

## **The Economic Potentials of Ubon Ratchathani: Inter-Local Relations between Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia after the outbreak of COVID 19<sup>1</sup>**

**Thanachate Wisaijorn<sup>2</sup>**

**Received: 14 November 2022**

**Revised: 10 March 2023**

**Accepted: 21 March 2023**

### **Abstract**

A borderland city plays a role in international relations. Because Ubon Ratchathani borders Champassak, Salavan and Savannakhet in Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) and Preah Vihear in Cambodia, it is used as a case study of the proposed idea of inter-local relations. Before the outbreak of COVID 19, Ubon Ratchathani attracted a number of Cambodian and Lao people who boosted economic opportunities in the city. When the international border was closed in 2020 because of the pandemic, Ubon Ratchathani experienced a slowdown in international economic activity. After the border re-opened, inter-local trade between Ubon Ratchathani, Lao PDR and Cambodia was revived and continues to be more promising than the inter-local trade with Vietnam. To look for the ways to improve the inter-local economic activity of Ubon Ratchathani, this article employs discourse analysis and interviews with local Thai entrepreneurs, state officers and a scholar. Major trade relations with Champassak remain promising although it might take time for economic recovery because of inflation in Lao PDR. Trade relations with Preah Vihear rely significantly on the informal checkpoint of Chong An Ma, and the trade volume there remains low. Also, Ubon Ratchathani can contribute to the economic partnership between Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia by continuing to provide public health services to both countries. However, people from the Cambodia will have to rely on the formal checkpoint in the adjacent provinces of Sisaket and Surin. This article proposes that Ubon Ratchathani should promote the inter-local economic activity with Lao PDR through the trade of coffee beans and tapioca, as well as tourism industry. With Cambodia, the informal checkpoint of Chong An Ma should be upgraded as an official one so the trade volume has the potential to increase.

**Keywords** Borderland Studies, Thai-Lao Relations, Thai-Cambodian Relations, Inter-local Relations, COVID-19

---

<sup>1</sup> This research article is part of the research 'The economic potentials of Ubon Ratchathani: The international relations between Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia from 1973 to 2021'. It is financially supported by Research Section, Ubon Ratchathani University (2021/22)

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer, Ph.D., Faculty of Political Science, Ubon Ratchathani University, Ubon Ratchathani 34190. E-mail: thanachet.v@ubu.ac.th, thanachatew@gmail.com

He authored *Riverine Border Practices: People's Everyday Lives on the Thai-Lao Mekong Border* (2021) by Palgrave Macmillan and *Space and Time in Thai-Lao Relations: Borderlands in International Relations* (2022) by Routledge.

## 1. Introduction

In this article, the notion of inter-local relations is proposed to describe the economic potential of Ubon Ratchathani, which is a Thai province that borders the Lao PDR provinces of Champassak, Salavan and Savannakhet and the Cambodian province of Preah Vihear. The term inter-local relations imply that local actors in borderland provinces contribute to the economic relations at the international level not only because of their geographical locations adjacent to another state but also the interaction of the local actors and global economy. The line that separates two state spaces makes the border special because different legal, economic, cultural and political spheres lead to its unique characteristic (Nail, 2016). A border plays a significant role in international politics in terms of trade and investment that differs from the central area of the state (Sankhamanee, 2018). In terms of people's movement, the boundary line is important because cheaper labour tends to move from the space of slower economic sphere to a faster one (High, 2009, Rigg, 2005; 2007; Rungmanee, 2014). These phenomena go in line with the argument by Donnan and Wilson (1999) that underground economy is most salient at borders, on the one hand. Similarly, underground economy plays a crucial role in Thai-Lao and Thai-Cambodian borderlands (Kasetsiri, 1997). For example, undocumented labourers are common in the border areas of the Thai Mukdahan province which is adjacent to Savannakhet in Lao PDR. Even in the borderland of Surin in Thailand and Oddar Mancheay, smuggling is witnessed from time to time (Liamdee, 2020). In addition, despite the venue being local, people in the borderlands have interactions that cut across the state boundary. A number of scholars whose research focus on the borderlands argue that people's movements in the borderland are influenced by globalisation (Krisnachuta & Srisupun, 2019; Pongsawat, 2007; Sankhamanee, 2018; Santasombat, 2008). With such interaction, this article proposes that citizens' movements in the borderland is not constituted only by local forces but also global capitalism. Hence, the local, international and global interactions are interrelated.

Political actors in Ubon Ratchathani, despite being local, are considered international, especially after the borders re-opened in 2022 as this city has the border provinces of Lao PDR and Cambodia as its major partners. However, the chance to promote inter-local trade with Vietnam will remain significantly in doubt because the two states do not share the same border. Nevertheless, the reason Vietnam is included in the analysis is because it is part of the former Indochinese state, together with Lao PDR and Cambodia (Ivarsson, 2008). During the Cold War, often, Vietnam was influential in directing domestic policy of Lao PDR and even Cambodia that directly border Ubon Ratchathani (Evans, 2002). In addition, there is a big community of Vietnamese diaspora that contributed to the economic growth of this border city (Kuboonyar-aragsa, Boonchai, & Boonchai, 2018). This article argues that from 1989, when Thai Prime Minister Chatichai

Choonhavan promoted the famous slogan of changing the battlegrounds of Indochina to the marketplaces, to 2020 which was the year when the COVID 19 pandemic affected the region significantly, Ubon Ratchathani regularly attracted a number of Cambodian and Lao people. As a result, the then inter-local border-crossings boosted the international economic opportunities of Ubon Ratchathani. However, the outbreak of COVID 19 in 2020 resulted in the border closing between Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia. Ubon Ratchathani had to experience an economic slowdown at the level of inter-local relations during that time.

To answer the research question, which looks for the ways to improve the economic potential of Ubon Ratchathani with its neighbours, this article employs the methods of discourse analysis and interviews with Thai local entrepreneurs, state officers and a scholar in borderland anthropology. While it is suggested that trade relations with Vietnam is limited, major trade relations with Lao PDR through the province of Champassak using the Chong Mek – Vang Tao Checkpoint look promising. The findings of this research article suggest that economic growth through the Thai district of Na Tan in Ubon Ratchathani and the Lao Lakhonepheng in Salavan is limited, despite its formal border checkpoint. Similarly, the trade relations with the Cambodian border province of Preah Vihear cannot contribute much to the inter-local economic growth because the volume of the trade across the Chong An Ma Border Checkpoint, which connects the Thai district of Nam Yuen with the Cambodian Jom Crasan, remains low. This article proposes that the informal checkpoint at Chong An Ma be upgraded as an official one so that more people with higher volume of trade can make border-crossings. At the moment, it is expected that Cambodian people who make crossing will rely on the formal checkpoint of Chong Sangam in the adjacent province which is Sisaket and Chong Chom in Surin. Also, Ubon Ratchathani should promote opportunities for the inter-local trade of coffee beans and tapioca with Lao PDR. It should continue acting as an area that provides public health services to both Lao PDR and Cambodia.

This article is divided into five sections. The introduction discusses the background and provides the overview of the article. The second section reviews the literature on the economic potentials of Ubon Ratchathani and neighbouring states in the past. It also explains how the interaction of local people is constituted by international and global capitalism. This section will be a springboard to argue that, despite being a border province, Ubon Ratchathani can contribute to the economic partnership between Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia. The inter-local relations with Lao PDR and Cambodia are promising. Meanwhile, it is very difficult to achieve any successful trade outcomes with Vietnam because the two nation-states do not share the physical border. The third section addresses the article's primary research question, which looks for the ways to improve the economic potentials of Ubon Ratchathani with its neighbours. The fourth section

argues that the most promising trade link for Ubon Ratchathani will be with the Lao PDR province of Champassak, rather than the Lao PDR provinces of Salavan and Savannakhet. People who make border-crossings from Cambodia usually employ the border checkpoints in Surin and Sisaket, rather than the unofficial one in Ubon Ratchathani. The final section is the conclusion of this article.

## **2. From local to global: The inter-local relations of Ubon Ratchathani as a borderland province**

When the topic of economic and political relations among Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia is discussed in mainstream international relations scholarship, the focus is on the policy making process of their central governments (Mephokee, Roopsom, & Klinsukhon, 2015; Ngaosyvathan & Ngaosyvathn, 1994; Oesterheld, 2014; Oldfield, 1998; Paribatra, 1984; Paribatra, 2013; Pawakapan, 2013; Sirikrai, 2007; Tonlerd 1998). However, instead of focusing on the central government in Bangkok, this article shifts the focus to Ubon Ratchathani. In other words, the relations with the neighbouring nation-states that include Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam will be narrated from the eyes of the borderlands.

Charoensri (2022) argued that mainstream International Relations often focused on the international structures, capabilities of the state and distribution of power in international politics. Meanwhile the role of city is often overlooked. Yet, the discipline that focuses on a city tends to examine the actors at the local levels but overlooks the interconnectedness of the city and international politics. This article bridges this gap by proposing the notion of inter-local relations with the analysis of Ubon Ratchathani. A citizen plays a role in international interactions and could be related to the concept of global citizenship in two aspects; a sphere of terrorism and international economic connectivity. For the former, Bamrungsuk and Kunthic (2020) proposed the idea of urban terrorism. Accordingly, a city becomes a new floor of international battlefield, instead of rural area. This proposal went in line with the concept of biopolitical border practice proposed by Vaughan-Williams (2009). He said that a mega city like London was the venue for international terrorism. For the latter, Charoensri (2020) explained the notion of regional connectivity. When a city provides basic infrastructure that facilitates people's trans-border movements, this is called economic regionalisation. Public services such as hospital and schools will benefit people from a land-locked country who want to get access to the sea such as Lao PDR. Specifically, when a government proposed the implementation of special economic zone in a border city, the inter-state movements are even more supported by the basic infrastructure funded by the government (Krisnachuta & Srisupun, 2019). The interconnectedness of Mukdahan of Thailand and Savannakhet of Lao PDR is the example of how the concept of special economic zone is implemented. The movements of the people of the two cities are

constituted by the forces of both local and international actors from Thailand, Lao PDR and the four other Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) nation-state such as China, Burma, Cambodia and Vietnam.<sup>3</sup> The Thai government's programme of Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Mukdahan to support the East-West Economic Corridor's construction of the road which connects Burma, Thailand, Lao PDR and Vietnam certainly affects the lives of local citizens. This interrelated economic connection of local, international and global capitalism can be compared with the case study of displaced people on the Thai-Burmese border. According to Pongsawat (2007), the US economic sanction on the military regime of Burma did not affect the lives of the military elites much. However, its impacts fall upon the lives of people on the ground with economic hardship in the country. This resulted in a number of people having to cross the border to Thailand not only for better opportunities but also for survival.

