

# **Integrating a Nation from the Margins: The Remote Area Security Development of the Border Patrol Police in Northern Thailand <sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

By promoting development and '*thainess*' in the remote border provinces, the Thai Border Patrol Police has gained a pivotal position within the communities of northern Thailand. This paper will study the changes in the characteristics and duties of the Border Patrol Police in the early 1960s and the impact of its civic action programs among the highland minorities in the remote northern border areas. By examining the implication of remote area development programs, this article will discuss the role of the Border Patrol Police in integrating the Thai nation in the marginal border provinces.

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<sup>1</sup> The research for this article was partially funded by the Empowering Network for International Thai Studies (ENITS), Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University with support from the Thailand Research Fund (TRF). This paper is partly adopted from the author's MA thesis and on-going fieldwork projects and presented in the Third ENITS Scholarship Research Presentation on March 29, 2010 in Chulalongkorn University. The author would like to thank Police Major General Manas Khantatatbumroong for sharing his collection of documents and experiences.

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## Police, Development and National Integration

By promoting development and *thainess* (ความเป็นไทย) in the remote border areas, the Thai Border Patrol Police (BPP) has gained a pivotal position within the communities of northern Thailand. The BPP's growth and success can be largely attributed to its celebratory civic action programs (การกิจพลเรือน) carried out since the mid-1950s with the support of U.S. economic aid and technical assistance. This article will discuss the implication of the Border Patrol Police's rural development programs in the northern border provinces of Thailand by tracing the BPP's history with special emphasis on the 1960s when the unit came to engage directly in the United States Operations Missions' Remote Area Security Development (RASD) programs.<sup>3</sup>

In short, this analysis of the BPP activities in northern Thailand will attempt to answer the following two questions: first, in what context did the BPP come to focus on the civic action programs in the late 1950s?; and, second, what are the characteristics and impacts of the BPP's civic action programs to northern Thai society? Building on these approaches, this article will argue that the BPP has played a key role in establishing the concept of development (การพัฒนา) and *thainess* among the northern highland minorities and remote area villagers through its engagement in the remote area development projects.

## Coming of the Border Patrol Police

In the middle of increasing fear against communist expansion in Asia, the Thai military leaders and the U.S. government organized a meeting called the Naresuan Committee in 1950. The Naresuan Committee was comprised of leading military generals, including Sarit Thanarat, Thanom Kitthikhachorn, Police General Phao Siyanon,

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<sup>3</sup> According to Police Major General Manas Khantatatumroong [พล.ต.ต.มนัส ขันทัด บำรุง], the Remote Area Security Development Program was known as โครงการพัฒนาเพื่อความมั่นคงปลอดภัย to the Thai Border Patrol Police at that time.

and some representatives of the U.S. government.<sup>4</sup> The members on the Committee agreed to set up a paramilitary unit that could carry out unconventional warfare with significant focus on psychological operations.<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and a former Office of Strategic Service (OSS) veteran, Willis Bird, worked closely to launch psychological warfare in Thailand by utilizing this newly established paramilitary group. The CIA created a firm in Miami, Florida called the South East Asia Supply Corporation (hereafter, SEA Supply) as a cover organization for its operation in Thailand.<sup>6</sup> On April 17, 1951, SEA Supply opened a paratrooper's training course in Lopburi that could train fifty policemen at a time in airborne and guerrilla warfare.<sup>7</sup> The CIA assigned James William Lair – better known as 'Bill' Lair, to establish an eight-week course in parachuting and unconventional warfare tactics.<sup>8</sup>

Among the first group of trainees, Bill Lair and Thai police leaders selected fifty men and organized a unit called the Police Aerial Reconnaissance Unit (PARU, ตำรวจพลร่ม) in 1951. PARU was the first BPP dispatched along the border areas.<sup>9</sup> Soon the Naresuan Committee members decided to move from Lopburi and build a separate camp apart from that of the military to train only the police paratroopers specialized in parachuting and the use of special

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<sup>4</sup> Border Patrol Police General Headquarters (กองบัญชาการตำรวจตระเวนชายแดน), *40 Years of the Border Patrol Police* (๔๐ ปี ตชด, ๖ พฤษภาคม ๒๕๓๖) (Bangkok, Thailand: Border Patrol Police General Headquarters, 2536 [1993]) 29, (hereafter, *40 Years Tor Chor Dor*); Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: the United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947-1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997) 133.

<sup>5</sup> See more historical, political background from the following official volume, Border Patrol Police General Headquarters (กองบัญชาการตำรวจตระเวนชายแดน), *Under the Charismatic Royal Patronage, 50 Years of the Border Patrol Police* (ใต้ร่มพระบารมี ๕๐ ปี ตชด) (Bangkok, Thailand: Border Patrol Police General Headquarters, 2546 [2003]) 1-8 (hereafter, *50 Years Tor Chor Dor*).

<sup>6</sup> Fineman 134.

<sup>7</sup> *40 Years Tor Chor Dor* 67.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth J. Conboy, *Shadow War: the CIA's Secret War in Laos* (Boulder, CO: Paladin Press, 1995) 57.

