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**LEVERAGING RELATIONSHIPS: SOCIAL NETWORKS AND
THE EDUCATION OF BURMESE MIGRANT CHILDREN**

presented by

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has been accepted towards fulfillment
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Doctoral **degree in** **Curriculum, Instruction and
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LEVERAGING RELATIONSHIPS: SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THE EDUCATION
OF BURMESE MIGRANT CHILDREN

By

David Scott McLaughlin

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Curriculum, Instruction and Teacher Education

2010

ABSTRACT

LEVERAGING RELATIONSHIPS: SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THE EDUCATION OF BURMESE MIGRANT CHILDREN

By

David Scott McLaughlin

There are an estimated 200 million international migrants in the world today (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). Though migration is often rooted in searches for opportunities to enhance the one's quality of life, it also brings costs and uncertainties associated with travel and settlement at a new location. Analyses of migration trends have highlighted the important role that social networks play in reducing the risks and costs of migration, while increasing probabilities of success at destination sites.

This study investigates the lives of 14 migrant families who travelled from Burma to western Thailand. Using the lens provided by social capital and capital theory more generally, I focus on the social ties and resources that families access in settling in Thailand and enrolling their children in local state schools. Interviews with migrant families, school teachers and administrators, Ministry of Education officials, and staff of nongovernment organizations are the primary data sources.

To facilitate travel to Thailand as well as access opportunities for housing and employment, families drew on *bridging* social capital, their relationships with other Burmese. Similarly, social ties within the Burmese community provided resources that facilitated access to migrant learning centers for children. In contrast, access to Thai schools depended exclusively on *bonding* social capital, social ties that reached beyond the migrant community itself and made available a different set of resources. The most

prominent of these resources is a set of national education policies formulated by the central government and made available to families through a number of state and non-state actors. Families' relationships with non-government organizations were also sources of important capital, especially economic, used to supplement the families' own limited reserves. Further, the study draws attention to additional resources that support effective policy implementation such as adequate classroom space and properly skilled school staff. These findings enhance our understanding of the nature of relationships and resources important to migrant children's initial enrollment in the Thai schooling system as well as their ongoing participation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation was very much a collaborative effort from inception to submission. I wish to offer my sincerest thanks to everyone, in addition to those mentioned here, from whom I was fortunate enough to receive assistance and support throughout this journey. From the MSU community, I would like to acknowledge my friends and cohort members Stefanie Kendall, for sharing and listening through those final, frantic semesters, and Amy Damrow, for her thoughtful and inspiring words. I thank my dissertation committee members—Lynn Fendler, Lynn Paine, and Angela Calabrese Barton—for their guidance and encouragement that extended to the whole of my doctoral program. In particular, I am indebted beyond measure to my dissertation director, Suzanne Wilson, for her infinite wisdom and endless patience. Thank you so much.

Among the many people who supported this work in Thailand were the Srisukri family who generously provided me with a place to call “home” in Bangkok during my research. In and around Mae Sot, I was the recipient of tremendous help from many members of both the migrant learning center and Thai public education communities. I would like to thank the teachers, administrators, and students of all the schools I visited as well as the staff of the Tak Education Service Area 2 office. Above all, I would like to acknowledge the families along the Thai-Burma border who so graciously received me into their homes and shared their time and life stories.

I am fortunate to be part of a wonderful family and group of friends who have offered me unconditional love and unwavering support over the years. I am grateful

beyond words for that stability. Lastly, I want to thank my wife, Yok, for giving me the time and space I needed to finish my dissertation during our first year together.

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Chapter 1

Migrants and the Education of their Children

Unable to meet their basic economic needs in eastern Burma, Sanda made the short trip across the Moei River into Thailand with her two sisters, brother-in-law, and niece. They settled in a small migrant community near the border where Sanda's brother-in-law had pre-arranged work through a former boss in Burma. Having entered the country without authorization, the family rarely wanders far from their home to minimize chances of an encounter with local police that might lead to detention or deportation. About the farthest place that Sanda does go to regularly is a Thai elementary school a few hundred meters away where she was enrolled a few months earlier. As each school day begins, Sanda takes her place in the class line as the students prepare to sing the Thai national anthem. The tallest girl in grade one, Sanda invariably finds herself at the back of the line. At 12, Sanda is also the oldest girl in the class, two years older than her sister and twice the age of her niece who also study with her in the same classroom. As the anthem proceeds, Sanda is only able to mouth some of the words, not knowing enough Thai yet to sing along.

Global Migration

This study is about Sanda and other children like her who represent some of the estimated one billion people around the world who have moved from their original place of birth. Not only have they moved, but these children and their families have crossed national boundaries on their journeys like some 200 million others (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2009). As a percentage of the world's population, international migrants have represented a steady 3% for the past 50 years. In absolute terms, however, the number today is more than double that from 1980 (Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM), 2005). Changes in migration patterns are at least as striking as their increasing magnitude. Fifty years ago, "countries of destination" were mainly limited to a handful of industrialized countries and "countries of origin" were mostly found in Europe (International Organization for Migration (IOM), p.

2, 2008b). Today, most countries are simultaneously countries of origin, of transit, and of destination, though to varying degrees.

As in the case of Sanda and her family, most international migration today involves relatively short journeys. Almost half of all international migrants move within their geographic region of origin, with about 40% arriving in a neighboring country. In addition to offering spatial proximity, neighboring countries often have other characteristics that may be desirable to migrants. For example, nearly 60% of migrants move to a nation with the same major religion as their country of origin, and for 40% the dominant language is the same (UNDP, 2009).

Barriers to Mobility

Though past discourse has often focused on “South-North” flows (Schiff, 1996; Stahl, 1991), movement from developing to developed nations represents less than 40% of current international migration (IOM, 2008b). Further flow in this direction is inhibited by high transport costs and policy-based restrictions discouraging those without sufficient resources to facilitate such a journey, the particular skills desired by a destination country, or the disposition to undertake a risky venture (UNDP, 2009).

Impediments to mobility are especially significant for people with low skills, despite the demand for their labor in more economically advanced countries. Migration policies generally favor the admission of better-educated foreigners and governments are usually far more cautious with respect to low-skilled workers, whose status and treatment at destination sites are often much inferior to locals (IOM, 2008b). In many countries, migrants working in agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and service sectors have an irregular, or undocumented status, having arrived at the destination site or remaining

there without attention to appropriate legal procedures. It is estimated that 50 million people today are living and working abroad with irregular status with some countries, such as Thailand and the United States, tolerating large numbers of unauthorized workers (UNDP, 2009).

In contrast to the broad consensus concerning the added value of skilled migration to destination countries, the arrival of low-skilled migrant workers often generates much debate. While these migrants fill vacant jobs, it is widely believed that they also displace local workers and push down wages. Other concerns posed by migrant inflows include higher risks of crime, increased burdens on local services, and fears of diminished social and cultural cohesion. These concerns, however, are often exaggerated, with research showing that negative effects on local workers are generally small or entirely absent (UNDP, 2009).

Benefits and Risks of Migration

Migration brings with it the potential for both benefits and negative consequences to sending and receiving countries (World Bank, 2006a). Positive economic advantages at the national level may include addressing an over-supply of labor in domestic markets and a reduction of worker shortages in particular labor sectors of receiving countries. However, economic migration may widen economic disparities in receiving countries by depressing the incomes of local low-skilled laborers. Sending countries may also experience reduced growth and productivity due to a drain on more highly skilled workers.

At the micro-level, benefits to migration have also long been couched in economic terms and personal earnings differentials (Sjaanstad, 1962). Additionally,

changes to place of residence are associated with improved access to basic services and infrastructure, or better living conditions more generally. Recent quantitative analyses have indicated that individuals with only moderate levels of formal education moving from a typical developing country to the United States can benefit an annual income gain of approximately US\$10,000—an amount greater than the GDP per capita of over 72% of countries in the world (Clemens, Montenegro, & Pritchett, 2008). Migration between developing nations may also have very significant impacts on family welfare. Ortega (2009) calculated an increase in over 20% in the probability of being enrolled in school for the children of Nicaraguan migrants to Costa Rica.

Domestic and international movement does not always lead to better human development outcomes. When the poorest migrate, they often do so under conditions of vulnerability that reflects their limited resources and choices. This may mean decisions are made on the basis of imperfect or inaccurate information increasing the likelihood of eventual exploitation (UNDP, 2009). In addition, journeys may be associated with sacrifices, including the emotional costs of separation from friends and kin, monetary fees for safe passage, the physical vulnerability of illegal border crossings, and dangerous occupations in destination locations. Further, many mobile populations must confront systemic disadvantages which make it challenging, and at times impossible, for them to access services on equal terms with local people (Touzenis, 2008).

Origins of Migration

A widely held approach to the origins of migration can be classified as “push-pull” theories. Economic, social, and political hardships in certain parts of the world combined with comparative advantages in others are presented as causal variables in

determining the size and direction of immigrant flows (Portes & Böröcz, 1989; Zimmerman, 1995). This view of migration has come to be criticized from a number of perspectives. Among these is its inadequacy in explaining why some areas experience significantly more emigration than other equally disadvantaged areas, or why certain individuals are more likely to migrate than others living within the same country or region (Boyd, 1989; Portes & Böröcz, 1989). Further, push-pull analysis is seen to minimize the decision-making practices of migrants and neglect the role of social channels in the migration process (Böcker, 1995; Massey & García-España, 1987).

Chain Migration. The role of kin and friends in supporting the domestic and international movement of people goes back at least to the mid-1960s. Rejecting crude push-pull models that present population movement as a “mechanical reshuffling of heads” (p. 82), MacDonald and MacDonald (1964) adopt a perspective of migration that takes into account sociological factors. “Chain migration” and “impersonally organized migration” are presented as two contrasting extremes of the ways in which prospective migrants receive information and other forms of assistance prior to, during, and after migration. Impersonally organized migration occurs when organizations such as the International Organization for Migration are responsible for the selection, transportation, and placement of mobile populations. Chain migration relies on more personal contacts and occurs where “prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged *by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants*” (p. 82, emphasis in original).

Social Networks. Vastly changing labor migration trends in the 1970s and 1980s further highlighted shortcomings in push-pull theories of migration and led to

consideration of structural factors, such as bilateral agreements and foreign investment patterns, in shaping migration flows. Structural approaches to understanding migration emphasize linkages between societies (Boyd, 1989). Social networks are one such link connecting migrants and nonmigrants across space and time. Studying networks, Boyd argues,

permits understanding migration as a social product—not as the sole result of individual decisions made by individual actors, not as the sole result of economic or political parameters, but rather as an outcome of all these factors in interaction. (p. 641)

A significant body of work around the role of social networks in migration has been contributed by Massey and colleagues (Massey, Alarcón, Durand, & González, 1987; Massey et al., 1993; Massey & García-España, 1987). Of particular interest is their discussion of networks with respect to the monetary costs of migration. In this analysis, the first to leave for a new location find migration costly and uncertain, with few social ties available to seek assistance with a move or in settling at the destination site. However, once established, migrant social networks can potentially make jobs and housing more readily available to future migrants increasing the chances of successful translocation. In reducing costs and risks, and increasing probabilities of success, migrant networks also increase the likelihood of international movement among those to who they are connected. In sum, these “sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and nonmigrants ... constitute a form of social capital that people can draw upon to gain access to foreign employment” (Massey et al., 1993, p. 448).

Mobility and Education

Despite uncertainties, most migrants reap gains in the form of higher incomes, better access to education and health, and improved prospects for their children (UNDP, 2009). For children like Sanda, education is especially important as a route to specific language, technical, and social skills that facilitate economic and social integration into host societies (GCIM, 2005). In recognition of this critical role, the intersection of mobility and education is a significant topic of scholarly inquiry. Numerous studies of internal and cross-national migrant children have examined the impact of mobility on aspects of access, academic achievement, retention, and high school completion. Across cases, the impact of mobility has been found to vary depending on such factors as the number of school changes, when they occur, the reason for the changes, and the student's personal and family situation (Rumberger, 2002).

Coleman (1988) links human capital development with social capital in his analysis of schooling and mobility. He posits that parents can further the cognitive development of their children through the parents' human capital and inter-generational connectedness, or network closure. Closure is present only when there is a relation between adults who themselves have a relation to the child. Adults are able to observe the child's actions in different circumstances, talk to each other about the child, and establish norms. Where "families ... have moved often, the social relations that constitute social capital are broken at each move" (1988, p. S113). Coleman's analysis of school completion reveals that the frequency of residential mobility had the strongest overall effect on dropping out of high school.

Global Access to Education for Migrant Children

Access to education for both international and domestic migrants can be difficult. In general, developed countries are more likely than less-developed nations to allow immediate access to schooling for migrant children. However, in a study conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (2009), one third of developed countries sampled, including Singapore and Sweden, were found to not allow access to children with undocumented status. The same was true for more than half of the developing countries in the sample, including Egypt and India. Even where children with undocumented status have the right to attend a state school, there may be real or perceived barriers to their enrolment. In France, Italy, and the United States, fears that families' irregular situation will be revealed through school registration processes have been found to deter enrolment. In South Africa, nearly one-third of school-age non-national children are not enrolled, for a combination of reasons including an inability to pay fees, the costs of transport, uniforms and books, or explicit exclusion by school administrators (Landau & Segatti, 2009).

Immigrant children in the United States. More immigrants arrived in the U.S. during the 1990s than in any previous decade and the school-aged foreign-born population increased by one million during this period. Along with greater numbers, an increasingly broad geographic dispersion of immigrant populations has meant that many U.S. communities have only recently begun to develop strategies to address the educational challenges and opportunities these children and their families present (Fry, 2007). In concluding that immigrant children's needs exceeded available institutional support, Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, and Clewell (2000) noted the low academic achievement

and school completion rates of some immigrant children. Others have found that despite the dislocation of an international move and a tendency toward having disadvantaged family backgrounds, immigrant children often display a high level of resiliency and educational success relative to later-generation minority counterparts (Kao, 1999).

Dropout rates. Perreira, Harris, and Lee (2006) investigated high school completion rates among immigrant and native youth using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). The data indicates that, while the majority of all students finish high school, 15% drop out. While non-completion rates vary minimally by immigrant generation, there are substantial differences associated with race-ethnicity. The authors found that a far lower percentage of Asians drop out of school between ages 18 and 26 than Hispanics, whites, or children of African heritage. Those of Cuban ancestry are the least likely to drop out among Hispanics while among Asians, dropout rates do not differ significantly by country of origin. The authors also explored interactions between immigrant generation and forms of capital. They found that Hispanic youth in the third generation and beyond lacking English-speaking skills (human capital) were at far greater risk of dropping out than those in the first generation and that first-generation Hispanic and Asian youth with strong attachments to school and high college aspirations (cultural capital) were less likely to drop out than those with weak attachments and low aspirations. The results also suggest that living in a segregated community (community social capital) may contribute to family and peer obligations that inhibit youth's educational attainment.

Fry (2007) examined changes over the 1990s in the dropout rate of foreign-born high-school-age youth using Decennial Census data for foreign-born 15- to 17-year-olds.

Fry found that the foreign-born high school dropout rate declined during the decade. Simultaneous increases in levels of parental education may have contributed to the changes in dropout rate. Despite lower dropout rates, young adults with limited English-speaking abilities were less likely to enroll in postsecondary education and complete postsecondary degrees. These same individuals were also more likely to be employed in traditionally low-wage occupations.

English language proficiency. By 1997, 20% of U.S. school-age children had at least one immigrant parent, a share that had tripled between 1970 and 1997. Growth in the proportion of the immigrant child population has been accompanied by a rise in the number of school children who are limited English proficient (LEP)(Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, & Clewell, 2000). Foreign-born immigrants who have been in the U.S. less than five years represent a larger share of the secondary (2.7%) than elementary school populations (2.0%). Recently arrived students are likely to require additional language and other services though spending on language acquisition programs tends to be concentrated in elementary schools. Across the United States, almost two-thirds of students attend schools where less than 1% of students are LEP. However, almost half of the LEP students attend schools where 30% or more of their fellow students are LEP. These data may indicate emerging patterns of linguistic segregation.

Challenges to students and school staff. In their report on immigrant children in U.S. schools, Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, and Clewell (2000) found that children's diverse educational backgrounds make it almost impossible to generalize about immigrant education. Nevertheless, data on LEP students suggests that the number of underschooled LEP immigrants in secondary schools has grown significantly in the past

two decades. These students enter U.S. secondary schools with a weak foundation for learning a second language and have difficulty working at age-appropriate levels in required subjects even when taught in their native/primary languages. Making classroom instruction fruitful for these students requires that teachers devote several months to helping the students become familiar with expected study habits and classroom behavior.

Among the challenges teachers face is a lack of reliable assessment instruments to use with LEP students, school schedules that inhibited individualized instruction, accountability measures that have historically omitted LEP/immigrant students, research gaps in the area of content instruction for LEP children, and shortages of appropriately trained staff. Nationally, less than 3% of teachers with English language learners in their classes have any special preparation to work with them (McGraener & Saenz, 2009; National Research Council, 2010).

International migrants in the European Union. The European Union (EU) hosts approximately 56 million migrants with between 10 and 15 per cent having irregular status (GCIM, 2005). Investigations into educational opportunities for these children found an extensive theoretical right to education protected by law and examination of legislation did not reveal any case of direct discrimination at the legislative level against undocumented children. In practice, however, educational inequality and discrimination in European education systems continues to be widespread. In Belgium, education is free and a right for every person, but not compulsory for irregular children. In Poland, education for children between six and 18 years is a right and is compulsory, but children with irregular status cannot be counted for funding purposes which may lead the school to decline to enroll such children (UNDP, 2009).

The most significant barriers to the education of undocumented children in Europe include (a) a lack of identification documents sometimes solicited by schools as proof of local residency, (b) an inability to meet extracurricular school expenses, (c) poor knowledge of the local language(s), and (d) a transient lifestyle preventing continuous enrolment and attendance. Even where enrolment is not problematic, the issuing of diplomas at the end of a scholastic career often is. NGOs have reported that residence permission or an identification document is required for graduation diplomas to be awarded (Bicocchi & LeVoy, 2008).

Internal migrants in China. China's large volume of internal migrants was one of its most significant social trends during the 1990s. Though adult migrants still face significant challenges in urban China, there is some consensus that migration has had a major positive impact on the economies of both origin and destination communities. However, the consequences of mobility for migrant children and children of migrants is less clearly understood (Liang & Chen, 2007).

In China, residency requirements are a major barrier to the education of internal migrants (Liang, Guo, & Duan, 2008). Rural-to-urban migrant children face the *hukou* (registered urban residency) system restricting access to basic education. Permanent migrants are those who have obtained local household registration at their place of destination and temporary migrants, also known as the "floating population," are those who have not obtained this registration. In Chinese cities two criteria are important for schools to admit students: (1) students must reside within the local school district in the city; and (2) students must also be registered in the school district. Recent data indicate that only two-thirds of Beijing's 370,000 migrant children are enrolled in public schools.

Another quarter were reported as attending unauthorized migrant schools of uncertain quality (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2010). Liang and Chen (2007) found that temporary migrant children with less than a year's duration in destination cities are less likely to be enrolled in school than non-migrant children in the place of migration origin. The authors concluded that while migrant parents may have made financial gains working in the cities, the education of temporary migrant children suffered.

Framing the Problem:

Social Capital

Throughout much of the writing on global migration, analysts and policymakers alike use explanatory concepts drawn from sociological theories concerning “capital.” The theoretical approach used in the present study draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and, in particular, his concept of social capital. However, social capital for Bourdieu is only one of several forms of capital that are considered together in accounting for “the structure and functioning of the social world” (p. 242). Although these other forms of capital are not the central focus of this study, all are entailed. It therefore seems prudent to provide a brief overview of these other forms while maintaining a primary consideration of social capital.

In an economic sense, capital can be defined as “a commodity itself used in the production of other goods and services” (Smithson, 1982, p. 111). In this way, capital represents an amount saved for future use, or “an accumulation of foregone consumption” (Robison, Schmid, & Siles, 2002, p. 4). Bourdieu (1986) describes the accretion of capital over time and its “potential to produce profits and to reproduce itself

in identical or expanded form” (p. 241). For Bourdieu, consideration of capital from a purely economic perspective is critical yet incomplete. To understand how the social world is structured and works, one must consider capital more broadly by taking into account three specific forms—social capital, human capital, and cultural capital. Economic capital retains its conceptual centrality for Bourdieu in that social capital, human capital, and cultural capital are merely “disguised forms” of economic capital and ultimately convertible to it. In the following sections, each of the three forms of capital will be described briefly.

Human Capital

Investments in human capital occur through activities, such as formal and informal programs of education, that improve skills, knowledge, or health (Becker, 1975). For internationally mobile actors, the development of destination-language skills can be an important form of human capital. Host-country language acquisition represents the accumulation of human capital specific to the labor market of the host nation and usually requires intensive contact with the native actors and with the lifestyle of the host country (Chiswick & Miller, 2001; Dustmann, 1996).

Conventional wisdom holds that investments in human capital through education lead to such beneficial outcomes as improved economic health and welfare, reduced social inequalities, and more democratic political systems (Hannum & Buchmann, 2005). Unfortunately, much of the research on returns to education has operationalized education simply in terms of seat time, or number of years of schooling. The failure to consider the *quality* of education as well can lead to misleading conclusions regarding potential and realized returns to education. Not only is quality relevant to the returns to

education once schooling is begun, it also highly influences the probability of initial investment. Where low quality teaching and learning occur or are perceived to occur, schooling is not likely to be seen worth the time and cost to parents and children (UNESCO, 2004).

Where education and labor experiences acquired abroad earn a lower rate of return than domestic human capital, human capital is seen to be imperfectly portable (Friedberg, 2000). In other words, for families that migrate, different members may accumulate domestic and foreign capital in different proportions. Parents may arrive having largely completed formal education though they may acquire new skills at a new job. Children have greater opportunities to develop a higher proportion of more valued human capital at the destination site through participation in local schools or other forms of education or training post-immigration.

Cultural Capital

Broadly defined, the term “cultural capital” identifies high-status cultural signals used in the processes of cultural and social selection. Where families are mobile, especially across borders, they can be expected to arrive with varying degrees of competency with the cultural signals of the destination site.

Bourdieu (1977) describes a relationship between culture, class, and domination. He holds that particular cultural competencies—style of speech, familiarity with specific events and institutions such as museums and the theatre—are differentially distributed through society such that the dominant, upper classes hold a monopoly. For members of the elite class, processes of socialization and familiarization to dominant cultural capital occur at home. These competencies are then legitimated through schooling, which

confirms the culture of the dominant classes (by treating their norms as “normal”) while disconfirming the cultures of other groups. For Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital appears in three different forms: 1) an *embodied* state (as particular attitudes and behaviors, or dispositions, of the mind and body), 2) an *objectified* state (as material objects or cultural goods such as artwork, books, and machines), and 3) an *institutionalized* state (as educational credentials or qualifications).

My understanding and use of cultural capital draws heavily on Bourdieu, but also differs in at least one significant way. Whereas Bourdieu studied differences in social classes within a single national identity, I explore cultural differences across national identities. That being said, cultural capital does not figure explicitly in data analysis despite the intersection of multiple cultures in this study. I will return to the interdependence of these forms of capital in the last chapter.

Social Capital

Notwithstanding a proliferation of uses and interpretations, scholars generally agree that social capital represents resources that people accumulate by virtue of their social ties with others (Portes & Landolt, 2000). In this study, I use Bourdieu (1986), who characterizes social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of ... relationships” (p. 248). I define a social network as individual or collective agents “embedded in webs of connections” (Scott, 1988, p. 112). This network of social ties represents a site of investment that can later be drawn upon to provide particular advantages, or profits.

I break with Bourdieu where he finds social capital to represent “a process by which individuals in the dominating class, by mutual recognition and acknowledgment,

reinforce and reproduce a privileged group” (Lin, 1999, p. 32). This study has no particular focus on the way social capital might maintain and reproduce a single, dominant class. Rather than being wholly exclusive, my use of social capital necessarily cuts across and connects a number of groups at various social levels.

Measuring social capital. Bourdieu’s definition distinguishes between two elements of social capital: resources and social relationships. Measurements of the amount, or volume, of social capital an actor has necessarily consider both the overall size of the social network and the amount of capital possessed by each of the actors connected through the network. While important, I concur with scholars who argue that indications of the *quantity* of ties or resources are insufficient in understanding the ways that investments in social capital might be made and profits accrued. Of equal importance is the *quality* of social capital one can activate. Rather than a focus solely on the amount of resources, Lin (1999) draws attention to their average composition, their variety, and their use value. Similarly, it is not merely the number of contacts actors have that matters but their location in the social network. Location is described by the nature of the relationship between actors and whether particular ties enable access to novel or redundant resources. As we will see in future chapters, the quality of ties between migrant families and other agents in the network have profound influence on the resources that are made available.

Social capital and migration. Like much of social capital theory, its relationship to migration in the literature cannot be generalized in any particular way. Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000) find that mobility has a negative effect on social capital due to the disruption of established social ties. Essentially, social capital held in these relations

becomes inaccessible to both those who leave and those who remain behind. However, as described earlier in this chapter, migration and initial access to housing and employment in the host community may draw significantly on resources embedded in social relations (Boyd, 1989; Massey et al., 1987). As Skeldon (2001) notes, it is generally not the poorest who move, but rather those with access to personal or social resources necessary to facilitate translocation from one place to another.

Where social ties are not broken through migration, migrants, former migrants, and nonmigrants become connected through an expanding and increasingly established set of social ties as migration networks mature. At some point in time, network connections—especially in an origin area—may reach “a critical threshold [whereby] migration becomes self-perpetuating because each act of migration itself creates the social structure needed to maintain it” (Massey et al., 1993, p. 449). Thus, over time, one can expect migration flows between a set of particular origin and destination sites to acquire a degree of stability. Such cases represent an “international migration system,” characterized by stable migration flows of a relative abundance of goods, capital, and people between “sending nations” and a “receiving region” (Massey et al., 1993, p. 454).

Inequality of social capital. Not all social capital is created equal (Edwards & Foley, 1997; Lin, 2000). Actors and social groups differentially acquire social capital and receive anticipated returns from their acquisitions. Lin finds that this is due to the interaction of two principles. The first is a clustering of social groups at disadvantaged socioeconomic positions. The second is a propensity for “homophily,” an association with others of similar characteristics. Acting together, these produce a collection of similar actors, each of relatively inferior socioeconomic standing, and a summative social

network that is resource-poor. When members recognize the existing restrictions in resource access, some may be motivated to establish (bridging) social relationships with members of more advantaged groups to gain access to better resources such as higher quality information (Lin, 2000).

Research Questions

This study describes and explains the participation of Burmese migrant families in the Thai public school system, using a frame of social capital. To do so, it draws on the stories of migrant children and their parents, and a variety of other agents whose lives and work link them together. I investigate the lives of migrant families broadly, revealing the means by which they have crossed the border and settled in Thailand. In particular, I consider how these particular migrant children gained access to schools when so many others cannot or do not. Two research questions guide the present study:

- What can be learned from these families that might benefit the majority who do not access Thai schools?
- What kinds of supportive resources do families leverage in enrolling their children in Thai schools?

Central Terms

Some of the terms and concepts that are central to this study have multiple, even contradictory meanings in the literature or are laden with cultural or political significance. Here I briefly clarify how some central terms used in this research and how they are defined. Other terms are defined later when they arise in the argument.

“Burma”: The name Burma is used throughout this report, as are other colonial place names such Rangoon rather than Yangon, since this is consistent with the majority

of the references cited. The word Myanmar is used only when it serves to preserve the fidelity of direct quotations from particular sources.

“Burmese”: This term refers to all people from or who have been born of parents from Burma, without reference to ethnic nationality (Burman, Shan, Karen, Mon, etc). It also refers to the language of the majority Burman people.

“Migrant”: A person who came to Thailand from another country after birth, or was born in Thailand of migrant parents and has no document to prove their Thai nationality.

“Irregular/undocumented migration”: Movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries usually through unauthorized entry, stay, or work in a destination country. “Irregular” and “undocumented” are also used to describe the status of a particular person in preference of “illegal.”

Conclusion

In sum, human mobility across and within national borders is sufficiently ubiquitous to be recognized as “one of the characteristic and perhaps even defining features of our contemporary world” (IOM, 2008b, p. 17). Though migration is often rooted in searches for opportunities to enhance the one’s quality of life, it also brings costs and uncertainties associated with travel and settlement at a new location. One of these uncertainties is access to schools at the destination site though for some, the primary goal of migration is to find work for children and not school. From the literature presented, it can be seen that challenges to school access is a global phenomenon for migrant children, especially those with undocumented status.

Social scientists have used notions of capital to support understanding of the mechanisms that affect life chances of individuals. Although there is abundance in the number and variety of capital theories, they share a central thesis that “investment and mobilization of capital will enhance the outcomes desirable to individuals or communities” (Lin, 2000, p. 786). In this study, I use social capital—defined as resources available through social relations—to understand the experiences of migrant families with the Thai school system.

In Chapter 2, I move from the global perspective of migration and education presented in Chapter 1 to a more refined description of the context in Thailand. Chapter 3 describes the methods used for sampling, data collection, and analysis. Chapter 4 introduces the varied actors involved in migrant education in Thailand’s Tak Province including both government and nongovernment agencies. The chapter also presents the stories of four children and their families highlighting their migration into Thailand and their initial contact with Thai schools. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of how various actors along the Thai-Burmese border access and activate social capital in light of the data presented in previous parts of the study. In Chapter 6, implications of this research are considered and areas for further study are described.

Chapter 2

Migration and Education in Thailand

Thailand is a lower middle-income country in central Southeast Asia. Regional economic and demographic differentials, as well as civil conflicts in neighboring nations, have contributed to the country's increasing prominence as a destination of international migration (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009). The vast majority of those who arrive are from neighboring Burma, seeking better living and working conditions than those available in their home country. Periodic efforts by the Thai government to register migrant workers suggest that hundreds of thousands of school-age children are among those who migrate. While many of these children work, tens of thousands participate in Thailand's state schools and a parallel education system which is largely organized by the migrant community itself. This chapter describes these two opportunities for schooling and presents an overview of migration into Thailand.

Geopolitical Context

Situated in Southeast Asia, the Kingdom of Thailand is a nation slightly smaller than the size of Texas. A significant proportion of the country's 67 million inhabitants reside in a densely populated central plain. To the south, the country forms a narrow isthmus connecting to Malaysia. The northeast, often referred to as Isan, is a sprawling plateau, bordered largely by the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (Laos) and the Mekong River. The mountainous west forms Thailand's 2,096 kilometer-long border with Burma. The majority of the population is Buddhist (93%) and ethnically Thai (89%). Standard Thai is the official language of the country and is spoken in every

province, though many areas also have a local dialect. Figure 2.1 shows the location of Thailand and its regional neighbors.



Figure 2.1 Map of Thailand and regional neighbors.

Migration into Thailand

Population mobility is not a new phenomenon to Thailand or its neighbors. However, the characteristics of modern flows are dramatically different from centuries past. Previously, large-scale population movements occurred primarily as part of the

expansion of frontiers, with resettlement of populations defeated during warfare a significant form of movement. In addition, ethnic minority groups living in border areas traveled freely in the region prior to the establishment of national boundaries (Caouette, Sciortino, Guest, & Feinstein, 2006).

