

## Why the Kula Wept: A Report on the Trade Activities of the Kula in Isan at the End of the 19th Century

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### I Introduction

This is a preliminary report on the trade activities of a minority group from Burma called the Kula or the Tongsoo in the Northeastern part of Thailand (Isan) during the last few decades of the 19th century.

This study attempts to examine the role the Kula/Tongsoo,<sup>1)</sup> one of the various actors in-

involved in the region, played in the development of the money economy and commercialization in this region, and the effects this development had on the different social groups during the period concerned here.

The main purpose of this article is to outline the Kula/Tongsoo's trade activities, which are mentioned in some studies on Isan economy but rather in passing,<sup>2)</sup> and their implications to the study of the socio-economic history of this region.

### II The Early Period

The Kula/Tongsoo seem to have been rather familiar to the people in Northeast Thailand for a long time. Paitoon Mikusol,

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1) Who the Kula/Tongsoo were is still an unanswered question. Although Siamese documents of the 1870s and the 1880s mostly use the two words interchangeably, it is not clear whether they refer to the same ethnic group, as there are exceptions. Wilson, for example, writes that "Tongsoo" (or Tongsu) was used in the 19th century as a designation for (a) "the Karen tribe in general"; (b) "a Thai trader tribe closely related to the Shans known for dealing in elephants and horses"; and (c) "the Shan pronunciation of the Burmese word *taungthu*, meaning 'hill man', referring to the Pa-O subdivision of the Karen tribe" [Wilson and Hanks 1985: 62]. Reporting on the gem diggers in Chanthaburi and Cambodian peninsula, Smyth says, "The Siamese often style the gem-mining Shans Tongsu, but there are very few real Tongsus among them. Europeans have usually called them Burmese, but beyond the fact that they come from the Burmese Shân states the term is not applicable to more than an extremely small percentage, and the application of the name to his face would not be considered flattering by the average Shân. The term *Gula*, which is most commonly used of the

Shâns in Siam both by the people of the country and by themselves, appears to be in reality the Burmese word *Kula*, foreigner" [Smyth 1898: vol. 2, 181]. The British Consular Reports, on the other hand, explain the Tongsoo were those who came from Pegu. This shows that there was confusion in identifying some of the peoples from Burma during this period. In this article, the word, the Kula/Tongsoo, is used in a broad sense, meaning certain ethnic group(s) from Burma who were called the Kula or the Tongsoo (*Tongsu*) and sometimes Shans. And where citations from any reference materials are made, the writer follows the wording of the original text.

2) See, for example, Deesuankok *et al.* [1986: 167-168], Sapsarn [1982: 38], and Nartsupha [1984: 44-45].

for example, writes in his thesis on the socio-cultural history of this area during the reign of King Rama the Fifth: "The Shan (Kula) from the Shan states took bells and gongs which were good[s] for [which] Shans were famous and trade[d] them in the northeastern *huamúang*.<sup>3)</sup> Since the Shan apparently met trouble in a large grass plain between Muang Suwannaphum and Muang Rattanaaburi, that plain is called the Thung Kula Rong Hai (the field of the weeping Kula)" [Mikusol 1984: 102-103].

However, the earliest official Siamese document in the Rattanakosin Era which mentions the Tongsoo appears, as far as this writer has noticed, in the year C.S. 1200 or 1838 A.D.<sup>4)</sup> And the earlier records made during the reign of King Rama the Third were primarily on those cases concerning the Tongsoo detained by local officials in the North, i.e., in Chiang Mai, Tak, Sawankhalok and Kamphaeng Phet, and not in the Northeast.<sup>5)</sup> The Tongsoo came in groups from Moulmein through Tak or Rahaeng, bringing some goods to sell along the way and sometimes buying elephants and oxen on their way back to their homes. The articles which they brought to trade were piece goods of various kinds, pieces of cloth (some were silk), mirrors, small toilet boxes (*aep*), rings made of gold and ornamented with gems, scissors, knives and so on.<sup>6)</sup>

One of the earliest records on the Tongsoo

in the Northeast appears in the reign of King Rama the Fourth. It reports the trouble between the Tongsoo and the *chaomúang* of Roi Et, Suwannaphum, and Khon Kaen over the dealing of almost six hundred head of cattle which the Tongsoo had bought there.<sup>7)</sup> According to the document, the Tongsoo had purchased 66 oxen in Roi Et, 178 oxen in Suwannaphum, and 333 oxen in Khon Kaen. Then the *chaomúang* of these principalities confiscated these oxen. The King ordered these *chaomúang* to refund the price to the Tongsoo, who were waiting in Bangkok, by selling these oxen either back to the original owners or to anyone as soon as possible. But the response by these *chaomúang* were so slow that the Bangkok authorities decided to pay the price of the oxen, or 2,763.5 bahts, to the Tongsoo first, and ordered the *chaomúang* to pay the money back to Bangkok without delay. The Bangkok authorities were, in fact, suspicious of the hidden intentions of Burma behind these Tongsoo trading activities and had been ordering the *chaomúang* under their control not to sell any cattle and animals to anyone from outside the territory.<sup>8)</sup>

These incidents in the North and the Northeast reveal the difficulties of trade in the early period. The trade with the Tongsoo, especially of animals, was discouraged and even forbidden by the authorities on the

3) *Huamúang* is roughly translated as "principality" or "township" and *chaomúang* is a "lord" or "governor" of *huamúang*.

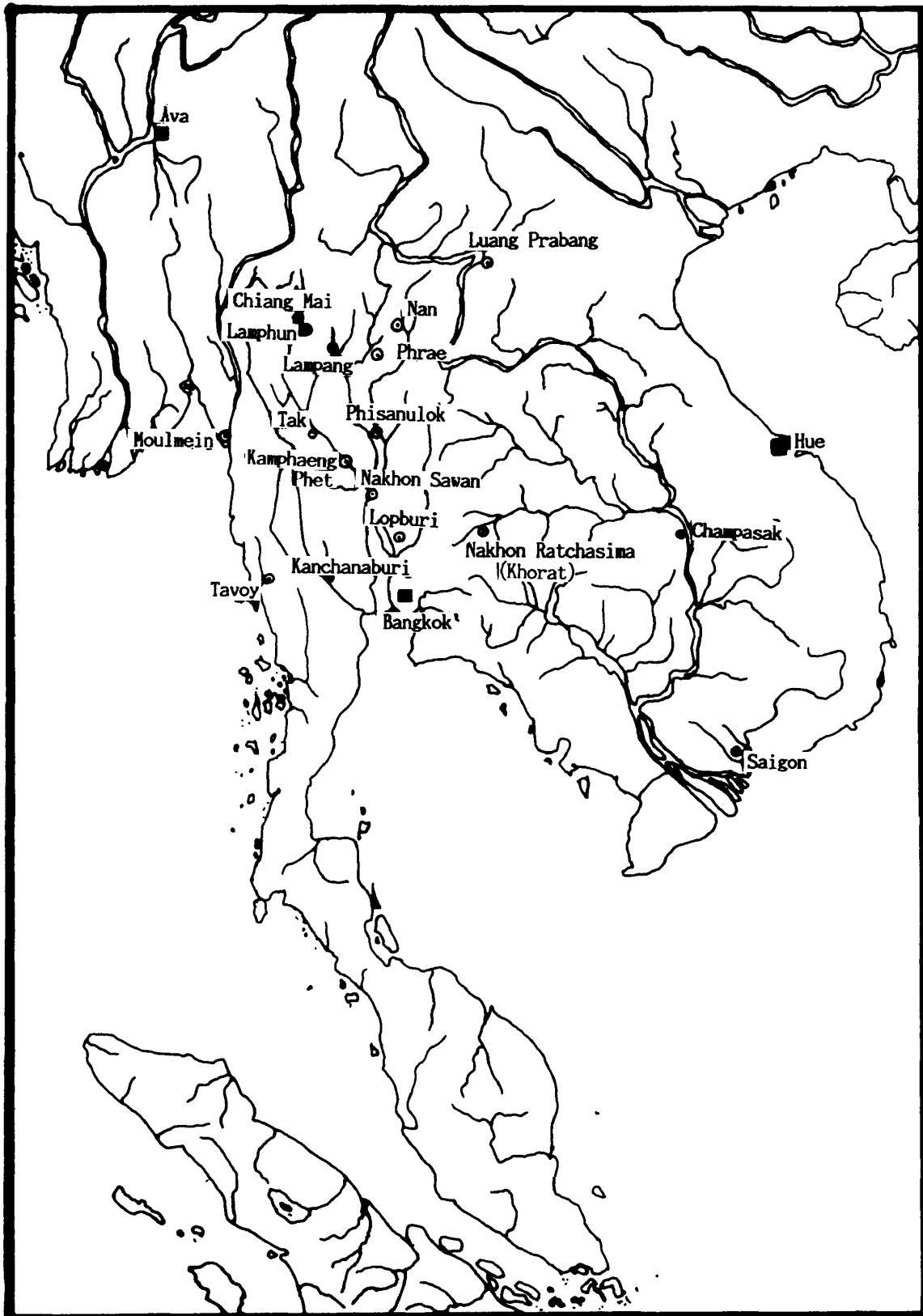
4) NL, CMH RIII, C.S. 1200: No. 1.

5) NL, CMH RIII, C.S. 1200: No. 1; NL, CMH RIII, C.S. 1207: No. 50, No. 101, No. 135, No. 301.

6) NL, CMH RIII, C.S. 1200: No. 1; NL, CMH RIII, C.S. 1207: No. 50; NL, CMH RIII, C.S. 1210: No. 188.

7) NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1217: No. 48, No. 74. In fact, previous to this incident, the *chaomúang* of Chonabot was accused of not prohibiting his subordinates from selling elephants to the "Moulmein people" (*phuak mqrmaeng*). But the document does not state whether they were the Kula or not [NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1215: No. 206].

