SOUTHEAST ASIAN BORDERS

Gehan Wijeyewardene

The proposal to hold a seminar on this topic at The Australian National University, sponsored by the Thai-Yunnan project, has had good response. The seminar will be held during the period 28-30 October 1993 over two or three days as necessary. The list of participants is still tentative, but the following have expressed interest, or their names have been proposed by ANU departments: Michael Vickery, Tuja Manam, Wan Kadir Che Man, Mya Than, Ananda Rajah, Ben Kerkvliet, Ron May, Des Ball, Andrew Mack, Ian Wilson, E.C. Chapman, Douglas Miles, David Bradley. Expressions of interest and other names are welcome. In addition to international relations, military deployment and conflict, topics already suggested include ethnicity, language relations, trade and changing class structures.

The situation in the region is far from reassuring. Professor Des Ball wrote in the Independent Monthly in February (pp. 23-24) on the Chinese military build-up,

In South-East Asia, apprehensions of China are higher than they have been since the 1960s. Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia dispute Chinese claims to the Spratlys. As best as they are able, they wish to deny China military superiority in the South China Sea. The Philippines is currently garrisoning eight islands in the Spratlys. Malaysia has set the ability to operate over the South China Sea from bases on its east coast as a requirement for the fighter aircraft which it plans to acquire in the next few years. All of the ASEAN countries are apprehensive about China's support for the brutal regime in Myanmar. India is concerned about both Chinese arms supplies to its neighbours as well as Chinese ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs. Unfortunately, many of the counter-programs being undertaken by these countries are simply confirming Chinese apprehensions. It is a vicious circle which can only exacerbate regional suspicions and tensions, and which increase the likelihood of regional conflict through inadvertent if not deliberate intention.

In our immediate region much attention is being paid to the building of roads and bridges and the forward march of trade and tourism. It is not always borne in mind that the road that takes tourists and consumer goods to Yunnan may
also carry armoured vehicles to the Indian Ocean. The Burmese situation has been crucial for many years. At last both SLORC and the Chinese Government seem to have reached a most favourable agreement, advantageous to both sides. Ball's comment above that ASEAN is concerned with Chinese support for SLORC may seem strange to some of us who have been critical of the policy of 'constructive engagement'. There is, however, no doubt that Thailand's Burma policy is extremely complex and not merely because of the crude military view that Thailand needs divided neighbours and buffer states. A recent unconfirmed report suggests that Burma has tried to put pressure on Thailand to move against Khun Sa and cut his supply lines. It is suggested the Thai were non-committal.

Some small insight into border relations between Burma and Thailand is given in the account of an officer of the Thai Military Mapping Department (Phayon Thimcharoen Khaw Phiset 9-15 April; 16-22 April; 23-29 April; 30 April-6 May 2536 [1993]) on assignment to Rangoon to sort out differences in the demarcation of borders. He has a lot to say on food, his disappointment at the unattractiveness of Burmese women, sightseeing etc., but on border demarcation there is little except surprise at the the primitive map-making equipment and the Thai preference for working with survey methods in contrast with the Burmese use of aerial photography.

The relative quiet on Burma's western border mentioned by Kevin Heppner (Letters, this issue) is also noted by Khaw Phiset (23-29 April):

> The question is being widely asked, why has the central Burmese government not mounted an offensive against the minorities this dry season as it has in past years? The strongest reason given is that there is an attempt to persuade many minority groups to accept a system of government on the basis of a 'union of states' which could be revived again, though it seems difficult, given the fact that the Karen, the strongest group, is totally opposed to this proposal. Another reason for the dry-season offensive being delayed is that Khin Nyunt, the real leader of the government, has been forced by world opinion to provide evidence for a section of this world opinion that Burma has changed its policy even though it may be very slowly. The weight of opinion however is that the reform of economic policy begun in 1992 will show real results in 1993 [my translation].

In effect SLORC is directing a campaign on internal and international political fronts as well as on the economic in the hope of transforming the view of SLORC expressed in the 1990 election and in international forums. From the point of view of the armed conflict the greatest threat to the Democratic Alliance of Burma has been the attempt to persuade the Kachin to make peace with SLORC. The pressure has, obviously, largely come from China, but what information there is suggests that the Kachin leadership will hold out for a national rather than a purely sectarian agreement (see letter from Kevin Heppner).

An alarming report in Khaw Phiset

> (16-22 April) reports that many Thai travellers in Laos have reported the movement of Vietnamese military vehicles into Laos, the transport vehicles covered to prevent observation of their contents. The report relates this troop movement to the Cambodian election, the decision of the Khmer Rouge to boycott the elections and the massacre of ethnic Vietnamese by the Khmer Rouge. The article that follows takes the view that were Hun Sen to win the election war will break out. A view apparently held by many Western observers as well.

Still on the future of Cambodia, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Gareth Evans, writes that he read the interview with Lieutenant General Chettha Thanajaro (summarized Newsletter No. 20: 3-4) 'with interest'. He continues, In my last trip to Thailand (January 20-21), I spoke to Thai officials about the likelihood of the Khmer Rouge commencing military action after the elections. On the basis of these discussions, I am satisfied that, in the unhappy event of the Khmer Rouge upping the ante, the Thais would have no choice but to give effect to any sanctions imposed by the international community (Letter 22 April 1993).
Travelling through Laos a few years back was like journeying though a deserted movie set. Archways constructed over the entrances to what had once been a cooperative or a state restaurant or guest house lurched dangerously, about to fall. Panels of flimsy plywood, with faded slogans like, 'Hold December 2 in your Heart Forever', the date of the communists coming to power in 1975, flapped in the breeze. Now the old Soviet embassy has a 'House to Let' sign on it. A new, perhaps more sturdy, set has since gone up announcing the presence of this or that Bolisat, 'company'. Everyone is talking toolakit, 'business', in Laos these days. Clearly visible on the new set are businessmen from Taiwan, Hong Kong or Bangkok who have established garment factories in Vientiane where they pay workers 26,000 kip (@US$35.00) per month. Even so they still try to 'exploit Lao workers', making them work long hours and without proper protection, claims the local paper Vientiane Mai.

Businessmen from Yunnan are also here, the advance guard of a grand plan to link Thailand with southern China. As one foreigner quipped, 'Laos is destined to become the truckstop of mainland Southeast Asia'.

I too am here on a businessman's visa because the Committee For Social Sciences, who sponsored my previous research trips, has been dissolved. It had occupied another deserted set, the large, white, former USAID building in Laos where names of former US employees (who is 'Woods'? I wonder) are still on the doors and old Operations Charts remain partially filled in.

The Committee, which dealt with things like culture, ethnography and linguistics is a victim of the toolakit craze. Starved of funds its members are now re-assigned to various Ministries. As ever, the party knows best, and the decision to dissolve the Committee opens up new vistas at least that's what Sisana Sisane, the former Director of the Committee, said officially at a Lao New Year lunch. In fact it is more likely that the study of Lao culture will be marginalized unless it can be commercialized, and the many new travel companies that have sprung up in Vientiane, no doubt will package a few saleable parts of the culture. But the prospect for real research by Lao themselves looks bleak. I sit in the Mixay restaurant that looks over the Mekong to Thailand, sipping my beer, eavesdropping on a conversation between two dishevelled young men in baggy shorts and blue singlets and two similarly clad women. The men are flicking through their Lonely Planet Guide, complaining that they cannot find in Vientiane the charm of French colonial days that the Guide Book had promised. They are in search of another deserted set. I can't imagine them seated in white suits, pith helmets, slow moving fans over-head, sipping gin.

A standard cliche about Laos has been 'does it really exist as a country?' According to one count the country has around 60 ethnic minorities, and more ethnic Lao live in north-eastern Thailand than in Laos. It is said only French colonialism stopped Laos from being divided up between Vietnam and Thailand. In Vientiane today, at least among some people, concern is expressed about the growing cultural influence of Thailand. Everyone watches Thai television, and central Thai snobbishness that thinks Lao is a 'country-bumpkin' language is being taken seriously by the smart young socialites in Vientiane who try to mimic Thai ways.

On the other hand, the Thai middle-class who now have the trappings of modernity, come in search of antiques, badges of their 'real Thainess'. One Lao intellectual complained that Thai are snapping up Lao bai-lan, palm leaf manuscripts, and traditional textiles and silver-ware. People charged with preserving Lao culture, however, do not have the money to buy or protect their heritage.

Phoumi Vongvichit, one of the surviving members of the revolutionary old guard is a tall Tai Phuan from Xieng Khouang. What does he feel about growing Thai influence on Lao culture? He was surprisingly unconcerned and was more interested in telling me how the north-easterners in Thailand are still Lao, and about his visit to a Phuan village there in 1990 which still knew its traditions from Laos. Drifting in nostalgia Phoumi only became animated about young people getting drunk at discos and dancing rock and roll: 'This is not Lao!'

Ironically, perhaps, the young swingers of Vientiane are the children of the revolutionary and new business elite. Their eyes are turned towards Thailand and beyond and they know little about Laos.
Most of Laos is poor, underdeveloped and socially and ethnically complex. Travelling through the mountains in the back of a truck with 40 or so people crammed together is one way of getting to know the country. In the mid-afternoon heat the woman crouched next to me starts vomiting down through the floorboards, and fourteen hours of travel even tests Lao good-naturedness.

On the road to Sam Neua we stop to pick up the occasional Hmong who has been out hunting. The ethnic mix in the back of the truck changes. A young Lao asks a Hmong if he can read the Lao on the airways tag. The Hmong is embarrassed. He can only read it slowly, much to the delight of the Lao who jokes with others about the Hmong's illiteracy. The Hmong points to some English writing on the travel bag and says, that's how you write Hmong. The Lao laughs in disbelief and the Hmong produces a postcard from America written in a script devised by missionaries. They both look to me for confirmation. 'Yes, that's Hmong', I say, this time to the delight of the Hmong.

After several days of travelling I arrive in the Black Tai village I've been studying to find that two days before a fire had swept through the village destroying thirteen houses and everything in them. Already relatives and helpers from other villages had arrived to rebuild the houses and provide bedding and other necessities which had gone up in flames. In the next two weeks a new set of bamboo houses arose from the ashes, and life returned to normal.

But remote villages are feeling the winds of change. Young people are migrating to the towns and down to the capital, and according to the old people they are throwing out, tim ork, their Black Tai traditions. Reconciliation between Laos, Vietnam and China has made Chinese manufactured goods more available. Everyday, a trickle of Vietnamese traders on bicycles or motorbikes, runs along the road that passes by the village. In 1988 there was only one radio, now there are several, and they bring ideas from a wider world.

On my return journey a group of Vietnamese traders was added to the ethnic mix. Often they come in search of forest products and animals (probably endangered species) for medicine shops back in Hanoi or in China. At one stage our truck catches on fire, and the flames lick up through the floorboards. We all tumble out onto the side of the road in a panic. But the easy resignation of the Lao countryside soon has us dozing at the side of the road as the driver tries to repair the damage. A young Vietnamese woman unpacks a mirror with a rose curling up one side which she intends to trade, and begins to preen herself in it. Two Hmong in the striped 'toreador' jackets, cradling home-made muskets watch her strange ritual.

Lao New Year, Songan, in April is a rite of renewal. People dance in the streets and splash each other with water. Government offices, which always have had a deserted air, are abandoned for days on end and traditional Laos reclaims its people for a riotous festival.

But change is coming fast and bringing anxiety with it. Phoumi talks of the bridge being built across the Mekong as a sign of modernization, but also as a conduit for AIDS. A young, drunk off-duty soldier asks for advice for friends who obviously have VD but are scared to ask because it might be AIDS. Like most people they do not know what AIDS is, only that is coming. Another man shows me a list of improbable herbal remedies for AIDS which had come to a woman in her dreams. 'It's worth trying. It might work', he said hopefully. The spectre of AIDS, it seems, is becoming a metaphor for the social changes engulfing Laos.

