

**ETHNICITY AND TRANSNATIONAL COMMERCE
IN THE MEKONG RIVER DELTA OF VIETNAM
1975–2007**

**Rucianawati
Amorisa Wiratri
Betti Rosita Sari**

**PSDR-LIPI
2009**

© 2010 Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI)
Research Center for Regional Resources (PSDR)*

Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ethnicity and Transnational Commerce in the Mekong River
Delta of Vietnam 1975–2007/Rucianawati, Amorisa Wiratri,
dan Betti Rositasari. – Jakarta: LIPI Press, 2010.

x + 126 hlm.; 14,8 x 21 cm

ISBN 978-979-799-558-4

1. Ethnicity

2. Mekong River

305.8

Editor	: Team
Copyeditor	: Sarwendah Puspita Dewi
Layouter	: M. khamim
Cover Designer	: M. khamim
Publisher	: LIPI Press, member of Ikapi



LIPI

* Research Center for Regional Resources
(PSDR)

Indonesian Institute of Sciences

Widya Graha 3rd floor

Jalan Jenderal Gatot Subroto 10, Jakarta 12710

Phone : 021-5265152

Fax . : 021-5265152

PREFACE

This book, “Ethnicity and Transnational Commerce in the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam 1975–2007” is the result of the last year of the five year plan of research on the Mekong River in four Mekong countries: Thailand, Cambodia, the Lao PDR, and Vietnam, conducted by the Research Center for Regional Resources, Indonesian Institute of Sciences (PSDR–LIPI) and involving researchers from various disciplines such as history, anthropology, and economics.

Like studies in the previous years, this research conducted during 2009 was focused on issues of ethnicity and transnational trade in the MRB, particularly on the aspects of interethnic relationships, the growth of the economy and trade, and the local and regional policy in managing the MRB. The first year’s research was conducted in Thailand during 2005, the second was in Cambodia in 2006, the third was in the Lao PDR during 2007, and the fourth and fifth were in Vietnam in 2008 and 2009.

The writers do give a high appreciation to many people for their assistance involving in this work. First, our heartfelt thanks goes to Prof. Dr. Vo Van Sen, Rector of The University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University–Ho Chi Minh City and Ms. Tran Cao Boi Ngoc, M.A., Deputy Director, International Relations, who were very patient and kind in preparing the invitation letter for this research, also for preparing the letter of introduction to visit Can Tho University and Tien Giang University of My Tho. Our thanks is also addressed to Mr. Nguyen Thanh Tuan, M.A. Deputy Dean, Head, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, USSH, Vietnam National University, for his dealing with the administration during our research, providing translators, and helping us to build networks in Ho Chi Minh City.

We would especially like to express our gratitude to Mr. Dalton Sembiring, Acting Consul General, Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Ho Chi Minh City and all of the staff, especially Ms.

Pande Ketut Wuri Handayani, Social Cultural Affairs, who were very kind in accepting us and helping us during field research in HCMC and surrounding areas. Furthermore, our thanks is extended to Prof. Dr Nguyen Minh Hoa (Center for Urban and Community Development–USSH), Mr. Le Van Thanh (Institute for Economic Research HCMC), Mr. Truong Dong Loc (Can Tho University), and Mr. Ngo Van Vang (Tien Giang University) who gave us valuable information on ethnicity and commerce in the Mekong Delta.

Finally, we really hope that this report provides worthy information for anyone concerned with Mekong studies. Nevertheless, we realize that there are still limitations and weaknesses in it. Thus, we would very much appreciate any criticisms and suggestions for better quality research in the near future.

Yekti Maunati,
Director,
Research Center for Regional Resources-
Indonesian Institute of Sciences,
Jakarta, December

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	i
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
Abbreviation	viii

CHAPTER I

ETHNICITY AND TRANSNATIONAL COMMERCE

IN THE MEKONG RIVER DELTA OF VIETNAM 1975–2007

An Introduction

Rucianawati, Amorisa Wiratri, and Betti Rositasari *Rosita Sari*

1. Background	1
2. The Concept of Ethnicity and Transnational Trade	5
2.1 Ethnicity	5
2.2 Transnational Trade	8
3. Organization of this Book	10
Bibliography	12

CHAPTER II

ETHNICITY, TRANSNATIONAL TRADE, AND THE ROLE OF THE RIVER BASIN

Conceptual Framework of the Study of Ethnicity in the Mekong River Basin

Amorisa Wiratri

1. Introduction	15
2. History of the people in the Mekong River Basin	16
3. Culture	18
4. Religion	20
5. Inter Ethnic Relationships	24
6. Political Access	26
7. Economic Access	38
Bibliography	43

CHAPTER III
THE MEKONG RIVER DELTA IN VIETNAM
The Key to Trade and Economic Growth in Southern Vietnam

Betti Rosita Sari

1. Introduction	47
2. Economic Development in the Mekong River Delta in Vietnam	47
3. Primary sectors in the Vietnam Mekong Delta	52
3.1 Agricultural sector: rice and aqua culture (seafood production)	53
3.2 The Industrial Sector	54
4. Trade Activities in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam	54
4.1 Trade Relations between the Mekong Delta and HCMC	55
4.2 Commodities	56
4.3 Perpetrators of trade	57
4.4 The Relations of Ethnicity and Trade	59
4.5 Trade Routes	61
5. Government Policies	62
6. Conclusion	65
Bibliography	66

CHAPTER IV
LOCAL AND REGIONAL POLICY IN MANAGING THE
MEKONG RIVER BASIN

A Case Study in the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam

Rucianawati

1. Background	68
2. Regional Policy in Managing the MRB	68
2.1 The Development of Hydropower	72
2.2 The Development of Transportation	75
3. Local Policy on Ethnicity and Natural Resource Development	80

4. Policy on the Chinese and Local Ethnic Minorities in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam	83
5. Conclusion	85
Bibliography	87

CHAPTER V
ETHNICITY, MIGRATION, AND TRANSNATIONAL
COMMERCE IN THE LOWER MEKONG BASIN

A Final Note

<i>Rucianawati</i>	89
Executive Summary	94

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Labor Migration

Table 2.2 Migrants in Thailand (September 2001)

Table 2.3 Employment Related Labor Shortages (2000)

Table 2.4 Employment Reported Need for Foreign Migrants (2000)

Table 3.1 Economic structure in the MD and the country, 1996–2004
(%)

Table 4.1 Dam Locations on the Mekong River

LIST OF FIGURES

- Picture 2.1 The Migration Pattern in the Southeast Asian Mainland
- Picture 3.1 Trade Route from the Mekong Delta Provinces to HCMC
- Picture 3.2 Map of trade routes in Vietnam in the Mekong Delta and several provinces in Vietnam, as well as in international trade
- Picture 4.1 Map of Dams on the Mekong River
- Picture 4.2 The Development of a Bridge in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam
- Picture 4.3 Road and river transportation in Can Tho, Vietnam

CHAPTER I
ETHNICITY AND TRANSNATIONAL COMMERCE
IN THE MEKONG RIVER DELTA OF VIETNAM 1975–2007
An Introduction

Rucianawati, Amorisa Wiratri, and Betti Rosita Sari

1. Background

The Mekong Delta is a triangle shaped fertile region of 49,520 km², encompassing both Vietnam and Cambodia, from Kampong Cham to the South China Sea. This region is a flat low-lying land area with altitudes ranging from 0.5 to 3 metres above the sea level. 74% of the area belongs to Vietnam and the rest to Cambodia. The population of this region is estimated at more than 17 million, 85% of which live in the rural regions. The Kinh people, who are the majority (above 90%), inhabit the region along with other ethnic groups, such as the Cham and the Khmer (Hori, 2000: 19; White, 2002: 25).

During the Vietnam War, this region underwent severe destruction resulting from bombing, deforestation and damaged irrigation systems that impacted on the forests and agricultural regions. After the war ended in 1975, the government encouraged the settlement of people in the Delta region in areas considered not good enough for agriculture or aquaculture. 24,000 km² out of 39,000 km² of the Vietnam Delta was used for agriculture and aquaculture, and 4,000 km² of the Delta was used for forestation. The main products of this region constituted 30% of Vietnamese GDP. It served also as the main producer of rice besides the Red River Delta, supplying 50% of the rice needed in Vietnam. This has placed Vietnam as the second top rice exporting country in the world (White, 2002: 25–26).

Agricultural crops decreased in quantity due to the increasing population which required new settlement areas and thus reduced the

agricultural areas. To revive the crop numbers, the government released scores of regulations, for example, Resolution 10 in 1988 concerning farm tax and a liberal market for produce. Then, Resolution 5 was released in 1993 to promote rural industry and migration of workers for the traditional agricultural sector (Edmonds, 2004: 2). Adoption of modern agricultural technology and development of irrigation systems has been of help to the improvement of agricultural crops, especially of rice. This achievement is mainly the impact of the reformed 'Doi Moi' policy in 1986 by the Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party, which allowed private companies in the agricultural, trade, and industrial sectors to emerge, and enabled the farmers to rent land for up to 50 year terms. This impressive economic growth has also stimulated the movement of people with different ethnic backgrounds in Vietnam.

Since the 'opening' of the Mekong Basin, especially after the end of the wars in Indochina and the reunification of North and South Vietnam in 1976, there have been changes in the socio-economy, politics, and culture. One of these changes, apparent at the surface level, is the number and composition of the population: internal-external migration currents of various ethnic groups and the dynamics of the relationship among those ethnic groups. In the previous years, this research in the Mekong Delta focused on the issues of ethnicities concerning the people mobilization in the Delta. The migration was internal in nature and reached its peak when people moved to the southern regions.

As Charnvit Kasetsiri argues (2005), one of the characteristics of the Mekong Basin is its ethnic diversity, with the characteristics of the people varying in ethnic backgrounds, religions, cultures, and languages. Such diversity has implications in the diverse roles and activities in various aspects such as the socio-cultural, political, and economic. This final year research, which is an integral part of the series of researches in the previous years, focuses more on the socio-economic aspects, ethnicities, and trade issues in the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam. The Mekong Delta has always been busy with trade activities, ranging from local ones as seen in some floating markets at

Cai Rang and Phong Dien in Can Tho, Cai Bend, and Phung Hiep, to international business as seen in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon Port) which functions as an export-import port and is the largest in Vietnam.

The description above covers scores of issues related to natural resource management, inter-ethnic relationships and domestic and transnational trade. Such issues are hard to elucidate separately as they are intricately linked with each other and each comes under the influence of the others. Therefore, this book attempts to bring to light only two main topics, i.e. inter-ethnic relationships and patterns of transnational trade. Furthermore this book tries to look at the types of inter-ethnic relationships in the Vietnam Mekong Delta, the dynamics of inter-ethnic interaction in relation with the trade, types of trade activities are practiced, the patterns of transnational trade in particular, and the government policies in dealing with the issues of ethnicity in relation with trade activities in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam.

The research for this book was carried out on the grounds of the following assumptions:

- 1) The rapid current of people movements in the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam should establish a multi-ethnic community in the region;
- 2) Each ethnic group owns a particular identity and expertise especially in trade;
- 3) The government pays less attention to inter-ethnic relationships (both among the locals and the newcomers) because the government gives more emphasis to economic growth.

Field research was conducted in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, i.e. in Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho, and My Tho. These three cities are the centres of trade and industry in South Vietnam. Besides, they are also the destination of the migrants where people of different ethnic groups mingle and thus are the very places to look into inter-ethnic relationships in the context of trade and identity attached to themselves. The time range of this research is 1975 until 2007, which

is a continuation of the previous year and for the reason that migration dynamics have created dynamics of inter-ethnic relationships since the end of the Vietnam War and have ascribed particular characteristics, especially after the reunification of South and North Vietnam. These characteristics, which have more or less, influenced the roles and activities of each ethnic group in social, economic, and cultural areas, mainly in transnational trade.

Both primary and secondary data were collected in Indonesia and Vietnam. Data collection was not solely through literary study, but also through interviews and Forum Group Discussions (FGD) with academics, experts on ethnicity, local people, NGOs and community institutions in the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam as well as the related government agencies. Literary study was done in a number of libraries in Indonesia, such as at the PDII, the ASEAN Secretariat, the CSIS, and research centres, libraries and universities in Vietnam.

This research utilizes the analytic-descriptive method with multidimensional approaches, such as economic, historical and socio-anthropological ones. Concepts of these multidimensional approaches used in this research are sociological concepts in the structure of the society and economy that bring forward the concept of supply and demand to illuminate the analysis of trade. In order that the research be not fragmented over a certain period of time, a historical perspective is taken into account.

Focus on the issue of ethnicity and commerce, this book has the general objective to investigate the social, economic and cultural roles and activities of each ethnic group in domestic and transnational trade from 1975 to 2007. Its specific objectives are to disclose the activities of the existing ethnic groups and patterns of relations they build among themselves concerning trade in the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam; bring to light the patterns of transnational trade; and learn about government policies in taking care of ethnicity issues related to trade activities in the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam.

Besides that, this book also has the goals to comprehend inter-ethnic relations and their activities in trade and other sectors of the

economy; discover the patterns of transnational trade in the Mekong River Basin in Vietnam; and grasp the roles of various 'actors', be it government or non-government, in dealing with issues that ethnicities and transnational trade in the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam engendered.

2. The Concept of Ethnicity and Transnational Trade

2.1 Ethnicity

In anthropology, there are three main theoretical perspectives used in discussion of ethnicity. Besides the primordial theory, there are the situational theory and the relational theory. The situational theory is the opposite of the primordial one. The primordial theory sees ethnicity as a primordial placement which is gained through birth and socialization in a specific cultural background or in other words, ethnicity is given in nature and is not obliterated. The situational theory views that an ethnic group is an entity that was built on the common factors the people in the group share. To them, what is more important is not the form of the similarities itself, but the determination and maintenance of ethnic boundaries which are selective and constitute an answer to a certain socio-historical condition (Barth, 1969). This theory places emphasis on that cultural commonness is a greater factor in classifying people into individual ethnic groups than blood commonness.

From the perspective of the situational theory, ethnicity is a product of influences coming from outside the group. One of the factors most influential in ethnicity is colonialism, in which for administrative benefits of the colonizing rulers they put the colonized nation into groups of certain ethnicities and races (Rex 1994). Since then, it was passed on and has been applied up to the present time. Relational theory is based on the concept that an ethnic group is a conjoining of two or more entities which have both similarities and differences which have been compared in the process of determining the ethnic formation and maintaining the boundaries. The combined

common things, which two entities or more share, will constitute an ethnic identity. In this theory, ethnicity is there because there are linkages among different entities. Meanwhile, according to Frederick Barth (1988), the term 'ethnic' refers to a certain group due to shared race, religion, and origin, or a combination of those categories, attached to its system of values. An ethnic group is a group of people as a population which:

- In their group population are able to sustain their group viability through proliferation;
- Share common cultural values and are aware of their sense of togetherness in a form of culture;
- Develop their own network of communication and interaction;
- Determine the characteristics of their individual group which are acceptable to other groups and can be distinguished from any other population group.

According to Phinney (1994), ethnic identity is a complex construction which involves a commitment and a sense of belonging to an ethnic group, a positive evaluation of the group, having interest in and knowledge of the group and active participation in the group social activities. Such identity is related to the past and future aspirations concerning ethnicity. Thus, ethnic identity will allow someone to engender expectations of the future related to his/her ethnicity.

Weinreich (1985) states that social identity, including ethnic identity, is a combination of ideas, behaviours, attitudes and symbols of language passed on from one generation to another through socialization. Thus, one's ethnic identity is not fully accomplished when one is officially acknowledged as a member of a certain ethnic group merely through blood. Rather, such identity is constructed from socialization in family and surrounding communities. Someone who

was born Bugis will not necessarily possess Bugis ethnic identity unless he/she is exposed to identity socialization. What impels ethnic identity to come into being, among other matters, are the similarities of fellow-members which are constructed through shared learning processes, experiences and backgrounds, which make them share common customs and behaviours.

These similarities grow the sense of shared identity. People feel they are a group different from others because in the group there is a wide range of similarities of language, behaviours, customs, and so forth. It is this sense of shared identity that gives rise to ethnic identity. However, having such similarities in the group is not sufficient to reinforce ethnic identity. In the process to experience the feeling of shared identity, there is the need for the presence of other entities or ethnic groups to compare with and to lay claim to a particular identity. Ethnic identity results from social interaction. A group that does not interact with other groups possibly will not realize that it shares a greater range of similarities. It is only through interaction with other groups that an ethnic identity will take shape and the more intense the interaction is, the more the ethnic identity will develop.

According to Keefe (1992), ethnic identity consists of two elements, namely 1) Self-ethnic identity vs. other ethnic groups through a cognitive process; 2) Level of attachment to a group and its culture which is an affective element. Anytime someone feels as having an ethnic identity, he/she will identify who are the members of his/her own group and who are of others. He/she will also identify the differences between his/her group and other groups. He/she will have certain emotional attachment to his/her ethnic group as well.

The elements above provide a clear picture that ethnic identity is both an objective and a subjective phenomenon (Hacoy 1996). It is objective when someone reinforces his/her ethnic identity through a number of fixed criteria. For example, a child who has parents of a certain ethnic group will feel that he/she is a part of his/her parents' ethnic group. Ethnic identity becomes subjective as it contains a

certain level of sense of belonging to the group. Someone may adulate his/her ethnic group while someone else may have no deep bond to his/her ethnic group. It is very common to find someone who meets the criteria of being a member of a certain ethnic group (based on heredity, for instance) refuse to retain that ethnicity as his/her identity. This could happen for scores of reasons, but there is a tendency that such refusal is closely related to the fact that retaining original identity is socially and economically disadvantageous.

In the theories about ethnicity, Abner Cohen's view (1996) mentions that ethnicity is a type of political resource to compete for what is yearned for, and is regarded as most fitting in describing the relationships among ethnic groups in the Mekong Basin. Unlike Barth, he refutes the existence of ethnic boundaries. His concept is appropriate to elucidate ethnicity in the countries along the Mekong River as most communities residing in the region no longer emphasize their ethnic origins. Even the children of mixed marriages, Sino-Khmer for example, maintain their ethnic identities only for personal interest. For example, among Khmer communities, they will say they are Khmer and when they are among Chinese communities they will claim they are Chinese descendants. Thus, ethnic identity is no longer on grounds of origin, which Geertz mentions in his concept of primordialism. Ethnic identity along the Mekong River is no longer confined by cultural boundaries such as language, religion, race, nationality, and custom.

2.2 Transnational Trade

Trade activity or exchange plays a great role in the fulfillment of peoples' needs for goods and services. Such activity existed in traditional society under subsistent¹ economic systems and is still being practised up to recent days in which the money mechanism

¹ The first definition of subsistent portrays an economic condition that works merely for survival purposes. The second definition of subsistent means a production system of which products are used to meet self-needs and when the products are marketed, they are not for profit-making purposes.

(market) applies. However, in reality, the trade among ethnic groups is still in the form of barter (exchange of goods or services) and is subsistent in nature. Karl Polanyi in *The Great Transformation* argues that, Firstly, economic activities, including trade, constitute an attempt to meet daily needs in the midst of both natural and social environments; and secondly, economic systems in modern societies are different from those in the primitive or traditional ones. In modern societies that live under market economic systems, economic phenomena constitute a self-sustaining social institution as the market has systemic potential to manage its own condition. Quite the opposite, in traditional, primitive societies, the economic system is inseparable from other social institutions, closely related to the religious system, the local political system, and so forth (Sairin, 2002: 16–17). As a matter of fact, trade activities among ethnic groups are highly influenced by kinship, culture, social systems and the like.

On the other hand, transnational trade or trade among countries takes place when one country is not capable of producing goods or providing services for domestic needs or the domestic production is not sufficient to meet domestic needs so that goods or services from other countries are needed. This may happen as every country with its trade partners has differences in the available natural resources, climate, population, human resources, labour specifications, geographical configuration, technology, price rates, economic, political and social structure and so on. On the grounds of mutual needs where there is supply and demand, trade may take place on a wider scale known as international/transnational trade.

Such kinds of trade can be seen in the activities in the Mekong River area where trade cities along the river were established hundreds of years ago. The cities are Luang Prabang, Phakse, Vientiane (Laos), Savannakhet and Nong Khai (Thailand), Phnom Penh (Cambodia) and Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam). In the past, trade activities on the river took place freely without political boundaries among the countries. Later on, when the borders of each modern country were set and the Mekong was the borderline for a number of countries, the trade became transnational in character.

The countries which the Mekong River passes through generally share common features, i.e. agrarian, with rice as the mainstay. Yet, different historical backgrounds, rapid economic growth, advanced development of technology and human resources make the economy of one country different from that of the others. Thailand and Vietnam are considered as the two countries with the highest rate of economic growth compared to other countries in the Mekong region and have manufacturing industries of which products cannot be manufactured in either Cambodia or Laos. These different circumstances allow transnational trade to take place in which Thailand and Vietnam sell their manufactured products while Cambodia and Laos sell raw materials as they have not had industries/manufacturing factories in their respective countries. The key principle of transnational trade is the comparative advantage in which a certain country will specialize in the export market of a certain product if that country has the highest comparative advantage and that country will import certain items if it has comparative disadvantage or lower comparative advantage (Halwani, 2005: 20; Tambunan, 2004: 56–66).

3. Organization of this Book

This book consists of five chapters presented as follows:

Chapter I is introductory chapter that brings the background of the book based on five years research, the concept of ethnicity and transnational trade in general, and particularly in the Mekong Delta.

Chapter II will bring ethnicity in the Mekong River Basin to light comprehensively map the local ethnic groups and newcomers, intra and inter-ethnic relationships, their roles and activities in domestic and transnational trade and other economic activities.

Chapter III will enlarge on the history of transnational trade in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, the trade actors, patterns of trade, ethnic domination of trade and the social-economic impact of the trade on the local people.

Chapter IV will expound government policies in the management and development of the Mekong River Basin, especially the ones concerning trade and ethnicity issues and the environment. It will also look at regional policies and cooperation of the Mekong countries in the Mekong River Basin management.

Chapter V is a final note that presents the conclusion of this final year research as well as look at the similarities and differences (particularities) of each country in ethnicity and trade in the Mekong River Basin.

Bibliography

- Acharya, Sarthi. 2003. "Labour Migration in the Transitional Economies of South-East Asia". *Working Paper on Migration and Urbanization*, December 2003, <http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/workingpapers/labormigration/index>
- Asian Development Bank (ADB) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). 2004. *Greater Mekong Subregion Atlas of the Environment*.
- Barth, Frederick. 1969. "Introduction' in Ethnic Groups and Boundaries". In Frederick Barth (Ed.) *The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Barth, Fredrik (ed.). 1988. *Kelompok Etnik dan Batasannya*. Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia Press.
- Butwell, Richard. 1988. "Sungai Mekong", in *Negara dan Bangsa*, Volume 3. Jakarta: Grolier International Inc
- Edmonds, Christopher. 2004. "Rice Production, Land Use Dynamics, and Infrastructure Development in Viet Nam's Mekong River Delta" in *Asian Development Review*.
- Eller, Jack David. 1999. *From Culture to Ethnicity to Conflict. An Anthropological Perspective on International Ethnic Conflict*. Michigan: the University of Michigan Press.
- Hacoy, D. 1996. "Empirical Distinctiveness between Cognitive and Affective Elements of Ethnic Identity and Scales for Their Measurement". Selected Papers in International Congress 12th of International Association for Cross-cultural Psychology in Pamplona-Iruna, Navarra, Spanyol. Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger.

- Halwani, Hendra. 2005. *Ekonomi Internasional dan Globalisasi Ekonomi*. Jakarta: Ghalia Indonesia.
- Hardy, Andrew. 2003. *State Visions, Migrants Decisions: Population Movements since the End of the Vietnam War in Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society*, edited by Hy. V. Long, Singapore: ISEAS.
- Hill, Lewis and Michael Hichcock. 1996. "Anthropology" in Mohammad Halib and Tim Huxley (eds.) *An Introduction to Southeast Asian Studies*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singap
- Hiroshi, Hori. 2000. *The Mekong. Environment and Development*. United Nations University Press, Tokyo.
- Kasetsiri, Charnvit. 2003. "Will the Mekong Survive Globalization?" in *kyotoreview.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp*
- Lenhart, Lioba. 2002. "Orang Suku Laut Identity: The Construction of Ethnic Realities", in Geoffrey Benjamin and Cynthia Chou (eds.), *Tribal Communities in the Malay World. Historical, Cultural and Social Perspectives*. Singapore: Iseas.
- Osborne, Milton. 2000. *The Mekong: Turbulent Past, Uncertain Future*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Owen, Norman G. (ed.). 2005. *The emergence of Modern Southeast Asia. A New History*. Honolulu: University of Hawai Press.
- Phinney, J.S., et all. (1994). *Ethnic identity and American Identification Among Ethnic Minority Youths*. Amsterdam: Swets and Zeitlinger.
- Rex, John. 1994. "Ethnicity" in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth Century Social Thoughts*, William Outhwaite & Tom Bottomore (Eds.), Oxford: Basic Blackwell
- Sairin, Sjafri, et.al. 2002. *Pengantar Antropologi Ekonomi*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.

Tambunan, Tulus. 2004. *Globalisasi dan Perdagangan Internasional*. Jakarta: Ghalia Indonesia.

White, Ian. 2002. *Water Management in the Mekong Delta: Changes, Conflict and Opportunities*. Paris: Unesco.

CHAPTER II

ETHNICITY, TRANSNATIONAL TRADE, AND THE ROLE OF THE RIVER BASIN

Conceptual Framework of the Study of Ethnicity in the Mekong River Basin

Amorisa Wiratri

1. Introduction

This Chapter will give an introduction to the research on ethnicity in the Mekong River Basin. As in the title, there are two central concepts, ethnicity and transnational trade, supported by migration and geography. The Basin also has its own concept that will be explained in this Chapter, especially of the socio-economic role of the River Basin. As is known, the Basin has international trans boundary characteristics, where it spreads across countries, which do not have other interconnections with each other.