This article takes the approach of Charoensri (2022) in combination with Krisnachuta and Srisupun (2019) to argue that a borderland city contributes to the economic connectivity at the international level. However, the notion of inter-local relations applied with Ubon Ratchathani differs from that of Charoensri (2022) because Ubon Ratchathani is not a mega city. In addition, the stance of this article differs from Mukdahan as examined by Krisnachuta and Srisupun (2019) because Ubon Ratchathani has never been included in SEZ. However, Ubon Ratchathani matters internationally because of the local actors' movements in the borderlands which cut across the state boundary. This section, accordingly, will scrutinise the two following issues: the definition of a borderland and the inter-local economic potentials of Ubon Ratchathani as borderland.

### ***3.1 Territory, boundary, border and borderland***

To understand what 'borderland' means and how Ubon Ratchathani is identified as a borderland, the three technical terms of territory, boundary, and border need to be discussed. Territory and boundary have similar meanings. They refer to the 'line' used to separate two nation-states. Territory has a connotation of the exercise of power by the state as it comes from the Latin words 'terrere,' which means to terrorise on the one hand and 'terra', which means land, on the other (Elden, 2009; Connolly, 1995;). Territory also implies the concept of territorial integrity of a sovereign state. The term boundary does not have an intensive political connotation when it is used in the context of international politics. In short, territory and boundary refer to the 'line' drawn to separate two state spaces. The term border, however, implies more of a zone than a line. But the zone must be adjacent to the aforementioned line.

---

<sup>3</sup> This article employs the term Burma instead of Myanmar to express disagreement towards the policy of the military junta that changed the country's name in the 1990s.

When the term ‘border’ is followed by the suffix ‘land’, it implies a connection between border cities in more than one nation-state. The two border cities, despite being in two different nation-states, have unique characteristics that are different from the relations of the central government that represent the country. For example, as pointed out by borderland anthropologists Donnan and Wilson (1999), there are two cities of Laredo along the US-Mexico border. One is located in Texas, United States and its twin city Nuevo Laredo, is in Tamaulipas, Mexico. The Rio Grande is the river used to be the territorial line. The two cities, despite being in two different nation-states, share a common identity – they have the same baseball team that represents the two cities. Such phenomena are defined by another borderland scholar Thomas Nail (2016) as a Third Space. He used the analogy of when a piece of paper is cut and hence torn apart to describe the Third Space. The cut does not only separate the paper into two pieces but also forms its own space. Similarly, this happens when land is separated by the territorial line of two national spaces. That very line and the zone adjacent to it forms its own space and identity, the borderland. There, people have everyday border-crossing activities.

Indeed, this article proposes that borderlands play a significant role in international politics, despite being local. As Charoensri (2022) argues, it is not only the state but also the city that matters in international arena because of more inter-connected modern infrastructure. Its location as a borderland on the edge of the state should not be overlooked. Borders not only separate but also bridge different nation-states. To understand the political connotation of the term borderland, the work of Jonathan Goodhand (2005, 2008) is worth considering. In his research on the borderland of Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbours, Goodhand (2005, 2008) stated that analysing the space that covers the areas of two border cities in two different nation-states will shed light on the relations of those two states. Consequently, this article coins the term centripetal approach, and argues that this concept was proposed in the analysis of inter-state relations in the work of Goodhand (2005, 2008). This approach indeed adds to the analysis of centrifugal approach which focuses on the foreign policy promulgated from the central government. There are different political dimensions in the borderland experienced by people who actually live in the border zone. Explaining the Thai-Lao relations, this framework is not attached to the centrifugal points of view of the capital cities of the two nation-states – Bangkok and Vientiane (Wisajorn, 2018). The analysis is shifted from the capital city to the borderlands of Khong Chiam (Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand) and Sanasomboun (Champassak, Lao PDR). It means that their local relations are at the same time international.

### ***3.2 The inter-local relations of Ubon Ratchathani in the international arena***

The literature on international interactions of Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia has largely focused on state-actors since 1953, as it was the year France officially left Indochina. While recent debates in International Relations have increasingly recognised the role of non-state actors such as transnational corporations and international organisations (Mephokee, Roopsom, & Klinsukhon, 2015), this article proposes that non-state actors along the borderlands, should also be academically paid attention to. Despite being local actors, they play a role in international politics as well.

To employ the framework of Goodhand (2005), political analysis of the borderlands that focuses on the central government is described in this article as centrifugal. Meanwhile, if the border is not treated as peripheral space and the political analysis uses the borderland as the starting point to study the interactions among the adjacent states in the area, it is described as centripetal. International Relations using the centrifugal perspective was taught for the first time in the 1930s. According to Paribatra (2019), at Thammasat University in 1934, the academic programmes at that time were intended to produce diplomats. Therefore, the texts were mainly about diplomatic relations and international law. Lecturers in International Relations at Thammasat University were renowned diplomats such as Thanat Khoman and Prince Narathip Praphanphong. It is not surprising that the centrifugal perspective of International Relations is academically expected. Considering the academic and political contexts at that time, it means that border provinces such as Ubon Ratchathani, which is the case study of this article, were viewed as peripheral areas of the state. Yet, Ubon Ratchathani matters internationally. This article argues that despite being local, its location on the borderland makes its relations with neighbouring nation-states international. Centripetally speaking, this situation is regarded as inter-local relations.

This article takes 1893 as the year that Ubon Ratchathani became a borderland of Siam and French Indochina. It was not only the year the Franco-Siamese Treaty was signed, but also the year bureaucratic reforms were initiated under the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Bunnag, 1968). The territorial border based on the concept of Westphalian space of the state was expected. The deepest point of the Mekong known as *thalweg* in international law was used to separate the spaces of Siam and French Indochina for the first time (Kasetsiri, 2011). This was in line with the roles of what Treaties of Westphalia did in Europe that the two states must be distinct, disjointed and separated from each other (Ruggie, 1998). At that time, a number of ethnic Lao people on both banks of the Mekong were abruptly separated by the territorial border (Iijima, 2018). Ngaosyvathan and Ngaosyvathan (1994) even argued there are more Lao people on the right bank of the Mekong in the present-day Northeastern Thailand than in present-day Lao

PDR. Thailand, then known as Siam, became a modern state and Ubon Ratchathani became a Siamese province adjacent to French Indochina (Pavie, 1902, 1903).

During World War Two, Ubon Ratchathani was affected by the international politics because of the foreign policy of Thailand, whose name was changed from Siam under the Phibun Regime. With the support of Japan, the Province of Champassak in French Indochina was annexed by Bangkok (Charoenvattananukul, 2020; Strate, 2015;). Parts of Ubon Ratchathani were accordingly replaced by Champassak as the border province of Thailand. However, after Japan lost the war and Champassak was returned to France, Ubon Ratchathani became a border province again (High, 2009). As World War Two ended and the ideological conflicts of the Cold War began in the region, Ubon Ratchathani played an important role in international politics again. While the Cold War was primarily a conflict between the United States, which supported liberal democracy, and the Soviet Union, which supported communism and socialism, Ubon Ratchathani became a strategic location for the two major powers (Kesboonchoo-Mead, 2007; Philips, 2017; Tonlerd, 1998;). Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base (URTAFB), which is around 70 kilometres from Laos, was employed by the United States Air Force (USAF) to drop bombs in Laos during the Vietnam War (Ravenstein, 1974). After the US withdrawal in 1973, North and South Vietnam were united and became a communist state. The Lao Monarchy was overthrown, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) was established. Afterwards, Cambodia was ruled by the communist regime of Khmer Rouge. It means the former states of French Indochina were under communist and socialist rule. Accordingly, Thailand was described as a frontline state between the two worlds of the ideological conflict at that time (Paribatra, 1984; Phonprapai, 2021). One side was controlled by a supposedly liberal democracy, although one might argue that Thailand was at times ruled by a military dictator. The other side included Kampuchea and Lao PDR, which were under the socialist and communist camp, either under the Soviet Union or China. Indeed, Ubon Ratchathani as a border province was part of that very frontline as described by Paribatra (1984). It means the province played a crucial role in the Cold War conflicts.

On the other side of the Mekong, after 1975, no private property was allowed in Lao PDR but all had to be owned by the state (Tonlerd, 1997). As the socialist style of collective farming was implemented, a significant number of Laos fled the country (Evans, 2002). This happened in Southern Laos the most, especially in Champassak. As a result, Ubon Ratchathani was one of many areas that received the exodus of Lao people. From 1979-1986, the then Lao President Kaysone Phomvihane rethought Lao people were not yet ready for such a hardcore campaign of a socialist state, as most Laos were peasants. According to Marxism,



a capitalist state was a pre-condition before a classless society of a socialist state. Therefore, socialist campaigns were relaxed and private property was allowed at certain extent in Lao PDR at that time (Tonlerd, 1997).

The economic and political trends at the global, international and local level continued to be constitutive. When the policy of glasnost and perestroika were implemented in Soviet Union and Doi Moi in Vietnam, the two communist states were more open to foreign capitalism and international market competition. In 1986, Lao PDR followed the footsteps of the economic policy of both Soviet Union and Vietnam (Tonlerd, 1997). Tonlerd (1997) argued that the policy of Chintanakanmai translated as New Economic Mechanism (NEM) is a Lao style of perestroika. In late 1980s, there were more economic connections with Thailand along the Mekong. Hotel and tourism industry started to flourish. In the south of Lao PDR, Savannakhet and Champassak which border Mukdahan, Amnat Charoen and Ubon Ratchathani were supported in terms of tourism, trade and agriculture. In 1989, the then Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan proposed the idea of turning battlegrounds into the marketplace (Erlanger, 1989, Phonprapai, 2021). It signalled that civil wars in the communist and socialist states of Lao PDR, Vietnam and Cambodia were over. International trade was expected to flourish. The inter-local relations have similarly developed. Moreover, the economic project of Emerald Triangle that covers the area of Ubon Ratchathani, Champassak, and Preah Vihear was planned although it has not been yet successful (Sanew, 2019). To the north, the First Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge which connected Nong Khai and Vientiane was opened in 1994 which implied the two economic spaces were connected (Ngaosyvathn & Ngaosyvathn, 1994).

