

# **Roles and Actions of State Agencies on Border Area Development: A Case Study of Chong Ahn Ma Checkpoint for Border Trade, Thailand<sup>1</sup>**

Pinwadee Srisupan

*Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University, Ubon Ratchathani 34190, Thailand  
pinwadee.s@ubu.ac.th*

*Received: June 16, 2020*

*Revised: September 15, 2020*

*Accepted: November 10, 2020*

## **Abstract**

Border trade at Chong Ahn Ma in Ubon Ratchathani province, Thailand emerged around 1992 after the “battlefield to market place” policy was launched in Thailand in 1998. The area is located in the overlapping territorial claim zone between Thailand and Cambodia. Originally an unofficial border trading post, it was upgraded to a temporary checkpoint for border trade in 1996. This article focuses on the roles and actions of state agencies that influence economic activities in this trading area. The data were collected by in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and non-participant observation. The results reveal that state agencies play important roles in promoting and regulating that trade. The present trading area has become more strictly controlled than it was in the past and the amount of trade has become more sizable. There were two main agents partaking in the Chong Ahn Ma trading zone development – governmental agents and local traders. The trade in Chong Ahn Ma conducted among local people is flexible with no high trade values. However, there are claims of rights of control between state agencies over the area with overlapping rules and laws on the trade zone, that led to ineffective border trade management. Thus, clear border trade zone re-management is required together with the participation of local traders.

**Keywords:** Chong Ahn Ma, checkpoint for border trade, border trade, agency

<sup>1</sup> “This article is a part of research project entitled “The Role of Border Trade in Border Area Development: The Case of Chong Ahn Ma Checkpoint for Border Trade, Ubon Ratchathani,” granted by the Thailand Research Fund.

## **Introduction**

Chong Ahn Ma is a checkpoint for border trade in Ubon Ratchathani, a Thai province next to Cambodia. This area is part of Khao Phra Wihan National Park in the Phnom Dangrek Mountain range, where a dispute over overlapping territorial claims has been ongoing under a treaty dated March 23, 1907. Chong Ahn Ma border trade emerged in the post-battlefield to market place policy around the year 1993. The area served as a buffer zone during the Vietnamese-Cambodian war before it was developed into a trading area. The Thai Ministry of Interior announced it to be a checkpoint for border trade on September 19, 1996. Recently the area has also been developed into a tourist site. Tourists from the Thailand side can cross the border to the permitted Cambodian zone without any required formal documents. However, as the area is on the border, trade here can be halted due to political and border security.

This area in the past was a natural route used by the ethnic Khmer people on both sides of the border to be in touch with their relatives since they are separated by high mountains. In the past, there was no definite territorial demarcation, but only the knowledge of local people who knew which area belonged to each country.

The initiative on formal trade was announced during the 13<sup>th</sup> Thai-Cambodia General Committee Assembly on March 20-21, 2018, in which both Thailand and Cambodia affirmed the promotion of trade in Chong Ahn Ma, Ubon Ratchathani and Ahn Sae, Preah Vihear province. Samdech Pichey Sena Tea Banh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense of the Kingdom of Cambodia, stressed that Cambodia was prepared to promote security missions, thereby facilitating trade and exchange between the people along the border areas of these two countries (GNews, 2018). In addition, the 14<sup>th</sup> Thai-Cambodia General Committee Assembly in Phnom Penh, on February 13-14, 2019, agreed to cooperate in expanding border security and peaceful relations as well as to develop novel strategies by bilateral and multilateral parties. Moreover, both parties supported the linking of Thailand and Cambodia by railway and the assembly

announced the addition of four checkpoints, one of which was Chong Ahn Ma (ASEAN Information Center, 2019). Nevertheless, the border trade area here has not fully promoted international trade. One reason is that overlapping territorial claims over the area still exist and have not been officially demarcated. However, there have been continuous local endeavors to transform this area into a permanent checkpoint.

