

Talaku Movement among the Karen in Thai-Burma Borderland: Territorialization, and Deterritorialization Processes¹

Kwanchewan Buadaeng²

The Talaku is one of many religious movements of the Karen peoples who reside in Thai-Burma borderland³. *Talaku* in Sgaw or *Talakhong* in Pwo Karen dialect comes from a Mon word for the one who possesses (*tala*) merit/truth (*khong*). The movement was said to emerge around the middle of the nineteenth century during which many revolts against British forces had been going on (Stern 1968). According to a study conducted by the Border Patrol Police (BPP Report 1998), the Karen people had fled to Thailand (then Siam) when Burmese forces invaded their former habitats, and founded the Talaku community in the remote and rough terrain. Later when the international border between Siam and Burma was drawn in the mid of 19th century, the Talaku community, covering many small villages, was located close to the border in both Thailand and Burma side. The center of the Talaku is at Letongkhu village, where the hermit head of the Talaku resides. Letongkhu village is right at the border in Mae Chan Subdistrict, Umphang District of Thailand. Every three months when a special religious ceremony is organized, Talaku members from other villages come to Letongkhu to participate in making merit.

Until the 1950s, the Talaku has maintained their autonomy over their territory and also their group boundary which is demarcated by their distinctive cultural and religious practices. The deep forest, which was unreachable by the Burmese state, became their zones of refuge, a shatter zone or flight zone, in Scott's words (2009), for a long time. After the 1950s, however, their places have changed from 'low state-making potential' ones, also in Scott's terms (2011), to places with intensified struggle and contestation by many centers of power in the territorialization of the borderlands. The term 'territorialization' here means the

¹ A paper presented at the conference on "Sedentism and Heritage in Thailand and Laos", organized by CESD and IRD at Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai on 1-2 December 2011.

² Lecturer, Department of Sociology-Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

³ Burma is changed to Myanmar in 1989. The article sometimes mention events occurred before 1989 so only the term Burma is used here for the sake of consistency.

control over people and the resources within the claimed boundary. As exemplified by Vandergeest and Peluso(1995: 285), three processes of territorialization carried out by the Thai modern states are ‘the creation and mapping of land boundaries, the allocation of land rights to so-called private actors, and the designation of specific resources (including land) uses by both state and “private” actors according to territorial criteria.’ Besides the Thai state, the Karen state-making organizations and army have also fought with the Burmese state to control resources and people at the borderlands.

Encountering the territorialization launched by many power centers, the Talaku community has created deterritorializing strategies, in the attempt to maintain their control over their territory and their people. Deterritorialization may be understood as the resettlement which leads to the change in peoples’ way of life (ecological, cultural, technical) as illustrated by the study of Evrard and Goudineau(2004). This paper however looks at the deterritorialization attempted by the Talaku people, sometimes with support from other actors. It aims to explore how the Talaku people rearrange their space and relations in order to free from the control of the state or state-like power and the force of modernization. The paper will provide more background on Talaku movement, their encountering with the territorialization and their deterritorialization strategies. The conclusion is on the becoming process of the Talaku movement.

Talaku Background and their Territory

The Talaku was said to be founded in Kyaing, the town in the present Karen state in Burma in 1860s (Hayami 2011). From the legend told by Talaku leaders in Letongkhu village, which is the present center of the Talaku community, originally they were Buddhists who were united under the leadership of Yaw Hae, the first Karen who became a Buddhist after meeting and having faith in the Buddha. Yaw Hae led the Karen people worshipping the Buddha and observing the five precepts: no killing, no telling a lie, no stealing, no adultery, and no alcohol drinking. The Karen people gathered and settled down in a big town around the stupa which contained Buddha’s relic and had lived there for many generations. Later, the Burmese invaded their town and chased them away. They had to flee to many places until they came to the present area. It was told that the then Karen leader had climbed up the cliff and lied down above a waterfall. He had a vision that the place would be the permanent settlement of his people. He had then set up a village named ‘Letongkhu,’ literally, above the rock. He had also set up the religious center and became the first religious leader which is

called phue I-Si, a Pali word for “hermit” (BPP Report 1998). When the hermit died, the Talaku selected the new one, usually the most senior disciple of the former hermit. It has been more than hundred year from the first hermit who found Letongkhu village until the present 11th one.