8) The Richardson mission, sent in 1839 to improve the trade relations, especially in animals, between Moulmein and Siam, failed.



Map 1 Siam and Her Neighbors

Siamese side. Those who peddled their wares in the North were sometimes caught by local officials as well.

The incident in Roi Et, Suwannaphum, and Khon Kaen happened just before the Bowring Treaty, ratified on the 5th of April, 1856, came into effect. The treaty, first of all, guaranteed that "all British subjects coming to Siam shall receive from the Siamese Government full protection and assistance to enable them to reside in Siam in all security, and trade with every facility" [Bowring (1857) 1969: vol. 2, 215]. "The interests of all British subjects" were "placed under the regulation and control of a British consul" in Bangkok [*ibid.*: vol. 2, 216]. And the Supplementary Agreement stipulated the exclusive jurisdiction of the consul over British subjects [*ibid.*: vol. 2, 233-235]. They were also provided with the right to "travel to and fro under the protection of a pass, to be furnished them by the British consul and counter-sealed by the proper Siamese officer, stating, in the Siamese character, their names, calling, and description" [*ibid.*: vol. 2, 218]. These stipulations in the treaty, including the Supplementary Agreement signed in May, 1856, provided the basic framework to regulate the trade activities of the Kula/Tongsoo who mostly came from Moulmein and were, therefore, British subjects. After the treaty, the trading activities of the Kula/Tongsoo increased because of the favourable attitude taken by the Siamese authorities toward these strangers from British Burma.

In the following period, numerous records show the Bangkok authorities announcing to the *chaomuang* of principalities concerned the

plans of trips desired by British subjects as reported by the British Consul in Siam.<sup>9)</sup> The places where the Kula/Tongsoo planned trading journeys were Northern Lao principalities (*huamuang lao fai nua*) in general, or often specifically, Nakhon Ratchasima, Tak, Chiang Mai, Phrae, Lampang, Lamphun, Nan, and to lesser extent, Nakhon Sawan, Sawankhalok, Lopburi, Lom Sak and so on. Those groups which visited Nakhon Ratchasima often proceeded to Moulmein, their final destination, travelling through the Northern (Lao) principalities.

Elephants, ivory, horns, silk, as well as oxen and buffaloes were the popular products the Tongsoo wanted to purchase in Nakhon Ratchasima and in the Northern Lao principalities. They were also interested in teak, which was the product of places like Chiang Mai, Phrae, Lampang, Lamphun, and Nan. Although they expressed their wishes to trade, both buying and selling, what they brought from Bangkok to sell upcountry were little mentioned. The only items specifically mentioned in the limited number of cases were guns and silk cloth. They usually traveled in groups of three to 17 or 18 people, but there was also a case of a group with 48 members recorded. These itinerant traders were always armed with guns and swords.<sup>10)</sup>

9) Some examples are: NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1222: No. 163; NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1223: No. 1, No. 188, No. 245; NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1224: No. 152; NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1226: No. 5; NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1227: No. 10, No. 94, No. 137, No. 141; NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1228: No. 106, No. 122, No. 128, No. 168; No. 187, No. 230; NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1230: No. 31. (NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1223: No. 1, No. 245; NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1224: No. 152 are concerning the Thaway people, and NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1226: No. 5 is a case of the Burman.)

10) See footnote 9).

On issuing letters to the officials in principalities, notifying them that the Tongsoo would make a journey for trade there, the Bangkok authorities gave directions to the *chaomuang* and his officials that they should see that these Tongsoo should be able to trade at will with convenience and safety and that the prices should be determined by negotiation. The officials were required to record the descriptions of the animals when the negotiation was completed.<sup>11)</sup> But as the trade grew, these operations became very difficult to follow, posing serious problems for the various parties involved in the business.

### III The Development of the Trade<sup>12)</sup>

By the 1880s, the Kula/Tongsoo traders were commonly seen in the Northeast. The places where the Kula/Tongsoo were reported to have appeared are shown on the Map 2. Although this map primarily indicates the places where the Kula/Tongsoo ran into trouble recorded in a limited number of sources, it clearly shows how pervasive these traders were in the region at that time. McCarthy, during his trip up to the North in 1884, wrote in Nong Khai that "The ubiquitous Shan pedlar is at Nawng Kai also, asserting his claims to a share in the profits of trade" [McCarthy 1900: 33]. In fact, they were ubiquitous.

The Kula/Tongsoo appeared in the North-

east basically as itinerant traders throughout the period concerned here. Unlike the fellow Chinese merchants, they did not set up shops or stores of any kind. They peddled their goods from one village to another, taking shelter in temple pavillions (*sala wat*) along the way. On journeys, they loaded their goods in packsaddles (*tang*) on both sides of the oxen in cases where they had pack oxen (*kho tang*). Besides, they also used carrying poles on their shoulders (*hap*) as well.<sup>13)</sup> A Tongsoo named Panta, living in Chaiyaphum, is described in a record as follows:

Panta, a Tongsoo, is a British subject. He has a wife and children, and set up home in Chaiyaphum. In the third month of the Year of Ox, Panta, a Tongsoo, with his 12 friends, made a trip for trading to Khok-luang village in Nakhon Ratchasima, carrying the goods to sell at the ends of the poles on the shoulders (*hap*).<sup>14)</sup>

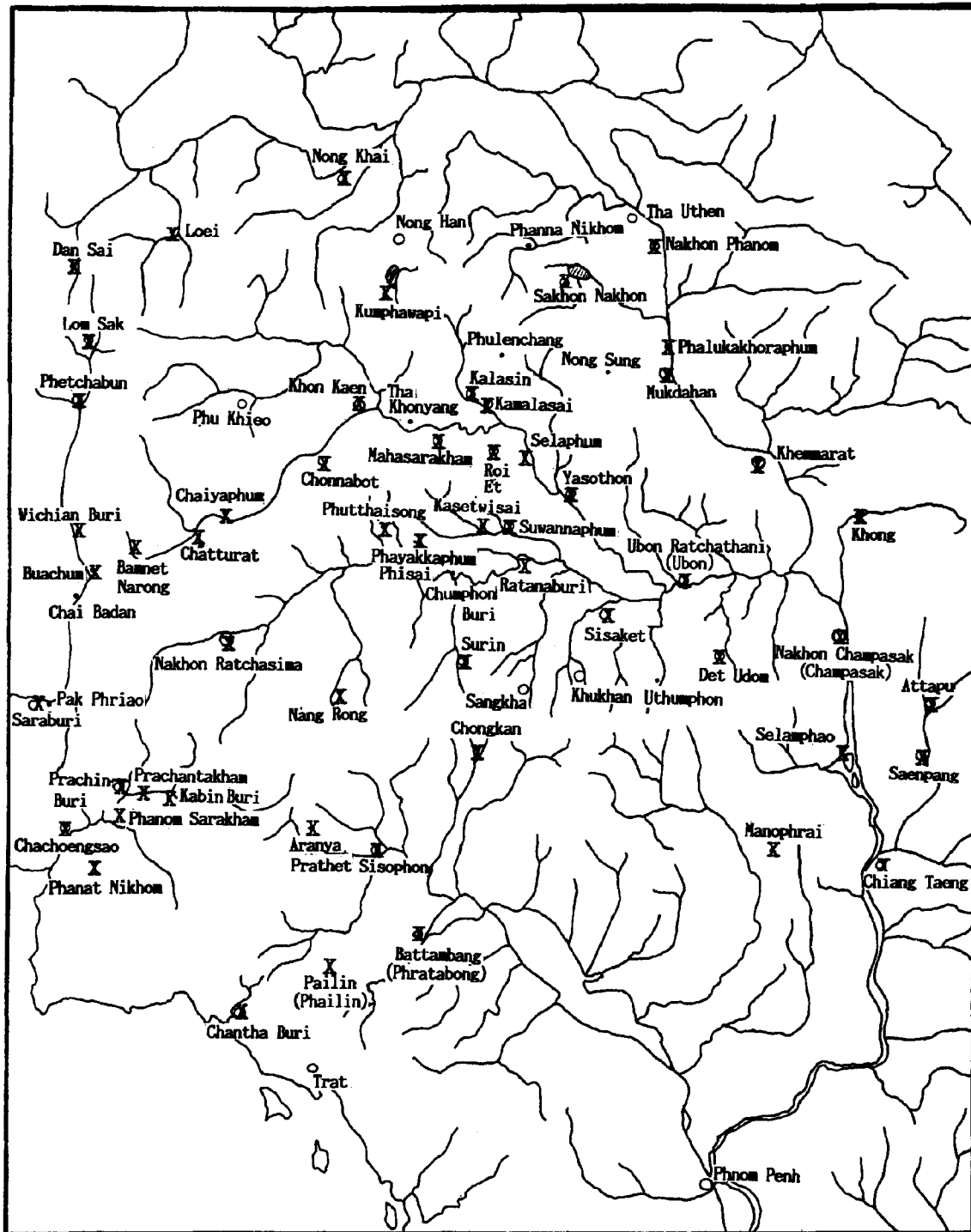
A caravan, in the 1880s and the 1890s, usually contained five to 20 members, though there were cases as small as one or two and larger ones of more than 100. The sizes of trading groups, in general, became larger than those of the earlier period. Relatives such as brothers, uncles and nephews, and fathers and sons often travelled together. A group, at times, included hired Lao laborers as

11) See footnote 9).

12) Numerous cases are recorded in documents in the National Archives, Bangkok, classified, for example, under NA, RV, M.1.1/1-21. The description of their trade here is largely based on these documents as well as those cataloged under RV, MT (L). vols. 1-43 and RV, M.2.12. kai.

