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COMPROMISED MARGIN: MIGRATION AND AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION
IN THE NORTHEASTERN THAI – LAO BORDERLANDS

Soimart Rungmanee

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Human Geography)

School of Geosciences, Faculty of Science
University of Sydney, Australia

February 2014
Statement of Originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes. I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Soimart Rungmanee

Soimart Rungmanee
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Abstract

Agrarian transformation, a process associated with changes in the relations of production, occurs when capitalism penetrates or is adopted into modes of agricultural production and labour. It has been classically approached through the prism of class and rural differentiation in peasant communities. Previous studies have tended to primarily focus on core agricultural areas rather than other geographical settings.

This thesis investigates how the socio-cultural and geographic contexts of the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands, specifically the flexibility of border crossing and language and cultural similarities, shape the current agrarian transformation in particular patterns of migration. It argues that the pathway of agrarian transformation in the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands is not a linear de-agrarianisation process. Although villagers are generally involved in a wide range of economic activities, many are engaged in farming at the same time. Labour shortages in the Thai borderlands have been resolved by transborder rural-to-rural migration.

Ethnographic fieldwork and surveys have been conducted in three communities. The first two are cross-border communities located along the Mekong River, one in Mukdahan Province in northeastern Thailand, and the others in Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR. The third community is in the hinterland of Laos, approximately 50 km from the border, and is also in Savannakhet Province.

The findings of this thesis are presented in three parts. The first part identifies the spatial contexts of northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands that allow the scope of compromise in state-village relations in the borderlands. The second part exposes migration patterns of villagers in the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands and their long-distance migration to Bangkok and its vicinities. The third part reveals that a certain type of agriculture persisted in the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands and a hinterland village of Laos in contrast to the linear theory of
de-agrarianisation. It argues that the ability of the Thai farmers to absorb cheap Lao workers supported ongoing agriculture and led to new agrarian relations between the Thai farmers and the Lao workers. In Laos, migration and remittance support agricultural households to invest in small businesses, build new houses, or buy new lands, all of which provide upward mobility for the Lao villagers.

Those findings contribute to theoretical debates about the state power, state-village relations in the borderlands, the non-linear and overlapping nature of rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban migration, and agrarian transformation in Southeast Asia. Taken together, the thesis provides a better understanding on the process of agrarian transformation, and suggests that, because this transformation often follow a non-linear path, it casts doubt on simple notions of de-agrarianisation.
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### Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMC</td>
<td>Asian Migrant Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAAC</td>
<td>Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDD</td>
<td>Community Development Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChATSEA</td>
<td>Challenge of Agrarian Transition in Southeast Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPT</td>
<td>Communist Party Thailand</td>
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<tr>
<td>EWEC</td>
<td>East-West Economic Corridor</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNI</td>
<td>Gross National Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMS</td>
<td>Greater Mekong Sub-region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>Lao People Democratic Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMN</td>
<td>Mekong Migration Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEM</td>
<td>New Economic Mechanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESDB</td>
<td>National Economic and Social Development Broad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Small to Medium Enterprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAO</td>
<td>Tambon (sub-district) Administrative Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>USDA</td>
<td>United States Department of Agriculture</td>
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Chapter 1 Setting the Case

1.1 Introduction

On a rainy day in June 2010, a group of Lao people, alighting from long-tail boats, stepped ashore in Ban Fangthai,1 Mukdahan Province, Thailand. The Mekong River, which they had just crossed, serves as a border; but, it is far from an obstacle. Based on geographical proximity, ethnic identity, linguistic and cultural closeness, the Lao people easily travel back and forth across the river for seasonal wage labour on the Thai border, moving through the local checkpoint - which is operated locally - without any documents. Formal sets of cross-border regime regulations seem to be less enforced in this part of the region. The Thai villagers claimed that transborder2 migration and their social connections with the Lao people have been everyday practice for centuries past. Currently, it was necessary for them to hire labour work from Laos because out-migration of the young Thai generation has given rise to severe labour shortages.

Such was the context when I commenced my fieldwork in this northeastern Thai border village from where I could clearly discern the Lao village located on the opposite side of the Mekong River. The River is a border; but, it is far from an obstacle since it provides a magnificent route linking Thailand with Laos. Borderland inhabitants engage in cross-river activities, e.g., labouring, business, trade, shopping, family visits and joining in festivals in the form of everyday practice built upon the two communities’ historical ties. The official re-opening of the Thai-Lao borders after the end of the Cold War re-affirms these cross-border activities and supports farming activities in the Thai borderland. Faced with labour shortages due to the out-migration of the young generation to the country’s urban areas, the Thai farmers have taken advantage of their borderland location of agriculture to obtain Lao seasonal workers from the opposite side of the river to work on their farms. But, this means passing through the traditional checkpoints that are operated locally and only partially follow legalised immigration practices and formalities. The rivalry that these cross-border practices set up between

---

1 Baan Fangthai, a pseudonym, literally means the village on the Thai side of the river.
2 I apply the term ‘transborder migration’ to refer to the movement between people living along the northeastern Thai border and Laos and their relationships and networks in both countries.
village and state authorities, along with the complexities surrounding transborder migration, complicate the agrarian livelihood in the borderlands.

This thesis seeks to explore how the contexts of northeastern Thai - Lao borderlands, specifically their border proximity, language, and cultural similarities, shape the current agrarian transformation, in particular through patterns of migration. Prompted by the simple observation that the extant agrarian literature largely concentrates on core rice growing and the upland areas, I turn my attention to the locally specific context of borderlands that to date remains understudied. My analytical mind was thus inspired to explore and analyse the prevailing issues relevant to the borderlands.

Moving beyond the treatment of national space as homogenous, I will suggest that borders are transcended by the processes of globalisation, regionalisation and liberalisation. In effect, the identities of borderlands are shaped by their inhabitants and the transactions that occur within and across their boundaries (Das & Poole, 2004; Horstmann & Wadley, 2006). I do not approach them as a physically demarcated space at the margin of the nation-state. Living as they do under formal regimes of trade liberalisation and regional economic integration, borderland people strive to maintain their everyday practices, although some have become in-formal and substantially illegal. What has occurred in the northeastern Thai - Lao borderlands -indeed in many border areas - is somewhat contradictory given that the local government authorities seem neither strict agents who control the flows and movement of people and commodities across the border, nor ignorant agents barely aware of what is going on. This perceived discrepancy prompted me to explore state-village relations in the borderlands since the majority of conceptual tools employed in the study of borders in Southeast Asia are

influenced either by theoretical perspectives of the power of state as core and the powerlessness of the border as marginal, or, by the explanation of border as frontier zones, marked by lawlessness and wildness (Scott, 1998, 2010; Winichakul, 1996). Such models are generalisations of local dynamics and disregard the increasingly complex relationship between the Thai state and the peoples of the borderlands, who have transformed and created a new environment that invites a rethinking of state-village relations.

Transborder migration between northeastern Thailand and Laos adds a new dimension to both migration and agrarian studies. Looking at the studies of migration and its linkages to agrarian transformation, I found overwhelming focus on rural-to-urban migration (Bryceson, Kay, & Mooij, 2000; Perjaranonda, Santipaporn, & Guest, 1995; Rigg, 2001; Rigg & Sakunee, 2001). In the scenario I am exploring, Thai-Lao border proximity contributes to migration across the Mekong River between Mukdahan and Savannakhet Provinces. Although almost all of the Lao seasonal migrants are employed mainly in agricultural land in the Thai border villages, some opted to go further to Bangkok and other urban areas in Thailand out of the cultivating season. In this way, they opted to practice both transborder rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban migration, with many of them continuing to return to work on their own farms in their natal villages. Much, however, remains to be investigated. For example, the multi-layers of migration, and the linkages between internal and international migration as the out-migration and labour shortages in the Thai borderlands lead to the immigration of the Lao migrants in the cultivating season.

In an attempt to link labour migration with an understanding of the spatiality of agrarian transformation, this thesis problematises the relations of transborder migration and the persistence of agriculture. In the process, particular attention will be paid to the agrarian relations produced in different times and spaces. My analyses in this thesis reveal that rural livelihoods in both Northeast Thailand and Laos have similarly changed in accordance with de-agrarianisation. Job diversification and out-migration among the
young generation generally prevail in each village; however, the processes are concomitant with the persistence of agriculture. In the northeastern Thai borderland, remittances, the immigration of Lao migrants, and new cash crops such as rubber support the persistence of agriculture. In Lao PDR, although migration has become a source of income for many households, labouring jobs in Thailand - and their migrant status in a different country - inspire many Lao migrants either to return home or practice multiple migration. The thesis emphasises that the conceptual perspective of agricultural transformation is implicit in a spatial socio-cultural geographic context. In the borderlands, transborder migration not only contributes to the sending of remittances and to social mobility, but also contributes to the new agrarian class that is determined by ethnicity and spatiality and goes beyond questions of a linear way of de-agrarianisation, and the production relations between landlords and the landless.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study attempts to determine the links between regional development processes and what their manifestations and meanings are at a specific location. It fills a gap in the linking of empirical agrarian and borderland studies, namely the absence of investigation into agrarian transformation in the locally specific context of borderlands and the broadening scale of agrarian studies from specific country to cross-country analysis. In doing so, this study sets out a series of research questions, important at both the empirical and conceptual levels.

1.3 Research Questions:

1. Core Question:
   - How does the combination of geographical location, migration and cross-border practices shape agrarian transformation in the borderlands?

---

4 In this thesis, I employ the terms ‘multiple migration’ to explain the character of the Lao migrants who benefit from cross-border proximity and their many similarities to the Thai people. The latter enable them to migrate to Thailand or return to Lao whenever they choose.
2. Sub-questions:

2.1 Borderlands
- What underpins illegal cross-border employment?
- What mechanisms do the borderland residents and state authorities employ to enable them to benefit from border-crossing activities?
- To what extent have the negotiations between the local state officials and borderland residents shaped state-village relations?

2.2 Migration
- To what extent - and how – has labour migration become inscribed on the lives of peoples in northeastern Thailand and Laos?
- How do the spatial contexts of the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands, namely, the geo-politics of the borderlands and language and cultural similarities, shape migration?
- How does the spatiality of migration, that is, migration around the Thai border and further migration to Bangkok and other cities, shape the legal status of the Lao migrants?

2.3 Agrarian transformation
- How do the individuals’ social identities (gender, age, ethnicities) and social relations (family, kinship, friendship, historical ties between individuals and groups, occupations) determine the ability of the people to access labour and employment?
- How does cross-border employment shape agricultural relations (social relations and class relations) in the villages in the northeastern Thai – Lao borderlands?
- How does the context of the borderlands contribute to an insight into understanding agrarian transformation?
1.4 Methodology, Fieldwork, and Research Sites:

I employed an ethnographic methodology to investigate the characteristics of the borderlands, cross-border practices and their relevance to agricultural employment, all of which characterise agrarian transformation. The first phase of the research involved a review of the extant literature focusing on agrarian transformation and borderland studies.

In the second phase, my preliminary fieldwork was conducted at the borderlands of Northeast Thailand and Laos during the rice transplanting season from June to August 2010. This allowed me to investigate local cross-border practices and their meaning for agrarian relations. In addition, I conducted informal interviews with government officials working in the Provincial Government Offices in the border provinces of Northeast Thailand, my aim being to discern government policies and critical issues pertinent to the borderlands.

The third phase of my research, in-depth ethnographic research, was conducted between November 2010 and May 2011. I employed participant observation, in-depth interviews, everyday conversations, and walk and talk methods in two communities in Thailand and Laos located on either side of the Mekong River, namely Ban Fangthai, Mukdahan Province and Ban Kaemkong, Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR. My aim was to explore the local cross border practices and agrarian relations and their links with seasonal and rural-to-rural migration and employment. Initially, I anticipated seeing migrant workers from Ban Kaemkong cross the river using the local checkpoint operated locally for daily workers in Ban Fangthai and nearby areas. As well, I intended to analyse the agrarian relations that obtained between the northeastern Thai-Lao villages situated opposite each other on the Mekong River banks. But, I learned that in fact, the Lao migrants came from diverse villages in the Lao hinterlands. During my fieldwork in November 2010, only seven of the 120 Lao migrants I met in Ban Fangthai were from Ban Kaemkong: the remaining 113 were from nine villages in three districts of Savannakhet Province,
Lao PDR. Out of this group, 31 people were from Ban Laonua, Xeno District, which is located approximately 50 km from the river border. They made up the largest migration group from a certain location; so, I decided to accompany them and to include this village in my research site (see Figure 1.1).
Figure 1.1 Research Sites (Provincial Level)
1.4.1 Ban Fangthai, Mukdahan Province, Thailand

Ban Fangthai, which is located in Mukdahan Province and is the 73rd province of Thailand, is located 642 km from Bangkok. The province was upgraded from a district in Nakhon Phanom Province in 1982. With an area of 4,339.830 sq km, the province comprises seven districts and is home to eight ethnic groups, namely the Thai Isan, Phu Thai, Thai Kha, Kra So, Thai Yor, Thai Saek, Thai Kralerng and the Thai Kula. Each group has its own distinct traditions and culture.

Situated next to the Mekong River which acts as a boundary between Thailand and Laos, the province of Mukdahan has enjoyed a long and close relationship with Savannakhet Province, of Lao PDR. It is renowned both as the location of the 2nd Thai-Lao International Friendship Bridge and as the gateway of Indochina. The bridge, which links Mukdahan province with Savannakhet province in central Laos, is part of the 1,400 kilometer (km) regional East–West Economic Corridor (EWEC), which extends from the coastal town of Moulemein in Myanmar to the port of Da Nang in western Vietnam. Apart from the First Mekong Friendship Bridge, which links Nong Khai Province to Vientiane, the capital city of Laos, Mukdahan is the second most important border cross-point between Lao PDR and Thailand (Warr, Menon, & Yusuf, 2009).

But, despite the strategic importance of its border crossing-point, Mukdahan remains one of Thailand’s poorest provinces. According to the Office of the Governor of Mukdahan (2010), the province ranked 66th out of the 76 provinces in Thailand in terms of per capita income; and, its GDP per capita was approximately $US 1,133 per head in 2010. Industrialisation in Mukdahan is minimal, in 2010, the manufacturing sector accounted for only 9.28 per cent of the GDP. The agricultural sector accounted for 20.49 per cent of the GDP, while the service sector, the largest sector, accounted for 46 per cent. Although the contribution of agriculture to the GDP was only half that of the service sector, most of Mukdahan’s population (approximately 70 per cent) are involved

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5 In 2010, Thailand GDP per capita was $US 4,803 (World Bank, 2013b).
6 Other sectors that contributed to the GDP were the trading sector, which produced 18.27 per cent of the GDP, and the transportation sectors that accounted for 5.96 per cent.
in agriculture. In 2010, the main cash crops were rice, rubber, sugar cane and cassava. Rice farms, including glutinous rice, occupied 552,982 rai (88,477 ha) of the total area 1,076,355 rai (172,216.8 ha) of the province’s agricultural land. Interestingly, 106,997 rai (17,119.5 ha) were used to grow rubber, an activity that has expanded rapidly (Office of the Governor of Mukdahan, 2010, pp. 8-9).

Ban Fangthai, a border village located approximately 30 km from the provincial town that extends up the west side of the Mekong River, encompasses three sub-villages or *mu*\(^7\) which, in the past, constituted one village. My fieldwork was conducted in two of the three *mu*, namely *Ban Fangthai mu 1* and *Ban Fangthai mu 2*, which comprised 362 households in 2010, with a total population of 1,274 (625 males and 629 females).\(^8\) Each *mu* now has its own administrative body and a village headman. The residents of each *mu* still share communal resources and participate in religious activities together. Based on the data collected by the District Governor and the Tambon Administration Organisation, agriculture constitutes the main economic activity in Ban Fangthai. The villagers, who grow rain-fed rice as their main crop primarily for household consumption, use the rest of the land for additional cash crops, i.e., cassava and beans. Nowadays, growing numbers of villagers are investing in rubber plantation, a new crop that has emerged over the last ten years.

Directly opposite Ban Fangthai is Ban Kaemkong, Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR. It can be easily discerned from the Thai side of the river bank. The villagers in Ban Fangthai have multiple connections with the villagers on the Lao side of the Mekong River in terms of trade and social ties. Initiated in the 1990s, on Sunday mornings and Tuesday afternoons, the local checkpoint in the village is opened so that Lao people can cross over to shop and trade. Over the last twenty years, socio-economic transformation and the out-migration of the young cohort of Ban Fangthai have resulted in labour

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\(^7\) The term *mu*, for administrative purposes, means sub-village.

\(^8\) In this thesis, I refer to *Ban Fangthai Mu 1 and 2* as Ban Fangthai or Fangthai village. My reason for not including *Ban Fangthai Mu 3* in the research is because it is a newly-established sub-village located in the hinterland and is separate from *Ban Fangthai Mu 2 and Mu 3* that spread along the Mekong River.
shortages in the cultivating season; for this reason, the villagers absorb seasonal labour from villages in Lao PDR during the cultivating season from June to August and November to December. These everyday cross-border practices that ostensibly take the form of illegal acts, are carried on informally via negotiations between the villagers and the local government officials at the district and provincial levels. There are an essential part of the livelihoods of the northeastern Thai and Lao peoples living along the Mekong River.

1.4.2 Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua, Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR

Savannakhet, the largest province of Lao PDR, has a population of 843,000 which accounts for 14.7 per cent of Lao PDR’s total population (Warr et al., 2009, p. 3). The total land area is approximately 21,774 sq km, and most of the topography of the land is marked by gentle hills (Warr et al., 2009). Located in central Laos, the distance from Savannakhet to Vientiane, the Lao capital city, is approximately 470 km. The province is abundant in natural resources, especially in agricultural land, forests, and resources for mining. It shares the border with Thailand and Vietnam, and has an infrastructure that links with these countries. Route Number 9 is the main transportation link on the EWEC that runs through Savannakhet province.

Between 2005 and 2010, Savannakhet province has experienced steady economic growth. Its provincial GDP grew by 10.5 per cent per year during this time. Its GDP per capita was $US 371 in 2000, $US 425 in 2005, and $US 897 in 2010 (Andriesse & Phommalath, 2012, p. 13). However, the GDP per capita was well below that of Thailand. The GDP per capita of Thailand in 2010 was $US 4,803. Many scholars observe that economic growth in Savannakhet and in many parts of Laos has been accompanied by labour exploitation, land grabbing and environmental degradation (Andriesse & Phommalath, 2012; Barney, 2009; Laungaramsri, 2012).

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9 Both are pseudonyms. Ban Kaemkong literally means ‘the village located on the river bank’ while Ban Laonua means ‘the village in the northern direction of Lao PDR’.
Ban Kaemkong is located 35 km to the north of Savannakhet city. As a new village, it was formally established in 1979 with the resettlement of government official families from various areas of Lao PDR. Prior to 1979, for many decades some households had built their houses near the Mekong River bank. These people, who migrated from the Thai side, maintained their connection with their relatives in Thailand. In former times, they helped with rice cultivation of their Thai relatives’ land to get their share of cropping. The closing of the border during the war from the 1960s to the late 1980s rendered travelling across the Mekong River difficult and gave rise to the feeling that the peoples living on the Thai and Lao sides of the river were different national entities pursuing different paths of political-economic development. When the Thai-Lao border was formally re-opened in the 1990s, Ban Fangthai’s economy was significantly more developed. The Thai marginal area had become a receiving migrant area providing job opportunities for the Lao people.

In the late 1990s, Ban Kaemkong was included in the new economic zone of Savannakhet Province. Job opportunities came from the new factories in the middle of the village and the sugarcane plantation in the nearby village, increasing job opportunities for the villagers. At the same time, the young generation in the village opted to migrate to Thailand in search of non-farm jobs. Seasonal migrants, who cross the border seeking wage-labouring jobs in Ban Fangthai, have been replaced by people from the hinterlands, including Ban Laonua, where the villagers are predominantly engaged in agriculture and suffer from a lack of out-agricultural jobs.

Ban Laonua is located five km along a small dirt road which connects to Route Number Nine on the EWEC. Because the village is located 30 km from Savannakhet city, it is far from the corridor development and industrialisation areas. The topography is flat and mainly agricultural land, i.e., rain-fed rice land. Due to the low numbers of job opportunities in the village compared to Ban Kaemkong, both short and long distances migration to Thailand has become one of the villagers’ main non-farm activities.
1.5 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is organised in nine chapters as follows. In the next chapter, Chapter two, the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the thesis are set out. This chapter highlights the existing issues and arguments surrounding agrarian transformation and borderland studies. In order to make sense of the core argument of the thesis, which is understanding agrarian transformation in the context of the borderlands, focus is upon the topics of mobility and migration across the border and debate concerning the illegal and illicit from the perspectives of state authorities and local villagers.

In the third chapter, I outline the main methodology and describe the specific methods employed. The discussion includes multi-sited ethnographies in agrarian studies fieldwork and the methods employed, e.g., formal and informal interviews, household surveys, and participant observation. The author’s reflections, positionality, along with ethical issues are also explored in this chapter.

Chapter four contextualises the specificity of Northeast Thailand and Laos and their trajectories of development. In this chapter, I provide an historical background of the socio-economic development of each country over the past centuries. The impacts of transnationalisation in the 21st century are also discussed in relation to the Thai-Lao economies and the growing disparity between the two.

Chapters five to eight form the core empirical chapters of this thesis. Chapter five analyses the contexts of the northeastern Thai - Lao borderlands which allow various spatial practices across the Mekong River border. The chapter explores everyday life at the border, the state-village relations in the borderlands, how the local state authorities and villagers negotiate to each other’s mutual benefit, and, how they legitimate illegal transborder rural-to-rural migration and employment.

Chapter six, which focuses on migration between Lao PDR and Thailand based on the empirical data, discusses the overlapping patterns of rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban migration, and how different migration landscapes between the borderlands and the Thai
hinterland produce different legal statuses for migration. As well, it looks at how the Lao migrants negotiate their migrant status in each location in Thailand.

Chapter seven discusses the conditions appertaining to agriculture in the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands and in a hinterland village in Lao PDR. It delineates the agricultural livelihoods in each research location, and the peoples’ growing reliance on non-farm occupations and migration which can be closely linked to de-agrarianisation. The chapter argues that farming has persisted, and that in the northeastern Thai borderland, agriculture is still a desirable alternative for many landowners. As well, it looks at how factors of land ownership, education, gender, and generation have determined class and social mobility. In case of Lao PDR, the new opportunities linked to transborder migration have generated certain inequalities. In addition, the status achieved by migrants in Thailand encourages them to struggle to earn money and then return home. Because migration between Laos and Thailand is facilitated by border proximity and language and cultural similarities, Lao migrants tend to engage in multiple migrations rather than practice long-distance migration and permanently return home.

Chapter eight links the empirical data addressed in Chapters five, six and seven with the existing literature and discusses how the context of the borderlands contributes to the particular characteristics of agrarian transformation. The chapter argues that the particular context of borderlands attracts scholarly attention to state-village relations, transborder rural-to-rural migration in association with agrarian transformation, and the agrarian relations and multiple identities of the people, and how they are shaped by spatiality.

Chapter nine, the concluding chapter, summarises the main research findings and proposes key theoretical implications for the study of agrarian transformation in the future.
Figure 1.2: The Mekong River runs through Mukdahan and Savannakhet Provinces

Figure 1.3: The east side of the Mekong River: Savannakhet Province
Chapter 2
Literature Review and Theoretical Discussion

2.1 Introduction

Agrarian transformation, a process associated with changes in relations of production, occurs, when capitalism penetrates or is adopted into modes of agricultural production and labour. It has been classically approached through the prism of class and rural differentiation in peasant communities. Previous studies have tended to primarily focus on core agricultural areas rather than extend their analyses to other geographical settings.

This chapter’s focus is on the borderlands where cross-border regulations and labour migration contextualise agrarian relations and rural differentiation. The first section explores the broad concepts of agrarian transformation, particularly in Southeast Asia, and the requirements to contextualise agrarian transformation based on the geographical contexts of the borderlands.

The second section associates concepts of borderlands with human mobility. It illustrates the rivalry between the state, that serves as the border controller, and the peoples who negotiate their movement across the border. This section also reveals the contradictions between the state ideology and local cross-border practices. In addition, state-village relations, and their association with concepts of migration, are included in the discussion.

In last section, I will draw upon concepts deemed important to exploration of how the geographical location of the borderlands and the particular patterns of migration drive the process of agrarian transformation. Three themes including de-agrarianisation, the transformation of class and labour relations, and multiple class identities will be identified to establish a conceptual framework.
2.2 Agrarian Transformation in Southeast Asia in Perspectives

The purpose of this section is to provide a theoretical framework appertaining to agrarian transformation and to address the significance of the Southeast Asian cases at a theoretical level. The major questions that need to be addressed here include: 1) how can agrarian transformation be understood? and 2) what are the key processes of agrarian transformation in different periods?

Traditionally, agrarian transformation is a process of social change, particularly from the primarily rural society to the predominantly urbanized, industrialised and market-based society with its capitalist social relations. Based on the European countries’ experiences, the classical literature outlines the transformation of peasant societies into capitalism within a wider nation state, and associated class differentiation (Harding, 1986; Kautsky, 1988; Marx, Engels, & Tucker, 1978). The key processes leading to agrarian transformation were: factors generating agrarian classes; i.e. the proletariatisation of the peasant into landowning capitalists and landless workers, which in time led to dissent and political revolution.

Over the decades, research into agrarian studies in many parts of the world has proven that agrarian transformation does not always equate with the classical model. As regards the political and social revolution aspects, the classic theories were criticised for being too linear, narrowly focused on political economy, and too Eurocentric (Bernstein, 1979; Borras Jr, 2010; Rigg, 2001; White, 1989). Comparative studies undertaken by Byres (1996) and Moore (1966) in particular areas of Europe (United Kingdom, France, Germany and Russia), Asia (China and Japan), and Latin America, show that agrarian transformation takes diverse paths to achieve resolution. In Southeast Asia, the process of transformation is continuing in many countries; and the transformation is far-reaching from structural change to capitalism and industrialisation, similar to the countries in global North.
Between the 1960s and the 1980s, studies of agrarian transformation in Southeast Asia were prominent in peasant studies, and featured two different ways of explanation. The first was relevant to the process of state-led capitalism penetrating the peasant mode of production. For example, Scott (1976) and Nartsupha (1986), who studied peasant communities in Burma and Vietnam, and in Thailand, argued that transformation of peasant communities results from state building processes and capitalism penetration. Peasant communities that shared a set of social relations and behaviours termed ‘subsistence ethical and moral economies’ attempted to remain autonomous and developed a sense of historical consciousness to fight against the domination. However, the moral economy perspective was challenged by Popkin (1979) who argued that peasants pursued their goals rationally and acted more out of self-interest than in a collective manner.

Another group of scholars have explored rural differentiation, proletarisation, and class struggle through the prism of Marxist peasant studies. Unlike the first category, this challenged the notion that class differentiation was not a natural characteristic of peasant communities. The changes that occurred in rural communities were not only attributable to external forces, but to internal force at the micro level as well. Investigating the complexity of classes and land tenure, they proposed the co-existence of subsistence and market economies (Ganjanapan, 1984; Turton, 1978, 1989). Topics common among the extant classical works were on state extraction, exploitation and local resistance. Peasants were viewed as a subaltern class who tended to contest state power by rebellion.

From the late 1980s, many processes leading to agrarian transformation were re-identified. Subsequent studies proved that the process of capitalist penetration of the peasant societies was not the only factor that led to social and economic transformation. A collection of articles on agrarian transformation in Southeast Asia (Hart, Turton, & White, 1989) argued that the key process of agrarian transformation was the Green Revolution, greater commercialisation and technologies, and also look more closely at the role of different state configurations in shaping agrarian change. This volume also
put the notion that classical studies were undertaken – at least to some degree – for political purposes. The questions were not directly about the changing structure of rural society; rather, they focused on the political roles of the people or peasants and potential for peasant revolution. Drawing on different case studies of the core rice growing areas in Southeast Asia, this edition suggested more flexibility of the interpretation of agrarian change in specific situations, and the linkages between global and local processes and the political economic system. Conceptually, the grand narratives of historical transformation should be reconsidered. There is a requirement on understanding agrarian transformation in specific cases and contexts.

Today, the literature on contemporary agrarian transformation in Southeast Asia is more innovative and broad ranging. Scholars working on the Challenges of the Agrarian Transition in Southeast Asia or ChATSEA (2002) project point out that many key factors shape agrarian transformation; for example, intensification of regulations and market integration; and, the former has dramatically reshaped resource access. Beyond the key actors, which include state, class-based actors, revolutionary movements, corporations, NGOs, development agencies and others are additional actors that are shaping regulations vis-à-vis who should be morally allowed to access natural resources and who should be excluded. Hall, Hirsch & Li (2011) show different types of exclusion associated with land titling driven by state regulations, protected and community-based conservation areas, and tourism development. State regulations, for example, contribute to property boundaries and the definition of eligible and non-eligible land usage. Other examples include conservation standards that envisage forests as priceless treasures and thus deprive people of their land (Li, 2008; Sato, 2000), and state land concessions for commercial purposes that exclude people from their right to use both their own land and communal forest land (Baird, 2009; La-Orngplew, 2012; Laungaramsri, 2012).

The expanding role of globalisation forces, particularly the recent expansion of the agribusiness sector in Southeast Asia, is one of the important factors in contemporary agrarian transformation. This transformation has been marked by a move from the predominant agricultural communities that have agriculture as their important source of
income to those based on industrial production and associated with the growing integration to the world economy (Turner & Caouette, 2009). Agrarian studies, that are predominantly analysed at the local level, have thus been shifted to the regional level and made subject to wider geographical considerations. International agribusiness firms and supra-national organisations have become dominant actors in shaping global agrarian processes. At the same time, the growth of agro-industrialisation has required a reconceptualization of the farmers’ access to land, agricultural technology, extension and capital (Kearney, 1996, p. 128). In a volume of Globalising Food: Agrarian Questions and Global Restructuring, Goodman and Watts (2005) present several case studies that focus on the changing character of agriculture, with emphasis on challenging neo-liberal markets. Some cases address the changing relationship between rural places of production and the impact of recent developments in technology upon agriculture. For example, Page (1997) who investigates American pork production in Iowa, argues that the arrival of a foreign agribusiness company in the area and new technologies have led to a dramatic reduction in the number of small-sized farms raising hogs. In addition, a new geography of hog farming has emerged in the Southern regions of the US where the big agribusiness companies are able to hire cheap labour from Mexico. Raynolds (1997) who studied the reorganisation of the agro-food system and livelihood change, considered it due to investment in large agro-food corporations in the Dominican Republic. She particularly stressed the disadvantages of workers under contract farming. In the case of female day labourers, not only were they paid below the national minimum wage, but they were typically paid less than male workers. The nation state plays a critical role in reconciling foreign and domestic political pressures and promoting the competitiveness of national agriculture under competing global and triadic regional trade regimes. Ultimately it is rural populations which are most deeply affected by restructuring processes which are simultaneously undermining existing agrarian livelihoods and reinforcing rural job insecurity and the political and economic marginality of rural workers (Raynold, 1997, p. 94). All of the above examples show a shift in the analytical scale of agrarian studies from the national level to a global framework wherein market forces and actors have become key players.
As one of the key areas of economic achievement, Southeast Asia is experiencing industrialisation, urbanisation, and the decline of agriculture as a major source of income. Studies conducted in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand (Cramb, 2012; De Koninck & Ahmat, 2012; Rigg, 1998, 2001, 2003; Rigg & Sakunee, 2001; Rigg & Salamanca, 2011; Soda, 2007) show that those countries are experiencing rapid de-agrarianisation; in other words, the diminishing of agricultural livelihoods and a transition to non-agricultural employment and rural-to-urban migration. Rural diversification is also occurring in pre-socialist countries such as Vietnam and Laos. Pham (2006) noted that the rural economic structure has become more diversified. The General Statistic Office of Vietnam reported that the non-farm sector has become an increasingly important source of employment for rural people, when employment is defined by primary jobs, the employment share of the non-farm sector has increased from nearly 21 per cent to 32 per cent between 1993 and 2002 (Pham, p. 8). Thanh, Anh, and Tacoli (2005), who conducted their research in the Red River Delta of north Vietnam, also reported livelihood strategy changes including income diversification and migration. As elsewhere in the region, farmers' futures are increasingly viewed as lying either beyond agriculture or in a combination of farm and nonfarm pursuits. Rigg (2007) notes that the Lao people increasingly migrate to Thailand in search of jobs, especially the young generation who generally avoid having to work on farms, preferring to seek urban opportunities and city life experience.

The changing livelihood from farm to non-farm occupation and the intensifying migration flows lead to the consideration of rural-urban interpretation and fragility of rural households (Hirsch, 1993a; Kemp, 1993b; Rigg, 2013; Rigg & Ritchie, 2002). Some scholars in addition raise questions on gender dimension in agrarian transformation, in particular on the difference between men and women to cope with the commercialisation of agricultural product and landuse (Hew 2003, 2011), and in the age cohorts in rural migration (Huijsmans, 2010; Kelly, 2012). Today, agrarian transformation is being investigated by the political sciences in terms of democratisation and social movements (Borras Jr, 2009). As the factors of transformation have proliferated, the theoretical frameworks in contemporary rural studies have moved away
from rigid class analysis to more diverse disciplines. In the final analysis, what the classic theories and the current identification have in common is the assumption that peasants will disappear or at least become less numerous as they are drawn into the modern economy (Rigg & Vandergeest, 2012, p. 5).

In this context of changing empirical processes and changing conceptual lenses, the question of agrarian transformation in a specific context is challenged. Studies of agrarian transformation in Southeast Asia overwhelmingly focus on the core rice growing areas. Although the current studies extend to the highland communities, few explore the spatial context of the borderlands where there are many dimensions to consider; for example, state-village relations in a marginal space, licit and illicit practices and their impacts on agrarian relations, and the transformation of agrarian relations. The spatiality of the villages are reworked through the long-distance linkages and spread across international areas; thus, the scales of analysis are no longer limited to village studies in one country as they used to be. The fact that the spatial context of the borderland, mobility and migration can bring individuals into diverse class positions in different spaces (migrants might be unskilled wage labourers in one context but landowners in another), and can lead to class mobility over time, means that fixed categories (peasants, wage workers, and landlord) need to be reconsidered.

2.3 State, Borderlands and Human Mobility

The increased prevalence of human mobility, and the significance of transnational workers in many localities, makes for an uneasy juxtaposition of the role of state and its representatives in shaping and regulating transnational borders, human mobility, and other movements across state boundaries. While migration flows take place as a consequence of globalisation, these flows occur within a territorialised framework of nation states. State borders are less porous to labour than to capital and goods. The border function of states becomes more salient when dealing with transnational labour and cross-border migration; for this reason, controlling immigration and cross-border regulations have become important policies in many areas (Suriya & Amara, 2000). However, transnational labour flows have impacted to national and local economies; for
example, in Thailand and Laos where the cheap Lao migrant labour brought pressure to bear on low-skilled labour in both agricultural and industrial sectors. Complying with the porous geographical nature of the Thai-Lao borders required negotiation between the state reinforcing state regulations and people who engage in daily movements across the state border.

This section aims to delineate the links between the borderlands, state policies, and human mobility. It will discuss (a) the politics of the borderlands; (b) state-village relations and the enforcement of state regulations at the border; and, (c) human mobility in the borderlands

### 2.3.1 The state and the politics of the borderlands

Areas along boundaries, which are unique in themselves, are basically defined by geographical features marginal to the states (Minghi, 1963). Walker (1999, p. 5) notes that the state-centric approach, which focuses on unequal, hierarchical and exploitative relations between state centre and other areas of society, has been prominent in analyses of social formation and in discussion surrounding the relationships between state centre and its peripheries. According to this approach, borderlands are backward regions, that is, economic backwaters peripheral to the particular nation-state in whose territory they lie.

In the pre-colonial period, Southeast Asia, borderlands were referred to as ambiguous zones of competitive influences exerted by multiple political entities. The powerful kingdoms that prevailed in the region tended more to control people rather than their territories. The relationships between states and societies were explained from the perspective of centre-periphery model. A set of vocabularies was used to depict the power system in the region. For example, Wolters and University (1999, p. 16), who characterised a model of diffuse power in early Southeast Asian History, applied the term ‘Mandala’ referring to call political situations in a vaguely defined geographic areas without fixed boundaries, where smaller centres tended to look in all directions for security. Tambiah (1977), when describing political patterns compatible with Mandala,
employed the term ‘galactic polity’ to explain when the weaker political units in Southeast Asia had to gravitate toward the stronger units.

The concepts of nation-state and border demarcation in Southeast Asia spread throughout European colonialism in the 19th century. Later, they culminated in the formation of the modern nation-state in the 20th century, supported by the logics of national identity, state citizenship and sovereignty. Employing a national and regional construction and reconstruction approach, some scholars argue that a certain kind of power and mechanism are implemented in different historical period. According to Anderson (1991), for example printing technologies and media contributed to the encouragement of nationalism, nationhood and notions of nation-state. Likewise, Winichakul’s (1996, p. 79) study of Siam’s nationhood, building in the nineteenth century emphasizes how mappings and boundaries were used in the formulation of new geography discourse on the geo-body of the Thai-state that replaced the indigenous discourse. The latter exemplified the powerlessness and nonchalance of the borderlands and the notion state’s domination of its peripheries. Later studies conducted in Thailand also held the view that state dominated its frontiers and borders. State penetration and the in-corporation of frontiers has been achieved using strategies, e.g., administrative systems (Kemp, 1991), culture and language (Keyes, 1993), agricultural expansion (Nartsupha & Prasartset, 1978) and development programmes (Hirsch, 1990).

The concepts of nation-state building and rigid border creation were similarly applied by Lao PDR. Drawing on the colonial period, the geographical space of the current Laos was treated as a marginal zone far from the centre of Siamese Kingdom. The Siamese–French treaties at the turn of the twentieth century established the territorial limits of both French colonial and Thai nationalist expansion in the Mekong region. The French-ruled Laos emerged as a separate colonial space distinct from Siam (Ivarsson & Goscha, 2007). The current Lao became a rich resource area ripe for exploitation for the French colony (Ivarsson, 2008; Stuart-Fox, 1996). When Laos gained independence from France in 1953, the country had been at war until the victory of the Communist Pathet Lao in 1975, which saw the country enter the mainstream process of nation-building
through state-penetration. According to Rigg (2009), the Lao government faced specific challenges including how to forge the country of Laos given that a large proportion of the population was not Lao at all, but belonged to one of several minority groups. An early mechanism was to create a history for all of the peoples of Laos. This saw the ethnicities of people from various minority groups prefixed by the term ‘Lao’, depending on the location of resident. The Lao Loum is referred to the Lao living in the lowland. Lao Soung indicated the highland, and Lao Theung the midland. The implications of state-penetration paradigm are profound for the analysis of development in Laos when the country reopened after 1985. Studies of Lao state formation demonstrate how the central government introduced administrative uniformity and commercialisation into many parts of the country, including the frontier signalling the state’s intention to place itself above both territory and society. It could be said that the standard narrative of modern state-making involves the creation of rigid borders and the strength of the state’s power. These imply that border crossing represents a challenge to both the authority of the state and the modernist project of state formation.

However, there is an alternative approach to understanding the politics of the state in the borderlands. Approaching the borderlands through the local residents as agents, and challenging the state-centric approach, the anthropology of the borderlands questions the overemphasis on state power and the generalisation of the state’s practices over its territories and peoples. In addition, this perspective views border regions as areas through which to understand social and cultural change driven by the processes of state formation and the local people’s active negotiation of their cross-border practices (Baud & Van Schendel, 1997, p. 235; Das & Poole, 2004; T. M. Wilson & Donna, 1998, p. 3). In addition, borderlands are places where diverse ideas and practices meet (Gainsborough, 2009, p. 5). People dwelling on the margins of the nation-state live their everyday lives at the frontier, regularly crossing international borders, and giving rise to questions of monopoly identification and concepts of nationalism (Horstmann, 2012). Moreover, understanding borderlands through human agents and the process of
Many anthropologists who study borderlands challenge the state-centric approach by focusing on the everyday lives of the borderland residents. Abraham and Van Schendel (2005, p. 22) suggest that borderlands constitute a third space wherein special forms of state practices are implemented. At the same time, it can be a site for activities that can only be called (il)licit: i.e., legally banned but socially sanctioned and protected. Das and Poole (2004) state that borderlands are thought of as sites of exception which some unique forms of state practice emerge. So, it is important to understand these areas through the local people who, ultimately place an important role in shaping the area’s political life, and regulatory and disciplinary practices. The anthropological literature of the borderlands presupposes a heterogeneous form of social life and struggles between the state and other social units such as clans and tribes. In the next section, I will explore the interaction between the state and the people through the eyes of anthropologists as a broader way of understanding why some spatial practices occur in a particular contexts of borderlands.

2.3.2 State vs the borderland residents; and, the enforcement of state regulations

Anthropologists who study borderlands employ diverse ways of discerning people respond to state rules and regulations. The classic literature on subaltern studies is widely used to explain how suppressive local peoples resist the state control. Scott’s (1985) book titled ‘Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance’ explores peasants’ oppression and resistance, and their vulnerability to more powerful people. In this book, he defines everyday resistance as struggles between the dominant and subordinate classes, i.e., through individual and small-group actions and simple tactics such as insults, humour, foot-dragging, and theft. Scott (2010) additionally describes the strategies employed by people living on the fringe of the state to resist state power; for example, their occasional rebellions and their attempts to elude paying taxes and serving as labourers. The notion of resistance has then become one of the main
approaches explaining state and society relations on the borders, margins and frontiers of the state.

The notion of resistance has become one of the main approaches adopted to explain state and society relations on the borders, margins and frontiers of the state. Some historical research highlights the interaction of the local people and the colonial powers. Ishikawa (2011) contends that the relationships between the peripheral uplands and the lowlands in Southeast Asia are the two opposing niches. The borderlands are simultaneously stateless spaces where the authority of government is constantly challenged by the local residents, not as a political act but as part of their daily lives. Wadley (2000) points out that the formation of borders was a crucial part of the ambition of the colonial states to establish control over the peoples and territory of the occupied land and to force them to produce revenue. The colonial power controlled the locals through naturalisation and marriage regulations. The locals frustrated the colonial regimes by engaging in smuggling, transnational bigamous alliances, and migration. Van Schendel (2000) argues that those people living in non-state spaces and distinctive regions he called ‘zomia’ resisted all notion of nation-building and state-making. This resistance has roots in the pre-colonial culture refusal of low-land patterns.

In the contemporary period, some anthropologists and social scientists who study states and peoples in borderlands insist that peoples’ resistance targeted to the state (Elinberg, 2012; Flynn, 1996; Martínez, 1994). The implementation of liberalisation policies and improved physical connectivity underpinned the peoples’ views on increasing borderless and the diminishing state’s authority. Some researcher, who explored the borderlands in Southeast Asia, argue that the liberalised borders offer marginalized ethnic minorities the possibility to reconnect with their kin across borders and to revive religious and cultural ties. Such reconnections were viewed as a form of resistance against the cultural hegemony of the states in which the indigenous people reside (Cohen, 2000; Davis, 2003).
However, it is increasingly challenges the proposition that resistance to state-village relations might be too static to understand the relationships that obtain between the state and the people in the borderland areas. Horstmann and Wadley (2006) observe there are two forms of narratives on borderlands; one endorses the state, while the other endorses the border populations. The anthropology of borderlands applies many politically-based frameworks. For example, it emphasises the influence of the state on the local people and the strategies that the border people employ to maintain their cross-border way of life. However, overemphasis on human agents leads to a certain degree of neglected investigation into the question of how the local populations engage in networks of collusion and other relationships with various state authorities.

Based on the perceptions that the state is not the all-powerful regulatory entity, and that the local people are capable of negotiating, collaborating and contesting with the state, some scholars have disaggregated the state, choosing instead to focus its diverse and dispersed practices and to identify how state agencies and officials are embedded in the social and economic networks of the frontiers.

Apropos of the northern Thai–Lao border, Walker (1999) argues that state officials and local traders are involved in forms of collaborative regulations in terms of facilitating cross-border trade and, at the same time, restricting entry by potential competitors who seek to capture a share of the profits. A literature conducted among the indigenous groups stresses that marginal people in actual fact desire connection with and recognition by the state, to have security and to be able to market goods. For example; Li (2002) contends that highlanders in Indonesia and the Philippines seek the benefits of citizenship from the state. Their demands commonly include access to roads, education, and health facilities. Sturgeon (2007) claims that the Akha living in Thailand and China would welcome property rights and recognition by the state. She explores the local border chiefs and their engagement with the state authorities in the borderlands of Burma, Thailand, and China through historical analysis of control of access to resources and the means by which such relations from special configurations. Sturgeon is critical
of border studies that emphasize a basic conflict between border communities and state officials, opting instead to clarify how different ethnicities and classes of local people influence their capability to negotiation with state officials. She argues that state officials and border elites - like village heads - meet each other’s needs. State officials do not necessarily wish to eliminate local cross-border networks, irrespective of whether they legal or illegal. Rather, they prefer to collaborate with the locals and to take advantage of the opportunities and benefits that accrue from these networks.

Another feature of non-resistance state-village relations was offered by geographer, De Koninck (1992), who wrote an article in French language about the concept of compromised territory. In another article in English language, he claims that:

Peasant communities have been involved in forms of land pioneering which have contributed to the territorial formation and consolidation of states. This has been facilitated by a compromise between the builder-administrators of the states and the peasants themselves in their capacity as guardian-prisoners of the territory. This compromise, through which the state gains territorial legitimacy by protecting and administering newly established peasant domains, has been and remains exceptionally dynamic in Southeast Asia (De Koninck, 1996, p. 231).

In this thesis, I approach state and village relations in the borderlands by looking at the views of the state agencies at both the local and provincial levels, i.e., their views of the villagers’ cross-border practices. My focus is upon the state representatives, for examples village heads, border patrol police, local and provincial governments. While the concept of the state is an entity apart from society and is reinforced through various practices, images, symbols and rituals, I will take Migdal’s state-in-society concept that tries not to view the state as a unitary, autonomous entity. According to Migdal (2001), state is a contradictory entity that is understood best at two levels that is, one that recognizes the powerful image of the state as a unified entity with clear boundaries and territories, and one that reunifies the state as bundles of fragments. As well, it seems appropriate to examine the ongoing struggles among the shifting coalitions over the rules for daily behaviour that societies and states should create and observe, and how
they should maintain distinct ways of structuring their day-to-day lives. However, one should not overlook the negotiation, interaction, and resistance that occur in every human society involving multiple systems of rules. One should also keep in mind that particular practices (the routine performances of state actors and agencies) may either reinforce the image of the state or weaken it. For example, state officials may use their office space to conduct private business, reifying at the public-private divide (Migdal 2001, pp. 18-20).

2.3.3 Human Mobility in the Borderlands

This section identifies some spatial characteristics of migration that occur in the borderlands: irregular migration; and, rural-to-rural, rural-to-urban and circular migration. In addition, it demonstrates perceived gaps in the migration literature, providing a background for later analysis.

- licit migration

Borderlands and migration are inevitably interlinked. While borderlands are connected geographic spaces around politically drawn boundaries or historically and ethnically-linked frontiers, migration is relevant to human mobility across spaces and borders of different kinds, both within and across national countries and varies with and between opportunities and obstacles presented by different borders and borderlands (Abraham & Van Schendel, 2005). The more convenient border crossing and the de-bordering policies in many parts of the world enhance migration across borders. Stronger border connections with uneven development on either side may turn borderlands into newly contested terrains for illegal migration. As such, borderlands are crucial spaces where migration occurs and as important shapers of migration.

