen as a spokesperson, this nationalist network maintains cross-border humanitarianism, while the KNLA exercised pressure on Karen villagers by demanding their loyalty, levying them for taxes and young men to serve as soldiers, and not least by exercising control over the population in the camps and in the KNU-controlled areas

of Karen state in Burma.

Non-KNU aligned Karen villagers, squeezed between different conflicting parties and their demand for taxes and labor often responded in strategies of avoidance, asserting their non-KNU, non-Christian identities, and/or settling outside the camp altogether. Settling in the countryside allowed Buddhist Pwo Karen to avoid the camp regime set up by the Christian and nationalist administration in the camps. These villagers often made a living by working for Thai Karen patrons as tenant farmers or farm laborers living in hiding, and thus, are not entitled or cannot access humanitarian assistance or the advocacy work of community based organizations (Prasert 2012).

Under these conditions the situation on the Thailand-Burma border has bifurcated: The camps have become a basis for the reconstruction of a nationalist movement and project, and for the emergence of corridors for transnational social formations and re-entering of the conflict zone in Burma with a humanitarian and military task. KNU and Christian-controlled education was the basis for the emergence of a distinct Karen identity. The reconstruction of the educational sector in the camps is one of the astonishing achievements of indigenous camp administration and protestant churches. High schools operating in Mae La were known widely as schools of excellence with a high quality of teaching, staffed with professional teachers, foreign volunteers, and community and church leaders. The educational system in the camps was in the hands of the KRC with little or no interference from the Thai administration. As such, while the educational system almost collapsed on the Burmese border and many schools were closed, the humanitarian situation and the support of many organizations, especially faith-based, and the bounded, quasi laboratory like character of the camp, allowed for the blossoming of the Karen education sector that was used for the modern production and transformation of illiterate refugees into “modern” educated subjects (cf. Dudley 2007). Education is the springboard to one of the lucrative positions in a humanitarian NGO.

This distinct refugee identity was backed by international humanitarian organizations that identified with the Karen and all too regularly grasped the conflict in Manichean terms of good against evil. Massive human rights violations by the Burmese military against civil populations, campaigns to depopulate whole areas, forced labor and relocations, massive displacement and wide spread state terror reinforced a global imagination of persecuted Christians in a world of hell. For some selected faith-based organizations and associated church networks, the Karen symbolized the prototype of persecuted ethnic minority Christians. Hence, faith-based relief and missionary organizations were able to raise substantial church donations in the US and elsewhere for the “Karen cause.”

Dudley (2007) describes the mental transformation of young men to conscious warriors during socialization in the camp schools and think tanks. Learning English with anthropologist Sandra Dudley, young refugees often expressed their desire to fight for, contribute to, and serve the Karen nation. These young women and men were transformed from Buddhists, Animists or other syncretic local religions and unawareness of ethnic or national attributes to a distinct ethnic, religious and nationalist identity.

In the camps, only some key public buildings (social, health and community centers) benefitted from electricity, while private households depended on public facilities, generators and candlelight. KRC members, camp speakers, Community organizations, zone representatives and other community, social and health workers contributed greatly to the wellbeing of the camp households by way of strategic planning and brokered the services and projects of numerous international NGOs. The RTG did not allow the UNHCR to operate in the refugee camps until the late 90s, as this would imply an acknowledgement of the fact that the refugees may be residing in Thai territory for good.

Above all, there were offices of the international organizations, the UNHCR and the EU. International NGOs present in the camps included *act for peace*, NCCA (Australia), *Caritas* (Switzerland), *Christian Aid* (UK and Ireland), *Church World Service* (USA), *Dan Church Aid* (Denmark), *Diakonia* (Sweden), *ICCO* (Netherlands), *International Rescue Committee* (USA), *Norwegian Church Aid* (Norway), and *ZOA Refugee Care* (Netherlands). Other organizations providing services included *Save the Children* (UK), faith-based *Partners*, *Red Cross*, *ADRA* and *World Vision*. In a sense, Maela was “over-served” with aid projects, with numerous international NGOs using the camp space to deliver their aid packages. Almost every aid project, health, educational or livelihood was coordinated and implemented closely with the Karen Refugee Committee and the Karen internal administration.

The seven “Karen” and two “Karenni” refugee camps are located in remote places on the Thailand-Burmese border. The intention the RTG had with this was to keep refugees away from being drawn into Thailand, and to make the sites less accessible. In the wet season, roads are difficult and four-wheel trucks are needed to make the way to some camps. This, however, has not hindered people in leaving the camps whenever they need to by way of drawing on their extensive social support networks. From around 2005, access to the camps was highly restricted. Even before, the RTG declared that the camps were full and therefore closed for new arrivals.

## KAREN PATRIOTISM IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS

Karen Refugees use a number of strategies to make the camp more human. They construct houses along traditional village architectonic forms, construct meeting places and beautiful gardens, places of worship and keep their communities intact by giving the name of the community or the church to the respective Zone. These efforts point to a central feature of the Karen situation, which distinguishes it from other camp situations around the world: From the beginning of the camps, the Karen situation was characterized by a highly encompassing level of community organization and discipline.

Resettlement programs, which started in 2005 and reached their peak from 2007 to 2011, lead to a huge enthusiasm and optimism about a better future in the West, although rural, uneducated villagers often had little idea what their life in the US would look like. Not all settlers were successful in the US and some ended up falling so deeply in debt in the new home that they returned to the camp again penniless. Families that successfully integrated into Western society mostly send important remittances to their home communities in the camps, which act as a life support for many refugee households who depended heavily on these. No less than 76,000 Burmese (mainly Karen) refugees had been resettled to the West in 2012, mainly to the US (around 80%) and the rest settled in either Australia, Canada, Norway, Denmark, Finland, or the UK.

In this process, the Karen have acquired a reputation of being “preferred” refugees in many of the countries they have resettled to. In the US, Christian refugee service organizations are largely responsible for taking care of the new arrivals. Christians of the *Kawthoolei* Karen Baptist Convention were, for example, able to mobilize international church networks to place children in educational institutions. Some of the Karen leaders have, however, decided to remain in the camps, sending their children abroad for a better future. People in high positions in the refugee administration were able to place their relatives high on top of the resettlement lists. This was not so much a corrupt practice, but emerged naturally from the camp structures.

The sense of the time of the camps coming to close has unleashed dynamics in the camps and heightened competition among a diverse refugee population. The refugee camps seem to be disintegrating, while the gap between the families is quickly widening. High remittances together with black money and aid resources has created urban markets in the camps such that nearly everything is now traded and shops, coffee corners and stalls are opening everywhere. Resettlement has increased pressure on the camp population tremendously as unfettered rumors have raised hopes among many (especially paperless) Burmese citizens that they

may have the possibility to also become a UNHCR registered refugee. Repatriation is not a prospective that many of people in the refugee camp are looking forward to, and the paradigmatic shift from UN and INGO discourses on resettlement to those on repatriation is too abrupt for many to digest. Political change in Burma may increase aspirations for the KNU leadership, however for refugees who suffered human rights abuses at the hands of military groups in Burma resettlement provokes many deep-seated anxieties.

Religion in the camps was from the beginning predominantly Christianity and has been deeply implicated in local governance. The first Karen Christian communities arrived on the Thai border almost intact and the community's pastor acted as their natural leader. Therefore, the original population in the camps was largely Christian, while the majority of the Karen in Eastern Burma are Buddhist, Animist or practice a syncretic mix of both religions. However, more recent arrivals in the camps have been Buddhist and Animists who have had to adjust to the relative hegemony of Christianity in the camps. Dudley describes the arrival of Animist villagers 1996-1997 from hill dwelling villages due to ethnic cleansing and forced relocation in Eastern Burma who had little contact with modern civilization, had often never seen a foreigner and were neither in touch with Christian nationalists nor identified with Pan-Karenni nationalism. The traditional Kayah villagers clashed with the educated Karenni in the schools and health clinics, who regarded the traditional villagers uncivilized and un-integrated (cf. Dudley 1999).

Maela refugee camp has some 56 churches where many of the churches and the bible school are Baptist. The name of the Karen Baptist Convention on the Thai border, the *Kawthoolei* Karen Baptist Convention, clearly demonstrates the proximity of the Baptist church to the Karen nationalist movement. While the church has its own theological agenda, many of the KNU leaders are Christian. Other churches, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, the Catholics or Anglicans do not identify with the nationalist movement to the same extent as the Baptists. The Mae La refugee camp and other camps have also become centers of proselytizing Christianity to Buddhist Karen. Conversion is not only a spiritual trajectory, and Animists are also integrated into the collective political project by way of conversion to construct an imaginative Karen homeland. Converts are invited to assist the highly politicized community based relief and human rights organizations where new members are needed. In this way, new converts and newborn Christians become part of the Karen modernity project and part of the imagined national community. A young friend in my host family in Mae Sariang, for instance, volunteered for an Australian Pentecostal church for which he taught impoverished children on the Burmese border, while another friend who converted in the camp went on missions with the humanitarian groups the Free Burma Rangers

inside Eastern Burma. The Free Burma Rangers is a Christian humanitarian organization that works with Karen volunteers, providing both emergency relief and worship service to displaced and wounded Karen villagers.

While the first wave of refugees was mostly Christian Karen, the last wave has been more disorganized and consists mostly of Buddhist and Animist Karen. In this manner, the population in the refugee camp has become more diverse and many new places of worship emerged for Buddhists and Animists as well as for Karen local religions. Many of the Christianized Karen in Eastern Burma became successful missionaries and far more Karen were converted by local missionaries who used local narratives and were more at ease with local cultural beliefs. All Karen churches, thus, believe in their obligation to spread the “good news” of the gospel and to organize evangelist teams in Eastern Burma. Local volunteer teachers regularly stay with war-torn civil populations in the Burmese borderland. After some time of teaching, they build a small chapel, conduct worship, and invite the children to the chapel and to Christian prayer. In the refugee camps, the Karen Baptist convention drew on the organizational structures they formed in Eastern Burma to successfully establish a local missionary network, connecting pastoral work in the camp with evangelizing missions on the Thai border. They have benefitted greatly from religious freedom in Thailand, whereas missionary activity in Eastern Burma has to be done low-key and is closely tied to the provision of social services. On the Thai border, Karen pastors, bible students, or churches visit Christian villages or Buddhist villages with Christian minorities. Christians from Burmese migrant villages go to the most remote villages on the Thai border to introduce locals to Jesus.

Religion in the refugee camps fuels a mergence that we may call religious nationalism. Every year, Baptists and different Christians residing in the Thai borderland meet in Chiang Mai to read the bible through Karen eyes. Reading the bible through Karen eyes also meant to interpret the past and to project the future. The success of this soft proselytizing in the camp became apparent to me after I attended a Baptist ceremony in the new year of 2010 in remote Mae Ra Ma Luang Camp, a difficult drive from Mae Sariang. The large-scale event brought the whole Karen community inside and outside the camp together, churches, refugees and NGOs and was presided by the KRC. More than 500 people, children and adults, were baptized on a single day. Friends and relatives living in Mae Sot or Chiang Mai joined the large audience on the small river flowing through the camp. Non-eother than the charismatic leader and chair of the KRC Robert Htwe resided the ceremony in traditional Karen clothes from a boat using a loudspeaker to address the big audience. Numerous church leaders, pastors, teachers and North American missionaries were invited to this auspicious ceremony and spectacular perfor-

mance. Baptisms included teenagers, born-again Christians who were baptized a second time and converts. The event occurred in a festive atmosphere that transformed a whole refugee camp into a church or Christian public space. The meaning of the ceremony however, transcended a mere religious practice. Religious leaders carefully planned this event as an ambition of evangelist practices in the camp. In realizing this event, church leaders talked about “God’s mysterious plan” where the suffering of the Karen was rendered sensible as it constituted a “blessing in disguise.”

## CONCLUSION

In the Karen case, as I have shown, Sgaw Karen leadership in the camps have developed an attitude that is at once parochial and cosmopolitan, since the KNU network is able to mobilize resources from international humanitarian aid organizations, human rights institutions, international church networks, Buddhist networks, and resettled refugee communities in the West. Thus, through mediating suffering Karen have faced many years of civil war, the Karen leadership in the camps has been able to reproduce a very strong national narrative of Karen national identity and to expose incoming refugees to this narrative. The cosmopolitanism is reinforced by the resettlement projects, diaspora formation, visits of former camp residents and resulting long-distance nationalism. This article, which can be read together with the excellent historical analysis of Gravers (2007b) on the development of Karen ethno-nationalism, Gravers’ essay on U Thuzana and Buddhist Karen nationalism and millenarian aspirations and movements (Gravers *fc.*), and Dudley’s participant observation’s report on Karenni nationalist education in the refugee camp (Dudley 2007) has explored the blurred boundaries and interfaces between civil society, social development and humanitarian cultures in the refugee camps, in the Thai borderland and diaspora and in Southeastern Burma. I have argued that the vitality of Karen nationalism was bolstered and developed in tandem with the humanitarian effort. That was because the “refugee warriors” (McConnachie 2012) were identified as efficient and invaluable partners by the Christian development circles and early missionary networks. Many if not most of the humanitarian grassroots humanitarian local civil society originated in the nationalist movement, but developed quickly independent agendas. This was because the KNU was not in a position to receive humanitarian aid. Moreover, despite the obvious limitations of camp conditions, the refugee camps has provided the basis for a revitalization of Karen nationalist education and everyday nationalism in the context of a human rights discourse. In this manner, refugee nation-

alism is a new type of nationalism that has evolved in tandem with exemplary humanitarian efforts of the Karen to navigate their lives. What has emerged, therefore is a sort of refugee nationalism of the suffering Karen, and this ethno-nationalism was reproduced in educational institutions as well as Buddhist monasteries and Christian bible schools and boosted by humanitarian aid. Even young people working in the young and emerging civil society in Hpa-an today are looking for leadership with the KNU and engage in Karen unity seminars and meetings where a Karen identity as a nation is upheld. Karen ethno-nationalism has thus survived in a defensive context, but has been revived in an essentialist form in exile as well as in the Diaspora. Karen ethno-nationalism and the notion of a utopian Karen homeland are very prevalent among Baptist pastors as well as among charismatic monks, such as U Thuzana. For this article, it is important that this spirit has fuelled civil society with powerful ethno-nationalist thinking. It is an open question if this ethno-nationalist drive goes hand in hand with a tolerant view towards the ethnic “other” or opens the door for narrow ethno-chauvinist solutions. Every day Karen nationalism is mobilized in a defensive context and used as a tool of solidarity in the face of development and state repression, but it is also mobilized by the Karen militia in a context of continuous militarization of large parts of South-eastern Burma. Thus, the ghost of Karen ethno-nationalism pairs uneasily with the grassroots and democratic efforts of the young civil society in the Karen state today.

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## **Illegality & Alterity: Preliminary Notes on SEZ, Civil Society, and the Thai-Burmese Borderland**

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to sketch preliminary notes on the nexus of illegality and alterity amidst the changing landscape of the Thai-Burmese borderland. Based on a set of ethnographic research, it lays out two seemingly disparate discussions that mutually inform each other: theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it articulates the intertwining relations of people, culture, and capital, framed as border's cultural politics. Practically, it addresses a set of complex concerns from members of the civil society and some business sectors regarding the advent of the Mae Sot Special Economic Zone.

### **Keywords**

Mae Sot Special Economic Zone, the civil society, Thailand, Burma, borderland

OTHERNESS AT A MARGIN<sup>1</sup>

Zin Min Naing had spent more than half of his life in monkhood since the age of 12 until 2 years ago when he was 33 years old. He had been travelling from place to place to pursue his religious education prior to his achievement in the middle level. There remained several more steps before reaching the highest degree, but with this success, he was considered capable enough to teach neophytes. So, around August 2012 he traveled to Mae Sot to teach, but it turned out that he could not do what he had wanted due to his lack of legal documents. Instead of going back to the temple in Burma, his curiosity about worldly life drove him to quit the monkhood. At the time, he thought he would like to learn more about the mundane world and to live a mundane life. “I am highly educated about religious knowledge. But I don’t know anything about how to earn a living, how to improve my life, and how to make money, how to be rich.” Hence, Zin Min Naing decided to disrobe in Mae Sot and started his first secular job as a migrant worker on a sugarcane farm.

Zin Min Naing said he would go back to the monkhood again in the next 2-3 years and go back to the place in Burma, where no one knew him (Phianphachong Intarat, April 21, 2014).

I invoke Zin Min Naing’s journey to exemplify those of many migrant workers along the Thai-Burmese borderland.<sup>2</sup> Juxtaposing his life with the borderland’s life becomes crucial during the time of two critical changes looming large on the horizon: the Mae Sot Special Economic Zone (hereafter Mae Sot SEZ) and the ASEAN Economic Community (hereafter AEC). His life evinces marginal peoples’ vulnerability at a margin of two nation-states amidst globalization and the ASEAN

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In this article, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is called ‘Burma/Myanmar’—except for the term “Thai-Burmese borderland”—in order to acknowledge the official name, Myanmar, as well as to emphasize traces of the Burmese junta’s attempts to Burmanize the whole social fabric of this land, which have also had deep impacts on both the peoples and spaces along the Thai-Burmese borderland. Moreover, the term “people” is pluralized in order to emphasize ethnic diversity that is the norm of the Thai-Burmese borderland’s lifeworlds. When the term is deployed as a singular, it is meant to refer to: people in general or people as a concept. Finally, I retain names within Burma/Myanmar as practiced before the Burmese junta changed them. Such deployment is aimed to emphasize a politics of naming that delegitimizes the junta as well as to remember the names designated by ethnic groups/nationalities themselves lest their memories are forgotten.

2 This excerpt is from a field note sent to me by my research assistant, Phianphachong Intarat. One could be tempted to discuss what considers “success” in his religious education when he was still tempted to get rich. Such question must be postponed for another occasion. Spring Song, Crystal Maung, Kzin Thuang Oos were the non-Thai research assistants and translators for that project.

regionalism, which has until now been designed to have economic dimensions at its heart, hence the AEC.

Until the historic election on November 7, 2010, memories regarding the Thai-Burmese borderland had predominantly been scripted with ethnic strife, war, and/or dictatorship. Since the election, the international community has largely been satisfied with culturo-political situations inside Burma/Myanmar. Myriad global investors have flooded the country lest they would miss tremendous opportunities. Yet, Burma/Myanmar's conundrums have been nothing short of alarming: the government's persistent authoritarianism, the "Muslim Question," fighting between the government's armed forces and ethnic armies in some areas, and human rights violations in many. On the Thai side of the boundary, five border districts in Tak's province—Umphang, PhopPhra, Mae Sot, Mae Lamat, and ThaSongyang—have often been affected by Burma/Myanmar's political uncertainty. Effects on these in-between zones and the peoples therein, however, dated back before the five districts were designated as such.

Since 1984, many non-Thais from Burma—both in terms of nationality and ethnicity—have tremendously impacted the social fabric of Mae Sot and its vicinity, at a rate not seen before. It was the year that the Thai state allowed humanitarian organizations to set up a string of (what the Thai state calls) "temporary shelter areas" along this borderland for (what the Thai state named) "people fleeing fighting." Four years later, there was a massacre during the so-called "8888 uprising" which started on August 8, 1988. Thousands of people were killed by the then junta, especially in big towns throughout the country. That massacre drove millions of people out of Burma/Myanmar, many of whom headed to Thailand—be they the "majority" Burman or the "minorities" Karens, Mons, Shans, Padong, Kachins, Chins, Pa-O, Rakhine, Arakans, among others. Mae Sot was the central gateway of Thailand's western front. Many of these people started their "illegal" lives in Mae Sot and its vicinity while more migrated deeper inside to become cheap laborers.

However, presently—April 2015—forced migration to Thailand due to war and dictatorship is, for the most part, not the norm of the day. Instead, illegality is the atmosphere that many people from Burma/Myanmar living in those five districts have found themselves dealing with. They are non-Thai nationals; and some of them are just stateless people. Zin Min Naing's story exemplifies a common fate of those diverse peoples who have traversed the Thai-Burmese state-boundary, more often than not, with little knowledge of how ugly life could become:

In January/February [2014], Zin Min Naing was arrested for illegal immigration. Police asked for 2,000 baht in return for releasing him. Zin Min Naing

did not have the money, so they detained him for 3 days. On the 4th day, the police officers gave him 50 per cent discount. Zin Min Naing insisted that he had no money. They asked him to contact his relatives for help. He told them that he had been alone and [was just] ... a construction worker. As a result, the police officers continued to detain him one more day. On the fifth day, the price offered was lowered to 500 baht, but Zin Min Naing's answer remained the same. On the sixth day, he was released. A police officer gave him 20 baht to help him travel back to the construction site(Phianphachong Intarat, April 21, 2014).<sup>3</sup>

Zin Min Naing's life is a life that epitomizes how illegality breeds vulnerability—at times, tragedy. It is the vulnerability as alterity to the Thai nation-state: illegal to the state; otherness to the nationhood. Within such complicated terrains of the borderland's culturo-political entanglements, this article, which is a work in progress, aims to sketch preliminary notes on the nexus of illegality and alterity amidst the changing landscape of the Thai-Burmese borderland<sup>4</sup> Based on a set of ethnographic research that I have been a part of, the article lays out two seemingly disparate discussions that mutually inform each other: theoretical and practical. The first part will attempt to theoretically articulate the intertwining relations of people, culture, and capital, framed as border's cultural politics. The second will address a set of complex and practical concerns from members of the civil society and some business sectors regarding the advent of the Mae Sot SEZ.