13) Smyth, on his way from Khorat to Chantuk, also met "a caravan of Shân peddlers with their packs on little wooden 'horses' across their shoulders" [Smyth 1898: vol. 1, 251].

14) NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 14: Mûang Nakhon Ratchasima hai Luang Čhindarak khaluang Luang Phakdisunthon kromakan chamra khwam thi mûang Chaiyaphum, C.S. 1240 (translated by the writer).



Map 2 Places where the Kula/Tongsoo Appeared

Sources: 1. NA, RV, MT (L). vols. 1-43;

2. NA, RV, M.1.1/1-21. Unfortunately, the condition of the microfilmed documents precluded their complete examination.

3. The map is adapted from Breazeale [1975: Map 6]. The X marks and the place names are this writer's additions; for the locations of the places, the writer follows the original.

Note: The places marked with an X are the principalities which were mentioned in the reports of the incidents that involved the Kula/Tongsoo and where their presence was reported. Where the names of the villages or districts were given, the principalities which had their control are indicated.

members.

The caravan of Kham Phiu and others, for example, had 143 members: Kham Phiu as head (*nai rōi*) and 26 of his Lao subordinates, Kham San as head and 35 Lao, and Kham Sai and Khan Thi as head and assistant, respectively, with 78 Lao, together formed a large caravan. Kham Phiu and his group from Nong Khai had bought nine oxen and 141 buffaloes, while Kham San and his group from Kumphawapi had purchased 50 oxen and 250 buffaloes, and Kham Sai and his group had purchased 36 oxen, 580 buffaloes, and two horses in a village in Chonnabot.<sup>15)</sup>

The members of a group were not necessarily fixed. The formation of caravan members was flexible. In some cases a caravan picked up additional fellows who had been waiting in local towns along their trading routes.<sup>16)</sup> In other cases, some of the members stayed at a town en route while the others continued on the trip.<sup>17)</sup> While on their journeys, they were always armed with guns and swords in order to protect themselves from bandits and wild beasts such as tigers. For example, the large caravan of 95 oxen, 971 buffaloes, and two horses led by Kham Phiu and others, mentioned just above, was attacked by a band

of 100 bandits when they were 20 kilometers from Bamnet Narong.

Interestingly—perhaps naturally—not all the activities of the Kula/Tongsoo traders were confined to buying and selling goods, as the accounts of a Tongsoo trader, Mộng Kham, show. His example also suggests the frequency at which the Tongsoo traders made trading journeys and some of the business practices they employed.

Mộng Kham was born in the middle of the 1840s (c. 1845) in a village in the Moulmein area. When he took his first journey to the Eastern Lao principalities with 32 other friends, he was about 30 years old. They bought cattle in Nakhon Phanom and Tha Uthen and sold them on their return. In the following year, he made another journey and purchased, in partnership with his friends, three elephants in Phanna Nikhom. On the way back to Moulmein, while they were staying at Khô village in Nong Han principality to feed their elephants, he fell in love with a local girl and married her. Two months later, Mộng Kham and his party returned to Moulmein. About two years later, Mộng Kham and his friends again returned to Khô village. His friends from Moulmein bought oxen in the village and returned to Moulmein, while Mộng Kham remained in the village. Another five years passed. Then Mộng Kham and two other Tongsoo with some Lao laborers took 32 buffaloes, 18 oxen, and three horses which he had purchased in his village to Kabin Buri. There Mộng Kham found another wife. Then having obtained a new pass in Bangkok in the year C.S. 1247 (1885), Mộng Kham came back with his party to Khô village. His accounts end several years later

15) NA, RV, M.2.12. kai (Nakhon Ratchasima)/6: Thi 14, Phra Phirenthonthep bōk pronnibat ma yang than ōk phan nai wen, dated May 24, R.S. 109.

16) See, for example, the case of Mộng Puk who were requesting a pass to Khorat for seven of his fellow traders waiting at Pak Phriau [NA, RV, M.1.1/15: Mùn Phiphitakson nai wen krom tha chaeng khwam ma yang than Luang Chindarak krom mahathai, dated the first day of the waning moon, of the 8th month, C.S. 1248].

17) For instance, NA, RV, M.2.12. kai (Mahasarakham)/2: Rûang khwam Kham Liam Kham Num nai bangkhap angrit ha wa mi ai phu rai plon ying nai rōi Kham Qng tai, R.S. 100–101.

when officials from Kumphawapi came to arrest a Tongsoo friend of his, and a Chinese and a few others who had been visiting him on their trading journey from Tha Khonyang.<sup>18)</sup>

Indeed, not a few of the Kula/Tongsoo married local girls and settled down in the Northeast. According to a list of the Kula/Tongsoo made in the middle of 1880s, there were 60 of them married to local women, who had settled down in the Ubon principality and its satellite towns (*mường khùn*). This number was incomplete since many others had gone out on trade journeys and could not be included. According to this survey, the earliest settler had already been staying there for 26 years.<sup>19)</sup> The settlement gradually grew. In 1887, it was so large that the *chaomường* of Det Udom sent a dispatch to the Krom Tha (Ministry of Port), asking for permission to establish a head (*nai kông*) in order to have the Kula/Tongsoo rule themselves, though the permission was not granted.<sup>20)</sup> Similar surveys taken in different principalities during this period reported that there were 64 cases of Tongsoo and Burman settlers in Nakhon Champasak and its satellite

towns,<sup>21)</sup> 13 in Nong Khai,<sup>22)</sup> and 80 in Chonabot.<sup>23)</sup>

The heaviest concentration of the Kula/Tongsoo population, however, was in the Chantha Buri-Battambang area, where gem mining was flourishing in the last few decades of the 19th century.<sup>24)</sup> The British Consular Report states that there were about 3,000 Tongsoos in Krat (Trat) in 1889 [B.P.P.b 1889: 23], and that about 2,000 Tongsoos and Burmans were mining gems in Battambang<sup>25)</sup>; while the census of the Bôphrô and Pailin areas taken in R.S. 114 shows that there were about 1,500 adult male Burmans, Tongsoos and Kulas residing in the region.<sup>26)</sup>

#### IV Goods and Trading Practices

The most common goods in the trade inventories of the Kula/Tongsoo were silk cloth of various kinds, raw silk, swords and knives made of silver, small silver articles such as

18) NA, RV, M.2.12. kai (Nong Khai)/9: Wan thi 27 kanyayon, R.S. 110, nai rôi-ek nai Bung, Luang Phaeng, Luang Phrom, Luang Bamrungyotha nang phrôm kan nai khai mường Nong Khai dai tham rôi Kham tongsu.

19) NA, RV, M.2.12. kai (Ubon Ratchathani)/3: An attached list—bôk Phra Ratchasena khaluang mường Ubon, thi 4, song banchi tamni rup phan tongsu sủng tang ban ruan yu nai khwaeng mường lae mường khùn, dated the 7th day of the waxing moon, of the 8th month, C.S. 1247. None of them on the list possessed the necessary passes for travelling upcountry.

20) NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 33: Thúng phu-wa ratchakan mường kromakan thao phía 69 mường prakat hai truat tra du lae bama tongsu sủng khao ma mi but phanraya tang ban ruan yu, C.S. 1249.

21) NA, RV, M.1.1/18: Thi 256/3435 Phraya Phiphatkosa chaeng khwam ma yang than Phraya Sisinghathep, dated the 11th day of the waning moon, of the 3rd month, C.S. 1250.

22) NA, RV, M.1.1/18: Thi 224/352(?) Phraya Phiphatkosa chaeng khwam ma yang than Phraya Sisinghathep, dated the 3rd day of the waxing moon, of the 4th month in C.S. 1250.

23) NA, RV, M.1.1/19: Thi 31(?) /2305 Phraya Phiphatkosa chaeng khwam ma yang than Phraya Sisinghathep, dated the 18th of May, R.S. 108 (109?).

24) See also Smyth [1898: vol. II, Ch.XXI-XXII] for a portrayal of the diggers.

25) The number of diggers reported in Battambang were 1,259 Thai, Lao, and Khmer, and 1,987 Burman and Tongsoo [NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 33: Mưang Phratabông tốp phraratchathan khưang it bô-riban hai Phra Bôriraknarakôn, C.S. 1249].

26) NA, RV, M.2.19/2: Banchi sammano khrua tam-bon khwaeng Bôphrô Phailin, R.S. 114. The location of Bôphrô is unknown to the writer. It may mean gem mines (*bôphrô*) in Pailin.



**Table 1** List of the Possessions of Wara, a Tongsoo, which were Stolen at Thonglang Village near Nakhon Ratchasima

| Items  | Value (baht) |
|--|--------------|
| One Small Silver Box for Betel<br>( <i>aep mak</i> )                     | 20           |
| Two Small Silver Lime Containers<br>for Betel Chewing ( <i>tao pun</i> ) | 8            |
| One Knife with a Silver Handle and<br>a Silver Cover                     | 12           |
| Money ( <i>ngoen tra</i> )   | 240          |

Source: NA, RV, M.1.1/6: An account of Wara attached to a letter—mistoe Noks (Mr. Knox) khø thun chaeng khwam ma yang Somdet Phraçhao-bpromawongthoe Krom Phrabamrap-porapak, dated the 6th day of the waning moon, of the 7th month, C.S. 1241.

lime containers used for betel chewing, jewelry such as rings and bracelets made of gold, silver, and precious stones such as rubies. Other minor goods, not often reported, were needles, bee wax, and opium.<sup>27)</sup>

Besides these, the trade in elephants, buffaloes, oxen, and, in a few cases, horses were important. In fact, it was so important, as will be shown later, that the troubles concerning the trade of these cattle and animals, especially of buffaloes and oxen, created serious problems for the authorities at all levels, for the Kula/Tongsoo themselves, and the villagers as well.