The Talaku identity has been gradually formed since the time of the first hermit. The distinctive practices which differentiate Talaku from non-Talaku are, to mention most important ones, unique costumes and the top-knot hair style of the Talaku men; and the prohibition of raising pigs and chicken and of eating pork and chicken meat. Other practices in relation to Buddhist precepts are also strictly applied namely, no alcohol drinking and no adultery. Anyone who commits adultery will be chased away from the village territory. Some Talaku practices have been practiced for a long time. Some however have been newly created in responding to specific situation arose in the time of different hermit. For example, not raising pigs and chicken was a rule since the beginning because, as one group explained, when they fled from the Burmese invasion, pigs and chicken which usually raised by Karen elsewhere made a loud noise which made hiding difficult. Pigs and chicken would be full of evils since that time and not good to raise or eat. In another explanation, to flee from the Burmese follow, all evils in people’s bodies were removed and put in pigs and chicken so that they can magically make themselves invisible from the eyes of the Burmese. Some rituals for example, the bonfire, have just been practiced since the time of the third hermit to commemorate the second hermit who was told burning himself alive to sacrifice for the Talaku.⁴

Talaku identity has been continuously maintained for many generations with the role of hermit, village and family institution. The hermit always lives in a monasterial compound secluded from village areas. Every year, young boys are ordained to become *ta waw bu*, literally monasterial people, to be trained by the hermit and elder *ta waw bu* to have knowledge and be skillful in organizing Talaku rituals which require many types of handicraft making. *Ta waw bu* spent at least three years in the compound before they can go out of the area. The hermit led *ta waw bu* cultivates their own land. They also cook their own food. The hermit and *ta waw bu* observes more precepts than Talaku lay people such as no

⁴ See more details on the historical/mythical stories of each hermit, the Talaku structure and rituals in Kwanchewan (2008)

intimate relationship with woman is allowed. In one period of the year, the hermit would undergo fasting. At community level, the religious institution comprises of *bu kho*, religious leader and his committee whose members are former *ta waw bu*. The religious leader and his committee coordinate with the hermit on the rituals organized in the monasterial compound and on religious matters to be handled in Talaku community. The religious leader together with other elders also led in the organization of village rituals which are organized outside the monasterial compound. Lastly, at family level, elders and parents are important mechanism in maintaining Talaku practices and living styles. They teach their children dressing style, eating taboo etc.

At present, there are altogether around 20 Talaku villages settled along the big river which is passing through both sides of the border. More villages are in Burma side while 4 villages are in the area of Tambon Mae Chan, Umphang District of Tak Province. The number of Talaku villages and Talaku members is reduced through time. In the former time, to the south which is now in Sangklaburi District of Kanjanaburi Province, to the East which is in the same Tambon and to the West which is around the town of Kyone Doh and Kawkareik, Pa-an District, the Karen State of Burma, many Talaku villages were found. In 2005, when I visited a village, near Kyone Doh town, which had been set up by Talaku from Letongkhu, a 68 year old man told me that they were no longer Talaku but Buddhists because they could not maintain the link with the hermit center at Letongkhu. His late father had walked for 6 day to Letongkhu to participate in the ceremony every year. But later the situation is not safe to participate in the ceremonies and consequently boys cannot be ordained there. I also met the 90 year old man who is the founder of this village but later left to live in the town of Pa-an. He had been a *ta waw bu* at the hermit monastery in Letongkhu when he was 12 years old. He still identified himself as a Talaku.

The Talaku controlled territory is the physical area in which Talaku rule of practices is applied. It is the sacred area because the customary practices were determined by former hermits which had become mythical sacred beings. Violating the rule of practices is desacralizing or polluting the area. The area can be classified into private one which is the domestic household area. Bringing pork or chicken from the market in a Talaku house is offending the house owner. The cleaning ritual has to take place right away. Besides Talaku rituals, traditional rituals found in other Karen villages can be found practicing here though not exactly the same in every household. The public area is the village area and hermit

monasterial compound. Inside the compound, the area is classified into the outer area where Talaku men and women can enter. The middle area where only Talaku men can enter and the inner one which is limited for the hermit and *ta waw bu* only. In the past, to limit the polluted impact from non-Talaku visitors, the village constructed a guest house to accommodate visitors.

