

Burma as ‘Corridor’:

A case of South Asian descendants’ community in northern Thailand

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This paper highlights the location of Burma (Myanmar) and reconsiders its geographical territory and its historical position. There were and are a lot of studies of Burma/Myanmar. Most of the studies were on the Burma itself or on those people living in Burma. On the other hand, Burma situated at the meeting point of South Asia and Southeast Asia. In other words, Burma holds a position of the node or corridor which connecting these two regions. This paper tries to focus on Burma as ‘corridor’, by considering a case of South Asian migrant groups in Thailand, a Bangladeshi (or Eastern Bengal) Muslim descendants’ community in northern Thailand.

1. South Asia and Southeast Asia: Continuity and disjuncture

At first, it should be pointed out that there seem several reasons for having not paying attention to this aspect. Firstly, we must think about the very existence of nation states and its borders. We, those who accustom with the nation states and its borders, are tented to presuppose the framework of those ones. Van SCENDEL (2005:4-5) pointed out this tendency clearly and critically, and suggested the difficulty to avoid its grip as ‘territorial trap’. Needless to say, there are two borders, India/Bangladesh-Myanmar border and Myanmar- Thailand border, between South Asia and Thailand. In addition to these, there lays down a vast geographical space of Myanmar between these two regions. It might be difficult to imagine that there were and are communications beyond these borders and land. Because of this, the theme of the land-route connection between two regions might have been left almost untouched. Moreover, the borderland area of Myanmar is the tribal area and the conflicting zone where many tribal people and their armed fronts have been severely confronted with the central government. Movement of an ordinary person has been restricted and it has been difficult to cross the borders. This situation would have been affected to the scholar’s thinking as if the communication before this period had been also restricted.

Secondly, we must think about that the scholars of Southeast Asian studies focus on the topics and themes of Southeast Asia. They pay attention to the topics 'inside' the area, but not so to the topics beyond the area. In other words, the cultural exchange or the peoples' movement between the larger regions such as 'South Asia' and 'Southeast Asia' has not been highlighted. van SCHENDEL (2002) pointed out this problem critically. To avoid this trap, he proposes to rethink the existing "academic politics of scale" and to introduce the "jump scale". Exceptionally, the communication between these two regions by 'sea-route' has been discussed in some degree. It might be because of that there is no border, national or geographical, on the surface of the ocean.

Thirdly, I will mention to the concept 'Zomia'. SCOTT (2009) developed the argument raised by van Schendel (2002) and presented a 'Zomia' hypothesis. He grasps the vast hilly area, i.e. The north-eastern part of South Asia, the northern part of Southeast Asia, and the southern part of China, as a continuous body and named it as 'Zomia', and argues its unification and its autonomy from the plane land powers. In contrast, he states that the plane land was conquered by the 'national power' earlier, lost its autonomy and included as a part of 'states', and as a result people are divided by the states' borders. This is perhaps true in some degree. But, recent development of border studies tells us such facts that there were and are continuous communications and transactions across the borders, and that this kind of transactions are not only limited to the 'illicit' flow of the goods and people, but also often seen as a broad range of movement of the ordinary people along the border area or of the people of larger area. Then, we cannot help suspecting that, contrary to the Scott's hypothesis, there were (and are) any flow of people, which the 'state' cannot be able to control fully in the fringe area of Zomia. In other word, there might be a 'land-route' connection between South Asia and Southeast Asia and we would have to re-think about the continuity between these two regions.

2. Burma Studies and the 'Indian': some simple questions

It is well known that there were a lot of 'Indians' in British Burma, especially in Rangoon at that day. For example, Tin Maung Maung Than (1993) describes largely that there were many 'Indians' in Rangoon and they even consisted of over-half of the population of the city in the late colonial period. He also points out that many kinds of people were included among the 'Indians'; i.e. people of the different regions and of different religious beliefs. We should pay attention to a fact that the large numbers of Muslim people were included in this 'Indian' category. They were labeled as

‘Chittagonians’ or ‘Bengalis’. After the WWII, as a result of the independence of Burma, many ‘Indians’ left Burma and returned to Indian sub-continent and, as a result, ‘Indian’ population was decreased drastically. He referred to a very interesting point that, as the mass exodus of the Hindu population from the city had happened, “in terms of visibility the Muslims appear to be more numerous and active than the Hindus in both retail trade and services” (Tin Maung Maung Than 1993: 594). And this sentence stimulate me to think a simple question; where did they, this large number of Muslims, go? Of course, some of them has been staying in Myanmar today, but another would have left there. Then, where were their destinations?

