

## Chapter 5

### THE TAI YAI ASSIMILATION PROCESS IN MAE HONG SON AFTER 1962

#### 5.1. The Assimilation Process of Post-1962 Tai Yai Immigrants

As seen in the previous chapter, the post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants first enter the sub-society of the “circle of relations” in the area of Mae Hong Son when they came to Thailand.

Gordon calls attentions to the existence of sub-society and sub-culture in the host society, which provide standard to which other groups adjust or measure their relative degree of adjustment.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Mae Hong Son, especially in the village studied, the Tai Yai population and their way of life is predominant there. So, we can assume that the sub-society composed of Tai Yai people provides such standards to the post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants. Thus, the direction of the assimilation of the post-1962 immigrants described in this thesis is limited to that occurs in this “circle of relations”. However, we must pay attention to how this sub-society is related to and has overlaps with bigger host, Thai society.

##### 5.1.1. Cultural and Structural Assimilation

According to Gordon's model of assimilation, the whole assimilation process is composed of seven stages or variables: namely, (1)cultural and behavioral assimilation (acculturation), (2)structural assimilation<sup>2</sup>, (3)martial assimilation, (4)identificational assimilation, (5)attitude receptional assimilation, (6)behavior receptional assimilation, and (7)civic assimilation.<sup>3</sup> During the first stage, the immigrants change their cultural

---

<sup>1</sup> Milton M. Gordon, *Human Nature, Class, and Ethnicity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p.168-169.

<sup>2</sup> As Gordon defines social structure as “the basic framework within which institutions function and social processes take place”, for example, “cliques, house-visiting patterns, churches, fraternal societies, neighborhood, etc.”, the term “structural assimilation” does not always refer to the assimilation in institutional sense, but also refer to the one in unofficial sense. *Ibid.*, pp.146-158.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.169.

patterns, including religious belief and observance, to match those of the host. In the second stage, they take on large-scale primary group relationships with host, i.e., have enter fully into the societal network of groups and institutions, or societal structure, of the host. The third stage is the stage that they intermarry and interbred fully with the host. In the fourth stage, they develop sense of peoplehood, or ethnicity of the host. The fifth stage is that time period in which they reached a point where they encounter no prejudiced behavior. In the sixth stage, they reach a point where they encounter no discriminatory behavior. During the last stage, they do not raise by their demands concerning the nature of public or civic life of the host any issues involving values and power conflict with the host.<sup>4</sup> He also states that cultural assimilation is likely to be the first of the types of assimilation to occur when a minority group arrives on the scene. He sometimes use the term "structural assimilation" to refer to all the processes following the second stage, because once structural assimilation has occurred, either simultaneously with or subsequent to acculturation, all of the other types of assimilation will naturally follow.<sup>5</sup> Here, we can simplify the whole assimilation process as the process which has two main stages of cultural and structural assimilation. According to him, while acculturation does not necessarily lead to structural assimilation, structural assimilation inevitably produces acculturation.<sup>6</sup>

Now, I will review the two main stages of assimilation process of the post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants by following this model. Sub-stages of structural assimilation will also be reviewed.

For Tai Yai immigrants, acculturation is easiest because they already have shared the same ethnicity with the host members of the "circle of relations". Common indices of cultural assimilation include language usage, participation to religious activities, change of clothing, and exposure to the mass media of the host society.<sup>7</sup> None of these issues

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.167-168.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.173.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.178.

<sup>7</sup> Hirota, op. cit., p.75.

seem to create any problem in the case of Tai Yai immigrants. They speak the same language as their hosts, practice the same form of Buddhism, and wear the same ethnic costume<sup>8</sup> although most of younger Tai Yai people both of the host and immigrants tend to wear western styled clothes.

Tai Yai is the primary language of daily life in Mae Hong Son. *Kammuang* is the language of wider communication, and the Standard Thai language is used on official occasion, for education, and in the media.<sup>9</sup> Although other languages are increasing in importance,<sup>10</sup> the Tai Yai language is still the predominant one in village life.<sup>11</sup> The use of Standard Thai is limited to the school and talk with outsiders who come to the village. Basically, life in the village is possible for those who only can speak the Tai Yai language. At certain times, the immigrants might have to use *Kammuang* or Standard Thai. According to informants, this is not a big problem, as the three languages are all similar.<sup>12</sup> The immigrants, as well as the hosts, are exposed to TV programs broadcast in Standard Thai and the contents of the drama series become the topics of conversation next day. The immigrants also listen to Thai popular songs and sing them to themselves. Of course, children study in Thai at their school. They might not be fluent in speaking Standard Thai, but they can understand it.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> What are peculiar to traditional Tai Yai clothing include baggy trousers for men, *Pa Sin*, a lapped skirts for women, and a wide disc shaped hat.

