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LIVING

WITH

FOUR

POLITIES

MYANMAR
Shan State

**Busarin
Lertchavalitsakul**

Laihka

Loilem

Taunggyi

Möng Nai

Möng Pan

Pawn River

*Salween River
(Nan Kong)*

Mawk Mai

Langkhur

Homöng

Loi Tai Laeng

*Kayah State
(Karenni)*

Möng Maü

4015

Pangmapha

Loikaw

1285

1095

Pai

*Kayin State
(Karen)*

Mae Hong Son

108

Chiang Mai

States and Cross-border Flows in the Myanmar-Thailand Borderland

Mae La Noi

Mae Sariang

THAILAND

Living with Four Polities:

States and Cross-border Flows in the Myanmar-Thailand Borderland

Busarin Lertchavalitsakul

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**Living with Four Polities:
States and Cross-border Flows in the Myanmar-Thailand Borderland**

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex
ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel
op woensdag 13 december 2017 te 16.00 uur
door Busarin Lertchavalitsakul
geboren te Bangkok, Thailand

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The deaths of three people recall the birth of this dissertation.

Uncle L asked me, ‘Who are you? What are you doing here?’ while demanding I show him my ID card. That was the first day of my fieldwork at the Nam Phueng border checkpoint. While staying in the village to collect data for several months, I rode in his truck to Mae Hong Son’s center many times. Starting his day before dawn, he was the earliest-rising driver around. He always believed that my presence in his village would somehow contribute to the development of border affairs. Uncle L died of heart attack before this work was completed. ...Uncle C dropped me off one day at a specific spot not far from the border checkpoint where I would be out-of-view of the Thai soldiers. ‘Just continue walking. The other car will pick you up on the other side’ was the last sentence he spoke to me during his life. ...Granny M was from Mōng Küng in Shan State. Before I managed to actually travel to Shan State, she persistently encouraged me to visit her hometown—a place where she never returned herself. These three persons were among the members of border communities on both sides of the border to whom I am extremely grateful. I also thank Ajan Ge (Prasert Pradit) and Ajan Aung Tun for the Shan language lessons I took during my fieldwork and their help with Shan and Burmese languages for this research. This dissertation could not have contained the life stories, narratives, and other information without the help, support, and participation of my informants.

What have you found in the field that you want to tell the world?

Willem van Schendel asked me this question shortly after I returned to Amsterdam in the Fall of 2013. It was a stunning question and reflected the state of writing my thesis over the past five years. I had so many things to share with the world, but not all could be contained in this dissertation. Over the years, I have gradually learned from him how to selectively present the cores of what I have discovered during my fieldwork. I know that I am very fortunate to be academically supervised by him. Throughout the years of smiles and tears, I am thankful for his understanding, acceptance, and assistance that have come at exactly the right times and moments. Tina Harris has also been a great supporter, both academically and morally. I learned tremendously from her dissertation-turned-book on how to prepare a quality manuscript. My dissertation is certainly not at her level, but her style illuminated my way of my struggling to write a dissertation. Olga Sooudi came to be involved later, but it was during a critical state. With her hard work and encouragement, my work has been greatly advised and improved to reach finality. Thank you all very much for your excellent supervision.

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LIST OF ABBREATIONS

AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BPP	Border Patrol Police
CO	Certificate of Origin (for teak and timber in Burma)
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
ISOC	Internal Security Operation Command
KIA	Kachin Independent Army
KIO	Kachin Independent Organization
KKY	<i>Ke Kye Ye</i> (Burmese state's people militia force established in the Shan State during General Ne Win's rise to power)
NRC	National Registration Card (Burmese identification card)
SSA	Shan State Army
SSA-N	Shan State Army-North
SSA-S	Shan State Army-South
SSS	South Shan State
SURA	Shan United Revolution Army
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
UWSA	United Wa State Army
WNA	Wa National Army

NOTES ON THE USE OF LANGUAGES AND NAMES

Languages and transliteration

This dissertation includes terms and phrases from three languages other than English: Thai, Shan, and Myanmar (Burmese). All non-English terms appearing throughout this work have been transliterated into English. Each transliterated term is followed by a bracketed note regarding from which language the term originates, and with an English translation of the term, the first instance it appears in the text (for example, *mae ga* [Shan: female trader], *myao ne* [Myanmar: township], and *talat phra* [Thai: Buddha image market]). The Royal Thai General System of Transcription has been used for the transliteration of Shan and Thai. Shan location names are spelled similarly to as they appear in James George Scott and John Percy Hardiman's *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States*, which comprised two parts and five volumes published between 1899 and 1901. The transliterated spellings of Myanmar-language terms and places follow common use in various sources, particularly academic literature and news media.