Although Thailand and Vietnam are not geographically adjacent to each other, the two states had direct interactions from time to time during the Cold War. For example, the district of Nam Yuen in Ubon Ratchathani was a fierce battlefield during the Cold War. It borders Munpamok in Champassak, Lao PDR and Jom Crasan in Preah Vihear, Cambodia. The Thai Army played a crucial role in that area as it had to contain the incursion of Vietnamese troops in Lao PDR and Cambodia. The victory of the communist Vietnamese from the north and the fall of Saigon led to the Vietnamese unification in 1975 (Lawrence, 2008; Taylor, 2013). Laos also became a communist state as the communist movements of Pathet Lao which was very close to the Communist Party of Vietnam overthrew the Lao monarchy the same year (Evans, 2002). Meanwhile, the pro-China communist movement of Khmer Rouge could establish its government in Phnom Penh and put the centrally-economic plan into practice. That led to the genocide of million Cambodians (Kiernan, 1998). A significant number of Cambodians were displeased with the Khmer Rouge regime and turned towards another communist state which was Vietnam (Tasukonth, 2015).

At that time, the structure of global geopolitics started to change because of the Sino-Soviet split (Herz, 1975). Despite being in the same communist camp, in 1979 Vietnam supported by the Soviet Union invaded Kampuchea under the Khmer Rouge (Chandler, 2008). The troops of Khmer Rouge, despite being supported by China, were defeated and had to retreat to many areas of the Thai-Cambodian border (Liamdee, 2020). After the US withdrew its troop in 1973, the Thai state at that time re-directed its foreign policy and became a major ally of China. As a result, it had to support the Khmer Rouge militants along the Thai-Cambodian border. With a significant number of Vietnamese troops in Lao PDR and Cambodia, the Thai state was described as a frontline state (Paribatra, 1984). Ubon Ratchathani was one of the battlegrounds in which 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the Thai state, Khmer Rouge, right wing Lao militants and Vietnamese troops in Lao PDR and Cambodia took part. After the Cold War ended, there were changes in international politics that affected the international relations in the region. Direct interactions of Vietnamese military with the Thai military in Ubon Ratchathani terminated. The government of Hanoi withdrew its troops from Cambodia in 1989 (Cima, 1990). The United Nations Peace Keeping forces arrived in Cambodia to restore peace and order. It means that direct inter-local relations between Ubon Ratchathani and Vietnamese actors were limited. However, the Vietnamese diaspora in the city still played a role in boosting the economy of the city (Kuboonya-aragsa, Boonchai, et al., 2018). The Vietnamese Association of Ubon Ratchathani was established so that it cooperated with the local government in terms of tourism development and even Thai-Vietnamese diplomatic relations.

With the new millennium, attacks at the border checkpoint in the village of Chong Mek in Ubon Ratchathani which borders the village of Vang Tao in Champassak, Lao PDR reconfirmed the fact that Ubon Ratchathani is an international political venue, despite being local (Phookongchi, 2003; Theeravit & Semyaem, 2002;). A group of Thai citizens with Lao ethnicity and Lao citizens living in Thai territory launched a military attack on a government Lao building. They claimed that they were related to the group of the Royal Lao Government that existed before 1975 and were fighting on behalf the royal Lao regime, even though the Cold War was over. After a few hours, the Lao military officers reclaimed the building on the Lao side and twenty-eight militants crossed the border back to the Thai territory. They were later arrested by the Thai police (Phookongchi, 2003).

The political unrest on the Thai-Lao border was short-lived. People from Lao PDR and Cambodia continued to travel to the Thai border city of Ubon Ratchathani. As argued by Rigg (2005), a land with more economic opportunities attracts peoples from a land with less. Due to Thailand's higher levels of economic development, significant numbers of Lao people cross the border for economic

opportunities (Rigg, 2005; High, 2009). Lao people were accordingly introduced to the market economy, and Thailand, which is located on the opposite side of the Mekong, became a desirable destination. Some search for jobs, but not all are legally registered. In 2001, the number of illegal migrants from Lao PDR to Thailand was 58,411 (Pholsena & Banomyong, 2006). Recently, Ubon Ratchathani has received significant number of undocumented labourers from Lao PDR and Cambodia, according to anthropological research by Lyu, Hirsch, et al. (2013) and Natedao Taotawin (2019).

Similarly, Liamdee (2020) analysed the people's mobilities that cut across the Thai-Cambodian borders of Surin (Thailand) and Oddor Meanchey (Cambodia). Wisaijorn (2021) analysed the everyday undocumented border-crossings on the Thai-Lao border near the towns of Khong Chiam and Sanasomboun and argued that these movements matter internationally. Indeed, the aforementioned anthropologist points of view examined the marginalised people's movements that cut across the state boundary. The fact that they are marginalised cannot be ignored because their marginality is co-constitutive with the policy formulated by the central government. Centripetally, Ubon Ratchathani and the adjacent border provinces in Lao PDR and Cambodia – Champassak, Salavan, Savannaekhet and Preah Vihear are considered venues where international political and economic relations take place, despite being local. This is co-constitution of the local and international analysis of politics is mentioned very little in the literatures on International Relations as a discipline. Aiming at answering the research questions that look for the ways in which the economic relations of Ubon Ratchathani and its neighbouring nation-states could be promoted, this article proposes that the analysis of the inter-local relations should be academically considered.

### **3. Methodology<sup>4</sup>**

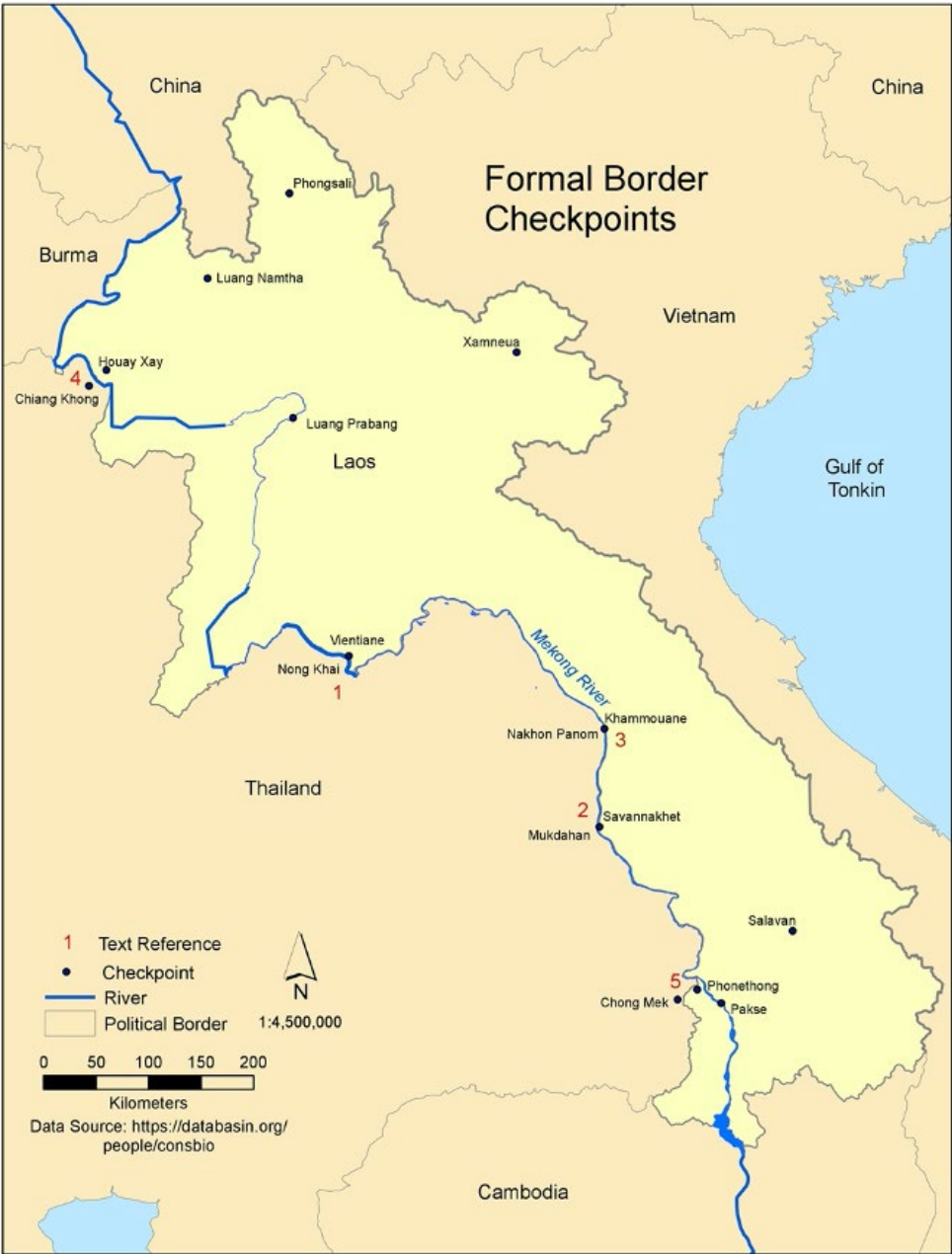
This section discusses the methodology that guided the design and implementation of this research project. It is organised into five sub-sections. Firstly, it focuses on the research settings, Ubon Ratchathani in Thailand, Champassak, Salavan and Savannakhet in Lao PDR and Preah Vihear in Cambodia. Secondly, it discusses the access to and recruitment of research participants in Thailand and Lao PDR. Thirdly, the sampling criteria and the profiles of research participants is described. The main research method is interview, which is in section four. The fifth sub-section is about analysis and interpretation.

---

<sup>4</sup> I received ethical approval from Ubon Ratchathani University in May 2022. Ethical consideration was taken as part of the research project. The informants were informed that their information would be recorded as part of this research project.

3.1 Research setting

Figure 1: Map of Thailand and Lao PDR



Source: Wisajorn (2021)

Ubon Ratchathani (No. 5 on the map) strategically borders Lao PDR and Cambodia. The confluence of the three nation-states is referred to by the Tourism Authority of Thailand as ‘The Emerald Triangle’. Twelve kilometres away from that very spot is the area known as Chong Bok, where fierce battlefields during the Cold War took place (Supatn, 2012). With the ideological conflicts of the Cold War over, and the slogan of changing the battlefields to the marketplace announced by the then Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan in 1989 (Phonprapai, 2021), prosperous economic cooperation was expected to flourish in the area. Indeed, the Emerald Triangle Cooperation Project was established in the early 2000s to promote the tourism industry, economy and politics of Thailand, Cambodia and Lao PDR (Supatn, 2012).