This research applied concepts concerning border area trade in order to understand the roles of the border trade agencies in Chong Ahn Ma. Border area studies have been developed from the perspectives of geography, demarcation, and security problems along border lines. Since the beginning of globalization, disputes over borders have focused on the roles of states and their borders as well as the way of life of border people who often participate in cross-border activities. Several studies of border trade have raised questions relevant to people at the borders and the related states (Rungmanee, 2013: 206). Kolossov and Scott (2013) point out that some of the border studies indicate that border area development has changed people's relationships and mobility, as well as introduced new forms of activity. The border has different meanings for the various agencies.

As yet there has been no study on border trade in the Chong Ahn Ma area, nor has there been scholarly work on the historical relationship of the Thais and the Cambodians in Nam Yuen district. Research on changes in the area is still insufficient, and consequently, a study of Chong Ahn Ma is considered pioneering work. This research aims to understand that area, focusing on the roles and actions of state agencies that influence economic activities. Chong Ahn Ma has special characteristics in that it is a border area with overlapping territorial claims and is located in a Thai national park. In the process of border development, there are various agencies that play roles in economic border movement. Numerous state agencies claim rights of control with overlapping rules and regulations that affect trade activities. Many rules are unclear, and thus, misunderstandings often exist between local traders.

This article presents the background and characteristics of the border trade at Chong Ahn Ma and proposes policy recommendations for border trade management. State agencies play important roles in promoting and regulating the trade as well as influencing changes in trade activities.

### **Methodology**

Data were collected by interviewing 52 key informants, including 28 Thai vendors, two Cambodian vendors, representatives of 15 state agencies, and local senior citizens. In addition, non-participant observation was used. The information consisted of practical policy recommendations which could be employed both at the local level and in border trade development in the future.

### **Background and Characteristics of Border Trade at Chong Ahn Ma**

To understand the agencies engaged in the Chong Ahn Ma area, it is necessary to understand the background and changes that took place there. The development of border trade can be divided into five significant phases. Before 1997, Chong Ahn Ma was a local mountain pass near a battlefield. Thus, there was very little trade except for some Khmer Rouge members who brought their goods, including wood, cattle, and rubies, to sell. The post-war period (after 1988), was a time when, as was mentioned above, the Thai government led by Chatichai Choonhavan launched a policy of "changing battlefields into marketplaces" by promoting border trade by the local people. The Thai merchants transported consumer goods to sell to the Cambodians and bought wild products from them. In addition to vegetables, the Cambodians sold cattle and pigs to the Thais. According to the traders' narratives, in 1992 it was found that a number of wood traders used Chong Ahn Ma to cross from Cambodia into Thailand. Traders tell stories of the difficulties of transporting goods and how they would

travel in groups so that they could help each other in case their trucks got stuck in the mud. Subsequently the trail was transformed into a firm dirt road, making travel more convenient.

### The Years 1997- 2005 Marked the Official Market Opening

After the border trade announcement in September 1996, the Ministry of Interior came to officially regulate the border area while soldiers remained there to maintain order along the border. The Thai and Cambodian markets were located adjacent to the border crossing point. There was a mutual agreement between the two countries and regulations were issued for importing and trade.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, because of the limitations of the area and more complicated regulations, some goods from Cambodia, especially live animals such as pigs, cows, and buffalo disappeared from the market. In 1998, the establishment of Khao Phra Wihan National Park, which includes the Chong Ahn Ma area, was announced, resulting in changes in the rules over the trade area. However, intensive control measures were not yet implemented at this time. There were new traders, such as those selling chickens, that influenced higher border trade values significantly.

### New Market Development (2005-2012)

In 2005, commercial and expediting buildings were built and renovated. However, the crossing was often closed because of incursions into the area and battles at the Phu Makhue hill because of the Preah Vihear

<sup>2</sup> In general, the Thailand's border trade can be classified into three levels.

1. Villager trade with a value not exceeding 20,000 Thai baht. This level of trade can be conducted without tax. However, the goods must not be illegal, that is, the items must be authorized to be imported.

2. The trade of middlemen has an export and import value of not exceeding 50,000 Thai baht. At this level, the Thai Customs Department collects duty on deck without import entry declaration. However, the traders must comply with customs regulations.