Many studies suggest that there were intimate relationship between those ‘Indian’ people in Burma and India. They did frequently come and go between these two areas because these areas were belonging to the same British Raj. Perhaps because of this reason, many Hindu people went back to India after the independence of Burma. But, in the case of Muslims, the situation was a different. Their homeland was divided and they persuaded to choose where to go back, India or Pakistan. If they think about to go back the Islamic state, they again should have to choose the destination, West Pakistan or East Pakistan. I suspect that, in the case of those Muslims from Eastern Bengal, i.e. Chittagonians or some of Bengalis, they (some of them, at least) might go back to East Pakistan by land-route. Because, Burma and Eastern Bengal (East Pakistan) are relatively close in terms of distance and are connected by land. Unfortunately, as we have not sufficient data or detailed studies on the relationship between Eastern Pakistan (after 1972, Bangladesh) and Burma (Myanmar), it is rather difficult to confirm the right or wrong of this conjecture. Though there are a lot of recordings and documents on the close connection between Burma and India (ex. migration flow in the colonial era, return of the Hindu migrants to India after Burma’s independence, etc.), it is curious that we can find a few of those kinds on the relationship between East Pakistan (or Bangladesh) and Burma, despite East Pakistan (or Bangladesh) is a neighboring country of Burma. As I have tried to investigate on the documents and books in Bangle in Bangladesh, I could find a few of those, except on the themes of Rohingyas or of Hill Peoples like Marma etc. And it is also difficult to know about the people’s movement from Burma to Thailand, except the studies on the labor migration or on the refugee problems. We raise the simple question in this case, too; though there was a close connection between Burma and India by sea-route, were and are there a weak relation between East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and Burma or those between Burma and other Southeast Asia by land-route?

3. Muslim studies in Thailand, and Bangladeshi Muslims in Chiang Mai

In the field of Thai studies, we can find some valuable studies on South Asian migrants and their descendants; ex. HUSSAIN (1982), MANI(1993), NAKAVACHARA (1993), SATO (1995). However, these are the studies on the groups in Bangkok, and especially focuses on the Sikhs from Panjabi or the Hindus from northern India. Except these studies, a few studies have been done on the other ethnic or religious groups. Moreover, almost all groups these studies mentioned had been migrated by sea-route (by air, later). Few studies did mention on the 'land-route' migration.

We must think about another aspect. Although Thailand is a Buddhist majority country, a sizable Muslim population is also living in. The official census figure of the Muslims population in the country is about 4.5% (JITMUAD 2009), but some scholars suggest that the figure may be bigger. For example, BAJNID (1999) suggests the figure as 5-8%. On the other hand, it has generally believed that the Muslim population is concentrated in southern districts near Malaysian border and most of them are Malay Muslims. It is plausible, as some part of those people insists the independence or autonomy of the region and often armed struggles have been happen in the area. Because of this, most of the Muslim studies in Thailand deals with the Muslim of this region. But, in reality, there are many Muslim people also in the central part and northern part of the country. Even so, we can find relatively few studies on the Muslims in these areas. Besides, in the cases of the Muslim studies, a tendency to emphasize the communication by 'sea-route' is also found, just as those in the cases of the Sikh or of the Hindus (ex. GILQUIN 2005).

One of the places where the Muslim population is most concentrated in the northern Thailand is Chiang Mai city and its neighboring area. And some studies that dealt with the Muslim people in the area has been found (ex. SUTHEP 2013, WANG 2011, YOKOYAMA 1992). These studies refer that there are two major Muslim communities in this area; Chinese Muslims (Yunnanese Muslims, 'Chin-ho' in Thai) and 'Indian' Muslims. But, curiously, except the work of Suthep, most studies only deal with Chinese Muslims.

SUTHEP (2013=1978) is not only one of the earliest studies on Muslims in northern Thailand, but also the only study of the 'Indian' Muslims ('Pakistani' Muslims, in his word) in the area. In this sense, we should highly appreciate his work. Unfortunately, his work had only vaguely mentioned the place of their origin, such like 'Eastern Bengal', their route of migration, and the reason and process of migration. Exceptionally, in the case of the first Imam of the Chang Klan mosque in Chiang Mai city, he described a little

bit longer. But, in this case also, the details of the movement had lost. It seems that there was no written record at this point and the only data which Suthep found was the oral tradition of his descendants. Perhaps for this reason, it is suspected that some part of his description is dubious.