All of the concepts above, in this research are not separated but united for the one definition about ethnic dynamism in the Mekong River Basin, especially in connection with Thailand, the Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Vietnam. One country that is excluded in the Mekong River Basin area is China which is not explored in this study.

Ethnicity and transnational trade have strong interconnections which cannot be separated because each ethnic boundary is diminished especially in trade activity which is more dynamic nowadays. In the ethnicity context in the Mekong River Basin, its existence cannot be separated from natural resources which have now become a medium in transnational trade.

Abner Cohen (1996: 83–84) argues that ethnicity should be regarded as a type of political resource for competing interest groups and therefore, unlike Barth, he refuses to take the ethnic boundary for granted. Cohen's analysis is one of many that emphasize the ways in which ethnic groups and ties are beneficial and effective for the

attainment of individual and collective goals. This concept is the most appropriate one to describe ethnicity in countries along the Mekong River. That condition is caused since many people on the Mekong River do not emphasize their ancient ethnicity, in fact, children from mixed marriages, such as Sino-Khmer, will choose their ethnic identities only according to their individual tendencies, for example, Sino-Khmer children, will choose their ethnic identity according to their need. When they live in a Khmer community, they will admit to being Khmer, but when they live in Chinese society, they will admit to being Chinese, so ethnic identity is no longer based on origin as posited in the Geertz concept of primordialism. Ethnic identities along the Mekong River are no longer recognized by cultural boundaries, such as language, religion, race, nationality, or traditions.

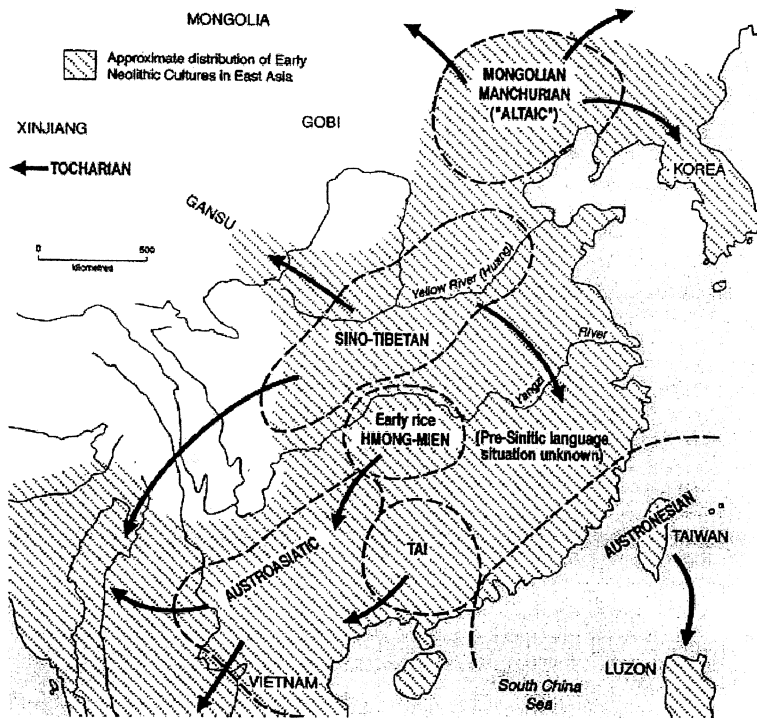
Along with the times and the dynamics of life, ethnic boundaries diminish and ethnic relations become fluid. This condition is also shown in the ethnic groups in the Mekong River Basin. Transnational trade among ethnic groups makes acculturation faster. Nevertheless, there are some factors that become linking connections for ethnicity and migration in mainland Southeast Asia:

2. History of the people in the Mekong River Basin

The Mekong River is one of the world's top 10 rivers in length and has great influence upon nature and societies of the Indochinese Peninsula. The name MEKONG originates in the Thai language, Mae Nam Khong. The source of the Mekong River is in the Tibetan mountains where it is called Dza Chu River (River of Rock). After running through a very narrow valley paralleling the Yangtze Jiang and the Salween River, the Mekong reaches the Yung-Nan province of China where it is called Lancang Jiang (Turbulent River), then, via the Golden Triangle, crossing China, Myanmar and the Lao border, the Mekong flows into the Vientiane Plain.

The term, Lower Mekong, means the downstream segment from the source. There are some notorious rapids, according to the French

navigation plan in the colonial period, before the Mekong gets to Cambodia, and the last segment is the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, which distributes wide influence on agriculture, especially on paddy fields. The people along the Mekong River, first came from China and migrated through the Mekong River. They spread agriculture and brought water buffalos to help their work, so this kind of migration is called buffalo migration.



Source: *A Cultural History of Southeast Asia: From Earliest Times to the Indic Civilizations*, 2004, (ed.) P. Bellwood and I. Glover. Routledge Curzon Press, New York.

Picture 2.1 The Migration Pattern in the Southeast Asian Mainland

The initial development of rice cultivation, which I assume took place in the inland areas of Southeast Asia, relied principally on cultivation under rainfall. Another innovation of this region was the stilt house, a light but sturdy dwelling suitable at once for life on hillsides and in wet areas, which later spread throughout mainland and island Southeast Asia. As well, further developments emerged. I believe that the development of paddy cultivation, in which rice was grown under water, took place in areas now known as South China, was by people speaking both Chinese and proto Austronesian languages. The domestication of water buffaloes and their harnessing to the construction and care of paddy fields for rice, brought a great expansion in the productivity of rice cultivation, and led to the expansion of the two populations concerned (Manning, Patrick, 2005: 69).

3. Culture

According to Adam Kuper:

Culture areas are defined in part by historical relationship and they may exhibit profound continuities despite superficial changes. Structural continuities within a region may signal shared roots, though local variants may be shaped by direct interactions, exchanges, even confrontations between communities(Kuper, 1992: 12).

In the Mekong region, there are at least two important myths that have long been known and recited in several local ceremonies throughout the Mekong communities and lately have been comprehensively translated in English publications. One is the Phadaeng Nang Ai by Wajuppa Tossa (1990) and the other is the Phya Khankhaak (1996). The Phadaeng Nang Ai, probably the first of Thai-Isan folktales ever translated into English verse, deals throughout its 'epic' with an explanation of regional geography, local place-naming and more importantly, the interpretation of multi-layered relations

between humans and nature asserted by the beliefs of Buddhist doctrine and cosmology. Wajuppa claims that Phadaeng Nang Ai continues to be a cultural force in Isan tradition as it is still told and performed annually at the firing-rocket-for-rain Bun Bangfai festivals as well as recited during other occasions throughout the year. In fact, myth is far from being an idle mental pursuit; it is a vital ingredient of practical relations with the environment. For that reason, Tambiah in his anthropological work of Isan spirit cults refers to two versions of the myth of Phadaeng Nang Ai which he collected from two local sources followed by his structural analysis of such myths. Tambiah comes up with the conclusion regarding Phadaeng Nang Ai that while the plot of the myth overtly predicates an antagonism between man and nature, the underlying message is the resolution of the relationship between them in terms of fertile union and sharing of common properties. For Tambiah, the Phadaeng Nang Ai myth portrays what he calls the 'balance equation between naturalization of human society and the humanization of nature' through the narration of triangular contested love of the Naga's son Pangkee, Phadaeng and the princess Nang Ai.

Culture on the mainland has had a long historical journey. Many times, it is founded on similarity with uniqueness of ritual in each area. One of the examples is the Loy Kratong festival in Thailand, a ritual to show gratitude to the Water God, especially in the Mekong River that gives livelihood to all living creatures. This festival takes place in every year. Every country names this festival in its own language and culture, for example: in Cambodia, this festival is called Loy Protip.

In Thailand, a tribute, Loy Kratong, is a kind of cone shaped ceremonial dish that in Siamese is called *kratong* so the festival is called Loy Kratong. The tributes are very decorative. A *kratong* usually consists of flowers, banana leaves, a candle or lamp, and other offerings and is floated on the river. All the tributes are floated at night under the full moon, like a lantern party on a Chinese river. This beautiful and romantic event is used by the tourism board as one of the attractive festivals in Thailand. The festival is opened by a high

functionary from each area in Thailand. The opening ceremony is livened up by fire crackers and food. In Bangkok, the ceremonies are centred on the Chao Phraya River.

Besides ritual, another part that is important in the peoples' cultural life is the existence of forests. Forests are not only crucial repositories for much of the region's biological wealth and diversity, but equally important, are intrinsic parts of the lives, cultures and economies of the majority of the region's peoples. Many indigenous societies have sacred, spirit forests that are governed and shared through stringent rules and practices. Many sacred forests are sources of local rivers and streams and protecting the forests also means protecting the communities' water sources. Forests are also important for local folklore, education, and knowledge; children learn the value of plants, animals, poisons, and medicines by accompanying their parents to forests (Guttal, <http://www.landaction.org/spip/spip.php?article149>, accessed 2 June 2009).

4. Religion

Charles F Keyes describes mainland Southeast Asia (Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam) as the 'crossroad of religions' whereby 'a large diversity of original tribal religions are intermingled with Hinduism, Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam and Christianity, as well as the modern secular faith of Marxist-Leninism' (Keyes, 1987: 512). The complex blending of early primitive religious practices and those influenced by China over several centuries, have been reshaped by political changes in the twentieth century.

Because of the Han conquest between 124 BCE and 43 CE, Vietnam looked to China for religious guidance with the influx of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. This influence remained long after Vietnam's independence from China in the eleventh century. Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand were shaped by Indian Hinduism

and Buddhism up to the fifteenth century. Traditional tribal societies that relied on archaic rituals and Sino-Indian religions were slowly changed by Christian missionaries. As new agricultural systems emerged, adherence to folk cultures began to wane.

In the twentieth century, various religious movements emerged in the island cultures of Southeast Asia, in addressing the effects of globalization on ancient cultures. James J Peacock categorizes these movements into three groups: Hindu-Buddhist, Muslim and Christian. For example, Budi Utomo (High Endeavour) in Java and Bali sought to reestablish religious beliefs against a growing Western technology and a values system that replaced traditional beliefs of Javanist-Hindu-Buddhists as Peacock relates:

Looking to India's Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Gandhi as inspirations in the revival of these traditions, Budi Utomo was controlled by the aristocracy and intelligentsia and never gained a broad popular following, although it had amassed some ten thousand members within a year of its founding (Keyes, 1987: 527).

The ancient indigenous religion of mainland Southeast Asia is Animism. Its exact temporal beginnings are unknown and probably simply developed naturally with the development of the early bronze-age communities. It continues to exert a strong influence on the modern cultures, both Buddhist and Islamic, of Southeast Asia. Together with aspects of Confucianism from China, Animism underpins all the adopted religions of the region. It may go back to as early as the earliest known human communities such as that of Ban Chiang in North East Thailand which is thought to date from 3,000 BCE. Buddhism and Hinduism, according to the archaeological finds on the Malay Peninsula, Indonesia and the southern Delta regions of Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, made their appearance about the first to third centuries of the Christian millennium. They seem to have come with Indian traders and missionaries from India and Sri Lanka. Knowledge of their philosophies, art and administrative approaches accompanied the rise of the first commercial states in these regions

such as Funan, Chen-la, Sating Pra, Nakhon Sri Thammarat and Takua Pa. Whilst Hinduism took root most strongly in Cambodia, from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries and in Indonesia in about the same time frame, it remained a superficial influence in Thailand, Burma and Laos where Buddhism took hold most strongly. In Cambodia, it was the basis of the ancient Angkorian civilization. However, archaeological finds in Thailand and southern Burma show that Theravada Buddhism was most dominant in the ancient kingdom of Dvaravati up to about the eleventh century when it was overtaken by the Khmer and the Thai. Theravada Buddhism, however, conquered its conquerors and spread throughout Pagan Burma (11th century), the first great classical Thai kingdom at Sukhothai (13th-14th centuries) and post Angkor Cambodia as well as Laos.

Islam which had been present since the early Christian era among the Muslim traders only started to spread as a concerted movement in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries after the fall of Baghdad changed the balance of power in the West and affected the trade routes and therefore revenues of the Islamic world. By the end of the fourteenth century the great temple building empires of Southeast Asia were all in crisis perhaps as a result of the strain on manpower and resources which such huge building programs entailed. Islam, with its emphasis on individualism, took root most strongly among the commercial groups in the port cities of Sumatra, Java and southern Malay Peninsula at Malacca, later spreading to the archipelago world of eastern Indonesia.

Today, a little more than a hundred Muslim families remain in Laos. The single largest ethnic group among them is Muslims of Cambodian origin, numbering sixty one families. The first Muslims from Cambodia arrived in Laos as workers and small traders some forty years ago, but most of them came after the mid 1980s, when their homeland was taken over by the deadly Khmer Rouge. Today, most of them live from selling Cambodian traditional medicinal herbs.

Most of Vientiane's Cambodian Muslim community lives around a locality not far from the town's Chinese quarter. In the centre

of their settlement, there is a large mosque, established in 1986, the Majid Azhaar; a graceful building topped with numerous gilded domes, which contains two large rooms. One room serves as a prayer hall and the other as a *maktab* (Koranic elementary school), where some fifty Cambodian Muslim children study in two daily shifts that are timed in such a way as to allow them to attend regular school as well.

Pakhtuns from Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province are the largest Muslim ethnic group in Laos after the Cambodian Muslims. In recent years, the community has been considerably depleted with migration to Pakistan and Western countries and now numbers less than thirty families. Almost all of them are Lao citizens and some twenty Pakhtun men have married Lao women, the women having converted to Islam thereafter. Roughly a dozen Pakhtun men are in government service, including one who is a top-ranking police officer. Most of the rest are fairly prosperous cloth merchants based in Vientiane, and several of them own considerable amounts of agricultural land.

Laos' Tamil Muslims, along with Pakhtun and Cambodian Muslims living in the country, recently joined together to set up the Muslim Association of Laos to oversee Muslim community affairs and also to liason with the government. According to Haji Muhammad Rafiq alias Sofi Sengsone, the President of the Association: 'Our relations with the Lao government have always been very good and we face no problems at all in our religious affairs. The Lao people, in general, are very gentle and affectionate,' adding: 'and we think it is our good fortune to be living here.' (http://en.qantara.de/webcom/print_site.php, accessed 2 June 2009).

Overall the religious life in Southeast Asia is very peaceful although there are still numerous religious conflicts in mainland Southeast Asia, especially involving Muslims, as in Pattani, Thailand, where there is a Muslim community that has its own beliefs in Islamic values. The conflict that in this case is more closely seen as separatism is perceived not only as having a socio historical logic, but also as

being a practical possibility because of the coincidence of geography and cultural plurality, distance from the centre of authority and the support of sympathetic groups outside the state (Man 1990: 2). Ethnic minorities with their own beliefs are susceptible to becoming implicated in conflict with the nation or larger ethnic groups.

5. Inter Ethnic Relationships

The ethnic relationships along the Mekong River are very dynamic. This fact cannot be separated from history. The Southeast Asian ancestors that derived from China came to find new livelihoods and interact with indigenous people in the new place. At first, the relationship between the foreigners and the indigenous people was not in harmony, but with time, there were many marriages making assimilation easier and diminish ethnic identity.

Many mixed marriages have taken place along the Mekong River, for example, mixed marriages among the Kinh and the Hoa in Vietnam. These marriages produce Sino-Kinh children and function as a bridge to connect ethnic Kinh and ethnic Hoa. They easily become part of the Kinh people and vice versa of the Hoa people, without any discrimination. They are free to choose their ethnic identities; whether to follow their father or their mother as they like. This kind of marriage can repair bad relationships of the past and strengthen ethnic relations in the future. Young generations from mixed marriages spread in all areas and many of them participate in industrial sectors in urban areas.

On the other hand, a number of ethnic groups that are not balanced often cause discrimination between ethnic minorities and ethnic majorities. This condition has happened almost in all countries on the Southeast Asian mainland, such as: the Lao PDR, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. For example, in the Lao PDR, ethnic Hmong who live in the mountainous area have experienced discrimination from the government, where they could not actively participate in political activities and were seldom touched by development activities.

In Thailand, discrimination of ethnic minorities has also occurred, for example, the Thai government decided to use the central Thai dialect in all government schools and all who aspired to government positions, from village headmen up, were expected to master Central Thai. People who used other dialects tended to see Central Thai people as both different and superior, as can be seen among the Thai Lao people. They felt inferior to the Central Thai who represented progress, prestige, wealth and national power (Suribidari, 2005: 87). Language constraints also widened the distance between Thai people who lived in central cities and those who lived in border areas, like the Thai Lao people. Their language and culture that is closer to Lao than to Thai made them viewed not to be part of the Thai people even in their home country.

In addition, the existing Chinese in almost all areas of the Southeast Asian mainland dominating trade have also had ups and downs in their relations with local people. Many of them work as middlemen or traders. They accept natural resources from local people and resell these to the market. As can be seen in Cambodia where many Khmer work as farmers and sell their crops to Chinese middlemen who resell the crops in the local market. Economic factors, especially trade, can be used to bind the multi ethnic relations other than through mixed marriage.

Multiethnic relationships or a multicultural society can be found in all mainland Southeast Asia, such as in Vietnam, where there were Vietnamese, Chinese, French, and Indian people. The Vietnamese peasantry was squeezed between the Chinese rice monopoly, the Indian money lenders, the French colonial authorities and the large land owners (French, or Vietnamese rewarded by the French for their cooperation).

The Mien Tay area of Vietnam, had two main features about which Brocheux in Ojendal (1997) tells us: 'It was rural and it was plural'; there were Chinese, Vietnamese, French, Khmer, Indians, and Chams. Internal conflicts were historically well known but the French presence seemed to have put a lid on it and at least made the different

ethnic groups accept some degree of coexistence. The Khmer were more numerous close to the mountains and in the western part of the Delta, the Chinese were more urban oriented and the Chams lived in rather sealed off, self sufficient communities. Socially speaking, two groups dominated, the *dien chu* (landowners) and the *ta dien* (tenant farmers). The former, group included both the absent large landowners, often drawing discontent by a lack of responsibility, and the small landowners, whose living conditions were not necessarily very different from those of the *ta dien*. This is a pattern we recognize from other parts of Indochina.

6. Political Access

Nowadays, the existence of ethnic groups cannot be separated with politics, which now is represented by national power. Many times, there are thick walls that cannot easily be breached by many ethnic groups that are minor in their numbers. In Vietnam, the relationships between the ethnic minorities and the government have had ups and downs until now, for example, in the existence of the Hoa People. In their early arrival, they lived separated from the Kinh people with many of them living in the lowland. The government did not acknowledge their existence and they were not allowed to participate in any political activities.

The attention to ethnic minorities is very important to keep stability and solidarity among ethnic groups that live in an area. The development from each ethnic group has close relations with national strengthening and development. The strengthening from communal consciousness and unity is not opposite to and does not omit diversity and originality in ethnic identity. Every person is part of the country and part of an ethnic group. They have two communities: the national community with members of ethnic groups living and working in the country and the ethnic community with members from the same ethnic groups living in their homeland and other places (Van, 2001: 109–110).

Relations between ethnic groups and the government can vary from time to time. In fact, it can be seen that the government did not

always respect the existence of the ethnic minorities. Many government policies were not favourable to the existences of ethnic minorities, for example, the policy about forest land in Thailand. This policy caused many ethnic minorities, that only rely on forest resources, to end to meet their needs, lose their livelihoods and migrate to other areas or countries (Suribidari, 2005: 127).

Migration does not directly bring their rights as citizens back. Many migrants who usually come from ethnic minorities, do not have good education and economic facilities so that they become illegal migrants who often get abuse from immigration officials or migrant brokers that exploit them. In the last few years, there have been increased discussions on migration issues, especially in the border areas in the Mekong River Basin. Many of them migrate to get better jobs without legal documents. They move from their home countries because they have lost their ethnic identity.

In the past three decades, almost all countries along the Mekong River have had the same social problems. Crimes that often occurred in those countries were such as, gun trading, ammunition trading, trade in protected animals, drugs, even human trafficking that mostly happened in children and women (Lamijo, 2004: 81–82). In the border area of Thailand, many illegal migrants come through river and land ways. Many of them come from Myanmar, the Lao PDR and Cambodia. There are more than a hundred illegal entry points that are used by many migrants, besides the official locations that are set up by local governments, such as on:

- The border between Thailand-Myanmar: Chiang Rai (District Mae Sai and Chiang Kong), Chiang Mai (District Fang), Mae Hong Son (District Khun Yuam), Tak (Districts Thasongyang and Me Sod), Karnchanaburi (Districts Sangklaburi and Thongpaoon).
- The border between Thailand-the Lao PDR: Chiang Rai (Districts Chiang Sen, Chiang Kong, and Wienghang), Phayao (District Chiangkham), Nan (District Chalermprakiat), Nakorn Panom (Districts Thatpanom and Tauthane), Nong Khai

(Districts Sri Chiangmai and Tha Bor), Ubonrachathani (Districts Khemmarat and Piboonmangsaharn), Mukdahan (Districts Don Tan and Som Poi), Amnat Chaeron (District Chanumarn).

- The border between Thailand-Cambodia: Surin (Districts Karbchherng, Prasart and Ban Kok), Sra Kaew (Districts Tapraya and Aranyaprathet), Trad (Districts Klong Yai and Kaoh Kong).²

It is not surprising that policemen and immigration officials control the migrant movements. Their illegal status often makes immigration officials rude to them. They often arrest and fine them. They also get deported to their home countries. In addition, the officials also are often seen to persecute and sexually abuse women migrants. This condition produces tensions between migrants that represent ethnic minorities and officials that represent national power.

The Mekong Region has been marked by political conflicts for hundreds of years, many among neighbours within the region. Some of the most visible imprints on the region have come from the colonial aggressions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from Britain, France, Imperial Japan, China, and most recently, the United States. During the 1960s and 1970s, much of the lower Mekong was consumed by war, whose human, social, economic, and environmental costs have yet to be fully mapped and acknowledged. The Cold War provided the US and its allies with the impetus for full-blown war (in Vietnam), the heaviest bombing recorded in history (in Laos) and political manipulation with tragic consequences (in Cambodia). China and Thailand, while quick to protect their own lands from becoming theatres of war, colluded with external aggressors at various times.

Now it is peacetime and the regions' peoples are exhorted to look towards the future rather than at the past. But collective memory is more difficult to rewrite than history books. Despite a newfound

² AMC, "Migration Needs, Issues and Responses in the Greater Mekong Subregion", AMC, Kowloon, 2002 in Lamijo, 2005: 34.

spirit of inter governmental cooperation in the Mekong region, old suspicions and prejudices linger. Former occupying powers too seem unable to give up their spheres of influence. What they are no longer able to do with colonial administration, artillery and bombs, they attempt to do through economic policy and development assistance. (Guttal, Shalmali in <http://www.landaction.org/spip/spip.php?article149>, accessed 2 June 2009).

The problem is often found where government policies precisely increase the poverty level. Almost all poverty along the Mekong River is caused by the mistakes of government regulations, such as in Myanmar where more than half of the country's agricultural land is under military authority (Ard, 2003).

The two sets of issues: the international trade agreements and international development financing are important also for the everyday life of the people in the region. While international trade agreements are essential in order for people to successfully avail themselves of the advantages of the global economy, the international development financing is also vital for much infrastructural building for which often the countries in the region lack finance. However, these very factors: the international trade agreements and international development financing are also capable of becoming the major causes of suffering and underdevelopment of the people of the region. For example, the wrong type of trade agreement can easily hamper the job opportunities of the people or from an unwise infrastructure building project may ensue displacement of the people without giving them any viable alternative livelihood, or destroy the ecology and the physical environment that is essential for the economic sustainability of the people living in that area. So, a democratic process of decision making on these issues is fundamental in order to have the positive significance of the international trade agreements and the international development financing on the development of the countries in the region. The criticism and resistance by many civil society and advocacy organizations in the region against the present pattern of international trade agreements and international development

financing is due to the fact that the present development pattern does not accommodate the needs and interests of the majority of the people rural and urban poor, indigenous people, and other minorities of the countries in the region. Such a development pattern can be called an exclusive development pattern (Hossain, 2008).

The most significant policy in order to make the poverty level and ecosystem degradation getting worse is forest land policy. To protect forests, governments arrange to protect land, remove people from their original habitat on protected land and limit shifting cultivators by reducing the planting period. The impact is that people from ethnic minorities that mostly live in forests and are dependent on the agricultural sector, decide to migrate to get a better life and jobs, as consequences from the closing of forest land and regulations that do not side with the ethnic minorities.

Despite problems inherent in the migration process, the number of people willing to move nationally and internationally for purposes of work continues to increase. The reasons for this include the following:

- Greater ease and lowered costs of international travel;
- Greater levels of financial and communication infrastructures remove some barriers which make it unattractive to work overseas for some periods;
- Increased levels of income inequality fuel desire for more income;
- More awareness of possibilities and ability to take advantage of them.

The issues connected with labour migration are complex and multifaceted. At the levels of the individual, the enterprise and the state, there are various advantages and disadvantages (Table 1) and it would be a complex undertaking to try to assess which of these factors might outweigh the others.