27) Nai røi Decha, a Tongsoo, for example, appealed to the British Consul when he got into trouble with the tax farmer in Nakhon Ratchasima over the opium which he had brought in to sell to the farmer [NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 43: Rång khwam nai røi Decha tongsu nai bangkhap angrit kap çhao-phasi fin mường Nakhon Ratchasima, C.S. 1243]. Their trade in opium might have been a rather important matter to tax farmers and the government authorities.

The British Consular Commercial Report for 1885 describes this trade as follows: "A considerable number of Burmese Tongsos (Thoungthoos) come over from Burmah into Siam, bringing with them piece-goods, miscellaneous objects of barter, and money, which they exchange for silk cloths, brass utensils, cattle, ivory and elephants" [B.P.P.a 1885: 6].<sup>28)</sup>

Another important business of the Kula/Tongsoo was gem mining. Its center was in the Chantha Buri-Battambang areas. Valuable sapphire mines were discovered there in 1879 and "the great influx of foreigners, chiefly from British and Independent Burmah" went into the area [B.P.P.a 1879: 2]. Among these foreigners, "Toungthoos from Pegu" were noted as "the most capable of standing the climate, and, many having made money and returned successful to their homes, the rush continued unabated for a long time" [*ibid.*: 3]. When they found the precious stones, they would go by sea to Rangoon or Calcutta where the stones brought them good prices.

Although jewelry found a market in Rangoon and Calcutta, part of it was taken into Isan by itinerant Kula/Tongsoo traders and seemed to have attracted the local elite and probably some Chinese as their customers. Silver articles such as small boxes and knives

28) The Commercial Report for 1884 also gives an account as follows: "Burmese traders, principally from British Burmah, carry on a considerable business overland between Siam and British Burmah. Brassware from Bangkok and Chinese silk made in Laos States, cattle, buffaloes, elephants and ponies, are the principal articles of export to British Burmah" [B.P.P. a 1884: 18].

**Table 2** List of the Possessions of Kham Daeng, a Tongsoo, which had been Left with a Person in Det Udom and were Stolen

| Items   | Value |        |
|---|-------|--------|
|   | baht  | salung |
| 2 Trunks ( <i>hip</i> ), which Contained 2 <i>kuli</i> <sup>1)</sup> of Chints Cloth ( <i>pha lai</i> ) | 50    | —      |
| 2000 Needles  | 6     | 2      |
| 7 Trunks ( <i>hip</i> ) of Chinese Golden Flowers? ( <i>dok kham chin</i> )                             | 25    | —      |
| 9 Silver Bars ( <i>thaeng</i> ) <sup>2)</sup>   | 229   | 2      |
| 4 Pieces of Silk Cloth of which Edges Sewn Together ( <i>phrae phlo</i> )                               | 32    | —      |
| Charms ( <i>khruang rang</i> )  | 84    | —      |
| 7 Rings with Rubies   | 150   | —      |
| 1 Piece of Horn ( <i>no</i> )   | 51    | —      |
| 2 Pieces of Sarong Cloth ( <i>pha sin</i> )   | 3     | —      |
| 2 Pieces of Silk Loin-Cloth ( <i>pha muang</i> )  | 8     | —      |
| Brass Basin with Engraved Designs of Children? ( <i>khan pak salak luk?</i> )                           | 1     | —      |

Source: NA, RV, M.1.1/8: An account given by Nai Rqi Kham Daeng attached to a letter—mistoe Palkhref (Mr. Palgrave) thun chaeng khwam ma yang Somdet Phrachao-boromawongthoe Krom Phrabamrap-porapak, dated the 4th day of the waning moon, of the 8th month, C.S. 1243.

Notes: 1) *kuli* is a package of 20 pieces of cloth.

2) Each is worth 25 bahts and 2 *salungs*.

**Table 3** List of the Things which Kham Bai and Inta had Bought in Kalasin and that were Robbed at Khae Tha Mon Village in Thewadan<sup>1)</sup>

| Items   | Value (baht) |
|---|--------------|
| Money ( <i>ngoen tra</i> )  | 400          |
| 50 Pieces of Laotian Silk Loin-cloth ( <i>pha muang lao</i> ); 5 bahts per piece                                      | 250          |
| 30 Pieces of Laotian Silk Loin-cloth ( <i>pha muang lao</i> ); 4 bahts per piece                                      | 120          |
| 30 Pieces of Khmer Silk Loin-cloth ( <i>pha muang khamen</i> ); 12 bahts per piece                                    | 360          |
| 80 Pieces of Silk Shawl ( <i>pha hom mai</i> ); 2 bahts per piece   | 160          |
| 12 Copper Pots ( <i>mo thong daeng</i> ); 2 bahts per each  | 24           |
| 4 Small Silver Box ( <i>aep ngoen</i> )   | 40           |
| 2 <i>chang</i> <sup>2)</sup> of Laotian Silk  | 4            |
| 2 ? ( <i>bang? lang? thong khao</i> )   | 12           |
| 11 Hackling Knives ( <i>mit to</i> ); 1 baht per each   | 11           |
| 3 Cakes ( <i>buk</i> ) of Bee Wax   | 2            |
| 96 Pack Oxen; 16 bahts per head   | 1,536        |
| 64 Buffaloes; 24 bahts per head   | 1,536        |
| 11 Bags which had Bowls that Contained Betel Leaves and Arecanuts in Inside ( <i>yam mi khruang chian mak phrom</i> ) | —            |
| Total   | 4,455        |

Source: NA, RV, M.1.1/17: An account of Kham Bai and Inta attached to a letter—mistoe Frens (Mr. French) kho chaeng khwam ma yang Phraya Phiphatkosa, dated the 5th day of the waning moon, of the 7th month, C.S. 1250.

Notes: The party, with 20 other hired laborers, were chasing a herd of 1000 buffaloes and 252 pack oxen all together.

1) Maybe Saengbadan in Kalasin or Chai Badan in Lopburi.

2) 1 *chang* equals about 600 grams.

were also goods for the well-to-do.<sup>29)</sup> The Kula/Tongsoo, in return, purchased local products such as silk cloth and cattle and took them back to Moulmein or to other places in the central part of Siam. Some of them bought elephants in the Northeast which had a market in the teak industry in the North and in Burma as well.<sup>30)</sup>

Some caravans of the Kula/Tongsoo were quite large in terms of the amount of the goods they carried and the number of the people in the groups. The total value of their stock-in-trade sometimes reached some thousand bahts. This was not a small amount in comparison with the amount of money involved in the business of some of the local Chinese merchants active in this region.<sup>31)</sup> Table 3 shows one of the largest examples of

the goods a caravan carried along, although the prices, given by the Kula/Tongsoo, of the goods claimed to have been robbed or stolen, might have been made higher than the actual ones.<sup>32)</sup>

Since the places where the Kula/Tongsoo purchased these goods were usually in villages and those who sold things to them were usually designated as *nai* (Mr.) in the documents, it could be said that the Kula/Tongsoo did their transactions with or-

29) The list of the property of a Chinese named Nao and his wife who lived in Amnat Charoen and were attacked by robbers in C.S. 1249, includes gold rings ornamented with various precious stones. However, it is not clear whether these were obtained from the Kula or not [NA, RV, M.2.12. kai (Ubon Ratchathani)/3: A list attached to a letter—bòk Phraya Ratchasena palat, thi 29, thun charong krom mahathai fai nua Khun Phiphat khaluang múang Ubon bòk ma, dated the 11th day of the waning moon, of the 11th month, C.S. 1247]. Luang Phakdiwiset at Kut O village in Chumphon Buri, on the other hand, listed the items that he was plundered of: a small Kula box (*aep kula*), money, rings and other valuables [NA, RV, RL-PS. vol. 9, thi 268, C.S. 1245].

30) For example, Inta, who had been engaged in trading in Chiang Mai, came to purchase elephants in Khon Kaen with his brother [NA, RV, M.1.1/12: A deposition given by Inta attached to a letter—mistoe Numan (Mr. Newman) khò thun chaeng khwam ma yang Somdet Phraçhao-bromawongthoe Krom Phrabamrap-porapak, dated the 13th day of the waning moon, of the 9th month, C.S. 1245].

31) The amount which several Chinese merchants owed another Chinese merchant named Liang Long Chu in Nakhon Ratchasima, varied from 50

bahts to almost 600 bahts per person [NA, RV, M.1.1/13: An account of Tan Chia Ngu, a Chinese merchant who was a French subject, attached to a letter—Çhaophraya Phanuwong Mahakosathibodi khò prathan krap thun ma yang Somdet Phraçhao-bromawongthoe Çhaofa Mahamala, dated the 3rd day of the waxing moon, of the 1st month, C.S. 1246]. In the case of a Chinese named Hòng Çhan in Khorat, he and his wife had purchased goods on credit from another Chinese named Ngeo Mòng Huad. When Hòng Çhan died, the remaining debt amounted to 1,783 bahts. Besides, Hòng Çhan was also indebted to five other persons from whom he had borrowed money or bought silk on credit. Although he had returned part of the principal and interest, the remaining debt still amounted to over 5,500 bahts [NA, RV, M.2.12. kai (Nakhon Ratchasima)/1: Bai bòk Phraya-bromaratchabonhan (?) kromakan múang Nakhon Ratchasima bòk pronibat ma, dated the 1st day of the waxing moon, of the 11th month, C.S. 1241].