Das and Poole (2004) contend that borderlands are thought of as sites of exception where some unique forms of state practice emerge including state policy on migration across the border. Abraham and Van Schendel (2005, p. 22) argue that borderlands can be sites for activities that can only be called licit: legally banned, but socially sanctioned and protect. They propose a different way to conceptualise illegal flows over time and
space. Arguing that nation-state is not the point of departure, they propose investigating the distinction between what states consider to be legitimate (legal) and what people involved in transnational networks consider to be legitimate (licit). They argue to the effect that:

Many transnational movements of people, commodities, and ideas are illegal because they defy the norms and rules of formal political authority, but they are quite acceptable, “licit”, in the eyes of participants in these transactions and flows. To categorise between illegal and licit practices, a qualitative difference of scale and intent between the activities of internationally organized criminal gangs or networks and the scores of micro-practices that, while often illegal in a formal sense, are not driven by a structural logic of organisation and unified people (Abraham and Van Schendel 2005, p. 22).

Based on the above logic, Abraham and Van Schendel distinguish between legal/ illegal and licit/ illicit practices by the scale of activities. They contend that licit practices are not driven by organisations and unified people. For example, the armpit smugglers or ant traders who cross borders all over the world with small quantities of goods may together account for huge quantities, but they do not represent global syndicates of organised crime. Thus, they cannot be categorised into one particularly group. Regarding illegality, Abraham and Van Schendel defined that an effect of criminalised objects moving between political, social, cultural and economic spheres wherein human smuggling and human trafficking are practiced contrary to the law. Licit, on the other hand, is the normative recognition of certain unlawful activities within a social network or group. These networks exercise their authority by placing judging on these social practices according to perceived norms and values, thus legitimising this practice.

The forms of cross-border migration I investigate in this thesis may be considered both licit and illicit. On the one hand, undocumented cross-border migration is illegal; but, people, on the other hand, involved in practices across state borders may or may not recognise the state’s categorisation of their activities as criminal. In the past, people living in the frontier areas were able to move freely. In more recent times, however,

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10 Throughout this thesis, I quote Abraham and Van Schendel’s (2005) the use of the terms ‘licit’ and ‘illicit’ to refer to locally regarded legitimacy, different from ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’.
conceptual context of the modern nation-state has transformed the everyday mobility of the local people into illegal and irregular movement. The importance of this distinction is to question the origins of the regulatory authority, which may be either political or social. The judging authority includes persons who are involved in the activities and practices through direct or indirect participation. Social acceptance may determine the ‘legality’ of a specific practice even though it might be illegal.

2.4 Rural-to-rural/rural-to-urban and Circular Migration: the Overlooked Connections

In migration studies, conventional patterns tend to be categorised according to sending and receiving areas: rural to urban, rural to rural, urban to rural and urban to rural. In addition, migration may occur within or across national boundaries. It may be or involuntary (forced as a result of conflict or natural disasters): regular (with documentation) or irregular (without documentation); or, temporary, seasonal or longer term/permanent (UNDP, 2010, p. 3). Yet, there is increasing awareness that the different forms of movement are not always clearly demarcated, particularly in cases where a country cannot accommodate the current migration due to the changing of state boundaries, differential border regimes, globalisation, technology, transportation and economic environments (Deeleen & Vasuprasat, 2010; Inthasone, 2009; Pholsena, 2006). Migrants may become involved in both rural-to-urban and rural-to-rural circulation; they may be permanent/return migrants for a few years, but later become temporary/seasonal migrants for a certain period of time. Focus upon one specific type of movement only without considering the overlapping forms of migration may prove inadequate especially in the borderlands where all categories of migration are likely to occur.

Studies of internal migration in Asia overwhelmingly focus on a linear process of rural-urban migration as a response to economic growth and the transition to urban areas (Acharya, 2003; Guest & Kritaya, 1999). Urbanisation and the expansion of manufacturing, especially in the export sector, have contributed to the rise of rural-to-
urban migration. The World Development Report 2009 revealed the implications of rapid urbanisation in relations to population growth and rural-to-urban migration (World Bank, 2008). The United Nations (Social Environmental Research Consultant, 2010) estimate that the world urban population will increase by 72 per cent by 2050, and from 3.6 billion in 2011 to 6.3 billion by 2050. By mid-century, most of the urban population of the world will be concentrated in Asia (53%). However, scholarly investigation challenges the population figures for cities in Asia, claiming that the increase will be temporary due to the seasonal migration of labourers. In Vietnam, massive seasonal migration to Ho Chi Minh City occurs during the Mekong River floods (Dang Nguyen, Tacoli, & Hoang Xuan, 2003). Apropos of Indonesia shows an increase in non-permanent and circular migration and in the numbers of people commuting from rural to urban areas (Hugo, 1982, 2001).

Rural-to-urban and rural-to-rural migration in fact predominate in developing countries where the majority of the people lives in the rural areas (Huguet & Punpuing, 2005, p. 244). Labour mostly moves from the poorer regions to the agriculturally prosperous areas, where there is more work or where irrigation systems are accessible. Rural-to-rural migration typically involves the poorer people, e.g., those with little education and few assets. This way, it requires lower investment (IOM, 2005). Studies conducted in Africa and Asia identify the ‘push’ factors e.g., environmental constraints especially deforestation, population pressure, and the floods and droughts that lead to socio-economic deficiency (Carr, 2009; Oucho, 1984; Skeldon, 2003; Srivastava & Bhattacharyya, 2003). However, most have specifically focused upon internal rural-rural migration without taking into consideration potential forms of migration that might occur at the same time. Most consider rural-to-rural migration only as internal migration.

Over the past two decades, there has been an increase in international rural-to-rural migration across national boundaries in the agricultural sectors of many countries that are considered to be more affluent than their neighbours. The high cost of domestic labour, together with out-migration, location, the high wage rate, and changes in
demographic structures, has led to agricultural labour shortages during the peak harvesting season. As well, it has given rise to the replacement locals by labourers from the less affluent countries to work in the rice fields and vegetable farm. Inexpensive travel and communication allowed easier information access and travel, culminating in circular migration on a larger scale. Many countries developed policies, immigration programmes and granted specific visas to facilitate and encourage circular migration in their agricultural sectors; for example, berry-picking in Denmark, Finland and Norway required seasonal migrants from Eastern Europe (Partanen, 2009). A programme known as ‘de gestion integral de l’immigration saisonniere’ promoted by the Spanish government organised Moroccan workers to migrate to Spain for strawberry and citrus fruit cultivation (Constant, Nottmeyer, & Zimmermann, 2012). The shortage of labour for fruit and vegetable harvesting in Australia was resolved by welcoming seasonal workers from the Pacific Islands as substitutes for domestic labour (Blanco, 2009). Agricultural labour shortages, and the subsequent welcome of guest workers through a special type of visa in the United States, attracted predominantly Mexicans and migrants from other countries (Griffith & Kissam, 2002). Farmers across Europe and the United States, who had come to rely on migrant workers to harvest their fresh fruit and vegetables, called for governments to support guest worker schemes.

In Southeast Asia, few research projects have explored international rural-to-rural migration, even though cross-border rural–rural flows have occurred on a wide scale. World Bank (2006, pp. 35-36) indicated that drawing from the countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), Thailand’s agricultural sector employs the highest number of migrant workers from Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao PDR on fruit, flower, chicken and rice farms in Northern and Northeast Thailand. These workers, however, are not confined to the agricultural sectors. The increased level of educational attainment among Thai workers has allowed for a wider horizon of employment opportunities. The demographic trend towards a low birth rate has created a shortage of unskilled workers in jobs such as fishing and fish processing, construction, domestic service and tourism. Latt (2009) and Makpun (2008) focus on the rural-to-rural migration of the ethnic minorities living along Thailand’s and neighbouring countries’ borders. Latt investigates
the Shan migrants from Burma, who work in vegetable and fruit farms in Northern Thailand. He explored the new way of understand agrarian transformation beyond rural-to-urban migration, and the ethnic division of labour between the Hmong employers and the Shan employees. Latt noted that the intensification of agriculture in the highland required the Hmong farmers to minimize the costs associated with agriculture. The Shan workers after escaping from the clash between the Shan State Army and the United Wa State Army, entered Thailand illegally and became cheap labour for the Hmong farmers, enabling them to remain economically competitive in the market. Makpun (2008) examines the survival tactics employed by the Thai border residents living along the course of the Mekong River, in a border village located between Thailand and Lao PDR. Their tactics included the maintenance and reproduction of a cross-border network of Thai-Lao people who sought to recruit cheap labour from Laos for their vegetable farms.

This thesis seeks to identify the connection between migration in the borderlands and the importance of migrant workers to rural communities. It also addresses the multi-layer and overlapping forms of migration that involve migrants in rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban migration, both internally and internationally. In the last section, I will explore the main conceptual frameworks that are crucial for understanding how this cross-boundary rural-to-rural migration shapes agrarian relations and transformations, both in Thai borderlands and in Laos.

2.5 Reformulating Agrarian Transformation in the Borderland Context
In the previous section, I discussed the spatial characteristics of the borderlands, in particular the state-village relations at the border and the complex patterns of cross-border migration. In this section, I will review and discuss the studies on agrarian transformation in Southeast Asia. Particular focus is on livelihood change, de-agrarianisation and social relations associated with changes in and beyond agriculture. The above studies, I argue, tend to understate the borderland context where many particular practices delineate agrarian transformation in a certain way. This section aims to define the conceptual framework of agrarian transformation and the ways in which the geographical location of the borderlands - and the particular form of migration -
drive processes of agrarian transformation. Three conceptual frameworks are presented: a) the borderland and de-agrarianisation; b) the transformation of class and labour relations; and, c) the multiple class identities.

2.5.1 The Borderlands and De-agrarianisation

The last two decades have seen a growing body of literature on de-agrarianisation. Having noted the moving away from strictly agricultural-based modes of livelihood in terms of off-farm occupational and off-farm income-earning, Bryceson et al. (2000) highlight an active process of de-agrarianisation in rural Sub-Saharan Africa. The additional factors contributing to de-agrarianisation include: migration; decreasing farm size; increasing inability of young people to access enough land to take up farming as their main occupation; poor farming production; and, in some instances, declining yields due to declining soil fertility. The same phenomenon as in Africa is later observed in Southeast Asia. Contending on the overemphasis on agricultural importance, Rigg (2001, 2003) proposes commercialisation, globalisation, and de-agrarianisation as analytical foci, contends that rural households in Southeast Asia are increasingly diversifying their livelihood activities and becoming hybrid. Rigg and Sakunee (2001) make reference to a decline in the economic importance of smallholder agricultural activities. Their article titled ‘Embracing the global in Thailand: Activism and Pragmatism in an Era of Deagrarianisation’ features an analysis of Thailand’s de-agrarianisation and evidence from village studies illustrating how a growing number of farmers becoming heavily involved in off-farm occupations. They additionally emphasise that globalisation, higher education, migration and livelihood diversification among farmers resulting new cash crops and off-farm work can prove beneficial. As well, they suggest that few farmers in Thailand today rely solely on agriculture to meet their needs. In some areas, severe labour shortages due to out-migration cause farmers to either leave their land, rent it out or dispose of it.

However, moving away from the farm is not always the best way to support rural livelihoods. Li (2009) criticises the World Bank Development Report 2008’s recommendation on the best option for Asia’s rural poor is to exit agriculture and work
for wages that it could not achieve easily. In addition, in some poor countries the opportunities for wage work are still limited. Some studies in Southeast Asia in the current era have stressed that there have been several processes working against de-agrarianisation. Despite the emphasis on the importance of non-agricultural work, the changes in land use and social relations around the land due to industrialisation and urbanisation, and the gradual disappearance of farmed land and farmers, agriculture and the importance of farming are enduring (Hirsch, 2011; Kelly, 2011; Santasombat, 2008).

In case of labour shortages, there is always a way to provide labour substitution. Geographical location is a crucial factor that determines the pattern of agriculture, and it is in the border areas that the labour gaps have been filled by migrants from neighbouring countries (Rigg & Salamanca, 2011). Makpun (2009), emphasising the importance of cross-border employment, adds that acquiring cheap labour from Laos to agricultural border areas is one of the tactics employed by Thai farmers living in the Northern Thai-Lao borderlands to facilitate intense commercial cash cropping and economic competitiveness in the global market. But, her research does not pay attention on spatial location and how cross-border employment sustains agriculture. Rather, she focuses on the survival tactics of local people who negotiate their practices and networks across the borders in the context of regionalisation in the Mekong Sub-region.

Geographical location additionally determines the level of livelihood diversification. Rigg and Natapoolwat (2001) observe that de-agrarianisation in the villages in Northern Thailand has occurred because the villages are located near the urban centre. So, people are easily mobile and have many chances to work in off-farm jobs. But, in areas without such geographical advantages, few non-farm works are founded. In some developing countries, Lao PDR for example, the manufacturing and service sectors are poorly developed. Thus, the people remain highly dependent on agriculture and natural resources. Those seeking off-farm incomes migrate to Thailand in search of job opportunities. However, earning money from off-farm occupations does not necessarily imply leaving the farm permanently.
Apropos of the linear process of de-agrarianisation, Rigg and Nattapoolwat (2001) stated that migrants who experience working in off-farm jobs tend to lose the desire to farm. Some opt to avoid farming completely viewing it as a low-status occupation. In such instances, land may be sold leading to disengagement and a final break between the rural household and traditional farm-based livelihoods. Nonetheless, there is some critical analysis on the persistence of farming due to the support from off-farm jobs and remittances. Santasombat (2008) and Brookfield (2008) argue that the diversification of rural livelihood strategies sustains family farms keeping them alive. Farmers are able to be both peasants and labourers at the same time; they can be wage labourers in the agricultural sector, international labourers migrating abroad, urban labourers and small-scale traders. But trapped in the path of change, they fight back in various forms under varying socio-political conditions and contexts. Arguing that the family farm is far from dead in both the developed and developing countries, Brookfield (2008) investigates family forms of farm organisation which oscillate between theories on agrarian transformation and the reality. He demonstrates that family farming in developed countries has persisted through the plural activities of farmers, some of whom have undertaken non-agricultural work on their own farms while other have travelled away from home to work on the farms of others, or in nearby towns, solutions turned off-farm diversification. These alternatively choice have helped the family farm to survive and prosper where there is readily accessible off-farm employment or other means of livelihood diversification. It also exposes farm households to a comparison of rewards in terms of lifestyle and living standards between farm work and urban work (Brookfield, 2008, pp. 116-117).

Moreover, in some cases, the adaptation of the farmers’ strategies has sustained agriculture. Vaddhanaphuti and Wittayapak (2011) addressing the new challenges posed by agrarian transition in the Mekong Subregion showcase different experiences of farmers in Thailand, Laos and Vietnam and how they have adapted their agrarian practices to cope with on-going change. Their practices include, for example, livelihood diversification, i.e., switching between farm and non-farm jobs or growing non-rice crops and utilising social capital such as kinship ties.
In sum, de-agrarianisation is highly contested; but the extant studies lack explanation of the specific context of the borderlands. I will suggest that the pattern of agrarian transformation may be different in particular contexts and requires more flexibility of interpretation.

2.5.2 The transformation of class and labour relations

Analysis of class differentiation based upon the differential access to means of production, e.g., land, capital, and labour, is the main focus of agrarian studies. Class is based on the ownership of means of production while social relations are connected with production forces in agriculture. Since land is the primary means of agricultural production particular, the form of land property is the basis of agrarian relations, which in turn are determined by the nature of landownership and land tenure. Agrarian relations change as conditions of landownership and land tenure change.

Previously, agrarian differentiation or the process involving the differences the rural populations, has been the main focus in agrarian studies. As White (1989) noted that:

Differentiation thus involves a cumulative and permanent process of change in the ways in which different groups in rural society – and some outside it - gain access to the produce of their own or others' labour, based on their differentiation control over production resources and often, but not always, on increasing inequalities access to land (White, 1989, p. 20).

However, as social class differentiation has been reworked in the contemporary times, globalisation, migration, urbanisation, and industrialisation have restructured economic production, class mobility and social relations in the rural areas. Many studies have proposed extending their criteria to understanding rural class structures and inequalities. Nowadays, a broader range of access to resources such as off-farm occupations, migration, education, social networks, and information is taken into account. Arguing that the landless are not necessarily poor, and, the richest is not necessarily the previous who holds the largest amount of land, Rigg & Sakunee (2001) propose that the basis for rural differentiation in the 21st century in villages in Northern Thailand is education. The higher level of education the villagers achieve, the greater their chance to get better
earning off-farm jobs. Kerkvliet (1990) distinguishes groups in a village in the Philippines based on their standard of living: very poor, less poor, the adequate and the rich. Class can be divided into working class, peasants, petty entrepreneurs, and capitalists.

Some scholars after investigating who can or cannot migrate and the results from moving away, contend that migration also reworks class mobility. Łukasiewicz (2011), for example, claims that it is only the wealthy families who can afford the recruitment costs of an overseas labour contract. Lack of the requisite funds make it difficult for poor families in Laos to migrate to Thailand. They have to invest by borrowing form their village money lender (Barney 2012, Rigg 2007). Furthermore, the benefits accruing from migration differentiate the sending communities. Migrant families can move from tenant to owner and from user of family labour to employer of waged labour. At the same time, migrant earnings in the city make a real difference to rural migrants’ lives; they establish new stratifying indices of modern living and social status, indeed defining the migration option not only as necessary for their survival, but also as profoundly desirable. Clearly, a class structure of uneven wealth exists; but it is not necessarily based upon agrarian or even local, non-farm activities. Instead, it may be based on the ability to migrate and to get non-farm jobs. The socio-economic hierarchy in a village becomes disconnected from local relations of production.

I regard class relations as repositioned within much wider processes, and, as imbued with many significant factors that the conventional view of class cannot encapsulate. The point I am making is that social inequality in contemporary period has to be analysed within a wider context. This thesis questions the rework of class and social relations in the borderlands where domestic migration commonly occurs. When there is a replacement of waged labourers from less affluent neighbouring countries, how are classed and labour relations reworked within and across communities and ethnicities?
2.5.3 Multiple class identities

Another sense in which overseas migration reworks class is when the same individual experiences different class processes in different places (Kelly, 2011, p. 498). Building on the dynamic and fluid nature of the class trajectory and a variety of class processes coexisting in diverse economies, Gibson, Law, and Mckay (2011) argue that the contradictions in migrant class processes disrupt the hero and victim discourses. Filipino women employed as domestic workers, for example, are not only depicted as exploited victims in a global economy that is dominated by foreign agendas, but are also seen as heroines of national development in the Filipino government scheme. In-depth interviews and fieldwork reveal that migrant females remit money regularly to their household in the Philippines for investment in buying land and in education for left-behind children, for example. Although the female domestic workers are frequently viewed as victims in their countries of service, Hong Kong, for example, they are often landlords in the homeland. In this respect, overseas migration transforms them and their families into capitalist class with some capacity to accumulate surplus.

Rigg (2005) argues that the access to land and migration in Laos does not always signal that households with large land areas are inevitably wealthier than those with little land. Lao migrants in Thailand do not usually come from poor families. In many wealthy areas of Laos, migration to Thailand is not only the route for gaining money. Instead, it is an aspiration of people to engage with modernity (Nevins & Peluso, 2008). In this sense, the means of production in a village is no longer an indicator of an individual’s social and economic status. Class structure is a deciding factor in migration and off-farm occupations.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter suggests the following three theoretical implications: the contextual approach to understanding agrarian transformation; the social and political needs to understand the borderlands; and, the more details understanding of the relationships between class and mobility.
In this chapter, I have detailed relevant concepts on agrarian transformation, borderlands and migration. I have reviewed the key processes of agrarian transformation in different periods and given significant consideration to understanding agrarian transformation in a particular locations and contexts. Taking the borderland as a site of focus, this chapter argues that borderlands are spaces wherein unique forms of state-society relations are found. In an attempt to explore borderlands, this chapter critically examines local cross-border practices and negotiations between state officials and borderland residents. In the context of porous Thai-Lao borders, various local cross-border practices are considered illegal including cross-border migration and employment in agricultural sectors. This chapter suggests disaggregating these practices and distinguishing between legal / illegal and licit / illicit practices to understand political life and regulations in the border shape the state-village relations.

The politics of the borderlands, along with patterns of state-village relations and migration, are the three components that shape agrarian relations, rural differentiation and class mobility in the Thai-Lao borderlands. Taking these three components as the defining framework, this thesis delineates the spatiality of agrarian transformation in the context of the borderlands.
Chapter 3
Researching the borderlands: Practice and context

3.1 Introduction:

This chapter, which illustrates the methodological and theoretical challenges I encountered throughout my research, also discusses the methodologies employed when in doing cross-border research, the dilemmas, and the methodological choices. Research methods, limitations, and the reflections of the researcher will also be presented in the following sections.

This research addresses three different themes, i.e., agrarian transformation, borderlands, and cross-border migration. The main research question focuses on agrarian transformation in the specific context of the borderlands. For this reason, practices related to agricultural livelihoods in the border are brought into question. In this regard, cross-border practices, state-village relations, and linkages between rural-rural, and rural-urban migration are of specific interest.

In this chapter, I detail the nine months of fieldwork I conducted in Thailand from June to August 2010, and from November 2010 to May 2011. The first section explains how I gained access undertaking a research in Lao PDR. Then, I describe my methodological dilemma and problematise the methodology employed. I question whether agrarian studies that focus on in-depth ethnographic fieldwork and village studies are sufficient to understand the nature of transnationalisation, mobility, and the diffusion of the borderlands. Here I explain how I employed multi-sited ethnography in this research. I will describe my methods which primarily consisted of in-depth interviews, conversations, participation observation, and the distribution of questionnaire. Finally, I will delineate my positionality in the fieldwork and outline ethical considerations.
3.2 Doing fieldwork along the borderlands of Northeast Thailand and Lao PDR

My research aimed to examine agrarian transformation in the context of northeastern Thailand and the Lao borderlands. Particular focus was on cross-border agrarian relations and the livelihoods of the Thai-Lao border communities along the Mekong River. Having noted that the majority of border and agrarian studies tended to undertake their fieldwork either in a single area or on the border of one country, I attempted to research practices relating to discourses of border control based on two crucial aspects. First, instead of thinking of borders in terms of solid lines and certain locations, I looked at borders as relational spaces and not simply as territorial lines separating two different areas or regions. Brambilla (2008) suggests that borderlands are spaces of interaction where social relations are articulated through historical, political, economic, and cultural relations. This led to the second objective to balance the research sites in both Thailand and Lao PDR to have clearer picture of the social networks across the border. So, my ideal research locations were one village on the Thai border and another on the Lao border. The nature of my research was of necessity dependent on in-depth interviews, village studies, and fieldworks undertaken across the borderlands. Mukdahan Province in northeast Thailand and Savannakhet Province in Lao PDR were my focus areas due to the transnationalisation engendered by the opening of the 2nd Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge in 2007, the engagement with cross-border migration, and the shared of cultures, ethnicities and family ties (Pholsena, 2006, pp. 59-60).

The core element of my research when I commenced my fieldwork was Agrarian Transformation in the borderlands. In order to determine the research locations at the community level, I commenced my preliminary fieldwork in February 2010 by conducting interviews with many government officials working in the Mukdahan City Hall.11 My aim was to collect some information about agricultural practices information and cross-border management. While most of the people I interviewed provided information about their responsibilities; for example, the Provincial Agricultural Official gave me data on rice farming and rubber plantations, and the Chief of Provincial Labour

11The Mukdahan Provincial Governors, the Chief of Provincial Agricultural Officers, the Chief of Provincial Labour Office, and the staff at the Provincial Security Affairs Unit.
Office talked about the out-migration of the young generation from Mukdahan to Bangkok and the rising number of Lao migrants working in all of the service sectors in the city. Inside information came from a high ranking official working in Provincial Security Affairs about the local checkpoints along the Mekong River and the cross-border employment involving Thai farmers and Lao migrants. He pointed out that because out-migration in Mukdahan was very high; it led to labour shortages in various sectors. Benefiting from the border location, the people of Mukdahan absorbed Lao migrants to replace Thai workers in local unskilled and labouring jobs, both legally and illegally. In the agricultural sectors, farmers living along the Mekong River resolved their labour shortage problems by hiring daily Lao workers across the border through the traditional checkpoints established along the Thai border villages under the supervision of the District and Provincial Governors.

I travelled to a few villages in the provinces where the traditional checkpoints operated. I was looking for a village that had cross-border employment facilitated by the social networks of the Thai-Lao people living along the Mekong River. During a consultation with officials at the Mukdahan Provincial Governor’s Office, Ban Fangthai was chosen as my research site in northeastern Thailand because it had the most active traditional checkpoint. As well, its cross-border activities included cross-border employment in the rice paddies, and the big weekly market held on Tuesdays and Sundays. In terms of geographical location, I could see Ban Kaemkong, the opposite village, very clearly.

During my preliminary survey in June 2010, I asked the villagers to take me on a boat to Ban Kaemkong. Some went fishing in the River and often joined in social ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. But no one wanted to take me because I was not a ‘local’. Finally, I asked one of the Thai government officials in Mukdahan Customs House to take me there by car as a one-day trip. We crossed the 2nd Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge and took the local road, approximately 40 minutes from the bridge to the village. My first trip in Ban Kaemkong was only as a sightseer. I could not do much because I first had to apply for a permission to do my research from the Lao Government.
Sarah Turner (2010) observes that obtaining official research permission to do fieldwork in contemporary socialist countries – in Lao PDR, Vietnam and China, for example - is difficult and takes time. One main reason is because governments are cautious regarding foreign researchers who want to undertake long-term fieldwork (McKinnon, 2010). Besides research authorisation, foreign researchers must be accompanied by government counterparts and/or research assistants. Some foreign scholars acquired permission to do research in Laos through long-term engagement with numerous development project initiatives and academic institutions. In this way, they reduced the difficulties in dealing with the Lao centralised, politically controlled bureaucratic system (Barney, 2011; Daviau, 2010; Huijsmans, 2010). Wassana, a researcher who attempted to establish a connection with the University of Laos as her host institution, mentioned that it took almost 10 months to obtain research approach and an official visa. Such circumstances can be extremely stressful, especially for those on limited research funds (Sarah Turner, 2010, p. 123).

My case strongly relied on personal connections and considerable good fortune. Being a lecturer teaching in a university in Bangkok, I had a postgraduate student from Laos in my department. I contacted him via e-mail from Australia to ask about obtaining official permission to undertake research in Savannakhet Province. I was subsequently introduced to his friend who worked at Savannakhet Province City Hall and was pursuing a Master’s Degree in a university in Bangkok. After agreeing to be my research coordinator, he took me to the Lao Embassy in Bangkok where I submitted my project document to the Lao ambassador. Within two hours, I received a letter of permission.

My Lao research coordinator understood how difficult it was to deal with the highly bureaucratic system in Laos. He was concerned that it would take a long time for the letter to reach the local authorities, the Savannakhet Provincial Governor’s Office, and the Saibuly District Office, the district where Ban Kaemkong is located. Having planned a home visit in the next two weeks, he made an appointment to see me in Savannakhet city and took my letter with him to get it stamped. When we met at his place in Laos, the
letter was ready to give to the Saibuly District Office. We went to submit the letter to the Head of Saibuly District together to get another stamp. But, this short cut to obtaining a research visa was unsuccessful. I had to be accepted by a research affiliation in Laos to obtain that type of permission. This required me to go to Lao and stay as a Thai tourist. This type of visa allowed me to stay in Lao for 30 days; then I had to cross the border back into Thailand and from there re-enter Laos.

The completion letter of the granting of permission did not end there. I was still faced with many circumstances that made me realise the importance of personal connections and how fortunate I was to have been introduced to my Lao coordinator. Realising that the majority of the Lao migrants working in the paddy fields in Ban Fangthai came from Ban Laonua in Xeno District, I made a decision to include this village in my research site (see section 3.2 for a discussion on extending the research site to Ban Laonua). So, I had to revise my letter to Savannakhet Province and write another letter requesting permission from Xeno District. My Lao coordinator helped me through the whole process. Without him, to get everything done by myself would have taken a few months and to access another field site would have been impossible.

Having a Lao staff member present during the fieldwork was another regulation for a foreign researcher. This process came with financial incentives for the Lao official involved: the appointed official was entitled not only to a daily allowance, but also to other expenses that were expected to be paid by the researcher including accommodation and food which in turn cost a certain amount of money (Daviau, 2010). In my case, the situation was the opposite because my Lao coordinator took care of me as his younger sister who came to undertake research alone in his country. He could not stay with me in the field all of the time because he had to return to study in Thailand. When I told him that I was self-financing, he understood and initially did not want to accept any money. He insisted upon helping because his friend who referred me to him was a close friend. However, I paid him some money on the days I needed him to accompany me to the field, plus his travel costs, food, and all of the expenditure incurred.
As many researchers have pointed out, having a government official accompanying one while conducting research tends to make one’s informants cautious vis-a-vis the answers and comments. In my case, my Lao coordinator initially escorted me to both villages, introducing me to the village headman as his fictive younger sister who was conducting research into agriculture and was keen to learn about livelihoods in Laos. His accompanying of me really helped to confirm my intention and status in the fieldwork, in particular in Ban Laonua where I accompanied some Lao migrants on my first trip. I was asked to show the letter of permission, and to pay some money to all of the village committee members. When I returned the second time, I asked my Lao coordinator to go with me and to introduce me again. Whenever I was questioned by the Lao police or soldiers, I contacted him and asked him to speak to the Lao officials directly. This was one of the advantages of the networking as discussed above.

### 3.3 From one site to multi-sited research: From field sites in the borderland to the hinterland and the global city

In his study of children’s migration undertaken in the Laos PDR, Huijsmans (2010) states that methodological considerations in academic studies are not only shaped by academic factors, but are also determined by the particular research context. Similar to research conducted in the borderlands, unexpected circumstances that occur during the fieldwork – the circular movement of people and the compromised form of state-village relations – determine the methodology and highlight the limitations of previously planned methodologies.

Agrarian studies conducted in Southeast Asia between the 1960s and the 1980s generally focused on empirical case from rural villages (Ganjapan, 1984; Nartsupha, 1986; Kemp, 1982; Potter, 1976; Robert, 1956). The latter were clear fix boundary units of administration, fully occupied by farmers, and located far from the city. Household analyses and ethnographic fieldwork were the dominant methods employed.
However, later research places analysis in relation to the wider contexts of the local and the global. Some question the meaning of the village community and the construction of community as a non-essentialist unit, thus moving away from simple analyses of village (Hirsch, 1993a; Rigg, 2013; Rigg & Ritchie, 2002). There is, however, a rising concern regarding villages and households as units of analyses in the contemporary era. Hirsch (2013: 397) points out that the changing world in which rural people’s live and the changed place of agriculture within it are the main factors generating the new empirical context for agrarian studies. Rural-urban interpretation through mobility and migration, he claims, lead to questions of households that are comprised of members who reside, live and work in different places and jobs. (Hirsch, 2013; Rigg, 2013; Rigg & Salamanca, 2009; Rigg & Vandergeest, 2012). This becomes a methodological challenge to the single-sited ethnographies of village communities that treat realities as bounded without investigating movement and flows.

As suggested earlier, my initial research sites were Ban Fangthai and Ban Kaemkong. Initially, I anticipated that migrants from Ban Kaemkong would cross the river via the local checkpoints operated for daily workers in Ban Fangthai and nearby areas. My intention was to collect data across the border. This was based on an assumption that the classical method of collecting data in one single site could not cope with diffuse networks, diverse forms of mobility in the transnational location of the borderlands, and the spatial bounds of the social relations that constituted the everyday lives of those domiciles in the borders. As Hastrup and Olwig (1997) stated regarding discussion of the field, we should not primarily think of fieldwork as a locality, but as field of relations. However, I learned from my first period of fieldwork during the rice transplanting season in July 2010 that the Lao migrants not only came from Ban Kaemkong, but were also from many villages in the Lao hinterland. During my second period of my fieldwork during the rice harvesting season in November 2010, only 7 out of 120 Lao migrant workers were from Ban Kaemkong. The rest were from 8 villages scattered throughout the Lao inner areas. Of this group, 31 workers were from Ban Laonua, Xeno District, approximately 35 km from the river. These comprised the largest
migration group from a certain location. This implies that the rights of passage at the border not only belonged to the borderlanders. People living in the hinterlands could also cross the border with non-recognition of documents (Walker 1999). Based on the principal goals of the research which are to understand the livelihoods at the border, and on the notion of social and cultural networks across the Thai-Lao border, I followed some people from Ban Laonua to their home village and ultimately included this village as the third research site.

The Lao migrants did not simply move between two locations; rather, they circulated between many locations. In January 2011, I returned to Ban Laonua where I learned that a number of migrants I met in Ban Fangthai had returned to their jobs in various parts of Thailand. After acquiring a few telephone numbers from the interviewed households, I phoned a number of Lao migrants who had returned to Bangkok, my initial objective were to greet and to visit them if I could. I visited these people a few times, and our great discussions gave me a broad understanding of the multi-locality of people’s lives and the integration of rural production, migration, farm and off-farm employment in Laos and in Thailand, between places and across scales. Recognising that migration in the context of the borderlands was distinctly unique, the adoption of multi-sited ethnography approach suited my research questions as well as my multilevel analytical framework as it both offered a broad understanding of transnational processes and linked the macro and micro levels of analysis (Falzon, 2009; Marcus, 1995, 1998). Marcus (1995) argues that a multi-sited ethnography is useful for the study of phenomena that cannot be accounted for by focusing on a single site. Mobile, ethnography has to get engaged with these movements. This made sense of my study that was focused on human mobility. The multi-sited ethnography also enabled me to understand the relationships between agricultural livelihoods in the migrants’ homelands, agricultural land along the Thai border, and off-farm occupations in the cities.
3.4 Methods and Data

This section illustrates how data was generated and analysed. Reflecting the nature of agrarian studies, a qualitative methodology was employed. In order to capture migration patterns, the research was multi-sited and combined various methods. I started by interviewing key informants at the provincial levels; then I conducted informal interviews and participant observation at the village level employing a work and talk technique. As well as both observing and joining in the villagers’ activities, I disseminated a questionnaire to elicit more systematic data. The methods employed, and the number of research participants and locations are shown in Table 3.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Numbers (N)</th>
<th>Locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Interview Based Methods</td>
<td>- Mukdahan Province Governors</td>
<td>Mukdahan Province and Savannakhet Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Director of Mukdahan Province Agricultural Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Director of Mukdahan Province Labour Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Staff at the Security Affairs of Mukdahan Province</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Chief of District Governor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Head of Community Development Department</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Assistant to the Head of Savannakhet Province Governor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal interviews</td>
<td>Village Heads, Ban Fangthai Mu 1,2,3 and Village Committee Members</td>
<td>Mukdahan and Savannakhet Provinces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village Head, Ban Kaemkong, Lao PDR</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Village Head, Ban Laonua and Committees</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thai Border Patrol Police</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lao Border Patrol Police</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thai-Lao cross border traders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local expert on Ban Fangthai history</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Priest, Ban Fangthai Church</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thai Businessmen in Ban Kaemkong</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Previous Head of Saibuly District</td>
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<td></td>
<td>School Teacher, Ban Laonua</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2) Questionnaire Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Survey</th>
<th>100 out of 362 households in Ban Fangthai</th>
<th>Ban Fangthai, Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 out of 204 households in Ban Kaemkong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 households out of 213 in Ban Laonua</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| In-depth interviews with Lao migrants in Bangkok | - 2 females and 1 male in a Western Restaurant  
- a family with 6 family members in the gas station  
- a female in a Northeast Thailand Restaurant | Bangkok |
| informal interviews by telephone with Lao migrants in Bangkok | - a couple working as domestic workers  
- a female working in a massage shop  
- 2 males working in a plant nursery | Bangkok |
| Informal interviews with Lao migrants on a bus trip from Bangkok to Mukdahan Province, the international bus across the Friendship Bridge | - 2 Lao females working in Bangkok and taking a bus to visit their home in Savannakhet  
- an elderly Lao lady coming to visit her daughter in Bangkok with her nephew and taking a bus to return to Savannakhet | Roadtrip from Bangkok to Mukdahan, and from Mukdahan to Savannakhet |

3) Ethnographic based methods

| Work and talk:  
- participating in rice transplanting and rice cultivation  
- helping women groups at village weddings and funerals  
- helping local traders to sell goods at the border markets  
- cooking with villagers in the kitchen | Recorded as fieldnotes | Ban Fangthai, Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua |
Everyday conversations
-taking food to join breakfast, lunch, and dinner
-following men group to go fishing in the Mekong River
-attending religious ceremonies
-joining Thai New Year Festival

Recorded as fieldnotes
Ban Fangthai, Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua

| Participating in village meetings and local festivals | Recorded as fieldnotes | Ban Fangthai |

### 3.4.1 Formal interviews

Formal interviews, or interviews conducted based on prepared questions and appointments, were the main research methods conducted with a wide range of government officials in Mukdahan and Savannakhet Provinces. The interviews were mostly open-ended: I asked the informants for the facts and their opinions. The data I acquired from the formal interviews were mostly relevant to the prevailing socio-economic conditions, security problems in the borderlands, and border policies at the provincial level. I recorded the interviews using a tape recorder, and transcribed them within the following days.

### 3.4.2 Informal interview

I mainly conducted informal interviews in the field with village heads and committees, resource persons in each village, police, soldiers, Lao people I met on the way from Bangkok to Mukdahan and on the local truck to the village, and cross border traders. These interviews helped me to acquire general information about the village history, customs, and traditions. They could be conducted anywhere, often in paddy fields during the workers’ lunch break, at funerals, in the border weekly market, during my trips to the village, and at the local checkpoint where the police and soldiers were working. I found that the informants occasionally gave different information at different interviews. Conflicting information was mostly related to conflict over rules and regulations; for example, regulations related to the local checkpoint. In my first interview with the village head of Ban Fangthai, he told me that villagers who hired...
daily Lao workers had to confirm that their employees daily returned to Ban Kaemkong before 6 p.m. None of the Lao employees was allowed to stay over in Ban Fangthai because it was illegal. However, after spending a few weeks in the village, I learned that most of the Thai farmers let their Lao employees stay over until the end of the cultivating season because the latter came from villages far away from the Lao border. So, in a subsequent interview, I asked the village head about the checkpoint regulations and the reaction of the local governors. He said that this involved the livelihood of the Thai people living along the Mekong River, who were facing labour shortages. So it was necessary to use Lao migrants to fill the labour gaps. He pointed out that the District Governor knew that Thai farmers let their Lao workers stay over in their places during the cultivating season but did not see the practices as affecting the state’s security. As long as the village could prove that there were not criminal offences such as drug and human trafficking occurring, the government officials would not intervene.

I initially used Informal interviews to get to know the villages and to make myself of interest to them because they showed interest in and curiosity about my life and background. Common questions that they asked, for example; where do you come from?, what do your parents do?, are you married?. These kinds of informal and two-way interviews also helped me to recruit the right informants. There were many cases where I opted to return to conduct in-depth interviews. For example, I conducted in-depth interview with some Thai farmers to learn about their life histories and aspirations, I also conducted in-depth interviews with some Lao migrants I initially met in Ban Kaemkong. I interviewed them in their workplaces in Bangkok, eager to learn about their migration histories, their relationships with their home villages, and their expectations. I tried not to make our conversations too formal; and, I either wrote any kind of voice-recording. I wrote down the main points of the conversations while conducting the interviews or immediately afterwards.

3.4.3 Participant observation: work and talk

Mavasti (2004, p.8) argues that social research should be based on the stuff of the real world: interaction, interviews, documents, or observations of, and related to, the social
world that all agree is out there. One of the primary methods employed in ethnographic fieldwork is participant observation: it allows researchers to learn about the activities of the people being studied in a natural setting by observing and participating in their activities (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). However, the researcher must determine to what extent he/she will participate in the lives of the participants and whether to intervene in a situation. Given that my study focused on agricultural livelihoods in the borderlands, which were shaped by cross-border practices, and regulations, migration, an everyday conversation in the form of work and talk proved out to be one of the most valuable data collecting methods for me. After commence my fieldwork in the rice transplanting and rice harvesting seasons, I learned that the best way to talk to people was to join their activities. As a tool for conducting participatory assessment of rural resources, the “work and talk” technique made people feel at ease and motivated to enter into casual conversation with me. Furthermore, this method allowed me to interact with the research participants not simply as research subjects but in a natural and non-threatening manner (Burns, 1994).

In Ban Fangthai, valuable information emerged indirectly in casual conversations, often when socialising with groups of people and talking about daily life. I participated in their activities, e.g., helping women’s group with cooking and selling foods, and even went fishing. Initiating conversations with people and joining in their activities made people keen to talk to me and often led to direct questions relevant to my research. At the same time, the villagers enjoyed teaching me how to plant rice, harvest the rice, and cook some local foods. Many people laughed when they saw I was very clumsy when trying to work with them in the rice paddy. For of many Lao migrants I met along the Thai border, it was common to see them simply shaking their heads and replying: “I don’t know” or not replying at all when questioned. And, because the Lao migrants were employees of the Thai farmers, attempting to conduct informal interview with them while they were working was inappropriate. It became clear to me that if I joined them in the rice paddy and worked with them, they would feel more comfortable carrying on
conversation rather than directly asking them about where they came from, and how they crossed border.

3.4.4 Questionnaire survey

DeWalt and DeWalt (2002, p. 9) suggest that participation observation may help the researcher gain a better understanding of the context and phenomenon under study. But, more validity of the study could be acquired by the use of additional strategies together with observation, such as interviewing, document analysis, surveys, questionnaires, or other more quantitative methods. Questionnaire survey was the last tool I applied during my fieldwork to generate substantial data.

Informal interviews and participatory observation not only helped me to formulate sensible survey questions, but also enabled me to become acquainted with people who were motivated to answer the questionnaire. But, this took more time and required more information than the everyday conversation or informal interview.

Household surveys which took the form of questionnaire were carried out in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua between January and March 2011. They involved 50 households in each village (out of a total 204 and 213 respectively). I returned to Ban Fangthai in April 2010 and conducted survey involving 100 households (out of a total 362 households). Two questionnaires were developed; the first to collect data from Thai farmers, and the second for Lao migrants. The questionnaires were designed in the English language, and translated into Thai (see Appendices). The questions addressed three main areas:

1) Demographic and socio-economic profile
2) Households’ migration experiences, reasons of migration, remittances, and the methods used to hire Lao workers
3) Section on agricultural livelihoods and labour management
There were some differences between the compiled questions for the people in Thailand and in Laos. For example, the questionnaire for the Thai farmers focused upon households’ migration experiences, remittances, and the methods used to hire Lao workers. The questions for the Lao workers were relevant to their migration experiences in Thailand, remittances, and how and why they migrate to Thailand. One individual household member could answer the questions; but, in most cases, other household members were present and responded to the questions. I personally conducted all of the questionnaire surveys. Systematic sampling was employed. I selected one in every four houses in each village based on the site map I had drawn. Most of the households in Ban Fangthai and Ban Kaemkong were located along the main road, so I could easily draw the lines on the maps. However, it was more difficult in Ban Laonua where the households were located close to the centre of the village. I had to draw circles on the map indicating sampling one in every four households.

Conducting a statistical survey of household economies and production in Laos presented two main challenges: (1) the representativeness of the sample; and (2) the accuracy of the statistical data. Although the survey was designed to obtain information on a household basis, balancing the informants based on age and gender proved difficult. Most of the informants available in the home were either middle aged (40 years or more) or elderly. The younger people were working outside of the village.

In addition, I found it challenging to collect some of the statistical data, in particular the total household monthly incomes and the property the villagers owned in the Lao villages. Because the majority of my respondents were non-salaried, they did not record the amount of money earned per month. So, instead of trying to ascertain their monthly incomes, I had to guide them to calculate how much they earned per day from a certain activity, e.g., selling vegetables and catching frogs. Then I asked how many days per week they engaged in certain activities. In terms of the amounts of remittances, some households had more than three family members working in Thailand who sent remittances every two or three months. Some remitted money on a monthly basis. I had
to estimate and recheck each respondent to arrive at the correct figure. In the case of Ban Fangthai, some villagers stated that they did not want to give information about their cash incomes and debts. I opted to give them a range of numbers and asked them to indicate in which range their incomes fell. I also found calculating household economies extremely difficult. Some villagers lived in different homes. Other worked on their family farms, in particular in the Lao village where one farmland was often shared by 2-3 families. I had to crosscheck all of the questionnaires in which people mentioned either their own land or the land that they were working on.

Data from the structured questionnaires survey was tabulated in Microsoft Excel as a basis analysis for charts and Tables. The survey not only provided a deeper understanding of the demographic and socio-economic statuses of those in the three research sites, but also provided the foundation for further analysis of the pursuance of agriculture in each village based on land and labour availability and migration.

3.5 Limitation of Field Research

There were some limitations to my thesis; for example: (1) the validity and reliability of the data; (2) under representation of Lao state officials; and (3) following the Lao migrants to various destinations beyond Bangkok.

As Le Compte and Goetz (1982) observed, the results of ethnographic research are often unreliable and lacking in both validity and generalisation. Reliability depends upon the extent to which studies can be replicated: validity is associated with generalisation. Unlike scientific research wherein the researcher can maximally control external variables, ethnographic research does not have this facility because it is carried out in a natural setting and is difficult to reproduce. Bryman (2012) who discusses reliability and validity in ethnographic research somewhat differently from Le Compte and Goetz, wrote that the terms reliability and validity in ethnographic research could not be employed in similar ways to scientific research. The nature of ethnographic research concerns words and meaning and takes the view of the participant into consideration.
Bryman (2012) suggests that reliability, validity, and accuracy in ethnographic research are associated with an accurate and systematic methodology.

Despite my best attempts to conduct my fieldwork, I had to bear in mind the nature of ethnographic research which due to being based on participant observation, oral histories and personal experiences can prove selective, biased, and incomplete. Replication is very difficult to achieve because events that occur in natural settings cannot be reproduced. In addition, my research involved investigating field sites in which no academic studies had been conducted previously. I could only draw upon existing data from government organisations on the basic socio-economic conditions. Other historical information came from the collective memories of the villagers.

The second limitation was the under representation of Lao state officials at the district and provincial levels. As my research was related to state-village relations in the borderland, it was important to ascertain the perceptions of the state representatives regarding cross-border practices. To this end, I interviewed local village headmen, soldiers and border patrol police I met during my fieldwork, accompanied by a Lao government official who worked at the City Hall and functioned as my research coordinator. I encountered problems when interviewing state officials in Laos. Unlike the Thai government officials who I could interview by myself, interviewing the high-ranking government officials in Laos required provision of an official letter. Also I had to take my Lao coordinator with me; but he could not accompany me at all the time as he was studying in Bangkok.

A final limitation was relevant to the multi-sited methodology I employed. This was critical, particularly as researcher’s applying multi-sited methodologies may spend little time at each site and with each localised population. Marcus (1995, pp. 7-10) argues that the strongest point of an ethnography is the in-depth knowledge one acquires from spending time in the field and through getting to know people during one’s stay. In cases of multi-sited ethnographies, researchers learn to know people (objects) who are mobile
and/or spatially dispersed by ‘knowing’ a place through participant observation. In my case, I was unable to follow the Lao migrants who migrated to various locations in Thailand due to limitations of budget, time, and information. For these reasons, my interviews with Lao migrants in Thailand were limited to two particular locations only: the northeastern Thai borderlands and Bangkok. In terms of limited information, many households in Lao did not have the phone numbers of their children working in Thailand. Besides, the Lao migrants changed telephone numbers very often. Although I collected 10 numbers from Ban Kaemkong and 12 from Ban Laonua, I could only reach 6 in total. Thus, my research may have inadvertently omitted groups from other areas who could possibly have related valuable experiences.

3.6 Reflecting upon Positionality

Positionality, in a broad sense specifies the power, privilege and biases or power structures that surround the subject (Madison, 2012). It may be exemplified through consideration of both the similarities and differences between researchers and the research participants, inclusive of race, class, gender, age, sexuality, disabilities as well as life experiences (Hopkins, 2007). My research conducted in Northeast Thailand and Laos reflects both differences and similarities. In this section, I illustrate my positionality as a Thai female researcher undertaking research in her home country and a neighbouring country with similarities of language and culture. Not only race, class, and gender shaped my positionality: my fieldwork location in the borderland also determined my legal and extralegal\textsuperscript{12} status.