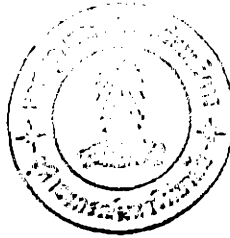
<sup>9</sup> According to Durrenberger, Thai now started to prevail as the language of the market and the street. Paul Durrenberger, "Three Decades of Change: The Shan Villages of Northwestern Thailand" *World and I*, April, 1999, vol.14, p.192.

<sup>10</sup> "Kammuang, the neighboring major regional language, is penetrating ever more deeply into Tai Yai area along the new roads and other means of communication. Use of Standard Thai is also increasing, spread by the schools and media." Smalley, *op. cit.*, p.122.

<sup>11</sup> Even the Karen immigrants in the village mentioned earlier used Tai Yai language as the communication language.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. "The communication distance between Tai Yai and Kammuang or between Tai Yai and Standard Thai is much like the distance between the major regional languages and Standard Thai. Some differences are due to the vocabulary borrowed from different sources, Tai Yai having had centuries of contact with Burmese and other languages in Myanmar. Others include Tai Yai tone patterns and other sounds which do not fully match those of Kammuang and Thai. Smalley, *op. cit.*, p.121; Khachaphai, *op. cit.*, p.29.

<sup>13</sup> Only one informant answered that they have language problem. The informant is the mother of two school-aged children and she feels inconvenient that she cannot correct her children's homework in Standard Thai.



Immigrants can continue to enjoy their cultural activities in Thailand, as traditional festivals and customs particular to the Tai Yai people are still maintained by the Tai Yai society in Mae Hong Son. Such traditional festivals include *Poi Sang Long*, an ordination ceremony of novices in March, *Chedi Saai*, making merit ceremony by building pagodas of sand and the rocket festivals in June, and the annual festival in October.<sup>14</sup> On the occasions of these festivals, there are performances of traditional lion dance, courtship music, and Tai Yai style musicals. Immigrants enjoy such performances as audiences. At the same time, many of these performers include Tai Yai immigrants from Burma because they are successors of non-Thainized and more authentic Tai Yai cultures.<sup>15</sup> Here, we can see one aspect of their interactions that the host villagers also need the immigrants to maintain their traditions.<sup>16</sup> So, the immigrants are welcome to join these activities. The traditional festivals and customs are important not only to the cultural maintenance of the immigrants and host, but also as the act of partaking in the activities of the host society for immigrants. This sharing of traditions and activities reinforces close relations, and immigrants can enter "the circle of relations" because of these connections. They can be assimilated into the host society without making any major cultural adjustments.

Structural assimilation, including martial assimilation and following stages of assimilation, is, unlike cultural assimilation, little bit more complicated. This is because Mae Hong Son is existing as a part of Thailand that are regulated by Thai legal and value system as well as sub-society which is dominated by Tai Yai virtues. The indices of structural assimilation include the number of friends among the host society, the amount of participation in social activities in the host society, and entrance into cliques, clubs and

---

<sup>14</sup> For details, see Murakami, op., cit., p.66.

<sup>15</sup> A band of Tai Yai music, which I saw, included three Burmese Tai Yai among five members. They said the traditional Tai Yai song singing is very difficult and now there left a few Thai Tai Yai can sing them.

<sup>16</sup> I could observe many occasions that the immigrants teaching Tai Yai scripts to the host villagers. Murakami writes about the role of the Burmese Tai Yai monks in the maintenance of Buddhist Sangha system because younger Thai Tai Yai started not to be attracted in the monastic life. Murakami, op. cit., pp.74-75.

institutions of the host society through the acquisition of citizenship.<sup>17</sup> Peculiarity of the case of Mae Hong Son lies on the fact that these processes include a formal and an informal part.