Accordingly, Ubon Ratchathani became a key gateway, as it has two official border checkpoints with Lao PDR; Pak Saeng in Na Tan and Chong Mek in Sirinthon. Five informal checkpoints are located in front of Khemmarat District Office in Khemmarat, Ban Song Khon in Pho Sai, Ban Khan Tha Kwian and Ban Dan in Khong Chiam and Ban Charoen Phattana in Buntharik known as Chong Ta U (Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce, 2020).<sup>5</sup>

---

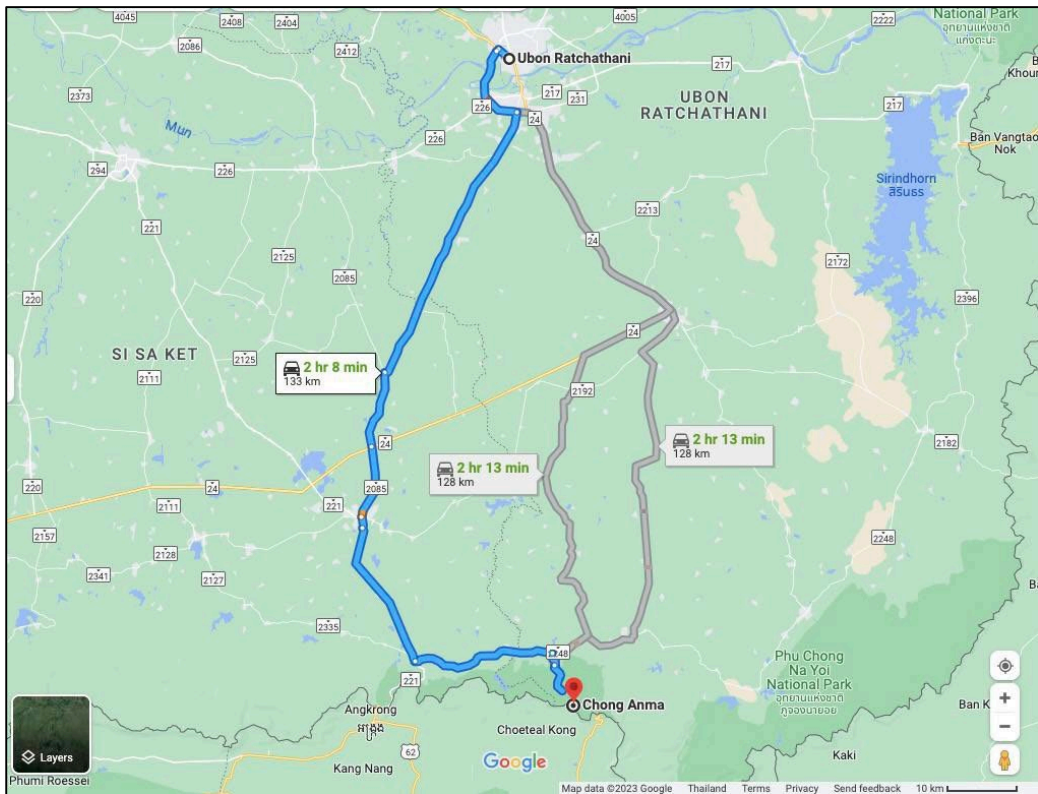
<sup>5</sup> According to the interview with the Office of Provincial Commercial Affairs, there are two official checkpoints and eight unofficial ones. This information differs from the data provided by Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce (2020).

**Figure 2: Map of Thai-Lao border formal checkpoints (Red) and informal border checkpoints (Green)**



Source: Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce (2020)

**Figure 3: The Map of Ubon Ratchathani City Centre and the informal border checkpoint of Chong An Ma**



Source: Google (n.d.)

Another informal checkpoint, or Dan Prapheni, which borders Cambodia is known as Chong An Ma. As will be shown in this article, the formal checkpoint of Chong Sangam in Sisaket and Chong Chom in Surin will be important routes for Cambodians even though their destination is Ubon Ratchathani.

### 3.2 Discourse analysis

The method of discourse analysis by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) is employed to detect how the economic potential of Ubon Ratchathani has been defined since the outbreak of COVID 19 in the finding section. The analysis of academic texts on relations between Thailand, Cambodia and Lao PDR in the previous section is used to provide the context of inter-local relations of Ubon Ratchathani. That context will then be a springboard to answer the research questions with regards to its present-days economic potential with neighbouring nation-states.

According to Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), there are three dimensions to discourse analysis: text analysis, discursive and social practice. This article



focuses only on the first one, as the coverage of discursive and social practice will be left to future research which requires ethnographic fieldwork. As proposed by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), text analysis includes the indication of ‘goal’ and ‘value’ of the border discourse between the two states. The particular time, defined as ‘circumstance’, of when the text was produced will also be brought into the analysis.

Discourse is the representation of everything that contains meaning (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987). Social theory scholars should pay attention to it because what happens in a society has meaning. Discourse is about how the world is narrated and understood (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). It is a process to analyse how significance is produced through practices. It means that both linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions are employed in the study of discourse analysis. What to analyse could be texts in interviews, policies, organisations and institutions. According to Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) and Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), the first step of discourse analysis is to examine text production which focuses on ‘goal’, ‘value’, and ‘circumstance’. Secondly, the linguistic function of the text is studied, focusing on attributes such as the grammar of the text. Thirdly and fourthly, it looks at how people consume the text and subsequently implement it in daily life. Fifthly, it looks at how the text and society are constitutive.

Accordingly, this article aims to look at how the interviewees in this research project responded to the questions on how Ubon Ratchathani plays a role in international relations and its economic potential with neighbouring countries. Drawing on Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), this article looks at the data to detect the ‘goal’, ‘value’ and ‘circumstances’ that produce the meaning of the location as a border province. The ‘goal’, ‘value’, and ‘circumstances’ in the ways in which the location of Ubon Ratchathani is understood, described and narrated will be analysed – should the economic potential of Ubon Ratchathani be considered local or international?

### **3.3 Interviews**

In this research, open-ended questions for the interviews are constructed and categorised into three groups. Firstly, questions were asked about the informants’ thoughts about the economic potential of Ubon Ratchathani and its neighbours, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam before the outbreak of COVID 19. The questions are about the types of obstacles and opportunities that existed for international trade. The second group contains questions about the informants’ knowledge on the border trade and the effects of the border closure that lasted from 2020 to 2022. The third group consisted of questions focusing on the economic potential of Ubon Ratchathani after the re-opening of the international border checkpoints in 2022. Despite being situated at the local level, the informants were asked about the challenges and opportunities in international



trade of Ubon Ratchathani with the border provinces of Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam. The interview with the informants took between forty minutes to one hour.

The interviews include active and sensitive listening and repeated feedback. In active listening, the informants' responses are listened to carefully. The details of the interview, the content, and the meanings in the context of the research setting were recorded and summarised as suggested by De Walt & De Walt (2011). In the interview, the conversation flowed smoothly, and the researcher maintained eye contact in a non-intimidating manner with the interviewees. Also, the interviewer was attentive to what was being discussed at the time of the interview. The last words of sentences uttered by the interviewee was repeated with a question-tag tonality. This repetition was to imply to the interviewee that the topic being discussed at that time was relevant to the research questions. However, there is no question-tag tonality in Thai, so the last word was restated with the question-noun-phrase instead.

### ***3.4 Research informants***

Ten informants were interviewed. They comprised the actors from both the private and government sector. The information provided by the former sheds light on how business entrepreneurs see the potentials of Ubon Ratchathani in the inter-local arena. Meanwhile, the latter gives details on how the government sectors could provide assistance to private sectors in order to boost the economy of the borderland provinces in Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia. They include the Provincial Governor of Ubon Ratchathani, five state officers from the Office of Provincial Commercial Affairs, the Vice President of the Provincial Chamber of Commerce (who is also the owner of a hotel business), a former state officer at the Office of Passport Division, a business entrepreneur in the tourism sector and a scholar in Borderland Studies.

## **4. Findings**

This section answers the research questions of this article, which looks for ways to improve the economic potential of Ubon Ratchathani with the borderland provinces in Cambodia and Lao PDR. It also seeks the economic potentials of Ubon Ratchathani with Vietnamese provinces. It argues that although Ubon Ratchathani is a province in Thailand, which is considered a local entity, its economic potential should be considered in terms of inter-local relations. With the method of discourse analysis as framed by Fairclough & Fairclough (2012), the interpretation of the 'value' of Ubon Ratchathani implies the hope that the city develops greater international economic potential. In 1989, the slogan of changing the battlefields to the marketplace in Indochina was announced. As Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam are former French Indochina colonies, the slogan suggests

that an increase in trade between Ubon Ratchathani and the border provinces of Lao PDR and Cambodia, as well as Vietnam is expected. In 2022, the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised an academic seminar on the relationship between Thailand and the former Indochinese colonies. It was even argued that a new goal is to upgrade the relationship as partnership among the three states.

All the informants in this research share a similar ‘goal’, the economic success of this borderland province. Concerning ‘circumstance’, after the end of the border closure because of COVID 19 in 2022, Ubon Ratchathani is expected, with Cambodia to the south and Lao PDR to the east, to play a role in international relations again. While it is suggested that the trade relations with Vietnam will remain limited, the rebirth of the economic relations through the land checkpoint with Champassak (Lao PDR) is expected to be more fruitful than through the riverine checkpoint in Na Tan (Thailand) and Salavan (Lao PDR). Meanwhile, the trade volume between Ubon Ratchathani (Thailand) and Savannakhet (Lao PDR) is not expected that much because there is no official checkpoint that could bridge the two cities. However, Mukdahan and Savannekhet are expected to be more economically interrelated instead (Krisnachuta and Srisupun, 2019). This expectation of a border province indeed goes in line with what Charoensri (2022) proposed. If basic infrastructure is sufficiently developed, regional connectivity can be achieved and it could benefit a city in a land-locked country like Lao PDR. Accordingly, the import of coffee beans and tapioca is promising as the Lao province of Champassak is the key provider to Ubon Ratchathani. To the south, the district of Nam Yuen which borders Lao PDR and Cambodia used to be the venue of fierce battlefields during the Cold War (Ishida, 2012). In 2000, Emerald Triangle was a project initiated by the central government of Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia to facilitate the international scheme of GMS and EWEC. Indeed, basic infrastructure was aimed to bridge the six riverine nation-states along the Mekong; China, Burma, Lao PDR, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. To be more specific, the cooperation of Emerald Triangle covers the area of seven cities. Three are from Cambodia which include Stung Treng, Preah Vihear, and Oddor Meanchey. Two are from Lao PDR; Salavan and Champassak. Ubon Ratchathani and Sisaket from Thailand are also included in the project. Known as a triple border, Emerald Triangle was aimed at promoting the cooperation in tourism, economy and politics but its concrete implementation is doubted because of the uncleared landmines and roads are not in a good condition. Moreover, underdeveloped logistics and different legal mechanism of the three nation-states are major obstacles (Sanew, 2019). However, this article agrees with Sanew (2019) that even after the border-opening of the Thai, Lao and Cambodian state in 2022, the trade volume through this channel of border-crossing will remain low if compared with other border checkpoints.