<sup>9</sup> *40 Years Tor Chor Dor* 66-67.

weapons. Thus, the Thai government helped Bill Lair to open Camp Naresuan in Hua Hin, and this camp became the major PARU base from its official opening on April 27, 1954 to the present.<sup>10</sup>

As soon as the first group of paratroopers completed training at the end of 1951, a paramilitary police unit called the Territorial Defense Police (ตำรวจรักษาดินแดน) was organized with twenty-two platoons and was deployed in the North, Northeast and Eastern sides of the Thai borders.<sup>11</sup>

In 1953 both the U.S. and Thai governments introduced a more aggressive anticommunist policy in conjunction with the drastically changing Southeast Asian regional political environments. First of all, the Chinese communists formed a “Thai Autonomous People’s Government” in Sipsongpanna in the Southern Chinese province of Yunnan that borders Burma and Vietnam in the early 1953. Soon after the formation of this group, the Chinese Communist Party announced on January 31, 1953, that it would repel the American influence in Thailand.<sup>12</sup> Not long after, Viet Minh forces overran Northern Vietnamese borders and most of the Vietnamese countryside, finally attacking Laos in March 1953. By April, they reached Luang Prabang, the Lao capital that borders Northern Thailand.

The rapidly changing Southeast Asian regional political situation greatly alerted the Thai military government in terms of the possible Viet Minh’s infiltration into Thailand and the need for border security. Right after the Viet Minh’s invasion of Laos, The Ministry of Interior ordered the establishment of the Border Defense Police for the Northeastern Region (ตำรวจรักษาชายแดนภาคอีสาน) on May 6, 1953 and began to train the selected police force in a Nakhon Ratchasima police training camp. Twenty-two platoons were dispatched to various towns

<sup>10</sup> 50 Years Tor Chor Dor 75-77; 40 Years Tor Chor Dor 69.

<sup>11</sup> Manas Khantatatumroong [มนัส ขันรทัตบำรุง], “The History of the Border Patrol Police General Headquarters (ประวัติกองบัญชาการตำรวจตระเวนชายแดน),” *Border Patrol Police Review* (ตำรวจตระเวนชายแดน ปริทัศน์) 11:39 (September-November, 2538 [1995]) 4 (hereafter, *BPP Review*); 40 Years Tor Chor Dor 33.

<sup>12</sup> Edwin F. Stanton, “Spotlight on Thailand,” *Foreign Affairs* 33:1 (October 1954): 79.

in the northeast after eight-weeks of training.<sup>13</sup> In the same year, the clash between the Burmese military and Kuomintang (KMT) forces in the north forced the Ministry of Interior to order the establishment of another Border Defense Police unit to guard the Northern Region (ตำรวจรักษา ชายแดนภาคพายัพ) on August 3.<sup>14</sup> However, due to confusion and inefficiency derived from conflicting responsibilities and working conditions between the existing Territorial Defense Police and newly founded Border Defense Police, the Ministry of Interior finally decided to merge these forces into the Border Patrol Police on December 15, 1954.

Under the leadership of one of the most influential figures within Thai military government, that is, Police General Phao Siyanon, the BPP enjoyed both autonomy and privilege because it was one of the most elite paramilitary forces trained by CIA experts and had familiarization with high-end armaments. In addition, the unit was specifically trained to be the frontier force in guerrilla fighting, intelligence gathering, and psychological warfare, and was widely dispersed to the border areas. The close relationship between Phao and the CIA, and the U.S. government's visible support for the Thai police, especially the BPP, therefore, caused Sarit to resent deeply the BPP over time.

Consequently, after the first coup in 1957, Sarit immediately attempted to inactivate Phao's police forces and removed the military strength of the organization. Sarit replaced the leadership of the Thai National Police Department (TNPD) and appointed his supporters to the positions. Shortly after the second coup, Sarit himself assumed the position of Director-General of the TNPD in October 1958. Previously, the BPP had constituted an independent branch of the police under Phao's leadership, but after Sarit took over the title, he placed the BPP under the command of the Provincial Police (ตำรวจภูธร).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> 50 Years Tor Chor Dor 11.

<sup>14</sup> 50 Years Tor Chor Dor 11.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas David Lobe, *United States National Security Policy and Aid to the Thailand Police* (Denver: University of Denver, Graduate School of International Studies, 1977) 28, 39, (hereafter, *Aid to the Thailand Police*).

In a sense, Sarit's coup had directly changed the characteristics of the unit from a well-armed anti-guerrilla force of an ordinary police organization. More precisely, because Sarit's suspicion to the military strength of the unit did not cease, the BPP was apparently forced to concentrate more on civilian activities. However, it should be noted that the BPP's involvement in the civic action programs in the remote border areas has a longer history than before Sarit's reform of the Thai national police and BPP. When the BPP unit was formed as the Territorial Defense Police in 1951, the initial objective was to collect intelligence from the villagers in the border areas to control communist infiltration. To carry out this mission effectively, the BPP had been building Border Patrol Centers, community development centers, medical clinics and most importantly, Border Patrol Police schools in the border areas, which eventually allowed the unit to move its focus to civilian activities more smoothly and quickly after the coup and police reform.

