

### Local Cultural Diplomacy on Promoting Stability along the Thailand-Cambodia Border

### By

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### **Abstract**

The research aimed to study context of the current stability situations and community relationships along the Thailand-Cambodia border, to find out local diplomats on stability promotion along the Thailand-Cambodia border, and guidelines on stability development through local diplomats along the Thailand-Cambodia border. This research mainly used to investigate a qualitative research method. It consisted of in-depth interview with 140 key informants in two areas, 70 people in each area at Dan Klang village, Phu Pha Mok Sub-district, Kantharalak District and Sare Pai village, Phrai Phatthana Sub-district, Phu Sing District, Sisaket Province. A focus group discussion was also carried out in two areas with 15 key informants from each area. It was conducted together with observation, document review. In addition, the use of triangular technique was utilized to deeply check the data obtained. The results found that the result of context of current stability situation and community relationship along the Thailand-Cambodia border at Dan Klang village and Sare Pai village revealed that they are located along the border of Phanom Dong Rak mountain range which is a boundary line between Thailand and Cambodia. Most people are Cambodian ethnic group who mainly use Khmer language to communicate with people in the border communities of Cambodia. They have similar ways of life and earn a living on farming. The same tradition and culture of both areas is a practice of witches to help sick people which has been inherited from generation to generation. Sare Pai village, a trading and cross-border path, is the last village next to Chong Sa Ngam border crossing point. The people living in the two communities have a form of folklore relationship with the border communities of Cambodia on behalf of local diplomats to build a relationship and promote stability along the border. The result of local diplomats of stability promotion along the Thailand-Cambodia border revealed a form of building a relationship by local diplomats in promoting stability. This consisted of several aspects of relation in terms of family line, economy and trading, shared space and shared tradition and culture.

**Keywords:** Local Diplomats, Stability Promotion, Thailand-Cambodia Border

#### Significance of the study

Due to significant economic cooperation, the current integration of the six Mekong countries, namely Cambodia, China, Burma, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand are now known as "Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS)." Its cooperation has been supported intensively by the Asian Development Bank since 1990 under a policy called "The Mekong Sub-region Economic Development Cooperation". In addition, Dore and Kaosa-ard (2003) stated that the key processes that contribute to the integration of all countries included, namely 1) globalization,



2) internationalization, 3) recognition of liberalization, internationalization, westernization, and 4) boundlessness. Additionally, regionalism can be reviewed by the integration of the economy of the countries with the global financial-capital market system by utilizing the Mekong river resources for development. The nations establish market mechanisms, agreements and contracts as the intermediary to create the connection in the region. The creation of international sister cities development is therefore a tangible example of cooperation in the Mekong region, such as sister cities of Ubon Ratchathani Province (Thailand) and Champasak Province (Lao People's Democratic Republic), and Sisaket Province and Siem Reap (Kingdom of Cambodia) arisen from the Irawadee - Chao Phraya - Mekong economic cooperation strategy (Sisaket Province, 2016).

In addition, the Suranaree Armed Forces government agency has continued to drive the construction of parallel strong villages along the border in the lower northeastern region of five provinces including Buriram, Surin, Sisaket, Ubon Ratchathani and Amnat Charoen, Thailand. In 2005, according to the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, the Sufficiency Economy Training Program was implemented in Kingdom of Cambodia to improve the quality of people's life of neighboring countries in the border areas. In 2007-2016, a parallel village was implemented in the area of Phu Sing District, Sisaket Province (Thailand) with the district of Al long Weng, Udon Meechai Province (Kingdom of Cambodia). There were four roadmaps cooperated with a network of cooperation from various agencies in Sisaket and Ubon Ratchathani Province: 1) developing relations and coordinating with neighboring countries, 2) preparing experts, 3) training on sufficiency economy, and 4) maintaining a follow-up relationship with project assessment (Sisaket Province, 2006).