In the conditions mentioned above, studying Bangladeshi Muslims in Chiang Mai and its neighboring area is very important. 1) It will contribute the understanding of Muslim society in northern Thailand. 2) It will confirm the connection between South Asia and Thailand. 3) As a result, it will offer the clue to re-think the continuity and connection between South Asia and Southeast Asia. 4) We will position the place of Burma (Myanmar) as a node or corridor between two regions. 5) It will help to grasp the character of Chiang Mai as a cosmopolitan city. In other words, we will be able to confirm the trans-nationality of city Chiang Mai. 6) It is also possible to offer a new point of view for the Border Studies.

4. Bangladeshi Muslims in Chiang Mai and neighboring area

Chiang Mai is a major city of north in Thailand. As I have mentioned above, there are two different Muslim communities in Chiang Mai, Chinese Muslims and so-called 'Indian' Muslims. I will concentrate on the latter only in this paper. 'Indian' Muslims are in reality a descendant community of the Muslims from Eastern Bengal in the British era. The area had changed its name as Eastern Pakistan after 1947 (Partition of India and Pakistan) and then to be Bangladesh after 1971 (the independence of Bangladesh). To avoid the complexity, I will mention them as 'Bangladeshi Muslims' hereafter. SUTHEP (2013) writes that "at present, the Pakistani Muslims have two major quarters within the city with a total population about 2,500." This figure was in 1978. Most recent figures are around 1500, reported by a leader of a Chang Klan mosque. This difference of figure is not because of the decline of the community, but due to the following reasons; 1) They are concentrated in the neighboring places of two mosques in Chiang Mai city, the Chang Klan in the south and the Chang Pueak in the north. Besides, there are smaller communities in the neighboring cities such as Doi Saket, Samkamphen, etc. But, now a days, people's change of location is gradually proceeding and the Muslim population is scattered in and around the city along with the development of Chiang Mai city, so it is rather difficult to grasp all their locations. 2) Because of the modernization and even of the globalization, the younger generation has been moving to the other places, especially to Bangkok in Thailand or such places outside of the Thailand as middle east countries, for the purpose of getting higher education or of getting a better job opportunity.

Therefore, though the number of households has not been changed, the number of the people is fluctuating. 3) Just because of the same reason, the cases of mixed marriage with the other Muslim groups, such as Malay Muslims or Pashtu Muslims (Pathans) or even Chinese Muslims, has been increasing. We can find some cases of marriage, both of husband and wife are mixed blood. In this case, their children's ethnic identity hardly defines. For this reason, it is rather difficult to determine the exact number of the community members. 4) There is many Burmese Muslims in and around the community. They are very similar to the Bangladeshi Muslims except their native language, Burmese. And in some communal feast occasion such like the Id festival, both communities celebrate it together. This makes also difficult to define the outline of the community. 5) There is no ethnic-based organization of Bangladeshi Muslims. The only formal organization is the Mosque Committee and it is a religious organization. As its religious character, the organization recognizes well on its core members who are practicing Islam enthusiastically, but not so for those who practicing it halfheartedly. So, we can safely say their population as around 2000-2500. It should be noted here that their settlement in Chiang Mai is "the largest in northern Thailand" (SUTHEP 2013:18) Concerning their identity, the Thai government authority referred them as 'Thai Muslims', but they themselves prefer to say 'Bangla' or 'Bangladee' (Thai pronunciation of 'Bangladesh'). But, almost all of them lost their ancestral language, Bangla or Bengalee, and even lost the knowledge of their forefathers' history. The only knowledges that they can refer to their ancestors are the terms such as 'Chittagong' or 'Noakhali'. They know that these are place name, but except this they can say nothing more. Some of them even told me, "we do not know what these words mean, if these are the name of district, or of the county, or of village, we do not know." They speak only in Thai, except religious terms of Arabic. In this sense, they are in reality Thai Muslims, except their South Asian flavored faces and their self-introduction, 'Bangla'.