As a Thai female from Bangkok conducting fieldwork alone in rural northeastern Thailand and Laos, I faced challenges and enjoyed advantages in many ways. Fortunately, I did not experience language barrier problems because northeastern Thai

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12} According to Oxford Dictionary Online 2\textsuperscript{nd} Edition (2010), extralegal means something beyond the province of law, not regulate by law. In Nordstrom (2008), extralegal is a term designating the range from the illegal and illicit through the informal to the undocumented and unrecognized, the invisible realities of extralegal trade, the illegal, illicit, informal; undeclared, unregistered, unregulated and all the movement of people and goods that takes place in the shadows.}
language and Lao language are very similar. And because Thai televised dramas were very popular in Laos, so I could communicate in Thai to the Lao people. Unlike foreign researchers, many of whom have to depend upon interpreters, I could directly communicate with my research participants. Furthermore, my Thai female identity not only provided safety, but also allowed me to easily access my research participants. I visited many locations that foreign researchers, who ‘look different’ (have different eye, skin, and hair colour), and speak different languages could not access. I followed the Lao migrants easily, travelling in local boats and trucks, and travelled to and within Laos on my own without any trouble. On the first and second occasions, Lao border soldiers asked to see my documents and fee. But, after a few weeks, they got used to seeing me traveling back and forth and stopped checking my documents.

The differences between male and female ethnographers have been detailed in previous studies; for example, Vera-Santos (1993, p.162) saw ‘understanding, sympathetic’. Perrone (2010), who researched on drug-using behaviours in highly sexualised dance clubs, observed that female ethnographers can compromise safety and inhibit access to establishing rapport that can benefit the process of data collection. In Thai-Lao border region, my female identity helped my research participants to feel comfortable to talking to me. The village head of Ban Fangthai said to me: “It is lucky that you are female so you could travel anywhere without being suspect like a male”.¹³

Additionally, my female identity enabled me to easily access fieldwork and to gain moral support of provincial and district organisations. Besides providing general information, many local government officials found safe places for me to stay during my fieldwork. I initially stayed with the village headman; but, knowing that I needed to stay for a few months, I started looking for a rental place. I finally rented a room at a local trader’s home. Her husband, a police officer worked in another district, and her daughter was studying and working in the city. So, she lived alone in a three bedroomed house in the village. In Ban Kaemkong, my Lao coordinator initially left me with the village

¹³ Author’s fieldnotes, 17 April 2011.
headman, who helped me to find a room for rent in the village. When I arrived Ban Laonua with the Lao migrants, I was asked to stay in the house of a young couple who lived with their mother. I stayed there until my research was completed. Everywhere I went, old female villagers helped me to find a place where I could stay. They often said: “Poor you, you are a female conducting a research alone. You must miss your parents badly”.\textsuperscript{14}

However, there were a few challenges and dilemma associated with researching in northeastern Thailand and Laos. First, returning to Thailand, my home country, to undertake my fieldwork in the northeastern region and Laos was by no means returning home. The field sites were all rural and totally different from urban Bangkok where I was born and had always lived. I felt truly an outsider in my own country and had to adjust to staying in my three field sites.

Being a single Thai female undertaking research alone posed a dilemma vis-a-vis how to position myself with the male villagers. Many researchers who have conducting their research in rural villages, state describe that they obtained a lot of information by drinking with villagers after work. As a non-drinking female staying in villages by myself, I was frequently asked to join drinking circles but I found a way of politely refusing, often making a joke of it. When I first arrived in Ban Laonua, the village head and 7 committee members invited me to drink beer with them. I made a joke “I am Buddhist and follow the five precepts. One of them talks about protecting ourselves from intoxicants causing heedlessness. How could you claim that you are Buddhist if you don’t follow the rules of morality?”. The village head laughed and replied that he could follow any rule except that one, so I replied in a humorous way: “Protecting yourself from intoxicants is very important because if your consciousness is gone, you can violate all rules of morality”. The villagers laughed a lot but they stopped encouraging me to drink with them. To counteract the problem of limited socialising with the male villagers, I joined in other activities in the daytime. I went fishing with

\textsuperscript{14} Author’s fieldnotes 4 December 2010.
some of villagers, and if I made appointments with people in the evenings, I generally
took someone with me; for example, a female I lived with in Ban Fangthai, the young
son or daughter of the house owner in Ban Kaemkong, and the daughter of a lady who I
lived with in Ban Laonua.

In addition, my ethnographic fieldwork in rural northeastern Thailand and Lao raised
my awareness of social classes and expectations that originated in my educational
background and my habitus in general. In Ban Fangthai, because I was studying in
Australia and was a lecturer at a well-known university in Bangkok, people expected to
be rich. They saw me as a rich lecturer who must be earning good salary. Villagers often
asked about my salary and my parents’ occupations. Fortunately, my work and talk
technique proved helpful in these circumstances. When people saw me trying to learn
how to work in the paddy fields and joining in as many activities as I could, some
commented that they thought people who had a good education mostly had very
comfortable jobs in air-conditioned rooms. My work and talk technique not only
facilitated more acceptance from the communities, but decreased my positionality that
was tied with my education background and Bangkok. Although they frequently asked:
“You are educated people and must know more than us”, in time they learned that there
were many things I did not know and for this reason needed their guidance. Thus, it
became a two-way-learning process between the researcher and the communities that
were being studied.

The people in Laos had some expectations regarding my capacity to help them improve
their lives. Some asked me to take one of their daughters to work as a domestic worker
in my home in Bangkok. Many asked about the benefit of my research, what they would
get in return, and why they had to help me answer the survey if they stood not to benefit
at all. Some said that I was only conducting research so that I could return to Bangkok
and to earn a lot of money. They said I would not be able to understand the tough lives
they endured as farmers; some even asked for money if I wanted them to answer the
questions. While some foreigners conducting research in Laos (i.e. Daviau 2010,
Wasana 2012) faced problems of official controls; for example, a Lao officer was assigned to accompany them and villagers demanded to cooperate with the research officially, I too had to work hard to get the cooperation of my research subjects. As a way of appropriately answering when asked about the benefits of my research, I generally replied that I could not assure them that my research would help to improve their lives; but, it was a way of increasing Lao communities, understanding of rural hardship. I did not have enough money to pay the people who cooperated with my research. But, whenever I visited them, I took big bags of snacks, candy and pain relief balm. Inviting people and their children to snack with me, as well as bringing my simple food to share with them, were very good methods for starting conversations. I usually gave households that participated in the questionnaire survey a bottle of pain relief balm in return. I did not intend it as a gift for the people although one usually takes some offer. When interviewing villagers, I considered the pain relief balm useful for people who had to do hard physical work in the fields all day. A sense of humour was also crucial. In situations where people started to become bored, one female complained: “Why you ask so many questions? I am so headache”. I instantly gave her the pain relief balm and replied: “I know you might feel like this so I prepared a balm for you. Please smell and then think about what I have asked you”. The respondents laughed a lot and seem to enjoy answering subsequent questions.

The last dilemma impeding my fieldwork was my extralegal status. Although I obtained an official letter of permission from the Lao government to conduct research in Bang Fanglao and Ban Laonua, engaging in ethnographic fieldwork among undocumented Lao migrants plus my journeys between the Thai-Lao borders placed me in extralegal circumstance at some stages. Without a research visa, any journey I made to Laos, that is crossing the border at the 2nd Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge in Mukdahan city, was as a tourist. As a Thai national, I could stay legally in Laos for 30 days for tourism purposes. So, with that in mind, I became a Thai tourist conducting a research in Laos. I regularly entered Laos, had my passport stamped and then return to Ban Fangthai by boat along with local villagers who went to shop in a local market on Sundays through the
traditional checkpoint. Just as the Lao migrants took advantage of language and ethnic similarities to the Thai people in order to stay extralegally in Thailand, I adopted the same method so as not to disappear from the Thai immigration system. I became an undocumented Thai citizen in my own country because my passport showed that I was still in Laos. Locked in the situation, I emulated the Lao migrants who crossed the Mekong River to return home after the cultivating season, I took the same boat and showed my legally stamped passport to the Lao border soldiers if requested.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Before conducting their fieldwork, researchers are required to submit an ethics application to a committee for review to ensure that participants in the research are informed and consent to participate in the research. Ethics, in practice, is a reflexive method that guides the researcher’s morality and enables her/him to be sensitive to the ethical dimensions of fieldwork (Turner 2010). In the following section, I delineate how research addresses the topics of consent, confidentiality, and sensitivity to the research topic.

At the beginning of my research in Ban Fangthai, I planned to inform people verbally at village meetings about my research objectives and what I needed to do in the village. The village headman informed me that, however, village meetings were only randomly convened. Utilising information technology, the village radio broadcasted every morning at 6.00 a.m. If there is an urgent matter, the villagers contact each other by mobile phone: the network has covered the whole area for more than five years. Based on this information, I went to see the village head the next morning and used his village radio to introduce myself and my research. In terms of the two villages in Laos, I introduced myself through everyday conversations. I also encouraged the villagers to ask questions if they wanted further information when conducting the interviews, I first made sure of the willingness of the respondents to participate and always informed them that they could cease participation at any time. However, I did not distribute consent forms because it made little sense in the context of the rural areas wherein written
language rarely features in everyday lives of people. I built on the rapport I had established earlier. This enabled the villagers to understand my work and made the interviews more relaxed.

Before leaving the field, I showed my participants the data I had collected from each research site. In Ban Fangthai, I spoke to the local priest\textsuperscript{15} and asked if I could use the meeting room in the church in which there was a projector and a computer. After the religious ceremony that the people in general attended every Tuesday night, I presented my research topic, and the photos I had taken. The villagers in Ban Fangthai were excited to see photos of Lao villages on the opposite side of the river. In Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua, I used my notebook to present data, along with pictures of the balcony of the house in which I lived. Approximately 20 people came to listen to my talk.

Finally, but not less important, I had to consider issue of the security of the borderlanders and any impacts on the well-being of those among whom the project was take place (Donnan & Willson, 2010, p. 14). Aware of the sensitivity of the research topic, e.g., migration patterns and illegal movement in the agricultural sectors, I anonymised my research locations and use pseudonyms in my research to ensure the safety and well-being of my interviewees. In cases where respondents did not want me to reveal their names and positions, for example, government officials who provided information on migrant policies in Mukdahan Province, I quoted only high rank government official.

\textbf{3.8 Conclusion}

This chapter addresses the methodological challenges and methods applied in the field. As well, it demonstrates my pre-fieldwork preparation, my expectations, and the reality and challenges I encountered when undertaking field research in areas far from home.

\textsuperscript{15} Ban Fangthai is a catholic village with a large church in the middle of the village.
In this chapter, I reveal some of the unexpected circumstances that shaped my research methodologies, from my in-depth ethnography of a particular village to exploration of multiple locations. The natal villages of the Lao labourers in Ban Fangthai, together with their migration experiences, characterised the increasingly mobility of the people. Multi-sited ethnographies were undertaken in order to engage with these movements, Rather than limiting my study to two villages across the Mekong River border, I included another village and investigated the linkages of these multiple locations. This enabled me to access key informants and to make sense of Lao’s migration circuit.

This chapter additionally details the range of methods employed, i.e., participant observation, formal and informal interviews and household surveys, and identifies the limitations of my field research. Finally, I reflect upon ethical considerations, and my positionality as a Thai female researcher from Bangkok undertaking research in northeastern Thailand and Lao PDR. On many occasions, I travelled undocumented with local villagers, crossing the Mekong River by boat. This showed that not only race, class, and gender shaped my positionality: my fieldwork location in the borderland also determined my legal and extra-legal status.

In the following chapter, I will contextualise the study by exploring the historical changes that have shaped northeastern Thailand and Laos, and Thai-Lao development trajectories.
Chapter 4

Contextualising Northeast Thailand and Lao Borderlands
and Trajectories of Development

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses Northeast Thailand (or Isan) and Laos from a historical perspective. Focus is on political and economic developments: this will provide a substantial background to the relationships between Northeast Thailand and Laos and associated historical, cultural, social and economic aspects. Historically, the areas were once considered as the same polity under the rule of the Siamese King since 1828. In 1893, the French colonialist army occupied Laos and forced Siam to withdraw from the left bank of the Mekong River. This saw Isan ultimately incorporated into the modern Thai state. These events engendered the ethnic, cultural and language similarities of northeastern Thai and Lao people and marked the spatiality of the border and migration patterns that I will discuss in Chapters five and six.

After exploring cross-border migration from Laos to Thailand and its implications for agrarian transformation, the chapter then reveals the trajectories of development of Thailand and Laos that have led to economic disparities and migration. Prior to the 1960s, Northeast Thailand and Laos were relatively similar. Both areas were farming-focused and their economies lagged behind other areas. From the 1960s on, industrialisation in Thailand led to economic growth and urbanisation; but, Isan was left behind, marginalised from the benefits. Because Isan is the poorest region of Thailand, numbers of Isan people have migrated to work in labouring jobs in the industrial and service sectors in Bangkok and its vicinities. Some return to work in the paddy fields in the cultivating season. In the same historical period, Laos was the hidden arena in a ‘Secret War’. It suffered extensive aerial bombardment by the United States in the

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16 The term ‘Isan’, which is of Pali-Sanskrit origin, means ‘Northeast’. People living in the northeast of Thailand interchangeably label themselves and are labelled by others as Isan, Thai Isan, Lao Isan, Thai or Lao, depending on the ethnic, political, social or familial nuances of any given situation (Hesse-Swain, 2006, p. 257). In this thesis, I use the term Khon Isan which means people of northeastern Thailand, and Khon Lao to refer to people of Lao PDR.
latter’s attempt to destroy North Vietnamese sanctuaries and to rupture the supply lines known as the Ho Chi Minh trail. The Lao government divided into two factions: the Communist Pathet Lao and the Royal Lao Government. Both the former leftists and the later rightists received external support for a proxy war from the Cold War superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States. In 1975, the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party established rule over the country, leaving Laos almost isolated from the global economy and the non-communist world until 1986 when the government announced its New Economic Mechanism (NEM), designed to re-orient to a market economy.

Different paths of modernisation produce different political and economic circumstances. At the beginning of the new millennium, Thailand became an upper-middle income country. Now it is confronting the labour challenges of the upper middle-income trap: eroding labour productivity, chronic labour shortages, a dwindling labour force and a declining fertility rate (Vasuprasat, 2010, p. 14). When Thailand and its neighbouring countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region began to formalise political and economic relations and regionalisation efforts in the mid-1990s, Thailand became the main destination for migrants from its poorer neighbours, namely Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar. These countries subsequently filled the labour gaps with jobs such as fishing and fish processing, construction, domestic service and tourism.

In the contemporary era, while northeastern Thailand remains the country’s poorest region, living condition of the Isan people has significantly improved (Grandstaff, Grandstaff, Limpinuntana, & Suphanchaimat, 2008). Their migration pattern has changed from short moves to increasingly long periods of being away doing non-farm work, a change which has resulted in labour shortages in the peak agricultural cycle (Rigg & Salamanca, 2009, 2011). Farmers living in the Thai border provinces who are aware of the availability of a labour force in Laos, welcome Lao seasonal migrants (Makpun, 2008; Taotawin, 2011). Aided also by the porous Thai-Lao border, language, appearance, and cultural similarities, farmers find it eases to employ Lao migrants in informal ways. The resulting migration dynamics and the association with agrarian transformation will be further examined in Chapters six and seven of the thesis.
4.2 Northeast Thailand and Laos from pre-colonial to post-colonial times

This section examines Thai-Lao historical relations and concepts of border and boundary which prevailed throughout in the pre-vand post-colonial periods. In addition, it delinears the connection between people living in northeast Thailand and the Lao people, which has laid the foundations of cross-border practices and migration in the current era.

4.2.1 The pre-colonial time

The contested identity of people living in northeast Thailand, and their cultural, linguistic and historical association with the people of Laos, have been subjected of interest for many scholars (Keyes, 1966, 1967; McCargo & Hongladarom, 2004; Phongphit & Kevin Hewison, 1990). The term ‘Isan’ (Northeast), and ‘Khon Isan’ are used to describe the inhabitants of this region. Some northeasterners who had experienced intensive interpersonal relations with the Lao, who had made the connection between Laotians and north-easterners promulgated by the radio, or who simply were familiar with the term "Lao" because of its long history of use by the people on the right bank of the Mekong River, pen phulao, "being Lao," was indeed a possible ethnic identification (Keyes, 1966, p. 367).

Evans (2002) and D. E. G. Hall (1973) note that Thailand and Laos are countries that emerged from a complex regional history of empire-building. Around the 13th century, the Tai-speaking people established the Sukhothai first capital of Simese state. Shortly after Sukhothai fell in the mid-14th century, two new capitals were established; Ayuthaya, the Siamese kingdom in the central region of the peninsula, and Lan-Xang (Laos). The area of northeastern Thailand became a buffer zone between Lan-Xang and Siamese Kingdom. In 1350, King Fa Ngum of Lan-Xang was able to extend influence over some parts of what is now northeastern Thailand. This era saw the first mass migration of Lao people to the northeastern region. It also saw the introduction of the Lao culture and languages.
At the beginning of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, the Lao kingdom separated into three small kingdoms: Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Champasak. The King of Ayuthaya extended his power to the surrounding kingdoms of Nan, Chiang Mai, Sipsongpanna, Sukhothai, some parts of Lan-Xang and of the Khmer kingdoms. All of Kingdoms were hostile and tributary to each other, and to Burma and China (Reid, 2009, pp. 38-39). In 1767, Burmese troops from the west completely destroyed Ayuthaya, leaving Vientiane a vassal state of Burma. The Thai state re-established by King Taksin following the Burmese conquest.

\textbf{Figure 4.1 Southeast Asian Kingdoms, CA. 1400-1600}

From 1779 on, Siam expanded its influence over all of the Mekong territories. The three Lao kingdoms (Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Champassak) were subordinated to Siam.
as the tributary states. A rebellion led by the Vientiane King Anuvong in 1826 represented a final attempt to promote Lao ethnic nationalism, on both sides of the Mekong, and to reconstitute the Lan-Xang kingdom. But, the Lao were defeated. The King of Siam subsequently removed large numbers of Lao across the Mekong to Isan where they could be controlled more easily. Isan was nominally ruled by Bangkok from 1827 onwards. As a result of this involuntary resettlement, the vast majority of people living in northern Thailand today are of Lao descent and considered themselves to be close cultural relatives of the Lao on the opposite bank of the Mekong (Keyes, 1967). However, the northeasterners’ rejection of the domination of Bangkok culminated in the Holy Men revolts of 1902 (Keyes, 1967, 1977).
4.2.2 French colonisation (1893-1945)

In the 19th century, a new strong power emerged from the European colonial countries, notably France and Great Britain. The Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1893, signed under threat of a French ultimatum, allowed the French to expand their territorial influence...
into Southeast Asia, thus halting Thai expansion. As well as establishing the present areas of Thailand, the treaty also transferred the entire area of the left bank of the Mekong River, or (what is known as Laos today), to France. This saw Laos became as a territorial entity within French Indochina (See Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4).

**Figure 4.3 Siam prior to the Franco–Siamese War, before 1893**

Source: Gibbons (1921, p. 84)
Nationalism and the construction of nationhood in Thailand and Lao slowly developed in the 20th century as a product of their integration with the modern world system. According to Winichakul (1996, p. 81), controversy over the question of what today may be seen as “sovereignty” over the left bank of the Mekong was not only critical to
the formation of the modern Thai state, but also to its misunderstood history. Before the
arrival of European colonialists, Siam was a collection of people in a broad area within
territory that was not clearly by demarcated boundary lines. Thus, Siam had different
perspectives of its territories compared to those of the British and French. It accordingly
negotiated for the surrounding frontiers. In the areas of what is contemporary Laos,
Siam tried to claim the ownership of the space along the Mekong River. But, Europe
claimed that it had to be decided whether a particular tributary was independent or an
integral part of a colony of another kingdom, not somewhere between independent and
dependent or possessed by more than one kingdom at the same time (Winichakul 1996,
p. 88). This controversy underpinned the Franco-Siamese dispute. The confrontation
ended by when French battle ships sailed up the Chao Phraya River to Bangkok and
forced Siam to leave the east bank of the Mekong River to French colonial control. In
1893, a treaty was signed in Bangkok established the Mekong River as the border
between Siam and French Indochina. For Winichakul, this was the turning point
regarding Siamese elites’ concern for territory, the land about which their ancestors had
never worried and had even given away as gifts to ensure that most of the borderland
would be securely under Siam’s sovereignty (Winichakul, 1996, p. 111). Subsequently,
it became necessary for Siam to develop mapping technology to exemplified
geographical boundaries of the nation, and construct Siam nationhood and nationalism,
what Winichakul refers to ‘a geo-body’. He states that:

[geo-body] describes the operations of the technology of territoriality
which created nationhood spatially. It emphasizes the displacement of
spatial knowledge which has in effect produced social institutions and
practices that created nationhood (Winichakul, 1996, p. 16).
Apart from the new geographical boundaries, the association with Western colonial powers accelerated cultural differentiation between Siam and Laos. Commencing during King Chulalongkorn’s (reign 1853-1910). However, the Siamese government faced problems of resistance from the Northeast vis-a-vis its attempts to exert stronger control over northeastern region. The government’s decree to eliminate slavery had adversely affected the local economy. Commissioners who had been appointed in the region, attempted to strengthen tax-collection and administrative control through the local nobles. The years 1901-1902 saw a large scale uprising central government named the "Holy Man's" rebellion. The holy man is a religious prophecy circulated among the people about an upcoming turmoil in which gold would turn into pebbles and pebbles
would turn into gold. Pigs and buffalo would turn into man-eating monsters and a tumultuous nature would wreak destruction on evil people (Toem, 1987). Only the Holy Man who would be a just and righteous king for the people, would be able to help. At that time, many men claimed themselves as Holy Men in many provinces including Chaiyaphoom, Buriram, Korat, Roi-et, Nong Khai, Surin, and Nakhon Phanom.

The largest rebellion was in 1902 in Ubonrachatanee Province when a monk from Savannakhet, Ong Man, appeared and claimed that he was the Holy Man. He set up his army of his thousands of followers and challenged the Siam Government by capturing Siam officials in the Northeast. The government sent a number of soldiers to combat the situation but they were killed by the group of the rebels, a victory that enhanced the prestige of the Holy Man and attracted more followers. Finally, Siam sent troops to the Northeast to stop the rebels. They were ultimately were captured and executed while a few of the major leaders fled across the Mekong River (Murdoch, 1974).

The Holy Man uprising can be interpreted in both economic and political terms. According to Keyes (1977), Siamese administrative control was seen as restrictive and invasive, particularly as officials from the central government often took part of profits from animal trading and taxation. The Holy Man’s rebellion gave new importance to the Northeast region. It urged the Siamese government to slow the pace of centralisation, and to gradually integrate the local nobility into the new bureaucracy which operated at the provincial level. By doing so, the government was able to prevent any further widespread rebellions (Phatharathananunth, 2002). In 1910, the Siamese government expanded educational reform into the outer provinces to include the peasantry on commitment to the Thai state was emphasized through the teaching of patriotic songs, recitations of the king’s words and standardisation of a central Thai language. These nationalist policies produced a widespread consciousness in the people of being Lao or Siamese.

In case of Laos, scholars emphasise that the French had little to do with the forging of the sense of Lao identity (Evans, 2002; Jerndal & Rigg, 1998; Pholsena, 2004; Pholsena & Banomyong, 2006; Rigg, 2009; Stuart-Fox, 1993). Laos had become a component of
French Indochina for 60 years. According to Stuart-Fox (1993), the only Lao political entity that existed was the Kingdom of Luang Prabang which was protected by France rather than being tributary to Siam. The rest of Lao territories became dependent provinces administered by French officials as part of Indochina. In addition, Jerndal and Rigg (1998, p. 817) argued that prior to World War II, Laos became a residual, almost empty space within the wider political unit of Indochina.

**Figure 4.6 Contemporary Map of Southeast Asia**

![Contemporary Map of Southeast Asia](http://www.aseanbriefing.com/userfiles/regions/asean/asean-map.jpg)

4.2.3 The post-colonial period (1945 to 1975)

The pan-Thai ambition initiated by the Pibun Songkhram government in Bangkok was a turning point that forced the French government to rethink the sense of Lao national identity (Jerndal & Rigg, 1998; Rigg, 2009). The aim was to awaken in the Laotians a national spirit in the Laotian and to progressively achieve moral unity in the country. The principal instrument of this policy was the introduction of a Lao language
newspaper, ‘Lao Nyai (Great Laos)’, which began publication in January 1941. However, Evans (2002, p. 80) contends that: the content of the paper was never allowed to stray beyond French policy; nor was it to become explicitly nationalist. It most important function was to instill in its readers a sense of Lao space and to create a sense of identity across this space.

The history of Laos during 1945-1975 was marked by the turmoil. Supporting by Japan, Lao declared of independent from France in September 1945 and enjoyed the independence for 6 months, then was ruled by Japan. At the end of the World War II, Japan was defeated. Laos survived without being absorbed by Siam or integrated into Vietnam, and finally achieved independence from France in 1954. However, a further tragedy saw Laos divided by civil war for more than two decades. Faced with poverty and the reality of geography which placed Laos in the middle of the Cold War, Laos opted for neutrality. But, neutrality proved impossible. The US started pouring aid budget into Vientiane ostensibly for development, but its programme gave rise to corruption and an unwarranted growth in the power of the military. At the same time, the Lao communist movement opposed any alignment with the US, supported by the North Vietnamese was growing up. A series of military coups and counter-coups in Vientiane in the early 1960s allowed the Lao communists to take more role and made significant inroads into the Royal Lao Government's control of the country. When America began its air war in Vietnam, Laos became caught up in the Vietnam War. In 1975, Laos was finally reunified and emerged as a communist country.

The next section will illustrate the different paths of state-led modernisation taken by Thailand and Laos as a basic factor contextualising the different appertaining the different of Thai-Lao borders and economic disparities.

**4.3 Political Economic Development of Thailand and Laos after the 1970s**

In this section, I will draw on the trajectories of political economic development in Thailand and Laos. Particular focus is on the disparities between Bangkok, northeast Thailand, and Laos, state-led modernisation, and the rural transformation in Thailand
which commenced in the 1960s. The rise of socialism in Laos in 1975 resulted in a centrally planned economic system replacing the private sector and private enterprises, and in strict border control along the Mekong River. Across the Mekong River, Northeast Thailand underwent little economic change due to the area being the site of political struggle between the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and the government. As well as being Thailand’s poorest region; it was located relatively close to Indochina, where decolonisation under the banner of revolutionary struggle was occurring.

The landmark period came in the late 1980s when Northeast Thailand and Laos underwent change from sharing relatively similar landscapes to others characterised by difference. During this period, Thailand achieved remarkable economic growth, which marked a shift from an agrarian to an export-driven industrialising economy. At the same time, the end of Indochina war in 1975 enhanced regional cooperation and saw the re-opening of the Thai-Laos border. Migration to Thailand had become the means to generate income for many Lao. The Thai economy required cheap labour in various sectors, whereas Laos offered few job opportunities other than subsistence farming. In addition to the Greater Mekong Sub-region Programme that forged links between Laos and its neighbouring countries through international bridges and highways, there was a rapid rise in the number of Lao economic migrants in Thailand.
4.3.1 The Industrialisation of Thailand from the 1960s and the lagging behind of the Northeast

Prior to the 1960s, Thailand was predominantly an agricultural economy. Under the Sarit government\textsuperscript{17}, with the support of the United States, its industrial promotion policy was implemented in the early 1960s. The country’s attempt to become industrialised

\textsuperscript{17} Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1908–1963) was Prime Minister during Thailand’s military government from 1958 to 1963.
was characterised by focus on food processing within which domestic agricultural products were excellent resources for industrial investment. The availability of local labour, combined with abundant natural produce, enabled the country to increase production and to shift to manufacturing or processing products for export purposes. From the 1960s on, the Thai economy firmed its foundation by investing in physical infrastructure which led to economic growth in the later period.

However, the growth of Thailand was predominantly in Bangkok and its vicinities: the rural areas remained largely agricultural and offered limited employment opportunities, especially in Northeast Thailand which has always been synonymous with poverty and a backward rural setting. The underdevelopment of the Northeast was variously attributable to its poor environment, unreliable rainfall, and lack of irrigation (Long, 1966; Parnwell, 1988). In 1962, per capita income in the Northeast reached only $US 45 compared with approximately $US 100 for the remainder of the country [National Statistical Office 1964 cited in Long (1966)]. However, another important factor that determined the backwardness of the Northeast had its roots in history; that is, in the way that the Thai state treated the Lao ethnicities. As Gustafson (1994) states:

Northeast Thailand was in a sense an "enclave" which was far removed from Bangkok and in large measure ignored by both Bangkok and Laos. The interaction of the aristocracy with the Northeast would have been difficult at best. In addition to the physical obstacles were the social inhibitors. The inhabitants of the Northeast in the early days were either political dissident from Laos or war captives who were forcefully resettled in the Korat Plateau by the conquering Siamese in the early 19th century. It seems likely, as a result, that what trade there was, if any, in the Northeast at that time was of a narrowly focused and internal nature.

Gustafson (1994), further notes that Northeast Thailand was transformed by Thailand’s modernisation under Bangkok’s control. Isan people’s sense of being subordinated and marginalised was ongoing and continually expressed. Between the 1960s and 1970s, the region had become a popular site for the Communist Party of Thailand and the leftist
politicians. Thus, it became the matter of security for Bangkok to develop Northeast Thailand which was remote and relatively isolated from Thai society. The economic development of the region in the form of the construction of the Friendship Highway and the establishment of Khon Kaen Province as a regional hub in the early 1960s was driven largely by political considerations based on a significant volume of military and monetary support from the US (McCargo & Hongladarom, 2004, p. 221). Wilson (1966, p. 349) contended that a principle motive for the development programmes in the Northeast was the threat of a rural insurgency, which was basically rooted in the following characteristics of the Northeast Region: (i) its ethnic distinction from central Thailand and similarity with Laos; (ii) the appeal of Lao separatism; (iii) the existence of non-Thai ethnic communities, such as Vietnamese and Cambodians; (iv) the isolation of substantial parts of the population from government authority; (v) the relative economic deprivation of the region; (vi) the susceptibility of the Lao border to infiltration by hostile elements, Thai or otherwise; (vii) the availability of weapons from Laos; (viii) the occurrence of certain number of acts of violence which are interpreted as having political motives; and (ix) a history of political dissidence. Few villages were irrigated effectively, dry season unemployment was high and labour migration had become deeply entrenched.

The budget allocation for development the Northeast region was also considerably low in comparison to that of the central region. According to Muscat (1994, pp. 139-140), the per capita development budget for the Northeast Thailand was only two-thirds of the allocation to the central and the per capital allocation under social development budget was only 30 per cent of the central’s in 1975. As such, the major programme driving of development in Northeast Thailand was the investment in infrastructure that linked the isolated Northeast Thailand to other parts of the country rather than economic opportunism in the region.

One of the major results of the underdevelopment of Northeast Thailand was the large-scale out-migration to the country’s urban centres. The expansion of transportation
intensified the possibility of the northeastern populations being incorporated into the national and global economic and political systems. As inhabitants of the country’s most populous region, the northeasterners became the main labour supply for Thai industrialisation. During the economic boom that occurred between the 1980s and the early 1990s, 1.1 million northeastern Thai population aged between 15 and 30 years moved out mostly to Bangkok (Phongpaichit & Baker, 1995). Northeast Thailand provided the highest number of migrants. The six largest migration streams to Bangkok between 1985 and 1990 were from Ubon Ratchatani, Nakhon Ratchasima, Roi Et, Khon Kaen, Si Sa Ket, and Burirum (Perjaranonda et al., 1995, p. 184). However, this was the seasonal migration pattern. The majority of the northeastern Thai population remained house registration and formal residents in their home provinces, typically returned for a few weeks to take part in labour-intensive agricultural work, and for harvesting or for holiday times (Guest 1998).

4.3.2 Laos as a socialist country in 1975 and the post-socialism in 1985

In 1975, the Communist Pathet Lao succeeded in taking control of the country, officially closing the international borders and isolating the country from the world community. Having for years been subjected to French imperialism, civil war, and the Indochina war, the country now strove to be independent and to reconstitute its territories. However, newly introduced socialist economy which led to the limited human mobility and private trade, resulted in people withdrawing from the marketplace and relying heavily upon subsistence production. During this period, the Lao economy was probably less built around urban trade and industry than it was in the 19th century (Rehbein, 2007). In effect, communism did not necessarily constitute a higher stage of economic development; rather, it provided an alternative route to modernisation. The supposition was that socialist project of rural collectivisation and forced industrialisation would provide the underdeveloped nations with the means to catch up to the advanced nations; but, it was not achieved.

Employing its socialist regimes, the Lao government set out to stabilise the post-war socio economic and political conditions. In a bid to create a modern industrial economy
by bypassing capitalism, the government placed controls on the market and individual commerce, nationalised the industries, and launched a collectivised agricultural programme (Stuart-Fox, 1996). Evans (2002, pp. 191-192) stresses that agricultural collectivisation programme was implemented to serve two main reasons: to generate economic surplus that would finance state and development; and for political reason. In the worlds of Evans (2001 p. 192):

Communist orthodoxy claimed that the productivity of agriculture could only be raised through economies of scale (by analogy with an industrial model), and this could only be achieved by collective ownership of the means of production. Cooperatives, they argued, could maximise the use of modern inputs into agriculture. The second main reason was political. Although the LPRP had immediately set about recruiting members and sympathisers at the village and district levels in the former RLG zone, and established them in positions of leadership there, the degree of control was still deemed insufficient. By drawing peasants into cooperatives they would lose their ‘individualistic’ (‘capitalistic’) economic base of resistance to the new regime and the cooperatives could slowly come to be not only an economic form of organisation in the rural areas, but also a key political structure.

However, the collectivisation plan was unsuccessful. Two years after communist revolution, the Lao economy was even worse than it was during the final years of the civil war (Evans, 1988). The years between 1976 and 1978 were miserable for the Lao people due to drought and an economic recession. In early 1979, the government put efforts into raising the agricultural output; but the regime’s policies was instead compelled people to try to escape the ‘bamboo curtain’. According to Stuart-Fox (1993), families whose breadwinners were in re-education camps sold what they had to survive, then crossed secretly to Thailand. Between 1975 and 1980, approximately 300,000 people (ten per cent of the population at that time) fled from Laos across the Thai border. (Reddy, 2009, p. 14). Some left Laos because of dislike of communism, others because of the rapid decline in their living standards. Many among them were former rightist army personnel, police officers, teachers, technicians and civil servants who constitute the educated cohort. In 1974, the end of US aid led to the collapse of the Lao
urban economy. Unlike in Cambodia, the mass terror of the Khmer rouge was not practiced in Laos. Reddy (2009, p.15) states that the porous nature of Thai-Lao border provided relative ease of escaping communist Laos across the Mekong River into Thailand.

Lao PDR’s planners recognised that the construction of socialism would take time and require, the Lao communist party to abandon its programmes of rural collectivisation. In 1986, after ten years of isolation, the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) was implemented as a mean to facilitate market-oriented policies that would encourage foreign investors. NEM had three main pillars which were: (i) macro-economic stability and fiscal adjustment; (ii) private sector encouragement; and (iii) public sector reorganisation. To implement this plan, many facets of the Lao economy were decentralise, but the central authorities continued to control the policy guidelines which comprise (Rigg, 2005, pp. 19-20):

- A move to a market determination of prices and resource allocation
- A shift from central planning to guidance planning
- An elimination of subsidies and introduction of monetary controls
- An alignment of the domestic currency with the market rate
- A decentralisation of control to industries and lower levels of government
- The encouragement of the private sector
- The encouragement of foreign investment.

However, after two decades of reform, Laos was still one of the least-developed countries in the world. Its landlocked geographical location, which underpinned its lack of access to market, education and transportation, was but one of the factors that contributed to poverty. Only one quarter of the country’s urban population stood to benefit from the centrally located liberalisation of internal trade and industry. The remainder of the people who lived in poor rural areas, predominantly relied on agriculture and natural resources for their survival.
Closely related to the economic development in Laos was the state-led modernisation in Thailand. In the next section, I will depict Thailand in the same period and how lives of the villagers on both sides of the northeastern Thai-Lao border shifted from similarities to urbanisation in Northeast Thailand.

4.3.3 Green Revolution and Commercial Crops in the Northeast

In the 1960s, Thailand diversified its agriculture based on the green revolution: improved high-yielding varieties of rice, irrigation or controlled water supplies, improved moisture utilisation, fertilizers and pesticides, and associated management skills. The World Bank played a key role in promoting cash crops in Thailand. Among the organisations set up at the Bank's recommendation was Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), which oversaw all public investment planning. Following its establishment in 1959, NESDB became a major promoter of cash crops grown for export (Moulton, 2008, p. 15). New cash crops including sugar cane, tapioca, and corn among various other crops came to challenge rice and rubber. In Central Thailand, traditional subsistence farming was incrementally replaced by cash cropping and an export-oriented industrial monoculture. Farmers not only began adopting improved varieties, but also had to adopt the rice farming technology package developed for the Green Revolution. This included application of chemical fertilizers, intensive pest control with pesticides, and efficient water management through irrigation. In addition, the Thai government encouraged the use of new rice species, pesticide and chemical fertilizers. To this end provided credit and loan to the farmers through the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) and the Farmers' Group (Phongpaichit & Baker, 1995).

In Northeast Thailand, the Green Revolution came equipped with government policies for regional integration and economic development, the aim being to stem the expansion of communism. The Friendship Highway, which was completed in 1957, connected the region to Bangkok. It facilitated the introduction of the new rice species, the new technology of rice growing, and new cash crops such as maize, kenaf, and eucalyptus.
However, the people in the Northeast continued to grow staple crop of glutinous (sticky) rice, primarily for subsistence consumption.

According to Rigg (1985), the Green Revolution have failed to recognise the special problems facing farmers cultivating wet-rice in marginal rain-fed conditions in Northeast Thailand. Because the region is located on a semiarid plateau, rainfall in Northeast Thailand is inconsistent. Not only do periodical droughts, sandy soils, and substantial salt deposits constitute as the main ecological and agricultural problems, but the flat terrain of the plateau also often flooded in the wet season. A combination of these effects created difficult conditions for rain-fed agriculture and the Northeast Thailand population that were largely dependent on rice farming as the primary sources of income and food. Also, it forces the Northeast people to take on different jobs, for example, temporary employment in Bangkok, outside of the country as seasonal agriculture workers.

4.3.4 Migration and Rural Transformation in Northeast Thailand

For nearly three decades, from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s, a time when Laos was absent from the global community, Thailand was experiencing a period of intensively industrialisation and modernisation. The intensifying migration flew from the Northeast to Bangkok and other urban cities had made a significant contribution to the social assimilation of the Northeasterners with other regions. Muscat (1994, p. 285) argues that migration has broken down the prejudice that Central Thai formerly held toward Northeasterners and the old sense of inferiority among the Northeasterners who used to accept Bangkok’s judgment that Isan culture was backward. Migration also minimised their sense of self-identity as a disadvantaged and deprived ethnic group (Parnwell & Rigg, 1996).

Various academics have researched the impact of migration on rural transformation in Northeast Thailand especially the changing patterns of households and farming systems. Many have suggested that majority of households are likely to have at least one member living outside of the village, who rarely returns home and no longer solely relies on an
agricultural income (Grandstaff et al., 2008; Rigg & Salamanca, 2009, 2011; Shigetomi, 2004). In 2008, approximately 82.4 per cent of Northeast Thailand households had extended their income generating activities beyond their farm gates (National Statistical Office, 2010).

Migration is also an important factor associated with the rise of households’ incomes. Guest (1998) who investigated the changes in household incomes in Northeast Thailand between 1992 and 1994 and the proportion of remittances to the households, argued that remittances contribute to an increase of household incomes. This was consistent with other studies that explored the the benefits of internal migration for household income in Northeast Thailand. Invariably, remittances result in poverty reduction, improvement of family living conditions, and better development outcomes (Boonyamanond & Punpuing, 2009; Piriya, 2011). In terms of international migration, Jones and Kittisuksathit (2003) stressed that migration benefited both the macro- and micro-levels of households located in the Northeast, the poorest region of Thailand. Their study compared households with international migrant and the households with domestic migrant. Remittances from international migration were higher than from domestic Thai workers. But, debate surrounded the negative consequences that could result from inward remittances that are used mainly for consumption purposes and less for investment. The effects of Thai out-migrants on domestic investment can be considered in a more positive way when taking into account the migrants’ new experiences, skills, and savings, that enable them to set up their own businesses. The re-studies of villages in Northeast Thailand conducted by Rigg and Salamanca (2011, 2012) show the livelihood changes that occured over the 30 years since the villages’ economies became attached to work away from the villages, and how people have come to depend on economic opportunities outside of farming. In addition, various forms of re-investment in the village have been facilitated through remittances and by migrants.

However, higher reliance on non-farm incomes does not mean that the agricultural sector has declined. Amare, Hohfeld, Jitsuchon, and Waibel (2012) point out that
temporary out-migration is a labour-diversification-based livelihood strategy. Migrants who send remittances to their home villages consider themselves as members of their respective rural households, regardless of their duration of absence, frequency of home visits, or place of official registration. Furthermore, households in Northeast Thailand hold on to their lands as a safety measure due to low quality and vulnerable employment conditions. Grandstaff et al. (2008) contend that agriculture remains a major source of income among farm households. Although income from agriculture is far less when compared to non-farm income, half of the population in the region still engaged with farming; but, they integrate their farm and off-farm work. Nowadays, more people working part-time off-farm. Thus, agriculture has become a part-time occupation for many households. The percentage of northeastern households whose incomes mainly deserve from outside support (24 per cent) is about twice as high as in the rest of Thailand.

Some scholars point out that what has changed in Northeast Thailand is the type of agriculture being practiced and farm labour management. Cooperative labour arrangements no longer function as an effective economic mechanisms were replaced by hired-wage labour since the 1960s (Ganjanapan, 1984; Shigetomi, 1998). The National Statistical Office (2010) reveals that by 2008, 77 per cent of the farmers in Northeast Thailand employed agricultural workers on an occasional basis. Only 0.3 per cent of farmers employed permanent agricultural workers. And, even though domestic labourers were still available, their supply failed to meet the high demand during the peak periods. In fact, meeting labour supply became increasingly stressful as local populations switched to off-farm occupations. This became the major reason why some farmland were left idle or were farmed inefficiently, rented out, or disposed of. The farmers in the border provinces of Northeast Thailand generally absorbed immigrant labour from Laos or Cambodia to fill the labour gaps (Rigg & Salamanca, 2011).

4.3.5 Commercial Agriculture in Lao PDR

Following the declaration of the NEM policy in 1985, the Lao government launched a national campaign to modernise agricultural production and transform of the subsistence
agriculture into a commercialised form of market-oriented approach. In the upland areas, the government discouraged shifting cultivation and encouraging people in the uplands to resettle in the lowlands. It promoted commercial agriculture, e.g., rubber plantation, and opened for investment - and gave rubber concessions to - foreign companies from neighbouring countries, in particular Thailand, Vietnam, and China. In the Lowland areas, projects aiming to develop irrigation systems and water management were implemented to improve the local water resources. Agricultural input including fertilizers, pesticides, and seeds were also initiated to intensify the growth of agricultural products. These innovations undoubtedly changed the Lao people’s traditional livelihood and engage them in commercial agriculture or to work as agricultural wage-labourers (Fujita & Phanvilay, 2008; La-Orngplew, 2012).

One of the move rewarding aspects of economic integration with Laos was economic growth. Lao PDR’s real GDP growth in 2011 was 8.6 per cent, compared to 8.4 per cent in 2010 (World Bank, 2011a, p. 2). However, economic growth is also stimulates inequalities and disparities. At present, agriculture remains the most important sector and employs the majority of the Lao population. However, Lao agriculture is still reliant upon traditional methods; hence the low levels of mechanisation and technology. Research conducted in many areas of Laos revealed that the country’s rice yield remains low, and that households cannot produce enough rice for household consumption. Access to credit and agricultural input continues to be limited. This has become one of the push factors that motivated the Lao people to move to Thailand seeking higher incomes (Manivong Vongpaphane, Cramb, & Jonathan Newby, 2012; Syviengxay, 2008). In Northern Laos, the land concessions given to foreign companies for rubber plantations have overwhelmingly been villagers’ swidden fields and crop fields. Consequently, most people living in plantation project areas have lost their swidden land (Barney, 2008, 2009). Many villagers desperate to earn money, work as labourers for the plantation companies. Rigg (2005) highlights that in the older days, many Lao households were poor due to being separated from the market. Commercialisation and
marketisation have produced a new poverty because increasing numbers of landless people have opted to escape poverty through migration.

In the next section, I will contextualise Northeast Thailand and Laos in the transnationalisation era, which was intensified by the Mekong Sub-region Programme. The current market integration not only brought a new pattern of dependency and inequality between Thailand and Laos, but also intensified the influx of migrants from Laos to Thailand.

4.3.6 Northeast Thailand and Laos in an Era of Transnationalisation in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (1990s-present)

The end of Indochina war in the late 1970s marked a new era of peace and stability and manifested a regional rapprochement in Southeast Asia. In 1988, Chartchai Choonhavan, the Thai Prime Minister, launched a policy to turn ‘battlefields into marketplaces’ that would shape Thailand’s border relations and its broader economic and political relations with its neighbouring countries (Battersby, 1998-1999; Hirsch, 2009). One of the major forces driving this transformation of regional integration was the Greater Mekong-Subregional (GMS) Cooperation Program, which involved Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Burma, and China’s Yunnan Province. Launched in 1992, the GMS Cooperation Program entailed massive-scale development along the Mekong River and its tributaries to generate economic cooperation in the region. The current transnationalisation in the Greater Mekong Sub-region contextualises a new phase of Thai-Lao relations that could be summarised as two key points.

The first point is the changing of cross-border control. During the period of communist occupation in Laos from 1975 to 1986, Laos subsequently isolated from the global community. One of the underlying reasons was the closure of Thai-Lao border, from open to strict control. The border policies of both countries were primarily based on security concerns. Between 1987 and 1988, Thailand and Laos engaged in a 100 day war. Factions of a syndicate that was felling timber across a vaguely defined section of
the border between Thailand and the Lao province of Sayabouri precipitated the fighting. Battersby (1998-1999, p. 484) maintains that the conflict arose out of the expansion of Thai logging operations into areas where Thai and Lao territorial sovereignties were blurred.

After the conflict over the Sayabouri border was settled, Thailand and Laos began to seek opportunities for economic cooperation. Seizing upon new diplomatic and commercial opportunities, and declaring a policy for transforming the battlefields into a marketplace, Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhawan visited Laos in November 1988 and signed an agreement with Lao Prime Minister, Kaysone Phomvihane. The plan was to build the first Friendship Bridge across the Mekong River connecting Nong Khai Province, Thailand, and Vientiane, Laos’ capital city. One month later, Thailand and Laos agreed to form a joint border committee. Under the auspices of the Thai and Lao interior ministries, several provinces established frameworks for local level consultation over customs and immigration.

In 1992, a ministerial meeting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) launched projects to integrate and promote the socio-economic development of the peoples of the four Mekong riparian countries (Laos, Burma, Thailand and Vietnam). The East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC), which was a project of the meeting, aimed to reduce poverty in the region by supporting the development of rural and border areas. The central component of the EWEC was the 1,450 km road connecting Da Nang in Vietnam on the eastern end, with Moulemein in Myanmar on the western end, cutting across central Lao PDR and north and northeastern Thailand. The Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge, which was also a project of the EWEC, has greatly accelerated the flow of people, capital, goods and services across the Mekong River (Warr et al., 2009).