Table 2.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Labor Migration

	Emigration		Immigration	
	<i>Potential Advantages</i>	<i>Potential Disadvantages</i>	<i>Potential Advantages</i>	<i>Potential Disadvantages</i>
For migrants or for individuals	Employment Discontinuity/Greater income	Bad working/living conditions/loss of seniority	Services that free women to enter labour force	Competition for jobs; marginalization of less skilled
	Cheaper goods and services	Lower local wages	Training or education	Lower status work; loss of skills
	Richer cultural life	Crowded schools	New cultural experiences	Racism or discrimination
	Learning about other countries	Strange languages and customs	Meeting new people	Separation from family; adverse impact on children
For enterprises	Skills of returning migrants	Losing skilled workforce	Cheaper/more flexible labour	Less stable workforce
	Lucrative business for the recruitment industry	Labour shortages that drive up wages,	Workforce diversity	Dependence on foreign labour for certain jobs
	Extra business for communications and travel firms	Larger markets and economies of scale		
For the country as a whole	Reduced population pressure	Losing younger people	Rejuvenating population	Social friction
	Lower unemployment	Coping with sudden returnees	Larger workforce; lower inflation	Delayed technology upgrading

	Foreign currency remittances	Loss of potential output and tax revenue	Higher GDP; capital brought by immigrant investors	Increased income inequality
	Knowledge and skills of returnees	Brain drain and loss of better workers; reduced R&D	Brain gain	Costs of integration programs
	Building transnational communities	Social disruption and a culture of emigration	More diverse and energetic population	
	More social stratification/immigrant ghettos	Increasing inequality	Tax income from younger workers	Cost of social service welfare benefits

Source: <http://www.geocities.com/jcwalsh102/mekong.doc>, accessed 2 June 2009.

States have the responsibility not only to manage their economic lives short term, but also to balance this condition for long term social stability and competitiveness. Attempting to coordinate the requirements of these different needs often leads to multiple flows of migrants both from within and from without a country. General labour both moves into Thailand from Laos and Cambodia and is also exported overseas to Taiwan and the Middle East, among other locations. It should also be borne in mind that the Mekong River region generally suffers from a low level of human resource development. Skills and competencies are lacking. This situation is compounded by poor education and training systems and inputs (<http://www.geocities.com/jcwalsh102/mekong.doc>, accessed 2 June 2009).

The number of migrant workers from all border countries, especially Laos and Myanmar, entering Thailand in the middle of 2004 has, according to reports, increased significantly since the Royal Thai Government announced a new policy on registering migrant workers. This policy is one of a number that have been designed to

register migrant workers to bring them under the protection of the regulatory authorities and, hence, provide a higher level of human security. There has been a steady stream of stories of the abuse of workers in the popular media, to the extent of mass murder in some cases. The Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Human Security continue to work to prevent exploitation of workers in Thailand, for example, while government bodies in other countries are also active.

Labour migration has been prefigured and facilitated, to some extent, by existing and re-emergent trading networks and links already uniting traders across the region and, in the particular context of this paper, a quadrangle linking northwestern Laos, Yunnan province of China, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar (Walker, 2000). Similar trading networks are to be found across all the borders under consideration here. These are mirrored in the continued nomadic style of some swidden farmers, who are now constrained in their ability to migrate internationally, but who still pursue a way of life that requires occasional movement.

The migration patterns in Laos towards the end of the twentieth century demonstrate a number of important points with respect to labour market migration in the Mekong River region. Based on two sets of census results (1985 and 1995), it has been possible to approximate population movements and, therefore, consider why these movements have taken place. This is the method employed by Bounthavy and Taillard (2000) who find that around 166,200 people were involved in migration between the two censuses, from a total population of around four million, approximately 4% of the total. Movements took three main forms: The first was from the rural to the urban areas in the form of migration into the capital Vientiane; The second was movement into provinces bordering Vientiane and also the Mekong River, further demonstrating the magnetic effect of development pathways; and, finally, The third movement was towards the northwestern provinces, suggesting the influence of a growth quadrangle in the region joining Laos, China, Thailand, and Myanmar (*ibid.*). These movements correlate quite strongly with what would be

expected from the literature and, presumably, more temporary movements would accentuate these trends. Certainly, examination of more local trends supports these ideas, with southern and northeastern inward flows to Vientiane balanced with a slight outward movement to those provinces where infrastructure development provides a draw for labour, like the Xe Xet dam, the Sekong and Saravane capital works and the Muong Xay road to the north.

A study by Tien and Ngoc (2000) into specifically female rural-urban migration in Vietnam also uses census data (1999) to demonstrate that migration was taking place, especially with respect to movements from rural to urban areas, notably Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). These were a lack of available cultivable land of a sufficient area to sustain employment. This might have resulted from increased urbanisation and industrialisation, larger population or high birth rates, together with an inability of the people concerned to manage the land profitably; low and unstable incomes from an agricultural lifestyle that led to a permanent shortage of cash in an economy increasingly involved in consumer pressures; seasonality of the agricultural lifestyle and its low income leading people to seek wage paying jobs in the cities; agricultural failure as a result of adverse environmental conditions or infestations by pests or other problems; risk and ill-fortune; to raise money for children's education; for self affirmation and to escape from difficult domestic situations and; moving to get married. When men migrate to the city, there will generally be a demand created for marriageable women from similar home areas who then move to the city to live with their new husbands (Tien and Ngoc, 2000: 39-60).

It is estimated that approximately 900,000 to one million migrants have moved to Ho Chi Minh City and although some two thirds are in the labour market, about 180,000 are in unstable job situations being either without a job or else obliged to take any work that becomes available. In Vietnam during the 1990s period of transition, the government stated policy with respect to overseas labour migration was for migrants to develop new skills and capabilities overseas while obtaining much needed hard currency

remittances. However, it has also been argued that the underlying motivation was to export surplus population at a time of high unemployment (Anh, 2000: 167–80). Unwanted labour has, therefore, effectively been exported.

Until some 10–15 years ago, Thailand was almost entirely a labour exporting country. The plentiful labour supply, which is generally considered to be diligent and low cost, compared to many of its competitors, has been active overseas in East Asia and the Middle East, among other areas. Lack of skills and English language ability has generally meant that overseas Thai workers are unable to obtain managerial or other highly paid work.

Instability in the Middle East over the past few years had led to a relative decline in the number of Thais going to work there, which has been compensated for by increased demand for labour in Taiwan. However, Thailand is now a significant importer of labour in mainland Southeast Asia, with generally rising levels of income leading to vacancies in poorly-regarded and rewarded industries, such as working on rubber plantations or domestic labour. As a result, particularly in border areas, large numbers of Burmese, Cambodians, and Laotians are to be found working in often difficult situations. Many take advantage of exceptionally porous borders to circumvent expensive bureaucratic regulations, but then find themselves outside the protection of the law and potentially at the mercy of unscrupulous employers.

Table 2.2 Migrants in Thailand (September, 2001)

Bangkok	24,423
Central Region	193,479
Northern Region	190,429
Northeastern Region	62,796
Southern Region	176,333
Total	647,460

Source: MOLSW in (Martin 2003: 34).

Table 2.3 Employment Related Labor Shortages (2000)

	Agriculture	Manufacturing	Mining, Construction and Transportation	Total
Thai-Myanmar Border	20,744	5,718	7,351	33,813
Thai-Cambodian Border	4,436	549	785	5,770
Thai-Lao Border	342	0	0	342
Total	25,522	6,267	8,136	39,925

Source: Adapted from *ARCM Labor Shortage Study, 2000* (Martin 2003: 68).

Table 2.4 Employment Reported Need for Foreign Migrants (2000)

	Agriculture	Manufacturing	Mining, Construction and Transportation	Total
Thai-Myanmar Border	61,558	46,761	28,039	136,358
Thai-Cambodian Border	20,171	0	0	20,171
Thai-Lao Border	6,492	0	13,582	20,074
Total	88,221	46,761	41,621	176,603

Source: *ibid.* in Martin 2003:71.

Numerous stories of ill treatment of migrant workers have been reported, especially those involving Myanmar migrants, but not only them. It is somewhat ironic, of course, that these kinds of problems are very similar to those affecting Thai workers overseas. Migrant workers in Thailand who are not registered face a situation common to hill tribe people and others who have moved to Thailand but have not been offered residential status and, hence, find it difficult to obtain identity cards and other necessary documentation. This leaves them vulnerable to constant low level harassment and worse.

Migration within the Mekong River region has been an important and persistent phenomenon throughout recorded history. Prior to the establishment of the nation state, movements of people represented long range trading and temporary movements in response to differing economic opportunities. More recently, the movements of people have been caused to a much greater extent by economic opportunities, either as a result of domestic insecurity or to locate better future standards of living. Inevitably, as economies develop, jobs which are considered to be at the low end of acceptability and are poorly paid are those which are in most danger of not being filled when this economic development takes place. There is clearly a role here for migrant labour to fill some at least of these vacancies to the benefit of both the recipient and the country-of-origin states. However,

when this form of movement is unregulated, there are obvious dangers from corruption and trans-border crime. Minimizing these dangers requires effective and transparent governance supported by effective and inclusive institutions (Walsh in <http://www.geocities.com/jcwalsh102/mekong.doc>, accessed 2 June 2009).

In the case of the state, the lack of accountability is due to the lack of democracy, both in the procedural meaning of democracy lack of a multipartite political system, regular free and fair elections and in the substantial meaning of democracy the absence of a free press and lack of nationwide discussion on the major developmental issues. In the case of the market, the strong international linkages of the private enterprises involved in the infrastructure building, forbids them from being accountable to the local people. The private enterprises involved in the infrastructure building in the region are often from outside the region and these private companies are accountable to their shareholders who are often located in the rich countries rather than to the peoples of the areas where the infrastructure building projects are implemented. Hence, to successfully solve these problems there is an urgent need to decide democratically on these development projects by giving the civil society a larger space for engaging itself in the national and in the regional discussion on the vital developmental issues of the region (Hossain, 2008).

7. Economic Access

Before the arrival of Western colonial powers, Southeast Asian trading was marked by what is called 'tributary trade' or tribute trade to China, because in the past, China was a hegemonic country to many kingdoms in Southeast Asia. They sent tribute ships to China every year in the past. They did that because they wanted protection from China from neighbouring country threats, like Siam. In inter Asian trading, they also exported (such as spices) from abroad, they also imported some products that were much in demand, such as silk and ceramics from China and textiles from India.

Economic interaction through trade ways along the Mekong River slowly diminished the borders of each country and often this trade was called transnational trade. Walker (1999: 147) finds that low prices can be offered and negotiated with the sellers who have close relation with buyers. Dependence on socio economic relations that grow in society involved in transnational trade, allow each part to meet, socialize and obey local government policy along the Mekong River. Walker (1999: 152–162) also says that the range of trade is limited to be in an equal position with a free trade range to create business opportunities. In those, both in the range of cultural practices and in negotiating the policies, were an important part to keep maintenance of the long distance trade. In his study, long distance trade could be a good opportunity with support from social relations that have been built over a long period.

Besides transnational trade that was related to economic access, access to natural resources became an important issue in all countries along the Mekong River. Development that grew rapidly in the past two decades caused natural resource conditions along the Mekong River to experience degradation, for example more forests transferring to be settlement and industrial areas. Natural resource problems finally produced agreement among countries along the Mekong River to build the Mekong Committee in 1957. This Committee aimed to coordinate comprehensive development in the Mekong River Basin area. Besides helping to improve the prosperity level of people, this Committee also had the duty to control the use of natural resources in order to avoid over exploitation and conserve the resources for the next generation.

The Mekong River Basin is an area occupied by many ethnic groups. People who live along the Mekong River mostly work as farmers and fishermen depended for their lives on natural resources. The unity of the Mekong ecology has a very important part in social, economic, and cultural life. Unfortunately, there are some cases where there is a lack of balance in the use of natural resource practices among people from different ethnic groups, like shifting cultivators in the Isan group in the highlands of Thailand. Mostly, over exploitation

of natural resources by certain ethnic groups makes the poverty and environmental conditions worse.

Commercial logging has been going on in Laos for more than 30 years now. By the end of the 1980s, timber products accounted for half the country's export earnings. In 1990, Laos adopted the World Bank-UNDP-FAO initiated Tropical Forest Action Plan (TFAP), which lays out a framework for land and forest management, and recommends a logging rate of 280,000 cubic metres a year and the establishment of industrial tree plantations. In the following years, commercial logging reached unprecedented scales with clear felling of high value hardwood forests well beyond the permitted limits. Private companies from neighbouring countries and the Lao military owned companies (such as Bolisat Phattana Khet Phudoi (BPKP) and DAFI) sparred for the best cuts. By the mid 1990s, a worried Lao government attempted to ban all commercial logging in the hope of curbing illegal logging. However, both legal and illegal logging continue with the tacit assent of forestry and highly placed government officials and much of the logging revenues do not reach state coffers. Although precise figures are hard to come by, it is possible that Laos has already lost about 40 per cent of its total forest cover and most of its hardwood reserves.

With the TFAP also came categorization of forests as production, conservation, protection, regeneration, and degraded forests. Although the Lao government has recognized that rural communities need forests to meet their food, health, livelihood, and spiritual needs, a key objective of forest categorization and management plans is to restrict the access of 'unauthorized' rural people to the forests. Those who are considered properly authorized are forestry officials, logging and plantation companies, selected donors, and conservation organizations. Often, forests that rural communities have used for decades for foraging and firewood are declared off bounds for village residents. If village residents need to cut a few trees, to build or repair their homes, the village meeting house or a local wat (Buddhist temple), they must get permission from district authorities, or they are likely to be penalised. But companies

that extract more than the permitted amount of timber, or log protected areas, are rarely chastised. Such contradictions have led to increasing tensions between rural communities (especially those who are already impoverished) and forestry officials.

Commercial logging is an old story in Thailand and was possibly first established by the British logging industry, which expanded its operations from Burma into northern Thailand. While the early logging era focused on teak, after World War II, commercial logging continued of non teak trees and was Thailand's predominant form of forest exploitation until it was banned in 1989. The ban, however, did not end timber extraction from natural forests. Thailand's timber industry simply switched its supply chain to illegal logging inside the country and legal and illegal imports from Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. The timber industry also found a new supply source: commercial tree plantations.

In Cambodia, a handful of powerful companies with high political connections have secured 'economic land concessions' across the country for rubber, eucalyptus, pine, acacia, teak, palm oil, sugar cane, and cassava. Many of these concession areas are not actually being used for the agreed purposes, for example, in the Pheapimex area in central Cambodia. The common wisdom in the country is that these lands have been grabbed by companies for speculation and tourism development and that they will not be returned to the communities. In northeastern Cambodia, land grabbing by powerful local elites and private companies has become so commonplace that local communities often remark that the only reason the government supports road building projects is so that their lands can be stolen more easily.

Contract farming is being aggressively promoted in every Mekong country to 'integrate' small hold farmers into the regional and global economies. While contract arrangements may provide some income to farmers in the short term, contract terms do not generally favour subsistence or small scale agricultural producers. In Cambodia, small hold farmers are facing acute financial distress because of

contract farming related debts. Thailand's experience over the past thirty years of leaving its small hold farmers vulnerable to market forces with no protection is a cautionary tale. Real farm income in Thailand has not increased since 1977, whilst spending on agricultural inputs has increased over the same period. Small farmers are increasingly indebted and many farming families have lost their lands due to heavy debts that they are unable to service. Out of 5.7 million farming families, 4.7 million do not have enough land to sustain themselves. In Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, distress migration from rural to urban areas is rapidly increasing. Those who were once able to live off their lands, forests, and rivers are now trying to survive as workers in the construction, service, and hospitality industries.

Bibliography

- Anh, Dang Nguyen. 2000. "Labor Emigration and Emigration Pressures in Transitional Vietnam," in Michio Kiura and Yasuko Hayase, (eds.) 2000. *Proceedings of the International Workshop on International Workshop and Human Resources Development in the APEC Member Economies*, Japan, March 2000. Japan: Institute of Developing Economies, JETRO.
- Ard, Mingsarn Kaosa and John Dore (eds.). 2003. *Social Challenges for the Mekong Region*. Social Research Institute, Chiangmai University, Chiangmai.
- Bellwood, P and Glover, I (eds.). 2004. *A Cultural History of Southeast Asia: From Earliest Times to the Indic Civilizations*. New York: Routledge Curzon Press.
- Cohen, Abner. 1996. "Ethnicity and Politics", in Hutchinson, John and Anthony D Smith (eds.). 1996. *Ethnicity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Guttal, Shalmali. 2006. "Development and Plunder in the Mekong Region: Focus on the Global South." In <http://www.landaction.org/spip/spip.php?article149>, accessed 2 June 2009.
- Hossain, Masud. 2008. "Civil Society and International Development Financing in the Mekong Region". *Proceedings of Seminar, Energy Policy, Climate Change and Ecological Democracy*, held in Helsinki, 3 November 2008.
- Keyes, Charles. 1987. "Southeast Asian Religions: Mainland Cultures." In *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited Mircea Eliade, vol. 13. New York: Macmillan.
- Kuper, Adam. 1992. *Conceptualizing Society*. New York: Routledge.

- Lamijo. 2004. "Migration, Trafficking and the Sex Industry in the Cross Border Areas Between Thailand and Burma." In *Trade Contacts in the Cross Border Areas between Thailand-Burma 1900-2002*. Jakarta: PSDR-LIPI.
- Lamijo. 2005. "Migration and its Problems in the Mekong River Basin in Thailand." In *Indigenous People, Ethnicity and Transnational Commerce*. Jakarta: PSDR-LIPI.
- Man, W K Che. 1990. *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Manning, Patrick. 2005. *Migration in World History*. Great Britain: Routledge.
- Ojendal, Joakim. 1997. "The Mekong Delta: Ecology, Economy and Revolution, 1860–1960," in *Journal of Political Ecology: Case Studies in History and Society*, vol. 4 (1997). Madison: The Center for Southeast Asian Studies.
- Sikand, Yogie. 2009. "Muslims in Laos: Hidden Beyond the Mekong," on http://en.qantara.de/webcom/print_site.php, accessed 2 June 2009
- Suribidari and Betti Rosita Sari. 2005. "Ethnicity and Commerce in the Thai Mekong Basin Area." In *Indigenous People, Ethnicity and Transnational Commerce: in the Mekong River Basin-Thailand*. Jakarta: PSDR-LIPI.
- Tien, Ha Thi Phuong and Ha Quang Ngoc. 2001. *Female Labor Migration: Rural-Urban*. Hanoi: Women's Publishing House.
- Van, Dang Nghiem. 2001. *Ethnological and Religious Problems in Vietnam*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Walker, Andrew. 2000. "Regional Trade in Northwestern Laos: an Initial Assessment of the Economic Quadrangle." In Grant Evans, Christopher Hutton and Kuah Khun Eng, (eds.). *Where China Meets Southeast Asia: Social and Cultural Change in the*

Border Regions. Bangkok and Singapore: White Lotus Co and Institute of South East Asian Studies.

Walsh, John. 2004. "The Changing Mekong: Pluralistic Societies under Siege, Labor Migration and Labor Market Development in the Mekong River Region." On <http://www.geocities.com/jcwalsh102/mekong.doc>, accessed 2 June 2009.

Sources of Tables:

Advantages and Disadvantages of Labor Migration, **Source:** Walsh, John. 2004. "The Changing Mekong: Pluralistic Societies under Siege, Labor Migration and Labor Market Development in the Mekong River Region." On <http://www.geocities.com/jcwalsh102/mekong.doc>, accessed on 2 June 2009.

Migrants in Thailand (September 2001), **Source:** Martin, Philip in collaboration with the Asian Research Center for Migration (ARCM) of Chulalongkorn University, the Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) of Mahidol University and the Thailand Development Research Institute. 2003. *Thailand: Improving the Management of Foreign Workers*. Bangkok: International Labor Office and International Organization for Migration.

Employment Related Labor Shortages (2000), **Source:** Martin, Philip in collaboration with the Asian Research Center for Migration (ARCM) of Chulalongkorn University, the Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) of Mahidol University and the Thailand Development Research Institute. 2003. *Thailand: Improving the Management of Foreign Workers*. Bangkok: International Labor Office and International Organization for Migration.

Employment Reported Need for Foreign Migrants (2000), **Source:** Martin, Philip in collaboration with the Asian Research Center for Migration (ARCM) of Chulalongkorn University, the Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) of Mahidol University and the Thailand Development Research Institute. 2003. *Thailand: Improving the Management of Foreign Workers*. Bangkok: International Labor Office and International Organization for Migration.

CHAPTER III
THE MEKONG RIVER DELTA IN VIETNAM
The Key to Trade and Economic Growth in Southern Vietnam

Betti Rosita Sari

1. Introduction

The Mekong River Delta is planned to be a key economic region in Vietnam. The great abundance of natural resources, fertile soil, good infrastructure, relatively flat topography, and low paid labour are the factors behind the Vietnamese government's stimulus to investors in this region. Moreover, commercial routes took shape in the Mekong Region long before the explorations by the French who considered the Mekong River full of potential. The Government of Vietnam too, believes that the Mekong Delta of Vietnam possesses enormous economic potential to become one of the growth leaders of the Vietnamese economy and reduce the poverty levels in this country.

This paper is divided into four parts: First, I will explore the economic development in the Mekong River Delta in Vietnam; Second, identify the primary sectors in the Mekong Delta to understand the key growth leaders; Third, look at the trade activities in the Mekong Delta; and finally, I will examine the policies of the Government of Vietnam to improve the economic development in this region.

2. Economic Development in the Mekong River Delta in Vietnam

Economic development in southern Vietnam has been growing since the issuance of policy number 100 in 1982 to open the entire field in rural areas to employ labour in the countryside, especially in agriculture, trade, and small industries. These development activities grew further when the Vietnamese Government issued the policy of

“Doi Moi” in 1986 with economic policy no longer centralized, but more pro-market so that the private sector, communities, and foreign investors have become the major players in the Vietnamese economy having greater opportunities to invest and open new industries in Vietnam (Taylor, 2004).

The downfall of Communist ideology from the mid 1980s onwards, forced Vietnam to leave alliance building behind and to embark on an omni directional foreign policy in order to: 1) Make up for the loss of capital and goods supplied by the Soviet camp; and 2) Escape the now virtually complete political and economic isolation. The key ingredient of the success of *Doi Moi* is the opening up of the economy, attraction of FDI and a normalization of diplomatic relations. Economic growth, in turn, is seen as a way to provide Vietnam with national security since Vietnam is regarded as living ‘in a region surrounded by tigers and a dragon; the continued backwardness of the country is the biggest security threat to the nation’. In other words, ‘a poor country is not a strong country’ (Hoang, 1994).

Later on, the various policies issued by the Vietnamese Government aimed to attract investment to southern Vietnam, especially in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and several provinces located in the Mekong Delta. Ho Chi Minh City has developed as a centre of economy and trade in southern Vietnam serving as a trade and industrial centre, while the provinces in the Mekong Delta serve as a periphery, the central supplier of raw resources/raw materials to be processed in processing industries in HCMC. Central-periphery relationship between HCMC and the provinces in the Mekong Delta were established because most industries in the southern Vietnam region are concentrated in HCMC due to the infrastructure already available from processing industries to marketing, as well as, well integrated transportation facilities. As for the provinces in the Mekong Delta, they are the main producing areas of agricultural products, such as rice, vegetables, fruit and fisheries in Vietnam because the land, traversed by the Mekong River, is fertile and there is an abundance of water. The Mekong Delta produces 90% of exported rice production

in Vietnam and 55% of seafood products which also contribute as export commodities.

Nevertheless, in the last ten years the Vietnamese Government started considering the Mekong River Delta as new for export oriented industries and a trade centre, regarding that HCMC is no longer able to accommodate the number of people migrating to it to seek employment and utilise the rapid progress of the city's infrastructure development. In addition, the Vietnamese government aims to reduce poverty in the Mekong River Delta region so that development is directed to increasing agricultural production and development of new industries that can absorb the labour force of the population of several provinces in the Mekong Delta.

There are several factors that led to the Mekong River Delta in Vietnam serving as a new centre of economic growth and trade, namely:

- i. The stable weather condition/*tho nhuon* and rare natural disasters such as floods or typhoons in central or northern Vietnam so that the area is suitable for the development of infrastructure, the centre of industry and trade activities. Frequent natural disasters cause severe infrastructure damage and disrupt a society's economic activities;
- ii. A good geographical condition, such as fertile land in the Mekong Delta to cultivate rice and vegetables, and abundant water resources for a rich aqua culture, so that it is a very attractive investment area;
- iii. A strategic area for the trade traffic in the Southeast Asian region and the world, with a large number of rivers and canals that serve as connectors between the natural resources producing area and the marketing area. A good water transportation system that makes it easier for the people to market their agricultural products to traditional/floating markets or centres of industry. The residents in the Mekong Delta are

still dependent on these river transportation routes, although the government has built roads and bridges;

- iv. The large population because the Mekong Delta region consists of 12 provinces so that it is rich in cheap labour and potential marketing areas. However, the large population is still constrained by the quality of human resources that is still low due to the low education level and difficulty in accessing the education system.

The above factors provide the basis for the Vietnamese Government to make the Mekong Delta region a centre of trade and economic growth by pouring massive investment into infrastructure development. To enhance development in the Mekong River Delta, the Vietnamese Government made several strategic steps as follows:

- i. Construction of public infrastructure, like electricity, roads (National Highway 1A) and bridges like the Can Tho Bridge on the Hau River, the Cao Lanh Bridge on the Tien River and the VAM Co Bridge on the Hau River, and built irrigation systems to prevent flooding and improve the river transportation system (waterways);
- ii. Construction of the 'Can Tho Port' sea port with the main line 'Dinh An' that can receive ships with a maximum weight of 10,000 tons. To prevent the risk of mud piling up on the line 'Dinh An', the government plans to create a channel/canal 'Quan Bo Chanh' in Tra Vinh Province that can receive ships with a maximum weight of 30,000 tons;
- iii. Construction of river ports scattered along the Tien and Hau Rivers (Tien and Hau Rivers flow across all provinces in southern Vietnam), for example, the river port in Dong Thap, Cao Lanh, Tien Giang, My Tho and Kien Giang;
- iv. Airport construction in the Mekong Delta region in 2010 in which four commercial airports will be built in Can Tho, Ca Mau, Rach Gia and Phu Quoc. Airports in Can Tho and Phu Quoc will serve as international airports and be located near the

industrial zone. Having a port and international airport, the city of Can Tho will later become a bustling commercial area where its transportation facilities will make it easier for business people to run their businesses;

- v. Economic restructuring oriented to industrialization and modernization by establishing several industrial areas (the New Economic Processing Zones) like the Exclusive Economic Zone and Export Economic Zones, such as the Tra Noc Industrial Zone I and II in Can Tho;
- vi. Acceleration of the construction of the Can Tho bridge, upgrading the sea route between HCMC-Cau Mau, building gas and nitrogen fertilizer plants and setting up of several universities and research institutions, including upgrading the status of Can Tho University to the level of a National University;
- vii. Reducing poverty levels in the Mekong Delta by increasing the productivity of the seafood industry and handcrafts and encourages the private sector to help farmers, especially in marketing and financing. In addition, the government also has provided assistance to improve irrigation systems, access to clean water and living standards. Approximately 80 per cent of the population in the Mekong Delta is farmers with average per capita income of USD365 in 2001. In general, the causes of poverty in the Mekong Delta are the poor access to capital, infrastructure, technical training, and agricultural experts.