After Sarit died, the BPP's autonomy within the Police Department was still restricted, while its name remained the Border Provincial Police (ตำรวจภูธรชายแดน) under the command of the Provincial Police. Namely, it was the endless suspicions from the Army towards the BPP's ability in military operations that deterred the BPP organization from restoring its organizational autonomy. Still, Army generals like Praphat Charusathien refused to recognize the unit as a police force because it was trained and performed like the military and thus needed to be under stricter control by both the Thai National Police Department and the military government.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, by Royal Thai Police order on September 29, 1972, the unit restored its name and reestablished the Border Patrol Police General Headquarters. The order also assigned the areas of responsibility to the unit for further improvement of BPP's performance in defending the porous Thailand borders to the present.<sup>17</sup> Currently, the Border Patrol Police Bureau under the Royal Thai Police continues its past civic action projects, such as building and and

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<sup>16</sup> Manas, *BPP Review* 16.

<sup>17</sup> Manas, *BPP Review* 18.

supporting the royal development projects, and it is assigned to perform special police duties, such as drug suppression and counter-terrorism, and to provide training for the local police along with regular patrol duties in the border areas.<sup>18</sup>

## Contexts for the Change

The BPP was initially formed and trained as a paramilitary police force in the early 1950s. However, its key activities in the border areas, especially in the northern region, have been much more focused on development projects since the late 1950s. How did the Border Patrol Police as an elite paramilitary force come to engage in civic actions and, subsequently, in the remote area development programs launched by the United States Operations Missions to Thailand? To understand the shift in BPP's major activities and characteristics, it is necessary to see the political and historical background in both Thai and U.S. politics between the late 1950s and early 1960s.

As mentioned above, the Sarit's coup in 1957 brought a significant shift in the characteristics of the BPP organization: from a paramilitary unit to a civic action agent. However, it is significant to note that the Border Patrol Police had initiated various civic action programs, even before the military coup in 1957. For example, the first Border Patrol Police School opened for highland minority children in Ban Donmahawan in Chiang Rai Province on January 7, 1956, which later became the first Border Patrol Police sponsored school (โรงเรียน ตำรวจตระเวนชายแดนบ้านม่วงที่ ๑) approved by the Ministry of Education.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Royal Thai Police (สำนักงานตำรวจแห่งชาติ), *Guarding the People's Peace* (พิทักษ์สันติราษฎร์), *The Royal Thai Police* (Bangkok, Thailand: Royal Thai Police, 2550 [2007]) 120-121.

<sup>19</sup> Border Patrol Police General Headquarters (กองบัญชาการตำรวจตระเวนชายแดน), *40 Years of the Border Patrol Police School* (๔๐ ปี โรงเรียนตำรวจตระเวนชายแดน) (Bangkok, Thailand: Border Patrol Police General Headquarters, 2539 [1996]) 53, (hereafter, *40 Years BPP School*).



Before building schools in 1956, the BPP members in the remote borders surveyed the area and befriended the villagers in order to gain knowledge and insights about the border villages and population.<sup>20</sup> In the beginning years of the school project, the police members in the remote villages taught children under the trees or on the ground between thatched houses. Before the Border Patrol Police Headquarters received financial aid from the government and some civilian organizations, the school buildings were temporarily set up in the villages with no proper, basic facilities, such as desk and chairs. Oftentimes, the BPP teachers and the villagers spent their own money to buy nails and wire to build temporary school buildings.<sup>21</sup> Despite the indifference and lack of support for the school building project, the Border Patrol Police members managed to build 18 schools in 1956 and the number increased to 84 schools by 1957.<sup>22</sup>

After the 1957 coup, Sarit's army attempted to remove the BPP's strength by cutting its autonomy within the police department and restricting its military activities. As the military strength of the unit and the CIA's direct support greatly were reduced after Sarit's coup, the BPP initiated more civic action projects from 1958 onward. During the Sarit administration, the BPP intensified its effort in building close relationships with highland villagers by learning local dialects, volunteering for services in remote northern villages and familiarizing themselves more with villagers.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the early phase of civic action programs before 1962 laid the groundwork for building contacts and close relations with the highland villages and, at the same time, the BPP could gain substantial knowledge and experience about the border villages and people.

In 1962, the United States Operations Mission (USOM) launched the Remote Area Security Development (RASD) program and mobilized the BPP as a sponsoring force. In the eyes of USOM officials, the BPP had accumulated crucial experience and useful skills

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<sup>20</sup> 40 Years BPP School 52.

<sup>21</sup> 40 Years BPP School 52.

<sup>22</sup> 40 Years BPP School 84.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas David Lobe, *U.S. Police Assistance for the Third World* (Ph.D. Dissertation; Political Science, University of Michigan, 1975) 200.



through almost a decade of work in border areas and mountain jungles. When the Public Safety Division (PSD) in the USOM decided to make civic action programs a key component of its counterinsurgency strategy in the early 1960s, it could easily take advantage of the BPP's presence in the remote border villages.