The trade relations of Ubon Ratchathani with the Cambodian border province of Preah Vihear are considered limited because the route at Chong An Ma in Nam Yuen (Thailand) and Jom Crasan in Preah Vihear (Cambodia) is still an informal checkpoint. According to Srisupan (2020), the Thai-Cambodian trade volume through Chong An Ma will be limited not only because the checkpoint is informal but also the practice of the border regulations by the Thai and Cambodian state tends to be arbitrary. Nevertheless, the public health service in Ubon Ratchathani is still popular among both Lao and Cambodian people. A lot of Cambodians rely on the formal checkpoint in the adjacent provinces of Ubon Ratchathani which are Sisaket and Surin.

#### ***4.1 Economic potentials with Lao PDR***

##### **4.1.1 Circumstance**

In 2019, the border trade volume between Thailand and Lao PDR was 197,446,53 million baht (Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce, 2020). Major exports from Thailand include gasoline, agricultural and industrial products. Meanwhile, Thailand imported fuel, gold, copper, vegetable and electronic devices such as telephone, radio, and television from Lao PDR (Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce, 2020). The highest trade volume of the official border checkpoint is witnessed at Nong Khai (Thailand) and Vientiane (Lao PDR) international border checkpoint which is 59,302.69 million baht. The border checkpoint of Mukdahan-Savannakhet ranks the second which is 56,391.60 million baht. In 2021, Nong Khai and Mukdahan are still the areas of the highest volume of border trade. Nan ranks the third and Ubon Ratchathani at Chong Mek official border checkpoint the fourth respectively (Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce, 2022).

Considering the proposed concept of inter-local relations, the province of Mukdahan (Thailand) and Savannakhet (Lao PDR) are good examples. With the hope to boost the economy according to the norm of economic neo-liberalism, the province of Mukdahan was announced to be under the plan of SEZ. In 2014. Mukdahan became an important border city and the citizens are connected to international capitalism because it lies on the edge of EWEC that binds Burma, Thailand, Lao PDR and Vietnam. Krisnachuta and Srisupun (2019) argued that local people were not simply passive with the implementation of SEZ which was promulgated from the centre of the state. They negotiated with the Thai government arguing that many areas would not be fit to be included as SEZ. To them, natural resources such as twenty species of local vegetables and fifteen species of insects would be damaged by the implementation of SEZ. These local insects and vegetables are the sources of food as well as income to the local people.

In addition, the ways in which the local people make border-crossing must be noted. According to the PhD dissertation from Sydney University, Soimart Rungmanee (2014), the people in the borderland of Mukdahan- Savannakhet have a close relationship. Lao people would cross the border to the Thai side to look for jobs without being granted a work permit. Strictly interpreted, that is perceived by the Bangkok and Vientiane administrations as illegal. However, that kind of border crossing has been allowed as the police would have to arrest most entrepreneurs in Mukdahan, which would be impossible. Rungmanee (2014) described this kind of situation as ‘illegal’ but ‘licit’. People there have everyday border activities that cut across the Thai-Lao border. Their languages, Thai and Lao, are mutually understandable. They, moreover, have similar taste in music, food and pop culture. Similarly, Taotawin (2019) argued that in the district of Chanuman, in Amnat Charoen which is located to the north of Ubon Ratchathani, Lao labourers from Song Khone, Savannakhet are hired by local Thai farmers. This is because the wages of the Thai labourers are often higher than those from Lao PDR. Therefore, the movements of the Thai-Lao people in the area are very common along the Mekong. Taotawin (2019) has even argued that the people in the area intermingle to such an extent that the concept of territorial integrity is not often expressed by them.

This situation of inter-local border trade is further exemplified with the case of Ubon Ratchathani, as it borders three Lao provinces, Champassak, Salavan and Savannakhet. According to the Office of Provincial Commercial Affairs, Ubon Ratchathani has two official border checkpoints and eight informal checkpoints known by locals as Dan Prapheni or Dan Wattanatham.<sup>6</sup> At the two formal checkpoints of Chong Mek-Vang Tao in Sirinthon and Pak Saeng-Lakhonpheng in Na Tan, where the construction of the sixth friendship bridge is expected, people are required to show their national ID card to cross to Lao PDR. However, at the eight informal checkpoints, the central government of both nation-states allows, to a certain extent, the local administration to organise the arrangements of border crossing on their own.

Along the 1,810 kilometres Thai-Lao border, there are twenty formal border checkpoints where people who make crossings are required to show their passport or national ID card (Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce, 2020; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). Those formal checkpoints are for tourists and others who want to proceed further into the hinterland of the host state. However, there are informal checkpoints, or Dan Prapheni and Dan Wattanatham, in every Thai-Lao border province. If the border is riverine, the province organises channels where boats can cross the Mekong, as found in Khong Chiam (Thailand) and Sanasomboun (Lao PDR) (Wisaijorn, 2018). Before the

---

<sup>6</sup> This data is different from the information provided by Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce (2020)

COVID 19 pandemic, the district of Khong Chiam and Sanasomboun ran their own border-crossing arrangements. Three days per week people from Lao PDR would be allowed to cross to Khong Chiam to do business from approximately 8am to 4pm, on the condition that the people who make crossing do not proceed further than the village of the host state where they land. They did not need to use a passport or border pass. Similar arrangements occur all over the length of the Thai-Lao border. If it is a land border, the local administration will organise their own timetable for the people to cross, as found in Chong Ta U in the district of Buntharik in Ubon Ratchathani (Thailand) and Soukhouma in Champassak (Lao PDR).

According to Thanawat Manathat, Thai Consul to Savannakhet from 2013 to 2017 and the officer at the Office of Passport Division in Ubon Ratchathani from 2020 to 2021, Champassak provides more economic opportunities compared to Salavan. Considering its economic potential, as well as the size of population, Champassak ranks third in Lao PDR. The comments by the Office of Provincial Commercial Affairs were in line with the opinions expressed by Thanawat. It is stated that Thai business entrepreneurs have had difficulties in certain areas when they want to import tapioca from Lao PDR. First of all, the Office of Provincial Commerce Affairs of Ubon Ratchathani said the riverine conditions of the Mekong in Pak Saeng are not convenient for a big ship because of its shallow water. Very often, products have to be exported through the Pier of Na Hin Ngon in the district of Na Tan which is around 15 kilometres to the north of Khemmarat. Next, although the checkpoint at Pak Saeng is an official one, the one in Lakhonepheng, Lao PDR is still an informal one. The Lao counterparts, therefore, accept only the import of everyday products from Thailand, although the district of Khemmarat which is adjacent to Na Tan has more potentials to export construction products. Consequently, they have to be exported through the route of Chong Mek-Vang Tao which is connected to Champassak. That is considered very costly because the district of Na Tan is 119 kilometres to the north from Chong Mek in Sirinthon that is the gate to Champassak. Finally, the Office of Provincial Commerce Affairs of Ubon Ratchathani said the legal regulations of the Thai state which limit only one formal checkpoint for the import of tapioca obstructs the rise of the inter-local trade volume. While the district of Khemmarat has the potential to import tapioca from Salavan, importing through this route is not possible as the Thai government has chosen to prioritise the exports through the route of the Champassak counterpart instead.

#### **4.1.2 Values and goals**

Regarding the values and goals, after the end of the Cold War, the slogan of changing the battlefields to the marketplace in Indochina was announced. As Lao PDR is a former French Indochinese colony, it means an increase in trade between Thailand and Lao PDR is expected. In October 2022, the International Studies Center, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Kingdom of Thailand organised an academic seminar on the relationship between Thailand and the former states of Indochina. It was even argued that the trade relations between Thailand and the former Indochinese states could be upgraded from the market relationship to partnership. If that is the goal in the post-pandemic era, the term partnership needs elaborating. The term partnership was once defined in the 1994 Moscow Declaration. The then US President Bill Clinton stated that the US was in a new and more mature stage of the relationship with Russia because the two states recognised each other's mutual national interests. Accordingly, this article proposes that the mutual interest of both Thailand and Lao PDR are recognised at the level of the border provinces, underscoring the important role of local actors in international relations.

An economic renaissance of Ubon Ratchathani in international trade with the Lao border provinces is expected among stakeholders after the border reopened. Because of the border closure caused by the COVID 19 outbreak in 2020, the border provinces experienced an inter-local economic slowdown and saw little in terms of imports. With the reopening of the Thai-Lao border in May 2022, Chonlathee Yangtrong, the Provincial Governor of Ubon Ratchathani, expressed his interest in supporting the national policy of the government that the economy of the province is boosted though trade with the Lao provinces, both through formal and informal checkpoints. Accordingly, there are five obvious ways that the potential economic partnership can be developed when people are allowed to cross the border: labourers from Lao PDR, rich tourist spots, shopping and leisure of people from Lao PDR, public health, common benefit of the young entrepreneurs in the import of coffee beans and tapioca.

The first way Ubon Ratchathani can develop the economic partnership between Thailand and Lao PDR is by ensuring that labourers from Lao PDR are better documented, especially after the outbreak of COVID 19. According to Napanaree Tohsang, Deputy President of the Chamber of Commerce of Ubon Ratchathani and the owner of Tohsang Hotel, before the Thai-Lao border closure, the undocumented Lao labourers in the border area of Ubon Ratchathani were common. In line with the research of Rungmanee (2014), despite being illegal, the presence of the undocumented labourers was accepted by the business sector in Thailand because it was impossible to arrest everyone in the border area and consequently the police turned a blind eye over this matter. This situation was explained with the notion of licitness, meaning it was legitimate for the Lao people

to work in the Thai province of Ubon Ratchathani without the need to have a work permit. However, because of COVID 19, more local entrepreneurs are willing to have their Lao employees registered as it is more convenient for disease investigation and less costly to get access to the health service in Thailand.

The second way the economic partnerships can be enhanced is through tourism. The province of Champassak has a number of popular tourist sites both culturally and naturally. Because several famous tourist spots in Ubon Ratchathani are located in the border zone, Thai tourists can further their trip to Lao PDR. They can either have a one-day visit or spend a weekend there. For natural tourist spots, according to Piyavadhana Prohmha, the owner of a tourist company 'Go Asia', one can cross a formal border checkpoint at Chong Mek-Vang Tao from Ubon Ratchathani to Champassak. The destination could be the Khone Phapheng Waterfall which is often called the Niagara Falls of Asia. The Bolaven Plateau is also famous for its coffee plantations and the beauty of its mountainous landscape. While enjoying these natural spots, one can also visit Vat Phou Temple, which is an important cultural heritage, among other Angkor civilisation sites.