## A BORDER'S CULTURAL POLITICS: PEOPLE, CULTURE, AND CAPITAL

Mae Sot has for a long time been the busiest area of Thailand's western zones. It is located across Myawaddy, a town in the Karen State of Burma/Myanmar on the other side of the Moei River, a *boundary*.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the history of western Thai-

3 As of April 15, 2015, 1 US\$ was about 32.45 ThaiBaht.

4 This article is developed from my chapter in Varanyuwatana et al. (2015). The chapter was in turn summarized from three groups of research projects which I have been involved since 2000:

- a) An on-going project on the Mae Sot SEZ (Tangseefa et al. [2015]).
- b) My works since 2000: Tangseefa (2003), (2003/2004), (2004), (2006), (2007), (2008), (2009), (2010a), (2010b), (2013), (2015); Tangseefa et al. (2014); Monthathip & Tangseefa (2014).
- c) Research projects within the grand project "Streams of Knowledge along the Thai-Burmese Border Zones: Multiple Dimensions of People, Capital, and Culture," which I led during 2011-2013: Durier & Chanthawong (2015), Boonprakarn et al. (2013), Bua-dang et al. (2013), Arunotai et al. (2013), and Warland (2013).

5 The Karen State was later renamed as Kayin State in 1989 by the junta government.

land, Mae Sot has always been culturally rich—even before it was designated as a district.<sup>6</sup> These kaleidoscopic textures have resulted from two complex dimensions: geography and history of violence.

### The Geography

Mae Sot was located next to a kingdom and is located next to a nation-state, both have been culturally extremely rich—the richest on the mainland Southeast Asia. When this land was still known as the Kingdom of Ava, a missionary—who had travelled into the hinterland encountering diverse indigenous peoples—once wrote that “some of the races or tribes change their language[s] as often as they change their cloths.”<sup>7</sup> Many people who had lived in this land had to be able to speak a few languages if they wished to cross mountains to contact with other peoples. Later on, under the military rule, the government used to declare that there were 135 “national races” in the country.<sup>8</sup>

Mae Sot is located about 160 kilometers from the sea at Maulamaeng (later renamed as Maulmyei by the junta in 1989). Maulamaeng was one of the British Empire’s most important international deep seaports in the Indian Ocean (Panthuratana 1998, 14). Before the construction of a road from the city of Tak to Mae Sot over mountainous terrains, it was far easier for Mae Sot’s residents to trade with peoples who lived along the paths to Maulamaeng. Thus, Mae Sot—or as it was known *Chod* in ancient time—has always been situated in a space of trade opportunities through contacts with peoples from faraway lands.

With these spatial conditions, different ethnic groups have lived in this town for over one hundred years: first were the Karens, later on the Tais, the Chinese from Yunnan, the Burmans, the Muslims from Bangladesh and northern Thailand, the Sikhs and the Hindus from India. Later on, many Tais, Chinese, and Burmans also fled turbulence in Burma to live here; not to mention many Chinese migrants from mainland China to Thailand, who came here through Bangkok. Northern Thai and Thai-Chinese merchants from southern Thailand also migrated here later (Ibid., 14-17).

6 In historical records of the Sukhothai Kingdom, Mae Sot was then known as *Chod* (Panthuratana [1998]).

7 J. H. Green, “A Note on the Indigenous Races of Burma,” in *India, Census of India, 1931, Vol. 11, Burma*, pt. 1, Report (Rangoon, 1933), app. C., p. 245; quoted in Silverstein, 1980, 8.

8 Myanmar Information Committee, Information Sheet No. B-1417 (I), 21 June 2000: quoted in Amnesty International, 2001a, 4.

### History of Violence

Again, violence inside Burma/Myanmar has horrendously affected the social fabric of Mae Sot and its vicinity. Two periods must be underlined when one attempts to fathom this borderland's kaleidoscopic reality: 1962-1984 and 1984-2010.

**1962-1984:** When General Ne Win staged a *coup d'état* ending a fourteen-year-old democracy of a nascent independent country, fire of violence devastatingly intensified. The flames harrowingly burnt throughout with Burma/Myanmar's army(hereafter the *Tatmadaw*) fighting with many ethnic nationalities' armies— some of whom had started fighting since the independence in 1948. For the Thai-Burmese borderland, the army of the Karen National Union (hereafter KNU) had secured this contact zone and set up gateways, taxing all black-market economy passing through them. Before 1988, the KNU-controlled areas had been tacitly accepted by the Thai government as “buffer zones” between the two countries. All these political complications as well as devastating violence have, for many decades, shaped Mae Sot and its vicinity as a hub of not only some ethnic nationalities' headquarters that connect with the world at large, but also of trade amidst fire of violence along the borderland.

**1984-2010:** In 1984, the Thai government officially allowed a string of “temporary shelter areas” to be established along the borderland. Before then, the *Tatmadaw* had retreated back into the country when the rainy season arrived; and displaced peoples who had crossed into Thailand had returned to Burma's side. But 1984 was the year that they could not return after fighting stopped because the *Tatmadaw* set up their military bases along the borderland. Such military deployment rendered the lives of hundreds of thousands critically vulnerable. Many humanitarian organizations the world over had to set up their operational branches in Mae Sot to support the displaced peoples in those shelter areas. Later on, many community-based organizations (CBOs) run by the displaced themselves had gradually been developed to help their own peoples.

With such kaleidoscopic lifeworlds, a question is: how does one theorize the changing contours of the Thai-Burmese borderland?

### A Border's Cultural Politics

A borderland is a zone of heterogeneity which also implies tremendous (economic) opportunities. Especially, if a borderland is located next to a political society with the following features: a) more-than-half-a-century history of violence and war; b) high cultural diversity like Ava/Burma/Myanmar; and c) not far from a sea or an ocean. Mae Sot is such a location. Moreover, theoretically speaking, after more than one hundred years, diverse localities have been produced; translocalities have emerged in and surrounding Mae Sot and its vicinity. This is because: first,

people have deepened their roots into where they have moved; and, second, they have come from faraway searching for prosperity provided by this “contact zone.” Many peoples thus have developed both characters and mentality of *translocality*. Mae Sot and its vicinity have become and continue to be a manifestation of multi-faceted localities—and will be even more so once the SEZ and the AEC commence.

Like other borderlands, Mae Sot and its vicinity have been a site of conflict and/or accommodation, on the one hand, and cultural translation and negotiation, on the other. Some Chinese traders I talked with in Mae Sot recounted the time over two decades ago when they had helped their counterparts from Burma who had been forced to (temporarily) leave Myawaddy to the Thai side because of fighting between the KNU and the *Tatmadaw*. Perhaps it was because of such “specific histories of cultural displacement” (Bhabha 1994, 172) that have been parts of every town dweller’s genealogies and memories, especially the older generations’ memories, that, in turn, have rendered this town accommodating to “the others.” The memories they refer back to, and the discourses that account for those memories, are rooted *somewhere else*—because most people have immigrated here. However, such tolerance has later decreased when many people have forgotten that they themselves had once immigrated here. In effect, they have often belittled later generation diaspora, to say the least.

What we have witnessed are two incongruent strands. On the one hand, whoever are considered as “others” would be ill-treated. On the other hand, because many people migrated from somewhere else, their cultures have been reconfigured more drastically than those of the “hosts.” Such transnational dimensions of the cultural transformation of these residents has complicated cultural signification—cultures are then always translational (Bhabha, *Ibid.*). Each group’s cultures are always fluid because of engagement with “otherness” and globalization. The Thai national culture has not been easily entrenched here either: “The fiction of cultures as discrete objects like phenomena occupying discrete spaces becomes implausible for those who inhabit the borderlands,” write Gupta & Ferguson (1997, 34). The transnational and the translational intertwine and are closely akin—they form a hybrid location of cultural value. That is, any attempt to establish a certain set of “values” deemed better than another group’s would not succeed or at least would be much more complicated than in other spaces deep inside a nation-state. This is because *cultures become strategies for survival* (Bhabha, *Ibid.*) for every subject that has to always alertly negotiate in this contact zone.

Moreover, peoples’ spatial histories of displacement within and along these translocalities have more often than not been accompanied by “the territorial ambitions of ‘global’ media technologies” (*Ibid.*). Together with capital flows, such ambition has tenaciously deterritorialized nation-states’ boundaries. Dated back to

at least since the opening of the Thailand-Myanmar Friendship Bridge on August 15, 1997 when war was still raging in Burma/Myanmar,<sup>9</sup> Mae Sot and its vicinity have been a zone where the electronic mediation thrives along with capital transactions, creating capital-electronic circuits. These material conditions have in turn been exploited by diverse subjectivities, including members of ethnic nationalities fighting against the Burmese junta.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, since the late 1990s, there have been more computer-support and/or internet shops in Mae Sot than in other border districts of Tak. From the late 1990s till the historic election in 2010, ethnic nationalist organizations located along the borderland were exploiting cyberspace and technological supports from experts in towns like Mae Sot, by setting up their own websites to disseminate their peoples' struggles in war zones to the world.

The urbanization along the borderland—at least on the Thai side—since Prime Minister Chatchai Chunnawan's policy of “turning war zones into trade zones” in the late 1980s has significantly transformed this area. On Burma/Myanmar's side, gradual development and urbanization in the late 1990s resulted from a spatial transformation: from contested spaces among various armed forces to Burmese-controlled spaces, from war zones to economic zones. Through diverse foreign-invested developmental projects, global capital flows have enabled the Burmese nation-state to weaken and gradually wipe out resistant ethnic armies along the borderland (e.g., ERI & SAIN 1996). The spatial memories of ethnic nationalities along the borderland have gradually been erased, while the two nation-state's memories have been re-entrenched. Still, as mentioned earlier, once the electronic mediation began to surge in Mae Sot in the late 1990s such capital-electronic forces have begun to deterritorialize both countries as well. The prolif-

9 The Thailand-Myanmar Friendship Bridge was first envisioned in 1986 as a connection point, filling the missing gap of the Asian Highway A 1, between Myawaddy town of Burma/Myanmar and Mae Sot. The Asia Highway A1 runs through Iran, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, altogether with a length of 7,615.6 miles. As Mae Sot was later envisaged as a strategic gateway of a land-bridge from Da Nang Port of Vietnam in the Pacific Ocean to a few deep seaports of Burma/Myanmar in the Indian Ocean, the Friendship Bridge then became critical in fulfilling this aspiration. Such a land-bridge which will be part of a new ocean and land shipping route will shorten even the shortest ocean route, for instance, between Japan and the Persian Ports through Malacca Strait from 6,800 miles down to 5,500 miles (Directorate of Operation, Royal Thai Army, 1997; Tantisunthorn, 1997).

10 Since Thailand's policy of “turning war zones into trade zones” in 1988, the Thai government began to link with its war-torn neighboring countries by focusing on the economy. Along with the strategic envisioning of the Vietnam-Myanmar land-bridge is a series of multi-billion dollar developmental projects in the Thai-Burmese in-between spaces ranging from logging, natural gas, dam projects, highway constructions, to deep seaports. These economic prospects have been too tempting for some Thai armed-forces leaders, business people, and politicians to not pay attention (see a variety of views in e.g., Chae 2000; ERI & SAIN 1996; ICN 1999; Ngerndee 1996; Pa Pawklo 2002; “Phama poet prathet tem roi,” Phuchatkanraiwan; Chaisawat 2000a, 2000b; Subpan 1992; Jinakul 2000; Thai Koei International Co., Ltd. et al. 1996).

eration of the capital-electronic circuits had, in some ways, pushed, and in others, opened, another space for members of ethnic nationalities (and their sympathizers) to also start fighting against the junta in cyberspace. Such a phenomenon has resulted from a capital-electronic circuit's paradox along this borderland—long before the era of social media that has become the dominant quotidian mode of global citizenry.<sup>11</sup>

## MAE SOT SEZ, THE STATE, AND PEOPLE

On July 15, 2014, the Policy Committee on Special Economic Zone Development, chaired by General Pruyuth Chan-ocha, prime minister and the head of the National Council for Peace and Order (hereafter NCPO), announced its plan to develop special economic zones (SEZs) in five potential areas. Mae Sot was one of them. Mae Sot SEZ was designed to grasp opportunities provided by abundant transnational resources of people, capital, and culture, especially when Burma/Myanmar's infrastructures—physical, legal, knowledge and public health—are still comparatively inadequate to support attempts to exploit such opportunities. Under the borderland's kaleidoscopic complexity and within the mentioned conceptual frame of cultural politics, this section will highlight key issues that must be addressed when designing a SEZ. They are the voices of many members of the borderland's civil society. While a design of a SEZ basically prioritizes economic investment, as far as the Thai-Burmese is concerned, the following two dimensions must be paid attention to: a) Nation-state and Internal Politics; and b) Border Peoples.<sup>12</sup>

11 See more detailed treatment of such a paradox especially regarding the intertwining relations between time, capital, and identity in (Tangseefa 2003: chapter 7).

12 For the latter, my research team was organizing a series of workshops and focus-group discussions. On July 25, 2014, my team and I organized a workshop to listen to members of the Thai-Burmese borderland's civil society regarding the Thai state's plan on the Mae Sot SEZ. There were fourteen organizations, whose work ranged from issues regarding education, public health, gender, environment, legality, labor, human rights, and children. Afterward, my research assistants—one Thai and two Karens (who spoke Sgaw Karen, Pwo Karen, Burmese, and English [though their English was at the intermediate level])—transcribed the whole conversation of the workshop. They then developed a set of questions for a round of follow-up deep-interview with all attending organizations, plus four more organizations working in the borderland. After that, the deep-interview transcriptions were double checked by the Thai research assistant. The latter then suggested some further questions for another round of follow-up interviews with almost all organizations of the earlier round for some missing issues. Afterward, the two non-Thai research assistants wrote a set of field notes from all the interviews for me to study. After reading, I developed some questions for the three research assistants to follow-up for me with some interviewees at least one more round, depending on the complication of issues being pursued. The whole process of data collection from these members of the civil society lasted about six months and became the basis of my chapter in the first comprehensive master plan of the Mae Sot SEZ (Varanyuwatana et

### Nation-state and Internal Politics

All policies toward sustained economic growth along any borderland hinge firstly upon a simple reality: stable relations between the two bordering countries. Yet, toward the end of March 2015, Burma/Myanmar's internal political fragility has been the largest undermining factor regarding the two nation-states' border security. Our research team has learnt from members of the civil society who have been campaigning for peace, democracy, and human rights within Burma/Myanmar for a long time—for instance, Burma Partnership, Forum for Democracy in Burma, some leaders of ethnic armed groups including the KNU. They have all confirmed that peace agreement between the government and ethnic armed forces is still faraway. Moreover, a national ceasefire agreement has not yet been signed. On the contrary, there have been worrying signs, for instance: military-strong-grip politics behind a democratic façade; inadequate freedom for the civil society therein; religious discrimination toward the Muslims; the *Tatmadaw's* pounding of some ethnic armed forces. If such internal political fragilities are not well taken care of, the planned special economic zones could easily run into trouble. Some leaders of the civil society recently said to me: With all these fragilities coupled with the authoritarian ethos therein, we must not be surprised if—instead of closing the string of “temporary shelter areas” and repatriating shelter residents back to Burma/Myanmar, as has been planned by the Thai government for quite a few years—more shelter areas might have to be opened for a new flood of “people fleeing fighting” due to new wave of violence. One only hopes that such a remark was too pessimistic.

Nonetheless, there were some skirmishes and/or confrontations that have sent negative signals, as they could negatively affect the atmosphere of both the two countries' corporation and the border investment as a whole. There was an example of such a situation happening on September 13, 2014 while Thailand's Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Finance and his entourage were visiting Mae Sot and Myawaddy for a few days. An armed wing of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), led by Col. Tiger, and the Myanmar police—who were escorting the Permanent Secretary's trip while in Myawaddy—almost clashed. Listening to analyses on that episode from diverse borderland's actors—e.g., some leaders of an armed group, members of the civil society, business sectors, and the Thai authorities—I came to a conclusion that such confrontation could easily and violently escalate as long as power and benefits among all concerned armed groups in Burma/Myanmar have not been adequately settled. All armed groups—

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al. 2015). Aye Thandar Aung, Yoon HtarAein, and NaruemolTuenpakdee were those wonderful assistants.

big or small—possess adequate weaponry and fighting experiences to wreak havoc in the borderland amidst the development atmosphere whereby infrastructure and land have been transformed for the sake of rapid economic growth of both nation-states.

### Border Peoples

Within this rubric, there are four issues that members of the borderland's civil society and the business community have emphasized: a) Migration and Population Growth; b) Illegality; c) Welfare for the Unskilled and the Young; and d) Labor Training and Education.

#### a) Migration and Population Growth

Becoming a multicultural society has been a most important phenomenon in Mae Sot during the past one hundred years. If Burma/Myanmar's prolonged violence is properly taken care of, the Mae Sot SEZ will attract a great amount of people. In this light, there were two major concerns that we learnt from the civil society's members: first, the "Muslim Question"; second, the question of public health.

First, Mae Sot has a big Muslim community which has taken root over many decades. At the same time, the "Muslim question" has been a most fragile segment of Burma/Myanmar's cultural politics for quite a few years. In this light, Mae Sot SEZ's architects must heed the issue of religious fragility as well as a possibility that Mae Sot could become a sanctuary for some religious extremists who might pass through this area. One most important question therefore is: How will the Thai state manage border multiculturalism amidst the nexus of migration and population growth?

Second, since Burma/Myanmar's public health services are still largely rudimentary, people mobility to-and-fro along the borderland could contribute to complex problems of border and transnational public health. Members of the civil society emphasized that the two countries—at least Thailand—had to develop a Border Health Care Master Plan as well as a Border Health Management System for both Thais and non-Thais, whether migrating from Burma/Myanmar or not. In this sense, low-cost health insurance with the least complicated application procedures possible would thus be a necessity.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, they also suggested that a Border Health Network had to be established and would have to systematically work as a team that comprises government's hospital and health care services as well as those of the civil society—this might include private hospitals, if possible.

<sup>13</sup> Durier & Chanthawong (2015) have shown that low-cost, not-for-profit health insurance for migrants along the Thai-Burmese borderland is feasible.

Furthermore, extensive health education for all people living along the border would also be critical and be continuously pursued, especially for those who had little (or no) education.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, a member of the leading organization along the borderland, the Mae Tao Clinic, proposed that the borderland would have to have the following centers to tackle transnational public health issues which had become increasingly complicated: a Communicable Disease Control Center; a Health Education Center; a Counseling Center; and a Drug Rehabilitation Center (for border youth who have increasingly become drug addicts). Multilingualism would be a most important element of these centers—so as to take care of people with different linguistic backgrounds. Thai, English, and Burmese languages would be the basic means of communication to serve both Thais and non-Thais. These centers could be developed from similar health care services that might have already existed within the existing public health system of the five border districts. Otherwise, they would have to be immediately set up.

#### b) Illegality

Quite a number of people along the borderland do not have any *legal status*. Many are even *stateless* as they have not (gone back to) register(ed) as Burmese/Myanmar nationals after the then junta opened the nationality registration service before the historic election in 2010. Still, many of those who registered and have been residing in Thailand do not have *work permits*.<sup>15</sup> Many of these illegal mi-

14 I myself have had the honor to be a part of a multi-national research team, led by Prof. Dr. Nick White from the University of Oxford, who is considered as the world's top malaria specialist. This grand project started along the Thai-Burmese borderland with the Shoklo Malaria Research Unit (SMRU) as the driving agency. The project has recently been expanded to cover some areas in Vietnam, Cambodia and will also be commenced soon in Laos, Bangladesh, and within Burma/Myanmar. Scientific data that this transnational team and their networks have gathered for many years show very alarming signs: a) malaria parasites in the mentioned areas have resisted the best ever produced anti-malarial drug named Artemisinin; b) without a proper mass drug administration (MDA) in those areas, the malaria resistant could resurge to Africa and millions of people could die—it did happened before in the past. See more details in Gozner (2006), McLaughlin (2014), Nosten (2014), WHO (2011), Young (2014).

15 All of this signifies the complicated lives of migrants from Burma/Myanmar. In July 2014, Thailand's junta, the NCPO, announced the establishment of one-stop services in order to register migrant workers whose registration grace period would expire on October 31, 2014. Following this all migrant workers would have to enter the nationality verification process before March 31, 2015. After such announcements, concerned parties along the five border districts—especially, the Ministry of Interior at the local level, the municipality, the Tak's Federation of Thai Industries, and the Tak's Chamber of Commerce—together conducted a survey of illegal migrant workers. They learnt that there were about 126,000 such kind, which Mae Sot, PhopPhra, and Mae Ramat, respectively, had the highest level of illegal migrant workers along the border.