Sister cities and parallel strong villages along the Thailand-Cambodia border were created to aim for a strong relationship in all sectors, including military, economic, social, especially the stability and safety of both Thai and Cambodian people. There were six important cooperation issues as follows: 1) stability and peace cooperation along the Thailand-Cambodia border to be consistent and effective based on good relationships and to eliminate problems that will lead to further conflict; 2) prevention and suppression of various wrongdoings along the Thailand-Cambodia border, such as illegal deforestation, illegal immigration, drug smuggling, the problem of smuggling and evading goods including the emphasis on nationality verification in illegal foreign workers issue to facilitate passport issuance. The cooperation group has been set up to reduce the current problems for a better coordination; 3) cooperation in cross-border traffic restrictions and checkpoints to facilitate and promote relationships between people of both sides in accordance with the agreement on cross-border travel between Thailand and Cambodia, the correct use of border crossing documents, the discussion of the opening of the border crossing point, and the request to upgrade the border crossing point to meet common international guidelines; 4) the establishment of sister city and parallel village projects along the Thailand-Cambodia border in relation to the government policies of both sides for the development in all aspects of four villages in four provinces, namely Buriram, Surin, Sisaket and Ubon Ratchathani (Thailand), with Khemarat and Udon Meechai provinces (Kingdom of Cambodian) to provide exchanges of education, observation, and support for experts to educate about the Sufficiency Economy



approach, and the support of plant and animal breeds for cultivation and livestock of Thai-Cambodian people, in order to strengthen parallel villages for sustainable cooperation as a protected and surveillance area (Buffer Zone) along the Thailand-Cambodia border; 5) land boundaries survey and establishment by delimitation committees from both countries implementing the ongoing delimitation process to allow the cooperation based on the defined agreements to soften border problems through peaceful means; and 6) cooperation in various fields including trade, investment, economy and tourism in accordance with the ASEAN Economic Community. This includes the student exchange programing, being a good change to Cambodian students to study at Rajabhat University and Rajamangala Institute in the area of Ubon Ratchathani, Sisaket and Surin in the direction of a long-term cooperation to bring peace and good relationships to the border area on the basis of equality.

Sisaket Province, a border province, has its southern side bordering on Kingdom of Cambodia with a distance of approximately 127 kilometers, including Kantharalak District bordering on Chom Krasan District (Preah Vihear province), Khun Han District bordering on Dropiang Prasat District (Udon Meechai Province), and Phu Sing District bordering on Al long Weng District (Udon Meechai Province). There are five areas of cooperation practice: 1) conference or relationship activities, 2) trading, 3) education, 4) sports and culture, and 5) public health. Sok Kham Pom village (Phu Pha Mok Sub-district, Kantharalak District, Sisaket Province, Thailand) and Bor Sbow village (Chom Krasan District, Preah Vihear Province, Cambodia) have become parallel strong villages with a variety of joint activities allowing the people in the communities to become local diplomats who connect and promote stability along the border (Sisaket Province, 2016). This is in line with the National Security Development Strategy (2013-2017) that supported community and local operations in border areas leading to good relationships at the community and a happy coexistence with the surrounding countries.

Chong Sa Ngam (Phu Sing District, Sisaket Province, Thailand) bordering on Al long Weng District (Udon Meechai Province, Cambodia) is the only one permanent border crossing point for trade and tourism purposes along with seven natural border crossings, namely, 1) Chong Phoi (Phu Pha Mok Sub-district), 2) Chong Sam Tae (Phu Pha Mok Sub-district), 3) Chong Ta Tao (Sao Thong Chai Sub-district), 4) Chong Phra Wihan (Sao Thong Chai Sub-district), 5) Chong Don Ao, (Rung Sub-district, Kantharalak District), 6) Chong Phra Phalai (Samrong Kiat Sub-district, Khun Han District), and 7) Chong Daraka (Phrai Phatthana Sub-district, Phu Sing District). In the past, some natural border crossings were used as both legal and illegal border crossings in the form of kinship relations and local diplomats. Some natural border crossings have never been opened due to the unfinished demarcation cases, the lost and removed boundary markers, and especially the adherence of Thailand and Cambodia to maps with different interpretations resulting in disputes affecting Thai-Cambodian relations.