32) Luang Phakdinarong, the Commissioner who was sent to Ubon, condemned the Tongsoo, saying that they alleged prices much higher than the actual ones when they petitioned the authorities. Some precious stones, according to him, which were only worth one *salung* (1/4 baht) or one *fuang* (1/8 baht), claimed to be worth two *chang* (160 bahts) or three *chang* (240 bahts) [NA, RV, RL-PS. vol. 25, thi 11, C.S. 1245]. This writer, however, discovered only one case in which a Tongsoo made such a high price: Çhongkayo in Aranya Prathet claimed his two sapphires were worth 150 and 300 bahts [NA, RV, M.1.1/9: An account attached to a letter—mistoe Numan khò thun ma yang Somdet Phraçhao-bromawongthoe Krom Phrabamrap-porapak, dated the 13th day of the waxing moon, of the second 8th month, C.S. 1244].

dinary villagers. They bought these commodities a few at a time from villagers along the way, as in the case of a certain Kongma who had sent his hired laborers to fetch his six buffaloes from Yasothon to catch up with his main caravan.<sup>33)</sup>

In some other business practices the Kula/Tongsoo borrowed, or were entrusted with, money by other fellows to purchase goods. Most of these arrangements appear to have been limited to caravan members who were often related such as brothers, sons and fathers, and nephews and uncles.<sup>34)</sup> The way in which one provided the necessary labor and his partner the required capital was another form of cooperation in their business practices.<sup>35)</sup> In general, the Kula/Tongsoo basically worked on a small group basis and did not seem to have formed any kind of specific institution for their business activities though they appear to have formed a kind of informal network of trade contacts. It seems that the comment by the British Consul on gem min-

ing business by the Kula/Tongsoo was also true of their trade in Isan: "The Tongsoos do not appear to form themselves into companies for mutual assistance or division of profits" [B.P.P.b 1889: 23]. Independent ad hoc transactions characterized their trade as a whole.

As for the currency they used, the baht, or the official Siamese silver money (*ngoen tra*), was widely used by the Kula/Tongsoo traders. Nearly all the lists of the stolen items reported by the Kula/Tongsoo included this currency. In a few cases, silver bars and other local Lao coins were also in use. To cite an example, in the middle of the 1880's, at a certain market place in Ubon, two Tongsoo were negotiating the rate of exchange between the baht and the *lat* (a local Lao coin) with a merchant there. They wanted 58 *lats* per baht, while the merchant was offering only 55 *lats* for one baht.<sup>36)</sup> There also were a few cases in which the Kula/Tongsoo possessed rupees.<sup>37)</sup>

It is rather difficult to say exactly how profitable the Kula/Tongsoo's trade was. Only one case, shown in Table 4, is available that suggests the profit margin in the trade.<sup>38)</sup> A certain Mộng La and his party of 32 members, having received a pass from Moulmein, were trading in the Lao principalities. They purchased about 240 kilograms of raw silk, 40

33) NA, RV, M.1.1/17: An account attached to a letter—Phraya Phiphatkasa čhaeng khwam ma yang Phra Sisena, dated the 14th day of the waning moon, of the second 8th month, C.S. 1250.

34) To cite an example, Tang Kae Kham, a Tongsoo, had sent his younger brothers and relatives out to buy some buffaloes in the Nam Nao-Ubon areas, entrusting his money to them [NA, RV, M.1.1/11: Mistoe Numan khō thun čhaeng ma yang Somdet Phračhao-bōromawongthoe Krom Phrabamrap-pōrapak, dated 4th day of the waning moon in the 5th month, C.S. 1245].

35) For instance, Mộng Pan Khaeng in Phetchabun had been doing business with his partner, Nantiya to whom he provided capital money, while Nantiya went out on trading journeys [NA, RV, M.1.1/11: An account attached to a letter—mistoe Numan khō thun čhaeng ma yang Somdet Phračhao-bōromawongthoe Krom Phrabamrap-pōrapak, dated the 14th day of the waxing moon, of the 8th month, C.S. 1245].

36) NA, RV, RL-PS. vol. 25, *thi* 9, C.S. 1245.

37) See, for example, the list of Kham Lú's valuables stolen [NA, RV, M.1.1/12: A list attached to a letter—mistoe Numan khō thun čhaeng khwam ma yang Somdet Phračhao-bōromawongthoe Krom Phrabamrap-pōrapak, dated the 6th day of the waxing moon, of the 7th month, C.S. 1245].

38) NA, RV, M.2.12 kai (Chonnabot)/1: Rúang khwam Sang Mộng La tōngsu nai bangkhap angrit ha wa thao phia kromakan chap tua wai mai hai pai thiau kha khai, R.S. 101.

**Table 4** An Account of Trade by Sang Mộng La, a Tongsoo

| Items                          | Prices in<br>Phayakkaphum Phisai-Phutthaisong  |                    |                      | Expected Sales in<br>Moulmein |                  | B-A/A × 100<br>(in R)<br>% |
|--------------------------------|--|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
|                                | Amount   | Prices per<br>Unit | Total Value<br>A     | Prices per<br>Unit            | Total Value<br>B |                            |
| Pack Oxen                      | 33 head  | c.18-19B           | 443B<br>(590.7R)     | 40R                           | 1,320R           | 123.5                      |
| Silk Cloth, Hangkarok          | 40 pieces                                      | 6B                 | 240B<br>(320R)       | 16R                           | 640R             | 100.0                      |
| Silk Sarong                    | 24 pieces                                      | c.1B               | 25B<br>(33.3R)       | 4R                            | 96R              | 188.3                      |
| Silk (raw)                     | 4 <i>hap</i>                                   | 190B               | 760B<br>(1,013.3R)   | 500R                          | 2,000R           | 97.4                       |
| Total                          |  |                    | 1,468B<br>(1,957.3R) |                               | 4,056R           | 107.2                      |
| Other Costs<br>and<br>Expenses | Wages for Hired Laborers<br>40R per Person × 5 |                    | 200R                 |                               |                  |                            |
|                                | Interest on 1000R<br>Borrowed in Moulmein      |                    | 250R                 |                               |                  |                            |
| TOTAL                          |  |                    | 2,407.3R             |                               | 4,056R           | 68.5                       |

Source: Compiled by the writer from NA, RV, M.2.12.kai (Chonnabot)/1, R.S.101.

Notes: 1) B stands for baht and R for rupee.

2) The price of pack oxen per head and the total value given here are not quite consistent.

3) 1 *hap* equals about 60 kilograms.

pieces of silk cloth woven in the Hangkarok way, 24 pieces of silk sarong, and 31 pack oxen in Phayakkaphum Phisai and Phutthaisong, then continued their journey to Chonnabot where they purchased two more oxen. There they were detained by the local officials on suspicion of having stolen the animals. Denying the charge, Mộng La then gave an account of the loss he would incur if their goods and animals were to be seized and not sold back in Moulmein.<sup>39)</sup> The profit margin in this case seems good, though such costs as traveling expenses were not included in the calculation.<sup>40)</sup>

## V The Cattle Trade

### *The Growth of Trade*

The cattle trade had become quite important in the last few decades of the 19th century, along with the development of rice cultivation in central Siam and the demand in foreign markets such as Burma, Singapore and Atjeh. As the trade became more lucrative, trouble also increased. This was the period which saw a series of orders and regulations issued by the Siamese authorities who tried to control the bandits and thieves

39) Since the rate of exchange between the baht and the rupee for 1882, the year this incident happened, is not available, the writer simply assumed the rate during 1864-90 was constant at 0.75 baht for one rupee [Prasartset 1975: 280].

40) In fact, there are costs for food (*kha kin*) and

compensation (*puai-kan*) stated in the account. But it is not clear if these costs were meant to cover the period they had been traveling and peddling before the detention, since the Kula/Tongsoo sometimes demanded compensation for the food expenses and other losses incurred during the period they were detained or involved in a court case and, therefore, could not conduct business.

and to regulate the trade.

It is difficult, however, to know the exact size and growth of the cattle trade either in the hands of the Kula/Tongsoo or of others,<sup>41)</sup> or to know the extent of the domestic or foreign trades. But some figures might, at least, provide a rough idea of them.

The British Consul states in its Commercial Report for 1879: "There is a large overland trade in buffaloes and bullocks with British Burmah, of which I am unable to obtain any reliable statistics. This trade is chiefly conducted by wandering bands of British subjects from Burmah" [B.P.P.a 1879: 4]. The export from the port of Bangkok, on the other hand, was easier for the consul to trace. It grew throughout the 1880's from somewhat more than several thousands to well over 20,000 head of cattle. And in the middle of the 1880s the consul estimated that "the export of cattle from Northern Siam into British Burmah is stated to be over 40,000 head per annum, four times the export from Bangkok" [B.P.P.a 1884: 14]. And the consul found that the trade was profitable: "There are immense numbers of fine cattle found throughout Siam, and the prices in the interior are very low, the value of a fine cow with its calf being some 6 rupees" [B.P.P.a 1885: 2].<sup>42)</sup>

However, the figures for the domestic trans-

41) Besides the Kula/Tongsoo, other peoples such as the *Kheak* (the designation for Asiatics other than the Chinese or the Japanese) and the local Lao were also actively participating in cattle trade. It was said that the traders in Bangkok who purchased stolen cattle from Siamese were "nearly all British subjects, chiefly low-classed Hindoos." These stolen cattle consisted significant part of the export [B.P.P.b 1887: 2].

42) The followings are a few examples of the prices for cattle:

actions indicated by the number of description forms issued, of which scattered and incomplete records exist, seem to have substantially exceeded the numbers exported.