This data was extrapolated from an interview with Mr. Chaiwat Withithammawong, the President of the Tak's Federation of Thai Industries. It must be noted here that this figure was not much lower than the officially registered number of Thai-nationals in these three districts—Mae Sot (72,838), PhopPhra

grants are transnational laborers. There is no need to elaborate how fragile their lives could be: both in terms of working conditions and the necessity to always hide from police. What we have learnt from a few projects along the borderland has pointed to the same direction. When these people are abused or their rights violated by people who have power (in every sense of the term) over them—traffickers, employers, and/or state apparatuses—generally, these illegal laborers have not been able to take the wrongdoers to court. To do so is to render themselves “viable” to the legal procedures when they themselves are illegal. Theirs, thus, are lives with irony. In effect, illegality breeds (extreme) vulnerability—a vicious cycle of long-term violation. At the end of the day, there will not be any legal procedure to protect them against their violators. Many illegal migrant workers have lived their lives this way. Within this conundrum, these people have to endure being cheap laborers when they are illegal—with possibilities of continued exploitation. Nonetheless, they have been a part of millions of people pushed to Thailand since the mass killing during the “8888 uprising.” These millions have been one of the most important collective “backbones” of Thailand’s economic growth since the late 1980s. In a nutshell, illegal status breeds exploitation for the host country’s economic prosperity.

Legalization of migrant workers, therefore, becomes extremely critical. Yet, when these migrant workers’ wages become higher due to legalization, the Mae Sot SEZ’s comparative advantages will become less so. In the long run, if the Thai state cannot balance foreign investment attraction with appropriate labor wages, the SEZ will finally encounter the stage of diminishing returns. Thus, it is crucial to ponder a proposal by a most important business sector along the borderland: the Tak’s Federation of Thai Industries (hereafter TFTI) who proposed a plan for sustainable management of migrant laborers.<sup>16</sup>

With the “Announcement No. 70/2557: Temporary Measures for Solving Migrant Laborers and Human Trafficking Problems,” Thailand’s junta attempted to legalize low-skilled and unskilled migrant workers by establishing one-stop service centers in every province and pushing the workers to enter the nationality verification process. The announcement led entrepreneurs in Thailand’s border areas, especially Mae Sot, to propose their notion of effective solutions to the NCPO.

According to the TFTI, many entrepreneurs along the borderland had learnt that Mae Sot and its vicinity had been training zones for unskilled or low-skilled migrant laborers. After spending some time along the border as well as acquiring

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(58,283), and Mae Ramat (40,523)—altogether were 171,644, as of March 2015. [http://stat.dopa.go.th/stat/statnew/upstat\\_m.php](http://stat.dopa.go.th/stat/statnew/upstat_m.php). Accessed on April 15, 2015.

16 The TFTI’s President granted out team several interviews. The last session was on October 23, 2014. See my more detailed discussion of this proposal in (Varanyuwatana et al. 2015: Chapter 7).

some skills and documents provided by their employers, the workers would move into Thailand's inner provinces. During all these years, the entrepreneurs always: first, encountered revenue loss due to labor shortage, hence facing an imbalance between labor power and production orders; second, bore the documentation cost for inner provinces' entrepreneurs.

Article 14 of the Alien Working Act B.E. 2551 (AD. 2008), proposed by the TFTI, inspired a dual-track solution for this conundrum by: first, implementing the article along the country's border provinces; second, signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for employment in the country's inner provinces.<sup>17</sup>

First, According to Article 14, an alien—with residency in and being a citizen of any bordering country and who enters Thailand using any document in lieu of passport and in accordance with all relevant immigration laws—may be permitted to work in bordering provinces in some certain categories of jobs on a temporary basis. The TFTI thus proposed that, for a worker in this category, only a border pass would be issued, allowing him/her to commute to work in Thailand in the following manners: (a) crossing the border daily; (b) short-term stay for a period of either 7 days or 14 days; (c) long-term stay, e.g., seasonally, but no longer than 90 days.

Second, the Thai state should sign a MoU with the Burmese/Myanmar government in order to legally import workers for Thailand's inner provinces; and air transportation will be the only channel. This track was proposed to: a) overcome challenges associated with illegal immigration, including smuggling and trafficking; b) ensure migrant worker rights protection.

The Article 14, the TFTI averred, would serve to benefit all concerned parties—the Thai state, the Burmese/Myanmar state, migrant laborers, and entrepreneurs, especially those who resided along the border provinces. Effective immigration control would be very feasible because this implementation would: a) separate migrants working along border from those who would not; b) legalize migrant laborers, hence helping them from being exploited; c) facilitate a certain level of smooth immigration by legalizing more natural/traditional channels of immigration flow along the border;<sup>18</sup> d) enable migrant workers to cross to work in Thailand easier by using only border passes as had been stated in the agreement between the governments of Thailand and Burma/Myanmar, signed on May 10th, 1997; e) help employers manage uncertainty in the production process and re-

17 The Alien Working Act B.E. 2551 (2008) can be found at ([http://www.immigration.go.th/acts/act\\_alien-work2551.pdf](http://www.immigration.go.th/acts/act_alien-work2551.pdf)). Accessed on November 6, 2014.

18 *The Establishment of Special Economic Zone in Mae Sot-Mae Ramat- PhopPhra, entrepreneurs satisfied the privileges, zoning areas and one-stop service center on investment.* <https://www.facebook.com/aecasean-news/posts/881942871816385>. Accessed on December 11, 2014.

duce production costs. Moreover, once the Mae Sot SEZ as well as the AEC commence, this dual-track system would strengthen the development of both the borderland and the country as a whole. To be sure, this proposal is not agreed upon by the borderland's civil society working on labor issue, the discussion of which I discuss elsewhere (Tangseefa et al. 2015).

### c) Welfares for the Unskilled and the Young

One of the most important prerequisites for the Mae Sot SEZ is cheap labor. One could inquire how much an unskilled or low skilled worker will earn within the minimum wage's parameters. Some members of the borderland's civil society inferred from their data: After the Thai government increased the minimum wage to 300 Baht/day a couple of years ago, most borderland's migrant laborers had rarely earned up to 200 Baht/day. Moreover, they maintained, because the Burmese/Myanmar society would not be ready to embrace all unskilled laborers to work in the short future, many of them would continue to come and work in Thailand. Many of these workers would not have work permits—unless an accessible and uncorrupted system would be installed—they thus would be willing to work in whatever odd jobs they would find, including the unreliable, dirty, difficult, and dangerous (3-Ds), as it were. Therefore, it is advisable that a committee supervising labor wage decisions for migrant laborers be formed. Such a committee could comprise representatives from five sectors: the government, employers, employees, non-governmental organizations (working on labor issue), and academics.

It is also critical that the Thai nation-state must take good care of the borderland's young, especially the “illegal” migrant youth which are many in number. Data from the Committee for Protection and Promotion of Child Rights confirmed that there had been a lot of youth who had been physically (including sexually) and mentally abused as well as exploited as child labor. It was thus extremely crucial that all concerned parties brought these youth back to classrooms before they would become even more acute social problems. This committee was also very concerned that these youth had gotten married or become pregnant at younger ages than before—while they had not learnt life-skills and had little or no education.<sup>19</sup> Quite a number of them, moreover, had become part of drug rings while many still had no interest in continuing their education but wanting to earn their income as early as possible. Hence, when the Mae Sot SEZ commences these young people would enter the labor force without much knowledge and/or skills and join an enormous contingent of cheap laborers. The committees thus

<sup>19</sup> Interview Naign Min, Director of the Committee for Protection and Promotion of Child Rights on August 15, 2014. See also ARHN (2012).

inquired: Under the SEZ landscape, how could we ensure that rights of people, especially young ones, be protected—be they rights to life, education, and caring for their own health?

#### d) Labor Training and Education

A most important issue that I learnt from the civil society, therefore, was: Training/education. Since many migrant workers have to work in the 3-Ds conditions, their health will inevitably deteriorate. It was thus proposed that skill training for these unskilled laborers become imperative, especially for the young who had come from very poor families, hence receiving very little education—or none at all. This group had easily fallen victim to their employers and/or traffickers and finally became social problems along the border. Many of them had turned to alcohol and drugs. It was thus proposed that the Thai state set up a series of training for these people, which in the long term would help increase the Mae Sot SEZ's productivity. A concrete proposal was to set up a vocational school for these people.

One last proposal from many interviewed members of the civil society that must be highlighted here is: In the process of establishing the Mae Sot SEZ, it is advisable that representatives from the civil society—who, they averred, had worked closely and had continuously learnt problems of the migrants situated therein (and who were many in number)—should be involved. This proposal has not been honored and very most likely will never be.

## CONCLUSION

Zin Min Naing's story at the beginning of this article signifies an "illegal other" along the Thai-Burmese borderland, which has undergone the biggest change in its history. Within this economy-driven changing-landscape, migrant workers' lives along the borderland are at a crossroads. On the one hand, after the Burma/Myanmar general election in 2010, many non-Muslim migrants who have since left the country have Myanmar's ID cards, which have enabled them not to be stateless persons in both countries. On the other hand, having such ID cards does not securitize their lives if they do not have at least one of the followings: first, reliable transnational social networks to help them start and sustain their lives in Thailand; second, adequate education or intellectual capability that enables them to "read" the world good enough to make sound decisions; third, sought-after skills to land them in sustainable jobs; and fourth, adequate money to help smooth their life journeys. At the end of the day, *choice* is the key word here. Or, to frame it philosophically, it is the issue of *freedom*. Yet, in order for them to have

decently sustained lives, their *rights* as workers must be protected. This nexus between freedom and rights is thus the cornerstone of each migrant labor's "good life," as it were. Such a nexus becomes even more acute within the politico-cultural matrix of the Mae Sot SEZ, looming on the horizon. One cannot help but ask: Will lives like Zin Min Naingbe become better or worse? Up to this point, what we have learnt seems to have a negative confirmation.

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## **Intersections between Civil Society, Insurgency, and Development: Case of the Subnational Conflict in the South of Thailand**

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses the nature of and challenges faced by civil society in subnational conflict areas when participating in development programs. Drawing from the case of the current insurgency movement by Malay nationalists along the Thai-Malaysian border, it analyses how civil society members at the village level interact with development programs by the state. Based on 100 interviews in 10 communities the data found that civil society behaviors are restricted and shaped by relations with insurgents and the state combined. Key findings are 1) civil society groups are caught between the state and the insurgents; 2) civil society members have aspirations and ideologies supporting nationalism; and 3) there are links between empowerment and the insurgency movement. The study finds civil society groups are fearful of both military (and the state) and insurgents. They have to continuously negotiate with both insurgents and the state to protect their lives and livelihoods. The article provides these policy recommendations 1) shift discourse from separatists to nationalists; 2) shift discourse from villagers to citizens; 3) have sound communication plans; 4) have sound participatory approaches; and 5) conduct political dynamic mapping for every project on the ground. In addition, it argues that it is important to accept the political nature of development programs in subnational conflict areas.

### **Keywords**

insurgency, empowerment, Southern Thailand, civil society, development, subnational conflict

## INTRODUCTION

Most do not realize that since 1992 there have been at least 26 subnational conflicts in Asia (Parks et al. 2013). It is estimated that the number of people affected by these conflicts is over 131 million (Parks et al. 2013). These conflicts are mostly ethnic-based conflicts along international borders and are usually part of unfinished nation-state building processes since independence. Examples of such are seen in Myanmar, Aceh in Indonesia, Assam and Kashmir in India, Baluchistan in Pakistan, southern Thailand, and the Mindanao in the Philippines. These conflicts last on average 45 years (Parks et al. 2013).

Subnational conflicts have their own distinct characteristics. These conflicts are often considered as domestic issues where foreign governments are not welcomed to interfere. Subnational conflicts are dissimilar to traditional development issues such as basic utility like water and electricity, education, and infrastructure, where development assistance (a form of interference) is highly welcomed.

Furthermore, conventional protocols and international treaties related to peace building and maintenance between nation-states do not apply either. The parties in conflict do not have equal status in the international arena. These conflicts are often between a smaller (natural) nation situated in or dominated by a more powerful (natural or constructed) nation-state. The more powerful nation is usually the people of certain ethnicity that controls the central government and state military forces. These conflicts often erupt in borderland regions of the nation-state (Wucherpennig et al. 2001).

These distinct characteristics suggest that civil society in these areas face certain challenges that civil societies in general do not face. For instance, an all-Burmese youth group promoting traditional music in Yangon would not face the same challenges as a Karen youth group promoting traditional Karen art and music in Myanmar's Karen State. In the midst of an armed conflict, they face limitations on how openly they can express themselves for fear of being labeled as siding with the insurgency movement.

Therefore, it is imperative for scholars and practitioners to make such distinctions and to closely examine civil society in these subnational conflicts to see how they can be better understood. There is also the need to understand relationships between civil society and insurgency movements. A better understanding will help governments and international donors work more effectively with civil society to solve or manage these protracted conflicts.

By using the case of southern Thailand, this study analyzes the challenges that civil society actors face in a subnational conflict with respect to development programs. The article aims to provide general policy recommendations to support

and foster civil societies in subnational conflicts.

This article is organized as follows. Definition of terminologies is explained in the first section, which includes references to existing literature. This is followed by a description of the southern Thailand case and the methods section. Key findings and specific analyses are then provided, which can be summarized as 1) civil society groups are caught between the state and insurgents; 2) civil society members have aspirations and ideologies supporting nationalism; and 3) there are links between empowerment and the insurgency movement. In the last section, before the conclusion, a discussion on policy implications is provided. Key recommendations include the need to 1) shift discourse from separatists to nationalists; 2) shift discourse from villagers to citizens; 3) have sound communication plans; 4) have sound participatory approaches; and 5) conduct political dynamic mapping for every project on the ground.

## CIVIL SOCIETY IN SUBNATIONAL CONFLICTS

The term subnational conflict can be defined as “armed conflict over control of a subnational territory within a sovereign state, where an opposition movement uses violence to contest for local political authority, and ostensibly, greater self-rule for the local population. Armed violence may take many forms, as competition between local elites and inter-communal violence may be closely linked to the vertical state-minority conflict” (Parks et al. 2013, 12).

Parks et al. further state that “In most cases, the defining characteristic of the conflict is the presence of an armed political movement with ethno-nationalist motivations that is seeking greater self-rule through increase political autonomy from the central government, greater control of local resources and economic activity, and outright separation” (Parks et al. 2013, 11).

Ethno-political conflict is characterized by the struggle of a group of people based on their ethnicity, which is primordial, non-voluntary, and exclusive in nature (Marchetti & Tocci 2009). It can be said that the notion of ethnicity is a multiple concept that refers to a myth of collective ancestry (Horowitz 1985). Ethnic conflicts, defined broadly, are based on ascriptive group identities—race, language, religion, tribe, or caste (Varshney 2001).

In sum, the nature of subnational conflicts can include the presence of hard politics (governance, power, and autonomy); ethnic and identity-based narratives; interpretation of history; injustice and suppression; economic deprivation; social ills and problems. Table 1 below illustrates the subnational conflicts found in Asia

Table 1. Subnational Conflicts in South and Southeast Asia (1992-2012)

Country	Conflict Area	Ethnic Group	Active 2012	Duration (years)
Bangladesh	Chittagong Hill Tracts	Chittagong Hill Tribes	N	17
	Kachin State	Kachins	Y	51
	Karen State	Karens	Y	64
	Karenni State	Karenni	Y	64
	Mon State	Mon	Y	64
	Rakhine State	Arakan	Y	64
	Shan State	Shans	Y	60
	Chin State	Zomis (Chins)	Y	24
India	Assam	Assamese	Y	33
	Assam	Bodos	Y	18
	Kashmir	Kashmiris	Y	65
	Manipur	Manipur	N	48
	Mizoram	Mizos (Hmar)	Y	26
	Nagaland	Nagas	N	65
	Punjab	Sikhs	N	65
	Tripura	Tripuras	N	34
Indonesia	Aceh	Acehnese	N	52
	East Timor	Timorese	N	24
Papua	Papua	Papuans	Y	51
	Limbuwan and Khambuwan	Kiratis/Kosi, Mechi, Sgaramatha	Y	20
Nepal	Terai	Madeshi	Y	8
	Pakistan	Baluchistan	Baluchis	Y
Papua New Guinea	Bougainville	Bouganvilleans	N	7
Philippines	Mindanao, Sulu Archipelago	Moros	Y	43
	Sri Lanka	North/East Sri Lanka	Tamil	N
Thailand	Southern Thailand	Malay-Muslims	Y	110

Source: Parks, Colletta & Oppenheim (2013).

since 1992.<sup>1</sup>

Conventional theories and studies of civil society today emerged out of Western Europe's context of state formation (Hobbes, Locke Ferguson), capitalism, class struggle (Hegel & Marx), and democratization (Gramsci & Habermas) (Marchetti & Tocci 2009, 202). Civil society groups have a variety of roles with respect

1 The author acknowledges that the current nature of conflict in the Middle East has differing qualities from other subnational conflicts. The analysis presented here does not claim to be universally applicable to such complex civil wars.

to its relations with government. In normal, non-conflict situations, civil society groups compliment and collaborate with government. In some situations, civil society groups advocate for change, protest and compete against the government (Boris 2006; Young 2006).

However, in subnational conflicts, where groups of people are contesting the legitimacy of the government or the people who are governing, the relationship between civil society groups and the government does not neatly fit into the above typology.

Studies of civil society in relation to conflict have been confined to the role of international non-government organizations (NGOs) in conflicts, and civil society as agents of change in places of post-conflict or in peace building mode. NGOs can be crudely divided into those that provide humanitarian assistance and those that do development work.

Among studies of international NGOs and their operations in conflict areas, many of them are on violence against aid workers. There is an underlying assumption or expectation that humanitarian work should be exempted from questions of allegiances and political motivation and that NGOs should not be harmed. However, this is not the case. Fast's (2007) study of NGOs that worked in Angola, Ecuador, and Sierra Leone found that NGOs that were inflicted with violence were those that 1) carried out multiple types of activities and provided material aid; 2) they implemented programs on the ground; 3) they worked with both sides of the conflict; 4) they integrated into the local community.

In reality, once an NGO steps into a conflict area, the notion of being neutral is highly difficult to defend. It has been argued that humanitarian neutrality in war and political emergencies is absurd (African Rights, 1994). Some also reject the notion of neutrality because it imposes silence upon violations of human rights (Plattner 1996). Thus, there is incompatibility between neutrality and justice of programs in conflict areas. The only international NGO that is recognized as being neutral is the International Committee of the Red Cross (Plattner 1996).

In studies of nationalism, civil society is labeled to be a negative agent in fundamentalist or nationalistic struggles (Marchetti & Tocci 2009, 205). Subnational conflicts are often overly simplified to be about a group of people wanting independence or self-determination, which entails separating away from the central national government. In addition, people who support such change are labeled as anti-state or pro-rebel or pro-insurgency. Irrespective of which sector civil society and NGO are working in—health, education, social, or environment—their choice of policy and programs can be used to judge their loyalty towards the state or the separatist movement.

In their study to link civil society and conflict, Marchetti and Tocci (2009)

argue that civil society does exist in failed states, authoritarian rule, and ethnic nationalistic conflict. They further assert that civil society is both an independent agent for change and a dependent product of existing structures. Civil society actors can be 'civil' and 'uncivil' actors carrying a variety of actions on the ground (Marchetti & Tocci 2009, 202). For instance, in a study of looting behaviors of war actors including NGOs in Somalia, Bakonyi (2010) categorized five types of looting: strategic looting; protest looting; leveling looting; poverty looting; organized looting; and rackets.

In this study, civil society is defined as an informal network of relationships in communities that is independent from the state (or government) and the business sector. The study takes a broad view to include formal associations and informal groupings of citizens with certain interests and goals. It also takes into account the fact that civil society groups that have genuinely emerged during times of conflict usually have a strong nationalistic undertone i.e. a dependent product of the conflict. Normally, they are not apolitical entities. These actors include village leaders, elected representatives at the local level, youth groups, women groups, elderly, and health volunteers.

The study of civil society, in this broad definition, and conflict is scarce. Exceptions include a study of civil society in the Hindu-Muslim riots in India by Varshney (2001). The study suggests that interethnic networks and intraethnic networks produce differing impacts on ethnic conflicts. These engagements are part of civic life and civil society groups for both formal and informal associations.

Marchetti and Tocci (2009) conclude that civil society in conflict can have three macro-impacts: fuelling conflict, holding conflict, and peacemaking. These impacts are also true in the southern Thailand case. Hence, it is crucial to acknowledge that civil society in subnational conflict areas are shaped by the context they operate in. These include political structure, historical narratives, cultural and traditional values, and experiences of violence. In this context, it is a fallacy to narrowly define civil society in the conventional sense of being agents of positive change. However having stated this, it is equally important to acknowledge civil society's role and power to bring about positive change because they can simultaneously shape the context that they are in.