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KENGTUNG IN 1993: Languages in Use

David Bradley

Since 1 October 1992, the Eastern Shan State has been open to foreign visitors coming overland from Mae Sai in northern Thailand. This is the first time since 1962 that new foreigners have been allowed in at all, and the first time that any substantial numbers of foreigners have been into this area since the 1940s. This appears to be a local initiative by the regional military commander, motivated by a desire for hard currency. A small amount of tourist infrastructure has been set up, but has already been overwhelmed by the demand.
For many years it has been possible for Thais and Chinese to enter the border towns in Burma, such as Tachilek adjacent to Mae Sai. With the truces prevailing in most of the Shan State, crossings on the Chinese border are open for day trips at Daluo near Jinghong in Sipsongphanna; and at Wanding or Nongdao near Ruili in Dehong, crossing to Namhkam. According to the Burmese, the road from Daluo to Kengtung was to be opened to foreigners on 1 March 1993; so now one may also be able to reach Kengtung from China, depending on the immigration arrangements made by the Chinese; or even to travel across Burma between Sipsongphanna and Thailand.

The procedures might make some visitors nervous, but they do work; all travel and accommodation arrangements must be made first with Myanmar Travel and Tours, who can be found at the Top North Hotel in Mae Sai. On the appointed day of departure, one stops at the Thai Immigration office towards the southern edge of Mae Sai to obtain a permit; details are entered in a ledger, and a small white form is filled out. Details are again entered in a ledger at the checkpoint on the Thai side of the bridge, and the passport must be left there. The white Thai form must then be taken across the bridge and to the Burmese Immigration office on the left before 10 am. There the white Thai form is kept and a pink form applying for a visa is filled out for you; three pictures are required. This pink form is then kept by your officially supplied guide; so your Burmese guide has a form which will get you back the white Thai form from the Burmese Immigration office in Tachilek when you are ready to leave; and this Thai form in turn gets your passport back from the Thai checkpoint. Since the passport never leaves Thailand, Thai visas are unaffected and no indication appears in the passport.

Judging from the ledger at the Thai checkpoint, numbers are very large and rapidly increasing, especially day entries to Tachilek. The visa for a day visit into Tachilek and five kilometres around costs US$10; for three nights and four days in Tachilek or travel to Kengtung the visa is US$18. In January normal travellers were allowed up to three nights and four days travel to Kengtung and surrounds, while missionaries were allowed up to seven days.

Numerous other fees apply; a Myanmar Travel and Tours guide must accompany each group leaving Tachilek, at a cost of US$10 per day. Entry fees apply for vehicles: US$100 for one's own car if going to Kengtung, US$25 for a bus over 20 seats entering Tachilek only, US$15 for a smaller car or US$5 for a motorcycle to Tachilek. Myanmar Travel and Tours services including accommodation must in principle be in an official hotel and must be paid for in US dollars at the official rate (approximately 6 kyat to the dollar); but everything else including restaurants can be paid for directly in kyat, which are freely available in Mae Sai at about 110 kyat to the US dollar (current banknote denominations 1, 5, 10, 15, 45, 90 and 200; avoid demonetized 25, 35, 75 and 100 kyat notes), slightly less in Tachilek and less still in Kengtung itself. The preferred currency in Tachilek is the Thai baht, and this will also be eagerly accepted everywhere along the road. There are even a couple of petrol stations near Tachilek, supplied and owned from Thailand, which will only take baht; the price is higher than in Thailand, so fill up before you cross.

In January 1993 the guest house in Tachilek cost US$15 per night; the official hotel in Kengtung - the state guest house next to the recently-levelled Sawbwa's palace - cost US$36 for a cold water room or US$42 for a hot water room. These rooms are spacious and will accommodate two people easily, or more if the hotel is full as it was when I was in Kengtung. Missionaries are allowed to stay with their mission station; we stayed with local friends as the hotel was full of Thai tourists.

Myanmar Travel and Tours will also supply or arrange a vehicle for you; this costs US$160 from Tachilek to Kengtung return, US$50 per day for day use in Kengtung, and US$70 for a day return trip from Kengtung to the former mission station at Loimwe. Thus the vehicle costs US$280 if you take the recommended 'package' of three days and four nights including Loimwe. Driving is a skill with which few people in Burma are familiar, but with peace and prosperity there are many overcrowded ex-Thai Japanese left-hand drive pickups and other small trucks plying the right-hand drive road from Tachilek to Kengtung, and villagers are not yet used to so many passing vehicles in their villages, so the traffic is dangerous, especially near Tachilek.

Myanmar Travel and Tours and the local military commanders are making efforts to please visitors. Tachilek is a boom town, full of Thai tourists, with a large number of gambling stalls and with excellent shopping for all kinds of handicrafts and other goods from all parts of Burma. The most successful official initiative in Kengtung, with a large local patronage, is a series of three open-air discos with taxi dancers: two next to the lake (one including karaoke and a floor show); since the visit by Thawi Swangpanyangkoon in April 1991 (Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter 16, pp.6-11)
the path around the lake has become a road, for better access to these two discos. The third is at a hot spring about seven kilometres to the south. The bathing facilities at this hot spring are amazingly unsalubrious and dirty; it is hard to believe that fastidious Thais will use them, let alone foreigners; but the circus atmosphere at night is something to be seen. There is a nightly cultural show at the guest house in Kengtung. Though the Kengtung palace is gone (Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter 20, p.17), many temples and one of the city gates remain; even more interesting is the city market. Some of the most impressive buildings are those now or formerly associated with the Catholics. These include the Number Two High School and the hospital, nationalized shortly after 1962; and the mission station with its large church, two seminaries, orphanage and other buildings on a hilltop overlooking the lake.

According to locals, the road from Tachilek to Kengtung has been enormously improved in the last year by prisoner labour; there is a large labour camp just to the west of the road north of Tachilek, near the airport. Apart from a few kilometres near Kengtung it is unpaved and very rough, and took seven hours of hard, unpleasant driving in January. In the wet season this could easily be doubled, if the road remains passable at all; but this is still a major improvement on the former travel time of seven days for the 166 kilometres.

The road passes through beautiful country which is in much better condition than the hill areas of Chiangrai. There are many Akha and Lahu villages along the road, as well as several major Khyn (Kengtung Shan) towns such as Tale and Mng Phyak. We stopped in one Akha village for several hours due to an accident and more briefly in a couple of Lahu villages as we were travelling with a group of Lahu. The first ten or so kilometres shows the prosperity generated by the only border crossing with Thailand that has been continuously controlled by the Burmese; the rest is desperately poor. In the valley near Kengtung there are a few Lahu villages and one Kachin village; in the nearby hills Lahu and especially Akha are widespread. There is also a small Tai Loi community in one quarter of the town, speaking an undescribed Mon-Khmer language.

The main interest for me in Kengtung was to observe the language situation, which is very varied. In the market, the most usual language of transactions during the three mornings that I spent there was Khyn. However vendors were willing and able to conduct transactions in a variety of other languages, if the buyer selected them (in approximate order of observed frequency): Lahu, Akha, or occasionally Burmese. The numerous Yunnanese Chinese vendors were also happy to conduct business in Chinese, and visitors’ Thai was easily understood and comprehensibly answered. Most of the stall holders are Khyn, but those selling more valuable goods (silver, gold, books) are mainly Chinese and the ladies sitting on the ground selling vegetables may be Khyn, Akha or Lahu. Among the buyers the largest group are the Khyn, but there are also many Akha and Lahu who talk to each other in their own languages.

**INSERT PHOTOGRAPH HERE**

Signboard outside City Hall, Kengtung: 'Love the Motherland, Obey the Law' (Burmese above, Khyn below)

In the Catholic organizations, the masses are given in Khyn, Akha or occasionally Burmese. Confessions are accepted in Khyn, Akha, Lahu, Burmese or English. One of the seminaries is basically a Burmese-medium school; the other, at a more advanced level, is English-medium. As nearly all of the foreign priests and nuns were Italian (three Italian nuns, all in their 80s, remain), many of the Catholic clergy also speak Italian. The usual language of the Catholic orphanage is Akha, as most of the children are Akha. It is amazing how widely Catholicism has spread among the Akha of the Eastern Shan State; this appears to be one of the major developments of the last thirty years. Akha ladies in very well-made, new clothes of traditional patterns are widely in evidence in churches and elsewhere in town, and there are quite a few Akha priests and nuns; though the Bishop of Kengtung, a fine man, is in fact Karen. The Catholic faith is disseminated through publications in Burmese, Shan and a peculiarly complicated and redundant romanization for Akha; there are also some publications in a Lahu romanization which is not quite as bad. There appear to be quite a few monolingual Akha, but most village Akha also speak some Khyn and Lahu and a few know some Burmese or Thai.

Another successful group is the Baptists; they are also continuing to increase in numbers, primarily among the Lahu. At the Baptist Mission Compound there is a school up to Standard Ten which has about 2000 mainly Lahu students; but literacy in Lahu is studied only in Sunday School. There are two churches and a former hospital, now a hostel. There is also a small bookstore near the city market, which produces some Lahu materials including a calendar, and
sells materials from Thailand and hoary tracts printed before 1962. This is in the standard Lahu orthography as also used among the Christian Lahu in Thailand. Some Lahu speak English from their pre-1962 contact with American missionaries, but most speak only Lahu, Khyn and (if educated) some Burmese.

The government high schools teach only in Burmese; but quite a few of the teachers are of non-Burman background. When I visited the formerly Catholic Number Two High School, I met Lahu, Akha, local Khyn, other Shan, Lisu and even Arakanese teachers; the Number One High School is next to the military area just south of the town. It was extremely difficult to get textbooks for these schools anywhere; the local government bookstore was closed for major renovations, and no stall in the market had anything like a complete set for any subject. With great difficulty and by going through every book in the city market, I was able to find most of the Burmese language materials currently in use; but by local standards they are quite expensive - several hundred kyat for a set of textbooks for the higher Standards. These are in literary Burmese, and have not been adapted in any way for the non-Burmans; if anything, the current 1989-1991 textbooks are worse than the 1970s editions in assuming a Burman cultural context, choosing inappro-priately difficult or irregular examples, and making no attempt to teach spoken Burmese. Obviously the non-Burman teachers are in a position to overcome some of these difficulties; but if education is this problematic in the cap-ital of the Eastern Shan State, the educational situation elsewhere must be very difficult.

Shan or Khyn literacy is the responsibility of the temples. Some temples including the Mawme Temple teach the standard Shan orthography as revised in 1971, and use textbooks prepared for this purpose in Taunggyi, the capital of the Shan State. The script for this is a modified version of Lik Tai which indicates all the tonal and vowel contrasts, unlike the traditional Shan script. Most monasteries includ-ing those outside Kengtung teach the much more complicated Khyn orthography from books printed by the Khemarat Press and others in Kengtung. For details of this script, which is similar to the traditional Northern Thai script, see Sren Egerod, 'Essentials of Khn phonology and script', Acta Orientalia 24:123-148, 1959.

Most of the restaurants are Chinese. Menus are in unsimplified Chinese and Burmese, and a large, well-prepared meal more than sufficient for four people costs about 300 to 400 kyat; naturally the dishes and price must be negotiated and determined in advance; for this, purpose Chinese works best. There are also acceptable restaurants in Tale and Mng Phyak along the road; the one in Tale is better, and is well-patronized by the local military officers from the large military base nearby.

