

SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

<http://englishkyoto-seas.org/>

<Book Review>

Kai Chen

Premjai Vungsiriphisal, Dares Chusri, and Supang Chantavanich, eds. *Humanitarian Assistance for Displaced Persons from Myanmar: Royal Thai Government Policy and Donor, INGO, NGO and UN Agency Delivery*. Cham: Springer, 2014, xxi+245pp.

Benjamin Harkins and Supang Chantavanich, eds. *Resettlement of Displaced Persons on the Thai-Myanmar Border*. Cham and New York: Springer, 2014, xix+116pp.

Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 6, No. 1, April 2017, pp. 173-178.

How to Cite: Chen, Kai. Review of *Humanitarian Assistance for Displaced Persons from Myanmar: Royal Thai Government Policy and Donor, INGO, NGO and UN Agency Delivery* by Premjai Vungsiriphisal, Dares Chusri, and Supang Chantavanich. *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, April 2017, pp. 173-178.

Link to this book review:

<https://englishkyoto-seas.org/2017/04/vol-6-no-1-book-reviews-kai-chen/>

View the table of contents for this issue:

<https://englishkyoto-seas.org/2017/04/vol-6-no-1-of-southeast-asian-studies/>

Subscriptions: <http://englishkyoto-seas.org/mailling-list/>

For permissions, please send an e-mail to:
english-editorial@cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp



Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

A further complication emerges in the discussion of the interactions between colonial authorities and the demands and aspirations of the local elites in terms of economic and financial policies. While this is an important question that builds on from research such as Michael Cullinane's *Ilustrado Politics* (2003), Nagano tends to treat the "Filipino elite" (pp. 74, 76) as a monolithic whole without differentiating much between the demands of differences in terms of the kinds of enterprises they engaged in, or regional varieties.

Nagano may not have written the "true history" (p. 5) of the Philippine financial crisis—such a qualification applies to no account of history, however well researched, and should have been avoided by the author. Nevertheless, her book is a vital revision of this crisis and its implications for the (political) history of the Philippines.

Hidde van der Wall

Department of Fine Arts, Ateneo de Manila University

References

- Abinales, Patricio N.; and Amoroso, Donna J. 2005. *State and Society in the Philippines*. Pasig: Anvil Publishers.
- Anderson, Benedict. 2004. *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Cullinane, Michael. 2003. *Ilustrado Politics: Filipino Elite Responses to American Rule, 1898–1908*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Kramer, Paul A. 2006. *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States and the Philippines*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Humanitarian Assistance for Displaced Persons from Myanmar: Royal Thai Government Policy and Donor, INGO, NGO and UN Agency Delivery

PREMJAI VUNGSIRIPHISAL, DARES CHUSRI, and SUPANG CHANTAVANICH, eds.
Cham: Springer, 2014, xxi+245pp.

Resettlement of Displaced Persons on the Thai-Myanmar Border

BENJAMIN HARKINS and SUPANG CHANTAVANICH, eds.
Cham and New York: Springer, 2014, xix+116pp.

In 1984 displaced people from Myanmar began to flee to the Thai-Myanmar border. To date, Thailand has hosted millions of displaced people in Thai-Myanmar border shelters. These people have insufficient language skills to be integrated into Thai society, while "many Thai officers and voluntary guards did not speak the displaced persons' languages" (Premjai *et al.*, p. 72).

Both academics and policy makers need to know more about the dynamics of the Royal Thai Government's policies toward the displaced population on the border, challenges facing the stakeholder involved and policy implications for the stakeholders. These two volumes edited by the Asian Research Center for Migration at Chulalongkorn University can easily find a place on reading lists for academics interested in international security, human insecurity, refugees, and Thai studies. They are also must-reads for anyone seeking a better understanding of the displaced population on the Thai-Myanmar border.

Correcting Misunderstandings about the Royal Thai Government

A collection of essays by brilliant scholars from multiple disciplines, *Humanitarian Assistance for Displaced Persons from Myanmar* reviews the dynamics of the Royal Thai Government's policies toward the displaced population on the Thai-Myanmar border and explores the impacts of current interventions by stakeholders (e.g., donor countries, NGOs, international organizations, and the Royal Thai Government).

This volume has two parts. Part 1 (Chapters 1–6) highlights the Royal Thai Government's policies toward the displaced population on the Thai-Myanmar border, while Part 2 (Chapters 7–13) analyzes the other stakeholders' funding policies, project implementation strategies, and countermeasures against the Royal Thai Government, as well as the impacts and limitations of stakeholders. From a comparative perspective, this edited volume examines three potential solutions for the displaced population on the Thai-Myanmar border: resettlement, local integration, and repatriation.

In the opinion of the reviewer, the most obvious contribution of this edited volume is to correct misunderstandings about the Royal Thai Government, which has been contributing significant funding and human resources for the displaced population on the Thai-Myanmar border.