According to such problems, it greatly was an obstacle on strengthening the relationship between Thai and Cambodian border communities. Although Thailand and Cambodia had tried to resolve the disputes, they still faced various obstacles. According to the problems that impact on the Thailand-Cambodia border community area collected by the researcher, there should be guidelines for relationship building that can cover all levels. Especially at the border

communities, people of the two countries should be able to cross the border without difficulty, and to locally promote the participation of the two communities to forge a good relationship. The main goal is a development base of peaceful coexistence relying on the relationship of the Thailand-Cambodia border communities in the research area. Involvement of local residents is essential to ensure border stability by adhering to the principles of suitability and a real relationship of the border community conditions. In 2015, it was such an urgent agenda that government agencies participated in solving problems and becoming an ASEAN Community to create international cooperation and stability using kinship relations, also known as local diplomats, as a driving force in the aforementioned various activities that occurred on the basis of communities in the Thailand-Cambodia border area. Therefore, the researcher was interested in studying local diplomats and stability promotion along the Thailand-Cambodia border aim the following purposes: to study the context of the current stability situation and community relationships including local diplomats on stability promotion and guidelines for stability development through local diplomats along Thailand-Cambodia border to study context of the current stability situations and community relationships along the Thailand-Cambodia border, to find out local diplomats on stability promotion along the Thailand-Cambodia border, and guidelines on stability development through local diplomats along the Thailand-Cambodia border.

#### Research Objectives

Three objectives were aimed in this research:

- 1. To study context of the current stability situation and community relationships along the Thailand-Cambodia border
- 2. To study local diplomats on promoting stability along the Thailand-Cambodia border
- 3. To study guidelines on stability development through local diplomats along the Thailand-Cambodia border.

### **Research Methodology**

There were five crucial elements of research methodology as follows:

#### 1. Scope of Research Area

There were two areas covering two villages of Thailand, namely, 1) Dan Klang village, Phu Pha Mok Sub-district, Kantharalak District, and 2) Sare Pai village, Phrai Phatthana Sub-district, Phu Sing District, in Sisaket Province (Thailand) along the Thailand-Cambodia border which have been cooperating on promoting stability together with villages in Kingdom of Cambodia.

#### 2. Research Period

Research period was 12 months from October, 2017 to September, 2018.

#### 3. Research Samples



The two groups of research samples of this qualitative research were determined by the selective method, namely, 1) key informants for interview and 2) key informants for group discussion as follows:

### 3.1 A group of 140 interviewees from two areas

- 3.1.1 A total of 70 leaders and citizens of Dan Klang village, Phu Pha Mok Sub-district, Kantharalak District, Sisaket Province, Thailand
- 3.1.2 A total of 70 leaders and citizens of Sare Pire village, Prai Phatthana Sub-district, Phu Sing District, Sisaket Province, Thailand

The qualifications of key informants were leaders and citizens living in the areas along the Thailand-Cambodia border and participating in activities to build relationships between Thailand and Cambodia.

- 3.2 A group of informants in a group discussion consisted of 30 people from two areas:
- 3.2.1 A group discussion of 15 leaders and citizens of Dan Klang village, Phu Pha Mok Subdistrict, Kantharalak District, Sisaket Province, Thailand
- 3.2.2 A group discussion of 15 leaders and citizens of Sare Pire village, Prai Phatthana Subdistrict, Phu Sing District, Sisaket Province, Thailand

#### 4. Research Instruments

The instruments used for data collection consisted of interview and focus group discussion.

#### 5. Data Collection

The process of data collection was as follows:

### 5.1 Document study and literature review

Document study and literature review were carried out by collecting information from documents related to local diplomats on promoting stability along the Thailand-Cambodia border. This includes books, research reports, thesis, term papers, articles, academic reports, and information from related electronic media. Those documents were used to support and obtain details about the village context, research areas, the current stability situation and community relations along the Thailand-Cambodia border.