Research undertaken in the borderland areas of the GMS notes an increase in economic activity caused by improved transport links, and a reduction in the number of political and bureaucratic barriers; but, the policies for labour migration are exceptional (Latt,
The policies and regulations pertaining to labour migration in the GMS were developed in 1992 in the forms of unilateral and bilateral agreements. As a main receiving country for migrants in the GMS, Thailand’s migration management plan was approved by the cabinet in 2004 with the objectives of setting up a comprehensive system of migration management that would integrate the efforts of all relevant government agencies. Subsequently, the Thai government signed MoUs with Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar to regulate how citizens of each country can work in the other seven points: (1) organizing a formal system for potential migrants to apply from their countries of origin to come and work legally in Thailand; (2) ensuring that employers enforce national labour standards for both Thai and foreign workers; (3) intercepting people crossing national borders illegally; (4) arresting all involved in facilitating illegal migration; (5) repatriating illegal migrants to their countries of origin; (6) publicizing the organization of the labor migration system among workers, employers and government officials; and (7), following up and assessing the effectiveness and relevance of the system (World Bank, 2006b, p. 63).

However, the signing of the MoUs and the discourse on open national borders for regional cooperation and prosperity in the GMS, were usually considered by International Development Organisations as problematic because they came with new forms of regulations and restriction (Gainsborough, 2009; Latt, 2013; Walker, 1999). While the international agreements in fact facilitated the travel of professional people and tourists, they excluded the mobility of unskilled migrants, otherwise known as the mobility of the marginal (High, 2008). Such mobility, in effect, resembled more of a migration circuit than a notion of flexibility (Ong, 1999). In Thailand, labour migrants were required to register themselves: the cost for each migrant was a minimum of 2,500 baht. Latt (2012, p. 165) argues that migrant registrations helped guarantee minimum wages and rights to protection; but there were still many difficulties for migrants to legalise their status. Financially, they needed to register with the government for a temporary stay; the fee which was 3,800 baht, was very high for the average migrant worker whose monthly income was around 2,000–3,000 baht for farm workers, and
4,000–6,000 baht for domestic and construction workers. After spending most of their incomes on living expenses, the fees become a challenge, especially if a migrant had dependents, e.g., elderly parents or a pregnant wife. In addition, migrants became tied to their employers and had to pay 1,000 baht fee any time if they wanted to change their jobs and places of work. Face with these difficulties, only half of the migrants registered under the system. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (2011) reported that in 2011, there were 1,950,650 registered immigrants workers in Thailand. These included 905,573 from Myanmar, 106,970 from Lao PDR, and 235,521 from Cambodia. However, these numbers did not include illegal migrants who had crossed the border illegally or entered the country legally to work but had overstayed because it was extremely difficult to acquire this data, particularly about about Lao migrants. Even though the Lao constituted the smallest group of migrants in Thailand, it was very difficult to distinguish a Lao migrant from a Northeastern Thai because their language, appearance and cultural practices were very similar. Consequently, the real number of Lao immigrants was likely higher than the number reported by the Thai government.

Second, transnationalisation in the GMS exacerbated socio-economic disparities, and the identity differences between Thailand and Laos. The saying ‘brotherhood countries (or Ban Phi Muang Nong – the home of the elder brother, the land of the younger brother)’ was widely used to portray the historical and cultural ties between the two-nations. It implied that in a hierarchical sense, Thailand was an elder brother and Laos a younger brother (Pholsena, 2006, p. 57; Pholsena & Banomyong, 2006, p. 61). This saying, in addition, referred to the development context of the two countries: it had connotations of modernity and tradition and suggested that as far Thai-Lao historical relations were concerned, Thailand was powerful and a more sophisticated society compared to Laos. At present, Thai people view Laos’ society and culture as comparable to Thailand’s before modernisation and globalisation (Reynolds, 1998).

According to an ADB report, all of the GMS member countries have experienced progressive economic development. In 2005, all of the countries achieved impressive
growth, with Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam registering the highest recorded growth since the start of the decade (Asian Development Bank, 2006). In 2011, Laos has seen a reduction in its poverty rates from 46 per cent in 1993 to 26 per cent in 2008 (Mekong Migration Network (MMN) and Asian Migrant Centre (AMC), 2013). The per capita income is on the rise. In 1992, Laos’ gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was only $US 278. In 2011, the range was $US 1,204. In addition, its poverty incidence decreased dramatically from 56 per cent in 1998 to 34 per cent in 2011 (Asian Development Bank, 2012, pp. 1-2). However, many challenges and economic and income disparities persisted. Mekong Migration Network (MMN) and Asian Migrant Centre (AMC) (2013, p. 52) revealed that even though the service sector accounted for 42 per cent of the economy in 2011, the largest portion of any sector, Lao PDR’s poorest 20 per cent relied almost entirely on agriculture as their means of income.

Compared to Laos, Thailand’s Gross Domestic Product per capita (GDP per capita) is four times higher. In 2011, only 11.52 per cent of Thailand’s inhabitants were surviving on less than $US 2 per day (World Bank, 2011b). While in Lao PDR, the most updated population figure in 2008 showed that those living below international poverty line of $US 2 per day was 66 per cent. But, income inequality in Thailand is also problematic. Geographically speaking, Bangkok comprises the most prosperous part of Thailand, whereas northeast Thailand has the lowest income distribution although economic growth of northeast region has been widespread. Thailand, although classified as an upper middle-income country, is now confronting the labor challenge of the upper middle-income trap: eroding labour productivity, chronic labour shortages, a dwindling labour force, and a declining fertility rate (Vasuprasat, 2010, p. iii). The country therefore welcomes migrants in order to help meet its labour challenges.

Tranualisation in the GMS links the less diverse economy of Laos to the more diverse economy of Thailand and, in the process spurs migration. While the Thai economy requires cheap labour in various sectors, Lao PDR offers an inadequate amount of job opportunities other than subsistence farming. Rice-based agriculture, the dominant agricultural system, accounts for approximately 60 per cent of the country’s
total cultivated areas (USDA, 2011). However, Laos’ engagement with migration is not only economic driven: cultural forces relative to consumerism and materialism are influencing the migrants (High, 2008; Inthasone, 2007; Rigg, 2007). Influenced by Thai media (television, radio, newspapers and magazines), Lao people yield to the strong appeal of Thai cultural products and modernity (Pholsena, 2006, p. 58). The contrast between Laos and Thailand has become more visible through television. As Mills (1999) demonstrates in her research into the migration of northeastern Thai females, the factor underpinning the motivations of young women to migrate was not only economic necessity: the desire to participate in modern life in the city was also a main driving. The northeastern females’ perception of Bangkok, modelled upon television depictions, instructed them vis-à-vis what is modern and what is beautiful. The way to create a new identity as a modern female was to migrate to Bangkok. These kinds of aspirations to a modern life have shaped individual migration decision-making processes in Laos: migration has been rendered relatively easy by connected transportation and transnationalisation between Thailand and Laos.

Studies of migration in Laos demonstrate the advantages that Lao migrants enjoy compared to Burmese and Cambodian migrants. The cultural and language similarities between Thailand and Laos provide additional convenience and comfort to migrant workers. They help them adjust living in Thailand and make working with Thai people easier. However, such commonalities are not sufficient to eliminate their migrant status. Economic migrants in Thailand earn more money than they would in Laos; but, they have to contend with poor living conditions. And, if they have entered Thailand illegally, they have to negotiate with the police by paying money to protect them from being deported to Laos. In sum, issues of inequality and vulnerability are a large part of transnationalisation. As Rigg and Wittayapak (2009) explained, the regions and areas connected to the mainstream economy are likely to narrow inequality at some scales, while widening inequality at others.
4.4 Conclusions

This chapter has provided an historical background of Northeast Thailand and Laos in each period, from the same political entities to the establishment of national boundaries in the 19th century, and the trajectories of development of Northeast Thailand and Laos from the 1960s onwards. The chapter delineates (a) how nationalism has been constructed; and, (b) how it has fostered differentiation between northeastern people and the Lao people. While industrialisation and economic growth led by the manufacturing and services sectors started to emerge in Thailand in the mid-1970s, around the same time, Lao became a socialist country isolated from the global communities. Even though Northeast Thailand has remained the poorest region, the living conditions of the Isan people have significantly improved through from off-farm opportunities and migration (Grandstaff et al., 2008).

Apart from providing historical perspectives of Northeast Thailand and Laos, the chapter explores the relationship between the two countries in an era of transnationalisation led by the Greater Mekong Sub-region Programme in the 1990s. Many international organisations have reported successful of economic development in all of the GMS countries. This chapter, however, highlights the economic disparities and modernisation aspiration that spur migration from neighbouring countries to Thailand. In the following chapter, I will discuss how the porous Thai-Lao border has shaped migration and how can a porous border constitute state-village relations.
Chapter 5

Compromised Margins: state regulations, local checkpoints, and everyday life at the northeastern Thai-Lao borders

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter two, I demonstrated the links between the borderlands, state policies and human mobility. Borderlands are sites where a range of unique forms of state practices and everyday life have merged. In this chapter, I will problematise the tensions between state regulations and cross-border employment that occur in Northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands in the cultivating season, and several practices peculiar to agricultural livelihoods. How did this illegal cross-border employment evolve? What were the views of the local villagers and the local state authorities? And, how can state-village relations in the context of borderland be explained?

According to Abraham and Van Schendel (2005, p. 4), there is a distinction between what the state considers to be legitimate (legal) and what the local people consider legitimate (licit). Quoting the practices of the cross-border traders and the armpit smugglers as examples, they argue that the difference between illegal and licit is based on both scale and objectives. While transnational crime occurs on a large scale and for particular purposes, micro-practices are not driven by the logic of organisational and unified purposes. I will explore the concept of licitness to explain how some illegal practices in the borderland are acceptable, and what are the conditions that support the making of licitness? In this case, it was not merely the fact that borderlanders considered their cross-border employment to be legitimate: the local state authorities also turned a blind eye and opted not to confront the local people. The local state authorities claimed that they needed the cooperation of the local borderland residents to conduct surveillance of the border. Although hiring Lao seasonal migrants was illegal, it was not considered a criminal practice.
The reaction of the local state authorities gave rise to another question on state-village relations in the borderland. Walker (1999) notes the overemphasis of the centre-periphery paradigm of borderland studies. According to this paradigm, the periphery are viewed as passive, and relationships between border communities and the centre were analysed within the rhetoric of domination. Walker’s study also provides a critical discussion of borderland studies that generally emphasise the conflict between borderland residents and state officials. After conducting case studies of boat and truck operators, female traders in long-distance trading, and timber exporters in the borderlands, he concludes that the borderland residents in fact actively participate in and collaborate with the regulation of borders. Drawing on Walker’s study, I question my research on the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands and the dispersed practices of the state as well as people’s practices and their negotiations with the state.

In this chapter, the focus is on the livelihoods of the borderland residents in Ban Fangthai (northeastern Thailand) and Ban Kaemkong (Lao PDR). Drawing on my ethnographic fieldwork, I will illustrate how some illegal practices were carried on and viewed as licit traditions. I address elements of state-village relations, and show how local state officials and villagers were involved in the scope of compromise relations based on the following two dimensions: 1) state officials and villagers shared mutual interest in cross-border practices; and, 2) the embeddedness of the state in society. Using the concept state-in-society (Migdal, 2001), I will show how the state and the people became allies; that is, the state was assimilated into society. Many of the state officials in the borderlands are local people who negotiate between their own interests as local borderlanders and their official roles of protecting the state’s interests. These negotiations make the borderlands, as the state’s margins, areas of compromise. In addition, they substantiate the non-unitary form of the state’s power.
5.2 Everyday lives at the Northeast Thailand and Lao borders in the past: Ban Fangthai and Ban Kaemkong

My interest in undertaking research in Ban Fangthai endued from a conversation I had with a high ranking government official who works for Security Affairs of Mukdahan Province. During an interview about general security issues in the Thai-Lao border areas, he told me about the everyday lives of the farmers living along the Mekong River. He said, the farmers employed illegal wage-labourers from Laos due to the out-migration of local people to the urban sectors that had resulted in domestic labour shortages. When I asked him about illegal employment and security concerned, he said:

The Mukdahan Governor understands that the farmers need labourers to work in their paddy field in cultivating season. We agreed to establish a checkpoint in the village based on Thai-Lao historical and cultural ties. We control the movement of the Lao people by limiting the time of arrival and leaving, and prohibit them to stay overnight in Thai border areas. The checkpoint is operated locally by the village committees and is closely patrolled by the District and Provincial Governor. By this way, we can assure that the rules are followed and we can keep security along the border.\(^{18}\)

Eager to see what the local checkpoint and the village looked like, I first entered Ban Fangthai village for my preliminary fieldwork on 5 June 2010. Two staff members from the Security Affairs Section drove me to the village and introduced me to the village head and village committee members. They showed me the local checkpoint located in the middle of the village nearby the Mekong River. A cursory inspection of the checkpoint revealed that it was just a small hut bearing many signs informing the public that this was a place for mooring boats and a regular checkpoint where fishermen could anchor their boats. I saw many fishing boats anchored in the river; some could be seen mid-stream, but it was difficult to identify whether they were Thai or Lao boats. The Mekong River was not very wide; so the village opposite the river bank was clearly discernible. It was the Lao Mekong River village named Ban Kaemkong and came

\(^{18}\) Interview, the high ranking staff member of the Security Affairs Section, Mukdahan Province, 18 May 2010.
under the administration of Saibuly District, Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR. The environment around me looked so peaceful. There was no-one at the checkpoint. It was not as I had imagined a border village would be strictly controlled by state officials.

In the next section, I will describe the everyday lives of the peoples in Ban Fangthai and Ban Kaemkong. Approaching the subject of the borderlands through the interplay between state regulations and local cross-border practices, I will refer to Walker (1999) who structured Thai-Lao borderland history as a ‘three-phase version’ – from open to close and then open again. I will demonstrate the villages’ histories in the following different periods; the free movement in the early period of modern national borders, the restricted borders during the Cold War, and the globalisation period.

5.2.1 The early connection

My father was a boat driver owning a big long-tail boat that was able to contain 20 people/trip or more. When I was seven years old, my parents took me on the boat with many kinds of product from the village such as vegetables and non-timber products travelling to Savannakhet City with many villagers to sell to the Laos and many foreigners living there. We left the village early in the morning. It took only two hours to travel downstream. I remembered that they were very rich and had plenty of money. My father organised this type of trip 2-3 time/week. At that time, Mukdahan city and the Thai districts along the Mekong River were relatively rural areas comparing to Savannakhet City where there were many beautiful buildings and many rich people who had purchasing power living there.19

Mrs Nang, my oldest key informant in Ban Fangthai, was 74 year-old. The daughter of the area’s richest landlord, who used to own a big long-tail boat that commuted between Ban Fangthai, Mukdahan City and Savannakhet City, she revealed incidents in her childhood from memory. Her stories told of the free movement of people, and their freedom to engage in small-scale cross-border trade. Mrs Nang’s memories conjured up of a glorious Savannakhet City under French colonial administration. Compared to Ban Fangthai 70 years ago, Savannakhet under French administration was rich and had

19 Interview, Mrs Nang. 25 November 2010
considerable purchasing power. Ban Fangthai, on the other hand, was a small village under Mukdahan district control. It was considered a real margin of Thailand based on its location and economic opportunities.

Village profiles published by the District Governor demonstrated the relation between Ban Fangthai and other villages along the Thai border and the border villages of Lao PDR. Documentation revealed that the people of Ban Fangthai originally either moved from Ban Naam in Nakhon Phanom Province or from the current Savannakhet Province of Lao PDR. When I interviewed many senior people in the Thai and Lao border villages, i.e., Ban Fangthai, Ban Wan, Ban Naam, Ban Kham, Ban Saitong, Ban Kaemkong and Ban Naam Aoy (see the map below), they all referred to their original village of Ban Naam, and to the re-settlement of their ancestral generation in the current villages due to agricultural expansion and disease. In the very old villages, e.g., Ban Kham, Ban Saitong and Ban Naam, all of the original villagers had the same last name. The historical ties between the Thai-Lao people living along the Mekong River were evident in their old temples and religious ceremonies. Phra That Phanom temple and its holy pagoda (chedi) which was built in the sixteenth century by the Lao King Setthathirath of Lanxang are located 15 km from Ban Fangthai. To honour the temple, thousands of people make pilgrimages during the festival held every February. According to Jaithaing (2002, pp. 114-115), Phra That Phanom is the spiritual symbol of the Thai-Lao people. In the older days, people living in the remote areas walked up to a week or a month just to have a chance to pay their respects to the holy chedi. Located 5 km in the southern direction of Ban Fangthai is Wat Prasri Maha Bodhi that was built in the seventeenth century by a prince who ruled Kantabuly District in Laos, along with a number of people, he migrated to this area and established a new village.

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20 Previously, Mukdahan was a district under Nakhon Phanom Province. The district became a province in 1982.

21 The history of Thai-Lao people can be traced back to the 6th century B.C. when areas of the Northeast Thailand and Laos were known as Si Khottaboon Kingdom. Most of the Isan people are of Lao descent. They migrated to Isan from areas that are now part of Laos between the mid-fourteenth and the late eighteenth centuries. See the history of Northeast Thailand and Lao in Chapter two.

22 Interview, Head of Sub-district, 10 July 2010.
Unlike the surrounding villages, Ban Fangthai is a Roman Catholic village. Oral history provided by the village committee members in Ban Fangthai and village document published by a local temple in Ban Fangthai in 2009 stated that the ancestral generation migrated from Ban Naam in 1905, the period marking the abolition of slavery in Siam. Approximately fifteen families were accused of being devil spirits taking human forms and were forced to move away. Together, these families established a new village named “Ban Fangthai”. Upon their arrival, villagers were informed that the Catholic priest in Chiang Kwang District in Laos could exorcise the devil spirits; so, they invited the priest to visit the village. The priest successfully helped the villagers who in reality were suffering from cholera. From then on, the villagers in Ban Fangthai adopted Christianity. However, their adherence to a different religion did not give any impact on cross communal and cross river ritual ceremonies. The Roman Catholic peoples of Ban Fangthai regularly participated in the Buddhist ceremonies held in both Buddhist villages in Thailand and Laos: the Buddhist villagers acted reciprocally. While I was staying in the village, I attended many social and religious ceremonies including weddings, funerals, the Christmas service at the church in Ban Fangthai and the Buddhist robes presentation ceremony (Thot Kathin). I met participants from many villages in the Sub-district and in the Lao borderlands. Connections and networks of local people have been maintained across village administration, and also across the national boundaries.

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23 Interview, village committees of Ban Fangthai, 8 July 2010.
24 ‘125 years Ban Fangthai’, pamphlet published by the Church of Ban Fangthai
Information about the history of the establishment of the Mukdahan Immigration Office\textsuperscript{25} shows that prior to 1927, Thai-Lao people were able to cross the Mekong River without documents. In 1935, the Thai government established a checkpoint in Nakhon Phanom Province based on a Thailand and France agreement signed in 1927 on the passage of the Mekong River. Mukdahan, which at that time was a district under Nakhon Phanom Province, was dependent on the same agreement but the small villages along the Thai borders in Mukdahan district were considerably marginalised from economic opportunities and the state centre. Mrs Nang stated:

\begin{quote}
It took one day on a boat trip to Savannakhet city or took two days walk. The area on the opposite side of the riverbank that is currently Ban Kaemkong was only a small village. Only a few families moved from Thai side and established homes near the river.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25}Information inscribed on the board in front of the Mukdahan Immigration Office
My father had a friend who moved there so I regularly followed him to visit his friend and attended tradition ceremonies such as funerals and other religious ceremonies.  

Mrs Nang stated that her father’s boat ride service ended when the Thai government built the road to the village, at approximately the time she had her first son in her early 20’s between 1965 and 1970.

This section has exemplified the movement between the two Mekong River banks. These activities are not only motivated by local cross-border trade, but are also built upon the historical and cultural ties. In the next section, I will outline Ban Fangthai’s relationship with villages in Laos in the restricted period due to the civil war in Laos and the communist insurgency in Northeast Thailand.

5.2.2 The restricted border (1940-1988)

Political instabilities and a series of wars between 1940 and 1988, interrupted the cross-border activities in Ban Fangthai. In 1940, Field Marshal Pibunsongkhram, the Thai Prime Minister who promoted the country’s nationalism undertook “the campaign for a return of the lost territories” (Ivarsson, 2008, p. 60). He pressed the French colony in Indochina to return the territories that Thailand lost when the French drew the borders of Siam with Laos and Cambodia, forcing a series of treaties between 1893 and 1904. The Franco-Thai dispute led to the expulsion of foreign missionaries and pressured Roman Catholics to abandon their faith in Christ. This oppressive regime extended to the Catholic Church in Ban Fangthai. Seven Songkhon villagers sacrificed their lives proclaiming their belief in God: they were ultimately shot by the Thai police in the village graveyard in 1940.

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26 Interview, Mrs Nang, 25 November 2010
27 Prime Minister and virtual military dictator of Thailand from 1938 to 1944 and 1948 to 1957.
After the cessation of World War II in 1945, the onset of the Cold War and the establishment of a communist regime in North Vietnam and Communist insurgencies in Thailand’s neighbouring countries spread the fear of communist rule over Southeast Asian countries. Thailand, allying with the United States, entered into the war against the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT)’s insurgency in the North, Northeast and some parts of the South. The United States turned Thailand into an important operational base for the wars in Indochina. At the time, many villages in the Mukdahan District functioned as bases for the CPT, in particular the hinterland villages that were surrounded by forest and were difficult to reach. When the Communist Pathet Lao took control of Laos in 1975, it was believed that the victory of the Communist Party in Laos would destabilise the Northeast and open Thailand to direct attack by the communist forces (Thomas, 1986). In response, the Thai government imposed very strict regulation along the Mekong River border and officially closed Thai-Lao borders. As well, the restrictions were imposed on commercial exchange in the major towns and on inter-provincial trade and travel.

During this period, the Thai-Lao border remained open to residents who were willing to take risk from possible violence along the border. A group of rural traders in Ban Fangthai continued their trading activities. Walker (1999, p. 58-59) points out that the Thai-Lao borders were supposed to be closed but many areas remained dynamic with cross-border trade and investment. He also notes that strict state regulation of trade created opportunities for women enabling them to build on the commercial and social experience they gained during the war years (Walker, 1999, p. 153-155). Women in Ban Fangthai worked as cross-border traders between Ban Fangthai and Savannakhet Province, selling vegetables and non-timber products and made a profit from smuggling goods and cattle across the Mekong River through their networks in Ban Kaemkong. One of the traders, Mrs Daeng, a 56 year-old villager of Ban Fangthai said:

I knew many traders in Ban Kaemkong and also made friends with Lao soldiers. I had a group of friends to paddle the boat containing cigarettes, rice and dried food across the river in the night
time. For the cattle, we could take only a small number, perhaps one to two cow or buffalo. My boat was once shot at by a Lao soldier on the way back from Laos. The garlic in the boat was sunk so I made a loss from that trip. However, I did not give up and went on with my business since the return from smuggling was good. I was very tempted to take a risk.\textsuperscript{28}

In 1979, the Lao government established Ban Kaemkong, a new village opposite to Ban Fangthai, as the centre of administration of Sibulay District. One of the earliest settlers, Mrs Pheng, an 84 year old lady and the oldest person living in Ban Kaemkong during the period of my fieldwork, said that in the old days, Ban Kaemkong used to be a location where many Thai fishermen built temporary shelters for fishing activities. Later, approximately sixteen families moved permanently into the area, including Mrs Pheng’s family that moved from Ban Naam in Nakhon Phanom Province. After the settlement, her family still regularly returned to visit relatives in Ban Naam. Mrs Pheng said that food, medicine and assistance exchanges across the river were common practices, including travelling across the river to help her relatives working in Thai paddy fields. The landscape of Ban Kaemkong - its rocks and hills, limited the amount of land available for paddy fields. For this reason, the villagers engaged in fisheries rather than in rice production. Cross border marriages and the formation of families across the river were common practices among the Thai-Lao peoples and had never been problematic in the past.

Many new settlers in Ban Kaemkong were also families of government officials from various parts of Laos, who moved to the area to work as government officials, e.g., local public heath staff, soldiers, police, and local governors. The numbers of villagers continued to increase consistently; in time, Ban Kaemkong became the centre of administration with strict control of cross-border movement.

In 1980, Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda\textsuperscript{29} introduced a government order, "66/2523", encouraging CPT cadres to defect. He granted amnesty for former cadres, his

\textsuperscript{28} Interview, Mrs Daeng, 20 November 2010.
\textsuperscript{29} The Prime Minister of Thailand from 1980 to 1988.
action leading to the decline of the CPT in Thailand. Responding to the Lao-Thai relationship that was gradually developing, Mukdahan Provincial Government allowed the Lao people to cross the border for healthcare. This sharp change in attitude was concomitant with the Lao’s adoption of the slogan of Chintanakan Mai (New Thinking), which signaled the country’s comprehensive reform and embracing of a market-oriented economy. In the 1990s, the Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan announced a policy to convert the Indo-China battlefields to market places. This resulted in the official re-opening of the Thai-Lao border and the re-establishment of formal relationship between Thailand and Laos.

5.2.3 Re-connection through the market space (1990s-present)

At the end of Cold War in the 1990s, cross-border activities between Ban Fangthai and Ban Kaemkong flourished due to the increasingly peaceful Thai-Lao political relations. Cross-border trade, border weekly market and religious ceremonies were important factors re-uniting the people living along the Mekong River.

As Roman Catholics, the people of Ban Fangthai were obliged to attend Mass every Sunday from 7.00 a.m. to 8.00 a.m. All of the villagers gathered at the church, which was located in the middle of the village near the Mekong River. This had long been a traditional practice of villagers in Ban Fangthai. After attending Mass, villagers regularly went to shop at the few grocery stores adjacent to the church. Local traders in Ban Fangthai and nearby villages also brought their goods to sell in the public space near the church, which in time became the site for the Sunday weekly market. In the late 1980s, the Lao people living on the opposite side of the river were allowed to cross over to shop at the Ban Fangthai weekly market. The security regulations at the time were operated by the border patrol police. The official cross-border regulations were operated in the village level.

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30 The Prime Minister of Thailand from 1988 to 1991.
In 1995, the new, large church that was built near the Mekong River became a sacred place for Ban Fangthai’s Catholics. The rising numbers of people attending Mass resulted in the expansion of the Sunday Market, and the addition of a weekly market on Tuesday afternoons. The market was formalised when the church, supported by the Tambon Administration Organisation (TAO), utilised the courtyard adjacent to the church and charged a rental fee of ten baht per day. There were significantly increasing numbers of vendors and customers came from the city and nearby areas with a greater variety of products, including various kinds of fresh foods, consumer products, clothing, and miscellaneous goods. Generally, the market looked the same as other Thai markets. But, the difference was in its diversity of products, vendors and activities. Many Lao traders could be seen sitting on the ground, selling various kinds of non-timber products including honey, mushrooms and bamboo shoots.

5.3 The contemporary cross-border regulations

The end of Cold War in the 1990s and the era of globalisation were triumphs of market expansion and capitalism. Some scholar argues that the nation states have lost their power completely (Ohmae, 1990). The fact that the world is globalised means the end of the nation states especially through what is termed the “Borderless World” (Ohmae, 1990, p.172). State borders that were commonly thought to be closed and subject to considerable restriction during the Cold War period are now viewed as open due to the flows of trade, people and technology across national boundaries. However, these intensive cross-border flows have given rise to many forms of transnational crime, for example, drug trafficking and human smuggling, both of which have benefited from globalisation. Over time, they have become common security challenges for states around the world (Mittelman, 2000).

Activities in Ban Fangthai involved not only economic but also social activities. Many of which were informal or illegal. The weekly market was a place for people living along the Mekong River to trade, shop, meet, chat and update their social lives. Since the number of Lao people who had migrated to work in Bangkok and its vicinities had
increased dramatically over the previous decade, Ban Fangthai Market was a place where Lao people could access remittances from family members working in Thailand. A form of kinship connection underpinned the Lao migrant workers’ transferring remittances through the Ban Fangthai villagers’ bank accounts; usually, they asked their families in Laos to cross the river to collect the money on Sundays. Furthermore, the weekly market was an original space for cross-labour employment. Often when they met each other in the weekly market, local Thai vendors would ask their Lao customers if they were looking for work or knew someone who would like to take a wage labour job. In this way, the Thai-Lao villagers’ good connections were utilised to legitimate informal cross-river employment during the cultivating season.

Further important components of cross-border movement were illegal practices including immigration, drug smuggling and human trafficking. According to the Office of Narcotics Control Board (2012), incidences of drug smuggling and methamphetamine epidemics in Thailand escalatel in the 1990s. In the early 2000s, the number of drug cases rose sharply to over 200,000 cases per year (Office of Narcotics Control Board, 2012). Northern and Northeastern Thailand were the major regions in which drug trafficking was occurred, in particular, the border provinces of Thailand, i.e., Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Mehongson in the North and Leoi, Udon Thanee, Nong Khai, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Amnajchareon and Ubonratchatanee in the Northeast. All were well-known as sites of drug trade.

Faced with increasing use of drugs and a rising incidence of addiction, in 2003, the Thai government launched its War on Drugs policy with new mechanisms for improving cross-border surveillance and tightened enforcement measures along the border zones. High ranking Mukdahan Provincial Governors, who were in charge of border security, provided an overview of border control in Mukdahan. The province had an international checkpoint at the Friendship Bridge, a temporary checkpoint in Don Tan District, and
another six local checkpoints in villages spread along the Mekong River Bank including the local checkpoint in Ban Fangthai.\textsuperscript{31}

Although Ban Fangthai was the hub of cross-border activities in Wan Yai District, the scale of cross-border trade was too small to establish a temporary checkpoint that would require additional government budget and resources to manage. So, the village became a local checkpoint, officially called a ‘traditional checkpoint [Dan Prapenee]’\textsuperscript{32}. The head of Sub-district, who was involved in the establishment of the checkpoint at Ban Fangthai stated that he was called to attend a meeting with the Provincial Governors of the Northeast borderlands, several District Governors, all of the heads of Sub-districts along the borders, and representatives of the Thai Royal Navy. This meeting launched a new strategy for border control. Included in the strategy were requirements to restrict the boat mooring area, and to record and report on the movement of Lao people entering Thailand. Local police volunteers and the border patrol police were required to monitor all cross-border movements and to record the names of all Lao people who crossed the border on Sundays and Tuesdays. The village committee agreed to charge all of the Lao people who entered Ban Fangthai a five baht fee. The fee was recorded and used to support community activities and to purchase coffee, drinks and miscellaneous items for village committee members, who conducted voluntary surveillance at the border during the night shift. All cross-border activities and border security issues had to be reported to the Wan Yai District Governors and the Mukdahan Provincial Governors. The border control policy, and regulations introduced by government authorities were printed and attached to a big steel board near the river bank. The main objectives of the regulations were: to limit the number of those eligible to use the checkpoint to borderland residents living in the Thai-Lao borders; to limit the time for crossing the border between 06.00 a.m. and 18.00 p.m.; to zoning the boat mooring areas, and to ensure that no border

\textsuperscript{31} Interview, two staff of Mukdahan Provincial Governor who were in charge of provincial security, 18 June 2010

\textsuperscript{32} According to the Ministry of Interior, a traditional checkpoint is a checkpoint established based on the long relationships and spatial history of local borderland residents who might be relatives. It involved maintaining cross-border practices over a long period of time until the practice became traditional. The traditional checkpoint only operated for social and religious ceremonies on occasion.
activities violated Thai laws. However, no conditions related to cross-border employment appeared on the sign; so, the villagers gained the impression that employing Lao workers during the peak cultivating season was legitimate. But the Thai farmers, in fact had to report their employment of workers to the village head and undertake to return their workers to Laos daily before 06.00 p.m. Lao workers were not permitted to stay overnight in Thai border areas except in cases of emergency as determined by the village head.

Figure 5.2: The checkpoint in Ban Fangthai - Village committee members noting the Lao people’s names and charging five baht fee when they entered the checkpoint at Ban Fangthai en route the weekly market on Sunday mornings. Many Lao people also took this route to their wage-labour jobs in Thai paddy fields.

Parallel to the establishment of a checkpoint in Ban Fangthai, the local checkpoint in Laos was established. Village committee members in Laos were required to record the names of all of the Lao people who crossed the river to shop at the weekly market or to work in the Thai border areas. Having heard about the five baht fee charged for crossing into Thai territory, the Lao local authorities in the borderlands decided to charge those
who used the local checkpoint in Ban Kaemkong to cross to the weekly markets in Thailand. This fee was utilised by Lao officers, including the border patrol police, village committee member and soldiers, who conducted voluntary surveillance at the border.

The village head of Ban Kaemkong confirmed that the Lao government authorities had acknowledged the rule of cross-border employment that only permitted daily movement across the border. Workers were not permitted to stay overnight. When asked why Lao people had to pay a fee to leave their country, the village head replied:

This money will be distributed among border patrol police, village committees, and border soldiers. We work to protect people’s security so when they go to work in Thailand and earn money, this is a cost that they have to share with the officials.33

Figure 5.3: The checkpoint in Ban Kaemkong - The Lao people reporting themselves to the border patrol police in Ban Kaemkong and paying 5,000 Kip fee (20 baht) to cross the Mekong River to work in the paddy fields in the Thai borderlands.

33 Interview, Mr Anurak, 16 July 2010.
5.4 The making of licit cross-border employment

In his article ‘Presidential Address: Maps in the mind and the Mobility of Asia’, Ludden claims that:

Modernity consigned human mobility to the dusty dark corners of archives that document the hegemonic space of national territorialism. As a result, we imagine that mobility is border crossing, as though borders came first, and mobility, second (Ludden, 2003, p. 1062).

But, Abraham and Van Schendel (2005) argue, human mobility is typically categorised in relation to fixed state boundaries. The state regularly performs as a screening agent that controls what can legally flow and what cannot. Based on this assumption, cross-border practices are built on Thai-Lao historical ties, including the employment of Lao workers for agricultural purposes, would be considered illegal. In this section, which deals with the interface of legality and illegality, I examine how cross-border activities are maintained and negotiated to become socially acceptable. I will present the views of local people and state officers vis-a-vis transnational movement, and look at how the state laws and regulations governing the borderland have been re-negotiated by state officials and the local people.

5.4.1 Transnational movement: the views from local people

As well as travelling for trading, social and cultural purposes, people living in the Lao border region also travelled to villages on the Thai bank to work in the paddy fields. Initially, the Lao people came to help their relatives and friends in Thailand and for rice distribution in the cultivating season. Here I will provide an example from Ban Phong Kham, a nearby village adjacent to Ban Fangthai. During my fieldwork, several villagers in Ban Fangthai suggested that I should go to see the well-known family of Mrs Jit, a 40 year-old sub-district health officer living in a village near Ban Fangthai, who owned a big house facing the Mekong River. My first visit fortunately coincided with the family relatives gathering for their house merit; so, I met many elderly people living in Ban Kham and nearby villages. In addition, I met ten Lao people from Ban Nam Aoy and Ban Savang, who had brought sticky rice to join the ceremony. Mrs Lek,
Mrs Jit’s eldest sister gave a brief description of relationships between her family and the Lao people as follows:

My family has known people living in Ban Savang and Ban Nam Aoy since the parental generation. My great grandfather moved from Ban Nam Aoy to settle down here. We have maintained relationship with our relatives in Laos through social ceremonies including weddings, funerals and religious ceremonies. Some years, when they lacked food, they came to my house and ask for rice. When the next cultivating season came, they returned to help working in the paddy fields. At present, I have to pay money to hire the Lao people, not my relatives but anybody from the Lao villages. In my family, it was only me who took care of the agricultural land. One of my younger sisters is 48 years old but she has been sick and regularly needed to see the doctor while Jit is the youngest, but she has high education and works for the government. I have a son who works in the city. I am too old to work alone and it is so difficult to get domestic labourers.34

From the 1980s, labour-shortages occurred in the Thai agricultural sector due to industrialisation and out-migration. These shortages also became acute in Ban Fangthai. However, the border location and the post Thai-Lao tension period allowed Thai farmers to benefit from cheap labour from Laos. By coming in contact with each other at the Sunday and Tuesday weekly markets, the Thai farmers could offer agricultural jobs to the Lao, or ask them if they had friends who were available for work.

During the 1990s, the number of Lao people crossing the Mekong River to Ban Fangthai market has continuously increased. A man who was village head between 1995 and 2009 estimated that more than 200 Lao people came to the market on Sundays during the period he held the position.35 At the same time, the employment of Lao people in the paddy fields became commonplace in the villages near the Mekong River. During the cultivating season, Thai farmers waited for the boats carrying Lao workers from the Lao side to dock so that they could recruit daily workers. Farmers sometimes competed to get Lao workers during the peak season by offering higher wages. Asked how he

34 Interview, Mrs Lek, 7 July 2010
35 Interview, Mr Sanguan, 30 June 2010.
confirmed that all of the Lao workers returned to the Lao side after finishing their work, the former village head replied:

We followed the rules of the checkpoint. Everybody who stepped on Thai border had to report their name to me. It was the Thai farmers’ responsibility to send all of the Lao workers back. I confirmed that no one remained in the evening after work.36

On the 2nd of July 2010, Mr Sanguan came to see me at the house where I was staying. He mentioned that a group of Lao people had arrived at the checkpoint: I was surprised as it was Wednesday and the checkpoint was supposed to be closed. Following Mr Sanguan to the checkpoint, I saw eight Lao people stepping ashore from long-tail boats. A few villagers from Ban Fangthai were discussing how to divide the Lao workers; that is how to allocate them to each paddy field. After the Lao workers were divided into four groups, they followed the Thai farmers in different directions. I wrote down the names of Thai landowners and their home locations, and asked if I could follow them to the paddy fields to talk to the Lao workers. It was then that I learned that I had misunderstood the following points. First, regarding the practices and regulations at the Thai border, the checkpoint only formally operated on Tuesday afternoons and Sunday mornings. There was no one in charge of surveillance of the border during the peak cultivating season as most of villagers were working in their paddy fields. Lao workers travelling from the other side of the Mekong River could cross through the local checkpoint in Ban Fangthai anytime with the help of friends or relatives. Second, the Lao workers actually came from several villages located along the Mekong River and the hinterland of Laos, not from Ban Kaemkong. Asked where their Lao workers came from, many Thai farmers generally said that they were from Ban Kaemkong. Similarly, the Lao workers always referred to Ban Kaemkong or replied that they were from the opposite side of the river (Fang Lao). Third, since many of the workers came from remote villages in the Lao hinterland, they could not return home in one day so they needed to stay overnight in Ban Fangthai. What appeared contradictory was the fact that

36 Interview, Mr Sanguan, 30 June 2010.
state agents, i.e., the village heads and district government officials, also employed and allowed their Lao workers to stay overnight illegally. These circumstances ranged from trifling – where no government representatives at either the local or district level, inspected the border during the peak cultivating season – to more significant. Many Thai farmers allowed their Lao seasonal workers to stay overnight either in their homes or in small huts in the middle of their paddy fields.

I gained a clearer picture of cross-border employment in Ban Fangthai during the cultivating season. I returned to the village in late October 2010. Difference from my preliminary fieldwork, the villagers mostly remembered me and knew I was a student who had come for purposes of research. For this reason, they talked to me more openly. Many let me access their paddy fields, where I talked to their Lao workers during lunch times. I either had lunch with them, or went to their homes in the evening to interview them. Usually, they were watching Thai TV dramas. My observations and interviews revealed the Thai farmers’ perceptions of their cross-border employment strategies. Most of them knew that it was illegal; but, there could be some degrees of flexibility and compromise given that the extant cross-border practices in terms of travel, marriage, trade and employment had been observed for a long time by both sides. However, these went under the two conditions which are (1) the Thai landowners had to guarantee that state officials, i.e., the district and provincial government, and immigration officials could not obviously notice the number of Lao people in the village, and (2) the Thai landowners had to send all of their workers back to Laos after work.

When I asked if any Lao migrants tried to escape to other areas after they had completed their work in Ban Fangthai, the majority of the Thai farmers said that it was almost impossible as there were three checkpoints along the way to Bangkok. However, my interviews with the Lao workers revealed that some who came from a village not far from the Lao border and who had Thai relatives managed to proceed to Bangkok. They paid money to the bus driver and the bus attendant to hide them from the police, either in the truck under the bus or by dropping them off to hide in the forest before arriving at
the checkpoint. The bus driver would pick them up later. Most of the Lao workers preferred to save money to get a passport so that they could cross the border at the official checkpoint on the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge. They did not want to risk being arrested by the Thai police.

Abraham and van Schendel (2005) argue that the borderlands are the grey areas of legality and illegality. What is considered legitimate practices or licitness are rooted in the borderland and often brought into play alongside state laws. These local practices are often invoked as a replacement for state laws if these do not comply with what is considered legitimate with livelihood of the borderland people. In the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands, residents were subjected to state regulations; but, some opted not to obey certain laws that were not in their interests. The majority of Thai farmers in Ban Fangthai who hired Lao migrants knew that keeping their Lao workers in their houses was illegal; but, they did not see themselves as criminals. The village head and village committee members also hired Lao migrants and let them stay at their places. From their perspectives, hiring Lao migrants was not only a licit practice; it was also a necessary part of their agricultural livelihoods. In the words, one of the village committee members stated:

Without them, who would work for me? We depend on the natural rain. When it comes, we have to finish rice transplanting as soon as possible. I do not have any children at home to help. There are only two old people in my family: my wife and I. If I could get Thai labourers, I would not hire the Lao one even their wage rate is cheaper. I do not want to risk of being arrested by the police. Although letting the Lao workers stay in the village is acceptable among villagers here, I have to hide them away and not to make it obvious.37

With regards to the Lao workers, the majority of them were non-borderland residents, trapped in illegality in both Thailand and Laos. However, they did not see themselves as involved in crime since their intention was only to get paid-jobs. The lack of wage labour jobs in their home villages drove them to seek work elsewhere. Similar to the Thai farmers, the Lao workers claimed local acceptance of the long relationship and

37 Interview, Mr Maew, 12 November 2010.
brotherhood of the northeastern Thai-Lao people. The non-borderland Lao did not have any relatives in Thailand. They used their friends’ and neighbours’ networks to ensure that they would not be arrested, and would get higher paid jobs in the Thai borderland. None of them had experienced arrest by the Thai or Lao police when they illegally crossed the border to work on agricultural land. Nonetheless, several people reported having to pay bribes when they returned to Laos. Ha, a 14 year-old girl from Ban Sivily said:

My family made a loan 5,000 baht to the broker to send me to Chonburi Province last year. I worked as a domestic worker in a factory and earned 500 baht/month. I had worked there only two months and was arrested by the Thai police. They sent me back to Laos. I am in debt and need to return those 5,000 baht to the broker. My friends in the village told me to come to work in the paddy fields in Thailand to earn money. It is safer but we have to be careful of the (Thai and Lao) police. Some of my friends were caught by the Thai police. A lot of them were caught by the Lao police. They did not take us to the jail but they usually took the wage we earned. I had a friend whose entire wage was taken by the Lao police when she returned to Laos after cultivating season.38

The Thai villagers stated that only one landowner had been arrested by the police for hiring Lao workers. The first arrest occurred when a woman had a big fight with her neighbour. The latter reported the woman to the police saying that she let a few Lao workers stay in her house. The arrested landowner had to pay two hundred baht fee, and was ordered to send all the workers back to Laos. Then, the police let her go home.39 Generally speaking, the villagers did not face arrest. Their practice of hiring Lao migrants generally known only by their neighbours and relatives. They did not talk about it openly as they were afraid someone might tell the police. When I first commenced my fieldwork in June 2010, I introduced myself and told the villagers to let me know when the Lao workers arrived. A few of the villagers, who recognised me and understood that I was a student conducting research, obliged with some information.

38 Interview, Ms Ha, 16 November 2010.
39 The local police’s and the government officials’ view on this issue will be mentioned in the next section.
The majority were silent so I went to each paddy field to see for myself. The Thai landowners confessed that they did not trust me. As far as they were concerned, I could have been a spy from government office. By the time I returned to my fieldwork in late October 2010, the villagers had grown used to me and showed more trust. Many people informed me about the arrivals and the lengths of stay of the Lao migrants. And, to ensure their safety, several landowners asked me not to talk about their paddy fields and the Lao workers to anyone after our interviews.

5.4.2 The view from the state

Schoenberger and Turne (2008), Sturgeon (2007) and Walker (1999) point that the degree of state enforcement in the borderland was normally pragmatic, flexible and loose, and that the role of the state in governing the borderlands was intensified by border conflicts. The situation in the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands followed the same direction. Even though both the Thai and the Lao local state officials knew about the illegal cross-border employment, they claimed that it was simply the people’s livelihoods. As long as there were no criminal problems such as drug or human trafficking or international conflict between the two countries, the state officials turned a blind eye and shared mutual benefit from local cross-border practices.

At the end of cultivating season, I returned to interview the District Officials, the high ranking staff at the Provincial Security Affairs Section, and one of the high ranking Provincial Governors of Mukdahan Province, of whom had provided me with information about the rules and regulations at the local checkpoint before I commenced my fieldwork. I was reluctant to talk to them about what I had learned in the field since I was not sure how they would react and of possible impact on the local people. They questioned me how I felt seeing so many Lao migrants in the village. They expressed their concern regarding the many illegal practices in the borderlands, including the staying on of the Lao workers during the cultivating seasons. They said they had chosen to turn a blind eye as it was a borderland where anything could happen; and, this practice was not considered criminal as it posed no threaten to the country’s security. As the high ranking staff of the Provincial Security Affairs Section said:
We have to ‘turn a blind eye’ [ao huu pai naa, ao taa pai rai: lit. ‘take ears to the ricefields, take eyes to the swiddens’] and be flexible with the law. It is the way local borderlanders manage their agricultural livelihoods. Hiring Lao workers is a necessity since majority of rural young generation has moved to Bangkok. Not only agricultural sector, the whole service sectors of this province are using Lao migrants. Thailand and Laos are brotherhood countries. How can we stop their practices that have been maintained for hundreds of years?40

During my 2nd interview, I asked if I could see the documents on rules and regulations pertaining to the operation of the local checkpoint. But, all of the state officials said they did not have any. They added that they all knew that the law was blind to the cross-border practices, but they allowed relatively minor offences to occur in exchange for local cooperation in terms of observing drug trafficking and human smuggling in the borderlands. The high ranking staff of the Provincial Security Affairs Section questioned:

How could we have such document since our job is protecting the laws? If we have something written on paper saying that we allow the Thai farmers to hire the Lao workers through the traditional checkpoint, it means we support people’s illegal practice.41

In the District Governor’s view, the state officials had to be flexible in many ways, especially regarding what was relevant to the people’s livelihoods, because they needed the cooperation from local people. He stated:

The Thai border along the Mekong River is very porous, how could we protect the border and prohibit the movement across the river? To maintain border security, we need local people to help us with surveillance of the border. All news on drug and human trafficking comes from local borderlanders. Hiring the Lao workers to work in their farmland and keeping them during the cultivating season are not as dangerous as drug and human trafficking. If the villagers become un-cooperative, it would be more difficult to work and control border security. If we use more strict strategies such as prohibiting all cross-border movement, villagers will still attempt to

40 Interview, a staff member of Provincial Security Affairs Section, 14 January 2011.
41 Ibid.
get the Lao workers and smuggle goods across the river. It could have serious consequences since all practices would be done behind our backs.\textsuperscript{42}

Equally important are the perceptions and reactions of the Lao state officials. According to Huijsmans (2010, p. 106), cross-border migration to Thailand was not in any sense addressed by the Lao government because Lao PDR for long had policies either aimed at keeping people in place, or moving people to a particular place (resettlement). Over the past decade, cross-border migration and mobility between the Lao PDR and Thailand has started to receive much attention but either presented as an issue of human trafficking which needs to be combated, or as an issue of irregular migration which needs to be brought under state control (Huijsmans, 2010, p. 106-107). After Laos became a member of ASEAN in 1997, the Lao Government Authorities found difficult to ignore evidence of irregular Lao migrants working in Thailand. The Lao government had to accept the cross-border migration of Lao nationals as a reality and had to enter into bi-lateral discussions on migration as one of the consequences of a wider politico-economic agenda of regional integration. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on employment cooperation between Thailand and Laos was agreed in 2002. However, the position of the local authorities regarding cross-border employment was ambivalent, particularly as arrests and fines were rare. Huijsmans’s research, undertaken in a non-border village located not far from Vientiane, the capital city of Laos, showed that the constant bribing of Lao and Thai border controllers sustained undocumented migration.