3. Merchandise and import-export companies must strictly follow the customs laws. This requires import entry declaration forms and follows the laws of customs declaration procedures (Chongmek Customs House, 2019).

Nevertheless, in mentioning Thailand's "border trade," both formal and informal trade are considered. The trade encompassed exchange of general consumer goods and high volume goods purchased by the people in the adjacent territories. Chong Ahn Ma represented a local level of border trade that included local goods as well as manufactured products.

dispute.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, people came to trade in this area under uncertain circumstances of border security.

The Thai market was officially relocated to a new trading area and divided into two zones. The primary traders were mainly in the so-called 'upper market' and the new traders were in the area called 'the lower market.' They had good relationships with the Cambodian traders whose market was called 'the cliff-market.' In the very beginning, there were only a few small shops. The poultry traders used an area in a former parking lot as a delivery point. This point was separated from other areas for food sales. Around 2009 many types of food, especially coconuts, were important export goods from Thailand. Later, the roads were improved and asphalt roads were constructed. As a result, more traders and tourists accessed the area, the market was expanded, and some traders began to sell their goods along the pavement.

### New Trader Era (2012-2015)

After the dispute over Preah Vihear ended in 2013, there was an endeavor to reestablish Thai-Cambodian relations. Various border committees were established to work on issues, including borderline demarcation, opening an international checkpoint, and opening the trading area. Even so, the crossing point was still closed frequently. Later, a permanent checkpoint led to an increased number of traders in the area, especially Cambodians. However, both countries claimed rights over the land.<sup>4</sup> On the Cambodian side casinos were built to attract gamblers and used as an economic strategy. At a certain period of time, fuel was the main item transported through Chong Ahn Ma.

In the exchange of goods among the Thai and Cambodian traders at Chong Ahn Ma, some traders moved from Chong Chom and Chong

<sup>3</sup> The dispute between Thailand and Cambodia started in June 2008 over the Prasat Preah Vihear area where there were many clashes between the military forces along with the claims about the disputed territory of each party.

<sup>4</sup> Improved cooperation allowed the Cambodians to develop the area on the Cambodia side. They included the building of a monument of a local leader called Ta Om, depicted riding a horse and holding a spear, and facing the Thai side. After being created in 2010, Cambodia utilized it as a marker to claim rights over the area which had not yet been demarcated, and in 2014 changed the landscape around the statue, which affected the territory's geography.

Sa-ngam, the Thai-Cambodian permanent checkpoints in Surin and Si Sa Ket provinces, respectively, because of more complicated international import-export regulations at those checkpoints. Even though the trading area changed, the most popular Thai product for Cambodians was still coconuts. There were reports that a number of new traders came to the market. Some of them came as tourists, but once they arrived, they imagined trading opportunities and set up trading areas along the road which caused confusion and problems in waste disposal.

Since 2015, more state organizations have taken part in regulating the traders and the trading area, such as the Song municipality sub-district organization, which tried to develop the main market for a year but was not successful. Later, Khao Phra Wihan National Park, which controlled the area, came to regulate the area by using national park regulations. Among those state organizations, however, there were no common guidelines or regulations over the trading area. As of today, the management of the trading area is under the regulation of the national parks, which adapted the law for tourists, and Yod Dom Wildlife Sanctuary, which belongs to the entrance-exit of the area and collects entrance fees from tourists. At first, traders were not satisfied with the state control as it posed obstacles and was inconsistent with the real trade.

So far, the number of tourists has increased during holidays and major festivals. Imported goods that are famous among the Thais are natural products, especially mangoes and puffball mushrooms. The puffballs are seasonal and sell well from May to June. Thai export goods that bring in great income are chickens, coconuts, and consumer goods such as bottled water.

### **The Roles of the Agencies and Actions Influencing Economic Activities**

Nowadays there are two types of agencies taking part in the Chong Ahn Ma development – state agencies and the private sector. The private

sector consists of minor dealers, who have had rather minimal roles, except in the past when wood traders were involved in developing the trading routes and the roads. The key state agencies working in Chong Ahn Ma come from various organizations. Their roles in controlling, regulating, and managing the area are relatively complex. The state organizations play a key role in policies on area development. The organizations have more or less influential roles in the area development, depending on certain periods of time.