Over the past 60 years, Thailand has sheltered people fleeing conflict and persecution in their countries of origin. In the last three decades alone, Thailand has provided asylum to over 1 million people, including displaced persons, refugees, and others outside of international protection (Huguet & Punpuing, 2005b). In addition, economic and demographic differentials have led to a flow of workers having low skills and thus, low human capital, from the weakest economies in Southeast Asia into the country, while slightly more skilled Thai migrants move to stronger economies in Asia, the Middle East, and destinations further abroad. The overall total foreign-born population living and working in Thailand at the end of 2007 was estimated to be more than 2.6 million. Approximately half are unregistered migrants from neighboring countries (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009). Conservative estimates place international migrants at 1.7% of Thailand's population by mid-year 2010, more than double the proportion of 1990 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009).

Migration from the Greater Mekong Subregion

Thailand is the fourth richest nation in Southeast Asia in terms of per capita income after Singapore, Brunei, and Malaysia (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009). In particular, Thailand is significantly ahead of its immediate neighbors—Cambodia, Laos, and Burma—three of the least developed countries in the world. In 2006, Thailand's per capita Gross Domestic Product was about seven times that of these three nations

...warfare a
...in border areas
...in Cambodia

...conflict and
...Thailand has
...refugees, and
...In addition,
...having low
...Asia into the
...economics in Asia

...born
...to be more
...phoning
...international
...the
... (Harris, 2002)

...China
...In
...in
...Thailand

(UNESCAP, 2007). Levels of education, health, and sanitation are also higher in Thailand than in neighboring countries (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009). These factors have contributed to Thailand becoming the principal destination of population movement in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)¹ of Southeast Asia (Hugo, 2006; Skeldon, 2001). The GMS includes Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Viet Nam, and the Yunnan and Guaxi provinces of the People's Republic of China. Of these, movement to Thailand from Cambodia, Laos, and Burma account for 70% of all migration in the GMS region (Caouette et al., 2006). Table 2.1 presents a comparison of various indicators for Thailand and select GMS nations.

Recall from Chapter 1 that Massey et al. (1993) define an “international migration system” as a set of specific sending nations linked to a core receiving region. Huguet (2008) notes that such a system has evolved in the GMS, “with Thailand attracting large numbers of low-skilled and low-wage migrant workers and their dependents from its three poorer neighbors” (p. 4). Informal and formal agreements between Thailand and neighboring states, such as GMS development strategies, have supported growth of this system. Rapid improvements in transportation and checkpoint facilities, in combination with a relative easing of land travel restrictions for tourism and business purposes, are facilitating unprecedented flows of people across borders. Further expansion of the existing current migration system is expected due to decreasing costs of movement in combination with more developed cross-border social networks (Caouette et al., 2006).

¹ The GMS brings together its six member countries through an economic development program launched in 1992 with the support of the Asia Development Bank and other donors. The GMS program aims to facilitate sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction through enhanced infrastructure and efficient cross-border movement of goods and people (Asian Development Bank, 2008a).

Table 2.1

Key Indicators of Select GMS Countries

	Burma	Cambodia	Laos	Thailand
Mid-year population (millions) 2007	57.7	14.4	5.9	65.8
GDP per capita 2006 (1990 US dollars)	417	384	403	2,797
Population living below national poverty line (%)	26.6 (2001)	34.7 (2004)	32.7 (2003)	9.8 (2002)
Life expectancy at birth (years) 2006	61.6	58.9	63.9	70.2
Under 5 mortality (per 1,000 live births) 2006	104	82	75	8
Rural population using improved sanitation facilities (%) 2006	81	19	38	96
Human Development Index* (global ranking of 177 economies) 2008	132	131	130	78

* The Human Development Index is a measure of overall quality of life. The index is constructed by combining proxies for health, education, and a decent standard of living. Education is represented by literacy and school enrolment, health by life expectancy, and standard of living by GDP per capita. The latter two are also given as unique measures in this table. (Asian Development Bank, 2008b)

As of December 2007, there were more than 625,000 registered GMS migrants in Thailand. An additional 1.3 million are believed to be living and working in Thailand irregularly. Migration from GMS countries is complicated by the nature of the registration processes in Thailand, which undermine conceptual distinctions between “regular” and “irregular” migration. In Chapter 1, “irregular migration” was defined as movements taking place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit, and

receiving countries (IOM, 2004). In contrast, “regular migration” occurs through recognized, legal channels. Thailand’s separate processes for work and immigration, however, mean that migrant workers from neighboring countries can be considered “regular” for work but “irregular” for migration. By recording their presence with authorities during one of the organized registration periods, GMS migrants may be allowed to work in specific locations in Thailand. Though this process documents them in terms of their employment, they are still considered to have entered the country illegally.

In general, GMS migrants arriving in Thailand have little human capital as represented by accumulated skills and formal education. According to data from Thailand’s 2004 registration scheme, 74.1% of applicants had less than eight years formal education (Huguet & Punpuing, 2005b). The 2000 Thai National Census found illiteracy rates of around 30% for Cambodian, 40% for Lao, and 76% for Burmese migrants. Approximately 30%, 33% and 80% respectively never attended school. The prominent number of migrants from Burma who are illiterate and poorly schooled is partly due to the higher percentage of ethnic minorities among migrants from Burma when compared with Lao and Cambodian migrants (Caouette et al., 2006).

By and large, GMS countries do not have the capacity to properly manage the mass movement of labor and to protect the rights of their migrant-nationals abroad. Thailand itself has a fairly weak migration policy framework, much of it reactionary to the arrival of large numbers of migrants over the last few decades. The lack of a legal framework to regulate migration puts migrant workers at a higher risk of abuse and reinforces the prevalence of smuggling rings involved in sexual exploitation and slave-

labor. Absence of an adequate migration policy framework thus contributes to increasing the costs and risks of migration and to reducing its benefits (World Bank, 2006a).

Migration from Burma

Migration from Burma, with whom Thailand shares its western border, is especially noteworthy. In particular, there is significant mobility of ethnic minority groups. Much of this movement can be traced to ongoing discriminatory policies and practices of the country's ruling military regime (Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2009b). At the same time, ethnic minority populations have historically inhabited current boundary areas. As a result, cross-border movement is considered by some as part of daily social, cultural, and economic mobility patterns rather than intentional international migration (Aphijanyatham, 2009).

Country overview. In area, Burma is the largest of the mainland Southeast Asian nations and more than 30% larger than Thailand. Its northern and eastern borders with China and Thailand respectively are both more than 2,100 kilometers long. To the east lies India. In ethnic terms, the country can be described as having a central core of lowlands where the majority Burmans live with a horseshoe of highland areas inhabited by minority peoples. In reality, very little recent and reliable demographic data exist, and few of the available figures are disaggregated by sex, geographic area, or ethnicity. Although current estimates generally place the population at 50 million or more, poor infrastructure and ongoing conflict in remote parts of the country have meant that a reliable population census has never been conducted in Burma. Though imperfect, figures from the last official national census in 1983 are often cited. This data revealed that ethnic minorities make up approximately one-third of the total population. Only one-

quarter of the population lives in cities and some rural areas are populated entirely by non-Burman ethnic groups (Belak, 2002).

Over a period of 62 years (1824-1886) Britain conquered Burma and incorporated it into its Indian Empire (Steinberg, 2010). Once administered as a province of India, Burma gained its full independence in 1948. However, this time period was also marked by power struggles and mistrust leading the country to the brink of civil war. In 1962, the Burmese government was overthrown in a military coup. The following decades saw the country ruled by decree with constant food shortages, economic hardship, and violent suppression. Burma's once prosperous economy spiraled downward, and approximately half the country's revenues went to support the military machine. In August, 1988, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets, demanding the end to disastrous economic policies and the brutal regime. Government troops responded swiftly and opened fire on demonstrators, killing thousands. The bloody conflict became known as the "8888 Uprising" to commemorate the date. In response to international pressure and tightening economic sanctions, the ruling junta called a general election in 1990. Though the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won a landslide victory, the military government refused to recognize the election and, instead, arrested opposition leaders, including Suu Kyi.²

Government policies and inaction are seen to be responsible for the rapid deterioration of conditions in the country over the last half century. The International

² Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of General Aung San, a hero of Burma's fight for independence from Britain who was assassinated by political rivals in 1947. Winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize for her nonviolent campaign for democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi remains the symbol of hope to those opposed to the military junta. Aung San Suu Kyi is scheduled for release in November 2010 after a total of 14 years of house arrest and detention (<http://www.nytimes.com/info/daw-aung-san-suu-kyi/>).

Development Committee (2007) claims that since military rule was imposed in 1962, “Burma’s economic, industrial and social fabric” have been systematically ravaged, “transforming it from one of South-East Asia’s wealthiest countries to a Least Developed Country by 1987.” Least Developed Country status is defined by three criteria set out by the United Nations General Assembly: low income, economic vulnerability, and human resource weakness. The latter of these is defined by a composite index based on indicators of nutrition, health, adult literacy, and education (United Nations & World Bank, 2006).

The situation is especially grim in eastern Burma where military patrols and landmines are the most significant, and fastest growing, threat to civilian safety and security (Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), 2009b). Humanitarian and human rights groups have documented the destruction and forced relocation of more than 3,500 communities and hiding sites since 1996, including 120 villages between August 2008 and July 2009. At least 470,000 people are estimated to be internally displaced in rural areas of eastern Burma. The scale of forced displacement is the strongest single indicator of crimes against humanity in eastern Burma.

Education in Burma. The schooling system in Burma, once a model for Asia, has deteriorated in quality and breadth of service under the junta’s rule. Cheesman (2003) notes that “the degree to which the state exerts control over schooling in the current period is without historic parallel in Burma” (p. 56). This extensive control has been especially damaging given the meager attention the junta has afforded education. Fink (2001) contends that this low priority has been enacted for several reasons. First, the junta fears that the more people are educated, the more they are likely to mount serious

challenge to military rule. Second, the top generals are themselves poorly educated, and often resent better-educated people. And third, with limited funds, priority has been given to expanding and equipping the army rather than the country's schools.

Meeting schooling costs. Primary schooling is said to be free but, in reality, families must bear a range of associated costs—entry fees, monthly fees, book fees, special activity and sports fees—in addition to uniform and school supply expenses (National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), 2007). The fact that most people living in the border areas rely on seasonal work for their income makes it even harder for them to survive let alone make the financial contributions expected of them. The resulting financial concerns are the major factor affecting students' attendance though children also drop out by choice because of poor performance and dissatisfaction with school. Only around one third of the million children who begin school each year at the primary level will finish four years of school (Committee for the Promotion and Protection of Child Rights (CPPCR), 2009). Commenting on a local government school, a parent in southeastern Mon State reported that

[t]he entrance fee is 4,000-6,000 Kyat for one student and that is for school materials and maintenance cost. If the parents could not pay in cash ... they have to donate building materials needed to repair the school, such as cement logs, and galvanized iron sheets. If they could not donate, the children will lose the chance to attend the schools. ("High drop-out rate," 2005, p. 10-11)

Schooling for girls. Girls generally receive less education than boys. Adult women interviewed by Belak (2002) cited the inability of families to pay the necessary fees, and the need for girls, especially if they were the oldest daughters, to work, taking

care of other children or supporting the family with whatever income they could provide, as the reasons they dropped out or did not attend school. When one or both parents died, domestic responsibilities and pressure to work to generate income led to greater dropout rates. Cultural norms that education for girls and women is not important are also a significant factor.

Education and child soldiers. One consequence of student dropout is the growth in child soldiers and child laborers. According to a recent report by Human Rights Watch (2002), Burma has the largest number of child soldiers in the world. There are an estimated total of around 70,000 child soldiers from both the government army side and armed opposition in Burma. Children under 18 years old represent around 20 percent of the government forces. According to a number of interviews done with former child soldiers, most were conscripted into the army after dropping-out of school. Thus, even when some children say they “volunteered” to join armed forces or groups, deeper analysis of their stories often reveals increased vulnerability and a lack of other opportunities associated with a disrupted education (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2002).

Burmese migration flows. Though reliable estimates of migration outflows are difficult to obtain, it has been suggested that up to 10% of Burma’s population migrates internationally (IOM, 2008a) and that nearly three-quarters of the persons migrating out of Burma cross the border into Thailand (Save the Children, 2001). As many as 150,000 refugees³ live in nine camps along the Thai-Burmese border (TBBC, 2009a) Of the two

³ Thailand has not yet signed the U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or other relevant international instruments, and has enacted no domestic legislation relating specifically to the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in the country. As such,

million migrant workers in Thailand, approximately 75-80% are from Burma (Rukumnuaykit, 2009).

This immense population movement is often considered alongside the country's deteriorating political, social, and economic conditions. A joint study by World Vision Foundation of Thailand and the Asian Research Center for Migration found that the three most important reasons for migration out of Burma were low wages, high unemployment, and family poverty (Huguet & Punpuing, 2005a). The fourth most important reason was the traumatic experiences suffered in the country, including forced labor. The study demonstrated that the frequency and scale of mobility was such that migration to Thailand had become nearly routine for many persons in Burma. Almost half (48%) of study participants entered Thailand along with family members or friends with more than a third (36%) entering Thailand alone.

General social welfare is often cited as a factor influencing migration out of Burma (Thornton, 2006). Overall, state provision of social services is minimal with poor quality and limited availability contributing to the low human capital of the general population and thus, migrants (Caouette et al., 2006). Thawngmung and Sarno (2006) found the pattern of state resource distribution in Burma to indicate "a complete disregard for the welfare of the general population" (p. 53). Only 3% of the national budget is allocated for health and 8% for education, while 29% goes to the military. In 2000, overall health system performance in Burma was ranked 190th out of 191 countries

Thailand considers these groups to be illegal migrants who, being in breach of the country's Immigration Act, are subject to arbitrary arrest, detention, prosecution, and deportation. However, Thailand does allow international and local NGOs to provide humanitarian assistance. Considered "displaced persons" or "persons fleeing fighting," the Thai Government permits temporary respite in the country. In reality, distinctions between economic and forced migrants are often blurred (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009).

(World Health Organization, 2000). In their brief but stark comparison of Thailand and Burma, the United Nations Human Development Report (2009) states:

Someone born in Thailand can expect to live seven more years, to have almost three times as many years of education, and to spend and save eight times as much as someone born in neighbouring Myanmar. These differences in opportunity create immense pressures to move. (p. 9)

Migration to Tak Province. A significant proportion of migration from Burma into Thailand occurs in northwestern Tak Province, especially near the border town of Mae Sot (Arnold, 2004). Lying across the Moei River from Myawaddy, in Karen State and due east of Burma's former capital city, Rangoon, Mae Sot is a major gateway to Burma via the Asia Highway. In contrast to the Burmese in Thailand's northern Chiang Mai province who come primarily from Burma's Shan State and those entering the south of Thailand from Burma's southern states and divisions, the Burmese in Mae Sot come from all parts of the country.

The Committee for the Promotion and Protection of Child Rights (CPPCR, 2009) undertook a research project to investigate and document the situation of Burmese migrant children in the Mae Sot area. Among the findings were that Burmese families enter Tak via a number of ways, which can be relatively straightforward or involve considerable risk. The most dangerous part of the journey is often on the Burmese side of the border, especially in times of active conflict where an extensive system of checkpoints are active. "We were unable to take a car so we had to come on foot and walked for 3 days," reported one 17-year old girl:

We came with our friends and other people. At this time there were demonstrations; the Karen and Burmese are at war too. If Burmese soldiers saw people they would kill them all, whether they were local people or their enemies. We were very frightened and we had to hurry; we were so cold. (CPPCR, 2009, p. 33)

Upon reaching the border area, however, entering Thailand is relatively easy. One-day passes are available between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. at the “Friendship Bridge,” the official checkpoint connecting Mae Sot and Myawaddy. Regular migrants can go to Thailand on a one-day pass and simply not go back, becoming irregular in the process. In the first six months of 2008, 298,847 Burmese entered Thailand legally across the bridge. More than one quarter did not return, an average of almost 500 per day (Kasem, 2008). Irregular entry is possible immediately below the bridge, and within sight of immigration officials, where small groups traverse the river on inflated inner tubes. During the dry season, sections of the river are also navigable on foot. Social ties to relatives, friends, and brokers make available numerous unofficial entry points (Caouette et al., 2006)

The number of Burmese migrants in and around Mae Sot may be as many as 300,000, and about 10% are children (CPPCR, 2009). In some areas, Burmese are the majority. In one village built on the edge of the Moei River on the outskirts of Mae Sot, the *phooyaiba* (village leader) estimated that there were 12,000 Burmese compared to 3,000 Thais living there (Kheunkaew, 2009). Though no reliable data is available on migrant worker demographics in Mae Sot, non-governmental organizations estimate that 70% are young women, in their late-teens to mid-twenties (Arnold, 2004). The manufacturing sector is a main source of employment with around 250, mainly garment,

factories in Mae Sot. In Phop Phra District to the southeast, migrants largely work in the agricultural sector (CPPCR, 2009).

Thai-Burmese legal agreements. In 2003, Thailand and Burma signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that defines the legal channels for Burmese nationals to work in Thailand. In 2006, the countries agreed to work more closely on the verification of the nationality of Burmese workers registered in Thailand who do not have identification cards and passports issued by Burma (IOM, 2008a). The verification process, to have been completed by February 2010, was intended to provide migrants with legal status to live and work in Thailand for up to two years at a time for a period not exceeding four years. Workers would also receive certain rights, including access to accident compensation and the ability to travel within Thailand.

Progress on implementing this latest phase of the MOU has been slow. In part, this is due to the process only being available to those migrants who have completed annual registration procedures since 2004. Newly arrived migrants have no option but to live and work illegally in the country (Pollock, 2009). Further, the process for Burmese migrants is more complex than that for workers from Cambodia and Laos whose governments sent representatives to Thailand to facilitate the verification process. Migrant workers from Burma are required to travel back to Burma for registration. Travel expenses, fears of providing personal background information to their own government, and doubts that registration would bring any improvements to their working conditions are given as reasons that hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers from Burma had likely failed to register (McCarten, 2010).

Migrants' Lives in Thailand

Migrant workers in low-skilled positions, along with refugees and asylum seekers, are among the mobile populations who have faced acute discrimination in Thailand. Though national legislation and local measures toward migrant workers have often shifted, they have retained a generally restrictive and punitive nature. As a result, regular or otherwise, the GMS migrant population in Thailand is extremely vulnerable. They often work in difficult and exploitative conditions, live in unsanitary and crowded environments, lack legal and social protection, have little freedom of movement and reduced civil entitlements, and are exposed to arrest and deportation (Sciortino & Punpuing, 2009). Further, the Thai community's stance toward migrant workers, especially those from Burma, is generally unwelcoming.

Working Conditions

In many cases, migrants take on work that has become less desirable to the domestic labor force as Thais gain more options in an expanding economy. Inheriting the so-called 3-D jobs—dirty, difficult, dangerous—migrants have been left vulnerable to injury and other health-related issues with little chance of securing compensation. Discriminatory attitudes towards foreign laborers have helped to create a climate of tolerance for the pervasive mistreatment of workers from Burma. Despite higher relative wages in Thailand than in Burma, incomes of migrant workers are often lower than stated minimum wage rates and the pay of local Thais. For example, the local minimum wage for Thai workers in Mae Sot was just above US\$4.40 per day as of December 2008, yet Burmese workers were entitled to US\$3.50 a day, with the majority earning US\$2 or less in practice (NCGUB, 2009).

A report entitled *Underpaid, Overworked and Overlooked* (Pearson, Punpuing, Jampaklay, Kittisuksathit, & Prohmmo, 2006) investigated the realities of young migrant workers in Thailand. One woman from Karen State in Burma described conditions at the factory where she was employed:

I sew the seams on jeans—I will usually begin work at 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning. I don't get a break for lunch and I have to work straight through until 5 pm before I can rest. So I eat only 2 meals per day, one in the morning before work and one in the evening after work ... My boss gives me a place to stay but he deducts 250 Baht (US\$6.25) for accommodation and 130 Baht (US\$3.25) for water and electricity expenses. He also deducts 500 Baht (US\$12.50) per month as the job assurance fee ... We get one day of rest every two weeks and do not receive money for those days. I cannot speak Thai very well so I haven't been able to look for a new job. Besides, my boss threatened that if I were to leave he would have the police come and arrest me. I would have to try and escape during the night. (p. 30)

Perhaps not surprisingly, Thai employers dispute claims of unfair treatment of migrant workers. In one *The New York Times* article (Cropley, 2007), the Chairman of the Federation of Thai Industries in Mae Sot, denied that migrant workers were poorly paid, maintaining that employers need to deduct board and food from workers living on-site, in addition to administrative expenses. The article also found that, although migrants complained of cramped dormitory conditions and of inedible food, many workers appeared happy, saying they were better off in Thailand than in Burma where military rule, economic mismanagement, and Western sanctions have left the economy in

ruins. One worker reported, “In Thailand, we face difficulties, but at least it's a job. In Myanmar, there's no work at all” (Cropley, 2007).

Limits on Social and Cultural Activities

Outside of the workplace, migrant communities have faced discrimination through local restrictions imposed on expressions of cultural identity, including language and celebration of cultural celebrations. The governor of Samut Sakhorn district, near Bangkok, pushed to prohibit public signs in Mon or Burmese languages. As the 61st Mon National Day approached in February 2008, that same governor announced that ethnic Mon migrant workers should refrain from wearing traditional dress, celebrating Mon culture and traditions, and engaging in political activities (Htaw, 2008). Area officials also called on the public to not give their support to other Mon cultural events in the area and Thai police blocked entry into a temple where celebrations were to take place. According to a Bangkok newspaper, Thailand's Internal Security Operations Command issued a notice that the festival was prohibited from staging activities that encouraged “national sentiment” (Weng, 2008).

A Provincial Decree on Migrant Workers adopted by the southern province of Phuket in 2006, prohibits migrant workers from Burma, Cambodia, and Laos from owning mobile phones, driving motorbikes or cars, gathering in public in groups of five or more, and leaving their dormitories between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. unless working at night. Failing to comply with the restrictions would result in the cancellation of the migrant's identity card and work permit prior to deportation (Malikaew, 2007). Since mid-2007, seven other provinces in the restive south have adopted the decree on grounds of improving local security.

Fear of the Police

Rather than providing support and assistance, police, military, immigration officers, and other government officials have been accused of threatening, physically harming, and extorting migrant workers with impunity (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Migrants held in custody have reported demands for money or valuables in exchange for their release. With their typically low wages, such incidents could cost migrants the equivalent of one to several months pay. Lacking enough money to be freed, detained migrants are frequently asked to find relatives or friends to pay to secure their release.

Through a series of articles titled “Shattered Dreams,” Thailand’s daily newspaper, *The Bangkok Post*, investigated the lives of migrant workers in Mae Sot (Ekachai, 2003). The articles describe deadly attacks on Burmese workers by Thai youth hate groups, extortionists, and traffickers. Fears of arrest and deportation forced workers to keep silent if they are robbed or abused. Those who had regularized their employment were not immune to being victimized. After completing registration processes, workers were often given only photocopies of their documents, or receipts for fees paid. These papers were of limited value when detained by authorities:

The police do not acknowledge these informal papers. But both the officers and the workers know the rule of this cat-and-mouse game. Pay up to be let go, or be kicked out of the country. “I never feel safe here,” said [a migrant worker named] Lui Lui. “Walking down the street can be a risky business. We can be harassed anytime. People with wives and children can be deported and their families broken apart. Every time I see a policeman, I tremble and sweat. It’s a life full of fear. It is so stressful.”

Fears of arrest and deportation also limited workers' mobility, forcing migrants to spend much of their time at or near their places of employment. "We never knew that life on this side of the border is also very insecure and dangerous," another worker said (Ekachai, 2003).

Public Opinion and Social Acceptance

Crush and Ramachandran (2009), noting largely unfavorable attitudes among the general public, claim that "[o]fficial policy resonates with Thai opinions on migrant workers" (p. 32). Public acceptance of migrant workers and their families is, in part, related to negative perceptions about the economic impact of immigrants on the Thai , although Martin (2007) has estimated that migrant workers contributed US\$2 billion to the Thai gross domestic product. More recent research found that a 10% increase in migrant workers did not lower employment opportunities of Thai locals as often feared and only reduced wages by 0.2% (United Nations Development Program, 2009). Real gains and losses, however, are likely to be unequally distributed among the Thai population. Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Board has concluded that migrants primarily benefit employers and corrupt officials (Martin, 2004).

Public perception of Burmese migrants is also influenced by history and health. Hostile attitudes towards Burma and its people are seen to go back well over 300 years to 1767 when an invading Burmese army destroyed Ayutthaya, a former capital of Thailand (Fowle, 2008). Thai students continue to learn about the conflict as an integral part of Thai education. The Thai film industry has also popularized the battle.

Thais widely believe that persons from Burma pose a public health risk, entering the country carrying diseases that have been eradicated or are rare in Thailand. Migrants

are also seen to be a burden on government hospitals, especially those in border areas, by using services for which they are not able to pay (Huguet & Punpuing, 2005b). While migrants do put demands on the health system, the problem has been exacerbated by government policy, which sets hospital budgets solely according to official provincial headcounts that exclude migrant populations. Further, changing proportions of registered and nonregistered migrants has meant fewer financial resources to care for all patients. In 2004, an estimated 85% of migrant workers in Thailand registered with the Ministry of Interior and paid into a national health insurance scheme. By 2007, that number had dropped to 30% (Fowle, 2008).

The Human Development Report 2009 demonstrated the Thai public's limited support for immigration (UNDP, 2009). Data from a World Values Survey revealed that more than 72% of Thais called for the government to "limit/prohibit immigration" of people coming from other countries looking for work. Only Malaysia and Indonesia had a higher percentage among the 52 countries surveyed.

In 2006, a public opinion survey was administered by Bangkok's Assumption University to mark International Migrants Day. The poll, sponsored by the International Labor Organization and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) found that nearly 59% of respondents wanted the government to ban the entry of migrant labor. More than 80% believed that migrant labor had an adverse effect on the wages of domestic workers, especially those with lower skills and wages (UNIFEM, 2006). Most poll participants, and in particular those personally acquainted with migrant workers, indicated that migrants were hard working, if not honest or loyal.

Child Migrants and Children of Migrants

When the Ministry of Interior invited migrants from Cambodia, Laos, and Burma to register in July 2004 to receive permission to remain in the country to work, 93,082 persons under age 15—among a total of 1.28 million migrants—were registered (Huguet & Punpuing, 2005a). Though those less than 15 years represent only a fraction of the total number of foreign migrants in Thailand, the figure indicates that much migration from GMS countries involves families rather than individual adult workers. More than 77,000 of the children who registered were from Burma.⁴ More recent estimates put the number of migrant children in the country at 200,000 (CPPCR, 2009). Along the Thai-Burmese border, children represent around 15% of the migrant population while seldom reaching more than 5% of the population elsewhere.

Child Workers

In rural areas of Thailand, children work primarily in agriculture, such as rubber plantations, orange orchards, and sugarcane and vegetable production. In urban areas, children work in the service sector including gas stations, entertainment venues, and restaurants. It is common that children also work in street vending, as well as the construction, manufacturing, knitting, garment, and fishing sectors (U.S. Department of Labor, 2007).

Thailand's legal working age, and the minimum age at which migrants can register for work permits, is 15 years. For those 15 to 18 years of age, Thai law places restrictions on conditions of employment including limiting working hours to between 4 p.m. and 10 p.m. However, a substantial proportion of migrants aged 12 to 14 are likely

⁴ Thailand does not differentiate between children born in Thailand to Burmese parents in and those born in Burma who later travel to Thailand (IOM, 2008a).

working in Thailand. The illegal nature of their employment increases the likelihood that it is also exploitative, with working conditions and pay below local standards (Huguet & Punpuing, 2005a). An investigation into child work in six Thai provinces by the ILO found that 35% of more than 2,600 children surveyed were below the legal minimum working age (Lisborg & Buckley, 2006). Many children faced abuse by employers, including physical confinement, physical punishment, general harassment, sexual harassment, rape, and verbal humiliation.

A study of child workers in Mae Sot, Tak Province interviewed a total of 313 Burmese respondents (The Federation of Trade Unions - Burma (FTUB), 2006). Though more than 80% of children came from just three regions of Burma, the total sample included children from diverse geographic areas with 12 of Burma's 14 political divisions represented. More than three-quarters of children were girls with seven younger the minimum working age of 15 years (the youngest being 12 years old). A total of 94% of the children indicated that relatives, a guardian, or friends assisted them in crossing the border with most arriving legally and then overstaying their permit.

About 98% of the children indicated they had attended school in Burma and some were enrolled immediately before undertaking their journey to Thailand. This data dispels notions of migrant child workers in Thailand being similarly employed in Burma before migrating. Very few workers were able to continue their studies in Thailand citing their need to work, the costs associated with education, or a lack of access to schools.

Some child workers reported that they were virtually forced to remain at work sites due to restrictions placed on their movements by factory owners, and by threats of arrest and harassment by police and other officials if they were stopped outside the

factory gates. “Put succinctly,” the report stated, “ Mae Sot has perfected a system where children are literally working day and night, week after week, for wages that are far below the legal minimum wage, to the point of absolute exhaustion” (FTUB, 2006, p. ix).

Trafficking and Exploitation of Children

Trafficking of minors is a significant problem in Thailand and throughout Southeast Asia. Shifting economic differentials significantly influence its direction of flow while poor comprehensions of the consequences of trafficking and high expectations for the quality of life in other places exacerbate its extent. Research by the International Labor Organization suggests a figure of 250,000 women and 12,000 children trafficked in Southeast Asia annually. Thailand’s domestic trafficking victims are largely members of northern hill tribes while migrant children arrive from neighboring Cambodia, Laos, China’s Yunnan Province, and, in particular, from Burma (Burke & Ducci, 2005).

Minors are trafficked for a wide range of service, industrial, and agricultural work with an increasing number brought into the country’s growing sex industry (Boonpala & Kane, 2002). Girls are frequent victims due to gender biases in law enforcement and cultural contexts. Poor income-earning opportunities for women with low levels of education, the desire to provide economic support for their families, and a relatively tolerant attitude toward prostitution in some segments of Thai society help sustain a flow of victims towards the sex industry (Burke & Ducci, 2005).

Social ties to familiar others that facilitate migration flows may also endanger its participants. Impoverished families send or sell children to traffickers, who may be a neighbor, a local official, or other respected local person offering a way out of poverty. Typically, local traffickers feed persons into larger networks, after which they exercise no

further control. The type of work and working conditions are often misrepresented, and victims subsequently find themselves forced to remain and work in difficult and exploitative conditions. Frequently unable to speak Thai and considered illegal immigrants, migrant trafficking victims are particularly vulnerable to abuse (U.S. Department of State, 2005).

Thailand has passed a number of legal measures to combat trafficking and prostitution among women and minors. Among these is the Prostitution Prevention and Suppression Act of 1996 which recognizes that prostitutes are victims of poverty, social problems, and organized crime. The intent of the Act is to shift the focus of criminality from prostitutes themselves to procurers, traffickers, brothel owners, customers, and parents. Further, the Trafficking Act of 1997 provides for foreign women and children trafficked into Thailand to be given food, shelter, and repatriation to their home country (Burke & Ducci, 2005). Despite these measures, those trafficked into prostitution continue to be treated as criminals to be prosecuted rather than persons to be assisted (Pearson, 2002; U.S. Department of State, 2005).