## **DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN SUB-NATIONAL CONFLICT**

In the field of development aid, there is valid and growing concern about how development programs on the ground affect the course of subnational conflict. Some studies have focused on the role of international aid and unintended consequenc-

es related to ethnic conflicts. For instance, in their study of development projects with respect to ethnic conflict, Herring and Esman (2001) articulated concisely that aid projects have distributive consequences and that turning a blind eye to the effects on the power equilibrium of different ethnicities can have tremendous negative consequences.

They assert that “however administratively rational the plans of agencies, aid is allocated and administered in a political context; considerations of ethnic territoriality, power relations, and patronage influence the effectiveness of development assistance even when evaluated on narrowly technical grounds” (Herring & Esman 2001, 3). They further state that in conflict areas “even in an expanding-sum game, relative gains may be more important than absolute gains” (Herring & Esman 2001, 7). More critical studies have argued how development aid can be very destructive in conflict areas where it propagates dependency, corruption, and violence. Examples of prominent studies include Maren’s (1997) work on aid in Somalia and Uvin’s (1998) work on Rwanda.

Furthermore, combatants and civilians are intrinsically mixed in subnational conflict areas (Slim 1997). Levine (1995) notes that combatants are not a distinct group, separated from the civilian population, but are fathers, brothers, and sons frequently returning to their homes. In such circumstances, women and children who have received aid are not going to refuse to feed their own family members. Thus, in reality, it is nearly impossible to safeguard resources for only the ‘good’ civil society members in subnational conflict areas.

Most existing studies use conventional discourse on *development assistance* that rests upon the nation-state as a unit of analysis (Herring & Esman 2001). However, in subnational conflicts, the legitimacy of the state is questioned by segments of the population, which is usually ethnic-based. Consequently, treating the government (or state) as a ‘partner’ in programs and policies, based on the new partnership approach for aid effectiveness (i.e. the Paris Declaration), will not answer the problem of ethnic-based grievances. This is especially true when the politically dominant ethnic community is a demographic majority, where the government can privilege its constituents by formal majoritarian democratic processes (Herring & Esman 2001, 5).

Whilst there are many common problems between development programs administered by government and by NGOs, regardless of where the funding comes from (national or international funds), there is no short list of recommendations from scholars and practitioners to improve development assistance with respect to ethnic conflicts. Common principles include 1) avoiding conflict and ensuring peaceful coexistence; 2) achieving equity or rough distributional justice; or 3) simply to do no harm to any ethnic community (Herring & Esman 2001,

244). More specific recommendations are such as following the principles of 1) the search for common interest; 2) divisibility of projects, as opposed to one large project; and 3) producing interdependence between ethnic communities (Herring & Esman 2001, 248).

Particularly widely accepted is Mary Anderson's (1999) book *Do no harm: How aid can support peace—or war*, which provides accounts of how aid can aim to build capacities for peace. It puts forward the “Analytical Framework for Assessing Sources of Tensions, Dividers, War Capacities, and Connectors and Capacities for Peace in Conflict Situations,” a planning tool for practitioners to assess the impact of their work and programs on peace and war capacities. Her study has since influenced fundamental principles of development aid in general conflict zones, which is perhaps not specific to subnational conflict areas.

In response to the criticisms, in the last decade we have witnessed development programs moving away from direct redistribution of resources to empowering individuals and capacity building for organizations and communities (See such as Eade 1997; Nussbaum 2000). This capacity approach includes training programs and opportunities provided to segments of the population to learn skill sets such as leadership, project management, financial management, computer, negotiation, communication, consensus building and decision-making skills. This approach aims to improve people's capacity to govern, which in turn should help localities to develop. Supporters of this approach assert that it should help to remedy competition for resources among ethnic groups in conflict. This approach is a hybrid of humanitarian assistance and development working together with the rights-based approach. It is often found in protracted low-intensity subnational conflict areas.

It can be argued that these capacity-building programs do influence power dynamics in a community, not limited to conflict areas. Doubts are now cast on how effective these development approaches are for subnational conflict areas. Questions that have been raised include how empowerment programs affect ethnic power dynamics in local areas and in turn how that influences the direction of the subnational conflict itself.

## THE CASE OF SOUTHERN THAILAND

To describe any subnational conflict in a few sentences risks the potential to overly simplify a highly complex problem. Many studies already exist covering the nature, characteristics, and causes on the subnational conflict in the south of Thailand (i.e. Askew 2007; McCargo 2008; Satha-Anand 2009; Liow & Pathan 2010).

Therefore, this article will not discuss the details and nuances of the conflict but will describe the key features.

This conflict is an on-going struggle of the Malay-Muslim population in the far southern part of Thailand (along the Thai-Malaysian border) to gain greater autonomy from the Thai state. It has persisted for the last 100 years since Thailand began to form its modern nation-state. The region comprises of three provinces, Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and a segment of Songkhla province. More than 75 percent of the 1.8 million people in this afflicted region identify themselves as Malay-Muslims.<sup>2</sup>

The current wave of the insurgency movement started in 2004 when multiple acts of violence were staged, by both civilians and security personnel. Since then violent acts have erupted periodically which include drive-by shootings, car and motorcycle bombs, beheading, arson attacks, and counter attacks by security personnel. So far, over 6,000 lives have been lost in this conflict.<sup>3</sup>

The Malay people's struggle for self-determination and governance clashes with the mainstream narrative of nation building for Thais that the central government in Bangkok is determined to create and sustain. Assimilation policies, inequalities, discriminatory judicial practices, and the highly centralized nature of the Thai government, fuelled the feelings of being oppressed and the lack of space for expression of grievances (Burke et al. 2013). This subnational conflict is typical of many ethnic conflicts where the ethnic region is far from the capital. The state's cultural penetration generally declines in remote areas, which contribute to the alienation of peripheral groups to be involved in the nation-building process (Wucherpennig et al. 2001).

The conflict has never truly made top political agenda for national politicians and government leaders. Partly due to its mysterious nature (i.e. insurgents not publicly taking claim for the violence, not making public demands, and not making their identities known), but mainly due to the larger national-level political crisis that Thailand is going through. Since 2006, Thailand has had two military coups and more than five prime ministers. Hence, not only is the region peripheral with respect to geographical location, the issue of the Malays is also considered peripheral on the political agenda. Across the border is Malaysia, which has the potential to play an important role in facilitating peace. Interestingly Kuala Lumpur also sees its northern part of the country, where stricter interpretation of Islam is practiced, as peripheral to the national government's agenda.

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2 Thailand has a population of 67 million. Over 90 percent of which are Buddhists.

3 For more information on violence levels see Deep South Watch at <http://www.deepsouthwatch.org>. This organization also has the list of formal civil society organizations working in the conflict area and its analyses.

According to Burke et al. (2013, 2) this case is representative of subnational conflicts in Asia for the following reasons. It is a protracted historically low-intensity conflict, contestation over the state that is limited to the region (rarely do insurgents operate outside of the conflict zones), fragmented insurgent groups, very limited international involvement, and extreme difficulties in providing assistance from outside due to government sensitivities.

## DATA & METHODS

This study draws data from a large-scale research project spearheaded by the Asia Foundation in 2012-13. The project aimed at understanding the effectiveness of international and national development programs in the subnational conflict areas of southern Thailand, Aceh of Indonesia, and Mindanao in the Philippines. The author was one of the lead researchers for Thailand.

From the larger dataset, for this study, 100 in-depth interviews conducted in 10 sub-districts in the three provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani were used. The interviewees were village heads, women group leaders, elected members of sub-district councils, youth group leaders, religious leaders, natural leaders, school principals, and respected elderlies. These actors are key drivers of civil society at the most primary unit of administration in the country, villages, and sub-districts. Formal and informal interviews were also conducted with registered civil society groups, on the ground and national level NGOs that worked in the local area. Each interview was transcribed into 3-6 pages of text.

Due to the nature of the subnational conflict, it was important to take into consideration a set of sensitivities during the data collection process. These were the interviewers' ethnicity, safety, and well-being. Some local researchers were unwilling to interview military, police, and certain government officials due mainly to fear and distrust. Some villages were in very remote areas that required an overnight stay. The author is a Thai from Bangkok. Thus, it was important for her to be accompanied by Malay researchers from the region to gain trust from the interviewees. Almost all of the interviews were conducted in Thai language, with a few exceptions that were conducted in Yawi, a Malay language dialect used in the region.

The focus of the interviews was on a set of government-led or military-led programs that had a variety of goals. Table 2 below shows the list of programs investigated. These programs were chosen based on its wide scale effort—covering every district in the afflicted area. They were on-going programs that people could relate to and had opinions on.

Table 2. Development Programs Studied

Program	Description
Panop	Aims to help households make a living by giving \$150 dollars (US) worth of goods per household
Panom	Aims for village development by letting village committees decide on how to use \$6,700 dollars (US) funding
Masjid Sanjai	Aims to combat drug abuse by empowering religious leaders to educate and talk to vulnerable families
Jalannabaru	Aims to bring awareness on drugs and rehabilitate former drug addicts

Funded partly by United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the first two development programs were led by the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC)<sup>4</sup> and were implemented by officials from the provincial, district, and village levels. The goal of Panop was to raise the income and standard of living for about 110,000 households. The English name is Development of Peaceful Communities Using Self-Sufficiency Philosophy. The Panom funding was aimed for villagers to decide together on how to use common funding given by the government. Many used the funding to build infrastructure such as mosque walls, water tanks, and community meeting halls. Internal Security Operations Command 4, Narcotics Control Board, and Tanyarak Institute-Ministry of Health initiated the Jalannabaru project. This project aimed to curb drug addiction by sending youths at risk to training camps for seven days. The training camps are run by military and are located near to military bases in the three provinces. Lastly, the Internal Security Operations Command 4 together with imams in each village organized the Masjid Sanjai project. The aim of this project is to combat drug abuse among village members by empowering imams and mosque committees to monitor households that have drug users. The idea is to use mosques as the main infrastructure to gather youths. During Friday prayers, imams are to preach on the danger of drugs. As of 2013, there were 650 mosques that have participated out of the total 2,035 in the region.

4 The Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) is a special agency setup specifically to coordinate and take lead on all policies regarding the three southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. It also coordinates closely with religious groups, community leaders, the military and local governments in the region.

## KEY FINDINGS

The following are key findings related to civil society and community members' reaction towards the programs.

1. These programs have strict templates for implementation, which leads to the lack of flexibility to customize projects to fit community and household levels' needs. For example in the Panop project, certain households were provided with livestock such as chickens, catfish and goats regardless of the fact that they did not have land nor knowledge on how to raise livestock. Many of these households ended up selling the animals the very next day.
2. Most projects lacked transparency. Civil society and community members did not know how decisions were made and did not understand why some were asked and some were not asked to participate in these programs. Some people were skeptical about how funding has been used for the programs. For example in the Panop program, in certain locations, the officials mandated that the money had to be used to buy goods and farming equipment only from certain shops.
3. Some of these programs have the underlying assumption that a certain level of participation from community members will help curb corruption. However, there were incidences where community members were accused of cheating and unfairly distributing resources. Interviews reveal that village heads and local government officials are not accustomed to setting agenda, managing deliberations and discussions. They often complain that community members' needs are very diverse. They are often not successful at drawing consensus and creating positive space for deliberations. In addition, fake signatures are often used to support projects at the village-level. This is due mainly because of conditions set by the programs, such as the mandate to have at least 70 people in the public hearings or the mandate to have the signatures of the four main pillars (local government, village head, religious leader, natural leader) of the sub-district. Public hearings end up being either charades or space for only the like-minded. Thus, it is not surprising that there is a perception of elite capture in some communities.
4. Some local communities perceive these programs as an effort by the government to gain more legitimacy. However when the program fails and corruption or dishonesty is detected the state's legitimacy further deteriorates.

The above findings are not unique to southern Thailand. These problems are often found in development programs in many developing countries around the world. However, what makes all the above very alarming is the fact that these civil society actors and community members are constantly deciding whom they trust and whom they are loyal to. This is a crucial aspect in ethnic-based subnational conflict where the state wishes to minimize insurgency supporters and sympathizers. Thus, there is a need to further analyze how civil society groups in such a setting feel and think.

## ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

These points below highlight how the treatment and understanding of civil society in subnational conflict areas should be different from conventional methods.

### 1. Civil society groups are caught in between the state and the insurgents

In subnational conflicts, civil society groups and community members have to negotiate with both the government and armed groups. They are reluctant to say no to government initiatives for fear that they will be labeled anti-state and be understood as part of the separatist movement. At the same time they are afraid the insurgents might think they side with government. Thus, civil society and community groups are put in a very difficult position.

This is exactly what happened in Thailand when the military gave color codes to villages labeling them as red or green. Red villages were uncooperative with the state and possibly siding with the insurgents. The basis for such labeling was unclear but interviews alluded to the possibility that cooperation with government programs was used as one of the criterions.

Among the programs studied, Masjid Sanjai was one of the more troubling programs for civil society actors. The program asks community members to identify people in the community who are associated with drugs, including those who produce, sell, smuggle, and consume. The idea was to empower imams and mosque committees to monitor households that have drug users and to use mosques as the main infrastructure to gather youths. During Friday prayers, imams are to preach on the danger of drugs. Households that are 'clean' receive white flags, provided by the military, to put up front, show casing that they are drug-free.

The imams who were asked to take the lead on this project were hesitant to participate. One imam said he knew who sold the drugs in the village but of course, cannot turn his own friend in to the military. Understandably, the imam

fears for his own safety. He needs to calculate how he wishes to maintain his relationships in the long run. He would rather not interfere with armed groups or powerful individuals. The imams take caution not to upset the power-balance of the insurgents, drug dealers, and other strong groups. Striking the wrong cord can easily cause them their life. At the same time, they do not want to be labeled as not cooperating with the military either. Some imams expressed this frustration that they are caught in between. In some villages everyone simply voted for every household to be clean without actual investigation. In other places community members simply exchange votes i.e. 'you vote my family is clean and I will vote that your family is clean too.'

Other problems were also found with this program. They include the slowness in transfer of funds to the mosque committees from the military and the rigidity of the process on how to work with community members. For example, each household had to contribute money to a drug-combating fund and public referendums were held to publicly identify households that had drug users. This program has profound impact on how community members, imams, and insurgents view the Thai state. It feeds into some of the skepticism that the state is not genuine about its intention to solve problems.

Similar to the above project, Jalannaburu project also aimed to combat drug abuse. Male youths at risk were selected to attend a training camp for seven days. The youths were selected either through volunteering or they were nominated by leaders of the village. The camps are run by the military near military-bases in the three provinces. Those interviewed expressed mixed feelings towards the effectiveness of this program. Some youths were able to stop using drugs, while some continued. Unfortunately, many youths who went through the camp had stigma of a drug addict, forbidding them to find good work despite the fact that some of them voluntarily went because they wanted to learn more about the harm of drug abuse.

After the training, youths are asked to start Jalannaburu clubs in their communities. Some youths expressed fear in working with the military. Some community members were unhappy that their youths were too close to the military. This happened in one sub-district, where the youth leader felt pressured from the military to select other youths to join the camp training, while the youths (his friends) were not willing to go. He was caught in the middle until finally he resigned from the club.

Some community members thought this in-camp training method was the wrong approach. Some said funding should be used for scholarships, some said the imam should play a bigger role, and some disagreed in using religion to solve drug problems. One interviewee said he thought the program was security related

i.e. preventing youths to join the insurgency by using the drug program as a tactic. Because this program is run by the military, there is probably an implicit goal to unlock the link between drug abuse and recruitment of insurgents. Such a tactic makes it very dangerous for youths involved in the project.

Another example is the Panop project where households distributed animals, farming equipment, seeds, and fertilizer worth \$150 dollars (US). The village head and his team held the responsibility of identifying who got what. While many community members took part in receiving this free handout, many criticized the program for wasting budget and held views that the program does not help to solve long-term economic problems.

Interview data reveals that some community leaders are coerced to distribute the goods and animals to members of the insurgent group first or else their safety is not guaranteed. Despite rules to have public participation processes to decide on who gets what and how, some communities that had a strong insurgency influence held private closed-door meetings to negotiate and decide before the actual public meeting. Some village heads were fearful; thus, they reluctantly gave-in to the insurgents. Many leaders did not want to take part in the decision-making process but they were also afraid to be suspected of siding with insurgents. Thus, they reluctantly cooperated with the state. This puts community leaders in the middle and it was no surprise that some leaders were not supportive of the project at all.

In addition, as briefly mentioned in the key findings, the project quickly failed for some communities where there was no tradition of raising farm animals. Some interviewees expressed that since most community members worked in rubber tree plantations, raising catfish or goats is not aligned with their existing skills. Some suspected corruption within the project, saying that officials buy animals and equipment at a higher price than the market. Also, some animals such as cows were not suitable for the humid hot climate of the South and died soon after being delivered to the community members. These negative views towards the project fuel further deterioration of state-society relations.

## **2. Civil society actors have ideologies and aspirations**

In areas of subnational conflict where communities are close-knit, people tend to know each other on a personal basis. This is especially true in more rural and agricultural-based societies. This study found that many people in the region of the far south do feel the sense of suppression and wish to freely express their Malay identity more freely. Some do support the idea of having an autonomous province for the Malay-Muslim population. However, most would not support the use of

violence to achieve such a goal.<sup>5</sup>

Founded on the situation that civil society groups are often caught in between combined with the natural feelings of nationalism, civil society members sometimes end up helping insurgency group members in one way or the other. Some interviewees shared these experiences with the research team. For example a well-known woman activist, who commands respect from the government and military due to her ability to convene people, once allowed for a fugitive to hide in her house. She decided to do so based on her ideologies and aspirations for the local people. We also heard from a village head that openly shared how he asked for insurgents to leave his village area because he did not want trouble with the military. He did not report them, of course, but allowed them to move on freely.

Based on observations and interviews with more candid individuals, many seem to know someone personally who is in the insurgency movement. Thus, in the first point above, insurgents command provision of goods and services from development projects by threatening village leaders in some cases; however, in this second point, some village leaders willingly ration for insurgents and insurgent supporters first. This is not meant to judge the choice of action among civil society actors. But it is meant to emphasize the need to accept that in subnational conflict, it is rational to expect that civil society actors do have ideologies and aspirations. It is inevitable for these actors to take a stand and take sides.

The last example of how civil society actors can also hold aspirations of independence or self-governance is of a man who the author encountered. He once took up arms and trained with other fighters. After a while, he left the group to pursue higher education. He is now a scholar and has started an NGO that aims to provide alternative discourse on the autonomous movement. This individual's case illustrates the reality that people's beliefs and behavior is complex and dynamic. Events and people's behavior cannot be fully understood in snapshots. The fact is people in general do have aspirations and ideologies, and their wishes need to be acknowledged.

### 3. Links between political empowerment and the insurgency movement

Anderson (1999) points to the reality that in many conflict settings there is no right side to support. She argues that NGOs should empower the local population and organize the local community. Many development programs have objectives to empower certain segments of community members, such as women, youths,

5 For more discussion and statistics on support or non-support of violence, see Asia Foundation's 2013 report *The Contested Corners of Asia: Subnational Conflict and International Development Assistance—The Case of Southern Thailand*. Available at <http://asiafoundation.org/publications/pdf/1219>. Accessed on April 13, 2015.

and minority groups. In subnational areas, these empowerment programs are useful for they allow new groups of people to rise and take part in the political sphere of the community. It helps to break old monopolies and hegemonies at the village, district, and provincial levels. In this study, it was found that some youths and women who have been empowered do take up leading roles in their communities.

In one of the villages that were studied, it was found that the newly elected village head was relatively young, in his mid-twenties. This is uncommon as most village heads are forty to fifty years old. This particular young man was a youth leader in his teenage years. He has been of service to the community, we were told. However, we were also told that he enjoyed support from the separatist group, which in essence, endorsed his leadership. Without such support, it would be difficult for a very young man to win an election over more mature and experienced community leaders. Interviews with him revealed how he grew stronger as a leader through the various empowerment programs offered.

In another case, a women's group that grew more powerful because of various skills-based development programs they went through became the community's swing vote during village head and local government elections. These development programs included baking and cooking skills, sewing skills, and marketing skills. It would not be inconceivable that members of the insurgency movement would try to win hearts and minds of these empowered women groups.

It was also found that there is a systematic bias that hinders the advancement of civil society groups among Malay-Muslims. Communities with retired teachers or bureaucrats often have an advantage in setting up women's groups, community funds, and elderly groups. In gaining access for funding to support these groups' activities, people need to be able to speak and write Thai bureaucratic language, aside from knowing how the bureaucracy works. Often these retired bureaucrats are Thai-Buddhists. The lack of this capacity in other places stems from the fact that not many Malay-Muslims enter the public sector. This is not surprising given that in similar cases, members of certain ethnic groups who were initially privileged by education and employment opportunities benefit more from market-based competition or programs that do not consciously allocate resources based on ethnicity (Herring & Esman 2001). Examples include the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Jews in Russia, and the Chinese in Indonesia (Herring & Esman 2001).