First, it is evident that the Royal Thai Government is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on the Rights of Refugees; neither does it have any domestic legislation that directly defines the standards of the treatment for refugees. However, this does not mean that the Royal Thai Government does not follow international standards on the treatment of refugees. The government's policy toward the displaced population is "shaped in various Cabinet resolution, Ministry announcements and regulations" (Premjai *et al.*, p. 90).

For decades, the government has been providing community-based shelter services and protection to the displaced population, "not on the grounds of refugee status, but as displaced persons" (Premjai *et al.*, p. 12). It has had to balance the needs of its own citizens with those of the displaced population on the Thai-Myanmar border. According to interviews with some members of the displaced population, "they largely feel safe, and believe their education and health care provision are at a certain level satisfactory" (Premjai *et al.*, p. 75).

Second, stakeholders have been seeking durable solutions to improve the quality of life in the border shelters. For instance, “microfinance has been initiated in some settlements in the form of Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLA) for those who are more interested in setting up their own small businesses than looking for waged employment” (Premjai *et al.*, p. 45).

As the Royal Government insists, “when the circumstances that caused them to flee have changed or ceases, then they must return to the country of their former habitual residence” (Premjai *et al.*, p. 13). Therefore, the displaced population’s voluntary repatriation is the most practical second-best solution in the future. However, voluntary repatriation of the displaced population would depend on the ceasing of armed conflict between ethnic-based militias and the Myanmar Army, and peace appears a distant prospect.

Third, some critics ignore the fact that Thailand is in a uniquely difficult position with regard to funding shortage. On the one hand, the Royal Thai Government needs to serve the immediate basic needs of the displaced population on the Thai-Myanmar border. On the other hand, it needs to provide the displaced population with opportunities for self-reliance. Due to a funding shortage, there is a lack of effective communication among the Royal Thai Government, donor countries, international organizations, and NGOs, as well as a halting pace of registrations in the border shelters. As a result, many unregistered displaced people are not eligible for the resettlement program.

Some donor countries are still recovering from the 2008 financial crisis. Not surprisingly, it is hard for the Royal Thai Government to commit to sustainable funding, let alone providing increased opportunities for vocational training and income-generating activities for the displaced population. There is an increasing incidence of violence and human rights abuses toward displaced children on the Thai-Myanmar border, and education is still disrupted: “graduation in the settlements is not recognized by the Thai education bureau yet” (Premjai *et al.*, p. 44), and “large numbers of children are not continuing their studies and number of drop-outs is quite large” (Premjai *et al.*, p. 62).

Fourth, there is a fallacy that the Royal Thai Government’s policies toward the displaced population are unchangeable. In fact, the government’s policies are somewhat flexible: “there has been flexibility at the practical and local level” (Premjai *et al.*, p. 85). For instance, members of the displaced population are allowed to leave the shelters to seek health care in Thai hospitals as well as get access to education in other shelters. More important, many displaced people leave the border shelters to seek employment. Many of them “do have jobs, and are able to leave the settlements to work for local employers, usually in agriculture and manufacturing” (Premjai *et al.*, p. 44). “This practice is often tolerated at the local level” (Premjai *et al.*, p. 24).

At the same time, displaced people can work within the border shelters, such as employees of the NGOs. The findings of this volume show that “almost two-thirds of displaced persons” who participated in the study agreed with the Royal Thai Government’s policies toward the displaced

population and “none of the displaced persons complained openly about the poverty they experienced within the shelters” (Harkins and Supang, p. xiv).

In the conclusion, the editors and contributors to this volume note that there is no optimal solution to reduce the number of displaced persons in the shelters on the Thai-Myanmar border. They believe that “resettlement is the only one of the three durable solutions available in the border shelters” (Premjai *et al.*, p. 30). This conclusion is open to further discussion.

Is Resettlement the Best Solution?

The past decade witnessed more people flowing from Myanmar into the Thai-Myanmar border shelters, “primarily due to the ongoing conflict and human rights abuses within Myanmar.” Historically, resettlement of displaced populations has the following three functions: meeting “the protection requirements or special needs of individual refugees,” providing “a major durable solution for large groups of refugees,” and serving as a second-best solution of burden sharing among the stakeholders (Harkins and Supang, pp. 10, 88).

The resettlement of displaced families on the Thai-Myanmar border is regarded as the largest resettlement program in the world, with 12 receiving countries accepting displaced families (Harkins and Supang, p. xiii). According to a report issued by the Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 11,107 displaced persons from the shelters departed for resettlement in 2010, bringing the total number of departures since 2006 to 64,513. Approximately 76 percent of this total were destined for resettlement in the United States, “with the remainder accepted by Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Japan” (Harkins and Supang, p. 2).

In practice, if an applicant living in a border shelter has “all of the documentation necessary, it is correctly filled out without any major discrepancies and they are able to answer the application questions plausibly, the process generally takes less than 1 year” (Harkins and Supang, p. 54). The applicant is also required to apply for an exit permit from the Royal Thai Government, without which he/she cannot depart from Thailand (Harkins and Supang, p. 57).