The language of street signs in Kengtung is determined by their function. Most temples have signs in Khyn or in Burmese and Khyn, or occasionally Khyn and English; a few such signs, like the central, former state temple, the Maha Myat Muni, are in Burmese, Khyn and English. The government slogan board at the town hall has Burmese on top and Khyn below. Christian organizations (churches, seminaries, mission buildings) have signs in English and Burmese. Some restaurants, like the Honey Teashop in front of the city market, have signs with large letters in English and Burmese in smaller letters; others have signs in Burmese and unsimplified Chinese. Some other shops, like the Star hairdresser across from the city market, have signs in Burmese, English and Chinese. Some private shops have signs only in Khyn; government shops can be identified by their Burmese signs. There are a few shops with signs in Lahu and Burmese, such as the Lahu bookstore; there was also one trilingual Burmese/Khyn/Lahu sign advertising a medicine. In early January 1993 calendars in Khyn were available from several vendors in the market, with a Shan calendar and a Lahu calendar also available but somewhat more difficult to find. The market has a number of stalls selling various Buddhist articles including handwritten copies of Khyn Buddhist texts on thick white paper folded concertina-fashion into the shape of palm leaf manuscripts. Other printed Khyn materials are available from some temples or the Khemarat Press shop.

Government organizations such as the cinemas have Burmese signs and posters and show mainly Burmese movies, but video parlours show the usual range of violent Western films found now in most third world countries. Consumer goods in the market are largely from Thailand or China, as transport from the rest of Burma is difficult and was until recently mainly by air. Using a new satellite dish, Rangoon TV and radio are broadcast very clearly; many Thai AM radio stations including the hill tribe radio can also be received, as well as the usual range of shortwave offerings.

In summary, the majority language of Kengtung is Khyn, but Lahu and Akha are also widespread, and Burmese is used in a variety of official domains as well as by the military whose presence is substantial. Chinese and standard
Shan are also present, and contact with Thai is rapidly increasing. The economy is also developing rapidly, with a substantial Chinese presence in many trading activities; mainly the long-established Yunnanese families, among the main beneficiaries of the opening to China and Thailand. In mid-January the Governor of Chiangrai and a large group of officials and others made a heavily publicized trip to Kengtung, with a view to expanding this connection. The truces with most of the ethnic rebels of the Shan State appear to be holding, and so tourists should be relatively safe from most depredations other than those of Myanmar Travel and Tours. Thai travel agents already have started organizing overland group tours into this and other areas of Burma; and there are rumours of private backpackers' hotels opening in Kengtung.

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**ISSUE PAPER** BURMA: 'CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT'

Chao-Tzang Yawnghwe

(1) The Constructive Engagement policy of Thailand and ASEAN states vis-a-vis the SLORC junta in Burma stems basically from the goodwill of these governments for the people of Burma.

(2) Underlying this policy are 4 major assumptions concerning the situation in, and the politics of Burma. These are:

(a) that only the SLORC (and the military) can 'hold the country together'. Or conversely, that without the control asserted by the SLORC (and the military), Burma would be 'Balkanized', and thus greatly destabilized.

(b) that there is no other alternative to the SLORC because the military (the Tatmadaw) is the best organized and most cohesive body. The adjunct to this assumption is that Nobel Laureate Daw Aungsan Suu-kyi is not a viable alternative. That is, she is too inexperienced, and Burma's problems are too complex for her.

(c) that the SLORC represents the force of orderly change (and stable transition), and is further an agent of economic development/growth which, in time, would result in the further opening of the political process (or system) and to incremental liberalization in all spheres of life.

(d) that the SLORC can affect a process of national reconciliation, thus ending the long civil war situation, and as well, the downward spiral of Burma's economy.

(3) Although the goodwill and concerns of neighbouring governments (ASEAN states especially) is appreciated, there is a need to recognize that there is also a reality which is greater than the fact of power (as held by the SLORC). That is, although the SLORC holds power in its hand and is undoubtedly capable of holding on to power for quite some time by its use of brute force and system of terror, this reality of power is eclipsed by a greater reality. The greater reality is that which concerns the viability of Burma as a 'nation-state'. In other words, is Burma, as presently constituted (and globally recognized as such), a viable national entity?

Judging from the over 30-40 years of resistance of most non-ethnic Burmese formations and groups to the rule (and policies) from Rangoon, there is very little reason to pronounce that Burma is viable as a 'nation-state'. Burma's viability as a 'nation-state' has been further compromised by the inability of its military rulers to come up with a unity formula acceptable to important non-ethnic Burmese elites/leaders, and is exacerbated by widespread (and deliberate) atrocities perpetrated by military units in the non-ethnic Burmese areas.

The cardinal question which begs a clear answer is: Is it productive for Burma's neighbours to hold on to the notion, given clear evidence to the contrary, that Burma is viable as a 'nation-state'? Is it in any way fruitful or productive for neighbouring governments to encourage the Burmese military to 'hold the country together', and to help it to hold on to what essentially a collection of colonial possessions?

Colonialism in any form is, in this century, not productive, and is moreover counter-productive for both the possessors and the colonialized. The root of Burma's economic decline and subsequent economic decay can be traced directly to the colonial arrangements and system of rule practiced by the Burmese military (dominated by ethnic Burmese).
(4) The question to be squarely faced by neighbouring governments (and ASEAN states), given the unviability of Burma as a 'nation-state', is: What is wrong with the breakup or 'Balkanization' of Burma? Is 'holding together' an unviable 'nation-state' at so much cost in human suffering and economic ruin (and chronic political upheaval/instability) worth the effort for both Burma's neighbours and the people of Burma?

(5) Putting aside emotional considerations and the fear that the breakup of Burma would create a 'Yugoslav' scenario, it is worthwhile nonetheless to consider the positive economic and political potentials of Burma without its 'frontier areas'-cum-colonial possessions.

Burma Proper, i.e., Burma without its troublesome and rebellious frontier 'possessions', constitutes in, and by itself, a very viable national and economic unit. It is rich in natural resources, fertile, and endowed with a sufficient population mass and skilled human resources and human capital to enable it to join the ranks of S.E. Asian NICs within a decade or so.

True, the loss of its rebellious 'possessions' may deprive Burma Proper of much of its potential 'natural wealth and resources'. But it must be kept in mind that the perceived 'natural resources' of the frontier 'possessions' may be more of a fable than a fact because there has been no systematic survey or exploration (or more importantly, feasibility study) carried out.

Also, economic development or growth, as shown by the Japanese, Taiwanese, and the Singaporean examples, is not dependent in any way on the abundance of natural resources. What is more important is population density, skilled human capital, a healthy investment environment, infrastructures, the entrepreneurial spirit, etc., with which Burma Proper is more than adequately endowed but which it may be rapidly losing because of extended military rule (or to be precise, misrule and mismanagement since 1962).

In other words, Burma Proper (i.e., Burma without its rebellious 'possessions') constitutes a more viable political-economic-social entity than as it is presently constituted and 'held together' by military force and by a 'government' (the SLORC junta) which has been clearly rejected by the ethnic Burmese themselves.

(6) The recognition of the unviability of Burma as a 'nation-state' (as presently constituted) raises the question of what does the global community and regional governments should do with Burma's rebellious frontier 'possessions', i.e., the Rakhine, Chin, Kachin, Shan (Syam), Karenni, Karen, and Mon states.

The most rational and economically viable solution to this problem is to permit them to decide for themselves to which neighbouring, larger national formations they wish to be associated with.

Given this choice, it is most probable that many of them would opt for some kind of association with Burma proper (but on a more equitable and autonomous basis). This preference has been expressed by both the NDF (Nationalities Democratic Front) and the DAB (Democratic Alliance of Burma), the major opposition groups. However, some may opt for some kind of association with national formations other than Burma. For example, the Chin state might choose to be associated with Mizoram (under some kind of arrangement with New Delhi).

The Shan (Syam) state may choose to be associated with Thailand due to historical, ethnic, cultural, and most importantly, geo-economic links and affinities. The Kachin state would probably choose association with Burma Proper (but under new terms of association), or it may opt for association with the Jingpaw-Dai region of Yunnan (after satisfactory arrangement with Beijing). However, if neighbouring governments, especially ASEAN states, are a party to the realignment of Burma and assist in the formation of a new Burma, it is most probable that almost all former frontier 'possessions' would choose to be associated with Burma Proper. In this way, Burma's neighbours could contribute to reintegrating Burma as a viable 'nation-state'.

The important point to keep in mind is that the breakup of Burma (as currently constituted) can be handled/managed in a most beneficial and peaceful manner, i.e. that it need not lead to a 'Yugoslavia'. Likewise, the integration of Burma (in a more viable/stable form) could be affected in a more constructive manner, once the unviability of Burma (in its present incarnation) is recognized, and if this greater reality is faced squarely.
(7) With the collapse of hostile power blocs, the growing trend toward regional economic-market groupings, and with the further integration of the global economy, and associated globalization of production, investment structures and market infrastructures, the 'Balkanization' of Burma need not be viewed gloomily/negatively as a breakup of a nation-state. Rather, it can be viewed positively as a restructuring and rationalization of an unstable, unviable national formation, or better still, as a first step in the reintegration of Burma.

With the kind of revolutionary changes in the global/regional/national economic structures and economic-oriented political alignment which the world is now undergoing, it does not make much much economic or rational sense to uphold an outdated, grossly wasteful, inefficient form of rule (i.e., colonialism, under the guise of 'holding together' a 'nation-state').

(8) The fear, unexpressed but nonetheless deeply felt by many countries and governments, that 'Balkanization' in Burma will lead to a similar process elsewhere (via the 'demonstration effect') is, rationally, quite groundless. The above fear is indeed without foundation because governments other than Burma (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, which have ethnic problems) have succeeded in defusing ethnic tensions, via the recognition of, and accommodation with, not only the reality of ethnic pluralism, but with other forms of pluralism as well.

In Burma, there exists a threat of 'Balkanization', and a strong trend in this direction precisely because the ethnic Burmese military has failed (and absolutely refused) to recognize the reality of ethnic and other forms of pluralism.

(9) The main message I wish to convey here is that the main obstacle, an important conceptual one to resolving Burma's problems is the entrenched notion of Burma as being a viable 'nation-state' (as presently constituted).

This entrenched preconception (or conviction) constitutes a mental/conceptual logjam, which has prevented the flow of new ideas, new solutions, new options/alternatives, new leadership/leadership styles, etc., from emerging inside Burma. Once this mental/conceptual logjam is removed and a more realistic assessment of the viability or unviability of Burma as a nation-state is made, solutions to the grave legitimacy/transition crisis which currently confronts Burma become less intractable, the field of policy alternatives and strategies becomes wider.

Without the clearing of this mental/conceptual logjam, it is only natural that one should be stuck with a false dilemma this being, that the SLORC is bad, but what comes after SLORC could be many times worse.

It is from this false dilemma that flows unconstructive and overly pessimistic policies which, in effect, supports the SLORC-dominated status quo. It is this false dilemma and unreasonable fear (of 'Balkanization') which prevent neighbouring governments (especially the ASEAN states) from being optimistic about changes in Burma.

Changes cannot be prevented. And changes in Burma will be positive if the need for change is recognized by neighbouring governments.

Burma's new leaders are obviously committed to real changes. They are in favour of new policies and new political/economic openings more than the SLORC is. Moreover, Burma's new leaders (Daw Aungsan Suu-kyi and democratic opposition leaders) are more open, more receptive to friendly advice and suggestions than the SLORC is. And, more importantly, they also recognize, unlike the SLORC the trajectory of change which has transformed not only S.E. Asia, but the whole world as well. In short, Burma's new leaders will cooperate more openly and deal more closely with the ASEAN and other neighbouring states.

As such, neighbouring governments should seriously re-think and re-shape the Constructive Engagement policy so that it will be really be constructive.

March 1993.

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EXTRACTS FROM A PERSONAL STATEMENT BY KHON MAR KO
PAN REGARDING THE SLORC'S NATIONAL CONVENTION

The writer is a member of the Kayan National Unity Democracy Party and elected MP for Pay Khon Township, Shan State. He was a delegate to the first session of the National Convention in January 1993, but fled to Manerplaw rather than return for the second session in February.