In sum, development programs of any type—distribution of resources or empowerment/capacity training programs—do highly influence the direction of the conflict. Its effects on ethnic-based political dynamics are associated with trust towards the state, social capital among community members, and livelihoods of the families and civil society involved in the policy or program. Many development and security projects in the South are accompanied by opportunities for greater

access to resources and power for families, government officials, military personnel, insurgents, religious leaders, local government officials, and volunteers. While it can positively influence development in localities, these opportunities for resources and power also contribute to friction and conflict among the actors involved in the design and implementation of the projects. Serious cases of mistrust and conflict stemming from these projects lead to further deterioration of state-society relations, and state legitimacy.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

Based on the above findings, this study suggests a few key implications for practice for development programs in subnational conflict areas.

First, the discourse should shift from separatists to nationalists. It is crucial to move away from judging civil society as not being representative of the popular constituency. Often civil society actors and active citizens are portrayed to be propagators of narrow self-centered political interests or they are shamed and punished for being separatist movement sympathizers. While there is the need to promote peaceful means, it is also important to respect citizens' aspirations and the pride of their identities (perceived, created, or real). There is very little use in cornering civil society actors to choose sides and to categorize them as 'for' or 'against' us. This black and white categorization of people does more harm than good in subnational conflict areas.

This point is echoed in Duncan McCargo's (2008) criticisms of schemes by military forces. He states "the security forces proved terminally incompetent in their day-to-day operations, and persistently failed to grasp that most Malay Muslims were neither "good" nor "bad," but simply trying to survive in a murky environment where they feared antagonizing either the state authorities or the burgeoning militant movement" (McCargo 2008, 185).

Second, the discourse should shift from villagers to citizens. Once there is no 'us' and 'them' mentality, it would be easier to see people as citizens. Citizens have aspirations for their homeland and society. They follow sets of ideologies, formed through education and associations in religious, cultural, and societal settings. Most development programs funded internationally or by the state, treat people as recipients and beneficiaries of aid rather than active citizens, who have rights and obligations. People are called 'villagers' (in Thai-Chao Ban) and 'subjects' (in Thai-Rasadorn). These words should no longer be used due to their inferior connotations. Citizens' views and aspirations should not be taken lightly.

Third, there should be an acceptance of the fact that civil society behavior is

restricted due to safety reasons. Most projects do not have formal and continuous mechanisms for monitoring and providing direct feedback from citizens. Citizens feel fearful of speaking out directly about how they feel about the projects. Thus, aside from setting feedback mechanisms that people trust, a thorough communication strategy and effective implementation of the communication plan is another vital aspect of development programs. Often when citizens do not receive or have full access to information regarding the project, they will misinterpret the intention of the project, which in turn can fuel feelings of hostility towards the government. We experienced the difficulty of accessing information on these development projects first hand through this research project.

Fourth, it is not enough to merely require civil society actors to participate in the decision-making process of the programs. It is crucial to determine the type of participation, level of participation, timing of participation, duration of participation, objective of participation, follow-up on impact of participation, monitoring of participation, checks and balances of participation, which are all important components to help think issues through carefully. A proper accountability system must be in place at the local level to ensure that decision-making and participatory processes are sound.

Last, and most importantly, political dynamic mapping and forecast ethnic dynamic impact assessment must be undertaken prior to starting any project. It is also important to do continual assessment of the dynamic during the implementation and evaluation stages of the program. This recommendation is not new, Herring and Esman (2001, 13) concluded from their study of seven cases of conflict ranging from Kenya, Sri Lanka, and India to Russia, that development analysts need to pay more attention to grounded qualitative assessments of ethnic conflicts. Other scholars have also raised this concern. However, its practice has been relatively limited.

## CONCLUSION

This study analyzed how civil society actors face certain challenges unique to a subnational conflict. The study was guided by a basic proposition that civil society and community members on the ground can be victims of violence, and at the same time can also be indirect supporters of insurgents and violent acts. The findings of this study suggest the fallacy that development and humanitarian spheres can be separated from political spheres that is at the heart of all subnational conflicts.

As long as civil society is strictly defined as people who are ‘civil’ or ‘for

peace,' the true picture of the complexity of people's aspirations and challenges in subnational conflict areas can never be fully captured. Insurgency movements are made up of thinkers, political advisors, family members, and neighbors, in addition to fighters who use violence. The bottom-line is the civil society should be engaged and nationalism and strong nationalistic ideals that many civil societies are built upon should be accepted. If people are respected and treated as citizens, there is a higher chance for people to develop constructive civic mindsets and 'act civil.' Thus, policies should treat people in the region as equals, as citizens, as opposed to trying to segregate civilians and insurgents, especially in development programs.

Civil society is part of the political sphere of any community, regardless of the community's democratic nature. It is erroneous to expect and assume civil society groups to be apolitical in subnational conflict regions. Any type of intervention, such as empowerment programs, will have an impact on the political dynamics of the community. Thus, we have to accept the fact that any kind of intervention in a community is a political action, which will always have some level of political consequence. It is, thus, misleading for governments, international NGOs, and donors, to insist that their development programs and policies are neutral and non-political in nature. Once you step into a subnational conflict area, everything you do will be related to the conflict, in one way or the other.

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## Assessing Local Responses to Chinese-Backed Resource Development Projects in Myanmar and Cambodia: A Critical Survey

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### Abstract

This article examines local responses to Chinese-backed resource development projects in Myanmar and Cambodia. It interrogates why, despite comparable levels of state restrictiveness, localized resistance has emerged in Myanmar against the Sino-Myanmar oil and gas pipelines, whereas the Chinese-backed North-South railway mega-project in Cambodia has been met with tempered opposition. Here, the article proposes that the existence of high civil-society capacity can contribute to facilitating opposition under restrictive state conditions.

### Keywords

resource development, Cambodia, Myanmar, Chinese investment, civil society, activism

## INTRODUCTION

How can localized resistance emerge under restrictive state conditions? What accounts for the striking displays of popular contestation in authoritarian countries like Myanmar, where civil society activism is often a target of persecution by the state? This article explores the emergence and non-emergence of sustained opposition against Chinese-backed resource development schemes in Myanmar and Cambodia. Adopting a comparative perspective derived from field research in China and mainland Southeast Asia, it focuses specifically on two large-scale resource projects: the oil and gas pipelines that cut across Myanmar's Rakhine (Arakan) and Shan States, and the North-South railway mega-project in Cambodia's Rovieng district. Situated in socially and ecologically-sensitive areas, both schemes are identified as 'high-impact': not only can the consequences of such large-scale, resource projects prove detrimental to the natural environment, but the social ramifications on local communities as a result of forced displacement and the loss of livelihoods can also be acute. However, while organized forms of resistance have surfaced against the Chinese-backed scheme in Myanmar, there appears to be tempered opposition, if not conspicuous silence, in the Cambodian case examined. This raises the two-fold question of why there is such a divergence and what factors have contributed to this outcome.

A key variable considered here is the role played by civil society within each of these countries—in particular, their capacity to leverage information, resources and external support, as well as manipulate the status quo in favor of their principled ideas. Access to information, for one, is revealed to be a sizable inhibiting factor in the Cambodian case, but is less of a barrier for network activists working in the Myanmar example. This is due not only to the persistent efforts of local civil society groups and transnational NGOs like Arakan Oil Watch, Badeidha Moe and the Shwe Gas Movement in data-gathering and raising public awareness, but is also in part the result of the support these organizations were able to gain from external actors (e.g. major news outlets) that helped to disseminate their cause to the wider regional public. As such, while the popular outburst against the Chinese-backed oil and gas pipelines scheme in Myanmar might appear to be spontaneous at best, the traction achieved thus far by civil society in generating public interest is in fact based upon a sustained advocacy campaign; one which has been driven by a broad-based and resourceful activist network with transnational linkages. It is in this sense that a high degree of civil-society capacity has proven central to fostering localized resistance despite Myanmar's restrictive socio-political circumstances.

This article proceeds in three parts. The first section offers an overview of the

nature of Chinese investment in mainland Southeast Asia's extractive industries. The second advances a working analytical framework with which to make sense of the relationship between civil-society network formation and the development of resistance. The third section then considers, in turn, cases of tempered opposition in Cambodia and localized resistance in Myanmar.

## CHINA AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN MAINLAND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

As China's demand for energy and mineral resources grows (*Reuters* 2013), mainland Southeast Asia has witnessed a surge in Chinese investment aimed at developing its resource sectors. At present, China is the biggest investor in Myanmar and the largest investor in Cambodia in terms of the cumulative investment volume as of 2012 (Deboonme 2014; *Radio Free Asia* 2014). The expansion of the Chinese corporate presence has, however, given rise to a host of social and environmental problems, as forests are felled in Laos to fuel the region's illegal timber trade, specifically to supply China's booming construction industry (Fogarty 2012); bauxite, crucial for aluminum production, is mined in Vietnam's Central Highlands for export to China (The Hanoiist 2010); and oil and gas pipelines are constructed in Myanmar, traversing ethnically fragile areas much to the chagrin of local villagers. Here, major Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) are often accused of enabling the questionable enforcement of social and environmental standards in host countries, as well as perpetuating unsustainable resource management practices within the region (Maurin & Yeophantong 2013; Turner & Wu n.d.; Lazarus 2008).

That said, it warrants note that the governance problems associated with resource exploitation are deeply entrenched in this industrializing region. Indeed, this arguably has more to do with the nature of the autocratic regimes in place than with Chinese investors *per se*. Although the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Energy (MIME) is the primary agency responsible for overseeing the development of Cambodia's natural resources, ultimate decision-making authority rests with the incumbent prime minister, who can directly authorize certain projects considered under urgent or special circumstances. This clearly raises a probable cause for alarm, as it becomes feasible for Hun Sen to circumvent existing regulations, including those requiring environmental impact assessments (EIAs) to be conducted before the granting of licenses for mining exploration. Similar problems related to implementation and enforcement are likewise seen in the Myanmar and Vietnamese country-contexts. Despite having an elaborate approval mechanism in place

for foreign investment projects, the uneven enforcement of regulatory requirements in Vietnam has meant that some major resource schemes have been allowed to proceed without the necessary impact assessments. The recent publication of laws such as the 2013 Foreign Investment Rules notwithstanding, Myanmar has also yet to formally pass any EIA legislation.

Even in cases where the existence of such regulatory gaps can work to afford greater political space to processes of civil regulation, whereupon civil society is able to help monitor business practices and make up for government oversight, such informal forms of regulation cannot wholly serve as a substitute for official regulation. Rather, civil regulation is at best a complementary mechanism: despite potentially contributing to 'bottom-up' governance and greater accountability on the part of governments and the private sector, it remains invariably constrained in its ability to directly shape corporate conduct.

Moreover, when it comes to deciding between resource development to meet market demands and spur economic growth on the one hand, and stringent regulatory enforcement that could increase project costs and deter some investors (and for which government capacity might also be lacking) on the other, developing-country governments will tend to find a stronger incentive to pursue the former course of action. The Chinese, Cambodian and Myanmar governments represent prime examples of this mentality, having actively prioritized the extraction of finite resources as a means to enhance economic development and hasten regional integration.

The imperative to secure and diversify the country's resource supplies abroad is, of course, one that has long-standing roots in Chinese policy rhetoric, having been stressed by Deng Xiaoping ever since the late 1970s. More recently, it has become embodied in such concepts as the 'two markets and two resources' (*lianggeshichang, liangzhongziyuan*) idea. At the opening ceremony of the China International Mining Conference in November 2010, then Vice Premier Li Keqiang had expounded on the concept by stressing the importance of strengthening domestic resource markets and enhancing international cooperation in the resource sector (*People's Daily* 2010). Crucially, it is also this notion which serves as the rationale behind the ongoing push to develop China's 'strategic energy channels.' As discussed later, the Sino-Myanmar oil and gas pipelines, which are intended to help accelerate economic growth in southwest China, constitutes a project that has been undertaken as part of this policy directive.

## LOCALIZED RESISTANCE AND CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS

Mainland Southeast Asia's extractive industries are marked by high levels of political opacity and sensitivity. Coupled by the fact that mining projects are often situated in remote areas, investment in this sector tends to be hidden away from the 'public eye,' effectively rendering it difficult for civil society to monitor such projects and, should the need arise, mobilize collective action against them. Indeed, the ability of civil society actors to effect actual policy change (e.g. suspension of or withdrawal from a high-impact scheme) within this sector suggests considerable constraints.

Yet, across the two cases examined here a degree of variation is found to exist on one dimension: that is, the emergence of localized resistance. Even though limited public concern and opposition has been leveled in Cambodia against Chinese investments in Rovieng to date—this is despite there being some knowledge of Chinese plans and their potential impacts on communities and the surrounding environment—the case of the oil and gas pipelines in Myanmar yields a strikingly different outcome. Here, the Chinese SOE involved became a prominent target of localized resistance that subsequently grew into a full-fledged campaign. And as suggested earlier, the campaign managed to attract considerable public attention despite Myanmar's unfavorable political climate. If one were to subscribe to conventional wisdom which considers state restrictiveness, as manifest in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian countries plagued by endemic corruption and political opacity, to be an inhibiting factor vis-à-vis civil society's freedom to maneuver, how is one to explain the emergence of sustained resistance in Myanmar against this Chinese-backed scheme?

The link between state restrictiveness and an activist network's level of effectiveness in issue creation and resistance mobilization is by no means straightforward. I posit that the *capacity* of a network constitutes a key determinant of whether or not localized resistance emerges in restrictive socio-political contexts. To be sure, the term 'capacity' is an equivocal and oftentimes conceptually-loaded one, which renders any attempt to measure it precarious. There is, moreover, the added risk of committing to a tautological explanation, whereby civil society capacity is defined by the very existence of localized resistance. For this reason, it is necessary to formulate a set of indicators for assessing the relative capacity of civil society networks in the Cambodian and Myanmar cases. As a first step, I advance the following three: access to information, access to resources, and breadth of network.

It is not sufficient for local advocacy groups or international NGOs to adopt an issue; they need to also have adequate resources at their disposal as well as ac-

cess to ‘game-changing’ information. These are integral to processes of ‘issue definition’—that is, the identification of ‘responsible parties’ and the proposal of ‘credible solutions’ (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 19)—which, in turn, serve as the basis for orchestrating effective campaigns that attract public support and gain policy resonance. At the same time, for an organization to create a compelling ‘problem,’ it will need to draw on authoritative, if at times ‘shocking,’ information that can add to its credibility as a ‘gatekeeper’ within a given issue-area (Carpenter 2010, 214). The breadth of a civil society network (i.e. the degree of external support it has) is likewise predicated on the other two indicators. Once an ‘expert’ reputation has been established, the expansion of a network is more likely to occur, as other domestic and transnational NGOs are persuaded to join the cause. In certain scenarios, one may also see an advocacy campaign gaining sympathizers within government and the bureaucracy, in a way reminiscent of the strategies used by ‘rightful resisters’ (O’Brien 1996). Anti-Myitsone dam activism in Myanmar, for instance, has succeeded in fomenting intense opposition at both the local and national levels. This was made possible by the existence of a well-organized activist network, which was also notably characterized by a broad membership base. Despite facing many impediments in their efforts to bypass the state and build civic engagement, this network managed to employ a range of strategic tools, which included cooperating with those inside the Myanmar government, to turn the Chinese-backed Myitsone dam project into an issue worthy of public concern and collective resistance (Yeophantong 2013).

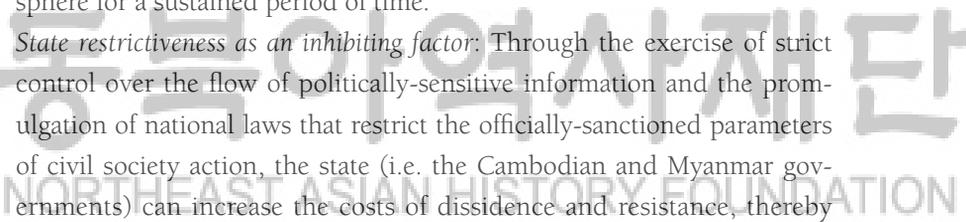
This is where the notion of civil regulation—defined as the regulation of the private sector by civil society actors (see Mason 2005, 150)—comes into play. It is usually in response to the weaknesses inherent in extant governing arrangements that activist networks are either formed or bolstered. Working to rectify governance gaps by bringing public scrutiny to bear on opaque decision-making processes, a major function performed by such networks is to push for outcomes such as answerability, compensation and remediation (Fox 2007, 663-671) through indirect as well as direct channels of influence. What this means is that network activists may attempt to effect policy change either through direct engagement with the target actors (i.e. government or company in question); indirect pressure through engagement with the affected public or host government; or some combination of both. Mass campaigns, popular protests and petitions are, of course, among the more confrontational approaches adopted by activists, whereas the formation of collaborative partnerships with government agencies and companies represent more consultative pathways of engagement. Regardless, the overarching objective is usually aimed at increasing the costs of actor non-compliance to established standards and, in other cases, prevailing social expectations. As

reflected in reinvigorated calls in past years for sustainable investment practices, social disapprobation of high-impact resource schemes has the potential to escalate into protracted host-society opposition. This could negatively impact not just the reputation of investors, but also result in commercial losses in the event that a project is disrupted or cancelled.

That said, there remains the distinct possibility that, aside from civil society capacity, other factors can also contribute to the emergence of resistance or, conversely, the lack thereof. A summary of the potential causal mechanisms is as follows:

1. *Civil society capacity as an enabling factor*: Civil society networks that have a broad support base, sufficient resources at their disposal, and are privy to sensitive information are likely to succeed in fomenting resistance at the grassroots and national levels. Such attributes grant them increased capacity to raise public awareness on sensitive or little-known issues, as well as ensure that their cause remains prominent within the public sphere for a sustained period of time.
2. *State restrictiveness as an inhibiting factor*: Through the exercise of strict control over the flow of politically-sensitive information and the promulgation of national laws that restrict the officially-sanctioned parameters of civil society action, the state (i.e. the Cambodian and Myanmar governments) can increase the costs of dissidence and resistance, thereby deterring as well as limiting the capacity of civil society to engage in and sustain activism.
3. *International and/or regional involvement as an enabling factor*: Involvement in the form of support and/or scrutiny from the international community and regional organizations (e.g. the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN) can contribute to emboldening or even catalyzing localized resistance within a given country.

These causal pathways need not be treated as mutually-exclusive. Indeed, isolating these dynamics may prove to be a challenging undertaking, as they can coexist and complement one another. The ensuing analysis, nevertheless, suggests that the level of civil society capacity remains the key factor here. As evinced by the Cambodian case, the existence of a civil society alone does not ensure that organized resistance will occur in a particular issue-area.



## CASES OF TEMPERED OPPOSITION AND RESISTANCE

The following two cases involve Chinese-backed, resource development schemes that are both large in scale and located in countries exhibiting restrictive state characteristics, where the incumbent regimes generally do not look favorably upon civic activism (Sopheap 2015; *Guardian* 2015) and where political transparency is low. While the exact nature of the projects are different (i.e. one concerns the completed construction of oil and gas pipelines; the other involves the ongoing construction of a steel plant, railway and seaport to export extracted resources), it is the case that the social and environmental impacts of both schemes were already anticipated in the early stages of project development (that is, when information on the schemes was not readily available to the public) to be harmful and extensive. Here, concerns have largely centered on human displacement, livelihood loss and environmental degradation. In this regard, the varying project-type and level of project development are not expected to affect civil society responses to these schemes.<sup>1</sup>

### The Cambodian North-South Railway Mega-Project

As early as 2010, plans were proposed by the Cambodia Iron and Steel Mining Industry Group (CISMIG) to undertake the construction of a US\$11.2-billion mega-project comprised of a US\$650-million steel mill in Preah Vihear province, a purpose-built seaport in Koh Kong province, and a 404-km railway in the Cambodian district of Rovieng. In 2013, CISMIG signed an agreement with two other Chinese SOEs—China Railway Major Bridge Engineering Corporation (MBEC), a subsidiary of the state-owned China Railways Group, and China Ocean Engineering Construction General Bureau (COEC), a subsidiary of the China National Machinery Industry Corporation (Sinomach)—to construct the railway and port components of the bigger project (Prak 2013). Although CISMIG is registered as a private company based in Cambodia with a majority Chinese stake (70%), according to its chairman Zhang Chuan Li, it is supported by four major Chinese steel companies (Phorn & Lewis 2013). Poised to become the country's largest Chinese-financed scheme when completed, the North-South Railway mega-project will provide the Chinese with access to valuable iron ore, while purportedly stimulating the economic growth of Preah Vihear province through the export of locally-mined steel to neighboring countries.

Very little information on the scheme is publicly available, however. Even the Cambodian Minister for Public Works and Transport Tram Iv Tek has admitted to

1 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

not knowing ‘what the [Chinese] companies [involved] will do’ (quoted in Phorn & Lewis 2013). While it appears that the scheme has mainly proceeded on the basis of Prime Minister Hun Sen’s approval, Environment Minister Mok Mareth has also revealed that an EIA for the scheme has yet to be submitted for the Ministry’s formal consideration, despite work on the project then set to begin six months later and with feasibility studies having already been conducted for the steel plant and railway in 2009 and 2010, respectively.