**Area management:** The national park is a major agency that regulates the Thai trade zone, especially the lower market. The lower market is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays, following one of the formal rules of opening the border checkpoint. The upper market is used by the traders who sell food and beverages on Saturdays, Sundays, and national holidays. However, some shopkeepers in the upper market also have goods for sale on Tuesdays and Thursdays since these items are only consumer goods that are sold to Cambodian customers. Moreover, the Yod Dom Wildlife Sanctuary, which belongs to the entrance area, collects tourist fees, which traders are exempted from paying.

**Area regulation:** At the Thai-Cambodia borderline, a security unit known as the 23<sup>rd</sup> Ranger Forces Regiment, Suranaree Task Force is in charge. This unit plays a key role in regulating the movement of people crossing the border. The Nam Yuen District Officer also checks and reports to the Ubon Ratchathani Immigration Office. As with other checkpoints, the state administrative offices that are in charge of the import of goods in the area include a customs office, an excise department, a plant quarantine station, an animal quarantine station, and a livestock office. These organizations check imported goods according to international import-export regulations. Nevertheless, their roles are limited due to capacity and cost issues. Moreover, conditions of the checkpoint for border trade have made import-export difficult. When dealing with amounts higher than the amount defined by law, the traders need to travel to request permission from various relevant state agencies, each of which is located quite far away from Chong Ahn Ma. For example, the provincial level organizations are all

located in towns that are approximately 100 kilometers away. Thus, many traders no longer import and export their goods through this channel.

The changing policies of the Thai state directly influenced actions that affected change in the economic activities of local state agencies at various periods of time. Local agencies following the rules have only limited power; for example, they cannot make decisions on opening the border without central government permission. Some actions of traders may not comply with the rules; for example, sometimes the traders try to import more goods than the limit. However, the local government tries to be flexible with the rules and trade.

### **Problems and Obstacles of Chong Ahn Ma Trading Area Management**

In terms of managing the border trade area, problems, and obstacles stemmed from the fact that there are many agencies involved, each of which uses different rules and regulations to administer the trading area. The increased amount of goods resulting from the demands of the traders from both sides is managed under limited conditions. For example, Thailand banned the import of pumpkin from Cambodia so that in the pumpkin season, Thai people can buy only a few, while the Cambodians want to sell a large amount. Moreover, export-import goods for villagers' trade without fee should not exceed 20,000 Thai baht. These conditions often caused misunderstanding between the traders and the state officers, especially during certain seasons when the traders had a large amount of goods on hand. Thus, there have been many challenges to the effective management of the trading area.

**Market management problems:** Many traders viewed the officers' work as a burden for them. Since there were many agencies responsible for managing the market, there were many conflicts of interest. Because the traders paid the market fee, they felt that the market management lacked clarity and effectiveness and the official budget is difficult to access.

Because the market was not considered permanent, it was neither attractive nor clean. For example, waste was carelessly disposed of even though bins were provided. Most of the traders claimed that this waste came from the tourists.

Hence, some state officers and traders were not pleased with the newly expanded market area. Some of them did not want the new market area as it put a burden on them, and some informants felt that it was manipulated by influential people and was not well organized.

Moreover, there were numerous border trade issues, as described below.

1) Pricing problems: The traders, especially chicken traders, frequently encountered price competition in which some traders cut their selling price so that the other traders would sell less. This price-cut problem occurred more frequently when there were more new traders.

2) Import-export goods problems: At the checkpoint, essential conditions of import-export included defining the amount of goods and limiting or prohibiting certain types of goods. These conditions became problematic when the Cambodians had an increase in agricultural goods which they needed to sell on time.

3) Debts of the Thai traders: The Thai traders commonly used credit to buy goods from the Cambodians, sometimes causing problems. An example occurred in 2019, when a Thai trader refused to pay a debt owed to a Cambodian seller for mangoes, which eventually led Thai officials having to negotiate to resolve the problem.