April 5, 1993

Although it was a very clear fact that the National Convention being organized and led by such a notorious military junta could only be a deception, as a publicly elected representative I felt that it was my personal responsibility to attend and observe the Convention. So I attended the so-called National Convention meetings held in Rangoon 9-11 January, 1993.

The SLORC selected 702 representatives to attend the Convention but it never even published or publicized a list of names of these representatives. Instead, the SLORC divided us into 8 groups, and only provided lists of names and credentials within each group. Anyone who studied the composition of all 8 groups and considered their credentials would see clearly that this Convention is nothing but a show and a fraud.

A) The SLORC's choice of representatives from political parties

Only 10 of the 93 parties which contested the 1990 election are still legal according to the SLORC, and they only remain legal because the SLORC wants the international community to believe that they have a multi-party system. Most of these 10 parties are still legal because they have allied themselves with the SLORC's National Unity Party (NUP). Because these parties are willing to obey the SLORC, each party is allowed 5 representatives to the National Convention.

B) Elected representatives from the 1990 elections

Out of 702 delegates to the SLORC convention, there are only 120 representatives who were elected in 1990. Furthermore, the SLORC has made it clear that none of these elected representatives are authorized to speak on behalf of the ethnic nationalities; instead this will be done by unelected people whom the SLORC has appointed as 'ethnic nationality representatives'. The National League for Democracy (NLD) was only allowed to send 92 delegates, only one third of all the elected NLD members who have not yet been disqualified or imprisoned. Most of these 92 were selected by Rangoon NLD Chairman U Aung Shwe, under pressure from the SLORC. U Aung Shwe is a former Brigadier and one of only 2 NLD Central Committee members from election time who have not yet been imprisoned. The current NLD Central Committee in Rangoon also expelled Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from the party due to SLORC pressure in 1991.

Most of the elected NLD representatives chosen by U Aung Shwe and the central committee have been opposed and rejected by the NLD in their own townships. Documents exist to prove this, in the form of letters of protest from the township NLD to NLD in Rangoon.

C) Other representatives

The SLORC claims that the other representatives are of 6 types:

- representatives of ethnic nationals
- representatives of peasants and cultivators
- representatives of intellectuals and technicians
- representatives of civil servants
- other invited elite representatives

Over 530 of the delegates are classified in the above groups. Most of these are SLORC's selected people. They represent no political party in particular.
The representatives are lodged in barracks as though they were students in a training course. All delegates have been issued a book entitled 'Rules and Regulations for the National Convention'. The first chapter lists the six aims of the National Convention, the most significant of which is the establishment of a leadership role for the Army in future national politics. The second chapter instructs delegates on duties of the chairmen and how they will be representatives. The fourth chapter lays down rules on how to hold discussions. Chapter 5 lays down prohibitions on the actions of delegates, and Chapter 6 lists actions which can be taken against delegates who break any rules. It is stated very clearly that all existing state laws, orders and decrees also apply to the delegates, thereby forbidding them from making any statement which could be called criticism of the military or a threat to national security.

I myself have no wish to participate in the SLORC's National Convention and to be remembered by history as a traitor. I also do not want to have any part in drafting a Constitution which will only provide fuel to keep a fascist military junta in power in our country. I have therefore come here to join hands with the other elected representatives who have formed the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) in order to help our people get rid of the yoke of fascist militarism. I hereby appeal most earnestly to all my brother representatives not to be the criminals and traitors of History, but rather to come and join hands with us.

SLORC RESTRICTIONS ON DELEGATES TO THE NATIONAL CONVENTION

The following are translated excerpts from the booklet 'Discipline, Rules and Regulations for the National Convention', distributed by the SLORC to all delegates to the current National Convention in Rangoon.

Chapter 1 - Aims of the National Convention

In drafting a sustainable and strong Constitution for the state, all discussions should be based on and fall within the framework of the following Aims:

   a) To prevent disintegration of the Union
   b) To sustain ethnic unity
   c) To protect national sovereignty
   d) To develop a genuine multi-party system
   e) To promote and develop freedom, equality and LOKAPALA DHARMA
   f) To establish a participatory and leadership role for the Armed Forces in the future national politics of Burma.

Chapter 2 - Duties and responsibilities of the Chairmen and Representatives to the National Convention

Representatives to attend the National Convention:

By prescription of the National Convention Council, the following are entitled to attend the National Convention meetings:

   a) Representatives from political parties
   b) Elected representatives from the last general election
   c) Representatives of the ethnic minorities
   d) Representatives of the peasants and cultivators
   e) Representatives of the workers
   f) Representatives of the intellectuals and technicians
   g) Representatives of the civil servants
   h) Other elite representatives as invited

Duties and responsibilities of representatives

   a) All existing State laws, orders and directives must be obeyed by the representatives.
f) The confidentiality of the National Convention must be maintained.
g) All duties and responsibilities given to representatives by the Chairman should be fulfilled completely.

Duties and responsibilities of Chairmen

... 
d) If a National Convention representative's behaviour is not according to the discipline and regulations of the National Convention, the Chairman concerned will give him warning. If he does not heed the warning the Chairman should expel him from the meeting, and if necessary consider further action. The Chairman concerned should put the case before the council of Chairmen.

Chapter 3 - Meeting Places and Times

Fifty percent attendance is sufficient for each meeting to be declared a legal one.

Chapter 4 - Rules for Discussions

(Section 24)

a) Representatives must not use any words that may damage loyalty to the State
b) Representatives must not use any words which contribute to subversion of the Union, disrupt unity of the Ethnic Peoples, or subvert National Sovereignty.
c) Nothing should be said or discussed which is in the interests of people or organisations which are not within the law.

...

No representative should exaggerate his own importance or that of his organisation by saying things detrimental to the dignity of other individuals or organisations.

(Section 29)

...

b) Representatives must submit a written account of their planned discussions to their respective Chairman.
c) Subjects for the agenda within each group can be discussed within that Group.
d) No subject which has not been agreed upon within a group can be presented to the National Convention.

...

j) A representative to the National Convention should read only his written discussions which have been sent in advance to the group Chairman for approval. He should not discuss any matter which has not been included in his paper. Should he do so, his discussion will not be recorded.

(Page 26)

...

k) Walkouts, individually or in groups, and any other shows of protest, are not allowed.

Chapter 5 - Prohibitions

a) To lobby or influence other representatives is prohibited.
c) No one should disturb either the representatives or the security guards in exercising their duties.

d) Wearing badges of any kind or trying to distribute leaflets or propaganda in any disguise are prohibited.

e) No paper or leaflets of any sort which have not been approved by the National Convention working committee are allowed to be brought in to either lodging or meeting places.

f) Subjects listed as confidential at the national Convention must not be revealed or taken outside in any form.

Chapter 6 - Suspension of National Convention representatives

All laws, orders and directives of the State and of the National Convention must be upheld. Any representative failing to do so shall be suspended from the meeting.

If a representative fails to attend a meeting for two consecutive days, the Committee will decide whether he should be ousted from the meeting.

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THE EMERGING MEKONG CORRIDOR : A NOTE ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS (TO MAY 1993)

E.C.Chapman1 and Peter Hinton2

In a recent issue of the Newsletter we wrote of the vigorous enterprise being shown by prefectural and county administrations in Yunnan, in establishing local industries and fostering cross-border trade with Myanmar, Laos and, less directly, with northern Thailand (Chapman, Hinton and Tan 1992). Our observations were based on field experience in Lancang Jiang (Mekong River) counties of western Yunnan in the early months of 1992. A year later, in January 1993, the Mekong Corridor suddenly came much closer to reality, exciting immense interest in the towns of northern Thailand (notably Chiangrai) in the prospects for expansion of tourism and trade with Xishuangbanna and Simao prefectures and the further expansion of Thailand's trade northwards from Mae Sai.

Our objective here is to identify the main steps taken (to May 1993) by Yunnan Province and Thailand, towards the opening of the Mekong transport corridor between Chiangrai and Jinghong; and secondly, looking beyond the imminent expansion of tourism, to take account of some likely consequences which may help to reshape the economic geography of mainland south-east Asia, in this decade and the next.

New roads and long distance shipping on the Mekong River.

In mid-January 1993 Governor Kamron Booncherd of Chiangrai made an official visit to Kengtung by road, for discussions about the 258-km road link between Mae Sai/Tachilek, Kengtung and Daluo, the Chinese border town in Xishuangbanna Prefecture. The road had already been improved significantly after 1989 by the Burmese Public Works Department under the Border Areas Development Program, but was announced in the Bangkok press as 'part of Thailand's strategic plan to open the Golden Triangle for joint trade and tourism' (Bangkok Post, 21 January 1993). This statement and much of the subsequent public attention within Thailand to the prospects for increased trade and tourism, gave little or no attention to the efforts of Yunnan officials and agencies in the previous 2-3 years, or to the broader question as to why Yunnan Province is now looking to expand its links southwards, through the Mekong corridor to Chiangrai and beyond.

The changes now beginning are made more dramatic because of the tight closure of China's borders with Burma (Myanmar), Laos and Vietnam during most of the past 50 years. From 1949 until 1984 the border with Myanmar was closed to cross-border trade and for most travellers. For similar reasons, under the broad heading of national security, Thailand and Myanmar closed their border more tightly in the 1960s and 1970s; and the eastern Shan State was in the grip of civil war until 1989. In 1993 the area between Daluo and Kengtung is still under the control of a detachment of Wa soldiers, claiming to belong to the united Wa State Army and charging fees from travellers, with the tacit agreement of the Myanmar government (Bangkok Post, 26 April 1993). These obstacles to cross-border movement
over several decades greatly reduced the traditional movements of traders, hill communities and lowland villagers through the Thai-Yunnan borderlands (including Tai family members moving between Xishuangbanna and northern Thailand), but as conditions improved in the late 1980s Thai consumer goods flooded northwards and there has been a strong southward movement of Shan and Chinese girls, to work in brothels.

The formal opening of the Mekong corridor began in 1989 and 1990, without much fanfare, on the river rather than roads, and as a demonstration of official Chinese and Yunnan provincial interest in tourism and trade. After a first success in May 1990, a flotilla of five barge-type vessels successfully negotiated rapids and the hazards of submerged rocks upstream from Chiang Saen, travelling as an official mission from Jinghong to Vientiane and return in October 1990. As another expression of Kunming's initiative, in 1989 the Governor of Yunnan Province visited Thailand and Myanmar, and signed an agreement for the opening of department stores and the marketing of Chinese goods in Myanmar (Far Eastern Economic Review, 21 December 1989).

A short chronology of recent events and announcements relating to planned transport developments, at the end of this note, helps to emphasize the leading role of Yunnan and particular prefectures, notably Xishuangbanna and Simao. Clearly, Yunnan pioneered the use of the Mekong between Jinghong, Chiang Saen, Chiang Khong, Luang Prabang and Vientiane for cargo and passengers; Yunnan official agencies have sought to promote traffic on the river and to supervise the handling of road freight across northern Laos; and thirdly, China has provided US$2 million in loan funds for 'rehabilitation' of the Luang Nam Tha-Ban Houei Sai road which it built in the 1970s (Lao People's Democratic Republic, 1991). In contrast, Thailand's interests in improving tourism and trade through the Mekong corridor were not publicized before 1993, and most of the early action has involved individual firms, tourist operators and the Chamber of Commerce in Chiangrai. In addition there have been many meetings between officials from Yunnan and their counterparts in Thailand, including officials from the Tourist Authority of Thailand.