The project, specifically its railway component, is expected to cut through an expanse of land that will entail the forced relocation of communities, including indigenous Kuy ethnic communities that have traditionally lived in the area. It is also likely to pass through protected forests such as the Botum Sakor National Park (World Forest Movement 2014). Of the concerns that have been raised over the scheme the majority have focused on the failure of Cambodian officials and the companies involved to disclose project information and the expected impacts on communities (Marshall & Prak 2013).

Despite Cambodia being known for having an active and fairly outspoken civil society (see Todd 2015), concerns voiced against this mega-project have yet to translate into outright opposition, having drawn limited public attention. According to interviews with Cambodian environment and development NGOs, they attribute this to the general lack of transparency that typifies the extractives sector and, in particular, to the difficulty involved in ascertaining the project’s repercussions (Author interviews, Cambodia, March 2014). As one representative from a major international NGO observed, ‘No one really knows what’s happening’ (Author interview, Cambodia, March 14, 2014). The limitations faced by local civil society in mobilizing information on this matter is further reflected in a recent (and possibly the only) briefing report published on this issue by Equitable Cambodia and Focus on the Global South, which had to rely for the most part on information collated from secondary sources—namely, media reports and company websites (Equitable Cambodia and Focus on the Global South, 2013).

Without a proper EIA, the scheme’s full range of effects remains largely unknown and uncertain. Unlike resource development projects in the hydropower sector, for example, where reservoir inundation causes visible changes to the surrounding environment, mining involves more low-key development that renders monitoring difficult. For this reason, generating broader public awareness—that is to say, concern beyond the communities who stand to be adversely affected by the mega-project—has proven to be challenging, as the gravity of the situation remains unclear to the general public and even to most of the NGOs themselves. At the same time, these problems are further compounded by the fact that CISMIG maintains close ties with the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) and local officials.

Clearly, the political barriers to gaining information encountered by civil society actors seeking to contest the scheme are high. Despite reports of local communities meeting with the prominent Cambodian NGO Development and Partnership in Action (DPA) to voice their misgivings of the scheme, there has since been little sign of sustained civil society advocacy on the issue, let alone outright resistance. However, although originally slated to be completed by 2017, according to latest reports, progress on the railway component of the mega-project has been delayed due to a lack of funds (de Carteret 2014).

### **The Sino-Myanmar Oil and Gas Pipelines**

A different set of dynamics is found in the case of localized resistance against the Sino-Myanmar oil and gas pipelines—and, in particular, the Shwe gas pipeline scheme. A joint venture between the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and Myanmar's national petroleum company, Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, the Shwe gas pipeline underwent three years of construction and has recently begun operations. The pipeline is set to deliver approximately 12-billion m<sup>3</sup> of gas annually for domestic consumption and for export to China's southwest provinces, including Yunnan and Guangxi. The project feeds into the Chinese government's broader resource strategy, as previously mentioned, that seeks to secure the country's access to energy resources overseas.

Despite government attempts to publicize the scheme as a boon to Myanmar's economic development, this has not helped to allay the intense opposition that has emerged domestically against the project over the years. From the very beginning, details about the project were not properly disclosed to affected communities. No prior public consultation was conducted by the Myanmar government or the companies involved. In fact, when it first became known that the natural gas extracted would be destined for the Chinese market, this sparked a '24-Hour Electricity' campaign across Rakhine State in 2011, with villagers and youth groups subsequently mobilizing protests across the country (SGM 2011).

Given how the project cuts across an ethnically-fragile area, this has given rise to an additional slate of concerns pertaining to the project's socio-political and environmental repercussions. The potential for leakages during the drilling process meant that the surrounding coastal areas stood to suffer from chemical contamination. Despite CNPC's claims of handling land acquisition issues on the basis of 'voluntary decision' and fair compensation, accusations soon surfaced over forced labor practices and land confiscation during the project's construction phase, leading to the displacement of communities on the Maday and Ramree Islands. Research undertaken by such organizations as Arakan Oil Watch, a member organization of Oilwatch Southeast Asia, has further added credence to these

claims, with concerns also raised over revenue transparency. Crucially, the sale of Shwe gas to China is estimated to bring in over US\$29 billion to the Myanmar government in the next 30 years (Author interview, Chiang Mai, March 2, 2013).

One major instance of popular opposition within Myanmar against the scheme took place in April 2013 on Maday Island. The protest was attended by around 400 people—the majority of whom were subsistence fishermen (*Radio Free Asia* 2013)—who marched to CNPC's office to demand the project's immediate suspension and adequate compensation for confiscated lands. It was also during this period that the Myanmar-China Pipeline Watch Committee, an alliance of twelve civil society groups, was formed in Mandalay. Notably the committee assumed an important role not only in successfully organizing a mass signature campaign, but also in undertaking a social impact assessment survey of the pipelines' effects on local communities in three townships in Rakhine (Mann 2013).

Of particular interest here is how activism against the oil and gas pipelines showcases transnational linkages. Through the combined advocacy work of transnational NGOs such as the Chiang Mai-based Arakan Oil Watch, Burma Environmental Working Group (BEWG), International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and Earth Rights International, as well as Burmese civil society groups like Paung Ku, Myanmar Green Network and Thazin Development Foundation, the issue came to garner attention on both a national and regional scale, such that pressure was progressively placed on the Myanmar government and CNPC to account for the negative consequences of their joint venture. Previously in 2012, 130 NGOs from over 20 countries had orchestrated a 'Global Day of Action' against the oil and gas pipelines, staging public protests in front of Chinese embassies and submitting letters to President Thein Sein that requested the project's postponement (FIDH 2012). More recently, in 2014, local environmental and human rights group Badeidha Moe organized a photo exhibition in Yangon, which featured photos taken by villagers affected by the environmental degradation and uneven development caused by the pipelines project.

What the emergence of localized resistance against the Chinese-led oil and gas pipelines underscores, in effect, is the importance of broad-based, civil society networks to popular mobilization under restrictive state conditions. Anti-pipeline activists operating within Myanmar managed to sidestep the state largely by virtue of the assistance they received from an incipient network of likeminded individuals. According to one civil society representative, given the difficulty in accessing politically-sensitive information in Myanmar, their organization had to rely to a considerable degree on information gathered by individuals working with CNPC, as well as on data from international partner organizations, including the Revenue Watch Institute and Earth Rights International (Author interview, Thailand, March

2, 2013). The information was then disseminated to the organization's wider network. A number of these civil society groups also maintain close ties with local and 'exiled' journalists (Ibid.). Certainly, constant coverage of the issue by the national and international press—in particular, independent news outlets like *The Irrawaddy* and *Democratic Voice of Burma*—has played no small part in catapulting local Burmese concerns onto both the national and regional public sphere. Given the Myanmar government's long-standing aversion to displays of civic activism, this is by no means an insignificant achievement on the part of civil society.

It is in this way that civil society capacity—that is, the ability of network activists to leverage the necessary resources to galvanize support and disseminate information—has contributed to issue definition and the longevity of the anti-pipelines campaign. The Shwe Gas Movement (SGM), for one, has played an active role since the early 2000s. By 2005, the coalition was already aware of plans to extract and export Myanmar's oil and gas deposits through 'overland pipelines' to Yunnan Province (SGM 2006, 13). Established by the All Arakan Students' and Youths' Congress (AASYC) as a coalition of activists and civil society organizations 'based in exile' (Natural Resource Governance Institute, n.d.), SGM has offices in Thailand, India and Bangladesh (SGM 2006). Further, its international partners include such organizations as Arakan Oil Watch, the Korean Federation for Environmental Movement and the Indian platform Other Media. As part of its broader aim to monitor and curtail natural gas extraction throughout Myanmar, SGM has served as an advocacy hub responsible for publicizing and sharing information about the Sino-Myanmar pipelines, as well as for coordinating domestic and cross-border resistance. In this light, the movement has effectively built upon the strategies and the momentum of a preexisting, region-wide activist network—one that gradually came into being over the course of 'high-profile' campaigns in the 1990s and 2000s like the Yadana gas pipeline campaign and the ongoing movement against the Salween dam cascade (Simpson 2014, 173).

Even now, censure of the pipelines has persisted in spite of the state repression faced by activists (Aung Hla Tun 2013). Notably, in early 2014, a major dispute took place between ethnic Chin and Chinese workers at one of the project's work sites. This later prompted a delegation consisting of representatives from the Rakhine National Party (RNP) and National Democratic Force (NDF) to request, during their visit to China, that Beijing exercise stronger oversight of the behavior of Chinese national companies abroad (*Radio Free Asia* 2014).

## CONCLUSION

This article examined local responses to two Chinese-backed resource development projects in Myanmar and Cambodia. In so doing, it asked why localized resistance surfaced against the Sino-Myanmar oil and gas pipelines, whereas the Cambodian case only saw tempered opposition against the North-South railway mega-project. Here, the existence of high civil-society capacity was identified as an important factor that could help to facilitate popular resistance under restrictive state conditions. In the Myanmar case, network activists—assisted by transnational ‘allies’—were shown to play a critical role in raising public awareness and attracting the external support necessary for spearheading a sustained, grassroots campaign. In the Cambodian example, there appeared to be no such capable advocacy network in place.

It deserves note here that censure of the Sino-Myanmar pipelines had first originated from grassroots civil society groups. Only once the issue had become a prominent issue of contention at the local level did it attract regional and international attention, with the subsequent issue adoption by transnational NGOs and foreign media helping to expand the campaign’s membership and support base. In this way, international and regional involvement served as an enabling factor insofar as it helped to bolster *preexisting*, localized activism. Regional organizations like ASEAN played no discernible role in the issue.

As a major regional power that needs to maintain good relations with its neighbors, deflecting the external scrutiny brought to bear on the adverse consequences of its overseas resource operations has become more difficult for China and its SOEs over time. With China’s expanding corporate presence in mainland Southeast Asia becoming an integral facet of the region’s industrializing landscape, the onus of responsibility is upon China to shoulder its part in encouraging the sustainable governance of natural resources within the countries it invests.

There have been promising developments from the Chinese side in this respect, as policy-makers and corporate executives in Beijing begin to demonstrate an increased awareness of the commercial and reputational costs of host-society opposition. This is manifest in the evolving body of Chinese domestic regulations and voluntary guidelines on sustainable investment and the corporate social responsibility (CSR) of SOEs abroad (e.g. the 2008 ‘Guidelines on fulfilling CSR by State-owned Enterprises Directly under the Central Government’ and the 2013 ‘Guidelines for Environmental Protection in Foreign Investment and Cooperation’), as well as in the publication of CSR frameworks and annual reports by major Chinese enterprises.

That said, the extent to which these regulations and guidelines are imple-

mented and enforced remains highly uneven. It is thus in this regard that civil society networks in Myanmar and, to a lesser degree, Cambodia have the potential to serve as informal civil regulators, working to fill governance gaps and pressure the Chinese government, along with its SOEs, into observing their responsibilities within strategic resource sectors.

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## Japanese Activists, the Environment, and Border-Crossing Movements in Asia

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### Abstract

This article examines the emergence of Japanese environmental groups involved in overseas activism in the 1970s. It argues that two key factors help to explain the appearance and evolution of this activism. First, although seemingly counterintuitive, the article argues that local attachment, local sentiment, and local experience were extremely important in motivating activists to reach out beyond national borders. Traumatic experiences with industrial pollution at home nurtured a desire among some activists to communicate the Japanese experience abroad and to assist overseas groups in preventing a repeat of the tragedy elsewhere. Second, the article points to the important role of movement intermediaries in this process. Utilizing the concept of “rooted cosmopolitans,” the article shows how these intermediaries served as communicators between geographically separated movements and, significantly, how they connected local actors across national borders in East Asia into transnational mobilizations.

### Keywords

Japan, environmentalism, transnational activism, rooted cosmopolitans

Until around the early 1970s Japanese environmental activism was predominantly a domestic phenomenon characterized by manifold small local movements opposing industrial pollution and governmental infrastructure projects around the archipelago. The majority of these movements were typical NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back-Yard) mobilizations whose primary concern was to protect and/or restore local living spaces and to obtain compensation for damages suffered. Most of the activists involved did not see their specific mobilizations as part of any wider political struggle or movement and, even if they did, their strategies and objectives tended to focus on solving the environmental damage and health risks within their immediate vicinity. From the early 1970s however a new stream of extra-local environmental initiatives emerged alongside this established localist model of activism. Significantly, some of these initiatives eventually transcended national borders in the form of transnational alliances among Japanese environmental activists and their counterparts in East Asian countries such as Thailand, South Korea, the Philippines, and Malaysia. In the coming decades these border-crossing initiatives intensified and the types of groups involved proliferated, expanding well beyond antipollution protestors to include professional associations of lawyers, scientists, and medical doctors.

Numerically speaking, this new transnational stream of activism was not as extensive as the earlier—and, in many ways, extraordinary—wave of domestic environmental protest in Japan of the 1960s and early 1970s nor did it replace the domestic sphere of activism which continued thereafter in myriad forms. Rather, the rise of transnational groups represented a creative expansion in the scope and ideational underpinnings of Japanese environmental activism which would have knock-on effects for the development of environmental movements in East Asia, the behavior of Japanese corporations abroad, and the evolution of civic activism and civil society within Japan. Together with pioneering Japanese humanitarian relief and developmental NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) formed in the 1970s, the new transnational environmental groups became models for the professionalized, advocacy-focused civic movements which became more and more prominent in Japan from the late-1980s onward.

In this article I examine the origins and ideational foundations of the new Japanese transnational environmental activism in East Asia. Why did these groups form and why did some activists with an earlier focus on local and domestic issues become interested in environmental struggles in other East Asian countries? The fact that many of the same Japanese corporations which had polluted at home were now polluting throughout East Asia certainly offered a potential new issue for activists to address. But, as social movement theorists note, the “existence of tensions and structural conflicts” does not explain the emergence of collective ac-

tion since these are always and everywhere present (Della Porta & Diani 1999, 8). The capacity for mobilization is a function of the material and nonmaterial resources accessible to a specific group. The unlikelihood of activism is only further exacerbated when geographical distance and national borders are involved because activists are less likely to have interpersonal ties and relationships of trust and reciprocity (Tarrow 2005, 6). If civic mobilizations are to occur they need material resources and ideational frameworks with which to convince people to offer support and to help them to act.

In attempting to answer the puzzling rise of Japanese transnational environmental activism in the 1970s, this article focuses on two crucial intervening variables operating between the issues (i.e. pollution in other countries) on the one hand, and the mobilizations (i.e. transnational movements) on the other. One of these factors is somewhat counterintuitive, while the other is more obvious. First, I will argue that local attachment, local sentiment, and local experience (especially in localized protests and struggles) appear to have been important in motivating activists to reach out beyond local and national borders. Needless to say, this proposition appears counterintuitive at first sight since localism, ipso facto, should heighten the insularity of groups. Nevertheless, by reference to the evolution of Japanese activists' "translocal sentiment," I will show the relevance of the local in the emergence of Japanese transnational environmental activism from the early 1970s. My second argument focuses on agency and, specifically, the centrality of movement intermediaries or so-called "rooted cosmopolitans" who have the capacity or, at least, the curiosity to try and look across borders (broadly defined) all the while keeping one eye firmly focused on the local. Their key role in the case of the Japanese environmental movement was to transfer information to local activists about related issues and movements abroad and, moreover, to connect local actors across national borders throughout East Asia into transnational mobilizations glued together by translocal sentiment.

I begin with a discussion of the three key theoretical assumptions underlying the analysis, namely, localism as a motivational source, the role of translocal sentiment, and the function of rooted cosmopolitans. I then offer case studies to show, first, how the local activist experience in Japan laid the roots for transnationalism, second, how rooted cosmopolitans connected Japanese activists with other Asian activists and, third, how a number of important transnational initiatives resulted. I end the paper by thinking through some of the longer-term implications of border-crossing Japanese environmental movements, particularly the ways in which experience in overseas activism folded back to shape the cognitive parameters of civil society within Japan. I see this process in which transnational activism shapes domestic civil societies as an important but understudied aspect of the new trans-

national activism.<sup>1</sup>

## THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS: TRANSLOCAL SENTIMENT AND ROOTED COSMOPOLITANS

In an age of globalization and global-level problems, the “local” in all its ideational and spatial permutations has come under increasing scrutiny. Nowhere is this trend more palpable than in research on the environment and environmentalism. With the emergence of global-level problems such as climate change, declining biodiversity, cross-border pollution, and stratospheric ozone depletion, many are calling for a radical reconceptualization of local space in terms of interconnectedness and extra-local responsibility. For some, the local has even become an impediment to the development of a “sense of planet” deemed more appropriate for our global age (Heise 2008). The prominent eco-critic Ursula Heise, for instance, argues that ecological thinking has simply not “come to terms” with globalization theories which highlight the relentless processes of “deterritorialization” in the contemporary world.<sup>2</sup> According to such theories, the “increasing connectedness” wrought by globalization is creating “new forms of culture” which “are no longer anchored in place” (Heise 2008, 104). For Heise and globalization advocates, this deterritorialization is a positive development. Indeed, Heise (2008, 46) speaks of the “ambivalent ethical and political consequences that might follow from encouraging attachments to place.” She criticizes proponents of the local such as deep ecology founder Arne Naess who assume the spontaneity and naturalness of “sociocultural, ethical, and affective allegiances” at the local level, on the one hand, and their assumption of the difficulty of creating meaningful attachments at larger scales, on the other (Heise 2008, 34). There is nothing natural about local attachment according to Heise, so “rather than focusing on the recuperation of a sense of place environmentalism needs to foster an understanding of how a wide variety of both natural and cultural places and processes are connected and shape each other around the world, and how human impact affects and changes this connectedness” (Heise 2008, 21). In other words, “ecological awareness” and “environmental ethics” in a global age must abandon a “sense of place” for a superior “sense

1 Keck and Sikkink (1999, 93) have proposed a “boomerang” pattern of transnational activism wherein “international contacts can amplify the demands of domestic groups, pry open space for new issues, and then echo these demands back into the domestic arena.” I am referring to a similar phenomenon here but focus on the effect of transnational activism on domestic civil society as opposed to government policymaking.

2 On the domestic pollution crisis see Avenell (2012a).

of planet” (Heise 2008, 55).

Heise’s call for a global vision makes good sense against the backdrop of ever-intensifying cross-border and global environmental problems and, indeed, it dovetails with other prominent theorizations on globalization and new forms of cosmopolitanism (Appiah 1997, Nussbaum 1996, Beck 2006, Beck, Bonss and Lau 2003). Yet not all observers are satisfied with this depiction of an inexorable evolution in environmental consciousness from the local (read “insular”) to the global (read “broadminded”) either empirically or theoretically. In his seminal work on transnational activism, the social movement scholar Sidney Tarrow (2005, 2), for example, notes that “even as they make transnational claims,” activists continue to “draw on the resources, networks, and opportunities of the societies they live in.” Activists with local roots “do not migrate to the international level but utilize their domestic resources and opportunities to move in and out of international institutions, processes, and alliances” (Tarrow 2005, 28). What makes these activists interesting for Tarrow is not their abandonment of the local for the global but, on the contrary, the way they connect the two (Tarrow 2005, 2). The Japanese activists I examine in this article conform very much to this model of *domestically-rooted* transnational engagement.

From a different perspective, the STS (science, technology, and society) scholars Sheila Jasanoff and Marybeth Long Martello (2004, 6) have also questioned the “wholesale adoption of shared environmental ontologies among the nations of the earth.” They point to the absolute centrality of the local in environmental activism which has derived “emotional force” from attachments to “particular places, landscapes, livelihoods, and to an ethic of communal living that can sustain stable, long-term regimes for the protection of shared resources” (Jasanoff and Martello 2004, 7). Far from defending an antiquated local perspective, they criticize social science for not adequately incorporating “the resurgence of local epistemologies and their associated politics in the context of globalization” and they call for a more complex conceptualization of the local far richer than the epitome of everything “prescientific, traditional, doomed to erasure, and hence not requiring rigorous analysis” (Jasanoff & Martello 2004, 14). Specifically Jasanoff and Martello identify the ways in which the local has been fundamentally reconstituted and made “richer” through policymaking for the environment and development. No longer is the local constrained to “spatial or cultural particularity” but it also becomes a signifier for “particular communities, histories, institutions, and even expert bodies” (Jasanoff & Martello 2004, 13-14). The “modern local,” Jasanoff and Martello (2004, 14) argue, is distinguished not by parochialism but in the way it produces “situated knowledge” that creates “communal affiliations” built on “knowing the world in particular ways” (Jasanoff & Martello 2004, 14). Here they

borrow from the globalization scholar Roland Robertson (1995, 26) who proposes the notion of “glocalization” in an attempt to highlight the entanglement of the local in trans-local, supra-local, and global processes. The local is certainly being re-constituted through globalization but it retains import as a situated—or rooted—perspective. As the feminist scholar Donna Haraway (1988, 590) astutely puts it, “the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular.”