Access to Social Services

For some migrant families, the social and cultural exclusion experienced in Thai society more generally extends to the public education system as well. Although Thailand has demonstrated positive increases in national enrolment rates in recent years, a Human Development Report (United Nations (U.N.), 2007) for Thailand articulated lingering questions about differential access to educational institutions. Inequality in access to education, health, and other social services was found to be “relatively high” for a country at Thailand’s current level of development. An earlier report by UNICEF

(2005) expressed similar concerns about migrant children's access to schooling, despite claims by district officials that universal education had been achieved for both Thai and foreign national children. At the same time, the Thai Government has attempted to improve the quality of, and expand access to, public education to all children through various legislative, administrative, policy, and budgetary measures over the last decade. These initiatives and their nascent outcomes are highlighted in the following pages after first considering the overall structure of the Thai education system.

Structure of the Thai Education System

Education in Thailand is divided into formal, non-formal, and informal approaches (Office of the Education Council (OEC), 2007). Non-formal and informal education target those outside the regular school system such as infants and the elderly, the labor force, and conscripts. Formal education, the focus of this study, describes schooling with defined aims, methods, curricula, duration, and assessment. Formal mainstream education includes both general and vocational streams provided through public and private institutions at both basic and higher education levels. Basic education covers pre-primary education, six years of primary, three years of lower secondary, and three years of upper secondary education. Figure 2.1 presents the structure of the Thai formal mainstream education system.

Compulsory education requirements were lengthened to nine years in 2003. As a result, all children between seven and 15 years of age, regardless of nationality or citizenship, are to complete a primary education plus three years of lower secondary education. Children must be enrolled in basic education institutions from age seven

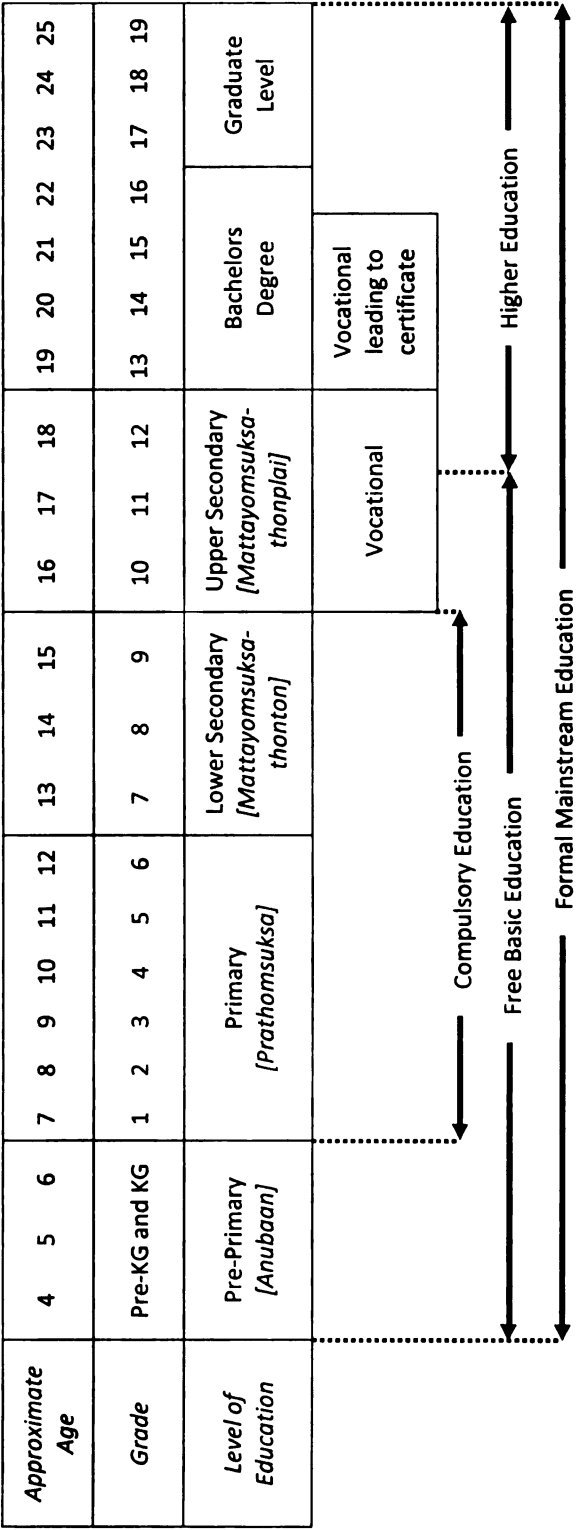


Figure 2.2. Structure of the Thai formal mainstream education system. Mainstream education includes both general and vocational streams. Terms in square parentheses are phonetic translations of Thai descriptors. Adapted from *Education in Thailand 2007* (Office of the Education Council, 2007) and data available from The Government Public Relations Department (<http://thailand.prd.go.th>).

through the age of 16, except for those who have already completed Grade 9 (Jumpatong, 2009).

Guiding Frameworks

Thailand's current and previous constitutions and its *National Education Act 1999/2002* guide the provision of education in the country guaranteeing the right—and duty—of all Thais to receive education and training. Concerning *Rights and Liberties in Education*, Section 49 states that “A person shall enjoy an equal right to receive the education for the duration of not less than twelve years which shall be provided by the State thoroughly, up to the quality, and without charge.” In 2002, twelve years of free basic education was made available to students nationally for the first time (OEC, 2007).

Budget allocation is a key mechanism to help increase access for schooling. A predominant feature of budget distribution in the Thai educational system is that financial support is allocated upon a per head basis for those receiving basic education in both public and private schools. To receive more subsidies, individual schools thus tend to attract more students. Originally allocated only for the primary and secondary levels, subsidies were expanded from 12 to 14 years in 2004 to cover two years of kindergarten (Jumpatong, 2009). Beginning with the 2009-2010 academic year, an additional year of funding was added at the pre-primary level. Individual schools receive a budget for tuition fees and textbooks. Money for uniforms and consumable learning materials is distributed to parents by schools upon presentation of receipts. The family of a child in primary school is eligible for a total of 2,195 baht, or US\$73. A student in upper secondary would receive almost double that, or 4,030 baht (MOE, 2009).

Education Administration and Management

The 2007 Constitution also calls for the decentralization of government administrative authority. Section 80 establishes the role of the State in promoting and supporting decentralization of powers to local administrative organizations, communities, religious organizations, and the private sector. The State retains duties such as developing the standard of education management, national education plans and law, and the quality of teachers and educational personnel. In 2003, 175 Educational Service Area (ESAs) were established throughout the country; each was responsible for approximately 200 educational institutions and a population of 300,000 to 500,000 students (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2008).

In accepting responsibilities for providing education and training, local governments were required to have regard for the conservation of regional arts, customs, knowledge, and good culture. An initial evaluation of the effectiveness of the individual ESAs revealed varied capacities to take on the range of service delivery functions transferred to them due to differences in geographic coverage area, number of qualified personnel, and endowed resources (World Bank, 2006b). In response, the number of ESAs was expanded to 185: three in Bangkok and 182 in the surrounding provinces (OEC, 2007).

History of Migrant Participation in the State Schooling System

Education for all. Issues of access and equity in education have been brought to the fore of Thai education in the last several decades through various national and international initiatives. On the global stage, Thailand was host to the 1990 World Conference on Education for All. Article III of the Declaration that arose from this

meeting urges an active commitment be made in removing educational disparities and discrimination in access to learning opportunities suffered by underserved groups.

In 2002, “education for all children”—including refugees, stateless persons, and other marginalized groups—received further attention in an oft-publicized speech made in Geneva, Switzerland by the daughter of the King of Thailand, Princess Maha Chakri. Highlighting the acquisition of “useful knowledge and skills for their future role in society,” the Princess promoted the advantages education would bring to both non-Thai children and Thai society. “Socially,” she said,

the danger lies in the alienation of an entire class of people, albeit a minority, within our society. Without the job skills necessary to secure a reasonable quality of life for them and their dependents, refugees face hard times and are forced into circumstances that might cause trouble for others. . . . Economically, the question of post-primary education is not a question of “Can we afford to do it?” but rather a question of “Can we afford not to do it?” (Maha Chakri Sirindhon, 2004)

In reality, migrant children have been able to access public schools for more than a decade albeit with limitations. Prior to 2005, children registered with government officials could attend schools, but only those in the same geographic area in which they were documented (Huguet & Punpuing, 2005b). In addition, graduating migrant students received documents stamped to indicate that they did not have Thai nationality, which may limit access to subsequent educational institutions. Statistics from the Ministry of Education indicate that in the 2004 school year, there were 13,459 students from Cambodia, Laos, and Burma attending secondary school or lower in Thailand. These modest enrolment rates of between 15 and 20% of registered migrant children reflect, in

part, high financial costs to schooling, families' uncertainty about the cultural relevance of the implemented curriculum, and a lack awareness—on the part of both families and schools—of migrants' rights to enroll (Proctor, Sanee, & Taffesse, 2009). Experiences in Tak and Surat Thani Provinces also indicated that some schools were unwilling to accept migrant children (FTUB, 2006). In such cases, families may be hesitant to publicly assert their rights with local officials where fears of arrest and deportation are well-founded and their acceptance in the Thai community is tenuous (Bryant, 2005; Huguet & Punpuing, 2005a).

The 2005 Cabinet Resolution. Adjustments to the Ministry of Education's regulations on the provision of education to six categories of disadvantaged children were proposed to the Thai Government in 2004. The following year, on July 5, 2005, the Cabinet approved a Resolution (hereafter referred to as the 2005 Resolution) to provide education to children who lack evidence of civil registration or Thai nationality. According to this regulation, schools no longer stamp academic records in red ink to indicate the bearer's non-Thai identity. Further, the 2005 Resolution lifts restrictions on place and duration of education for migrant children (but not refugees), eliminates the need for identification documents for enrolment, and provides equal funding to schools for all students regardless of nationality, or lack thereof (OEC, 2008).

Since the introduction of the 2005 Resolution, migrant access to Thai schools has been gradually increasing. Sciortino and Punpuing (2009) reported 41,099 GMS migrant children enrolled in primary schools in Thailand, including more than 33,000 from Burma. However, taking into consideration official registration data from 2004 and likely increases in the numbers of migrant children in the country since that time, the

authors concluded that “a large portion of migrant children is not enrolled in Thai schools” (p. 72). In the years following approval of the Resolution, the Office of the Education Council (2008) has observed limited implementation of the policy and delayed enforcement nationwide. Many schools continue to turn away migrant and stateless children, especially those without proper documentation. Some schools are unaware of the 2005 Resolution but in other cases refusal is linked to lack of clarity of policy implementation, insufficient numbers of teachers, and difficulties of schools in obtaining per head subsidies.

Migrant Learning Centers

Migrant schools, also known as migrant learning centers (MLCs), can be found in provinces with significant migrant populations. These include Chiang Mai in the north, Samut Sakhon in central Thailand, Tak in the west, and Ranong in southern peninsular region. MLCs represent an effort by local migrant communities and various NGOs to provide a relevant, low-cost alternative to attending Thai schools—or to not attending any school—for migrant children. Many constraints that restrict migrant families’ participation in the Thai education system—lack of awareness of rights to enroll, schools’ lack of willingness to accept migrant children, unfamiliar language of instruction, concerns about the curriculum’s cultural relevance, financial costs to schooling, families’ itinerant lifestyles—do not apply equally to MLCs (Proctor, Sanee, & Taffesse, 2009). Although not formally recognized by the Thai government, a report of 12 ESAs identified more than 80 MLCs, with an estimated 15,800 students and 980 teachers, throughout the country (OEC, 2008). The vast majority of the schools are in western Tak Province, with

at least 62 MLCs serving 9,200 students. It is likely that a significant number of MLCs are as yet unknown to education authorities.

That the MLCs are formally unrecognized brings a unique set of challenges to their continued operation and the educational and working future of participating children. These include: 1) graduating students do not receive official certification of their qualifications; 2) security concerns for the schools themselves and for the majority of the staff who are often undocumented migrants; 3) a wide range of curricula and variable teaching and school management standards; 4) a lack of accountability mechanisms to ensure good quality education is provided; and 5) limited and precarious resources to build and maintain infrastructure, to provide teaching resources, and to pay teachers' salaries (Proctor, Sanee, & Taffesse, 2009).

Some of these challenges, especially the high degree of variability between MLCs and their lack of accountability, have also been identified as a cause for concern by Thai authorities. Citing "a chaos [of] diversification," the Office of the Education Council (2008) finds that a continued absence of official regulations to govern the MLCs "will be harmful to Thailand's national security" (p. 28).

Currently, MLCs are neither officially "schools" nor "learning centers" (though are commonly referred to as both). However, gaining official status as learning centers would address many of the challenges associated with being unrecognized. Though this possibility has been under discussion for several years, ongoing political turmoil in Thailand has delayed development of practical proposals to implement such a policy. Other obstacles also exist. The MLCs, for example, are autonomous entities with loose, or sometimes no affiliations between them. Setting a coordinated course of action can be

very challenging. Second, official documents about registration plans and policies are in Thai, which few migrant school staff can read or speak. Thus the sharing of information is labor intensive and subject to misrepresentation/interpretation. In addition, resistance from the migrant community is likely given that, if implemented, registration policies would require closure of smaller school in a process of consolidation. Further, registration would mean changes to curricula and language of instruction, and significant expenses to meet requirements for additional human and physical resources (Proctor, Sanee, & Taffesse, 2009).

Conclusion

We have seen that large numbers of GMS migrants and their children currently reside in Thailand. As adults and working children, they are subject to exploitation and discrimination in their working and social lives. These conditions extend to families' attempts to engage in public education for their children where, traditionally, enrolment in Thai schools was limited and access to legitimate certificates was unavailable. Recently, policy initiatives from the central government have focused on supporting all children in their quest for education. We will see in future chapters how various actors along the border and points more distant navigate the many challenges described here such that migrant families can successfully participate in public education.

Chapter Three

Methods

In this chapter I describe and explain the research methods used in the study, starting with the research design. Following that, I discuss instrument construction, sampling, and data collection methods. I then describe the analysis techniques used for interview data and observational data. I conclude with a discussion of several challenges I faced, the study's limitations, and my position as researcher.

Research Design

In this study, I hoped to describe and explain the participation of migrant families in a state education system. In particular, I looked for the activation of social capital as resources became available through various social relationships. I concentrated on one particular case, Burmese families in Thailand, in an attempt to get a more nuanced understanding of the actors, their roles, and the processes involved. Within the case, there is one site. The boundaries of this site are defined by the administrative responsibilities of Educational Service Area 2 in Tak Province (Tak ESA2). As described in Chapter 2, ESAs are the local representatives of the central Ministry of Education. Tak Province has two ESAs, each responsible for several hundred schools (Figure 3.1 presents the location of Tak Province in Thailand and identifies the administrative region of Tak ESA2). The use of a single site defined in this manner afforded several advantages relative to the purpose of this study. First, it provided a set of actors—migrant families, school staff, and MOE staff—who were, to some degree, already linked together through their common association with public schools. This facilitated identification and exploration of the social network in which families were



Figure 3.1. Map of the Thai-Burmese border and key cities. Tak province was the single site for this study. Politically, Tak Province is divided into nine districts (see inset). Schools in the five numbered districts are under the supervision of Tak ESA2. The districts are: 1. Tha Song Yang; 2. Mae Ramat; 3. Mae Sot; 4. Phop Phra; and 5. Umphang. The Tak ESA2 office is located in Mae Sot District. Participating schools are located in Mae Sot and Phop Phra Districts.

embedded. Second, the single site provides a probable measure of consistency in terms of network structure and function. That is, because all schools were under the responsibility of the same ESA, I could more confidently assume uniformity in the way relationships were established and maintained, and in the way that resources might be made available between these actors.

A study concerned with personal histories requires methodological tools that can explore subjective realities and the social life worlds of migrants. A field study focusing

on interviews and careful observation allowed me to foreground the words and testimonies of a small number of families as strongly as possible. Rather than attempt generalizability of results from a large sample size, this design was also consistent with my aim to develop an improved understanding of a single, complex issue (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In enacting this interpretive approach, I developed categories and theories inductively from the data and reformulated interpretive schemes and various hypotheses during the course of the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The study largely draws on data collected during a five-month trip to Thailand in 2008. This was the second, and longest, of three visits over three years. A brief, preliminary trip was made in 2007 to assist in developing an initial network of contacts and in refinement of the research proposal. In 2009, a follow-up visit was made to the border area where additional data were collected. By this time, a new academic year had begun and it was possible to confirm the trajectory of some of the students I had met the previous visit. Unless otherwise indicated, all interview and observational data refer to the context in Thailand as of 2008. I also used document analysis, reviewing published data made available in hard copy and electronic form through a multiplicity of Websites, and government and nongovernment agencies.

Selecting a Research Site

Though I had lived in Thailand for four years before this study began, I had never knowingly or purposefully interacted with the country's migrant population. Thus, I had no prior knowledge I could activate in selecting an appropriate research site. Instead, I relied on scholarly and mainstream information gleaned from the Internet prior to my preliminary visit in 2007. Such searches invariably led me to Mae Sot in Thailand's

western Tak Province. Though not a large city, the relatively high numbers of documented and undocumented Burmese in the region, along with a vibrant exchange of goods across the Moei River, have given the area a particular notoriety.

I began with the name of one person before my trip in 2007, a senior staff member of the organization World Education who was working in Mae Sot. Electronic communication led to an invitation to the monthly meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Services for Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT), a communications network for NGOs who meet on a regular basis to exchange information and to discuss various aspects of their humanitarian work with refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. From these modest beginnings, my own social network began to expand in volume.

Drawing on information these first informants provided, a list of prospective sites began to develop. At the time my research proposal was defended the next year, the study had evolved to include the possibility of a multi-site investigation across three provinces. When I returned to Thailand in 2008, I spent the first month visiting each of the sites for a few days—Mae Sot in the west, Chiang Mai in the north, and Samut Sakhon, a mid-size city in central Thailand near Bangkok. I arrived at each location with a short list of people to see and things to do. It quickly became apparent that Mae Sot stood apart from the other sites in that it was the only location where I was able to quickly meet staff from the local MOE office. This was a vital link, not only in terms data sources for my study, but also as those staff also acted as gatekeepers, the sources of legitimate authorization to visit schools. It was in this way that I decided to begin in Mae Sot. Over time, I realized that there was more than enough going on in this one site for

me to attempt to describe and explain, and so, acting on the advice of my committee, I chose to dig deeper into the one site rather than expand—and risk spreading myself too thin—to two sites.

It was during my first few hours in Mae Sot that I made many of the connections that would influence the direction of my investigation. Before leaving the U.S., I had been given the contact information of Mr. P, the outgoing Executive Director of Tak ESA2. Through a brief series of electronic exchanges, he invited me to visit Mae Sot the same morning that the International Labor Organization (ILO) was holding a special event about child labor. I had been in Bangkok for another of the CCSDPT monthly meetings and my overnight bus arrived in Mae Sot at 5 a.m. Four hours later, Mr. P had arranged for Ms. G, a senior staff member of the ILO's Bangkok office, to pick me up at my guest house. Over the coming months I would attend several of the same events as Ms. G and she would also consent to an interview.

In attendance at the ILO event were numerous actors with whom I would interact in the coming months. Of particular note was the presence of a woman from the Tak ESA2 office who supervised English language instruction at schools throughout western Tak Province. The importance of her knowledge of people and institutions in the area was equaled by her ability to communicate in English. She eventually proactively facilitated my contact with several teachers and administrators in Thai schools.

Interview Protocol Development

A primary method of data collection was through interviews following a semi-structured format. Guiding lists of questions and prompts were developed in order to increase the likelihood that that the same cluster of topics would be covered in each

interview in a similar way (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, p. 122). A separate list of questions was prepared for three main subgroups of actors: (a) migrant families (adults and children), (b) personnel from various local and international organizations, and (c) MOE and Thai school staff.

Conversations with families attempted to reveal their perspectives on education, their access to it, and the reasons behind their participation. Topics of conversation with parents and students focused on their personal migration and education histories, initial and ongoing school experiences, relationships with school staff and the local community, and views of education for the future. Semi-structured interviews with organization staff attempted to understand why these organizations work with migrant populations, how they do this work, and the challenges they encounter. Similarly, conversations with teachers and school administrators centered on how these actors understood their roles in providing education to migrant children, what resources are made available to support them in this, and what challenges have arisen. The Appendix further elaborates the categories for interviews.

In total, 44 participants were interviewed for this study. The distribution of participants within categories is presented in Table 3.1. Of the 14 migrant families interviewed, 12 were participating in schools in Mae Sot District and two had children attending schools in the more rural Phop Phra District. Eleven staff from nongovernmental organizations of various scope and size were interviewed. The majority of these organizations work directly with Thai schools in some capacity but among them were four people working in the system of migrant learning centers. One lawyer with expertise in immigration was also interviewed. In

Table 3.1

Interview participants

Characteristic	Number	Interview hours (approximate)
Migrant family	14	20
Nongovernmental organization staff	11	14
State employee		
Tak ESA2 office staff	3	5
School administrator	4	5
Teacher	9	10
Other	3	2
	n=44	n=56

addition to Tak ESA2 staff, school administrators, and school teachers, three other state actors participated in this study. Two were local *phooyaibaan* (village leaders) and one was an official from the administrative offices of Mae Sot District.

Interview Sampling

Interview participants were identified and recruited into the study by a combination of sampling methods. I discuss each group of participants separately here and identify the methods of identification and invitation.

Nongovernmental Organization Staff

Some participants from nongovernmental organizations were recruited through judgment sampling (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). In such cases, the information I had available indicated that including certain organizations in the Mae Sot area would add value to the study. Contact was then made with the organization, in person or by email.

Equally effective were referrals by participants to other organizations or a specific person within an organization. In such cases, an actor I had interviewed would

recommend that I talk to another person, either within or outside of the same organization, who they deemed particularly relevant and/or knowledgeable. Such “key informant” or “snowball” sampling (Heckathorn, 1997) increased as time went by and people became more familiar with my study and the kinds of information I was seeking. (The irony that this was proof positive of the role that social networks and capital can play in one’s life did not escape me.)

State Employees

As previously mentioned, my initial hours in Mae Sot in 2008 provided me with access to Mr. P and one other key informant from the Tak ESA2 office. Through the two of them, I was introduced to other Tak ESA2 staff and various teachers and administrators. Ultimately, a number of state employees were included through judgment sampling, with most of them having met me several months before a request for an interview was made. (In general, I attempted to observe first, and only ask for interviews much later in the research. This allowed me time to make sure that the questions I asked in the interview were well suited for the place of the informant in the general scheme of things.) Only in the case of other state actors were interviews conducted the first time I met them. In these instances, the opportunities for a chance encounter were rare and I had asked to be introduced to them with the specific intent of inviting the person for an interview.

Migrant Families

For the purposes of this study, I consider a family to be a unit of cohabitating kin of whom one or more were migrant adult caregivers and one or more others were migrant children, of an arbitrary minimum age of 10, enrolled at a Thai public school. More

specifically, I was interested in families where the adult caregivers or parents had been born in Burma. I did not include families where one parent was from Thailand and one was from Burma. Birthplace of the children was not as restrictive in that I considered as migrant children both those born in Burma and those born to migrant parents in Thailand. This is consistent with Thai government usage of the term (IOM, 2008a). All participating families had more than one child, though not always more than one child at a Thai school. Where a family had more than one child currently enrolled at a school, the eldest child was chosen as focus.

Within my case, I had first envisioned limiting my sampling to middle and high school students since older children may have been better able to articulate their experiences with migration and also with the Thai school system. In the end, this did not work out as planned for several reasons. The first was that there were very few high schools within a reasonable commuting distance of Mae Sot. In addition, enrolment data provided by the Tak ESA2 office indicated very few non-Thai students participated at the upper secondary level at any schools in the region. Further, without talking to each student individually, it could not be determined whether he or she would meet the criteria of having both parents born in Burma, as many “hill tribe” families also live in the Tak ESA2 administrative area. Many of these families have been in Thailand for multiple generations but have not applied, or have not been able to apply for Thai citizenship. To increase the chances of successfully recruiting migrant families, I visited only primary and lower secondary schools that appeared to have at least 20 non-Thai students enrolled.

Heckathorn (1997) characterizes “hidden populations” as groups “with strong privacy concerns, because membership involves stigmatized or illegal behavior, leading

individuals to refuse to cooperate, or give unreliable answers to protect their privacy” (p. 174). I anticipated that these same protective behaviors may be demonstrated by particular migrant individuals or communities as a whole given that some members had undocumented status in Thailand. In addition, the literature demonstrated that Burmese adults were often detained and deported by Thai police when out in public (Grumiau, 2003). Heckathorn reports that effective studies of hidden populations have usually been found to use one of three methods of sampling: (a) key informant sampling, (b) targeted sampling, and (c) snowball or other chain-referral sampling.

Families were identified in each of these ways. In visiting some schools, teachers pre-selected a small number of students for me to meet based on the description of my study and the participant criteria I had given them. After a brief conversation, I was able to decide which families I was most interested in interviewing. I used targeted sampling to invite two families into the study. This method was used with students in a grade one class who appeared significantly older than some of the other children. One family was identified through snowball sampling based on the referral of another family who I had already interviewed. After completing an interview with the first family, the student led us to the house of her friend nearby. Finally, two families were invited into the study through opportunistic sampling. In these cases, I had been driven out to visit somewhat remote rural, migrant communities in Phop Phra District. As people gathered around to investigate what I was doing there, my interpreter asked which of them had children in school and if any of them would be willing to talk to me. These were also the only times I did not meet the children in advance of meeting parents.

My “interest” in particular families fluctuated somewhat in an attempt to provide diversity and representativeness (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002) within the overall group of participants. Invitations for interviews were influenced by the gender and grade level of the focus sibling in the family, as well as ethnicity and any unique family characteristics revealed during a brief, initial questioning process. Of the 14 families that participated, there were equal numbers of female and male focal children. Focal child grade levels varied from first grade through ninth grade, and ages from 10 to 20. Though the eldest participating student was indeed in the highest grade, the converse was not true, in that the 10 year old student was in grade two, not grade one. Parents represented a total of four political areas within Burma. Additional characteristics I attempted to account for were working children, siblings of school age not currently enrolled, and date of families’ first participation in schooling (before or after the 2005 Resolution was introduced). Only some of these characteristics were revealed during the initial screening process, with most details being filled in upon actual visits to the homes and interviews with the family. Although I aimed for contrasts within the sample of interviewees, I did not do so presuming that the end sample would be representative of the full population of migrant families. I simply presumed that these contrasts would allow me to understand more nuance and complexity than a narrower range of informants.

Data Collection

Observation and Participant Observation

Data were collected through observation in essentially every waking moment of every day, during events that varied from the routine to the rare, from the happenstance to the scripted. I had rented a room in a guest house in central Mae Sot whose owner was

an English teacher at a local high school. Though about five kilometers from the schools I later became most interested in, I was able to observe the daily rhythm of life for migrant families living in town. Burmese men were identifiable by their use of a *longyi*, a sarong-like garment wrapped around the legs and waist. The Burmese women—and children—applied yellowish *thanaka* powder to their cheeks, foreheads, and noses. Burmese women also often kept their hair longer than Thai women did, pulled back and held in a single, flowing pony-tail. During a visit to a new post-secondary science and technology school, one young Burmese woman told me she had decided to blend in by dressing Thai style—wearing jeans instead of a skirt and cutting her hair shoulder length.

After deciding to make Mae Sot my research site, I visited the Tak ESA2 office every few days to keep my face familiar and to talk with some of the English-speaking staff. The office was temporarily hosting two academics from the Philippines. A man was helping the office with their special needs programs and a woman was assisting the office work cooperatively with many of the migrant learning centers in the area.

After visiting regularly for over a month, the woman from the Philippines helped me establish a more permanent presence in the Tak ESA2 office by securing an unused desk for me. With a place of my own to sit whenever I wanted, I began to visit the office even more often. In this way, I kept better informed of various education activities and continued to expand my list of area contacts. I was literally in the midst of things, and this helped me increase the serendipitous—as well as planned—opportunities for data collection. Over the months that I was in Mae Sot, I received several invitations for active participant observation. Specifically, I helped lead a weekend professional development workshop for Thai teachers of English and to assist in the organization and

delivery of a three-day training event for the head teachers and directors of more than 40 migrant learning centers. I also was invited to Thai schools on three occasions, evaluating speech contests in English at the primary and secondary levels.

Once permission was secured from Tak ESA2 to conduct visits to local schools and talk to staff, I began to go to one school or another two to three times a week for several months. The schools I chose were based on the recommendations of Tak ESA2 staff and travel distance. Renting a motorbike increased my level of independence and allowed me to arrive at schools and leave as I wished and, over time, I witnessed the range of school curricular and co-curricular activities from morning assembly to mid-day meditation to afternoon dismissal. Almost always, visits began with the classrooms of teachers I knew to speak the best English in the school. Several times, my intentions to observe became opportunities for participant observation when teachers whose classrooms I was visiting asked me to teach a spontaneous lesson in English to their students. Most times, my presence in a classroom landed somewhere between extremes of full participation and full observation. Regardless of the particular circumstances, I realize that my presence influenced how classroom events played out and, therefore, what I was able to observe or not observe (Hatch, 2002).

During visits in both 2008 and 2009, I went to several events organized by NGOs in cooperation with local education officials specific to the education of migrant children in Thai schools. One of these was in Bangkok, two were in Samut Sakhon, and two were in Mae Sot. All meetings were in Thai. Although I was able to raise my visibility within each community by attending, I was never able to arrange for a dedicated interpreter on the day of these events and was only able to get the gist of talks, discussions, and

assemblies. Generally, the intent of the events were similar: to increase awareness of Thai education policies and ongoing obstacles to education for migrant children. Invited guests included NGO staff, school and learning center administration, and, on two occasions, representatives of local police. Records of events were either hand written or voice-recorded when time became available.

Interviews

As already mentioned, interviews were intended to be semi-structured and open-ended and most followed this design. The majority of interviews were recorded during the second half of my five-month visit to Thailand in 2008 as, by then, I had met most participants multiple times and often in multiple contexts before asking permission for a more formal interview. In all but two occasions, the participant allowed the interview to be voice recorded. Interviews ranged in length from a brief 15-minute question and answer session with a Mae Sot District official as he conducted his work in a busy office, to a three hour conversation with Mr. P in his home in Chiang Mai. The majority participants agreed to “formal” follow-up conversations in addition to talking with me in more casual, nonrecorded interactions.

Interviews with school teachers, administrators, and NGO staff generally occurred in quiet offices or classrooms away from prying eyes and ears. In contrast, interviews with families almost always occurred with curious neighbors or relatives present for all or part of the conversation. Some houses were peaceful, but others absorbed the sounds of the outside world, including the noise of machinery from worksites nearby—or literally, next door. Family interviews were almost always scheduled for Sundays when the adults were least likely to be working. Initially, appointments were set up with children at

school during the week for later visits. Later on, I would stop by at a house with my interpreter if we happened to be in the area to inquire if and when we might schedule a future visit. On occasion, our intentions were only to pass by certain homes but families insisted we stop for a visit.

The migrant families were generous people, hospitable and kind. As guests, families offered snacks and refreshments during visits as my interpreter and I sat on a mat that had been unrolled for the occasion. On follow-up visits to families, we often stopped by a convenience store and brought food and drink for everyone we could then estimate would be there. On one occasion, we were invited to stay and talk over dinner, eating by candlelight after the father had gotten home from work. If families had concerns about the questions they were being asked, it never showed in overt actions or tone that I could detect. Although my interpreter did not indicate to me that questions about family histories or personal finances were overly intrusive, we took care to present them at a moment that seemed most appropriate (if at all). Only on rare occasions did families indicate they wanted to ask specific questions of me, but I do remember that at the end of my third visit to a particular home, the mother asked to be reminded why I was interested in talking to her and her family.