For the most part, the actual improvements to main roads through northern Laos, and between Tachilek and Daluo, are yet to be realized. But in the wake of recent discussions and announcements - and the Chinese commitment to improve the road from Ban Houei Sai to the Yunnan border - there seems little doubt that by 1995 or 1996 there will be a bitumen-sealed highway between Tachilek and Daluo, a regular boat service on the river (2 days?) from Jinghong to Chiang Saen-Chiang Khong (extending to Luang Prabang and Vientiane) and an improved road from Yunnan through Luang Nam Tha to the Mekong. Despite the expected improvements using China's loan funds, the Luang Nam Tha-Ban Houei Sai road (194 km) still required nineteen hours of treacherous driving in 1993 (Business Times, 29 April 1993).

The opening of southern China's 'back door' still has far to go, but recent events and plans prompt questions as to why Yunnan Province has been so active in the past few years and why successive Thai governments were relatively inactive. We endeavoured to answer the first question previously (Chapman, Hinton and Tan 1992): the later economic reforms in China, in and after 1984, have given prefectures and counties more responsibility and financial autonomy, leading in turn to important incentives for county and prefecture-level managers to foster enterprises which will generate revenue, using whatever comparative advantage they may have, or may claim to have. Simao Prefecture's 'drive to the Mekong' at Ban Houei Sai is a good example, made more remarkable by the recent announcement of port facilities on the Lancang Jiang (Mekong) in Simao (Lloyd's List, 6 May 1993). The second question is not so simply answered: Thailand's most obvious potential benefits from the Mekong corridor are west of the Mekong and through trade and tourism with Xishuangbanna, rather than in northern Laos; and in 1991-92 Thailand was racked by the uncertainties of five administrations in less than two years.

Prospects in the Growth Quadrangle?

When Thailand's Foreign Minister, Mr Prasong Soonsiri, visited Beijing in late February 1993, he advocated four-country cooperation in the development of a new growth area in the Thai-Yunnan borderlands. His proposal quickly received strong support in Beijing and Kunming, but was greeted with only restrained support in Vientiane and Yangon. The notion of a 'growth quadrangle' (sii liam sethakit) immediately captured popular attention in Thailand, but its actual dimensions and growth characteristics remain for the future.

Clearly, the tourist industry in Chiangrai and Jinghong anticipates a bonanza. In 1992 Xishuangbanna received 1-2
million 'local (Chinese) tourists and 13,000 foreigners' (Bangkok Post 1 March 1993). The 'foreigners' component is likely to grow exponentially, if adequate accommodation and other services can be provided: air services between Bangkok and Kunming increased from one-weekly in 1990 to five-weekly in early 1993 and eight-weekly in April-May 1993. But we need to recognize that tourism can fluctuate greatly, seasonally and annually, and as a factor in economic development the tourist industry is highly selective: it affects some places much more than others, even when they are close; and while it may make a few hotel-owners and transport operators wealthy, the tourist industry often has rather small employment-multiplier effects.

Looking beyond tourism, the potential for trade and investment in south-west China is enormous. Yunnan has long been one of China's poorest provinces, but in 1992 its growth in GNP was 10 per cent (Yunnan People's Broadcasting Station, 20 January 1993). In some respects production in Yunnan is hampered by its distance from a port for export, so we may well see Yunnan exports (for example, minerals) being shipped to Vientiane and then by rail to Laem Chabang for export overseas. But the main prospects for growth are probably in import trade, in the market for Thai manufactures, particularly consumer goods. In 1990 Yunnan's population was 36 million. If Sichuan Province is added - immediately north and linked by improving transport services with Kunming - the market accessible via the Mekong corridor is approximately 150 million and, as the middle class grows, there is an expanding market for consumer goods of all kinds, whether manufactured in Thailand, or at new plants in Yunnan. As one early example, pre-dating the recent proposals for road construction, President Foods (Bangkok) announced in October 1992 that it planned to open an 'instant noodle' factory in Kunming, as part of a planned expansion program in Thailand and China: the chief executive noted that the Kunming plant would enjoy lower costs of production and 'will be equipped with old machinery exported from Thailand' (Business Times, 19 October 1992). The 'development of underdevelopment' by multinational corporations continues!

Labour costs in Yunnan confer an immense comparative advantage in the 1990s. Currently the wages for unskilled and semi-skilled workers in Yunnan are about one-fifth to one-third those in Thailand, and lower again if the real value of the US dollar is taken into account in the conversion. Thai-owned enterprises, such as President Foods, or Thai-Japanese joint ventures based in Thailand, stand to gain substantially from lower production costs for goods manufactured in Yunnan, whether for the local market or for export, including export to Thailand. But Yunnan will also be a major market for Thai technology, investment and financial services, so that we may see Thailand fulfilling a role comparable to that of Hong Kong in the recent development of Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

Finally, and on another front entirely, Yunnan's power resources will become increasingly important in the next 10-20 years. Manwan Dam, the first mainstream dam on the Lancang Jiang-Mekong throughout its length, will begin power generation in mid-1994. When fully operational, Manwan's hydro-electric power stations will have an installed capacity of 1.0 million kW; the much larger Xiaowan Dam, upstream from Manwan, is expected to begin construction in 1996; and a third hydro-electric power complex of 1.5 million kW capacity is expected to be built near Jinghong, to supply the Southeast Asian market. In all, 14 power stations are now planned for the Lancang Jiang within Yunnan Province (Xinhua News Agency Bulletin, 29 August 1992). The market is virtually guaranteed: the Secretary-General of Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) reported recently that Thailand 'already has to rely on its neighbours for up to 60 per cent of its energy supply' and by the year 2000 its dependency will be as high as 70 per cent (Bangkok Post, 15 May 1993).

Conclusion

Many of the prospects mentioned here go far beyond the immediate expansion of tourism and trade between northern Thailand and Yunnan, and clearly many additional effects of the Mekong corridor (for example on cities, on the environment in Myanmar and Laos, and on rural economies in the 'growth quadrangle') will deserve future study. It seems certain, however that the imminent opening of the Mekong corridor is the beginning of a major economic transformation in south-west China and in south-east Asia.

Appendix:

The 'Mekong Corridor': a chronology of recent events and announcements, September 1989-April 1993

September, 1989: The Governor of Yunnan Province visited Thailand and Burma; agreements were signed for increased
border trade, to open department stores in particular cities etc. (Far Eastern Economic Review, 21 December 1989). April, 1990: Yunnan opened Jinghong Airport, allowing direct access to Xishuangbanna Prefecture by air from Kunming.

May and October, 1990: Chinese shallow-draft vessels (motorized barges) successfully negotiated rapids on the Mekong and the hazards of submerged rocks upstream from Chiang Saen, at low water (1 vessel, May) and high-water levels (5 vessels, October); in October the 5 cargo vessels of about 60 tons sailed to Vientiane and return to Jinghong (Mekong News, 1991).

?, 1991 China agreed to provide loan funds (US$200 million) for 'rehabilitation' of the road from Luang Nam Tha to Ban Houei Sai; the work was scheduled for 1992 and 1993 (Lao Peoples Democratic Republic, 1991).

September, 1992 : China tourist vessel, 'Panna' (120 tons) carrying 60 officials and tourist agents sailed Jinghong-Chiang Saen (385 km) in 2 1/2 days (Bangkok Post, 17 September 1992). In a separate initiative Simao Prefecture made an agreement with Bokeo Province, Laos (centred on Ban Houei Sai) for the construction of 2 warehouses, for checking imports to Yunnan; the agreement also covered arrangements for Simao 'cargo ships' using Lao territorial waters on the Mekong River (Lao National Radio in Lao, 7 October 1992).

January, 1993 : The Governor of Chiangrai Province and a large official party travelled by road, Tachilek-Kengtung, for discussions of tourist promotion, trade and improvement of the road from Mae Sai/Tachilek to Daluo (Bangkok Post, 21 January 1993).

February, 1993: Thai Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri visited Beijing and Yunnan: 'discussions on road links and navigation in the upper (sic) reaches of the Mekong River were cited as a main objective (Bangkok Post, 1 March 1993). March, 1993: China announced its intention to introduce services on the Mekong from Yunnan to Vientiane, and to improve the main road from Xishuangbanna to Chiangrai Province. Rock blasting would begin, to allow all-year river transport on the Mekong. Laos was urged to build a bridge at Ban Houei Sai (Bangkok Post, 6 April 1993).

April, 1993: Two private firms in Thailand (one based in Maehongson and one based in Chiangrai) were reported to be negotiating with the Myanmar government in Yangon, for construction of the Tachilek-Kengtung highway. By late April it was reported that Suk-Ua-Anan Company had 'won agreement in principle from the Burmese Government to build-operate-transfer ... the highway, on a limited-term, revenue-sharing basis'. The road was expected to cost Baht 326 million (US$13 million), to take 18 months to complete, and to be followed by construction of the Kengtung-Daluo highway (Bangkok Post, 27 April 1993).

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MON DEMOGRAPHY: SOME RECENT DATA

Christian Bauer

Since the publication of demographic data concerning the Mon in this Newsletter (1990, 9, pp. 267) and in Gehan Wijeyewardenes Ethnic groups (Singapore, 1991, pp.1447), new data have become available this year: The German language bulletin of the 'Institut fr Asienkunde', Hamburg, Sdostasien aktuell reproduces in its January 1993 issue (pp. 2831, an erratum appears in the March 1993 issue: the Shan figure should read 2.2) new population figures for Burma specified by ethnic groups; a word of caution is of course necessary, given the source (and the source itself states that figures are approximate only): the figures are culled from the Working Peoples Daily, Rangoon, and were presented during a speech by Chief/Supreme Justice (?) U Aung Toe on January 11, 1993. I have yet to check whether these figures are simply cooked up using earlier British census figures referred to in my Ethnic groups essay and projected onto new overall population figures for the states and divisions of Burma.

Whatever one is to make of these figures, I think they should be taken into account in any discussion on the demography of ethnic groups in Burma. I will reproduce here the figures for the Mon; how these figures were arrived at I do not know: do we deal here with (native) speaker population, or people who simply identified themselves as belonging to a particular group? On what grounds? To what extent are they bilingual? Are the parents of those who identified themselves as Burman bilingual?

In my discussion on Mon demographic data earlier I came to the conclusion that the figure for a Mon speaking population today (1990s) was about a million; this seems to be validated by the recent official figures. More interesting is the percentage of speaker communities in certain states, in our case, Rangoon, Pegu and Tenasserim divisions as well as Mon and Karen states (see Table 1).

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Mon Population</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rangoon Div.</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>4,790,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pegu Div.</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>4,410,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenasserim Div.</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>1,120,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon State</td>
<td>780,000</td>
<td>2,060,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen State</td>
<td>220,000</td>
<td>1,260,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,060,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>13,640,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to see that Mon and Burmese account for 2/3 of the population of Mon state with each group just below the 40% mark (an increasing Burmanization to be expected); whereas the Karen population of Mon state accounts for ca. 15% (Pa-O included here), the Mon population of Karen state is significantly larger, at just under 20%.

For Mon and Karen states we obtain the following:

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mon State</th>
<th>Karen State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
According to this new government source, the Mon in Burma comprise 2.53% of the total population, being the third largest non-Burman group, after the Karen and Shan.

One of the questions to be looked at is whether Mon in Karen State is gaining (at the expense of Karen?) as Burmese seems to be gaining at the expense of Mon in Mon State (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Mon State

Figure 2. Karen State

TRANSPORT NETWORKS IN THE MIDDLE MEKONG REGION OF THAILAND AND LAOS

Andrew Walker

Introduction

Transport systems offer considerable colour and movement in the ethnography of Southeast Asia, and, I am sure of many other regions. Writers regularly refer to rural villages transformed by their incorporation into modern transport networks; traders are observed carrying their goods to and from markets on boats, rafts, bicycles, motor-bikes, trucks, buses and trains; ownership of transport resources is often reported as being associated with economic and political power; by contrast other writers describe landless peasants travelling to urban areas to pursue marginal and informal careers as taxi drivers; historical accounts are dotted with caravan traders conducting intensive local, regional and international trade; and recently increasing attention has been directed towards the relationship between transport networks and the transmission of HIV/AIDS.