With less interference by the States and powerful others, the Talaku has well maintained their cultural boundary which is corresponding with territorial boundary. Other non-Talaku Karen who are neighbors also recognize Talaku identity and well respect the group as a high moral non-political people. The Talaku who cannot comply with some rules usually left the area. However, the change in political landscape in the borderland with many power blocs operating has affected the maintaining of Talaku group boundary. In Burma side, as mentioned above, Talaku has gradually become Buddhists after the link with Talaku community at Letongkhu has been cut off by the war between ethnic secessionist movements and the Burmese army at the borderlands. In Thailand side, territorialization by the Thai state has greatly affected the survival of the Talaku identity.

Territorialization by the States and Other Powerful Agencies

The border lines between Thailand (Siam until 1939) and neighboring countries had been demarcated since the beginning of the 20th century. Thai state started to set up district office, police office, schools, health station, and offices of other state agencies in the border town. But it cannot really control the whole borderland areas due to limited number of staff and low technologies for transportation and communication. There was no systematic control over the movement of people and commodities across border. Thus until 1960s, Talaku community had been rather autonomous in their administration and management of natural resources with less interference from Thai and Burmese state agencies.

The situation around Talaku territory started to change in 1960s when many powerful parties have territorialized the borderlands. By territorializing the area, each party does not only occupy the territory, control and regulate the use of natural resources but also try to change the people's belief, idea and way of life of the people. The first group which had operated in the Talaku territory mainly in Thai side during the late 1960s until early 1980s is

the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT)⁵. The second group which came to occupy the area near to Talaku territory in Burmese side of the border is the Karen National Union (KNU). Fighting with the Burmese army since 1949, later on, the KNU moved to set up their strongholds and camps along the border with support from Thai state. After the defeat of CPT in 1982, Thai state armed forces and agencies have stationed and launched many development projects in the Talaku area. Road, solar cell for electricity and other modernizing projects have been constructed/conducted. The last group to be mentioned here is Christian missionaries who first visited Talaku center at Letongkhu in 1962 but only successfully converted the first Talaku in 2008.

Christian missionaries from the Church of Christ in Thailand and the United Christian Missionary Society went to meet the 8th Talaku hermit at Letongkhu in 1962 in order to convert him and his followers (Stern 1968: 323). They found out that there are five Talaku villages in Thailand with the rest of the nearly 7000 followers live in Burma. The report writes “These people feel free to travel back and forth across the border” (Church of Christ News, 1963). However, chaos has happened in the area due to the fighting between Burmese and Karen armed forces. The first mission was received warmly but the conversion did not happen. The mission found out that “his main concern was for the present peace and prosperity of his people. He asked first of all that the US should withdraw all arms from both the Burmese and the Karen rebels, so that his people might have peace...” (Church of Christ News, 1963). The missionaries had come back to Letongkhu again every year until 1967 but had to stop afterward because the chaos happened. The 8th hermit led Talaku members and some KNU’s soldiers fighting with Burmese forces and was later defeated. He was then executed by KNU force in Burma side (Smith 1999: 455). In 1969, when missionaries came to Letongkhu again, they found out that the hermit’s monasterial center was ruined and some Talaku villagers moved out of the village. A few villagers had still conducted the rituals which usually can be done without the hermit (Hovemyr 1997).

It was this time that Talaku community was in disarray, that the CPT had successfully mobilized some Talaku members to join the CPT force together with other non-Talaku Karen people from many villages. Until today, many Talaku members still enjoy

⁵ For the history of CPT, consult for example Rousset (2009)

telling their experiences working with the CPT. They were trained to be nurses, soldiers, etc. They remember revolutionary songs and their good impression with Thai friends, many of them university students who join the CPT, after the massacre in 1976, and return to the cities in early 1980s. Those joining the CPT decided to change their dressing style, cut their hair, wear trousers etc. One big Talaku village turned to be CPT stronghold and, after 1982 when CPT left the area, was replaced by stations of Thai state armed forces and agencies. However, some returned to Letongkhu to live the normal lives as Talaku. Letongkhu became more settled after the CPT left, new hermit, the former hermit's disciple, was invited from Burma to station at the monasterial compound. The headman, the former CPT soldier, had been actively working with religious leaders in Letongkhu and also with Talaku leaders in other villages in strengthening the Talaku belief and practices by regularly organizing ceremonies and confirming that every Talaku practice according to the regulations.

