

Dynamics and Adjustments of Malay-Muslim Cross-Border Rice Traders in Narathiwat Borderland, Thailand

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Abstract- Muslims had been living in Thai and Malaysian borderland and interacting across the borders even before the two states were officially established. After WWII (1946 A.D. or 2489 B.E.), the Thai government monopolised rice export and set the rice price two or three times lower than the price in Malaysia and Singapore. A significant price difference was a starting point of unofficial rice trade which turned into a multitude of trading activities in the past 67 years. Cross border rice trade faced difficulties with strict border controls from Thai and Malaysian authorities. As a result, the traders needed to adjust and negotiate with the law by using various trading strategies including a network of relatives, friends, people from a similar racial group, Ant Army smugglers, the patron-client system, trust, a change of role from a trader to a network coordinator to reduce investment cost and risks, and partnerships between networks to share job roles and trading points.

Index Terms- Dynamics and adjustments, Malay-Muslim cross-border rice trader, Borderland

I. INTRODUCTION

Malay-Muslims have been living in the borderland of Narathiwat Province in Thailand and have been trading with the borderlanders in Kelantan, Malaysia for a long time. The cross-border trading in this region has a long history. In the earlier days, oxen and ox-carts were used in the trading. When the rice trade began, human labour was used to carry rice across the Thai-Malaysian border.

Several factors made Malay-Muslim cross border rice trade possible; firstly the similarities in language, religion, belief, customs, rituals, folk and games, secondly kinship both by bloodlines and marriage, thirdly a geographical feature of Golok river which dries up in the summer allowing people to walk across, and finally a better rice quality and lower price of rice grown in Thailand. These strengths encouraged the borderlanders to continue the trading, adjust, and employ group or network strategies to negotiate with the Thai and Malaysian government policies and border controls.

The relationship in the Malay-Muslim cross-border rice trade comprised both vertical and horizontal relationships. The vertical relationship was a personal engagement in kinship systems while the horizontal relationship was formed through trust among professionals in the network. The relationship made the cross border rice trade thrive and the trade was considered a

good part-time job for the locals. Rice trade had indicated the prosperity of the borderland community until the Malaysian government launched a policy to make Kedah State a major agricultural state and introduced various strategies to promote the industry such as the irrigation system, profit sharing and compensation scheme, construction of a paddy museum, sanction on rice import, and reinforcement on border controls. Moreover, the aggravation of political unrest in Thai Southernmost provinces since 2004 (2547 B.E.) resulted in stricter border controls. Several checkpoints were closed. This did not affect only the cross border rice trade, but also the employment of young male labourers carrying rice across the border. Day labourers used to be a first step to employment for the youth in the village. When hours, days, and trips of work were reduced, with low education at the primary level, the labourers struggled to earn enough to support their families. Some decided to find work in Malaysia. Some became members in the local Muslim rice retailers' network.

The phenomenon in the borderland communities was found very striking. This study would then explore the dynamics and adjustments of Malay-Muslim cross-border rice traders in Narathiwat Borderland, Thailand.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of social phenomena and movements of the borderlanders have become of the interest in mid 90s (Faist, Thomas. 2004, p.1) especially in terms of cross border exchanges and transactions.

Cross border transactions were carried out in two ways; transactions through custom clearance and transactions without custom clearance which could be legal transactions or illegal transactions depending on intentions and circumstances. Cross border trade between Thailand and Malaysia was carried out through four channels. The first channel was a temporary permitted area which was open to promote humanity and local relationship and to accommodate goods and services exchanges and border commuting. The second channel was temporary crossing point which was open to mainly benefit Thai economy. Its temporality had a definite time frame and had no threat to the national security. The third channel was a permanent crossing point formally agreed by the two countries' governments for trading, commuting, and international relations. The last channel was a natural pass which was a geographical feature of the borderland convenient for border crossing. This channel was not

officially permitted by the two states and was used as a point for illegal transactions (Jittima Kuptanon. 2005, p.1-3). It was noticed that the border points between Thailand and Malaysia had been used for migration, communication, trade, resource exchanges, and labour exchanges for a very long time.