Documents

Print and electronic documents were collected continuously. Of particular interest were documents that were likely to be most-readily available or only available locally. This included brochures produced in limited numbers and , and other documents offered at some of the meetings I was able to attend. While I was provided with some examples of the latter, they were usually written in Thai and only the briefest have been translated

into English for analysis. Documents collected online include scholarly articles in peer-reviewed journals, reports by various domestic and international NGOs, policy-relevant documents, and daily news articles.

Logs and Head Notes

Two additional forms of data were collected while in Thailand. The first was an electronic log, or calendar, of each day's events. The log began as a forward-looking planner so that I could keep track of appointments scheduled in the coming days and weeks. After each day was completed, I recorded an overview of how I had spent that day, with whom, and where.

Some thoughts about a particular event occurred when I was not in a position to record them on paper or electronically. They would come in bits and pieces but these head notes (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002) were important enough to capture in some form at the time. In these moments, laying in bed or out at a restaurant, I voice recorded my own ideas and queries taking into account my tenuous memory so as to not lose track of them forever. I also wrote emails to my advisor on a regular basis, and these stories too became part of the written record of what I was seeing and learning.

Data Analysis

Given that I had opportunities for multiple visits with families and other actors, an initial process of data analysis was begun while still in Thailand. Recorded interviews and field notes were reviewed and summarized to highlight emerging patterns in the data as well as gaps, and to identify further avenues of inquiry (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Upon return to the U.S., interviews were transcribed and coded. As further transcripts were prepared and analyzed, they were compared with themes already identified to look

for ways new data further confirmed, refuted, or simply did not support my emerging conceptual matrix. Themes that arose from these data included concerns for personal security, social ties to similar and diverse others, and the centrality of financial support for schooling among others.

One unanticipated effort that was arose involved the re-translation of various transcripts of conversations in Thai and English. In listening to the interviews I sometimes became concerned about the fidelity of interpretation that occurred in the moment with the person I had hired for that work. At times, answers I was given seemed unconnected to the original question I had asked. Other times, lengthy, animated exchanges between my interpreter and a participant became a single phrase in English. My wife, who is Thai, was able to help me re-examine these data sources.

Analysis of the data and identification of coding themes led to drafting of analytic memos. These early attempts to develop a sense of coherence around data collected from different sources or at various points in time served as the basis for meetings with my dissertation director. Setting aside time for writing—and sharing—provided opportunities for extending, elaborating, and integrating coding categories (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Comments and queries arising from these discussions were used to inform future coding and analysis of existing data. In addition, these conversations were used to guide collection of a limited amount of additional data during a visit to Thailand in 2009.

The next step of analysis involved taking these descriptions and examining them through the lens of the conceptual framework for the study. I developed charts for each form of capital and listed ways these were operationalized in the literature. I reviewed my

descriptions and sorted what I had seen and heard to identify where parallels and mismatches occurred. With respect to the families, for example, I coded for their economic capital (wages, material goods in and around the home). Drawing on Bourdieu (1986), I sorted evidence of families' cultural capital (overt mannerisms, state-issued documents), human capital (years of schooling, work skills, knowledge of Thai language), and social capital.

To code for social capital, I found it helpful to distinguish what social capital is from what it does (Edwards & Foley, 1997) or sources of social capital from outcomes of activation (Woolcock, 2002). To think about what social capital is, I used Bourdieu's (1986) conception of networks and resources. Family visits (who was in and around the homes) and interview recordings (who did families say they talked to/spent time with) helped construct families social networks. To code for resources, I looked the ways families described what they gained from their networks especially in terms of access to information (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999), financial support, and small, daily exchanges (Briggs, 1998). Other times, it was more helpful to work backwards, identifying an outcome (i.e., access to housing or schools) and then coding and sorting the means (the resource and the tie) by which the outcome appeared to have been achieved.

Description, coding, and sorting of the capital of non-Burmese actors occurred in a similar manner. In addition to formal interviews, I gathered evidence during visits to worksites, homes, and informal social encounters. For economic, cultural, and human capital, data of these actors was usually coded and categorized less vigorously. That is, I often relied on more general memories of their homes and mannerisms and used these as points of contrast when coding and sorting migrant family data. Analysis social capital

for these actors was more explicit. In the interview data, I looked for where actors mentioned individual or collective social contacts, or described ways in which they received information about policies or more general news.

Additional information about an emerging social network became available through various formal and informal encounters. That is, I recorded who was in attendance at various meetings and workshops. I also learned about the composition of the network by making note of who socialized together at particular restaurants and bars in Mae Sot.

Challenges and Limitations

There were numerous challenges associated with the design and execution of this study. One significant challenge had to do with language and the resulting biases, uncertainties, and (assumed) miscommunications this produced.

A severe limitation is that my own skills with Thai language are minimal. This had numerous effects on the way I was able to interact with participants and the direction the study took. First, it limited the data I could collect. I often visited schools unaccompanied by someone who could interpret and translate for me. Thus, my descriptions of what schools are like for migrant students often rely heavily on the visual. What teachers said to students and how they said it largely went undocumented.

I had a key informant who spoke English well at the two schools I visited most. Time spent with other teachers was extremely limited except when formal interviews were being conducted. At one school, the key informant was a Burmese man. This provided great advantages for communicating with migrant children at the school. However, this did not assist me in communicating with Thai teachers who spoke little to

no English and with whom I developed little of a personal relationship. This was personally disappointing and made my learning about their lives less robust.

The majority of the interviews, and all those with families, were conducted with the aid of an interpreter. A review of some recorded interviews conducted in Thai with teachers revealed that errors through misinterpreted questions and answers occurred occasionally. I currently have no way to verify the quality of interpretation that was done with Burmese families. Further, each interpreter I hired conducted their work according to the vocabulary they were most familiar with and preferred to use. In using social capital as an interpretive frame, I have attached significance to particular terms that describe relationships such as “friend” or “neighbor.” Thus, the way I understand these words to have been used by participants may be different from the way they actually intended them.

Additionally, I chose schools to visit largely based on geographic convenience and the number of migrant students enrolled. As the reader will see later, one school was exceptional in the high proportion of Burmese children who study there. While the school does provide a sense of spectrum of possibility in Thailand, this school may be so unique as to provide little insight into what happens at the vast majority of other schools.

“It is only us that must worry!”:

Positioning Myself as Researcher

In part, I chose to investigate migrant families’ access to education in Thailand because it offered both the familiar and the new to me. On the one hand, I was familiar in the country having lived in Thailand for four years. I knew something of the culture and how things “worked.” Though I couldn’t speak the language well, let alone those of

the migrant families along the border, that hadn't stopped me before in navigating my way through each day and I was confident enough that I could find a way to manage at least most of the challenges that might arise. But while doing the study, I also encountered much that was new, especially as the lives of the migrants were abrupt contrasts with my own life and prior experiences. I knew little of the Burmese when I started and this newness represented refreshing spaces for me to learn, to teach myself and be taught.

In an attempt to "dismantle the traditional hierarchy that puts researchers in positions of power" (Kirsch, 1999, p. 26), I also wanted to establish a sense of the familiar with interview participants. That is, I tried to find ways to reveal some of myself to them, especially in a sense of having something in common. It was my hope that finding parallels might facilitate a more personal connection with the people I met. The goal was to not only make us both/all more comfortable, but perhaps reveal additional or even better data in the process. In interviewing Thai school teachers, I always presented myself as a teacher as well. My business cards, printed in Thai and English, indicated I was a science teacher and I asked my interpreter to specifically mention this early in each interview. I knew enough Thai to recognize when this had been done and it was usually accompanied by a knowing smile or perhaps a nod from the teacher. I mentioned that we also shared the experience of teaching students whose first language was often not the same as our own. Again, there was usually an overt sign of confirmation, an indication that the point had been made and received.

Beyond this, however, I often didn't get a sense that teachers felt we had much in common. Relationships with Thai teachers were severely inhibited by language and I

finished the study largely unsatisfied with my lack of a good rapport with many of them. It seemed to me that at least some likely saw me as someone who came in to mine data from their lives and nothing more.

I also tried to establish a connection at some level with the migrant families. I couldn't talk about my own kids in school, but I did have a lot of experience myself as a mobile person. I wasn't just a researcher who came to investigate their lives, I was a migrant myself. It has been almost two decades now since I left my own "home" in Ontario. I have learned some of the constraints to living abroad as a foreigner. I understand what it is like to be unfamiliar with local customs and language, to not understand or be understood. I thought that this sharing these stories might be an opportunity to enhance my rapport with families so I often asked that my interpreter present an abbreviated version of my travels to the families.

I could never be sure of how the families saw me or interpreted my presence. Later I imagined that perhaps they only saw the privilege of my travels, having led a glamorous life of adventure and exploration. I did get a glimpse of what at least one participant was thinking one day. Near the end of my visit to Thailand in 2008, I was having a conversation with one family about travelling between Thailand and Burma and within Thailand itself. It was at least the fourth time I had been to their home and, as part of the conversation, we discussed the military checkpoint nearby that controlled access to the nearest town. I mentioned that I was (truthfully) concerned that I might be stopped for questioning, noting that I usually did not carry my passport nor could I likely answer any questions that might be asked of me. Though these apprehensions were very real to me, one woman was skeptical and very dismissive. Looking at me with some disbelief,

she said, “They will never stop you. You are a Westerner. We are Asian. It is only us that must worry!”

Issues of trust and vulnerability were particularly important with the families because, unlike the teachers, discussions revolved around their personal lives and not just their work. I asked about their legal status in Thailand, about their salaries, and about their relationship with the host society, any or all of which they might have found particularly intrusive. Further, living as migrants with undocumented status in Thailand, they were a vulnerable “hidden population” (Heckathorn, 1997) and a sense of trust seemed particularly important in delving into how they had arrived, what they did in Thailand, and how long they planned to stay. Despite being committed to being trustworthy with them, I violated my own sense of trust with families one day. In a conversation about my experiences in Bangkok teaching at a school there, we began to discuss the cost of living and salaries. I had been asking families about their earnings (with appropriate sensitivity I had hoped), but when it came time for me to answer their questions, I became uncomfortable at the level of our differences. I knew that my daily salary in Bangkok was equal to or greater than their monthly salary here on the border. Thinking it was best to make a downward adjustment, I underreported my earnings to them. So much for trust! After asking them dozens of questions, I was disappointed I felt the need to massage my own answer on only the third question they had for me. In moments such as these, I was reminded of our differences that I had sought to downplay most times. I was reminded as well of the undercurrents in interviews that lead both the interviewee and the interviewer to constantly be adjusting one’s answers, and the

implications that has for how much faith a researcher can ever have in the data that he so carefully collects and interprets.

Chapter Four

Migrant Education in Tak Province: Introducing the Actors and Their Roles

This chapter presents various actors living and/or working in Thailand's Tak Province and illustrates the manner by which they have responded to an evolving policy context with respect to the education of non-Thai students. I begin by describing the activities of Tak Educational Service Area 2 (Tak ESA2), the local government office responsible for education in Tak Province's most western regions. There is an extended history of accepting migrant students into area schools which, given their proximity to the border, is perhaps not surprising. I draw attention to the work of former and current staff in supporting both state schools and, through a nascent cooperative arrangement, migrant learning centers.

I next turn to three government schools to see how each has responded to recent education policy. Much of the data around Thai schools focuses on a recent policy instrument, the 2005 Resolution. Recall that the Resolution extends the rights of non-Thai students to enroll in, and receive certificates from, state schools as well as providing for equal financial support to schools for both Thai and non-Thai students. We will see that the schools sometimes engage differently with the Resolution choosing to manage the challenges and opportunities provided in their own way.

Following this, I introduce readers to four children who were among the 14 families who participated in this research. All of the children were enrolled in government schools in Mae Sot District overseen by the Tak ESA2 office. Two of the children began attending prior to the 2005 Cabinet Resolution and two after the Resolution was implemented. In addition to their experiences with local schools, the

children and their families describe their lives more broadly, revealing details of their cross-border travel into Thailand and the ways in which work and housing were secured. In doing so, their stories introduce us to additional actors—individual and collective—with whom the families are associated and from whom they receive assistance to achieve their goals.

Finally, I describe the work of three NGOs—of different size and scope—whose efforts focus to varying degrees on migrant education, and more specifically, the education of migrant children in Thai schools. Each organization was chosen because of their familiarity with the context of Tak Province, though only one works exclusively in this region. The two smallest organizations work “on the ground,” making direct contact with migrant families. The largest describes its location more distally, a position it finds advantageous to providing oversight and coordination of services.

Tak ESA2

The Tak ESA2 office is located in the town of Mae Sot. At the time of my arrival, Tak ESA2 was going through a period of transition with respect to its management. After a brief tenure of 13 months, the former Executive Director of the office, Mr. P, had been transferred to an ESA in another province and staff were making adjustments to meet the demands of his replacement. The former director was well known throughout the district for his overt and creative support of educational opportunities for migrant children. In contrast, the new director was described by a number of office staff as being sterner in demeanor and more cautious in his actions with respect to migrant education. I didn’t find the latter totally unexpected given the undocumented status of migrant workers and their families and the extra-legal status of

dozens of migrant learning centers in the area. Still, the loss of the former director was lamented by many.

According to Mr. P, the 2005 Resolution was a significant legal instrument in efforts to improve the quality of formal schooling opportunities to migrant families. One reason is that students can now receive legitimate educational credentials upon completing various levels of study. Mr. P explained that, before this time, national policy did allow for migrant and hill-tribe students who had registered with local authorities to attend schools near their homes. However, upon successful graduation, documents would be stamped with provisional comments in red ink indicating the document “was not official.” The remarks were added to all students who were not listed in the civil registry of Thai nationals. These remarks may prevent students’ previous coursework from being recognized by institutions offering higher levels of education (Vital Voices Global Partnership, 2007).

Equally important to legitimate academic records was a simplification of the enrolment process. Schools are no longer required or even allowed to ask for any kind of birth or identify documents for new students. For children lacking such documents, registration can be facilitated through an interview with a local administrator who can validate the child’s identity and vouch for her ongoing residency status in the community. One such person is the village leader, or *phooyaiban*, who is the person of highest authority likely to know all the inhabitants of a particular area. As part of the registration process, the child’s date of birth, the place of birth, and other details are recorded and kept on file. The school keeps the interview paper and issues the certificate when the student graduates.

Apart from policy development, Mr. P found that officials at the central MOE office knew little of the realities of providing education to migrant families. In fact, there was nobody in Bangkok whose work focused exclusively on education for migrant children. Describing his contact with one division of the Bangkok MOE office, Mr. P said that staff had traveled to Mae Sot several times in recent weeks. Each time, they relied on his expertise to guide and advise them. “Anyone who comes here, they know nothing about migrant or refugee education,” he said chuckling slightly. “They just invite me to talk to them about it.”

Policy Dissemination

Local ESAs distribute information to individual schools about national regulations and directives through social ties that link the two levels together. During Mr. P’s tenure at Tak ESA2, the office worked hard to make sure that school administrators were well aware of all policies, including the 2005 Resolution. “Every month we have a meeting for school directors at our office. And sometimes we have a letter from the MOE in Bangkok that we send to them.” Tak ESA2 also followed up: “We try to do monitoring and supervising,” Mr. P said. “We visit the school and ask for the progress for the policy, if they have migrant students in their schools.” The proof of their success, he felt, was seen in the increasing numbers of migrant students in area schools. As of early 2008, migrant children made up 3% of the student population in Tak ESA2 schools.

Though he couldn’t be sure, Mr. P was doubtful that other ESA offices were as aggressive in their efforts to promote the policy and to attract migrant students to their schools. “We try to tell the school administrators many, many times about the policy and

the regulations from the MOE,” he told me. “I don’t know for other areas or other provinces. Maybe they do like this too. But I think most of the school directors other than Tak Province don’t know about the policy or the regulations.”

As awareness of the 2005 Resolution increased, so too did the potential for resistance on the part of various stakeholders to implement it. Mr. P recounted a story of another province where the school director was keen to accept migrant students in her school. However, other stakeholders were not interested in extending educational opportunities to migrant students and so the director faced considerable opposition. Mr. P was sympathetic, as he had faced similar challenges in the past. Still, he remained determined to offer migrant students the same opportunities as Thai children. “I can say that I have met problems like this,” he explained. The solution was to “work step-by-step to make sure everyone understands about human rights and the declaration for Education for All and students’ rights. Although they are migrant students, they have a spirit and a soul like the Thai students.” Similarly, the Director of one of Tak ESA2’s primary schools said: “I tell my teachers, ‘You must love the migrant students like the Thai students because she is human. She has lost the opportunity to go to school and we give the opportunity to them. You ought to love them.’”

Support to Thai Schools

As well as informing the schools of their responsibilities to enroll migrant children, the office supported schools in teaching these students. In particular, office staff provided strategies for migrant student integration into the school community and resources to implement these strategies. In part this was supported through social links to nonstate actors. For example, in cooperation with World Education, a U.S. based NGO,

Tak ESA2 had planned to offer training to teachers at Thai schools that would help them adjust to increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity in their classrooms. Unfortunately, budgeting cuts meant that this plan was not being enacted as of 2008. However, the program was up and running through the 2009-2010 Thai school year.

Another initiative unique to Tak ESA2 was the development of bilingual curricula at schools with especially high proportions of migrant students. In addition to migrant students learning the Thai language, Thai students also learn the Burmese language. This proposal is meant to promote cross-cultural learning and to prepare students for the realities of life in Tak Province where the two languages, in addition to others, are spoken. To support the curriculum, Tak ESA2 staff encouraged schools to employ teaching assistants who are native speakers of Burmese and/or Karen. In the lowest grades, the teachers assist newly-arrived migrant students who cannot speak Thai. In the upper elementary grades, Burmese is introduced to Thai students as a foreign language for study. One challenge involved finding the necessary financial resources to hire additional personnel (even though non-Thai staff can be hired at much lower wages than certified Thai teachers). Where MOE funding is insufficient, Tak ESA2 staff suggests that schools find support from various community-based or nongovernmental organizations.

In 2008, Tha Chai School (TC) had begun to implement a multi-language curriculum and others were encouraged to adopt a similar model. Using funds from local businesses and organizations, TC offered two parallel education programs. Each program operated in a separate classroom at the grade one level. The “regular” program was taught to a mix of Thai and migrant children using Thai as a medium of instruction.

Next door, a wholly migrant classroom followed TC's "international" program. The intent was to build on each program year-by-year, such that a students' primary education occurred entirely in one or the other. This was clearly not the vision Mr. P had in mind: "We intended to have the bilingual education for both students, Thai and Burmese, to come together and study together and not to separate one room for Thai and another for migrants. We didn't want that." Further details of the two programs are described in the section on schools later in this chapter.

Work with Migrant Learning Centers

Tak ESA2 recognized that both schools and students needed support. For migrant students, language was a significant obstacle. To enter at a grade level higher than grade one, students needed to be tested for their fluency with Thai language. Mr. P felt some learning centers did not understand the depth of the problem and did not do enough to develop this particular aspect of human capital among migrant children. Thai language skills were especially critical where students had completed the migrant system (which, until recently, ended at grade 10) and then wanted to continue on in the Thai secondary system (which offered up to grade 12). Given the limited attention to Thai language in most learning centers, the assessment was likely to prevent migrant children from being placed at the appropriate level for their age. One foreign volunteer at a learning center indicated that language made it nearly impossible for migrant children to enroll in a Thai school at the secondary level if they hadn't first studied at the primary level.

That is not to say that Mr. P was unsupportive of families who were truly interested in sending their children to the schools. When a student was ready, that is, when a student could pass the Thai language test, Mr. P encouraged him or her to move.

The number of students ready to make the shift was not high. There was, however, a possibility that a student could be advanced to a higher grade part way through the academic year.

Tak ESA2 acknowledged that migrant learning centers were important players in the local education landscape and worked to develop social links between the office and the centers. The MLCs' total student population of 6,766 in 2008 was more than four times the number (1,588) of migrant students in Thai schools. Though Mr. P felt that Thai schools offered a better quality education than the learning centers could, it was not lost on him that government schools were unprepared to accept the number of children currently in learning centers, not to mention those not participating in any formal education system (it was estimated that 50-70% of migrant children in western Tak Province were not attending any school at all). "I think that it is a big problem if one day most of the migrant students transfer to our government schools," he said. "We don't have enough buildings or teachers. We talk about this issue and we will try to maintain the learning centers because of this idea. We cannot accept or transfer or permit most of the migrant students to go to government schools because of the lack of facilities and teachers."

Though Tak ESA2 needs the centers to continue teaching migrant children, it recognizes that most MLCs are severely underresourced. The "teachers" themselves often have little education, buildings are basic, and supplies are scarce. Rote learning is the norm, with choruses of chanting often heard at a distance from any of the centers. Further, classrooms are sometimes separated by a curtain, or nothing at all, with the result being dozens of students and teachers trying to out-shout one another. Teachers are ill-

prepared and have often completed minimal schooling themselves; at one center, I mistook three teachers—aged 13 to 15—for students. School administrators are also undertrained and few had prior experience in managing such an institution.

Given the MLCs' lack of recognition as official institutions of education, Tak ESA2 traditionally has had neither the legal mandate to offer support nor the power to make the centers accept help in order to improve. Still, Mr. P was hopeful; there were "many things we can do for them and not break the laws in Thailand." Among the efforts undertaken was the provision of identity cards to learning center staff to reduce the likelihood of harassment by police or other Thai authorities. Though the cards held no official currency (Burmese migrants are not legally eligible to be employed as "teachers"), there was an implicit agreement to honor them in the Mae Sot area. When the new director arrived to replace Mr. P, one of the first actions he took was to stop issuing the identity cards. Anecdotal evidence indicates he saw the cards as overstepping the mandate of the Tak ESA2 office.

Additionally, Tak ESA2 created the Thai-Myanmar-Karen Educational Coordination Center (the TMK Center). With a limited budget of 50,000 baht (US\$1,500) in 2008, the TMK Center was designed to co-ordinate the flow of information and other resources between Tak ESA2, migrant learning centers, and various organizations supporting education for migrant children. In this way, it was an investment in the local social network. At the time of my visit in 2008, there were 54 learning centers in a cooperative, voluntary partnership with the TMK Center. The TMK Center itself had two staff—an academic from the Philippines provided through

Voluntary Services Overseas⁵ and a Thai woman who was acting Deputy Director of Migrant Education in the office. Unfortunately, the efficiency of the TMK Center's work was often compromised by language barriers. The foreign academic spoke Tagalog and English, but neither Thai, nor Burmese, nor Karen, the three most common languages along this part of the border. The Deputy Director spoke some Burmese but fairly little English. By 2009, the TMK Center had hired an interpreter quite fluent in Thai, Burmese, and English, and this was seen by the academic to be immensely helpful in facilitating her work.

Mr. P saw the ultimate goal of collaboration as raising the standard of education in the learning centers to a level where children could make a lateral move into the Thai school system relatively easily. However, the Deputy Director felt that there was resistance from within the migrant community to transfer students. In part, opposition came from MLC teachers whose livelihood depended on families' continued preference for the centers over Thai schools. If enrolment at the centers fell, some teachers might find themselves out of a job. Further, working at an MLC was seen as a much more enticing option than other, more labor-intensive jobs. "I think the Burmese or Karen, they want to work like that, to be a teacher, because they don't want to be a day laborer," she said. "It is like those centers are just for unemployed Burmese."

Other resistance came from the migrant families themselves. This was not surprising given that the MLCs used Burmese and Karen as the media of instruction and

⁵ Voluntary Service Overseas, or VSO (<http://www.vso.org.uk/>), is an independent international development organization that works through volunteers to fight poverty in developing countries. In 2008, VSO was providing expertise to assist with various aspects of education along the border. Some worked within the Tak ESA2 office, while others were placed in CBO and NGO organizations in Mae Sot district.

that the schooling was often completely without cost. The more formal and restrictive educational environment of Thai schools was also a likely disincentive for families, especially the requirement for regular attendance. “Some days the children go to school and some days they don’t” the Deputy Director told me. “In the Thai school, they can’t do that. In the learning center, maybe they can.”

Tak ESA2 Schools

Tak ESA2 is responsible for disseminating education policy to more than 120 schools along the Thai-Burma border, and there is—not surprisingly—considerable variability in how the policy is enacted. Here I describe how three of these schools work with migrant families and negotiate schooling for their children. The schools—Tha Chai (TC), Wan Hin (WH), and Huay Nat (HN)—are each located less than one kilometer from the border, although the actual numbers of migrant children they enroll vary. These schools are the same ones attended by the four students presented in Chapter 5.

In describing the schools, I begin with brief portraits of the schools themselves. I then summarize several themes that arose in my discussions with various actors in the system. These include how the Resolution of 2005 benefits the schools, how the schools disseminate word of the policy to its relevant communities, and how the schools respond to several challenges that arise in relation to the policy. These challenges range from issues of language to teacher preparation to student attendance.

Overviews of Three Schools

TC, first opened in 1940, offers primary level education from kindergarten to grade six. Entering through the school’s main gate, the campus is dominated by large, often unkempt, soccer field. Along one side of the field is a low, concrete structure

housing four kindergarten classrooms. At the far end of the field is a small wooden building raised on stilts where there are four more classrooms—two for grade one, one for each of grades two and three. This building separates the soccer field from another play area that has a basketball court. Across the court is a larger wooden structure housing additional classrooms for grades four through six. There is also a room with a half dozen desktop computers, although there were never students in it and only twice did I see teachers using the computers. The playground is bounded on a third side by a small concrete building with the office for the school administrator and a small multi-purpose room. It is the only air-conditioned space on the school's campus. Opposite this building, on the other side of the basketball court, is a large covered structure serving as the school cafeteria and a smaller adjoining room where staff eat. Beside this are a series of smaller concrete buildings housing the student bathrooms (rather unfortunately placed right beside the windows of the staff lunch room), a school barbershop (where boys with hair deemed too long immediately got it trimmed), and a modest library (which I never saw in use during numerous visits).

In 2008, TC staff included a director, Mr. S, five certified Thai teachers, and seven non-credentialed support staff. Most of the latter were Burmese working in the kindergarten and grade one classrooms where their multiple language skills were most beneficial. When Mr. S first arrived at TC ten years ago, there were less than 100 students in its 12 classrooms, of whom half were migrant children; now more than 80% of the school's 321 students are migrants. According to Mr. S, the current proportion of Thai and migrant students reflected recent changes in the populations of both groups in the surrounding village. The number of Thai children had gone down over the past few

decades due to more effective family planning, while the number of migrant families moving to the area was increasing.

Once students graduate from sixth grade at TC, many find their way to WH and HN nearby, which offer grades kindergarten through ninth grade, or all of primary school (*prathomsuksa*) and the first three grades of secondary school (*matthayomsuksa*). Comprised of several multi-story concrete buildings, each has larger, more modern classroom and administrative facilities than TC's mostly low, wooden structures. In particular, WH recently added both a new concrete library and covered gymnasium to the campus. Unlike TC, WH also has an instrumental music program (students play the national anthem each morning) and a computer room that is actively in use. A multi-purpose room displays awards the school has won for several co-curricular programs including agriculture, animal husbandry, and youth groups. These programs are supported by a small rice paddy behind the school's administration offices, as well as a large pond stocked with fish, enclosures for pigs, chickens, and, oddly enough, a pen with one adult ostrich.

WH had 370 students in 2008, of whom 119 (32%) were considered to be from migrant families. Mr. Y, WH's Director, said that when he first started working at the school 10 years earlier, there were less than half the current number of migrant children at the school. This was difficult to confirm, however, because at that time the school did not keep accurate records of their enrolment and students were more transient.

HN has the smallest proportion of Burmese children of the three schools. According to Ms. H, a teacher with a decade of experience at the school, 32 of 270 (11%) HN students have two parents from Burma. An approximately equal number have one

Thai and one Burmese parent. Unlike TC, neither WH nor HN had any Burmese staff working in classrooms.

Each of the three schools has a history of accepting migrant students going back at least a decade. This was confirmed by veteran school staff and, in the case of TC, by a recent university graduate who herself had been a migrant student at TC and had recently returned to work in one of the TC kindergarten classrooms. In addition, several migrant families indicated they had sent their first children to the schools ten or more years earlier.

The Benefits of Recent Policy

All three schools indicated that current education policy, and in particular the 2005 Resolution, provided a number of benefits to both migrant families and the schools themselves. One benefit is a more flexible and streamlined registration procedure that eliminates the requirement for families to provide government-issued documents. Though no school spoke specifically to the enrolment process as it now stands, mention was made of prior restrictions mandated by the Thai government. TC, for example, only accepted children whose parents had “registered” with local authorities. Though it is unclear exactly what was meant by the term, several sources have acknowledged that just those migrant children whose parents had been documented by Thailand’s Ministry of Interior could attend school in the past. In addition, children could only enroll in the district where documentation had been completed.

Mr. Y’s interpretation of previous policy was that schools had no obligation to accept migrant children, whether their parents were registered or not. As a result, participation depended more on the generosity of individual schools than a policy

mandate. “The migrant children only came because we were being kind to them,” he said.

The provision of academic records and graduation documents that are identical to those of Thai children is another benefit of current policy. Mr. Y said that in the past, schools like WH would admit migrant students but not offer them any official graduation certificates. Later, migrant students could receive a certificate but the school, as Mr. P commented, was to comment at the top in red ink that the student had non-Thai status.

Mr. S continued to worry about students who received the stamped certificate in the past, wondering how many of them had been able to continue their education after finishing grade six at TC. The legitimacy of the current certificates, he explained, were one of the reasons that Thai schools provided a better education to students than MLCs. Some learning centers recognize this and have transferred children into schools. However, other MLCs were resisting, for reasons that eluded Mr. S. “Other centers should go to talk to the Thai school that is close to them and then the children won’t have any problems about the certificate,” he explained. “But how should we tell them to take those migrant children to a school like this school? I don’t know what those directors’ thoughts are.”

Though the red stamp was no longer required, there remained a potential problem with respect to many migrant students’ official academic records: a lack of surname. When asked to identify non-Thai children from class lists or other school records, teachers and administration would invariably begin by sorting those with last names from those without. On one visit to TC, a teacher was in the school office organizing documents. “This one is migrant, no last name,” she said, skimming the papers. “This

one is Thai with a last name. This one is a migrant student but they just added the last name recently.”

In addition to the yearly grade reports prepared at TC, staff at WH needed to submit student information as part of the graduation process from lower secondary school. This requires that a family name be put in the appropriate space on the documents sent to the Ministry of Education. For migrant children, the usual procedure is for the school to make something up so that the forms are not rejected as incomplete. Though this satisfies the needs of the administrative system, Mr. Y was not sure what the longer-term implications were for the graduating student for whom the name was only meant to be temporary. “For the school, it’s not a problem,” he told me. “We can write ‘Mr. A’ or student ‘A.’ But we are not sure if in the future it is a problem for the student.”

Current policy provides schools with funding from the Ministry of Education to support the education of migrant students. Administrators at TC and WH stated that, prior to 2005, schools did not regularly receive any money toward the extra costs incurred by institutions that enrolled migrant children (other anecdotal data indicates the schools got 40-50% of the amount for Thais). Insufficient financial support was cited as one reason that TC had not accepted more migrant students in the past. Schools now receive equal funding for both Thai and non-Thai students: 700 baht (US\$20) per year per student in kindergarten and 1,700 Baht (US\$50) for each student in grades one through six.

Mr. Y was able to recall only one time when WH got extra money for migrant students, albeit indirectly through a unique government initiative to assist children from

very poor families. When WH drew up their list of those who needed support, the school included migrant children in the total number.