4) A communication gap in understanding area management: According to interviews with the traders and officers, a serious problem in managing the trading area stemmed from a misunderstanding between the traders and the officers. Some traders felt that their opinions regarding market development were ignored. The officers might not choose to follow their opinions because they felt these proposals might not help develop the market. Moreover, misunderstandings could occur because of too few meetings between the traders and the officers. A one-way communication involving only the head of the market might not bring the message through to everyone. Some traders did not pay

close enough attention to study the regulations on contracts, and some were newcomers who might not understand how the management operated. They did not understand the conditions of the checkpoint for border trade and viewed them from a perspective different from that of the state. Thus, communication gaps and misunderstandings still remained. When state officers needed to monitor a situation according to the regulations, the traders perceived it as an inconvenience or as ineffective management.

### **The Roles of the State in Border Trade Management**

Studies such as Promphakping et al. (2020) suggest that border markets grew from the “changing the battlefield into a marketplace” policy initiated by the Thai government. This research also recognized significant border trade stimulating this trade policy. The war between Vietnam and Cambodia during Thailand’s anti-communist period and relocation of the Khmer people to the border areas had led to an increased exchange of goods. In daily life, people needed to buy consumer goods. On top of relying on natural ways of living, the informal exchange also occurred. Thai soldiers were in charge of controlling the border area at that time. They played a key role in initiating changes, little by little, transforming the area as a buffer zone for national security into one for trading, as we can see nowadays.

The emergence of the border trading area changed the geographical characteristics of the area. The changes were most apparent in the Cambodian market in the non-demarcated area. The market itself expanded beyond the previous area. This expansion created some misunderstanding among the Thai and Cambodia people regarding whether the expanded area already belonged to Cambodia while, in fact, it was still under dispute. The Cambodian market expansion was not only limited to trading demands of the people, but also lack of responsibility on the part of Cambodia and the geographical changes, such as the building of Ta Om statues, which led to the change of the international watershed line. The Thai officials and citizens viewed this

phenomenon as a Cambodian scheme for controlling the area. The Thais did not have any clear prohibitions regarding building and expanding the market. Moreover, certain economic activities which are considered illegal in Thailand are still conducted in this area. Examples are the selling of wildlife, restaurants serving meals made with wildlife, and small-size casino. According to Nail (2016, cited in Sangkhamanee, 2018), the border was perceived as an in-between area. The border is not simply a territorial marker but is influenced by nationalistic mechanics, such as the building of Ta Om statues. This might affect the ways in which the territory is demarcated, as mentioned earlier.

Furthermore, as Sangkhamanee (2018: 184-185) points out, each border area has unique patterns that resulted from the different forms of trade, while the trade itself also influenced the ways in which the border developed unique characteristics. Those characteristics include the borders as a specific economic area, political exemption, flows of people and cultural networks from near and far areas, various goods, and diverse exchange systems. Those specific characteristics helped each border to maintain its unique trading status and trading management. Similarly, Santasombat (2016: 80) perceived how the influence of state regulations on border areas can vary according to the regional context and conditions of each area, as well as emerging trading patterns. Border trade reflects the relations between local state agencies and local vendors through state facilitation and regulation (Srikham et al., 2015). At Chong Ahn Ma, there were some remarkable characteristics, including those described below.

- 1) The Thai market zone is located in a national park. The route to the border area passes a wildlife sanctuary area. This connecting route is around one-kilometer-long and the traders and tourists think of this area mainly as a trading zone, not a tourist attraction. However, the Cambodian market zone is like a tourist area. Thus, the principle of collecting trader’s market fees by using tourism rules is not practiced.

- 2) Fundamentally, the national park area is managed under tourism principles, even though the checkpoint for border trade was announced before the designation of the national park. Therefore,

border management was originally practiced according to the Ministry of Interior's announcement. Some regulations were not practical for trading. These regulations then were not strictly controlled, but used flexibly so that the practices should benefit both the traders and the people.

3) Goods exchange among the Thais and the Cambodians occurred in the Thai territory and the area that is not precisely demarcated. Consequently, state security is needed to pursue its roles in regulating the area usage. The Thai state endeavored to follow the agreement by moving the market areas out of the unidentified territorial demarcation, while the Cambodian market expanded into the unidentified area, which might have resulted in enlarging permanent ownership of the area.