However, despite the frequent background noise of transport in many accounts, there is very little anthropological analysis of the transport systems themselves. With few exceptions, the transport system is treated as an infrastructural given, and as an aspect of infrastructure that warrants little of the attention received by other systems similarly concerned with 'movement' or 'flow' such as marketing and irrigation.

Transport systems are taken much more seriously in the work of human geographers. This is a body of literature that I see as being important in my research, but I am yet to subject it to serious examination. To briefly highlight two features: firstly, I see transport geography as being valuable in its detailed analysis of systems and networks (even if these networks sometimes seem to be peopled by vehicles rather than by people) and, secondly, transport geography's focus on the role of the state, arising out of its close relationship with issues of public policy, is useful.

One of my basic aims, then, is to develop an approach to the analysis of transport systems that draws on the work of transport geographers and others who have been concerned with transport systems such as town planners and transport economists, whilst at the same time maintaining a distinctly anthropological approach. The location of my research will be the middle Mekong region of Thailand and Laos - a region that is witnessing significant expansion in economic activity, international trade and tourism.

The Geographical Context
The Mekong River is one of the great rivers of the world. It rises in Tibet, and 4200 kilometres later flows into the South China Sea in southern Vietnam. En route it traverses Yunnan, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. It forms a short border between Laos and Burma, a shorter border between Laos and parts of Thailand's Northern Region, and a substantial border between Laos and Thailand's Northeastern Region. For the purposes of this study I am concerned with that part of the river lying between the border of Yunnan and Laos in the north and Vientiane/Nong Khai in the south (the site of the Mittaphab bridge which is currently being constructed).

The physical geography of the middle Mekong region is dominated by mountainous terrain, posing particular difficulties for the development of transport systems. The main exceptions to this are the flood plain of the Vientiane region, and the great plain of north-east Thailand extending south from Nong Khai. A number of tributaries, with valley floors of varying sizes, flow into the river and these have provided traditional lines of travel, trade, migration and settlement. Control of access to the tributaries has traditionally been an important strategy in securing economic and political power.

There is enormous variation in population density within the region. Laos as a whole has a population of only 4 million, with approximately 2.3 million living in northern Laos. The most densely settled area in Laos is the Vientiane plain having a population of some 750,000 with a rural population density of only 15 persons per square kilometre. Directly across the river, the Thai province of Nong Khai has a population of 850,000 with a population density of 116 persons per square kilometre (Maunsell SKP 1990).

This demographic contrast is matched by the stark differences between the transport systems on either side of the Mekong. Whilst a program of intensive road upgrading is in place, Laos currently has one of the lowest road densities in Southeast Asia. By contrast, northern and north-east Thailand have amongst the highest road densities in Southeast Asia. Traffic flows reflect the relative development of the transport systems: the road from the Thai city of Udon Thani north to Nong Khai carries in excess of 5000 vehicles per day; by contrast the road between Vientiane and Luang Phrabang (the busiest rural road in Northern Laos) carries only 70 vehicles a day. Further to the north the road between Ban Huay Sai and the Chinese border carries only 10 vehicles per day (Maunsell SKP 1990).

Despite the contrasts between Laos and Thailand it would be wrong to under-play the linkages between these Mekong nations. As Hewison has recently noted as part of his social impact study for the Mittaphab Bridge:

Culturally there is little to distinguish the people on each bank of the river in the project area. As ethnic Lao, their language, habits, festivals, religious beliefs and lifestyles are similar. These aspects are influenced by the rice growing cycle, the river, Buddhism and belief in the spirits (Maunsell SKP 1990, p. F1).

But, to qualify this qualification, it is also important to bear in mind the significant military, political and administrative barriers that have existed between Thailand and Indo-china that are only relatively recently being broken down.

Historical Context

The development of a modern transport infrastructure in north and north-east Thailand is a relatively recent phenomenon, and as I have mentioned, is still in an early stage of development within Laos. To get some idea of the continuing pace of transport development in Thailand I need only quote Hewison's figures to the effect that vehicle registrations in Thailand have increased from roughly 700,000 in 1970 to 8.5 million in 1991 (unpublished source - see Hewison (1992) for figures to 1988).

In this section I want to draw attention to components of the transport system that pre-dated modern developments, and in many cases also appear to pre-date the incorporation of this region into commercial and colonial economic and political systems. This historical record suggests some important themes that may inform an analysis of more contemporary developments.

The largest scale pre-modern forms of transport were provided by caravan traders who used bullocks, mules and horses to conduct regional and long distance trade in a wide variety of commodities. Prominent among the caravan traders were Muslim Chinese who carried silk, metal goods, tea, salt, foodstuffs and opium from Yunnan to Laos and
Thailand and returned with cotton to supply Yunnan's cottage weaving industries and with British manufactured goods from the Burmese port of Moulmein (Hill 1982, pp. 97-118; Breazeale and Smukarn 1988, pp. 4-5; Moerman 1975, pp. 154-146; Izikowitz 1985, pp. 62-63, 148). Shan caravan traders, travelling from Burma, were also active in north Thailand. Moerman's informants in Northern Thailand told him that 'no one packed as many oxen as the Chiangtung people' (Moerman 1975, p. 156). Local Thai were also involved in caravan trading activities. Chusit (1989) writes of peasant farmers in northern Thailand who operated ox-trains providing a distribution network within the north for goods originating from the ports of Bangkok and Moulmein (cf. Moerman 1975).

By contrast with caravan trade there appears to be very little documentation of the extent or nature of river trade on the Mekong or its tributaries. Use of the Mekong for river transport is compromised by rapids, rocks and dramatic changes in the river height between seasons. For vessels of any size, many sections are only navigable when the river rises in the wet season and many tributaries tend to be only navigable at their mouths (Donner 1978, pp. 167-8).

One reference to river transport is found in a study of the Phuan of Northern Laos:

... going to the Mekong, the Phuan climbed two or three days on foot down to the boat landings of the upper Chan, rafted perhaps eight days down to the mouth of the river and as many days up or down the Mekong to the nearest Lao towns (Breazeale and Smukarn 1988, p. 4).

Izikowitz refers to trade moving the other way - of Lao merchants travelling up the Mekong tributaries in canoes to sell to the mountain dwelling Lamet (Izikowitz 1979, p. 54). A hint of river trade on a larger scale is provided by Bowie who refers to 1,000 elephants being used to carry goods from Chiang Mai to Chiang Saen on the Mekong for transshipment, presumably down river by boat, to Luang Phrabang in Laos (Bowie 1992, p. 816).

Porters were also used for local and long distance transport, especially in areas of rugged terrain and for carriage of low bulk, high value items: ivory, gold, spices, rhinoceros horn, etc. (Breazeale and Smukarn 1988, p. 4; Bowie 1992 pp. 808-809).

As I indicated earlier, this brief historical collage suggests a number of themes that are relevant for the research I will be undertaking. Firstly, the historical information about transport and trade prompts some questioning of a strong tradition in Thai historical study that emphasizes the self-contained subsistence nature of the society in the nineteenth century and before (Bowie 1992). While I don't want to enter into this debate here, I feel that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that some analysis of the points of articulation between 'traditional' and 'modern' transport systems may be fruitful, particularly in Laos where the modern network is in the early stages of development.

Secondly, the historical record consistently suggests that control of transport resources and networks is an important source of economic and political power. At a broad level control of transport routes facilitated the extraction/extortion of charges, taxes and protection money (Hill 1982, pp. 108-110). For example, Hong's study of the economic system of nineteenth century Thailand demonstrates a close relationship between transportation and the tax farming system (Hong 1984, Ch. 4). In relation to the operation of transport systems themselves there is considerable evidence that transport activities assisted in the accumulation of capital in other sectors of the economy. Hill, for example, suggests that caravan expeditions generated investment returns for entrepreneurs in Yunnanese market towns. She also documents the economic importance of transport related activities such as horse breeding, ferrying and innkeeping (Hill 1982, pp. 106, 116). Moerman establishes some linkages between involvement in trading activities and relatively higher standards of living amongst peasants in Thailand's north (Moerman 1975, 167-68).

Contemporary Developments

I will now move on to discuss some of the specific developments currently unfolding in the middle Mekong region. My discussion will focus on what might be called the eastern half of this region - in particular the developing linkages between Yunnan, Laos and Thailand - rather than on developments taking place within Burma.

In general terms, I feel that there are two basic movements taking place within the region. Firstly, economic development in Yunnan is encouraging cross border trade into Laos and, through Laos, to Thailand. Some initial documentation of the emerging local trade from the Yunnan side has been provided by Chapman, Hinton and Tan.
(1992) following observations made early last year. China also sees the Mekong region as a corridor to the ports of Thailand for the manufactured goods of Yunnan. At a political level the significance of this local and regional trade is demonstrated by the signing of a border accord between China and Laos settling border disputes and promoting economic cooperation. Similar initiatives in relation to economic cooperation and trade are being developed between China and Thailand, demonstrated by the recent agreement to open a Thai consular office in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan. Secondly, the progressive opening of the Lao economy since 1986 is providing substantial opportunities for investment by Thai businesses, especially those seeking relatively low cost labour and the benefits of a small but expanding consumer and tourist market. Thai investment has made up some 40% of total foreign investment since 1988. Ready opportunities for Thai investment are provided by Lao sales of state assets and relaxation of foreign investment laws. Areas of investment have included banking, hotels, manufacturing, construction and motor vehicle sales. Increased Thai involvement in the natural resources of Laos (forestry products, tin, coal and iron ore) and in heavy industry seems inevitable. Formal and informal trade between the two countries is increasingly dramatically, with a substantial trade imbalance in Thailand's favour. A political and military dimension of this commercial relationship can be seen in the concerted efforts currently being undertaken to resolve border disputes between the two nations and relaxation of controls on the movement of goods and people across the border. The Thai cabinet has also recently endorsed a draft trade and investment agreement with Laos.

Obviously, these political and economic developments have important implications for the development of transport networks within the region. One of the most significant developments is the construction of the Mittaphab Bridge across the Mekong river between Nong Khai and Vientiane. Currently, this is by far the dominant crossing point for trade between Thailand and northern Laos and the bridge, to be opened early next year, will reduce the cost and inconvenience of trade between the two nations and encourage the development of a more extensive and less regulated flow of transport across the border. Thailand is also expanding the north-eastern highway from Khon Kaen to Nong Khai in part to handle increased road transport between Thailand and Laos.

A second major transport development is the ongoing negotiation between the nations of the region to develop high quality road links between Yunnan and Thailand. It seems that most interest is being expressed in two alternative routes - a Burmese route via Kengtung and a route traversing northern Laos from Luang Namtha on the Chinese border to Ban Huay Sai (two important caravan routes from earlier times). While the Lao route poses greater problems in terms of terrain, the Burmese route is compromised by political and military instability. However, news just to hand suggests that agreement is likely for the construction of the Burmese route, with a Thai firm based in Chiang Rai negotiating with the Burmese government for the construction contract. It is also relevant to note that plans are in place for road upgrading throughout Laos as part of the Lao National Transport Plan.

There is also a range of initiatives aimed at improving river transport within the region. China and Laos have entered into agreements on rights of river access, dredging of river routes and the construction of port and associated storage facilities. China appears interested in using the river to transport cargo to the markets and land transport networks of north and north-east Thailand. There is also significant interest in developing river tourism - particularly between Thailand and China.

The Theoretical Context

I will now set out some of the theoretical issues, both within the ethnography of the region, and further afield that are relevant to my research. I should note that, to the extent that I will be considering ethnographic material, my discussion is biased significantly towards Thailand.