Despite increases in support, both TC and WH indicated that they did not always have enough money to meet their basic needs. One place where WH cut costs when the budget is low is in the school canteen. “Sometimes when we don’t have enough money,” Mr. Y explained, “we will just cook curry sauce and ask the students to bring their own rice.” Both schools also look to the community for financial donations. Shaking her head with embarrassment, a WH teacher told me how she would sometimes be asked to walk down the main streets of Mae Sot with her hands out asking businesses for money. Schools also organize special events to raise funds. Students at TC raised 10,000 baht (US\$300) by selling jasmine garlands as part of their Mother’s Day celebration.

For TC, funding also came through Good Friends Center (GFC), a local organization that had transferred more than 100 students to the school from a nearby MLC in 2006. GFC contributed to the salaries of teachers, as well as supporting the costs of the mid-day meal for the migrant students. However, a senior GFC staff member accused Mr. S of being deceitful in his practice of accepting government funding *and* asking her organization to meet some of the costs of educating the migrant students. By 2009, GFC had dropped most of its financial support to TC. GFC is one of the nongovernmental organizations that I describe in greater depth in the third part of this chapter.

In addition to the routine operating expenses of the school, TC’s rapidly expanding enrolment made it necessary to consider adding more classroom space. Mr. S said that construction of additional classrooms would be very difficult to finance since

there were no resources: “the government has no money.” To seek additional funding, Mr. S planned to create a website in English, adding “We can’t wait for the government.”

Communicating Policy to the Migrant Community

Each school described ways in which the surrounding community was informed about current education policies and of imminent enrolment opportunities. All three schools used staff and students to propagate policy through various forms of social ties. When children took such details back home with them, the information spread, as Mr. S explained in his limited English, “mouth-to-mouth,” as migrant families communicated with each other. Mr. S sometimes went to businesses that employed migrant workers to talk with parents. In addition, teachers from the school occasionally went out to “survey” the village to see if families have school-age children who are not in school.

The three schools also leveraged social capital through ties to community leaders, such as the *phooyaibaan*, to support school participation. Ms. H, a teacher at HN, said the school provides details to the *phooyaibaan* near the start of a new academic calendar so that families are advised of the appropriate age range for enrolment. This is done through a mobile loudspeaker driven through HN village. Given the *phooyaibaan*’s familiarity with who the migrant families are and where they live, HN also uses this person as an initial screening mechanism for one criteria of enrolment: residence on the Thai side of the Moei River. With significant cross-border travel in the area, it is important to the school that they prioritize education for those families who actually reside in the local community. “Sometimes the families just walk into our school and want to send their kids here,” Ms. H said. “We have never known or seen them before. We can’t admit them because we are not sure who they are and where they are from. So,

mostly the *phooyaiba* will send them to us.” In contrast, neither TC nor WH were as strict about place of residence, openly acknowledging that they had students who crossed the river each day to attend classes in Thailand and returned home to Burma in the afternoon.

TC was most aggressive in recruiting migrant students. Beginning in 2006, Mr. S decided to take advantage of the broad mandate the 2005 Resolution offered and invited children studying at various nearby MLCs to transfer to TC. This was done on his own initiative without the knowledge of Tak ESA2. The effort was promoted as a “win-win” situation for the school and the families. TC could address its problem of declining enrolment—it had fewer than 80 students at the time—and migrant children could benefit from a Thai education. Though GFC did send the school around 150 students, other learning centers decided to pass on the opportunity. “Some centers appreciated the help we offered,” said Mr. S, “but some didn’t.” One reason the school might have not been as successful as hoped was because of a mistaken belief among the migrant community that TC does not teach Burmese language as part of its curriculum.

Though each school is active in publicizing policy, these efforts are not attempts to enforce compulsory education mandates with respect to migrant families. Though some informants in this study believe compulsory schooling policy applies equally to migrant families, Mr. S saw it otherwise. “We go talk to the migrant parents about school although there is no law that says we have to,” he explained. “Because their children are here now they should learn the Thai language. So we need to talk to the families, to make them understand” that they should send their children to school. However, families couldn’t be forced to comply. As an example, one family in this study

lives just one kilometer from WH and is well known to school staff, yet their 18 year-old daughter has never received a formal education.

Challenges Arising from Integrating Migrant Children into Thai Schools

Successful promotion of education policy and the benefits of a government-sponsored education had attracted migrant families to TC, WH, and HN. However, the children they send to the schools are of a broad age range with widely varying prior educational experiences. Prior acquisition of skills and knowledge—or human capital—is also a particular concern, especially students' facility with Thai language. Taken together, these create a significant obstacle for the schools as they attempt to provide children with a relevant and effective education. Interviewees mentioned four challenges: student age and language capacity, creating bilingual programs, teacher preparation, and family poverty and absenteeism. I discuss each briefly.

Student age and language capacity. Primary schooling in Thailand begins at grade one when children are usually six to seven years old. Students who are younger than this when they enroll are placed in kindergarten. In general, each of the three schools believed that migrant students older than six should be placed no higher than a grade one classroom for two reasons, both related to human capital development. First, the Thai education system is designed to build on students' knowledge over time. Placing students higher than grade one meant that they would be unprepared as a result of missing out on the content and skills delivered in prior grades. Second, being put at the lowest grades allowed migrant children to develop Thai language skills at a more natural pace alongside Thai classmates who were also learning.

Ms. H acknowledged that some migrant parents wished to enroll children at HN who were 10 years-old or more. The school, however, was firm in its admission routines and does not accept these children because, placed in grade one, they would be much older than other children in the class. This would make it difficult for HN staff who had no experience teaching multi-aged classrooms. “We can’t take older students into school because we don’t know how to teach them,” Ms. H said quite firmly.

HN’s grade placement practices were recognized as likely discouraging some families from enrolling older children. Positioning herself as second language learner, Ms. H explained how uncomfortable, yet necessary, it would be to be placed below her expected grade level. “For example, if I am not good at English, I need to start learning A-B-C with little children. I feel that I’m too old for that. I could not do that. It’s too embarrassing.” As a result, these students may choose to not attend HN. School staff sympathized with these families, but Ms. H made clear that there was a difference between HN adhering to its admission criteria and actively turning families away. When families lost interest in registering older children at the school, “we understand what they feel,” she said, “but it is not that we don’t accept them.”

Ms. H explained that families are advised of the appropriate age range for enrolment at the start of each new academic year. Even so, the school could not be sure of the actual age of the students who come from Burma without official documentation. The school often suspects parents make up an age for the children in order to align with school regulations:

When they bring us their children, they won’t tell the truth. If we say we accept six-year-old children, they will say their children are six though we believe that

they are older or younger than that. But we can't get any paper or document from them as proof because they don't have any.

Ms. H made no mention of HN using a testing program to assist with grade placement as the Tak ESA2 office had described. Such a tool is used on occasion by WH. Though newly-enrolled migrant children are placed in kindergarten or the lowest primary grades by default, older students who can pass a proficiency test in Thai are considered for a higher grade level.

Among the schools, TC was the most flexible in terms of accepting students of varying ages and placing them at levels higher than grade one. "If the student's age is in grade four, we will give a test of grade three," Mr. S explained. "The school will test the students from the Thai curriculum in the main subjects like English and Mathematics." Thai language skills were especially critical to the grade placement process. For children older than seven who don't understand Thai language very well, the norm was to place them in grade one.

Mr. S said that TC staff retests students at the end of their first year at the school to see if they are eligible for advancement by more than one grade level. Although several students at TC indicated that their initial placement grade had been adjusted upwards, this was done within the first few days or weeks of them starting school rather than at the end of the year and not clearly tied to any assessment results.

The practice of assessing students to assist with grade placement was less of a mandate than a suggestion of the Tak ESA2 office. Each school was free to design, administer, and interpret tests as they saw fit or not use them at all. Though HN was firm in directing all new students to grade one or kindergarten, this practice was never

criticized by Tak ESA2 staff. In fact, Mr. S had specifically recommended inclusion of the HN in this research due to its high quality. On the other hand, TC regularly administers assessments to new students.

TC's more generous approach to accepting and placing migrant students is common knowledge among staff other schools in the district and personnel from various organizations. Some praise the school's receptiveness and creativity, while others find its system to be overly informal and primarily driven by a need to bolster enrolment. Speaking of his school's registration process, one director made it clear that TC was a place for migrant children who couldn't get in anywhere else:

I tell the parents, "If you want to transfer to my school you send the little children—four years old, five years, seven years, but not fourteen." And sometimes I ask for insurance, for the health. But if they say they don't have it, I tell them, "I invite you to go to TC."

Creating "bilingual" programs. Recall that Tak ESA2 promotes the development of bilingual curricula at schools with especially high proportions of migrant students. The previous Director's vision for these programs was that students would be integrated in classrooms and that language instruction would go both ways: Thai would learn Burmese, Burmese Thai. These efforts were a new endeavor for the school and it was apparent that the program was undergoing numerous adjustments "on the fly" as it was being implemented.

In 2008, TC had one class of each of grades two through six. There were two classes of the lower levels—kindergarten 1, kindergarten 2, and grade 1—to accommodate larger numbers of students at these grades. The two classes of grade 1,

however, used two different curricula. One classroom was part of the school's regular "Thai program" and the other represented the school's new "international program." This was Mr. S's interpretation of the bilingual educational program as described by Mr. P.

The Thai class had 37 Thai and migrant students, aged seven through 12 and followed the school's usual course of study including mathematics, science, English, Thai, art, health, and physical education. The class had one teacher who used Thai as the medium of instruction. The 26 students in the international program were all from migrant families, ranging in age from seven to 13. Teaching in the international program was divided between two teachers. Of the two, only a Thai woman named Mrs. J, had her teaching credentials. The other teacher was a Burmese man with no formal teacher training nor was he legally entitled to work in Thailand as a teacher. In contrast to the classroom next door, the posted schedule for the international program included only English, mathematics, science, and three hours of review time weekly. Mrs. J occasionally taught social studies and Buddhism.

Initial visits to TC found both teachers attempting to use English as the medium of instruction for all classes, although it was not a language either the teachers or the students were particularly strong in. To alleviate confusion and move the instructional process along, the Burmese teacher often communicated in Burmese to students and Mrs. J spoke in Thai, relying on a few knowledgeable students to translate her words into Burmese for the rest of the class.

Absent from the initial routine of the international program was any attention to Thai language. Given the importance of destination-language skills as a form of human

capital and that, more specifically, Mr. S had stressed learning Thai as a significant benefit of studying in a government school, this was especially curious. It wasn't until several months after the school year began that Mrs. J began to teach the children Thai. Initially, she reported, Mr. S thought that students in the international program didn't need to learn Thai language. However, the students were eager to study Thai: "Those Burmese students want to learn Thai so that they can get a job here in the factories." Over the course of a few weeks, Mr. S came to her to change the languages she was teaching, first telling her to add Thai in addition to teaching students English. Then he told her to stop teaching English and only teach Thai. For Mrs. J, uncertainty was a constant feature of the international program. To describe how she determined what to teach the class next, she laughed as she admitted, "I don't know!"

In addition to confusion surrounding what material should be covered in the international program, it was unclear how students were selected for one or the other. Mr. S explained that it depended on both parents' and students' interests. However, interviews with families indicated they were unsure of how their children got into the class they were in and some were unaware that TC even had two programs.

A return visit in 2009 found the parallel bilingual system still in effect, and had been expanded to another grade level. There were now two separate classrooms at both the first and second grade levels. The second grade classroom with the migrant students included all the children I had seen in grade one the year before, with an additional student who was new to the school.

Teacher preparation. A third challenge faced by the schools was the preparation of teachers to work with the mixed population of students. Teachers at TC

reacted differently to the challenges presented by their work and the particular context of the school. Mrs. J, for one, seemed flustered neither by the apparent lack of direction the international program had nor by the difficulties of teaching a large group of students who had few Thai language skills. She seemed impervious, or oblivious, to the complexity of her daily work, and never failed to smile at me or the children.

Commenting on the differences between teaching English to grades two through six as she used to do and her current responsibilities, Mrs. J said, “It’s *sabai sabai*. I can teach it.”⁶

Similarly, Mrs. N said her job as a Thai language teacher for grades four through six was not particularly difficult. She admitted it probably was more challenging in the lower grades but, by the time the children reached upper elementary, most of them had a decent grasp of Thai. This was only partly true. Family interviews revealed that some students in grades five and six had only a weak command of Thai language and admitted to understanding very little in class.

In describing her classroom routines, Mrs. N said that she usually assigned one page of Thai language homework every day. However, she was cautious not to overburden students who were still learning the language and always asked first about their homework assignments in other subject areas. Though students did not always complete their work before returning to school, Mrs. N did not want to scold them for fear that it might discourage them from even coming:

Sometimes the students do not do their homework at home but bring it back and do it at school, and sometimes in the class. But I understand and we go very

⁶ *Sabai* is a common element of Thai language and is used to indicate that someone is relaxed or well. *Sabai sabai* emphasizes a sense of everything being fine.

slowly. So I do not punish them about not doing homework because they still coming to school. It is better than them doing something else that is not good for them or going to work in the field instead of coming to school.

While these teachers found little to trouble them about their work, it was different for Mr. M who arrived at TC in 2009. Mr. M taught the grade two classroom of the international program, alongside the Burmese man who had partnered with Mrs. J the year before. A fairly recent graduate of the Thai teacher training program, Mr. M finished his preparation in 2004. After graduation, Mr. M had taught in Phop Phra, a district of Tak Province with a high proportion of migrant students. Despite that experience, he lacked important human capital to be successful in his current job. “Starting to work at Phop Phra was a big problem for me because I didn’t understand the students,” he explained. “The students were Mon and spoke Mon language and some spoke Karen. So this year, I teach here and it’s a new problem: the students speak Burmese.”

Given their language differences, the students and Mr. M were often not able to understand each other. He often relied on his teaching partner to mediate: “Sometimes I say to him, ‘Help me please!’” Mr. M had expected it to be challenging for him for the first term or perhaps the whole first year at TC. Though he wasn’t aware of any professional development that might help him in his work, the mere suggestion got him excited: “Yes, I want! I want!” None of the other teachers at the school indicated a need or desire for such training.

Family poverty and attendance. A fourth problem that all of the schools faced was that many of their students—both Thai and migrant—came from poor families. The

poverty and nature of the families' work sometimes made it challenging for students attend school, as they also needed to contribute to the household income. Recall that Sarai did not attend classes at TC on days that she performed paid work with her mother. Of the three schools, TC and WH were the most lenient towards the families, recognizing the unstable financial situation that many are in and excusing their short absences when necessary. "We understand the children and the families," Mr. S told me. "Sometimes," he said,

the boy goes out to work or the girl needs to stay and take care of their younger sisters or brothers because the parents go out for their work. We understand this kind of situation because all the families who live around here are poor.

Still, when there was a lot of harvesting or planting to be done, TC found that migrant students were more likely to go to work in the fields and miss school. In comparing out-of-school responsibilities for the two groups of children, Mrs. N said that migrant students were often required to work at times when Thai students would be able relax, especially during holidays. "After a school break," she explained, "we will ask the students what they did while the school was closed. Thai students will normally take a family vacation but the migrant children will say they had gone to work."

At WH, one migrant student had missed several months of classes to work. The student, 20 years old and in grade nine, came from an extremely poor background and the school was doing all it could to at least make sure he graduated with a lower secondary certificate. Teachers told him that it was acceptable to miss some school, but encouraged him to come back as soon as possible so as not to fall too far behind. While the teachers wished to be compassionate, they also feared that leniency towards his multiple absences

set a bad example for other students. One teacher admitted that the student was sometimes marked present even when he wasn't at school so as to meet the minimum requirements of 80% attendance. It was unclear if the school's director was aware the teaching staff was doing this.

Schools' accountability to the MOE for migrant children's attendance has traditionally been less than that for Thai children. Before 2005, non-Thai students did not appear on official school lists. At HN, the school recently began refusing to enroll children when parents indicated that they might not insist on regular attendance. In part, this was an effort to protect the school's image. Where students enrolled in the school and then had substantial absences or dropped out early, the MOE became suspicious, reflecting poorly on school staff: "If too many students quit in our school then the Ministry would ask why that happens too often and consider that our school is not good enough or does not take care of them, didn't support them enough," Ms. H said seeming a little annoyed. "Though the truth is, we do help them with free food and free milk." The school now made parents understand that by enrolling their children at HN, they were making a commitment to keep them in classes. Ms. H explained further:

If they are students here, they must have discipline. When they arrive at school, they must stay in school until the school is over. This is one of our rules. So they can't go out of school whenever they want and also must attend the class regularly. They can't come three days, then miss five days. If they miss class so many days, we will follow up on them to come back. Sometimes the parents will come to talk to us and say that they need their children to help them work.

Sometimes they miss class for 10 to 20 days to help their parents work. When

they come back, they cannot follow or catch up to what their friends have learned or what teachers are teaching. And that makes them not want to come back after they missed class for many days. We have rules. They can't come or stop whenever they want.

If the parents wanted a more lenient environment, they were encouraged to seek out one of the learning centers.

Getting Students into Schools

In this section of the chapter I introduce readers to four children—Annan, Mae, Sarai, and Kanok—and their families. In 2008, the children were enrolled in the government schools just described: two were attending TC and one studied at each of WH and HN. At the time of the interviews, all of the children were 14 or 15 years old, and all had studied at the primary or lower secondary level in their respective schools.

Annan

Annan came to Thailand with his family about 10 years ago when he was five years old. Prior to that, the family had been living in an ethnic Shan village in Karen State in Burma, about 20 kilometers from the Thai-Burmese border. Annan's father had attended school until the fourth grade, his mother just until kindergarten. In Burma, the parents were day laborers, collecting bamboo and firewood to bring in nearby forests to sell in their village: "At that time, we working making about 60 baht (US\$2) a day, though we worked very hard," Annan's father explained. With a large family—10 children were born in Burma (four died as infants)—the family didn't always have enough food.

The family had social ties to people who had already traveled to Thailand. Many from their own village had made the trip. Annan's father also had an "auntie" who had come 10 years earlier. She urged him to bring the family across the border: "Please come to find a job in Thailand. You will have a better situation for your family if you live here."

The family lives in Huay Nat Village in a small house raised up on stilts to avoid flooding in the rainy season. The walls are a mixture of woven bamboo and small sheets of corrugated metal. The roof is mostly made from layers of palm leaves except over the cooking area, which is covered with a few sheets of rusting metal. The family bought the materials to build the house and only have to pay to rent the land at 200 baht (US\$6.50) each month. There is no running water, but there is electricity. I saw a DVD player inside the home, but no television to connect it to. Neighbors on either side of the home are also from Burma, but one doesn't have to travel far up the street to find Thai families.

After arriving in Thailand, Annan's father found a variety of odd jobs, from planting rice to basic carpentry. Currently, he is a security guard at a nearby factory, a job he heard about through another Burmese man. "I got this job through a friend, but at first I didn't like it," Annan's father said. "I have to sit or stand the whole night with nothing to do. But my friend said, 'Just try it for one month or two months and if you are not happy, you can quit from this job.'" He works 12 hour shifts, starting or finishing at 7 o'clock, 15 days and 15 nights each month. There are no scheduled holidays though if he is sick, he can ask for permission not to go to work. His salary is about 3,000 baht (US\$100) per month.

The family came to Thailand with six children. The four eldest had attended some primary school in Burma but had dropped out several years before. Not being familiar with education options in Thailand, the children were not enrolled in schools immediately after arriving. Instead, the four eldest, between 12 and 19 years old at the time, began doing “light work” near the home. Annan, then five, and a brother, who was seven, spent a year playing in and around the family’s home.

One day, a Thai woman who lived in the neighborhood, noticed the two of them playing. “She was a teacher at a school near here and she came to the house to talk to us,” Annan’s father said. “When the teacher saw that our children were playing, she asked us, ‘Why don’t you let your children go to school?’ And she told us we could take them to the school.” The woman asked the parents if they had Thai birth certificates for Annan and his brother. Since the two boys were born in Burma, the parents did not have the birth certificates, but the teacher insisted that wouldn’t be a problem: “Even though you don’t have the birth certificate, you can still take your children to the school.” Annan was subsequently enrolled in the first year of kindergarten, his brother in grade one, both of which were the usual grade levels for their ages.

In 2008, when we met, Annan was in grade eight at Huay Nat School (HN), a mid-size, local school offering education from kindergarten through to grade nine, although the family wasn’t sure how much longer they could afford it. His parents thought he would likely finish grade nine, but going further would mean transferring to a school further from home and likely greater expenses. The family had faced a similar dilemma the year before when Annan’s brother had finished grade nine. Given the family’s financial predicament, the brother had left for Samut Sakhon Province to join his

four elder siblings who all worked in a plastics factory. Becoming disenchanted with factory work, he eventually returned to his parents' home.

A few years after they arrived in Thailand, Annan's parents had a baby girl. Six years old, she was not attending HN: "For the Thai school, if you have more than one child, you have to pay a lot of money," Annan's father explained. A neighbor living nearby has some children studying at the learning center, which entailed no costs for families. The neighbor spoke to some staff at the learning center on behalf of the family; later, a teacher came by the house. "The teacher," Annan's father said, "he told us, 'If you cannot take your daughter to that Thai school, please bring her to our school.'" The teacher even brought out the registration documents. For the time being, the family was satisfied with the education at the learning center, noting especially that the daughter was learning to speak Karen, Burmese, Thai, and English.

Mae

In 2008, Mae was a new student in grade five at Tha Chai School (TC), a small primary school in the village of the same name. Along with another Burmese boy in the same grade, Mae had just transferred from a migrant learning center a few months before. Mae's parents live about two kilometers from the center of Mae Sot, just off the highway that leads north to Mae Pa Village. Her house sits behind a run-down automotive repair shop and is part of a small cluster of homes that are impossible to see from the main road. A small pack of mangy dogs watched me the first day I arrived.

The family lives in one half of a duplex-style wood building that they rent for 800 baht (US\$24) each month. Water and electricity cost the family another 300 baht monthly. When asked how they found the house, Mae's father explained that they drew

on their social capital: another migrant family (who had lived there) told them about it. The house, built on stilts, has walls entirely made of snugly fitting wood planks rather than the split bamboo I had grown used to seeing. A pathway of partially sunken cement blocks leads to the front porch and saves one from having to walk on the barren ground between the front of the house and the lane. Close to the house, a half dozen croton plants flank the pathway. Two appear to have been newly planted, with dirt packed into a small mound around the stem. The house was the most solid structure of all the migrant families I visited. The newish looking roof is made of corrugated tin rather than the leaves or plastic sheeting other homes had.

When my interpreter and I arrived for our first conversation, the mother and father followed the routine of Burmese hospitality, laying out a small bamboo mat for us to sit on. I settled at one end and two glasses of cold water are placed in the center. Mae's parents sat on the verandah floor, just off the opposite end of the mat. Mae's mother did most of the talking. The family is from Mon State in Burma. While living there, the mother was a schoolteacher; the father was a caretaker of the school grounds. Mae's mother completed two university Bachelors degrees in Burma, one in science and one in education. Her father finished 10th standard.

There are four children in the family, three are girls. A 27 year-old daughter (who stayed in school until 10th grade in Burma) works in a tea shop in Mae Sot. A son, two years her junior, works in Bangkok, and a 22 year-old daughter has a job in a clothing factory near the home. Both attended university in Burma. At 14, Mae is the youngest.

The eldest daughter was the first to come to Thailand, arriving around 2001. Over the next few years, the daughter went back and forth several times between the two

countries and the mother also came to Thailand to visit her. In 2004, Mae's mother came to Mae Sot, but could not return to Burma because her personal security was at risk as she was active in the National League for Democracy (NLD), participating in various political demonstrations and helping other NLD members travel from Burma into Thailand. Local authorities in her hometown got wind of these activities and had plans to arrest her. "My family called me," she said. "They told me, 'Please don't come back to the village anymore.'" Mae's mother decided to stay in Thailand. Bringing along the rest of the family, her father arrived a year later.

After arriving in Thailand, Mae's mother easily found work through social ties to local NLD workers and began teaching in a local learning center where she stayed for about three years before becoming too ill to work. When she took leave for three months, her position at the school was given to someone else. In the spring of 2008, she got a new job at a different learning center. Mae's father explained that he had not been working for about six months due to health problems. He had been working in a quarry outside of Mae Sot, although when he first came to Thailand he worked in the fields planting and harvesting crops. Currently, he makes four round trips on his bicycle every day, delivering and picking up both his eldest daughter and his wife at the tea shop and learning center respectively.

Mae's father is the only adult in the family not to have any proper identification or work permit. The police usually don't bother him because he is quite old. Still, he admits to a tenuous sense of security: "Every time I take my daughter or wife on the bicycle, I pray." In the evenings the family generally stays at home, preferring not to take the chance that they could have trouble with young Thais in the surrounding

community. In contrast, Mae's mother has a legal work permit. Although teaching is not one of the sectors available to migrants to work in, when she first arrived, the government in Mae Sot had opened a registration process whereby migrant adults could get the necessary documents to allow them to work there legally. Aware that she would not be eligible for the permit as a teacher, Mae's mother applied to be a housekeeper. She had never been a housekeeper, but she knew that by working the system she could get the proper documentation to allow her to travel around Mae Sot freely.

Mae attended school in Burma until she completed the fifth standard early on, the end of primary school years in the country. When she arrived in Thailand, Mae began at the sixth standard in the same learning center where her mother used to teach. She studied there for three years, finishing the eighth standard at the top of her class. However, the family was becoming concerned that Mae was fast approaching tenth standard. This is the highest level of upper secondary education inside Burma and the last grade offered by the migrant education system in Mae Sot. "After that we were thinking for the future," Mae's mother explained. "If Mae stayed and studied in the migrant school, after finishing she wouldn't get any certificate. That's why we moved her to the Thai school. So one day she can finish university and get a degree."

The family believes that with official Thai education credentials, Mae might either find a job more easily or find an easier job. Not all migrant parents see benefits in an extended education for their children. "They think if they have their children finish the fourth standard then they can ask their children to work. But we don't think like that." Mae's mother added, "For Mae to finish her studies and then graduate is better for her life, for her future."

There were other reasons the family was interested in the Thai school. Although some migrant students received scholarships to attend post-secondary schooling in third countries such as India, Mae's mother wasn't sure that Mae's English would make her competitive. Her parents were also concerned about Mae's rather precarious health and felt she would get better care in Thailand should it become necessary. Thus the family decided to stay in Thailand where, if they remained long enough, the children might become eligible for Thai nationality.

Though the Thai government drastically reduced barriers to public school education for non-Thai students in 2005, it was only in 2008 that Mae's mother found out about the new Resolution. She learned about the policy through her relationship with Ms. E, a Thai woman (who speaks Burmese) working at a local NGO, Good Friends Center (GFC). In the past few years, GFC had transferred more than 100 migrant children from learning centers to Thai schools in the Mae Sot area with most going to Tha Chai School (TC), the school Mae ended up attending. When Ms. E visited the learning center where Mae's mother was teaching, the two began talking about the details of the transfer process. "After that I was very interested," Mae's mother remarked. "I was asking, 'How did those students go there?' and 'How did they do that?'" According to Mae's mother, discussions of migrant students enrolling in Thai schools did not occur often at the learning center.

Though her parents were very interested in moving Mae to a Thai school, there were several challenges to overcome along the way. One was that Ms. E was only able to facilitate the transfer of students from GFC-managed learning centers and the learning center where Mae was currently studying wasn't one of them. If Mae wanted to transfer

to TC, she would first need to change learning centers. “Other migrant centers cannot go to that Thai school,” Mae’s mother explained. “The children who would like to study at the Thai school have to go and register with Good Friends Center first and after that they can go to the school.” To facilitate Mae’s transfer, Ms. E “created” the documents necessary to make it appear that Mae had been attending one of GFC’s learning centers in Mae Sot.

Another obstacle was that Mae’s home is about 10 kilometers from TC, making it difficult for her to get to and from classes each day. The solution offered to the family was to have Mae stay at a boarding house managed by GFC and located close to TC. Commonly referred to as “the orphanage,” the boarding house had previously operated as one of GFC’s learning centers. When all its students were sent to TC several years earlier, the orphanage stopped offering daytime classes but continued to provide several dozen migrant children with a place to live. Since GFC pays for the living and schooling expenses of all the students who sleep there, some families send their children to stay at the orphanage as a way to save money. For Mae and her family, the move to the orphanage was more a matter of geographic convenience. “Ms. E said that Mae can stay here at home and go to TC but the school is very far from here,” Mae’s mother recounted. “It was better to live in the orphanage. We also agreed and we went and looked at the orphanage. And we agreed that Mae will live there.”

Mae’s parents were generally happy with the process. Academically, they feel that Mae’s Thai language skills are improving but, in other subject areas like mathematics and English, she is not advancing very quickly. “If she were studying in the learning

center, she would be the ninth standard already. So maybe she would know more. But at TC she is in fifth grade, so the level of the subjects is not high.”

In fact, grade placement at the Thai school had been a main initial concern for the family given that Mae is a teenager already and quite tall. “At first, we only worried if she would have a problem with the grade placement,” Mae’s father admitted. “If she will start at a very low grade, grade one, then it would be very difficult for us. That is the only thing that we worried about.” Fortunately, Mae had studied Thai language at her learning center twice a week and had some background knowledge to prepare her for the entrance test to TC.

Initially, Mae was placed in the fourth grade. However, she felt uncomfortable in the classroom because the other students seemed “very small” and also because they were mostly Thai, so a week later, she moved up to the fifth grade on a trial basis. One teacher later told her that she could even spend just the first semester in fifth grade and move up the sixth a few months later. However, Mae resisted, deciding that it would be better to get two years of Thai language practice before moving onto lower secondary at a new school. Also, Mae felt comfortable in fifth grade where other students were also older looking and most spoke Burmese. “I just have one problem. It is Thai language,” she explained. “But for mathematics and for the other subjects it is not difficult. So that’s why I stayed in grade five.”

Mae’s mother has visited TC once, during registration. The family has plans to keep Mae in school for another ten years, until she is 25 years old and has finished university. They are, not surprisingly, concerned about the costs they might incur when Mae graduates from grade six. The best secondary school in town is the most expensive,

and they are not sure about future support from GFC. Nonetheless, they are busy making plans. Mae's mother has a friend who teaches at that same secondary school. The friend might be able to list Mae as a relative and then the family could possibly get a discount on fees.

Mae's mother showed me a small tin can with a slot on the top. On the side is a winter holiday scene though the cartoonish snowman seems out of place in the tropical heat. As often as possible, the family puts money in the can for Mae's education. "Our daughter working in the factory will give 500 baht (US\$15) a month. And the other daughter, maybe 200 baht. And we have another relative who gives 200 baht one time and 100 baht another time." The parents feel they have an advantage in that the two eldest daughters are still single. "They don't have their own families yet. The biggest sisters can help support their younger sister," Mae's father adds, picking up the can and holding it in his hands.

Sarai

Though I wasn't to visit her home for several months, I likely saw Sarai for the first time when I attended a World Day Against Child Labor event sponsored by the International Labor Organization (ILO). It was my first day in Mae Sot in mid-June, 2008. Sarai was one of about a dozen students who had agreed to read the "life story" she had written to those in attendance. Her story, also featured in a recent ILO publication, told of how her family's poverty had forced her to miss school in order to work and help provide for her family. "There is nothing exciting or interesting in my life," she wrote, "only hardship."