To achieve these objectives, the Vietnamese Government continued to try to attract investors to the area. According to the Statistics Office of Vietnam, the FDI registered in the Mekong Delta is only USD41.3 million, or approximately 2.84% of the total investments throughout Vietnam. In addition, the FDI does not cover all provinces in the Mekong Delta and is mostly focused on Can Tho, Long An, and Kien Gian. The Vietnamese Government targets the economic growth for 5 years in the Mekong Delta at 9.8% per year, compared with the 7.5% economic growth target throughout Vietnam.

As quoted in *Asia Pulse* (17 July 2009), Prime Minister, Phan Van Khai, said: 'Development must pave the way to the industrialization of rural areas in the Mekong Delta, thus narrowing the gap between the region and other parts of the country'. In fact, during 1996–2000 investment in the Mekong Delta amounted to VND 16 trillion or 17.5% of the total investment in Vietnam and was aimed at infrastructure development. In the same period, 10 provinces in the Mekong Delta received loans from the government to build housing, clean water facilities, and school buildings. The investment poured promoted economic growth in the Mekong Delta up to 7.48%, which was supported by an increase in food production, such as farm and seafood production for export, industrial output, and the service sector.

3. Primary Sectors in the Vietnam Mekong Delta

The Mekong Delta is a region located on the lower Mekong River with a total area reaching 40,000 km². This area has become the centre of rice production in Vietnam due to its fertile soil and availability of water resources for irrigation. It consists of 4 million rice fields and more than 18 million tons of grain produced per year, or half of the total rice production in Vietnam. This area is also a producer of sugarcane, fruit, and vegetables for domestic consumption and the export markets.

During the last several years, a change occurred in the economic structure in Vietnam, from the agricultural sector to industry and the service sector, but the agricultural sector in the Mekong Delta still dominates the formation of regional income compared to other sectors (Table 1). Despite a decline in the contribution of the agricultural sector to the total GDP, the Mekong Delta region is still the largest producer of agricultural commodities in Vietnam and having a comparative advantage in some agricultural commodities. The agricultural sector growth in the 2000–2004 period reached 7% or higher than of other provinces.

Table 3.1 Economic structure in the MD and the country, 1996–2004 (%)

Sector	1996		2000		2004	
	Mekong Delta	Country	Mekong Delta	Country	Mekong Delta	Country
Agriculture	58.89	27.76	48.61	24.53	41.64	21.83
Industry	21.60	29.73	27.97	36.73	34.89	39.95
Service	19.51	42.51	23.42	38.74	23.47	38.22
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: *Socio-economic Statistics of Mekong Delta*, 2005

3.1 Agricultural Sector: Rice and Aqua Culture (Seafood Production)

The agricultural sector in Vietnam has grown tremendously since the issuance of the policy of Doi Moi in the agricultural sector, that is agricultural de-collectivity and land liberalization to improve the welfare of farmers by giving them bigger responsibility to cultivate their land, sell their agricultural products, and conduct trade. One of the impacts of this policy is the rise in food production which increased very significantly in the late 1980s so that agricultural commodity trade activities developed rapidly placing Vietnam as an exporter of agricultural commodities in the world.

Farmers in the Mekong Delta harvest rice three times or more in a year because of the fertile soil, friendly climate, irrigation of the Mekong River and a good drainage system. Since the agricultural reforms have been carried out, farmers in the Mekong Delta have produced rice above their basic needs so that in the late 1980s it became the largest supplier of rice and fruit in Vietnam to meet the domestic market and export the excess of those commodities. Since

that time, Vietnam has become one of the rice exporting countries in the world and according to reports, its rice exports reach 3 million tons per year as a result of the rice surplus produced by farmers in the Mekong Delta that supplies 90% of the Vietnamese rice export commodity (Vietnam News 1 May 2003). In addition to rice, the Mekong Delta is also a supplier of fishery products, such as fish, shrimps, crabs, etc. for the export market. Vegetables and fruit produced in Can Tho, Vinh Long, Ben Tre, Dong Thap, and Tien Giang, are mostly for export to the markets of Japan, USA, Europe, and other Asian countries.

3.2 The Industrial Sector

State owned enterprises in south western Vietnam mostly are local natural resource processing industries, such as aqua culture processing, agricultural product processing, and fertilizer and animal feed industries. At the same time, the private sector has begun to grow, although not so rapidly. Viewed from the Mekong Delta economic structure, the industrial sector showed an increase starting in the 2000s when the government most keenly built infrastructure to attract investors. For example, there are currently new export processing zones (EPZs) in Can Tho, namely Tran NOC I and II, in which local and foreign investors own industries. The Tran NOC I industry zone which is located 10 km from Can Tho consists of food processing, cement, garment, oil and gas, consumer goods, construction materials and electronics industries, etc. The foreign investors come from China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia.

4. Trade Activities in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam

Trading activities in the Mekong Delta in general are dominated by agricultural commodities, especially rice. Since the ancient times, Vietnamese agriculture has been given the nick name of ‘rice farming’ because rice has had an important role as a source of livelihood and

farming systems of Vietnam. As Vietnamese agriculture develops and produces many agricultural products, the demand for exchange and trade increases. Quite early, the Chinese ethnic group began to play an important role in trade.

In fact, the trading activity has been going on for generations. It is marked by the existence of a port in the Province of Soc Trang (one of the provinces in the south western part of Vietnam) which was built in 1511, a small port which still receives a lot of goods from the port of Malacca. This port also receives visitors from various countries, such as China, Japan, India and other Southeast Asian countries. It is proof of the emergence of trade in southern Vietnam since the sixteenth century. In addition, the port of Soc Trang also inspired the construction of large and small ports in South Vietnam, one which is Saigon port, the port of HCMC.

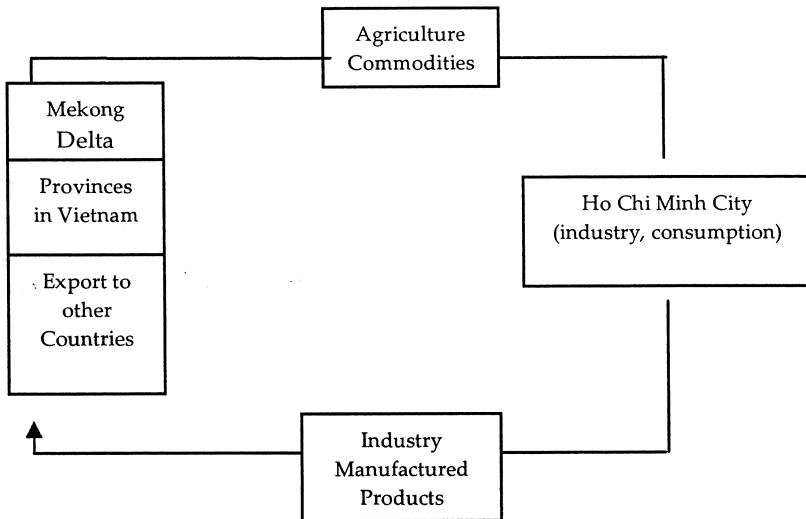
Trading activities in southern Vietnam have experienced rapid progress since the Doi Moi, for private parties and traders are allowed to conduct trade activities, especially the Chinese traders. Most of the Chinese traders in HCMC have networking relationships with traders/farmers in the Mekong Delta, whether they are Chinese or Vietnamese, resulting in most of the agricultural trade commodities being controlled by Chinese traders. However, Vietnamese traders have also begun to participate in trade activities in the Mekong Delta.

4.1 Trade Relations between the Mekong Delta and HCMC

The Mekong Delta and HCMC are two areas which are inseparable and interdependent. On one hand, the Mekong Delta is the main producing area of agricultural commodities, such as rice, vegetables, fruit, flowers, and fishery products that are the source of raw materials in the food processing industry in HCMC. In addition, agricultural commodities sent from the Mekong Delta are also consumed by people in HCMC. While on the other, HCMC is the marketing and the processing area of agricultural products from the Mekong Delta that are distributed to meet the domestic needs of

various provinces in Vietnam and exported to various countries. HCMC is also a supplier of processed products from the industry to markets across the provinces in the Mekong Delta.

The condition of infrastructure in the provinces in the south western part of Vietnam is still not sufficient, resulting in the businesspeople still being concentrated in HCMC. Ho Chi Minh City plays the role of a major trading activities area in South Vietnam and a transit point for goods from the Mekong Delta. The commodities to be exported to consumer countries must be sent first to HCMC before being exported to the destination countries. The relationship between the two regions can be described as follows:



Picture 3.1 Trade Route from the Mekong Delta Provinces to HCMC

4.2 Commodities

Traded agricultural commodities from the Mekong Delta consist of rice, vegetables, fruit, flowers, seafood, and other fishery

products such as fish, shrimps, crabs, shellfish, and processed fish products that are the result of home industries (fish oil, fish sauce, etc.). In addition, processed or dried fruit is exported to various countries such as Japan. Each of these commodities has a network or distribution channels and a merchant or retailer and a market mechanism.

Commodities traded from HCMC are the result of industries to meet everyday needs, such as basic food, processed food products (instant noodles, canned drinks, snacks), appliances, plastics, electrical equipment, fertilizer, building materials, vehicles, garments, machinery, etc.

4.3 Perpetrators of Trade

Perpetrators of trade in the Mekong Delta region are a food company in southern Vietnam (single food company owned by the government) and private companies large/small owned by people of Chinese or Vietnamese ethnic groups. In addition, local merchants, both large and small traders are also involved in brisk trading activities in the Mekong Delta. Chinese traders have a large role in trade in the Mekong Delta region, followed by Vietnamese traders.

The Chinese ethnic group has a major role and is very important in trading activities. It manages the circulation of goods, the supply of goods, and contact with the vendors and their business associates. They have set up the Chanh, i.e. the central market or the wholesale market which is very effective, where all kinds of merchandise are collected. In general, the Chinese ethnic group lives clustered in a community close to the market or city centre. Even their homes are used as places to conduct trade and other businesses. In addition, the people of the Chinese ethnic group act as brokers. They accommodate all the demands for goods from traders in the Mekong Delta and manage all offers from merchants in HCMC. They act as intermediaries that manage the demand and supply, and send goods to and from the Mekong Delta-HCMC. This method was later adopted

by the Vietnamese and used in trading activities and up to the present time this pattern is still applied in the trade centres in Vietnam.

The Chinese ethnic group makes use of its kinship relations everywhere in distributing goods, both in HCMC and the Mekong Delta. If someone needs an item, the person will contact a relative and if the relative does not have the goods in question, then the relative will contact his relative that might have what is required. So when there is demand for new products, they can immediately distribute those products well. It is this interwoven networking that has made the Chinese merchants strong and dominating in trade because of their mutual support. In addition, the support of the Viet Kieu who live in Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong is very important, not only through capital but also knowledge and skills. Since “Doi Moi” the Vietnamese Government tried hard to encourage Vietnamese and Viet Hoa entrepreneurs to build Vietnam's economy, especially in HCMC, the hub of the economy and trade in Vietnam (Scott, 2004).

However, recently, the Chinese ethnic group has merged with the Vietnamese ethnic group (Viet Hoa), so it is very hard to work out which one has the more important role in trade in Vietnam. Currently the number of people of the Chinese ethnic group reaches 18.7% of the total population of Ho Chi Minh City, mostly engaged in the trade sector and small/medium enterprises, like manufacturing shoes, plastic, rubber, and processed foods. In the past, people of the Chinese ethnic group were merchants and rice mill owners, but at this time, many ethnic Vietnamese have become merchants and mill owners.

The Kinh ethnic group also has an important role in developing trade in the Mekong Delta. Activities associated with trade, like transportation in seaports, river ports, central markets, and the floating market has become part of the Kinh ethnic group life in the Mekong Delta. Most people of the Kinh ethnic group are small traders and merchants in the floating markets on some rivers in the Mekong Delta by selling their agricultural products, such as vegetables, fruit, and food. They have also become middlemen who sell clothing or goods of daily needs sent from HCMC.

The floating market is the way people in the Mekong River Delta trade, a custom which has existed since the past and has become a place to exchange goods. The floating market system is a trade system of the western part of southern Vietnam and has become the centre to collect various kinds of merchandise, in places like Cai Rang, Cai Be, Phung Hiep markets, etc. The characteristics of these markets are that they are located near the river and most have a gate facing the river (water) and a gate facing the road. This distinctive feature was a policy issued by the French colonialists, who occupied 6 provinces in southern Vietnam, based on the geographical situation of the area and was an effective system that is applied until now in South Vietnam. In general, the floating market is dominated by female traders who are very agile in rowing little boats down the rivers as they offer their wares. These floating markets, as found in Can Tho, in addition to being places of purchase and sale have also become one of the interesting tourist attractions in the Mekong Delta.

4.4 The Relations of Ethnicity and Trade

Ethnicity and trade are indeed strongly related. 'Ethnicity' in 'ethnic economy' performs a double duty; it is defined as a Social Science concept, while at the same time borrowing the aura of 'ethnicity' from general usage. One problem is that these two uses (the definition and the image of ethnicity) cannot be kept neatly apart. What precisely is *ethnic* in ethnic neighbourhood, ethnic food, and ethnic economy? The term ethnicity expresses a relationship; it denotes foreignness, but a particular kind of foreignness. It seems that some national origins are foreign, while others are also ethnic. Ethnicity denotes difference and cultural distance from the mainstream. Ethnic associations 'provide social and moral support, especially in time of bereavement and fatal sickness, much more than any tangible economic and social value for the establishment of business, hence their limited membership base and level of participation'. Ethnic associations exist alongside other networks such as national associations, old boys' networks, professional associations,

class-based networks, women's clubs, and church networks. It is also found a lot in Vietnam where there are many organizations of Chinese ethnic groups, active in the economy, religion, or culture (<http://ein.sagepub.com>, accessed 5 October 2009).

In reality, there are no neat boundaries between ethnic groups; the boundaries are typically fuzzy and permeable. Thus, many immigrant entrepreneurs who are labeled ethnic are in reality hyphenated and mixed, and on this ground alone ethnic economies tend to be hyphenated economies. Furthermore, an 'ethnic economy' is not necessarily an economy with a degree of interconnectedness or integration, but rather a random set of businesses. It may be a different case if we consider ethnically diverse societies (i.e. diverse not as a result of recent immigration). Here, ethnicity and ethnic social capital *may* be relevant terms with the proviso that there are many different varieties of ethnicity here too (Pieterse, 1997a). Besides, of course, cross cultural relations count here as well.

Research indicates that the advantage of using interethnic ties is conditional on the socioeconomic status of job seekers and job contacts: if the contact is with higher status ethnic groups, the use of interethnic ties is more rewarding than are ties with members of lower status groups. Besides, cross cultural commerce is a growing trend and an emerging theme now. Part of this, is due to the rise of ethno marketing as a function of growing multiculturalism in many countries across the world. For commerce in cross cultural settings, the importance of cross cultural skills such as language is also being recognized. Meanwhile, research on ethnicity and ethnic economies has generally concentrated on the *inward* character of ethnicity to the neglect of relations with the outside world. They function commercially and as entrepreneurs by acting as go betweens or by integrating. Chinese traders deal with suppliers, customers, and employees of different ethnicities, whether local or of other immigrant communities. Operating in an intercultural space affects the consciousness and identity, habits and business practices of immigrants.

4.5 Trade Routes

Trade routes in the Mekong Delta region and HCMC are still centred in the port of Saigon located in District 4. In the port there are loading and unloading facilities for goods for export and import of ships from various countries. From the port of Saigon the goods are transported by land and river transportation. Land transportation uses trucks or cars to transport goods from HCMC to the Mekong Delta, while river transportation uses boats or canoes from the port of Saigon to the canals or rivers in the Mekong Delta.

The construction of roads and bridges that connect HCMC with the Mekong Delta or the provinces in the Mekong Delta region have resulted in faster and also cheaper distribution of goods and services. It is the situation that causes the economy in the Mekong Delta to grow rapidly due to the rapid rotation of goods and people becoming closer to the marketing area. As said by the World Bank and the ADB, a region that has road infrastructure (road-based transport infrastructure) has a high level of market participation and economic growth (Taylor, 2004).

Kinh tế và thương mại phát triển sâu rộng



Picture 3.2 Map of trade routes in Vietnam in the Mekong Delta and several provinces in Vietnam, as well as in international trade

Trade routes in Vietnam are as follows:

- i. The trade centre in South Vietnam is located in the port of Saigon (District 4);
- ii. The arrow pointing to the northwest shows the border region of Vietnam and Cambodia;
- iii. The arrow pointing to the northeast is the eastern part of southern Vietnam (which is also busy in trade and located in the eastern part of HCM City);
- iv. The arrow pointing to the southwest is the western part of southern Vietnam (which is in the Province of An Giang, Can Tho, My Tho, etc.);
- v. The arrow pointing to the southeast is to foreign countries, all of the countries that send goods through the ports of the eastern sea into Vietnam.

The goods go in and out of Vietnam not only through 1 route but through 2 routes. The first route is the entry route of goods to Vietnam (imports) where the port of Saigon serves as Chanh or the central market (blue circle area pointed to by the 4 arrows). The imported goods are later distributed throughout Vietnam. The second route is the exit route of the goods from Vietnam (exports) that is also based in the port of Saigon. Goods from 4 satellite areas are collected in the port of Saigon, then exported to various countries or meet the demand in populated places such as Ho Chi Minh City.

5 Government Policies

Trade policies implemented by the government of Vietnam are meant to work with both sides (bilateral), namely between the government and the private sector, and to work with many parties (multilateral). The recruited work force comes from all ethnicities

living around the Mekong Delta, among others, ethnic Cham, Khmer, Chinese, and Kinh.

In trade, the government does not limit the number of participants or the role of the Chinese ethnic group and does not differentiate between the Chinese ethnic group and other minority ethnic groups. The Cham ethnic group, the Khmer ethnic group, the Chinese ethnic group, and the Kinh ethnic group have the same rights in trade. All ethnicities can work together well and have a harmonious relationship with no clashes. Although the Kinh and the Chinese ethnic groups are more prominent, the Kinh people live in harmony within the society. In addition, the government policies numbers 134 and 135 and the government commitment to 'eliminate hunger and reduce poverty in the Mekong Delta' have become the government tool in helping poor and underdeveloped ethnic groups, like the Khmer and Cham ethnic groups. The government also requires that children from the ethnicities attend school by providing excellent learning facilities and opportunities to study abroad.

Other government policies are trade cooperation with neighbouring countries through the BTA (Bilateral Trade Agreement) and the cooperation among the countries in the Mekong Delta region (GMS = Greater Mekong Subregion). Cooperation between the governments of Vietnam and Cambodia, among others, is that the Ministry of Agriculture of Cambodia asked Vietnam to support and help to increase rice production by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of the An Giang province (a province in the western part of South Vietnam) inviting investors to cooperate in this plan. Vietnam profits through investing and selling commodities to Cambodia due to the regulations (tax) applied in Cambodia. The regulation is that the goods imported by Cambodia are taxed, but the goods exported out of Cambodia are not taxed. So Vietnamese goods imported by Cambodia and re-exported again are not taxed. Meanwhile, Vietnam's economy is still using IFN tax rules, in which both parties, both importers and exporters of goods will be taxed so that the cooperation with Cambodia is certainly bringing benefits to Vietnam.

Other cooperation is the cooperation among GMS countries where the policies issued by all member states of the 'Mekong Region' namely Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, China, and Vietnam must be approved by member states and in accordance with the rules agreed to by all member countries of the 'Mekong Region'.

According to Nguyen Than Duc (2002: 4), Vietnam pursues a threefold purpose of subregional cooperation in foreign policy: 'A diversification of foreign relations in a new global environment; improving relations with former adversaries (especially China); demonstrating trustworthiness in international relations in order to reach long-term goals such as WTO membership'. International cooperation and (especially) subregional cooperation, is seen as a vehicle to realize the goals, as political and economic relations with China started a process of normalization in the early 1990s. It is hoped that the actions of China and Vietnam can be coordinated in subregional forums, the more so since China is already a dialogue partner of ASEAN and a member of the ARF (Asean Regional Forum). The resulting hope of Vietnam is to further develop ties with China in Vietnam's favour, while there is also fear, at the same time, of becoming increasingly dependent on China, the more domestic markets are opened and the more China can succeed in realizing its aims regarding: 1) The use of the Mekong's upstream waters (e.g. for irrigation and energy purposes); and 2) The opening of new markets in Southeast Asia. In economic terms, this could mean the development of an even greater economic force that cannot be challenged by the economies of the Mekong countries.

ASEAN membership is of great importance for Vietnam for economic, security, and political reasons. Vietnamese steps to strengthen ties in the field of foreign and security policy with countries, apart from China, are limited, due to both old enemy conceptions of the USA, and the difficult tight-rope walk concerning China. Hanoi's general foreign policy strategy is 'making friends with all countries' and 'diversifying foreign relations' (Thayer 2001: 186) in order to widen its diplomatic scope on the international stage and

cope with China's highly flexible foreign policy (Hensengerth, 2004: 12).

6. Conclusion

The Mekong Delta of Vietnam which has an abundance of natural resource becomes one of the Vietnam's opportunities to improve their economy by increasing trade and investment to this region. A lot of development project to facilitate the trading activities were done by the government and private sector. Thus, the Mekong provinces play an important role in Vietnam's economy, not only as a source of raw resources, but also a center of trading and industrial in Southern Vietnam.

Bibliography

- Beresford, Melanie. 1988. *Vietnam: Politics, Economics and Society*. London and New York: Printer Publishers.
- Beresford, Melanie and Dang Phong. 2000. *Economic Transition in Vietnam*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Diokno, Maria Serena and Nguyen Van Chinh. 2006. *The Mekong Arranged and Rearranged*. Chiang Mai: Mekong Press.
- Hensengerth, Oliver. 2004. 'Vietnam's Foreign Policy and the Greater Mekong Sub region', UNU-CRIS e-Working Papers.
- "Mekong Delta to be Built into Key Economic Region in Vietnam", *AsiaPulse News*, Asia Pulse Pty Ltd. 2004. HighBeam Research. 27 Sep. 2009 <<http://www.highbeam.com>>.
- "Vietnam's Mekong Delta region strives to eliminate poverty", *Xinhua News Agency*, Xinhua News Agency. 2003. HighBeam Research. 27 Sep. 2009 <<http://www.highbeam.com>>.
- "Vietnam's Mekong Delta Hopes to Lure More FDI", *AsiaPulse News*, Asia Pulse Pty Ltd. 2005. HighBeam Research. 27 Sep. 2009 <<http://www.highbeam.com>>.
- "Vietnam Government to Restructure Mekong Delta", *AsiaPulse News*, Asia Pulse Pty Ltd. 2001. HighBeam Research. 27 Sep. 2009 <<http://www.highbeam.com>>.
- Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. 2003. Social Capital and Migration: Beyond Ethnic Economies. *Ethnicities*. 2003; 3; 29. Retrieved on October 5, 2009 from <http://ein.sagepub.com>
- Scott, Steffanie and Truong Thi Kim Chuyen. 2004. "Behind the Numbers: Social Mobility, Regional Disparities and New Trajectories of Development in Rural Vietnam." In Philip Taylor. (ed.) *Social Inequality in Vietnam and the Challenges to Reform*. Singapore: ISEAS.

- Taylor, Philip. 2004. "Redressing Disadvantage or Re-arranging Inequality? Development Interventions and Local Responses in the Mekong Delta." In Philip Taylor (ed.) *Social Inequality in Vietnam and the Challenges to Reform*. Singapore: ISEAS.
- Thanh, Vo Tri and Pham Hoang Ha. 2004. "Vietnam's Recent Economic Reforms and Developments: Achievements, Paradoxes and Challenges." In Philip Taylor (ed.) *Social Inequality in Vietnam and the Challenges to Reform*. Singapore: ISEAS.

Interviews:

1. Le Van Thanh, HCMC, 12 May 2009
2. Prof Dr. Nguyen Minh Hoa, HCMC, 13 May 2009
3. Mr Ngo Van Vang, Tien Giang University, 15 May 2009
4. Truong Dong Luong PhD, Can Tho University, 18 May 2009
5. Huyen Van Sinh MA, HCMC, 21 May 2009

CHAPTER IV

LOCAL AND REGIONAL POLICY IN MANAGING THE MEKONG RIVER BASIN

A Case Study in the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam

Rucianawati

1. Background

Mekong, the big river traversing the six riparian countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), is an international river. Geographically, it transits Vietnam, Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Thailand, Myanmar, and the Yunnan Province of China meaning that no unilateral policy on developing the Mekong River Basin (MRB) can be made. The development made by one country may have impact on the other countries so it is important for the Mekong countries to coordinate and cooperate in managing and developing its part of the MRB.