Unlike the Thai border, that had checkpoint regulations, the checkpoint and fee in Ban Kaemkong were mediated by the social relations of involved individuals. While the residents of Ban Kaemkong were requested to pay twenty baht to cross to Thai border, the outsiders had to pay a different rate varying from twenty to a hundred baht or more. I learned more about the informal systems of border crossing in Laos by travelling with Lao migrants back to the Lao border at the end of the cultivating season. Non-borderland residents, who lived in villages other than Ban Kaemkong, were required to

\textsuperscript{42} Interview, the District Governor, 14 January 2011.
pay a border-crossing fee between 100 and 200 baht. Asked why the non-borderland residents had to pay the extra fee, one of the Lao soldiers replied:

This is the cost of passage. They will have to pay since they are not villagers of Ban Kaemkong and are not legally allowed to cross the border to work. If they went to shop in Thailand on the weekly market days, we would get usual rate of twenty baht. But, they went to stay on the Thai side for several nights. If they travelled daily, they would have to pay twenty baht per day anyway. The amount 100 baht is a lump sum fee.\textsuperscript{43}

Although the Lao officials recognised that travelling to work in Thailand through the checkpoint was illegal, at the same time they view it was acceptable. They said they knew that there were a few wage-labour jobs available in Laos compared to availability across the Thai border. Money proved a means of compromise between state officials and villagers under this informal cross-border arrangement: it enhanced the state officials’ opportunities to benefit as they facilitated local villagers migration from Laos. During my fieldwork, I asked the Ban Kamkong village headman why the Lao government did not control border security by establishing the formal checkpoint in Ban Kaemkong, he replied:

Lao is a poor country. We are not ready in terms of staff and budget. We all know that a lot of Lao people illegally travel to work in Thailand but it is the necessity for them to go to get income for their households. This is uncontrollable. However, it is their task to pay for an extra-security cost to the state officials. If something happens in Thailand such as they are arrested, it would be Lao officials who go to get them back.\textsuperscript{44}

5.5 The Scope of Compromise in State-village Relations

In the previous section, I have demonstrated why many cross-border activities, although illegal according to the state law, continued to be maintained. The main reason was that because local borderland residents and the government officials viewed them as licit. Furthermore, there is the mutual benefit of both the Thai and Lao states; hence, the

\textsuperscript{43} Interview, the Lao Soldier, 4 December 2010.
\textsuperscript{44} Interview, Village Head of Ban Kaemkong, 4 December 2010.
Thai-Lao people decide to allow this particular combination of legal, illegal and licit to persist. This scenario not only offers the chance to explore the fragility of state power and to question the exercising of state regulations, but also reveals that state-village relations are not antagonistic relations.

In Southeast Asia, the compromise between the state and peasants has been noted in the state formation process. De Koninck (1996) who examines the mutual advantages for states and peasants in the agricultural expansion process, alludes to the relationship that links peasantry and the state in the production, integration, control, and administration of territory as ‘the territorial compromise’. He further suggests that the states send peasants out to the peripheries and then protect them, thus asserting control over these regions but having to compromise with the peasants vis-à-vis massive deforestation in order to gain advantage through monitoring peasant production and expansion, even though it could possibly jeopardise the state’s own territorial legitimacy (De Koninck, 1996). In their article titled ‘Agricultural Expansion as a Tool of Population Redistribution in Southeast Asia’, De Koninck and Dery (1997, p. 2) argue that the very formation of numerous states, the gathering of the pieces that comprise them and the colonisation of their borderlands have relied at least partially on the peasantry, or on a process of peasantisation. By "planting" or "sowing" peasants, and then "protecting" them, many states have secured their peripheral and border areas, by extension contributing to the integration or even assimilation of minority peoples.

State-village relations in this thesis invite a degree of compromise and negotiation. In addition, it becomes evident that the consolidation of state borderlands has relied on the cooperation of the people who support state border control and security while at the same time turning a blind eye to licit cross-border practices. Similarly, the villagers have relied on the state to administer the borderlands and to oversee security matters; i.e., drug and human trafficking.
Borderlands are traditionally recognised as marginal; that is, as distanced from state power. But, this may be an erroneous view of the state and it marginal territories. This thesis reveals that while the state unarguably operates at the local level, its modes of order have a scope of compromise. Again, the degree to which the state undertakes to compromise differs somewhat between Thailand and Laos. In effect, the Thai authorities are more capable of negotiating with their local state officials than their Lao counterparts. This chapter points out that in the seemingly exploitative situation in Laos, people are still able to negotiate crossing the border.

Previous literature on borderland anthropology disaggregates state power and its dispersion practices from the state centre and its margins (Das & Poole, 2004; Gainsborough, 2009; Horstmann & Wadley, 2006; Walker, 1999). In northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands, the state’s dispersion practices are based on the mutual benefit of both the state and the people. While Thai state officials seek to ensure the collaboration of the borderland residents, the Lao local state officials enjoy the benefits of informal cross-border fee collected from non-borderland residents who work as wage-labourers in Thailand. Cross-border migration from Laos to Thailand, in this case, is based on collaboration between local state agents and Lao villagers. By avoiding the control of the central government, both parties profit. The above cases reflect expectations of how the state should perform for its own citizens; that is, how it should exercise state functionality and state power in the borderlands. By compromising, both the officials and the borderland residents stand to gain: they can enjoy the benefits that accrue by renegotiating the extant regulations. This in turn shows that both the Thai and Lao, recognising their limit at the frontier, have opted to compromise in the case of certain extant practices.

The state and the villagers’ practices in the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands urge for the re-consideration of the state-village relations in the borderlands. The anthropology of borderlands applies many politically-based frameworks; for example, it emphasises the influence of the state on the local people and the strategies that the border people
employ to maintain their cross-border way of life (Flynn, 1996; Makpun, 2008; Martínez, 1994). However, the results of scholarly fieldwork in the research sites reveal the aspect of the state that relies on people’s collaboration. Some scholars stress that many illegal practices occur due to the state officials’ involvement, and that while the states declare some practices illegal, they themselves are often involved in said practices (Abraham and Van Schendel 2005; Donnan and Wilson 1999; Walker 1999).

This thesis suggests that certain practices in the borderlands occur because many state officials are also local borderland residents. Hence, there is a conflict of interest. They are required to mediate between the government and the locals, are responsible for enforcing the laws and regulations in the borderlands, and at the same time benefit with the farmers who own the farmland and employ Lao labourers. Previous research into Thai villages depicts Thai village heads as people ‘in between state and citizenry’ (Bowie, 2008), ‘synaptic leaders’ pressured by both village and state authorities (Moerman, 1969), engaged in a role sanctioned at both the national and local levels (Keyes, 1970). Walker (2012) suggests that the old-style politics of the rural poor, which were characterised by rebellion, revolution or resistance, have been shifted to peasants’ strategy to engage with the state to gain advantage from the state’s development policies. The state plays a key role in addressing these challenges through an array of subsidies, welfare, and community development schemes. Modern peasant politics in Thailand are motivated not by an antagonistic relationship with the state, but by a desire to draw the state into mutually beneficial transactions. These factors have ultimately supported the potential for the degree of compromise in relations between state officials and borderland residents.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have draw on my experiences in Ban Fangthai and Ban Kaemkong to show how particular everyday practices in the Thai-Lao borderlands are considered licit and how they provide insights into the scope of compromise vis-a-vis state-village relations. As regards a common understanding of the state as an institution extending
power from the centre to control the borderlands, I argue that there is a room for the local people to negotiate given that the state has to actively collaborate with the borderland residents.

In the first section of this chapter, I demonstrated the nature of state power and its relations to the national borders. While the security of state and good governance is formally ensured by adherence to states’ law and order policies, diffusion at their borders can pose a threat to nation-states. The case of northeastern Thai border reveals that both the state and the local borderland residents have their own narratives to support the prevailing illegal cross-border activities. Each tries to differentiate between legal and illegal, ultimately declaring them licit. The narratives of long historical ties, brotherhood, similarities in language and culture, and requirement for the state officials to collaborate with the local people are reasons to make the everyday practices at the border licit.

Second, the chapter examines the particular factors that facilitate the scope of compromise inherent in state-village relations. In Thailand, these factors include the the state officials’ dependence on the local people for surveillance of the borders, and the growing interaction between the state and the villagers. While the Village Heads, police and government officials in the local level are servants of nation states, many of them are also farmers who hire wage labourers, evidence of the synergetic relations that obtain between state and society. In Laos, cross-border activities include the illegal movement of seasonal agricultural workers. Both the villagers and the state authorities share a mutual economic interest in those illegal cross border practices. In addition, villagers in Ban Kaemkong, and other villages, who cross the Mekong River to find jobs in Thailand, attempt to justify their activities as a mean of livelihood improvement, activities that have effectively blinded the law. The informal tax they have to pay upon their return to Laos is justified as a fee for keeping the local border police quiet and for protecting them from being caught by the state officials.
Third, the chapter proves that nation-states can be flexible. They employ different modes of order to consolidate their control over populations and territories (Das & Poole, 2004; Lukasiewicz, 2011; Walker, 2009a). In the case of this thesis, the borderland region under local scrutiny practices and state-village interactions fall between legal, illegal, formal and informal patterns. The chapter additionally demonstrates the diversity of state practices and how the state treats its territories differently according to position, location and context. In this sense, the borderland is subject to the unusual regulations compared to other areas of the country. The spatial character of the borderland and state-village relations produces a particular pattern of migration and rural transformation, that I will be address in the next chapter.
Chapter 6
Mobile Lao-Isan Livelihoods

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I exemplified the geo-politics of the Northeast Thailand and Laos and argued that historical tie, the border geography, and the mutual benefit that accrues to both state officials and people by legitimating the illegal cross-border employment by Thai farmers of Lao labourers. These arrangements ultimately enhance the scope for compromise in state-village relations, and the illegal but licit local cross-border practices in the marginal areas of the state.

My intention in this chapter is to examine how labour migration has become inscribed on the lives of the peoples of Ban Fangthai, Thailand, and Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua in Lao PDR. I will also explore how the Thai-Lao border locations complicate the migration patterns, which are distinctive due to the border proximity, cultural and language similarities, and historical ties. Ellis (2000) classifies labour migration into the following four types: (1) the seasonal migration or temporary movement occurring in response to the agricultural calendar, that allows people to move during the low season and to return in the peak period; (2) circular migration that occurred in response to the demand for labour but might not engage with the agricultural reasons; (3) permanent migration or long-term migration; and (4) international migration, that is, temporary or permanent movement to work in another country. While research into migration in Laos in general focuses on the movement of Lao people to urban areas in Thailand, resulting in an abundance of data vis-a-vis rural-to-urban cross-border movement, I will contend that the flows of people between the rural and urban areas are nonlinear. Lao people, in fact, move across rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban sectors, establishing further connections with many areas beyond Bangkok, e.g., provinces in southern and eastern Thailand. The geographical locations and porous Thai-Lao borderlands offer good opportunities for people to move with very little difficulty.
The quantitative data presented in this chapter were collected from interviewees domiciled in Ban Fangthai, Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua. In each village, I conducted survey with 25 per cent of the total households, which equalled 100, 50 and 50 households respectively. The questions included in the questionnaire were not only designed to elicit data from the individual interviewees, but also to collect information about their household members in terms of ages, occupations, incomes, remittances, migration experience, employment, and, their relations with their respective families.

I will begin the chapter by detailing the migration history of the villagers of Ban Fangthai and the area’s transformation from a sending to a receiving migrant destination. I will then explicate the migration situation in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua to show how the complex migration patterns in Laos are determined by geographical location, village economic development, and government policies. This will be followed by a discussion of the legality for the Lao migrants’ journey between their seasonal migration to the Thai borderlands and their long-distance migration to Bangkok and its vicinities.

6.2 Mobility into and out of the margin

This section provides information about migration in Ban Fangthai and the village’s shift from a sending to a receiving landscape. Before the 1990s, Ban Fangthai was only a small village located far from the urban cities. The villagers engaged in temporary migration to Bangkok and other urban cities of Thailand during the non-cultivating season seeking alternative off-farm incomes. Thus, not only did cheap, unskilled labour support urban industrialisation, but workers opted for international migration to the Middle East countries. The section reveals that Ban Fangthai functioned as a labour sending village to both internal and international destinations.

However, while out-migration from Ban Fangthai to urban cities resulted the labour shortages in the agricultural sectors, the the marginality of the village did not contribute to agricultural marginalisation. After the re-opening of the Thai-Lao border in the 1980s, the villagers of Ban Fangthai benefited from seasonal labour, most notably the illegal
migrants from Laos. The second part of this section demonstrates how Ban Fangthai shifted from being a labour supplying village to being a labour sending and receiving landscape.

6.2.1 Ban Fangthai as a sending landscape

Migration and mobility have been identified as important features of rural livelihoods (Kelly, 2011; World Bank, 2006a, 2008). Regarding Northeast Thailand, a number of scholars wrote that by the early 1980s, migration and non-farm work had become a crucial source for income of the people (Grandstaff et al., 2008; Maneemai, 2012; Rigg, 2007). Their observations were valid for Ban Fangthai too, where domestic migration to Bangkok and its vicinities had been common practice.

The results of the data survey conducted as part of this study in Ban Fangthai in 2011 show that out of 100 households, 58 had at least one family member who had migrated to work out of their home village for a period of time (see Figure 6.1). The reasons for migration included household poverty, the unreliability of rain-fed agriculture, population pressure on land, and the low level of industrialisation in the northeast region. Of the 42 households without any family member working outside of the village, almost half of them (i.e. 22 households) had at least one return migrant. Three households had a family member practicing long-distance migration to the Middle East and who had been away for between three to five years. The remaining householders had left the village for between three to five years but had returned to establish a family in Ban Fangthai.
The ages of the migrants were another notable feature of the survey data. More than half of the interviewed households (N=58) had at least one family member currently working outside of the village. Almost one third (i.e. 16 households) were parental households who stayed behind to look after their grandchildren because the father or mother of the children was working in Bangkok or another city. In terms of households currently without migrants (N = 42), the majority were single families with children of school age.

There was a significant different in the forms of migration, reflected by the age dynamics. The parental generation migrated for part-time jobs, their aim being to save enough money to supplement the household income and helped sustain their rural way of life. Some spent a few years outside of the village, or might go abroad to Middle East countries for some years, working and saving a sum of money to invest in a small
business in the village while working on the farm at the same time. The survey also revealed that the respondents were increasingly seeking off-farm jobs, both inside and outside of the villages. Their earning accounted for the main source of household income, coupled with remittances from family members who had moved into industry and services outside of the village.

Mr Tia’s experience provided a good example of the migration patterns and age dynamics of migration in Ban Fangthai. The owner of 25 rais of paddy field, ten rais of cassava and five rais of rubber, Mr Tia lived in Ban Fangthai with his wife. When approached to help pay his parents’ debt, Mr Tai migrated to work in Saudi Arabia at the age of 35, leaving his wife and children behind in Ban Fangthai. After living as a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia and Iraq for 3 years, he returned to Ban Fangthai with sufficient money to pay his parents debts, to build a new house, and to buy more agricultural land. But, his investment in his children’s education was minimal. He said:

‘They preferred to leave school to find jobs outside of the village. Nobody wanted to work on the farmland.’

Mr Tia’s 32 year-old eldest daughter was working as an in-house staff at the Roman-catholic school in Bangkok. The second daughter was having a family and work for her husband’s business. Both girls had graduated from Mor 3 (Grade 9). His youngest son, who graduated Mattayom 6 (Grade 12) worked on a casino ship running between Bangkok, Phuket, Malaysia and Singapore. All of Mr Tia’s children earned more than 10,000 baht per month. They regularly transferred money to Mr Tia and his wife (approximately 5,000-7,000 baht per months). Mr Tia and his wife worked the farm on their own and used their children’s remittances to invest for labour, fertilizer, and other costs incurred by farming. Like other households in Ban Fangthai, Mr Tia faced difficulty finding labour, especially during the rice cultivating season when all of the local domestic labourers in village worked on their own rice farms. The out-migration of

45 Interview, Mr Tia, 22 April 2011.
the younger cohort had also contributed to the severe labour shortages in the peak agricultural season, this being one of the factors that has changed Ban Fangthai into a receiving migrant destination.

6.2.2 The receiving landscape

Grandstaff et al. (2008) points out that throughout the 1990s, the numbers of Northeastern people working in agriculture declined consistently: people were taking less time off from their off-farm work to return home for transplanting and harvesting. Those who found themselves facing long hours and hard work in the paddy fields, opted to remit money home to pay for hiring others who could do this work instead. Cooperative labour arrangements no longer functioned as an effective economic mechanism: they had been replaced by hired-wage labour since the 1960s (Douglass, 1983; Ganjanapan, 1984; Moerman, 1968; Sharp & Hanks, 1978). And, although domestic labourers were still available, the supply did not meet the high demand during the peak periods.

In Ban Fangthai, reciprocal labour arrangements have been replaced by a wage system for sometimes. The majority of interviewees emphasised that they did not have time to cooperate with others; and, they found it troublesome to have guest labourers because they had to prepare meals for them. Some said they started hiring labourers when their parents divided their land and left them to manage the agricultural work on their own. Only eight out of the 100 interviewed households practiced semi-reciprocal labour exchange with relatives who lived in Ban Fangthai and nearby villages, saying that they still had to pay comparable daily wages to those of the usual labourers. In addition, they had to prepare meals for all of the workers. After completing the work on their own farms, the landowners then had to go work as labourers in their relatives’ farms when they earned the same rate of daily wage in return.

Labour shortages have caused the majority of farmers in Ban Fangthai turned to depend on wage labour from Laos. Of the 100 interviewed households, 96 had hired Lao seasonal workers at least once. Eighty-eight households regularly hired Lao seasonal workers every year, including 2010, the year in which the fieldwork was conducted.
Only four households had never hired any Lao workers; and, one of them was landless. Another had a small piece of land (less than three rai) that was managed by their family.

The method employed to hire Lao workers from across the Mekong River revealed the transition of cross-border relations between the Thai-Lao border residents. In the past, the villagers of Ban Fangthai had sought help from relatives and friends living in the Lao villages along the riverbank. Little attention was paid to the equivalence between what one gave and what was returned, thus, achieving an exact balance between the two transactions was rarely pursued. A labour debt might be repaid in different ways: for example, products from harvesting in a year later. However, the nature of labour management in Ban Fangthai and the relationship between the Thai and the Lao villagers transformed into a more strict monetary exchange in the form of daily wage after the officially re-opening of the Thai-Lao border in the late 1980s.

My in-depth interviews with a few Thai villagers revealed that prior to the new millennium, most of the Lao workers came from Ban Kaemkong and other nearby villages located along the Mekong River. Consequently, it was practical for them to cross the border on a daily basis. The number of Lao labourers from the above villages dropped significantly over the last decade: they were replaced by workers from villages in inner Laos. Because it is difficult for them to travel back and forth between their villages and Ban Kaemkong daily, the majority of the Lao workers stayed in Ban Fangthai until the end of the cultivating season. They lived either in their employers’ homes or in temporary shelters located in the middle of the paddy fields. In the 2010 harvesting season from late October to the middle of December, out of a total of 120 migrants, I met only seven migrants from Ban Kaemkong and another twelve migrants from Ban Savamg, another border village not far from Ban Kaemkong (see Table 6.1). It should be noted that two of the seven Ban Kaemkong villagers were relatives of Ban Fangthai residents; so, they regularly crossed the river for trade and family visits.

The nature of labour management in Ban Fangthai, and the relationship between the Thai and Lao villagers were transformed in line with a number of conditions. As shown
in Table 6.1, in the early 1980s, domestic labour was manageable given that the majority of the parental generation of Ban Fangthai undertook seasonal migration during the agricultural off-season. Only a few households hired Lao workers from across the Mekong River. But in the late 1990s, the officially re-opened border, together with industrialisation in Thailand and the out-migration of the younger generation, stimulated labour shortages. Half of the respondent households commenced hiring Lao workers in the first decade of the 2000s while loose reciprocity was replaced by the more strict exchange in the form of daily wage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of commencing hiring Lao workers</th>
<th>Number of households that commenced to hire Lao workers in each period of time</th>
<th>Original migrant sending villages in Laos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior to the 1980s</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ban Kaemkong, Ban Hin Nam Aoy, Ban Tung Hua Chang, Ban Savang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Ban Kaemkong, Ban Savang, Ban Don</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s-2010</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Ban Kaemkong, Ban Savang, Ban Lhak, Ban Don, <strong>Ban Laonua</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 2010</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ban Kaemkong, Ban Savang, Ban Lhak, Ban Don, Ban Som Sanouk, <strong>Ban Laonua</strong>, Ban Phonh, Ban Dong, Ban Tham, Ban Lhao, Ban Na, Ban Sa Ath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s survey, 2011

Table 6.1 shows the movement of Lao people in particular decades. Prior to the 2000s, most of the Lao workers came from villages located along the Mekong River so it was practical for them to cross the border on a daily basis. The number of Lao labourers from Ban Kaemkong dropped significantly over the last ten years. The workers were replaced by people from many villages located far from the borderlands. But, due to this remoteness, it was difficult for them to travel back and forth on a daily basis. For this
reason, majority of the Lao workers stayed in Ban Fangthai until the end of cultivating season.

Table 6.2 shows the names of the Lao villages that were home to the 120 Lao workers I met during my fieldwork between October and November 2010. The approximate locations of the villages in Laos illustrated in Figure 6.2. Out of these workers, the largest migration group was 31 people from Ban Laonua, Xeno District, Savannakhet Province, which is located approximately 50 km from the river border.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village Names</th>
<th>Approximate distance from the Mekong River</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Village Location in Lao PDR</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ban Kaemkong</td>
<td>The border village</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Xaibouri District, Savannakhet Province</td>
<td>Daily workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Savang</td>
<td>The border village approximately two km from Ban Kaemkong</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Xaibouri District, Savannakhet Province,</td>
<td>Daily workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Laonua</td>
<td>Approximately 50 km from the Mekong River</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Outhoomphone District, Savannakhet Province</td>
<td>Temporary stay workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Phonh</td>
<td>Approximately 50 km from the Mekong River</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Outhoomphone District, Savannakhet Province</td>
<td>Temporary stay workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Lhak</td>
<td>Approximately 20 km from the Mekong River</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Outhoomphone District, Savannakhet Province</td>
<td>Temporary stay workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Som Sa Nouk</td>
<td>Approximately 15 km from the Mekong River</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Outhoomphone District, Savannakhet Province</td>
<td>Temporary stay workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Don</td>
<td>Approximately 40 km from the Mekong River</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Outhoomphone District, Savannakhet Province</td>
<td>Temporary stay workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Dong</td>
<td>Approximately 15 km from the Mekong River, the village is located opposite That Phanom District, Nakhon Phanom Province</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Khammuan District, Savannakhet Province</td>
<td>Temporary stay workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Tham</td>
<td>Approximately two km from Ban Dong</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Khammuan Province</td>
<td>Temporary stay workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Author’s survey 2010
Overtime, Ban Fangthai changed from a sending to a receiving migrant destination. Having long been seen as marginal areas of development, it was accepted by current critical perspectives that Northeast Thailand had experienced some degree of economic growth (Grandstaff et al., 2008; Rigg & Salamanca, 2011). Such broad perspectives may have relevant to Ban Fangthai in terms of the improvement in the village’s living conditions due to remittances and, the availability of economic opportunities across the border.
The fact that families were hiring Lao workers implied a higher demand for labour to fill the labour gap. At the same time, it showed that villages located in the peripheral area of Northeast Thailand had become sites of job opportunities for the less dynamic economic areas in Laos. In the next section, I will examine the sending migration landscape in Laos. Particular focus will be on two villages: Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua.

6.3 Everyday Mobility in Lao PDR

Rigg (2001) observes the misperception that Laos is a relatively immobile society, a misperception rooted in the various factors that constrain human movement, e.g., limited physical infrastructure and government policies aimed at mobility control. This paradigm of immobility may have its genesis in the period spanning 1975 to 1986 when the Lao government restricted and controlled both internal and inter-national mobility. In fact, between 1975 and 1980, approximately 300,000 people (ten per cent of the population at that time) migrated from Laos across the Thai border to escape from the communist regime (Stuart Fox, 2008, p. xii). Some left Laos because of the rapid decline in their living standards (Reddy, 2009, p. 14). Many among them were former rightist army personnel, police officers, teachers, technicians and civil servants who constitute the educated cohort. The implementation of NEM in 1986 elicited the new forms of migration which have rendered short and long distance international migration considerably easier, in particular migration in the border provinces which is reportedly on the rise. This includes out-migration in Ban Kaemkong where people tend to engage in long-distance migration rather than seasonal cross-border migration.

In this section, I will draw attention to the migration situation in two Lao villages located in the borderland and hinterland respectively. I argue that migration to Thailand has become a part of the villagers’ lives in both social and economic terms. In addition, short and long migration to Thailand can occur at any time in any area of the Thai-Lao border as part of everyday migration. Given these circumstances, I found it difficult to generalise the Lao people into the categories of returnees or ongoing migrants. Likewise, to divide current migration situation in Laos only as international rural-to-
urban migration significantly limits one’s understanding of migration, both in individual and collective terms.

6.3.1 The demise of daily cross-border movement from Ban Kaemkong

The main reason why only a small number of people from Ban Kaemkong crossed the Mekong River to find labouring jobs in Ban Fangthai lay in the off-farm opportunities available both within and outside the village. A survey of the villagers’ main occupation revealed that almost half of the residential households (80 out of 194 households) were government officials’ households, which did not have any social connections to the people in Thailand. In-depth interviews with fourteen government officials’ households revealed that only four of these households had at least one family member who had ever worked in Ban Fangthai. These interviewees, who were mostly female, had followed their neighbours’ decisions to avail themselves new experiences in Thailand. The Lao workers were generally from a small number of local families that had relatives or friends living along the Thai border. As of 2010, the remaining cross-border seasonal workers in Ban Kaemkong constituted of less than ten households that were either relatives of Thai farmers, newcomer residents who were landless, or widows. According to the survey, only five females from residential households still crossed the river to Ban Fangthai in search of agricultural jobs. Seventeen out of 36 residential households had at least one family member who had travelled to work in Ban Fangthai at least once in their lifetime. Fifteen out of those those seventeen residential households had a member who regularly travelled to work in Ban Fangthai over the last ten years but had already ceased mobility. Twenty-one households in the survey had at least one family member who had traveled to work in Ban Fangthai at least once in their lifetimes but had stopped going because they were busy working in other jobs.

Job diversification within Ban Kaemkong began in the 1990s for a number of reasons, ranging from the re-opened Thai-Lao border for trade and investment, the establishment of fertilizer and sugarcane factories by Thai business companies, and land privatisation for cash crops such as sugarcane and rubber. These innovations led to the second phase of immigration of outsiders to Ban Kaemkong. Not only did villagers in the nearby
villages come to find laboring jobs, but also Thai businesses brought educated staff, technicians and some Thai labourers to work in the sugarcane plantations. Several villages surrounding Ban Kaemkong became transformed into sugarcane plantation zones.

Immigration by outsiders resulted in the emergence of businesses such as grocery stores, local restaurants and karaoke shops that were owned by local villagers. The majority of whom were relatives of government officials. Among the local businesses, the biggest grocery store in the village was owned by a lady who had previously worked as a district health officer and decided to become a local trader in the early 1990s. Similarly, three restaurants and karaoke shops located along the village’s main road were owned by the wives of government officials, the village head, and the local governor respectively. At the end of the road near the fertilizer factory, another two restaurants were operated by the wives of local policemen and soldiers. Some residents also operated small grocery stores, but the variety of goods was not as high as in these shops operated by government officials or their wives. These more diverse economic opportunities in time generated greater incomes for the villagers.

The opening of the border in the late 1980s additionally spurred the out-migration of the young generation. Due to the improved economic conditions in the village, people were able to contemplate long-distance migration to inner Thailand. Furthermore, due to Lao PDR’s topography and the poor condition of the roads, it was easier and cheaper for Lao migrants to cross the border into Thailand than to migrate to Vientiane in search of work. Out of 50 households interviewed, 38 had at least one family member working in Bangkok and other cities as long-term migrants. Only six households stated that their family members circulated regularly between their village and Thailand. Economic factors and material needs such as money, jobs, house renovations and consumer goods were the main factors driving migration. In addition, the influence of friends or neighbours who had successfully received significant remittances also propelled migration. As some scholars have suggested along with the lure of better economic
opportunities in Thailand, consumerism and materialism were also very important to the Lao villagers (Barney, 2012; High, 2008; Rigg, 2007). Young Lao people in the main disinterested in working in low-paid farming jobs. And, although they often had the chance to work in fertilizer and sugarcane factories, the young cohort rejected such opportunity because it was deemed too labour-intensive, e.g., packing fertilizer and working on sugarcane plantations. As well, wages for these jobs were low: 80 baht per day. Ms Sun, a 23 year-old female, who moved to Bangkok when she was seventeen years old and currently works in a restaurant in a suburb of Bangkok, talked about her life in Bangkok:

I can earn up to 10,000 baht per month but I spent a lot of money as well. There is plenty of food to eat and many places for recreation in Bangkok. I love to go to the department stores. Staying in my home village was so boring.

Migration and economic development in Ban Kaemkong transformed the village into both a sending and a receiving area, similar to Ban Fangthai. While the young labour force tended to migrate to Thailand, the vacuum they left was filled by groups of migrant; for example, Lao villagers from many villages in Lao hinterland to serve as labourers in the sugarcane plantations who either engaged in daily migration if they lived in nearby villages, or in temporary migration from one up to three months, staying in camp sites in the middle of the sugarcane plantations.

Daily and temporary migration also occurred in Ban Kaemkong during the rice cultivating season when domestic wage labourers could not meet the demand. Families that still worked in their farms had to recruit labourers from their surrounding villages in the Lao hinterland. Many workers heard of job opportunities in Ban Fangthai through Ban Kaemkong villagers. The telephone network across the countries allowed many Lao people living along the border access to Thai numbers so that they could contact people in Thailand. One regular procedure I noted during the rice cultivating season was people

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46 Interview, Ms Sun, 17 July 2010.
calling from Thailand early in the morning, followed by Ban Kaemkong villagers riding their motorbikes and shouting for people who wanted to go to work in Thai paddy fields. Among people who rode the motorbikes around the village were boat riders, who benefited from the boat fee extracted from the Lao passengers.\(^{47}\) However, from what I learned, it was very little chance of encouraging people living in Ban Kaemkong to go with the exception of the females mentioned earlier. Those villagers who received orders from Thailand had to go further than Ban Kaemkong area or call Lao people living in other villages to let them know about the wage jobs along the Thai border. These activities subsequently led to a variety of Lao migrants; and, the distance from their home villages to the Thai border did not determine their journeys to the borderland as soon as they had made contact with people living along the border. The furthest home village of migrants in Ban Fangthai in 2010 was Ban Phonh, which was more than 30 kms from the Lao border. However, the furthest location of migrants’ original village that I became aware of in Ban Kham, a village near Ban Fangthai, was Phin District, which was located almost at the Lao - Vietnamese border.

### 6.3.2 Circular migration of the hinterland populace in Ban Laonua

Migration in Ban Laonua entailed complex patterns of movement. Located in the hinterlands, the lack of industrial and commercial opportunities deprived the local residents of many job opportunities. Therefore, the majority of households still worked in the agricultural sector. After benefiting from the re-opening of the Thai-Lao border, people moved to find jobs at both Thai border and in the inner areas. Where they went depended largely upon whether they could afford to pay the travelling costs of short or long distance migration. However, the young generation in this remote village could not easily move away from agricultural work, unlike the majority in Ban Kaemkong, because it was difficult to find labourers to fill the labour gap during the peak agricultural season. Consequently, some migrants returned home during the cultivating season. All types of migration – seasonal, circular, rural-to-urban, and rural-to-rural both

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\(^{47}\) The fee for people travelling from Laos to the weekly market on Tuesdays and Sundays was 40 baht for the roundtrip; but the fee varied in accordance with the social connection of the people who want to cross the border. Lao migrants from villages in the hinterland had to pay more, e.g., 50 to 100 baht per ride or 200 baht for the roundtrip (see Chapter five on border passage).
domestic and international - were found; and, many times villagers’ movements fell into more than one category.

In June 2010, for the first time I saw twelve Lao migrants from Ban Laonua working in the paddy fields of the deputy village head of Ban Fangthai. When I returned to the village during the rice harvesting season in November, the total number of migrants in this village had increased to 31, the largest number among Lao migrants from other villages that year. Group and individual interviews in Ban Fangthai revealed that more than half of the migrants from Ban Laonua who went to work in Ban Fangthai in November 2010 had come for the second times or more (see Table 6.3). Four had recently returned from Phang Nga and Phuket Provinces in Southern Thailand, eight had returned from Bangkok, and the rest were moving between Bangkok and the border provinces in Northeast Thailand, e.g., Ubon Ratchatani, Sakonnakorn and Nakorn Panhom Provinces. Asked about their next work destination, five people replied that they would return to their wage labour jobs in Bangkok and other industrial cities of Thailand, mostly to work in aluminium and furniture factories and on construction sites. The rest were unsure when they would return to Bangkok because they wanted to take a short break in their home villages until they were ready to leave again or had to leave because of lack of money. Their movements were thus unpredictable.
Table 6.3 Information about migrants from Ban Laonua who went to work in Ban Fangthai between October and November 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>come 1st time</th>
<th></th>
<th>come 2nd time or more</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s Survey, 2010.

I gained more in-depth information about the degree of geographical scope and its impact on migration patterns when I returned to conduct my ethnographic fieldwork and a survey in Ban Laonua between January and February 2011. My survey of 50 households revealed that the case of Ban Laonua exemplified complex migration that to date has been understudied. In general, scholarly research into migration in Laos focuses heavily on the pattern of international migration to urban areas in Thailand. But, in the case of Ban Laonua, the movement of people fell into all categories of rural-to-urban/rural-to-urban, internal/international, and seasonal/circular migration. The village’s remote location brought to fewer opportunities for economic development; so, only a few labouring jobs were available in the village. Most of the families in Ban Laonua were engaged in the subsistence agriculture; hence, migration was the strategy people employed to earn money. The young cohort, who migrated to Thailand, practiced circular migration because the majority of them found it difficult to find wage labourers to replace their absence during the peak agricultural season.

Drawing on the migration experience of 50 households in Ban Laonua, 38 had at least one family member currently working in Thailand. Fifteen of them reported that their
family member practicing circular migration or moving between their home village, the Thai borders, Bangkok, or other provinces in Thailand. Interestingly, I interviewed four villagers who were between 51 and 60 years of age. They had migrated to work in the paddy fields in many villages along the Thai border through connections with their relatives. These people named the Thai border villages as follows: Ban Fangthai, Ban Kham, and other Thai border villages in Nakhon Phanom Province. Asked about the names of the Thai farmers in Ban Fangthai that they had ever worked for, they mentioned a few names of landowners who were widely known among the Lao people.

In addition, I conducted in-depth interviews with seven people aged between fifteen to 40 years, who had experienced working along the Thai border and in other areas of Thailand including Bangkok. These people could be categorised as ‘unpredictable migrants’ as they could not provide information about their yearly life calendars and their times and places of work. Their migration lives could not be categorised seasonal nor as return migrant. They moved back and forth between farm work and labour jobs in Thailand. In line with their unpredictable timelines, they might opt to return home to work on the farm; it was not their regular practice. And, nothing confirmed that they would return to work on the farm every cultivating season. For example, some may have returned home last year to do rice transplanting in response family demand. Then, they left the village without working on rice harvesting. These people might return again in one or two years time to undertake agricultural work. Figure 6.2 shows the complex patterns of migration and the replacement of Lao seasonal migrants in the Thai borderlands. In addition, it reveals the overlapping patterns of rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban migration as the Lao migrants proceed to Bangkok and urban cities.
Figure 6.3 Migratory Routes of the Northeast Thailand People and the Lao People***

*** Map boundary data supplied by the Mekong River Commission. All other map data are by the author.
In sum, migration to Thailand has become a common livelihood strategy in both Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua. However, the patterns of migration in these two villages were diverse. While many households in Ban Kaemkong had become increasingly engaged in non-farm employment, people in Ban Laonua typically still grew rice and diversified their income through migration. The differences in location, accessibility, and local employment opportunities determined the migration patterns.

In the next section, I will discuss the geography of legality of migration between Laos and Thailand. While working in the Thai borderland area during harvest seasons was illegal but licit, the workers’ movement to other more distant areas without documentation was strongly illegal. Case studies will be drawn from migrants’ individual biographical notes regarding their movement across and between borders and sectors.

6.4 Landscape of legality

As already suggested in Chapters two and five, Abraham and Van Schendel (2005) identify the distinction between legal/illegal and licit/illicit. They claim that legality is related to what the state regards as legitimate in a legal sense, while licit is what people involved in transnational networks and activities regard as legitimate in a social sense, even though it may be illegal.

In this section, I will discuss the relationship between the specific area of migration and the landscape of legality. In an attempt to identify the complex migration trajectories of the Lao people, and the interface between illegal and licit, I will focus on the biographical narratives to show how Lao migrants negotiated to stay in Thailand, and the differences between working in the agricultural sectors along the in Thai borderland, and in off-farm sectors in Bangkok. My discussion will provide new perspectives of migration between Laos and Thailand and how this illegal but licit transnational labour migration is carried on.
I met Whai, a 28 year-old man working Mr Nguan’s rice farm during the rice transplanting season in July 2010. He was very shy and reluctant to talk to me during our first meeting. I met him again in November 2010 during the rice harvesting season and learned that he was the head of the migrants from Ban Laonua. He had earlier been in contact with a few Thai landowners and encouraged his neighbours to migrate with him. This time, he remembered me and seemed to feel more comfortable talking to me.

I first came to Ban Fangthai with my neighbours when I was 18 years old and came to work twice a year in rice transplanting and rice harvesting seasons because no wage jobs were available in the village. Over the last three years, the demand for labour in Ban Fangthai had increased. I always get a phone call from Mr Nguan, Ms Lao, or Mr Srinuan to bring more people from the village with me. We took a truck to Ban Kaemkong and paid 100 baht to cross the Mekong River. Generally, we stayed for two to three weeks until the end of cultivating season.48

This glimpse of Whai’s story illustrated the stories of Lao migrants from many Lao hinterland villages. They headed for the Thai border for agricultural work, hoping to earn large amounts of money and to stay temporarily for a few weeks. Most of them were undocumented migrants who came to Thailand by crossing the Mekong River. Some crossed during the night time or in the early morning, hoping to escape the Lao border police. Many negotiated the border crossing by paying money for the Lao soldiers; and, they typically paid a higher boat fee than the normal rate (the local rate was 40 baht per ride but these migrants paid 100 to 300 baht). When crossing the River back to Laos, these workers had to pay the bribe again. However, they all said that it was worth paying to get a chance to earn money in the Thai borderland. Even though they knew it was illegal to cross the border and to stay overnight across the Thai border, they viewed it as acceptable since getting a wage job was important for their livelihoods.

Whai was an example of a Lao who had never migrated further than the Thai border areas. He was afraid to go and did not have enough money to pay for the travelling cost

48 Interview, Mr Whai, 17 November 2010.
and the broker. Upon completion of his work on his farm in Laos, Whai moved to Ban Fangthai and other villages along the Thai border. He said:

I have never been to Bangkok and never wanted to go. Many people go and remit much money home but a lot of them are caught by the police and are deported home too. Many make a loan with the brokers and are deported before they earn enough to pay debt. They have to stay in debt or make more loan to go again. Working in Thai border is more secure because I know the Thai farmers. I have never been arrested here. However, I need to stay away from the Thai and Lao police. Upon returning to Laos, I have to pay them to go home. Some people have to give them the whole wage but it is never happened to me.49

Whai’s story was a cameo part of the migration landscape of the Lao people. Socioeconomic change, along with the new opportunities from regional integration complicated, the migration patterns from Laos to Thailand. These patterns even circular occurred at the interface of legality and illegality as I will demonstrate in the following narratives.

I met Mr Rae and Mrs Perd, a young couple aged 29 and 23 years respectively in the paddy fields in Ban Fangthai in November 2010. I struggled at first to determine whether they were Thai or Lao. Their characters and the way they dressed looked fashionable, and their Thai accents were excellent. Having spent eight years in Bangkok, they had seldom returned to work in the farm until this year, when Perd’s mother called them to come back to Laos due to the lack of labour in the village. The absence of the young generation in Ban Laonua led to labour shortages. Upon completion of work on their own farms, they moved to Ban Fangthai, following their neighbours who regularly sought jobs in villages along the Thai border.

During my stay in their home in Ban Laonua, I learned that their families had a long migration history with Thailand. Perd’s father who migrated to Thailand approximately twenty years ago with his friends. Initially, he worked on a construction site in Chantaburi, a province in eastern Thailand, and returned home for the peak period of the

49 Interview, Mr Whai, 17 November 2010.
agricultural calendar. Ten years ago, he got a job in a restaurant in Rayong Province, also in eastern Thailand. So, he took Perd, his eldest daughter who was fifteen at the time, with him. Perd started working in Rayong and moved to work in a restaurant in Bangkok through a connection of her father’s employer. During the five years she spent in Bangkok without a work permit, she returned home once a year during Song Kran or the Thai and Lao New Years Festivals. Three years ago, she married Rae, a male also from Ban Laonua, but they had never met each other in the village in Laos as Perd moved out long ago. They got to know each other through friends. Rae moved to Bangkok at the age of twenty to work in an aluminium factory. His family had two sons so, he left his younger brother at home to help his parents in the paddy fields.

In February 2011, when I returned to the village to conduct my fieldwork, I found that Perd and Rae had left for Bangkok with a numbers of young migrants I had met in Ban Fangthai. Some families kindly gave me the telephone number of their family members working in Thailand and insisted me to visit them. I also learned that some people were currently working in another border village not far from Ban Fangthai.

Upon returning to Ban Fangthai, I called the Thai employer and asked if I could meet the above people. I met seven Lao people from Ban Laonua, who had been hired temporarily for fifteen days to prepare the land for growing rubber. This work gave them 1,500 baht wage. Food and accommodation were provided by the employer. Five out of this number were people I had met during rice harvesting season in November 2010. Two of them had worked in Bangkok before but did not want to go there at the moment. One who had been travelling around the Thai borderland agreed to work in any jobs offered by the Thai employers. These people crossed the border via the River. Their employer collected them from the pier in Ban Fangthai and sent them back using the same method. Asked why they went no further than the Thai border, Lek, a 25 year-old migrant said:

I try not to go far away from home. I did it when I was younger and was arrested. I was deported to Lao. My family had to pay money to get me from the police. I had worked around Thai border for many years so I knew many Thai employers. Next month, I would go to That Phanom
District to work in a grocery shop. I can ensure that I would be paid and am safe from the officials compared to go to Bangkok where I have to pay more money and may be arrested.\footnote{Interview Mr Lek, 12 February 2011.}

Pan, another migrant aged 29 years stated:

I have been working in Thailand since I was 15 years old. I moved around in Phang Nga, Phuket and Bangkok. I was once cheated by a Thai employer, who promised to pay me, but he did not. After working for him for a few months, he sent me to the police. I was deported to Laos but I found opportunities to return and worked until I married my wife. We returned home because she was pregnant. Working in Thai border is another way to earn money where cases of arrest or cheating are rare.\footnote{Interview Mr Pan, 12 February 2011.}

The two above interviews resonate with the illegal but licit landscape. For these two migrants who experienced long-distance migration and arrest, working in the licit landscape of the Thai border was more secure.

Returning to Bangkok some weeks after, I went to a Western restaurant in one of the most popular tourist areas of Bangkok to see Perd and other three migrants from Ban Laonua. One of them was Lhai, a sixteen year old boy who I had met twice before in the paddy field in Ban Fangthai in June and November 2010. He was working as a kitchen hand, grilling steak and making spaghetti. Perd and Lhai said they wanted to collect money to buy a new land and to do housing improvements. They could not say whether they would return to Ban Laonua again in the next rainy season or not. All depended on their parents, who would ask them to go home or tell them to stay. Perd and Lhai had travelled without documents for many years and had never been arrested. However, in 2011, they paid 3,000 baht to do a passport and crossed the border via the Friendship Bridge as a tourist. This allowed them to stay in Thailand legally for 30 days. Both of them did not have work permit, so they had to be very careful when they wanted to go outside of their workplace and had to hide themselves from outsiders.
In order to gain broad perspectives of the lives of Lao migrants, I phoned another six Lao people from Ban Laonua, who were in Bangkok at the time. I made appointments to meet two of them at their work places. One of them was Mart, a 30 year-old female, who I had met in person in Ban Laonua in February. Mart regularly went to work in a Thai-Isan restaurant in Bangkok upon completion of the cultivating season. She had two sons in Laos but left them to stay with her elder sister. Her husband was a long-term migrant working on a rubber plantation in Nakornsrithammarat Province in southern Thailand. Besides seeing Mart, I met Kham and six of his family members including his wife and four children between fifteen to 28 years of age. All of them worked in a gas station not far from Mart’s working place. Getting paid around 150-200 baht per person per day, Mr Kham and his family were reluctant to return home in the rice transplanting season in the next few months. They said that rice production the previous year was terrible due to drought. Staying in Bangkok provided them with a chance to earn more money. I also talked to the owner of the gas station and learned that he preferred to employ Lao workers because they understood each other and most trustworthy compared to Burmese and Cambodian migrants. To get the Lao workers, he asked a friend in Laos to recruit labourers for him.

Prior to the 1990s, the majority of Lao people crossed the border illegally with brokers. At present, while some still migrate illegally, the majority enter the country legally using Lao passports but overstayed and ignored to register themselves to the Thai labour system. Familiar with working and travelling in Thailand, they pay money to brokers to get passports. Even though they are permitted to stay for only 30 days, in practice, most of them overstay varying from three to four months to a year. Some migrants might return to Laos monthly to reissue their passports. This provided them with a chance to help their families by working on the farms in the harvesting season. Some opted to return, that is to overstay in Thailand but they had to be careful of the police. When they wanted to return home, they could acquire for a certification of Lao citizenship from the Lao Embassy in Bangkok and bribe the Thai and Lao police at the checkpoints along the way.
From my observation, the appearance of the Lao migrants and the way they spoke made it very difficult to distinguish whether they were Northeastern Thai people or Lao. However, all of the Lao migrants said the police could distinguish them. Mr Kham, who had been caught by the Thai police a few years earlier said that the police just asked to see his identity card. Refusing to be put in jail, Mr Kham asked his employer if he would pay 3000 baht for the police, asking him to deduct the money from his wages in return. Asked what would have happened if he refused to pay a fee to the police, Mr Kham said:

I prefer to pay for the fee the Thai police to keep staying here. It was a chance to earn more money. If I did not pay and was sent back to Lao, I would have been arrested by the Lao police. My family in Lao would have to come to collect me and pay for the fee anyway.  