Demonyms and ethnicity

Following the change of the country's official name from Burma to Myanmar in 1989, the Burmese government also changed the country's demonym from 'Burmese' to 'Myanmar'; for instance, 'Myanmar people' and 'Myanmar language' instead of 'Burmese people' and 'Burmese language'. In this dissertation, I use 'Burmese' as a demonym and adjective attached with nouns, such as 'Burmese government' and 'Burmese soldiers'.

The use of the term 'Burmese', however, needs to be problematized. While the term can be used to refer broadly to all people from the country of Burma to refer to their nationality, it is also used to specifically denote those who are Burman, the country's largest ethnic group. Therefore, the terms 'Burmese' and 'Burman' can lead to confusion, as they are often used interchangeably, i.e., an ethnic Kachin person born in Burma can be referred to as 'Burmese' although he is not 'Burman'. 'Burmese' is also widely used by scholars to refer to the language spoken by the ethnic Burman, and which is the national language of Burma (Smith, 1991, p. 29n, cited in Keyes, 1994, p. 5). Throughout this dissertation, I use the term 'Burmese' to refer to the nationality of all people who are from the country of Burma, and 'Burman' when the subject is specifically the Burman ethnic group.

‘Shan’ and ‘Tai’ (Dai)

This dissertation focuses on the Shan ethnic group, members of which primarily reside in the present-day Shan State of Myanmar. The Shan are the second most populous ethnic group in Burma following the Burman. The use of the term ‘Shan’ in relation to ‘Tai’ or ‘Dai’ and ‘Tai Yai’ in this research and other materials deserves to be conceptualized as the history of the Shan is relatively complex and requires careful elaboration. The Shan are classified as one of the Tai-speaking ethnic groups who settled throughout mainland Southeast Asia, primarily in what is today southwestern China (Yunnan province), northeastern India (Assam), northern Thailand, northern Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and eastern Burma (Keyes, 1995, p. 136; Sai Aung Tun, 2009, p. 3). These Tai-speaking groups can be categorized broadly as ‘Tai’, although they have also been sub-categorized with different names reflecting variations in traditional dress, dental distinctions, tattoos, and the geographical features of where they have dwelt, such as streams, rivers, lakes, forests, plains, hills, mountains, and valleys (Sai Aung Tun, 2009, p. 3).

With broad groupings based on geographical criteria, the Tai are classified into six groups: first, the Tai Yai or Tai Long, living mainly in central and southern Shan State, some parts of Kayah (Karenni) State, and northwestern Thailand; second, the Tai Nue or Tai Mao, who have settled along the borders of Burma and China in southern Kachin State, northern Shan State, and southwestern China, including the south bank of the Shweli River; third, the Tai Khün, who settled primarily in today’s eastern Shan State, especially in the town of Kengtung (Chiang Tung); fourth, the Tai Khamti, who dwell in northern Kachin State and northeastern India; fifth, the Tai Lue or Tai Yong, scattered throughout Xishuangbanna (Sipsongpanna) in China’s Yunnan province, northwestern Laos, and northern Thailand; and sixth, the Tai Yuan or Khon Muang, referring to the northern Thai people mainly living in northern Thailand (Murakami, 2002, pp. 82–83, cited in Yasuda, 2008, p. 4).

The term ‘Shan’ was first introduced during the British colonial period in the 19th century by academic missionaries who traveled to the northern areas of Shan State, the areas along the headwaters of the Irrawaddy River in Kachin State, the Shweli River in Sagaing Division, and the Shan plateau, in order to research and produce ethnographic works on local peoples living in mentioned areas. Western usage of the term ‘Shan’ derived from the Burmese-language term to refer to the group of people who shared socio-cultural similarities with the ‘Siam’ or ‘Syam’ (Siamese) people of the Kingdom of Siam, as Thailand was previously known (Lintner, 1999 [1994], p. 52; Seekins, 2006, p. 403). The Tai people who lived in southeastern areas of Burma were commonly exposed to the culture of the Siam Kingdom and tended to lose aspects of their Shan identity (Saimong Mangrai, 1965, pp. 8–9). This led to the Burman calling

this group ‘Shan’ after replacing the sound of ‘m’ with ‘n’ according to the Burmese pronunciation of the ending consonant (Lintner, 1999 [1994], p. 52). The missionaries then broadly defined these people as ‘Shan’, including all groups who used any form of the Tai language (Smerchai, 2003, pp. 1–2).