Structural assimilation into Tai Yai society in Mae Hong Son requires having Thai citizenship and recognition as an official resident. These legal and institutional requirements are the formal aspect of structural assimilation. It is very difficult for the post-1962 immigrants to satisfy these requirements. Structurally being same as the Tai Yai people who changed their economic statuses thus the patterns of life, and came close to the positions of Thai people is also difficult because the immigrants have legal and structural restrictions. This difficulties can be seen in the fact that very few immigrants could achieve structural assimilation by obtaining position as Thai citizens and few (or none) of them join the formal organization formed outside the village, such as regional development organizations.

The informal aspect of the assimilation process is not difficult for the immigrants to complete. The immigrants participate very actively in the Tai Yai host society, and structural assimilation can easily take place, as described in the previous chapter. Most immigrants have friends in the host society through the network of co-workers, neighbors, and others, regardless of whether they are Thai Tai Yai or Burmese Tai Yai.<sup>18</sup> On the receiving side, the members of the host society also establish relations with the immigrants, no matter what their position is in the Thai legal system.

Intermarriages between the members of host society and the immigrants have also been taken place without any significant obstacles. Among the informants, 23% have spouses who are Thai citizens, and 46% have relatives-in-law who are Thai citizens. In

---

<sup>17</sup> Hirota, op. cit., p.75, Gorden, op. cit., p.167.

<sup>18</sup> Among the informants, 44% answered they had close friends among both Thai Tai Yai and Burmese Tai Yai, 2% answered they had more Thai Tai Yai friends than Burmese one, and 54% answered they had more Burmese Tai Yai friends. But most of the immigrants have more Burmese Tai Yai friends living in the newly established communities. So they have no intention to limit their friends to those within the Burmese Tai Yai, but it was just a result of their location of living spaces. Only two informants answered they preferred to keep company with Burmese Tai Yai because they could share their experience and more be understandable.

the cases of intermarriage, they do not put much importance on legal procedure, because the immigrants do not have any official registration, thus the marriage following legal procedure is impossible. If the couples have children, they deal it with unofficial procedure by registering their children's names into with house registration of agreeable relatives or friends. This arrangement was not so common till the 1990s because most immigrants did not place a high value on the rights associated with the position as Thai citizen, or believed that their blue and pink cards would be changed into official ID cards after a certain length of stay in Thailand. But now, the immigrants have realized the importance of citizenship, especially for education and employment. This prompts many to make this unofficial arrangement for their children to be recognized as Thai citizens.

Another example of unofficial structural assimilation is through the Tai Yai quasi-kinship system. The Tai Yai family unit fosters non-kin member,<sup>19</sup> quasi-kinship construction through the sponsorship of the religious ceremonies,<sup>20</sup> and the extension of kinship terms and relations, such as brother, sister, uncle, and aunt, to unrelated people. Though the construct of these informal relations, the immigrants enter "the circle of relations".

Entrance to the "circle of relations" leads to identificational assimilation into the unofficial Tai Yai sub-society of Mae Hong Son. There is little prejudice or discrimination towards the immigrants in the village.<sup>21</sup> However, this assimilation into the Tai Yai community of Mae Hong Son does not directly lead to immigrants'

---

<sup>19</sup> Those found in this study were the cases of fostering newly arrived immigrants as dependents in their households, bringing up the children of their distant relatives as family members, and so on. Tannenbaum also mentions this. Tannenbaum, op. cit., 1990, p.24.

<sup>20</sup> Murakami writes that through the sponsorship of the novice ordination, the sponsor and the novice become "parents of ordination" and "sons of ordination". Usually, the real parents of the novices become sponsors of the ceremony, but any other persons can be sponsors when the parents cannot afford to sponsor it or there are no parents. Many such relations have been built between sponsor of being the member of host society and novices of being the immigrants. He states that this system works in integration of Tai Yai immigrants into the host society. Murakami, op. cit., p.673-681.

<sup>21</sup> There is an exception. Some informants mentioned a Tai Yai person in the village who discriminates Tai Yai immigrants from Burma. They explained, "He became rich and became like a Thai and does not care about Tai Yai people anymore. Other villagers cares Tai Yai immigrants because they are also Tai Yai."

identification with Thai society as a whole. That world is far removed from the daily life of the immigrants, and the immigrants are restricted from being a part of its institutional structure. On the occasions that the immigrants do leave the village, they sometimes encounter discrimination. The informants reported that they had been discriminated against when they met government officials for the issuing and extension of blue and pink cards, and when they went to market and met people in the district capital looked down on them. This indicates that the structural assimilation into larger Thai society is still difficult to the post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants, although they might successfully assimilate at the village level. While no significant conflicts of value and power, an index of civic assimilation, is seen in their life in the village, for the eyes of the central government and officials in Mae Hong Son, the existence of the immigrants itself might be the cause of the conflicts.