The territorialization which has strongest impact on Talaku's livelihood, religious and cultural practices until present days came from Thai state agencies. Border Patrol Police (BPP) is the first group which set up their station in Letongkhu although the access to the village could be done only by 8-hour walk or helicopter. In 1989, a BPP high-rank officer came to visit the BPP station in Letongkhu and found out that only 2 people in Letongkhu could speak a little Thai⁶. He then coordinated with the Non-Formal Education Center and the Hilltribe Development and Welfare Center, both of Tak Province to plan for the "development" of Letongkhu village. A BPP school was finally set up in the village in 1989 after long process of negotiation. Initially, Talaku villagers rejected the plan to set up a school in the village saying that it was contradicting to their tradition. After repeated visits and discussions with the BPP, the villagers finally gave their agreement but put on the conditions, for example 1) Do not bring pork, chicken, alcohol and drug into the village 2) Must not interfere with their cultural practices and 3) Must not raise pig, duck and chicken. The first BPP teacher agreed upon these conditions and gave a ceremonial vow at hermit's office but the Talaku people were still worried and hesitant. When an epidemics broke out a few months later, the villagers attributed their illness to the newly constructed school and asked that it is

⁶ They are the first and second official headman who had joined the CPT and thus gained some Thai language ability.

removed. It takes some times until they agreed to let the school operating again without any protest (Boonruang Wantha, n.d.).

However, after 1990s, things have changed. New BPP teachers did not keep the promise done by their predecessor. They now eat pork, chicken, drink alcohol and try to instill modern thinking and behaviors in their students. Some villagers still complain about the school and regret the decision they made in the 1980s. As one of them said, “We thought that they would stay only temporarily but we were wrong. We cannot do anything any way, we cannot prevent them to do this. They first lived far away but now they come much closer” (interview 2005). In 2012, the school is expanding with more students from Letongkhu as well as other villages in the borderlands both Thailand and Burma side. It has managed to send students to further their studies in secondary schools and colleges in the district town and elsewhere. In towns and cities, students feel embarrassed to continue their distinctive appearance identity.

In the mean time, Talaku villagers are increasingly incorporated into the modernization and commercialization. With village fund provided by the government in late 1990s, some Talaku bought small tractors to replace cattle formerly used to plough the land. With improved road, these tractors are also used, at least in dry season, for transporting commodities from the nearest town. Need for cash is increased as they have to pay back village fund and to buy more facilities including motorcycles and electric appliances. Some started to go out to work for cash in non-agricultural sectors in remote provinces.

In Burma borderlands in 1990s, territory which had been fully controlled by KNU is divided into many places controlled by different Karen and Burmese armed forces. While the Burmese army managed to control important border check points, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army(DKBA) and the Karen Peace Forces(KPF), two groups which mutiny against the Karen National Union (KNU) have also controlled some parts of the border area⁷. In the past, some Talaku members of Letongkhu who inherited land from parents originally lived in Burma easily went back across border to cultivate the land during planting season.

⁷ In 1995, the KNU lost its stronghold, Manerplaw, to the Burmese army and the DKBA. See further details of conflict between DKBA and KNU in Gravers (1996) and Smith (1999)

Nowadays, they would be frequently taxed by many armed forces which controlled the area they have to pass by, in either cash or kind.

The territorialization process initiated by many parties has threatened the Talaku's autonomy on the management of their political, economic, religious and cultural matters. It has taken away the aura and the mystical conception of Talaku territory, and turned it into secular one which is, for the Talaku, polluted and evil. Talaku villagers are to be "developed" by the Thai state to become a modern nationalist citizen. They are also subjected to the exploitation by many powerful groups across the border, if they want to maintain the use of resources there as they had done in the past.

Deterritorialization Strategies

In the territorialization process, the modern states control the territory by regulating border crossing of people living in both sides of the border; control the use of natural resources by classifying forest land types and regulating the use of natural resources in each type; and control the people's actions by imposing nationalist and modernized ideas via educational, media and administrative institution. The study found that the Talaku is in the process of deterritorialization, which means that amidst the new conditions, some people have left the territory and Talaku way of life. But most of the Talaku could not leave their territory but try to recategorize their territory, adjust their religious practices or adopt new religions, and negotiate the use of resources across the border as details below.