Ultimately, all of these approaches point to the continuing centrality of the local in a global age—a theoretical position I endorse and illustrate utilizing evidence from Japanese environmental movements. Indeed, if the example of Japanese transnational environmental activism is indicative of anything, then it must certainly be the way the local becomes a crucial staging ground under conditions of globalization for the construction of multidimensional activist identities capable of sustaining commitment to *both* extra-local (i.e. transnational), intersubjective communities and struggles, as well as the situated relationships of geographically distinct locales. As the Japanese case reveals, the glue binding together activists across borders throughout East Asia was not originally or primarily a product of global awareness—although this certainly played a role—but, more directly, an empathetic impulse best described as “translocal sentiment.” I borrow here from Arif Dirlik (2005, 397, 407) who uses the notion of “translocal” to invoke a conceptual realm quite distinct from nations and civilizations and based instead on a plastic notion of place in which “processes” trump “settled places”—much in the spirit of Haraway’s idea of situatedness. Important in terms of my notion of translocal sentiment is the way Dirlik’s (2005, 407) translocal emphasizes the borderless “contact zones” that become “locations for the production of cultures and spaces.” It is in these contact zones—some actual physical places, others shared ideational spaces—that I see translocal sentiment at work, binding activists together in transnational mobilizations. On the most rudimentary of levels this is certainly a case of seeing the self in the other. But synergies also result when disparate local activists come together. Larger visions (sometimes global) inevitably develop, the local itself is often recalibrated, and activists go home changed, sometimes transformed. But transformation does not imply deracination. While transnational engagement tends to multiply the contexts in which the local is understood and strategized it does not seem to undermine the import of the local as a primary source of identity and struggle for activists. Japanese transnational environmental activism is an excellent case in point because we witness in it all of these processes—border-crossing empathy, identity transformation and recalibration, as well as the persistence of locally-rooted attachment.

But—and this is the second major point I want to make—contact zones and translocal sentiment do not materialize out of nowhere to be somehow spontane-

ously populated by broadminded locals. What Japanese transnational environmental activism also confirms is the critical intermediary role of so-called rooted cosmopolitans. Tarrow (2005, 29) defines these transnational activists as “people and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in contentious political activities that involve them in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts.” By “rooted,” of course, Tarrow (2005, 42) is pointing to the way these activists remain linked “to place, to the social networks that inhabit that space, and to the resources, experiences, and opportunities that place provides them with” even as they “move physically and cognitively outside their origins.” Tarrow identifies a number of general characteristics of rooted cosmopolitans which seem particularly germane in the case of Japanese activists. First, most begin as domestic or even local activists and only a few ever become fulltime international advocates with most returning to domestic activism after transnational involvement; second, they are usually better educated, travelled, and speak more languages than other domestic activists; and, finally, they are skilled at shifting between and bridging scales of activity from the local to the global and everything in between (Tarrow 2005, 43). Not surprisingly, in the earliest Japanese transnational environmental movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, scholars figured prominently precisely because they had the resources to travel and were also already socialized into the practices of international academic exchange. But, as Japanese civil society matured, these pioneers were joined by a cadre of professional NGO activists who became important connective tissue between local movements and movements throughout East Asia. To illustrate, I turn now to discussion of Japanese transnational environmental activism from the early 1970s onward.

## THE LOCAL SOURCES OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM IN JAPAN

From around the mid-1950s until the early-1970s Japan experienced a historic spurt of economic growth which was only interrupted by the “Nixon Shock” of 1971 (removing the gold standard) and the Oil Shocks of 1973 and 1979. Economic growth continued thereafter, only coming to an abrupt halt in 1990. Not coincidentally, the phase of high-speed economic growth also produced in Japan some of the worst forms of industrial pollution ever experienced in the contemporary world. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s in particular, numerous shocking cases of food contamination involving arsenic and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) occurred. As early as 1955, for example, infants were poisoned by arsenic mistakenly introduced into powdered infant formula manufactured by the Morinaga Milk Company. The arsenic caused fever, severe diarrhea, skin spotting

and, in severe cases, death. Survivors suffered from impeded bone development, abnormal brain activity, hearing loss, and lower IQ levels. Another infamous food poisoning case occurred in 1968 when thousands of people consumed rice bran oil contaminated with PCBs. Victims experienced painful eye discharge, skin maladies, respiratory difficulties, joint and muscle pain, and general lethargy. Offspring of mothers poisoned by the rice bran oil had dark-brown pigmented skin and were found to have lower IQs.

Pollution from industrial facilities wrought havoc on surrounding residential communities during this period. Emissions from petrochemical complexes caused chronic and sometimes fatal cases of asthma, as in the city of Yokkaichi where affected residents literally coughed themselves to death. Chemical wastes dumped into bays and rivers also caused terrible cases of human poisoning. Cadmium dumped into the Jinzū River in Toyama Prefecture, for instance, contaminated fish which, when consumed, had devastating health consequences. Victims' bones became so brittle as to fracture on the slightest movements such as coughing. So painful was the condition that it was dubbed *Itai Itai-byō* or "It Hurts, It Hurts disease." The largest number of bone fractures recorded for an individual sufferer was seventy-two, twenty-eight of which were located in the bones of the rib cage alone. Just as devastating were instances of mercury poisoning, most infamously at Minamata Bay in Kumamoto Prefecture but also later in Niigata Prefecture. Both instances were the result of industry illegally dumping organic methyl mercury into the water system. Trace elements of the mercury subsequently entered the food chain and through the process of bioaccumulation reached dangerous levels at the top of the chain. Cats who had consumed contaminated fish showed the first signs of severe neurological dysfunction. They were followed soon after by humans who displayed horrifying symptoms such as constriction of the visual field, sensory disturbances, speech impediment, hearing loss, motor coordination disturbances, and convulsions. Tragically, methyl mercury can also cross the placenta. Infants born of women who consumed contaminated fish had shocking symptoms such as mental retardation, involuntary reflexes, and coordination disturbances. On top of these terrible cases of industrial poisoning, urbanites also suffered the effects of pollution—though to a lesser extent than regional communities. In major cities such as Tokyo and Osaka, residents dealt with dangerous levels of air pollution from industry and automobiles. So bad was ambient pollution that officials in Tokyo erected air pollution monitoring stations in busy downtown areas. By the late 1960s Japan was justifiably labeled a "polluters paradise" and the "canary in the mineshaft" for the rest of the industrialized and industrializing world.

How did this domestic environmental crisis of the 1950s and 1960s connect

to transnational activism? The answer can be found in the resulting grassroots protests and the personal profiles of the individuals involved. Although early on victims of industrial pollution tended to suffer in silence, by the mid-1960s a wave of environmental protest was spreading throughout the nation and it would not recede until the early 1970s. Government officials initially took the side of industry, attempting to dismiss claims of industrial pollution with dubious scientific data. Officials also appealed to the “national interest” of economic development and labeled protestors unpatriotic “local egoists.” Nevertheless, pressure from the protest movements intensified throughout the 1960s and eventually government officials were forced to respond by passing stringent regulations, first at the local level and then at the national level in a historic session of the Japanese parliament in 1970 known as the Pollution Diet. After this session Japan boasted some the strictest environmental standards in the world enforced by a new cadre of environmental bureaucrats. Industry was also forced to clean up and, in some cases, enter into pollution prevention agreements with local authorities and residents’ associations. As a result, by the mid-1970s Japan had turned the corner on environmental pollution, prompting some to speak of a pollution miracle in the country. To be sure, Japan’s rivers and bays were less polluted and its air was certainly cleaner. The environmental protest movements could rightly claim many local victories (although victims would have to live with the health consequences—often for life).

One of the enduring legacies of the wave of environmental protest was the emergence of a victimization consciousness—or victimization “frame” in sociological language—among antipollution activists.<sup>3</sup> Many of those involved felt that their communities had been sacrificed for the good of corporate profits and national growth. Activists rightly believed that their localities were under siege and needed to be proactively defended, hence the strong NIMBY character of these movements. This victim consciousness was based on the existence of what activists perceived as discordant and antagonistic binaries: the national versus the local, the center versus the periphery, and the urban versus the regional. Importantly, this victimization frame was not only shaped by such geographical and political realities but also by notions of legitimacy, authenticity, and genuineness. The environmental tragedy, which most severely impacted local communities, exposed the disturbing contradictions and paradoxes beating at the heart of an urbanized, modern, and affluent Japan. In its most unadulterated form, the victimization frame was deeply skeptical of industrial modernity which seemed to be premised on voracious abuse of the natural environment and exploitation of the very weak-

3 On framing processes see Snow and Benford (2000).

est groups in society.

Of course, not all or even most local protestors thought about their movements or articulated their objectives in such reified terms. But I believe that this critique—or the potential for it—existed within many local protest movements, laying the conceptual groundwork for future transnational involvement. It made it possible for some activists to understand their victimization in the context of other instances of victimization—that perhaps their predicament may not be unique but part of a wider systemic problem; that there were other victimized locales. Again, for most this realization was never more than a somewhat indistinct afterthought but for some it would provide the opportunity for rethinking and repositioning the local and for recalibrating objectives and commitments as conditions allowed. More concretely, when activists positioned victimization within wider configurations of exploitation and power, the “local” itself could encompass more than a specific geographic place, becoming a symbol of situated, rooted and, hence, genuine resistance to industrial modernity. I am suggesting, then, that the consciousness of local victimization and the experience of local struggle effected more than a closing of ranks, it also created the potential for some to develop a wider vision which transcended the local (i.e. translocal sentiment) and, when the opportunity arose, a receptivity to involvement in transnational initiatives.

But this wider vision of local victimization and subsequent translocal sentiment and action did not happen spontaneously. There were crucial intermediaries—rooted cosmopolitans—who nurtured its development. Almost from the outset of the pollution crisis in the 1950s a group of pioneering activist-scholars had actively supported antipollution protest movements. At the time they were a rare breed, representing almost the entirety of specialist knowledge on industrial pollution in Japan. When eight of them formed the pioneering Research Committee on Pollution (RCP) in 1963 their group was essentially the only nongovernmental group of specialists devoted to the issue in all of Japan.<sup>4</sup> The membership of the RCP reads like a who’s who of antipollution specialists in contemporary Japan, including the Harvard-trained economist Tsuru Shigeto, the environmental economist Miyamoto Ken’ichi, the legal scholar Kainō Michitaka, and the engineers Shōji Hikaru and Ui Jun. In the context my argument about the role of rooted cosmopolitans, members of the RCP embodied two critical perspectives: first, a concern for local struggles in and of themselves but, second, because of their socialization in international academic networks, an awareness from the outset that local struggles were deeply entangled in, and indeed had to be understood and addressed within wider institutional configurations which often transcended na-

4 On the RCP see Avenell 2012b.

tional borders.

RCP members were drawn into the domestic environmental struggle out of a concern for the rights of victims and they spent a good deal of time offering specialist knowledge to local movements and supporting activists in legal proceedings as expert witnesses and advisors. Their background in research and academia gave the group a distinct advantage in connecting the many dots into an overall picture of the causes and dynamics of industrial pollution in the country—a vision which local activists alone might not otherwise have been able to formulate. Significantly, RCP members not only fanned out to the countryside to assist local movements, some such as the Tokyo University engineer Ui Jun also set about creating a national network of antipollution struggles. In 1970, for instance, Ui commenced a series of public lectures entitled the Independent Lectures on Pollution in which he explained the history and dynamics of industrial pollution in Japan to packed audiences. The lectures proved so popular that transcripts were subsequently published as newsletters and then as a bestselling bound volume.<sup>5</sup> After the initial series of lectures a group of supporters—students, housewives, and, teachers—mobilized around Ui with the aim of creating a national network of antipollution movements. As Ui's network expanded over the coming years it became a crucial contact point and clearing house for the exchange of ideas and strategies among geographically dispersed groups around the archipelago. Ui appropriately described the Independent Lectures movement as a kind of telephone exchange for the environmental movement in Japan.

The RCP and the Independent Lectures movements, because of their nationwide reach, provided local protest movements with a wider vision than might otherwise have been impossible. Significantly, almost from the outset of their activism in the 1960s RCP members pursued a two-pronged strategy, the one domestic and the other transnational. Within Japan they assisted local movements and built networks, while outside Japan they communicated the story of Japanese pollution and collected data to relay back to local activists at home. That individuals like Ui Jun and Tsuru Shigeto were seasoned world travelers—somewhat rare in 1960s Japan—also meant they could provide an international angle on the Japanese situation, not to mention providing Japanese activists with information about movements abroad. Ui, for instance, travelled through Europe in the late 1960s examining environmental policies and practices and cases of industrial pollution. He also informed his European counterparts about the terrible pollution tragedy unfolding in Japan, especially the methyl mercury incident at Minamata Bay. In short, I see RCP members as the first generation of rooted cosmopolitans in the

5 See Ui (1990).

Japanese environmental movement. Their travels and their public activities in Japan and abroad laid the groundwork for transnational movements involving Japanese activists and their counterparts throughout East Asia from early the 1970s onward.

## JAPANESE TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM IN EAST ASIA

In terms of structural causes, the rise of Japanese transnational environmental activism in East Asia had much to do with the changing profile of Japanese patterns of capital investment. The 1970s marked an important transition in Japan's economic engagement with East Asia in the postwar era. Growing frictions with the United States and West European countries over trade imbalances coupled with the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in 1971 and the tripling of oil prices after the first Oil Shock of 1973 encouraged Japanese policymakers and industrial elites to turn their vision "westward" and "southward" in the direction of East Asia. According to T. J. Pempel (1996/97, 18), Asia "became a more important component in Japan's overall economic strategy" during this decade. Notably, the character of economic engagement changed. Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) into East Asia became more prominent than the earlier economic interaction based on simple trade. As Pempel (1996/97, 18) notes, total Japanese FDI from 1973 to 1976 virtually doubled that of the preceding twenty years.

Needless to say, wherever industry travelled pollution tended to follow, especially when industry moved from highly regulated jurisdictions such as Japan to others with few or very lax regulations on environmental pollution and environmental standards. Yet, as I have suggested, the occurrence of Japanese industrial pollution in East Asia did not—in and of itself—cause a transnational response in Japan. This required a human intervention: the relaying of information, the desire to act, and the resources to do so. Here extant movement networks such as Ui's Independent Lectures group and elements of the earlier Japanese anti-Vietnam War movement, *Beheiren*, played a vital role.

For example, in the early 1970s some Japanese activists involved in these movements began to display an awareness of what would later be called the "pollution export" problem. Their first "wake up call," so to speak, came at one of the landmark postwar events for global environmentalism and activism, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE), held in Stockholm in 1972. Ui Jun and a group of pollution sufferers travelled to Stockholm to take part in the many NGO forums held parallel to the main UN event. Their primary

objective was to communicate the shocking story of Japanese industrial pollution as a warning to the world, which they certainly did to great effect. But Ui and his compatriots were shocked when other activists told them about cases of Japanese corporate pollution and environmental destruction in East Asia. As Ui (1972, 66) later confessed, he and others had not really considered Japanese corporate pollution beyond the boundaries of the archipelago until UNCHE because of their concentration on domestic problems. But the stories they heard from East Asian activists at UNCHE demanded a fundamental rethinking of Japan's so-called "pollution miracle" of the early 1970s. After all, if domestic pollution was merely being relocated to or replicated in East Asia then it was a hollow miracle indeed. Reflecting on the lessons learned at UNCHE, the sociologist Isomura Eiichi pointed to the worrying inequalities developing between Japan and its neighbors. "From the perspective of Asians," he said, Japan represented the "factory owner" and Asians the "workers." This factory owner took resources from Asia back to Japan where they were processed and sold back to the "workers" at a higher price. More alarmingly, in this process the resources of the "workers" countries were appropriated, the natural environment destroyed, and the standard of living not necessarily improved (Isomura 1972, 104). UNCHE forced the Japanese attendees to rethink the nature of their local struggles in a wider regional framework: how was their affluent and now unpolluted daily life implicated in the spread of Japanese industrial pollution and environmental destruction throughout Asia? Rooted cosmopolitans like Ui Jun and others in the group communicated this information to activists back in Japan which, in turn, stimulated a domestic response.

Activists involved in extant transnational mobilizations, especially the Japanese anti-Vietnam War movement, also played a role in communicating instances of Japanese industrial pollution in East Asia to a home audience. Beheiren, the Citizens' Federation for Peace in Vietnam, was among the most important transnational antiwar movements in Japan during the late-1960s and early 1970s. The movement began in opposition to the Vietnam War in 1965 and continued until 1974—one year after the end of direct U.S. military involvement. Beheiren or, more accurately, the many Beheiren chapters throughout Japan, were transnational in outlook and strategy from the very outset, connecting with antiwar activists in the U.S.A., Western Europe and, to a lesser extent, Southeast Asia. From the late 1960s activists in the movement became more and more concerned about the involvement of Japanese corporations in the Indochina conflict, for example, through the supply of munitions and other military technologies. This sensitivity to Japanese corporate involvement in Southeast Asia continued after the movement officially disbanded and, indeed, became a new cause for activists to pursue. The novelist and primary public spokesperson for Beheiren, Oda Makoto, took

the lead in exposing Japanese pollution export.

In a historic union of the Japanese antiwar and environmental movements in 1974, Oda Makoto and activists from the former Beheiren joined with Ui Jun and members of the Independent Lectures to hold the inaugural Conference of Asians.<sup>6</sup> This landmark event ran for seven days in mid-1974 and brought together some 250 participants, including 40 participants from East Asian countries such as South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia. During the conference the foreign participants visited pollution sites around Tokyo and met with local activists such as the group of farmers opposing construction of the Narita Airport. On the final day participants ratified *the Joint Declaration of the Asian People* and they issued resolutions condemning political imprisonments, discrimination against women in Asia, and Japanese corporate pollution. The Joint Declaration articulated the organizers' vision of a progressive, grassroots Asian regionalism which they hoped could form the ideational underpinnings of cross-border alliances among localized movements. The following extract succinctly captures this sentiment.

We, who are gathered here at the Conference of Asians are people, Asian people. We are not state powers nor ruling elites dominating our respective countries and Asia. Those who have power and money have destroyed and are destroying us—our health, our well-being and our human dignity. Because they want to keep power and money, because they want to get more, they have created and are creating the systems and structures for this purpose.... They extend such systems and structures to other countries, creating the networks of power and money all over Asia. The center of the network is Japan as well as the USA.... We want to live as human beings; to do so, we have to change the circumstances, bring a radical change to our own society and destroy the network of power and money.... In struggling, we are building up solidarity. Only solidarity can bring us the final victory. In this, we are common, we are one. In this, Asian people are one. (Tokyo, 15 June, 1974). (Oda 1976, 279)

Ui Jun and Oda Makoto's efforts in the early 1970s to inform local activists of industrial pollution export and to stimulate translocal sentiment proved highly successful. Activists involved in both the Independent Lectures movement and the former Beheiren began to address issues in other East Asian countries almost immediately and, significantly, they garnered support from many activists who

6 On the Conference of Asians see Oda, Makoto (ed.).

had previously only been involved in local struggles within Japan. Consider the following examples of early transnational initiatives involving Japanese activists and their counterparts in Thailand, South Korea, and the Philippines.

After UNCHE in 1972 Ui Jun and Independent Lectures' activists started an English-language newsletter entitled *KOGAI: The Newsletter from Polluted Japan* as a conduit for building connections with East Asian environmental activists. The newsletter proved a great success, garnering a healthy readership among grassroots groups across East Asia. To communicate news from East Asia back home, Ui's group also established a new column entitled "Window on Asia" (*Ajia no Mado*) in the movement's widely-read Japanese-language newsletter, *Jishu Kōza*. The latter column carried reports from Japanese activists who had travelled to East Asian countries, observed cases of industrial pollution, and met with local activists. In the September 1972 column, the young activist Matsuoka Nobuo reported of his meeting with members of the nature conservation club at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok (Matsuoka 2005, 106). During his visit Matsuoka gave a presentation on Japanese industrial pollution and distributed English-language materials on the topic. Matsuoka's visit to Chulalongkorn University proved to be a timely one because only months later Thai newspapers reported that the Thai Asahi Caustic Soda Company (TACS), a joint-venture with the Japanese Asahi Glass Company, had been identified as the source of caustic soda contamination of Bangkok's Chao Phrya River. The newspapers reported that, along with caustic soda, tests also detected traces of chlorine, hydrochloric acid, and mercury in factory effluent. The result was a massive die-off of fish and shrimp which local residents unwittingly consumed. These victims subsequently contracted skin afflictions and suffered with bouts of diarrhea. TACS officials denied that the factory had dumped contaminated waste and refused to take responsibility for the fish kill and the health impact on local residents. By coincidence, TACS parent company, Asahi Glass, was facing its own contamination back in Japan at around the same time. In mid-1973, fishermen from Chiba Prefecture blockaded Asahi Glass and other factories they accused of contaminating Tokyo Bay with organic and inorganic mercury (Hirayama 1974, 5). The timing of these localized incidents in Tokyo and Bangkok, combined with the connections forged between Japanese and Thai activists like Matsuoka some months earlier, provided fertile ground for the transnational movement which subsequently developed.