We can summarize the stages of assimilation as follows: while Tai Yai immigrants have very high potentials to be assimilated into both of Tai Yai sub-society and larger Thai society in cultural aspect, it is very difficult for them to be structurally assimilated into larger Thai society in official part, even they have high potentials of structural assimilation into unofficial Tai Yai sub-society of Me Hong Son.

#### 5.1.2. Non Zero-Sum Model of Assimilation

As be seen so far, the assimilation direction of Tai Yai immigrants into the host Tai Yai sub-society is different from the one into larger host, Thai society. The gap between these two processes can be seen in the disparity between cultural and structural assimilation.

Kim and Hurh call such cases of assimilation, which the immigrants do not orient themselves to the complete assimilation to the host society though they achieve partial assimilation as "Non zero-sum model of assimilation".<sup>22</sup> According to Kim and Hurh,

---

<sup>22</sup> K. C. Kim and W. M. Hurh, "Adhesive Sociocultural Adaptation of Korean Immigrants in the U.S.: An Alternative Strategy of Minority Adaptation" *International Migration Review*, Vol.18, 1984. Cited in Hirota, op. cit., p.51-53.

this type of assimilation are caused by the difference between cultural and structural assimilation. Because the complete assimilation into the host society is difficult, immigrants cannot dispose their own culture and social networks, which cover the deficits caused by their incomplete assimilation.<sup>23</sup> This is shown in the case of Korean immigrants in the United States. Koreans tend to attach themselves to the Korean community since they cannot fully identify with the host society because of structural restrictions, such as racial discrimination and legal regulations, even they have achieved a certain level of assimilation. For Korean immigrants, the Korean community in the United States is the substitutional entity with which they identify themselves<sup>24</sup>.

We can apply this example to the case of the Tai Yai immigrants, whose degree of assimilation into the Tai Yai sub-society is remarkable, but whose degree of assimilation into Thai society is better described as "moderate" within the framework of this model. This interpretation is better slightly adjusted. This is because Tai Yai immigrants settled in Mae Hong Son where the majority of people were Tai Yai, while the Koreans who studied in the United States were an obvious minority. While most part of the daily life of Korean immigrants has to be carried out in larger host, American society, with interactions with ethnically different members of the host society, the one of Tai Yai immigrants can be carried out in Tai Yai sub-society, which is interchangeable with the term "Korean ethnic community" of Korean case. The Tai Yai immigrants rarely feel discriminated against or structurally segregated in their village life, while their Korean counterparts often experience such negative treatment in their everyday life in the host society.

The Tai Yai immigrants in the Tai Yai sub-society stay there without any ethnic consciousness or thoughts of ethnic solidarity. It is more natural to interpret existence of the Tai Yai immigrants in the Tai Yai sub-society rather that they stay there without any ethnic consciousness or intentions of maintenance of ethnic solidarity than that they return

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.52-53.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



to the ethnic community with strong ethnic attachments after experiencing the intercourse with other ethnicity. This can be seen in the fact that I could hardly find the immigrants' comment on ethnic attachment or ethnic consciousness during the course of interviews.<sup>25</sup> It is possible to see the Tai Yai immigrants' adherence to the Tai Yai sub-society as the result of structural segregation, legal regulation, and other discrimination, but, we also can assume the case that they just have no need to go out of their sub-society because they have any necessity to do so. This issue will be examined in the next section.

## 5.2. Facilitators of Assimilation Process

### 5.2.1. Purpose of Migration

Hirota calls attention to the relationship between immigrants' purposes for moving and their eventual degree of assimilation.<sup>26</sup> His ideas rest on the proposition that we conceptualize migration as a subjective action, and consider that immigrants move in order to achieve goals which could not be achieved in their original place. Their purposes for moving thus become crucial to understanding their behavior in the receiving society. Migrant workers and students studying abroad are obvious examples of persons who move for certain purposes. Recently, Kitagawa proposed the application of this viewpoint to the analysis of refugees.<sup>27</sup> The background of this proposal is the fact that most of refugee studies prior to this have done in the fields concerning the international law and organizations, and they lacked a viewpoint to the micro level analysis such as refugees' decision making and their migration process.<sup>28</sup> This perspective give us the chance to reexamine the movement of refugees whom have generally been viewed as powerless people who were structurally pushed out of their home country and waiting for aids, of course they are some aspects of the refugees though, from the different angles.