It was found that illegally exported goods at Narathiwat borderland were rice, fresh fruits, clothing, and plastic and aluminum products. The smuggling routes were the Golok river route along Amphor Waeng, Amphor Su-Ngai Golok, and Amphor Tak Bai, the automobile route, and the train route by Ant Army group (smugglers). The illegal trading was difficult to intercept by the officials for many reasons. Firstly, it was due to a unique geographical feature of a river which allowed people to commute to each other by boat. Secondly, it was due to family and kinship systems of the people in the borderland. People had been trading for a long time and smuggling was seen to be an honest profession to earn a living. Suppression of the activities would affect the lives of so many villagers, most of whom were Muslim. Thirdly, there were an insufficient number of officials to patrol. Lastly, every day there were seven train journeys across the border and the smugglers could spread across different trains waiting to get on the train near the departure time or using different stations (Chapa Chittpratoom. 1997, p. 68–86 and Ati Kusagayavong. 2001, p 58, 76,145).

The studies of cross border trading in other regions of Thailand such as the Thai-Lao borderland found that the factors which encouraged unofficial cross border trade were a high rate of import duty, families and kinship systems, networking systems, personal relationships, and trust among the groups. The trade did not only rely on the network and informants, but also on the bribery culture of the officials which included regular fees and one-off convenience fees. The trade could survive with support from some officials who coordinated across the border as well as support from local officials such as a village sheriff. The illegal trades were commonly found at a temporarily permitted area (Prasert Rangkla. 2007, p.14; Bank of Thailand, Northeastern Region Office. 2003, p.87,94; Noppamas Komkum and Sirijit Rattanadara. 1989, p. 124 and Kanjana Chottawon. 2001: p. 48-81).

It can be summarised that the characteristics of unofficial cross-border trade in Thailand were firstly the use of a network system to transport goods to the destination, secondly negotiation strategies, thirdly trade and duty policies which encouraged illegal trade, fourthly the power of officialdom in the borderland, and finally the exploitation of legal loopholes to accommodate the industry.

III. METHODOLOGY

In the study, data was mainly collected from fieldwork experience by an observation, individual and group interviews, group conversation, and case study stories. 17 subjects of the study were interviewed. The subjects were divided in seven groups; 1) business investors and retailers 2) trade coordinators 3) Ant Army group (smugglers) 4) informants or sources 5) local officialdom 6) community leaders including village sheriff and deputy sheriff 7) Imams (Islamic worship leaders)

To collect the data, the researcher did a survey in the Thai borderland area which was connected with Kelantan border in

Malaysia. The survey was done on foot along Golok riverbank from Amphor Tak Bai, Amphor Su-Ngai Golok, and Amphor Waeng, in Narathiwat Province. From the survey, more than 30 rice trade points, some of which were in a temporary shelter, were found along the 92 kilometre trip. The initial interview from the field trip revealed interesting information about the dynamics and adjustments of Malay-Muslim cross border rice traders.

IV. HISTORY OF CROSS-BORDER RICE TRADE IN NARATHIWAT BORDERLAND

Four Districts in Narathiwat Province namely Amphor Tak Bai, Amphor Su-Ngai Golok, Amphor Waeng, and Amphor Sukirin borders Kota Baheu, Rantau Panjang, and Pasia Mas in Kelantan, Malaysia. The Golok river lies on the border between Thailand and Malaysia. It is 95 kilometre long. The river originates between Amphor Waeng and Amphor Sukirin, then flows through Amphor Su-Ngai Golok and flows into the Gulf of Thailand at Amphor Tak Bai (Border Patrol Police Sub-division 43, 1992: p.11).