In 1876, responding to the growing problems of cattle stealing and of the Tongsoo's role as middlemen who bought the stolen cattle, the Bangkok authorities issued an edict to the *chaomuang* of all the Thai, Lao, and Khmer principalities, declaring that they were to make certain that the local officials, such as the *nai amphoe*, the *kamnan* and the *phuyai-ban*, follow the regulations for the animal trade. The local officials had to write a description (*rup phan*) of every animal the

|     | Year    | Prices of Buffaloes<br>(bahts, per head) | Places         |
|-----|---------|--|----------------|
| i   | 1877    | c.14-15                                  | Lom Sak        |
| ii  | 1880-81 | 4  | Yasothon       |
| iii | 1881    | 30                                       | Aranya Prathet |
| iv  | 1888    | 24                                       | Kalasin        |
| v   | 1891    | 14.5                                     | Nong Han       |

Sources: (i) NA, RV, M.1.1/4: the case of Ngakantama; (ii) NA, RV, M.1.1/12: the case of Kham Lu; (iii) NA, RV, M.1.1/9: the case of Chongkayo; (vi) See Table 3; and (v) NA, RV, M.2.12. kai (Ubon Ratchathani)/8: the case of Kham Di.

|     | Year | Prices of Oxen<br>(bahts, per head) | Places                         |
|-----|------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| i   | 1855 | 3.9-5.1                             | Khon Kaen, Roi Et, Suwannaphum |
| ii  | 1881 | 19                                  | Phanom Sarakham                |
| iii | 1882 | 18-19                               | Phutthaisong                   |
| iv  | 1882 | 40                                  | Prachin Buri                   |
| v   | 1882 | 20                                  | Phetchabun                     |
| vi  | 1888 | 16                                  | Kalasin                        |

Sources: (i) NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1217: No. 74; (ii) NA, RV, M.2.12. kai (Nakhon Ratchasima)/1: the case of Ngapong; (iii) See Table 4; (iv) NA, RV, M.1.1/9: the case of Saemtosan; (v) NA, RV, M.1.1/11: the case of Mong Pan Khaeng; and (vi) See Table 3.

**Table 5** Cattle Exports from the Port of Bangkok

| Year | Exports (head) |
|------|----------------|
| 1877 | 162            |
| 1878 | 644            |
| 1879 | 5,890          |
| 1880 | 7,515          |
| 1881 | 5,681          |
| 1882 | 6,853          |
| 1883 | 8,335          |
| 1884 | 10,537         |
| 1885 | 12,654         |
| 1886 | 14,141         |
| 1887 | 15,263         |
| 1888 | 27,118         |
| 1889 | 25,770         |
| 1890 | 21,511*        |
| 1891 | 14,552         |
| 1892 | 16,144         |
| 1893 | 18,664         |
| 1894 | 24,923         |
| 1895 | 21,612         |
| 1896 | 26,033         |

Sources: The figures under the classification of "cattle" or "bullock" in B.P.P.a and B.P.P.b of various years.

Note: \* It might be 21,541.

Tongsoo and Burman traded and record the names of both the old and the new owners at the *kamnan* or the *phuyai-ban*.<sup>43)</sup> In the same year, 4,000 copies of the printed description forms (*tua phim rup phan*) were granted to the Nakhon Ratchasima principality with an edict urging the *chaomưang* to appoint local officials to be responsible for the description papers.<sup>44)</sup> In the following year, the Bangkok authorities again sent out to Nakhon Ratchasima and its

43) NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 11: Hai *chaomưang* kromakan mưang thai, lao, khamen tham tamni rup praphan ma chang kho krabủ sủng bama tongsu sủ khai, C.S. 1238.

44) NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 11: Hai Phraya Nakhon Ratchasima tang kọng tham rup phan kho krabủ, C.S. 1238.

12 satellite towns 400 copies of these forms in addition to the 2,000 copies which had been sent earlier, along with 12 copies of the royal act concerning the animal trade.<sup>45)</sup>

On the other hand, late in the 1880s, the Nong Khai principality was begging for 10,000 copies of these forms from the King, and Ubon also requesting a grant of 100,000 copies, saying that over 20,000 copies sent earlier were almost out of stock.<sup>46)</sup>

In 1894, a Mr. Gittins, a railway engineer who made a survey trip between Nakhon Ratchasima and Nong Khai, observed that "at the present time, some 7,000 to 8,000 head of cattle, are shipped down yearly to Lopburi, from the district of Chonlabot [Chonnabot] only, and large herds of buffalo—principally from Nonghan, are sent down to Korat."<sup>47)</sup>

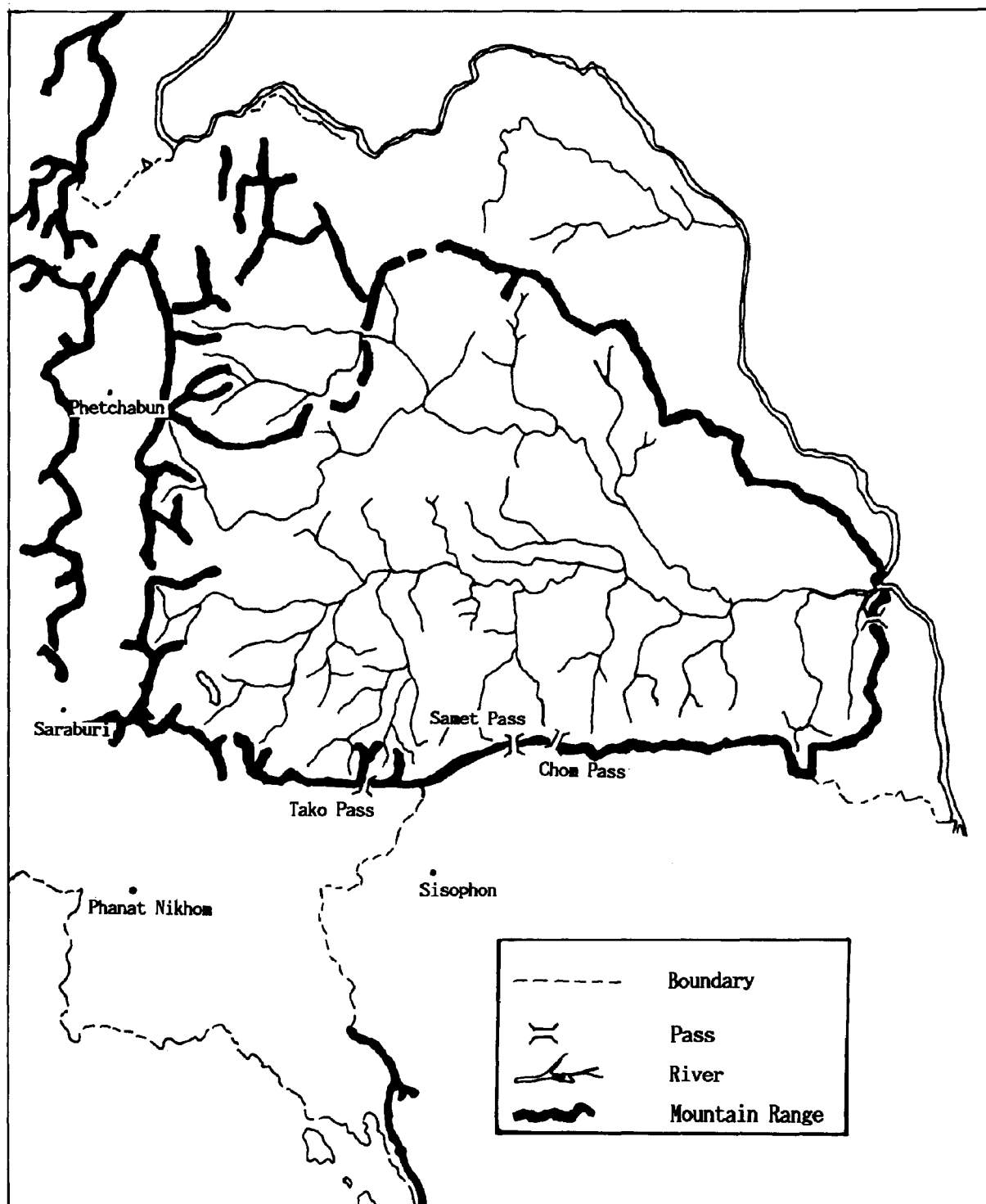
For the cattle traders and the local ox-cart traders who made trade journeys between the Northeast and the other places, there were five regular routes they could have taken; namely:

1. The Don Phya Fai route to Pak Phraio and Saraburi;
2. The Don Phya Klang route which lead to the Sanam Chaeng District in Lopburi;
3. The Tako pass route which lead to Kabin Buri, Phanat Nikhom, Phanom

45) NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 12: Mưang Nakhon Ratchasima hai Uthairatchathani khủn pai chỉ *chaeng khỏ* phraratchabanyat kho krabủ, C.S. 1239.

46) NA, RV, M.2.12. kai (Nong Khai)/4: Thi 6, song banchi rai chủ khon nai sapyek tang prathet, dated the 10th day of the waxing moon, of the 1st month, C.S. 1250; NA, RV, M.2.12. kai (Ubon Ratchathani)/6: thi 34/108, Phraya Ratchasena bỏk ma yang phan nai wen krom mahathai, dated the 30th of March, R.S. 108.

47) NA, RV, YT.5.6/15: A Report, Khorat-Nong Khai extension, Sept. 28, 1894.



**Map 3** Rivers, Mountain Ranges, and Passes in the Northeast

Source: Adapted from "phaen thi maenam samkhan lae sakha nai phak tawan-ok Chiang Nua" [Map of Important Rivers and Tributaries in the Northeast] cited by Sapsarn [1982: 12]. The original is in Thailand, Krasuang Saksathikan [Ministry of Education] *Baep Rian Phumisat Prathet Sayam* [A Textbook on Geography of Siam] (Bangkok: Akson Niti, 1925).



Sarakham, and Nakhon Nayok;

4. The Moulmein route via Phetchabun and Rahaeng (Tak); and
5. The Khmer route through the Chom pass in Surin leading to the Sisophon area [Warangrat 1984: 106-107].