The purpose and role of the BPP in carrying out the RASD program are described in the program's evaluation report published in 1971, as follows:

In order to develop border security, the BPP must acquire and utilize detailed knowledge of the area and its people. Because of this operational requirement and because the mutual target of both the police and the insurgents is the people – the BPP, in addition to para-military operations, are engaged in numerous activities designed to provide mass contact with the border population...The objectives of these activities are to: expand and strengthen the local government; demonstrate to the people the government's interest (and strength); gather sufficient intelligence to identify and locate insurgents and their support structure; and assist in isolating the insurgents from the population (emphasis added).<sup>24</sup>

To achieve these objectives, the RASD program promoted elementary education, medical assistance, village development, economic growth, youth activities, and psychological operations. The initial project of building BPP schools continued in the RASD program throughout the 1960s, and the medical assistance project – another major activity of the BPP – was formally initiated in 1963. This medical assistance program proved quite different from earlier ones, particularly in terms of the improvement of medical skills and personnel. Previous medical services provided by the BPP to the

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<sup>24</sup> Raymond I. Coffey, *Thailand: Public Safety/ Border Patrol Police Remote Area Security Development. An Approach to Counter-Insurgency by the Border Patrol Police* (USOM: Bangkok, April 1971).

highland villagers had been limited to first-aid services or the mere distribution of general medicines.<sup>25</sup>

The USOM's engagement in the remote area development programs with the BPP organization in the early 1960s, on the other hand, reflects the larger shift in U.S. foreign policy in terms of countering growing communist influence in Southeast Asia. One notable event in the U.S. political context was the coming of John F. Kennedy to the presidential office in January 1961. Oftentimes, the Kennedy administration has been regarded as the first administration of the "counterinsurgency era" in U.S. political history.<sup>26</sup> While President Dwight D. Eisenhower generally pursued direct confrontation and suppression of insurgents with military and paramilitary units, his successor, Kennedy, preferred to counter subversive activities with more civilian measures. Therefore, one of the most significant elements in Kennedy's counterinsurgency policies was bringing "modernization" to the underdeveloped countries via U.S. foreign aid and technical assistance. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and its branches in the foreign countries, the United States Operations Mission (USOM), were the institutions that furnished this new counterinsurgency ideology with technical and financial assistance to foreign countries.

The beginning of U.S. military and economic aid to Thailand from 1950 permitted this counterinsurgency concept, that is, modernization, to disseminate throughout the 1950s and 1970s. To many Thai political leaders who came to dominate the new government, modernization gradually came to be believed as the strongest method for protecting the Thai nation-state from communist

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<sup>25</sup> It should be also noted that HRH, the Princess Mother Sangwan, also aided the BPP's medical projects for the highland minorities. See for example, "Princess Mother Medical Volunteers" 14 May 2010 <<http://www.moph.go.th/ngo/pmmvh/ngo/Main/PMMV.php>>. See also about the Princess Mother's contribution to the health care projects from "Centenary of the Princess Mother" 14 May 2010 <[http://www.lukthung.de/reiseziel-thailand/monarchie/100pm2000/pmwork\\_e.html](http://www.lukthung.de/reiseziel-thailand/monarchie/100pm2000/pmwork_e.html)>.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Douglas S. Blaufarb, "The Kennedy Crucible," *The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance, 1950 to the Present* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1977) 52-88.

victory.<sup>27</sup> In particular, although Thailand began to receive foreign aid and assistance from 1950, it was the Sarit administration that benefited most from the influx of aid and the strategy of “development for security (การพัฒนาเพื่อความมั่นคง).” Sarit had initiated building socio-economic infrastructure in the provinces from the late 1950s and his successor, Thanom Kitthikhachorn, expanded this greatly, along with the USOM’s Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) projects well beyond the 1960s.

However, it should be noted that most development projects of the military government were focused on the northeastern region that was historically regarded as the subversive region. As one American military advisor observes, the Northeast had “the poorest roads, the poorest communication, the poorest and driest farmlands, the lowest per capita income, and the least secure and effective government control of all of the major regions” and thus, it became the key region for the counterinsurgency operations for both the Thai and U.S. governments.<sup>28</sup>

While the military government concentrated on the northeast region, the BPP gradually came to play a significant role in the development of northern border provinces. The Border Patrol Police built its first school in Chiang Rai Province in 1956 after the organization had received permission to initiate a hill tribe education program from the government.<sup>29</sup> By 1957, the BPP operated 84 schools in remote areas. Throughout 1958, the BPP started establishing schools and providing medical assistance and clothing for school children with support from the Ministries of Health and Education, the Department of Public Welfare and the Thai Women’s

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<sup>27</sup> Chai-Anan Samudavanija, Kusuma Snitwongse, Suchit Bunbongkarn, *From Armed Suppression to Political Offensive: Attitudinal Transformation of Thai Military Officers since 1976* (Bangkok, Thailand: Institute of Security and International Studies, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, 1990) 10, 52-53.