People from both sides of the Golok River had been commuting to each other before Thailand relinquished its claims over Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah and Perlis to Great Britain in 1909 (2452 B.E.). A.L. Peter Gosling (1981: p. 27-36) documented, “traditional trading activities involved an exchange of natural products from the domestic consumption in the region which were superabundant. The trade was operated by the local traders who were not under constraint of political rules.” This was corroborated by an account of an elderly person from Barn Dorn Bay (interviewed on the 25th of March 2008) who said that when he was young a Malay barque came up to Kanchanadit (a district in the province Surat Thani) to exchange brass for rice. This indicated that rice had been abundant in the South of Thailand as Suwaphan Sanitwong Na Ayuthaya (1990: p. 11-148) stated “Rice mills were found throughout the south of Thailand. In 1923 (2466 B.E.), 25% of rice was exported to Singapore and Melayu as it was believed that Thai rice had better quality than rice from Burma, Indonesia, and Vietnam.” During the colonial period in 1917 (2460 B.E.), the Thai government constructed the southern railway line through the Jantulee rainforest to Su-Ngai Golok canal to connect with the Malay railway line (Thaksin Salatan, 1983: 51-59). The name “Jantulee” rainforest was named after a type of a very big tree taking two or three grown people holding hands to fully encircle. Jantulee also means “so dense that the noise cannot pass through” (“Knowing Su-Ngai Golok”, Dan Tai Journal 18(14); August 2000:42-43). In a local Malay dialect, “Tulee” means deaf, which can also be compared to the density of the forest.

The railway connection between Thailand and Malaysia affected the coastal trading between Pattani, Kelantan and Terengganu. The construction of the roads along the east coast of Malaysia encouraged goods transportation in automobiles instead of sea trading (A.L. Peter Gosling 1981: p. 27-36) while, in fishing, sailboats were also replaced by motorboats.

Fifteen years later in 1932 (2475 B.E.), the Thai government established Su-Ngai Golok checkpoint at Su-Ngai Golok train station to facilitate import and export trade services by train

between Thailand and Malaysia (Chapa Chittpratoom.1997:68-86). Su-Ngai Golok was then upgraded as a municipality district in 1940 (2483 B.E.).

After the declaration of independence in 1957 (2500 B.E.), the Federation of Malaya was formed in 1963 (2506 B.E.) (Patya Saihoo. 1966:37-53). At the time, people could still commute across the border freely. Commodities were traded. Border markets were established to accommodate a larger demand of trades. A former retailer in a border market commented, "My family had been trading rice since I was very young. It started from a very small casual trading. Then more and more buyers came from Malaysia. More people became traders too. It finally became a big market. When the market was closed down in 1997 (2540 B.E.), I stopped the trading." (interviewed on the 11th of April 2008).

In 1965 (2508 B.E.), the Thai and Malaysian governments increased the degree of strictness in border controls by using the existing legislation and through the cross-border agreements. The first agreement which was signed in 1965 (2508 B.E.) (Dollaya Tiantong, 22 (1); 2001:32-42) focused on six areas as follows; 1) the controls of smuggling and fishing 2) the controls of movements of citizens 3) cooperation in national security through training, information exchange, visits of state leaders, and military collaboration 4) social and economic development 5) joint development plan for the overlapping claims over the land 6) joint support for hardship and disaster. The border control policy focused on national security while the cooperative borderland development policy was designed to support macro trading and export.

When trading and tourism in border districts had grown, the Thai and Malaysian governments had an agreement to construct Su-Ngai Golok bridge, a road bridge crossing Golok river, allowing people from both countries to commute to each other (Chapa Chittpratoom.1997:68-86).

30 years later in 2008 (2551 B.E.), another bridge crossing Golok river was built connecting Buketa village in Waeng District, Narathiwat Province, Thailand with Bukit Bunga town in Kelantan, Malaysia. However, a lot of people still used unofficial crossing points to commute to each other. The borderland played a bigger role than being a boundary of the nation. It was a cultural space for the locals.

Although several official crossing points were established, local Malay-Muslim rice traders always sought for alternative routes along the Golok river to continuously affiliate with the cross-border trade networks.

V. DYNAMICS AND ADJUSTMENTS OF MALAY-MUSLIM CROSS BORDER RICE TRADERS IN NARATHIWAT BORDERLAND, THAILAND

In the past 67 years, the Malay-Muslim unofficial rice traders in the borderland of Narathiwat province have been negotiated with the changes of border controls policies. The dynamics and adjustments are divided into five eras.

1. State rice trade monopoly and the beginning of unofficial rice trade (1946 – 1971 approx.)

After WWII in 1946 (2489 B.E.), Thailand was forced to pay the war reparations to Britain with 1.5 tons of rice. To make such a great payment, the Thai government had to monopolise

rice trade and had full control over rice export to be able to buy rice from its domestic market at low price (Narong Phetprasert et al., 2005: 14-15). The government only allowed Khlong Toei Port to be the only export point in the country. This encouraged people to hoard rice and smuggle it across the border.