I “officially” met Sarai when I took the ILO magazine to TC and asked the school director, Mr. S, if I could speak with any of the children featured. He directed me to the playground where I quickly found Sarai. I arranged to visit Sarai’s family a few days later. Sarai’s family lives in a simple stilted house set 50 meters back from a dirt path on the edge of Wan Hin Village. The path winds up a hill from a paved road that, if one continues on, passes by the GFC orphanage that sent all its students to TC. The home’s lower exterior walls are made of split bamboo. An assortment of salvaged planks make up the upper walls that support a roof of nipa palm leaves. Spaces between the wood pieces on the walls and floor make the inside of the house bright and airy. Additional light seeps into house through the numerous holes in the roof. The fragility of the house is not lost on Sarai who wrote in her ILO story, “Every time it rains or a storm comes, the house seems as if it is about to be destroyed.”

The interior has essentially one open living space. Though there is little decoration adorning the walls, the house has the typical small alcove on one side with several Buddha images and a photo of an elderly monk. In front of these are three small vases with fresh flowers, each spaced to divide the width of the alcove into four equal sections. A small cooking area extends from the back corner. On one side is a shelf with a few pots and pans. A pile of firewood lies on the floor ready to be burned and the palm leaves above are blackened from smoke.

Sarai’s father was working most of the days I visited the house and so we usually interviewed Sarai’s mother who is from Karen State in Burma. Sarai’s mother never went to school; her family was too poor. She speaks Burmese and Po Karen and understands a little Thai, but cannot read nor write in any language. Sarai’s mother came

to Thailand to find work when she was 16 years old. She had an elder sister living in Mae Sot district and so she moved in with her. Now she has four siblings living and working in Bangkok, 500 kilometers away. She has never been there to see them, nor have they returned to Mae Sot.

Sarai's father went to grade four in Burma and later worked as a restaurant cook. He can speak Thai, Burmese, Po Karen, and Sgaw Karen, though he can only read and write Burmese. He came to Thailand more than 20 years ago when he was 25 years old: "I didn't know about working here. I left from my village with no goal. I left from my home to go somewhere and then I arrived here without intentions." After travelling around the Mae Sot area for a while, he eventually met up with a friend from his younger days in Burma. It was through this social connection that he found a job in Thailand. He has lived in about 20 different houses in Thailand: "If I want to change from one house to another," he explained, "it might not be owned by the same boss. So I not only change the house, but change the boss." To meet the new boss, he usually relied on his friends to provide introductions. Sarai's father is now working as a carpenter and has a work permit that allows him to travel freely to and from the nearest town (he makes the ten kilometer roundtrip by bicycle). He and his employer each paid half of the 4,500 baht (US\$130) cost of the permit.

Sarai's mother and father met in Thailand. They lived in a variety of villages near Mae Sot, as well as in the town itself before settling in their current home. A Thai man that Sarai's father knows owns the land and gave them permission to build there. The family had to find the building materials, but the land is rent-free and there is no electricity to pay for. The water for drinking and bathing is drawn from a well nearby.

When I asked her mother how to describe the area where they live now, she calls it “*sitagon*.” *Sita*, I am told, means army post in Burmese and it’s true that the Thai Army’s Black Rangers man a checkpoint less than a kilometer down the road, which Sarai’s father passes each day on his way into town.

Sarai’s mother is afraid of the police (she does not have a work permit) and describes how she has been detained four times in Mae Sot. The first time it happened, the police picked her up with some friends in a house where they were playing the lottery. If you pay a fine on the spot, you can bypass the detention. Sarai’s mother was told she had to pay a fine of 3,000 baht (US\$100) or go to jail for six months. The family drew on social ties to neighboring families to borrow enough money to pay the fines. Another time she was picked up by the police in Mae Sot, she spent one night in the detention center and the next at the immigration center. The following day, she was among a group deported across the Moei River from a pier a few kilometers from their home. On the other side, they were received by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), who maintains an outpost there. The DKBA soldiers asked for 20 baht from each person, but Sarai’s mother didn’t have any money. “They will first let the people go who have money,” she said, describing what happens on the Burmese side of the river. “They tell you if you don’t have money to ‘Sit! Sit! Sit!’ Then, later, they let you go anyway.” Though it all sounded quite serious to me, Sarai’s mother and another woman at the house laughed as she finished the story. Still, Sarai’s mother admitted that she is afraid to travel the five kilometers back to Mae Sot and hasn’t been there for four years.

Sarai is the eldest of four daughters. She is currently in *prathomsuksa* 6, or grade six, the last year of primary school. At 15, Sarai is about three years older than the norm

for her grade. She began her education at a migrant learning center in Mae Sot when she was eight. Other migrant families told the family about the learning center and her parents went to meet a teacher there prior to formally enrolling Sarai. She started in kindergarten and studied for three years, completing the second grade. At that time, the family moved to their current house and the parents had to look for a new school. When the family first arrived at their new home, they didn't know where they could send her to study. "So we just asked and found out that a new school would open close to here," she added, referring to the orphanage learning center run by Good Friends Center a half kilometer away. "It wasn't here when we arrived. They had set up the building, but it hadn't opened yet."

At that time, the orphanage learning center went to primary grade two, and although she had just finished grade two, Sarai repeated it again. She continued to study at the learning center for four years until she completed grade six. It was then that TC partnered with GFC to admit all the students who had been studying at the orphanage learning center. At TC, Sarai was again demoted, first placed in *prathomsuksa 3* (primary grade three) after being assessed for her Thai language skills. However, she only stayed there for two days and then moved to grade four. Having to repeat grades at both the learning center and Thai school made the family feel that it was taking a long time for Sarai to go through school. On the other hand, her mother acknowledged that Sarai was getting used to starting over again and that she was also learning new information each time. "This is a good thing," her mother said.

Sarai has two other sisters at TC. When each began, they were given a Thai name. "The teacher told us, 'Now you study at a Thai school, so you have to have a Thai

name,” Sarai said. One sister is nine years old and in grade one, the only grade level where TC runs a bilingual program that divides students into classrooms using either Thai or English as media of instruction. The sister is in the regular Thai program. Sarai’s mother was not aware the school separated students in this way and no one in the family is sure how that daughter got placed in the class she did.

Sarai’s other sister is 12 and in grade five, one year below the usual grade level for her age. Much like Sarai, she initially spent a few days in grade two, but was quickly moved her to grade three. When asked what they think about the quick moves, Sarai said that she and her sister looked a little older than the other students at that grade level. “That’s the first reason,” she explained. “And also we were tested for Thai language. Even if you are older and bigger, if you cannot read Thai, you cannot move to a higher grade.”

All three girls continue to attend evening classes in Burmese, English, and math at the orphanage as well. As dusk approaches, GFC sends a pick-up truck out (free of charge) to migrant communities in Wan Hin and Tha Chai, ringing a bell as it passes by. The route passes directly in front of Sarai’s home and by the last stop, the truck is filled to the brim with dozens of children. A few hours later, the children are brought back home. In the morning, Sarai and her sisters can get a ride in the same truck to or from school, although at these times it only travels a direct route between the orphanage and TC. Sarai admits the girls don’t always get up early enough to take advantage of this.

When her father is sick or between jobs, Sarai has to work for her family. For about three weeks during the year of this study and then again during school breaks, Sarai worked in the fields planting and harvesting crops. Sarai and her mother often go out to

work together with each earning about 80 baht (US\$2.40) per day. Even combined, this is less than the 200 baht per day Sarai's father makes as a carpenter. The pay is always below minimum wage (151 baht per day): "If the Thai people do it, they have to pay more. So they ask the migrant people and they can pay just 80 or 90 baht," Sarai's mother explained. Though Sarai wrote and spoke about her 12 year-old sister working as well, her mother said that the younger daughter didn't look old enough to be allowed to work in the fields⁷

When she can't go to school, Sarai asks a friend to tell her teachers why she is absent. She also checks with a neighbor about the lessons she missed. The teachers were very understanding, Sarai said, expressing their concern about her absences and asking that she come back to school soon. Sarai's mother didn't want her daughter to miss school, as she felt Sarai's studies were very important, and she worries about the working conditions in the fields. "I have to ask," she says, "We are faced with a family problem, to get food to eat."

Being in grade six, Sarai would have to change schools to continue her education at the secondary level the following year. The closest school with lower secondary grades is Wan Hin School (WH), which is actually closer to her home than TC. Sarai's mother hoped to send her to secondary school. "We would like our children to learn English and Thai because it will be useful for the future. If they can read and write English and Thai, maybe they can have an easier life." She later added, "We have some

⁷ In 2008, the legal minimum wage in Thailand varied by geographic location from 148 baht (US\$4.50) per day to 203 baht (US\$6.00) per day as set by the Ministry of Labor. Of the 24 levels of minimum wage, Bangkok and five other provinces had the highest rate. Tak was tied for having the fourth-lowest minimum wage rate (<http://www.boi.go.th/english/how/demographic.asp>).

friends who are educated people and they have a good job. We would like our daughters to be like that.”

The biggest question concerned paying for Sarai’s education. Without outside help, it was doubtful she would continue in school. “We don’t have enough money and we have a lot of children,” her mother explained. The only chance they saw to keep Sarai in school was “if the teachers and the school continue to help us, to give us support.”

Kanok

When I first met Kanok, she was studying *mattayomsuksa* 3, or grade nine, the highest grade level at (WH). At 15, she was the usual age for her grade. When I arrived (with my interpreter in tow) at her home, Kanok waved at us shyly from her house. The family lives in a modest wooden home, raised off the ground by short stilts. The walls are made of woven split bamboo except for those surrounding the cooking area at the rear corner of the home where corrugated metal is used. The overhang of the roof provides a place for the family to hang drying clothes and keeps the rain off the family’s motorcycle and bicycles.

To the right of the house is an open-sided, thatch-roofed hut used for storing a variety of small gardening tools. Beside that is a small field for growing crops, including corn and sugar cane. Behind the house is a collection of plastic tubs of various sizes for doing laundry. Just beyond is the family’s latrine with a ceramic toilet bowl embedded into the hard-packed ground. Though simple, the structure is walled and roofed. A piece of corrugated metal has been framed with wood to act as moveable door for added privacy.

A short wooden ramp at the front corner of the house leads to its interior. The first space one enters, about two meters by four meters, sits a short step below the rest of the living space. In the corner are several 50 kilogram bags of rice and beside them a small bunch of bananas that look like they were just cut off a tree in the yard. A picture of Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit hangs above them. Bamboo walls are used to divide most of the remaining space into two sleeping areas on the left and a cooking area on the right. A mid-size Samsung TV sits on a small table and there is a small electric rice cooker beside it. Two women are seated at the front of the house on the wood plank floor, busying preparing vegetables for sale. I am told her mother is one with thanaka on her face, a pale yellow-colored cosmetic paste made from ground tree bark. The other is a neighbor. Neither seems to pay us much attention at first, preferring to let Kanok and her father do the talking.

As guests, my interpreter and I sit cross-legged on the plastic mat that has been set on the floor. Two kittens immediately jump on my lap. Kanok chuckles; "Just push them away," her father tells me, smiling but obviously somewhat annoyed. At the same time, I can see a half dozen chicks scurrying and chirping underneath the floorboards. The family dogs run towards the road to bark at a passing motorcycle.

Kanok's two older brothers, 18 and 17 years old, live at home as well. Kanok also has a younger sister who is ten years old and in grade five at TC, the primary school closest to the family home where the other children had begun their studies. Though the younger sister often visits, she spends most of her time at her grandparents' home down the road. The family's diverse collection of linguistic abilities represents a significant reserve of human capital. Both parents speak Po Karen, Burmese and some Thai,

although only her mother can read Burmese. Kanok's mother also speaks the Pa-O language (as does her younger sister, having picked it up at the grandparents' house). Kanok herself, like her brothers, speaks Po Karen and speaks, reads, and writes Thai fluently. This creates a brief moment of confusion for my interpreter who speaks Sgaw Karen but not Po Karen. He decides to speak Burmese with Kanok's parents, Thai with the children, and English with me.

Kanok's parents arrived in Thailand more than 20 years ago when they were in their late teens. Her father came first, using assistance provided by an in-law. "My sister was married to a Burmese man who was working here," he explained. "When I went to visit them one time, he told me about Mae Sot and brought me here." Kanok's mother joined him later and the two were married in Thailand. Then the couple moved in with a Burmese friend who lived near their present home. All the children were born in Thailand: Kanok and one brother at home, the two other children in a nearby hospital.

The family rents the land where they live from a Thai-Chinese businessman; the rent is 5,000 baht (US\$150) per year, a price Kanok's father insists can no longer be found. They met the owner through a Burmese friend with whom they were staying soon after they arrived in Mae Sot. The current home is about one year old; its roof, made of dried palm leaves, needs replacing every two to three years. "The time depends on how much the leaves overlap," he adds pointing upwards. "This one is not woven so tightly."

The family is allowed to grow whatever they choose for personal use and profit. What they don't need, the family sells both in their immediate neighborhood and in Myawaddy. To get into Burma, they travel to an unofficial crossing point on the Moei River less than a kilometer from their home. Though their produce could fetch higher

prices in Mae Sot, the parents don't dare to venture there. "We cannot go to Mae Sot," Kanok's mother said. "We are afraid of the police."

The parents arrived in Thailand without Burmese identity documents and admit to not being very interested in following any registration procedures. They have, however, received a temporary "stay permit," which, as its name implies, allows migrants with work permits to temporarily remain in Thailand. They have applied for 10-year identity cards through the local *phooyaibaan*, or village leader. The three eldest children have their cards already, issued by the Ministry of Interior with a unique 13-digit card identifier. When I asked if I could see what the card looks like, one of Kanok's brothers disappeared to go look for his card. He came back quickly with the card in his hand, white on one side and pink on the other, and gave it to me. Since the family has no last name, a small dash (—) has been printed on the card where a surname would otherwise appear.

Kanok and her brother explained that WH staff assisted them in filling out the necessary paperwork. Kanok's brothers keep their original cards at home adding that, except when applying for work, no one usually asks to see it. Kanok's original is kept at her school; when she graduates from WH, it will be given back to her. The card identifies the children as non-Thai citizens. Even with these cards, the family's movement is restricted to within the political district in which the card was issued. "We cannot travel outside of Mae Sot," Kanok explained. "But if there is a special program or an exhibition in another province, then we can go with the school."

Kanok's mother and father had lived in the immediate area for about five years by the time that her brothers reached school age. Thai neighbors they had social ties to

encouraged the parents to enroll the boys at TC. At that time, there were few migrant students attending classes and Kanok's parents were skeptical that their children would be accepted. "We asked our neighbors, 'Is that really true?'" Kanok's father said. "Then we went to the school to talk with the teacher." The two boys, though one year apart in age, were placed into the same kindergarten. While the boys were still in lower elementary, Kanok started at the same school. All three grew up speaking Po Karen at home and began to learn Thai in school. Like many migrant students, Kanok is a Thai name given to her by a TC teacher. Neither parent found anything unusual in that. "Because they are teachers," Kanok's mother said, "it is no problem for them to give the name."

At the end of *prathomsuksa* 6, or primary grade six, Kanok's brothers moved from TC to WH where they continued their education from *mattayomsuksa* 1 through 3 (lower secondary grades seven through nine). After finishing their compulsory education, the boys left formal schooling and began looking for work. Though the family would have liked to keep the boys in school, it was too costly. "We cannot afford for all of the children because there are four," Kanok's mother said. "If they all go, then it will be very expensive. Our sons are very interested to study but we have a problem with money."

Currently the family is paying about 1,000 baht (US\$30) per year for Kanok's school supplies and about 800 baht for her sister's. School uniforms—of which there are four kinds (regular, girl scout, sport, and *mau hom*, a sort of denim pullover representing traditional Thai village dress)—account for much of the cost. Asked about whether Kanok will continue in school on to grade 10, her parents admit they are not well

acquainted with the upper secondary schools. Before she graduates from WH, they expect the teachers to recommend the students should go next. Usually the children complete their high school in Mae Sot or another town nearby. “We will choose a school that is not the most expensive,” said Kanok’s father. However, when asked what her first choice would be, Kanok named the area’s most prestigious and costly secondary school.

Unlike a number of migrant families in Tha Chai and Wan Hin , Kanok’s family has no direct connection with Good Friends Center, having arrived in the area well before the orphanage was established. The parents say they didn’t learn that TC was going to accept migrant students from the orphanage until after the fact. By this time, Kanok and her brothers had already moved on to WH for their lower secondary classes. Kanok’s younger sister was in grade three when enrolment at TC surged by around 150 students. When asked if she has made friends with the new students, she shook her head “No, usually I will play with Thai children.”

Nongovernmental Organizations

We have seen previously that at both the district and school level, educators work hard to attract and keep migrant children such as Annon, Mae, Sarai, and Kanok in their schools. Their work is not without substantial challenges that involve communication across cultures and communities, building teacher and curricular capacity to meet the needs of the migrant students, and offering a range of services that extend far beyond teaching in order to support a clientele that lives in often dire straits. In addition to the formal education system, a range of nongovernmental organizations are active in providing migrant with access to adequate education services as well as labor protection and health care.

In this final section, I highlight the work of three organizations that vary in size, geographic reach, and range of overall activity. Although each is based in a different part of Thailand, they converge around education for migrant children in Tak Province and serve as representatives of the kind of extra-educational organizations that partner with schools to meet the needs of migrant families. I begin with Good Friends Center, the organization referenced in the stories of Mae and Sarai. In addition to being the smallest of the three NGOs described here, GFC focuses most exclusively on education. I then discuss the two other organizations which have increasingly broader mandates and are more removed from the day-to-day experiences of migrant children in the schools.

Good Friends Center

More than 80 MLCs in Tak Province provide education to upwards of 9,000 children (Proctor, Sanee, & Taffesse, 2009). Good Friends Center (GFC), a Thailand-based organization that supports education for disadvantaged migrant and hill-tribe children in Mae Sot and Phop Phra districts of Tak Province, manages five of these. Fr. O,⁸ a Catholic priest from France, oversees GFC from Phop Phra. Ms. E, a Thai woman introduced previously, supervises the daily operations of GFC's learning centers in the Mae Sot area.

⁸ Fr. O's work was originally under the auspices of the National Catholic Commission on Migration (NCCM), a charity organization established more than 20 years ago with a primary objective of improving the living standards of undocumented and migrant children in Thailand. During the course of this study, NCCM's activities shifted toward health- and HIV-related issues in Bangkok. Though the organization's website (<http://www.nccmthailand.com/>) indicates NCCM continues to support migrant education in some areas of Thailand, the degree to which GFC's work is independent of NCCM remains unclear. GFC does not maintain its own website nor, to my knowledge, publish documents that describe its work.

Connecting families and schools. While other organizations also manage learning centers, GFC is one of the few that actively tries to link learning centers and Thai schools. GFC believes that, while children were better off in a learning center than in no school at all, attending Thai schools is the best choice for them and their future. For one, Thai schools can provide students with a higher quality education than can the MLCs. Additionally, government schools offer access to important forms of capital: intensive Thai language instruction (human) and the potential for official certificates upon graduation (cultural). These are important for continuing in the Thai education system and for finding decent work. A more immediate benefit related to personal security; children were less likely to be harassed by police if they said they were students at a Thai school.

GFC often informs parents about the benefits of having their children enroll in a Thai school and, in Ms. E's experience, are the first to do so. For interested families, GFC offers extra Thai lessons to better prepare students for the transition. Many parents, however, prefer migrant schools because their children can learn in the Burmese language (many families plan to return to Burma one day); some are also worried about the costs. Migrant families know that the learning centers provide an education that is either nearly free or completely free, including a midday meal.

GFC had arranged to send migrant children from three of its learning centers to Thai schools in and around Mae Sot. At two centers, only a small number of interested families were found. At the third, known locally as "the orphanage," the entire student body was transferred to TC. As previously discussed, TC had historically struggled with

low student enrolment and the arrangement between GFC and TC was thought, at least initially, to provide benefits to all involved.

Until 2006, the orphanage operated as both a day school, with a Burmese-language curriculum, and a boarding house, where 35 students received food and lodging. Despite its name, most students living there had parents either in Thailand or in Burma. In fact, some children were separated from their families by as little as a kilometer. After being approached about a possible transfer by Mr. S, TC's director, GFC held meetings with the parents of both the day and boarding students to explain the move. When parents agreed to the transfer, GFC staff completed the necessary paperwork on the parents' behalf. In total, about 150 migrant children studying at the orphanage learning center enrolled at TC in this way being placed from kindergarten through to grade three. Forcing the children to study at grade one or lower had not been an option: "No, no, no! If they do that, then no one will want to go," Ms. E declared.

Concerns with education at TC. At first, GFC suspended all instruction at the orphanage when the children started attending TC. Ms. E felt it would be "too much school" to ask students to study in Burmese in the evening after they had completed a full day of lessons at TC in Thai. However, through school visits and talking with children, Ms. E became concerned about the quantity and quality of instruction at TC, especially in mathematics, English, and Burmese language. A year after the transfer, GFC began to offer extra support for these subjects five evenings a week for two hours. The classes are attended by the 35 children living at the orphanage, as well as another 50 children living in villages nearby. GFC provides transportation to and from the evening classes.

GFC takes children living at the orphanage to and from TC in a truck and covers the incidental costs of schooling, including stationary, pens and pencils, and some school uniforms. Ms. E reported that teachers at TC had sometimes scolded and hit students because they were not properly dressed. She had explained to Mr. S early on that the migrant children were very poor and that GFC was not able to provide all of them with acceptable uniforms (she also emphasized to me that students were able to study successfully at the orphanage without shoes or socks!). Mr. S had agreed to let the students study at the school without the full uniform, but later some were mistreated; subsequently, they temporarily refused to go to classes.

As had I, Ms. E noted that children in the international program at TC were receiving minimal exposure to Thai despite it being the medium of instruction throughout the school and a crucial form of human capital. Ms. E felt that being denied access to Thai language in a Thai school was simply unthinkable. She was also concerned about the work ethic of TC's teachers: "If you go, you will see that every day the teachers are sitting down and talking with each other. They don't want to teach the students." My own observations were similar. During many visits to TC, I regularly saw students left unattended in their classrooms. Sometimes I came across this quite accidentally, popping my head in a doorway as I passed a class with the intention of saying hello to the teacher—only to find she wasn't there. When I asked where the teacher was, the students almost always said that they didn't know. A few times, I entered the room to talk with individual students. On occasion, I picked up some chalk and attempted a short English lesson to the whole class. It was not uncommon for me to leave 10 or more minutes later with no sign of the teacher still. However, more than once I did notice the class teacher

pause outside the door at some point and, seemingly content that things were under control, continue on her way. Although I didn't have many other schools to compare these experiences to, it seemed that education at TC had a particularly casual nature to it.

GFC also developed concerns about the economic partnership it had established with TC. Although the school received funding for all its students from the government, it had asked GFC to cover some of the expenses of educating the migrant children. In the beginning, GFC provided funds to pay for student lunches and school supplies as well as the salaries of three Thai teachers and one Burmese teacher TC had needed to hire. Over time, GFC renegotiated its financial commitments to TC and withdrew much of this extra support.

In addition to the views that GFC developed about TC, Ms. E believed the school also had a poor reputation within the surrounding community. As a result, only about half of the primary age Thai children living near the school were actually enrolled there; the rest were sent to more distant schools. This was supported by the comments of one member of Tha Chai Village who was concerned that migrant students with weak Thai language skills compromised instruction and learning at TC. He had chosen to send his son into Mae Sot for school.

TC staff themselves provided conflicting information about the school's relationship with the immediate community. Mr. S explicitly denied that Thai families had sent their children to other schools rather than attend TC; Ms. J was well aware (and unfazed) that some families preferred to send their children into town (if they could afford to do so): "The students can choose what school they go to. The teachers here don't worry about that. If they want to come it's ok, if not, it's ok."

In retrospect, Ms. E said if she had known more about TC in advance, GFC would not have sent students there. She now believed that the transfer from the orphanage had not been in the best interests of either GFC or the migrant children. It was merely a vehicle by which TC was provided with a steady stream of migrant children to ensure job security for the school's teachers.

Migrant Assistance Programme

A second nongovernmental organization, the Migrant Assistance Programme (MAP),⁹ whose Thai name translates into the “Foundation for the Health and Knowledge of Ethnic Labor,” was formed in 1996 to assist migrant workers in accessing medical services in Thailand's northern Chiang Mai Province. Since this time, MAP's mandate has broadened to include a range of critical health and welfare issues and the organization currently had a presence in two additional provinces: Tak and, following the 2004 regional tsunami, Phang Nga in the south.

To reach its target populations, MAP broadcasts radio programs in all three provinces using the dominant migrant languages, including Shan, Karen, Akha, and Burmese. It produces audio tapes, CDs, and various print materials in a number of languages. News archives, translations of worker registration materials, national and international worker policies, and reports from original research are available through the MAP website.

Harassment of MAP staff. MAP works out of a small, nondescript house in Mae Sot. Unlike the work MAP does, the office draws little attention to itself. Mr. A, a staff member who was born in Thailand and has worked with MAP since 2001, attends to

⁹ www.mapfoundationcm.org/

legal issues that migrant laborers encounter in their work, such as problems with pay and safety conditions. He and other MAP staff are faced with chronic concerns for their own personal security, in part because several MAP staff are migrants themselves who lack proper identity cards and work permits. Thus, they can be detained by police if they have to pass through a checkpoint to and from work. In addition, the police are usually suspicious when migrants congregate; hence when MAP is preparing for a meeting or making announcements, they are often under some sort of police surveillance.

MAP staff have also faced harassment from Thai factory owners as a result of their work on labor rights for migrant workers. Pictures of MAP staff have been posted on the entrance wall of some worksites, along with a warning to factory security not to let them enter and talk to workers. In such cases, MAP finds other places to talk to workers, perhaps a local tea shop. One of MAP's brochures quotes an external evaluator who reported: "Feedback suggests that MAP is well respected by the target group and by allies [and] in Tak Province it is loathed by abusive employers" (Migrant Assistance Programme, 2006, p. 25)

The interplay of health, knowledge, and education. As mentioned previously, the Thai name for MAP is the "Foundation for the Health and Knowledge of Ethnic Labor," a name that recognizes the interdependence of various services. Much of MAP's work entails developing ties to local communities and migrant families and engaging with them on a number of fronts. For example, Mr. A described one project where MAP was helping a small number of rural, agricultural communities in Phop Phra district access legal, health, and education services. After finding isolated clusters of migrant families, MAP set up a health program for adults working in the fields. This work then

led staff to have questions about education, as staff realized that there were many school-aged children living with their parents, only one of whom was actually involved in formal schooling.

MAP found many of these families were interested in having their children attend school but there were no learning centers nearby. Thai schools were closer, but families were worried about the direct costs to such an education. A number of parents also saw children in school as a lost opportunity for additional income. Once their children could read and write, there seemed to be little necessity for further schooling. MAP also found that parents were reluctant to send their children to school where their own formal education had done little to provide them with decent work or an adequate salary. “Many of the parents speak like that,” Mr. A confirmed. “Some of the parents ask us, ‘Do you know my background?’ because they have graduated from university in Burma. But when they arrive here, they have to harvest crops or something like that. So they feel hopeless about education.”

Connecting families and schools. Much of the work MAP does around education involves proactively mediating the relationships between migrant families and schools. Ms. K, a young Akha woman, works out of MAP’s Chiang Mai office. Born in Burma, Ms. K had crossed the border from Shan State into northern Thailand when she was nine years old, joining an aunt and her parents who had come earlier. Over time, she, along with the rest of her family, was eventually able to get Thai citizenship. Ms. K regularly explains to migrant families that Thai policy provides them with legal access to local public schools. Access to reliable information about rights and obligations is a major challenge that migrant families face. When the Cabinet Resolution of 2005 was

passed, MAP made brochures explaining the new policy and distributed them to migrant communities. Without such assistance, families don't know that they can send their children to Thai schools or are unsure of the details of the transfer process, including costs. Though expenses for uniforms, stationary, and other school supplies can be significant for families, it was usually less than the families imagined.

In reviewing available data, MAP found that Bangkok has a high number of migrant workers but relatively few migrant children in schools, largely because few organizations work in Bangkok for children's education. Ms. K explained: "They have many organizations working for advocacy, working on the laws," she said, "but not working on the ground." In comparison, Mae Sot had many more non-Thai children in the Thai school system. This was due to the "good connections" that various organizations had with Tak ESA2.

Familiar with a variety of migrant communities, Ms. K knows of the educational opportunities available near their homes. She answers questions that parents have and volunteers to go to the schools with families as both a facilitator and interpreter. In this way, she enhances the density of ties in local social networks. Families often ask whether a migrant learning center or a Thai school is a better place to send children. Though the final decision is left up to the families, MAP's stance is that Thai schools are the preferred choice: they usually offer a better quality education and students can earn a legitimate certificate upon graduation. In addition, the future of many migrant schools is quite precarious since they remain dependent both on funding from external sources and permission from Thai authorities to operate.

Providing financial support. Helping families make connections is not enough. Over time, MAP determined that economic support was essential if families were to agree to send their children into nearby Thai schools. Before 2005, MAP did not extend their assistance to include financial support, only intervening to negotiate initial access. At that time, the government did not provide funds for educating migrant students. Any additional costs incurred by enrolling extra children were passed on from schools to migrant families. “Collect the water fee, the electricity fee, the teachers’ salary,” Mr. A elaborated. “They collected all that from the children and so the families would have to pay a lot.” MAP found could not afford to absorb those costs. Current policies make the direct costs of schooling much lower, better positioning MAP to offer financial support. Recently, MAP set aside enough money to provide around 30 children with 700 baht (US\$23) each for the upcoming school term, with plans to help children from other families in subsequent years. To assist in meeting future financial obligations at the school, MAP arranged for expenses in subsequent years to be paid by families in installments if necessary.

Families’ varying interest in education. When MAP staff went back to the migrant communities to finalize the list of children wanting to go to school, they didn’t find as much interest as they had anticipated. “We mentioned to the villages, ‘How many children and how many parents would like to go to the school?’ They came and give us their names,” Mr. A explained. “But when we announced this information, we received only 16 children.” Six children were eventually sent from one community and 10 from another.

The children were enrolled in kindergarten and grade one at two different Thai schools despite their ages varying by more than one year. Mr. A explained that lack of Thai language skills prevented some students from being placed at a level matching their age. Interviews with two families indicated that they were quite happy and appreciative that their children were attending a Thai school. However, follow-up communication with MAP staff a few months later indicated that the number of students who were still in school had been cut by half. Mr. A said that the families of the eight students who had dropped out preferred that the children work rather than go to school.

Where parents don't want to participate in formal schooling, MAP tries to encourage their children to study with others who are in school whenever they have a chance. In this way, working children might still learn some basic literacy skills. Ultimately it is the parents who choose how children spent their time and MAP "cannot push" them into sending their children to school instead of working.

A "Bird's Eye View": International Labor Organization

In addition to local NGOs, there are also national and international organizations that poured resources into helping migrant families. One of these is the International Labor Organization (ILO),¹⁰ whose regional office for Asia and the Pacific is located in Bangkok. In fact, the date of my arrival to Mae Sot district of Tak Province in 2008 was timed to coordinate with an ILO-sponsored public event designed to raise awareness of formal schooling as an alternative to child labor in Thailand. The meeting began with a parade of children from local Thai schools and learning centers. Within a few minutes, the festive mood was interrupted by a police van carrying migrant workers who were

¹⁰ <http://www.ilo.org>

being deported across the river back to Burma. Shaking her head, Ms. G—an ILO staff member—said she wished the children didn’t have to see such a thing.