<sup>28</sup> Edward B. Hanrahan, *An Overview of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Thailand through 1973 – A Background Survey for Perspective and a Guide to the Literature* (CHECO/CORONA Harvest Division, Operations Analysis Office: HQ PACAF, 1 January 1975) 12.

<sup>29</sup> Coffey 3.

Society.<sup>30</sup> Then why did the BPP focus on the civic action programs in northern Thailand?

Here, it may be useful to see how the BPP and Thai government viewed the northern region in the early 1960s in terms of national security and development. Police Major General Manas Khantatatumroong, former Deputy Commissioner to the Border Patrol Police Headquarters, wrote in his Masters Thesis about the BPP's hill tribe welfare projects in 1965:

Owing to their lack of scientific knowledge, their innocent and backwardness, the hilltribes can be a vital problem to national security through the communist infiltration and subversion along the northern border of the kingdom. Therefore, the national administration could not leave these people alone as in the past and the welfare program to uplift these people both economically and socially had to be operated by the government in which the Border [Patrol] Police has been carrying out this welfare program during the past 10 years [explanation added].<sup>31</sup>

To summarize, while the Northeast became a key region to the Thai military for safeguarding national security due to its geographical and historical relationship with Laos and Vietnam, along with its geopolitical condition, the North came to have a crucial importance to the BPP, Thai government and also the U.S. government due to the presence of a large population of highland minorities. More precisely, more than the two million hill people in the highland villages encircling the northern border areas could turn to be either a friend or an enemy to the Thai nation-state. Moreover, a substantial amount of cash income for the highland minorities came from opium and slash-and-burn cultivation and, thus, resulted in an increase of opium trade

<sup>30</sup> Robert T. McMillan, *Report on Completion of Assignment: Community Development in Thailand* (USOM: Bangkok, November 1958) 20.

<sup>31</sup> Manas Khantatatumroong, *Welfare and Management Activities of Border Police Among the Hill Tribes in Northern Thailand* (MA thesis; Department of Public Administration, Thammasat University, 1965) 9, (hereafter, *Border Police Among Hill Tribes*).

and deforestation in the northern border areas.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the BPP and other political leaders believed that not only national security, but also the environmental and socio-economic conditions in northern Thailand could be greatly threatened by the presence of highland minority communities.

Having said this, however, it does not necessarily mean that the Border Patrol Police was inactive in other regions. It would be fair enough to say that the unit's civic action projects for the highland minorities in the North reflect the very characteristics of BPP missions more vividly, which will be discussed in detail in the following section.

Responding to the heightening concern, the Royal Thai Government began to initiate a variety of welfare programs for the highland minorities by setting up the National Hill Tribes Welfare Committee under the Ministry of Interior in June 1959. The Committee included twenty-eight representatives from military, police and civilian agencies. The members in the committee realized that the three most urgent problems in the remote highland communities were border security, opium cultivation and forest destruction, and then they outlined several programs to resolve these issues.<sup>33</sup> The committee first launched a survey on the census and socio-economic conditions among the hill people in the Northern provinces in 1959 and 1961-62 respectively. Also the self-help resettlement programs, or "nikom", were extended to the highland minorities.<sup>34</sup>

In this process, the Border Patrol Police's civic action program came into consideration and appreciation because the unit had been building contacts with the highland communities much earlier than the government had begun to engage in the hill tribe welfare projects. In particular, the BPP School was considered one of the most efficient methods of securing highland minorities loyalties towards Thai nation. The Ministry of Interior and other governmental organizations, therefore, began assisting the BPP's establishment of schools in the

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<sup>32</sup> Manas, *Border Police Among Hill Tribes* 5-10.

<sup>33</sup> Robert M. Hearn, *Thai Government Programs in Refugee Relocation and Resettlement in Northern Thailand* (New York, NY: American University, 1974) 28.

<sup>34</sup> Hearn 30.

remote areas. In addition, the beginning of the Remote Area Security Development program by the USOM in 1962 also allowed a substantial increase of BPP facilities, such as permanent school buildings and medical centers.

In summary, the political and historical changes in both the Thai and U.S. governments provided a context for the changes in the BPP key activities in the northern region. First, Sarit's new government sharply cut down the military strength of Thai police and the BPP in general. Not only the military capacity but also the bureaucratic autonomy of the BPP was greatly restricted since it was put under the command of the Provincial Police. On the other hand, the beginning of civilian counterinsurgency policies by the U.S. government and, subsequently, the Thai government also allowed the BPP to focus more on civic action programs from the early 1960s.

In addition, the dramatically changing geo-political and social conditions in the northern region pressed the BPP to launch various development projects for the highland minorities. Since the BPP has been engaged in building contacts and trust with the highland minorities in the northern border areas, it could easily move on to civic actions by taking advantage of its previous experience and also the USOM's recognition and assistance to its activities. In this context, the BPP's civic action programs in the northern region came to bring the concept of development and modernization to the border communities.