The rice trade administration was centralised in Bangkok with committee members to authorise rice trade activities. Thai rice mills' society, Rice traders' society, and Rice exporter' society were set up. The government regulated rice control and rice movement law. The regulations made it impossible for the rice producers (the mills) and the rice traders (exporters) to make profits. Therefore, an underground trade was set up during and after the war. Smuggling activities were introduced such as smuggling by sea to Singapore (Chawalit Angwittayatorn, 2001: 190-191). A lot of rice smuggling activities from Thailand to Malaysia spread throughout the borderline.

Rice traders started to establish their trading networks. The Ant Army group employed every strategy to negotiate with the government policy to prohibit unauthorised traders to export rice. Two routes were used to conduct unofficial cross-border rice trade; the train route from Su-Ngai Golok to Pasir Mas in Kelantan, and the train route from Bang Nara River, Tak Bai River, and Golok River to the Gulf of Thailand and Singapore as a final destination. Several factors contributed to the rice smuggling.

Firstly, the rice monopoly and control in 1946 (2489 B.E.) resulted in low rice price in the domestic market while the rice price in other countries was about £40 higher. In Malaysia rice was sold at £200-500 per ton while in Thailand the government bought rice from the farmers at £13-15 per ton (Narong Phetprasert et al., 2005: 15). The high rice price in Malaysia tempted the traders in Thailand to hoard and smuggle rice to Malaysia. This unofficial cross-border activity required speed and a lot of labour. A new profession called Ant Army was introduced (*the word Ant Army was used by police officers to call young people in the village who got together to work as a labourer smuggling rice for the cross border rice trade network. Each Ant Army group consisted of approximately 8 people. The group usually had its own group name*).

Secondly, after the rice smuggling activities especially in Narathiwat had grown, in 1949 (2492 B.E.) there was rice shortage in the Thai domestic market. The rice price in the country increased. The official retail price was 220 Baht per sack with 40 Baht delivery charge or 50 Baht in the monsoon season. However, most retailers would hoard some rice to sell through the backdoor at 600-800 Baht per sack (Voramai Kabilsingh, 2005: 45, 69, 73)

Therefore, the government introduced a new policy to revoke the export control and to use the premium duty system. In the premium duty system, if the export amount of rice was high, the duty rate would be high and if the export amount was less, the duty rate would also be less (Narong Phetprasert et al., 2005: 16). The premium duty system was intended to make the domestic rice price independent from the global market and make the price in the country remain relatively low. (Somboon Siriprachai, 1988: 61 – 97). However, the new policy stimulated a higher volume of rice smuggling activities at the southern border of Thailand because the traders could avoid

paying high duty rate and could gain more profits from the unofficial price.

Thirdly, Malay-Muslims living in the southern borderland had been doing rice farming as a profession while in Malaysia rice was only farmed in [Terengganu](#), Kelantan, Perak, [Kedah](#), and [Perlis](#). Malaysia had always been importing rice from Thailand. Therefore, when the Thai government monopolised the rice export, the demand of rice consumption in Malaysia was then higher resulting in an increase of rice price in Malaysia. The demand in Malaysia encouraged the growth of smuggling activities. Plenty of traders were found in the border towns. Ant Army workers were plenty as well.

With the cross-border rice smuggling and rice shortage problem, the Thai government was compelled to introduce a stricter export control rules. In 1966 (2509 B.E.), the Ministry of Economics issued an announcement (no.7) to prohibit the export of rice seeds, brown rice, white rice, glutinous rice, broken rice, rice bran, or any rice products from the Kingdom of Thailand.

After rice export was prohibited, the seaports and fishing ports in Narathiwat were full of illegal activities. The smuggling was even done by using a raft. Some elderly people who lived near the seaports said, "Bang Nara River at night time was shaken by the boats carrying rice to Malaysia. The traffic was heavy from the sunset to the sunrise. The trade brought the local traders and officialdom a lot of wealth. (An interview with the mayor of Narathiwat Municipality and some elderly people, conducted between the 17th -19th of July 2008).