Names of places

Burma (ဗမာ) and *Myanmar* (မြန်မာ)

Amidst the growing interest in Burma/Myanmar studies, researchers have tended to express diminishing concern with regard to the politics of the use of the terms ‘Burma’ and ‘Myanmar’. In this dissertation, I use both names to refer to the country in an attempt to not demonstrate support for any particular political ideology. I use ‘Burma’ to refer to the country during the period prior to the 1990s, while ‘Myanmar’ is used as the name while discussing the country in the 1990s and after, following the Burmese military government’s change of the country’s name in 1989. In addition, I keep the terms as they appear in the original sources from which I cite. In the same vein, for other locations in the country that have two names, notably the former capital Rangoon or Yangon, I use the names according to the division of time periods described earlier.

Shan State and Shan States

This dissertation deals with various locales in several of present-day Myanmar’s administrative divisions. Shan State is situated in the northeast of the country, and consists of three regions—northern Shan State, southern Shan State, and eastern Shan State. The current administration of Shan State is detailed in the Constitution of 2008, and was implemented in August 2014, as follows: northern Shan State comprises 24 townships in the seven districts of Lashio, Kyaukme, Muse, Laukkai, Möng Mit, Hopang, and Markmang. Southern Shan State is composed of 21 townships in the three districts of Taunggyi, Loilem, and Langkhur. Eastern Shan State contains ten townships under the three districts of Kengtung, Möng Hhat, and Tachilek (S.H.A.N., 2014).

Shan State today does not represent a traditional political system. In the pre-colonial period, Shan State was a polity comprising 48 *möng*. A *möng* was an independent polity ruled by a *saopha* [Shan: prince, *sambwa* in Burmese]. Each *möng* enjoyed its own autonomy, although each was not equally powerful due to the difference of land occupation and size of the population

(Sao Sanda, 2008, pp. 23–24). During the pre-British occupation of Burma, *saopha* of powerful *möng* occasionally fought those of the weaker in order to consolidate their power through domination, with the populace of smaller *möng* tending to change their allegiance to the rulers of stronger *möng* (Sai Aung Tun, 2009, chapter 5). Nowadays, Shan State is called *Möng Tai* by Shan people, with *möng* being translated into English as ‘state’ or ‘kingdom’ (Sao Sanda, 2008, p. 18). In 1885, the British colonial power gradually reorganized *Möng Tai*, incorporating smaller states into larger ones to form what was known as the ‘Shan States’, or the Federation of Shan States (Sao Sanda, 2008, pp. 15–16, 18; Sai Aung Tun, 2009, chapter 9). Accordingly, *saopha* of larger states received higher salaries extracted from revenues compared to those of the smaller states (Adams, 2000, p. 11). In October 1922, the Shan states were divided into the two administrative regions of Northern Shan State and Southern Shan State as part of the Burma Frontier Services (Collis, 1938, p. 25; Sai Aung Tun, 2009, pp. 167–174), which was geographically separated from ‘Burma Proper’. After 1948, the eastern region was separated from the southern region due to the political dominance of the Kengtung, Kokang, Wa states (Sai Aung Tun, 2009, pp. 342–343). In 1959, the entirety of the Shan states were re-administered into roughly 30 states (Adams, 2000, p. 10; Sao Sanda, 2008, p. 24). Several townships in present-day Shan State are former autonomous *möng*, previously different states.

In this dissertation, I use the term ‘Shan States’ to refer to the pattern of polity during British colonization, whereas ‘Shan State’ is used to refer to the current form of polity.