#### 5.2 Field data collection

There were four parts of field data collection as follows:

- 5.2.1 Participatory observation and non-participatory observation to collect village context data in the research area, current stability situation, and community relations along the Thailand-Cambodia border
- 5.2.2 In-depth interviews to collect information from key informants about local diplomats and stability promotion along the Thailand-Cambodia border, divided into two research areas with a total of 140 interviewees as follows:

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- 1) Two interviews were carried out with 70 key informants in a research area at Dan Klang village, Phu Pha Mok Sub-district, Kantharalak District, Sisaket Province, Thailand. The first interview was on February 10, 2018, and the second interview was on June 21, 2018.
- 2) Two interviews were carried out with 70 key informants in a research area at Sare Pire village, Phrai Phatthana, Sub-district, Phu Sing District, Sisaket Province, Thailand. The first interview was on February 21, 2018, and the second interview was on June 28, 2018.
- 5.2.3 Group discussion was divided into two groups of 15 people each, totaling 30 people. The details were as follows:
- 1) A group discussion of 15 key informants in Dan Klang village (Phu Pha Mok Subdistrict, Kantharalak District, Sisaket Province) was carried out twice. The first time was carried out in Dan Klang village area on July 15, 2018, and the second time was a group discussion forum to return the information to the key informants on September 11, 2018 at Dan Klang village hall.
- 2) A group discussion of 15 key informants in Sare Pire village (Phrai Phatthana, Subdistrict, Phu Sing District, Sisaket Province) was carried out twice. The first time was carried out in Sare Pire village area on July 20, 2018, and the second time was a group discussion forum to return the information to the key informants on September 16, 2018 at Sare Pire village hall.
- 5.2.4 Knowledge integration and accuracy verification were the process to return the information to the key informants in the research area and to compare with the concepts, theories and related research.

#### 6. Data analysis

The qualitative data collection along with the descriptive analysis method were utilized in this research. The information obtained from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, informal interviews, and participatory and non-participatory observations. A triangular technique was also employed to check whether the obtained data were different or the same under the conditions when the person giving changes, the time of colleting the data changes, and the place of colleting the data changes. In order to achieve the research results, an interpretative analysis and linkage analysis were conducted to verify the conformity of the content based on conceptual logic, theory with context, and related research works from literature reviews.

### **Research Results**

Research results were presented according to three research objectives as follows:

- 1. Context of the current stability situation and community relationships along the Thailand-Cambodia border was classified into two areas as follows:
- 1.1 Dan Klang village, Phu Pha Mok Sub-district, Kantharalak District, Sisaket Province

Most of the population in Dan Klang village, Phu Pha Mok Sub-district, Kantharalak District, Sisaket Province were Cambodian ethnic who mainly used Khmer language to communicate, and some elderly people were still able to write Khom-Khmer characters. Most



of them were engaged in farming, kenaf farming and hunting. They have recently changed their occupations from rice farming to rubber plantation, cassava farming and kenaf farming, respectively. Most of them have performed the witch practice as a way of helping the sick of the Khmer ethnic group inherited from the past to present. The religious activities were such as the festival of Buddhist Lent, the end of Buddhist Lent, the merit of Khao Sak, and the Loi Krathong festival. A unique local tradition was the Loi Krathong tradition known as Pang Ok Preia Khae (in Khmer). This ceremony is performed when the moon rises above the head, to predict the amount of precipitation will begin. It is a ceremony to predict the weather conditions of the villagers with the belief that in which month it will rain and which month it will be dry. Most of the people are Buddhists and local wisdom is of healers called Mor Ya and Mor Bao.