### **Integrating the Nation**

To get a better sense of how the BPP's civic actions performed in the remote areas, the following is a description of one Thai Border Patrol Policeman and his duty in 1963:

L/Cpl. [Lance-Corporal] Bai had served the BPP for over seven years, having been stationed in other areas before he was assigned to Platoon 413, Area 4 [Northeast]. For three years L/Cpl. Bai taught in the school which he had organized for Thai I-san children from two villages. The school is located in the

middle of deep jungles, midway between the two villages, and has 62 children, many of whom now are able to read and write Thai very well. Five mornings a week, the children gather before the raised flag to pledge their allegiance to their country's King, then to learn more about their country along with the other educational courses given. Before this school had been opened, these communities were indifferent to the Thai Government and had little or not sense of belonging to any country at all (explanation added).<sup>35</sup>

What is the nature of BPP's civic action programs in the remote border villages? What are the implications of the BPP's remote area development to the larger northern Thai society? In a nutshell, the BPP's remote area development projects have two key objectives: first, the modernization and enhancement of socio-economic conditions of the highland minority communities; second, the increase of highland minorities' sense of belonging and allegiance to the Thai nation.

As mentioned above, the BPP began its civic actions by building the Border Patrol Police School in Chiang Rai Province at the end of 1955. The major activities of the BPP in the highland communities were concentrated on building schools and community development centers, distributing medicine, providing first aid and basic medical services for the injured, and assisting agricultural development, while encouraging the highland minorities to abandon the slash-and-burn cultivation.<sup>36</sup> Most of times, the BPP was the first government authority that visited, resided in or assisted these highland minority communities in the 1950s and even in the 1960s.<sup>37</sup> While the above

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<sup>35</sup> Public Safety Division, USOM to Thailand, *The Civic Action Program of the Border Patrol Police and the USOM Public Security Division* (Public Safety Division: USOM, January 1963) 22, (hereafter *Civic Action Program*).

<sup>36</sup> See more details from Manas, *Border Police Among Hill Tribes* 48-50; also *Civic Action Program* pamphlet.

<sup>37</sup> Hans Manndorff, *The Hill Tribe Program of the Public Welfare Department, Ministry of Interior, Thailand* (Bangkok, Thailand: Ministry of Interior/Dept. Public Welfare, 1965) 2; Young 11.



tasks may require only the simple, basic skill of the BPP members, the actual burden of the operation came from the remoteness of the communities. Hence, many accounts from the USOM reports, Thai newspapers or writings compliment the dedication and sacrifice of the BPP in the remote villages.<sup>38</sup>

After the pilot visit by both the USOM and BPP members, one or two BPP members are assigned in one village to advise the development program, such as agricultural and stockbreeding projects, building a school and encouraging the engagement in the market economy.<sup>39</sup> All of these public welfare services given to the highland minorities by the BPP have a critical implication in understanding the expansion of Thai nation-state to the remote border areas. To put it simply, the Border Patrol Police, as a state apparatus, has expanded the state governance over the border population, firstly by providing a public welfare services, and secondly by encouraging the villagers to comply with the duties of being Thai citizens, such as paying tax and obeying the laws and regulations. In addition, as American political scientist Thomas Lobe points out, the BPP's presence in the remote areas fulfilled one of the most significant missions for expanding the state authority over the borders. Through civic projects, such as building schools in a remote village, the BPP could bring isolated villagers in the surrounding areas into the state surveillance system.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, the presence of the BPP in the village itself was another significant opportunity for the highland minorities to experience the outside world. When the BPP and USOM advisors traveled to the highland villages, they brought technical devices, such as radios and Polaroid cameras, and demonstrated how to use these

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<sup>38</sup> During this author's interviews with some former BPP members, they often stated that patience is one of the most significant disciplines required of the BPP in order to endure the hardship and isolation in the remote villages. Interestingly, there are many Thai *lukthung* songs that describe the loneliness and sacrifice of the BPP members in the villages. *Civic Action Program* pamphlets also introduce some anecdotes about the BPP's work and its dedication to the remote village development projects.

<sup>39</sup> See more detailed notes about the BPP approaches to the remote villagers from Peter Kunstadter, "Thailand: Introduction," Ed. Peter Kunstadter, *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1967) 381.

<sup>40</sup> Lobe, *Aid to the Thailand Police* 82.

devices to the villagers. Many villagers were entertained with the devices, especially when the BPP members took pictures of them by Polaroid cameras. While creating a medium to build friendly relationship with the villagers, the BPP also reminded the hill people of the world beyond the mountain ranges.<sup>41</sup>

Most importantly, the BPP teachers taught the Thai language to illiterate villagers. Until the BPP built schools, almost no formal school education existed in highland areas. Minorities from these remote regions were excluded from the normal Thai education system until the early 1960s. As American linguist David Bradley indicates, the BPP schools constituted the first governmental effort to provide education for minority groups in the remote areas, and these efforts to teach the Thai language to illiterate villagers can be regarded as an effort to assimilate minority groups into the Thai nation.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the following statement by an American ethnologist cited in Peter Kunstadter's account, captures the impact of the BPP's school building project upon the assimilation of highland minorities:

The Thai Border Patrol Police (BPP) now constitutes a conscious instrument of gradual assimilation. This organization, apparently out of sheer propinquity to the ethnic minorities living in remote border areas and the necessity of dealing with them, has taken it upon itself, or had thrust upon it, cultural responsibilities which are not normally within the domain of the simple guardians of law and order. The BPP has established throughout much of the hill area, where ethnic minorities are most numerous, a series of schools in which the instructors are policemen. The primary objective of instruction in these schools is to bring a knowledge

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<sup>41</sup> *The Hill Tribe Program of the Border Patrol Police* (Bangkok, Thailand: USIS, 1966) (no page numbers).