A comment on the trade routes by Luang Phakdinaron, the Commissioner to Ubon, a contemporary observer in the late 19th century, also recognized these routes. He reports that after a secret deal involving stolen cattle, a Tongsoo leading a caravan with several tens of Laos, usually drove a herd of elephants or sometimes horses or oxen or buffaloes toward Saraburi and Phisanulok via Nakhon Ratchasima where they obtained a pass necessary for the group to travel. And to go down to the Khmer districts and Prachin Buri, the Tongsoo and his party would generally take the routes via Surin, Khukhan, Sangkha, or Uthumphon.<sup>48)</sup>

### *The Problems*

Perhaps not surprisingly for the times and circumstances, the Kula/Tongsoo ran into trouble on their trading expeditions. In the beginning of the 1880s, a Tongsoo named Kokhansuna and his party of 29 people, having received a pass in Moulmein, went to buy oxen, buffaloes and elephants in the Lao principalities. They bought 24 oxen and 200 buffaloes in Mukdahan and drove the herd toward Phanat Nikhom where they intended to sell the cattle. But when they reached Nong Sung village in Chongkan, they were attacked by 70 Khmer bandits and robbed of 17 oxen, 64 buffaloes, and other possessions

valued at 2,905 bahts.<sup>49)</sup>

In another case, the brothers of a Kham Ong give the following account:

Our elder brother, Kham Ong, we two, and Kham Phiu and Kham Thon, five of us all together, had received pass [es] in Moulmein and been engaged in trading journeys in the Northern Lao principalities for many years before we arrived in Chatturat. In the 12th month of Dragon Year [C.S. 1242], Kham Ong alone, hiring a Lao named Sali and ten other Lao laborers, took 1,500 bahts and left Chatturat for Ubon to purchase oxen, buffaloes and horses there. But we two stayed in Chatturat and continued to buy oxen there and often went to Pak Phriao to sell them, while Kham Phiu and Kham Thon remained trading in Chatturat. Later, Mr. Sali and the Lao laborers, who had accompanied Kham Ong to Ubon, returned and informed us that Kham Ong had been to Ubon to buy oxen, buffaloes and horses. After he had purchased some animals, however, when he drove them back to Tambon Huai Toei in Sarakham, on the 3rd day of the waxing moon of the 4th month in the same year, a group of armed bandits attacked them and shot Kham Ong to death, then, took some of his money and valuables away."<sup>50)</sup>

Thus, the Kula/Tongsoo cattle traders often

48) NA, RV, RL-PS. vol. 25, *thi* 331, C.S. 1246.

49) NA, RV, MT (L). vol.17: Muang Phanomsok hai súp chap phu rai plon kho krabú Kokhansuna nai bangkhap angrit, C.S. 1242.

50) NA, RV, M.2.12. kai (Mahasarakham)/2: Rúang khwam Kham Liam Kham Num nai bangkhap angrit ha wa mi ai phu rai plon ying nai ròi Kham Ong tai, R.S. 100 (translated by the writer).

fell prey to "Siamese dacoits" [B.P.P.a 1879: 4]. Some of these bandit parties were quite large, numbering even up to a hundred members. And they were often fierce and murderous.<sup>51)</sup>

Dealing with stolen cattle was another problem. The Kula/Tongsoo, at times knowingly and at times unknowingly, bought stolen animals, or they themselves stole cattle from villagers as well.<sup>52)</sup> To add to these problems, local authorities were often not cooperative in pursuing and punishing these offenders;<sup>53)</sup> and the court was too slow in solving cases, sometimes taking years to settle a

case.<sup>54)</sup>

To cope with the endless cases of bandits and thieves, the Siamese authorities sent out an edict in 1876, as we have seen, by which the *chaomuang* were to see that local officials produce a description of every animal that the Tongsoo and the Burman traded and record the identities and residences of the traders involved at the local officials.<sup>55)</sup> In the same year, by another royal act issued to the 27 inner principalities, the description of every animal traded had to be written by the appointed local officials stationed at announced places (*tambon*) both on the printed forms (*dika tua rup praphan*) produced at the Royal Printing House and the passes (*nangsú doen thang*) which traders had to have with them while on journey.<sup>56)</sup> This stipulation was also enforced in the Northeastern principalities in the following year.<sup>57)</sup> But this was not prop-

51) Ngalek and Nanta, for example, were attacked by 40–50 bandits in Wichian and robbed of 30 buffaloes. Nanta was killed in the incident [NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 17: Muang Wichian top rai chin chú Chang Siu luk chang chin Sai Sin Sian khon nai bangkhap hōlanda khat ao tua ai Phet phu rai plon krabú Ngalek Nanta nai bangkhap angrid wai, C.S. 1242].

52) In the Nakhon Ratchasima principality, for example, it was reported that some groups of bandits lead by 3–4 Tongsoo with 40–50 followers were committing a series of robberies [NA, RV, M.2.12. kai (Nakhon Ratchasima)/6: Thi 56, Phra Phirenthōnthebōdi khaluang raksa múang Nakhon Ratchasima kromakan bōk, dated the 23rd of Nov., R.S. 108].

53) For example, the *uparat* (vice governor) of Suwannaphum was reprimanded twice by the Bangkok authorities, in C.S. 1230 and C.S. 1239: firstly, for ordering 100 of his servants (*baō*) and subordinate commoners (*phrai*) to attack the Tongsoo and then, unreasonably imprisoning the Tongsoo; and secondly, for ignoring a Tongsoo's accusation of robbery. In both cases the servants of the *uparat* committed the crimes [NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 1: Múang Suwannaphum hai khun Wisutsontrai khaluang khun pai chamra khwam rai tongsu ha wa ti tongsu tai; NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 13: Múang Suwannaphum hai chamra khwam phu rai yaeng khong Kham Tum tongsu]. There are many cases reported in which village heads, villagers, or higher officials ignored requests for help made by the Tongsoo.

54) The Tan Kae Kham case, in which his brother and

nephews had been killed by bandits, was ingored for 6–7 years by the *chaomuang* and officials of Ubon and Khemmarat [NA, RV, M.1.1/11: Mistoe Numan khō thun chaeng khwam ma yang Somdet Phrachao-bōromawongthoe Krom Phrabamrap-porapak, dated the 4th day of the waning moon, of the 5th month, C.S. 1245].

55) Already in C.S. 1225, due to the frequent occurrences of cattle stealing, a commissioner was sent to stamp, and make descriptions and lists of, the cattle in various principalities [NL, CMH RIV, C.S. 1225: No. 143].

56) NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 11: Thung chaomuang kromakan múang 27 múang hai tham rup praphan kho krabú, C.S. 1238.

57) NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 11: Hai Phraya Nakhon Ratchasima tang kōng tham rup phan kho krabú, C.S. 1238; NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 12: Thung múang Nakhon Ratchasima hai song khō phraratchabanyat kho krabú pai yang múang khun múang Nakhon Ratchasima 12 chabap, C.S. 1239; NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 12: Thung chaomuang kramakan múang chan-nōk pratat khō phraratchabanyat phoem toem song tua phim tham rup phan chang kho krabú, C.S. 1239.

erly implemented.

On the other hand, the British Consul, in 1878, also expressed an apprehension that "it does seem to me rather hard that Tongsoos should be obliged to have a separate pass [*dika*] for each beast in a drove of say five hundred."<sup>58)</sup> The consul was afraid that the paper work would take too much time and that some of the animals might die or the market price might fall in the meantime. The consul proposed that if the Siamese authorities took action on these points, then, he would be "quite willing to give to Governors the necessary power to arrest offending Tongsoos, provided your Royal Government also punish your officials in case they are the persons who go beyond the rules."<sup>59)</sup> The Siamese authorities responded by issuing another edict to supplement the original royal act, ordering the Tongsoo and other traders to take their animals to the *kamnan* if the number of transactions were five or fewer animals per day; but if the number exceeded five, the traders were to report to the *kamnan* and have him come and make the necessary passes within three days. In the latter case description papers were to be produced on a daily basis, and not by individual head count. And if the *kamnan* was too slow in acting, then the traders could appeal to the *chaomúang*, and if the *chaomúang* in turn was too slow, to the *chao krasuang* (the executive of a ministry).<sup>60)</sup>

But the problem was far from solved. The

official forms for descriptions were often out of stock in local areas as we have seen. The Kula/Tongsoo who then set out on journeys without necessary papers were stopped by officials and faced seizures of their cattle.<sup>61)</sup> In other cases they were detained on suspicion of dealing with stolen animals as they were without proper papers to prove legal transactions. The Siamese authorities again issued an edict to supplement the royal act to cope with these ceaseless problems, this time forbidding officials to confiscate the cattle without proper papers when the original sellers lived too far away to contact and there was no suspicion of theft and there was no one to claim the cattle. The edict also ordered the officials who found such cattle to make passes (*nangsú doen thang*) for them.<sup>62)</sup>

61) A Tongsoo named Kham Mò had bought 250 buffaloes in Yasothon. Since the stamped certificate forms (*traphim*) were out of stock there, the Tongsoo just made the descriptions (*rup praphan*) at the *kamnan*'s place, then, chased the herd toward Chantakham, where his party was stopped by the *uparat* and was requested to show the stamped certificates (*traphim*) for the animals. The *uparat* did not accept the Tongsoo's explanation and imprisoned the party [NA, RV, M.1.1/6: An account attached to a letter—mistoe Numan khò thun čhaeng khwam ma yang Somdet Phračhao-bromawongthoe Krom Phrabamrap-porapak, dated the 14th day of the waning moon, of the 1st month, C.S. 1241].

62) NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 28: Thúng čhaomúang kromakan thao phia 65 múang prakat phoem toem khò phraratchabanyat chang kho krabú sùng čhaokhong čhà nam pai sù khai tang khwaeng tambon, C.S. 1246. The edict issued in C.S. 1247 mentions the case in which a group of the Tongsoo and the Lao, provided with passes (*nangsú doen thang*) but without proper description papers (*tua phim rup praphan*) were selling oxen and buffaloes in Chanthaburi. The Tongsoo explained that upon the purchase of the 75 oxen and 433 buffaloes in Sisaket, they only received the passes (*nangsú*) and set out on their journey since the description forms had been out of stock. The edict ordered ↗

58) NA, RV, RL-PS. vol.2, *thi* 172, a letter of George Knox, dated May 8, 1878.

59) See footnote 58).

60) NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 14: Thúng čhaomúang kromakan 63 múang wa duai phoem toem khò phraratchabanyat kho krabú, C.S. 1240.

These measures still proved to be ineffective. At the end of the 1880's, the situation was still as if "almost all of the animals exported being stolen from the unfortunate agriculturalists of the country" [B.P.P.b 1887: 2]. As a result, "stringent orders have been passed for the inspection before export of cattle, each head of which must now be furnished with a properly authenticated bill of sale" [*ibid.*].<sup>63)</sup> But the situation awaited more decisive measures to see any decrease in bandits and thieves.<sup>64)</sup>

## VI Conclusion: Why the Kula Wept

Several considerations arise concerning the development of monetization and commercialization of the economy in this region during the period investigated.

Firstly, I would like to point out that the trade by the Kula/Tongsoo was triggered by

the economic changes which had begun in the middle of the 19th century in Burma and Siam.<sup>65)</sup> It is not quite right to treat the Kula/Tongsoo just as a small group of itinerant traders in the traditional style. Their status was, after all, British subjects who were protected by the treaty arrangement. Following the phased colonization of Burma, the development in the teak industry first in Burma and later in northern Siam, and the extensive cultivation of rice in the deltas, Isan villages supplied elephants, buffaloes, and oxen in some significant numbers, through the Kula/Tongsoo, to a larger economic network.

In the second place, it should be emphasized that northeastern Siam at that time was not really an isolated nor a closed region. The Kula/Tongsoo were fairly active traders there by the end of the 19th century. Since the commodities handled in their trade, such as cattle and silk cloth, were common products produced by the villagers, it is not wrong to say that the Northeast at the village level had already been within a wider international network of trade. I must admit, however, that the effect of the involvement in the wider trade network on the village economy was not fully studied here, being left for future inquiry.

The third point to be noted is that the Northeast in the last few decades of the 19th century—that is, before the completion of the railway to Nakhon Ratchasima and the full-

the governors and local officials not to leave the description forms (*tua phim rup praphan*) depleted, and to provide the proper papers without fail [NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 28: Thung chaomuang kromakan thao phia 68 muang wa duai prakat ruang kho krabú mai hai tham nangsú doen thang thaen tra phim hai kae ratsadon, C.S. 1247].

63) The same report for 1888 also mentions this matter [B.P.P.b 1888: 3]. See also NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 35: Thung khaluang phu wa ratchakan kromakan muang 68 muang hai truat tham tua phim rup praphan chang ma kho krabú lae duang tra nai tambon thi prathap nangsú-phim, C.S. 1250.

64) Phraya Pradit-sinlakan reported that the problem of bandits in the middle of the 1890's had been very serious and that disorder prevailed before the introduction of the Thesaphiban system and the disposition of soldiers [NA, RV, M.2.14/14]. The commissioners who were sent from Bangkok to assume control over bandit-stricken Nakhon Ratchasima had to, first of all, launch extensive suppression campaigns from the end of the 1880's to the beginning of the 1890's [Breazeale 1975: 134-136, 139-143].

65) Besides the trade with Burma and the Central Siam, some Kula/Tongsoo were also exporting cattle from Champasak to Phnom Penh via Chiang Taeng [NA, RV, M.62.1/26: Bòk Phraya Maha Amat, thi 8, dated the 5th of June, R.S. 109].

scale integration into (or intervention by) the Thai Kingdom through the Thesaphiban system—was rather in a period characterized by disorder and, probably, change. The striking numbers of the Kula/Tongsoo who faced troubles with thieves, bandits, imperfection in documents, and sometimes unreasonable confiscation of possessions by local authorities reveal the confusion and disorder of the period.

Lastly, to put things in a broader perspective, the Kula/Tongsoo was, by no means, the only traders active in the Northeast. Chinese and *Khaek*, as well as Vietnamese, traders were already in this area by the last few decades of the 19th century. It was also rather common for local villagers to become ox-cart traders or cattle traders (*nai hqi*), mainly during dry seasons, peddling within the region and often traveling far distances. The people in the southern Isan, too, were trading processed fish from Lake Tonle Sap.<sup>66)</sup>

Although it is impossible to estimate the importance of this trade as a whole, either in volume or in value, still the growth of trade in this period seems to have had a significant impact on and meaning for the society of the regions in regards to the breakdown of law and order.

This situation raises a number of questions. Why were there so many incidents of bandit attacks during this period? Who were these bandits? Were the targets of robberies confined only to the Kula/Tongsoo, or were other peoples similarly targeted? Did this disorder imply that there were more profound

socio-economic and political changes underway in the region? Why did the authorities in both Bangkok and the local areas fail to provide a system to safeguard trade transactions and ownership of goods?

According to the accusations from the Kula/Tongsoo, bandits were local villagers. Villagers in neighboring districts were often in conspiracy with fellow villagers who actually committed the robberies by not helping the Kula/Tongsoo in searching for the bandits, for example, or by providing refuge for the bandits. This kind of conspiracy could be seen in the responses of villagers, village heads, as well as the local ruling class. Did this mean that local communities joined together to share in the profits from these traders from the outside? Yet the bandits often committed murders which seemed too violent for simply demanding a part of the strangers' wealth. Or was this because the Kula/Tongsoo were itinerants, and were strangers from a foreign land? But at the same time there were also cases in which the Kula/Tongsoo were the thieves and some villagers joined hands with them. Luang Phakdinaron, the Ubon Commissioner mentioned earlier, explains that many Laos resorted to thievery and banditry because they could sell the stolen elephants, oxen, buffaloes to the Tongsoo. According to him, the Lao made deals with the Tongsoo in the forests where there were no witnesses or proper documents, then together drove the herds down in groups.<sup>67)</sup> Then, too, the targets of the bandits were often the local villagers as well. Therefore, it was not a simple case

66) For a description of the fish industry at Siemreap, see, for example, NA, RV, RL-PS. vol. 25, *thi* 35, C.S. 1245.

67) NA, RV, RL-PS. vol. 25, *thi* 331, C.S. 1246.

of the Kula/Tongsoo vs. the local population.

Indeed, the robberies and assaults were committed indiscriminately. Chinese merchants also often fell prey to the bandits. Even the official envoy of the Mahasarakham principality, on the way to Bangkok with levy money (*ngoen suai*), was attacked in broad daylight by some 60 bandits near Chatturat and robbed of over 7,200 bahts and three horses.<sup>68)</sup>

Did the frequent occurrences of banditry in this period mean that the power and authority of the local elite was declining? Or had it originally been too weak, to begin with, to cope with the changes and confusion occurring in this period? What was the original basis of the economic and political power of the local elites, then? Or did the patron-client social relationship in which the local elite sometimes seemed to have sided with the local population under his control who committed assaults or thievery by not punishing them severely enough, encourage the robbery and theft,

worsening the situation?

Then, too, in some cases villagers from a wide range of places across many principalities, formed groups to commit a series of robberies. The people who joined these bandit groups were often "servants" (*bae*) of the local ruling class.<sup>69)</sup> They left their original villages and became dependants of the powerful figures. Did this indicate the possibility of the uprooting of certain parts of the population, due to such a reason as population growth?

The economic opportunities which suddenly arose in this period stimulated the interests of the whole population. Everybody wanted to get a share in them. The local elite, however, were seemingly unable to meet the changes that were taking place. They failed to provide the rules and order necessary to regulate the economic activities.

Further studies of the nature of the banditry during this period, and of the economic and political basis of the local power and its possible breakdown, as well as of other changes, including demographic changes, taking place in the area, are necessary before the question of why the Kula wept can be more fully answered.

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68) NA, RV, M.2.12. kai (Nakhon Ratchasima)/1: Phraya B̄romaratchabanhan phu raksa m̄uang Nakhon Ratchasima kromakan b̄ok, dated the 13th day of the waning moon, of the 7th month, C.S. 1243.

69) For example, a group of about 40 bandits were committing a series of robberies, cattle stealing, and arson around the Yasothon and Ubon areas. Three of them were the servants of Phra Yokrabat, an official in Nakhon Ratchasima. In their interrogation the three reported that 6 of the bandits were from Wichian, another 6 from Sisaket, another from Nakhon Ratchasima, 1 from Ratanaburi, 4 from Ubon, 2 from Bamnet N̄arong and 3 were servants of Nin, who himself was interrogated; and that there were 15 others whose names the three did not know [NA, RV, MT (L). vol. 5: M̄uang Yasothon prot klau hai Phra Sunthon Rat-chawongsa chaom̄uang Yasothon chamra rai khwam phu rai plon chang ma kho krab̄u kh̄ong ratsad̄on, C.S. 1233].

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## Abbreviations and Chronology

- C.S.: Čhula Sakkarat (Lesser Era)+638=A.D.  
 R.S.: Rattanakosin Sok (Rattanakosin Era)+1781=A.D. (for the months of January, February, and March, R.S.+1782=A.D.)  
 CMH: Čhodmaihet (documents)  
 R: Ratchakan thi ( \_\_th Reign)