While the smuggling activities were thriving, to combat with the smuggling, the strict controls at Su Ngai Golok checkpoint and Su Ngai Padi checkpoint were reinforced. For sea control, the government's enactment in 1979 (2522 B.E.) allowed the navy to have a power of arrest. The control measures, however, could not stop the Ant Army groups who operated throughout the borderland.

2. The boom of cross border rice trade (between 1972 and 1975 (2515-2518 B.E.))

Between 1972 and 1975, the rice price in Malaysian market was three times higher than in Thailand. Chinese traders relocated their warehouses to the area close to the border and bought rice from retail traders with a proposition of doubled profits. When the Ant Army group bought the rice at 350 Baht per sack and sold it to the Chinese trader, they would be paid at 700 Baht per sack (one sack contained 100 kilogram of rice). If a kilogram of rice was bought at 8-9 Baht, the Chinese trader would double the price. When the rice was successfully smuggled to Malaysia, the price per kilogram would be 20 Baht. However, if it was caught, all the investment would vanish.

The rice retailer tended to use a motorcycle to smuggle rice at night time. The headlight would be turned off. A minor route in the district would be used to avoid the police patrol. Rice would be transported to a village near the train station. Then the Ant Army would use the train to carry rice to Su Ngai Golok station. Some Ant Army groups handed over the rice at the train carriage. Some delivered it at Golok riverbank while some continued on the boat to Malaysia. The profit would be greater if the delivery was closer to the buyer, yet the risk was greater too. Some of the smugglers were intercepted in the middle of Golok river.

The rice trade network consisted of Buddhist Thais, Chinese Thais, and Muslim Thais. The trading ranged from a retailer selling only 20 kilograms of rice to selling 2-4 sacks using a motorcycle or a truck to transport. At least two deliveries were done every night. If the delivery was done by a truck, it was likely that a bribe was given the police officers to secure the delivery. A retailer with a small delivery tended to take more risks because they did not pay a bribe. The rice was secure once it was in the Chinese trader's store. It was known that the police officers would leave it alone.

During this time, even primary or secondary students seriously got involved in rice trade because they potentially earned about 1000 Baht a day. A lot of rubber tappers, food sellers, and even government employers became full time rice traders. Some did it as a second career after a day job. It was said the cash flow in the village was very good.

3. The end of automobile routes and the beginning of the train routes for the Ant Army (between 1977- 1996 (2520-2539 B.E.))

The smuggling through automobile routes started to be less popular in 1977 (2520 B.E.) while the train routes through Yala and Su-Ngai Golok became very vibrant. A high rank government official revealed, "Rice traders consisted of government employees, retailers, villagers, and young people. They were called the Ant Army. Rice was transported across the border every day. The government officials were the key players to facilitate the delivery. For the smuggling through the river routes, a Kolek fishing boat was used to transport the rice with a payment of 30 Baht per sack. The seaports were divided into zones controlled by custom officers or police officers who shared profits from the traders. The automobile routes were operated with complex code system by using cards with different pictures on for example a fish card or a monkey card. Motorcycles were used in the delivery to take over some parts of the journey to avoid the search at the checkpoints. When the rice was handed to the first trader, the first trader would hand it to the second trader to transport to an agent at the border who packed the rice in small bags for the Ant Army to carry them across the border by train. On the train, the Ant Army had to find a place to hide the bags. They might have to pay the train conductors for an exclusive hiding place for example 300 Baht for a toilet space. Pattani Province does not border any town in Malaysia so it was used as a temporary storage. Rice from Narathiwat was transported back to Saiburi District in Pattani to keep the activity a low profile before arranging a delivery across the border. While the patrol was strict in Narathiwat, the rules were lax in Yala. The Balor train station in Yala, which is close to Rueso District in Narathiwat was a popular rice distribution point for the traders. When rice was sold in the Thai domestic market at 400-500 Baht a sack and it could be sold at 1200 Baht a sack in Malaysia, even with some overhead expenses the profit was still immense. The free market was unlikely to happen when the rice price difference in the two neighbouring countries was high" (Seni Madagagul et al. 1974 : p. 5-12).