Muslims from Eastern Bengal had come to Chiang Mai in the British era, married with local Thai women, and once settled there. These Thai women converted to Islam and they, Bangladeshi Muslim migrants and their families, formed the core of a small South Asian descendant Muslim society in Chiang Mai and its neighboring area. They also greeted their followers, i.e. those migrants from Eastern Bengal. This flow of migrants stopped at around the WWII and supply of the first generation migrants from Eastern Bengal (East Pakistan at that time) had almost finished then. SUTHEP (2013:26) writes; "The majority of the present population of these two quarters are third and fourth generation descendants of the first settlers" in the period of 1978. This means that the majority of the community today has been changing over fourth, fifth, or sixth

generation.ⁱ

5. Migration route: Mae Sariang as a key point

SUTHEP (2013:27-29) narrates; “Four major thoroughfares on the borders of northern Thailand are known to have been used by the Pakistani migrants to penetrate into the northern region and Chiang Mai city.” Those are Mae Sod (Mae Sot), Hot, Mae Sariang, and Mae Sai. Of these, Mae Sod is the most important point and many ‘Pakistani’ (=Bangladeshi) Muslims headed to the various northern towns including Chiang Mai, he said. This identification is very important, because this is the first and only identification of the transit points of the migration of Bangladeshi Muslims. Admitting his contribution, however, I must point out that his description includes some errors or misunderstandings.

First, the communication between Bangkok and Chiang Mai was very difficult until the late 19th century, and it took about 1 and half or 2 months for going upstream. “Because of the slow connection, mail from Europe and even from North America was sent to Chiang Mai via Moulmein in Burma” (PENTH 2004:142). Namely, until the early 20th century, Chiang Mai is a closer connection with Moulmein, Burma, than with Bangkok.ⁱⁱ Moreover, POBGSAWAT (2007: 386) pointed out that “the first commission from *Moulmein* to *Chiang Mai* did not take the *Raheng* route to *Chiang Mai*, but the *Mae Sariang* (Currently district of *Mae Hong Son*) which was in the *Lan Na* territory.” (Italic, as original). Raheng is almost the same as present Take and this route means via Mae Sot. His historical survey suggests that it was Mae Sariang, not Mae Sot, as a transit point from Moulmein to Chiang Mai. In addition, a British councilor in Bangkok who traveled around northern Thailand in 1863, from Bangkok to Chiang Mai, then to Moulmein and went back to Bangkok, reported very interesting observations; i.e. 1) the communication between Bangkok and Chiang Mai was not so good and took time, 2) a letter of introduction issued by Bangkok palace had almost useless in Chiang Mai, and 3) the communication from Chiang Mai to Moulmein was easy and this was the common route from Chiang Mai to the outer world (SCHOMBURGK 1863).

Besides, my own research in Chiang Mai reveals that many Bangladeshi Muslims in Chiang Mai reported Mae Sariang as their forefathers’ transit point, not from Mae Sot. My research in Mae Sariang reveals the following points; the communication between Moulmein and Mae Sariang via Papun, Burma, was very active in the latter half of the 19th century and early 20th century. Compared to this, communication to China Mai was not so, because the over-hill trekking route was rather difficult to go. Also, my own

research in Mae Sot declares as; until WWII, most of the consuming goods were coming from Burma side. The communication to Bangkok was not so frequent and communication with Chiang Mai was limited.

All of these historical studies, memoirs and research indicate the conditions of communication of northern Thailand in the late 19th century, such as; 1) the relationship between Chiang Mai and Bangkok was weak because of the difficulty of movement. 2) Chiang Mai had a close connection with Moulmein via Mae Sariang/Papun. 3) Mae Sot was surely a node between Bangkok and Rangoon, but the communication of these two places was with much difficulty. If these are all plausible, Suthep's writing which insisted that many of first generation migrants from East Bengal had come "via Mae Sot" was dubious. Perhaps, he did not conduct his own research in Mae Sot or Mae Sariang, or at best visited these places very short term.

I will add one more supporting evidence. In my survey in Mae Sot, some informants told me that the first group of Bangladeshi migrants were coming from Satkania, though they do not know the place's whereabouts. Satkania is a southern suburb of Chittagong city, a port city of eastern Bangladesh and the district capital of Chittagong district. On the other hand, as I will explain later, it is revealed in the research in Mae Sariang that many of Bangladeshi Muslims in Chiang Mai was migrated from Mae Sariang. And, my research in Bangladesh declares that at least some of the migrants (their ancestors) were come from northern most part of Chittagong district or southern most part of Noakhali district, i.e. the area at the mouth of Feni River. Considering these all, it is highly probable that the original homeland and the history of migration of these two Muslim groups, i.e. of Chiang Mai (via Mae Sariang) and of Mae Sot, are different.