Conversely, Lao workers who stayed in Thailand legally and had long-term stay rights, did not travel home very often. Their employers both registered and paid for their work permits; therefore, they did not have much freedom to move and change jobs compared to the illegal migrants. Armed with telephone numbers from families in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua, I contacted four people who agreed to talk to me. Two were a couple working as domestic workers. One was a teenager aged 18 years, working as gardeners in the plant nursery not far from Bangkok. Another was a female who worked in a massage shop. Their employers kept their passports and other documents as a form of guarantee, making it more difficult for them to travel. They regularly sent remittances to their families and kept in touch by phoning their parents.

Interviews with Lao migrants who moved only in and around the Thai borderlands, and with the above-mentioned Lao migrants in Bangkok showed some of the paradoxes between short-distance migration along the Thai border and longer-distance migration. First, while both groups were illegal migrants, they experienced different levels of risk. The further the distance travelled, the more the risks of being arrested and/or be cheated. Levels of legality depended on location. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, moving across

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52 Interview, Mr Kham, 13 March 2011.
the Thai-Lao borders and working in the paddy fields were considered licit. In contrast, travelling to many destinations in Thailand, and working without work permits were considered illegal. Second, all of the case studies mentioned above demonstrate the multi-layered aspect of mobility in Lao PDR, and the people’s migrant status in Thailand. In the case of the Lao migrants, going to Thailand was likely perceived as an occasion to go to another city, rather than going abroad because most of them could speak Thai and they shared many similarities to Thai people. And, even though these similarities may have blurred their movement between internal and international migration, at the same time they provide some form of convenience and comfort to the migrant workers in terms of adjusting living and working with Thai people. But, these commonalities were not sufficient to eliminate their migrant status in another country.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored migration landscape in a village in northeastern Thai borderland, and in two villages located in the borderland and the hinterland of Laos. I have demonstrated the causes and the patterns of migration in each location. While the focus of most of the earlier research into migration from Lao to Thailand has been on rural-to-urban migration, my study suggests the additional determining of the locations of sending and receiving areas, the histories, social connections, and the rural-to-rural migration across nation-state boundaries that occur extensively between the more and the less affluent countries.

As the border villages, both Ban Fangthai and Ban Kaemkong served as sending and receiving migration landscapes. On the one hand, the people of each village were struggling to get access to the more diverse economic areas in many parts of Thailand. On the other hand, the need for agricultural labour force provided opportunities for people living far from the economic centre. Migration in Ban Kaemkong, as Lao border village, was, however, more diverse. It involved migrants keen to participate in the new businesses that emerged after the re-opening of the border, and labourers interested in securing wage-labour jobs. The better living conditions that now prevail have resulted in
the discontinuation of crossing the Mekong River to get wage-labour jobs in Ban Fangthai.

The movement of the northeastern Thai people to urban cities, and of the Lao people from Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua to Ban Fangthai and other parts of Thailand, revealed two major aspects. First, it demonstrates the links between internal and international migration, i.e., that the traditional categories of migration based on destination and the dimension of short/long/seasonal migration fail to adequately describe the situation of Lao migrants working in Thailand. It also marks the blurring and overlapping of rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban migration. This chapter suggests that this dynamic migration requires a situated examination, not only of the two localities, but also of the process in which such mobility is made possible.

Second, the movement of the northeastern Thai people from their agricultural lands and their replacement by Lao migrants is evidence that internal migration can often lead to international migration. This finding challenges the conventional views embedded in contemporary migration studies, which only analyse migration in accordance with the dichotomies of international migration or rural-to-urban migration. The relevance between migration and agricultural livelihoods will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 7
Borderlands Agriculture, Labour Relations, and Agrarian Aspirations

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter two, I addressed the key processes pertinent to the growing body of literature on de-agrarianisation: moving away from strictly agricultural livelihoods to off-farm occupations; the growth of off-farm incomes; and, the young generation’s lack of interest in agrarian livelihoods. However, some contemporary works problematise another side of the linear process of de-agrarianisation. Vandergeest (2012), for example, raises a question regarding re-agrarianisation based on renewed interests in the new chances available in agriculture effected by the boom in cash crops and food prices. Hirsch (2011) suggests reconsidering a unilinear approach to agrarian transition in light of the cultural, geographical and historical specificity of diversified rural transformation.

In this Chapter, I discuss the conditions of agriculture in the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands and a hinterland village of Lao PDR. I argue that, although rural livelihoods in both Northeast Thailand and Laos have changed in similar ways in line with de-agrarianisation due to job diversification, mobility and migration, and the growth of remittances, farming has persisted and, agriculture is still a desirable alternative for many people. However, the interaction between people and agriculture is determined by different family contexts; e.g, land ownership, education, gender, and generation. Educated and successful migrants, who have moved socially upward may find an opportunity to invest in cash crops as entrepreneurs. Conversely, uneducated migrants, who cannot move upward to middle-class jobs, viewed agriculture more favourably than the labouring jobs in the city.

In the first section of this Chapter, which delineates the agricultural conditions of Ban Fangthai, I suggest that the village faced agricultural labour shortages because the young cohort were moving to the city. This section, as well as revealing the specific contexts of
Ban Fangthai, argues that a certain type of agriculture persisted because the villagers were able to absorb Lao migrants across the border. In addition, the abundance of land, the boom in the price of rice, support from the government’s rice mortgaging schemes or price guaranteeing, and the new opportunities stemming from rubber plantations, together facilitated agrarian livelihoods. Villagers from different backgrounds in terms of generation, ages, and gender interacted differently with agricultural jobs for different reasons. The discussion explores the nature of differentiation and social class became more complicated in a more mobile rural context.

In the second section, I outline the agrarian livelihoods in two villages in Lao PDR, Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua. Ban Kaemkong is located at the border and Ban Laonua in the hinterlands. Agriculture persisted in both villages albeit in different ways. In Ban Kaemkong, half of villagers were salaried people. Those who owned lands grew rice only for subsistence consumption. The other half diversified their livelihoods to off-farm jobs in Thailand, remitted money to their natal village, or pursued their agrarian livelihoods. Differentiation in Ban Kaemkong was evident in the proportion of family members who obtained salaried and off-farm jobs, and in remittances. In Ban Laonua, fewer opportunities for off-farm jobs encouraged some villagers to migrate to Thailand. Both the wealthy and poor households were equally dependent on the amount of agricultural land and remittances. My in-depth interviews revealed that many Lao migrants in Bangkok wanted to quit their intensive labour jobs in Thailand and return to invest in both farming and off-farm jobs in their home villages. Some had returned to work on their parents’ lands. Their earnings from labour jobs in Thailand allowed many of them to invest in small businesses, build new houses, or buy new lands, all of which provided upward mobility for the Lao villagers.

7.2 Agrarian Transformation in Ban Fangthai

Over the past decade, studies of agrarian transformation have shown that Thailand’s agricultural sector is in a process of de-agrarianisation (Rigg 2001, Rigg & Sakunee 2009). Focusing on the diversification of livelihood strategies, Rigg (2001) argues that
subsistence-based agriculture, if it ever existed, was discontinued long ago. Rural-to-urban migration, non-agricultural pursuits of the young generation and severe agricultural labour shortages shrink farming activities, diminish agricultural livelihoods, and ultimately push farmers into leaving their farmlands, renting them out or even disposing of their land completely. Inevitably, these conditions fuelled aspirations of the people to move away from the village (Rigg, 2001; Rigg & Ritchie, 2002; Rigg & Sakunee, 2001).

The linear process of de-agrarianisation is currently being questioned by contemporary works (Hirsch, 2011; Kelly, 2011; Vandergeest, 2012). Vandergeest (2012), for example, argues that farming endures mostly through the process of re-agrarianisation, a process prompted by food prices, renewed interest in agriculture, poverty reduction and food security policies that agriculturalists view as alternative solutions.

In the case of the villagers of Ban Fangthai, in the period 2010-2011, I found that not only had peoples’ livelihoods changed, but their sources of income had become diversified. But, they had not lost interest in farming. This section reveals why and how farming persisted and how this has enhanced our understanding of agrarian transformation.

**7.2.1 Livelihood diversification in Ban Fangthai**

Outwardly, Ban Fangthai looked very much like an agrarian community. Large areas of paddy fields, and the gardens surrounding the village distinguished it from the city. The houses were located along a small paved road that ran parallel with the Mekong River; other sealed roads led to the paddy fields. Most of the houses were built from concrete or a mix of concrete and wood. Electricity and water system were available to all, every household had a motorcycle, but cars and pickup trucks were rarely seen. The villagers led selectively basic lifestyles. All of the houses had television sets, refrigerators, fans, and radios; however, only five households in the village had air-conditioners.
Most of the households in Ban Fangthai owned and farmed their land, of which 71 per cent was defined as agricultural. Others were involved in fisheries in the Mekong River (10 per cent) or labouring jobs (10 per cent), (See Table 7.1). Based on the TAO’s and the local Agricultural Office’s data, Ban Fangthai villagers’ livelihoods were mainly derived from the agricultural sector.
### Table 7.1 Ban Fangthai: Summary Data (2010)

#### Population
- Household 362
- Population 1275
- People/household 3.52

#### Land use (rai)\(^{53}\)
- Agricultural land in total 2,350
  - Rice land 1,500 (63.8%)
  - Rubber and orchards 227 (9.66%)
  - Sugarcane and Cassava 300 (12.77%)
  - House plots 303 (12.90%)
  - Public land 20 (0.85%)

#### Occupation
- Farming households 71%
- Fisheries households 10%
- Labouring households 10%
- Government households 5%
- Trading and business Households 4%

#### Average Income/Villager/Annum

#### Sources of income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Income</th>
<th>Farm</th>
<th>Non-farm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crop Yields</td>
<td>33.24%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livestock</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisheries</td>
<td>4.26%</td>
<td>12.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total-farm</td>
<td>45.20%</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: the data were collected by the local government offices which are the Tambon Wan Yai Administration Organisation (TAO) and the Department of Community Development (CDD) of Wan Yai District Governor Office in 2010.

However, some doubt surrounds the figures reported by the TAO (2010) and the CDD (2010), particularly those relating to income and occupation. In terms of sources of income, the balance of livelihoods were dominated by agriculture and farming. Yet,

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\(^{53}\) 1 hectare (ha) is 6.25 rai.
households were more likely to depend on non-farm than farm pursuits. Grandstaff et al. (2008, pp. 302, 308-309) also reflected this trend in their study that the northeastern Thailand region as a whole has the proportion of households whose main source of income was from agriculture declined from 71 per cent in 1986 to 37 per cent in 2004. At the same time, households’ non-farm cash earnings have gone from 21 per cent in 1981 to 42 per cent in 2004. This became clear from the results of my survey of 100 sample households with traditional and second occupations: only 25 among them declared agriculture as their main occupation (see Table 7.2). The majority of villagers embraced multiple occupations, combining their agricultural pursuits with various forms of off-farm enterprise and employment. Two out of 100 interviewees were unemployed, having already given their land to their children. One local entrepreneur had no land because his parents had sold it to pay for their debts. Their current income came from selling ice-cream. And one household earned mainly from construction jobs. It should be noted that apart from these four households, the remaining 96 identified themselves as farmers, regardless of the small amount of income from agriculture. Agriculture, rice farming in particular, was a very important source of cultural identity. This persisted despite the fact that it became a subsidiary activity for the majority of households.

Table 7.2 Occupations in Ban Fangthai by the Survey Conducted with 100 Households in 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main jobs</th>
<th>Number of Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture (Farming/Fisheries)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers/labourers (construction and agricultural labourers)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Enterprise(traders, food stallers, etc) /farmers</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Enterprise (no farm)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaried employees/farmers</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labouring jobs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s survey (2011)
Agrarian studies commonly point out that the phenomena of villagers multiplying their occupations and the large number of villagers migrating to off-farm jobs in the city are signs of de-agrarianisation (Bryceson et al., 2000; Rigg, 2001). However, I found this concept problematic when explaining agrarian livelihoods in Ban Fangthai because it tended to overlook the fact that farming remained significant for some villagers. The literature did not take into account different contexts, the amount of land, educational backgrounds and generational differences. As I have already suggested in Chapters five and six, out-migration and agricultural labour shortages were typical in Ban Fangthai. The spatial context of Thai-Lao borderlands supported this marginal village’s absorption of the Lao seasonal migrants. In the following section, I will show how the context of the borderland provided supportive factors to agriculture in association with land and labour.

7.2.2 Land Holdings in the Borderland Context

Scholarly research in agrarian transformation reveals that one of the factors leading to de-agrarianisation was the dramatic decline in the importance of agricultural land due to both non-farm job opportunities and the rising land prices, the combination of which urged farmers to cease farming and to sell their land (Rigg, 2001; Rigg & Sakunee, 2001). Thailand’s export-oriented industrialisation efforts since the mid-1980s led to the establishment of large industrial estates in many provinces and to increased land prices. In Ayutthaya province in central Thailand, for example, the establishment of the Industrial Park resulted in the booming land prices which encouraged landowners to sell their land (Suriya & Amara, 2000). A study by Rigg, Veeravongs, Veeravongs, and Rohitarachoon (2008, p. 371) conducted in a village in Uthai district where the Industrial Park is located, shows that before the Park began operations, the price of land was approximately 3,000–4,000 baht per rai. When land agents began to arrive in the village, the price rose more than 10-fold; by 1983–84, land was selling for up to 60,000–70,000 baht per rai. By 1989, the figure had reached 2 million baht per rai; today, prime roadside land commands as much as 5–6 million baht per rai. These increases in price saw farmers become millionaires overnight.
In sharp contrast to events in Uthai district, this land boom did not occur in Ban Fangthai. Located on the border of Northeast Thailand, the poorest region in the country, the village was neither a popular tourist venue, nor was it zoned for industrial development. Hence, the pattern of development in the area was different from that of some locations, described in agrarian studies elsewhere and which describe agricultural land around a city being sold for tourism purposes or for the construction of gated communities. In essence, it is urbanisation that drives land price rises (Rigg & Ritchie, 2002; Rigg & Sakunee, 2001; Tubtim, 2011).

It was difficult for the Ban Fangthai villagers to convert their land for purposes other than agriculture. The low land prices were a consequence of low levels of industrialisation. While the villagers of Ayutthaya Industrial Park in Uthai district were able to sell their land for 2,400,000 – 12,000,000 baht per rai, villagers in Ban Fangthai could only realise 100,000 – 200,000 bath per rai (see Table 7.3). Thus, although the villages of Ban Fangthai earnestly wished to sell their lands, sales were impeded by the slow rate of land development in the area. Mr Derm, a 54-year-old male who owned 15 rai of rice land stated that:

> Although the land price has been increasing over the years from 500 baht per rai when I was 18 years old to 50,000 to 100,000 baht per rai at the moment, I still do not want to sell land. The price is too low to lose the land that I am still cultivating. In general, villagers here do not sell land and nobody asks to buy land from neighbours or relatives. If they need money urgently, they tend to borrow from relatives. Some might mortgage the land and continue cultivating it but, in the end, they would try to pay and get the land back.\(^{54}\)

Some land in good condition was sold to outsiders, but this depended on the location and the individual reasons of the land owners for selling. Asked about the two newly built vacation houses along the Mekong River and the land owners, Mr Derm said:

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\(^{54}\) Interview (telephone), Mr Derm, 5 June 2013.
Those lands were sold to rich people from the city. It was worth selling because the land price was 500,000 – 1,000,000 baht per rai. In fact, the landowners did not want to sell it, but they were in debt.\(^{35}\)

Table 7.3 Comparative land prices between Wan Yai District and other Districts in the studies on de-agrarianisation in Thailand (baht per rai)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts/Province</th>
<th>Land price/rai/baht</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wan Yai/ Mukdahan</td>
<td>100,000 – 200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muang/Chiang Mai</td>
<td>3,120,000 – 100,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hang Dong/Chiang Mai</td>
<td>2,400,000 – 8,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uthai/Ayutthaya</td>
<td>2,400,000 – 12,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Treasury Department Thailand (2013)

Land prices were among the factors that persuaded most of the households in Ban Fangthai to keep their land. According to interview with a 77 year-old lady, who had ceased farming and given all her land to her children:

I had 120 rai of rice land but it is divided among my six children who all lived and worked in Mukdahan city and Bangkok. Nobody worked on the land. Some of them rent out their land to my relatives who are living in another village to farm. I owned a large amount of land because my husband and I had firstly cleared the jungle and had occupied the land since sixty years ago. Most of the lands were hilly, dry and infertile. We used to grow rice once a year and had stopped in the last twenty years. The land here is too cheap to sell and nobody wants to buy especially the hilly location of my land. It was only 50,000 baht per rai. My children said that they did not need money in urgent, so they do not need to sell the land.\(^{36}\)

A survey of the land holdings conducted in 2011 by the District Agricultural Office revealed that a total of 169 households\(^ {57}\) had reported owning rice paddies. The majority

\(^{35}\) Interview (telephone), Mr Derm, 5 June 2013.
\(^{36}\) Interview, Ms Kard, 10 June 2010.
\(^{57}\) The total number of households of Ban Fangthai is 364 but the numbers of households reported on rice growing land is 169 because in many cases several households grow rice on the same piece of land.

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169
were small to medium scale farmers, who grew rice on land ranging in area from 6.25 to 15 rai. They comprised 51 per cent of total households, followed by households that grew rice on land of size range 16-30 rai or 28 per cent of total households (see Table 7.4). Only seven large-scale farmer households grew rice on more than 31 rai of land; they accounted for four per cent of the total households.

Table 7.4 Households’ Rice Growing land (Ban Fangthai)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Land holding</th>
<th>Number of Households and Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 6.25 rai</td>
<td>28 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.25-15 rai</td>
<td>86 (51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-30 rai</td>
<td>48 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 rai or more</td>
<td>7 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>169 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


7.2.3 Agricultural labour and technology in the Borderland Context

The movement of people from farm to non-farm employment and from rural to urban areas led to agricultural labour constraints, but forced farmers to adapt their farming techniques. In many parts of Thailand including some areas in the Northeast, farmers adopt to mechanisation of rice production (Benchaphun, Sungkapitux, Kitchaicharoen, & Suebponsang, 2007; Hirsch, 2012a; Molle & Srijantr, 1999). But mechanisation does not work with all geographical locations. In Ban Fangthai, the hilly environment played a vital role in limiting the adoption of agricultural technologies. This made agriculture highly dependent on human labour.

Compared to other regions of Thailand, rice farming technology in Ban Fangthai was relatively less advanced. In central Thailand, the region had long been the main source of rice for the country’s exports. In more recent times, the farmers had abandoned the traditional practice of transplanting paddy seedlings or ‘Na Dum’ and changed to sowing rice seeds or “Na Whaan”. The villagers opted to use advance ploughing and rice cultivating machines to respond to labour shortages. In addition, they had been using
more chemicals. The rice fields were planted to yield two to three crops a year and most of the areas have irrigation systems (Hirsch, 2012a; Molle & Srijantr, 1999). In contrast, farmers in Ban Fangthai retained their rice transplanting growing method because according to them it guaranteed higher yields than the broadcast sowing technique. Without efficient irrigation and drainage systems, the people were dependent on rain-fed agriculture and human labour. For them, the most advanced technology was use of the two-wheeled tractor that arrived in the village in the 1980s. *Gor Khor* glutinous (sticky) rice species and jasmine rice species replaced their local rice species, they used chemical fertiliser mixed with natural fertiliser, and used chemical pesticides to kill the crabs and weeds.

Households in Ban Fangthai grew glutinous rice predominantly for consumption: they sold the surplus. People who owned more than fifteen rai of land split the land so that they could plant part in sticky rice for household consumption and part in jasmine rice for commercial purposes. The rice-planting season started in May with the arrival of the rainy season. First, the farmers prepared the land. Then they cultivated the seedlings by growing rice seed in the wetland or the areas not far from the pond, the river or streams. Once the paddies were ploughed, and there had been adequate rain, farmers then transplanted the seedlings into prepared paddies. They pulled out the seedlings one by one and transferred them to the prepared paddies. This backbreaking constantly work was carried out from June to August. In the meantime until early October, the farmers had to constant remove weeds by hand or use pesticide for this purpose. After the rainy season, the rice seedlings grew and turned gold in colour. By late October, the crop was ready to be harvested.

**Table 7.5 Specific months allocated to rice production**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ploughing, prepare seedlings, and broadcasting pesticide in the soil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>transplanting seedling, fertilising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>weed removing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>harvesting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prior to the 1960s, the villagers engaged in relatively few activities. Rice growing, the most labour intensive job, spread over several months a year. Ploughing, using cattle, was predominantly done by males. Behind them came the women and children who worked on transplanting. The whole process would take at least four months and involved the whole family. And because they grew local rice, they had to wait for at least three to four months for cultivation.

Today, rice transplanting takes only three to five days for farmers who own less than 6.25 rai of land, and two weeks for farmers who own more than 31 rai of land. The standing plough machine allows villagers to work quickly, especially the households that hired the owner of the standing plough to work for them. However, the unpredictable rainfall and their non-farm jobs make all of the farmers eager to finish their rice farming as soon as possible. When they find that the rainfall is sufficient to make the soil muddy, they start ploughing and rice transplanting at the same time, a joint action that spawns competition among the labour forces.

In Ban Fangthai, the villagers have taken advantage of the marginal location of the Thai-Lao border to employ seasonal Lao migrants for their labour intensive rice production. Research programmes conducted in other border provinces of Thailand also demonstrate the use of seasonal migrants from neighboring countries, who come to stay during the peak demand for labour. Providing an example of research conducted in Chiang Rai Province, Makpun (2008) notes that Thai farmers growing cash crops under the contract farming system, hire the cheap Lao seasonal workers from the other side of the Mekong River. Similarly, in a study undertaken in Ubonrachatanee Province, Taotawin (2011) points out that farmers who are faced with labour shortages hire cheap Lao seasonal migrants for intensive organic rice farming. These examples all highlight the fact that farmers living in the borderlands respond to labour constraints by seeking new sources of labour from their poorer neighboring countries rather than use more farm machinery. In this sense, their borderland location proves advantageous for the farmers. They can acquire cheap labour across the border easily whereas their hinterland counterparts have difficulties acquiring seasonal migrants. However, the borderland farmers’ ability to
absorb cheap labour may give rise to lack of incentive to improve their rice cultivation technologies.

7.2.4 The Boom in the price of rice and Alternative Cash Crops

In a major rice consumption and rice-growing country like Thailand, rice is deeply rooted in the people’s way of life. It is the repository of traditions and customs that are profoundly linked with particular aspects of Thailand’s economic, social and political conventions. The story of rice has been primarily one of de-agrarianisation in Thailand (Vandergeest, 2012). The moving away from rice fields of the farmers to off-farm jobs and the lack of desire to be farmers among the young generation, are frequently addressed topics in a mainstream de-agrarianisation literature (Rigg, 2001). In the borderlands, although an abundance of land and migrant labour has increased the capacity of farmers to continue rice farming, they are not sufficiently strong push factors to encourage people to continue farming where income gains from rice cultivation are very low and the working conditions in the paddy fields are unfavourable, especially due to hot weather and hard labour work. Under such conditions, villagers opt for off-farm jobs that offer better incomes than rice. When I asked the villagers why they kept on farming, most replied that it was because they had been farming the land for a long time and could not just abandon it.

Further enquiry, however, revealed a number of factors that support villagers’ continuance of rice farming, factors such as the boom in the price of rice and government policy to subsidise rice farms around the country. An increase in the price of glutinous rice in 2009 was one of the major factors that encouraged farmers to continue working on their farmland. Table 7.6 shows that the overall price of glutinous rice in Thailand rose steadily between 2002 and 2012.

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58 As Vandergeest (2012) notes, there was a revitalisation of rice farming due to a price boom and government rice rice price guarantee scheme.
59 In 2007, the boom was affected by a price guaranteeing scheme that focused on jasmine rice. As a result, the majority of farmers turned to growing jasmine rice, which led to a low supply of sticky rice.
Table 7.6 Average Price of Unmilled Glutinous Rice between 2002 and 2012 (baht per Tonne)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Baht per tonne</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>7,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>10,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>8,654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>9,363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>15,109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>13,614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>11,925</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The price of unmilled glutinous rice in each of the year

Source: Office of Agricultural Economics (OAE) Thailand (2013)

The boom in the price of rice which was triggered by surplus demand (starting in 2007) reinforced the Ban Fangthai villagers to continue growing rice for household consumption and keep the leftover amount for selling. Although family farms in Ban Fangthai relied heavily upon hiring both Thai and Lao workers, the cost of growing rice for household consumption was considerably cheaper than buying rice. Among the total 100 sampled households, the inputs for one rai of rice farm would cost approximately 1,000 baht. This cost included wages, fertilizer and other miscellaneous items. At the same time, the farmers would gain 503 kg (milled rice) average rice yield per rai.60

The cost of growing rice was cheaper than buying rice. Ms Sud, a 45 year-old woman who had been a farmer for her entire life, said that her family of two adults consumed approximately one bag of milled rice (50 kg) per month. At the time that I conducted my fieldwork, the price of glutinous rice was 22 baht for one kg. If Ms Sud had to buy rice, it would have cost at least 1,100 baht per month. However, she grew rice on her land which yeilded approximately 400-500 kg milled rice yield per rai. Ms Sud invested

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60 Rice yields in Wan Yai District in 2011-2012 were approximately 13.75 tonne (unmilled rice), per hectare or at 503 kg (milled rice) per rai (Office of the Governor of Mukdahan, 2010). This was above the rice yield of Northeast Thailand rice yields in general (336 kg of milled rice per rai, or 2,100 kg unmilled rice per hectare) and the national average (370 kg milled rice per rai, or 2,312 unmilled rice per hectare) calculated by Thai Rice Exporters Association (2013).
1,000 baht per rai in her land; and she and her husband worked the land helped by migrant labour.\textsuperscript{61}

Aided by labour from Laos, rice farming generated a certain amount of rice for domestic consumption and some money from selling the surplus. In terms of non-salaried families who were dependent on agricultural production, such as local vendors and small-farm holders, rice farming was not only an income source but also their source of food security. This was in the form of diversification, not the subsistence survival as was the case decade ago. Ms Yao, a 39 years old female stated that:

\begin{quote}
Living costs and the price of rice are increasing yearly. If I have to buy rice, I might have to spend more than a thousand baht per month. Growing rice in our land is cheaper. Rice is the staple food for my family. It is the most important thing. For other food, we can gather from the nature. We can catch fish in the River and get vegetables from the forest.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

Another important factor that encouraged farmers to invest in rice farming was the government rice price guarantee scheme introduced in 2010 that allowed farmers to pledge their rice to the government. If the market price was higher than the pledged price, farmers could sell rice for the higher amount. If not, the government would compensate for the shortfall to provide financial relief for farmers who had been suffering from climatic fluctuations and market instability. Because the majority of farmers in Ban Fangthai were small-to-medium scale farmers who owned rice land below 30 rai,\textsuperscript{63} most of them benefited from this scheme and were encouraged to continue investing in rice farming.

The villagers in the borderlands not only invested in rice: additional major crops were cassava, corn, eucalyptus, tamarind, and sugar cane (see Table 7.7). Cassava grew particularly well in poor soil. Small areas were allocated for growing peanuts and corn.

\textsuperscript{61} Interview, Ms Sud, 7 April 2011.
\textsuperscript{62} Interview, Ms Yao, 14 November 2010.
\textsuperscript{63} The rice mortgaging schemes limited to 25 rai (4 hectares) of rice land per household.
Cropping systems were mainly mono cropping; double cropping was undertaken only in the irrigated areas. Although agriculture had become a subsidiary activity for many families, land was considered the fundamental way of generating food and money.

**Table 7.7 Major Cash Crops Based on a Survey Conducted with 100 Sampled Households in 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main jobs</th>
<th>Number of Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice only</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice and cash crops (cassava, beans, corn, eucalypts, orchards)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice and rubber</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice, rubber and other cash crops</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash crops only</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop farming, no farming</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s survey (2011)

In the 1990s, commercial crops such as rubber trees and eucalypts were introduced and sponsored by the government. Rubber tree plantations extended from southern to northeastern Thailand, beginning in the border areas near the Mekong River. However, plantations on a larger scale did not emerge until 2005. Rubber tree plantations in northeastern Thailand had increased from 2,984,097 rai in 2009 to 3,362,791 rai in 2011, and 3,477,303 rai in 2013 (Rubber Research Institute of Thailand, 2013). In Mukdahan Province, the total rubber tree planted area in 2010 was 136,083 rai while the total rubber tree plantation in Wan Yai district was 2,473 rai (Office of the Governor of Mukdahan, 2010, p. 23).

The growing demand and consistent rise in rubber prices over the decades motivated the villagers of Ban Fangthai to invest in rubber plantations. Some visualised profit in the long run, but not everybody was able to make the switch given that rubber tree plantations required considerable financial investment. Table 7.7 shows that 31 out of 100 sampled households grew rubber along with rice and other cash crops, but only five
of them earned money from the rubber. The remainders were new growers. The success of early rubber growers in Ban Fangthai and in the nearby villages in Nakorn Phanom Province became their inspiration.

7.2.5 Rural differentiation in the borderland context

Rural differentiation based upon the differential access to means of production, e.g., land, capital, and labour, is the main focus of earlier agrarian studies. Class is based on the ownership of means of production while social relations are connected with production forces in agriculture (White 1989). In contemporary agrarian studies, many scholars suggest extending the criteria for understanding rural class structures and inequalities to a broader range of access to new opportunities such as off-farm occupations, commercialised agriculture, and migration (Kelly, 2011, 2012; Rigg & Sakunee, 2001). While the new opportunities are available, villagers do not have equal access. Rigg & Sakunee (2001) highlight education as an important determinant of the opportunities. They point out that villagers with a low level of educational attainment are marginalised as wage labourers on the agricultural lands or in unskilled non-farm employment. For those who complete secondary school, new job opportunities in non-farm sectors open up. Likewise, Vandergeest (2012), highlights that agriculture is a favourable alternative for local villagers lacking post-secondary degrees, that is, people faced with the choice of either agrarian occupations or working as unskilled hire labour on construction sites and in the factories. This was partly true in Ban Fangthai, which saw many middle-aged people below 40 years of age return to agriculture and other off-farm jobs. However, the factors that determined whether people stayed in agriculture were also differentiated by generation, gender, family, and educational background, all of which shaped their interaction with agriculture and rural differentiation within the village.

64 Prior to 1999, Thailand compulsory education was six years. In 1999, Thailand compulsory education was increased to nine years, enforcing all parents to enroll their children in schools until they graduate from the lower secondary level. It consists of six years of primary education, three years of lower secondary, and three years of upper secondary education.
In order to investigate rural differentiation in Ban Fangthai, I categorise households based on their main occupation and range of income and draw attention to individual and household case studies. Table 7.8 shows that marginal households with below 5,000 baht of income per month were evident in both categories, i.e., agricultural pursuit households and job diversification households. And while off-farm jobs provided some rural families with better income, this may not have been the case for other households. Many households that were dependent on agriculture alone could earn more than 10,000 baht per month. By categorising household incomes, I will reveal households that pursued agriculture, and the factors that shaped their decision making and their social mobility trajectories.

Table 7.8 Range of Income based on Main Occupations in Ban Fangthai

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Occupations</th>
<th>Range of Income/Number of Households</th>
<th>Total (N=100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below 5,000 baht/month 5,000-9,999 baht/month 10,000 or above baht/month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture (Farming/Fisheries)</td>
<td>4 8 13</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers/labourers (construction and agriculture)</td>
<td>6 18 15</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Enterprise/farmers (traders, food stallers, etc)</td>
<td>6 14 2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Enterprise (no farm)</td>
<td>- 1 -</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaried employees/farmers</td>
<td>- - 10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only labouring jobs</td>
<td>- 1 -</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>- 2 -</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s survey (2011)

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The range of income presented here is based on my survey. According to the office of Governor of Mukdahan (2010), the average income per household in 2010 was 13,497 baht/month.
- Households that earned above 10,000 baht per month

Most of the agricultural pursuit households that earned above 10,000 baht per month held at least 15 rai of land and diversified their crops. They grew rice along with cassava, sugarcane, rubber, and orchards to maximize their profit from agriculture. Some also caught fish in the Mekong River to sell. Ten out of 25 households, whose members were a couple both above 50 years of age. They were entrepreneurial farmers, who had invested in agri-business and obtained loans from the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives (BAAC) for agricultural investment. All had more than 31 rai of rice fields and at least 5 rai of rubber plantations; but, only three of them could earn money from rubber while the rest had just started to grow rubber.

Non-labour intensive agriculture proved an alternative means of livelihood for an entrepreneur who wanted to ensure long-term saving after retirement. Ms Mon, a 59 year-old female, married an Australian and moved to live in Australia for 20 years. She returned to Ban Fangthai last year and stayed with her mother. Her husband still travels between Australia and Thailand and plans to retire in Ban Fangthai. Ms Mon owned 15 rai of rice paddies and hired Lao migrants during the rice cultivating season. She had recently bought five rai of land from her neighbour and planned to invest in rubber. I met Mr Ken and Ms Mon in January 2011. Mr Ken, Ms Mon’s husband, who was a 60 year-old man, stated:

We wanted to retire here and found that rubber is a good thing to invest in. It is a low-labour intensive business with a good return. In only five years, we can earn money from it and it will last for at least twenty years. It could be an earning for our retirement.

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66 Most households in Ban Fangthai were in debt to the BACC and/or village fund. However, they mostly stated that objective of taking loans was for consumption. Only the entrepreneurial farmers earning more than 10,000 baht per month stated that they used the money from the BACC and other funds for investment in cash crops.

67 Interview, Mr Ken and Ms Mon, 21 January 2011.
The young cohort, many of whom have little education, regarded agriculture as a favorable alternative. Three out of 25 of the prominent agricultural households that earned more than 10,000 baht per month were young households composed of the siblings below 35 years of age. They had finished in the elementary education and had experienced working in urban cities. But they chose to return to Ban Fangthai to invest in agriculture on the condition that they would inherit the land from their parents.

Agriculture is a complementary income for those households that have diversified their income generation. Households that earned more than 10,000 baht per month usually had diversified their income generation to include local enterprise, and labouring jobs. And, most of the salaried households allocated more time to their non-farm jobs, both within and out of the village. The two local enterprises were households that owned the big grocery stores in the village. They were both managed by females with a male sibling who had experienced migration to Bangkok and the Middle East. In terms of laboring households earning more than 10,000 baht per month, they usually had two or more household members working. Their ages were below 50 years so they had more opportunities for jobs than the elderly family members. It was also interesting to find that although many sources of income came from off-farm jobs, households in this category still pursued agriculture as an alternative livelihood strategy. Notably, these households did not own much land: the majority of households in this group owned less than twenty rai of rice paddy.

Villagers with higher educational backgrounds and salaried people maintained their farms as safety nets. All of the salaried households that earned more than 10,000 baht per month comprised people who had reached post-secondary school education level and worked as teachers, government officials, or local leaders, e.g., the village head and

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68 Villagers educated below secondary school level.
the staff at TAO.\textsuperscript{69} The upward mobility of these households was obviously generated by education and work experience. In the highest-achieving family, the father was a teacher while the mother engaged in agricultural activities which are included 50 rai of rice fields and ten rai of rubber plantation. Their two daughters, both of whom had university degrees, worked as nurses in a private hospital in Bangkok: each earned more than 40,000 baht per month.

However, education did not necessarily bring people away from farming. Some people who had good education profiles and were employed in middle-class jobs, would consider returning home if they could access opportunities in agriculture. Four highly-educated villagers working in Bangkok, who returned to their natal village during the Thai New Year in April 2011, said to me that their natal village could be a retirement place. Bee, a 28 year-old female, who currently works as a teacher in a private school in Bangkok, stated:

I left the village when I was fifteen years old to go to a high school in Udonthanee Province. I never return to work in my parents’ farm. I know my parents invest in rice, cassava, and rubber but they have my elder brother to help. I like my job but the living condition in Bangkok is also tough. Things are expensive. If I have a family, I would have to send my kid to my parents to take care of. I could not return home if I got a job here or after retirement. I do not know how to cultivate rice but I have a lot of relatives and I know I could find wage-labourers to do it for me.\textsuperscript{70}

- Households with an average income of 5,001-9,999 baht

The majority of households in Ban Fangthai earned approximately 5,001-9,999 baht/month: they had average land holding of five to twenty rai and have diversified their off-farm jobs to support to return from agriculture.

\textsuperscript{69} Some highly-educated villagers, e.g., teachers and local government officials who appreciated the sufficiency economy, realised that the idea could be put into practice. Some did organic farming and mixed farming - fish ponds, vegetable farms, and rice farms at the same time. They hired Lao migrants to do work. One teacher stated that he generally hired Lao migrants for most activities on his farm including rice transplanting and cultivating, removing weeds once a month, and digging the fish ponds.

\textsuperscript{70} Interview, Ms Bee, 12 April 2011.
Almost half of the agricultural and labour households (N=8) and agricultural and enterprise households (N=5), comprising people aged above 40 years, had children working in the urban centres. Off-farm employment and/or enterprises were the most important sources of income for one third of these households that had approximately fifteen rai of rice land. They were also a supplementary source of income for the remainders who owned less land. It is well recognised that agriculture provides food security, while the income from off-farm jobs helps to mitigate the risks involved in cultivation. Some of my interviewees said that they were willing to pay wage labourers to help them finish their rice cultivation quickly. Then, the farmer could return to their wage jobs that provided regular incomes rather than the paddy fields, which they could cultivate once a year and from which they obtained low profit.

More than 80 per cent of the household in this category had at least one household member who held Por 6 (Grade 6) to Mor 3 (Grade 9) or had only achieved the compulsory education level. Some had earlier migrated to off-farm jobs in the urban centres. Most of those of this generation, who were living in the village at the time I conducted my fieldwork, were return migrants. They had been faced with choosing between agrarian occupations or unskilled labour jobs in the cities. In terms of female returnees, most of the women had experienced working in urban cities. But, their opportunities to secure non-farm jobs were lost if they became pregnant. If they wanted to return to their city jobs, they had to leave their children behind with their grandparents.

However, whether the villagers returned or chose not to return was based on determination of land ownership. Those who had land tended to return home more than landless migrants. During the Thai New Year Festival, I met some Ban Fangthai villagers who had migrated to work elsewhere but had returned home to visit their parents. Based on my informal conversations with these people, some young females with low education were working in factories. Their parents only had rice farms, so, the
girls did not want to return home because they would not find any better chances in agriculture.

Somewhat interestingly, remittances were not necessarily a main source of income for the majority of households that with an average income of 5,009-9,999 baht per month in Ban Fangthai. My findings were slightly different from the extant scholarly research into the importance of remittances and off-farm jobs and their growing contribution to household incomes in northeastern Thailand (Grandstaff et al., 2008; Rigg & Salamanca, 2009). Only one third of households earning 5,000-9,999 baht per month continually earned money from remittances. The rest stated that their children were working in factories. They remitted money only during agricultural season, when their families had to pay for labour costs, and purchase fertilizer and pesticides. When asked why their children did not remit money, one interviewee answered:

> How could they remit money to me? They earn only a little amount. I only wish them to survive from that money without asking me to support them.  

Four households earning 5,000-9,999 baht per month were not involved in a farm. Two consisted of elderly people who lived on remittances from their children. One, who was landless, had become an ice-cream maker and seller. Another, who earlier had a small piece of land, had led his relatives to cultivate.

- Households earning below 5,000 baht per month

The low-income households (comprising 16 households out of 100) were among the the least successful farming households, especially those that only had access to less productive land, and the elderly, who could not effectively exploit opportunities from non-farm jobs.

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71 Seven households replied the same reason that their children earned less. Some said their children had a family in other provinces and needed to survive with this small amount of money.
The members of the four agricultural prominent households that were the most economically marginal were above 45 years of age, had less than 6.25 rai of land, and had little choice of off-farm activities. One was a widow living alone, and another were elderly villagers who had children working in urban areas, but, they remitted money only during the agricultural season.

Other households had jobs besides agriculture in order to diversify their income generation methods. Some had only a small piece of land (less than 6.25 rai), often on marginal land that lacked irrigation facilities and, in some cases, tenure security. These households were also comprised of elderly people, often living with one of their siblings who had to be responsible for their family members.

From the information I gathered on household sources of income and levels of income per month, it became clear that a certain type of agriculture persisted in Ban Fangthai, but each household dealt with it in a different way depending on age, gender, and education background. Land was still a concern of some households imbued with different characteristics such as entrepreneurial farmers, the left-over parent generation who had little chance to exploiting off-farm opportunities, and the young cohort who had not achieved post-secondary school education. All were struggling with choices either to remain on the farm or to seek intensive labouring jobs in factories in the urban centres. People with secondary school educational background tended to seek access to different sectors of the economy, particularly those that provided high levels of income.

Another important finding was that it was difficult to categorize members of family households in Ban Fangthai into one class. Spatially, households become fragmented as members become increasingly mobile across both rural and urban sectors. And, this fragmentation is exacerbated by members having different interests. I found that households that were considered to be autonomous entities with common interests in
previous studies were, in fact, rare (Rigg, Salamanca, & Parnwell, 2012). Few household members shared the same interests. Rural disparities were reproduced both based on the amount of land and the composition of social groups based on gender, level of education, and generation. Since most of the households in Ban Fangthai hired Lao workers to labour on their farm, class was also reproduced across the border. This transborder class re-production and its spatiality will be discussed in Chapter eight.

7.3 Agrarian Transformation in Laos

The empirical findings on the persistence of agriculture in the two villages in Lao PDR were slightly different to those about Ban Fangthai. First, agriculture persisted along with off-farm occupations but they were associated with transborder migration to Thailand. And, second, rural disparities emerged significantly in the case of remittances. The circumstances propelling social mobility also differed. While education and middle-class jobs were important upward social mobility in the northeastern Thai village, the Laos’ social mobility was mainly determined by consumption and visible material conditions, for example, a new modern home.

As discussed in Chapters five and six, the Thai-Lao border proximity and the degree of compromise in state-village relations facilitated the complex migration patterns of the Lao migrants. Frequently these migration patterns fell into categories of long/short term migration and circular/seasonal migration, allowing the Lao migrants to also participate in agricultural work in their home villages when their families required their help. However, important questions arise here concerning how diverse patterns of migration affected agricultural conditions, class mobility and rural inequality in Laos.

In the next section, I commence by discussing the economic conditions in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua and the importance of migration and remittances. Then, I pose the following questions: who were able to migrate, who were the stayers, and how did ability to migrate affect agricultural livelihoods? I argue that migration to Thailand

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72 The previous studies that perceived rural villages as an autonomous entity, i.e., Nartsupha (1986, 1999).
has instigated processes of change. The remittances that have flowed from migrants to those left behind show that migration supports household incomes and facilitates differentiation between the movers’ and the stayers’ households.

### 7.3.1 Economic condition: they are not the poor villages

Lao PDR is the most rural country in Southeast Asia, with over three quarters of the total population currently living in rural areas. Approximately 38 per cent of these rural dwellers live below the poverty line, and population growth continues to be concentrated in the rural areas (80 per cent of the one million population growth since 1993 is in rural areas). While population density is relatively low at 23 people per km², the distribution is uneven and the mountainous terrain of much of the country limits the possibility of planting crops and making a living from agriculture. Nonetheless, a large majority of people depend on agriculture and natural resources to subsist. Two-thirds of households have no access to electricity, half have no safe water supply and half of all villages are unreachable by all-weather roads during the rainy season.

World Bank (2013a)

Lao PDR is classified as one of the least-developed countries with low income and a heavy dependence on agriculture by the majority of the population (UNDP, 2012). As the above excerpt from the World Bank’s website shows two-thirds of the households have no access to electricity and more than half have no safe water supply. Thirty-eight per cent of the population is living below the poverty line. The key challenges of the country are to improve rural productivity and link the rural population to the market.

According to the World Bank’s criteria, Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua are not poor, despite the fact that not all villagers are better off. There is a sufficiency of food. Both villages have electricity and water systems, and can be accessed by road. But Ban Laonua still has dirt roads and is difficult to reach in the rainy season.

Based on the information I acquired from the village heads of Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua on the acquisition of electrical appliances and transportation, Ban Kaemkong was relatively better-off compared to Ban Laonua in ownership of assets (see Table 7.9). Indicators such as motorbikes, CD players, and mobile phones were evidence of
household consumption of non-food materials. More than half of the households in both villages owned motorbikes and television sets, a positive sign of the level of income earnings. However, the number of tractors in Ban Kaemkong was significantly low compared to Ban Laonua because the majority of households in Ban Kaemkong were involved in non-farm jobs rather than farm jobs.

Table 7.9 Durable Assets in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ban Kaemkong</th>
<th>Ban Laonua</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of household</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of population</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>1,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durable-assets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tractors</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trucks</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorbikes</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycles</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television sets</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD Players</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radios</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Phones</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua Village Data (2009)

The same set of data from the village heads additionally shows that almost half of villagers in Ban Kaemkong were salaried people while most villagers in Ban Laonua embraced agricultural jobs (see Table 7.10). However, my survey of 50 households in each village with traditional and second occupation revealed that villagers had exercised job diversification albeit Ban Kaemkong had more job varieties (see Table 7.11).
Table 7.10 Main Occupation in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main occupations</th>
<th>Number of Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ban Kaemkong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture (Farming/Fisheries)</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Enterprises</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labouring jobs</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Officials</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua Village Data (2009)

Based on data from my surveys conducted with 50 households in each village, Table 7.11 shows that the majority of villagers in Ban Kaemkong combined their agricultural jobs with others. The salaried villagers, mostly government officials, had more opportunities in diversifying their income generation in both enterprise and agriculture. However, in Ban Laonua, much labouring work was still within the agricultural sector. The villages’ location and the history of its establishment enhanced job opportunities and diversified village populations. ⁷³

⁷³ A history of the villages was detailed in Chapter five. Ban Kaemkong, which was a newly-established village in the 1980s, was comprised of both government officials and local farmers (50 per cent of each).
In relation to land holding, I conducted a survey in 2011 and found that the majority farmlands in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua were small to medium scale. Farmers grew rice on land ranging in size from 6.25 to 15 rai comprised more than half of the total households (see Table 7.12). Only two large-scale farmer households in Ban Kaemkong and five large-scale farmer households in Ban Laonua grew rice on more than 31 rai of land; they accounted for 4 per cent and 10 per cent of the total households respectively. In both villages, there was still a strong subsistence focus on rice with limitation of mechanisation and irrigation system. Villagers reported that they were lacking money to invest. Additionally, the plot sizes were small and the terraced terrain was uneven. They only adopted two-wheeled tractors to plough a rice plot. Rice cultivation relied on reciprocal exchange labour. However, the use of wage labour was increasing. In Ban Kaemkong, almost half of rice growing households (thirteen out of 29 households) hired labourers within the village, or from other villages nearby, as a result of competing demands on the available workforce. Ban Laonua, only five out of 48 rice growing households hired wage labourers within the village because they were households with a couple both above 50 years of age. Their children were working in Thailand and could not return in the cultivating seasons.
Nonetheless, there was not a clear correlation between the amount of land and poverty. In Ban Kaemkong, more than half of the landless (N=8) operated local enterprises (grocery stores). On the other hand, a small number of households in Ban Kaemkong that owned above 31 rai of land had less productive upland fields. One of them rented the land out to the sugarcane company to grow sugarcane and earned only 18,000 baht per year (the rent was 600 baht per rai per year). Several households that owned less land at 6.25 – 15 rai that had two to four family members who had migrated to Thailand, had considerably better income.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Land holding</th>
<th>Number of Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ban Kaemkong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landless</td>
<td>12 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 6.25 rai</td>
<td>4 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.25-15 rai</td>
<td>15 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-30 rai</td>
<td>9 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 rai and more</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working on parents’land</td>
<td>8 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s survey (2011)

Another key poverty indicator was monthly and yearly income. According to the World Bank (2012), Lao’s GNI per capita in 2011 was $US 1,130 (approximately 33,900 baht per year or 2,825 baht per month). Huijsmans (2010) claims that measuring the incomes of peasant households is extremely difficult since the majority of what they produced does not enter the market. In addition, consumption, income and asset-ownership is notoriously prone to being misreported as there may be vested interests in appearing poor on paper, ranging from being included in various programmes to tax evasion. I faced the same problem: I learned that people did not regularly think about their monthly income and expenditure. They tended more to live in the same manner
described in the Lao proverb ‘Go to find food in the morning, eat in the evening [ha sao
kin kum]’. With this firmly in mind, I encouraged people to calculate their household
incomes by day, including their labour payment, and their seasonal incomes from
activities such as growing/selling seasonal vegetable. Then, I collected data on any
family members working out side of the village and the approximate remittances they
sent per month. As shown in Table 7.13, the majority of people in both villages earned
incomes ranging between 2,000 to 4,999 baht per month (their yearly income was
approximately 24,000 – 59,988 baht). Ban Kaemkong villagers were obviously better-
off, a number of people earning more than 10,000 baht per month compared to Ban
Laonua.