Cross-border rice trade activities through the train routes including carrying, hiding, and moving around were exciting, frightening, and chaotic. During the year 1975- 1981 (2518-2524 B.E.), the Ant Army was fully operated. Rice could be

transported on the train in a very short time before the train left the station. Any possible hiding places on the train such as the toilet, the roof, and under the train were fully used. Most of the Ant Army workers were teenagers who took great risks every day holding on the train and being searched by the officials. The Ant Army workers employed several tactics to avoid the search. Some tied the rice sacks under the train with a tin of acid which could harm the officials to put them off searching under the train. Female smugglers employed different tactics to the male counterparts. Some tied the rice bags to the abdomen to make them look pregnant. Some wore a sarong, put the rice bag in the sarong, and sat on it through the train journey. The train police officers tended to ignore them although once in a while the officers might pull them off the seat to tease them. The tease and the scream made the local train journey colourful.

An former rice retailer (interviewed on the 19th of June 2009) shared his train smuggling experience during the year 1975- 1984 (2518-2527). Living in Su Ngai Golok, he got up early in the morning to take the train from Su Ngai Golok station. More than 30 Ant Army workers spread out on different carriages. When the train arrived at Yala station, the Ant Army workers went to buy rice from a Chinese trader who was generally called "Tee". Each of them bought 2-3 sacks of rice at 800 Baht a sack. The rice would be delivered to the train station by the Chinese trader's employees. The Ant Army hid the rice on the train and transported it back to Su Ngai Golok. On the train, they pretended not to know each other and made sure they did not look suspicious. When they arrived at Su Ngai Golok station, the youngsters would carry the rice to the Chinese trader's warehouse. The youngsters were paid 40 Baht a sack. Most of Chinese traders were female. They were generally called "Jay". When the rice was stored in Jay's warehouse, it was secure. Jay would then contact the trader in Malaysia. Each Chinese trader in Thailand would have their own Malaysian contact and they would not poach other traders' contacts. In Malaysia there was no search point. If the smugglers could deliver the rice across the Thai border, the mission was accomplished and definitely yielded profits.

The Ant Army continued to use the train routes to operate cross-border rice trade. In 1983 (2526 B.E.), Thaksin Salatan (1983:51-59) explained that "commodities were regularly smuggled in Su Ngai Golok. Some were packed in small bags and transported by the Ant Army. The commodities were delivered to Malaysian traders who waited at the train station before it reached the final destination at Su Ngai Golok. Both adults and youngsters carried bags of rice from Yala or Tanyongmat. Sometimes, the Ant Army workers had to run away as they were about to be intercepted by the police. Along the Golok river, which is a boundary between Thailand and Malaysia, there were several small docks used to transport commodities from Thailand to Malaysia. In Su Ngai Golok municipality there were more than 10 docks. An auction for dock operation took place. The auction advantage usually went to an owner of the land on the riverbank. Dock operation guaranteed wealth for the owner.

For smuggling activities around Bang Nara river in Narathiwat, after the Royal Irrigation Department built a small dam in 1988 (2531 B.E.), people were no longer able to commute

by the river. This ended the Bang Nara river route for rice smugglers.

After having monopolised the rice market for 30 years, in 1986 (2529 B.E.) the government decided to allow free market competition in rice industry (Ammar Siamwalla and Direk Patamasiriwat, 1989: 139-154). In 1991 (2534 B.E.) the Ministry of Commerce's regulation (no.1) on rice export allowed private rice traders to export rice. This made train smuggling become less popular and the Ant Army workers decided to adjust their smuggling strategies or look for another job.

4. The Renaissance of the locals when the rice "store" is on the borderline (early 1997-2003 (2540 -2546 B.E.))

In Early 1997 (2540 B.E.), the Malay-Muslims completely changed their cross border rice trade strategy. As the transportation in the country was more convenient, Thai rice traders put their "stores" (the term the local used to call a warehouse) on the borderline of Golok river and once the Malaysian investor gave a signal, the rice could be transported across the river immediately. This kind of smuggling was successful because the local Muslim smugglers shared the same ethnic and cultural identities with the Malaysian traders. There were a lot of Malay-Muslim traders along the border towns. They were members of big Chinese investors. One of the big investors revealed, "I had two big warehouses. I started the business in 1997. I stored my own rice and rice from other investors too. I had two 6WD trucks to transport rice to my network. I had 20 Muslim traders in my network. (interviewed on the 8th of May 2009)

Using a store or a warehouse was a type of rice trade aiming to transport rice to Malaysia or to Singapore via Malaysia. Each rice sack contained 100 kilograms of rice. An former investor explained, "A "store" trade was operated in two ways; a trader collected the rice and made the delivery before coming back to make a payment or a big investor hired a network coordinator to deal with the Muslim traders. The network coordinator did not need a lot of budget. It was important to pay the traders and to build trust between the investors from the two countries. Other trade agreements would be carried about among the investors." (interviewed on the 19th of October 2010).