The third way that Ubon Ratchathani as a border city could contribute to the economic partnership of Thailand and Lao PDR is by allowing the Lao people who cross the border to enjoy a one-day trip shopping either along the border or in the city centre. According to the Office of Provincial Commercial Affairs, after the re-opening of the border in 2022, the Lao people from Champassak continue to cross the border through the official checkpoint despite the severe inflation in Lao PDR. The exchange rate of Thai baht and Lao kip in 2019 was approximately 1 baht to 250 kip. In 2022, around 500 kip is equivalent to 1 baht. This results in a lower frequency of the border crossing compared with the time before the outbreak of COVID 19. The economic recovery in Lao PDR is still expected, although it might take time. After the construction of the Sixth Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge that connects the district of Na Tan in Ubon Ratchathani and Lakhonepheng in Salavan, the economic potential of Ubon Ratchathani is expected to grow. However, the actual number of the people who cross through the bridge and the economic benefits must be assessed after construction is completed, according to Thanawat Manathat.

Next, further opportunities for the economic partnership lie in the ways that Ubon Ratchathani can provide public health services to Lao PDR. For example, according to the state officers at the Office of Provincial Commercial Affairs, before the COVID 19 pandemic, people from Lao PDR crossed to use the services of a number of hospitals in downtown Ubon Ratchathani such as Sanphasitthiprasong Hospital, Ubonrak Thonburi Hospital and Princ Hospital. It is not only when they were sick and need to have medical prescription, but also for elective beauty procedures and surgical operation as well. As the border

checkpoints have re-opened, more people from Lao PDR are expected to come to Ubon Ratchathani for medical services.

Finally, it cannot be denied that the young entrepreneurs of the two nation-states, especially those in Ubon Ratchathani and Champassak, have similar culture and language. They understand one another better compared to their Cambodian counterparts. According to Thanawat Manathat, the young business persons in Ubon Ratchathani, Champassak and Salavan have had plans to do business together. Coffee shops are a promising business in Ubon Ratchathani. As a qualified source of coffee beans is from the Bolaven Plateau in Champassak, Lao PDR, the economic collaboration on the import and export of coffee beans could form a springboard for potential partnerships between Thailand and Lao PDR. Better economic relations between Ubon Ratchathani and Champassak could contribute to better inter-local relations.

## ***4.2 Economic potentials with Cambodia***

### **4.2.1 Circumstance**

Along the 798 kilometres of the Thai-Cambodian border, there are seven formal and eleven informal checkpoints (The Secretariat of the Senate, 2020). The total trade volume between Thailand and Cambodia in 2018 was 145,800 million baht (Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce, 2022)). Major exports from Thailand to Cambodia include beverage, car, motorcycles and machines. Meanwhile, Thailand imported vegetables, cables, aluminium and copper from Cambodia. The most important border-crossing checkpoint is in Aranyaprathet, Sa Kaeo (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2019). Obviously, the informal border checkpoint of Chong An Ma in Ubon Ratchathani does not contribute much to the total trade volume of the two nation-states.

The informal checkpoint of Chong An Ma that connects the district of Nam Yuen of Ubon Ratchathani and Jom Crasan of Preah Vihear is the only channel which contributes to Ubon Ratchathani in terms of inter-local relations. Because it is informal, the trade volume is very low, according to Thanawat Manathat and the Office of Provincial Commerce Affairs. Nevertheless, there are more Cambodians who cross the border to buy daily products in Nam Yuen, compared with the number of the Thais who make crossings to Jom Crasan. The most popular products are live chickens and other agricultural materials. Meanwhile, the unclear border demarcation has always been a problem for the two nation-states. In the interview with the Office of Provincial Commerce Affairs, it was reported by the Department of Forestry that there was Cambodian encroachment in the area of Chong An Ma, claiming that the Cambodian local market was very often set up in Thai territory. With the outbreak of COVID 19, the informal border



checkpoint was not active. There was then no market and this problem has been absent for approximately two years.

However, more trade volume can be expected through the formal checkpoint in the adjacent provinces. They are Sisaket and Surin which border the Cambodian province of Oddar Meanchey. Sommai Chinnak, a lecturer in anthropology and Border Studies at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University, said that before the outbreak of COVID 19, Cambodians crossed the border through the formal checkpoint of Chong Chom in Surin and Chong Sagnam in Sisaket for hospitals in Ubon Ratchathani. In 2019, the number of Cambodians who used the service of Sanphasitthiprasong Hospital, Ubonrak Thonburi Hospital and Rajavej Hospital in the city centre was approximately 17,000 persons per year. According to Sommai Chinnak, the first reason why Ubon Ratchathani is selected by Cambodians instead of Surin is that Sanphasitthiprasong Hospital and other private hospitals have more medical potential than others. Also, there is a cancer hospital in Ubon Ratchathani, but there is none in Surin. Second, the frequency of the bus from Surin to Ubon Ratchathani made the trip comfortable. There were five return-trips per day from Surin to Ubon Ratchathani before the initial stage of the pandemic in 2020. Considering all these reasons, Sommai Chinnak said it is cheaper for the Cambodians to cross through the border checkpoint in Surin, travel to a hospital and stay a night in Ubon Ratchathani than using the service of a private hospital in Cambodia itself.

Also, the tourism industry must be mentioned. After the end of the Cold War, according to Akkharapong Khamkhun (2008), tourist industry was expected to hinder the hatred based on nationalism for both Thailand and Cambodia. Consequently, travelling from Ubon Ratchathani to Cambodian provinces used to be a promising business before 2020. Although tourists from Ubon Ratchathani could not directly cross the border through Chong An Ma, they could visit the dream tourist destination in Siem Reap via the adjacent province which is Sisaket. Before 2019, Piyavadhana Prohmbha, a business owner of a tour company 'Go Asia', organised countless Ubon Ratchathani-Siem Reap tours via the formal checkpoint of Chong Sangam. Once the tourists arrived in the Cambodian province of Anlong Veng, they could directly travel to Siem Reap which is only 253 kilometres away. However, when the Thai-Cambodian border was close in 2019, the number plummeted to zero.

#### **4.2.2 Values and goals**

Since the border closure due to the COVID 19 outbreak in March 2020, the border provinces have experienced the inter-local economic slowdown and little in terms of imports. Similar to the Lao border provinces, an economic renaissance of Ubon Ratchathani in terms of the international trade with the Cambodian border province is expected among several stakeholders after the border re-opened. Accordingly, there are four obvious signs of opportunities that Ubon Ratchathani could contribute to the economic partnership between Thailand and Cambodia: public health; shopping by the Cambodians; tourism industry; and machinery and construction product export from Thailand.

The first area of the economic partnership between Thailand and Cambodia that Ubon Ratchathani could contribute to is the public health services in the city centre, according to Chonlathee Yangtrong, the Provincial Governor of Ubon Ratchathani. Although the Cambodians tend not to cross through the informal checkpoint of Chong An Ma, they employed the formal checkpoints in Surin and Sisaket instead. According to Sommai Chinnak, after the re-opening of the Thai-Cambodian border, it is expected that the number of the Cambodians who use the services of the hospital in Ubon Ratchathani would be similar to the pre-pandemic days. In addition, the information by the Office of Provincial Commerce Affairs went in line with Sommai Chinnak that in the business exhibition held in Ubon Ratchathani in 2022, Cambodian entrepreneurs expressed their interest in organising health service trips from Preah Vihear to Ubon Ratchathani. If that idea is implemented successfully, it would benefit both the border provinces and help contribute to the partnership of Thailand and Cambodia significantly.

Shopping is the second aspect of the expected partnership between Thailand and Cambodia that the inter-local relations of Ubon Ratchathani with its neighbouring countries could contribute to. Although the trade volume is very low in the informal checkpoint in Chong An Ma, the everyday border crossings over there could boost the economic vibrancy of the area. With the re-opening of the Thai-Cambodian border, an economic renaissance in the area was witnessed according to the Office of Provincial Commerce Affairs. However, the challenge that Ubon Ratchathani faces is that the border checkpoint of Chong An Ma is still considered informal. Consequently, the Cambodians who cross the border would not be able to proceed to downtown Ubon Ratchathani which is around 114 kilometres away from the boundary.

The third aspect of the partnership between Thailand and Cambodia is that Ubon Ratchathani could contribute to the tourism industry in Cambodia. Because the level of economic density in the provinces of Preah Vihear and Oddor Meanchey that border Surin, Sisaket and Ubon Ratchathani is still low (World Bank, 2018, p.16), it is difficult to expect the economic growth in tourism industry in the two provinces. However, the formal checkpoint of Chong Sangam must be

mentioned. It is located in the district of Phu Sing, Sisaket (Thailand) and the district of Anlong Veng in Oddor Meanchey (Cambodia). The tourists from Ubon Ratchathani could travel to Siem Reap via this route. According to Piyavadhana Prohmmbha, Angkor Wat as one of the world seven wonders in Siem Reap is the dream destination for the tourists from Ubon Ratchathani. Before 2019, he had organised a number of Ubon Ratchathani-Siem Reap tours via this route for years and the renaissance of such trips is expected after the re-opening of the Thai-Cambodian border.

The fourth aspect Ubon Ratchathani plays a role in the Thai-Cambodian relations is that the Cambodian business entrepreneurs have purchased machinery from the business persons in Ubon Ratchathani before the outbreak of COVID 19. As mentioned, Preah Vihear still has vast agricultural areas that need modern agricultural equipment. Sommai Chinnak said that the Ubon Ratchathani branch of Kubota, the Japanese multinational company, crossed the informal checkpoint in Chong An Ma to sell agricultural machinery in the district of Jom Crasan, Preah Vihear, despite its very low volume. With the re-opening of the Thai-Cambodian border, this trend has continued as reported by the Office of Provincial Commerce Affairs. In the business exhibition held in Ubon Ratchathani in 2022, the Cambodian entrepreneurs expressed their interest in purchasing solar cell that could directly convert the sunlight to electricity. According to the Office of Provincial Commerce Affairs, there was discussion between the Cambodian entrepreneurs and the local company Ruam Sin Thai on this business.