The upper and lower Mekong River has different characteristics, so the local governments also have different policies in managing their areas. This Chapter will try to explain the government policies, especially on ethnicity and natural resource development. Besides that, it will look at the cooperation and coordination among the Mekong countries in managing and developing the MRB.

2. Regional Policy in Managing the MRB

As mentioned before, the Mekong is a big river which passes through a number of countries. For this reason, it is important for the countries included in the Greater Mekong Sub region (GMS) to cooperate and coordinate with one another. The regional cooperation is realized through the formation of the Mekong Committee in 1957 when the Lao PDR, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam became

members. The main task of this Committee was coordinating the investigations on the lower part of the MRB. The various programs planned by the Mekong Committee did not go well since from the 1960s to the 1980s there were wars, ideological conflicts, and other divisions among the riparian countries. These programs were revived with the end of hostilities in the region following the conclusion of the Cambodian Peace Accord in the early 1990s. The conditions that were relatively more stable enabled economic growth, development, cooperation, and integration to take place more readily (Apichai Sunchindah, 2005: 3).

The Mekong Committee was transformed into the Mekong River Commission (MRC) when the members (the Lao PDR, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam) signed the Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin on 5 April 1995 in Chiang Rai, Thailand. This Commission is supported by the lower Mekong Governments and survives on international donor aid, among others, from the World Bank, Australia, Denmark, Finland, France, Japan, and Sweden.³ The MRC mandates to promote sustainable development of the Mekong River. This organization takes in some important issues such as human trafficking, drugs, tourism, infrastructure, agriculture and transportation.

According to Apichai Sunchindah (2005: 3–4), regional cooperation in managing the MRB can be divided into five frameworks:

- (1) The Greater Mekong Sub regional Economic Cooperation Program (GMS Program).

This program was established in 1992 among Cambodia, China (Yunnan Province), the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam with the aim of strengthening economic linkages among them and enhancing the achievement of common

³ http://www.savethemekong.org/issue_detail.php?sid=14

policies and objectives including sustainable management of natural resources and the environment.

The GMS Program gets financial aid from the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

- (2) The Mekong Committee which became the Mekong River Commission (MRC).

The vision of this organization is ‘an economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally sound river basin’ and its mission is ‘to promote and coordinate sustainable management and development of water and related resources for the countries’ mutual benefit and the people’s well-being by implementing strategic programs and activities and providing scientific information and policy advice’.

- (3). The Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI).

IAI was created in 2000 to enhance and facilitate the process of integrating the newer and less developed countries of ASEAN with the older and more developed member states. This was further emphasized in the Vientiane Action Program adopted at the ASEAN Summit in November 2004 whereby the goals and strategies for narrowing the development gap were more clearly enunciated. In addition, the ASEAN Mekong Basin Development Cooperation (AMBDC) Forum was established in 1996 with the following objectives:

- (i) Enhance economically sound and sustainable development of the Mekong Basin;
- (ii) Encourage a process of dialogue and common project identification which can result in firm economic partnerships for mutual benefit; and
- (iii) Strengthen the interconnections and economic linkages between the ASEAN member countries and the Mekong riparian countries.

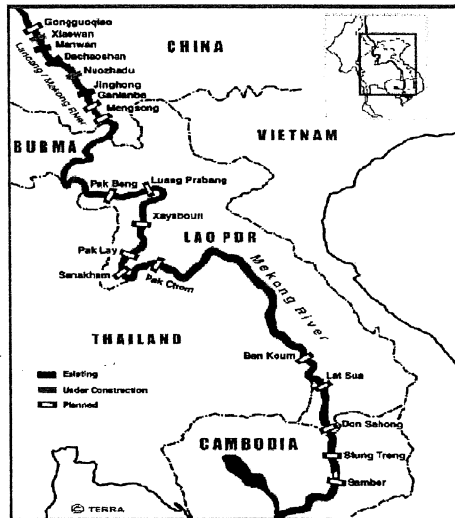
AMBDC is a cooperative framework involving all ASEAN countries and China and it is worth noting that the five lower riparian states of the Mekong River Basin are all members of ASEAN. Under the proposed ASEAN-China Free Trade Area and the plan of action on strengthening ASEAN-China strategic partnerships, the Mekong Basin development also featured prominently as one of the key areas of cooperation between the two sides.

- (4). Various Japanese initiatives such as the Forum for the Comprehensive Development of Indochina (FCDI) and the collaboration with ASEAN under the AEM-METI scheme came into being in the 1990s to foster cooperation primarily in the areas of trade and investment facilitation, infrastructure and industrial development, promotion of business and private sector involvement as well as human resource development. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) which is the successor of ECAFE had also been a collaborative partner in the FCDI.
- (5). The Decade of Greater Mekong Sub region Development Cooperation, 2000–2009.

This program was proclaimed by UNESCAP at its 56th Commission Session on 7 June 2000, in order to focus attention and encourage the support of the international community for the intensification of economic and social development in the sub region. UNESCAP is expected to play a coordinating role in mobilizing the required resources in the provision of technical assistance to the countries of the GMS, particularly in such areas as human resource development, trade and investment, transport and communications, tourism, poverty alleviation and social development.

2.1 The Development of Hydropower

As a big river with strong currents and many branches, the Mekong has very great potential for hydropower. Several dams have been built, especially in the upper part of the River, e.g. in the Yunnan Province of China, Laos, and Thailand. The Chinese Government in the 10th of its Five-year Development Plans (2001–2005) decided to build hydropower stations in the Yunnan Province. With the construction of eight dams on the Mekong, Yunnan became the main provider of electricity in China with production of approximately 15,000 MW.



Source: http://www.savethemekong.org/issue_detail.php?sid=21

Picture 4.1 Map of Dams on the Mekong River

The Figure above shows that China has three existing dams, two under construction, and three still planned, while the Governments of Cambodia, Laos and Thailand are planning eleven big hydropower dams on the Mekong River's mainstream. The location of planned dams can be seen in the Table below:

Table 4.1 Dam Locations on the Mekong River

Project	Province/ Country	Status	Developer	Power/ Inundated Area
Pak Beng	Oudomxay, the Lao PDR	MOU signed 29.8.07	Datang International Power Generation Co. Ltd.(China- Hong Kong)	1230 MW / 110 km2
Luang Prabang	Luang Prabang, the Lao PDR	MOU signed 14/10/2007	Petro Vietnam Power Corporation (Vietnam)	1410 MW / 110 km2
Xayaboury	Xayaboury, the Lao PDR	MOU signed 04/05/2007	Ch.Kanchang & PT (Thailand)	1260 MW / 30 km2
Pak Lay	Xayaboury, the Lao PDR	MOU signed 11/06/2007	CIEC & Sinohydro(China)	1320 MW / 110 km2
Sanakham	Vientiane, the Lao PDR	MOU signed 11/12/2007	Datang International Power Generation Co. Ltd. (China- Hong Kong)	570 MW / unknown
Pak Chom	Vientiane, the Lao PDR and Loei, Thailand	unknown	*Department of Alternative Energy Development and Efficiency, MoE, Thailand (Thailand)	1079 MW / 80 km2
Ban Khoum	Champassak, the Lao PDR and Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand	MOU signed 25/03/2008	Italian-Thai Development PLC & Asia Corp, Holdings Limited (Italy-Thailand)	2000 MW / 158 km2
Lat Sua	Champassak, the Lao PDR	MOU signed 02/04/2008	Charoen Energy and Water Asia Co. Ltd.(Thailand)	800 MW / unknown
Don Sahong	Champassak, the	MOU signed 23/3/2006 PDA	Mega First Corporation Berhad	360 MW / 1.6

	Lao PDR	signed 13/02/2008	(Malaysia)	km2
Stung Treng	Stung Treng, Cambodia	Unknown	Unnamed Russian developer	980 MW / 640 km2
Sambor	Kratie, Cambodia	MOU signed October 2006	China Southern Power Grid Company (China)	2600 MW / 880 km2

Source: http://www.savethemekong.org/issue_detail.php?sid=21

Table 4.1 shows that the Lao Government has nine dam projects on the Mekong River where two of those are in collaboration with Thailand, while Cambodia has two projects. In Laos, hydropower is important for the economy of the country. Besides, on the mainstream of the Mekong River, many dams have also been built on the Mekong's tributaries. In 2004 it was recorded that at least six large and medium scale hydropower projects and approximately 30 small hydropower projects were built in Laos. Hydropower is used to fulfill domestic demand and export, especially to Thailand and Vietnam. Largely, these projects are funded by the ADB, but the government has also invited the private sector to invest in these projects.

On one hand, the development of dams supports the development of industry, but on the other, it has negative impact on environmental changes. Further, these changes could bring destruction to the ecosystems of the River. The construction of many dams on the Mekong mainstream and its tributaries also has negative impact on the habitat of the fish as these dams will block fish migration to breed.

The development of Pak Mun dam in Thailand as an example, brought protest from the fishermen who feel they have lost out.

The negative impact of the development of dams also can be seen in the dams built in the Yunnan province, such as the Xiaowan, Manwan, and other Lancang Jiang dams. First and foremost, the development of these dams aims to provide a cheap source of energy

to fuel industry in Yunnan and elsewhere. However, these projects changed the water levels and decreased currents to the degree that silt accumulations blocked river channels (Hamlin, 2008).

There are positive and negative impacts of building dams on the Mekong River. The more dams constructed, means the more negative impact on the ecosystems of the river. Therefore, it needs handling through local government policies and regional cooperation among countries on the Mekong River to overcome problems.

2.2 The Development of Transportation

The Mekong River has been used for a long time as a means of transportation by the people living in its basin. For thousand of years, people and goods have moved along the navigable waterways found in various stretches between southwest China and the South China Sea. Chou Ta-kuan, a Chinese envoy, noted the presence of Chinese traders when he visited Angkor in 1296 and 1297, indicating the continuing importance of commercial navigation (Starr, 2003: 7).

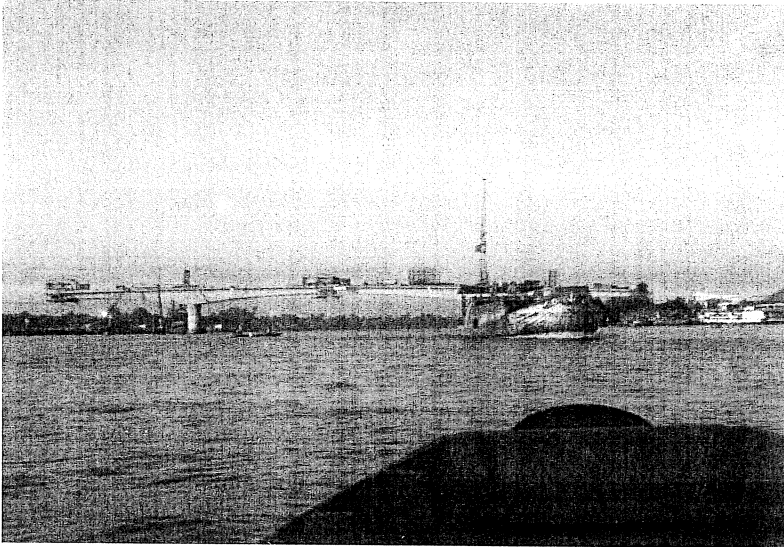
The River serves as an inland waterway corridor linking the region. During the colonial period, the Mekong River was also used as a transportation route to transport various commodities from the hinterland to the port and vice versa. The function of the Mekong River as a transportation means began to decline when roads were developed.

There are many reasons for leaving the Mekong River as a transportation means. The construction of bridges along this River affects the decline in function of the Mekong as waterway transportation. The 'Friendship Bridge' for example, connects Nong Khai in Thailand and Vientiane in Laos and facilitates relations between the two countries which previously were carried out through the Mekong River. Besides that, transportation through the Mekong River is segmented by the natural barriers at Sambor Rapids and Khone Falls. These barriers are difficult to overcome, so, developing

roads and bridges is regarded as the best solution to facilitate transportation.

Picture 4.2 The Development of a Bridge in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam

In Cambodia, people prefer to go by road because the cost is less than through the river. However, for certain commodities such as



timber and agricultural products, the water transport is preferred because the ships may carry more and the costs are less than by road. The government of Laos, in cooperation with the MRC, tried to revive the transport route through the Mekong River by improving the river path for 426 km (<http://www.vientianetimes.org.la>).

As modern transportation infrastructure is essential for economic growth, some Mekong countries (China, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand) have tried to improve the function of the Mekong as a transportation channel. The main purpose is to enhance the regional trade in the region. This program consists of five

components, covering socioeconomic planning, establishment of a legal and operational framework, enhancement of human and environmental safety, regional coordination and information, and institutional development.⁴

In 1993, those countries cooperated to develop the Mekong River for larger cargo shipping. The Economic Quadrangle Plan involving those four countries further spurred on development of the River as a commercial opportunity. China initiated a program of dredging and removal of rapids, reefs and shoals in conjunction with construction plans of a cascade of hydroelectric dams in the Yunnan province. This program is enabling vessels of 500 DWT to ply the route between Simao Port in Yunnan and Luang Prabang in the Lao PDR with twelve other ports laid out along this route (Hamlin, 2008).

Not only China but also Thailand has responded to increased river trade through the Mekong. For this reason, the government is improving facilities at Chiang Khong Port and construction of a new port at Chiang Saen 2. The new port is intended to replace the original Chiang Saen Port that was located in an area that constrained growth and its cultural and historic importance prevented drastic renovations. Therefore, an entirely new facility was constructed at Chiang Saen 2 (Hamlin, 2008).

On 20 April 2000, China, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand signed a trade cooperation agreement, which among other things, includes free sailing of the ships of the four countries passing through the harbour in Simao Port to Luang Prabang (Chuenodomsavad, 2004: 59). This cooperation, known as the 'Agreement on the commercial navigation on Lancang-Mekong', is a regional partnership that focuses on the development of transportation through the Mekong River.

⁴ Dr. Dao Trong Tu, in foreword to Peter Starr, 2003. *The people's highway: past, present and future transport on the Mekong River System*, Mekong Development Series No. 3, Mekong River Commission, Phnom Penh.

The second part of the navigable Mekong is in the lower part from the Khone Falls to the Delta. The main problems in waterway transport in this lower part, particularly between Phnom Penh and the Mekong Delta has been a lack of proper all weather and nighttime navigation aids. The MRC, through its Navigation Program (NAP) rectified this situation by installing channel markers, buoys, beacons, and shore marks to aid navigation and increase efficiency of river transportation from Phnom Penh to the South China Sea. Besides that, the MRC is considering plans to dredge and widen the Hau River (Bassac), one of the Mekong's splits in the Delta to allow 10,000 to 20,000 DWT ships to transit the Tra Vinh province (Hamlin, 2008).

The development of major infrastructure and investment projects on the Mekong River mostly was financed by foreign donors. For example, Japan financed the construction of the Second Mekong International Bridge connecting the Thai Province of Mukdahan and the Lao Province of Savannakhet, the improvement of highways along the East-West economic and transport corridor in the northeast of Thailand, across the Lao PDR and into Vietnam and the upgrading of several port facilities along the Mekong River.



Picture 4.3 Road and river transportation in Can Tho, Vietnam

The development of river transportation on the Mekong that requires destroying natural rapids, reefs, and shoals will have negative effects, as it will destroy the habitats of much biodiversity of the Mekong River. Of the over 1300 fish species that live in the Mekong River, many depend on these habitats for essential parts of their lifecycles. If the plans to canalize the waterway are implemented, the natural hydrology of the River will be destroyed. Another negative impact of the development of transportation through the Mekong is the greater pollution from the increasing River traffic (Hamlin, 2008).

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the improvement of navigation via the Mekong River will bring serious environmental and socioeconomic impact. The aim to bring about prosperity for

people in the Greater Mekong Subregion might be found to be otherwise, as the ecosystem is damaged.

3. Local Policy on Ethnicity and Natural Resource Development

Almost in every region traversed by the Mekong River, poverty is a major problem for local people. In our field research in Thailand, we found that poverty exists among the Isan people who live in the area of the MRB. The result of this study shows that mismanagement by the local government in managing its MRB, for example, in the land forest policy, played a role as a causal factor of the poverty among the local people. On the one hand, the government is trying to protect forests, considering the high rate of deforestation in the MRB, but on the other hand, these policies are a loss for the Isan people who are mostly farmers of shifting agriculture in the forest area of the MRB.

In Laos, the government also faces the dilemma of forest management in the MRB. On the one side, the government has a lot of profit from the export of timber and other forest products, on the other, the government must maintain forest sustainability. With a deforestation rate of about 0.4% per year, Laos is known as the area with the highest deforestation rate in the Mekong Region. Every year there is 125,000 ha of damaged forest, while reforestation is only about 1000 ha per year (Hiroshi Hori, 2000: 51–52).

In forest management, the government of Laos is also facing a problem with the local ethnic groups who depend on forest products and shifting agriculture as their livelihoods. To overcome this problem, the government issued ‘the resettlement policy’ to resettle the people who practise the slash and burn method to the lowlands which allows them to farm permanently. The Lao government, supported by the World Conservation Union, has also released a special policy for reforestation to preserve the natural resources, for example, the export of timber ban.

In Cambodia, poverty is also seen in the MRB, especially among the local people living as farmers or fishermen. As in Cambodia, Tonle Sap is abundant with fish products, in reality, the local fishermen live under a reasonable standard of living. However, local communities (mainly ethnic Cham) are unable to compete in fishing and trading with the Vietnamese, who come to Cambodia in both legal and illegal ways. In this case, actually the government policy is crucial to solve the problem, for example, to overcome illegal fishing and the use of fishing equipment that can damage the environment. The government should issue fishing regulations, such as a limitation on the use of nets of a certain size, electric shock or explosives. In practice, government regulations are often ignored due to a lack of control in the implementation, so the position of ethnic minorities, like the Cham, has still not had any improvement.

Vietnam, as a socialist state, is more capable of controlling its government policy, for example, in the agricultural policy in the Mekong Delta. Actually the Mekong Delta is a fertile area that has become the main rice producer in Vietnam. This region supplies most of the need for rice in Vietnam. Historically, the ethnic Chinese have played a pivotal role in rice cultivation in the Mekong Delta since the seventeenth century. They lived in this Delta, and mixed with the Vietnamese. By the end of the eighteenth century, a mixed Vietnamese-Chinese society had emerged in this region. They conjured up mangrove forests into fertile agricultural land. In that time Cochin China was able to support the region around the capital Hue and the provinces further north with rice.⁵ It is not surprising that the Mekong Delta has been a rice bowl for hundreds of years.

Agricultural production in this Delta decreased during the war period (1959–1975). The wars caused damage to agricultural land and irrigation canals, so there was a reduction in the agricultural area.

⁵ Grabowsky (2003), cited from Thomas Engelbert (2002), *Die Chinesische Minderheit im Süden Vietnams (Hoa) als Paradigma der Kolonialen und Nationalistischen Nationalitätenpolitik*: 100.

Economic reforms with a new economic policy (*Doi Moi*) in the mid-1980s have brought changes in the economy of Vietnam, including reforms in the agricultural sector.

In 1988 the government issued a special policy on the agricultural sector: allowing agriculture a tax-free status for a certain period; opening a free market for agricultural products; supporting the use of new agricultural technologies; and, providing credit for farmers. This new policy allowed farmers to have the right to manage their own land, at least for a period of 20 years (Edmonds, 2004: 2).

In 1993 the government also issued a policy to promote the agricultural industry and to encourage labour migration to the traditional agricultural sector. The government also implemented new farming systems that integrated agriculture and fisheries in order to maximize the utilization of natural resources and increase agricultural production.⁶ As the result of the new policy, rice production increased by 50% during the period 1988–1997, and there was even over production. Part of the rice produced was used for livestock feed. In addition, the production of fruit and cattle also increased sharply. In general, it can be said that the diversification of agricultural and livestock products has led domestic economic growth, including the economy in the Mekong Delta region.

Although the agricultural production has been increased, the condition of farmers in the Mekong Delta, on average, is still poor. Approximately 40%–47% of the population is classified as poor, with an average income of USD1 per day. This problem is probably caused by government policies that restrict the ownership of land and limit the amount of agricultural production (quota). Each farmer is only allowed to cultivate a maximum of three hectares of agricultural land.

⁶ Le Thanh Phong et.al. 'Integrated Agriculture-Aquaculture Systems in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam: An Analysis of Recent Trends', in *Asian Journal of Agriculture and Development*, vol. 4, no. 2: 64.

The government also decides the prices, so restricting the development of free markets.⁷

The development of industrial zones in the Mekong Delta has impact on the level of the farmers' poverty, as the new industrial areas take some agricultural land with inadequate compensation.⁸ Many farmers then look for other jobs, such as fishing or as labourers. Generally, they live below a good standard of living as they lack specific skills.

4. Policy on the Chinese and Local Ethnic Minorities in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam

Vietnam has about 54 ethnic groups of which 53 belong to ethnic minorities. Data from the Nationalities Committee (2003), notes that the number of people of ethnic minorities in Vietnam, totals about 11.5 million, 13.8% of the total population. The ethnic minorities are concentrated in three main areas: the North West (about seven million inhabitants), the Western Highlands (about two million inhabitants), and the Western part of South Vietnam. The Mekong Delta has two main ethnic minorities, the Khmer (1,043,678) and the Cham (20,000) (Nguyen Thanh Xuan, 2007: 64–65).

Almost in all of the Mekong countries, the Chinese are dominant in economic activity and have a better life than the local ethnic groups. The government does not provide special policies on ethnic Chinese, such as giving certain facilities to them. They become successful as they have the tenacity and the ability to build networks. The Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City have a good network with the Chinese in the Mekong Delta. In this Delta, the Chinese dominate the trade in agricultural products. Ethnic Viet Kinh have the same position

⁷ Interview with Prof. Dr Nguyen Minh Hoa, Ho Chi Minh City, 13 May 2009.

⁸ 'Mekong Delta farmers face land shortage', <http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=01AGR141008>

as the Chinese in the economy, while ethnic Cham and Khmer, who are mostly peasants, live in poverty.

In Vietnam, the policy related to ethnic Chinese can be traced from the Vietnamese Le Dynasty in the fifteenth century that used ethnic Chinese as well as Vietnamese to found settlements in the Cham and Khmer territories of central Vietnam. Like the Vietnamese, the Chinese then settled on the former Cham and Khmer lands. This event is known as ‘Vietnamese *Nam Tien*’ (Movement to the south) (Grabowsky, 2003).

During the French colonial period, the Chinese maintained a high degree of autonomy as they had better economic conditions and stronger networking. In the 1930s, the French administration in Vietnam and the Vietnamese anti colonialists were competing for influence to get support from the Hoa (Chinese). Facing this dilemma, the majority of the ethnic Chinese decided to avoid a clear political commitment to either side (Grabowsky, 2003). This shows that the Chinese looked for a safe position, so that they survived in a place that was in upheaval.

Grabowsky (2003), citing from Thomas Engelbert, says that in the post colonial period the political position of the Hoa in Vietnam reflected the relations of respective Vietnamese governments with their powerful neighbour in the north. The perception of the Hoa as an ethnic minority was never better than Vietnamese-Chinese relations in general. Since the economic reforms in the 1980s, there has been an improvement in these relations which has had positive impact on the resurgence of the Hoa in South Vietnam.

The Chinese in the south did not get special treatment from the government. In Vietnam, equality among ethnic groups is guaranteed by the Constitution. The Vietnamese Government gives more attention to the poor people of any ethnic group. For the local ethnic minorities in the Mekong Delta, like the ethnic Cham and Khmer, the Vietnamese Government issued special policies such as to provide funds for the construction of houses (USD1000 per house), loans for

business, improving health levels and developing education.⁹ UNESCO estimated that 93.8 per cent of the adult population of Vietnam was literate in 2002. For minority groups, literacy rates reached 73 per cent for persons over the age of 10. Seventy per cent of all illiterates live in remote provinces and in the Mekong River Delta area. The government has also established educational affirmative action policies for minority groups. This program was accepted with enthusiasm, as was shown with the increase of the average class size from 36 to 41.7 between the period 1990 and 1997.¹⁰

According to the report of the Asian Development Bank in 2001, the areas with ethnic minority populations lacked between 1,000 and 1,500 teachers. To cover this shortage, many volunteers or unqualified teachers with poor instructional skills are now teaching in remote classrooms. For the area of the Greater Mekong Sub region, it is stated that 40–50 per cent of teachers in primary schools in mountainous areas have not met the educational standards for Vietnam.¹¹

5. Conclusion

The Mekong River has played a significant role in the lives of millions of inhabitants residing within its Basin. They depend on it as a major source of livelihood, a transport route and in recreational and socio-cultural activities. Because of the importance of this River, it requires good management, both in the local policies of each country included in the GMS and the regional policies in cooperation among the countries.

⁹ Interview with Le Van Than, Ho Chi Minh City, 12 May 2009.

¹⁰ Giacchino-Baker, Rosalie 2007, 'Educating Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam: Policies and Perspectives', http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4009/is_200707/ai_n19511352/: 2

¹¹ Giacchino-Baker, Rosalie 2007, 'Educating Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam: Policies and Perspectives', http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4009/is_200707/ai_n19511352/: 2

From the many problems faced by the Mekong, the development of dams and the improvement of river transportation appear as major issues that have high impact on the socioeconomic lives of the communities that live surrounding it. The construction of hydropower dams, and navigational channel improvements have had negative impacts and potentially undesirable effects. The dams block major fish migrations and disrupt life on this vitally important River, placing at risk millions of people who depend upon the Mekong for their food security and income.

Besides policies related to infrastructure development, governments must also have specific policies relating to the ethnic groups in the Mekong River Basin. Almost in all Mekong countries, ethnic Chinese play a pivotal role in economic activities and local ethnic groups usually become lost. In some Mekong countries, the local ethnic groups are often ignored in the policy making, although the policy is concerned with them. In the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, there is no different treatment of any ethnic group. The government does not give special attention to a particular ethnic group, but to the poor, the government gives more interest, such as in the provision of housing assistance and education.