One of the issues that I wish to explore in relation to the operation of transport sector is the nature of the interpersonal relationships between transport operators and their employees, customers and regulators and between transport operators themselves. The key theoretical model used to analyse such relationships in the Thai context is the patron-client model. Typically, this model suggests that inequality of status provides the basis for the development of dyadic patron-client relationships between persons at different levels in the status hierarchy. The relationship between the patron and the client is typically described as having a number of distinguishing features. Firstly it is reciprocal: the patron provides access to scarce resources, protection, employment, education, housing and opportunities for upward social mobility in return for which the client provides labour, produce, loyalty and, at certain times I expect, votes.
Secondly, the relationship is described as a whole person or multi-stranded relationship whereby economic, personal, religious and legal ties are blended closely together. Finally, in spite of its multi-stranded nature, the patron-client tie is described as being characterized by a high degree of flexibility - it will continue only as long as it is in the interest of both parties.

In my previous work on this issue (Walker 1983) I challenged the patron-client model with some enthusiasm, suggesting that what was being observed was an ideological idiom that enabled people to live out exploitative relationships in a way that emphasized reciprocity and common interest, obscuring the structural conflict of interest that lay between them. I do not want to explore this argument further here, but I do feel that some analysis of the patron-client idiom will be highly relevant to an understanding of the transport sector. A number of questions are worth exploring.

Firstly, what is the nature of the patron-client idiom in the context of geographically dispersed relationships, characteristic of the transport sector, given the idiom's usual reliance on strong notions of community and regular face to face contact? This spatial theme is one I will return to shortly. Secondly (and this may be just another way of asking the same question), are there differences in the way the patron-client idiom operates in the context of exchange rather than production? Although I don't want to make too rigid a distinction here, I think it may be worth exploring the way in which the idiom operates differently in different economic contexts, rather than blurring many different types of relationships together under a single patron-client heading. Finally, what are the mechanisms whereby 'traditional' idioms based on community and reciprocity, of which the patron-client idiom is one, come to be replaced by more 'modern' idioms based on individualism and freedom?

Another set of theoretical issues that I would like to explore relate to the nature and role of the state. Up until relatively recently the most common characterization of the Thai state was that of a bureaucratic polity - a state system based on a close bureaucratic/military alliance that had few meaningful links with the wider society. In this formulation politics consists largely of changing alignments between the various factions within the military/bureaucratic elite. The counterpart of this characterization of the elite was a non-involved, authority respecting peasantry and a relatively non-existent working or middle class.

In recent years this view of the state has been increasingly challenged. Among English language scholars the work of Kevin Hewison has been prominent. Hewison (1989) has argued that the bureaucratic polity model and related 'dependency' models of the state underestimate the extent to which the Thai state acts in the interests of an indigenous capitalist class. In particular, he documents the emergence of finance capital 'as a significant force in the Thai political economy' (1989, p. 174), a point of particular interest given the rush of Thai banks to establish themselves within Vientiane. Hewison's work gains strong support from Anek (1992), a Thai political scientist who has documented the rise of a wide range of business associations and their role in the formulation of government policy. He also points to the increasing presence in government of politicians with a business (rather than a military/bureaucratic) background. This theoretical embedding of the state more fully within Thai society opens up the potential for more extensive work on the articulations between the state and the business community with a more local focus than the strong Bangkok-centric orientation of most previous studies. There is already evidence that the issues arising out of the rapid development of cross border transport networks will be a key point of articulation between business interests and the state. Anek's study of business associations, for example, refers to the lobbying activities of Chambers of Commerce in the north-east aimed at achieving liberalisation in cross border trade with Laos (1992, pp. 95-96). Recent reports indicate that this lobbying is continuing in the north and north-east with calls for improved transport infrastructure, more border crossing points and deregulation of transport systems. Similar reports are also emerging from Laos.

This discussion of the state provides a jumping off point into the spatial theme that I have alluded earlier in this paper. Rather than attempt to summarize the vast 'spatial' literature here, I would like to suggest a number of ways in which a very broadly defined spatial approach may be useful in my research, particularly in relation to the nature of the state.

Traditionally, and for very good historical reasons, analyses of the Thai state have focused on control of people. Conceptions of the state tend to emphasize its hierarchical nature, documenting a series of unequal interpersonal relationships ascending from the village headman to the centre of power in Bangkok. I would suggest that this approach may lead to some neglect of the way in which the state constitutes itself spatially and territorially. To pursue
a somewhat contrived metaphor, I feel that an approach that views the state as a flat spatial entity, may cast a different light on the role of the state to an approach that views the state as a hierarchical interpersonal entity.

For example, the development of transport systems is an important spatial strategy adopted by the state to extend and maintain its control of peripheral regions. The close relationship between road construction, development and security in north and north-east Thailand is a good example of this. However, there are elements of contradiction in this strategy - while the state seeks to extend and free up access, it also has a strong interest in controlling access - especially at its borders (Ispahani 1989, p. 11). The tension between these two is reflected in the tension between military and commercial interests in relation to the Thai/Lao border. For the Lao state this contradiction is likely to be particularly intense, given that both its peripheral regions and its most populous region and seat of power are likely to become closely integrated into the spatial economies of neighbouring states.

The spatial manifestation of the state could be explored in a number of other ways, all related to the development and functioning of transport networks: How does the state create and control space through the use of regulation? What happens when different systems of regulation come into contact as transport networks develop across borders? What are the various ways in which the state constitutes its border, especially one as porous and historically recent as the Thai/Lao border? What is the physical architecture and symbolism of state authority at the border?

A spatial approach may also be useful in a number of other respects. One aspect of the anthropological discussion of spatial issues is a questioning of the frequently perceived naturalness of the relationship between place, people and culture, especially in this era of refugees, mass migration, internationally flexible production and international mass culture. In this context the anthropological tendency towards the 'spatial incarceration of the native' is increasingly problematic (Malkki 1992, p. 29; see also Gupta and Ferguson 1992). One issue that is being explored in this context is that of people living in border regions. As Gupta and Ferguson have argued:

The fiction of cultures as discrete, object like phenomena occupying discrete spaces becomes implausible for those who inhabit the borderlands. Related to border inhabitants are those who live a life of border crossings - migrant workers, nomads, and members of the transnational business and professional elite. What is 'the culture' of farm workers who spend half a year in Mexico and half a year in the United States (1992, p. 7).

Many questions emerge in the current context. For example: What is it like to be a Thai or a Lao citizen living along the border? What does the border feel like? How are conceptions of border manipulated to people's advantage and disadvantage? What effect does regular border crossing have on the biography formation of transport operators?

More generally, a spatial approach renders problematic an anthropology of people, like transport operators, who are, to quote Malkki, 'chronically mobile' (1992, p. 24). As Malkki (1992) has suggested in her discussion of refugees, the frequently assumed correspondence between place and culture can lead to people who are not rooted in place being denied culture - they are described as pathological, amoral and potentially dangerous. Is it drawing too long a bow to suggest parallels between these observations about portrayal of refugees and the current concern with truck drivers as risk taking, drug and alcohol abusing, and promiscuous and as key agents in the transmission of the HIV virus (cf. Yothin and Pimonpan 1991)?

Research Proposal

In this paper I have explored a number of themes that relate, in varying ways, to the development of transport networks in the middle Mekong region of Thailand and Laos. I will now set out a summary of my research proposal. At this stage in the development of my thinking, my research objectives are:

First, to develop an understanding of the operation of the transport system within the middle Mekong region. This will include quantitative information on numbers of vehicles, capacities and routes, together with information on organizational structures and operating arrangements. I hope to develop an understanding of the differences between these systems on either side of the border and the nature of the developing linkages between the two systems. Second, I hope to explore the nature of social life within the transport system, with particular emphasis on the ways in which this is lived spatially. Here I am concerned both with the creation of individual identity (and particularly the impact of mobility on this) and with the way in which spatially dispersed relationships are created and maintained.
Third, I hope to develop an understanding of the relationship between the state and the transport system. I am particularly interested in the issue of regulation and the way in which different systems of regulation interact across national borders.

Finally, I hope to explore the relationship between the transport system and the wider economy, particularly the role played by transport in generating patterns of economic development. I expect to examine the economic, financial and social linkages between the transport sector and some other sectors such as trading, tourism, or manufacturing. I expect that this will take the form of a specific case study.

At this stage I have not made a decision about the modal focus for my research. Broadly speaking the following transport modes are present in the region: freight and passenger transport by truck and bus; river transport (including cross-river ferries and long distance ferries and barges); and local transport by taxis and samlors. It is likely that the choice of transport mode may not be too rigid if I can focus on a particular transport node where there are linkages between the different components within the system. A river port could offer good opportunities for observing these linkages. The Mittaphab Bridge itself with its associated freight and passenger handling facilities and nearby river port will also offer good opportunities.

At present I am giving consideration to two possible research locations: either Vientiane/Nong Khai or Chiang Khong/Ban Huay Sai on the border between Laos and Thailand's northern region. As I have mentioned Vientiane/Nong Khai is the site of the Mittaphab Bridge, which is due to open at an early stage in my fieldwork. Location here would allow me to assess the initial impact of the bridge on patterns of movement, trade and commercial development. Chiang Khong/Ban Huay Sai is more directly in the line of the emerging trade networks from China to the south. It is also close to the emerging routes through Burma - allowing me to give those developments some attention.

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Chapman, E.C., Peter Hinton and Jingrong Tan 1992.'Cross-border trade between Yunnan and Burma, and the emerging Mekong corridor' Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter 19: 15-19

Chusit Chuchart 1989. 'From peasant to rural trader: the ox-train traders of Northern Thailand, 1855-1955' Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter 7: 2-8


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OBITUARY PROFESSOR ROGER KEESING

Professor Roger Keesing died suddenly in Canada on 13 May. Professor Keesing was Professor of Anthropology in the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University 1974 to 1991. At the time of his death he was in the Department of Anthropology, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec.

Professor Keesing gave much encouragement and support to the Thai-Yunnan Project and the publication of this Newsletter.

His major research was with the Kwaio-speaking people of the Solomons and he has published extensively on them. He also worked in northern India during his time at the ANU. His work is of major importance in modern anthropological theory and in the process of empowerment of oppressed peoples and groups in all societies. His early death is a great loss to the anthropological community.

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Books and other publications


Grant Evans 'Introduction: Asia and the anthropological imagination'; Sandra Bowdler 'Asian origins: archaeology and anthropology'; Amara Praisithratsint 'The linguistic mosaic'; Clark W. Sorensen 'Asian families: domestic group formation'; Clark W. Sorensen 'Ancestors and in-laws: kinship beyond the family'; John Clammer 'Fishermen, forest-eaters, peddlers, peasants, and pastoralists: economic anthropology'; Paul T. Cohen 'Order under heaven: anthropology and the state'; Grant Evans 'Hierarchy and dominance: class, status and caste'; Lian Kwen Fee and Ananda Rajah 'The ethnic mosaic'; Christine Helliwell 'Women in Asia: anthropology and the study of women'; Nicholas Tapp 'Karma and
Anthony R. Walker (ed.) The highland heritage: collected essays on upland north Thailand

Northern Thailand as geo-ethnic mosaic by Anthony R. Walker; Economic systems and ethnic relations by William Y. and Allain Y. Dessaint; Opium: its production and use in a Lahu Nyi village community by Anthony R. Walker; Akha ethno botany by Katherine Bragg; The movement of Lahu hill people towards a lowland life style by Peter Hoare; Basic themes in Akha culture by Paul Lewis; The Mlabri people: social organization and supernatural beliefs by Jesper Trier; Lahu Nyi village officials and their ordination ceremonies by Anthony R. Walker; The religious life of the Yao people: some introductory remarks by Chob Kacha-Ananda; Lisu world view by Alain Y. Dessaint; Exorcising the Jaw and Meh spirits: three Lahu Nyi ritual texts by Anthony R. Walker; Transformations of Buddhism in the religious ideas and practices of a non-Buddhist hill people by Anthony R. Walker.