During the past decade, thousands of people have benefited due to the resettlement program. “[R]eunion with friends and family members, educational opportunities and hope for a better future were the primary reasons for their decisions to apply” (Harkins and Supang, p. 48), although most resettled families argued that “they had no control over which country their application was sent to” (Harkins and Supang, p. 55). Will the resettlement program be the most durable solution for the displaced population on the Thai-Myanmar border in the long run?

In reviewing resettlement policy-related documents, interviews, and field visits, *Resettlement of Displaced Persons on the Thai-Myanmar Border*, edited by Benjamin Harkins and Supang Chantavanich, focuses on the receiving countries of resettled families (particularly the United

States), explores the motivations and constraints for the displaced population to participate in the resettlement program, analyzes the resettlement's impacts on stakeholders (e.g., the displaced population, remaining populations on the Thai-Myanmar border, and new displaced families flowing into the border shelters). Finally, this volume stresses the policy implications for stakeholders in the foreseeable future.

This volume has six chapters. The first two review the research approach and the literature of the resettlement program. As the editors and contributors believe, there has been a public-private partnership established by the stakeholders to promote the resettlement program, such as the Royal Thai Government's agencies (especially the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Foreign Affairs), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Organization for Migration, Overseas Processing Entity, US Department of Homeland Security, etc.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine the negative and positive factors influencing the displaced population's attitudes toward the resettlement program. The negative factors, constitute a pre-existing exclusion to full participation in the resettlement program. As the editors and contributors suggest, the negative factors include but are not limited to "living conditions within the shelters and the future prospects for local integration within Thailand," policy restrictions (e.g., lack of registration status, and stalled registration process), and security concerns—many displaced families felt that "it was unsafe to return to Myanmar currently" (Harkins and Supang, pp. 48, 50). On the other hand, the positive factors include "better educational opportunities for children," "better job opportunities," "an overall better future for their families," as well as "family reunification" (Harkins and Supang, p. 79).

In Chapter 5, based on the cases of resettled families in St. Paul, Minnesota, and San Francisco, California, the editors and contributors to this volume highlight the challenges facing resettled families in the United States. For example, "upon arrival in the U.S. they often find that they are over the age limit to attend local public schools" (Harkins and Supang, p. 82). What is worse, since the labor market in the United States "appears to have reached its saturation point for unskilled workers," resettled families have "very limited employment opportunities in a very high-cost living environment" (Harkins and Supang, p. 90). For instance, the funding allocated for cash assistance to support the resettled families was "too low for high-cost cities such as those in the San Francisco Bay Area where taxes and living expenses are among the highest in the US" (Harkins and Supang, p. 98). What type of welfare assistance did the resettled families receive? In most cases, they received food stamps (between \$300 and \$600 per month). In addition, the majority of resettled families received rental assistance, while some "said that it did not fully cover their actual rental expenses" (Harkins and Supang, p. 83).

Finally, Chapter 6 draws conclusion and advances policy recommendations for stakeholders in the future. As the editors and contributors suggest, although resettlement should be part of a sustainable and solutions-oriented approach to displacement on the Thai-Myanmar border, "it

appears highly unlikely that resettlement can resolve the displaced person situation in the border shelters as a lone durable solution” (Harkins and Supang, p. 95).

So far, the most significant constraint is that the resettlement program is significantly underfunded. For instance, the stakeholders have insufficient funding to reinvigorate the screening mechanism that determines displaced persons’ status, in order to provide new asylum seekers with basic services.

Unfortunately, stakeholders are often requested to provide funding for the needs of resettled families, such as “adjusted immigration status, stable housing, engagement with community services and independent functioning” (Harkins and Supang, p. 82).

In the opinions of the editors and contributors, there is no truly feasible solution for resettled families from the Thai-Myanmar border shelters. Without sufficient funding, it is impossible to implement any measures for self-reliance, which is “a necessary part of any truly sustainable longterm strategy for resolving the displacement situation” (Harkins and Supang, p. 97).

Kai Chen 陈锴

School of International Relations, Xiamen University

Two Crises, Different Outcomes: East Asia and Global Finance

T. J. PEMPEL and KEIICHI TSUNEKAWA, eds.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015, viii+267pp.

More Financial Crises Ahead?

Two Crises, Different Outcomes: East Asia and Global Finance makes three key assertions: first, contrary to the school attributing the Asian financial crisis to “crony capitalism,” the debacle of 1997–98 was due largely to unregulated capital flows that flooded the region then quickly fled at the onset of the macroeconomic distortions they had brought about.

Second, the United States and Europe could have avoided the financial collapse of 2008–09 had they learned the right lessons from the Asian financial crisis and strengthened instead of dismantling or weakening their systems of financial regulation.

Third, learning from the Asian financial crisis, the East Asian economies took steps to prevent a rerun of that crisis, including making currency swap arrangements, limiting their exposure to new financial products like credit default swaps, and, above all, building up massive financial reserves derived from intensified export-intensive trade strategies. These measures insulated them from the 2008–09 global financial crisis.

To be sure, these three arguments have been made by others in the academic and political