### ***4.3 Economic potentials with Vietnam***

#### **4.3.1 Circumstance**

Vietnam and Thailand do not share a land or river border. The bilateral trade between Thailand and Vietnam has to rely on Lao PDR. Therefore, to promote the inter-local relations of Ubon Ratchathani with any of the Vietnamese provinces is more difficult than their Lao and Cambodian counterparts. Nevertheless, according to Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce (2022), the total trade volume between Thailand and Vietnam in 2021 was 75,412 million baht. Even though there was an outbreak of COVID 19 the previous year, there was an increase of 27.03%. The major exports from Thailand to Vietnam include beverage, transistor semi-conductors, fresh and frozen fruits, agricultural products and textiles. Thailand imported radio receiver, chemical supplies, storage media, machines and trees from Vietnam in return. Certainly, Mukdahan and Nakhon Phanom played a crucial role in this inter-local relation because of their strategic location This article confirms this statistics arguing that because of the geographical factors, it is difficult for Ubon Ratchathani to promote direct trade with Vietnam.

According to Thanawat Manathat, the pairs of Thai-Lao borderland cities such as Mukdahan-Savannakhet and Nakhon Phanom-Khammouane, the two Lao provinces could be the area that better links Thai tourists to Vietnam if compared with Ubon Ratchathani and its Lao border counterparts of Champassak and Salavan. This is because the area of the two Lao provinces of Khammouane and Savannakhet are considered very tight spaces compared with the rest of the country. To cross to Vietnam by car, Mukdahan to the Vietnamese district of Lao Bao Huong Hoa, Quang Tri, would be more comfortable because the distance is only 249 kilometres. Piyavadhana Prohmbha supported this argument as before COVID 19, he organised a number of trips from Ubon Ratchathani to the Vietnamese province of Danang. He could make a profit of approximately one hundred thousand baht per trip. From Ubon Ratchathani, at that time, his tour group must cross the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge from Mukdahan in Thailand to Savavannakhet in Lao PDR before reaching Lao Bao Huong Hoa, Quan Tri in Vietnam.

To visit Vietnam through Ubon Ratchathani, the Lao provinces of Champassak, Salavan, and Attapeu which borders Vietnam is not preferable among Thai tour companies. This is because to cross the border by car from Ubon Ratchathani through the checkpoint of Chong Mek-Vang Tao, the distance from the Thai-Lao border to the Lao-Vietnamese one is 334 kilometres. One has to cross through the provinces of Champassak and Attapeu before reaching the Vietnamese district of Ngoc Hoi, Kon Tum. According to Napanaree Tohsang, to travel from Ubon Ratchathani to Vietnam is too costly. Exporting any product through that route is also costly because they have to travel through Lao PDR before arriving in Vietnam. Therefore, the economic potential of Ubon Ratchathani with any Vietnamese provinces is limited.

#### **4.3.2 Value and goal**

In terms of value, a sense of belonging between the present business entrepreneurs in Ubon Ratchathani and their Vietnamese ancestors in the home country can be witnessed. Despite the aforementioned geographical difficulties, it does not mean that plans for business in Vietnam are completely off the radar among the local entrepreneurs in Ubon Ratchathani. Thanawat argued that in the city centre, the Vietnamese diaspora community is considered one of the strongest groups among other provinces. If one visits Ubon Ratchathani, Vietnamese restaurants and products can be seen and are even promoted as souvenirs of the city. Dao Coffee that sells the coffee beans from Lao PDR could also be linked with Vietnamese business dealers, for instance.

In the product exhibition held in Ubon Ratchathani in 2022, the Office of Provincial Commerce Affairs said that business dealers from the Vietnamese provinces of Hue and Danang wanted to participate in the event. However, it was

not clear what business they want to plan for. If the goal is to upgrade the level of the economic potentials, the Sixth Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge which connects the district of Na Tan and Lakhonepheng must be completed first. At that time the economic landscape of Ubon Ratchathani and any of the Vietnamese provinces would be clearer in terms of the types of business and destination.

## 5. Conclusion

The term inter-local relations is coined to describe the economic potential of the Thai province of Ubon Ratchathani. Although its location is considered local, it shares a border with the provinces of Champassak, Salavan and Savannekhet in Lao PDR and Preah Vihear in Cambodia. Thus, the use of the term inter-local relations suggests that the local actors in these borderland provinces contribute significantly to the partnership at the international levels. With the Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge as part of EWEC which connects Mukdahan (Thailand) with Savannakhet (Lao PDR) and the economic plan of Emerald Triangle over the triple border of Ubon Ratchathani (Thailand), Champassak (Lao PDR) and Preah Vihear (Cambodia), the citizens of Ubon Ratchathani are related with the international and global capitalism. Although Emerald Triangle is not a successful project, it cannot be denied Ubon Ratchathani is located in a strategic location. Accordingly, Ubon Ratchathani has the border provinces of Lao PDR and Cambodia as its major partners, especially after the breakout of COVID 19 in 2020. Meanwhile, the chance to promote the inter-local trade relations with Vietnam is limited because Thailand and Vietnam do not share a border. From 1989 when there was the famous slogan of the then Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan to transform the battlegrounds of Indochina to the marketplace to 2020, which was the year when the COVID 19 pandemic affected the region significantly, Ubon Ratchathani has attracted a number of Cambodian and Lao people to the city. Their border-crossings are expected to open up the opportunities for the international economic relations, even though Ubon Ratchathani is a border province.

To answer the research question that looks for the ways to improve the economic potential of Ubon Ratchathani with its neighbouring countries, this article employs the methods of discourse analysis and interview with the Thai local entrepreneurs, state officers and a scholar in Borderland Studies. With Lao PDR, the major trade relations with the province of Champassak through the Chong Mek – Vang Tao Checkpoint will be more promising than the checkpoint in Na Tan and Salavan. The trade volume between Ubon Ratchathani and Savannakhet is not expected that much because there is no official checkpoint that could bridge the two cities. Meanwhile, the trade relations with the Cambodian borderland of Preah Vihear rely significantly on the informal checkpoint in Thai district of Nam Yuen – Cambodian district of Jom Crasan. This article proposes

that the province of Ubon Ratchathani promote the opportunities for the Thai-Lao young entrepreneurs on the coffee beans business and the import of tapioca to boost the economic relations of the two nation-states. If the informal checkpoint of Chong An Ma is upgraded to be a formal one, that will benefit the economy at the city centre. Similar to Lao PDR, with the Cambodian borderland, Ubon Ratchathani provides public health services to a number of Cambodians.

## References

- Bamrungsuk, S. & Kunthic, K. (2020). *Kankokanrai Nai Mueang Ruamsami: Kanchomti Lae Kan Pongkan* [Contemporary Urban Terrorism: Attack and Defense]. *Journal of Politics and Governance*, 10(2), 1-18. Retrieved February 10, 2023, from <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jopag/article/view/248536/167328>
- Bunnag, T. (1968). *The Provincial Administration of Siam from 1892 to 1915*. (Doctoral dissertation), Oxford University.
- Charoensri, N. (2022). *Mueang Kap Khwam Chueamyong Rawang Prathet* [Cities in International Connectivity]. Bangkok: International Studies Center, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand.
- Charoenvattananukul, P. (2020). *Ontological Security and Status-seeking: Thailand's Proactive Behaviours during the Second World War*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Cima, R. J. (1990). Vietnam in 1989: Initiating the Post-Cambodia Period. *Asian Survey*, 30(1), 88-95. Retrieved December 11, 2022, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2644777>
- Connolly, W. (1995). *Ethos of Pluralization*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.
- De Walt, K., & De Walt, B. (2011). *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*. Walnut Creek, Lanham, New York, and Oxford: Altamira Press.
- Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce. (2020). *Sathanakan Kankhakhai Chaidan Rawang Thai Lae Sopopo Lao Nai Patchuban* [The Situation of Border Trade Between Thailand and Lao PDR at the Present]. Retrieved March 1, 2023, from <https://www.itd.or.th/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/itdevent30102020-02.pdf>
- Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce. (2021). *Phapruam Kankhakhai Chaidan Lae Kankha Phan Daen Khong Thai* [Overall picture of border trade and transit trade of Thailand]. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.dft.go.th/Portals/3/1.%20%E0%B8%A0%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%9E%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%A7%E0>

- %B8%A1%20%E0%B8%98%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%A7  
%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%84%E0%B8%A1%2064(%2028%20%E0%B  
8%A1%E0%B8%84.65).pdf
- Donnan, H., & Wilson, T. M. (1999). *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State*. Oxon & New York: Biddles' Ltd, King's Lynn.
- Elden, S. (2009). *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Erlanger, S. (1989). *Thailand Seeks to Shape a 'Golden Peninsular'*. *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 6, 2018, from <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/04/30/world/thailand-seeks-to-shape-a-golden-peninsula.html>
- Evans, G. (2002). *A Short History of Laos: The Land in Between*. Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Fairclough, I., & Fairclough, N. (2012). *Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Goodhand, J. (2005). Bringing the Borderlands Back in: A Commentary on 'Selfish Determination'. *Ethnopolitics*, 4(1), 94-97. Retrieved February 17, 2016, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449050500072531>
- Goodhand, J. (2008). War, Peace and Places in Between: Why Borderlands are Central. In Pugh, M. Cooper, N., & Turney, M. (Eds.). *Whose Peace? Critical Perspective on the Political Economy of Peacebuilding* (pp. 225-244). Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Google. (n.d.). [Google Maps map of Ubon Ratchathani City Centre and the informal border checkpoint of Chong An Ma]. Retrieved January 10, 2020, from <https://goo.gl/maps/bQqprYsPXfDrnxD97>
- Herz, J. (1975). Korea and Germany as Divided Nations: The Systemic Impact. *Asian Survey*, 15(11), 957-970. Retrieved February 17, 2014, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2643550>
- High, H. (2009) Dreaming Beyond Borders: The Thai/Lao Borderlands and the Mobility of the Marginal. In Gainsborough, M. (Ed.). *On the Borders of State Power* (pp. 75-100). Abingdon & New York: Routledge.
- Iijima, A. (2018). The Invention of "Isan" History. *Journal of the Siam Society*, 106, 171-200. Retrieved October 10, 2018, from [https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/pub\\_jss/article/view/157699](https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/pub_jss/article/view/157699)
- Ivarsson, S. (2008). *Creating Laos: The Making of Lao Space Between Indochina and Siam, 1860-1945*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Jorgensen, M., & Philips, L. (2002). *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: Sage Publication, LTD.
- Kasetsiri, C. (1997). *Raingan Kan Samruat Naew Phromdaen Thai-phama-lao-kamphucha* [The report of the Thai, Burmese, Lao and Cambodian Border]. Bangkok: Thammasat University Press.