4) The emergence of the markets on both sides and regulations over the goods crossing state borders partially defined patterns of the trade and economic activities of the trading counterparts. As a consequence, the traders all have business connections. They normally formed close associations with each other as a result of which they trusted each other to provide credit. The agricultural buyers normally pre-ordered the amount of goods before delivery.

For wholesale, the Cambodians offered to buy goods from the Thai market, after which they took them across the border. Similarly, when the Thai wanted to buy Cambodian goods, Thai traders had to take the goods to Thailand by themselves. At the checkpoint, the maximum amount of trade is 50,000 baht per person per day, and the merchants tried to reduce the number of documents being processed to avoid being taxed. One way they did this was taking their friends with them to buy the goods and then bringing the goods together.

5) From observing the cross-border transportation between Thailand and Cambodia, it was found that enforcement of trading rules in Chong Ahn Ma could be seen as both strict and flexible. This meant that on some days the goods were not checked strictly, but sometimes the amount and type of the goods were limited. Practices regarding the tourists' entrance have also been highly lenient. Tourists could pass the

checkpoint easily. The Thai were aware that they could smuggle something into a high-risk area in Cambodia but they also assessed risks by themselves, and thus, there have been no smuggling problems so far. Therefore, strict control was not necessary and random checking and flexible control over the goods and people crossing were practiced here.

6) Agricultural export goods of the Thais were sold on the days announced by the checkpoint for border trade. This was because the supplies of certain goods were not being produced daily and they might not have enough goods every day. Hence, the traders had to travel to collect a sizable amount of goods so that each time they could be sure that the amount of goods was worth transporting. On the sellers' side, all goods had to be sold. It was sometimes necessary for the sellers to give away extra goods, reduce the prices, or use other sales promotion techniques, even though they got a smaller profit.

Nonetheless, prices of the goods fluctuated according to market mechanisms. During some festive occasions of the Cambodian people, the demand for chicken was very high. As a result, the price of chicken rose during that period of time. Even after the festive period was over, the traders still continued to sell chicken at a higher price than in Thailand's general market because live chickens are still in great demand in Cambodia.

7) The increase in the number of traders stimulated the fluctuation of the market prices. As the Thai traders competed with each other to sell their goods, the Cambodian buyers could have more choices. Although the amount of goods increased, values of the goods decreased.

Border development by promoting the border trade has demonstrated state control over the border. The state officers were also under pressure as they worked under the state structure. Although their work aimed to facilitate smooth and beneficial trade for all stakeholders, regional problems still occurred. The regulations utilized by different organizations were unsystematic. This affected the management of the area and border development was generally ineffective.

The roles of the state agencies in managing the area overlapped and there was no central organization in charge. The situations at Chong Ahn Ma since 2017 have been in a liminal stage of change to the permanent checkpoint. There was no host organization in charge of developing Chong Ahn Ma trade as its key mission. An organization or agency might not want to take risks to invest in development tasks because the investment could be lost as there was no comprehensive, effective plan for development investment. As seen in 2019, the border trade has continued without any distinguishable changes.

In terms of state organization management, this study concurred with Leepreecha and Chantakad (2018) which pointed that the state was concerned with national security while the community was concerned with the human security of making a living. The policy in promoting trade at the border area brought in state mechanisms, rules, and procedures that empower state authorities to control people in the border area. This policy benefitting mostly outside business investors, rather than local people who are grassroots and ethnic peoples. As for the Chong Ahn Ma trader community, they felt that when state agencies came to the border and administered rules according to economic policies, some regulations and policies did not facilitate their trading interests. Consequently, the traders requested self-management and the reduction of regulations that were not useful.

### **The Roles of the Border Trade on the Border Development**

Border trade at Chong Ahn Ma was promoted after the area was designated as an official checkpoint for border trade. Border trade played some core roles in developing the border area. Chong Ahn Ma is difficult to reach as the route passes through high mountain ranges. However, the emergence of the wood trade led to good roads with better access to the area. This was key in opening the area for connecting the local traders from the two countries.