The first strategy is to make Talaku territorial boundary more flexible but also more enduring to ensure the continuation of Talaku identity. We have seen previously that the Talaku villagers felt that the BPP school had violated their code of moral conduct. However, as the Talaku had no way to control the school which was expanding each year and has greater influence on the children's minds and behaviours, they decided to redefine the area where the primary school and other government service centers are set up as outside and not a part of Talaku territory. Consequently, polluted activities conducted in this area would not affect Talaku community. A similar issue concern the increasing number of Talaku students who continue their study in secondary school in the nearby district town or even bigger cities. These students have difficulty to maintain their Talaku practices and identity symbol, and above all the top knot hair style worn by the men as well as the typical costumes of their community. It is also difficult to avoid pork and chicken in their meals. The Talaku considers

these students as temporarily out of the Talaku community. When they come back the village, they have to stay at the school which is a non-Talaku polluted space. Until they undergo a purifying ritual, they can come back home. The same regulation applies for Talaku members who leave the village for off-farm jobs in other cities. However, it has to be seen if this strategy works in maintaining Talaku identity because young people increasingly leave the village for study and work. When they come back, they may neither undergo purifying ritual, nor return to Talaku way of life.

A second strategy is to negotiate and arrange for the cultivation of the paddy fields which lie across the Burmese border. Letongkhu territory overlaps the international border between Thailand and Burma. In the past, Talaku villagers always cross the border to gather food in the forest, to catch fish and other aquatic animals in the big rivers in Burma side, and also to visit relatives and friends in other Talaku villages there. Since the intermarriage between Talaku persons of different villages is a common practice, some households in Letongku have inherited paddy fields which locates on the Burmese side of the border⁸. During 4-month rainy season, they usually cross the border to cultivate their paddy fields and stay there most of the time before returning to Letongku in Thailand after the harvest. In the past, when the KNU was the single force controlling the area, Talaku villagers from Letongkhu had no problem to cross the border to cultivate their fields. The KNU and other non-Talaku Karen understand that the Talaku are religious people who are neutral and not harmful. Besides, they can easily differentiate the Talaku based on their dress and hair style. That is why they let them travel to any place freely without a question.

Things have changed when the border became a disputed territory between many armed forces: KNU, KPF, DKBA, and the Burmese army. Thereafter, the Talaku had to pay taxes to different forces if they wanted to go on cultivating their paddy fields in Burma and to transport rice back to Letongkhu. The Talaku also complain that the Burmese army use them as force labor and requisition their tractors for their logistic needs. Also, the Talaku has to show their good will toward DKBA by contributing their labor to construct the pagoda, the project which has been going on in many hills along the border. This means that the headman

⁸ In 2012, 32 households out of 258 households have cross the border to cultivate their paddy fields. The number of households having paddy fields in Burma side is higher than this but due to difficulties in crossing border, some households choose to leave their fields barren or ask local people to cultivate instead.

who has to take care of Talaku villagers' well-being has to work hard to satisfy every force. He has to show that the Talaku treats every force equally. However, after the former well-experienced headman died in 2008, the relations between the Burmese and other forces in Burma and the Talaku under the new young headman were not good. Some miscommunication and lost of trust between the two sides have occurred. In 2011, the headman, assistant headman and an elder crossed the border to attend the meeting to negotiate for the cultivation of paddy fields. On the way back to Letongkhu, an assistant headman was assassinated by unknown force in Burma side but very close to Thai border. As a result, in 2011, not any household cultivates the land in Burma side. In 2012, with renew negotiation and guarantee from all forces in Burma, some households decide to cross border to cultivate their land again.