A Muslim trader who had a store in a village on Golok riverbank informed, "The cross border trade was the most prosperous during 2000-2001. Every night, 1000 sacks of rice were transported to Malaysia. The border patrol on the Malaysian border was not as strict as it is now." (interviewed on the 27th of April 2009).

A Muslim trader had about eight Ant Army workers in his team. Each operation required different numbers of teams to do the job according to an amount of rice transported in each journey. Some investors might need 10 teams or nearly 100 Ant Army workers to transport the commodities. An Ant Army worker explained about the operation, "I was the team leader. I had seven people in my team. We transported goods at night time or at dawn. We collected the goods from the warehouse, put them on the truck, and then moved them onto the boat. When the boat was docked on the Malaysian riverbank, we moved the goods and put them on the truck. We were paid 25 Baht per a

sack of 50 kilograms. If it was a 100 kilogram sack, we got 50 Baht.” (interviewed on the 2nd of May 2009)

In 2001 (2544 B.E.), Thai and Malaysian governments developed their border agreement to solve border problems, one of which about the goods smuggling activities (Dollaya Tiantong. 2001, p. 32-44). The agreement did not affect the “store” operation much. There were still several warehouses on Golok riverbank. A Malay-Muslim investor mentioned, “I had a rice store on the riverbank like other people in the same profession because it was convenient to transport goods to Malaysia. The Malaysian investor’s workers would take the goods from the Malaysian riverbank and put them on the truck. Another team would take over the operation and sent them to Singapore. (interviewed on the 2nd of March 2009)

5. The era of cross border rice trade difficulties (2004 (2547 B.E.) -present)

Due to the political unrest in the southernmost provinces since 2004 (2547 B.E.), the Thai and Malaysian governments demanded stricter border controls. The Malaysian government provided more officials to the border checkpoints. Border patrol police and soldiers worked with custom officers to increase the patrol along Golok river. An Ant Army explained, “The border patrol along the Malaysian border is more frequent. It is much more difficult to transport rice across the river. At the same time, because of the political unrest, there are more soldiers in the village. The villagers were told by the soldiers not to keep stores near the riverbank. The stores had to be demolished and the rice was moved to store in the villagers’ houses instead. The villagers who agreed to store the rice for the investors would receive a fee at two Baht per sack.” (interviewed on the 2nd of March 2009) Malay-Muslim traders had to adjust their trade strategies under the change of border policies from the two states. While the Thai government encouraged free market competition, the Malaysian government demanded stricter controls over rice trade.

Unofficial rice trade during 1997- 2007 survived all difficulties with the border controls by adjusting their business strategies into two aspects.

Firstly, the trade took place at an unofficial market. The market was only known among the locals. The rice retailers in the market were the former investors selling rice to customers from Malaysia. The amount of sale increased on the market day. A rice retailer said, “Thai customers do not have the same purchasing power like the Malaysians. With Malaysian customers, we can sell 10 sacks of rice a day or about 1000 kilogram a day. My shop assistants are my relatives. They help pack the rice into bags, some of which have a Malay label on while some have a Thai label on. We sell white rice, glutinous rice, and black glutinous rice.”