The purpose of opening this area for trading was for economic benefits and promoting good relations among the people from the two

countries. The area was deemed an exchange point for obtaining necessary daily consumer goods for the people. The trade was not focused on high economic values. The checkpoint was viewed as useful for people from both countries. The Thai traders gained good profits from selling to the Cambodian customers. Even though, overall, the traders were satisfied with selling with good profits in this area, they are thinking of making border trade area better in the future.

#### **1. The role and importance of Chong Ahn Ma with respect to the Nam Yuen economy**

The local traders played a major role in boosting border trade. There were both small and major dealers. The traders outside the area were often asked if they had made an economic contribution to the locality or not. In general, the goods sold in the area were brought from both inside and outside the local area. Live chickens, for example, were gathered from major dealers in Nam Yuen district. However, coconuts, in high demand from Cambodian customers, were not exclusively from Nam Yuen, because the area did not have a sufficient supply. Fruits, which are the prominent goods of Nam Yuen, were not considered the main goods at Chong Ahn Ma. Some traders sold general goods.

Nowadays, the traders at Chong Ahn Ma are not all Nam Yuen people, as many come from other places as well. This research found that the border trade was not related solely to the local people around the area. The traders include both the original traders who are Nam Yuen locals and other people from nearby districts, namely Kantralak district of Srisaket province, and Nam Khun district of Ubon Ratchathani province.

#### **2. The role and importance of Chong Ahn Ma in relation to the Ubon Ratchathani economy**

The trade at Chong Ahn Ma was usually conducted by small traders. Local trading is often retail, which often doesn't get a lot of numerical attention. The trade at Chong Ahn Ma was different from that at the Thai-Laos Chong Mek Permanent Checkpoint, where the amount of goods and values of trade were rather substantial. Considering the provincial policies and development outcomes in the next five years, the province includes strategic plans for Thai-Laos border area



development. Hence, Chong Ahn Ma might not be the main target of Ubon Ratchathani border trade development.

The findings of this research are similar to those in the works of Surifai and Manmart (2018) and Leetrakun and Intrawut (2011). It was found that, in general, the border trade had a positive economic impact on the local community. The trade provided both new professions and employment. Also, the community gained income and developed into a stronger society with improved well-being. The trade also promoted an increase in international relationships. Specifically, the border area as the crossing point partially enabled various activities together with cross-border activities in the area. Although border trade might not benefit all the people living near the border because of cost limitations and professional conditions, the holistic picture of the trade still shows that most of the traders are the local Ubon Ratchathani people. The border trade had impacts on the family economy and it was a means for local goods to reach the international border.

### Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This research shows the significance of state agencies that regulate and facilitate border trade. After the formal border opening, various state agencies claimed the right to control the area with overlapping rules and regulations. Although inconsistent regulations resulted in ineffective border trade management, local state agencies tried to support the trade by being accommodating. At the same time, one could see the struggle among vendors in everyday trading who evaded the restrictions of border control. The vendors also needed to be allowed to trade without being limited by overlapping rules and border management.

This research suggests that state agencies should revise their management of the area to improve Chong Ahn Ma border trade management in three ways. Firstly, the national park as the agency that controls the area should administer regulations to ensure that the usage of the area is well organized and hygienic. Improved garbage and toilet management were recommended by the stakeholders.

Market management should be reorganized to set suitable rules by cooperating with the district. Secondly, the district office should initiate the formation of a market committee to improve the market and deal with management conflicts among traders and between traders and state officers. Thirdly, the district and provincial organizations should export higher margin value goods. The demands of Cambodians should be studied and the identity of goods should be unique so that they are worth buying. In terms of promoting the major dealers, the organizations should cooperate with the provincial chamber of commerce to launch road-show activities as well as to seek new Thai and Cambodian partners. More importantly, the minor dealers should not be overlooked. The districts should enhance and boost the trading capability of the districts so that the districts are able to export.