A third strategy relates to conversion to Christianity, considered as a mean to escape growing tensions inside the Talaku community. Forty six years after the first visit, the missionary is able to convert the first Talaku in 2008. At that time, they were growing tensions and disputes between the Talaku members over the choices imposed by the increasing pressure of the State and other regional actors, leading to the emergence of factions among them. The vision of what Talaku community should be in the current situation is not one but many. For example, the former headman tried to develop the hermit compound to be more modernized with permanent structure and electricity generated from diesel generator. Some people did not like that saying that the structure should remain the same as in the old days with easy-made and temporary style building. The highest tension occurred when the former headman gave the pair of elephant tusk belong to the hermit center to DKBA leader in Burma to show their good will. Some Talaku organized rallies to the District Office to give pressure to every party concerned for the return of the elephant tusks. The conflict and tension had occurred for many years and led to the assassination of the former headman in 2008. Right after the former headman died, his wife, family members, brother and relatives decided to convert to Christianity. Although they have not moved out of the village, they are deterritorialized in the way that they are not a part of Talaku community any more. They now belong to the Christian world where they believe in God and follow Christian way of practices. They also built their own church in the village. Interview with the headman's wife clearly shows that the breaking up of Talaku community is unavoidable for the level of disappointment and distrust with other groups in the same village is very high. So

she chose to join other community which tends to lend her more love and compassion. She said “It is time. After the headman died, the village is divided into two...we know that one day we will have to separate like a tree branch. There is an old saying that one branch points up to the sky, another points down to the water. The one points to the sky will never points down to the watermy husband died, I am sorrowful. I will do what I want...”

The last deterritorialization strategy is to go for more purification practice amidst the attempt of the state to secularize them. In 2008, the 10th hermit and former headman asked Talaku villagers in Letongkhu to be vegetarians for three years and three months as an experimental period. To become vegetarians is the new practice because although Talaku people do not eat pork, chicken or duck meat, they can hunt and fish in the wild and consume them. To become vegetarians mean that they have to avoid all kinds of meat and to change eating habits. The idea of vegetarianism emerged when the former headman’s visited several charismatic Buddhist monks who practiced vegetarianism in Burma. Working closely with the former headman, the hermit has promoted this idea and said that it is the means to prevent some Talaku to become Christian (interview assistant headman, 2011). The hermit also says that becoming vegetarian is to prepare the high morality society for the coming of Phra Sri Ariya, the fifth Buddha⁹ --- “If we do not practice vegetarian, we will also lose our Talaku identity” (interview the hermit, 2011). Within three years and three months, most Talaku villagers practice vegetarians with the belief in the hermit’s hint that that they would meet unexpected high benefit at the end of the experimental period.

In 2011, at the end of the experimental period, the hermit asks Talaku members not to stop but continue vegetarian forever. Most Talaku members did not agree and return to their previous Talaku consumption practice. They argue that they have to work hard and need energy from meat. It is troublesome to change eating style to be more selective instead of just eat everything provided by nature. They also don’t have enough money to buy soybean products which would add more protein in their dishes. Another important reason cited for

⁹ In popular belief, the present Buddha worshipped by Buddhists is the fourth Buddha. Phra Sri Ariyametrui is the fifth Buddha who is coming in the future on the condition that people strictly observe moral conduct. In the reign of Phra Sri Ariyametrui, the society will be prosperous and peaceful. The belief in the coming of the fifth Buddha is found in many millenarian movements among many ethnic groups who have associated with Buddhist neighbors (see Stern 1968, Gravers 2001)

difficulty to become vegetarian is that some households still carry on their ancestral worship ritual in which bamboo rat, a wild animal, is caught, prepared for food for ancestral spirits worship and consumed by household members after the ritual. However, the hermit sticks to his idea and goes further to pressure Talaku members to become vegetarians by announcing new regulation that only vegetarian Talaku is allowed to enter his monasterial center. So, non-vegetarian Talaku who are the majority could not join the important ceremonies which take place in the hermit center. Non-vegetarian Talaku elders in particular feel very upset and are sad with the discrimination. At the end of 2011, the tension between non-vegetarian Talaku members and the hermit and his vegetarian Talaku is heightening. The hermit is then asked by non-vegetarian Talaku to leave the center. The hermit says that he already plans to do that because his vegetarian Talaku in Burma side already construct the new center there. After the hermit left, villagers select one of the eldest hermit's disciples to become the new 11th hermit.