#### 1.2 Sare Pire village, Phrai Phatthana, Sub-district, Phu Sing District, Sisaket Province

It was unknow when Sare Pire village was officially established; however, the first founder was told to be Mr. Boon Samransuk. It was estimated that the village was founded during the year 1927-1937, or about 70 years ago by Mr. Boon Samransuk, a villager in Phum Cha Kae. He passed by and found the fertile terrain that was suitable for cultivation. He led about 30 families to the area and established a village located on the southern side of Tapiang Prai. They lived in the area around the swamp growing rice until this swamp became shallower and finally became rice fields. The village was then called Srok Sare Pire or Sare Pire. Later, the government established the school in 1964. Then, around the year 1968-1969, there was a regime change in Kingdom of Cambodia causing the Khmer people to smuggle into Thailand to steal property of Thai people living along border in the areas of Phum Sang Ngam village, Phum Chorak village, and Phum Chea village located on the south of the Sare Pire village. Finally, Thai people in those areas, therefore, emigrated to Sare Pire village.

At present, Sare Pire village has an area of approximately 1,740 rai, a farming area of 1,620 rai, and a residential area of 120 rai, with the Phanom Dong Rak mountain range on the border between Thailand and Cambodia. There is a permanent border crossing point at Chong Sang Ngam for trading and border crossing. There are important water sources, namely, Huai Samran River and Huai Tam Mon Reservoir. Sare Pire village is adjacent to O Talan village (Charas Sub-district, Buachet District, Surin Province) in the west, Sare Pier village no. 4 (Phrai Phatthana Sub-district, Phu Sing District, Sisaket Province) in the north, Chong Sa-ngam (Cambodia) in the south, and Wana Sawan village no. 5 (Phrai Phatthana Sub-district, Phu Sing District, Sisaket Province) in the east. Most of the topography is plains at the foot of Phanom Dong Rak mountain. It is 23 kilometers from Sare Pier village to Phu Sing District, and 90 kilometers to Sisaket Province. The languages spoken are mostly Khmer and Lao. Today Mr. Weerasit Norasing is the village headman ruling 11 divided administrative areas. Most of the people work in rice farming, cassava and rubber plantation, trading, animal husbandry and general labor. Most of the people are Buddhists with various beliefs in cultural traditions maintained. This includes the practice of witches, the tradition of making offerings to Don Ta, the tradition of making offerings to Pu Ta, the legend of Luang Pu Suang, the festival of Buddhist Lent, and the festival of the end of Buddhist Lent.



2. Local diplomats on stability promotion along the Thailand-Cambodia border

Local diplomats on stability promotion consisted of four cooperation relationships as follows:

- 2.1 Family relationship and kinship
- 2.2 Economic relations and trade
- 2.3 The relationship of sharing spaces for resources and forest by the villagers on both sides
- 3. Guidelines on stability development through local diplomats in promoting stability along the Thailand-Cambodia border

Some guidelines on stability development through local diplomats along the Thailand-Cambodia border were as follows:

- 3.1 Exchange of cultural traditions and economy in both areas
- 3.2 Request to open a temporary crossing point in Ban Dan area
- 3.3 Promote activities for language and culture education through government organizations every year

### **Discussion**

The relationship between the communities of the two countries living along the border is the creation of a long-established value system through social-cultural systems and mechanisms that has become a system of relationships between human and human, and human and environment. The valuable relationship is an important force that helps organize the system of coexistence and creates acceptance and mutual assistance among people in the border areas. Changes in the border areas that occurred in the past have caused tensions in coexistence and civil unrest. In addition, the policy of international relations has also caused the separation in the socio-cultural relations. Due to the changes, the villagers have not been able to continue promoting a relationship with each other.

The results of the study were consistent with Na Chiang Mai (1999: 62-63) who claimed that a strong community was defined as the ability of families and local organizations in the community to share ideas, work together, and solve their own problems by themselves as much as possible. Additionally, a strong community included self-development of the community according to the shared values, thinking methods and goals, the use of appropriate technology for the locality, the cooperation and necessary support from external organizations including public and private sectors, and community development organizations. The important features of a strong community were the continuation of community development activities, the consciousness of self-reliance, the love for the locality, and the love and care for the community.