Bibliography

- Apichai, Sunchindah. 2005. "Water Diplomacy in the Lancang-Mekong River Basin: Prospects and Challenges". Paper in workshop on the Growing Integration of Greater Mekong Sub-regional ASEAN States in the Asian Region, Yangon, 20–21 September 2005.
- Chuenodomsavad, Sayan. 2004. "New Waves", in *Exploring Borders: Reportage from Our Mekong*. Bangkok: Inter Press Service.
- Edmonds, Christopher. 2004. "Rice Production, Land Use Dynamics, and Infrastructure Development in Viet Nam's Mekong River Delta", in *Asian Development Review*.
- Ekaphone, Phouthonesy. "Plans to Re-Open Mekong to Shipping", <http://www.vientianetimes.org.la>.
- Giacchino-Baker, Rosalie. 2007. "Educating Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam: Policies and Perspectives", http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4009/is_200707/ai_n19511352/: 2.
- Grabowsky, Volker. 1993. "The Chinese Minority in Southern Vietnam", *IIS Newsletter*, #32, November 1993.
- Hamlin, Timothy. 2008. "Commercial Transportation on the Mekong River", <http://www.stimson.org/pub.cfm?ID=611>.
- Hiroshi, Hori. 2000. *The Mekong: Environment and Development*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.
- Le Thanh Phong et.al. "Integrated Agriculture-Aquaculture Systems in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam: An Analysis of Recent Trends", in *Asian Journal of Agriculture and Development*, vol. 4, no. 2.

“Mekong Delta Farmers Face Land Shortage”,
[http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=01
AGR141008](http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=01AGR141008)

Nguyen Thanh Xuan. 2007. “Religions in the Areas of Ethnic Minority Compatriots in Vietnam”, in *Religious Studies Review* vol. 1, no. 2, May 2007.

Starr, Peter. 2003. *The People’s Highway: Past, Present and Future Transport on the Mekong River System*, Mekong Development Series no. 3. Phnom Penh: Mekong River Commission.

Wongruang, Piyaporn. 2004. “Mekong Fisherman Left High and Dry”, in *Invisible Borders: Reportage from Our Mekong*. Bangkok: Inter Press Service.

Interviews:

Interview with Le Van Than, Ho Chi Minh City, 12 May 2009.

Interview with Prof. Dr. Nguyen Minh Hoa, Ho Chi Minh City, 13 May 2009.

CHAPTER 5

ETHNICITY, MIGRATION AND TRANSNATIONAL COMMERCE IN THE LOWER MEKONG BASIN

A Final Note

Rucianawati

Mekong, the longest river in Southeast Asia, plays an important role in the lives of some 70 million inhabitants residing within its basin. The majority of these people are farmers and fishers who depend on the waters of the River. Besides its function as a major source of livelihoods, the Mekong is significant in waterway transportation, as well as recreational and socio cultural activities. Because it has many advantages, such as biodiversity and a fertile land area, many people have come to this area for hundreds of years. Economic motivation was the most important reason for migrants to move to the Mekong area; to get a better life than in their home areas. Apart from which, political conditions were also a reason for the move.

Migration in the area of the MRB can be divided into two, namely external migration and internal migration. Mostly external migration occurs among the Mekong countries themselves, for example Thailand, which is entered by migrants from neighbouring countries such as Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and China, attracted by the rapid economic growth. Internal migration takes place in almost the entire MRB region, from rural areas to the commercial or industrial cities. In Cambodia, for example, the areas which have become the destinations of migrants in search of work are Phnom Penh, Kampong Som and Kandal.

In the Lao PDR, migration flow to the cities located alongside the Mekong River Basin has increased since the 1990s when the government implemented the open door policy for foreign investment. Vientiane, Champasak, Luang Prabang, and Savannakhet have

become the main destinations of migration. In the Vietnam Mekong Delta, migration can be traced since the 13th century, when southward migration occurred. Migration also increased in the 15th-16th centuries when rebellions took place in China, inspiring many Chinese to flee to South Vietnam. The large scale migration took place after the economic policy reform (*Doi Moi*) in 1986. Since that time the government has tried to establish liberalization of trade and open investment for foreign countries. Some large companies emerged in Ho Chi Minh City and surrounding areas, where there is also an industrial zone. The development of the industrial cities supports the migration rate in the Mekong Delta.

Migration in the Mekong River Basin has brought about interaction among the ethnic groups, both among the local ethnic groups and migrants. Similarities in language, ethnicity and culture among the Mekong countries, facilitates cross border migration of people in this region, particularly between the neighbouring countries, such as the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam or Thailand and Cambodia. In the Mekong region, migration has gone on for hundreds of years and over time, in general, there has been mixing between local ethnic groups and migrants. One thing that differentiates the two groups is that most of the local people survive through agriculture or fishing, while the newcomers dominate the economic activities, especially commerce. However, through a process that has been running for a long time, there can be found harmony between the locals and migrants

In the Mekong River Basin from the Yunnan Province of China to the Mekong Delta in Vietnam are emerging many trade centres such as, Mae Sai, Chiang Saen, Chiang Khong, Nongkhai, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Khong Chiam, Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Chong Mek and Savannakhet. In these trade towns, each ethnic group has its specialization in economic activity. All trading cities have one thing in common, that almost in every town there is a market, which brings together traders from different ethnic groups. In this market, usually

Chinese people play a pivotal role in the trade, while the local ethnic majority controls the agricultural sector.

In the Mekong River Basin in Thailand, which is known as the Thai Mekong Basin Area (TMBA), the Isan group which is regarded as the descendants of Laotian, Mon and Khmer people, is the majority, though at the national level it is considered a minority. They live in remote areas and are mostly engaged in agriculture. In Cambodia, the local ethnic groups who live in the MRB are the ethnic Cham and Khmer. The ethnic Cham are categorized as a minority group, while the Khmer are the majority. The Vietnamese are another ethnic group found in the MRB of Cambodia. They can easily become citizens of Cambodia, and even get privileges in land ownership. Together with the Cham, the Vietnamese dominate fishing while the Khmer dominate agriculture or land cultivation. The Chinese, as in other Mekong countries, play a big role in business and services. The position of local traders in Cambodia is weakened by Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese outsiders, as they have greater capital and better networks.

In the Lao PDR, there are three classifications of ethnicity based on geography; *Lao Loum* or lowland Lao, *Lao Theung* or mountainous Lao and *Lao Sung* or highland Lao. From all of these ethnic groups, the local ethnic group which lives on lowlands along the Mekong River and its tributaries is *Lao Loum*. They are considered significant in terms of the total population, with more than 60 per cent of the number. Most of them are farmers and they have dominance in the economy. In Vietnam, the ethnic Khmer, Cham, Chinese (Hoa), and Kinh (Vietnamese) inhabit the Mekong River Delta (MRD). The Khmer are considered indigenous people in the MRD. The majority of them are peasants. The Cham, the Muslim ethnic minority in the Vietnam Mekong Delta, mostly are fisherman, small traders and weavers. The Kinh and the Chinese dominate trading activity and they are considered as the wealthiest ethnic groups in Vietnam.

The economic activities in the MRB have grown in line with the development of the transport infrastructure. The development of road, bridge and waterway systems provided easier access among cities in the MRB. The construction of bridges over the Mekong River also facilitates relations between the two opposing cities, such as Mukdahan–Savannakhet and Nongkhai–Vientiane. As the development in one country can affect other countries, there are also regional policies resulting from the cooperation among the Mekong countries in developing the MRB.

Due to the importance of the Mekong River, in the long run, the government both locally and regionally continues to improve the socioeconomic role of the River. In Thailand, the Mekong River is not only a national border but also has a social and economic function, as many people, mainly fishers and peasants, depend on the abundance of natural resources of the River. Cambodia, which has Tonle Sap, a large lake that is rich in fish, should make and enforce policies to preserve the natural resources of the lake and its MRB in general. In Laos, the Mekong is very highly regarded because of its benefits for the development of hydropower, so the Lao PDR is called the 'battery of Asia'. In its Delta in Vietnam, the Mekong and its tributaries are very important for waterway transportation. There are also several floating markets in this area. The Delta region has an abundance of fertile soil so that crops, especially rice, are able to fulfill domestic needs and even be exported.

From studies that have been done in four of the Mekong countries (the Lao PDR, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam), there are some final notes. *First*, The wealth of economic resources, in this case in the MRB, has attracted migrants to come and settle, with the main purpose to get a better livelihood. Migration that occurred during these years caused ethnic meeting and ethnic mixing. *Second*, In the MRB, generally, no interethnic conflicts emerged, although there is always jealousy. The Chinese usually almost control the economic activity, while most groups of the local ethnic minority are less affluent. The local ethnic groups are not as strong as the immigrants, particularly

those from China and Vietnam. This is what often leads to jealousy, which is caused by the differences in economic positions. *Third*, Almost all of the Mekong countries participate in the commercial activity in the MRB. Many of the trading activities in the MRB trading towns can be categorized as transnational trade, which means traders or purchasers of several countries. *Fourth*, The government policies related to ethnic issues in the MRB are often only top-down policies that sometimes do not coincide with what is required. For this reason, the governments should involve the local people in decision-making regarding the management of the MRB. *Fifth*, It is necessary to improve and continue cooperation among the Mekong countries, to ensure that the policies in the management of the MRB walk in harmony.

Executive Summary

ETNISITAS DAN PERDAGANGAN TRANSNASIONAL DI DELTA-MEKONG, VIETNAM 1975–2007

Abstrak

Buku tentang etnisitas dan perdagangan transnasional di DAS Mekong Vietnam ini merupakan hasil penelitian lanjutan dari penelitian tahun sebelumnya yang telah memfokuskan persoalan pada pemetaan etnis, sejarah migrasi serta proses dan pola migrasinya, faktor-faktor penyebab migrasi, hubungan antara etnis lokal dan etnis pendatang dan dampak migrasi terhadap etnis lokal, terutama dampak sosial ekonomi. Sebagai sebuah lanjutan penelitian pada kawasan yang sama, persoalan kemudian lebih difokuskan pada hal-hal yang lebih spesifik, seperti persoalan peran kelompok etnis tertentu atas kelompok etnis lainnya dan aktivitas mereka di dalam perdagangan domestik dan transnasional. Jika pada tahun sebelumnya penelitian pada kawasan yang sama difokuskan pada bagian *upper delta*, maka tahun ini penelitian diarahkan pada bagian *lower delta* Vietnam.

Untuk mencapai tujuan tersebut, penelitian ini tetap akan menggunakan pendekatan multidisipliner yang mencakup sejarah, ekonomi, dan sosial-antropologi. Diharapkan kemudian penelitian ini dapat menghasilkan kajian yang komprehensif mengenai hubungan antaretnis yang terjadi di DAS Mekong di Vietnam yang berkaitan dengan pola perdagangan, serta kebijakan pemerintah yang berpengaruh langsung maupun tidak langsung terhadap peran dan aktivitas mereka di dalam perdagangan.

Kata kunci: DAS Mekong, Vietnam, Etnisitas, Perdagangan lokal, Perdagangan transnasional

1. Latar Belakang

Delta Mekong adalah sebuah kawasan seluas kira-kira 49.520 km² berbentuk *triangle*, dengan kondisi tanah yang sangat subur, yang meliputi wilayah di Vietnam dan Kamboja, dari Kampong Cham hingga Laut China Selatan. Kawasan Delta ini merupakan dataran rendah dan datar dengan rata-rata ketinggian antara 0,5–3 meter di atas permukaan laut. Vietnam meliputi sekitar 74% kawasan Delta tersebut, selebihnya merupakan bagian Kamboja. Populasi di daerah Delta ini diperkirakan lebih dari 17 juta jiwa di mana sekitar 85% di antaranya tinggal di *rural area*. Penduduk yang tinggal di Delta Mekong terdiri dari beberapa kelompok etnis, terutama etnis Kinh (lebih dari 90%), Cham dan Khmer (Hori, 2000: 19; White, 2002: 25).

Seperti disebutkan oleh Charnvit Kasetsiri (2005), salah satu karakteristik kawasan DAS Mekong adalah keragaman etnisnya, begitu juga karakteristik masyarakat di Delta Mekong Vietnam yang mempunyai latar belakang etnis, agama, budaya, dan bahasa yang beragam. Keragaman ini mempunyai konsekuensi kepada keragaman peran dan aktivitas mereka di dalam berbagai aspek, misalnya sosial, budaya, politik, dan ekonomi. Penelitian kali ini merupakan rangkaian penelitian tahun terakhir, di mana studi ini mencoba untuk lebih fokus pada aspek sosial-ekonomi, khususnya pada masalah etnisitas dan perdagangan di Delta Mekong, baik yang bersifat domestik maupun transnasional.

Di Delta Mekong ini kegiatan perdagangan tampak cukup ramai, dari yang berskala lokal seperti di beberapa pasar terapung, misalnya Cai Rang dan Phong Dien di Can Tho, serta Cai Be dan Phung Hiep, juga perdagangan internasional sebagaimana terjadi di pelabuhan Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon Port) yang berfungsi sebagai pelabuhan ekspor-impor dan pelabuhan terbesar di Vietnam Selatan. My Tho, yang merupakan kawasan industri juga memiliki pelabuhan di tepi Sungai My Tho (*inland port*) yang berhubungan langsung dengan pusat kota di Ho Chi Minh City. Kawasan ini terkenal dengan hasil kelapa, buah-buahan, dan sayurannya. Ramainya perdagangan salah satunya merupakan pengaruh dari kebijakan ekonomi pasar.

Gambaran di atas telah mengangkat beragam isu yang menyangkut masalah pengelolaan sumber daya alam, persoalan hubungan antaretnis dan perdagangan domestik serta transnasional. Buku ini berusaha untuk fokus pada dua topik sebagai persoalan utama, yaitu hubungan antaretnis dan pola perdagangan domestik dan transnasional, yang diuraikan ke dalam beberapa pertanyaan berikut ini: (1) Apa model/tipe hubungan antaretnis di Delta Mekong Vietnam? (2) Bagaimanakah dinamika hubungan antar-etnis dalam kaitannya dengan perdagangan di DAS Mekong di Vietnam? Apakah yang dikategorikan sebagai pendatang dan lokal masing-masing membentuk kelompok sosial tersendiri? (3) Apakah masing-masing etnis membentuk identitasnya sendiri dalam proses perdagangan tersebut? (4) Apa model/tipe aktivitas perdagangan di Delta Mekong Vietnam? (5) Bagaimanakah kebijakan pemerintah dalam menangani masalah etnisitas dalam kaitannya dengan kegiatan perdagangan di Delta Mekong di Vietnam?

Buku yang mengangkat tema tentang etnisitas dan perdagangan transnasional di DAS Mekong di Vietnam ini merupakan hasil penelitian tahun terakhir dari rangkaian lima tahun penelitian tentang DAS Mekong. Pada tahun kelima ini penelitian lapangan dilakukan di delta Sungai Mekong di Vietnam, yaitu di kota Ho Chi Minh, Can Tho; dan My Tho. Ketiga kota tersebut menjadi pusat perdagangan dan industri di kawasan Vietnam Selatan. Selain itu, ketiga kota tersebut merupakan lokasi tujuan utama para migran dari berbagai etnis sehingga menjadi lokasi pertemuan berbagai etnis dan sangat sesuai untuk melihat hubungan antaretnis dalam konteks perdagangan dan identitas yang melekat pada diri mereka.

Lingkup temporal yang dipilih adalah tahun 1975 hingga 2007 yang merupakan kelanjutan tahun lalu, dengan alasan yang sama bahwa dinamika migrasi yang menciptakan dinamika hubungan antaretnis sejak berakhirnya perang Vietnam telah memberikan karakteristik tersendiri, terutama setelah reunifikasi antara Vietnam Utara dan Vietnam Selatan tahun 1975. Karakteristik ini sedikit banyak berpengaruh pada peran dan aktivitas setiap kelompok etnis

dalam bidang sosial, ekonomi, dan budaya, terutama dalam perdagangan domestik dan transnasional.

Pengumpulan data primer maupun sekunder pada penelitian ini dilakukan di Indonesia dan Vietnam. Pengumpulan data tidak hanya dilakukan melalui studi pustaka, tetapi juga melalui temu wicara dan FGD (*Forum Group Discussion*) dengan para akademisi, pakar etnisitas, masyarakat lokal, NGO, lembaga komunitas yang ada di Delta Mekong di Vietnam, serta pihak pemerintah yang terkait. Studi pustaka dilakukan di sejumlah perpustakaan di Indonesia, seperti PDII, perpustakaan *Asean Secretary*, CSIS di Indonesia, dan juga pusat-pusat penelitian, perpustakaan, dan universitas di Vietnam.

Dengan berfokus pada isu etnisitas dan perdagangan transnasional, buku ini mempunyai tujuan umum untuk mengkaji peran dan aktivitas sosial, ekonomi, dan budaya dari tiap-tiap kelompok etnis dalam perdagangan domestik dan transnasional sejak tahun 1975–2007. Tujuan khususnya adalah untuk mengetahui aktifitas kelompok-kelompok etnis dan pola hubungan diantara mereka dalam kaitannya dengan perdagangan di Delta Mekong di Vietnam, mengetahui pola perdagangan lokal dan transnasional di Delta Mekong, Vietnam, serta mengetahui dan memahami kebijakan pemerintah dalam menangani masalah etnisitas dalam kaitannya dengan kegiatan perdagangan di Delta Mekong di Vietnam.

2. Konsep tentang Etnisitas dan Perdagangan Transnasional

Penulisan buku ini menerapkan metode deskriptif analitis dengan pendekatan multidimensi, antara lain pendekatan ekonomi, sejarah, dan sosial-antropologi. Konsep-konsep ilmu sosial-antropologi dan ekonomi digunakan untuk mengungkap benang merah hubungan etnisitas dan perdagangan transnasional di Delta Mekong. Berikut ini dua konsep pokok yang diterapkan, yaitu tentang etnisitas dan perdagangan transnasional.

2.1 Etnisitas

Dalam antropologi ada tiga perspektif teori utama yang digunakan untuk membahas mengenai etnisitas, yaitu teori primordial, teori situasional, dan teori relasional. Teori situasional berseberangan dengan teori primordial. Teori primordialis melihat etnisitas sebagai suatu penempatan primordial yang diperoleh melalui kelahiran dan sosialisasi dalam suatu latar belakang budaya yang spesifik, atau dengan kata lain etnisitas merupakan suatu sifat yang didapat dengan sendirinya, yang tak dapat dihapuskan. Teori situasional memandang bahwa kelompok etnis adalah entitas yang dibangun atas dasar kesamaan para warganya, bagi mereka yang lebih penting bukan wujud kesamaan itu sendiri, melainkan perihal penentuan dan pemeliharaan batas-batas etnis yang diyakini bersifat selektif dan merupakan jawaban atas kondisi sosial historis tertentu (Barth, 1969). Teori ini menekankan bahwa kesamaan kultural merupakan faktor yang lebih besar dibanding kesamaan darah dalam penggolongan orang-orang ke dalam kelompok etnik.

Sementara itu, menurut Frederich Barth (1988), istilah etnik menunjuk pada suatu kelompok tertentu yang karena kesamaan ras, agama, asal-usul bangsa, ataupun kombinasi dari kategori tersebut terikat pada sistem nilai budayanya. Kelompok etnik adalah kelompok orang-orang sebagai suatu populasi yang:

- Dalam populasi kelompok mereka mampu melestarikan kelangsungan kelompok dengan berkembang biak.
- Mempunyai nilai-nilai budaya yang sama dan sadar akan rasa kebersamaannya dalam suatu bentuk budaya.
- Membentuk jaringan komunikasi dan interaksi sendiri.
- Menentukan ciri kelompoknya sendiri yang diterima oleh kelompok lain dan dapat dibedakan dari kelompok populasi lain.

Weinreich (1985) menyebutkan bahwa identitas sosial, termasuk identitas etnik, merupakan penggabungan ide-ide, perilaku, sikap, dan simbol-simbol bahasa yang ditransfer dari generasi ke generasi melalui sosialisasi. Jadi, identitas etnik seseorang tidak berhenti ketika orang ditasbihkan sebagai anggota etnik tertentu melalui bukti darah. Akan tetapi identitas itu terbentuk melalui sosialisasi dalam keluarga dan masyarakat lingkungannya. Seseorang yang terlahir sebagai etnis Bugis misalnya, tidak akan merasa memiliki identitas etnis Bugis apabila tidak ada sosialisasi identitas terhadapnya. Salah satu yang mendorong terbentuknya identitas etnik adalah kesamaan-kesamaan sesama anggota etnik yang terbentuk melalui kesamaan proses belajar, kesamaan pengalaman, dan kesamaan latar belakang, hal mana membuat mereka memiliki kesamaan adat dan perilaku.

Elemen di atas menggambarkan bahwa identitas etnik merupakan fenomena objektif dan subjektif (Hacoy, 1996). Fenomena objektif manakala seseorang menegaskan identitas etniknya melalui kriteria-kriteria tertentu yang pasti. Misalnya seorang anak yang memiliki orang tua dengan etnik tertentu maka ia merasa sebagai bagian dari etnik orang tuanya. Identitas etnis merupakan fenomena subjektif karena terkandung derajat perasaan kepemilikan (*sense of belonging*) akan kelompok etnisnya. Seseorang bisa sangat memuja etniknya, sementara yang lain bisa jadi tidak memiliki keterikatan yang dalam dengan etniknya. Bisa jadi seseorang yang menurut kriteria umum diakui sebagai anggota kelompok etnik tertentu (karena keturunan misalnya), namun menolak untuk memakai etnik itu sebagai identitasnya. Ada banyak kasus di mana seseorang yang digolongkan ke dalam satu etnik tertentu berdasarkan kriteria darah menolak identitas etnik yang dilekatkan padanya. Alasannya bisa beragam. Namun, ada kecenderungan penolakan identitas itu berkaitan dengan tidak mengunggulkannya identitas asli yang dimiliki, baik secara ekonomi maupun sosial.

2.2 Perdagangan Transnasional

Kota-kota dagang di Sungai Mekong sebenarnya telah terbentuk ratusan tahun yang lalu. Kegiatan perdagangan berjalan bebas, tanpa batas politis. Dengan dibuatnya batas-batas negara yang modern, di mana Sungai Mekong menjadi batas pada beberapa negara, perdagangan yang terjadi menjadi bersifat lintas bangsa. Sebelum Perang Dunia II, semua kegiatan perdagangan yang melintas batas negara disebut sebagai perdagangan internasional. Akan tetapi, setelah Perang Dunia II, terutama sejak tahun 1980, campur tangan pemerintah dalam perdagangan semakin berkurang, beralih ke perusahaan-perusahaan transnasional. Aktivitas perdagangan lintas batas negara yang terjadi kemudian disebut sebagai perdagangan transnasional. John B. Cobb (2000) mendefinisikan perdagangan transnasional sebagai perdagangan yang dikontrol oleh perusahaan-perusahaan transnasional dan tidak dibatasi atau diatur oleh pemerintah.

3. Benang Merah Penelitian tentang DAS Mekong

Penelitian tentang etnisitas dan perdagangan transnasional di DAS Mekong di Vietnam ini merupakan penelitian tahun terakhir dari rangkaian lima tahun penelitian yang direncanakan, mulai dari tahun 2005 sampai dengan 2009. Secara singkat dapat dijelaskan bahwa pada tahun pertama, penelitian yang dilakukan di Thailand dapat memetakan secara sederhana pola-pola hubungan antar-etnis, migrasi, dan perdagangan yang dilakukan oleh etnis-etnis di DAS Mekong di Thailand. Penelitian tahun kedua, dapat menggambarkan hubungan antaretnis di DAS Mekong di Kamboja dan pola migrasinya, serta gambaran tentang dominasi mata pencahariannya, termasuk dalam kegiatan perdagangan. Hasil penelitian tahun ketiga di Laos dapat menggambarkan pola hubungan antar-etnis dalam perdagangan transnasional, pola migrasi, serta basis hunian berbagai kelompok etnis. Penelitian tahun keempat berhasil memetakan etnisitas dalam kaitannya dengan pola migrasi di DAS Mekong di Vietnam. Penelitian dari keempat wilayah tersebut juga dapat memberikan gambaran

tentang pusat-pusat perdagangan di DAS Mekong serta kebijakan pemerintah di masing-masing wilayah dalam pengembangan daerah aliran sungai.

Penelitian tahun kelima yang dilakukan di delta Sungai Mekong di Vietnam dapat menghasilkan rumusan tentang etnisitas dalam kaitannya dengan aktivitas perdagangan di DAS Mekong di Vietnam. Penelitian pada tahun terakhir ini juga mengungkap etnisitas dan perdagangan transnasional di DAS Mekong secara umum, yang berdasar pada hasil penelitian yang sudah dilakukan selama lima tahun. Pada akhirnya, hasil penelitian yang dikemas dalam sebuah buku ini diharapkan dapat memberikan gambaran yang komprehensif tentang isu-isu yang berhubungan dengan etnisitas dan perdagangan serta kebijakan pemerintah dalam mengelola masyarakat multi-etnis dan kebijakan dalam pengembangan daerah aliran sungai.

3.1 Etnisitas, Migrasi, Perdagangan Internasional, dan Peran Daerah Aliran Sungai: Kerangka Konseptual Studi Etnisitas di DAS Mekong

Bagian ini akan memberikan pengantar konseptual tentang penelitian etnisitas di Daerah Aliran Sungai (DAS) Mekong. Sesuai dengan yang tertera dalam judul, terdapat tiga konsep sentral, yaitu etnisitas, migrasi, dan perdagangan internasional, kemudian satu konsep yang merujuk pada wilayah geografis, yaitu Daerah Aliran Sungai Mekong. Namun, sebuah DAS itu sendiri mempunyai konsep tersendiri yang akan dibahas dalam bagian ini, khususnya yang menyangkut peran sosial-ekonomi dari DAS, terutama sebuah DAS yang mempunyai karakter *international trans-boundary*, yaitu aliran sungainya melintasi berbagai wilayah suatu negara, namun mempunyai keterkaitan satu sama lain.