Place names in the colonial era and in the current period

Apart from the country’s name, the Burmese government also changed the names of many locations from those used during the British colonial period. In this dissertation, I use the colonial names cited in Scott and Hardiman’s *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States*. To avoid confusion with the contemporary use of place names, I also add Burmese names by the references of several sources due to inconsistency in spelling and Romanization of names. Readers can always consult these names in the section *Guide to Shan, Burmese and Thai Place Names* with their original characters, for example, the name of Möng Nai (မိုင်းနဲ) in Shan, which is Mo-Ne (မိုင်းနဲ) in Burmese, and Muang Nai (เมืองนาย) in Thai; and Mawk Mai (မုခ်မိ) in Shan, which is Mau-me (မောက်မယ်) in Burmese, and Mawk Mai (หมอกใหม่) in Thai.

Place names in pseudonym

Locations and places where primary research was conducted for this dissertation appear as pseudonyms in accordance with the ethics of best practices for research on sensitive topics. Such pseudonymous place names will be noted in parentheses, for example, Nam Phueng village (pseudonym), the first instance they appear.

Names of persons

Informants' names

In order to protect each person's identity, I anonymize the names of persons who served as informants for this research, especially traders and migrants.

Citing Thai-language materials

I use last names to refer to Thai authors whose materials have been published in English, while I cite their first names while discussing materials they published in Thai. For example, I cite 'Jirattikorn' (last name) from her English articles, while I refer to her as 'Amporn' (first name) while citing her Thai works.

Currencies and exchange rates

This dissertation studies cross-border mobility in which two main currencies, Burmese kyat (MMK) and Thai baht (THB), are used in transaction. I write Burmese kyat and Thai baht in the first place in text, where after I shorten them into kyat and baht, respectively. According to the exchange rate posted by XE Currency (www.xe.com) on December 28, 2016, 1 US dollar is approximately equivalent to 1,370 Burmese kyat, and to 36 Thai baht.

Key Events in Relation to the Shan State-Thailand Borderland

1886	Colonization of the Shan States by the British
1948	Burma gains independence from the British
1949-1950	Invasion by Kuomintang Army in the Shan State
1962-1988	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ne Win institutes policy known as 'Burmese Way to Socialism'• Underground trade across Burma-Thailand and Burma-China borders flourishes
1967	Burmese military under President Ne Win creates <i>Ke Kwe Ye</i> (KKY) units made up of local militia groups assigned to fight against and balance the power of ethnic rebellion movements
1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kuomintang establishes base on the eastern bank of Salween River (Thanlwin in Burmese)• Numerous conflicts between ethnic rebel groups throughout country• Long-distance traders from upper southern Shan State relocate to the Thai border
1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Logging concessions dealt between ethnic insurgent groups and Thai businessmen, facilitating construction of roads and transportation of large-size vehicles• Thai people, especially from Thailand's northern region, flow to Thai frontiers, drawn by lucrative logging business and working as drivers for logging firms and transporters of goods and passengers, including settlers of border villages• Flows of long-distance traders who travel on foot and with mules traversing between Shan State's interiors and Mae Hong Son to serve demand created by Khun Sa and his soldiers
~1983	Decline and end of cross-border trade in Buddha images antiquities due to exhausted supply on Shan State side
1989	Burmese regime begins ceasefire negotiations with ethnic armed groups
1992	Thai government bans logging concessions in Thailand
~1993	Road improvements sponsored by influential cattle traders to facilitate transport of large animals
1996 (January)	Khun Sa surrenders himself to Burma Army

- 1996 (July)
- Thailand's Mae Hong Son government officially opens Nam Phueng border checkpoint
 - Removal of rangers and Border Police Patrol, and decrease of military units
 - Rearrangement of Thai state agencies
 - Thai government allows transportation of goods within two- kilometer radius of border checkpoint
- ~1998
- Order prohibits border crossers from Shan State from traveling more than 15 kilometers into Thailand's interior
- ~1999
- Order for construction of station at the Rong Haeng settlement to control people's movement
 - Order restricts people holding Burmese identification cards from traveling into Thai territory more than 12 kilometers, and then to 30 kilometers or to Mae Hong Son's center
- ~2000 (January)
- Local Thai government establishes official customs office at the border
- ~2001
- Thai government closes border checkpoint temporarily
- 2002-2003
- Burma Army attempts to block transport of goods from Thailand to Shan State through the Nam Phueng Checkpoint
- 2011 (December)
- SSA-S agrees to ceasefire pact with the Burma Army
- 2014 (May)
- Coup d'état in Thailand results in the closure of border for several weeks and the suspension of cross-border activities