The ILO is a self-described tripartite agency of the United Nations “that brings together governments, employers and workers of its member states in common action to promote decent work throughout the world.” The work of the ILO is based on the premise that the decent treatment of working people is necessary for the development of a peaceful society. The activities of the regional office in Bangkok include attention to a broad array of issues: skills and employability, labor migration, safety and health at work, labor market governance, international labor standards, and child labor. In 2008, the ILO had recently begun a five-year project focused on combating child labor in six provinces in Thailand, including Tak. As part of this project, Ms. G had been involved with a recent ILO publication which included the life stories of students from TC and other schools, including Sarai, who sometimes missed school to perform paid work.

Challenges to enforcing compulsory education in Thailand. Thailand’s compulsory education policy requires that all children attend school until they complete grade nine, or reach 16 years of age. The policy is purposefully integrated with the Labor Protection Act which sets the minimum age for employment at 15 years. Those attempting to implement compulsory education policy face several challenges. For one, the literal meaning of “all children” is taken differently by different actors. The ILO’s work in Thailand is grounded in an understanding that this regulation apply equally to

migrants and others with undocumented status. Others believe the policy is reserved only for Thai nationals.¹¹

Another challenge is that getting an education for their children is not a primary motivation of the migrant families: “They come here to find money and they need all their children to work,” Ms. G explained. “And this is something that we have to educate them about, that it is illegal to do that.” Part of the education process was to make parents realize that their already tenuous existence in the country could be jeopardized further by not sending their young children to school. Families who had entered Thailand without authorization or overstayed their permits were essentially committing a “double illegal” when they did not ensure their children were receiving an education.

In addition, Thai authorities themselves were not implementing policies appropriately. Labor inspections were ineffective and the system of referring working children to appropriate agencies was weak. Further, the Ministry of Interior (MOI), responsible for the Royal Thai Police and national security, viewed migrant families as a security threat. As such, the first response of the MOI was not to send working children to school, but instead to remove them from the country. Speaking of the MOI, Ms. G declared,

They always say, “Oh, we support education. They say “Yes, I will go with that. We will not prevent anyone from education” ... But if they find any immigrant children or immigrant families, they can arrest them because they will take it that they first entered illegally into the country.

¹¹ A lawyer interviewed for this study, who specializes in migrant rights, said he believed compulsory education applied to every child in the country. He also recognized that many other legal experts translate the policy to refer only to “Thai children” or “Thai citizens.”

Even though the ILO touted education as the proper alternative to work, it wasn't always true that local schools would even accept migrant children who had been taken out of the workplace, creating a fourth challenge. The solution, Ms. G declared, was "to rebuild the whole system" whereby child labor was better monitored and children had improved access to, and retention in, the education system.

Increasing communication between stakeholders. Drawing on existing social ties and forging new ones where needed, the ILO seeks to increase the capacity of individuals and organizations so that they are clear about their responsibilities towards migrant families. The organization works at various levels—from the regional offices of the MOE to the classroom teachers to do this. Ms. G was well acquainted with the staff of Tak ESA2 and aware of their active promotion of educational opportunities for migrant children, but she was concerned about what was happening in other parts of the country. "In some educational service areas," she explained, "the director doesn't even know about the Education For All policy. I have to tell them 'This is your mandate. This is a challenge in Thailand. This is your job.'" Similarly, Ms. G found that teachers needed to be informed of children's rights, child labor laws, and education policies.

Communication between actors on the ground throughout the country was also lacking. Staff in disparate organizations sometimes knew little of the work that others did. In Mae Sot alone there were dozens of NGOs and CBOs working on education. As noted by Ms. K at MAP, Tak ESA2 had worked to effectively link some of them together. The efforts of the TMK Center included partnering with organizations such as World Education, Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee, Voluntary Service Overseas, Child's Dream, Help Without Frontiers, Youth Connect, and Peoples Partner

for Development and Democracy, among others. However, there were likely to be as many or more actors disconnected from the local flow of information. In turn, this had a negative effect on the breadth and effectiveness of services that could be offered to those in need. Ms. G saw one of the roles of the ILO as a coordinating body that enhanced the social capital of all connected through the network. In having a broad perspective on education and child labor, the ILO could better ensure that various actors were aware; both of their own responsibilities and of available resources. Speaking of the variety of organizations working with Burmese migrant families, Ms. G said:

Right now I think it's a matter of information, to give them enough information to help them: where to go, what kind of assistance you can have. So we are bridging a lot of people together. I think it's a problem when you sit on the ground and you work with the people. You don't see anything else. For us, it's good that we are up here. We can see from a bird's eye view.

TC as a potential model school. The ILO was familiar with some of the schools in Mae Sot, however, it had not been involved with the integration of migrant students into any of them. Speaking specifically of Tha Chai School, Ms. G indicated that TC had been quietly accepting Burmese children well before the ILO found out about it. Once word got out, the ILO became an enthusiastic supporter of the school's efforts and positive stance toward migrant children. In fact, Ms. G thought TC should serve as a "real showcase" for the whole country, perhaps even a learning tool for others concerning integrating Thai and migrant students within a school. "When we found out about it, I said 'That's it! This is the model!'" Ms. G explained. "The school was hiding it but I said, 'No, this is a good thing. You've got to promote it and show it is possible to do

this.” That others working closer to the ground—GFC and Tak ESA2 staff—have concerns about what TC is doing by way of educating migrant children (separate classrooms for Thai and migrant children; lack of Thai language preparation in the international program) is to be expected. The downside of having a big picture view is that an organization might be so distant from the ground as to not have an understanding of the local nuances and complexities.

Further challenges. It was not lost on Ms. G, however, that significant challenges remained to providing migrant children with quality educational opportunities. For example, she found it “quite depressing” that migrant children were often placed significantly below the grade level appropriate to their age. This problem was likely to become especially acute when the children reached puberty long before their classmates. In addition, Ms. G described how families with children attending TC would require ongoing support if the children were to continue with secondary-level education. Besides finding a receptive and understanding learning community, solutions to pragmatic concerns such as meeting the costs of transportation and uniforms were needed. “The thing is, now the families are looking for resources in terms of who is going to pay if they have to move to those schools,” she explained, “[and wondering] how far they have to go, and what types of funds will be available.” Ms. G was unsure of the long-term solution to either challenge.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the efforts of various governmental and nongovernmental actors toward to the education of migrant children. Each agent has a particular set of resources at his or her disposal with which to do the work. The most

prominent is a set of national education policies formulated by the central government and, in particular, the 2005 Cabinet Resolution specific to education of non-Thai children. These policies are distributed through a network of state and non-state actors, ultimately becoming available to migrant families. Although reputedly there were staff in many provinces who were unaware of these policies, in this study, all participants had some level of awareness.

The policies had serious implications for instructional, human, and material resources. Efforts by Tak ESA2 and schools to respond to the 2005 Resolution have highlighted other resources necessary to support effective implementation. These include adequate classroom space and properly skilled school staff. Where supply was constrained, such as at HN, schools restricted enrolment of new students. TC was unique in accepting large numbers of migrant children. This can be traced to an initial availability of classroom space at the school. With a burgeoning migrant student population, the school recognized the need for further resources including Burmese support staff and a bilingual curriculum.

This chapter has also described the experiences of four Burmese families who live in Mae Sot District in western Thailand and have at least one child attending a Thai public school. The families interviewed largely left Burma to seek better economic opportunities. Mae's mother's political involvement was unique among participants. Though one or both of the parents have found work in Thailand, their financial security remains tenuous and, for Sarai, is a reason for her to miss school on occasion.

For Kanok and Annon, other Burmese actors are implicated in the families' cross-border travel, specifically those having prior migration experience. These agents

provided the families with information about the destination site that facilitated their migration. Searches for housing and work were also supported by various social contacts, almost exclusively Burmese: relatives and old friends. Only Sarai's parents mentioned getting permission to build their current house through direct contact with a Thai person. Where families enrolled children in a learning center, they identified other Burmese families as sources of information of how and where to do this.

In contrast, access to government schools was mediated solely through Thai individuals (for Annon and Kanok) and a Thai nongovernmental organization named GFC (for Mae and Sarai). These agents provided assistance by making the families aware that the possibility for participation existed. In the case of GFC, support is even more substantial, including direct intervention with TC on behalf of the families and transport to and from the school. Two other NGOs—MAP and ILO—have been identified with each working to support migrant education in a number of important ways. By mediating contact between families and schools, or, in the case of ILO, between other organizations, these NGOs (and others) facilitate access to existing resources among different actors in the network. These organizations also introduce additional resources into the network that families can leverage, such as financial support and transportation to and from schools. In the following chapter, I consider further the emerging network of actors and embedded resources described thus far. We will see how these can be explained by reference to the literature around social networks and social capital.

Chapter Five

Accessing and Activating Social Capital

In this chapter, we consider the helpfulness of the framework presented in Chapter 1 for understanding the stories told by migrant children and their parents, as well as those of government and nongovernment actors. Recall that the framework defines social capital as resources accessed through a network of social relations where the amount of each—ties and embedded resources—determines the volume of social capital one has (Bourdieu, 1986). Accounts of migrant families reveal that they were embedded in networks of social connections that made information and other resources available to them. The network is constituted by a variety of collective and individual actors residing on both sides of the Moei River. We will see that both the quantity and qualities of ties are important determinants of the assistance made available to migrant families and the outcomes these resources make possible.

Volume of Social Capital

Bourdieu (1986) states that “the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent ... depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital ... possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected” (p. 249). Network size, in turn, can be defined in terms of number of social ties to other actors (Valenta, 2008). Here we consider various factors that influence the number of social ties that migrant families are able to establish and, thus, the amount of social capital they have available to activate.

The Effect of Migration

Migration necessarily breaks social ties in any existing network. This reduces the quantity of social capital available to those who move (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000). When families leave Burma, they leave behind at least some family, friends, and neighbors. Families, at times, sustained preexisting ties through cellular phones (though this was not common due to the obvious expense and the lack of electricity in families' homes). Return visits to Burma also maintained relationships though families exhibited varying patterns of such travel depending on need and distance. Some had not returned in several years: others crossed the river weekly. Relatives and friends living in Burma also came to Thailand. Though I never saw temporary visitors at the homes of the four families featured in Chapter 4, it was the norm at other homes that one or more people from Burma were there, often having crossed the border to seek medical care at a clinic in Mae Sot.

While not disputing the potentially negative effects of migration on social capital, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) also highlight how migration offers possibilities for developing new relationships at destination sites, especially to others unlike oneself. However, as we will see below, the particular contexts of migrant families were seen to severely constrain development of these ties. Thus, families appeared to more readily maintain preexisting ties or establish new ties to other Burmese actors than to develop relationships with non-Burmese agents.

Families' Sense of Security

The irregular presence of family members in Thailand created fears for personal security, which inhibited travel. Lacking appropriate documents to live and/or work in

Thailand limited the range of migrants' movement beyond their home and place of work, reducing the possibility they might meet new people and have access to novel forms of information and support. In particular, Thai police and military invoked fears of insecurity, rather than safety. Mae's father prayed that the police would not detain him every time he took his wife or daughter to work by bicycle. Mae's mother emphasized how the family feels safe where they live because there *weren't* a lot of police in the area. Sarai's mother had not left her home for four years since her last encounter with the police.

Four families participating in this study lived in the same migrant compound at the edge of the Moei River. The compound consisted of a dirt pathway about 500 meters long with several dozen homes on either side. Those who lived in the compound had at least one family member working there either preparing cinder blocks or transporting various goods across the river on small barges. Families felt safe inside the compound with some rarely traveling much deeper into Thailand. Though Tha Chai and Wan Hin were close by, few Thai people ventured past the compound entrance, seemingly just as reluctant to enter as the Burmese were to leave. The only Thais to go into the compound regularly were the owner of the land and military personnel. On rare occasions, police would come to check the documents of the compound's residents. When this was about to happen, the Thai landowner would warn to those lacking proper documentation. The mother of one student at TC explained:

Our boss will tell us, "Today or tomorrow the Thai police will come and catch you so you must go to Myawaddy." When that happens we will cross the river

very near to here. We will stay on the other side but just for 1 hour or 3 hours.

The boss will tell us when to come back.

Similarly, the mother of two students in Phop Phra said that the migrant people in her agricultural community did not travel far from their homes. “We go to work and we come back home,” she explained. “There is a temple near here but we are not brave enough to go. We are afraid the police will arrest us.” Where families are limited in their geographic mobility, it is not surprising that their capacity to establish ties, even with actors nearby, is severely constrained.

The Influence of Language

A lack of appropriate language skills limited the size of families’ social networks. Families from Burma arrived in Thailand with various levels of competency in a range of languages including Pwo Karen, Sgaw Karen, Pa’O, Shan, Karenni, and Burmese among others. Despite skills with spoken language, it was not uncommon that individuals could not read or write any language. One mother had “signed” a Burmese identity document with her thumbprint because she could not write her name. Burmese and ethnic minority languages were used within migrant homes and to communicate with other families from Burma (though among migrant families, there were many who did not share the same language). However, few children, and even fewer adults, had the necessary skills in Thai to converse with members of the local population. Thus, migrants’ low stock of human capital restricted social capital development.

Parents indicated that when they visited the schools they relied either on Burmese support staff or on students who were competent in multiple languages. Sarai’s mother

explained that, though her husband had never been to TC, she had gone many times.

However, she never spoke to teachers when she went.

I go for Mother's Day and Children's Day and other special events. I don't talk to the teachers when I go, I just visit the school. The parents and the teachers don't know each other. I don't speak Thai, so I am afraid to talk to the teachers.

Thus, it was not common for migrant families to establish social relationships with non-Burmese. Families often stayed close to their homes and where Burmese and other agents occupied the same social space, communication was often impaired due to language barriers. As Briggs (1998) has noted, "proximity alone does not a neighbor make" (p. 187), and actors sharing a physical community may inhabit quite distinct social worlds.

While quantity of social ties is a key determinant of available resources, so too is the nature of the social tie. Briggs (1998) states that "the type and contents of each social tie, and not just the absolute number of ties, are important predictors of the social resources, or social capital, that networks provide" (p. 188). In defining the type of tie, I focus attention on the personal characteristics of the actors involved. In doing so, several categories of social capital – bonding and bridging -- are defined and explored for their power to illuminate these stories.

Forms of Social Capital

Bonding Social Capital

In undertaking cross-border migration, families drew on support from an array of agents. Further assistance became available when they arrived in Thailand and began to settle. Almost exclusively, families accessed resources for travel and initial adjustment

through ties to other Burmese actors. Where actors share demographic, spatial, and relational characteristics, they belong to the same group (Woolcock, 2002). Numerous scholars (Narayan, 1999; Warren, Thompson, & Saegart, 2001; Woolcock, 2002) argue that “bonding social capital” is present when resources become available through relationships established *within* a single group.

In this study, I take nation of origin to define an agent’s group membership status. Thus, bonding social capital exists whenever migrant families leverage relationships with other Burmese actors—family, friends, employers—to access resources. At times, social ties within the group crossed national borders allowing families like Annan’s to connect with actors in Thailand though the family was still in Burma. Family members also met other Burmese after arriving in Thailand. When Mae’s mother learned about a teaching job by through exiled Burmese NLD members, the family activated their bonding social capital.

Activation patterns. Bonding capital supported four important outcomes: travel from Burma to Thailand, locating housing, securing work, and gaining access to migrant learning centers. Table 5.1 presents patterns of bonding capital for these outcomes. Checkmarks indicate where families received support through ties to other Burmese actors. Empty boxes show where insufficient evidence was collected to determine the origin of resources. Four families have been omitted due to incomplete data (the origins of support for fewer than two outcomes were identifiable). Of the four outcomes, bonding capital most consistently provided resources to support cross-border travel. Seven of eight families who participated in migrant learning centers (MLCs) drew on bonding social capital to do so. Given the target population of these institutions, it is not

Table 5.1

Bonding Social Capital Among Migrant Families

Resource accessed in support of: Family	Cross-border travel	Work	Housing	Learning center access
1 (Annan)	√	√		√
2 (Kanok)	√	√	√	*
3 (Mae)		√	√	√
4 (Sarai)	√	√	√	√
5	√	√	√	√
6	√			
7	√	√	√	√
8	√			√
9	√			√
10	√	√		*

* Family did not participate in the system of migrant learning centers.

surprising that information and other forms of support can be found in ties between Burmese actors.

Resources for travel appeared in two main forms: shared information and escorted travel. The former is described here by the father of a boy at Tha Chai School.

I was working on a farm in Mon State, but the land was lost because of the erosion. My boss from the farm went to Bangkok to work in a fish factory.

When he came back, I met with him and my boss told me I should come to Thailand to work.

Unlike Annan's family whose father's "auntie" provided them with a preexisting stock of bonding social capital upon arrival in Thailand, other participants emphasized that they had no established social ties to those they encountered at the destination site.

A woman who had traveled to Phop Phra from Rangoon said:

I knew someone who was already living here. A friend told me that here the economics are a better than in Burma and, because of that, we came. But the people here did not know each other until they arrived. We do not come from the same place.

In addition to using information to support independent travel into Thailand, more direct support was provided when a social contact accompanied one or more family members on the journey. Kanok's father described how his brother-in-law "brought" him to Mae Sot. This kind of assistance was also available for hire. One mother used the services of a "carrier," a person paid to facilitate the (usually undocumented) transit of people or goods across the border. She told the following story:

The first time I came to Mae Sot, I lost everything [money and jewelry] at the border because of the police. The second time I went to Bangkok, I went with a carrier. There were so many steps. First from my hometown to Myawaddy [Burma], then Myawaddy to Mae Sot, then Mae Sot to Bangkok. The first carrier took me from Pa'an to Myawaddy. I knew him because he was known as a carrier in my hometown. I was not very friendly with him, but some people suggested to me that if I wanted to have a good job, I should join with a carrier.

In the example above, bonding social capital provided resources for travel and for finding work simultaneously. Other participants described leveraging bonding social capital to secure work and housing in combination. This is not surprising given that six of 14 families lived on some sort of "compound" where specific accommodations for workers were already established or space was provided with the intent that they would build their own house. Thus, finding a job meant that the family had secured housing as

well. Sanda's family, presented at the beginning of Chapter 1 was one such family where Sanda's elder sister and her husband acted as the adult caretakers. The elder sister described how her husband found work and, in doing so, a place for the family to live beside the worksite:

At first when my husband arrived to Myawaddy, he was working in a factory where they were bottling purified water. The boss planned to build a plastics factory here in Mae Sot. So my husband was first working in Myawaddy, and then his boss built a new factory and he came together with his boss. And my husband is the security guard for this plastics factory and so we can have this house.

Others, such as Mae's family, found housing independently of work or travel resources. They had found their home, hidden from view from the nearest road, through a Burmese friend.

Bridgeheads. The families' stories exemplify the concept of "chain migration," whereby assistance for travel, work, and housing are fed back to prospective migrants as a result of social relationships with prior migrants (MacDonald & MacDonald, 1964). Boyd (1989) suggests that prior migrants are "bridgeheads," actors who provide linkages between sending and receiving sites, in this case between Burma and Thailand. Bridgeheads act as "conduits of information and social and financial assistance" (p. 689) for other migrants and potential migrants. The resources they provide to others may shape future migration outcomes by mediating risks and uncertainties associated with travel from one site to another.

Consider Annan's father's aunt. As a migrant with 10 years experience, she is positioned to inform the family of improved opportunities across the border. The mother of a boy at TC provides another example. She described how her husband received help from friends who had prior migration experience. "Until he met his friends, my husband didn't know how to come here," she explained. "But some of the other workers have already come to Thailand. When they go to visit to Burma, they tell their friends how to come here." By returning to their native villages with first-hand knowledge of destination site, these actors became a resource—a bridgehead—for her husband and others who had yet to migrate.

Mapping bonding social capital. Figure 5.1 maps out Burmese actors along the border area. The nodes represent families who are indicated by circles on both sides of the border. Study participants are labeled with the first letter of the focus child; "A"nnan, "K"anok, "M"ae, and "S"arai. "F" represents a family living in Phop Phra district. Straight lines indicate social ties. Current or potential migrants not presently associated with participant families are shown by circles that are not connected to other nodes. The figure includes one outcome of social capital activation: a curved line indicates current enrolment in a learning center. As shown previously in Table 5.1, most families had at least one child in a learning center at some point in their stay in Thailand. However, only Annan's family had a child in a learning center in 2008. Her enrolment was facilitated through information provided by a Burmese neighbor.

Bridging Social Capital

Bonding social capital—resources made available through intra-group ties—provided families with assistance for travel, work, housing, and access to migrant learning centers.

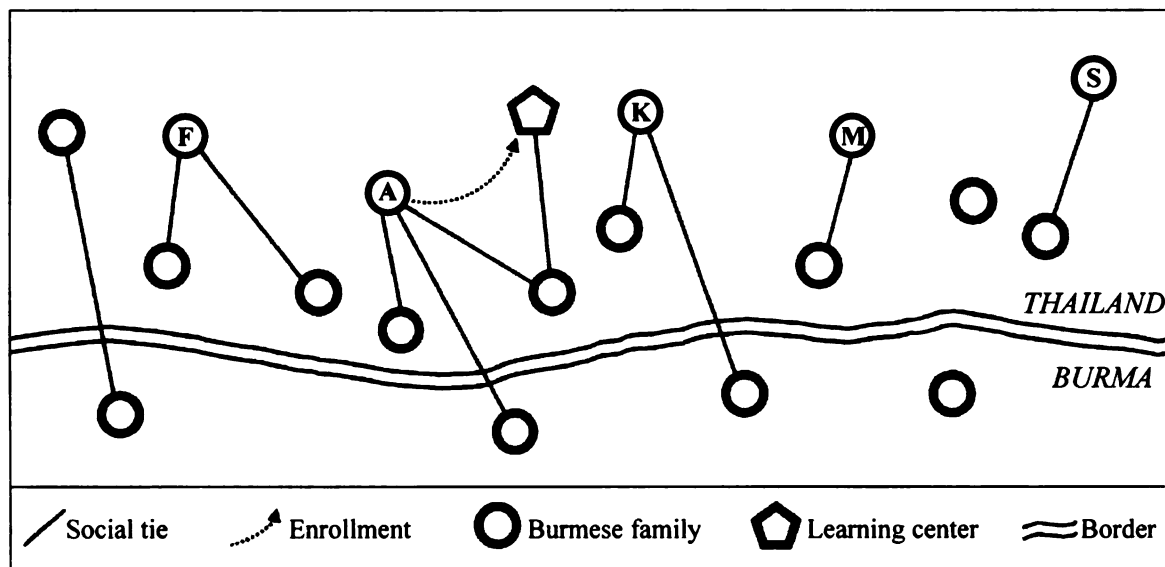


Figure 5.1. Network map of Burmese actors along the Thai-Burmese border.

But the story changes when we examine how families gained access to the Thai educational system. In those cases, it was “bridging capital”—resources made available through ties that connect people *between* groups, who have “different demographic characteristics, irrespective of how well they know each other” (Woolcock, 2002, p. 23)—that made the difference. Families in rural Phop Phra gained access to schools through MAP, a registered Thai NGO. Annan’s family was invited to the local school by a Thai woman living in their community. Kanok and her brothers enrolled in TC through information provided by Thai neighbors. GFC assisted Sarai and Mae in attending TC. These are examples of bridging social capital in action.

Participant families whose stories are not highlighted in Chapter 4 provide additional evidence for bridging social capital. For example, the family of sixth grade student explained that the manager of the father’s worksite informed them that they could enroll at the local Thai primary school. The vast majority of management in Mae Sot are

Thais who oversee Burmese workers. For many families, such as Sarai's and Mae's, it was through their association with GFC that they enrolled in TC. These ties made the 2005 Resolution available to the families as a resource that they could potentially leverage for their child's education.

Consider a story related by a father of two students at TC. The children transferred there from the orphanage learning center near the *sitagon* (Thai army post). The father had learned about the policy providing families with legal access to Thai schools. He also learned that, should the families agree to the transfer, GFC would facilitate the process and continue to offer various other supports to families as they had previously. The GFC staff had

told the children to study at the Thai school because the *sitagon* school is not registered with the Thai Ministry of Education. It is illegal. So it's not right for the law. At the same time, the headmaster of the school went to the *sitagon* and talked to the teachers and said, "If your students are interested to come and study in this school, you have the right to do that." In this school they didn't have a lot of students. They have room to study. And the teacher at the *sitagon* school also told us, "If your children study here at the *sitagon* or at the Thai school ... don't worry about anything. Everything is the same."

Similarly, the mother of one fifth-grade student explained how she found out her daughter could enroll at TC. Though the daughter was not studying at the orphanage learning center, the mother was there frequently selling baked goods to the other children and staff. Through these visits the mother learned of the upcoming transfer of students

by GFC staff. The mother drew upon her ties to GFC, including to Fr. O, to learn it was possible to send her daughter to TC:

I was selling cookies at the orphanage and I knew about it fairly well, that it taught Thai, English, and Burmese. The school is very near our home. The teachers told the parents “If you have children you can send them to the school.” Then the Father and the school director came to the orphanage and explained that TC might have to close if they did not get more students. The parents went to a meeting about that at the orphanage.

In total, 13 of the 14 families referred to bridging social capital in their descriptions of Thai school access by describing ties to non-Burmese actors. The only family not included here had sent their son to WH nine years earlier and could not recall the details of his enrolment.

Mapping the Network. Figure 5.2 presents a summative map of the network of migrant families and other actors along the Thai border and further afield. The bottom half, as described in Figure 5.1, shows Burmese actors (circles) with whom migrant families have bonding social capital. Recall that study participants are labeled with the first letter of the focus child; “A”nnan, “K”anok, “M”ae, and “S”aria, and that “F” represents a family living in Phop Phra district. Intergroup ties link migrant families with the new actors represented by shaded nodes. These ties to non-Burmese actors highlight bridging social capital. Square indicate state actors: the Royal Thai Government (RTG), Tak ESA2 education office, and Thai schools. PP represents government schools in Phop Phra district. Nongovernment actors are represented by triangular nodes. The two unlabeled triangles are the individuals not associated with larger NGOs. These are the neighbors

government to regional education offices like Tak ESA2 and from Tak ESA2 to individual schools. Dotted straight lines also connect migrant families to non-state actors. That is, the dotted straight lines emphasize that the five migrant families shown here—and, in fact, all 14 participant families—leveraged ties to non-Burmese actors to access education policy. More specifically, dotted lines connect migrant families to non-Burmese, nongovernment actors. This has important implications for this study and will be explored in the coming pages.

Brokers. We saw in Chapter 4 that schools described their attempts to inform migrant families of current policy in various ways, including through school staff. However, when families related how they learned about enrolment opportunities for their children, they did not speak of direct contact with schools. The one possible exception was the woman who spoke to Annan's parents was a teacher, but she also lived nearby and was not acting as an official recruiter for the school when she talked to the parents. Thus, we see an initial social disconnect separating the Thai schools and migrant families. This is indicated by an absence of social ties between the sets of nodes in Figure 5.2. That is, there are no straight lines—solid or broken—joining the open circles of migrant families with the shaded squares of schools. Instead, the relationship between the two is indicated by the curved line of enrolment. Of course, once children were enrolled at the school, families necessarily developed social ties to those institutions through the child. However, the emphasis here is on identifying the social tie through which families first gained access to education policy. These were clearly ties between families and nongovernmental organizations and not ties between families and state actors or families and other Burmese actors.

The disconnect existing between families and schools is overcome by individual and collective nongovernment actors who link these two groups together (shaded triangles). In the network, nongovernment actors are “brokers” (Burt, 1997; 2001), actors who span disconnects, or holes in social structures. Holes are created by clusters of actors with weak or non-existent connections with the result being that “people on either side of the hole circulate in different flows of information” (1997, p. 341). As Burt emphasizes, it is not that the clusters are unaware of one other. The schools recognize that migrant families live in the surrounding villages and, likewise, families know that Thai schools exist (if only in theory—families may not know exactly where the schools are located but certainly know that Thailand has schools). However, as individual institutions and families, they do not directly attend to each other and no direct ties link the two together. As a result, the schools do not have access to resources of families, and families do not have access to education policy or other school-based resources. Nongovernment actors facilitate the connection between these actors and provide them with potential access to the others’ collection of resources.

Similarly, the TMK Center at Tak ESA2 and the ILO are brokers. Recall that Ms. G saw the organization as “bridging a lot of people together.” By connecting agents that may or may not have previously been aware of each other, both organizations help to connect different clusters of actors and make a wider range of resources available within and across groups.

It is important to note that GFC and MAP have ties to migrant families that do not participate in Thai schools. The triangles of these organizations are each connected to nodes not linked to schools through a curved line of enrolment. This emphasizes that

some families have access to bridging capital, both the tie and the resource, but choose not to activate it, for whatever reason. Few families in Phop Phra eventually agreed to enroll their children even though MAP had provided information about local schools, offered to assist with registration, and provided financial support. Similarly, GFC informed all the families at their learning centers of the benefits of the 2005 Resolution and yet, notwithstanding the bulk transfer of children from the orphanage center, few families chose to leverage available social capital.

Getting By and Getting Ahead

To summarize, the discussion of bonding and bridging social capital above highlights the availability of particular resources through specific kinds of social ties. Similarly, Briggs (1998) finds that the characteristics of actors linked by social ties are important predictors of the kinds of resources made accessible. The author describes two forms of social capital—"social support" and "social leverage"—which assist actors in "getting by" and "getting ahead," respectively (p. 178). In getting by, actors cope with the challenges of daily life by accessing resources such as small cash loans, free child care, and emotional support. These resources are largely available through ties to other members within the same community—Briggs' "socially similar others" (p. 189). We see social support when friends of Sarai's family lent money to get Sarai's mother out of the Mae Sot detention center. Similarly, a family living in Phop Phra said that police in the area collected monthly fees of 30 to 50 baht (US\$1-2) from migrant workers. Though this did not enable travel beyond the fields where their community had been established, it gave them security in the immediate area. "If we don't have the money to pay," explained one woman, "we will borrow from our friends—but we need to give interest!"

she added with a smile. Additional evidence of social support to “get by” came during a follow-up trip to the border area in 2009. In revisiting a family living in a migrant housing compound next to the Moei River, a mother informed me that she had recently separated from her husband. She had no job and was unsure how she would provide for her three children. She had contemplated asking her son in the fifth grade to drop out of school to look for work. He hadn’t needed to work yet, as other workers at the factory were donating rice and other food staples to help sustain the family.

While social support is helpful, social leverage through ties to those with different racial and ethnic identities is also important, especially for the poor. Ties across groups allow one to cast a “wider and deeper” social net, making available a larger and more diverse set of resources (Briggs, 1998, p. 189). Rather than maintaining the status quo, these resources facilitate actors getting ahead by changing their opportunity in life. On the one hand, this study provides evidence to support getting ahead through bridging ties in that migrant families access Thai schools through their relationships with non-Burmese actors. I consider successful migration as well as securing housing, work, and access to learning centers to represent changes in their life opportunities as well. These outcomes are secured through ties to other Burmese or through bonding capital. However, opportunities to get ahead that are accessed through ties within a group appear to be less significant, or to have a lower quality than those provided through contact across groups. For example, access to learning centers and enrolment in Thai schools are both outcomes of leveraging social capital. However, the former likely presents children with fewer advantages in life than the latter given that only education in Thai schools provides students with official graduation documents. Similarly, information about jobs

circulating in the Burmese community may disproportionately direct migrants to work with low pay and/or demanding conditions. As Edwards and Foley (1997) point out, not all social capital is created equal with the socioeconomic location of the activated capital determining its value. Similarly, Briggs notes, for the poor, social ties to similar others is often “a quick route to bad jobs” (p. 188).