### References

- Chongmek Custom House. (2019). *Rupbaep kan kha chaidan*. (In Thai) [Border trade type]. (Mimeographed).
- Leepreecha, P. and Jantakad, S. (2018). *Kan kha chaidan kap khwam (mai) mankhong nai chiwit manut phuenthi chaidan Ban Huak*. (In Thai) [Trading and human (in)security in border area of Ban Huak]. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 30(2), 99-136.
- Leetrakun, P. and Intrawut, N. (2011). *Botbat khong kan kha chaidan to kan krachai raidai lae khwam yakchon nai changwat Chiang Rai*. (In Thai) [The role of border trade on income distribution and poverty in Chiang Rai province]. *Thammasat Economic Journal*, 29(3), 1-34.
- Promphakping, N., et al. (2020). The evolution of wet markets in a Thai-Lao border town. *Journal of Mekong Societies*, 16(2), 72-95.
- Rungmanee, S. (2013). *Chatphanwanna baep phahusanam nai kan sueksa kan pliangplaeng sangkhom chonnabot na chaidan Isan-Laos* (In Thai) [Multi-sited ethnography in the study of agrarian transformation in northeastern Thai-Lao borderlands]. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 25(1), 199-232.
- Sangkhamanee, J. (2018). *Limology: Chaidan sueksa kap khet khan wittaya khong phuenthi nai/rawang*. (In Thai) [Limology: border and boundary studies of in-between area]. Bangkok: Siamparithat.

- Santasombat, Y. (2016). *The border: Kon phrom daen rat chat*. (In Thai) [The border: people, boundary, nation-state]. Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund.
- Srikham, W., et al. 2015. *Kwam mankhong setthakit lae kan muang nai phuenthi chaidae: korani sueksa talat kan kha chaidae Chongchom amphoe Kapcheong, jangwat Surin* (In Thai). [Security, economy and politics in the borderland: A case study of Chongchom border market, Kapcheong district, Surin province]. In **Proceedings of the 53th Kasetsart University Annual Conference 2015**. (pp 740-747). Kasetsart University.
- Surifai, T. and Manmart, L. (2018). *Botbat kan kha chaidae nai kan phatthana setthakit chumchon korani sueksa changwat Nongkhai changwat Nakhon Phanom lae changwat Mukdahan*. (In Thai) [The roles of border trading on community economic development: a case study of Nongkhai, Nakhon Phanom and Mukdahan province]. **Journal of Politics and Governance**, 8(1), 153-176.

### Websites

- ASEAN Information Center. (2019). *GBC Thai-Cambodia banlu kho toklong ruam yok radap khwam ruammue dan khwam mankhong lae setthakit chaidae*. (In Thai) [Thailand - Cambodia reached an agreement enhance cooperation in security and border economy]. Retrieved May 1, 2019 from [http://www.aseanhai.net/ewt\\_news.php?nid=8784&filename=in](http://www.aseanhai.net/ewt_news.php?nid=8784&filename=in)
- GNews. (2018). *Khana kammakan chaidae tuapai Thai-Cambodia chuenchom khwam samphan song pratet yok radap sungsut yuenyan jettana ruam mai lamoet dindaen lae nam panha ketdan ma krathop khwam samphan kan lae kan*. (In Thai) [Thai-Cambodian border committee appreciates the highest levels of relations between the two countries. Confirms the common intention, not violating the territory and not bringing boundary problems to affect each other]. Retrieved May 25, 2019 from <https://gnews.apps.go.th/news?news=15953>.
- Kolossov, V. and Scott, J. (2013). **Selected conceptual issues in border studies**. Retrieved December 12, 2018 from <http://belgeo.revues.org/10532>
- Office of Provincial Commercial Affairs, Ubon Ratchathani (2017). *Sarup phawa kan kha chaidae changwat Ubon Ratchathani pracham duen thanwakhom song phan ha roi ha sip kao*. (In Thai) [Ubon Ratchathani border trade situation in December 2016]. Retrieved December 12, 2018 from [http://www.aecthaibiz.com/wapppcoc/34/upload/File\\_IPD\\_FILE34381801\\_20170124\\_162006.pdf](http://www.aecthaibiz.com/wapppcoc/34/upload/File_IPD_FILE34381801_20170124_162006.pdf)