<sup>42</sup> David Bradley, "Traditional Minorities and Language Education in Thailand," *Papers in South-East Asian Linguistics No.9: Language Policy, Language Planning and Sociolinguistics in South-East Asia*, ed. David Bradley (Pacific Linguistics Series A-67: Department of Linguistics; Australian National University, 1985) 91-92.

of the Thai language to the children of groups for whom that language is not the native form of speech...(emphasis added)<sup>43</sup>

To summarize, the pilot trips and Border Patrol Police schools in the remote areas represented the first step toward building friendly relations with highland minorities and, thereby, gathering necessary information from the villagers, and also gradually instilling the sense of belonging to the Thai nation. Therefore, one American advisor to the BPP's RASD program concludes that the Border Patrol Police work in the border villages is like "a light shines in the darkest jungle village which not only illuminates the patrolman's path but is bringing significant numbers of Thailand's remote citizens to a better understanding of their country."<sup>44</sup>

In this regard, the most significant implication of the BPP civic actions in the remote border villages derives from its effort to instill the sense of belonging to the Thai nation and *thainess* among the highland minorities. Indeed, by assuring the villagers' allegiance to the Thai nation, the Border Patrol Police could build the psychological border of *thainess* along the territorial borderlines. As shown in the anthropologist account above, the BPP's remote area development programs resulted in the assimilation and integration of the border population within the Thai nation-state. In this sense, the BPP's civic action programs in the northern highland communities constitute a conscious effort to consolidate the Thai nation from the margins.

Why was the integration of border population necessary? The reason for recognizing the northern regions as the outpost of civilian counterinsurgency operation by the U.S. and Thai governments was firstly due to geo-political conditions. As mentioned above, the growing tension in the neighboring countries, such as Laos and Vietnam, forced the long land-locked border of Thailand to be more porous. More importantly, most of northern border areas were occupied with highland minorities, which made these regions more

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Kunstadter, *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1967) 859. The name of ethnographer is not given in the text.

<sup>44</sup> Gordon Young, "Light in the Jungle," *Sawaddi* 3:4 (March-April, 1965): 11.

vulnerable to communist infiltration in the eyes of American and Thai leaders. For instance, Praphat Charusathien, then the Minister of Interior, explains that because “the [northern] region is mountainous and much of it jungle-covered it could, under the right conditions, offer ideal cover for the infiltration of foreign agents and the establishment of guerrilla base.”<sup>45</sup>

Escalating war tensions during the Vietnam War only worsened both the Thai and U.S. governments’ suspicions of these minority groups and, therefore, the BPP’s civic actions came to focus more on community development and school building projects. By improving the welfare and educational conditions of the remote villagers, the BPP and Thai government expected that the communists would fail to persuade these villagers to pursue communist doctrine. On the other hand, by strengthening the villagers’ respects to the Thai nation, the villagers would gradually have loyalty to Thailand and, consequently, they would protect their nation from any subversive actions.<sup>46</sup> Hence the BPP’s motto says: “To help the people to help themselves to help their country.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, the BPP believed that if the unit provides protection against the communist expansion and could win their hearts-and-minds, the border population would defend the Thai nation from the margins of Thailand for themselves.

Overall, the BPP’s early civic action projects and its involvement in the Remote Area Security Development program from the mid-1950s and throughout the 1960s aimed at defending the Thai nation by safeguarding the territorial borderlines and by integrating the highland minority communities into the nation. Through this process, the Border Patrol Police could build the border of *thainess* among the highland minorities in the northern Thailand.

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<sup>45</sup> Prapas Charusathira [ประกาศ จารุเสถียร], *Thailand's Hill Tribes* (ชาวเขาในประเทศไทย) (Bangkok, Thailand: Ministry of Interior, Dept. of Public Welfare, Hill Tribes Welfare Committee, 1966) 1-2. Note that this author used the English name Praphat Charusathien because of its closeness to the sound of his name. Prapas Charusathira is from the book cover of *Thailand's Hill Tribes*.

<sup>46</sup> Manndorff 19.

<sup>47</sup> Young 11.