---

<sup>25</sup> The exception is the example seen in footnote 21.

<sup>26</sup> Hirota, op. cit., pp.106-123.

<sup>27</sup> Kitagawa op.cit., pp.205-232.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Hanne Christensen, *Refugees and Pioneers: History and Field Study of a Burundian Settlement in Tanzania*, (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1985)

Kurimoto re-conceptualizes the refugees in Northeast Africa as a new type of "immigrant" by paying attentions to the "pull factor" of the movement. He states that we can see the refugees' subjective decision making in their relation with "pull factor", while the "push factor" only can emphasize the passive attitude of the refugees compelled to choose that option in order to survive.<sup>29</sup>

We can apply this perspective to the Tai Yai immigrants labeled as refugees/displaced persons. Most of them came to Thailand because of the destruction of their daily lives in Burma, such as the breakdown of their economic lives, deprivation of their cultural rights, and danger of the lives. Their primary reason for moving to Thailand is to survive and reconstruct the ruins of their lives. They want to recommence daily life and practices; they simply wish to again engage in agriculture, to go to temple, to make merits on occasions, to make their children have basic education, to have a house to live, and to have little recreation and enjoyment in their life.

They achieve these goals of immigration by building relations with other residents, developing networks, and becoming members of the settlement community. Networks offer companionship and provide aid in areas such as employment, land purchase, friendship, and all other aspects of daily life, as seen in previous chapters. Although most of the informants have certain legal and structural restrictions, they answered there was no significant problem in their settlement lives in Thailand.<sup>30</sup> Their purposes of migration, at least at the primary level, are realized through their participation in the Tai Yai sub-society in Mae Hong Son. Therefore, they actively join this Tai Yai sub-society, and their networks expand at a rate related to the amount they interact with that society.

There are cases in which immigrants have achieved their primary purposes and want to improve their lives further. This situation can be found more often among the immigrants who have stayed longer. They have started to look for better paying jobs and higher education for themselves and/ or for their families. Some of them migrate further,

---

<sup>29</sup> Kitagawa, *op. cit.*, 211.

<sup>30</sup> Some answered that only problem was the existence of policemen and immigrant officials, but some others denied it because their existence was not permanent but more occasional one.

to Chiang Mai, Bangkok, and other big cities, in order to find better jobs.<sup>31</sup> Some of them look for the way to get Thai citizenship for themselves and for their families and to make their children have higher education to expand the chance to improve their lives.<sup>32</sup> These practices sometimes cannot be dealt within the capacity of Tai Yai sub-society. They mostly need more institutionalized spaces, that is the space of Thai society, to be realized. Although they are structurally separated from that Thai society, they try to find other means to realize their purposes. Those are realized through the unofficial procedures mediated by the host Tai Yai people, who are the members of Tai Yai sub-society as well as of Thai society.

As explained in the previous chapter, the immigrants unofficially buy land from the host Tai Yai people, or look for persons who might agree to assist them with registration procedures, if they wish to purchase their own land. Most other procedures that require registrations, such as the purchase of motorcycles, are handled similarly.

Working in other provinces is also realized through informal procedures. It is almost impossible to work in other provinces if the immigrants follow the legal process to obtain a work permit outside Mae Hong Son.<sup>33</sup> But some of them find jobs with companies managed by Tai Yai people. They contact these companies through the connections of friends, relatives and neighbors and skip any legal procedures related to applications. Some are informally recruited by family enterprises as they are relatives of the owners. Because the Tai Yai people have no restrictions concerning inter-ethnic marriage,<sup>34</sup> many family members of the immigrants are married to Chinese, Thais and

---

<sup>31</sup> Many of family members of the informants are working outside of Mae Hong Son; often mentioned destinations were Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chonburi, and Nontaburi. Most of them work as wage labors at construction sites, restaurants, and orchards, or as security guards, and as house maids.

<sup>32</sup> Most of the informants who answered that they wanted to get Thai citizenship were found among those who have stayed in Thailand for more than 15 years and some had experiences to have worked outside of Mae Hong Son.