Suthep's description seems to depend largely on the narratives of the Imam as of 1977, the grandson of the first Imam named Miyashi, and, because of this reason, detailed description of the migration history was limited to Miyashi's case only. Then, it is suspected that Suthep might stretch the Miyashi's case to the Bangladeshi Muslim in Chiang Mai as a whole. Concerning Miyashi's case alone, Suthep wrote that Miyashi had visited Mae Sot or Mae Sariang several times before migration to Chiang Mai. But, as there is no description that Miyashi visited Mae Sot and Mae Sariang in one time, we can suppose that Miyashi had visited these two places in the different times respectively. Moreover, there is no description of his (Miyashi's) migration route to Chiang Mai. All of this suggests the following sequence of events; 1) Miyashi had the experiences of visiting Mae Sot and Mae Sariang for business purpose before settling in Chiang Mai. 2) When he migrated to Chiang Mai, he came from Burma via Moulmein and Mae Sariang. 3) Miyashi narrated these all to their children or grandchildren orally, but left no record. 4)

The Imam as of 1977 remembered what Miyashi had said, but he did not (or, could not?) differentiate the details of 1), 2) and 3). As a result, Suthep heard as if Miyashi had migrated into Chiang Mai via Mae Sot. Even if Miyashi himself had really migrated via Mae Sot, it is highly probable that many of other first generation migrants from Eastern Bengal was coming to Chiang Mai 'via Mae Sariang.'

6. Migration Process

Some elder Bangladeshi Muslims in Chiang Mai reveal that many of (some of, at least) their first generation ancestors were cattle herder and they were wandering around without any destination at that time. On the way seeking a good feeding place or seeking good business opportunity, they accidentally arrived to Chiang Mai and tentatively stayed there at first. Gradually some of them settled down and married with the local woman, most of them Thai. It is very difficult to confirm this, because there is no written documents or no records of eyewitness testimony. But, judging by the narratives of plural persons, this was more plausible. In addition, the present jobs which some of their descendants participates, such as butcher, meat shop owner, small stalls selling meat related food etc., also suggests that this earliest days 'image seems plausible. Getting any information from the first group of migrants or some other sources, their followers were coming. These latecomers would have been different in their professions. Namely, they were participating some small business. There were certainly some people doing 'pottering' business in the late 19th century to early 20th century between Chiang Mai and Mae Sariang or Burma (POBGSAWAT2007:386, BOWIE1988:187-194).ⁱⁱⁱ

Moreover, there were "oxen caravan traders (pohkhaawua tang)" between Chiang Mai and Yunnan and between Chiang Mai and Moulmein (BOWIE 1988:164-171; GEHAN 1985:103). For the person who bears this business, it was identified as the Chin Ho in the case of Yunnan-Chiang Mai route. On the other hand, it was not clear in the case of Moulmein-Chiang Mai route, especially between Mae Sariang and Chiang Mai. Judging from the witness collected in Mae Sariang and its neighboring area, it is most probable to assume that the bearers were Muslim and local Karen people. Getting the help of local Karen, Muslim traders would have collected cattle in Mae Sariang and its neighboring area, and herded the caravan to Chiang Mai.^{iv} On their occupation and social condition of the Muslim migrants from around 1900on, I have been able to collect many detailed witnesses by their descendants, but, because of the limit of space, it is impossible to mention anymore.

The flow of migration process had almost stopped around the end of WWII. It was because the independence of Burma and the partition of India and Pakistan made difficult to communicate from the East Pakistan (later, eastern part of independent Bangladesh) to northern Thailand through Burma (later, Myanmar). That is, Burma as 'corridor' had ended once.^v

7. Mirsarai, Chittagong, Bangladesh: Situated at the mouth of the Feni River

On the first or second generation migrants, especially on their native village and on the reason to decide migration, it is difficult to declare from the research in Thailand. We will then turn our eyes toward Bangladesh.

