



Constructed and Negotiated Identity of the Laotian-Thais in a Thai-Myanmar Borderland¹

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Abstract

This article primarily deals with the identity of the Laotian-Thais in a border community located in the northwestern part of Thailand. The data used in this article were drawn from qualitative research conducted in a field site located in Tha Sai Luat Subdistrict, Mae Sot District, Tak Province. The data-collection techniques employed for the research included key-informant interviews and participant and non-participant observations. Key informants were purposively selected from Thai residents, whose ancestors in ancient times were herded by the Burmese army from the Lao Kingdom to what today is the Mon State of Myanmar. According to the research, around the mid-twentieth century, the early Laotian settlers in this community left their villages in Myanmar. After crossing the Thai-Myanmar boundary, some families continued moving to the homeland of their ancestors, which is now Lao PDR, while some of them decided to settle down in the present settlement. Through a constructivist approach to ethnicity, the research suggests that against the backdrop of the economic development as well as ethnic diversity in the border area, not only do the Laotian-Thais construct their identity based on their cultural roots, but also the cultural ways of other ethnic groups, the Thai and Burmese in particular. Meanwhile, as little-known people in this borderland, in everyday lives they negotiate their constructed identity both among themselves and with members of the other ethnic groups.

Keywords: ethnicity, identity construction, constructed and negotiated identity, Laotian-Thai identity, Thai-Myanmar borderland

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