<sup>33</sup> According to the immigrants, they have to get permit from government officials to go to other provinces, and to work there. There also is time limitation and long term stay there are legally impossible or very difficult. Of course, they need many documents including house registration, ID cards and so on to apply the jobs.

<sup>34</sup> Chakrit, op. cit., p.106.

others who have such family businesses. Some get jobs by relying on the connections of friends and relatives who have already worked in the factories and orchards where they had been recruited by recruiters. In any cases, the immigrants need, at the least, the invitation and recommendation of their friends or relatives who have ties with the workplaces and may help the immigrants to avoid all legal and formal procedures.

In order to obtain Thai nationality or even just false ID cards, the immigrants tend to go through the unofficial route that have been explained in former chapters, rather than the official procedures of naturalization.

In all of the above-mentioned cases, the purposes of the immigrants are realized by means of the informal functions of the Tai Yai sub-society in Mae Hong Son. Most importantly, Tai Yai host people with Thai nationality are needed to act as intermediates, connecting the immigrants in informal sub-society with the formal Thai society, because they are members of both formal and informal strata of Thai society.

The post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants stay in the Tai Yai sub-society in Mae Hong Son not to shut themselves out of greater world, but to build contact points and to open the door to Thai society, which structurally refrains the entrance of the immigrants, for further realization of their purposes.

### 5.2.2. Social Space for the Immigrants

The Tai Yai sub-society, in which the post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants exist, is formed by the "circle of relations", composed of the networks between the host Tai Yai people and the newly arrived Tai Yai immigrants. The network has many functions, and supports the lives of the immigrants.

Hirota states that the existence of such social space in the host society plays an important role in the settlement lives of immigrants, especially when they are minorities in the host society, structurally segregated from the host society, or regarded as illegal immigrants.<sup>35</sup> He also claims that it is impossible to understand their migration process

---

<sup>35</sup> Hirota, *op. cit.*

without paying attentions to the existence of such social spaces.<sup>36</sup> In his study of Brazilian immigrants in Japan, who are also structurally segregated from the host society, he pays attention to their ethnic networks as such social space, and summarizes its characteristics and position in the host society as follows. It equips certain condition that allows the existence of the immigrants, who are illegal through the viewpoint of the central government. It is the place where the social relationships that support the immigrants and realize their daily practices in the host society are accumulated. Although it is not a pre-existing institutional world (the host society) but a space formed on the non-institutionalized level, it does not exist as an anti-thesis against the institutional world. It exists in overlap with that world and keeps its contact points with it. Through this contact points, this non-institutionalized social space for the immigrants takes the functions in the institutional world into its own space and utilizes them. Because it is the home to the immigrants who cannot live in the institutional world live, it must equip the immigrants with the elements that are provided in the institutional world, such as chances to get jobs and necessary information for that, means of solving the legal problems, mutual aids among the members, welfare and recreations and so on.<sup>37</sup>

The Tai Yai sub-society in Mac Hong Son is such social space for the immigrants. As in the case of Brazilians, this sub-society allows the existence of post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants who get negative recognition as illegal existences,<sup>38</sup> and gives them chances to rebuild their daily lives which were destructed in Burma. The space is connected by relationships between members of that space, which are found in everyday life. There are also the existences of members of the host society who can share the feeling with the immigrants there. And these people, through their intermediates, make the immigrants

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.82.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.168-179.

<sup>38</sup> Colson states that the host society can accept the immigrants if there are no competition over resources. Elizabeth Colson, "Introduction: Migrants and Their Hosts" in *People in Upheaval*, ed. by Scott M. Morgan and Elizabeth Colson, (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1987), p.2. In the case of Tai Yai, no such competition could be observed. If there is, they relief it by expanding their networks and taking resources in other areas. Going to work in other big cities is one of the example.

able to realize the practices in the area of the institutional host society.