## Border Patrol Police Still On Duty

After the United States Operations Missions terminated the Remote Area Security Development program in the mid 1970s, the Border Patrol Police has initiated similar rural development projects, while continuing some of previous civic action programs. As a result, between January 1956 and May 2009, the BPP built 721 schools along the Thailand border areas. Among them, 486 schools have been transferred to be under the Ministry of Education and local governments; 53 schools were closed as border security deteriorated or the number of students was too small to operate. By the academic year 2009, the BPP General Headquarters operated 182 schools, including two secondary schools, with 25,135 students and 1,787 teachers in total.<sup>48</sup> In response to its contribution to the educational development carried out in the remote areas, the Border Patrol Police School Project received the International Reading Association Literacy Award from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in September 1989.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the school projects, various development projects have been added to the extant BPP civic actions in the past decades. Now the civic action projects cover not only primary language education, but also the fields of nutrition, public health, higher education, natural resources and environment, vocational training and community development. The evolution from basic civic actions to advanced rural development projects, as shown above, demonstrates that even without external aid, such as that from USOM, the BPP has been actively engaging rural communities and at the same time, it has adopted civic action as a vital element of their missions in the remote border areas.

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<sup>48</sup> Border Patrol Police General Headquarters (กองบัญชาการตำรวจตระเวนชายแดน), *The Importance of Operating the Border Patrol Police Schools* (ความสำคัญในการดำเนินงานของโรงเรียนตำรวจตระเวนชายแดน) (Bangkok, Thailand: Border Patrol Police General Headquarters, 2552 [2009]) 2.

<sup>49</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Executive Board Hundred and fifty-fourth Session, *Summary List of UNESCO Prizes, List of Prizewinners (154 EX/INF.5)* (Paris: 23 March 1998) 3.

In particular, it is noteworthy that a considerable number of BPP's civic projects have been developed along with HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's royal projects since her initiation of the Agriculture for School Lunch project in the Border Patrol Police Schools in 1980. The BPP has been jointly operating the Princess' eight royal projects aiding the children and youth in the remote villages covering the above-mentioned fields of concern.<sup>50</sup>

The significance of the Border Patrol Police civic actions and development projects in the border areas in the present days may have a different implication from the past than this article has discussed above. However, the continuance of the BPP's development projects in the border areas implies that even in the present day, there exist "remote" border areas that demand the presence of Border Patrol Police. On the other hand, the expansion and development of BPP civic action programs allows us to see the gap between the government's actual reach and territorial border areas. Precisely, the Border Patrol Police are playing a complementary role where the remote population still receives scarce attention and benefits from the state authority.

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<sup>50</sup> The eight HRH Maha Chakri Princess Sirindhorn's royal projects that the Border Patrol Police has jointly operated are: (1) Agriculture for School Lunch Project (โครงการเกษตรเพื่ออาหารกลางวัน); (2) Iodine Deficiency Control Project (โครงการควบคุมโรคขาดสารไอโอดีน); (3) Promotion of Nutrition, Health and Sanitation for Mother and Children in the Remote Areas Project (โครงการส่งเสริมโภชนาการและสุขภาพอนามัยแม่และเด็กในถิ่นทุรกันดาร); (4) Promotion of Quality Education Project (โครงการส่งเสริมคุณภาพการศึกษา); (5) HRH Maha Chakri Princess Sirindhorn's Royal Support for the Student Project (โครงการนักเรียนในพระราชานุเคราะห์ สมเด็จพระเทพรัตนราชสุดาฯ สยามบรมราชกุมารี); (6) Vocational Training Project (โครงการฝึกอาชีพ); (7) Promotion of Cooperatives Project (โครงการส่งเสริมสหกรณ์); and (8) Preservation of Natural Resources and Environment Project (โครงการอนุรักษ์ทรัพยากรธรรมชาติและสิ่งแวดล้อม). See the detailed description about the eight Princess' royal project from Border Patrol Police General Headquarters (กองบัญชาการตำรวจตระเวนชายแดน), *With Faith and Loyalty, 50 Years of the Border Patrol Police School* (ด้วยจงรักและภักดี ๕๐ ปี โรงเรียนตำรวจตระเวนชายแดน) (Bangkok, Thailand: Border Patrol Police General Headquarters, 2539 [1996]) 125-129, (translations are the author's).

## Concluding Remarks

The above discussion on the Thai political context and development of BPP civic actions in the remote border areas in the northern Thailand attempts to bring our attention to the characteristics and role of the Border Patrol Police in modernizing highland minority communities since the mid-1950s to the present. To conclude, it is significant to note that the changes in the role and work of the Border Patrol Police can be fully explained within the global, Southeast Asian regional and Thai political contexts. In other words, the change in the characteristics of BPP reflects the shifting political contexts at three levels of political sphere: global, Southeast Asian regional and Thai national.

Additionally, the implication of the BPP's remote area development programs permits us to understand how the two key concepts, that is, development and *thainess*, came to be disseminated and adopted among the highland minorities in northern border villages. The BPP's civic action programs in these villages were the embodiment of the above two concepts aimed at defending the Thai border and nation from the margins by integrating the border population within the Thai nation.

Lastly, it should be noted that it was the BPP who has attempted for the first time to bring the concept of state and nation to the remote villages. Indeed, their pioneering works in the northern border areas encouraged the Thai government and other governmental and nongovernmental organizations to pay a close attention to these highland communities and, consequently, to launch several public welfare programs. As the former American BPP advisor Gordon Young has said, the BPP was not simply the police but also the pioneer in the widely stretched Thai borders.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Young 26.



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