Table 7.13 Range of Monthly Incomes in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua
(N = 50)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range of income (baht)</th>
<th>Number of Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ban Kaemkong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 2,000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 – 4,999</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 – 9,999</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 – 14,999</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s survey (2011)

Thirty-six and thirty-eight out of 50 households in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua
respectively had at least one family member working in Thailand. The survey findings
in both villages additionally revealed that remittances were very important additions to
the household income. The majority of families had remittances sent from migrant(s)
family members (see figure 7.1). Remittances were the biggest share of household
income of eight families in Ban Kaemkong and for one family in Ban Laonua that
earned 10,000-14,000 baht per year. Regarding households that earned more than
20,000 baht per month, two out of three households in Ban Kaemkong were migrant

74 The Lao’s income was significantly lower than the Thai’s. Therefore, I have made a lower range of
incomes for clear presentation.
households. Their remittances totalled more than twice the agricultural income. This was also the case with a family in Ban Laonua that fell into the same range of income.

Figure 7.1 Numbers of Households with Migrant (s) and Numbers of Households receiving Remittances in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua (N = 50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of households with remittances</th>
<th>No. of households with migrant(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ban Laonua</td>
<td>Ban Kaemkong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s survey (2011)

In the following sections, I analyse the differentiation of households in Ban Laonua and Ban Kaemkong in relation to migration, and the contribution of migration to the socio-economic conditions of the households. My analysis focuses particularly on the differences between migration and non-migration households in terms of income and socio-economic conditions, and the association of migration with agricultural livelihoods.

7.3.2 Migration and socio-economic differentiation

Migration from Laos to Thailand has not only become a feature of Lao’s village life but has also received considerable scholarly attention. Some studies examined the nature of migration and the remittances that migrants send to families in Laos (Barney, 2012; Deeleen & Vasuprasat, 2010; Rigg, 2005). However, the consequences of migration and
remittances on agrarian relations in sending communities, in terms of rural differentiation between migration and non-migration households have not been given sufficient attention. Kelly (2011), who provides the conceptual perspectives on the effects of migration on rural inequality and class structure, stresses three points. First, the wealthier families can afford to migrate while the poor cannot. Second, the benefits that occur from migration lead to mobility and class hierarchy, both of which are rooted in production. Apart from being direct economic earning in the form of remittances, it is also relative to learning about new kinds of production methods which allow households to diversify their income generation. Third, and last, class is reworked given that the same individual may experience different class processes in different places.

In terms of Laos, a survey by Deeleen and Vasuprasat (2010) shows that 95 per cent of Lao migrants remit money home. Moreover, their study reveals that more than 94 per cent of the surveyed households, who had more than two family members working in Thailand, confirmed that remittances had positively changed their livelihoods. Focusing on the sending migrant communities in Laos, Barney (2012) contends that the majority of remittance receiving families use the money for food and assets. However, his in-depth interviews revealed that one of his interviewees used remittances as capital for investment in rubber plots. Barney’s study delineates how migration and remittances situate rural differentiation.

Based on Kelly’s conceptualisation on the effect of migration, I will explore how migration and remittances affected the two sending communities in Laos. I will pose three questions: (1) who can migrate (the movers), who cannot migrate (the stayers) and how far can they go – only to the Thai border, further to Bangkok, or to other areas? (2) what are the implications of remittances for livelihood; and, (3) what are the implications for class mobility?
7.3.3 The movers and the distances of migration

For poor individuals and households with few assets, migration may be a case of moving to survive. For the very poor or ultra poor, lack of resources may be such that migration is impossible. For richer households, migration is more likely to lead to a degree of accumulation of both financial and human capital (skills). (Rigg, 2007: 174).

The above quote clearly portrays the differences between migration among the poorer and the rich households in Laos. It stresses that a basic requirement for movers is to have some resources for migration. Writing on migration in the Philippines, Lukasiewicz (2011) argues that the ability to migrate differ between the rich and the poor. Because migrants have to pay recruitment and overseas travel costs, this already categorises those who are able to migrate. In the case of Laos, to migrate further afield to Bangkok and its vicinities required an amount of money that the ultra-poor could not obtain. However, the poorer Lao families living not far from the Thai border had the opportunity to undertake seasonal migration to agricultural areas in the Thai borderlands. Thus, in a sense, they were beneficiaries of border proximity, and the social networks that exist between the Thai and Lao people.

What I discerned from the surveys and in-depth interviews were the differences in migration methods and destinations. The wealthier families generally chose to pay for a passport to migrate legally to Bangkok and its vicinities, whereas the poorer families could only join the informal seasonal migration to the Thai borderlands. With more opportunities in off-farm jobs within and outside of the village, villagers in Ban Kaengkong who were more well-off compared to Ban Laonua tended to invest in long-distance migration rather than short-distant seasonal migration to Ban Fangthai. In Ban Laonua, eight out of twelve households without family member working in Bangkok had at least one return migrant from different parts of Thailand, but still moved to Ban Fangthai for labouring jobs. When asked why she no longer migrated, one of them said she was afraid to migrate again because she had been cheated by the Thai employer.

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75 See information on migration in Laos in Chapter six.
Three out of this group said that they did not have enough money to pay for a Lao passport. As Ms Tan said:

> In the previous ten years, I could cross the river to Thailand with some friends. Now, we need to cross the bridge and pay for a passport. Having a passport is more secure but it costs a lot of money. I do not want to take a loan and I do not know whether I can make money in Bangkok. Many people come back with a lot of money while some are cheated and came back with nothing and have to pay off debts from migration.76

However, this does not suggest that the poor cannot migrate out of Laos. Two households in Ban Kaemkong and seven in Ban Laonua that earned less than 2,000 baht per month had one or more family members who practiced long-distance migration to Thailand. They took a loan from their neighbours to pay for travel costs. One household in Ban Laonua reported that a family member working in Bangkok could not remit any money because he had just left for one month. The earning in the first three months had to be used for debt repayment.

### 7.3.4 Remittances and livelihoods

Scholarly research into migration and development recognise the positive impact of remittances on rural development. Remittances can significantly improve the well-being of households, increase household savings, facilitate the purchase of goods, and alter the local income distribution. Nonetheless, little attention has been paid to remittances and their implications for agriculture.

Following a survey conducted in Laos in 2010, Deelen and Pracha (2010) wrote that approximately 37 per cent of remittances in Laos were used for daily expenses and housing. Only seven per cent was used for investment in agriculture or business. Interviews conducted in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua revealed similar outcomes. However, in-depth interviews conducted in both villages showed an explicit connection between migration destination, period, and how the villagers used remittances. In Ban

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76 Interview, Ms Tan, 16 February 2011.
Kaemkong, the majority (seventeen out of 50) of households used most remittances received for daily expenses, followed by seven households used most remittances for housing improvement (find Table 7.14). In Ban Laonua, seventeen households used most remittances for daily expense while fourteen households used most remittances for housing improvement. Only one interviewed household in Ban Kaemkong and two households in Ban Laonua reported that they invested in agriculture and livestock. In Ban Kaemkong, the household collected money to invest in rubber plantation, while buying cattle and a two-wheeled tractor was a priority for households in Ban Laonua:

Table 7.14 Use of remittances among remittance-recipient households in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution of expenses</th>
<th>Number of households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ban Kaemkong (N = 32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest in agriculture and livestock</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily needs and buying durable assets</td>
<td>17(53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing improvement</td>
<td>7(22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying land</td>
<td>1(3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings</td>
<td>1(3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education for family members</td>
<td>1(3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Medical treatment</td>
<td>2(7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Paying debt</td>
<td>1(3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Informal credit</td>
<td>1(3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s survey

Asked about their use of remittances from the Thai borderlands, some households that had at least one family member who had worked or was working in Ban Fangthai at the time,⁷⁷ said that the money was used for daily needs and expenditure. They could only earn 800-2,000 baht per time when they crossed the Mekong River and stayed for a few nights working on Thai agricultural land. This money was too little to use for other expenses. However, the majority of households confirmed that migration - whether short or long distance – yielded positive outcomes to their families. In Ban Kaemkong, for

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⁷⁷ Some households (21 out of 36 in Ban Kaemkong and 23 out of 38 in Ban Laonua) had at least one or more family members working in Thailand and additionally had at least one family member experienced working in Thai border.
example, earnings from migration were enough for two families to stop working on their agricultural land.

7.3.5 The nature of class mobility

You can differentiate the households with and without migrants from their houses. Families with children working in Thailand were always able to build a more beautiful house. Some turned from a small hut to a beautiful concrete house. They became rich because all their children were going to Bangkok and remitted a lot of money.78

The earlier agrarian studies define class mobility from production relations and the differential access to means of productions (Hart et al., 1989). However, contemporary agrarian studies have proposed more criteria for understanding rural class structures and inequalities. In a country like the Philippines where people typically migrate overseas, remittances have become a factor supporting social mobility. Kelly (2012) writes that the notion of class goes beyond unequal access to resources, income and wealth. Rather, class is reproduced by education and the kinds of work that are shaped by the family’s class background and remittances. Families with one child or sibling working overseas tend to invest in education for their children as a pathway to higher education and upward class mobility. Class in the Philippines is clearly reworked both by Filipino migrants employed as domestic workers in Hong Kong or by landowners and moneylenders in their home villages. Thus, people have different identities and classes in different places (Lukasiewicz, 2011). This is similar to Laos wherein uneven class is not only based upon agrarian land, but also associates migrant identities with where the person comes from and where he/she works. However, limited education development in rural Laos manifests in the different forms of social mobility. A new wealthier household has emerged in Laos, built upon remittances from Thailand that are utilised for both agricultural investment and consumption.

As I showed in the previous section, the Lao migrants in Ban Fangthai were not landless: they often had their own agricultural lands and were farmers in their home

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78 Interview, Ms Na, 22 February 2011.
villages. Some were even landowners, hiring people to work on their land. But because out-migration to Thailand decreased the supply of domestic labour, many families had to spend their remittances on hiring domestic workers. Among the remittance recipient households, twelve out of 32 families in Ban Kaemkong and eight families out of 35 in Ban Laonua hired labour during the cultivating season. This showed that the ways in which they used remittances were not disconnected from agrarian issues, but they did not take it as a first spending because these costs occurred seasonally. Some remittance recipients said they requested money from their family members working in Thailand when they needed to pay for fertilizer, pesticides and wage labour during the rice cultivating and harvesting seasons.

However, the number of families hiring wage labourers in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua was moderate compared to the Thai villages, where the majority of households demanded wage labour. One reason was because the Lao families still had several family members. Some families comprised up to ten to twelve children, so, they always kept at least one child at home and work on agricultural land.

Another consequence of the sending of remittances from Thailand was on class mobility, which tied economic remittances to social and cultural norms. Mills (1999) maintains that migration is associated with a notion of modernity, which may be expressed through the body (i.e. clothing) and experience of a new environment. Building upon Mills’ notions, High (2008) argues that aspirations to modernity are important factors that pushes people in Southern Laos to migrate to Thailand. Besides the money and the remittances they earn, migration transforms their social status in accordance with wealth. Within this scenario, one obvious element I had found in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua was the demand for investment in a place to live. As demonstrated in Table 7.12, besides using remittances for household consumption, housing improvement was the second task that the villagers wanted to spend money on. With these findings, to distinguish the rich from the poor in the village was not only based on the amount of agrarian land they owned and the amount of income they had, but also the material condition of the house and other belongings they occupied.
7.4 Agrarian Aspirations of the Lao migrants

For many of the young people interviewed, the prospect of working on the land year after year was not an attractive option. Farming held neither the promise of financial gain nor the promise of personal independence that working abroad appeared to offer. On the other hand, migrants spoke highly of their ability to make lifestyle choices abroad that they could not make in the village.

(Social Environmental Research Consultant, 2010, p. 2)

Currently in Laos, the large majority of migrants do return home. Migrants acquire, at best, only low-level skills and the moral imperative to return home remains strong. But it seems likely that the trend will be gradually towards migrants leaving home temporarily and then making the decision to remain away for longer and longer periods. When they do return, it will be increasingly as individuals towards the end of their working lives where the village becomes, in effect, a retirement home. Before that point, returns home will become consumption performances where the successful migrants parade their new-found wealth and sophistication.

(Rigg 2007: 173)

A main focus of the themes of migration and development is the impact of migration on rural communities. Some of the more widely discussed impacts are the changes in agricultural labour, rural class structure, cultural change, and agricultural inputs from financial remittances (Kelly, 2011). Regarding the first impact, the movement of the young rural cohort away from agricultural activities has been dubbed ‘aspirations to modernity’ (High 2008: 544) and it is extended to the vision of not being peasant farmers (Barney, 2012, p. 61). These motivations, i.e, migration and mobility, have sparked the debate surrounding de-agrarianisation, one main reason for which is that people have lost the desire to farm.

The discussion I have presented above has so far been based on long term anthropological studies. Focus has been on the experience of some households in particular places and times. As stated in the second quote by Rigg, many Lao migrants are strongly motivated to return home for retirement, a motivation based on the
assumption that the village is no longer a place for production because wealth has been generated out of community. As I argue in Chapter six, the Lao people in fact have multi-patterns of - and unpredictable - migration. Therefore, the movement of Lao migrants cannot be understood only in certain times and places. It is difficult to categorise the Lao as ‘migrants’ or ‘returnees’. Many return migrants might recommence migration again anytime, due to it not being far, inexpensive, and not difficult to enter Thailand. The distinction to draw here is how the Lao migrants see themselves, their expectation in income generation, and the changes in their perceptions and social status post migration.

Employing a multi-sited ethnographic methodology, I conducted additionally interviews with ten teenage migrants and their parents in Ban Kaemkong, Ban Laonua, in their workplaces in Thailand, in Ban Fangthai, and in many places in Bangkok. As well, I conducted telephone interviews with two migrants from Ban Kaemkong and three migrants from Ban Laonua. The majority of them stated that they wanted to return home when they had enough money for housing and land. Only one female who had a Thai husband were reluctant to return to Laos. Asked to envision themselves in ten years time, all of the male migrants had positive ideas that they might be home with their families working on their land. Lhai, a Lao migrants I met in Ban Fangthai during the cultivating season in November 2010, who returned to work in Bangkok in February 2011, alluded to his dream future as follows:

I will go back to stay home with my girlfriend. I only need to collect some money to buy land and build a home. My parents have five children. I want to have my own home rather than staying my parents.79

Questioned about what kinds of jobs he wants to do in the future, Lhai replied:

What I can do in my village besides growing rice and take care of the livestock?80

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79 Interview, Mr Lhai, 3 February 2012.
80 Ibid
Lhai’s answer was similar to those of other male migrants I interviewed in Bangkok. They all envisioned themselves working on agricultural land when they returned to Laos. Based on this information, I argue that it is not possible to assume the relationships between out-migration and agrarian transformation in the linear de-agrarianisation without first considering the nature of the socio-economic and job opportunities in Laos.

Gender is partly relevant to perspectives regarding employment. Lao females dream of having small businesses rather than being farmers. Here, Noi’s answer provides an example. Noi, a 27 year-old female from Ban Kaemkong was working in a massage parlour in Bangkok. I made a phone call to her through the number I obtained from her farther. She refused to talk to me at first but when I referred to her father and her village, she seemed more comfortable talking to me. Noi is single. She told me about her young life after her mother passed away. She helped her father who was working as a wage-labourer in agricultural jobs in both Ban Kaemkong and Ban Fangthai. She did not fear hard work but she wanted to earn more money. Thus, she was not reluctant to leave home at the age of sixteen. Noi realised that she could not work in a massage parlour for her whole life as with time she would get old. She planned to go home and open a small grocery store. Asked about the farmland, she replied:

> I know how to cultivate rice but I will not return to work in the farm. I send money to my father every month and let him manage the farm. I have my relatives to work for me.\(^\text{81}\)

The answers provided by the Lao interviewees clearly demonstrated why the Lao workers migrated to Thailand. It was a place for them to earn money. Most, though not all, Lao migrants do not intend to stay permanently in Thailand. Migration studies, which tend to oversimplify the lives of Lao migrants, insist that even though many of

\(^\text{81}\) Telephone interview, Ms Noi, 15 March 2011.
the migrants are marginalised in their workplaces and are faced not only with the hard labour, but also with the poor conditions of living, they wanted to stay in Thailand to escape from their rural lives in Laos. Previous studies tend to overlook the flexible movement of migration between Laos and Thailand and the flexible relationships that obtain between the Lao migrants and their farm and off-farm activities. The important factor that ties the Lao people to their natal households is the status of Lao migrant workers in Thailand. Because these people usually have a low level of education, it is hard for them to get well-paid and stable jobs. Furthermore, although the Lao and Thai peoples share cultural and language similarities, this commonality is not sufficient to eliminate their migrant status and the vulnerability of their stay in Thailand. Their expectation of going back home implies strong bonds and the maintaining of rural-based tradition in their everyday lives. As two young Lao migrants aged 30 years and above told me during our interviews in their workplaces in Bangkok: ‘I want to go to die in Lao, my home. I don’t want to die here in Thailand’.

I agree with Rigg’s observation that migration trends in Laos seems gradually to be towards migrants leaving home temporarily, then making the decision to remain away for longer and increasing time periods (Rigg, 2007, p. 173). However, my research offers further insights into the everyday lives of migrants and their practices in different places and times. I argue that the form of migration in Laos might require to investigate people’s life experiences and their expectations in the long-term. As I found in my study, the lives of migrants are not stable: they are unable to say whether they will return home permanently or not. Some Lao migrants leave home for two to three years. They might return home for a short period of time to work on their family farm, then return to their off-farm jobs in Thailand. I will provide another example to demonstrate the flexible movement of Lao migrants and circulatory farming.

I first met Pan in a paddy field in Ban Fangthai; later, I followed him and his friends to Ban Laonua. During our initial talk in November 2010, Pan told me that he had made a decision to stay in Ban Laonua permanently. He stated:
I spent more than 10 years in Phang Nga and Phuket provinces working in a furniture factory. I met Lom there and got married three years ago. We tried to work and collect money to build our home. Now, we have a home. Lom has just given birth to my daughter so we decide to go back to stay in Ban Laonua permanently.  

I met Pan in Ban Fangthai again in January 2011. He had crossed the river to work in a rubber plantation. At that time, he got fifteen days of employment. In March 2011, I returned to Ban Laonua to conduct a survey. Pan told me that it was very difficult to find a wage labour job in the village. Asked what he needs since he has already had a new home, Pan said:

I want to collect some money for my daughter and want to buy a new two-wheeled tractor for my father-in-law. I am thinking to go back to Thailand with my wife again for a year.

Although, I completed my fieldwork in July 2011, I still kept in contact with the Lao people. I heard from Lhai that Pan and Lom returned to work in Thailand in February 2012. I asked Lhai whether he would return to work in the paddy field this year: he said he did not know. It depended on his family. If his father could manage to recruit enough labourers among relatives and neighbours, he would stay in Bangkok and work to send money so that his father could invest in the farm.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the patterns of agrarian transformation in the Thai-Lao borderlands, using case studies from Ban Fangthai, the borderland of northeastern Thailand, and the two villages in Lao PDR, Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua.

In Ban Fangthai, the villagers have diversified their economic activities to non-agricultural spheres along with their agricultural activities. However, both land and

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82 Interview, Mr Pan, 20 November 2010.
83 Interview, Mr Pan, 15 March 2011.
agriculture remain important to them. Villagers who have sizable tracts of land still cultivate and maximise profit from agriculture. Villagers who have little land combine their farm and off-farm agricultural activities to mitigate the risk associated with unpredictable incomes from agriculture.

This chapter also reveals that each generation in Ban Fangthai valued agriculture differently. Young villagers, with secondary school education or lower, saw agriculture as a good alternative compared to intensive labour jobs in the city. Some among the elderly invested in non-labour intensive agriculture, rubber in particular, for long-term profit. Marginal villagers, mostly the elderly who have little land and cannot exploit opportunities in off-farm jobs, and landless villagers, remain dependent on agriculture as their main source of income. In addition, some highly-educated villagers, who had already moved away from their natal villages, viewed agriculture as a possible social safety net for their future retirement.

The case studies in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua, the chapter argues that rural differentiation and social mobility in Laos were partly based on remittances in combination with agricultural land. The long-distance and longer period of migration typically generated more remittances than shorter distance and periods of migration. Remittances were important factors for upward mobility as they supported consumption and material conditions. But, in turn, the ability to generate those remittances based upon the ability to migrate in the first place. Not all villagers had access to migration opportunities.

The Chapter also shows that farming in Laos has persisted: it will not easily disappear or lose importance. Return migrants have few alternatives apart from farm work due to the low economic development in Laos. Therefore, Lao people can either stay in their own villages and work on their farm or contemplate in cross-border migration whenever they need money.
Finally, this Chapter provides the link to the flows on labour and capital on the northeastern Thai borderland with Laos. The flow of migrants from Thailand’s rural areas to its cities and other growth centres, which has resulted in the replacement of labour forces from the country’s less-diverse economic areas, challenges the focus of agrarian studies on rural areas of a particular country. Such focus overlooks the larger picture of the agrarian transformation taking place in one country that has wider linkages to a neighbouring country. These linkages in turn serve to reproduce a particular pattern of agrarian relations and class identity which will be discussed in Chapter Eight.
Chapter 8

Reconceptualisation of Agrarian Transformation in the borderland context

8.1 Introduction:

In Chapters five and six, I have demonstrated the spatial characteristics of the northeastern Thai-Laos borderlands in terms of regulations, state-village relations, and migration patterns. In Chapter seven, I reveal how the geographical landscape of the borderlands, and their cultural and historical specificities have shaped agrarian relations. Just as transnationalisation in the northeastern Thai-Lao border region supports cross-border migration, and given that the linguistic and cultural similarities of the Thai-Lao people give rise to complex migration patterns, the thesis argues that borderland agriculture variously persists because of the availability of labour, new cash crop expansion, and remittances from family members working in urban centres.

This chapter aims to explore the links between the empirical findings and conceptual framework of the thesis. In the first section, I will draw on agrarian transformation in a specific context to question how contexts matter in the transformation. In the following section, focus is on transnationalisation and the role of the state in agrarian transformation. The discussion will then focus on to the empirical findings regarding migration between Laos to Thailand and the dialogue with the existing literature on migration and agrarian transformation.

In the last section, I attempt to show why the northeastern Thailand and Laos show little evidence of de-agrarianisation. The persistence of agriculture is supported by the geopolitics of the Thai-Lao borderlands and transborder migration. What needs to be taken into consideration is the ways in which constitution of agrarian relations, class and identity goes far beyond the local. All findings confirm the viability of rural livelihoods, and that agriculture remains a part of rural livelihoods, but that needs to be understood with reference to multi-local and transboundary livelihoods.
8.2 Spatiality in Agrarian transformation

Examination of agrarian transformation has centered on changes in the rural world. Traditional studies have focused on the pathway to capitalism and the emergence of an agrarian class and highlighted linear capitalist development, that is the transformation from an agricultural to an industrial and urban society that has occurred with the disappearance of the peasantry. However, later studies point out that there is no universal form of agrarian questions. Because the pathways of transformation are diverse, more attention should be paid to empirical and political contexts in each country, but, the focus of study has remained primarily on the agricultural core areas (Hart et al., 1989).

Contemporary scholarly research points out that the historical, geographical, political, and economic contexts in which the studies are taken place diversified agrarian transformation (Hirsch, 2011, 2012b; Rigg & Vandergeest, 2012). In 2005, the Challenges of the Agrarian Transition in Southeast Asia or ChATSEA (2002) project\(^8\) categorised the major locations of agrarian studies in Southeast Asia as follows: 1) agricultural core regions; 2) marginal zones i.e. upland areas; and, 3) changing space due to a rural-to-urban interface. The researchers’empirical findings, based on researches undertaken in different areas of Thailand under the ChATSEA project, show the different impacts of agrarian transformation.

With reference to the upland areas of Thailand, Latt (2009) contends that exploitative agrarian relations not only emerged from the relations between the landlords and the landless, but also occurred due to different ethnicities. The exploitative relationship between Hmong landowners and the Shan migrant workers, for example, was based on historical contingency. The latter’s illegal status in Thailand allowed the former to underpay and exploit them in hard labour jobs. Leblond (2008) who researched in Petchaboon Province in northern Thailand, explored the relationship between increased

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\(^8\) This project involved a group of researchers, who worked on agrarian and rural studies in Southeast Asia. The research programme was implemented over a period of nearly six years, from early 2005 to late 2010.
forest cover and the decline of agriculture. He stresses that one of the factors generating agricultural decline was the abandonment of agricultural land. Unlike in Latt’s research site in Chiang Mai Province, Leblond’s site revealed little immigration. In Petchaboon Province, labour shortage was the major factor causing abandonment of agricultural land. Rigg and Salamanca (2011, p. 563), who consider labour shortages to be the main reason of land abandonment in a village in Mahasarakam Province in Northeast Thailand, argue that when rural populations moved to off-farm occupations, and the labour gap is not filled by immigrant labour, farmland is either left idle, farmed inefficiently, rented out, or disposed of. The above projects conducted in Thailand have shown that cultural, geographical, and historical specificity have resulted in different transformations and conditions of agriculture.

Taking borderlands as a specific geographical context through which to understand agrarian transformation, I argue that a singular framework in agrarian studies in reference to land, class differentiation and production relations as a consequence of capitalist development, cannot explain the dynamic changes in the context of the borderlands. Chapters five, six, and seven have illustrated the empirical dimension that is the transnationalisation and scope of compromise inherent in state-village relations, the linkages between out-migration from rural areas and in-migration of migrant labour, and the way remittances and social mobility affected those left behind. The spatiality of the village in this thesis is reworked through social relations across the border. More specifically, the research was undertaken in the Thai-Lao borderland areas, where historical ties and similarities of ethnicity, language, and culture combine to intensify transnationalisation.

The northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands in the 20th century are a newly constructed space. For this reason, the role of the state in regulating migration is addressed. Issues of ethnic identity are foregrounded: different groups of people come into contact along the Thai border in response to the demand for agricultural labour. At the same time, migration both from the Thai border to urban cities and from Laos to Thailand, has
resulted in individuals being allocated into diverse class statuses and multiple identities in different spaces and may ultimately lead to class mobility. The fixed class categories in agrarian studies, that is peasant, landlord, and wage labourer, need to be reconsidered (Kelly, 2011). As such, borderland location provides challenges to understanding agrarian transformation in a variety of ways. In the next section, I will analyse the role of the state in agrarian transformation.

8.3 Bringing the state back in: the scope for compromise in state-village relations in the borderlands

The state, class-based actors, and revolutionary movements were key actors in early studies of agrarian transformation. According to Araghi (1995), the three decades after the end of World War II were considered the decades of state-led development. Scholarly research into the political economy of agrarian transformation in developing countries during that era highlighted the struggles of the peasantry, and of those who were negatively affected by the particular structure of domination. At the time, state-village relations were locked in uncompromising, oppositional and antagonistic conditions. The role of the state in bringing a capitalist market economy to peasant communities, along with the peasants’ responses, has been widely discussed (Byres, 1996; Moore, 1966).

The surge of neoliberalism and globalisation over the past four decades, and the absence of class-based revolutions and rebellions, have resulted in a reduction of class and class analysis in rural development studies (Borras Jr, 2009, pp. 19-20). Other actors besides the state, such as corporates, NGOs, and development agencies, became targets for social change movements at the turn of the 21st century, when the politics of agrarian transformation moved away from the left-right axis (Borras Jr, 2010). This era saw the emergence of new types of agrarian movements and coalitions, for example, the radical transnational agrarian movements, and movements that made the environment a discourse for protest (Hirsch, 1993b, 2013). Yet, contemporary resistance continues to
exist in response to a variety of dominating structures albeit in a more diverse process that involves negotiation and opportunism (Caouette & Turner, 2009). In some cases, a new commercial activity can be considered a subtle form of resistance and opportunism because it allows the rural people to become more involved in the market and development (Walker, 2009a, 2009b). The growing pluriactivity of rural households and the increasing inter-penetration of city and country additionally complicate the lives of the rural poor. Regarding the state’s rural development programme and marketisation, many contemporary works reveal the growing interaction between the villagers and the state authorities. Rather than exploring the antagonisms and dichotomies resulting from the integration of villages into the wider spatial political economy, many studies address the positive form of state village relations, i.e., state-village articulation (Hirsch, 1989), non-antagonistic state-village relations (Akarapongpisak, 2012), or the types of relations between the state and people in which people make use of the state to gain benefit from development (Li, 2007; Walker, 2012).

In my effort to understand agrarian transformation in the context of borderlands, I have paid particular attention to the relationship between the state and the borderland communities. In effect, the specificity of the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands in terms of the geo-politics of the borders, historical ties and language and cultural similarities that contribute to the degree of compromise in state-village relations. The results of scholarly fieldwork in the research sites reveal another aspect of the state that relies on people’s collaboration. The study of Walker (1999) on cross-border trade in the Upper Mekong borderlands of Thailand, Laos and Burma, for example, exemplifies that various illegalities persist based on personalised engagement between the local traders and state border officials. In this case, local petty traders were bringing goods across the border without paying border duties and fees. Their practice was to negotiate with the custom officers, with whom they established friendships by supplying them with beer or pornographic videos. According to my research, cross-border employment was operated locally by local villagers, many of whom had multiple identities, e.g., the local farmers who faced labour shortage problems, and the local state officials whose task was to
protect state laws and regulations. In an attempt to protect their interests as farmers, the former claimed that the cross-border practices - which included hiring Lao migrants from across the borders - were legitimate; that is, they could be seen as licit practices, illegal but ostensibly legitimate practices (Abraham & Van Schendel, 2005).

The Thai border officials, the District and Provincial Governor, for example, knew that illegal practices were occurring. And, despite the fact that cross-border practices were subjected to state regulation at the provincial and district level, the local villagers chose not to follow said regulations in the knowledge that the local state authorities had opted to turn a blind eye because they found it expedient to compromise with the people in terms of border surveillance. In other words, they waived observance of the regulations in the interests of consolidating border security. Claims that the remote borderlands were out of control and subverting central government’s rules were oversimplified. The case, I am addressing in this thesis is that state boundaries exist through the collaborative state-village relations in which local state authorities and villagers compromise to serve them mutual interests. De Koninck (1992, 1996) who has examined the territorial compromise, observes that states and peasants gain mutual benefits from the process of agricultural expansion in the frontiers of Southeast Asia. While the state sends peasants to their peripheries and negotiates to protect them in order to consolidate state territory, the peasants develop interest in the new agricultural frontiers. This kind of mutual interest may be seen as a degree of compromise vis-a-vis state-village relations.

The scope of compromise in state-village relations in Laos was similar. There was little doubt that local state authorities knew that Lao migrants crossed the border illegally to work across the Thai border. While the Lao government officials on the one hand realised that the large numbers of undocumented Lao migrants were travelling to Thailand, at the same time they recognised that migration was an important form of income generation and livelihood strategy employed by the Lao people (Huijsmans, 2010). At the local level, the Lao officials gained mutual benefits from the Lao
migrants’ cross-border fees that were determined by social connections. Lao migrants from villages located far from the border were required to pay for higher passage fees. But as I have demonstrated in Chapter six, that is as the Lao migrants were willing to pay because they saw this process as an investment, i.e., a way of earning money in the Thai border. They were fully aware that their route across the Thai border was illegal. Paying the Lao border officials not only helped protect them from being apprehended but was a way compromising with the border officials.

As well as rethinking state-village relations, the thesis considers how the above scope of compromise in state-village relations contribute to an understanding of state power. In the traditional agrarian studies, the village is an institution that has its own form of organisation: state power is located outside of the village. The expansion of state power to include the village community following the market expansion is seen as a form of state penetration and peasant resistance (Nartsupha, 1999; Scott, 1998). This thesis, as well as disaggregating state power, argues that the state is implanted in local social relationships (Migdal, 2001). The state, in this thesis, comprises the local state representatives who in case of conflict of interest mediate between the government and the locals. Also, the state has the responsibility to enforce laws and regulations, for example, when the local state officials who did not have any farmland, turn a blind eye to local cross-border practices and regard them as licit practices. What needs to be clarified here is how we look at the state as the central government, and at agencies or officials within states who have an important role in restricting and/or supporting the flows that occur at state boundaries.

Finally, analysis of state power in the borderlands has revealed that borders may be seen as sites of exception, places where certain distinctive forms of state practice emerge (Das & Poole, 2004). This thesis stresses that the forms of exception, and the problem of the legal/illegal and licit/illicit that occurs throughout the state structure, are most apparent in the borderlands. This study reveals the obvious sites of exception in relation
to the right of passage, and the illegal but licit nature of employment of Lao seasonal migrants by Thai farmers.

8.4 Transborder rural-to-rural migration and agrarian transformation

In this section, the thesis contributes to a new understanding of migration and its connection to agrarian transformation. Literature on agrarian transformation pays significant attention to rural-to-urban migration. Contextualising the Northeast Thailand and Laos, this thesis emphasises that themes of rural-to-rural migration - and the overlapping patterns of rural-to-rural, rural-to-urban, and transborder rural-to-rural migration add another material dimension to agrarian transformation.

Migration has been considered one of the dimensions of agrarian transformation. Classic scholars of agrarian transformation, for example, Lenin, Kautsky, and Chayanov, highlighted industrialisation in Europe and the proletarianisation of the rural peasantry (Byres, 1996; Marx et al., 1978). Their primary focus was on rural-to-urban migration, the changing relations of production, and the emergence of an urban society. Rural-to-rural migration and transborder migration were beyond their concerns.

In the contemporary era, much research has focused on rural-to-urban migration as an important key factor in rural changes (Kelly, 2000; Keyes 2012; Mills, 1997; Rigg, 2001, 2005; Rigg & Salamanca, 2011). Rural-to- rural migration appears in studies of settlement of agricultural frontiers where migrants come from other regions of one country (De Koninck, 1992; Hirsch, 1990). At the same time, scholarly research into movement across national boundaries has focused upon rural-to-urban migration. In general, it has describes population movements as a response to and part of the process of economic growth, globalisation and urbanisation. This thesis addresses the consequences of livelihood diversification in the Thai borderlands which have resulted in a labour shortage in the agricultural sector. In this case, focus has been on the geopolitics of the borderlands of Northeast Thailand and Laos, and on the economic disparities that characterise rural-to-rural migration from Laos to the Thai border. In
addition, case studies of a village in the border of Northeast Thailand, and two villages in Lao PDR show that in many instances there is a blurring and overlapping of the patterns of migration. Lao seasonal migrants, who opt to work in agricultural areas along the Thai borderland, inevitably engage in both rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban migration patterns at different stages of their lives.

Apart from bringing transborder rural-to-rural movement into consideration, this thesis also explores the linkages between internal and international migration. In migration studies, there is an increasing awareness that internal and international migration may not be clearly and separately distinct from each other (King, Skeldon, & Vullnetari, 2008; Skeldon, 2006). Empirical findings from many researches reveal the linkages between these two types of migration. For example, the case of Albania, Çaro, Bailey, and Van Wissen (2013) point out that remittances from international migrants are not only used for household consumption purposes, but also to support the internal migration of other household members to migrate internally to urban areas. Drawing upon international labour migration, and internal migration patterns from the mountain and hill regions to the lowlands of Nepal, Poertner, Junginger, and Mueller-Boeker (2011) contend that successful international migration to India supported internal migration, or the movement of migrant households from the highlands to lowlands.

In Southeast Asia, there is little study of the connections between internal migration in the rural areas and international migration from neighbouring countries. Two significant difficulties affecting the linkages between the two are: (1) the separate sphere between studies of internal migration and studies of international migration; and (2) the extensive attention devoted to rural-to-urban migration. In terms of studies on rural-to-rural migration, most are conducted within frameworks of rural studies and focus on the lives of migrant workers rather than on the connection between out-migration in the rural areas and in-migration to replace labour gaps (Latt, 2009; Makpun, 2008). However, in the main, all of the authors of these studies conducted their research in receiving areas of migrants in Thailand only. Likewise, studies on migration in Laos to Thailand mainly
focused on rural-to-urban international migration. While there have been some anthropological studies on migration undertaken in Lao PDR, most have highlighted the factors that push people to consider international migration, including intensified economic integration, marketisation, expansion of infrastructure, and cultural motivations. In other word, most of studies have been conducted under the framework of rural studies and as such they have focused on the lives of migrant workers rather than the connection between out-migration in the rural areas and the in-migration to replace labour gaps (Barney, 2012; Huijsmans, 2010; Rigg, 2007). This oversight has resulted in significant knowledge gaps in the linkages between Thai-Lao context, there is little evidence of connections between internal migration in rural Thailand and international migration from neighbouring countries.

This thesis has discussed internal migration in rural Northeast Thailand, and the agricultural labour shortages, that result in the in-migration of Lao workers in peak agricultural season. The distinction between internal and international moves between Lao PDR and Thailand is blurred, not only due to border proximity and ethnic and cultural similarities, but also because the Lao migrants’ journeys are multiple, complex and fragmented. The thesis aims not only to fill this gap, but also to show how these linkages fit into a larger picture of internal migration flows from Thailand’s rural areas to cities and other growth centres, and how they facilitate the replacement of labour forces from less-diverse economic areas. Aided by the spatial characteristic of the Thai-Lao borders, Lao migrants not only replace agricultural labourers in rural Thailand, but also are able to move between rural and urban areas, in the process complicating the conventional explanation of the migratory route.

**8.5 Rethinking agrarian transformation**

In this section, I look at how the empirical findings from the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands, i.e., the geo-politics of the borders and the complex migration patterns, contribute to the reconsideration of a conceptual framework for agrarian transformation.
While a significant proportion of agrarian transformation in Southeast Asia focuses on livelihood change, de-agrarianisation and social relations associated with changes in and beyond agriculture, this thesis explores non-linear agrarian transformation, the reworking of agrarian relations, and the social identity of the rural lives.

8.5.1 The non-linear pathways of agrarian transformation

There has been an attempt in the past to interpret how the lives of rural dwellers have changed. The traditional views on agrarian transformation highlight the pathways to capitalism and class differentiation. Later studies have pointed out that many key factors shape agrarian transformation; for example, environmental change, intensification of regulations, population dynamics, and urbanisation (ChATSEA, 2002). However, most interpretation of agrarian transformation links the pathways to urbanisation, industrialisation and marketisation with the disappearance of peasantry. A set of studies conducted in Thailand by Jonathan Rigg (Rigg, 2001, 2003, 2004; Rigg & Sakunee, 2001) highlight increases of mobility, non-agricultural employment, and off-farm incomes, and the fact that Southeast Asia is moving towards de-agrarianisation.

However, de-agrarianisation is problematised due to its too absolute nature and too linear interpretation (Hirsch, 2011). Using Europe as an example, Van der Ploeg (2007, 2008) argues that agrarian crises, that is the neglect of a peasant agriculture, together with neo-liberal projects and the rise of food empires, juxtapose re-peasantisation against industrialisation and de-agrarianisation. Re-peasantisation is a phenomenon in which people enter the peasant mode of production to counter crises and neo-liberalism: it has been reported in certain areas of the developing world, for example in Latin America. In Thailand, the role of agriculture was widely recognised during the economic crisis in 1997. Scholars claim that while the financial, industrial and service sectors had fallen into crisis, rural agriculture has served as a social safety net by absorbing many unemployed people returning from the cities (Siamwalla & Sobchokchai, 1998; Sussangkarn, Flatters, & Sauwalak, 1999). However, a view of agriculture as a safety net for the rural dwellers is controversial because people in rural Thailand are heavily dependent on an urban economy that has absorbed the poor and the
landless from the rural areas. Farming sectors are, in fact, frequently financed by remittances from off-farm sectors (Li, 2009). In addition, while many rural people have abandoned subsistence livelihoods, in many areas, they have become degraders of the environment and unsustainable resource users (Australian Mekong Resource Centre, 1999). In such cases, cash crops and the food prices boom, urbanisation, and the government’s subsidisation of agriculture have proven crucial factors in the repositioned relationship between urban migrants and their rural livelihoods. It some areas, people have been inspired sufficiently to renew their interest in agriculture and to return to the farm or re-peasantisation (Vandergeest, 2012). All of the above reflects the multiple pathways to agrarian transformation in Southeast Asia. In his later work, Rigg makes clear that although rural livelihoods in Southeast Asia are being transformed by the process of de-agrarianisation, the process coexists with the enduring importance of farming (Rigg & Vandergeest, 2012).

This thesis, as well as revealing the non-linear pathways of agrarian transformation in the borderlands, claims that irrespective of how rural livelihoods in both Northeast Thailand and Laos have changed in line with de-agrarianisation, farming remains a vital component of the rural dwellers’ livelihoods. But, the de-agrarianisation alluded to in my thesis was quite different from the processes taking place in other geographical locations. Under certain circumstances, people abandoned agriculture due to agricultural labour shortages, more inspiring opportunities in off-farm jobs, and rising land prices. I demonstrate in Chapter Seven that farmers in Ban Fangthai and Ban Kaemkong had multiple sources of income. While most households had family members who had migrated to the cities, villagers who completely abandoned agriculture were rare. Villager put one foot into off-farm jobs but kept the other foot in agriculture. Some combined off-farm jobs with work on the land. In Ban Laonua, given the limited availability of off-farm jobs, agriculture remained important. Lao migrants in Bangkok, commenting on their future occupations, said that they would have to work on the farms because the limitation of non-farm jobs in their home villages reflected the degree to which agriculture was still relevant to rural people’s lives. My fieldwork undertaken in
northeastern Thailand and Laos concerning de-agrarianisation, revealed that livelihood reorientation, occupational adjustment, and spatial relocation of rural people away from a strictly agricultural base might not be a linear process.

The spatial interconnectness of the Northeast Thailand and Laos contribute to cross-border migration, the employment of Lao seasonal migrants on the Thai farmlands, and the persistence of agriculture. Employing migrants in commercial agriculture in many countries, such as berry farms in Scandinavian countries (Partanen, 2009), fruit farms in Spain (Constant et al., 2012) and Australia (Blanco, 2009), and agricultural areas in the United States (Martin, 2002), has become common practice. Nonetheless, the case involving the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands is distinguishable from other cases, as much as long historical ties and cultural similarity support licit cross-border employment by the Thai farmers of Lao workers.

Important factors that contribute to the unique pathways of agrarian transformation in the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands include the availability of labour, the geographical location, new opportunities for rice farming, and cash crops facilitated by government policies. The existing literature on de-agrarianisation, while focusing on labour shortages, rural-urban interpretations, migration, and tensions between the farm and off-farm sectors (Bryceson et al, 2000; Rigg, 2001, 2004), omits factors relevant to geographical location and transnationalisation.

Clearly, from the empirical findings of this thesis, the geographical margin of the borderlands does not contribute in any way to agricultural marginalisation. Rather, the Thai farmers benefit from seasonal labour, most notably that of illegal migrants from Laos, whose wage rates are often less than those of domestic workers in Thailand. The de-agrarianisation concept ignores the fact that farmers are combining farm and off-farm labour. And, there is less re-peasantisation because agriculture has always persisted parallel to the multiple livelihoods of the rural dwellers. This thesis suggests that the transformation in the northeastern Thailand borderland can be understood by joining the
linkages between domestic and cross-border migration. What we see in this study has less to do with de-agrarianisation and re-peasantisation and more to do with reworking the labour relations and class identities that are spatially constituted.

**8.5.2 The new labour relations**

Labour relations have long been an important component of discussion in agrarian transformation. In Thailand, major studies conducted between the 1960s and 1980s highlight the contexts in the core rice-growing areas upon which agrarian society was based. The Green Revolution accompanying development programmes manifested changes in the production methods, labour relations, and land ownership, and consequently led to inequality within and between the rural and urban areas. Agrarian transformation focuses on the themes of class and rural differentiation and on the relationship between the state and village people. Anan (1984) wrote that the commoditisation of rice cropping led to an emergent class of capitalist farmers, who tried to control the tenants, labour - and wage-labour in general - by negotiating between the share-cropping method and the monetisation of labour employment. Turton (1989) also examined the politics of agrarian differentiation, extending his attention to the patronage system and how the local elites exercised power between the state and the local people.

Nowadays, those old agrarian contexts do not equate to the wider economic and social relations. Labour mobility, and the shift from farm to non-farm occupations, have transformed labour in the agricultural sector and seen it become increasingly determined by a wider labour market beyond local and village agriculture. Scholarly research today tends to focus on rural-to-urban migration tension and competition between the farm and non-farm sectors, and the pressures on agriculture (Grandstaff et al, 2008; Rigg, 2001, 2004; Rigg & Sakunee, 2001; Rigg & Salamanca, 2012). The contexts of immigration, and of migrant workers and rural-to-rural migration that open opportunities for farmers to adapt their labour management, remain understudied.
This thesis focus is on the complexity of the labour relations shaped by the movement of Thai local people and immigrant labour from neighbouring countries. Particular attention is paid to the specificity of Northeast Thailand and Laos, which together shape labour relations in the area in a particular way. With reference to farmers in Ban Fangthai, hiring the Lao workers puts them into a more obvious employer role. Prior to the 1990s, farmers used to employ their own labour and family farms, reciprocal labour, or even limited hired labour amongst themselves, which was not really an employee-employer relationship. After the 1990s, farmers in Ban Fangthai survived by the employment of cheap and available Lao workers, who stayed on the farmers' land for extended periods during the planting season. Hiring labour and using household labour to plant glutinous rice for their household consumption and non-glutinous rice for cash capture a glimpse of villagers’ semi-entrepreneurial character. It shows the increasingly vague distinction between farmers, rural workers, and entrepreneurs that class base analysis could not equip with. In addition, characteristics of farmers in Ban Fangthai resonate with the critical perspective on the Thai villages that they have become middle-income peasants (Walker, 2012). They are not poor, despite the fact that not all villagers are well-off. They have diversified their livelihoods and have developed non-agricultural sources of income, although agriculture is still an important part of their lives.

Research in other regions of Thailand shows that the use of transnational migrant labour in agriculture culminates in the control of labour, extremely flexible employment and new labour division based on ethnicities (Latt, 2009; Taotawin, 2011; Makpun, 2008). Scholars have highlighted the fact that in some regions the labour relations between ethnic minorities and the national population have created a disenfranchised underclass. Latt (2009), for example, reveals that the Shan ethnic minority, who migrated from Burma to Thailand are labelled as poor, marginalised and illegal migrants. Their arrival has provided an opportunity for Hmong employers to take advantage of them by paying them low wages, in this way facilitating commercialised agriculture. Similarly, Taotawin (2011) and Makpun (2008) observed that Lao labourers working in
commericalised farming in Chiang Rai and Ubonratchatani, border provinces located in north and northeast Thailand, earned lower wages than the local Thai labourers. And, they were unable to negotiate. All of these observations point to exploitative labour relations wherein workers are in vulnerable situations and their economic freedoms are limited.