After a series of field survey, I finally identified a village as a migrant's home village which situated in the northern part of Mirsarai Thana (county), a northernmost county of Chittagong district. The following research revealed that the area situated at the mouth of the Feni River, which runs through the border of Chittagong district and Feni district (an eastern part of the previous Noakhali district) was the main source (at least, one of main sources) of early migrants in northern Thailand. The area belongs an active delta and had been often suffered severe riverbank erosion of the Feni River or affected by tidal erosion of the bay of Bengal. The repeated erosion and sediment had transformed the shape of villages in the area, and some of the villages had almost vanished. This fact suggests a possibility that the reason, which some people of this area had decided to migrate, was the effect of the flood and erosion caused by the Feni River and Bay of Bengal. van SCHENDEL (1981:64-68) tells us a case of migration from Noakhali to Rangpur, a north-west district about 450km distant from their place of origin, and this case is indeed caused by the very same reason. Following his description; "shortly before 1950 the village of Chor Mozlishpur near Feni in Noakhali was severely affected by the nearby river, which changed its course and submerged many fields. A few of most affected households were forced to leave home for lack of employment. First the men left to find a new place to settle. They wandered north to Mymensingh and Assam, and from there into Rangpur, working as day-laborers or religious teachers" (ibid.: 65). Following some interviewees' witness in Mirsarai, Chittagong, in an earlier period, northernmost part of Mirsarai had experienced the river erosion and many houses and farmland has been washed away. It is most plausible that the mighty current of a same river, i.e. the Feni River, caused these two cases, a case of Chor Mozlishpur in the north bank and a case of Mirsarai in the south. In contrast to the people of Chor Mozlishpur who went to seek the fortune to the north, some people of Mirsarai went to southward,

first to Rangoon via Chittagong and then to northern Thailand. This movement of people at that time is proofed by the case of some families in Chiang Mai. The flood and erosion caused by the Feni River were not only the one-time happening but a repeated phenomenon. There were surely floods and erosions many times before the case of the before-1950 which van Schendel mentioned. This repeated disaster should be the reason (one of the reasons, at least) which people of the area had to migrate to other areas, and the northern Thailand was one of such destinations.

A study of local history of Chittagong describes; “Burma was a land of nurturing (*Jalanbhum*) for the Chittagong district and Noakhali district in particular. Several lakhs of people were living there and earning their food, and to do so they fed their families” (CHOUDHURY 1982:176). Following this, the author pointed out that the only carrier from Chittagong to Rangoon via Akyab was the weekly ship service run by British India Steamship Navigation Company Ltd. As this company abused the passengers (=people of Chittagong), some leaders living in Rangoon and some people of Chittagong had started their own new company, Bengal Burma Steamship Navigation Company Ltd. in 1929. Namely, this is suggested the situation that, from the latter half of the 19th century on, people of Chittagong (mainly Muslims) had migrated to Rangoon by using ship service run by British India Steamship Navigation Company Ltd., and at a time (perhaps around 1900) there were several lakhs of people living in Burma.^{vi} Another book of Mirsarai’s history testified that a local prominent person of Mirsarai named MoularaFararokh Ahmad Nezampri worked as an editor of a journal, ‘*Bangla Gajet*’ (Bangla Gazette) published from Bengal Burma Steamship Navigation Company Ltd. in Rangoon (CHOUDHURY 2004:128-134). This same part of the description vaguely suggests that there was a lot of people from Mirsarai living in Rangoon before that (around 1929).

To sum up, the following process is emerging; an area situated at the mouth of the Feni River had repeatedly experienced flooding and erosion and many people had suffered. At the same time, there were many migrants from Mirsarai to Rangoon or some other part of then Burma. Therefore, some of the sufferers of the flood or erosion had decided to leave the place and headed to Rangoon. From Chittagong to Rangoon, they perhaps employed a ship service run by a British company. I collected some witnesses in the field survey in the process after that. That is, though some of the migrants had stayed in Rangoon, some others felt frustration on their life there. They had intended to start up a small business there, but their small capital had not permitted to do so in Rangoon. Accidentally, they heard an information (rather, a rumor) that a remote area in the Burma-Thai border would offer them a good opportunity.

Hearing this, some young boys with an adventurous mind had headed to the place to seek fortune. Those places were Papun(Burma side) or Mae Sariang (Thailand side). They started a small business there; portering, tailoring, retailing, etc. Moreover, a few of them further moved to Chiang Mai or nearby area and settled there. It seems that they are the second wave or third wave of the Bangladeshi Muslim migrants.