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Other recent publications of Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography


The Natural History Bulletin of the Siam Society 40, 1992 has two very important articles on the region. We reproduce abstracts of the two articles.


The trade in wildlife meat and parts was surveyed (1) in and around Vientiane, the capital city of Lao P.D.R., (2) in Savannakhet, Southern Laos, (3) along the Thai Lao border from Amphoe Chiang Khan, Loei Province to Amphoe Nam Yun, Ubon Ratchathani Province and (4) in Northeast Thailand. Information on the trade in Attapeu was obtained from Chazee (1990). A detailed study on the wildlife meat trade was made at That Luang Fresh Food Market in Vientiane during January to April and July to October 1991. Wildlife trade in Lao P.D.R. is not for subsistence since wildlife meat is much more expensive than meat from other domestic animals. Wildlife trade around Vientiane and intercountry trade with Thailand pose a threat to wildlife populations in central Lao P.D.R.. The cross-border trade, especially in trophies, with Thailand is also a major threat to wildlife resources in northern Lao P.D.R. The continued demand for wildlife products in China, through Yunnan, has been a major factor causing depletion of wildlife resources in northern Lao P.D.R. A pangolin tannery at Ban Don Du near Vientiane produces pangolin leather for export on a large scale, which will jeopardize pangolin populations in the future.

The following immediate actions are recommended: (1) wildlife meat trade at the That Luang Fresh Food...
Market should be discouraged and limited to certain species, (2) the pangolin tannery at Ban Don Du and its supply and distribution network should be closed down, (3) attempts should be made both by Thailand Lao P.D.R. to discourage cross-border wildlife trade. Authorities at Champassak Province should be informed so that the trade in trophies at Ban Mai opposite Amphoe Khong Chiam, Ubon Ratchathani Province, can be stopped, (4) the commercial trade in wildlife meat and products should be recognized as a major threat to to wildlife resources in Lao P.D.R.

Wildlife trade is international and the demand is impossible to control. Lessons from Thailand have indicated the consequences of failing to recognize this factor, which eventually encouraged a large network of illegal wildlife trade. Non-systematic control of commercial wildlife cropping and legal possession of wildlife by the private sector are jeopardizing wildlife conservation and management in both Thailand and Lao P.D.R.


In common with those of other SE Asian nations, Thailand's forests have been depleted rapidly since the 19th Century. The following briefly assesses why Thai forests were important and where they were situated. It then reviews how this resource was depleted over the period 1870-1937. In recording this depletion, tables are presented for selected periods which give a breakdown of timber species exported by weight/volume, value and destination. These tables are accompanied by information and commentaries on the political, ecological and economic factors affecting production and exports during particular periods. A final overview assesses the effectiveness of certain forest policies, the role of the British in the exploitation process, the relative value of the resource over time, and its role in more modern developments within Thailand.

Military Powers Encyclopedia (available in French or English) Volume 6 (1991) covers Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

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Trevor Ling 'Introduction'; Tin Maung Maung Than 'Sangha reforms and renewal of Sasana in Myanmar: historical trends and contemporary practice'; Peter A. Jackson 'Re-interpreting the Traiphum Phra Ruang: political functions of Buddhist symbolism in contemporary Thailand'; Somboon Sukamran 'Buddhism, political authority, and legitimacy in Thailand and Cambodia'; Trevor Ling 'Singapore: Buddhist development in a secular society'.


Available from DD Books, 106/1 Sukhumvit 53, Bangkok 10110. Tel. 2590035. Fax 2592376.

Illustrated, 140 pages. ISBN 974-88747-8-8 This book... deals extensively with the architecture of the Dai peoples of South China. It includes sections dealing with Dai customs, ceremonies and beliefs, animistic as well as Buddhist... with physical descriptions of houses, villages and monasteries [from the cover notes].

Distributed by DK Book House, PO Box 2916, Bangkok. Tel. 662 245 5586. Fax. 662 247 1033.

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Correspondence

Kevin Heppner writes from Manerplaw

(7 April):

Meanwhile, the military situation here is still pretty quiet although there's still a good chance of one more minor SLORC offensive before the rains in six weeks, just trying to solidify their position for next year's certain big offensive. Right now they are working very hard to strengthen their supply lines for this. This year's Border Area Development north and west of here includes taking entire village populations as slaves for rotating five-day shifts clear cutting all the bush for three miles on both sides of main army supply roads, in order to hold on to Saw Hta, the Karen village they took up north in their October/November '92 offensive. They're keeping the thousands of Shan porters they rounded up from central Shan State, and forcing them to build a road down to Saw Hta from Pah Saung in southern Karenni (Kayah) State - a road for military supplies for the next offensive. Three or four bodies of these porters are floating down the Salween each week. Last week's group included one man who had been decapitated and another corpse with erect penis (a sign of death by strangulation). Most of the corpses still have rope around them A big part of the reason the SLORC wants to advance further down that part of the Salween River is that they've planned to build a huge dam there - no doubt to be partly funded by the UN.

So the SLORC is still very active, even without a major offensive. It seems they've declared this the 'Year of the Civilian'. In areas they control to the west of here, they've sent in 77 and 99 Divisions specially to terrorize the population. Even the troops have been telling the villagers, 'Central Command said 24 Battalion couldn't handle these villagers, so we've been sent in'. In Thaton district in particular they've been on the rampage. I can't keep up with the reports of rape, murder, torture and pillage, women porters, executions - you name it. They're clearing out entire regions of civilians, moving them to roads and Army camps as buffers against attack. The Border Area Development is increasingly aiming at a mediaeval-style feudal system, with the Army as nobles and the civilians as serfs. Each Army camp is obtaining its own resident slave population. This is also aimed at establishing an easily accessible supply of porters for next year's offensive - the troops are increasingly complaining about how all the villagers run away from them; but once they are all locked in a nicely guarded camp they can't. In their Bangkok propaganda release for 'Independence Day' on Jan. 4, SLORC wrote under BORDER AREA DEVELOPMENT - 'Primarily, Myanmar's aim is to establish KEY VILLAGES where infrastructure will be developed. Villagers from the surrounding villages will voluntarily move to the KEY VILLAGES'. Sure - just like 800,000 farmers (the SLORC's own figure) 'voluntarily' built the Aung Ban-Pin Loung railway in Shan State. And it doesn't say what happens if the villagers don't 'volunteer' to move to the camps. But I've got SLORC orders that say what happens - 'Anyone still found around these villages after the deadline will be shot, and all property confiscated'. It seems most of Karen State is to be declared a Free Fire Zone by next dry season, and most of the population is to be used as porters in the coming offensive which will attempt to crush Manerplaw just imagine, a whole new area 'secured' for UN Aid Projects, and increased Career Opportunities for the UN Agency people concerned. Unfortunately, the civilian population would rather have Freedom than UN Aid - so they are gearing up to fight like hell against the enemy. Please pray for the people to win.

PS. An elected Kayan MP recently arrived here too - he's a refugee from the SLORC's National Convention. He was a delegate to the first session, but he fled here rather than return for the 2nd session because the rules on delegates were so restrictive he felt sure he'd end up in prison. I've enclosed more on that. [These documents are reprinted in this Newsletter.]
PPS. Kachin sources say there's very little chance of any agreement coming from their current talks with SLORC. They're insisting any ceasefire must be nationwide - which the SLORC, of course, refuses. I noticed Ananda Rajah's paper [No. 19: 7-15] tended to imply that SLORC is more willing to talk than the opposition - this can appear true from a distance, but in reality it is the other way around. It is usually the SLORC who refuses to talk, particularly in a neutral environment. And if they really want 'conflict management' why no a nationwide ceasefire? The NDF would accept this, and then real talks could maybe begin.

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Professor Baas Terwiel writes that his department - Abteilung Thailand, Burma und Indochina im Seminar fr Sprache und Kultur Chinas, Universitt Hamburg- teaches Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian and Lao. Thai and Vietnamese may be studied as full subjects up to PhD level. The departmental library consists mainly of books in the vernacular mainland Southeast Asian languages. The regular members of the department are: Prof. Barend Jan Terwiel, Chair (Thai history, ethnography of Tai peoples, Ahom literature); Prof. Vu Duy-Tu (Vietnamese language and culture); Patcharee Kaspear-Sickermann (Lektorin Thai); Dr Christian Bauer (Hochschulassistent, mainland Southeast Asian linguistics, Mon); Dr Heike Lschmann (Cambodian); Kinkeeo Xayapheth; Mrs Ursula Frauen (Secretary).

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From Bryan Bruns:

I have found the Thai-Yunnan Newsletter interesting and with information which is not available from other sources. I am writing to ask if there is an e-mail version of the Thai-Yunnan Newsletter, or whether the editors have plans to develop an electronic version of the Newsletter. While there are probably many subscribers who would still prefer a paper version, I suspect that there are also a substantial number who would find an electronic version convenient, as well as reducing use of paper and clutter, and providing a medium where it is easier to search for information in older issues.

P.S. Chiang Mai University's Internet connection has only recently been set up and I would be interested if you have any suggestions regarding how researchers at the university may be able to take advantage of the resources offered by the Internet.

[B.Bruns contact details, next page]

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[Information on computer access is reproduced below. There is some delay in placing the last few numbers on the network, but this will be done shortly. We are also in the process of making most Newsletter articles available through WAIS.]

Computer Access to Thai-Yunnan Project Data

Materials available through INTERNET, WAIS and TELNET

The Thai-Yunnan Project Bibliography
The Richard Davis Card Index
The Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter

These three items are listed under 'Thai-Yunnan Project' and are available to Internet users 24 hours a day via the anonymous ftp or fetch procedure. The first two items are also available on the WAIS (Wide Area Information Servers). These documents form part of COOMBSPAPERS DATA BANK the ANONYMOUS FTP ARCHIVE on the node coombs.anu.edu.au.

COOMBSPAPERS are also available via TELNET from one of the ARCHIE world-wide databases of files kept by the anonymous FTP sites (e.g. archie.au in Australia, archie.ans.net in USA (NY), archie.mcgill.ca in Canada or
The COOMBSPAPERS files are fully mirrored (on daily basis) by wuarchive.wustle.edu site located at Washington University, St Louis, USA [sub-directory/doc/coombspapers].

They are also fully mirrored (on weekly basis) by ftp.uu.net site located at the US national gateway, California, USA [sub-directory /doc/coombspapers].

Also fully mirrored (on irregular basis) by capella.eetech.mcgill.ca site located at McGill University, Montreal, Canada [sub-directory /wuarchive/doc/coombspapers].

Also fully mirrored (on weekly basis) by samba.acs.unc.edu site located at the University of North Carolina, USA [sub-directory pub/wuarchive/doc.coombspapers].

These arrangements allow people in North America and Europe to fetch copies of articles without having to traverse the overloaded trans-Pacific link.

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The Newsletter is edited in the Community Health Research and Training Unit, Department of General Practice, University of Western Australia and transferred to The Australian National University by electronic mail for printing and distribution.

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Contributions, preferably on disk, may also be mailed direct to the Editor at: CHRTU, Department of General Practice, UWA, Nedlands, Western Australia 6009. E-mail sbamber@uniwa.uwa.edu.au

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1 Grant Evans is Reader in Anthropology at the University of Hong Kong. He is author of Lao Peasants Under Socialism (Yale 1990).

1 La Trobe University.

1 Faculty of Asian Studies, ANU.

2 Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney.

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1 This is an edited version of a paper presented as a pre-fieldwork seminar in the Graduate Program in Anthropology at the Australian National University. It is based on preliminary research and is intended as a general overview of some of the issues relating to my research. I would appreciate any comments or ideas that readers may have.

2 Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200.
3 Material in this section draws heavily on a range of press reports from Reuters Textline service. For reasons of space I have not cited individual articles.

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