With reference to the working conditions of the Lao migrants in Ban Fangthai, their Thai employers paid them approximately 130-150 baht per day, which was lower than the official minimum wage of 159 baht per day in Mukdahan province, and lower than the 200-250 baht paid to their Thai farm labour counterparts. Men and women were paid the same rate. From my point of view, however, the labour relations between the Thai farmers, as employers, and the Lao labourers cannot be simplified as exploitative relationship. Certain factors should be taken into considerations; for example: (1) the scope of compromise reached between the Thai farmers and their Lao workers due to the pursuance of licit practices; and, (2) the social relations based on village locations, historical ties and cultural similarities that trimmed down the exploitative nature of their labour relations.

8.5.2.1 The scope of compromise between Thai farmers and Lao workers that accommodates their illegal practices

In Chapter five, I discussed the differences between illegal and licit practices, and the perceptions of the local state officials and borderland villagers via-a-vis the cross-border employment practices engaged in by the Thai and Lao peoples along the Mekong River. Regulations declared it illegal to hire undocumented Lao seasonal migrants and to keep them resident on farmlands until the end of the cultivating season. Similarly, the migration of Lao people who cross the Mekong River and enter Thailand via the village checkpoint was also considered illegal. However, these practices have become legitimate and continue to be carried on, demonstrating the degree of compromise reached by the local state officials and the villagers.
In so far as this context is concerned, my thesis differs from work undertaken in other regions. According to Latt (2009, 2012), the illegal status of the Shan migrants working in commercialised agriculture in northern Thailand leaves them little opportunity to negotiate with their employers. And, because these workers did not want to return to Burma due to political oppression, they had no alternative but to accept whatever jobs were available. Without legal work permits, their stay in Thailand remain insecure. Their employers could call the police to arrest them and have then deported back to Burma.

In the case of the Thai-Lao villagers, the Lao workers not only entered Thailand illegally, but the Thai farmers knew that they were employing them illegally. Both parties perceived these as licit practices that allowed them to have mutual benefits. As Ms Nang, a 74 year-old landowner, who had been hiring the Lao workers for over 20 years and had been arrested by the Thai police, said:

A new policeman who had just moved from an other district saw the Lao workers in my paddy field. I was brought to the Police Station while my nine Lao labourers were deported back to Lao right away. The police asked me about hiring nine Lao workers and told me that it was illegal. I told that I knew but I did it for a long time. Then, they said they would release me because of misunderstanding but I had to pay 200 baht fee. They told me not to do it again. But, how can such an old woman like me working in the paddy field on my own. My children and grandchildren were away. There was none Thai labourers to hire because they were busy with their land. I then called the Lao workers from another village to work for me.\(^\text{85}\)

As suggested in Chapter five, the villagers of Ban Fangthai continue to hire the Lao workers and to hide their practice from the district government officials. At the same time, the government officials know what the people are doing but turn a blind eye. Only in cases where someone reports them do they arrest Thai farmers, charge a fee, or simply let them go. They do not arrest the Lao workers: they are deported back to the Laos. Just as the Thai farmers fear arrest, so do the Lao workers fear deportation back to

\(^{85}\) Interview, Ms Nang, 25 November 2010.
Lao because it eliminates their chances to earn money. This repositions their labour relations in a more compromised way.

**8.5.2.2 Social relations based on village locations, historical ties and cultural similarities**

It became clear to me that Thai-Lao historical ties, border proximity and cultural similarities diminished exploitative labour relations between the Thai farmers and the Lao seasonal migrants. For many Thai farmers, their Lao employees were not strangers. The former repeatedly hired the same person, after circulating him/her among their relatives. But, some Thai farmers, widows, or families with female members only feared keeping the Lao workers with them overnight so they ‘borrowed’ workers from their relatives and friends during the day time. The male workers regularly stayed in the temporary shelters in the fields. But, the Thai farmers always allowed the young Lao female workers to stay in their homes in the village for safety reasons.

The Lao migrants who had earlier worked in Ban Fangthai usually contacted Thai employers who they knew would treat them well. Some came through social connections established by the parental generation. A 32 year-old male migrant from Ban Don said:

> I first came to work for Ms Nang with my parents when I was 9 years old. When I turned 12 years old, I went to work in Bangkok with my auntie and never returned to work in Ban Fangthai. I returned to Laos 3 years ago and did all wage-labour jobs that were available in the village. Last year, my parents told me to come to work for Ms Nang. My parents are too old to do wage-labour job so I came with 3 neighbours. Ms Nang can remember me and treats me very well. Besides my wage, she provides good food and regularly pays for my boat trip back to Laos.86

Unlike the Shan workers, who, according to Latt (2009), were separately marginalised to live in the poor housing conditions outside of the village, the Lao workers in Ban

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86 Interview Mr Sopa, 3 December 2010.
Fangthai were treated relatively well. They were kept away from the police in small shelters in the middle of the rice farms. They were provided with three meals per day, mats, pillows, and blanket for sleeping with nets to protect them from insect and mosquito bites. In addition, toilet and bathing necessities were provided. In some cases, if the Thai landowners were sufficiently familiar with their Lao workers, that is, they had hired the same group of people over a few years, they invited their Lao workers to stay in their house with them.

Finally, the high labour demand in the peak cultivating season, and the increasing numbers of hired migrant labourers from Laos gave negotiation power to the Lao migrants. In the past, the Thai villagers were competitive. Their attempts to get Lao workers by offering higher wage rates caused conflict among them because the Lao workers opted to work for those who offered to pay higher wage rates. Recently, to discourage conflict, the Thai farmers agreed upon the standard rate. At the same time, negotiation power lay in the fact that if the Lao workers were not happy to work, they could leave. In addition, the labourers selected the landowners they considered the best to work for, and shared this information among their friends, emphasising the kind and unkind landowners. Thus, the Lao migrants no longer had to enter into subordinate relationships. One of the Thai farmers had a reputation for making her Lao labourers work overtime and not paying them extra money. Lao workers who came to Ban Fangthai frequently refused to work for her and spread the news among their friends. During the period of my fieldwork, this landowner acquired three new comer Lao migrants, but they only worked for her for approximately two days. Then, they moved to work for other landowners. Finally, this woman could no longer attract any Lao workers, so she had to wait until almost the end of the cultivating season to get Thai workers who had already finished cultivating their land. Most of them were her relatives and neighbours.

8.5.2.3 Multiple identities and class identities

In his discussion of agrarian transformation in northern Thailand over the last 30 years, Ganjanapan (1984) took land ownership as an analytical focus and categorised the rich
and poor villagers accordingly to the amount of their land holdings. In his study, a village was a community that could be understood as a small unit comprising local males and females with distinct cultures, politics and economics. Class conflict occurred due to the socio-economic differentiation between the rich who owned land and the poor, who were either landless or owned only a small plot of land.

In recent times, class conflict based on land ownership has been re-examined. Basing their analysis on the fact that rural livelihoods are now less tied to the land, Rigg and Sakunee (2001) explore the class-based analysis that shows that today, new factors generate class differentiation, not land ownership. They stress that landless people are not necessarily poor. The factors that shape social mobility and rural differentiation, they claim, are education, non-farm occupations, and migration incorporate rural lives into the wider economic sphere.

As I have suggested in Chapters six and seven, opportunities for migration are not equally distributed. In Ban Fangthai, age, gender, and education have determined the villagers’ opportunities to exploit non-farm work, whereas in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua, age and gender were major factors, with education playing a lesser role. Seasonal migration to Ban Fangthai was an alternative for some people, who were marginalised from long-distance migration. The older people in each village were predominant in agriculture while the younger people, who were more educated were in a better position to move to off-farm employment. In terms of gender, unmarried females could exploit more opportunities than their married counterparts who tended to return home to establish families. The effect of migration on each village could be elaborated conceptually. Rigg states:

Migration may be propelled by poverty, and encouraged by wealth; it may reflect resource scarcities at the local level, or be an outcome of prosperity; it may be embedded in economic transformations, or better explained by social and cultural changes; it may narrow inequalities in source communities, or widen them; it may tighten the bonds of reciprocity between migrants and their natal households, or it may serve to loosen or break these bonds; it may help to support
agricultural production, or it may be a means to break away from farming altogether (Rigg, 2007, p. 163).

As noted in Chapters six and seven, migration could provide economic return to migrant families that in turn could lead to social mobility. Some aging families in Ban Kaemkong, Lao PDR, with members working in Thailand and remitting money, could stop working on their farm while remittances from migration have allowed some households in Ban Laonua to hire wage-labour. Successive migrants have the opportunity to showcase their improved economic status through their new houses, new small businesses, or new land ownership. In the case of Northeast Thailand, earnings from migration have supported many families to re-investment in rubber plantations.

However, I would like to stress here that this thesis goes beyond village and national scales of class differentiation. Transborder migration, and the employment of seasonal Lao migrant workers on Thai farmlands, complicate rural class differentiation between the Thai farmers and the Lao workers. It not only reveals the fluidity of class and social identities, but also how class is reworked in different spaces and times (De Haan & Rogaly, 2010; Kelly, 2011, 2012). As demonstrated in Chapter seven, the majority of the Lao migrants in Ban Fangthai were not landless; in fact, they had their own land but they were faced with problems of low productivity and a limited chance of accessing non-farm job opportunities in Laos. Some among them opted to send money back to their villages for investment in their houses, better clothing and material objects that could distinguish them from their neighbours. But, when they chose migration, and opted to stay in Thailand, their social identity in Laos shifted to that of migrant workers. Even though non-farm work could project them into the modern economy, opportunities for such work remained marginal, and they were unable to be upwardly mobile to upgrade their social status to urban middle class. This fact shows that the same individual may experience different class processes in different times and places. Lukasiewicz (2011), in his article ‘Migration and Gender identity in the Rural Philippines’, has elaborated on the reworking of classes and social mobility in the Philippines that has resulted from international migration. That class is clearly being
reworked is evident in the status of the Filipino migrants employed as domestic workers in Hong Kong, but who are landowners and moneylenders in their home villages. Thus, people have different identities and classes in different times and places.

8.6 Conclusion
This chapter links the empirical data from the fieldwork to the literature on borderlands, migration, and agrarian transformation. This thesis argues that there are some commonalities in the agrarian transformation processes, such as migration, urbanisation, and increasing importance of off-farm occupations in all of the research sites. As well, this thesis shows the differences in agrarian transformation in particular places, spaces, and contexts, and how they are diverted by historical, geographical, cultural, political and economic factors. It reveals the oversimplification of claiming that a linear process of de-agrarianisation explains the persistence of agriculture in the borderlands, based on transborder migration from a poorer neighboring country. At the same time, re-agrarianisation is more than the reverse of de-agrarianisation because agriculture in the borderland - and the peasants - have persisted in parallel to new opportunities in off-farm sectors. The chapter problematises the new agrarian relations in this complex and wider context to reconceptualise agrarian transformation.

In the first section, I have discussed the role of the states and their relationships with the villagers in the borderlands. I have attempted to show how the specificity of the Northeast Thailand and Lao borderlands contributes to the scope of compromise in state-village relations. In addition, I have sought to unravel the complex nature of the state at both the local and national levels, and to make clear that the state has several layers. In effect, the study focuses on local state officials, who have an important role in restricting or supporting the flows of migrants across the state boundaries. The mutual interests between local state officials and villagers support the making of the licitness of cross-border migration and employment in the Northeast Thailand and Lao borderlands.

In addition, this chapter explores the overlapping patterns of rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban migration and the linkages between internal and international migration, all of
which are associated with the movement of migration between the rural and urban sectors. In the last section, the chapter reconceptualises agrarian transformation by demonstrating the more complex labour relations, classes and identities of the rural people that are shaped differently in each space. This reinforces the delocalised frame of reference needed to understand contemporary agrarian transformation.
Chapter 9

Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

In this study, I have questioned how the spatial interconnectedness of the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands shapes agrarian transformation, in particular through patterns of migration. Working from the premise that the borderlands are fields of relations rather than fields of location, I have demonstrated local cross-border practices, in particular the transborder migration of Lao seasonal migrants and their labour substitution on Thai farmlands that are facing severe labour shortages. Cross-border employment and the immigration of undocumented Lao migrants appear to confront the state’s law. I argue, however, that they in fact throw light on the apparent licit practices and scope of compromise in state-village relations in which local borderlanders and local state officials negotiate their mutual interest in the transnationalised border. While the farmers undoubtedly benefit from migrant labour, the state co-opts the local people into surveillance of the borderlands. This allows a great deal of overlapping of rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban migration across agricultural and other sectors and of the obvious linkages between internal and international migration. In addition, it shows that the marginality of the border do not contribute to agricultural marginalisation. Agriculture remains a significant activity along with other off-farm opportunities that a potentially allow villagers to gain benefit from the cash crops. The research shows the pathway of agrarian transformation in the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands is beyond the linear de-agrarianisation process. The employment of Lao labour in the Thai farmlands and the complex migration patterns of the Lao workers raise important points concerning agrarian relations and the identities of the people involved in this process of change.

I will now briefly recall the composition of this thesis: Chapter one illustrates the overall framework, rationale, and study sites. Chapter two focuses on theoretical considerations in relation to the borderlands, migration, and agrarian transformation. Chapter three introduces the research methodology, challenges and methods. In chapter four, the thesis
provides the historical backgrounds of Northeast Thailand and Laos and the two countries’ trajectories of development. Chapters five to seven present the empirical findings from my fieldworks in the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands, and a village which is located in the hinterland of Laos. The findings are linked to the literature to show how the research contributes new knowledge and provide better understanding of the agrarian studies explored in Chapter eight.

This concluding chapter (Chapter 9) aims to revisit the main themes of the thesis and to summarise the major findings which are reiterated in the research questions. Attention is also given to the main contribution of the research and to subjects requiring further investigation.

9.2 The Borderlands as a Spatial Context in Agrarian Studies and the Main Empirical Findings

In this section, I discuss how the study of agrarian transformation in the context of borderlands provides a broader understanding of agrarian transformation, based on the empirical findings.

Moving beyond the conventional agrarian studies that tend to focus on core-rice growing areas in particular countries, this thesis fills empirical gaps, both in agrarian studies and in studies of borderlands. I am alluding here to the absence of investigation of agrarian transformation in the locally specific context of borderlands and the broadening scales of agrarian studies from specific country to cross-country analysis. The borderlands, as a researchable field, not only provide insights into a border space that is socially and politically constructed, they also reveal the scope of compromise in state-village relations. The empirical findings in Chapter five encourage the rethinking of conventional models of state power in the borderlands of Southeast Asia. I discuss the more powerful state centre, the diminished power at the margins, and the confrontations that occur between the state and local communities as a form of resistance. Although the
reality of unequal power relations cannot be denied, this thesis reveals the interplay between illegal and licit practices based on the local borderland residents’ claims on historical ties and social networks which allow for the scope of compromise in state-village relations and the multi-layers of state entities, i.e., the central and local state authorities, and the synaptic roles of the state officials.

Unravelling the linkages between out-migration from rural Thailand to urban cities and in-migration of seasonal Lao migrants as replacement labour in the agricultural sector, this thesis highlights the specificity of Lao-Thai migration flows across rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban sectors, and the further connections with many areas beyond Bangkok, such as many provinces in southern and eastern Thailand. The particular geographical location, the porous Thai-Lao borderlands, and the similarities between the Northeast Thai and Lao peoples facilitate migration and blur the distinction between internal and international migration. However, these commonalities shared by the northeastern Thai and Lao peoples cannot eliminate the migrant status of the Lao people. In the last section of Chapter six, I discuss the landscape of legality or the interface between illegal and licit migration that is determined by different spaces. Apart from its contribution to migration studies in terms of revealing the above multi-faceted migration activities and linkages of internal and international migration, this thesis also highlights how the rural and urban sectors are connected through migration patterns. While most Lao migrants practice seasonal migration, they return to their natal villages to labour on their family farms when required.

In addition, this thesis argues that, although rural livelihoods in both Northeast Thailand and Lao PDR are now more reliant on off-farm income and remittances, farming persists albeit fundamentally altered by many changes. Regarding Northeast Thailand, the study confirms that the young generation is moving to off-farm occupations and that as a consequence, villages are facing with labour shortage problems. However, the villages’ marginal locations allow immigrant Lao seasonal workers to fill the labour gaps. Thus,
farming persists in the borderlands rather than being abandoned as has been the case in many other areas of Thailand.

The ability to absorb Lao seasonal migrants illuminates two sides of consideration in association with agrarian transformation. While it has helped farmers in the Thai borderlands to maintain their farms and has decreased the competitiveness between farm and non-farm jobs, at the same time, it has created conditions that have delayed the mechanisation and various more modern adaptations to the farming system. Rather than pursuing the linear pathway to mechanisation and de-agrarianisation, agrarian transformation in the Thai borderlands has been largely determined by labour substitution has introduced news form of agrarian relations across the border.

This thesis is also shown that agriculture has remained a viable alternative for rural dwellers in the northeastern Thai-Laos borderlands, and the hinterland of Laos. In northeastern Thailand, many young migrants, who could not join middle class occupations, found that agriculture provided a reasonable income and allowed them to avoid having to take labouring jobs in the city. Meanwhile, those successful or educated migrants, who opted not to become farmers as they did not know how to work in a farm, aspired to become entrepreneurial farmers and invested in new cash crops in particular in rubber plantations. Empirical findings also revealed the different perspectives between the young cohort and the elderly. While the younger generation viewed investment in rubber plantation as a mean of prosperity, their parents viewed it as insurance for their life security since it involved long term investment.

In terms of Lao PDR, farming has persisted. It has neither totally ceased nor lost its importance due to lower level of urbanisation and fewer off-farm job opportunities. Earlier return migrants had little opportunity but to farm; however, migration and remittances have contributed to differentiation among rural people. Longer distance migration has generated an increase in remittances, and the chance to join long-distance migration has been selectively embraced by the younger people who are in a stronger
position to migrate. In the case of females, those who were likely to exploit off-farm opportunities in Bangkok and other urban cities were either unmarried or married and accompanied by their husbands. But despite the higher wages that non-farm jobs, offered, along with the chance to join Thailand’s modern economy, the non-literates (both legal and illegal) migrant status allowed them access to marginal laboring jobs only. This prompted many Lao workers to consider returning to Laos, using the money they had to set up small business in the villages. They returned to earn money in Thailand only when it was needed.

9.3 Theoretical contribution of the thesis

This thesis provides empirical evidence that contributes to the broader understanding of the diversity of paths of agrarian transformation in Southeast Asia. The extant scholarly literature on agrarian transformation in Southeast Asia focus in the main on the rural-urban interface, out-migration, shifting from farm to non-farm occupations, and the abandonment of agriculture due to labour shortages within a broad concept of de-agrarianisation (Rigg, 2001; Rigg & Sakunee, 2001). In the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands, people are generally involved in wide range of activities; but, at the same time many are engaged in farming. Labour shortages in the Thai borderlands have been resolved by transborder rural-to-rural migration. The availability of land, labour and capital from remittances has facilitated agriculture in the three research sites. These findings demonstrate that the concept of de-agrarianisation is too linear and oversimplifies diverse pathways.

As well as addressing agrarian change from the conceptual angle of de-agrarianisation, some scholars have introduced the concepts of re-agrarianisation and re-peasantisation to explain why and how rural people who were once involve in off-farm occupations have renewed their interest in agriculture (Van der Ploeg, 2008; Vandergeest, 2012). This study contends that re-agrarianisation is not a reversal of de-agrarianisation and has little to do with borderland field sites because such sites were never really de-agrarianised. The study also suggests re-conceptualising agrarian relations in the wider
context beyond village and national levels. In Chapter eight, I explore the new class relations based on ethnicity that have occurred across the national boundaries. I also argue that exploitative class relations might not be able to explain the social relations of the Thai-Lao people living in the borderlands. At the same time, labour shortages in Thailand have increased the Lao people’s negotiation power to choose to work with the Thai landowners who have treated them well.

This study agrees with many previous studies that non-farm work and migration determine rural differentiation. The landless may not be necessarily poor and people who own land might not be as rich as the landless, who have the potential to earn money from off-farm jobs (Rigg & Sakunee, 2001). The thesis, by moving beyond the national to cross-country analysis, has established that many Lao seasonal migrants in fact own farmland in their natal villages. In addition, many of the Lao migrants who work in the marginal jobs in the urban cities in Thailand are in fact landlords or landowners in their own right in their home villages. This shows that while migration can be an outcome of agrarian transformation, at the same time it can produce many changes in rural areas. In this case of this thesis, transborder migration between Thailand and Lao has driven the rethinking of agrarian class position and relations and multiple class identities constituted by spatiality.

Conventional studies regard village as an immobile and subsistent unit comprising the peasantry (Nartsupha, 1986, 1999). Later studies argue that earlier studies ignored the degree of market relations and differentiation (Chayan, 1993; Kemp, 1993a; Nartsupha, 1999). Many scholars, for example, included migration and the movement of people as key factors transforming rural society; however, what has transpired over in the previous two decades was not as intensive as in the current era, where one sees the intensification of technologies and information flows combined with infrastructure development and growing region integration giving rise to internal and international migration. Within this scenario, rural households have become multi-sited and stretched over space (Rigg, 2013, p. 9).
In addition to the theoretical contribution, there is also a methodological contribution. This thesis contributes clear examples of the delocalisation of rural lives and invokes multi-scalar examination and awareness of the spatiality of livelihoods (Hirsch, 2012, p. 401). Increasingly mobility within and across countries has led to methodological challenge now that members of households are residing, living and working in different places. These changes provide a practical challenge to rural studies. Earlier studies have shown that rural people in Thailand are increasingly moving from farm to non-farm jobs, but the statistical data do not make clear their aspirations and their connection to agricultural livelihoods. In addition, there is awareness of the growing numbers of Lao migrants in the Thai economy, but uncertainty surrounds their migration across urban and rural sectors. Rigg (2013, p. 12) points out that it is not unusual for people to ‘keep a foot on the land even while they step on to the factory floor’. This is even truer when one consider occupations at the household level. Certain individuals and households pursue multi-stranded livelihood strategies (sometimes termed ‘occupational multiplicity’) in which they juggle a variety of activities and occupations. The empirical findings in this thesis reflect those changes and challenge the researcher to develop the most effective way to conduct a research. Instead of focusing on households in one space, I have conducted multi-sited ethnographies across the national border and follow people to different places to observe their geography of employment and migration across rural and urban sectors. The context of the borderlands and the methodological challenge in this thesis in my view provides a new approach to the analytical methodological exploration of agrarian studies that has taken the study away from a single-sited ethnography of core rice or upland areas, moving beyond a sole research site in one specific country.

9.4 Borderland Agriculture and Labour Migration: The Road Ahead

The thesis investigates agricultural livelihoods in the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands and the employment of Lao workers in the Thai border areas in the present and recent past. However, the situation is dynamic. The situation in the borderlands is shaped by
the changing contests, including policy change. New government policies have thrown up many questions in need of future investigation.

On the 1st of April 2013, one and a half years after I completed my fieldwork, the Thai government under the leadership of Yingluck Shinawatra of the Pheu Thai Party increased the Thai minimum wage from a variable rate by province of around 200 baht to 300 baht per day throughout Thailand. This policy mostly impacted the Thailand’s Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and some labour-intensive industries such as textiles, garments, and services that found the higher minimum wage a threat to their continued operation. In the agricultural sector, the Thailand Development Research Institute (2013) pointed out that it would be hit hard by the wage hike, with monthly wage costs rising by two to three billion baht or 22-30 per cent.

The increase in minimum wage in Thailand led to questions about labour strategies in the agricultural sectors. It could prove interesting to ask what will happen in the northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands when the Thai farmers are forced to pay 300 baht per day to procure not only Thai labour but also migrant labour? It has been reported that many Burmese living in the surrounding rural areas (farm workers, day laborers, etc.) are already holding out for the new minimum wage, declining to accept anything less than 300 baht (Pattaya News). Referring back to the Northeast Thailand and Laos borderlands, how will the villagers cope having to pay the minimum wage of 300 baht per day? Will the Thai farmers resort to hiring only Lao seasonal migrants because they are able to negotiate a cheaper wage rate? Will they invest in more mechanisation next year, or plant crops that require less manual handling? Will food prices rise due to more labour costs for rice farming? It may be that textual development will reshape the relations between employers and workers and transborder relations. If the Lao migrants opt to move to the non-farm sector due to the 300 baht wage policy while high labour demand in the peak cultivating season persists, competition among the Thai farmers may equip the Lao migrants with more power for negotiation. I foresee a change in the
employment strategies of people in Northeast Thailand which may prove of interest to future researchers.

Furthermore, an increase in wage labour prove an incentive for people to move from farming to the industrial and service sectors that provide all year round jobs rather than only seasonal agricultural jobs. The Thai Entrepreneurs have gradually adjusted to the 300 baht minimum wage following the law enforcement. The wage increase to 300 baht effectively makes Thailand No.3 in the region for wage levels, after Singapore and the Philippines. The wage rates in Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia are three times lower than those of Thailand’s. These new 300-baht per day minimum wage could lead to a surge in the numbers of migrant workers going to Thailand to work in the industrial sectors.

Finally, another interesting question is whether the shift in wage rate in Thailand has prompted to an increasing numbers of Thai people to return to agriculture? Dilaka”s article published in the Bangkok Post Newspaper on 12 March 2012 referred to his research conducted with the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) that the 300-baht minimum wage has had no major effect on employment rates; but, it has significantly affected employment reduction in small and medium manufacturing enterprises (SMEs) with no more than 100 workers. SMEs would then lay-off the workers and they could be forced to serve household business without any pay or serve small agricultural business of which pay structure is unclear. Many workers in these SMEs have moved into the agricultural sector where they do not receive salary payments as they are working for their families. The sum of all of these factors is beyond analysis in this thesis and provokes further research.
Appendices
Appendix 1: Questionnaire Household survey in Ban Fangthai (Thai)

แบบสอบถามสำหรับกลุ่มที่ 1 ชาวนาไทย บ้านฝั่งไทย

ครัวเรือนเลขที่________บ้านฝั่งไทย
โทร.________________________
วันที่สัมภาษณ์______________เวลาสัมภาษณ์ : เริ่ม___________น. เสร็จสิ้น__________น.

ครัวเรือนของคุณประกอบอาชีพหลักอะไร ? (คำตอบเดียว)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>อาชีพหลัก</th>
<th>อาชีพเสริม</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>เกษตรกร (ทำนาทำไร่ทำสวนไม้ยืนต้น เช่นยางพาราผลไม้)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ค้าขาย</td>
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<tr>
<td>งานรับเงินเดือน เช่นข้าราชการ/พนักงานรัฐวิสาหกิจ</td>
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<tr>
<td>รับจ้าง</td>
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<tr>
<td>เกษียณ</td>
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<tr>
<td>วางงาน</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>อื่นๆ (.........)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ครัวเรือนของคุณมีที่ดินของตัวเองหรือไม่?

| มี | 1 | ไม่มี | 2 |

ถ้ามี กรมธรรม์จำนวณที่ดินทั้งหมดของคุณ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>จำนวณที่ดิน (ไร่)</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tr>
<td>ต่ำกว่า 6.25 ไร่</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>6.25-15 ไร่</td>
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<td>16-30 ไร่</td>
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<td>31 ไร่ขึ้นไป</td>
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ขณะนี้ ครัวเรือนของคุณมีผู้ไปรับจ้างทำงานนอกพื้นที่ เช่น ไปกรุงเทพฯและจังหวัดอื่น ๆ หรือไม่?

| มี | 1 | ไม่มี | 2 |

ในอดีต ครัวเรือนของคุณมีผู้ไปรับจ้างทำงานนอกพื้นที่ เช่น ไปกรุงเทพฯและจังหวัดอื่น ๆ หรือไม่?

| มี | 1 | ไม่มี | 2 |
ข้อมูลสมาชิกในครัวเรือน

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>สมาชิก/รายละเอียด (เรียงอายุมากไปน้อย)</th>
<th>1</th>
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<td>15,000 - 19,000 บาท</td>
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ตารางรายได้ครอบครัว ต่อเดือน

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ตารางรายได้ครอบครัว ต่อเดือน</th>
<th>1</th>
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ค่าตอบที่ถูกต้องของคุณเมื่อแหล่งรายได้จากการทำงานอยู่ในครอบครัวที่ทำงานอยู่นอกบ้าน คุณระบุว่าคุณใช้เงินดังกล่าวอย่างไรบ้าง ระบุ 3 คำตอบ เรียงจากมากไปน้อย

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 คำตอบ เรียงจากมากไปน้อย</th>
<th>อัตราค่าตอบ</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- สงบที่ไม่เกินค่าใช้จ่ายเกี่ยวกับการทำการเกษตรกรรม เช่น ค่าจ้างค้าปลู ค่าเช่าที่ดิน</td>
<td>01</td>
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<tr>
<td>- ค่าใช้จ่ายในครัวเรือน เช่น ค่าอาหาร และจัดสิ่งของต่างๆ เช่น รถมอเตอร์ไซค์ เครื่องใช้ไฟฟ้า</td>
<td>02</td>
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<td>- ค่าใช้จ่ายในการศึกษาของบุตรหลาน</td>
<td>03</td>
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<tr>
<td>- ค่าใช้จ่ายในสุขภาพ</td>
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<tr>
<td>- ค่าใช้จ่ายในการศึกษาของบุตรหลาน</td>
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<tr>
<td>- ค่าใช้จ่ายในการจัดตั้ง Combo 06</td>
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<tr>
<td>- ค่าใช้จ่ายในการดูแลสุขภาพ</td>
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<tr>
<td>- ค่าใช้จ่ายในการศึกษาของบุตรหลาน</td>
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<tr>
<td>- ค่าใช้จ่ายในการดูแลสุขภาพ</td>
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240
ข้อมูลการทำเกษตรในปีที่ผ่านมา

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>พิช/</th>
<th>ข้าวเหนียว</th>
<th>ข้าวเจ้า</th>
<th>ข้าวโพด</th>
<th>มันสำหรับผลิตปุ๋ย</th>
<th>ยางพารา</th>
<th>อ้อย</th>
<th>ยุคสิบติส</th>
<th>อื่น ๆ</th>
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<td>เช่า 1</td>
<td>เช่า 1</td>
<td>เช่า 1</td>
<td>เช่า 1</td>
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<td>ไม่เช่า 2</td>
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<td>ไม่เช่า 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>ลงทุนด้อยปี (บาท)</td>
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<td>ค่าแรงงาน</td>
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<td>ค่าปี</td>
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<td>ค่าภาษี</td>
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<tr>
<td>ค่าเช่าที่ดินไร่/บาท/ปี</td>
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<tr>
<td>รวมค่าใช้จ่าย</td>
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แหล่งเงินที่เข้าถึง

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>กลุ่มเงินที่เข้าถึง</th>
<th>รหัส</th>
<th>ไม่ใช้ทำอะไร</th>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ดอกทุกหมู่บ้าน</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>อื่น ๆ โปรดระบุ</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

เครื่องทุ่นแรงที่คุณใช้ในการเกษตร มีอะไรบ้าง เริ่มใช้มาเท่าไหร่แล้ว?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>รถไถ</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>เครื่องเกี่ยวข้าว</td>
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<tr>
<td>อื่น ๆ โปรดระบุ</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

คุณจ้างแรงงานในการทำการเกษตรยังมีอยู่หรือไม่? จ้างได้หรือไม่ว่าเริ่มจ้างปี พ.ศ. ใด?

| เครื่องมือ | 1 | ครั้งสุดท้ายที่จ้าง ปี พ.ศ. ที่ | โปรดระบุ | 2 |
|-----------|---|-----------------------------|-------------|
| เครื่องเกี่ยวข้าว |   |                             |             |
| เครื่องปั่นข้าว |   |                             |             |
| อื่น ๆ โปรดระบุ | |                             |             |

เคยแรงงานลาวมาดานาเกี่ยวข้าวหรือทำกิจกรรมเกี่ยวกับการเกษตรอื่น ๆ บ้างหรือไม่?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>เคยง</th>
<th>1</th>
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เคยแรงงานมหาดานาเกี่ยวข้าว หรือทำกิจกรรมเกี่ยวกับการเกษตรอื่น ๆ บ้างหรือไม่?

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<td>บ้านสว่าง</td>
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<tr>
<td>อื่น ๆ โปรดระบุ</td>
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จ้างแรงงานคนเดิมๆกันทุกปีหรือไม่?

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<tr>
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ครอบครัวของคุณมีพาหนะที่มาใช้หรือไม่?

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<tr>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
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ช่วยให้ข้อมูลรวมการทำการเกษตรปีที่แล้วว่าจ้างแรงงานรับจ้างมาทำอะไรบ้าง

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<tbody>
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<td>รกกล้า</td>
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<td>อื่น ๆ โปรดระบุ</td>
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</table>
ถ้าแรงงานคนไทยเพียงพอ จะจ้างคนลาวหรือไม่

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คุณเคยนำลางมาค้างคืนที่บ้านหรือไม่

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ช่วยบอกวิธีการที่จะได้คนลางมาทำงาน ระบุวิธีแรกที่ทำบ่อยที่สุด

| ติดต่อนำเครื่องบินของคนลางในลาว | 01 |
| ติดต่อนำเพื่อนลางของคนลาง | 02 |
| ติดตอคนที่มารับจ้างปีก่อน โดยโทรศัพท์ไปตามเอง | 03 |
| รอติดต่อจากเพื่อนบ้านที่จ้างคนลาง | 04 |
| ติดตอเข้าเรื่องคนลางให้หาแรงงาน | 05 |
| ไปรับด้วยตนเองที่สถานปลอดค่อนข้างโดยไม่ได้ติดต่อลางหน้า | 06 |
| อื่น ๆ | 08 |

ช่วยบอกแหล่งรายได้หลักที่นำมาจ้างแรงงานทำงานเกษตร ระบุแหล่งที่มาที่มากที่สุด

| เงินรายได้ดีเดียว | 01 |
| เงินที่ไปยืมมา (จาก ธกส.หรือจากเจ้าหนี้อื่น ๆ) | 02 |
| เงินที่คนในครอบครัวที่ทำงานนอกถิ่นส่งมาให้ | 03 |
| อื่น ๆ | 04 |

เคยเจอปัญหาบัตรทหาร ตัวร่างเกี่ยวกับการนำคนลางข้ามแดนบ้างหรือไม่

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>เคย</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>แก้ปัญหาอย่างไร</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ไมเคย</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

243
Appendix 2: Questionnaire Household survey in Ban Fangthai (English)

**Questionnaire for Farmers in Ban Fangthai**

House Number ______ Ban Fangthai  
Tel. __________________________

Date of interview ___________  time: start ___________  end ___________

**What is your household main occupation?**  
**What is your household second occupation?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Main</th>
<th>Second</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture and Fisheries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading and enterprise</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaried jobs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labouring jobs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others (................)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Does your household own the land?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**If yes, how much?**

| Below 6.25 rai | 1 |
| 6.25-15 rai    | 2 |
| 16-30 rai      | 3 |
| 31 rai or more | 4 |

At present, is there any household member working out of the village?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Practice long-term migration for.....years  
Practice circular migration......

In the past, is there any household member working out of the village?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Practice long-term migration
Practice circular migration…..

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in or outside of village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary/month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share with family or not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much money giving for hh/month?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household income/month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 2,000 baht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 - 4,999 baht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 - 9,999 baht</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How did you spend remittances? Give three ways of spending in order from the most to the least.

- Agricultural investment | 01 |
- Domestic consumption | 02 |
- Education | 03 |
- Paying debt | 04 |
- Housing/ house improvement | 05 |
### Agricultural Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crops</th>
<th>Sticky Rice</th>
<th>Jasmine Rice</th>
<th>Corn</th>
<th>Cassava</th>
<th>Rubber</th>
<th>Sugarcane</th>
<th>Eucalyptus</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many rai?</th>
<th>Rent 1</th>
<th>Rent 1</th>
<th>Rent 1</th>
<th>Rent 1</th>
<th>Rent 1</th>
<th>Rent 1</th>
<th>Rent 1</th>
<th>Rent 1</th>
<th>Rent 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yields/rai</th>
<th>Invest (baht/rai)</th>
<th>Labouring cost</th>
<th>fertilizer</th>
<th>pesticides</th>
<th>Pay for rent/year</th>
<th>Total investment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you make any loan?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of loan</th>
<th>How do you spend the loan?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BAAC</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village fund</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a loan with people in the village</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving Group</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What kind of machines do you use in farming? When did you start using them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Machine</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standing tractor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice harvest machine</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice spining machine</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you use wage-labour in your farm? When do you start hiring wage labourers?

Have you ever hired the Lao migrant? When did the last time you hire them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are the name of villages in Laos that your Lao workers come from?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ban Kaemkong</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Laonau</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Savang</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you hire the same Lao migrants in each year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you have any relative in Laos?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Last year, did you hire any labour? What kind of jobs you hire them to work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ploughing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulling the rice seedings</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transplanting</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivating</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeding</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut sugarcane</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you ever let the Lao migrants staying in your place?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How do you get the Lao workers? (one answer)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact relatives in Laos</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract my neighbour to find the workers for me</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call the Lao migrants who worked for me last year</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get the Lao migrants from my neighbours</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact the boat driver</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to wait at the checkpoint without making any contact in advance</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please identify your source of money to invest in farmings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Money</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household incomes</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a loan</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remittances</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you ever been caught by the police because of hiring the Lao migrants?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

..............................
Appendix 3: Questionnaire Household survey in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonua (Thai)

แบบสอบถามสำหรับกลุ่มที่ 2 ชาวนาลาว บ้านแคมโขงและบ้านลาวเหนือ

ครัวเรือนเลขที่ ______ บ้านเลขที่ 1 บ้านแคมโขง บ้านเลขที่ 2 บ้านลาวเหนือ

วันที่สัมภาษณ์ ____________ เวลาสัมภาษณ์: เริ่ม ____________ น. เสร็จสิ้น ____________ น.

ครัวเรือนของคุณประกอบอาชีพหลักอะไร? (คำตอบเดียว)

ครัวเรือนของคุณมีอาชีพเสริมอะไร?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>เกษตรกร (ทำนา ทำไร่ ทำสวนไม่ยิ่งลง เช่น ยางพารา ผลไม้)</th>
<th>อาชีพหลัก</th>
<th>อาชีพเสริม</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ค้าขาย</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>งานรับเงินเดือน เช่น ข้าราชการ / พนักงานรัฐวิสาหกิจ</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ธุรกิจ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>เกษียณ</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ว่างงาน</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>อื่นๆ (. . . . . . .)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ครัวเรือนของคุณมีที่ดินของตัวเองหรือไม่?

| มี | 1 | ไม่มี | 2 |

ถ้ามี กรุณาระบุจำนวนที่ดินทั้งหมดของคุณ

| ต่ำกว่า 6.25 ไร่ | 1 |
| 6.25-15 ไร่      | 2 |
| 16-30 ไร่        | 3 |
| 31 ไร่ขึ้นไป     | 4 |

ขณะนี้ ครัวเรือนของคุณมีผู้ไปรับจ้างทำงานนอกพื้นที่ เช่น ในกรุงเทพฯ และจังหวัดอื่น ๆ หรือไม่

| มี | 1 | ไม่มี | 2 |

หมายเหตุ: กรุณาตอบแบบสอบถามด้านบนให้ถูกต้องและครบถ้วน.

249
ในอดีต ครัวเรือนของคุณมีผู้ไปรับจ้างทำงานนอกพื้นที่ เช่น ในกรุงเทพฯ และจังหวัดอื่น ๆ หรือไม่

มี 1 ไม่มี 2

ไปทำงาน...........ปี
ไปเฉพาะฤดูกาล..............

ข้อมูลสมาชิกในครัวเรือน

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>สมาชิก/รายละเอียด (เรียงอายุน้อยไปมาก)</th>
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<th>3</th>
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<td>อาชีพเสริม</td>
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<td>ที่อยู่อาศัย</td>
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<td>โน ล น 1</td>
<td>โน ล น 1</td>
<td>โน ล น 1</td>
<td>โน ล น 1</td>
<td>โน ล น 1</td>
<td>โน ล น 1</td>
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<td>นอกถิ่น 2</td>
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<td>เบ ง 1</td>
<td>เบ ง 1</td>
<td>เบ ง 1</td>
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<td>ไม่เบ ง 2</td>
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<td>ไม่เบ ง 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>แบ่งให้เท่าไร/ปี</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

กรุณาระบุรายได้ครอบครัว ต่อเดือน

| ต่ำกว่า 2,000 บาท | 1 | 10,000 - 14,999 บาท | 4 |
| 2,000 - 4,999 บาท | 2 | 15,000 - 19,000 บาท | 5 |
| 5,000 - 9,999 บาท | 3 | 20,000 ขึ้นไป | 6 |

ถ้าครอบครัวของคุณมีแหล่งรายได้จากคนในครอบครัวที่ทำงานอยู่นอกถิ่น กรุณาระบุว่าคุณใช้เงินดังกล่าวอย่างไรบ้าง ระบุ 3 คำ des ย เยี่ยงจากมากไปน้อย

อันดับ

250
- ลงทุนไปกับค่าใช้จ่ายเกี่ยวกับการทำเกษตรกรรม เช่น ค่าจ้างคนงาน ค่าปุ๋ย ค่าเถาที่ดิน 01
- ค่าใช้จ่ายในการรับเรือน เช่น ค่าอาหาร และชื่อสินค้าต่าง ๆ เช่น รถ รถโมเตอร์ไซค์ เครื่องใช้ไฟฟ้า 02
- ค่าใช้จ่ายในการศึกษาของบุตรหลาน 03
- ค่าใช้จ่ายในการที่ดินหลัก 04
- ปลูกบ้าน 05
- ชื่อที่ดินเพิ่ม 06
- ใช้ในการลงทุนเพิ่ม เช่น ปลูกยางพารา 07
- เก็บยอด เช่น ฝากธนาคาร 08
- อื่น ๆ โปรดระบุ ................................................................. 09

ข้อมูลการทำเกษตรในปีที่ผ่านมา

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>พืช/</th>
<th>ข้าว</th>
<th>เหล้า</th>
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<th>ข้าวโพด</th>
<th>มัน สาปะหลัง</th>
<th>ยางพารา</th>
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<th>ยูคา</th>
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<td>ไม่เช่า 2</td>
<td>ไม่เช่า 2</td>
<td>ไม่เช่า 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ผลผลิตต่อไร่ประมาณ (บาท)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ผลผลิตต่อปี (บาท)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ค่าจ้าง คนงาน</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ค่าปุ๋ย</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ค่าปุ๋ย</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ค่าวัสดุ แมลง</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ค่าใช้จ่ายสิน ไร/บาท/ปี</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>รวมค่าทั้งหมด การผลิต</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
แหล่งเงินกู้ที่เข้าถึง

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>กลุ่มเงินกู้</th>
<th>รหัส</th>
<th>ถูกใช้ทำอะไร</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

เครื่องทุ่นแรงที่คุณใช้ในการเกษตร มีอะไรบ้าง เริ่มใช้มานานเท่าไรแล้ว?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>รถไถ</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>เครื่องเกี่ยวข้าว</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>เครื่องปั่นข้าว</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>อื่น ๆ โปรดระบุ</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

คุณหรือคนในครอบครัว มีใครข้ามไปรับจ้างทํานางที่ฝั่งไทยบ้างหรือไม่ จําได้หรือไม่ว่าเริ่มไปปี พ.ศ. ใด?

เคยไปรับจ้างที่หมู่บ้านฝั่งไทยชื่ออะไรบ้าง

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>บ้านฝั่งไทย</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>บ้านสว่าง</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>บ้านน้า</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>อื่น ๆ โปรดระบุ</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ไปทํางานให้นายจ้างคนเดิมหรือไม่

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ใช่</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ไม่ใช่</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ครอบครัวของคุณมีญาติที่ไทยหรือไม่

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ใช่ อยู่ที่บ้าน</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ไม่ใช่</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ครัวเรือนของคุณจ้างคนทําเกษตรหรือไม่ จ้างทําอะไร

| ไถนา | 1 |
| รกกล้า | 2 |
| ดำนา | 3 |
| เกี่ยวข้าว | |
| ทางฝั่ง | |
คุณไปต่างศิริที่บ้านฝั่งไทย เวลาที่ไปรับจ้างทำงานที่นั่นหรือเปล่า

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>เคย</th>
<th>ไม่เคย</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>กิจวัตรครั้ง.............วัน</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ช่วยวิธีการข้ามแดนไปไทย ระบุวิธีที่ทำมาบ่อยที่สุด

| ติดต่อผ่านเครื่องกระดิ้งของคุณเองในไทย | 01 |
| ไปกับเพื่อนบ้าน | 02 |
| โทรศัพท์จ้างคนไทย หรือนายจ้างโทรศัพท์มา | 03 |
| ไปกับคนขับเรือ | 04 |
| อื่น ๆ.......................................................... | 05 |

เอาเงินจากไทยลงทุนทำเกษตร

| เงินรายได้ในครัวเรือนตัวเอง | 01 |
| เงินที่ไปยืมมา | 02 |
| เงินที่คนในครอบครัวท่านทำงานนอกถิ่นส่งมาให้ใช้ | 03 |
| อื่น ๆ.......................................................... | 04 |

เคยถูกตำรวจจับเพราะไปทำงานที่บ้านฝั่งไทยหรือไม่

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>เคย</th>
<th>ไม่เคย</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.................</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Questionnaire Household survey in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonau  
(English)

**Questionnaire for Farmers in Ban Kaemkong and Ban Laonau**

House Number_______Ban Kaemkong 1  
Ban Laonau 2  
Tel.__________________________

Date of interview__________time: start__________ end________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>What is your household main occupation?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Main</strong></th>
<th><strong>Second</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture and Fisheries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading and enterprise</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaried jobs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labouring jobs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others (............)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Does your household own the land?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>If yes, how much?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 6.25 rai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.25-15 rai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-30 rai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 rai or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>At present, is there any household member working out of the village?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice long-term migration for......years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice circular migration......</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>In the past, is there any household member working out of the village?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practice long-term migration for...years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice circular migration......</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main occupation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd occupation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Live in or outside of village</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salary/month</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Share with family or not?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How much money giving for hh/month?</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household income/month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Below 2,000 baht</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2,000 - 4,999 baht</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5,000 - 9,999 baht</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How did you spend remittances? Give three ways of spending in order from the most the least.**

- Agricultural investment 01
- Domestic consumption 02
- Education 03
### Agricultural Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crops</th>
<th>Sticky Rice</th>
<th>Jasmine Rice</th>
<th>Corn</th>
<th>Cassava</th>
<th>Rubber</th>
<th>Sugarcane</th>
<th>Eucalyptus</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many rai?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent land or not</td>
<td>Rent 1</td>
<td>Rent 1</td>
<td>Rent 1</td>
<td>Rent 1</td>
<td>Rent 1</td>
<td>Rent 1</td>
<td>Rent 1</td>
<td>Rent 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
<td>Not rent 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yields/rai</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest (baht/rai)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labouring cost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fertilizer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pesticides</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for rent/year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total investment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did you make any loan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of loan</th>
<th>How do you spend the loan?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What kind of machines do you use in farming? When did you start using them?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standing tractor</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice harvest machine</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice spining machine</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other.........................</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you ever crossed the river to work in agricultural land in Ban Fangthai or other villages? When do you start going to get those jobs?

What are the name of villages in Thailand that you have ever gone to work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ban Kaemkong</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ban Laonau</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Savang</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other...............</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you go to work for the same Thai landowners in each year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you have any relative in Thailand?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Last year, did you hire any labour? What kind of jobs you hire them to work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ploughing</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pulling the rice seedings</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transplanting</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultivating</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weeding</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut sugarcane</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you ever stay over in the Thai village(s)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How do you get your wage labour jobs in Thailand? (one answer)

| Contact relatives in Thailand | 01 |
| Go with my neighbour          | 02 |
| Call the Thai landowners who I worked for last year, or they called me | 03 |
| Go with the boat driver       | 04 |
Please identify your source of money to invest in farmings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household incomes</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a loan</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remittances</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you ever been caught by the Thai police because of crossing the River to work in the Thai farm land?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


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