An observation revealed that there were a few rice shops in every village along Golok river with the boundary to Malaysia. Rice sold in the shop was sent from an investor in Su Ngai Golok or Tak Bai. A shop owner explained, “We charge a Malaysian customer for a delivery to boat at the rate of 10 Baht per 25 kilograms. The customers from Malaysia cross the river by boat to buy rice and other types of goods all day. On Friday, the shop is busy. We may have 2-3 thousands customers. The boat taxi is operated by the riverbank landowner. The taxi fare is 20 Baht per trip. Shop owners have to pay a monthly bribe to the Thai officials. If the delivery has to go through the checkpoint, the

convenience fee must be paid. (interviewed on the 1st of May 2009)

Secondly, Muslim traders joined the city or the district investor’s network in Narathiwat. Facing difficulties with border controls, the networks started to work in partnership to share resources such as labour, information, and technology. Mobile phones were employed to communicate with each other. Ant Army workers tried to find new routes and tactics to avoid being intercepted by the officials.

Malay-Muslim cross-border rice traders built and expanded their networks across the borderland to transport rice across the border. A Muslim investor explained, “If we have rice in our “store” or in a villager’s house, we need to distribute it to Malaysia as quickly as possible to avoid an increase of expenses and a risk of flooding. Therefore, if our store in Waeng district cannot distribute the rice in the local area, we will then have to contact our network to distribute the rice in another area. On the other hand, when suitable, other investors from Tak Bai or Su Ngai Golok may want to distribute their rice at Waeng dock as well. (interviewed on the 31st of August 2010)

An Ant Army worker also shared his experience, “We have to get up early and get together to do the delivery. There are 15 people in the group. The employer (investor) uses the telephone communication to call for an assembly. The time of assembly cannot be informed in advance depending on when it is safe to do the delivery. If there is a Malaysian soldier patrol, the delivery will be called off. The delivery is usually done when the soldiers change shifts. Some soldiers are more flexible than others especially those from different religions. Before the assembly, the investor in Malaysia will be informed of the operation by radio communication. When it is safe, the Ant Army group will start the delivery. All will get on the truck and get off at the store. The workers help putting rice on the truck and travel to the dock. A boat is used to transport rice across the river. Once rice arrives at the Malaysian border, the Malaysian workers will take over the operation. (interviewed on the 18th of October 2010)

Another Ant Army worker reflected on the difficulties of the cross-border rice trade, “After there was the political unrest in the south of Thailand, there was a lot of tension in the borderland especially in Narathiwat. Everything is stricter and more difficult. The cross-border rice trade must be well-prepared. The network prepares a pickup truck and at least two boats because time is limited. When the source informs that the soldiers are coming, it means they are only 6-7 kilometres far from the operation. The operation must be called off. The rice has to be transported back. (interviewed on the 20th of October 2010)

As the cross-border rice trade has become a bigger network, the Muslim traders feel they are not in the position to quit because it will affect the operation of the whole network. A trader revealed, “I have thought about quitting so many times because of the long waiting time to make a delivery. I am not an investor and I am paid only on commission. There is always a risk of making a loss even for the investors themselves. However, I have no choice. It is a network. If I stop, it will affect other parts of the network.” (interviewed on the 19 of December 2010)

Most traders and members of a big investor have changed their job role to a coordinator after the cross-border rice trade faced more and more difficulties.

VI. CONCLUSION

Dynamics and adjustments of Malay-Muslim cross-border rice traders in Narathiwat borderland reflected how Malay-Muslims used a collaboration of relatives and friends in the community to work with each other and share profits.

Cross-border rice trade was considered a profession for the borderlanders as well as a work experience for youngsters in the village. The career was a symbol of economic prosperity of the region. It also showed a tight-knitted horizontal relationship between networks and between Ant Army workers.

The relationship at the network level depended on profits as well as trust upon each other. Fair shares of profits and duties were vital to the success of the network. The network does not only support its members in terms of wages, but they also look after each other. The relationship in the network was beyond an employer and employees. With stricter border controls policies the networks required to work together to share labour force and trading points.

The Ant Army operation was an opportunity for young people to learn to work and make friends. They gained both work experience and social skills. A good work relationship led to social support between each other.

Dynamics and adjustments of Malay-Muslim cross-border rice traders reflected capacity of the Malay-Muslims in the borderland such as skills in network management, area management, and negotiation skills. An unofficial cooperation like this implicated a complex cultural system of kinship and ethnic identity.

Moreover, the strengths of Malay-Muslim cross-border rice trade network were trust and promises between the members and between the networks. This characteristic was important to the survival of the trade even though they have faced with stricter rules and regulations concerning border controls.

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