But these spaces do not emerge spontaneously, according to Hirota. These social spaces emerge from some pre-existing relations, or communality that would be developed into relations. The accumulation of such relations and communality produces, maintains, and develops such social spaces. Hirota summarizes this communality as follows: (1) relations that are selected by the immigrants as the factors that would help them when they have crossed the border. They already have been expected to be the social contexts that support the immigrants' settlement lives; (2) it is open to the outside worlds and multipliable. It expands by contacting the sympathizers and the outside worlds through intermediates of sympathetic member of the host society. As a result of this, the communality would be found not only in their own space but also in outside spaces; (3) it is related to economic activities and everyday interests. The communality is maintained through these actions and is thus the social space; and (4) it does not emerge on the imagined space, but has a concrete place where the relations are accumulated. One can easily identify the common aspects in the elements existing in such places with accumulation of relations.<sup>39</sup>

Mae Hong Son is the place where the relations between the hosts and the newly arrived Tai Yai immigrants are accumulated. The wide capacity of Mae Hong Son that involves the immigrants who are usually viewed negatively from the host society is conditioned by the accumulation of the relations, which embody the communality. And that communality has long connected this Tai Yai community with the one in Shan State since its establishment of Mae Hong Son. Those have been long existing migration relations, business relations through the petty trading, and kinship relations through intermarriages, as be seen in former chapters. The immigrants are able to live and reconstruct their daily lives because of the existence of such a supportive social context.

So, this place, or this space, had constantly been the destination of the Tai Yai immigrants. Even when the policies of the Thai government turned into stricter one, the

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp.171-173.

Tai Yai immigrants continued to choose Mae Hong Son as their destination. And it has been in this space that they actively assimilate themselves into the local population.

### 5.2.3. The Sympathizers in the Host Society

Another important factor that influences the assimilation process of the immigrants is the existence of the host Tai Yai residents in the social space of Mae Hong Son. These people as supporters for the immigrants emerge from the everyday interactions and relations backed by the communality between the hosts and the immigrants. They establish relations with the immigrants, support them in the non-institutional social space, and help them when they must interact with the institutional world.

The position of the host Tai Yai residents and the post-1962 Tai Yai immigrants should be stated again. The host Tai Yai people with Thai nationality are considered to be Tai Yai residents in Mae Hong Son, as well as Thai citizens. They have experienced a certain amount of "Thainization", through education in Standard Thai, intermarriages with ethnic Thais, involvement with centralized national institutions, achievement of status in Thai society. The expanding capitalist economy, influx of Thai products and advertisements, exposure to Thai media dispatched from Bangkok, and changing patterns of life also make these people seem more "Thai".<sup>40</sup> The newly arrived immigrants are Tai Yai residents in Mae Hong Son, but are not Thai citizens. The groups overlap because they are both Tai Yai, and have relatives, friends, neighbors, and business partners in common. They go to the same temples, work in the same paddy fields and study in the same classroom. The immigrants also indirectly contact Thai society through such overlaps, and are partly assimilated.

The host Tai Yai people living in the institutional world sometimes shift to the unofficial social spaces and help the immigrants by its virtue different from the one of the institutional world. For example, families with relatives-in-law who are immigrants take the immigrants into their kin networks without any legal procedures. The village

---

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Chakrit, op. cit., p.106; Murakami, op. cit., p.64; F. K. Lehman (ed.), *Military Rule in Burma since 1962: A Kaleidoscope Views*, (Singapore: Maruzen Asia, 1981), p.3.

headman offers land to the immigrants not from the position of an official who should regulate and prevent immigration, but from the unofficial position of a resident in Mae Hong Son. As the position of an official, he is expected to report the entry of immigrants to district officials, but he does not. Instead, he keeps the record of immigrants for himself, puts them under his control and tries to prevent the issue becomes bigger beyond the village level.<sup>41</sup> We can see these as humanitarian behaviors, but that conclusion might be too simple. It is more natural to understand these acts as the result of a “we-ness” that raises the motivation for mutual help or sympathy for the immigrants. Hirota call such people, who continue to interact, sympathize with, and support immigrants, “sympathizers”.<sup>42</sup>

Such phenomena and sympathizers can be easily found in Mae Hong Son. This is because the immigrants and the hosts coexist there, and that place is one where relations have accumulated with the Tai Yai community in the Shan State over the border. In that place, the immigrants can easily find their communality with the hosts, and vice versa. Because of this communality and the accumulation of the relations, the immigrants can easily enter the “circle of relations”, and thus smoothly assimilate into the local population. The existence of sympathizers in the host society guarantees assimilation, and plays an important role in the indirect assimilation to larger host Thai society.

---

<sup>41</sup> Of course, he did this with complications because of his official position as intermediate between villagers and government officials, he said.

<sup>42</sup> Hirota, *op. cit.*, p.81.