Keempat konsep ini, dalam penelitian, tidak diperlakukan secara terpisah, namun merupakan satu kesatuan pengertian tentang dinamika etnisitas di wilayah DAS Mekong, khususnya yang terkait dengan Thailand, Laos, Kamboja, dan Vietnam. Satu negara lainnya

yang termasuk dalam wilayah DAS Mekong, yaitu China, tidak termasuk dalam studi ini.

3.1.1 Benang Merah Etnisitas di DAS Mekong

Etnisitas dan perdagangan transnasional memiliki kaitan yang sangat kuat. Keduanya sulit dipisahkan karena sekarang ini batas-batas masing-masing etnis semakin kabur, terutama dalam aktivitas perdagangan yang semakin dinamis. Pada konteks etnisitas di DAS Mekong, keberadaan etnisitas tidak dapat dilepaskan dengan kekayaan sumber daya alam di dalamnya. Kekayaan sumber daya alam inilah yang kemudian menjadi sarana untuk melakukan perdagangan transnasional.

Abner Cohen menyatakan bahwa etnisitas merupakan tipe dari sumber daya politik untuk bersaing memperebutkan yang diinginkan. Tidak seperti Barth, dia menolak keberadaan batas-batas etnis. Konsep ini merupakan konsep yang paling sesuai untuk menggambarkan etnisitas di negara2 sepanjang Sungai Mekong karena kebanyakan masyarakat sepanjang Sungai Mekong tidak lagi mementingkan asal etnis mereka, bahkan untuk anak hasil dari perkawinan campuran, seperti sino-Khmer, mereka akan memilih identitas etnisnya hanya untuk kepentingan pribadi, misalnya di komunitas Khmer, mereka akan mengaku sebagai etnis Khmer sedangkan ketika mereka berada di komunitas China, mereka akan mengaku sebagai keturunan China. Oleh karena itu identitas etnis tidak lagi berdasarkan asal usul, yang disebut Geertz dalam konsep primordialismenya. Identitas etnis di sepanjang Sungai Mekong tidak lagi mengenal batas-batas kultural seperti bahasa, agama, ras, *nationality*, dan adat-istiadat.

Seiring dengan perkembangan zaman dan dinamika kehidupan maka batas-batas etnisitas menjadi semakin kabur dan hubungan antar etnis menjadi semakin cair. Hal ini juga terjadi pada masyarakat etnis di sepanjang Sungai Mekong. Hubungan perdagangan antar etnis bahkan antar negara menjadikan proses akulturasi budaya menjadi

sangat cepat. Meskipun demikian, terdapat beberapa hal yang menjadi benang merah dalam kaitan etnisitas dan migrasi di daerah *mainland*.

3.1.2 Sejarah Masyarakat di Sepanjang Sungai Mekong

Masyarakat di sepanjang Sungai Mekong pada mulanya berasal dari masyarakat China yang bermigrasi menyusuri Sungai Mekong. Mereka menyusuri sungai dengan menyebarkan budaya bertanam padi dan membawa lembu untuk membantu mereka dalam bercocok tanam, yang seringkali disebut sebagai *buffalo migration*. Patrick menyatakan bahwa penjinakan kerbau dan pemanfaatannya pada penanaman dan perawatan padi membawa dampak besar pada produktivitas sawah dan perluasan kebudayaan masyarakat China (Manning, Patrick. 2005: 69). Kebudayaan ini yang menjadikan daerah di sepanjang Sungai Mekong menjadi lumbung padi di Asia Tenggara.

a. Budaya dan Mitos

Adam Kuper menulis bahwa “Area budaya digambarkan sebagai bagian dari hubungan sejarah dan mereka akan menunjukkan secara mendalam keberlanjutan walaupun terdapat perubahan di bagian luar. Keberlanjutan struktural dalam sebuah *region* akan menunjukkan akar budaya yang sama, meskipun variasi lokal dapat terbentuk melalui interaksi langsung, pertukaran, bahkan konfrontasi di antara komunitas” (Evan, 2000: 8–9).

Budaya di daratan Asia Tenggara juga memiliki perjalanan sejarah yang panjang. Seringkali, ditemukan banyak kemiripan meskipun dengan sentuhan khas dalam ritual di masing-masing daerah. Salah satunya yaitu Loy Kratong yang merupakan bentuk perayaan untuk mengungkapkan rasa terima kasih (seperti perayaan *Thanksgiving* di negara-negara Barat) manusia kepada dewa air, entah itu sungai, danau, laut, kolam, atau apapun sepanjang terdapat genangan air yang memberi sumber penghidupan kepada makhluk hidup.

Perayaan tersebut dilakukan oleh masyarakat di sepanjang aliran Sungai Mekong yang terdiri dari tujuh negara. Yakni, Tibet, China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Kamboja, dan Vietnam. Waktu perayaannya dilakukan setiap tanggal 12 lunar system (sistem kalender bulan) tiap tahunnya. Setiap negara menamakannya sesuai dengan bahasa dan budaya masing-masing negara tersebut. Sekadar contoh, di Kamboja perayaan itu disebut Loy Protip.

b. Agama

Charles F. Keyes menjelaskan daerah daratan Asia Tenggara (Burma, Thailand, Laos, Kamboja, dan Vietnam) sebagai persimpangan agama di mana keanekaragaman agama lokal pribumi bercampur dengan Hindu, Theravada dan Mahayana Budha, Tao, Konfusianis, Islam dan Kristian, seperti kepercayaan sekular modern dari Marxist-Leninism (Keyes, 1987: 512).

Perpaduan yang kompleks dari praktik religious primitif dan dipengaruhi oleh China selama beberapa abad terbentuk kembali akibat perubahan politik pada abad ke-20. Vietnam, Kamboja, dan Thailand terbentuk oleh Hindu India dan Budha sampai abad kelima belas. Masyarakat tribal perlahan-lahan mulai berubah seiring masuknya misionaris Nasrani. Sebagai awal dari sistem pertanian baru, ketaatan pada budaya populer mulai menurun (Keyes, 1987).

c. Hubungan Antaretnis

Hubungan antaretnis di sepanjang Sungai Mekong sangat dinamis. Hal ini tidak dapat dipisahkan dari sejarah. Nenek moyang penduduk Asia Tenggara yang berasal dari China masuk untuk menemukan tempat tinggal baru dan berinteraksi dengan penduduk asli daerah yang didatangi. Pada awalnya hubungan antara etnis pendatang dengan penduduk asli kurang baik, namun seiring dengan berjalannya waktu, mulai banyak terjadi perkawinan campur sehingga memudahkan proses asimilasi dan mulai melunturnya identitas etnis asalnya.

Perkawinan campur banyak terjadi di sepanjang Sungai Mekong. Salah satu contohnya adalah perkawinan antara etnis Kinh

dan etnis Hoa (China) di Vietnam. Pernikahan ini menghasilkan anak-anak yang biasa disebut Sino-Kinh. Mereka ini berfungsi sebagai jembatan untuk mempererat hubungan antara etnis Kinh dan etnis Hoa. Mereka dapat masuk ke etnis Kinh dengan mudah, juga dapat menjadi bagian dari etnis Hoa tanpa mengalami perlakuan diskriminatif. Mereka juga bebas menggunakan identitas etnisnya mengikuti ayah atau ibu menurut keinginannya sendiri. Perkawinan campur yang terjadi di sepanjang Sungai Mekong seringkali dapat memperbaiki hubungan antar etnis yang buruk di masa lalu dan mempererat hubungannya di masa depan. Generasi muda hasil perkawinan campur ini banyak tersebar di seluruh wilayah dan banyak yang masuk ke daerah perkotaan dan industri.

Meskipun demikian, jumlah etnis yang kurang berimbang seringkali menyebabkan terjadinya diskriminasi antara etnis mayoritas dan etnis minoritas. Hal ini terjadi hampir di semua negara di daratan Asia tenggara, seperti Laos, Kamboja, Thailand dan Vietnam. Di Laos misalnya, etnis Hmong yang tinggal di pegunungan seringkali mendapat perlakuan diskriminatif dari pemerintah, dimana mereka tidak dapat berpartisipasi aktif dalam kegiatan politik dan seringkali tidak tersentuh dari aktivitas-aktivitas pembangunan.

Di Thailand, diskriminasi terhadap etnis minoritas juga terjadi. Salah satu contohnya ialah saat Pemerintah Thailand memutuskan penggunaan dialek Thailand Tengah di sekolah, pemerintahan, dan semua kegiatan sehari-hari. Hal ini menyebabkan penduduk Thailand Tengah menganggap penduduk yang menggunakan dialek lokal lainnya lebih inferior dan dipandang sebelah mata (laporan tahun 2005: 87). Kendala bahasa juga menyebabkan adanya jarak antara penduduk Thailand yang tinggal di pusat kota dan yang tinggal di daerah perbatasan, khususnya yang berbatasan dengan Laos. Bahasa dan budaya Thai Lao ini lebih dekat dengan budaya Laos sehingga mereka seringkali dianggap bukan bagian dari masyarakat Thailand meskipun di tanah kelahirannya sendiri.

Selain itu, keberadaan etnis China di hampir seluruh negara di daratan Asia Tenggara yang menguasai perdagangan juga mengalami

pasang surut dalam hubungannya dengan masyarakat lokal. Kebanyakan etnis China bekerja sebagai pedagang kelontong atau tengkulak. Mereka ini menerima hasil sumber daya alam dari penduduk etnis local yang kemudian dijual kembali di pasar. Seperti dapat kita lihat di Kamboja, etnis Khmer yang kebanyakan bekerja sebagai petani menjual hasil panennya ke tengkulak yang kebanyakan beretnis China dan akan mereka jual kembali di pasar. Faktor ekonomi, khususnya perdagangan menjadi tali yang mempererat hubungan antar etnis selain melalui perkawinan campur.

d. Akses Politik

Pada sekarang ini, keberadaan kelompok-kelompok etnis tidak dapat dipisahkan dengan politik yang dalam hal ini diwakilkan oleh kekuasaan negara. Seringkali ada jarak yang sulit ditembus oleh kelompok-kelompok etnis, khususnya yang jumlahnya minor. Di Vietnam, hubungan antara etnis minoritas dan pemerintah mengalami pasang surut hingga sekarang ini. Sebagai contoh, keberadaan etnis Hoa (China) di Vietnam. Pada awal kedatangan mereka, mereka tinggal terpisah dengan etnis Kinh. Kebanyakan etnis Hoa tinggal di dataran rendah. Pemerintah tidak menganggap keberadaan mereka dan mereka juga tidak diizinkan ikut serta secara aktif pada kegiatan politik dalam bentuk apapun. Perhatian terhadap kesatuan sangat penting untuk menjaga stabilitas dan solidaritas dari etnisitas yang tinggal bersama pada satu wilayah negara.

Pembangunan dari tiap etnis sangat terkait erat dengan penguatan dan pembangunan negara. Penguatan dari kesadaran komunal dan kesatuan tidak berseberangan dan tidak menghilangkan keanekaragaman dan keaslian pada identitas dari tiap etnisitas. Setiap individu adalah bagian dari negara dan secara bersamaan juga menjadi bagian dari etnisitas. Mereka memiliki dua komunitas: komunitas negara dengan anggota dari etnisitas yang sama maupun yang berbeda yang tinggal dan bekerja pada suatu negara, dan komunitas etnis yang anggotanya dari etnisitas yang sama baik yang tinggal di tanah kelahiran maupun di luar tempat kelahirannya (Van, 2001: 109–110).

Hubungan antara etnis dan pemerintah seringkali mengalami pasang surut. Bahkan, kadangkala dapat terlihat ada pemerintah yang tidak menghormati keberadaan etnis minoritas. Banyak kebijakan pemerintah yang tidak memihak pada keberadaan etnis minoritas, sebagai contoh kebijakan mengenai lahan hutan. Kebijakan ini menyebabkan masyarakat etnis minoritas yang hanya mengandalkan sumber daya hutan untuk kebutuhan hidupnya kehilangan mata pencaharian dan bermigrasi ke daerah lain (Suribidari, 2005: 127).

Migrasi masyarakat tidak lantas mengembalikan hak mereka sebagai warga negara. Para migran, yang kebanyakan berasal dari etnis minoritas, tidak memiliki pendidikan dan ekonomi yang baik sehingga menjadikan mereka sebagai migran illegal yang seringkali mendapat pelecehan baik dari petugas imigrasi maupun oleh para broker migran yang memanfaatkan keberadaan mereka. Pada beberapa tahun terakhir, terjadi peningkatan yang sangat pesat khususnya pada isu migrasi di daerah perbatasan negara-negara di sepanjang DAS mekong. Kebanyakan dari mereka bermigrasi untuk mencari pekerjaan dan tidak disertai dokumen resmi. Mereka ini bermigrasi karena merasa dirampas identitas etnisnya dan juga karena alasan ekonomi.

Selama tiga dekade terakhir, hampir semua negara-negara di sepanjang DAS Mekong mengalami masalah sosial yang sama. Masalah kriminal yang seringkali dialami oleh negara-negara tersebut adalah tukar tambah senjata, amunisi, binatang yang dilindungi, obat-obatan, bahkan perdagangan manusia, yang biasa terjadi pada anak-anak dan perempuan. Masing-masing negara di sepanjang DAS Mekong selain menjadi penghasil obat-obatan juga menjadi tempat transit untuk perdagangan obat dan bagian dari jaringan perdagangan obat dan perdagangan wanita. Disinyalir terdapat oknum yang memang memegang kendali terjadinya perdagangan illegal di perbatasan ini (PSDR, 2004: 81).

Selain hubungan antara masyarakat etnis minoritas dengan negara, hubungan antar etnis pun juga mengalami pergerakan yang cukup dinamis. Pada setiap komunitas sosial politik atau komunitas

etnik, hubungan interpersonal menjadi lebih rumit. Setiap individu tidak hanya berperan sebagai anggota dari suatu etnis tapi juga bagian dari sebuah negara. Lebih jauh lagi, setiap individu tetap memiliki kelompok sosial yang berbeda, seperti: lokal (kecamatan, provinsi), pekerjaan, agama, kelas sosial, kasta, partai, asosiasi, dll. Hubungan ini menyebabkan ketidkacocokan dalam suatu komunitas. Pada semua komunitas terlihat banyak kelompok dari kepentingan yang berbeda. Dua budaya mulai muncul menjadi sebuah budaya nasional, dua Negara pada Negara, seperti yang diamati oleh Lenin. Perjuangan kelas dan agama pada suatu tempat dan lokalitas menjadi sebuah perdebatan pada sebuah etnisitas, Negara, tidak kurang intensitasnya dengan kontradiksi antara etnisitas dan Negara. Ada sebuah kasus dimana pada sebuah negara, etnisitas terbagi menjadi dua untuk kepentingan agama (Van, 2001: 75).

Daerah Mekong telah ditandai oleh konflik politik selama lebih dari ratusan tahun, kebanyakan dengan negara tetangga dalam sebuah region. Pada tahun 1960–1970an, kebanyakan negara yang terletak di Mekong bagian bawah mengalami perang, di mana biaya penduduk, sosial, ekonomi, dan lingkungan belum dapat dipetakan dan diketahui. Perang dingin menyediakan Amerika dan sekutunya dengan dorongan untuk bertempur (di Vietnam). Bom terhebat dicatat dalam sejarah (di Laos) dan manipulasi politik dengan akibat yang tragis (di Kamboja). China dan Thailand dengan cepat melindungi area mereka sebelum menjadi lokasi perang, bertentangan dengan agresi eksternal yang terjadi pada beberapa waktu yang berbeda.

Sekarang ini adalah waktu damai dan masyarakat di region tersebut mendesak untuk melihat ke arah masa depan dibandingkan melihat ke masa lalu. Akan tetapi memori kolektif lebih sulit untuk ditulis kembali daripada sekedar buku sejarah. Penguasa terdahulu terlihat tidak dapat menyerahkan kemampuan untuk memengaruhi. Apa yang tidak dapat dilakukan kembali dengan administrasi kolonial, pasukan dan bom, mereka mencoba untuk melakukannya melalui kebijakan ekonomi dan pendampingan pembangunan (Shalmali Guttal, *Development and Plunder in the Mekong Region. Focus on the Global South*. November, 2006 dalam

<http://www.landaction.org/spip/spip.php?article149>, diunduh pada tgl 2 juni 2009).

e. Akses Ekonomi

Sebelum kedatangan bangsa barat, perdagangan Asia tenggara juga ditandai apa yang disebut “*Tributary trade*” atau perdagangan upeti kepada China, karena pada saat itu China merupakan negara hegemoni bagi kerajaan-kerajaan pedagang di Asia Tenggara. Mereka mengirim kapal upeti setiap tahun ke China. Hal yang sama juga dilakukan semua penguasa Malaka untuk mendapat perlindungan China dari ancaman negara tetangga seperti Siam. Dalam Inter Asia Trade ini selain melakukan export (rempah-rempah dan hasil bumi lainnya), dari manca negara mereka mengexport berbagai komoditi yang laku di Asia Tenggara. Misalnya sutera dan keramik dari China, tekstil dari India.

Interaksi ekonomi melalui jalur perdagangan di sepanjang DAS mekong mulai melunturkan batas-batas kenegaraan atau yang dikenal dengan perdagangan lintas negara (*transnational trade*). Sistem perdagangan ini yang banyak ditemukan di sepanjang DAS Mekong.

Walker (1999:147) menemukan, harga yang rendah dapat ditawarkan dan dinegosiasikan dengan para penjual yang pembelinya memiliki hubungan personal yang cukup dekat. Kegiatan perdagangan jarak jauh juga membawa masuk bentuk interaksi dari kelompok masyarakat yang berbeda sepanjang Sungai Mekong. Hubungan perdagangan melibatkan baik jarak jauh maupun lintas batas operator kapal, penyedia kredit, peraturan, pegawai perbatasan dan pelabuhan, sopir truk, penyiapan buruh pada berbagai pelabuhan dan penduduk lokal yang menyediakan penginapan. Ketergantungan hubungan sosial ekonomi yang tumbuh di antara masyarakat yang terlibat dalam proses perdagangan jarak jauh khusus untuk kondisi ekonomi dan lingkup geografis mengizinkan masing-masing pihak untuk bertemu, bersosialisasi, dan secara mutual percaya pada aturan yang telah ditentukan oleh pemerintahan dari keempat negara di sepanjang Sungai Mekong. Walker (1999: 150–162) juga menyatakan bahwa lingkup perdagangan yang dibatasi menjadi sama pentingnya dengan

lingkup perdagangan bebas dalam penciptaan kesempatan bisnis. Pada kedua lingkup tersebut, praktik budaya untuk menegoisasi peraturan menjadi bagian yang penting dalam keberlangsungan kesempatan perdagangan jarak jauh. Menurut studinya, praktik perdagangan jarak jauh benar-benar menjadi ruang kesempatan dengan dukungan dari relasi sosial yang telah terbangun dalam jangka waktu yang panjang.

Selain isu perdagang lintas batas yang terkait dengan akses ekonomi, akses terhadap sumber daya alam juga merupakan isu utama yang terjadi di negara-negara sepanjang sungai mekong. Pembangunan yang pesat pada dua dekade terakhir menyebabkan kondisi sumber daya alam di DAS Mekong mengalami degradasi yang sangat cepat. Salah satu contohnya adalah semakin luasnya daerah hutan yang dialih gunakan menjadi daerah tempat tinggal dan industri.

Permasalahan SDA yang semakin meluas ini akhirnya menghasilkan kesepakatan di antara negara-negara di sepanjang sungai Mekong untuk membentuk Mekong Committe pada tahun 1957. Komite ini bertujuan untuk mengkoordinasikan pembangunan yang komprehensif di daerah DAS Mekong. Selain, membantu untuk meningkatkan tingkat kesejahteraan masyarakat di sepanjang sungai Mekong, komite ini juga bertugas untuk mengawasi penggunaan SDA agar tidak berlebihan dan dapat dilestarikan untuk generasi yang akan datang.

DAS Mekong merupakan wilayah yang dihuni oleh berbagai etnis. Dalam setiap negara terdapat satu etnis etnis mayoritas yang dominan. Kebanyakan masyarakat yang tinggal di sepanjang sungai Mekong adalah petani dan nelayan, yang sangat menggantungkan hidupnya pada sumber daya alam. Kesatuan dari ekologi sungai Mekong menjadi hal utama yang sangat penting dalam kehidupan sosial, ekonomi dan budaya mereka.

Sayangnya, ada beberapa kasus di mana terdapat ketidakseimbangan dalam praktek penggunaan sumber daya alam di antara masyarakat dari kelompok etnis yang berbeda, seperti pada peladang berpindah di daerah dataran tinggi dan peladang berpindah di daerah dataran rendah. Selain itu, etnis minoritas sangat dekat

dengan kemiskinan, sebagai contoh: etnis Isan di daerah timur laut Thailand dan etnis Khmer di Delta Mekong. Seringkali, penggunaan SDA yang berlebihan dari etnis-etnis tertentu tersebut semakin memperparah kemiskinan dan memperburuk kondisi lingkungan di sekitarnya.

Kemiskinan juga dapat disebabkan oleh kegagalan kebijakan dari pemerintah. Hampir semua kemiskinan yang terjadi di sepanjang DAS Mekong disebabkan oleh kesalahan pengaturan oleh pemerintah, sebagai contoh di Myanmar yang lebih dari setengah daerah pertaniannya berada di bawah kekuasaan pemerintah militer (mingsarn Kaosa Ard, 2003). Kebijakan yang paling signifikan dalam menyumbang kemiskinan dan kerusakan ekosistem adalah kebijakan mengenai lahan hutan. Untuk melindungi hutan, pemerintah menyatakan adanya wilayah yang dilindungi, menghilangkan masyarakat dari habitat aslinya dan membatasi peladang berpindah dengan mengurangi masa tanam. Akibatnya, masyarakat dari etnis minoritas yang kebanyakan tinggal di hutan (di Thailand) yang sangat menggantungkan hidupnya dari pertanian memutuskan untuk bermigrasi ke daerah lain untuk mencari pekerjaan lain, sebagai akibat ditutupnya hutan dan kebijakan yang tidak memihak pada keberadaan etnis minoritas.

3.2 Mekong River Delta di Vietnam: Kunci Pertumbuhan Ekonomi dan Perdagangan di Vietnam Selatan

Pembangunan ekonomi di Vietnam Selatan semakin berkembang sejak dikeluarkannya kebijakan Nomor 100 Tahun 1982 untuk membuka seluruh bidang di daerah pedesaan yang bertujuan untuk memanfaatkan tenaga kerja di pedesaan, terutama di bidang pertanian, perdagangan, dan industri kecil. Pembangunan semakin meningkat setelah kebijakan “Doi Moi” tahun 1986 dikeluarkan di mana kebijakan ekonomi tidak lagi terpusat, tetapi lebih pro pasar sehingga pihak swasta, masyarakat, dan investor asing menjadi pemain utama dalam perekonomian Vietnam serta mempunyai

kesempatan yang lebih besar untuk berinvestasi dan membuka industri-industri baru di Vietnam (Taylor, 2004).

Sejak saat itu, berbagai kebijakan dikeluarkan oleh Pemerintah Vietnam yang diarahkan untuk menarik investasi di Vietnam Selatan, terutama di Ho Chi Minh (HCM) dan beberapa provinsi yang berada di Delta Mekong. Kota Ho Chi Minh berkembang sebagai pusat perekonomian dan perdagangan di Vietnam Selatan yang berperan sebagai central, yaitu pusat perdagangan dan industri sedangkan provinsi-provinsi di Mekong Delta berperan sebagai *periphery*, yaitu sebagai pusat penyuplai sumber daya mentah/bahan baku industri untuk diolah di industri-industri pengolahan di HCM. Namun, dalam sepuluh tahun terakhir ini pemerintah Vietnam mulai melirik daerah Mekong River Delta sebagai tempat industri dan perdagangan baru mengingat kota HCM sudah tidak mampu lagi menampung jumlah penduduk yang pindah ke kota tersebut untuk mencari pekerjaan dan pembangunan infrastruktur kota yang maju pesat. Selain itu, pemerintah Vietnam juga bertujuan untuk mengurangi tingkat kemiskinan di daerah Mekong River Delta sehingga pembangunan diarahkan untuk peningkatan produksi pertanian dan pembangunan industri-industri baru sehingga dapat menyerap tenaga kerja penduduk di beberapa provinsi di Mekong Delta. Pemerintah Vietnam juga berambisi untuk mengurangi tingkat kemiskinan di Delta Mekong dengan meningkatkan kualitas sumber daya manusia, meningkatkan akses masyarakat ke permodalan, membangun infrastruktur, dan meningkatkan arus investasi ke daerah tersebut.

Menurut catatan kantor statistik Vietnam menyebutkan bahwa investasi asing (FDI) yang terdaftar di Mekong Delta hanya mencapai US \$41.3 million atau sekitar 2.84 % dari total investasi seluruh Vietnam. Selain itu, FDI tidak mencakup seluruh provinsi di Delta Mekong dan sebagian besar difokuskan di Can Tho, Long An dan Kien Gian. Pemerintah Vietnam menargetkan pertumbuhan ekonomi selama 5 tahun di Delta Mekong sebesar 9.8% per tahun, dibandingkan dengan 7.5% target pertumbuhan ekonomi seluruh Vietnam. Seperti yang dikutip dalam Asia Pulse (17 Juli 2009),

Perdana Menteri Phan Van Khai mengatakan bahwa "*Development must pave the way to the industrialisation of rural areas in the Mekong Delta, thus narrowing the gap between the region and other parts of the country*". Oleh karena itu, selama 1996–2000 investasi di Delta Mekong sebesar VND 16 triliun atau 17.5% dari total investasi di Vietnam diarahkan untuk pembangunan infrastruktur di Delta Mekong. Dalam periode itu juga, 10 provinsi di Delta Mekong memperoleh pinjaman dari pemerintah untuk membangun perumahan, fasilitas air bersih dan gedung sekolah. Investasi yang telah dikucurkan mendorong pertumbuhan ekonomi di Delta Mekong sebesar 7.48%, yang didukung oleh peningkatan dalam industri pengolahan pertanian, seperti farm dan seafood production untuk ekspor, sektor industrial dan jasa.

