

## **Border Governing and the Landscapes of Motions along Thailand- Myanmar Frontiers**

Convenor: Jakkrit Sangkhamanee (Chulalongkorn University, Thailand) jakkrit.mail@gmail.com

Thailand-Myanmar frontiers are currently experiencing cross-border economic booming, mass migration, infrastructural connectivity as well as a multiplicity of regulations. Within the “landscapes of motions,” on the one hand, the issue of how state regulating regimes shape border practices is pivotal in understanding the persisting roles of the state in controlling such movements. On the other hand, there are spaces at the state’s political margins where local, trans-border activities oftentimes influence, if not determine, state policies and practices through motions, which are ungovernable.

This panel brings together conceptual and ethnographic studies from Thailand-Myanmar frontiers to depict how cross-border activities challenge and shape state regulating regimes. Through case studies of the dynamics of governing refugee camps, cultural materials and their mobility, the multiplicity of categories in border regulation, the networks of commodity and consumption, as well as the displacement and replacement of cultures, the panel suggests that borders, as a landscape of motions, allow us to rethink not only on state relations but also the wider contributions of transborder motions that shape the region. Understanding the changing landscape of border activities will enhance our knowledge of how Southeast Asia as a region is continuously formed based on multiple internal borders of the region.

### **Panel**

Chair: Jakkrit Sangkhamanee, (Chulalongkorn University)

- 1. Conceptualising Southeast Asian Borders and Boundaries: The Contrivance and Multiplication of Issue, Concept, and Methodology**  
Jakkrit Sangkhamanee (Chulalongkorn University, Thailand)
- 2. Dynamics of Governing Refugee Camp along the Thailand-Burma borderlands**  
Jiraporn Laocharoenwong (University of Amsterdam, Netherlands)
- 3. Cross-border Mobilities and Bordering Practices on the Thailand-Myanmar Frontier**  
Prasert Rangkla (Thammasat University, Thailand)
- 4. Border Trade, Consumption, and Flexible Regulations in Thailand-Myanmar Border**  
Niti Pawakapan (Chulalongkorn University, Thailand)

## **5. From Border to Cosmopolis: The Narrative of Karenni Displaced Persons and the Quest of Culture**

Sorayut AiemUeaYut (Chiang Mai University, Thailand)

### **Abstracts**

#### **1. Conceptualising Southeast Asian Borders and Boundaries: The Contrivance and Multiplication of Issue, Concept, and Methodology**

Jakkrit Sangkhamanee (Chulalongkorn University, Thailand)

This paper will tackle gaps in existing border and boundary studies. On the one hand, it tries to examine the development and presence of Southeast Asian borderlands focusing on multi- sites of national borders that expand to cover distinctive nationalities and ecological terrains. The aim is to shed light on some of the key debates, approaches and methodologies in the studies of Southeast Asian state-based borderlands. On the other hand, it seeks to identify the multiplication of boundaries persisting in our present society. This is to take a critical review of the processes of social division employing different sets of social criteria (such as ethnicity, nationality, knowledge and belief, political ideology, and economic status) and apparatus (such as map, media, bureaucratic system, people identification, and migration control) and how these processes create consequences for people with different status and backgrounds. The study will be contextualised as part of the debate over the intricate notion of 'boundary'.

#### **2. Dynamics of Governing Refugee Camp along the Thailand-Burma borderlands**

Jiraporn Laocharoenwong (University of Amsterdam, Netherlands)

Refugee camps are often seen as spaces of exception. However, the Karen refugee camps along the Thailand-Burma border, existing for more than 30 years, show characteristics of self-governing at camp management level. Owing to an absence of Thai government presence at the beginning period of setting up the camps, refugees started to organize and manage the camps by themselves. The Thai government controls mobility and security of the camp population while maintaining a low involvement on the camp organization. The Thai state, although not obliged to be responsible for those refugees from Burma, allows them to stay and organize themselves for a long period of time. Why is this so, and how does it manage and govern the camps and its inhabitants? How do refugees maintain their autonomy in management of the camp?

To understand the governing regime of refugee camps, this paper explores power and other relationships among Thai government, humanitarian agencies, ethno-political/armed groups and refugees, both inside and outside of the camp realm. It argues that camp governing and organization comes forth from an intricate dynamics of governing at local levels, the state, and refugees themselves. With this, the paper attempts to contribute to a partial understanding of power and border regimes in the Southeast Asia region.

### **3. Cross-border Mobilities and Bordering Practices on the Thailand-Myanmar Frontier**

Prasert Rangkla (Thammasat University, Thailand)

This article explores the way nation-state's borders are enacted through practices and representation in the movement of people and commodities. Rather than seeing borders as lines bounding and separating nation-states, I approach them as social practices and 'performative acts of translation' (Belcher et al 2015). Bordering practices produce categories of mobility and instantiate partitions that consequently create social relations and trace fields of possibilities. A number of river piers in the Thai northwestern border with Myanmar are sites where people and material objects are on the move. These mobilities imply the process of borders' inscribing, erasing and redrawing as they become social practices embodied by heterogeneous bordering mechanisms. The Thai border regime encodes these activities as 'smuggling' in order to capture undisciplined movement and to create new partitions. The state's bordering practice acts upon the others' possible actions. Inevitably, it generates border struggles that are discordant to the categories encoded by the state. The paper argues that multifarious bordering practices and translation regimes constitutively reinforce nation-state borders in spite of the claim of a borderless world.

### **4. Border Trade, Consumption, and Flexible Regulations on the Thailand-Myanmar Border**

Niti Pawakapan (Chulalongkorn University, Thailand)

The paper focuses on the growing border trade and consumption in Thailand's northwestern border area. Although there have been movements across the border in this region since the nineteenth century, those movements were not regulated until recently due to political and security reasons. Border trade was often a risky activity. Because of Thailand's economic growth in the last two decades, border trade in this area has increased rather steadily. The growing border trade also brings a new consumption to the local people who live on both sides of the border. This paper will, firstly, demonstrate how border trade is connected to the trading and goods networks beyond the border, and secondly, how it is related to the new consumption. It will argue that government officials at the local level on both sides of the border do not always follow the state regulations. They are not reluctant to facilitate the border trade, which not only generates income and employment, but also brings supplies to the locals.

### **5. From Border to Cosmopolis: The Narrative of Karenni Displaced Persons and the Quest of Culture**

Sorayut AiemUeaYut (Chiang Mai University, Thailand)

This article examines the problem of Thai cultural homogeneity through an investigation of Karenni displaced persons who escaped to Chiang Mai from a temporary shelter on the Thailand - Burma border. All of them, the hope seekers, are voluntary displaced persons even though they are granted temporary asylum in the camps on the basis of humanitarian reasons. They use social media to stay connected to their multi-ethnic networks in the host country (Burma) and to find strategies to survive in Thailand as illegal migrant workers. Living

alongside mainstream Thai culture, they redefine themselves as they become one of many faces in the cosmopolis.

Their narrative expresses the cosmopolitan identity that challenges the notion of homogeneity on three points, which I refer to as the imaginary of displaced culture. Firstly, their mobilities in friction reflect the networks across borders which formulate their flexible lives. Secondly, they possess multiple cultural symbolic competencies. They are multilingual and use skills of code-switching as a strategy in different situations. Finally, they value other cultural forms and embrace the others by using technology as a tool for establishing familiarity with other places, materials and people.