Conclusion

The Talaku territory had been created in Thai-Burma borderlands for many centuries by the important mechanism comprising of hermits, religious leaders and elders and strict regulation of cultural and moral conducts. The Talaku community which comprises of many villages in both sides of the border has adjusted its physical boundary and religious and cultural practices through time. But it is since the mid of the twentieth century that the Talaku community faces the great challenge which endangers the existence of Talaku identity. The territorialization process in Thai-Burma borderland is the most intense for many states, state-like and powerful agencies have fought, contested and competed with each other to control the territory and people within. The control of territory means the occupation of natural resources which are abundant in the borderlands, including minerals, logs and other forest products. It also means that each party wants to be gate keepers to collect big amount of tax from traders and people who cross the border. To control the territory, there is a need to control the people. It is to regulate how the people use natural resources. For the Thai state, which is the strongest agency operating in Talaku villages in Thai side, territorializing people means to make the Talaku to become Thai modern citizen. This means to integrate Talaku people into the centralized political, economic and socio-cultural projects, which emphasizes the development toward commercialization and scientific mode of thinking and also Thai nationalist ideas.

Facing territorialization attempt, the Talaku people have employed deterritorialization strategies to free from the control of the state and other powerful agencies. Their main concern is to maintain their Talaku identity amidst the pressure to change. They felt that their territory is increasingly polluted by both outsiders and insiders who infringe upon the code of conducts. In the deterritorialization process, some decide to leave the Talaku territory, to the place which is more purified/promised ones. The recategorization/rearrangement of the territory with the new rule of conduct for people within each category is also done. Some go for more purified practices and others decide to convert to either Christianity or Buddhism. These processes are fundamentally complex and multifaceted and none of the actors involved, can fully control all of their aspects. The Talaku becomes increasingly fragmented with multi-layers identities. Deterritorialization is the process of becoming, according to Deleuzian concept (Patton 2000). Thus, it is hard to imagine what will be the future of the Talaku for ‘... a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination... A line of becoming has only a middle. The middle is not an average; it is fast motion, ... A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between...’ (Delueze and Guattari 1987: 293).

References

- Boonruang Wantha. 1991. “Prawat kwam pen ma khong ban letongkhu lae latthi ruesi” [History of Letongkhu village and hermit cult]. A manuscript.
- BPP Report. 1998. “Talakhon at Letawkho,” A study conducted by the 34th Border Patrol Police Force. (in Thai)
- Church of Christ News. 1963. “Report on the First Visit to the Talakon Sect of the Karen Peoples of Thailand and Burma,” No. 167 (Feb. 1963).
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix 1987(1980) *A Thousands Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Evrard, Olivier and Goudineau, Yves. 2004. "Planned Resettlements, Unexpected Migrations and Cultural Trauma in Laos", *Development and Change*, 35(5) 937-962.
- Gravers, Mikael. 1996. “The Karen Making of a Nation”, in *Asian Forms of the Nation*. Stein Tonnesson and Hans Antlov eds. Surrey: Curzon Press.
- 2001. “Cosmology, Prophets, and Rebellion Among the Buddhist Karen in Burma and Thailand.” *Moussons* 4: 3–31.
- Hayami, Yoko. 2011. “Pagodas and Prophets: Contesting Sacred Space and Power among Buddhist Karen in Karen State,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70(4): 1083-1105.

- Hovemyr, Maria. 1997. *A Bruised Reed Shall He not Break...* Chiang Mai: Office of History, Church of Christ in Thailand.
- Kwanchewan Buadaeng. 2008. "Constructing and Maintaining the Ta-la-ku Community: The Karen along the Thai-Myanmar Border", in Shigeharu Tanabe ed. *Imagining Communities in Thailand: Ethnographic Approaches*. Chiang Mai: Mekong Press.
- Patton, Paul. 2000. *Deleuze and the Political*. London: Routledge.
- Rousset, Pierre. 2009. "Thai Communist Party", in the *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest*. Ness, Immanuel (ed). Blackwell Publishing.
- Scott, James. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. Yale University.
- ._____. 2011. "The Art of Anticipating Criticism", paper presented at the international workshop on RADICALLY ENVISIONING A DIFFERENT SOUTHEAST ASIA: FROM A NON-STATE PERSPECTIVE organized by Asian CORE Program, Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports, Japan on 18-19 January 2011 in Kyoto, Japan.
- Smith, Martin. 1999. *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*. London: Zed Books.
- Stern, Theodore. 1968. "Ariya and the Golden Book: Millenarian Buddhist Sect among the Karen." *Journal of Asian Studies* 27: 297-328.
- Vandergeest, Peter and Peluso, Nancy Lee. 1995. "Territorialization and State Power in Thailand," *Theory and Society* 24: 385-426.