In Thailand environmental groups at Thammasat, Kasetsart, Chulalongkorn, and Mahidol Universities immediately convened a pollution exhibition which focused on the Japanese pollution experience and lessons for Thailand (Jishu Kōza *Ajia Gurūpu* 2006, 376). Meetings with Japanese activists at UNCHE and Matsuoka Nobuo meant that the Thai activists were able to offer attendees to the

exhibition with detailed knowledge about the dangers of industrial pollution (Inoue 1974, 52). By chance Hirayama Takasada of the Independent Lectures Asia Group happened to be visiting Kasetsart University when news of the TACS pollution broke. Hirayama was mortified by the news and resolved to mobilize support from Japan. As he explained in an article for *Jishu Kōza* in October 1973,

I was quickly filled with rage. I could not allow this. I simply could not allow it. Once again I engraved in my mind the purpose of this visit: to communicate the situation of Japanese pollution and to find a way to mobilize an anti-pollution movement based on cooperation between Japanese and Southeast Asian people (Hirayama 2006, 383).

In Japan activists promptly mobilized protest movements against Asahi Glass. In September 1973, some 150 protestors from groups such as the Independent Lectures, Beheiren, and the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Antiwar Shareholders Committee held a demonstration outside the Tokyo headquarters of the Asahi Glass Corporation. They held banners and placards—in Japanese and Thai—reading “Asahi Glass, Stop Exporting Pollution!” and “the Japanese people will not allow contamination of the Chao Phraya River by Asahi Glass” (*Jishu Kōza Ajia Gurupu* 2006, 375, 378). The Tokyo protests were widely reported in the Thai press and soon thereafter Japanese groups received a deluge of letters from Bangkok citizens expressing their appreciation for the show of solidarity (Inoue 1974, 51).

In October 1973, Inoue Sumio, an antiwar activist of the Beheiren movement, established the Japan-Thai Youth Friendship Movement (*Nichi-Tai Seinen Yūkō Undō*) which represented the Japanese side of the transnational movement against Asahi Glass (Inoue 1974, 51). Thereafter transnational connections intensified, through information sharing, site visits, and simultaneous events. In September 1974, for example, Thai and Japanese activists organized a simultaneous protest in Tokyo and Bangkok. In Tokyo some eighty protestors gathered outside the Asahi Glass headquarters with Thai-Japanese language banners reading “Asahi Glass, Get Out of Thailand!” (Inoue 1974, 52). Importantly, most of the Japanese protestors had never visited Thailand and knew no Thai people. What they did know, however, was the Japanese experience with industrial pollution and, thanks to the work of rooted cosmopolitans like Matsuoka, its repetition in Bangkok. These two factors were enough to inspire in them a sense of translocal sentiment and the motivation to come out in support of victims many thousands of miles away. As one participant put it, “there are many things we need to communicate. And there are so many things we need to learn. It is clear that the process of building connections between Thai and Japanese citizens has just begun. But to

the extent that we pursue the common objective of ‘eliminating pollution and that which produces it,’ there is a potential for us to build connections with the people of Asia... The task from here on is to further strengthen diverse and substantive connections. This is necessary for our mutual survival” (Okuda 2006, 45).

The movement against Thai Asahi Caustic Soda in Bangkok marked the beginning of a new phase of transnational environmental activism in Japan. In 1974 Japanese activists joined with members of the Incheon City Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in a movement opposing the Toyama Chemical Company’s plan to relocate a mercurochrome plant to Incheon.<sup>7</sup> Activists exchanged information, translated materials into Japanese and Korean, lobbied government officials on both sides, and appealed to the mass media. Their efforts proved successful as Toyama Chemical announced soon after that the planned relocation would not go ahead. Similar movements mobilized thereafter against the Nippon Chemical Company’s plans to manufacture pollutive sodium bichromate and mirabilite anhydride in the Ulsan Industrial region of South Korea and Kawasaki Steel Corporation’s construction of a sintering plant on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. By the 1980s Japanese grassroots transnational environmental movements in East Asia included logging and deforestation, radioactive contamination from rare earth mineral extraction, and commercial shrimp farming. The first generation of rooted cosmopolitans were joined by other groups, such as the pollution committee of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, or Nichibenren, which had previously focused only on domestic pollution. In early 1976 the various movements opposing Japanese pollution export assembled in Tokyo for the Citizens Rally to Protest Pollution Export to Asia. At this rally participants established the Anti-Pollution Export Center (*Han-Kōgai Yushutsu Tsūhō Sentā*) which became the central node in the Japanese movement against pollution export and the point of contact with movements throughout East Asia. The joint declaration of the rally announced that

We can no longer be concerned only with the wellbeing of the Japanese people. We must start a new movement based on a new set of values in which anything that disadvantages the people of the Third World is something that we too must repudiate. In order to destroy all mechanisms which are obstructing the realization of both their and our common wellbeing, we want to join hands with them and struggle together with them (Han-Kōgai Yushutsu Tsūhō Sentā 2006, 275).

7 On this movement see Inoue (1974).

## CONCLUSION

In this article I have attempted to explain the emergence of border-crossing Japanese environmental activism in East Asia in the early 1970s. Two factors appear to have been of particular importance: first, the domestic (i.e. local) experience with industrial pollution and its shocking effects on humans and the environment and, second, the role of rooted cosmopolitans in connecting activists across borders. Activists' experiences in local movements within Japan sensitized them to the fundamental violation of human rights inherent in industrial pollution. In the most extreme cases—for instance, as in the methyl mercury poisoning at Minamata Bay—human lives were negligently sacrificed for corporate profits and, ultimately, for national economic growth. To make matters worse, local activists often found themselves ostracized with few allies and resources to resist and having to fend off accusations of “local egoism.” This situation cultivated an understandable sense of victimization among pollution protestors which deeply informed their understanding of struggle, of politics, and of Japanese society more generally. The local became for them a stronghold of resistance and authenticity against an urban modernity nourished by voracious consumption and relentless, destructive industrial expansion. This understanding of the local as both a physical space and a critical perspective made it possible for some local activists to relativize their particularized victimization, seeing it in the context of wider structures of exploitation and inequity.

Of course, it is important to stress that this critical intellectual recalibration of the local was no guarantee of further activism, especially of a transnational kind. As I argued, this required the intervention of rooted cosmopolitans such as those involved in the RCP and Ui Jun's Independent Lecture's movement who literally put this conception of the local to the test. Reports about instances of Japanese industrial pollution in countries such as Thailand and South Korea relayed by rooted cosmopolitans like Oda Makoto and Hirayama Takasada challenged local activists to think about the nature of environmental victories won through domestic struggle. What did “victory” mean if it was based on the relocation and replication of industrial pollution in other less-regulated countries of East Asia? Needless to say, not all or even a majority of local activists responded to such questions. But, for those who did, the result was transformational. In the early 1970s, spurred by Ui Jun, Oda Makoto, and other rooted cosmopolitans, some Japanese antipollution activists began to participate in transnational initiatives for victims of Japanese pollution in Thailand, South Korea, the Philippines, and elsewhere. They were drawn to these movements out of a sense of shared predicament and empathy for victims they had never met and who lived in countries they

knew little about. I have called this motivation translocal sentiment in an attempt to highlight how the local played an important role in transnational activism, even as the local itself underwent important transformations and recalibrations in the consciousness of activists in the course of these movements.

These transnational movements had numerous significant outcomes. First, in Thailand, South Korea, Malaysia, and numerous other countries throughout East Asia they forced Japanese industries to either stop operations or radically alter their environmentally irresponsible practices. Transnational engagement also offered activists in developing countries such as Thailand and the Philippines access to cutting-edge knowledge on industrial pollution and its human health effects from Japanese activists with many decades of domestic experience. Also, as I have suggested, transnational involvement compelled Japanese to rethink the “success” of their domestic struggle not to mention the basis of their sense of victimization. They realized that victims could also unwittingly become perpetrators.

There were also arguably longer-term outcomes for Japanese civil society from these transnational movements. The anti-Vietnam War movement, *Beheiren*, was one of the first major postwar citizens’ movements in Japan to question the victimization consciousness informing much postwar Japanese civic activism and to call for a sense of responsibility and action for others. Not surprisingly, a similar mindset developed in the environmental movement when it incorporated transnational initiatives. Local activists’ recognized their position as perpetrators—albeit indirectly—as citizens and consumers in a nation responsible for industrial pollution in East Asia. Transnational involvement made it possible for some of these individuals to engage in activism as a form of advocacy for the first time, which was a radical departure from the simple self-defensive activism they had practiced before. I believe the advocacy mindset born of transnational movements represented an extremely important cognitive transformation not only within antiwar and environmental activism in Japan but also within the logic of Japanese civil society more generally. This is not to argue that there had been no other-focused, advocacy-style activism before. Indeed, Japanese modern history is replete with examples of such activism among religious organizations, consumer cooperatives, labor unions, and other groups. Rather, it is to argue that transnational environmental movements of the 1970s—because of their important role in recalibrating the ideational core of postwar civic activism at a critical moment—greatly helped to embolden a new agenda based on advocacy and outward-looking activism which would become more and more prominent in Japanese civic movements and professionalized NGOs from the late 1980s onward.

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## REVIEW

**Translating Critical Border Studies in East Asia**

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Liu, Joyce C. H. & Nick Vaughan-Williams (Eds.). (2014). *European-East Asian Borders in Translation*. London, UK and New York, USA: Routledge.

*European-East Asian Borders in Translation* is an edited volume that advances Critical Border Studies (CBS) on East Asia through a collection of essays that take an inter-disciplinary approach to question, explore and offer new insight into border theory. The critical approach moves the focus away from traditional knowledge of what and where borders are to give sociological treatment to a set of 'bordering practices.' This approach uncovers the 'array of technologies of governance designed to control the mobility of people, services and goods' (p. 2) and illustrates new dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, us and them and power and authority in East Asia.

The volume is organized in nine chapters by different authors with a short introduction by editors Joyce C. H. Liu and Nick Vaughan-Williams. The volume is primarily concerned with extending an understanding of bordering practice in East Asia far beyond what has traditionally been the focus of border studies and to offer new insight into border studies from East Asian cases.

Seeking to move beyond the impasse reached in debates in the 1990s and 2000s about whether borders between states are either withering under globalizing conditions or more virulent than ever against the backdrop of the so-called global 'war on terror,' CBS has urged a sociological treatment of borders as a set of practices (Liu and Vaughan-Williams, p. 1).

The volume makes a conscious effort to ‘decenter and deterritorialize the production of knowledge associated with CBS beyond its familiar “European”/“Western” geocultural context’ (p. 4). It employs a ‘bidirectional approach to consider both the “translate-ability” of critical border theory associated with CBS in diverse “East Asian” contexts’ and to ‘explore the ways in which “East Asian” conceptualizations of borders and bordering practices may be challenged in view of “European” thought and experience’ (p. 5).

To achieve this, the volume employs translation as a guiding problematic to raise questions of power and authority, to question borders between inclusion/exclusion, here/there and us/them and to offer new ways to theorize border studies. This opens border studies to inclusion of externalized physical borders and internalized bordered consciousness and allows contributors to focus on a range of geographical, linguistic, ideological and virtual borders in East Asia and to examine ‘historical processes and complex discursive contexts so that borders are questioned, problematized and pluralized’ (p. 9).

Acts of translation, understood broadly here in terms of attempts to make the incomprehensible comprehensible, always already both disrupt and reaffirm divisions. In this regard, translation must itself be understood as a border economy involving inclusions and exclusions, and it is central to the production of territory, identity, subjectivity and political community (Liu and Vaughan-Williams, p. 5).

Approaching border studies as bordering practices and thinking in terms of translation opens up new ways of theorizing border studies in East Asia. This is illustrated in the first chapter, ‘The figure of translation: Translation as a filter?’ by Naoki Sakai. Sakai’s contribution explores the philosophical underpinnings of translation practices and provides a critical platform for the remaining chapters in the book. It problematizes the figure of the filter in translation, arguing it presumes a dichotomist relationship of inside and out and arguing much ‘representation of translation serves to reproduce the schema of the international world’ (p. 34). Sakai’s theory of the relationship between border and translation gives critical treatment to the ‘impoverishment’ of the forms that translation can take ‘as a result of the formation of the nation-state.’ He argues it is the representation of translation that creates the unity of national language and forms the inner kernel of techniques for the production of national subjectivity. Sakai therefore suggests it is ‘through the reconstitution of the very ways to represent translation that we can continue to seek a mode of collective being, one that is neither nation nor

ethnicity' (p. 34).

The call to employ new forms of representation of translation to critique socially constructed borders is followed by three chapters of empirical contributions. These are organized around the theme of translating borders across history, culture and identity in Taiwan. The inclusion of historical knowledge, identity and political discourse presents a viable means of understanding bordering practices around Taiwan and demonstrates the drawbacks of a world of physical and national identity borders created and enforced through juridical international law and by various dominant groups at the exclusion of others. Contributors argue a shift in how borders are represented can provide new ways of democratizing borders, of collectively redefining identity for the future and of finding new approaches to deal with territorial disputes in the region.

...the question of Taiwan enables us to face an alternative mode of thinking: the possibility of a topological vision of a political society not conceived of as a nation-state-based entity defined by inter-“nation”-al law, but as a political community in a topological mode that is constantly undergoing re-composition (Liu p. 59).

The fifth and sixth chapters focus on Japan's maritime power through analysis of intellectual history and contemporary security discourse. Nishiyama's chapter translates land borders and sovereignty into the context of the sea with reference to the Amami Oshima incident in 2001. It problematizes the very notion of borders, boundaries and demarcation on the open sea. Hung Yueh Lan explores the intellectual discourse and translation of sea power theory into Japanese discourse and imagination as a maritime nation in the 19th century. This chapter provides valuable insight into how Japan developed a discourse and imagination as a maritime nation before comparing this to discourse in contemporary China. Lan argues the maritime nation imagination and translation of Mahan's sea power theory led Japan to expansionist Asianism (to become the West) and to expand the borders of Imperial Japan. Moreover, Lan contends that China no longer imagines itself as only a continental nation but increasingly as a sea power thus leading to the de-Asianization of China and increased border conflict in Asia. Taken together, these chapters present insights into how language has been used as a bordering practice in the maritime realm.

The final three chapters explore ethnicity in the Chinese diaspora and illustrate bordering practices in the Internet in China. These chapters stand out as significantly different from the previous as they shift the border studies focus away from analysis of traditional border issues. Previous chapters are valuable

for their application of critical approaches to well-known border issues in Asia. These chapters seem a little out of place with their focus on ethnicity discourse and Internet control and resistance. By framing these issues as bordering practices that 'control the mobility of people, services and goods' (p. 2) they sit comfortably under the critical border studies rubric and by doing so represent the greatest departure from mainstream border studies.

For those readers searching for new insights into well-known border issues in East Asia, the sociological treatment of bordering practices highlighted in chapters on Taiwan and Japan provide excellent material. They are well worth reading for insights and implications for border studies as well as their analysis of bordering practices in the region. The final three chapters extend border studies in East Asia well beyond the traditional field of study and are therefore of more interest to those readers seeking a new understanding of critical border studies. Readers with an interest in identity, transnational migration, Internet governance and resistance in China will also find these chapters fruitful.

Overall, the volume provides the reader with a critical view of bordering practices in East Asia. Many of the chapters present excellent empirics on well-known border disputes and border-related issues in the region and the sociological treatment brought forth by the lens of translation illuminates what is often obscured in these cases. However, shifting border studies away from the traditional focus on nation-states and *inter*-national relations redefines the very subject of research in border studies to a soft focus on a broad array of issues of inclusion and exclusion. This raises the hard question of what the boundaries of border studies should be. The unifying theme of the volume, the use of the lens of translation to understand bordering practices, provides a critical framework for the volume but the application of this framework differed considerably for each contribution. Future studies would do well to develop boundaries for the focus of research and to develop guiding principles for the application of translation as a critical approach to border studies.

## REVIEW

**A Critical Development of Border Studies**

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Diener, Alexander C. & Joshua Hagen (2012). *Borders: A Very Short Introduction*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press.

The end of the Cold War and the advent of the age of globalization led people to anticipate that the world they live in would become borderless. However, recent global headlines are filled with cases of the continued drawing and redrawing of borders; for example, the international community has witnessed the outbreak of the Ebola virus in western Africa, continued violence between Israel and Palestine in the Gaza Strip, and Russia's annexation and invasion of the Crimean Peninsula as well as portions of southern Ukraine. These recent events distinctly demonstrate that borders continue to constitute international affairs, as well as the daily lives of people around the world. Activities that seemed to remove borders were immediately exposed as attempts to redraw borders. Most ostensibly, the new jihadist group "Islamic State (IS)" erased state borders separating Syria and Iraq. Turning to Asia, the rise of China is changing the regional stability which can result in the potential redrawing of borders. Such phenomena raise the necessity to reevaluate established conceptions such as borders.

This book seeks to explore the breadth and depth of the field of border studies co-authored by Alexander C. Diener and J. Hagen. It provides various case studies and border-related issues as well as the basic concepts of border studies. After tracing the historical development of borders from hunter gatherer societies in antiquity, the geographical groundwork of city states and empires, to the emergence of the modern state system in which the absolutist transition of feudal

systems was crucial, the overview of contemporary border studies is mapped out in terms of debated issues such as globalization and trade, security and terrorism, environmental protection, tourism, health and ethics, among others. Moreover, the book also illustrates how the spatial manifestation of sovereign states caused by supra-nationalism and regionalism challenges the existing state system. Concerning the legal practice of sovereign states, the authors show that the national interests of individual states clash with human rights, in which humanitarian crises manifest themselves, leading to the critical issues such as whether various actors in the international community should intervene or not. In this book, the Arab spring, Darfur, and Guantanamo are illustrated as examples of this argument.

In classical border studies, as chapter four emphasizes, human lives have long been spatially and geographically divided and categorized by various territorial borders, whose main objective is to mark the difference between sovereign states in a Westphalian system. Thus, this fundamental view of modern state system is regarded as a given and hardly questioned. However, the authors underline that the world today is experiencing the dynamics that are brought by “world in motion” in this contemporary era. In this context, the multidisciplinary efforts to address the problematic issues of borders have made progress in the way of our thinking in “the practice of bordering.” The introduction of the notion of “bordering” into border studies opens a new dimension which understands borders as something continually “being made.”

The authors make a point that we are also likely to observe contradictory forces and processes pertaining to borders. The removal of barriers in the acceleration of the flow of goods and people and the emergence of new barriers after the attacks of September 11 are taking place simultaneously. It can be said that the dual process of “de-bordering” and “re-bordering” occurs on a global scale. It is worth mentioning the development of a new concept of “border permeability,” which refers to the filtering out of the wanted and the unwanted.

In light of the above, the main aim has been set out to offer a critical understanding of territorial borders which has been one of the central points of the scholarly inquiry in the field of border studies. The authors seek to go beyond the descriptive and static nature of borders and to clarify the inherent complexities and their essentially contested nature. They argue against the idea that our future world may lose borders and we are evolving toward a “borderless world.” In short, borders are constantly changing with respect to different border function at different place and time. The authors explicate that such an understanding is suitable for novices of border studies and general readers. They also display how to examine the multifaceted aspects of borders which are continuously in the making.

The reviewer has had the honor of translating this book into Japanese. My

intention is to offer a concise and informative textbook of border studies because such a textbook is difficult to find not only in Japan but in East Asia. I believe that the knowledge from such books is crucial in order to understand the regional dynamics in East Asia. Japan has territorial issues with neighboring countries such as South Korea, China, and Russia. Conventional wisdom has it that these borders are state borders in the form of fixed and rigid lines, reflecting the geographical tension in this region. Furthermore, nationalism based on territory makes this picture even more conflictive. This book provides vast implications for East Asia, reimagining borders as multifaceted borders and understanding state borders critically.

Lastly, I would like to make three critical assessments to this text in the hopes to develop border studies further as a discipline. First, as in all interdisciplinary fields, terminologies and definitions become crucial. We often use terms as border and boundary, borderland and border region, trans-border and cross-border interchangeably. However, this may pose a problem when translating into different languages. I, therefore, find a need for developing precise definitions and terminologies. Second, as in all textbooks, we tend to focus on state, national, and international borders between sovereign states. The authors mention that, "Truth be told, most people cross hundreds of geographic boundaries on a daily basis. Some are formal borders ... while others are symbolic or informal" (p. 1). Examples of non-state and informal borders can be found in the text, but are treated with less attention. Third, it seems that the authors have expanded the concept of borders. They demonstrate the breadth of borders such as political, economic, socio-cultural, and historical borders. I believe that the next step is the creation of a concrete methodology. Clues for such methodology may be found in the case studies illustrated in their previous book titled "*Borderlines and Borderlands (2009)*." If case studies are the next step, how can we distinguish area studies from border studies? A mere accumulation of case studies will not contribute to the theoretical development of border studies. In short, how do we reach "the status of a unified scientific subfield" (Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly)? Having said this, however, as all great books do, the book leaves you with immediate and imminent questions for further intellectual inquiry.