3.2.1 Perdagangan di Mekong Delta di Vietnam

Kegiatan perdagangan di Delta Mekong pada umumnya didominasi oleh komoditas pertanian, terutama padi. Sejak dahulu pertanian Vietnam terkenal dengan sebutan "pertanian padi" karena padi sangat berperan penting sebagai sumber penghidupan dan sistem perladangan orang Vietnam. Ketika pertanian Vietnam berkembang dan menghasilkan banyak produk pertanian, maka permintaan untuk pertukaran dan perdagangan semakin meningkat dan etnik China mulai berperan penting dalam perdagangan.

Perdagangan di Vietnam selatan mengalami kemajuan pesat sejak "Doi Moi" karena pihak swasta dan pedagang diperbolehkan melakukan kegiatan perdagangan, terutama pedagang China. Sebagian besar pedagang China di HCMC mempunyai hubungan networking dengan pedagang/petani di Delta Mekong baik itu orang China, Vietnam atau swasta sehingga sebagian besar perdagangan komoditas pertanian dikuasai oleh pedagang China. Namun, pedagang Vietnam juga mulai berperan dalam kegiatan perdagangan di Delta Mekong.

Selain itu, hubungan perdagangan antara Delta Mekong dan HCMC semakin meningkat sejak dibangunnya berbagai infrastruktur yang menghubungkan kedua daerah tersebut, terutama jalan dan jembatan. Infrastruktur di Delta Mekong sangat penting dalam menggerakkan perekonomian penduduk dan mengintegrasikan daerah ini dengan pusat-pusat pertumbuhan ekonomi, yaitu HCMC. Ditambah lagi Delta Mekong dan kota HCMC adalah dua daerah yang tidak bisa dipisahkan dan saling tergantung satu sama lainnya. Di satu sisi, Delta Mekong adalah daerah penghasil utama komoditas pertanian, seperti padi, sayuran, buah-buahan, bunga dan produk perikanan yang menjadi sumber bahan baku industri pengolahan makanan di HCMC. Selain itu, komoditas pertanian yang didatangkan dari Delta Mekong juga dikonsumsi penduduk di HCMC. Sedangkan di sisi lainnya, HCMC adalah daerah pemasaran dan tempat pengolahan produk-produk pertanian dari Delta Mekong yang kemudian untuk memenuhi kebutuhan domestik dengan dikirim ke berbagai provinsi di Vietnam dan diekspor ke berbagai negara. HCMC juga menjadi penyuplai produk-produk olahan dari hasil industri ke pasar-pasar di seluruh provinsi di Delta Mekong.

Keadaan infrastruktur di provinsi-provinsi di Vietnam Selatan bagian barat belum memadai mengakibatkan pelaku bisnis masih terkonsentrasi di HCMC. Kota Ho Chi Minh dijadikan daerah kegiatan perdagangan utama di Vietnam Selatan dan tempat transit bagi barang-barang dari Delta Mekong. Komoditas yang akan diekspor ke negara konsumen harus dikirim dulu ke HCMC sebelum diekspor ke negara tujuan.

Sementara itu, pelaku perdagangan di kawasan Delta Mekong adalah perusahaan pangan di Vietnam selatan (perusahaan pangan tunggal milik pemerintah) dan perusahaan-perusahaan swasta baik besar/kecil yang dimiliki oleh etnis China atau Vietnam. Selain itu, pedagang lokal, baik itu pedagang besar dan pedagang kecil juga meramaikan kegiatan perdagangan di Delta Mekong dimana pedagang China mempunyai peran yang besar dalam perdagangan yang disusul oleh pedagang Vietnam.

Pedagang China memiliki peran utama dan sangat penting dalam kegiatan perdagangan. Mereka mengatur sirkulasi barang, menawarkan barang, dan menghubungi para pedagang serta rekan bisnis mereka. Mereka mendirikan “Chanh”, yaitu pasar pusat (*central market*) atau pasar grosir yang sangat efektif dimana semua jenis barang dagangan dikumpulkan. Pada umumnya, etnis China tinggal mengelompok dalam satu komunitas yang dekat dengan pasar atau pusat kota. Bahkan rumah mereka juga dijadikan tempat berjualan dan bisnis lainnya. Selain itu, etnis China ini berperan sebagai makelar. Mereka menampung semua permintaan barang dari pedagang di Delta Mekong dan mengatur semua penawaran dari pedagang di HCM. Mereka yang bertindak sebagai perantara yang mengatur permintaan dan penawaran, serta mengirimkan barang dari dan ke Delta Mekong–HCM. Metode ini kemudian diadopsi oleh orang Vietnam dan digunakan dalam kegiatan perdagangan dan sampai dengan saat ini pola tersebut masih berlaku di pusat-pusat perdagangan di Vietnam.

Etnis China memanfaatkan hubungan kekerabatan mereka di mana-mana dalam mendistribusikan barang, baik di HCM atau di Delta Mekong. Jika seseorang membutuhkan sebuah barang maka mereka akan menghubungi kerabatnya dan apabila ternyata kerabat tersebut tidak memiliki barang yang dimaksud, maka ia akan menghubungi kerabat yang sekiranya memiliki barang itu. Jadi bila ada permintaan produk yang baru, mereka langsung bisa mendistribusikan produk tersebut dengan baik. Jalinan *networking* inilah yang mengakibatkan pedagang China kuat dan mendominasi perdagangan karena mereka saling membantu antara pedagang yang satu dengan pedagang lainnya yang masih ada hubungan kekerabatan. Selain itu, dukungan dari *Viet Kieu*¹² yang tinggal di Singapura, Taiwan, dan Hong Kong sangat penting, tidak hanya permodalan, tetapi juga pengetahuan dan keterampilan. Sejak “doi moi” Pemerintah Vietnam berusaha keras untuk mendorong pengusaha Vietnam dan Viet Hoa untuk membangun perekonomian Vietnam,

¹² Orang China Vietnam yang tinggal di luar negeri sejak 1975. Pada umumnya mereka adalah *refugee* ketika Saigon jatuh ke tangan Vietnam Utara.

terutama di HCMC yang menjadi hub perekonomian dan perdagangan di Vietnam (Scott, 2004).

Namun, dewasa ini, etnis China sudah menyatu dengan etnis Vietnam (Viet Hoa) sehingga sangat susah untuk membandingkan siapa yang lebih berperan penting dalam perdagangan di Vietnam. Saat ini jumlah etnis China mencapai 18,7 % dari total populasi penduduk kota Ho Chi Minh yang sebagian besar bergerak di sector perdagangan dan small medium enterprise, seperti memproduksi sepatu, plastik, karet dan makanan olahan. Pada jaman dahulu etnis China menjadi pedagang dan pengusaha penggilingan padi (*rice milling*), tapi saat ini etnis Vietnam juga banyak yang menjadi pedagang dan pemilik usaha penggilingan padi.

Sementara itu, Etnis Kinh memiliki peran yang penting dalam mengembangkan perdagangan di Delta Mekong. Aktifitas-aktifitas yang berhubungan dengan perdagangan seperti transportasi di pelabuhan laut, pelabuhan sungai, pusat pasar dan pasar terapung sudah menjadi bagian dari kehidupan etnis Kinh di Delta Mekong. Sebagian besar dari etnis Kinh menjadi pedagang kecil dan pedagang di pasar apung di beberapa sungai di Delta Mekong dengan menjual hasil pertanian mereka, seperti sayur, buah-buahan dan makanan. Mereka juga menjadi pedagang perantara yang menjual pakaian atau barang kebutuhan sehari-hari yang didatangkan dari HCMC.

3.2.2 Kebijakan Pemerintah

Kebijakan perdagangan yang dilaksanakan oleh pemerintah Vietnam adalah membangun kerja sama dengan dua belah pihak (bilateral), yaitu antara pemerintah dan pihak swasta dan kerja sama dengan banyak pihak (multilateral). Tenaga kerja yang direkrut berasal dari semua etnis yang tinggal di sekitar Delta Mekong terutama kawasan Vietnam Selatan bagian barat, antara lain etnis Cham, Khmer, China dan Kinh.

Dalam kegiatan perdagangan, pemerintah tidak membatasi jumlah dan peran etnis China serta tidak membeda-bedakan antara

etnis China dengan suku-suku minoritas lainnya. Etnis Cham, etnis Khmer, etnis China dan etnis Kinh mempunyai hak yang sama dalam melakukan perdagangan. Semua etnis dapat bekerja sama dengan baik dan memiliki hubungan yang harmonis dan tidak ada bentrokan. Meskipun etnis China dan etnis Kinh lebih menonjol, masyarakat Kinh hidup secara harmonis dengan masyarakat yang lain. Ditambah lagi kebijakan pemerintah nomor 134 dan nomor 135 serta komitmen pemerintah dalam “Menghilangkan kelaparan dan mengurangi kemiskinan di Delta Mekong”, menjadi alat pemerintah dalam membantu etnis-etnis yang miskin dan tertinggal, seperti etnis Khmer dan etnis Cham. Pemerintah juga mewajibkan anak-anak dari etnis-etnis tersebut untuk sekolah dengan memberikan fasilitas pendidikan yang bagus serta kesempatan untuk belajar di luar negeri.

Kebijakan pemerintah lainnya adalah kerja sama perdagangan dengan negara tetangga melalui BTA (*Bilateral Trade Agreement*) dan kerja sama antara negara-negara di kawasan Delta Mekong (Greater Mekong Subregion/GMS). Kerja sama antara pemerintah Vietnam dan Kamboja antara lain Departemen Pertanian Kamboja meminta Vietnam untuk mendukung dan membantu meningkatkan produksi berasnya dimana departemen pertanian dan pengembangan pedesaan provinsi An Giang (salah satu provinsi di Vietnam Selatan bagian Barat) telah mengundang investor untuk bekerja sama dalam rencana ini. Keuntungan yang diperoleh Vietnam jika berinvestasi dan menjual komoditi ke Kamboja adalah karena peraturan (pajak) yang diterapkan di Kamboja. Peraturannya bahwa barang-barang yang diimpor oleh Kamboja akan dikenai pajak tetapi barang-barang Kamboja yang diekspor keluar tidak dikenai pajak. Jadi barang-barang Vietnam yang diimpor oleh Kamboja lalu diekspor lagi tidak dikenai pajak. Sedangkan perekonomian Vietnam masih menggunakan aturan pajak IFN, dimana kedua belah pihak, baik itu pengimpor maupun pengeksport barang akan dikenai pajak sehingga kerja sama dengan Kamboja ini tentu membawa keuntungan di pihak Vietnam.

Kerja sama lainnya adalah kerja sama antara negara-negara GMS dimana kebijakan-kebijakan yang dikeluarkan oleh semua negara anggota 'Negara Mekong' yaitu: Myanmar, Laos, Kamboja, Thailand, China, dan Vietnam harus mendapat persetujuan dari negara-negara anggota dan sesuai dengan aturan-aturan yang telah disepakati bersama oleh seluruh negara anggota.

3.3 Kebijakan Lokal dan Regional dalam Pengelolaan DAS Mekong

Telah disebutkan bahwa Mekong merupakan sungai besar yang melintasi beberapa negara. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan kerja sama dari negara-negara yang tercakup dalam *Greater Mekong Subregion* (GMS). Kerja sama regional terwujud melalui pembentukan *Mekong Committee* (1957) yang kemudian berubah menjadi *Mekong River Commission* (kecuali China). Organisasi ini menangani berbagai isu penting seperti *human trafficking*, narkoba, pembangunan pariwisata, infrastruktur, pertanian, dan transportasi. Visi organisasi ini adalah kesejahteraan ekonomi, berkeadilan sosial, dan ramah terhadap lingkungan daerah aliran sungai Mekong; dan misinya adalah untuk mempromosikan dan mengkoordinasikan pengelolaan dan pengembangan sumber daya air dan yang terkait untuk keuntungan negara dan kesejahteraan rakyat dengan menerapkan program-program dan kegiatan yang strategis, serta dan menyediakan informasi ilmiah dan saran kebijakan

3.3.1 Pembangunan Pembangkit Listrik Tenaga Air (*Hydropower*)

Sebagai sungai besar yang punya arus kuat dan memiliki banyak cabang, Mekong sangat potensial untuk pembangunan *hydropower* sebagai pembangkit tenaga listrik. Beberapa dam didirikan, terutama di daerah hulu, misalnya di Provinsi Yunnan di China, Laos, dan Thailand. Pembangunan dam sangat mendukung kemajuan industri, namun di sisi lain berpengaruh pula pada perubahan lingkungan, misalnya pada kecepatan arus dan kedalaman sungai. Lebih jauh

perubahan ini membawa dampak negatif, misalnya pada rusaknya ekosistem sungai.

Pemerintah China dalam rencana pembangunan lima tahun yang ke-10 (2001–2005) memutuskan untuk membangun pembangkit listrik tenaga air di Provinsi Yunnan. Dengan membangun delapan dam di Sungai Mekong, Yunnan menjadi pemasok listrik terbesar di China dengan produksi sekitar 15.000 megawat. Hal ini tentu sangat berpengaruh pada perubahan lingkungan Sungai Mekong. Dam pertama (Manwan) yang dioperasikan pada tahun 1995 memberikan dampak negatif dengan penurunan hasil tangkapan ikan bagi para nelayan di Sungai Mekong, sehingga beberapa di antara mereka memutuskan untuk mencari mata pencaharian lain (Wongruang, 2004: 13).

Di Laos, pembangkit listrik tenaga air juga memberikan kontribusi yang cukup besar untuk perekonomian negara. Di sini pada tahun 2004 setidaknya tercatat enam proyek *hydropower* skala besar dan menengah, serta sekitar 30 pembangkit skala kecil. Industri *hydropower* ini digunakan untuk memenuhi kebutuhan dalam negeri maupun ekspor, terutama ke Thailand dan Vietnam. Pembangunan proyek-proyek *hydropower* ini sebagian besar dibiayai oleh ADB. Selain itu, pemerintah juga mengundang sektor swasta untuk berinvestasi.

Di Thailand, pembangunan dam Pak Mun pada anak Sungai Mekong juga memberikan pengaruh negatif pada habitat ikan karena pembangunan dam tersebut menghambat migrasi ikan untuk berkembang biak. Pembangunan ini sempat mendapat protes dari para nelayan yang merasa dirugikan. Dengan semakin banyak dam yang didirikan, berarti semakin besar dampak negatif yang diakibatkan. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan penanganan melalui kebijakan dari pemerintah lokal maupun kerja sama regional antarnegara Mekong untuk mengatasi permasalahan yang muncul.

3.3.2 Pembangunan Sarana Transportasi

Sejak lama Sungai Mekong dimanfaatkan sebagai sarana transportasi, terutama bagi orang-orang yang tinggal di kawasan DAS-nya. Pada masa kolonial, Sungai Mekong juga digunakan sebagai jalur transportasi untuk membawa berbagai komoditas dari pedalaman ke pelabuhan ataupun sebaliknya. Untuk meningkatkan fungsi Mekong sebagai jalur transportasi, pada tahun 1993 beberapa negara Mekong (China, Laos, Myanmar, dan Thailand) melakukan kerja sama untuk membangun Sungai Mekong agar dapat dilalui kapal-kapal yang lebih besar. Tujuan pokoknya adalah untuk meningkatkan perdagangan regional di kawasan tersebut. Selanjutnya pada tanggal 20 April 2000, keempat negara tersebut menandatangani kerja sama perdagangan, yang antara lain berisi kebebasan kapal-kapal dari keempat negara untuk berlayar sepanjang pelabuhan Simao di China hingga Luang Prabang di Laos (Chuenodomsavad, 2004: 59). Kerja sama keempat negara yang terkenal sebagai '*Agreement on Commercial Navigation on Lancang-Mekong*' merupakan kerja sama regional yang berfokus pada pembangunan transportasi melalui Sungai Mekong sehingga dapat dilalui kapal-kapal dagang sepanjang tahun.

Pembangunan transportasi di sepanjang sungai Mekong dengan menghancurkan jeram, karang dan beting akan memiliki efek negatif karena akan menghancurkan habitat keanekaragaman hayati. Lebih dari 1300 jenis ikan yang hidup di Mekong, banyak tergantung pada habitat ini. Dampak negatif lain adalah meningkatnya pencemaran sungai karena meningkatnya arus lalu lintas (Hamlin, 2008).

3.3.3 Kebijakan Lokal dalam Masalah Etnisitas dan Pengelolaan SDA di DAS Mekong

Hampir di setiap wilayah yang dilalui Sungai Mekong, kemiskinan menjadi masalah utama bagi penduduk lokal. Dalam penelitian lapangan yang dilakukan di Thailand sebagai contoh, kemiskinan terlihat pada masyarakat Isan yang tinggal di DAS Mekong. Hasil temuan dalam penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa

kemiskinan yang terjadi antara lain disebabkan oleh kurang tepatnya pemerintah dalam mengelola DAS Mekong. Sebagai contoh adalah kebijakan dalam penguasaan kawasan hutan (*land forest policy*). Di satu sisi pemerintah berusaha untuk melindungi hutan, mengingat tingginya laju deforestasi di DAS Mekong. Akan tetapi, kebijakan tersebut sangat merugikan masyarakat Isan yang sebagian besar merupakan petani ladang berpindah yang banyak memanfaatkan hutan sebagai lahan penghidupan.

Di Laos, pemerintah menemui dilema untuk pengelolaan hutan di DAS Mekong. Di satu sisi pemerintah mendapat banyak keuntungan dari ekspor kayu maupun hasil hutan lainnya, sedangkan di sisi lain pemerintah harus menjaga kelestarian hutan. Dengan laju deforestasi sekitar 0,4% per tahun, Laos disebut sebagai kawasan dengan tingkat deforestasi tertinggi di kawasan Mekong. Setiap tahun terjadi kerusakan hutan sekitar 125.000 ha, sedangkan reforestasi hanya sekitar 1000 ha per tahun (Hiroshi Hori, 2000: 51–52).

Vietnam sebagai negara sosialis lebih mampu melakukan kontrol terhadap kebijakan yang dikeluarkan pemerintah. Sebagai contoh adalah kebijakan dalam bidang pertanian di Delta Mekong. Sebenarnya Delta Mekong adalah kawasan subur yang menjadi penghasil beras utama di Vietnam. Kawasan delta ini memasok sebagian besar kebutuhan padi di Vietnam. Produksi pertanian di delta ini sempat menurun ketika masa perang (1959–1975), yang antara lain disebabkan oleh rusaknya lahan pertanian dan saluran irigasi, serta berkurangnya lahan pertanian. Reformasi ekonomi dengan kebijakan ekonomi baru (*Doi Moi*) pada pertengahan tahun 1980-an telah membawa perubahan pada perekonomian di Vietnam, termasuk reformasi bidang pertanian.

Pada tahun 1988 pemerintah mengeluarkan kebijakan khusus di bidang pertanian di mana pemerintah membebaskan pajak pertanian dalam jangka waktu tertentu, membuka pasar bebas untuk produk pertanian, mendukung penggunaan teknologi pertanian baru, serta memberikan kredit untuk para petani. Jika sebelumnya lahan pertanian dikelola secara kooperatif, maka kebijakan baru memungkinkan petani

memiliki hak mengelola tanah sendiri, setidaknya untuk masa 20 tahun (Edmonds, 2004: 2).

Pada tahun 1993 pemerintah kembali mengeluarkan kebijakan di bidang pertanian dengan mempromosikan industri pertanian dan mendorong migrasi tenaga kerja untuk sektor pertanian tradisional. Pemerintah juga menerapkan sistem pertanian baru yang mengintegrasikan *agriculture* dan *aquaculture* dengan tujuan untuk memaksimalkan pemanfaatan sumber daya alam dan meningkatkan produksi pertanian.¹³ Kebijakan baru menampakkan hasil dengan peningkatan produksi beras hingga 50% selama periode 1988–1997, bahkan hingga terjadi kelebihan produksi. Produksi beras sebagian digunakan untuk pakan ternak. Selain itu, hasil buah-buahan dan peternakan juga meningkat tajam. Secara umum dapat dikatakan bahwa diversifikasi produk-produk pertanian dan peternakan telah mendorong pertumbuhan ekonomi domestik, termasuk perekonomian di kawasan Delta Mekong.

3.3.4 Kebijakan Terhadap Etnis China dan Etnis Lokal Minoritas di DAS Mekong Vietnam

Hampir di semua Negara Mekong etnis China menguasai perekonomian dan mempunyai penghidupan yang lebih baik daripada etnis lokal. Kesuksesan mereka karena kerja keras dan kekuatan dalam membangun jaringan. Etnis China di HCMC misalnya, memiliki hubungan yang erat dengan etnis China di Delta Mekong yang menguasai produksi pertanian. Dalam perekonomian, etnis Viet Kinh mempunyai posisi yang hampir sama dengan etnis China, sementara itu etnis Cham dan Khmer yang biasanya adalah petani hidup dalam kemiskinan.

Etnis China di Vietnam selatan tidak mendapat perlakuan khusus dari pemerintah. Di Vietnam, kesetaraan di antara kelompok-kelompok etnis dijamin oleh konstitusi. Pemerintah Vietnam

¹³ Le Thanh Phong et.al. 'Integrated Agriculture-Aquaculture Systems in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam: An Analysis of Recent Trends', in *Asian Journal of Agriculture and Development*, vol. 4, no. 2: 64.

memberikan lebih banyak perhatian kepada kelompok etnis yang tergolong miskin. Untuk etnis Cham dan Khmer di Delta Mekong, pemerintah mengeluarkan kebijakan khusus dengan memberikan bantuan dana untuk pembangunan rumah (USD1000 per rumah), pinjaman untuk bisnis, meningkatkan kesehatan dan pengembangan pendidikan.

Bibliografi

- Abdillah S, Ubed. 2002. *Politik Identitas Etnis: Pergulatan Tanda Tanpa Identitas*. Magelang: Indonesiatara.
- Barth, Frederick. 1969. "‘Introduction’ dalam Ethnic Groups and Boundaries". *The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, Frederick Barth (Ed.), Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Barth, Fredrik (ed.). 1988. *Kelompok Etnik dan Batasannya*. Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia Press.
- Bellwood, P dan I. Glover (ed). 2004. *A Cultural History of Southeast Asia: From Earliest Times to the Indic Civilizations*. New York: Routledge Curzon Press.
- Cobb, John B. Jr, 2000. "International and Transnational Trade", <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1094>.
- De Jong dan Gardner. 1981. *Migration Decision Making*. New York: Pergamon.
- Edmonds, Christopher 2004, "Rice Production, Land Use Dynamics, and Infrastructure Development in Viet Nam's Mekong River Delta". Dalam *Asian Development Review*.
- Goldscheider, Calvin. 1971. *The Ethnic Factor in Family Structure and Mobility*. Balinger Pub.
- Hacoy, D. 1996. "Empirical Distinctiveness between Cognitive and Affective Elements of Ethnic Identity and Scales for their Measurement". *Selected Papers from the Twelfth International Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology Held in Pamplona-Iruna, Navarra, Spain*, (pp. 115–127), Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger.
- Hiroshi, Hori. 2000. *The Mekong. Environment and Development*. Tokyo: United Nation University Press.

- Kasetsiri, Charnvit. 2003. "Will the Mekong Survive Globalization?" dalam *kyotoreview.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp*
- Keyes, Charles F. 1987. "Southeast Asian Religions: Mainland Cultures." Dalam *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 13. New York: Macmillan.
- Mallinowski, Bronislaw. 1922. *Argonauts of The Western Pacific*. London: Routledge.
- Mangalam. 1968. *Sociological Quarterly*. California: Univ. of Missouri.
- Manning, Patrick. 2005. *Migration in World History*. Great Britain: Routledge.
- Scott, Steffanie and Truong Thi Kim Chuyen. 2004. *Behind the Numbers: Social Mobility, Regional Disparities, and New Trajectories of Development in Rural Vietnam*. Social Inequality in Vietnam and the Challenges to Reform, edited by Philip Taylor. Singapore. ISEAS
- Shalmali Guttal. 2006. Development and Plunder in the Mekong Region., Focus on the Global South. November, 2006 dalam <http://www.landaction.org/spip/spip.php?article149>, diunduh pada tgl 2 Juni 2009.)
- Suribidari dan Betti Rosita Sari. 2005. "Ethnicity and Commerce in The Thai Mekong Basin Area". Dalam *Indigenous People, Ethnicity and Trans-National Commerce*. Jakarta: LIPI Press.
- Taylor, Philip. 2004. *Redressing Disadvantage or Re-Arranging Inequality? Development Interventions and Local Responses in the Mekong Delta*. Social Inequality in Vietnam and the Challenges to Reform, edited by Philip Taylor. Singapore. ISEAS.
- Van, Dang Nghiem. 2001. *Ethnological and Religious Problems in Vietnam*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.

- Weinreich.1985. *Analysing Identity:Cross-Cultural, Societal and Clinical Context*. Great Britain: Routledge.
- White, Ian. 2002. *Water Management in the Mekong Delta: Changes, Conflict and Opportunities*. Paris: Unesco.
- Wongruang, Piyaporn. 2004. "Mekong Fisherman Left High and Dry". In *Invisible Borders: Reportage from Our Mekong*. Bangkok: Inter Press Service.