- Kasetsiri, C. (2011). *Pramuan Sonthisanya Anusanya Khwamtoklong Banthuegkhwamkhaochai Lae Phaenthi Rawang Sayamprathet Thai Kap Prathetasianphueanban Kamphutcha Lao Phama Malesia* [Collected treaties – conventions – agreements – memorandum of understanding and maps between Siam/Thailand – Cambodia – Laos – Burma – Malaysia]. Bangkok: The Foundation for The Promotion of Social Science and Humanities Textbooks Project.
- Kesboonchoo Mead, K. (2007). *Kanmueang Thai Yuk Sarit-thanom Phaitai Khrongsang Amnat Lok* [Thai politics during Sarit-Thanom Regimes Under a Global Power Structure]. Bangkok: 50 Years Foundation, The Bank of Thailand.
- Khamkhun, A. (2008). *Border Tourism Between Thailand and Cambodia After the End of the Cold War: Identity, Spirit, and Prospect* [Master's thesis], Chulalongkorn University.
- Kiernan, B. (1998). *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79*. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Krisnachuta, S., & Srisupun, P. (2019). *Wathakam Lae Kansangkhwammai Kanphatthana Khet Phatthana Setthakit Phiset Mukdahan* [Discourse and Meaning Construction of Mukdahan Special Economic Zone]. *Journal of Social Science, Naresuan University*, 15(2), 38-66. Retrieved December 12, 2022, from <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jssnu/article/view/231417>
- Kuboonya-aragasa, N., Boonchai, P., & Boonchai, P. (2018). *Botbat Khong Chao Thai Chueasai Vietnam Thi Mi to Kan Plianplaeng Dan Setthakit Sangkhom Lae Watthanatham* [The Role of Ethnic Thai-Vietnamese People in Effecting Changes on the Thai Economy, Society and Culture]. *Nakhon Phanom University Journal*, 8(2), 107-116. Retrieved December 12, 2022, from <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/npuj/article/view/136817>
- Laclau, E., & C. Mouffe. (1987). Postmarxism Without Apologies. *New Left Review*, 166, 79-106. Retrieved January 9, 2017, from <https://newleftreview.org/issues/i166/articles/ernesto-laclau-chantal-mouffe-post-marxism-without-apologies>
- Lawrence, M. A. (2008). *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
- Liamdee, K. (2020). *On the Move Across Phnom Dangrek: Mobilities and Silences in the Thai-Cambodian Borderland* [Doctoral dissertation], University of Washington.
- Lyu, X., Hirsch, P., & et al. (2014). Cross Border Field Based Learning in the Mekong: A Case of Field-based Education in Natural Resources



- Management. *Journal of Water Research & Education*, 150(1), 41-52. Retrieved January 7, 2021, from 10.1111/j.1936-704X.2013.03134.x
- Mephokee, C., Roopsom, T., & Klinsukon, C. (2015). Development of Trade and Investment Cooperation in Greater Mekong Sub-region: Thailand, Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Cambodia. *Thai Journal of East Asian Studies*, 19(2), 1-23. Retrieved September 1, 2022, from <https://so02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/easttu/article/view/50397>
- Nail, T. (2016). *Theory of Border*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ngaosyvathn, M., & Ngaosyvathn, P. (1994). *Kith and Kin Politics: The Relationship Between Laos and Thailand*. Manila: Journal of Contemporary Asia Publishers.
- Oesterheld, C. (2014). Cambodian-Thai Relations during the Khmer Rouge Regime: Evidence from the East German Diplomatic Archives. *Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Studies*, 14(2), 161-182. Retrieved June 14, 2022, from <https://so02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/hasss/article/view/20005>
- Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council. (2019). *Kankhachaidan Lae Kankhaphandaen Kap Prathet Phueanban Pi Song Phan Ha Roi Hok Sip Et* [Border Trade and Transit Trade with Neighbouring Countries in 2019]. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from [https://www.nesdc.go.th/ewt\\_dl\\_link.php?nid=10750](https://www.nesdc.go.th/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=10750)
- Oldfield, D. (1998). *The Restructuring of Thailand's Foreign Policy Towards Laos, 1988-1991* (Doctoral dissertation), Northern Illinois University.
- Paribatra, P. (2013). *Thailand's Relationship with Its Neighbors: A Study of Border Conflict from 1973 to 2011* (Doctoral dissertation), Northern Illinois University.
- Paribatra, P. (2019). Foreign Policy Analysis in Thailand. In Na Thalang, C., Jayanam, S., & Poonkham, J. (Eds.). *International Relations as a discipline in Thailand: Theory and Sub-fields* (pp. 84-109). Oxon, New York: Routledge.
- Paribatra, S. (1984). Strategic Implication of the Indochina Conflict: Thai Perspective. *Asian Affairs*, 11(3), 28-46. Retrieved March 14, 2014, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30171967>
- Pavie, A. (1902). *Mission Pavie: Indo-Chine, 1879-1895*. Paris.: n.p.
- Pavie, A. (1903). *Contes Populaire du Cambodge, du Laos et du Siam*. N.P.: n.p.
- Pawakapan, P. (2013). *State and Uncivil Society in Thailand at the Temple of Preah Vihea*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Phillips, M. (2017). *Thailand in the Cold War*. London: Routledge.
- Pholsena, V., & Banomyong, R. (2006). *Laos: From Buffer State to Crossroads?* Chiang Mai: Mekong Press.

- Phonprapai, S. (2021). *Battlefield to Marketplace: Responses to Thailand's Major Policy Change*. Bangkok: International Studies Center, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand.
- Phookongchi, P. (2003). *Phonkrathop Chak Khan Yuet Dan Sunlakakon Wangtao to Khwamsamphan Rawang Thai Lao* [Impact of the Seizure of Wang Tao Customs Office on Thai-Lao Relations] (Master's thesis), Chiang Mai University.
- Pongsawat, P. (2007). *Border Partial Citizenship, Border Towns, and Thai-Myanmar Cross-border Deveopment: Case Studies at the Thai Border Towns* (Doctoral dissertation), University of California at Berkeley.
- Ravenstein, C. A. (1974). *Air Force Combat Wings; Lineage and Honors Historits, 1947-1977*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, United States Air Force.
- Rigg, J. (2005) *Living with Transition in Laos: Market Integration in Southeast Asia*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Rigg, J. (2007). *An Everyday Geography of the Global South*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Ruggie, J. G. (1998). What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism and Social Constructivism. *International Organization*, 52(4), 855-885. Retrieved January 4, 2014, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2601360>
- Rungmanee, S. (2014). *Compromised Margin: Migration and Agrarian Transformation in the Northeastern Thai - Lao Borderlands* (Doctoral dissertation), Sydney University.
- Sanew, S. (2019). *Botbat Khong Tuasadaeng Phainai Prathet Thi Maichai Rat Kap Nayobai Dan Setthakit Khong Thai to Lao* [Roles of Domestic Non-State Actors and Thai Economic Policy Toward Laos] (Doctoral dissertation), Chulalongkorn University.
- Sankhamanee, J. (2018). *Chaidaen Sueksa Kap Khet – Khanwitthaya Khong Phuenthi Nai/Rawang* [Limology]. Bangkok: Kledthai.
- Santasombat, Y. (2008) *Amnat Phuenthi Lae Attalak Thang Chattiphan Kan Muang Watthanatham Khong Rath Nai Sangkhom Thai* [Power, Space and Ethnic Identity: Cultural Politics of the Nation State in Thai Society]. Bangkok: Princess Maha Chakri Siridhorn Anthropology Center.
- Sirikrai, S. (2007). Nayobai Tang Prathet Khong Satharanarat Prachathipatai Prachachon Lao [Foreign Policy of Lao People's Democratic Republic]. In Sonsri, S. (Ed.). *Esia Tawanok Chiang Tai: Nayobai Tang Prathet Langchang Wikrit Setthakit (1997-2006)* [Southeast Asia's Policy Response to the Global Economic (1997-2006)]. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.

- Srisupan, P. (2020). Roles and Actions of State Agencies on Border Area Development: A Case Study of Chong Ahn Ma Checkpoint for Border Trade, Thailand. *Journal of Mekong Societies*, 16(3), 116-134. Retrieved February 3, 2023, from <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/mekongjournal/article/view/241815>
- Strate, S. (2015). *The Lost Territories: Thailand's History of National Humiliation*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii'I Press.
- Supatn, N. (2012). Regional Development of the Golden and Emerald Triangle Areas: Thai Perspective. In Ishida, M. (Ed.). *Five triangle areas in the Greater Mekong Subregion, BRC Research Report*. Bangkok: Bangkok Research Center, IDE-JETRO.
- Taotawin, N. (2019). Kan Phalit Malet Phan Phueth Phak Phuea Songok Nai Phuenthi Chaidan Thai-lao: Kan Khuapkhum Thidin Lae Khan Plianplaeng Kan Chai Thidin [The Production of Seeds for Export in the Borderlands of Thai-Lao PDR: Looking Through Perspectives of Land Ownerships and Land Use]. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 15(1), 155-190. Retrieved January 7, 2022, from <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jssnu/article/view/201360>
- Tasukonth, S. (2015). Kan Chai Amnat Thang Kanmueang Khong Khamendaeng Klum Panyachon Parit Khrittassakkarat Nueng Phan Kao Roi Chet Sip Ha Thueng Nueng Phan Kao Roi Chet Sip Kao [The Use of Political Power by the Paris Student Group During the Khmer Rouge Regime 1975-1979]. *Journal of the Faculty of Arts: Silpakorn University*, 37(2), 103-109. Retrieved December 11, 2022, from <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jasu/article/download/238661/163111/816968>
- Taylor, K. W. (2013). *A History of the Vietnamese*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- The Secretariat of Senate. (2020). *Raingan Kanphitcharanasueksa: Reuang Kansongsoem Kankhachaidan* [A Study Report: Border Trade Promotion]. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.senate.go.th/document/mSubject/Ext86/866200001.PDF>
- Theeravit, K., & Semyeam, A. (2002). *Thai-Lao Relations in Laotian Perspective*. Jayanam, S. (Trans.). Bangkok: The Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University.
- Tonlerd, S. (1998). *Kaison Phomwihan Kap Phatthanakan Sangkhomniyom Lao Rawang Khoso Nuengphan Kao Roi Chetsip Ha Thueng Neungphan Kaoroi Paetsip Hok* [Kayson Phomvihane and the Development of Lao Socialism, 1975-1986 A.D.]. (Master's thesis), Silpakorn University.
- Vaughan-Williams, N. (2009). *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Wisajjorn, T. (2018). *Riverine Border Practices People's Everyday Lives on the Thai-Lao Mekong Border* (Doctoral dissertation), Loughborough University.
- Wisajjorn, T. (2021). *Riverine Border Practices People's Everyday Lives on the Thai-Lao Mekong Border*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
- World Bank. (2018). *Cambodia: Achieving the Potential of Urbanization*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.