Before them, I supposed that some waves of movement of the predecessors from the northern Mirsarai or nearby area to northern Thailand, and these people should be the first generation of migrants in Bangladeshi Muslims in northern Thailand. I suppose that these people were cattle herder. Unfortunately, it is not confirmed yet, and it will be very difficult to prove this in future also, because even local people tends to forget the very existence of a land and of those people living in the land after the land had been once washed away.^{vii}

On the timing of leaving the first generation migrants from Mirsarai or Eastern Bengal and of reaching Chiang Mai, there is no reliable data or document to prove it. But, from some supporting evidences, I suppose it to be around 1870s or so. 1) SUTHEP (2013) mentioned some different timings in relation to this, “1850s” in one part, “1870s” in the other, and “during the second half of the 19th century”. These are all falling into the range of the second half of the 19th century. 2) The oral traditions of the Muslims of Ching Mai or nearby areas suggest “1870s” as the time of the coming of the first generation. 3) Recent studies on global migration describes 1870s as the turning point of the Asian Diaspora; around 1870, “This step change in the scale of migration was made possible by a revolution in transportation and technology” (AMRITH 2011:25). 4) As I have mentioned earlier, a historical book on Chittagong reported that there were weekly ship communication between Chittagong and Rangoon run by the British India Steam Navigation Company Ltd. in the latter half of the 19th century. A record of the company reported; “Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Company secured the East India Company's mail contract between Calcutta and Rangoon and founded the Calcutta & Burma Steam Navigation Company Ltd, registered in Glasgow in 1856” and this company renamed to the British India Steam Navigation Company Ltd. in 1962.^{viii} This means that, in 1862 at the latest, the company had operated a weekly ship service from Calcutta to Rangoon via Chittagong. All of these supports my supposition that the timing of first generation migrants moved to Chiang Mai was around 1870s.

If this so, it will help to understand the difference of jobs of the first generation migrants and their followers. A local historian compiled a history of a logging-company in Mae Sariang, and the report tells us that The Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation Limited, a British company, opened its field branch in Mae Sariang in 1884 and cut teak

wood and brought it to Moulmein by using Salween river. The porters (Muslims, at least some of them) who flown down with the teak to Moulmein were coming back to Mae Sariang by land, via Bilin, Papun, and ThaTafan (WUCHIAN 2005). This means that there should be a periodical transportation from Moulmein to Papun or a place on the other bank of a Salween River of ThaTafan by land after 1884. In other word, for the ordinary business person like petty traders, it should be difficult to go this route before 1884. Wandering cattle herders or some oxen caravans alone would have been able to travel in such a difficult condition of land-route.

Considering these all, I will suppose the pictures like this; before 1884 (perhaps around 1870s), a small group of migrants from Mirsarai or from some other part of Chittagong district (or a nearby area) had started to migrate to northern Thailand. They went Rangoon by ship at first, then traversed a long distance to the area of the Thai-Burma border by land (on foot?). The reason why they had not stayed in Rangoon was perhaps that there were so many 'Indians' (many of them, Hindus) and it was difficult to find any niche for them. Some of them had collected cattle in the border area and further moved to Chiang Mai or its nearby area as a cattle herder. They settled there as a pioneer of Bangladeshi Muslim migrants. After their settlement, getting information from them, some other people followed. Among them, perhaps after 1884, a new type of migrants had appeared, a young, ambitious boys who intended to start up a small business like grocery shops or tailoring shops. They had employed the same route which the porters of the British logging company had used, from Bilin to Papun. A party of people opened shops there, some others in Mae Sariang, and another proceeded to Chiang Mai. Many of them, irrespective of former cattle herders or business oriented people, had married with local women and formed a community.

Concluding remarks:

To put it theoretically, we have confirmed the movement of Bangladeshi Muslim migrants at the fringe of or outskirts of 'Zomia'. That is, until recently (and even today) 'state power' has not completely controlled the movement of ordinary people. It is said that "borders unite as well as divide, and that their existence as barriers to movement can simultaneously create reasons to cross them" (DONNAN and WILSON, 1999:87). Just exemplified of this, many Bangladeshi Muslims had crossed the borders once, and most of Bangladeshi Muslims in northern Thailand today are losing the connection with their land of forefathers and lost their original language. They are in all respects Thai Muslims now, except their vague consciousness of identity. What makes this situation

and this consciousness is the land of Burma, long distance from their ancestral land, and the borders which their forefathers crossed. In relation to this, a concept, 'frontier effect' (DONNAN and WILSON 2010), come to mind. This is "the result of political actions and identifications that are dependent on the nations and states who meet, greet, and contest their political futures at the limits of their sovereignty and territory, and which by their very nature can only occur in borderlands." In this sense, we may say that the very existence of the Bangladeshi Muslims in Northern Thailand itself is a result of 'frontier effect'.