It was in line with The National Social Policy Committee (1999: 12) stating that a strong community was that the members of the community have confidence in their own potential to solve problems and develop their own livelihoods together. A continuous



movement of the community way is driven by the community leaders providing opportunities for members to participate in every step and learning process that aims at self-reliance, members' benefit and sustainable development. This was in accordance with Parnwell (2006) who stated that the strength of a strong community was the solution in solving all the crises that arise in the current world including the problems between the borders that could destroy the environmental system, social capital, cultural capital, the spirit of people and border communities that could cause serious conflict and cultural deterioration. Therefore, a strong community power is comparable to a body filter to maintain balance and the foundation for sustainable development of the country. The approach to community development must be to find a way of common ground in protecting their community by building unity, awareness, and action of solving problems as a whole. However, the most fundamental key is the cooperation of people in the community to help each other develop their communities to become truly strong. This was based on the process of learning, self-knowledge, self-exploration, continuous self-improvement, and good management. There were some elements involved in the development of a strong community as follows:

- 1. People in the community must have full consideration for the community and participation in its activities as in "Community owns, people gain benefits".
- 2. Cooperation and mutual acceptance will be a tool to coordinate the work of developing community capacity of development partners.
- 3. Leaders must be involved in community development as the main driving force.

The Office of the National Security Council (2002:14-20) stated a coherent opinion that in the changing situation of the globalized society, the national security policy intensively stressed the great importance of maintaining the security of the state. Due to the unrest problems arising from many reasons, it could extensively spread the issues, and might affect the stability of the state and the peace of the people as a whole. The Thai government, therefore, issued a national security policy, which was to promote synergies among the government, the private sector, the social sector, and the academic sector for continuous national defense. In unusual situations, the policy would lead to mobilization to sufficiently enhance the capabilities of the army in a timely manner. In normal situations; however, the government would strengthen the potential of the military to support the development of national power in all aspects to create the stability and prosperity of the nation under the philosophy of sufficiency economy. More importantly, the royally bestowed guidelines "Understand, Access, Develop" were adopted to promotion reconciliation, problem prevention, mitigation and solution to the national obstacles, involving insurgency problems in the southern border provinces including drugs smuggling, immigrant, illegal foreign workers, trafficking, and human trafficking. The government has developed and strengthened the military's security in accordance with the changes of the environment to maintain the capacity to prevent, deter and preserve the national interests. In addition, the government supported foreign cooperation in terms of stability with neighboring countries, ASEAN countries, and dear allies to reduce paranoia, build trust, maintain serenity, support the mission for peace including the interests of the country. In other words, national stability encompasses almost everything including policies and the performance of government officers.

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In terms of stability problems, it was consistent with Bamrungsuk (1998) who classified stability problems in the first decade of the year 2000 into two types. The first type was the military problems divided into four issues, namely, the borderline conflicts, the problem of strengthening military power, military economic problems, and international military security issues. The second type was non-military problems including environmental problems, migration, problems with the expansion of modern technology, economic development problems, disease outbreaks and public hygiene, and problems related to culture and ethnic groups.

Finally, Education Policy Research Center (1998: 22) also claimed that communities were an important driving force of cooperation to perform activities along the border between Thailand and Cambodia. A strong community was a result of fundamentals based on an intact relation of way of life, culture, beliefs, values, wisdom, leadership, livelihood patterns, environment, resources, autonomy as well as social processes in that community. For example, members of the community comprehensively help each other to learn and solve problems with characteristics of relationships between different groups. Sample communities along the Thailand-Cambodia border were testified that the important approach is that the community must undergo the process of participation.

### Recommendations

- 1. Strengthening the relationship leads to the creation of the stability of the community and reduces the tension in the area of the borders of the two countries. If local and upper-level government organizations understand and drive the development of the community relationships through border communities, it will provide the communities with a great opportunity to learn and develop at both individual and local levels.
- 2. For further studies, stability promotion in the Thailand-Cambodia border should be intensively cooperated at individual level of both countries. Border community relations should be studied to create the change of international policy advancing the stability and sustainable development of border communities of Thailand and Kingdom of Cambodia.

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