Social Ties and Resources Leveraged by Migrant Families

Social capital is defined as resources made available through social ties or relationships between agents. Figure 5.3 indicates the aggregate nature of social capital and identifies how the two components appear in this study among the participating migrant families.

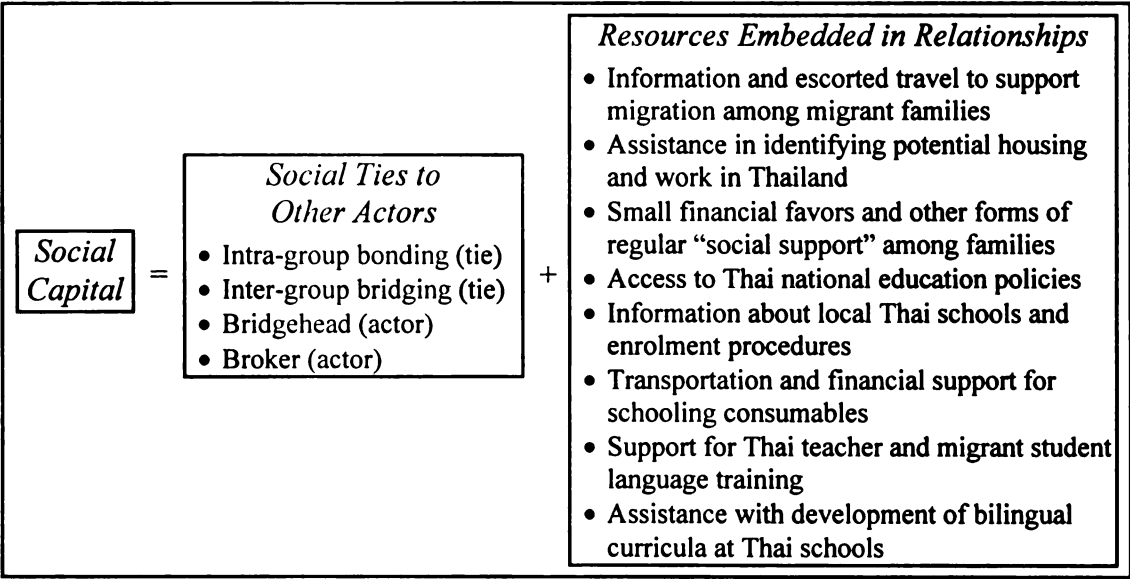


Figure 5.3 The aggregate nature of migrant families’ social capital

The general patterns of social capital activation by migrant families in this study are more clearly illustrated by reconsidering two of the families. Presented below are summaries of the social ties and resources Annan’s and Mae’s families drew upon from

their position within the larger social network represented in Figure 5.2 above and restate the roles of some of the actors previously described in Chapter 4.

Annan's family

Annan's family had been struggling to eke out an existence in an ethnic Shan village near the Thai-Burmese border, a village from which many others had migrated to Thailand according to Annan's father. From these other villagers and their kin, the family was aware of economic opportunities that lie across the border. However, it was the urging of a relative of Annan's father, a bridgehead who had already spent a decade in Thailand, which finally compelled the family to move. Bonding social ties also provided access to opportunities for work upon arrival in Mae Sot. Annan's father works as a security guard, a job he learned about through a Burmese man. In a similar manner, the family drew upon social ties to another Burmese migrant to facilitate access to a nearby learning center for their daughter who was born in Thailand after their arrival in the country.

Huay Nat school lies within walking distance to the family home. Access for Annan and his older brother, who enrolled there prior to the 2005 Resolution, was facilitated through bridging social capital. The Thai woman who lived in the neighborhood and noticed the two children playing represents a broker in the family's social network. It was through this woman that the family accessed information about the enrolment practices of HN school that led them to take their sons there.

Mae's family

Though Mae's elder sister was the first to come to Thailand for work in 2001, it her mother's visit in 2004 that led the rest of the family to move as a unit. Mae's

mother's political activities with the NLD had caught the attention of local authorities in Burma and the family warned the mother not to come back to their hometown. Bonding social ties to other NLD members living in Thailand provided Mae's mother with an opportunity for employment as a teacher in a migrant learning center near Mae Sot. Similarly, the family learned about the availability of their current house through Burmese friends who had lived there previously.

In addition to bonding social capital being leveraged for housing and work, bridging social capital was activated for Mae's education. Despite working in the migrant education system, Mae's mother did not learn of the 2005 Resolution until it had been in effect for several years and even then, only after speaking with Ms. E, a Thai woman working for the Thai organization, Good Friends Center. Ties to GFC also provide the family resources beyond the access to the policy. Through GFC, the family is provided food and lodging for Mae near Tha Chai school, transportation to and from classes, and material support such as uniforms and consumable school supplies. Mae's family is also preparing to contribute their own financial resources in the future should it become necessary. The extended family network is currently setting aside money in a small tin can to support Mae as she changes schools in order to progress through the secondary grades and beyond of Thailand's education system.

Discussion

In general, migrant families in western Thailand have social relationships with a variety of other actors on both sides of the border. Families derived various benefits from these relationships, enabling them to be more successful in their endeavors. Intragroup ties to other Burmese assisted families in traveling to and settling in Thailand. This

bonding capital was also activated to find housing, work, and gain entry into migrant learning centers. Access to Thai schools was provided exclusively through ties to non-Burmese agents. Prior to 2005, families' bridging social capital made available information about local schools who were amenable to accepting migrant students. Since this time, intergroup ties have provided families with access to a set of national education policies that make Thai schools legally accessible to non-Thai students.

In addition to highlighting the social capital that families in this study required for access to state schools, additional ties and resources that support school enrolment and extended participation, either unavailable or in short supply, have also been identified. Before moving to a general summary and conclusion for the study, here I briefly consider a few challenges to improving the education of migrant children already participating in the system and expanding access to additional families not yet enrolled in Thai schools. These challenges are informed by both what I did and did not see or hear in my research. Thus, these observations are less empirically validated.

Establishing More Effective Ties

The 2005 Resolution and other education policies originate with the central Thai government. From here, they are disseminated to local education offices and then further to individual schools. In the beginning, the policies are largely available within a group of Thai state actors but families are not aware of them—Burt's (1997) "different flows of information" (p. 341). The challenge is to facilitate migrant families' access to the policies so they can make use of them. When this happens, at least for the families interviewed here, it requires bridging ties, where the resource passes from Thai actors to migrant families. Foley and Edwards (1999) broadly describe the situation in this way:

In order for ... resources, the “raw materials” of social capital, to be converted into social capital, individual or collective actors must perceive that some specific resource is present within their social field and have some form of social relationship that provides access to those resources. Social networks provide direct access to both resources and information. They also constitute the most proximate spheres of interaction in which individuals come to perceive resources to be both available and valuable. (pp. 166-167)

We have already seen that developing bridging social capital is difficult for families. Linguistic and geographic barriers often prevent adults and children from meeting and communicating with others outside their national group. Expanding the social network through active outreach into migrant communities may be another effective tool in increasing the range of actors who might benefit from these policies.

While it may be ideal to expand the network broadly, that is, improve ties between migrant families and all non-Burmese agents, a more strategic approach would focus on the ties most likely to be helpful for school access. “More ties are better,” as Foley and Edwards (1999) recognize, “but one tie might be sufficient to gain access to a crucial resource” (p. 166). The ILO, MAP, GFC, and the Thai-Myanmar-Karen Education Center (TMK Center) at Tak ESA2 are engaged in this brokering activity. However, the effectiveness of the ILO is in some ways limited by its distance from “the ground,” and education is only one area of focus for MAP. Having more organizations that are in direct contact with migrant families and focused largely or exclusively on education may be an effective means to more efficient dissemination of resources.

Ties between organizations could also be improved. As Ms. G noted, the ILO's "bird's eye view" enabled them to see disconnects in the system that impeded access to resources. Tak ESA2 was particularly active and effective in promoting awareness of education policy to stakeholders in its area but other parts of the country are less informed. Thus, in addition to organizations active at the micro-level of individual families and schools, actors who work to identify and connect actors at a broader level are also critical.

Providing Additional Resources

Financial support. The work of MAP and GFC highlight that brokering relationships between schools and families is important but often insufficient. Recall that both organizations also offer financial assistance to families to help offset the direct costs to schooling. Conversations with families consistently indicated that meeting these costs was a primary concern. This was especially true for students that GFC had sent to TC and whose families had begun to worry whether support would continue past primary level education. It was not clear to these families—and perhaps not even to the organization itself—how long assistance would be available. As an interview with one family was concluding, a look of concern passed over the father's face. "I would like to ask you one thing," he said

I would like to know after our son finishes the 6th standard, if he goes to middle school or high school, for the expenses ... Is there any help from any school, of how to go, how to pay? If we have to do it by ourselves, we don't have enough money. This is a big problem for us.

In addition, as children moved from the primary to secondary level, schools generally became more expensive with additional fees levied on families to support an expanded range of co- and extra-curricular activities. As well, secondary schools were fewer in number, increasing travel distances and costs. Some were far enough away that students would not be able to return home daily. Ms. E explained that GFC was considering the costs associated with sending children they were currently supporting to various secondary schools:

It is very expensive to send students to [the main high school in Mae Sot]. I think we should start by sending students to WH for lower secondary because it is cheaper and then maybe to Mae Pa high school for grades 10 to 12. If we send them there, then we should take care of their lodging as well.

In the spring of 2009, the Thai government began expanding its financial support to schools and families with a 15-year free education policy for schooling from pre-primary through to grade 12.¹² The program is designed to cover fees for books, education tools, student uniforms, and recreational activities. During my follow-up visit to Thailand in the summer of 2009, I learned that the program had been implemented along the border. On her first day of grade 10 at a new school (the same school her father

¹² The Thai Government set aside 18 billion baht (US\$600 million) to finance the project in 2009. The fund was designed to cover the costs of tuition fees, textbooks, uniforms, education tools and materials, and school activities. Money was to be distributed to all schools nationwide who would then manage the funds themselves. Parents would only receive money directly from schools to buy uniforms for their children. See “The Government’s 15-Year Free Education Policy” (published March 17, 2009 at http://thailand.prd.go.th/view_inside.php?id=4128) and “15yrs of free education programme launched” (published March 18, 2009 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/local/137805/free-education-for-all>).

had identified as being too expensive a year earlier), Kanok received a cash payment of 700 Baht (US\$23) to put towards her school uniforms.

Student preparation. Many migrant children have few Thai language skills. For some, this barrier is enough to discourage any participation in state schools. For those who do enroll, two main effects on their educational experience were seen: 1) initial placement below the appropriate grade level for their age and 2) reduced understanding of the instruction offered in the classroom. For older students intending to transfer from learning centers to state schools, prior exposure to Thai language would better prepare them for social and academic success at school.

Many stakeholders expressed concerns about the long-term consequences of placing children below grade level. Compulsory education laws apply to students until they are 16 years of age. Some students participating in this study will not have completed their primary education by this time and it is unclear if they would continue past this age. One family who participated in this study had a son who began grade one at 11 years old. He was 20 years old and in grade nine at WH in 2008. Although he often did not attend classes for weeks at a time in order to work, the school was particularly lenient with respect to attendance policies enabling him to complete his studies. Few schools may be willing or able to do the same.

Traditionally, little attention has been paid to Thai language at the MLCs, largely because the centers do not consider it part of their mandate (the emphasis is on maintaining students' primary languages) or do not have the resources to effectively teach Thai. With the support of the TMK Center at Tak ESA2, progress was being made with respect to the latter. Beginning in 2009, arrangements were formalized to share

expertise between MLCs and Thai schools. Specifically, some learning centers and schools had a written “Memorandum of Understanding” whereby teachers and facilities were shared between the two. The goal was to improve English and Burmese instruction in Thai schools, as well as Thai instruction, computer training, and science in the learning centers. Available data indicates that learning centers in other areas of the country are also increasing Thai language preparation of migrant students.¹³

Teacher preparation. HN was reluctant to accept children who were older than the appropriate age for lower primary school. As Ms. H made clear, the school did not believe in advancing students past grade one upon initial enrolment. As a result, students of varying ages would necessarily be grouped together, a situation for which school staff were unprepared. Attempts to address this issue appear to be in place. Cooperation between Tak ESA2 and World Education has resulted in a nascent program designed to improve teachers’ skills with the new complexities resulting from the admission of migrant students into their classrooms.

In addition to support for practicing teachers, improvements in the preparation of preservice teachers seem to be warranted. It would be particularly beneficial to expose developing teachers to a greater diversity of students, especially at universities in border areas. Speaking of his own training a few years earlier at a university just 50 kilometers from the Thai border with Burma, Mr. N at TC said:

When I studied at university I taught Thai students. I didn’t teach Burmese students. I didn’t teach Mon students. So I didn’t learn about them. The

¹³ See, for example, stories about learning centers in southern Ranong Province (“Reaching out to migrant children,” published May 20, 2009 at <http://www.thailabour.org/node/68>) and in central Samut Sakhon Province (ILO, OEC, & MOE, 2006).

university teaches about Thai language and Japanese language. If the student if Japanese, ok, I can teach them a little bit.

According to Mr. N, the university now teaches Burmese language as a course of study but it is unclear whether preservice teachers are exposed to non-Thai students as part of their preparation.

Classroom space and teachers. Perhaps the resources in shortest supply are classroom space and available teachers. With tens of thousands of migrant children not yet in Thai schools, it remains unclear how they might be accommodated within the state school system. One alternative being pursued is to certify at least some of the learning centers as legitimate education providers. While the facilities of most are inadequate, a few centers in Mae Sot have buildings that rival those of Thai schools. Plans have been underway for several years—though often interrupted due to political instability in the country—to allow select migrant schools to register as private education institutions. However, the criteria for certification are extensive and include requirements for teaching staff (must be graduates of Thai universities), course work (teaching the Thai language), and school facilities (a large open recreation area as well as a health clinic). Further, the Thai government has yet to offer financial support to interested learning centers. Notwithstanding these obstacles, GFC did achieve private school status for one of its learning centers in 2009.

Given social capital's two components of ties and resources, we can see that increasing one or the other or both will provide greater quantities of social capital for all actors in the network. Adding more ties is likely to be most beneficial where additional actors are not uniquely clustered around inferior socioeconomic positions. A greater

diversity of ties connecting a wider range of individual and collective actors is likely to be most helpful. That is, the greatest advantages to the existing network are to be gleaned through the inclusion of a wider variety of individual and collective actors who offer a more beneficial pool of nonredundant resources.

Chapter 6

Implications and Future Directions

This study has introduced a few of the 33,000—of an estimated total population of 200,000 (CPPCR, 2009)—Burmese children in Thailand who are enrolled in state public schools. Analysis of their experiences reveals how they and their families successfully navigate significant barriers in order to gain access to schools. These barriers—including but not limited to unfamiliar language of instruction, lack of awareness of policy, direct and opportunity costs to schooling, and travel distances to school—are not unique to migrants in Thailand but can be found worldwide (Bicocchi & LeVoy, 2008; UNDP, 2009). Thus, this findings of this study have potentially broad application to mobile populations and their host communities and nations around the world.

Implications

The study has shown that social capital and capital theory more generally have explanatory power with respect to Burmese families' experiences in Thailand. Specifically, the study shows that Bourdieu's (1986) disaggregation of social capital into resources and social ties helps us understand such discrete phenomena as cross-border travel, searches for employment and housing, and school access. In analyzing particular outcomes, the study invites us to think of the nature of required resources and also their location.

Recall Sanda and her family who were introduced in Chapter 1. As with most families in this study, the family moved to Thailand to seek better living, essentially economic, conditions. This move was facilitated by activating bonding social capital,

that is, drawing on information available through a relationship with a former boss. We see that social capital provides access to economic resources in the form of information about work opportunities in Thailand. For actors who migrate, the ability to secure such knowledge can be an important way to lower risks and uncertainties associated with movement within or across borders.

The study shows that families exclusively activate bridging social capital for access into Thai schools. Activation involves accessing details of national policies and local registration procedures through relationships to non-Burmese agents. For migrants unfamiliar or unsure of local bureaucracy, or who do not speak the language of local institutions, these bridging relationships can be essential to successful school participation. Not all families could readily define their goals with respect to school participation. A few explained that they wanted their children to become “educated” in general terms. More specific outcomes were access to Thai language (human capital) or the academic credentials (cultural capital) that learning centers could not provide. Only in the case of Mae, whose mother and two siblings had attended university in Burma, were the credentials explicitly defined as important for participation in higher education. Other families described investments in education as providing opportunities for work that paid better or was less physically demanding than the labor which the parents did or were otherwise familiar with.

For many families, accessing policy through relationships was not enough to secure long-term participation in schools. Relationships with organizations such as MAP and GFC were also sources of economic capital used to supplement the families’ own limited reserves. Support for school supplies, uniforms, meals, and transportation were

all key to realizing the potential held in the social ties that connected families to schools by way of brokers.

Schools also drew on ties in the networks to access vital resources. The 2005 Resolution that enabled them to accept non-Thai children was made available through a professional relationship with the Tak ESA2 office. However, here again, the policy is not seen to be a completely sufficient resource. Schools sometimes also sought out additional financial capital to support the education of students. TC and WH were most explicit about this with donations being sought through ties to the local community and its businesses.

Schools required more than money to educate migrant students. They also lacked resources in terms of professional training that allow them to effectively teach multi-age classrooms and students who were not adequately fluent in Thai. These resources are commonly deficient in schools around the world trying to meet the challenges of educating migrant children and youth. The question in Thailand is where are these resources available? Which social relationships can schools draw on to enable access to this expertise? The answer remains unclear. Even Tak ESA2, which is generally seen as highly proactive in meeting the needs of the migrant community, has no one in their office who might assist schools in developing this capacity. The office has, however, found support within the network from World Education, an NGO with an office in Mae Sot having Thai, Burmese, and Western staff. World Education is assisting teachers in working with non-Thai speakers and schools more generally, in developing more appropriate curricula. Tak ESA2 has also leveraged its social capital through ties to

MLCs to draw on expertise there for instruction in Burmese and English. It seems it really does take a village, and a well-connected one at that, to raise a child!

It seems most likely that it is the teachers and school administrators working most closely with students who are able to identify the resources they most need. Tak ESA2 seems to have been content to let schools admit children based on the schools' perceptions of their abilities to access the necessary resources. Where schools like HN felt they lacked the expertise to teach over-age children, the school was free to discourage them from attending. Though the Tak ESA2 office appears to have been successful in identifying the sources of needed support for schools in its area, organizations operating at a national level, such as the ILO, may have a more effective, broader social reach. As Ms. G described, their more distal position in the network affords them a broader perspective which may facilitate connecting schools in a particular locale with actors nearby that they are not aware of.

In sum, individual actors are not likely to possess all the resources they need to facilitate a range of desired outcomes. However, establishing (investing in) social relationships with other actors is likely to broaden the range of resources that become available. Where actors connect to others they are similar to, the additional resources made available are likely to be redundant. By reaching out to those who are different, a broader range of resources may be available. For migrants isolated by language, culture, and lack of legal residence in Thailand or elsewhere, it seems likely that their ability to reach out is compromised. Thus, a more effective strategy would be for others to reach toward migrant and other marginalized populations to assist them in achieving their various goals.

For Further Study

This interpretive case study described and explained the participation of Burmese migrant families in the Thai state education system. My focus on one particular case was an attempt to obtain a deep appreciation for the actors, their roles, and the processes involved rather than attempt generalizability. In doing so, I have endeavored to address the knowledge gap that exists around the lives of foreign nationals in Thailand in general, and about the specific educational situation of migrant children (Huguet & Punpuing, 2005a; Skeldon, 2001). While past research priorities focusing predominantly on marginalized and at-risk subgroups have increased our understandings of what prevents migrant children from attending school, this study helps us understand the conditions under which they can and do participate.

The particular interpretation presented here represents a personal choice to foreground the experiences and stories of the migrant families themselves. Thus, in using the frame of social capital, I described school participation as an outcome of the families' social capital investments and activation processes. In the remaining sections I describe other studies that would complement the findings and further our understanding of the education of migrant children in Thailand.

Retention Patterns

Despite successful enrolment in Thai schools, many of the migrant children presented here have uncertain educational futures. They face a number of ongoing challenges to continued participation from various fronts. In part, uncertainty stems from financial concerns. Families who were receiving organizational support (from GFC, for example) worried that current levels of financial assistance may not continue. Other

families relying on their own means also expressed concern that they would not be able to meet future financial obligations. Concerns were accentuated for children who would need to change schools to continue with the next level of education due to increased school fees for uniforms and supplies as well as greater transportation costs where new schools were significantly further from their homes.

In addition, it seems reasonable to wonder about the long-term effects of placing students several years below grade level. In the coming years, psychological and physical changes in these children may exaggerate feelings of not belonging in the class where they are placed or in the school more generally. Though families did not directly address this issue, Ms. G of the ILO raised the same concerns and the impact of being overage for grade during adolescence is linked with school dropout in the literature (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Roderick, 1994). Further, as children get older, internal or external pressures to contribute to family income are likely to increase. Sarai had missed several weeks of school at TC to be able to contribute to her family's income when her father was not working. It is known that for many poor families, success in managing to send their children to school is fleeting and may last only until a crisis intervenes, such as the death or departure of the main bread-winner. When this happens, their coping mechanisms are no longer adequate and one or more children may be compelled to contribute to family income (Bourdillon, 2005).

To evaluate the effectiveness of government policy and local implementation efforts more holistically, it is important to consider the longer-term participation of families rather than just initial enrolment. In 2009 the highest grade level of children whose participation was facilitated through the 2005 Resolution was grade nine. Liang,

Guo, and Duan (2008), who investigated the participation of internal migrants in the Chinese education system, found that migrant children increasingly dropped out of school as they got to the age of middle school. It would therefore be useful to analyze participation patterns in several years by which time some of the students in this study should have finished grade nine.

Variations in Space and Time

The Tak ESA2 administrative area was chosen as the site for this study because it provided many features that though to be helpful in the execution of this study: (a) a significant local Burmese population, both with documented and undocumented status; (b) a researcher- and migrant-friendly ESA staff; (c) a variety of nongovernment organizations operating in the area providing health, labor, and education support to families; and (d) an extensive system of MLCs with associated support staff. At the same time, these same features made the site exceptional and difficult to compare with other locations, even within Thailand.

Though all research contexts are unique, the application of the conceptual frame used in Mae Sot may provide quite different results elsewhere. For example, families from Burma entering Thailand represent a variety of ethnic languages, religions, and cultures. To some extent, the diversity on the Burmese side of the border is mirrored as one travels in a north-south direction in western Thailand. For example, research on migrant workers has revealed that in the northwestern city of Chiang Mai, there is a predominance of ethnic Shan, while in Mae Sot further to the south, Karen was the most common ethnic group (Panam, Kyaw Zaw, Caouette, & Punpuing, 2004). The Shan are considered to be “ethnic cousins” of the Thai, in part because they practice the same

religion but also because their languages are related (Su & Muenning, 2005). Thus, the ability of these families to invest in and activate bonding social capital may be quite different than the families in this study. Further, the concentration of NGOs in Mae Sot is particularly dense. At sites with fewer actors to broker information flows between migrant and Thai communities, the aggregate social network and educational outcomes may look quite different.

In addition, this study is contextualized by a sense of time. Since the bulk of data collection was completed in 2008, significant changes have occurred in Thailand. These include specific policy initiatives such as the 15-year funding program previously mentioned. Another is the Thai Cabinet's decision to allow migrant schools to register as private schools in Thailand upon meeting certain criteria (Weng, 2009). A third is an ongoing migrant worker registration program that has thus far, received little support from Burmese workers (Pollock, 2009). This program is important in that Burmese parents' choice of participation in either MLCs or Thai schools has been linked to perceptions about the length of time they will be permitted to stay in Thailand (ILO, OEC, MOE, 2006).

Despite noncompliance with registration procedures, the passage of time will likely lead to greater inflows of migrant families into Thailand, many of whom will pass through or perhaps stay in Mae Sot. Thus, a follow-up study, in Mae Sot or elsewhere, may find denser connections in the social networks among Burmese and possibly more extensive bridging connections across migrant and Thai communities as existing networks mature and extend themselves further. These are likely to influence school access positively.

Foregrounding the Background

The interviews with Mr. P, the former Executive Director of Tak ESA2, give a sense of variations across the country with respect to active dissemination and implementation of the 2005 Resolution. Tak ESA2 appears to have been particularly active with respect to migrant education in a time when some schools didn't even know about the Resolution. Similarly, interviews with a number of actors, along with my own observations, indicate that individual schools interpret and take up policy—especially the 2005 Resolution—quite differently. TC, for example, actively recruited students while HN was much less receptive. In part, differences in schools' responses can be explained by ambiguity in the policy itself which indicates the outcome, but little about how to get there. Responses are also tied to available resources. TC had more space available than HN and thus could afford to enroll greater numbers of new students.

In response to the policy and available resources, TC staff, and Mr. S especially, made particular decisions around funding, bilingual programs, and Burmese support staff that were unique to the school. The motivations behind these decisions are less clear than the actions taken. Ms. E from GFC thought Mr. S was being greedy in seeking money from her organization as well as the government. She also thought saving jobs for the school staff was a prime motivator of the school's apparent generosity toward migrant students, not a true desire to help them.

The attitudes and motivations behind the actions of Mr. S, and the TC teaching staff more broadly, may never be determined for certain but deserves further investigation for their explanatory power. Such a study seems especially relevant given that negative attitudes have been documented among the Thai public and state education

providers. A joint report by the ILO, Office of the Education Council, and the Ministry of Education (2006) investigating the education of migrant children near Bangkok suggested that a “campaign” was needed “to make all concerned agencies and staff, especially provincial educational agencies and heads of the agencies, to have positive attitudes towards migrant children and [to recognize] the benefits to Thai society and national security in providing them education” (p. 130).

This recommendation reminds us that the ways in which Thailand’s educational policies are enacted at the local level depend on more than whether or not schools can find the resources available to make education for migrant students a reality. It also depends on the motivations of actors that interact with the migrant families. Of course, this is not an issue unique to Thailand or even to educational policy in Thailand. It is well recognized that individuals bring personal as well as professional stances and abilities to their work. As Milbrey McLaughlin (1987) states, policy success is dependent on two factors:

local capacity and will. Capacity, admittedly a difficult issue, is something that policy can address. Training can be offered. Dollars can be provided. Consultants can be engaged to furnish missing expertise. But will, or the attitudes, motivation, and beliefs that underlie an implementor's response to a policy's goals or strategies, is less amenable to policy intervention. (p. 172)

Thus, a helpful future study would explore the link not only between policy enactment and resource availability, but also between enactment and the motivations of essential actors as a way of explaining variations across locations and institutions.

Appendix

1a. Migrant Children/Students	
Areas of Inquiry	Interview questions
Personal and educational history	1. Where did you live in Burma? How long have you been in Thailand? 2. What other schools have you attended before this one? Why did you choose this school?
Everyday school experiences	3. What is your favorite subject? Least favorite? 4. What challenges have you had to overcome in order reach the grade you are now in? How did you overcome these challenges? 5. What are the most important things you are learning at this school? 6. What kind of activities are you involved in during and after the regular school day?
School, home and community	7. How much time do you spend doing schoolwork at home? When you need help with homework, where can you go to get it? 8. What other things do you do when you are not at school? 9. How many of your brothers and sisters go to school? When do they do when they are not in school?
Views on future/life after public school	10. Do you think you will go to this school next year? Why or why not? How long do you think you will stay in school? 11. What do you think going to this school will allow you to do that you wouldn't be able to do if you didn't go to this school? 12. What do you think are the most important things you have learned from going to a Thai school? 13. Where do you think you will live when you finish school? 13. What do you think you will be doing five years from now?
1b. Migrant Adults/Parents	
Areas of Inquiry	Interview questions
Personal and family history	1. How long have you lived in Thailand? From which part of Burma did you come from?

	2. How many children do you have? Tell me about them. 3. How many years of school did you complete? Tell me about your school experiences.
Daily family experiences	4. What types of work does your family engage in? 5. Tell me about the daily activities of your family. 6. What do your children do when they are not in school?
Family resources	7. Do you have other relatives living in this community? 8. Are you a member of any organizations/groups in this community? In what ways is this group beneficial/meaningful to you? 9. What do you do when you have a problem in your family that is difficult to deal with? How do you go about solving this problem?
School-home relationships	10. What kinds of schoolwork do your children do at home? Does anyone help them with their work? 11. How many times have you gone to the school this year? For what? 12. Do you get information about how your child is doing in school? How do you get this information? 13. Do other members of the Burmese community participate in the school? In what kinds of activities do they participate?
Educational decisions of the family	14. What are the different kinds of opportunities that you have to send your children to school? 15. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of each of these opportunities? 16. Many parents do not send their children to Thai schools. How do you think they decide whether to send their children to a Thai school? 17. How many of your children do you think will go to school next year? Tell me about why or why not they will go to school.
Views on education for the future	18. Where do you think your children will live when they are older? 19. What kind of work do you hope that they will do?

	20. What opportunities do you think there are for children who graduate from elementary school? From high school? From university?
2. Nongovernmental Organization Personnel	
Areas of Inquiry	Interview questions
Personal/work experiences	1. How many years have you worked at this organization? What is your current position? 2. What are your responsibilities in this position? Why did you choose this line of work? 3. How long have you lived in this area?
Aims/goals of the organization	4. What are the central purposes of the work of this organization in general, and of your work in particular? 5. What programs is this organization currently involved in with respect to education for migrant populations? 6. What are some of the challenges that you, and the organization more generally, face in attempting to complete your work? 7. Does your work involve collaboration with other agencies or organizations? What kinds of collaborative work do you conduct?
Specific policies	8. Are there some particular policies or regulations that guide your work? What are they? 9. How do they affect what you do? How do they affect the lives of migrant families?
Education for Burmese families	10. What kinds of educational opportunities are available to migrant families in this community? 11. Which kinds of opportunities are chosen most often by families? Why do you think this is so? 12. What are some of the challenges that migrant families face in finding education for their children? How do you think they attempt to overcome these challenges?
Perspectives on the future of education	13. What changes do you think will occur in the next five year with respect to Burmese migrants in Thailand? What effects do you think these changes will have? 14. How do you see the future of education for Burmese students in Thailand?

	15. How do you see the future of students from Burma in Thai schools? What advantages or disadvantages do you think their education will provide for them?
3. Ministry of Education and School Staff	
Areas of Inquiry	Interview questions
Past experiences and present responsibilities	1. How long have you worked at this particular school/office? What are your daily responsibilities in this position? 2. What kind of training did you receive in order to work at this school?
Views on students	3. How many of your students do you think will continue their education after they complete this grade? 4. What do you think causes so many/so few students to continue their schooling? 5. How do you view the future of the children you teach in this community?
Views of Burmese students	6. What do you see as your role with respect to the education of migrant students? What policies or regulations guide your role? 7. What resources do you have available to you to support you in carrying out this role? What are some other resources that would help you carry out your role? 8. What are some of the challenges that you face in carrying out your role?
Views on the relationship between school and community	9. What do you expect parents to do to help their children in school? 10. In what ways do you interact with the parents of migrant students in this school? 11. How does the participation of migrant parents compare with that of Thai parents? In what ways is it similar or different? 12. What are some of the challenges migrant families and children in this community face? How do you think they deal with these challenges? Does the school play a role in helping deal with these challenges?

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