There were a lot of Indian people in Burma, especially in Rangoon. In this sense, Burma was a destination for those Indian people. But, during the same period, many people were traversing Burma from Eastern Bengal to eastward and went to Thailand. Bangladeshi Muslim descendant' communities in northern Thailand are the legacy of this flow. And, though I cannot mention them in this paper, Burmese Muslims who were flowing into Thailand in recent years or is flowing into today are the witness of and living proof of this movement. For them, Burma was (and Myanmar is) the corridor to Thailand. Moreover, considering some of the descendants of them are moving to Bangkok for the purpose of getting higher education or of getting jobs, and considering some others to more distant places, including Malaysia or even the Middle East, Burma is a corridor to the other part of Southeast Asia or to the greater world. HORSTMANN and WADLEY (2006) insist that "scholars of Southeast Asian borderlands should concentrate more on the cultural complexity of the borderland communities themselves, on their transnational networks and spaces." The case of Bangladeshi Muslim community teaches us the truism of this suggestion. We should pay more attention to the aspect of Burma as 'corridor'.

Acknowledgement:

This research was financed by the Grant in Aid Program (Kakenhi) titled "Reconsideration on the Historical and Contemporary Land-route Connection between South Asia and Southeast Asia" (Chair: TAKADA). The author expresses his gratitude to Hajj Usman, Hajj Samsuddin, Dr. Aree, and late Khun Safiq for their kind cooperation. The author also appreciates Dr. Noriyuki Osada, Ms. Miku Takeguchi and Mr. Michihiro Wada for their kind assistance for the research.

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ⁱHirosue (2013:6) describes "cosmopolis" as the node of greater network of the region and he points out a tendency that local wives of the migrants and their descendant community becomes to be a host of various outsiders visited the cosmopolis. Bangladeshi descendant community in Chiang Mai is a typical case of the group and, in this sense, the city Chiang Mai itself is a kind of such 'cosmopolis'.

ⁱⁱConcerning this point, though a specific source is unknown, GILQUIN (2005:21) pointed out that in 1830s there was a small community of Bangali Muslims in Chiang Mai and they were participated with cow trade between Chiang Mai and Moulmain. The period he mentioned here "1830s" is questionable. I will try to tell on this matter in detail later.

ⁱⁱⁱBowie cited a narrative of a man; "He himself went every year with 2-3 others to Mandalay to obtain raw silk fiber for his weaving operation in San Khampaeng. Once they had bought the silk, they would transport it by train to Phaako. In Phaako, he hired a motorcar to transport the silk to Pimmale. In Pimmale he hired mules to take the silk to the Salween River crossing at Phaphun. This portion of the trip by mule took 10 nights. Once he had crossed the Salween, he would again seek transport for the next segment of the journey to Wang Lung. At Wang Lung, he crossed the Ping River, and then hired a motorcar for the remaining segment of the trip back to San Khampaeng." (BOWIE 1988:190) "The main goods,... cloth; raw silk; and dried fish." (ibid. 191)

^{iv}Cf. The route between Moulmein and Chiang Mai via Papun and Mae Sariang had used for centuries long. For example, a Thai prince's memoir on the Thai-Burma War from 16th century to 18th designates this route on a map (Map 1: Major Places and Military Routes" ; Prince Damrong 2001: ii).

^vSUTHEP (2013:26) writes; "After 1947, with the partition of India and the establishment of Pakistan after the British rule, there has been a continuous flow of immigrants from East Pakistan into northern Thailand and eventually into Chiang Mai

city. The great number of immigrants, however, did not move immediately into Thailand once they had left their native country. The majority of them went first to settle in Burma for sometime and married Burmese wives, before moving further into some northern provinces of Thailand and finally reached Chiang Mai city.” This seems his misunderstanding. He probably confuse Bangladeshi Muslims (following his saying, Pakistanis) with Burmese Muslims or even with Rohingyas. As far as I studied, most of the first generation migrants of Bangladeshi had come before WWII.

^{vi}Thant Myint-U (2011) briefly mentions the close relationship between Burma and Bengal as a whole.

^{vii}It is well exemplified by the case of lost ‘Mirgar’, a place of Panchagar district in northern Bangladesh (HASAN 2012).

^{viii} P&O Heritage HP: <http://www.poheritage.com/our-history/company-guides/british-india-steam-navigation-company> (last access June 23th, 2015)